



Jim heard a bone snap  
as he broke the other  
man's arm

# THE QUICK AND THE DEAD

By ERIC A. PROVOST

Hurricane winds, slashing rains and the murdered body of his best friend gave Pearce a night of horror in Florida

**A**T THE school crossing Jim Pearce braked his car to a stop in response to Arnold Leo's out-thrust palm. He watched two small urchins parade across the dusty street, amused at the way the children smiled up at their voluntary guardian, and at the care Leo took in his self-assigned task. You'd think he was still handling traffic on Fifth Avenue, instead of shepherding children to and from school on an island off Florida's west coast.

The children safely on the other side,

Leo stalked to the center of the street and beckoned Pearce with all the aplomb of New York's 'Finest.' Pearce eased ahead, smiling as Leo's deep baritone voice boomed with the strains of the old song, "She's More to be Pitied Than Censured." He winced as Leo went sharply off-key.

"Beer?" He asked, interrupting the song.

Leo nodded, glancing at his watch.

"I'll be with you in ten minutes. Maybe sooner. Got a couple more kids to account for."

Jim drove two blocks and turned left, parking at Charlie Saylor's bar. Before him the Gulf of Mexico lay like an azure blanket, rumpled somewhat by prevailing winds portending a summer blow. He left his car and pushed into the cool, semi-darkness of the gin-mill, taking a booth opposite the bar.

Elijah, the aged Negro of all work, brought him a tall glass of brew. Jim took a deep draught, enjoying the coolness of the liquid.

"Hi, Pearce!" A deep voice reverberated in the dark, cool bar.

Jim turned. A large man seated in the corner booth rose and walked over toward him, a highball in his hand.

Red Sloan was a Tampa bookmaker. He owned a cottage on the beach and came down often for weekends of fishing. Sloan's hair was combed tight to his head. A broken nose marred his face and there were times when he spoke from the side of his mouth. He drew a sheet of paper from a pocket and held it out.

"Sit down, Red." Jim invited and studied the sheet. Thoughtfully he made out a one-dollar, four-horse parlay.

"Stubborn, ain't you!" Red chuckled. "Always four horse parlays! Four dogs got to win before you make a nickel. Won't you ever learn?"

Pearce smiled at the grinning bookie.

"I gamble for fun, Red. When I win, I want to win something worthwhile."

"Heard anymore about that storm in the G-Gulf?" Charlie Saylor asked from behind the bar. He had a slight speech impediment that caused an occasional stutter.

"Nothing Charlie," Jim answered, "except that it's heading this way. May not amount to much, but you never can tell this time of the year."

Charlie Saylor was a curious duck, Pearce reflected. He had come down to the island from Pittsburgh, about a year before. He seemed to have a little money, for he had

bought out this beachside juke-joint, redecorated and enlarged it, then blossomed forth as Saylor's Baths. Nobody knew much about him, but he was accepted by the permanent residents. And that's what counted.

JIM was finishing his second beer with Sloan when he heard Arnold Leo approaching. Leo was some distance away, still singing, still going off-key without warning or apparent realization. But he had changed the song to "Only A Bird in A Gilded Cage."

"I wonder who's coming!" Sloan's tone was heavy with sarcasm. "You'd never guess, would you!"

The volume of the song rose as Leo pushed into the bar, then ceased abruptly.

"A beer!" he called cheerfully to Saylor. He nodded a greeting to Sloan, then seeing Jim's empty glass, "Correction! Two beers!"

Arnold Leo had a long nose lined with a network of veins, a mouth that was too wide. It wasn't used for smiling. Also he had a love for the songs of a bygone era. He sat down, grunting. To Jim he was more than a friend. They fished, played poker and drank together. Leo had backed Jim financially in buying the island town's only newspaper.

"There's tarpon off Point O' Rocks. How about going out in the morning?" Leo asked hopefully.

"Better not count on tomorrow," Jim replied. "There's a storm coming up the Gulf."

"First good day then," Leo said exuberantly. "Season's playing out. Okay?"

Jim agreed. They drank a few beers silently, finding a satisfaction in each other's company which did not call for words.

At last Leo rose.

"Better be getting home." He said. "Helen's expecting me early. Care to come over for dinner? We got some nice fresh chicken."

“Not tonight.” Jim said. “I’m no retired plutocrat. I got a newspaper to get out. Give Helen my best.”

Leo shouted his ‘goodbys’ to the men at the bar and pushed out through the screened door. As he left, Jim heard him pick up the melody of another old-time melody, “Father, Dear Father, Come Home With Me Now.”

Jim went to the bar to have a last drink of beer. Red Sloan was talking to Elijah about the coming storm.

“Do you think the blow will hit us hard?” Jim asked the darky who enjoyed considerable fame locally as a weather man.

“Little early to tell yet,” Elijah said, “but in another couple hours, I’ll know. I’ve got a feeling though that somethin’ is going to happen. Some thin’ is going to bust loose on this island—”

“You mean trouble of some kind?” Red Sloan asked. “What kind of trouble could hit us on this island? We’re all peaceful—”

“I got the earache!” Elijah stated. “And when I got the earache, something always happens.”

Charlie Saylor had come down to the end of the bar. He reached down beneath the counter and brought up a bottle. He was used to this.

“Here, Elijah, have a drink. It’s awful good for earaches.”

Elijah drank deeply.

“That’s a good drink, Mr. Saylor,” he said, “but my ear still aches.”

They all laughed. Everybody liked the cheerful Elijah and knew the joke about his customary evening drink on the house. He seemed to enjoy having Charlie Saylor give him the drink for a definite reason, rather than just taking it himself, as he was at liberty to do.

Jim said goodbye to the men at the bar and went out. The sky was overcast and the wind was whipping in stronger. The Gulf was flecked with whitecaps and had turned a dirty green color. It looked like the storm

would hit about midnight.

Jim shrugged and climbed into his car. On the other side of town he gave himself to the work of running his newspaper. Three hours later, his editorial work finished, he glanced over his account books. The summer season had been slacker than usual. There was a note of a thousand due in a month. He wondered how he’d meet it or talk the bank into renewing. He hoped he would not have to ask Arnold Leo for it.

It was ten o’clock when he left his plant and drove over to Saylor’s for another look at the Gulf, and a goodnight beer. It was raining hard and the wind was rising steadily. Darkness enshrouded him as he left the car and the rain drenched him to the skin. Saylor’s was a welcome refuge.

The barroom was crowded. Contrasted with the quiet of the afternoon, it was bedlam. Men argued with each other about the storm as they listened to a small radio Saylor brought out to the bar. The barometer which was falling slowly but steadily was consulted often.

Jim saw Red Sloan, moved into a space at his elbow and ordered a beer. From the conversation about him he picked up a couple of local items and made a note of them. A gust of rain and wind suddenly swept the length of the bar. Automatically, Jim glanced toward the door.

Elijah stood on the threshold, his face gray and his eyes wide with fright and wonder. Hands cupped before him like a catcher waiting for a fast pitch, he moved towards Saylor at the bar.

“Mr. Saylor, there’s a body outside. Mr. Leo is dead.” He spoke in a low voice but the barroom suddenly stilled.

Saylor stared at his employee.

“Are you c-crazy?” He said. “What kind of a g-gag is this?”

Conscious only of a cold numbness inside, Jim Pearce strode the length of the bar, seized Elijah’s arm.

“What was that you said?” he demanded.

Elijah winced, and tried to free himself.

“Honest, Mr. Jim, there’s a body lying outside in the rain, dead. And it’s Mr. Leo.” Elijah wasn’t gagging. “You are hurting my arm.”

“Sorry.” Jim relaxed the grip not realizing that his fingers had been gripping the man’s arm as if they were talons. “You said Leo was dead. How do you know?”

“He’s lying outside, in the path, with a gash on his head that long!” Elijah held his palms out.

“You have a flashlight?” Jim asked Saylor.

Saylor handed him a huge dry-cell searchlight. Jim pushed Elijah through the door and plunged outside into the storm.

“Come on!” He sang out to those behind him.

OUTSIDE the wind was rising. Seas pounded resoundingly on the beach, fifty feet away, and a mixture of salt spray and rain was carried horizontally by the force of the gale. Steadying himself, holding tight to Elijah’s arm, Jim made his way down the road, then cut into a narrow path which angled across a lot knee-high with coarse beach grass. Ahead and to the right he saw lights in Sloan’s cottage.

Jim realized Elijah could be wrong, but the numbness inside persisted. On such a night, Leo might have slipped, fallen, cut his head on a stone or shell. But an injured man could bleed to death if unattended. Jim fought for balance on the slippery footing. He was half-turned once and saw a string of lights bobbing on the path as men floundered along in his wake.

The gale blew steadily, but as yet it was nowhere near hurricane force. They’d progressed about halfway across the lot when the beam of the searchlight in Jim’s hand touched a form lying in the path.

It was Arnold Leo. Water swirled in

pools around him and his clothing was drenched. Jim saw the gash on his head, a good five inches long. Water under the head was tinged with blood.

Pearce dropped to one knee, laid the back of his hand against the cheek of his friend. His heart contracted at the feeling of coldness. He felt for a pulse, found none. He lifted one eyelid and couldn’t repress a shudder at the enlarged pupil. It looked like the eye of a fish, long boated, and unquestionably dead.

Jim’s stomach felt sickeningly empty as he rose, and in spite of his effort at control, his voice shook as he spoke to a man on his right.

“Dead, all right! Been dead some time.”

They gathered around in a loose circle and it seemed that everybody who had been at Saylor’s was out here now. Flashlight beams pointed at the body of Arnold Leo like spokes of a wheel leading to the hub. Jim felt the ground under Leo’s head for a stone or shell which might have caused the wound. There was none.

Jim sent the man nearest him back to Saylor’s to phone the sheriff on the mainland. He looked down at the body of his friend. The storm, and the wind, and the rain were blotted out for a moment, as he recalled the years of friendship with Arnold Leo.

He remembered Leo directing traffic on New York’s Fifth Avenue, singing the old songs he loved, loudly, off-key. Jim was a police reporter then, with an urge to run a small-town paper and a wholehearted distaste for New York winters. Leo had friends in Wall Street, and by following their advice had amassed a small fortune.

It was Leo who suggested, as their friendship ripened, that Jim buy the island paper, and loaned him enough money to get started. He thought of the friendly poker sessions in the office, with Leo, and five or six others, which usually lasted until dawn. But Leo would never play another hand of

seven-card stud. The full impact of the knowledge struck him suddenly like a physical blow.

“Let me through—let me through! My husband.” The cry came from outside the circle of men.

A lane opened. A woman stumbled forward. The force of the gale hit her, drove her off balance, but she recovered quickly and surged ahead, dropping to her knees and attempting to gather the head in her arms. It was Leo’s wife. Jim touched her shoulder.

“Careful, Helen!” Jim warned. “Don’t disturb him. Let the sheriff see him just as he is.”

Anger flared in her eyes for an instant, then died.

“You’re right, Jim.” Her face set like a mask. “Who did it?” she demanded.

“I’d like to know, too,” Jim said bitterly. He studied Helen Leo, on her knees, looking up at him, ignoring the sting of raindrops on her face. She was still undeniably attractive. Auburn hair showed under a silk handkerchief covering her head, tied peasant style. She wore a yellow slicker of the heavy type preferred by fishermen.

But as usual it was her voice which affected Jim. Low, throaty, it penetrated to the depths of his being, thrilled him, even now.

But it wasn’t difficult to control that emotion now as when he’d first met her. Helen, who’d been a singer in a side-street night club, sensed her attraction for him. There’d been times when he’d felt her invite his attentions but he fought against it. Bringing hurt to Leo was one thing he could not do.

Yet in spite of everything, he liked her. Helen was fun. And good company. Her eyes, the flash of her smile, and her deep, husky voice combined to stir him as no woman ever had. Yet, as the wife of Arnold Leo, she was something untouchable.

Her low voice interrupted his thoughts.

“Do we have to wait here? Can’t we move him? It—it doesn’t seem decent.”

As though in answer to her query a car slewed around the corner and stopped, its headlights poking through the rain and playing on them.

“That’s the sheriff,” Red Sloan said. “He’s got a cracked lens in one headlight.”

THEY gathered in Sloan’s cottage while the wind howled in off the Gulf. Sheriff Matheson’s investigation had been swift and practical. Aided by the county coroner, he’d decided to move everything to Sloan’s house, less than fifty feet away, where they could find protection from the storm. The onlookers told their stories simply, quickly. Elijah began and Jim finished.

It was when the sheriff asked Jim if he had any ideas that Jim suddenly went cold, and remembered the scene in the rain.

“Not yet.” He replied, speaking carefully. “If I get any, I’ll let you know.”

Matheson went on asking questions and noted the answers in a loose-leaf book. After a while he walked to a window, looked out, then turned.

“We’ll have an inquest in the morning if possible. If this turns into a hurricane, we’ll have to wait. But I don’t want anyone leaving the island, unless it’s evacuated for a storm. Understand?”

His gaze traveled quickly from face to face.

“Where’s Elijah?” He snapped suddenly.

Jim looked around. The old colored man had been there a few minutes ago. No one had seen him leave. Now he was gone, disappeared.

The tan on the sheriff’s face darkened.

“Find him! I want him! I got more questions for him!”

Two young deputies nodded and headed out into the storm. Jim followed, suspicion gnawing at him like a hungry rodent. He could see again clearly the scene in the rain,

with Helen standing outside the tight circle of men, crying, Let me through! *My husband—*

How had she known that it was Leo lying there on the rain-swept sand? He decided he needed a beer, to help him think it out.

The bar in Saylor's was nearly vacant when Jim returned. Saylor pushed a bottle and glass down the bar toward him.

"Help yourself, P-Pearce," he stuttered. "You need it."

Jim saw his reflection in the mirror. His face was white, drawn. The lines running from his nose to the outer corners of his mouth were deeper. His eyes looked tired.

"H-help yourself," Saylor repeated.

Jim poured a drink, lifted it, then dumped it into the spittoon.

"That's not the answer!" he said. "Thanks just the same. I feel as though I'd left part of myself out there. Leo was my friend."

"I know." Saylor nodded sympathetically. "Got any ideas?"

Again Jim thought of Helen. There had been friction between the ex-singer and her husband. She didn't care for life on the Florida key. She craved bright lights, the exciting pace of a big city. This quiet key, where people came to fish or rest had bored her after the first few months.

Leo had money, just how much Jim didn't know. But with Leo's death, Helen would be well fixed financially. Jim knew he had to investigate her, yet his mind revolted at the prospect. There must be another answer.

"You see more than you let on," he said to Saylor. "What's your idea? How about Sloan?"

"S-Sloan came in just before you did tonight. He looked nervous, jumpy. But why would he kill Leo?"

"I don't know why anybody would want to kill him," Jim said flatly, "money, maybe."

"Somebody might have a yen for Leo's wife," Saylor put in shrewdly.

Jim was startled. Of course, that explained it. Someone had planned Leo's death with Helen.

"Who could it be?" He demanded.

"Darned if I know," Saylor answered. "Anyhow I don't think any man would kill that way, just for another man's wife—isn't natural."

"How about Elijah? Has he come back yet?" Jim asked.

"Haven't seen him," Saylor said, "and when I do I'm going to lock him in a closet for the sheriff."

"Did Elijah ever have a run-in with Leo?" Jim asked.

"Never heard of it," Saylor admitted, "but when Elijah gets a mad on, he's dangerous."

The phone rang shrilly. Saylor answered, then turned to Jim.

"For you. Sounds like the sheriff."

Jim stepped to the phone.

"Pearce speaking."

"Leo was a friend of yours?" Matheson asked.

Jim didn't like his tone. He stiffened.

"You know the answer to that."

"Yes," the sheriff said. "But I didn't know how good. I just learned that he had an insurance policy in your name for ten thousand!"

Again Jim was startled. If such a policy existed it was news to him. The sheriff's voice continued:

"You wouldn't need that kind of money bad, would you, Jim?"

Jim thought of the note at the bank, decided on caution.

"No more than most people," he said.

“Just wanted to tell you not to go away. I’ve got to check on everybody, Pearce. You see that, don’t you?”

“Sure.”

Jim hung up, returned to the bar. So Leo had thought enough of him to carry a policy in his name and never mention it. That very act of generosity might implicate him now. He shook his head and stared at Saylor.

“I think I’ll have a talk with Helen. She may have a hunch.”

“Mrs. Leo?” Saylor seemed shocked. “You newspaper men! With her husband dead, you’re going to bother her? You ought to let her alone!”

Jim was surprised at Saylor’s belligerency.

“I’ll bother her no more than necessary. But there are angles.”

**J**IM PEARCE walked to the door and pushed through. The rain-laden wind beat him back for a moment. He had to fight against it to reach his car. His starter ground for a long moment with no response from the engine.

“Drowned out,” Jim concluded. With his ignition system short-circuited, there was nothing left but walking. He returned to the bar and borrowed Saylor’s searchlight again.

Leaving, he circled the building for protection from the storm. At the rear, he saw Saylor’s coupe parked in the lee of the building by the back door. He thought of borrowing it, decided against that idea.

He passed on, found a cross-street where the storm was at his back and walked carefully, his mind asking the question-again and again. If Elijah found Leo’s body and came immediately to the bar, how had Helen Leo known who or what was inside that circle of men?

The gale made walking difficult. He forced himself to think. If Sloan had killed Leo, he must have had a reason. Was Helen the reason? As far as Jim knew, there had

been no relationship between Sloan and Leo’s wife. But there might have been. If two people were extremely careful—

For a moment he hated Helen Leo. Hated her for her attraction to him. Hated her because she’d had the love and devotion of the swellest man who ever lived and hadn’t appreciated it. Hated her because he’d always wanted her and dare not even admit it.

He stopped short. Why couldn’t he? Arnold Leo was dead. He’d never stand at the crossing singing corny songs again. There was no reason Jim couldn’t speak now. Yet—He shook his head and bowed into the wind and rain.

Leo’s house was a long rambling affair built of cypress, overlooking the bay. There was a row of small cottages on the adjoining property, and there were lights in the windows. A driveway circled Leo’s lot to a two-car-garage in the rear. Jim passed the driveway and turned to a walk leading to the front of the house. There was a light in the living room. He punched the doorbell.

Helen Leo flung the door back suddenly, after Jim had waited a moment. She wore a bright red corduroy coat. Her face was tense, drawn, seemed paler than usual. Jim felt ashamed of himself for bothering her at such a time.

“Oh, it’s you, Jim,” she said. “Come in.”

Jim knew he had to find the answer to the question which kept beating into his brain. He sank into a chair and drew a deep breath.

Helen was standing before the fireplace. On one side there was a white, baby grand piano. The room was furnished with a curious blending of tastes. Leo liked simplicity and comfort. Helen liked swank. The white piano was hers. Above the fireplace there were two fishing rods. A divan with a highly flowered slip-cover contrasted with a club chair, the leather cracked with age. Helen looked down at him

inquiringly.

There was no use putting it off any longer.

"How did you know Leo was dead?" Jim blurted.

"What? You mean I knew—?" She was flustered.

"You stood outside that circle," Jim continued. "You said, Let me through! My husband— How did you know who it was?" He was leaning forward, watching her closely.

"You—you mean you thought I—"

"Tell me!" Jim stood up.

"Saylor phoned," she said simply. "He said you were going out there—told me what Elijah found. Naturally I got a slicker and ran over immediately."

Jim felt relief flood over him. It was like sunshine breaking through a storm.

"I—I forgot Saylor. Helen, I've been a fool! I hated to implicate you, but—"

"I know."

She came close to him. The sense of her was like wine, heady, intoxicating. She raised her face and smiled. He saw the pulse ticking in her throat and swallowed to hide the surge of emotion her proximity brought.

"Oh, Jim! What will I do? What will happen to me now that he's gone?" She sobbed.

"You'll be all right," he said. The next thing he knew her head was on his shoulder and she was crying softly.

"I—I can count on you, Jim, can't I? You were his friend, —I mean our friend!" She lifted tear-filled eyes.

He patted her shoulder. She came still closer, clinging like a small lost child, and her arms stole up around his neck.

"Once, Jim," she whispered, "you were fond of me. No woman misses a thing like that." She raised her eyes, and her lips were not an inch away from his. "And now, Jim, what happens now? I'm—I'm so alone."

He tried to speak, swallowed.

"You'll be all right. I—" He felt himself yanked backwards. Half intoxicated by Helen's closeness, not understanding, he turned quickly.

Saylor, his angular face white, eyes blazing, stood before him.

"So that's the angle you wanted to see about!" he snarled.

"You fool!" Helen whispered. "Why did you come out? Why didn't you let me handle it?"

Jim stared from Helen to Saylor. The bartender swung abruptly. Jim ducked it, and stepped into a hook that drove him backward. It also cleared his mind, showed him the light.

**S**AYLOR had not come in the front door. Jim had been facing it when Saylor entered. Saylor had been in the house when Jim arrived.

"I get it," Jim said coldly. Disgust and anger fought inside him. He stepped toward Saylor. A gun came up in the bartender's hand.

"Keep back, Pearce," Saylor rasped. "Or I'll let you have it!"

Jim laughed. There was no mirth in the sound. He stepped forward, seeing from the corner of his eye that Helen had snatched a heavy brass candlestick from the mantel and was maneuvering to get behind him.

"Just a bird in a gilded cage!" he said bitterly.

"Stop it!" Her words were a half-hysterical scream.

Jim got a sudden hunch. He began to sing, mockingly.

"She's only a bird in a gilded cage,  
A beautiful sight to see!  
You may think that she's happy  
And free from care--she's not!  
Though she seems to be. . . ."

He turned as Helen swung the

candlestick. The ornament glanced off his shoulder. He stepped in fast, grasped her arms, swung her around and drove her straight at Saylor.

The impact knocked the bartender off balance. The gun exploded, drilling a hole in the floor. By then Jim had an armlock on Saylor's forearm.

"Drop it, or I'll break your arm!" He warned.

Saylor flipped the gun to his left hand. Jim levered hard and heard the splintering sound of breaking bone. Saylor screamed.

Jim picked up the gun. He stepped to the phone and lifted it, watching Helen. She lay sprawled where she had fallen and the hate in her eyes was a flame. She laughed harshly.

"Go ahead! Call Matheson! What can you prove! You'll never convict us—" Her voice gritted, was ugly. Jim wondered what he had seen in her.

"Five'll get you ten he does!" a voice drawled from the door. Red Sloan lounged in the doorway. "I already called the sheriff. He'll be here any minute."

Matheson arrived and listened to Jim's story. He looked at Helen curiously. By that time she was sitting up, fighting for control.

"Sure I blew up when he sang that song!" She said. "Why wouldn't I? He was ridiculing Arnold!"

Jim stared. Could she convince Matheson? His gaze touched Saylor. His eyes narrowed as an idea came to him. He wheeled suddenly, spoke tersely to the sheriff, and went out into the storming night.

Ten minutes later rain-drenched and wild-eyed, he stood in the open doorway.

"Sheriff!"

All eyes turned to him, Elijah was on his arm, his face pain wracked, on his head an open bleeding wound.

"Elijah!" Matheson ejaculated, startled.

"Right!" Jim rapped out, "I found him in Saylor's car, behind this house. Locked in,

and bleeding. Who put you there, Elijah?"

"Saylor." Elijah's voice was weak. "I went to him when I left the sheriff. I was scared. Colored folks don't belong in a murder, down here. He claim he would hide me until they discovered the murderer. He hit me with something. I came to inside the back of his car. Reckon he thought I was dead!"

"You're lying!" Saylor lunged up, his face bloodless.

"Quiet!" Matheson snapped. "Watch him, Sloan!"

"It'll be a pleasure!" Sloan moved to Saylor's side.

"Who sent you through the path," Jim asked, "where you found the body?"

"Saylor sent me on an errand." Elijah said solemnly. "When I fell over Mister Leo, I ran back to the bar and told you all."

"You see it, Sheriff?" Jim explained. "Saylor came on duty a few minutes before I arrived. Leo was dead by then. I don't know how Saylor knew Leo'd be coming just then but—"

"Scuse me, sir," Elijah interrupted. "I heard Saylor make a phone call just after nine. He dialed some number and said, 'Okay, honey, send him over.' Then he said, 'I don't care what you tell him, just get him over here.' He didn't know I heard him, I guess. I was restin' with my eyes closed."

Jim was watching Helen as Elijah finished. He noted the sudden look of desperation she gave Saylor. But Jim continued doggedly before Saylor could intervene.

"Elijah, did you mean anything special this afternoon when you said trouble was coming?"

"No, sir." Elijah said. "But when one man fools with another man's wife, trouble is overdue."

"You've seen them together?" Jim demanded. "When?"

"Most every night you gentlemen play

cards. She'd come down the beach and go in the side door. I listened some and heard plenty!"

**T**HERE was a half strangled gasp from Saylor. Sloan's hand grasped his shirt collar, twisting it.

"That almost does it!" Jim couldn't keep a note of triumph from his voice. "Saylor put too much dependence on his car! When I pulled Elijah out I saw a piece of two-by-four in there. About three feet long. I didn't touch it. But there's a stain—"

Helen moaned abruptly through set teeth. She came to her feet and glared at Saylor.

"Oh, you fool! You blasted fool!"

"That really does it!" Matheson said. "Yes, indeed, it really does!"

Later, outside, Jim walked beside Sloan. Again rain stung his face, and the wind made progress difficult.

"How'd you happen to show up like that?" Jim asked.

"I did time once." Sloan explained. "Cops never forget. To play safe I was looking into it. I saw Saylor take off from the bar like a fire truck and I followed. I was outside Leo's, listening, when you came. When Saylor busted in and started swinging

I went next door and phoned Matheson. But how about you—how'd you know where to find Elijah?"

"I didn't," Jim said, thanking the hunch that had sent him outside. "But it struck me suddenly that he was the key to the whole thing. His disappearance was the crux. I knew the layout of Saylor's. There was no place he could hide Elijah safely there. I thought of his car. I've seen him haul liquor and supplies in the back, and from his standpoint it would be a safe place.

"I knew he was here when I arrived so he must have driven over. I found his car behind the house, the back locked. I broke it open and Elijah lay there moaning, doubled up like a pretzel. That's all."

"Oh sure, 'that's all,' " Sloan said. He was silent for a moment. "You think Leo sang those songs to burn her up?" He asked.

"No," Jim replied. "He liked the songs. Helen probably thought he was riding her. She couldn't stand that. What she wanted was freedom, money and a man who had the same tastes. She thought Saylor filled the bill!"

Sloan grunted with disgust.

"There'll be no gold on the cage she'll sleep in tonight! What a sap!"