

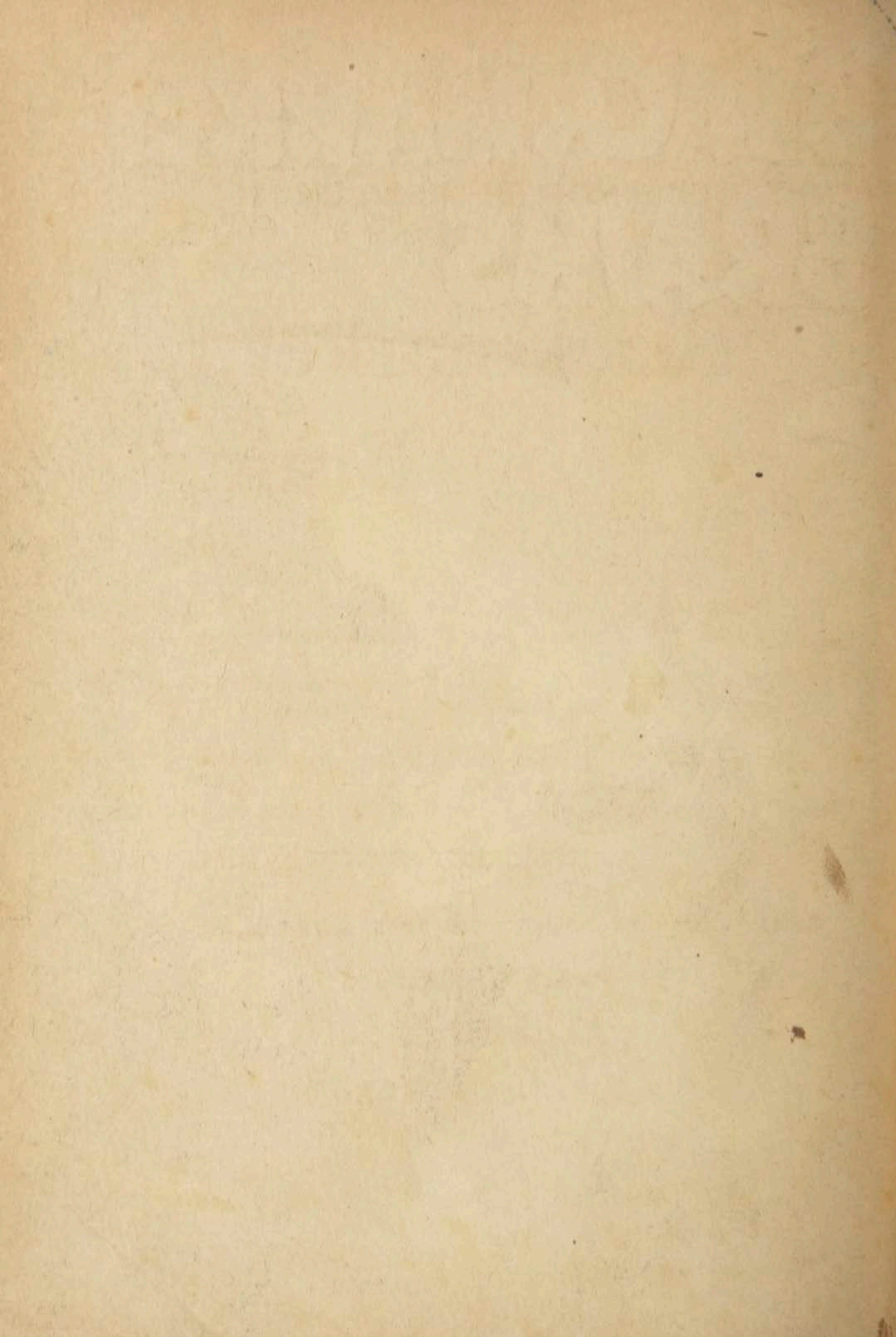
# BLACKMARKET BRAINS

By Kurt  
Hoffman



SCIENTIFIC  
6p  
THRILLER





**THIS IS A SHOCKER THRILLER!!**

# **"Blackmarket Brains"**

**N**O brain, no achievement, no talent is safe from this thief:  
a man who has the power to steal intelligence itself.

Transplanting the brains of the brilliant into his own  
hirelings, this man is a menace to civilisation.

**"Impossible"**

that's what the police said — till death knocked once too often.

---

**Look for the next of this series**

**"HYPNOTIC DEATH"**

**"X-RAY MENACE"**

**"DEATH IS A HABIT"**



THIS IS A SHOCKER TWENTY!

"Blackmail"

Brains

Impossible

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"HYPNOTIC DEATH"

"EASY MURDER"

"DEATH IS A HUNT"



# BLACKMARKET BRAINS

By

KURT HOFFMAN

## CHAPTER I

ALBY looked at the clock and noted it was almost 1 a.m. and about time to shut down his late supper bar. He began to clean up the few dirty cups and plates prior to shutting up for the night. The few customers sitting at the tables would quickly leave by the door then and they soon took the hint and left. Alby knew the business and it wasn't very often that he had to ask anyone to leave when he decided his day was over. It wasn't very often he had to throw anyone out either for that matter, but when the occasion arose he accomplished his task skillfully and promptly.

As Alby moved to the door he noticed a couple step down out of a taxi and hurry toward the door of his bar. He chuckled as he was about to shut the door in their faces. But he stopped suddenly and the girl called in a low husky tone that he knew so well:

"Don't you dare shut us out! You old reprobate, or I'll never speak to you again."

Alby chuckled then and flung the door wide open and stepped aside. He didn't mind a bit to be called a reprobate by this lovely young girl, whose honey-blond hair shone so vividly in the light of the bar.

"Come in, my dear." He smiled. "Long time no see?"

"Never marry a detective, Alby. Leastways, never have that intention. Just look at the hours I have to keep to even have the chance to speak to him." The girl laughed deep in her slender white throat.

"Come in Tessa. Come in Rick," Alby invited and bowed low as Tessa obliged.

Rick assisted Tessa to slip her coat from her shoulders and then sat wearily on a stool at her side. He was more than six feet tall and he was as dark as Tessa was fair. An unruly lock of jet black curly hair hung roughly down on his forehead from beneath his hat. His face was lined with fatigue and his dead black eyes were misted with weariness.

"Coffee, Alby," he said. "Make it good and black, and I could stand an egg and roll if you could dig them up."



"Just coffee, thanks Alby," Tessa smiled.

Alby moved about behind the bar and soon had two eggs, some ham and three cups of coffee on the bar in front of Rick and Tessa. Rick took his cup of coffee wordlessly and drank it down in three great gulps. He then attacked the ham and eggs as if he had not eaten for days. This was not quite literally true. Alby filled his cup again and sat down.

"Is this man of yours playing at cops and robbers again?" Alby said scornfully.

Tessa chuckled and looked slyly at Rick, who ate silently. "His Chief is mad at him, and so he figures he has to work twenty-four hours a day until his Chief says he is a good boy," Tessa jibed.

"You know Tessa. I reckon if you were my girl I'd darn well take better care of you. Why you ain't been round to see me in six weeks," Alby said agrieved.

"It's all on account of some Doctor that gets himself killed or lost or kidnapped or whatever people do with themselves when they disappear," Tessa explained.

"Rick has been looking all over for him and in six weeks he hasn't found one worthwhile clue."

"Say Rick, that ain't like you," Alby said glumly.

"This case isn't like any other I've ever had to tackle either. I've never met a case with so many clues that turned out to be useless and utterly misleading. It is almost as if someone who knew me well were playing at frustrating me. And boy! The Chief is madder than I've ever seen him," Rick growled.

"Why don't he put someone else on the case and give you a rest then?" Alby asked indignantly.

"I reckon I don't aim to see this case beat me. Anyway when the Chief cools down he knows I've done all that could possibly have been done by anyone he's got to put on the case," Rick snapped out.

"Doctor feller, you say," Alby said hopefully.

"Yes. To be precise, Dr. Edward James Hazell-White, aged forty-one, five feet eight inches tall, slim, greying hair and blue eyes. And the best damn brain surgeon that this country has ever had" Rick said angrily, and Tessa laughed in her low luxurious teasing tone.

Rick could not resist a smile when Tessa laughed like that. Besides he was feeling better now he had eaten, and nobody could cook like Alby. They were alone now in the little bar and Alby did not seem eager to lock up and go home.

"It's the damdest case I've ever struck. He just walked out of the hospital one day in a perfectly normal manner and never came back. He had no financial difficulties, no wife to run away from. No trouble of any sort. He just vanished. And we've had so many fruitless leads that I'm nearly crazy. The last case he dealt with before he vanished was Con Hedfirt."

"Not The Con?" Alby asked.

"The same. That delightful gentleman that has not the slightest stain of any sort on his record, yet is known to be the slickest con man in Australia. No one ever complains when he operates. He's oily smooth that character."

"What business did he have with the Doc?" Alby asked.

"He was in a car smash. The Doc. did the repair job. Con was



having some sort of trouble with it according to the Doc's book. He advised Con to take a long rest. He hasn't been seen since so he must have taken the Doc's advice," Rick explained.

"Rick, I've got a hunch about that. I've tried to tell you before that I've got a hunch about Con," Tessa said, her eyes flashing with excitement, but her voice low and calm.

"The Chief has a hunch about Con too. But we can't find Con. So me might as well look for the Doc. They're both of them lost, stolen or strayed. We're not much interested in Con, but we're mighty interested in the Doc, so I figure that the best angle is to look for the one I'd like most to find," Rick answered wearily.

Tessa's eyes faded to their usual calm and Alby took another gulp of coffee, hoping these two would let up on each other. He could see their nerves were worn to thin threads that were near to snapping.

"Talking about lost people," Alby filled a gap, "Punchy ain't been seen for near to a month now. He's vanished."

"He probably got tired of your face and has gone somewhere else to eat," Rick grinned.

No. It ain't like that, Rick. His landlady was round to say he hadn't been home and all his things were still in his room. I've been paying his rent till he turned up again," Alby explained.

"Didn't anyone report this to the police?" Rick snapped, his official veneer snapping into place, but beneath he felt an uneasy feeling of sickness. Punchy was one of the best boxers of twenty years ago but he had kept going too long and had been slugged to stupidity. Rick had a friendship of sorts with Punchy and had always done what he could to see that things went smoothly for him.

"Well," Alby said, taken aback, "we sort of figured he'd turn up again. We didn't see no reason to report it official like. You ain't been around now for six weeks so I couldn't tell you."

"It should have been reported. When was the last time he was seen?" Rick snapped, the light of battle in his eyes.

"Why, I don't rightly know. I figure it was yes! It'll be a month on day after to-morrow. He was in here with a young fighter bloke, name of . . . I don't seem to recall his name. He's only fought a few bouts . . . won them all, good fighter but he can't box fer nuts. I saw him once. If he could only box he'd be a champion," Alby muttered thoughtfully, still trying to recall the name.

"Was it Tiger Grace?" Rick snapped.

"That's it, Tiger Grace. Young snowy headed kid. He can't box fer nuts," Alby answered.

"They left here together? At what time?" Rick demanded.

"Sure they left together? At what time?" Rick demanded.  
till I shut. That was about one, same as usual. What's eatin' you, Rick?" Alby asked.

"Tiger Grace didn't get home that night either. He hasn't been seen since. It's queer," he said thoughtfully. "Six weeks ago a well known brain specialist disappears. His last patient to see him, a well known confidence man, also disappears. Two weeks later two fighters disappear. But why? Why? If we knew why they vanished we could probably find them."

"It's late Rick, and you're tired," Tessa said. "Suppose you find me



a taxi and then go home to get some rest."

"There's something to all this. There must be. People don't just all disappear in a bunch like that with no reason," was all Rick said.

Tessa's eyes flashed. "You look like a dissipated rake of forty, instead of what you are at thirty. It's time you quit and got some rest. You can't do anything more till morning."

"I've got to think this over," Rick stubbornly refused. "I'll get a taxi for you Tessa. Then I think I'll take a walk and see what I can work out of this."

"Look Rick, I want a live husband, not a dead boy friend. If you refuse to let up on this come up home to my flat and you can do your thinking there. Marie won't mind, and you can have a sleep on the lounge," Tessa pleaded, near to exasperation.

"I reckon Tessa shows some sense there, Rick. If I was your doctor I'd give you a sedative that'd put you to sleep for a week. You sure look as if you need it," Alby said.

"O.K. Tessa. You win. Alby, if you hear anything of either Punchy or Tiger Grace ring me straight away. Here's the number. If I'm not there, which is probable, just say you called." Rick handed Alby a piece of an envelope on which he had scribbled a number.

Alby let them out and some of the tenseness relaxed from Tessa's face as she got Rick into a taxi and on the way home. She knew very well that she could get him to sleep once she got him to the flat.

As they entered the flat Tessa cautioned for silence. "Don't make much noise Rick. It's terribly late and Marie will be asleep."

"I fancy I'm too tired to make any noise at all unless it is to snore," Rick grinned.

Tessa whirled on him and cried: "Rick Cole, you didn't tell me you snored."

Rick's tanned angular face broke into a merry smile. He drew Tessa down on to the lounge beside him and kissed her teasingly before he answered simply. "I don't."

"Oh," was all Tessa could manage to say right then. She crept out of his arms and disappeared into the bedroom and returned with two blankets and a rug. She removed his coat, tie, and shoes and lay him back on the lounge, covered him with the blankets and went into the kitchen. A moment later she was back with a glass of warm milk but Rick was already asleep. She smiled gently to herself, looked at the milk, pulled a little face and drank it down. She turned out the light and crept away to bed.



## CHAPTER II

MARIE had gone to work and Tessa was busily cooking Rick's breakfast when the phone woke him. He scrambled from the blankets as Tessa lifted the receiver and said "Hello." She listened a moment before turning to Rick. "It's your Chief. He's hopping mad."

Rick took the receiver and said sleepily: "Cole here."

"What in the blazes do you think you're at," Tessa heard. It's near ten o'clock. Get down here as fast as you can. Some Ham called Alby's been ringing for you. And that pug Tiger Grace has turned up. What sort of a man are you to be on any case? People disappear, they appear again and you know nothing about it. Get down here Cole, and quick." The receiver clicked at the other end and Rick placed the receiver slowly back on the phone.

"Well, he sounds good and mad this morning. I wonder what's in his hair now?" Tessa chuckled. "You had best have a shower and a shave Rick. You look half asleep. You'll find a safety razor and some blades in the cabinet in the bathroom. Your breakfast will be ready by the time you are." Tessa turned back to the kitchen, laughing.

"All mod cons, eh?" Rick called, puzzled. He couldn't figure out what was wrong with the Chief and he couldn't work out what Tessa found so amusing.

When Rick returned from the bathroom he felt and looked a new man. Tessa looked up from the table and smiled. "Good morning, Rick. My you look good."

"Now that you mention it I don't feel so bad. Say, Tessa . . ."

Rick faltered and said nothing more.

"What is it, Rick? What's the matter?" Tessa asked anxiously.

Rick looked down at Tessa and grinned. "I've just realised what I've been missing. Home-cooking. I fancy I could stand a lot of mornings with you to get my breakfast." He kissed her then, and it was a moment before Tessa spoke.

"Any time you like, Mr. Cole."

"Then I name it right after this case is cleared up. The Chief has something mighty important on his mind. I'd best hurry and get down there," Rick answered.

"Rick Cole, don't you dare leave until you've eaten every last piece of that steak and had your coffee," Tessa said warningly.

Rick chuckled and sat down and ate.

In forty minutes he was knocking at the Chief's door.

"Come in," the Chief's booming voice called. Rick opened the door and went in, bracing himself for the inevitable blast.

"What's the idea, Cole? Coming in at this time in the morning. You might not have turned up at all if that Alby character hadn't told me where to find you. What have you been at? . . ." The Chief boomed on without waiting for an answer to the dozen or so questions he asked in the process of his tirade. At last he stopped.

"I reckon I've got to sleep some time, Chief. I've been burning all my candles a bit too much lately. What's this about Tiger Grace turning up?" Rick asked.



"Grace arrived at his trainer's home early this morning and we were called immediately. Grace wasn't the least use. We've questioned him and he can tell us nothing. The whole world is going crazy and I'm going with it," the Chief spat out.

"He could tell you nothing at all?"

"Nothing of any importance. He and an old punch-drunk boxer were in a late supper joint. They leave when it closes. Some guys jump them in the dark and they are dragged into a car and chloriformed. Grace wakes up; he don't know how much later and finds himself in bed in a room. There's a nurse looking after him. She wore a white mask over her face and a long white uniform. She wouldn't talk to him. After a couple of days they let him up. There was a Doctor there too and he wore a mask also and a cap. A couple of days later at night he is blindfolded and led out to a car and driven for a long while round a lot of corners and turned loose. By the time the blindfold is off the car has gone and he goes to his trainer's place. The trainer rings us. That's the whole story. Grace has been examined and apparently he has been taking a lot of drugs which accounts for the fact that he was out cold for three weeks. There's a case for you. Kidnap a young pug. Drug him for three weeks and then when he recovers, turn him loose. No murder, no blackmail, no ransom, no revenge. In fact nothing. I tell you Cole the world is going crazy."

Just then the phone rang again and the Chief growled: "Detective-Inspector Woods here." "Yes. Yes. He's here. Just a minute." The Chief covered the mouthpiece and said: "For you. It's the character Alby." He handed Rick the phone.

"Rick here Alby . . . He has . . . This morning . . . I'll be right over . . . Keep him there . . . Yes . . . In ten minutes . . . Right." He dropped the handpiece back and looked puzzled.

"Speak up man. What's it all about?" the Chief raged.

"Punchy has turned up. His story fits Tiger's like a glove. It's damn queer; damn queer," Rick said.

"Get over there Cole and report back. This business will have us laughed out of the force unless we do something about it. We can't let people be kidnapped and then turned loose and do nothing. Get over there."

Rick took a car and raced across town to Alby's joint. He parked the car and rushed inside. Punchy was sitting at the bar happily drinking coffee and drying the gravy from his plate with a piece of bread. There was something different about him. He looked younger and freer in his movements somehow. Rick moved over and sat beside him.

"How is it, Punchy? I hear tell you've been on a little vacation," Rick quizzed.

"Hello, Rick. Yes. Damn funny that. I can't figure it out. But I ain't Punchy anymore. I feel better than I have since I lost the title fifteen years ago. My head is as clear as a bell. Damn funny. I got a hell of a shock when Alby told me I had been away near to a month. What you make of it, Rick?" Punchy asked.

"I don't know. Tiger Grace turned up this morning too. Your story and his check beautifully. It is sheer madness. Madness. Give me some coffee Alby. I reckon I'll have to drown my sorrows some way. You couldn't recognise the Doctor bloke or the nurse, Punchy?" Rick queried.



"Naw! Not a hope. They was always cluttered up in masks and things. They didn't talk much either. There were at least two other guys but I didn't see much of them and they always wore masks. I ain't got no complaints. They fixed me up fine, but I'm damned if I know how," Punchy concluded.

When Rick returned to the office the Chief was charging up and down his office in a towering rage. Rick ventured to ask what was wrong.

"Another disappearance. Another one. When's this going to stop? A golfer this time. The left-handed cove that's been winning all the championships. He was supposed to go to Adelaide to play in a competition there. He didn't turn up. His landlady thought he had gone. When he was three days late in returning she rang us. That means he's been gone ten days. Ten days before we even know about it. Before we can do anything about it he'll be back like the others. I tell you I'll go crazy if this keeps up. Stark raving crazy. I've put Bell and Jacobs on to the details. You'll be in charge of the whole show until it's cleared up and forget about getting tired. We've got to find out what's behind all this. These cases tie in somewhere with the brain guy. Where? That's the point. Where? Punchy has a doctor and a nurse. Tiger has a doctor and a nurse. A doctor is missing. We've got to find out what's behind all this. You've got to. Now get to it. Keep that car in case you need it and keep on the job."

"Right, Chief," Rick said and left the office. He gave a number that would find him and went after his car.

\* \* \* \* \*

Two weeks went by and Rick got nowhere. Every line of inquiry he followed led him to a dead-end. He had a dragnet out for Con Hedfert and nothing came of it. Con had vanished into smoke.

He dropped in at Tiger's gym to see how he was faring. In three days he was to have his first fight since his return. It was his big chance. Tiger had been a good draw card because he fought hard and clean from bell to bell. The promoters were short of a boy to fight the champ and had decided to give Tiger a chance. They knew he didn't have a ghost of a show of winning but the house would be good and if Tiger made a good showing he would be in the big-time money.

When Rick got to the training ring Tiger was in the ring, pounding away at a sparring partner and bobbing and weaving away from the punches and landing them just as fast as his gloves could carry their power back and forth. Rick greeted Darcy, Tiger's trainer, and asked: "How is he shaping, Darcy? He looks good to me."

"He is good. Too damn good. I can't figure it out. I spent two years trying to teach that boy to box and gave him up as a hard fisted fighter. Since he come back he's hittin' as hard as ever and he ain't had one solid punch landed on him yet. It ain't natural. That boy was a fighter and nothing else. Now he can box better than most I ever seen and fight with it. He looks just like Dave Bolt when he starts to box. There weren't many better than Dave when it came to boxing, but he couldn't punch. This boy's got both. It ain't natural. I tell you I spent two years tryin' to teach that boy to box."

"I reckon he's worth a little money in a wager. What are the odds about his chance?" Rick said as he watched Tiger pound his partner into a corner.



"That's damn funny too. Three days ago you could have got sixes against Tiger winning. Now it's evens," Darcy said.

"How come? The touts see Tiger in a workout?"

"Naw! He's done all his sparrin' in private. I don't figure it out. But someone has put a hell of a lot of money on Tiger to floor the champ. I wish to hell I knew who it was. A hell of a lot of money to make that much difference to the price."

"I think I'll see this fight. Even if the Chief does roar me out," Rick said thoughtfully.

"Reckon I can get you a couple of good seats if you like, Rick," Darcy suggested.

"Thanks Darcy, I'd appreciate that," Rick grinned.

"I reckon Tessa is most as keen on sport as you are, eh?"

More so," Rick laughed. "And I haven't had much time to take her out of late. I'm in the bad books. Well, I'll see you." Rick turned away and then swung back again.

"Say, Darcy, who was Dave Bolt? Before my time?" he asked.

"Yeah! Long time. Stayed in too long and got punchy. They call him that now," Darcy said sadly.

"You mean Punchy was Dave Bolt," cried Rick.

"Yeah. That's right. Damn shame to see a good'n go down like that. Damn shame."

But Rick was already running for the door. He dived into his car and started off fast. Then he realised that he had nowhere in particular to go. But that was his first clue. The first link. Perhaps things weren't crazy after all. Perhaps reason would come out of the mess yet.

When he got back to the office he found his Chief in a rage again. Only it was worse than ever this time. Worse than ever. The Chief stormed about the office mouthing curses and blasphemy about stupid Detective-Sergeants in general and one particular one in more detailed terms.

"What did I tell you," he bellowed. "What did I tell you. The missing golfer has walked into a police station to report that he had been kidnapped. They go, they come. You do nothing. Where have you been? What have you been doing?"

"I've been over at the gym seeing how Tiger Grace was shaping," Rick answered coolly.

"And how is Tiger Grace?" the Chief asked sarcastically.

"He's shaping just like he would if he had suddenly acquired the boxing prowess Punchy used to have when he was at his top. In fact I'd hazard a guess that he'll beat the champ to-morrow night," Rick answered.

"So you would eh? I've a pound that says the champ stays champ," the Chief growled. "That young mug was never anything but a fighter. He won't last three rounds."

Rick drew a pound from his wallet and dropped it on the Chief's desk.

"I won't ask you for odds. That would be robbery," Rick said. "Did our golfer friend have the same story as the others? Nothing to tell except about a doctor and a nurse?"

"That's all. The same story. If somebody doesn't tell me a different one soon I'll go sane again. Now get out and let me work. Jacobs or Bell can tell you all the details." Rick went, for he never stayed in the Chief's presence longer than he had to.



## CHAPTER III

"WHY, Rick Cole!" Tessa exclaimed as she opened the door, "you're on time. And flowers. Oh Rick, you're a darling." Tessie reached up on tip-toe and kissed him.

"Where are we going?"

"To the fight," Rick grinned. "To see Tiger Grace win the light-weight championship crown."

"To win . . . But you're kidding me. That young pug couldn't beat the champ," Tessa laughed.

"Like to make a bet," Rick teased.

"Yes. I'll back the champ to win. What's the wager?"

"How about a new dress against the price of supper at Alby's?" Rick chuckled.

"You're very sure of yourself aren't you? It's a bet." Tessie laughed. "I won't be a minute," and vanished into the bedroom to do whatever it is that young ladies invariably do before leaving on a date.

Meanwhile Con Hedfirt sat close to a wireless listening to the broadcast preamble to the fight.

"This had best be good, Doc," he said. "I stand to win ten thousand if Tiger drops the champ."

"Aw quit worrying Con," Jerry Green gawled. "Ain't I left-handed now? Gawd, this whole set-up is crazy though."

"Shut your face," Catface Carson growled. "What you got to winge about. It's the best racket yuh ever got a cut in."

They sat for a while till Catface screamed out: "Fer Gawd's sake Con, put that damn gun away. Lately yer ain't done nothing but play with that gun or tinker about with the car. Doc didn't do you no damn good."

"Watch yourself Catface. I'm not nearly as patient as I used to be. Like you say, the Doc didn't do me much good," Con said smoothly.

"You are very fortunate to be alive. What I did was your only possible chance of living," the Doctor said evenly.

"Yeah! An' now he wants to be an engineer instead of the smartest damn con operator in Australia. Do you call that yer very best. Yuh flamin' quack," Catface spat out.

Dr. Hazell-White's face went pale with anger at this insult but he said nothing.

"Aw fer Jeez sake shut up, the lot of yer," the mousy little blonde said petulantly.

"Yes, be quiet," Con agreed smoothly, too smoothly for the other's comfort.

The last preliminary bout was over when Rick and Tessa took their seats just two rows back from the ringside. The Champ came down the aisle amid a roar of cheering and was quickly followed by Tiger, who looked fit and very confident. The announcement made, the seconds left the ring and the boys moved in to the centre of the ring as the bell sounded for the first of the fifteen rounds.



They met each other carefully and threw a few probing punches. The Champ looked puzzled as the Tiger slipped his thrusts and landed a solid left to the side of his head. He was more careful now and they boxed away the rest of the round. The Champ used all his boxing skill but found that the Tiger always had a counter to his blow.

Back in their corners the Champ's trainer was talking urgently to him.

"Watch that young cub. He can box, and box plenty. He's never been better than a game fighter before but he can box now. Watch him close. He packs a powerful punch in that right glove," he cautioned the Champ.

"I'll get the mug. Don't worry. He's been smart so far but he'll make a slip," the Champ growled.

Back in their seats Rick looked just as pleased as Tessa looked worried.

"So you knew that Tiger could box, Rick," Tessa grinned.

"Well, I did drop into his training gym for a few minutes the other day to see how he was coming along," Rick confessed. The bell sounded and both boys came from their corners eagerly.

They met in the centre of the ring and exchanged blows. The Champ failed to land a solid punch on Tiger. Tiger was always going away as his punches were coming in. The Champ growled deep in his throat and waded in, fighting. However, Tiger was content to bob and weave away from the punches and counter when necessary. He was storing up points fast and the Champ knew it and didn't like it.

The third and fourth rounds passed in much the same way. Tiger was elusive and when he hit the Champ it was usually hard. In the fifth round the Champ came in with a determination to stop this young fool who thought he knew all the angle. He waded in and forced Tiger into a neutral corner where he aimed to drop him but before he could get set for his killer punch Tiger had counter punched with two swift lefts to the face and slamming a right to the body which rocked the champ back on his legs. He recovered quickly and they met again in the centre of the ring.

Cautious again now, remembering that staggering right, the Champ boxed for an opening but found none. Tiger seemed to become more elusive as the minutes of the fight crept by. The bell sounded the end of the round and Tiger was away ahead on points.

"Want to call that bet off?" Rick asked as he turned to Tessa. "I reckon that the Champ won't be champ much longer."

"I don't welch on my wagers, Rick Cole," Tessa flared. "Besides, the fight's not over yet. Your Tiger boy will make a slip, and if he does he's gone."

Rick laughed happily, and noted how well he had chosen the flowers to go with Tessa's honey-blonde hair.

Rounds six, seven and eight crept by and the points were still in Tiger's favour. The bell sounded for the ninth and the Champ was slower to leave his corner this time.

The crowd were on their feet in excitement at the unexpected turn of events in the fight. They knew the Champ needed a knock-out to win and very few there expected him to miss getting it. They were on their toes and waiting for the kill.



The Champ threw a low left to Tiger's body but Tiger rolled and the punch glanced off his side. He countered with a right cross to the side of the head and then slammed home a savage left that marked the Champ over his right eye. Blood began to flow from the cut. With the blood tricking into his eye the Champ threw precautions to the wind and went after the Tiger with the killer light in his eyes. He aimed to stop the young cub and stop him pronto.

Tiger boxed off skilfully and then let drive with a swinging left that landed squarely to the Champ's ribs. He grunted and his guard dropped slightly. Tiger flashed a terrific right flush home to the point of the chin and it carried every ounce of power he could muster. There wasn't the slightest doubt about the count and the seconds were into the ring at ten. The crowd were howling and cheered and cheered till the Anthem silenced them. The Champ's seconds were working over him in the centre of the ring and slowly he revived and looked dazedly up in wonder. Tiger had been hurried away to his dressing room.

"Well," Rick grinned, "I reckon we'll go across and see if we can't get a nice expensive meal at Alby's."

Tessa grimaced up at him angrily. He laughed. He thought her pretended anger very becoming. Then she laughed too.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Well, Con, I shure gotta hand it to yuh. That beats the band. Ten thousand fiddles just like that," Catface smirked.

"Yes, it went off very well. You'll collect to-morrow and put as much as you can get against Cadback winning the golf championship. After what we've done to him I think it should be a pretty safe bet. Don't you think so Jerry?"

"Gosh Con, I'm left handed ain't I?" Jerry whined. "When are we gonna bump the Doc, Con? With the clean-up we'll make on the golf we won't need him no more. We'll be on easy street," Catface asked matter-of-factly.

"The Doc's got another job to do yet. Just one more. I don't aim to stay as a damn engineer kid all my life. I rather liked myself as I was. The Doc is going to see that is arranged. After that . . ." He shrugged his shoulders eloquently.

"Yeah boss. I reckon I ketch on. It can be arranged," Catface grinned evilly.

"I notice in the papers that there is a gentleman coming here from America. The paper describes him as the confidence man of diplomacy. He sounds as though he should suit our purpose admirably. He will be here within a few days. We shall arrange that he disappear for a few weeks. I fancy he will not appreciate the honour but we must see to it that nothing slips up. You understand." Con growled, a look of hope lighting up the moroseness common to his face of late.

"Crikey Con. Ain't we done enough?" Jerry whined. "I ain't so sure we can get away with something like that."

"We have three times already. We shall again. Is that clear, Jerry? You're not getting cold feet are you Jerry?"

"No boss, I ain't got cold feet. I just got a sort of creepin' of danger in me blood," Jerry answered.

"Then get it out," snapped Con morosely.

"Shure boss, I reckon it's beat it already," Jerry said.



## CHAPTER IV

THE following morning Rick was out early and he made straight for the biggest bookmaker he knew who held a book on the fights. He passed down a narrow alley and into the billiard saloon that was already open.

"Hello Terry," he greeted the little undersized marker, who sat reading the morning account of the fight.

"Hello Rick. Can I help you?" Terry asked in a high faltering voice.

"Charley in, Terry?" Rick queried.

"Shure, Rick. Go right in. You might cheer him up some. He lost plenty on the fight last night. Who'd ever thought that mug fighter could box like that? That's what I call a damn crooked deal. You can't make a book if fighters are going to do that sort of thing. It ain't reasonable, Rick," Terry squeaked.

"It's surprising what fighters can do sometimes," laughed Rick. "You never can tell in sport. Anything can happen. And it more often does than not."

When Rick passed through the door and down into the narrow hall Terry pressed a button under the edge of the table that stood in the corner and Charley swept the papers from his desk and into the draw. Rick knocked on the door and entered to a gruff "Come in."

Charley got up and reached out a pudgy hand and smiled thinly. "Hello Rick. Ain't often we see you down here these days. Given up playing pool?" Charley greeted.

Rick returned the hand shake and felt a coldness seep from his hand till it tingled up and down his spine in an ugly dance. Charley was an ugly character. He was too fat. His eyes were too small and too close together. His lips were much too thin for the rest of him. In fact, he hardly could be said to have lips at all. It seemed as if his face stopped and a slit had been left for his mouth. That was all. He was balding visibly.

Rick sat down carefully in a rickety chair and drew out his cigarettes. He offered one to Charlie and lit up.

"This an official call, Rick?" Charley asked uneasily.

"Well, not exactly, Charley. I saw the fight last night. I just got curious about Tiger. He was backed pretty heavily I'm told. I been trying to figure out who the Smart Alecs were. You wouldn't know that would you Charley?" Rick said slowly.

"Well, Rick, I don't see as how I would. You see I been playing it damn careful of late. Some of you guys kinda figure that a man ain't entitled to make a livin'," Charley said smoothly, his piggy eyes gleaming.

"I reckon if a guy had had a book on the fight last night he would have lost plenty from what I've heard," smiled Rick conversationally.

"You're damn right, he would. Jeez! If fighters are suddenly gettin' to be boxers too, a bloke ain't got a chance. He ain't never sure of easy



money that way," Charley spat out disgustedly.

"Yeah! I guess that's so," Rick conceded. "How much would you say a guy with a book on last night's fight would stand to pay out on Tiger, Charley? Roughly, that is. If he had a book on the fight."

"What are you driving at, Rick? I ain't runnin' a book no more," Charley growled.

"I know you didn't run a book on the fight, Charley. But suppose you had. What sort of a pay-out do you reckon you would have had? Just supposing, that is," Rick probed, his eyes missing nothing.

"Weel, if you put it that way, I reckon some smart Alec would have clipped me for four thousand," disgustedly admitted Charley.

"You say one Smart Alec? Would there be only one?"

"Well, that was in a manner of speakin'. Things like that don't get around none too quick. I'd say only one," Charley decided at last, guessing viciously as to what the copper was getting at.

"I reckon a real smart guy like that would be in mighty early to collect, eh, Charley?" probed Rick.

"Yeah! Them guys don't waste no time in callin'," conceded Charley, his face grim with memory.

Rick sat and smoked in silence for a minute before he spoke again. He wanted Charley to have time enough to get really unsettled. He wanted information and he aimed to get it. He and Charley had known each other a long while. They had played at games like this before.

"Supposing this guy had come in and collected. What sort of a guy would you say he was?" asked Rick, smiling.

"Look Rick, I ain't no stoolie. I aim to keep me nose clean as long as I can. I wouldn't know what he looked like. Not even if he had come in. Which he ain't," Charley said desperately, little beads of perspiration forming rapidly on his forehead.

"I'm not asking you to be a stoolie, Charley, I'm just curious about the sort of mug that could have known about something like last night. That was a queer turnout," soothed Rick.

"Damn queer! Lousy coots steal a man's livin' like that. I'd like to pin them pussy ears of his back."

Charley snarled as he remembered. Rick dived forward and slammed his fist down hard on the table and screamed:

"Whose ears Charley? Whose?"

"Catf . . ." Then Charley's mouth clamped shut and his lips disappeared entirely. He looked frightened.

"Catface? Charley. So that's who it was," Rick snapped.

"I didn't say that. I didn't mean that. I told yuh I never kept a book on the fight. I . . ." Charley stuttered, his face red with rage and contorted with fear of the possible consequences of his slip.

Rick laughed. He was getting a break at last.

"It's all right, Charley. No one is going to know who told me. I'm not one to pimp on a friend, Charley," he said. Charley's face sobered now and he just looked frightened. Rick picked up his hat and bowed mockingly. "Well, thanks, Charley. I certainly appreciate the fact that you didn't keep a book on the fight. Good-bye."

Charley's face relaxed as Rick turned and left the room. He jumped up and locked the door and whisked the betting sheet from the draw and slid it into a crack in the skirting board running round the floor. He need



not have feared. Rick was already moving off in search of another client.

His job was easier now because he had information to use. He used it to good advantage and soon the winnings on Tiger had mounted to six thousand. Rick was happy now because the case was breaking open before his eyes. There were many things that he could not explain. Many things that still mystified him but the threads were tying together slowly and he could see a motive where before there was none. And once Rick had got to the motive he was always happy. No matter how much there was that puzzled. So long as a matter was clear Rick believed that the rest would fall into place as the rest of the information gathered.

He was about to turn down a side street to seek further information when he saw Catface Carson just ahead of him. He stepped back quickly and waited. Catface turned into the bookmakers, which in this case happened to be a tobacconist's and hairdresser's shop.

Across the street Rick noticed a public telephone and he ran across and dialled his number. He waited impatiently till a voice answered, then snapped:

"Detective-Sergeant Cole speaking. Put me on to Detective Bell. And quick. . . . He's not in his room. . . . Then find the man. Hurry." There was a wait of a couple of minutes and Rick impatiently drummed his fingers on the directory. Then he heard the receiver at the other end lifted and Bell's voice crackled over to him.:

"Bell here. That you Rick?"

"Yes Bell. Now listen. I've got a man I want you to follow. . . . Here he comes. Stay by the phone. . . . I'll call you back as soon as I can. Come in my car and come at the double as soon as I call. . . . Right."

Catface was moving down the street and Rick dropped the receiver and turned with seeming casualness from the cubicle. He trailed his man for twenty minutes before he had a chance to phone back Bell and give him his whereabouts. Catface had been to two other places and Rick made a note to pay them a call later on in the day.

When Bell arrived Catface was on the move again.

"Drop back and follow. We can't risk him seeing us talking. Next place he goes to you'll take over," Rick ordered. Some five minutes later Catface disappeared into a block of offices and Rick grinned. So old Sol is still running a book in conjunction with his finance business. Once a bookie, always a bookie.

Bell caught him up and Rick explained as much as he could of the situation to him.

"This is our first break. Don't lose him and don't let him sight you. I want to know everywhere he goes and how long he stays. Anybody he talks to, and most of all where he is living at the moment. For God's sake don't lose him. Report as often as you can. Got that?"

"Yes, I'll stick with him," Bell said confidently.

Rick left him then and retraced his steps to check up as much as possible on the actual amounts involved in the various wagers. This done to his satisfaction he decided it was time to get some coffee and a sandwich before returning to headquarters.

It was late in the afternoon when Rick looked in on the Chief. The Chief said nothing as he drew two pounds from his pocket and dropped it on his desk in front of Rick.



"It's yours Cole. You knew the score that time," he growled.

"Thanks Chief. I've got a lead at last on this business," Rick said slowly.

"A lead. Speak up man. What is it?" the Chief snapped eagerly. "Any crackpot theory would be better than nothing. I'm fed up with battering my head trying to figure this crazy mess out. Speak up man."

"Practically all the money that backed Tiger last night came from one source. I've checked with all the bookmakers I could and it's the same story all round. Catface Carson has collected at least seven thousand in wagers this morning. He may have got more. That's the lead. I've checked his record. He was tied up in the only two deals we ever tried to rope Con Hedfirt in on. The only record Catface has is for carrying a gun without a licence. Catface took even money about Cadback's chances of winning the golf open. He took it for two thousand pounds. That was the limit he could get."

"He backed Cadback to win the open?" the Chief snapped.

"No — to lose," Rick snapped.

The Chief grinned. "You wouldn't like to take a wager from me the same way would you?"

"Perhaps you'd best wait till I tell the lot before you ask that. If you're still inclined, I'll take you up."

"Out with it man. Out with it," the Chief cried.

"Cadback was a left-handed player. I saw him this afternoon and he's practising with his right hand," Rick said.

"What the blue blazes has that got to do with it?"

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"I don't know. Cadback says that he has always been left-handed until he was kidnapped. When he came back he found he was off his game to blazes. Quite by accident he discovered that his right hand is now even better than his left used to be. He'll win the open as a right-handed golfer," Rick answered assuredly.

"Well I'm damned. Good God, what's going on? What's the game they are up to?" the Chief gasped, stunned.

"I don't know Chief, but it's to do with the disappearance of Hazell-White or I miss the target by a long shot. And if Con Hedfirt is not at the back of it all I'll go back on beat as a constable," Rick asserted.

"Well I'm damned! What about Catface? Where is he? Did you locate him? Did you have him trailed?" the Chief snapped into action again.

"Bell is trailing Catface. I'm waiting on news from him now. He was to phone as often as he got a chance."

"Then there's nothing more can be done till we hear from Bell. We can't bring Catface in on a general alarm. We've got no evidence, blast it," the Chief growled.

"Catface will do us more good loose. We've got the chance of locating Con and I warrant that when we do we'll find out plenty," Rick suggested.

"Yes. You're right. It's the only break we've had in this whole mess of broken strings. It's time something came our way," the Chief agreed.

Just then the phone rang and Rick pounced on it.

"That you Bell? . . . Yes. . . . You what? . . . When? How? Good man! . . . Yes. . . . Yes. . . . All right. Report back here. Right." Rick turned slowly and looked at the Chief. The Chief held up his hands slowly and growled:

"Don't tell me. Don't tell me. I can guess. Bell lost his man in the crowd at Wynyard."

"No. He lost his man in the crowd in Pitt Street. That's that. We might as well put out a general alarm for him now. He must know that we're on to him. It's our only hope of making use of our break," groaned Rick.

"Yes. Do that. It won't do us any good but we can try," the Chief said disgustedly.

"Someday we'll clear this case up. Maybe."

Rick put out the general alarm for Catface and Con and then walked disgustedly to his office and slumped down at his desk. Rick was fed-up. The one break he'd had had fallen through. Then he couldn't see how any man could make a right-handed player out of a left-handed one without doing anything to him. Nothing added up and Rick decided to call it a day and go home. He left his number and wandered out and drove slowly off to his flat.

\* \* \* \* \*

Catface slammed into the hideout and demanded to see Con. Stella looked up from her fashion magazine and pouted: "He's out foolin' with the damned car. He never bothers about me any more. If he doesn't snap out of it soon I'm takin' a powder out of this hole. He used to be a man once. It ain't nothin' but a dirty old bear now. I'm fed up I tell you. Fed up to the neck."

"Sit tight where you are sister. We're in a jam and you're in it too. Jeez, I always figured a woman was glad when her money bag left



her alone," Catface sneered.

Out in the big garage Catface found Con tinkering with the engine of the big black car. The engine purred beautifully and Catface grinned as he thought of the speed hidden in that almost silent purr.

"They're on to us, Con," he announced without introduction.

"What? Who're on to us?" Con growled morosely.

"The cops. Who else?" snarled Catface.

"A flatfoot trailed me this afternoon. I gave him the slip, but that doesn't mean nothin'. We gotta beat it out of here, and beat it fast."

"We are not going anywhere until the Doc puts me back to normal. Do you think I want to spend the rest of my life acting like an engine was my only interest in life. We are not leaving until the Doc does one more job," Con ground out smoothly.

"I tell you they're on to us, Con. We've got to beat it."

"If you hadn't been so stupid as to advertise the fact that we had won a lot of money on Tiger I daresay they wouldn't have been on to us," Con snapped sarcastically.

"Where is the money? How much did you get against Cadback winning?"

"I got eight thousand here. I took two thousand at evens that Cadback would lose the golf. I tell you Con we gotta beat it," Catface said nervously.

"Shut up. Give me the money. I told you we are not going anyplace. Is that understood?" Con looked Catface in the eye for a long moment before Catface's eyes dropped and he mumbled: "Shure boss. Shure."

"Say boss, Stella figures to take a powder. She figures you ain't the man you used to be," Catface added slyly.

"Stella will do as she's told. And so will you. You understand Catface," Con stated in a dead flat voice.

"Shure, boss. Shure," and he backed silently out.

A little later Con went back into the house and found Stella manicuring her nails, her long slender legs stretched out along the divan.

"Why Stella!" he said, "you are very lovely to-day. Would you care for a drink?"

"Gee Con! I would. I'll get them," Stella said and rose to do so. Con moved over to her and his arms reached out and swept her roughly to him. Every curve of her yielded to him and her face tilted as his head came down. Their lips met and merged and she melted into his embrace.

"This is hardly a private place," Con said after a moment. "Suppose we take those drinks to my room. We would be alone there."

"Gee Con! I thought you'd changed. Jeez! And I was all set to take a powder," Stella mumbled.

"You won't leave will you Stella?" It was more a command than a question and Stella only smiled at him.

"I'll get those drinks. It seems like years since we've been pally," was all she said when she spoke at last.

Stella brought the drinks and handed them to Con. "You take them Con, I'll be along in a minute." She smiled slumberously up at him from under hooded eyes. Con went to his room and threw himself down on the large comfortable bed. He lay there thinking out his plans for perhaps five minutes before Stella returned.



She had left her dress off and doffed the high heeled shoes. Now she wore a long filmy negligee of pale rose that moulded her body in all its feminine allure. The symmetry of her tall grace and the fluffy slippers she now wore produced a startling effect that could not fail to effect even Con. It snapped him out of the morose mood that had been haunting him for the weeks since he had left the hospital. He remembered other times when he and Stella had worked together and put across some deals that were top money spinners. They had lived like a lord and a lady and he had enjoyed her beauty often.

Now he rose and handed her her drink with a grace that would have surprised those who had not known him before his accident. He bowed smoothly to Stella and raised his glass. He looked at her for a long moment before he said: "To beauty. To easy life. To love. To infinite pleasure. In a word My Dear, to You."

Stella raised her glass with him and murmured softly: "To Us."

They sipped their wine silently then for a moment and placed their empty glasses on the table by the bed. Con drew Stella to him and kissed her lightly at first and then their lips crushed together as their passion mounted on maddened wings of crimson and gold.

When the dark had fallen and the street lights were burning quietly in the road outside Con sat up on his bed and said: "We were a good team Stella. The best there was. You and I together were a perfect combination. It will be like that again. No damn doctor is going to ruin me. We'll get that American and I'll be my old self again. From what I've read of him, he and I are in the same profession." Stella laughed throatily. "Stella, we need some things for the kitchen. The boys aren't very welcome outside at the moment. Perhaps you would do me a favour and get them from the little shop around the corner. I'll write you a list."

"Anything you say Con. Jeez! And I nearly took a powder." Stella smiled oddly at her reflection as she arranged her hair before the mirror.



## CHAPTER V

TWO days later the Chief called Rick to his office and told him to sit down. He looked worried and puffed hard at the old briar pipe he habitually smoked. "I've got some bad news for you Cole. I'm afraid I've got to take Jacobs and Bell away from you. That's going to mean that you'll be working longer than usual. I've got to provide a nurse for some American diplomat that is arriving on the flying-boat to-day. He is pretty important and they are the only men I can spare. Higher up are squealing like hell because we've been able to get nothing on the Hazell-White case, and yet they're the only men available. That's the way the breaks come. I know you've been at this case from every angle. Goddam it! Why in blue blazes did Bell have to let Catface slip through his fingers? Anything else come up yet?"

"I'm afraid not Chief. The general alarm was just so unsuccessful, as we expected. Something might break when Cadback wins the golf. He's leading by a good margin at the moment. The result will be out to-night," Rick said slowly, realizing now that it was up to him and to him alone.

"Let's hope so. It can't go on forever without a break coming our way. All right Cole. That's all. As soon as this American goes to Canberra you'll have your men back." The Chief dismissed him wearily. He had refrained from passing on the abuse that he had received from higher up this morning. The papers were running editorials about police methods and protection of citizens' rights and all the usual talk that was dragged out when ever the opportunity arose. He was fed-up.

Rick went through the file on Con and Catface for the twentieth time hoping to find some clue that he might have overlooked previously. There was nothing.

He waited until the last edition was out then bought his paper and went for his car. Cadback had won the golf. So they had lost that bet anyway he thought. But that was small consolation. He phoned Tessa and went up to her flat for tea.

When the meal was over and Rick had wiped the dishes he sat down heavily in a chair and lit a cigarette and smoked thoughtfully. He was still sitting thus when Tessa came in and sat herself gracefully on a



cushion by his chair.

"What is it Rick? Trouble. You're as glum as Sydney on a rainy Sunday. What's the matter?"

"They've taken Jacobs and Bell off the case. I can't blame them because we're getting nowhere. Still what chance have I got if I'm to work on it alone. If I could only tie in on why these kidnappings have occurred I might get somewhere. The motive is obviously money but how did they arrange to make a fighter into a boxer. How a left-handed golfer into a right-handed one?" Rick smiled grimly. "They lost on that deal anyway."

"Do you think that Hazell-White is tied up in the case with the others?" Tessa asked.

"It looks that way. But it's hard to understand. He had an unimpeachable record. Anyhow how could he be? They've all turned up better than ever. Even Punchy."

"If Hazel-White was a brain surgeon then they probably had operations of some sort. They were all away for nearly a month," Tessa reasoned.

"But that would mean a scar of some sort. There weren't any scars," Rick said thoughtfully. Then he was on his feet and running to the door.

"Heh!" Tessa called excitedly, "where are you going?"

"To look under Punchy's hair. That's where a scar would probably be. I'm a fool. Why didn't I think of it before."

"Wait for me. Wait for me. I'm coming too," Tessa cried and ran for her coat.

Rick speeded through the early evening traffic as fast as he could and across town to Alby's supper bar. He was out and inside before the car engine had coughed its last before finding silence. Tessa was behind him.

Alby looked up from the bar where he was handing out coffee. He noted the obvious excitement on the faces of his two friends.

"There's no hurry!" he called. "I've plenty left. What's all the excitement?"

Meanwhile Rick had looked around the bar hoping to see Punchy but he was not there. Rick turned more slowly to Alby now and asked quietly:

"Have you seen Punchy this evening Alby?"

"Naw! Too early for him yet. He won't be in for a half hour yet. Always regular he is. Always," Alby answered.

"Where would he be?" Tessa asked excitedly.

"Well. I don't reckon he's so regular in the other places. I reckon



he might be anywhere," Alby answered. "But what's all this fuss about anyhow?"

"It's just a hunch, Alby," Rick answered slowly. "We'll wait till Punchy comes in. Better give us some coffee."

They sat and talked to Alby about general things and Tessa found the tension mounting as the moments ticked by. Then she heard Alby and Rick talking of the return bout between Tiger and the ex-champ, which was to take place in about half an hour's time. She smiled then.

"Rick won't win supper from me this time."

"That was downright mean of him, I'd say," Alby grinned.

"'Night folks! Quite a family to-night Alby," Punchy called as he swung in the door.

Rick bounded from his stool and met Punchy before he was more than two paces from the door.

"Punchy, I want to look at your head," he said, trying to take Punchy's hat off.

"My head. What's wrong with my head? I never felt better. Say! Are you crazy?" Punchy asked.

"Might be! We think you've had an operation. We want to see," Tessa explained.

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"You're both crazy. I ain't never had an operation in me life," Punchy asserted.

"What about the three weeks you can't remember?" Rick asked. "There was a doctor and a nurse wasn't there?"

"Yeah! That's right. There was too," Punchy said slowly, taking off his hat.

Rick was busily searching amongst the thinning hair on Punchy's head and then whistled softly to himself. He had found a thin scar running round just under the hair line where it would not show.

"You were right Tessa. He has had an operation of some sort." And the others too I'll warrant. Of all the crazy crooks. Well I'll be damned!" Rick muttered.

"Rick! If Tiger's had an operation on his head too he shouldn't be fighting. He might be killed. Rick, we've got to do something. Quickly!" Tessa cried.

"You're right. Let's go," Rick cried.

They ran for the car and made it across town with the siren wailing. Rick kept his foot hard down and took the corners at such a speed that Tessa felt her heart swooping up into her mouth. She held on grimly and said nothing.

Outside the boxing stadium Rick screeched the car to a halt alongside the parked line of cars and called to the policeman on duty.

"Constable, I'm Detective-Sergeant Cole. Take care of my car."

They dashed together into the stadium and along the corridors to the dressing rooms. Tessa breathed a sigh as she heard from the chatter in the stadium that the fight had not started yet. They found Tiger's room and forced their way through the attendants and into the dressing room. Tiger was stretched on a table getting a last minute tune up.

"Get that woman out of here," Darcy screamed. "Get her out."

"Take it easy Darcy," Rick said. "Put something over him. I want a word with you alone Darcy." Someone threw a towel across Tiger's back and Darcy came over to Rick looking puzzled.

"What's up Rick?" he asked.

"We think that Tiger had an operation on his head while he was missing. If he has it would be murder to let him run the risk of fighting. Last fight the Champ didn't land a single blow to his head. This time it might be different. If he has you'll find a thin scar running round his head just under the hair line like as if someone intended to scalp him and then changed their mind. Better take a look," Rick suggested.

"Gawd!" was all that Darcy said. He moved across and searched among the hair on Tiger's head. He stepped back slowly and said, "Gawd!"



"Time," someone called from the door, and screeched to a stop behind  
"It's there Rick. What in hell is the gameing, Tessa. I'll be back,"  
"We don't know Darcy. You'd better calaunds. Tessa sat tensely  
said.

"Jake, Call the Doc will you," Darcy ordered. by an excited Sister in  
"Somethin' wrong?" asked Jake, wonderingly.

"Call the Doc. blast you. Call the Doc," Darcy sp, the left. Hurry!"

"What's the matter, Darcy? Why the Doc?" Tige  
over and sitting up with the towel about him.

"I'm afraid you won't be fighting, kid. Lestaways not until the Doc.  
says you're O.K.," Darcy said gently.

"But I'm O.K. The Doc passed me this afternoon," Tiger argued.

"We'll see what he has to say when he comes," Rick answered.

The doctor came in and Rick explained to him. He looked worried  
and began his examination. He felt carefully over the skull and examined  
the scar carefully. His sensitive fingers probing gently. When he stood  
back there was a look of utter amazement on his face.

"He can't fight. That's definite. The whole top and side portions of  
the skull have been removed and any heavy blow would probably cause  
instantaneous death. I'm sorry Tiger, but I'm afraid you're through as a  
fighter," he said. "I'll notify the manager at once."

Rick did his best to explain the situation. It was hard. The defeated  
look that crept into Tiger's eyes brought an unwelcome tear welling into  
Tessa's throat. Outside they could hear the disappointed howl from the  
crowd as it was announced that the fight had been cancelled on the orders  
of the Doctor, who found that Tiger was not in a fit condition to fight.

Rick and Tessa slipped away and got the car. Neither of them  
spoke for a while as they drove slowly back toward Alby's bar. "That  
was tough going for that kid," Rick said at last.

"Yes. Mighty tough going. Right when he was on top of the  
world," murmured Tessa.



"You're both crazy. I  
Punchy asserted.

"What about the thr

"There was a doctor and

"Yeah! That's righ  
off his hat.

Rick was busily  
head and then r

## CHAPTER VI

CON was marching furiously up and down the room in the hideout and  
raging. Stella curled in a chair reading, completely ignoring the  
situation.

"Take it easy boss. We aint' so bad. We're a good eight thousand  
to the right side. What if Cadback did win the golf. We missed that  
one, that's all," Catface growled. "How were we to know he'd take a  
tumble and change to be right-handed. The Doc says we gotta have  
some ether an' stuff. We betta get that before we do th' snatch."

"Yes. Quite so, Catface. We'll pick up whatever the Doc needs  
from a hospital. That should be easy. Then we'll pick up our American  
friend. He's due to leave a meeting a block and a half away from his  
hotel in two hours. He'll walk the distance home. We'll meet him on  
the way. Stella!" She looked up vaguely as he spoke. "You'll stop here  
and guard the Doc. I don't reckon you'll have any bother. Use your  
gun if you have to. But don't hurt him none. Catface, dig Jerry out of  
that murder book he's reading and get the car ready."

"Shure, boss. Shure," Catface grinned. This sounded better.

"Crawl out of that paper Stella and take care of the Doc. He's got  
just one more job to do," Con snapped.

"Anything you say, Con," Stella murmured softly and unfolded herself  
out of the chair.

\* \* \* \* \*

Rick snapped on the wireless in his car as he drove along. He hoped  
it might break the tension that had mounted since they had left the  
stadium. There was silence for a moment then a voice croaked sharply  
from the speaker:

"Two men holding up doctor at St. James Hospital, Alpine Street  
demanding drugs and ether. Any car in vicinity proceed immediately.  
Repeat. Two men . . ."

"That means us," Rick snapped. "We're only a block away."

"But Rick . . ." Tessa began to protest.

"Sorry Tessa. It has to be done."

Rick wheeled the car round sharply and pushed the accelerator down



violently. They swung around the corner and he screeched to a stop behind a line of parked cars. "Keep the engine running, Tessa. I'll be back," he called as he darted into the hospital grounds. Tessa sat tensely waiting.

Dashing into the main entrance he was met by an excited Sister in white.

"Are you the police? Down that way and round to the left. Hurry!" she cried.

Rick took the corner at the run and was in time to see two masked men backing out the side door and running for the side gate. He was now in pursuit. His revolver was now in his hand. A car pulled away from the curb violently and the two men scrambled in. Rick fired at the rear tyre carefully. One shot struck home. The car lurched sideways violently and slammed to a stop. Three men scrambled out and two shots whined past him and he flung himself against the wall. He dived down the steps and snapped a low shot at the last of the men as they ran up and around the corner. He knew he had missed.

Con saw Tessa in the car with the engine running and wrenched the door open, and hurled himself into the driver's seat. Catface and Jerry hurtled into the rear seat and Tessa flung open the door to escape. Something hard and round prodded her in the back.

"Relax, sister, you ain't goin' no place," Catface growled close to her ear. Con flung the car from the curb even as Rick turned the corner. He raised the revolver to take a shot and his arm fell limply as he saw Tessa's terrified face. His car raced off down Alpine Street.

Rick raced back into the hospital and snatched up the phone on the enquiry desk.

"Put me through to the police. Quickly!" he cried.

"There's your number, Sir," the telephonist cried back in a moment.

"Detective-Sergeant Cole here. Speaking from St. James Hospital. Put out a general alarm for Police Car 819, proceeding along Alpine Street to the north. Three men, two of whom believed to be Con Hedfirt and Catface Carson. Have robbed hospital and kidnapped tall blonde. Get that out immediately."

Rick hung up and ran outside and found another car pulling to the kerb.

"I'm Detective-Sergeant Cole . . ." Rick stated as he reached the car.

"Hello Rick! Beat us to the punch, eh?" a voice called.

"Hello Dick. Contact headquarters. Get a man out to check the car down the side street for finger prints. In the meantime put a man on to watch it. You might see if there is anything that can be done inside. I'll borrow your car if I may."



"Yes Rick. That's all right. What's the matter?" Dick asked.

"They escaped in my car and took Tessa with them."

"Good God! I'm sorry Rick,"

Rick swung down Alpine Street after the escaping crooks and drove as fast as he dared and still kept a watch for his car. As he swung round into the main road he found a voluble little man talking heatedly to a Sergeant who stood beside his police car. Rick swerved in and stopped.

"Hello Cole. We've got your car, but that's all I'm afraid. They took this chap's car and left yours. I'm afraid they took the girl with them. I've sent in a description of the stolen car to headquarters. I daresay they'll drop it soon though."

"Thanks Williams. Did you find anything in my car?"

"Only this handbag." Williams shrugged. Rick looked at it and nodded. "Tessa's. I'll take it along with me. If any reports come in send them straight through. I'll be at headquarters," Rick called as he started away in his own car.

"Oh, Williams! See that that other car gets back to the hospital will you?"

"Right Rick. I'll take care of that," Williams called.

At headquarters Rick paced up and down the floor of the Chief's office as he explained all that had happened. The Chief nodded again from time to time but said nothing until Rick was done.

"I've been following reports as they came in. The finger print men are on the job. I've sent a Doc to check on Cadback to see if the same has happened to him. Every man that is available is switched to the case and I'm taking personal charge of it. Things like this have got to stop somewhere. We'll do it if no one gets sleep for a week. Sit down and smoke and for God's sake stop looking as if you were already dead. We'll get the girl," the Chief growled.

"If they monkey round with Tessa I'll . . ."

"Take it easy Cole. They used her to escape. They aren't interested otherwise. It might have been any girl."

"But it wasn't any girl. It was Tessa," Rick cried.

There was a knock on the door within a few minutes and a constable came in and dropped the finger print reports on the table in front of the Chief.

"The report on the prints from the car at the hospital, Sir," he said.

The Chief read the report and turned to Rick.

"You were right, Cole. Hedfirt, Carson and the third man was Jerry Green, a small-time racketeer. We'll clear up this mess before long now. We've good reason now to put all the men we can rake together on this



case."

"Will that be all, Sir?" the constable asked.

"That's all. If any further reports come in bring them here immediately," the Chief snapped.

"Yes Sir." He turned and left the office.

"If they want more drugs and ether, they must plan another operation. That means another kidnapping," Rick said thoughtfully. "If we only knew who it was to be."

"If we only knew. But we don't. The others were in the sporting world. Who would you suggest?" the Chief shrugged.

"My guess is that this is something more than that. They wouldn't go to all that risk for something small. I'd say it will be someone important and not in the sporting world. I'd say that it will be to-night that we hear of the kidnapping," Rick decided.

"That adds up," the Chief growled. "Get in your car and cruise and keep cruising. The moment I hear anything I'll send it through to you. Now beat it."

"Good idea. I'll stick close to the city though there's no telling where it will be if anything breaks," Rick decided as he walked down the stairs.

Rick began cruising about slowly and kept apace with the news as the messages came through. The stolen car had been found abandoned not three blocks from where it was stolen, and no further news was heard of any other stolen car. That might not mean anything. If another car had been stolen no report might come through for several hours. That would give them plenty of time to escape a dozen times. Rick cursed.

He had been cruising for more than an hour and still no breaks had come and no further reports had been received from any cars sighting the missing crooks.



## CHAPTER VII

JERRY pulled the cream-coloured saloon into the kerb and kept the engine running. Con studied the picture of the American he had torn from the paper again. Tessa lay on the floor in the back of the car, bound and gagged.

"Don't worry Boss, I'll know his mug when he shows up. I got a good eye for faces I have," Catface growled.

"There must be no slip-ups this time. We are as hot as hell at the moment. I want this American. I aim to be as I was before. This is a fool's racket. Before things ran smoothly and the money came easy," Con purred.

"Here he comes Con. Do your stuff," Catface breathed.

Con stepped down from the car and Catface was close behind him.

As the American drew abreast Con stepped towards him and greeted. "I've just heard your speech. I must say I was delighted. We were hoping you would allow us the honour of dropping you at your hotel."

"Why that is right neighbourly, Sir, but it's not more than a block from here. I can walk it in a few minutes," the American grinned.

"We really would like to help. It is a delight to have you with us and any service we can be would be a pleasure," Con purred, his voice as smooth as silk. But something of his old confidence was gone and he felt his fingers trembling as he gripped the butt of his automatic in his pocket.

"Well, thanks all the same," the American drawled. "But I really would prefer to walk." He turned to leave.

"Not so fast Yank," Con snapped, his voice hard and brittle now. "We invited you nice and friendly like. Get in there. We want to have a talk with you."

The American opened his mouth to say something but Con prodded him with the automatic and the American stepped toward the car.

Bell had been about twenty yards behind and now came running up calling: "Just a minute, there. Just a minute!"

"A squealin' flatfoot. Git him in there," Catface growled. "Stand copper," Catface snarled.



Bell dragged out his revolver and as he did so Catface fired. The shot dropped Bell to the ground. He rolled over and snapped a shot that rocked Catface back against the car. Catface pumped another shot into Bell. He tried to turn to get into the car but Con was shouting for Jerry to get going.

"What about Catface, Boss? Ain't we gonna take him?" Jerry whined.

"Get going or I'll plug you too. Catface is shot. We can't wait to pick him up. Get going."

Jerry flung the car forward and roared off down the street and swung round at the next corner.

"Not so fast now, blast you. Do you want someone stopping us for speeding?" Con cried.

The car slowed down and they drove quietly along through the late traffic and then swung away toward the hideout.

Back where the kidnapping had taken place a beat policeman had heard the shots and had dashed to a phone to put a call through to headquarters. Immediately the message came through the Chief dispatched a message to Rick and rushed down the stairs to a car.

When Rick arrived two policemen were keeping the morbid crowd back as much as they could. Bell was dead. Catface was bleeding badly from a chest wound and was obviously dying.

"The dirty rat," he gasped. "Left me here to die."

"You're not going to let him get away with that are you Catface? You wouldn't let a guy beat it out and leave you to take the rap would you?" Rick said sarcastically.

"I ain't no stool pidgeon," Catface growled.

"But you're not going to live to pay off yourself, Catface. You're on the way out. Why not see that they get what's coming to them? You wouldn't like to go out with any debts unpaid would you Catface?" Rick prodded.

"The dirty rat. I done his dirty work too often. I ain't gonna let him get away with that," he coughed.

"Where have they gone? I'll see that they pay. Where's the girl?"

"Thirty-five Park View Drive . . . big house . . . Con always did do it right . . . till now . . . dirty rat . . ." Catface fell back and blood flowed from his mouth in a thin trickle. Rick was running for his car.

"Tell the Chief," he called.

\* \* \* \* \*

At 35 Park View Drive Con and Jerry had the American, the Doctor and Tessa in the lounge room. Stella sat relaxed in a chair nursing a small automatic.



"Here's your man, Doc. Now you're going to repair the damage you did at the hospital. I don't aim to stay like this," Con snarled.

"It's impossible," the Doctor said. "I won't do it."

"You'll do it and like it. Get the things ready."

"Catface is not here. Who is going to assist this time. You can't. Jerry there is shaking as if he was having a fit. I won't do it. That's final."

"Get the things ready," Con snarled, his automatic snapped up into line.

The Doctor drew himself up to his full height and the look of despair and defeat vanished from his face. He smiled oddly and laughed, "I won't do it."

Con's face contorted in a sudden fury and he blazed two shots into the Doc's guts. The Doc crumpled to the floor. "Then take that you rotten quack," he screamed.

Tessa made to assist the doctor but Con swung the automatic in her direction. "Stay where you are sister, or you'll get the same." The killer light blazed madly in his eyes and Tessa shrunk back before it. The Doctor lay groaning on the floor.

"Boss, we gotta get out of this. This place is hott'n hell. We gotta beat it," Jerry whined, his face pale with fear.

"Shut up, you snivelling fool. I'll go when I'm ready," Con snarled.

"But Boss . . ." Con swung round and slashed a vicious back hand swing that caught Jerry across and knocked him to the floor.

The American dived through the half-open door and vanished. Con made no move to follow him. He seemed to have lost interest. Stella stood tensely now, her face pale with fear as the Doctor writhed on the floor, where he had fallen.

The wail of a siren sounded and Jerry was on his feet once more, his hands trembling.

"The cops, Catface blabbed. We gotta get out of here," he cried.

"Stella," Con snapped. "Get the money. We're leaving. This little doll will get us clear of any trouble." Stella ran into Con's room as he grabbed Tessa by the shoulder and pushed her through the door in front of him.

Jerry ran for the car and had it turned in the gateway facing the street. Stella came running back with two cases. She dived into the car. Con pushed Tessa ahead of him as he walked across the lawn.



## CHAPTER VIII

CON was about to get into the car when Rick screeched to a stop and sprang out, gun in hand.

"Make a move Hedfirt and I'll fire," Rick snapped. "You're under arrest." Con laughed harshly. "I got all the cards, copper. You make a move and I'll shoot this girl," he snarled.

Rick noticed Tessa then for the first time.

"Tessa! Are you all right? Have they hurt you?"

"I'm all right Rick. They've shot the Doctor. He's inside," Tessa cried nervously.

"Shut your face, you little wretch," Con growled. "Drop that gun, copper, or I'll shoot the girl."

Rick slowly let his revolver fall from his fingers. It clattered on to the roadway. Con fired two shots into the front wheel tyres of Rick's car, and laughed. "Just so you won't follow us, copper." He pushed into the front seat alongside Tessa and slammed the door shut. "Get going Jerry. Make it fast," he snarled.

Jerry slapped the car into gear and it lurched through the gate and Rick threw himself to one side to get out of the way. He heard Hedfirt laughing as the car gathered speed and raced down the road. He dived for his revolver and made to take a shot at the fleeing car but the distance was too great to risk a shot. He might hit Tessa. Rick ground his teeth and cursed. Once again Hedfirt had beaten him to it. And Hedfirt still had Tessa.

Rick ran into the house intending to telephone headquarters. The phone had been pulled from the wall and was useless.

The Doctor lay on the floor in agony. Rick kneeled at his side and turned him over. The Doctor's misted eyes cleared for a moment as he asked:

"Who are you?"

"I'm from the police. I'll see if I can get help for you," Rick answered.

"No. It's too late for that. I'm a Doctor. I know. I'm dying. It won't be long now," the Doctor gasped.

"Is there anything you want to tell me?" Rick asked.



"I'll try and tell you everything. If I have time. Hedfirt was brought into the hospital. He'd been in a car accident. The top and rear portion of his skull was badly shattered. His brain was not seriously injured. There was no chance of saving his life short of giving him a new skull. I knew that. I never did like to lose a patient. A young mechanic had been killed in a factory explosion and his body was brought in at almost the same time as Hedfirt. . . . Could you get me a drink of water?"

Rick rose and found the kitchen and brought back the glass of water.

"Here, drink this," he said gently. The Doctor rose his head slightly and took a couple of mouthfuls and then let his head fall back again.

"Thank you. I was thirsty. I thought about the idea of a new skull and then decided why not? It couldn't harm the dead mechanic any. So I swore the assistants to secrecy and told them what I proposed to do. It wouldn't have been approved of but it meant saving a life. That was what I thought of then. I took parietal and squamosal bones from the dead man and replaced those that were shattered in Hedfirt with them. It was a trying operation but it was successful. Hedfirt was discharged and I heard nothing of him for some weeks. He came to see me in my office one day. He complained of a strange moroseness. He said he had lost his old confidence that he had had formerly. He said he seemed to want to tinker with mechanical gadgets. He wasn't interested in his former work any more. It struck me immediately what had happened. . . . Some more water. . . . Thank you. . . . His brain had assumed the shape of the skull of the mechanic and he had acquired some of the aptitudes of the dead man. I was greatly excited. I asked him lots of questions and he became quite annoyed. I explained to him what my theory was and we talked for a long while. He seemed strangely interested. He asked me wasn't there any way I could right things? I told him not unless I had another skull like his had been. He laughed then. I suggested various ways he could try adapting himself to the changed circumstances. . . . He seemed to take it all in good part. I was greatly excited about the possibilities of the operation. . . . He left. He promised to come again. I left the hospital and went to my car and got in. . . . Hedfirt was in the back seat. . . . He was on the floor. . . . He had a gun. . . . He made me drive him here. . . . They've kept me here ever since. . . ."

"What about Punchy and Tiger and the golfer Cadback?" Rick asked.

"Hedfirt brought them home one night and told me I was to transfer the portion of the skull of the one to the other. He wouldn't say why I refused. He threatened to kill them both if I didn't. So I agreed. It was extremely difficult to do with such crude help. I succeeded. The



older man of the two had a lesion of scar tissue on the side of his brain. I removed that also. They released both of them later. I don't understand. Then they brought another man. I had to transfer the skull from Jerry . . . one of the criminals to him and give his to Jerry. I did this successfully also. It was amazing to notice how Jerry became left-handed as the result. The bone structure and redistribution of the cell masses had more to do with aptitudes than I had ever realised. It was extremely difficult to match the bone pieces but I managed the adjustments fairly well . . . Water please."

Rick handed him the glass and he raised his head to drink. His lips touched the glass rim and he fell back dead. Rick rose slowly to his feet and placed the glass on the table against the wall. He stood and gazed in wonder. He found it unbelievable. It was almost impossible to accept as fact and yet Punchy and Tiger and Cadback were ample proof of what the Doctor had said.

Rick became aware of the wail of sirens and ran out to the street to meet the three cars that jerked to a stop in front of the house. The Chief sprang out of the front car and ran toward Rick.

"What's happened Cole? Where are they?" he cried.

"Gone," Rick growled.

"Gone? What do you mean? Speak up man."

"I got here in time but Hedfirt used Tessa as a shield. I couldn't stop them," Rick explained.

"The American? Where is he?"

"I haven't seen him. He wasn't here. He wasn't with them. I'd forgotten about him. The Doctor is inside. He's dead. They shot him muttered Rick.

"Smith," the Chief snapped, "take two men and take charge here. We've every road of the area covered. They can't escape this time. They've no hole to run to now. We've got them."

"The Doctor talked before he died. He explained what's been going on. You won't believe me when I tell you," Rick added dazedly. "It's unbelievable."

"Out with it man. Out with it," the Chief snapped.

"The Doctor has been transferring skulls from one man to another. From Punchy to Tiger. From Cadback to Jerry Green. I told you you wouldn't believe me," Rick said.

"Transferring skulls! What in blue blazes for?"

"Apparently the shape of the inside of the skull and the redistribution it causes in brain cell structure has something to do with aptitudes. That's how Tiger was able to box so well. He had most of Punchy's skull case. Punchy had an injury to the brain that the Doctor fixed. That's why he



isn't Punchy any more. I tell you it's crazy," Rick finished.

Just then a local policeman came running up with the American. They stopped when they saw the police around the cars in front of the house. The constable ran up to the Chief and addressed himself to him.

"This gentleman says he is an American. He says he was kidnapped and brought to this house. That a man who was apparently a doctor was shot and that he escaped," he panted.

"All of which is true. You are unharmed, Sir?" the Chief asked the American.

"Well I reckon so. This here country isn't so peaceable as I figured on first acquaintance I reckon," he said. "Did you capture them there crooks that did the snatch?"

"No. They have escaped. We'll have them before morning," the Chief explained. "I'll have you returned to your hotel in a car. You'll have no further trouble, I assure you."

"Well I shure hope not. What did them there racketeers want with me anyway?" the American asked.

"They wanted your skull, I understand," the Chief snapped.

"My skull?" The American looked puzzled. "I don't understand. You're not kidding me."

"We don't quite understand yet. Lestaways I don't. Cole here seems to think they've been having a great time of it swopping skulls from one person to another. You'd best get back to your hotel. You must be tired."

"Yes, I reckon that is a good idea. I'm mighty grateful that this thing is getting straightened out. Good-night to you all. And thanks a lot. Say, guy, you are on the level about that skull changing business?"

"Yes. We're on the level. Read to-morrow's paper and you should get the story. This should be cleaned up by then if I know anything about it. Good-night, Sir." The Chief could not resist a grin at the American's puzzled expression despite the grimness of the situation.

"We might as well go down to the local station. We can take any reports there. That will be a damn sight better than standing about here in the cold freezing. Let's go."

The men climbed into the two remaining cars and they drove down to the local station where there was warmth and coffee available. Rick smoked cigarette after cigarette as he paced up and down the small office waiting for some call to come through.



## CHAPTER IX

MEANWHILE Jerry had slowed the car as they approached the main road. He drove slowly along till they were a short block away and then turned sharply down a side street.

"What's the matter with you? Why didn't you keep going?" Con snarled at him.

"Cops boss," Jerry said in a husky voice. "The blasted corner was lousy with the coots."

"Try the next street," Con bit out savagely.

But the next street was the same. And the next three after that. Jerry pulled the car in to the kerb in a darkened street. He was trembling violently now.

"It's no good Boss. They've got us surrounded. We're trapped like rats in a cage. We ain't got a chance. We should have beat it before instead of goin' back," Jerry whined.

"Shut up and stop whining," Con snapped. "They haven't got us yet. We'll leave the car and go through these yards. If we can get a couple of streets across we can get another car and we'll be in the clear."

"Gee Con! We're in a jam," Stella said from the back.

"Shut up I tell you and use your head. We ain't caught yet, I said," he snarled.

He opened the door and got out. Jerry did likewise.

"O.K., sister. Out you get. One squeak and I'll drop you." Con prodded Tessa with his automatic. She got out carefully and stood and waited while Stella climbed out from the back and lugged the two cases out with her.

"Why two cases?" Con asked. "What's in the other one?"

"Gee Con, a girl's gotta have clothes," Stella answered.

"Leave them. Bring the money. If we get out of this you can buy new clothes. If we don't you won't need them anyway."

"Gee Con!" Stella protested.

"Leave them I said. We'll go through this yard here. It looks quiet. No noise. You, sister, go ahead. Any slips and I'll drop you."

They moved in through a side gate and crept silently past the house



and down the yard. There was a heap of wood and old boxes piled against the back fence and Stella and Jerry climbed carefully up and dropped quietly into the yard beyond.

"You're next sister," Con growled. "And make it quiet."

Tessa climbed over and dropped down and Jerry covered her with his revolver, his hand shaking. Con quickly dropped alongside them and they moved down the yard towards the next street. When they got safely to the front they waited for a moment and Con said: "Jerry, take a look and see if the street is clear."

Jerry crept quietly forward and peered over the front fence. He stood silently looking up and down for a minute before he beckoned them to come up. The nearest policeman was half a block away at the corner. They were about to go through the gate when the policeman turned and began walking slowly back toward them.

"Get down everyone. Down on the ground. That means you too sister. Down, I said," Con snarled and he dragged Tessa roughly down alongside him. The hard roundness of his gun pressed firmly into her side. The slow footsteps grew louder and louder and then slowly faded away as the constable on beat passed on up the street.

"Now. Across the street. One at a time. Stella, you go first. Jerry next. I'll come over with this doll."

Stella strolled casually across the street and Jerry followed her in nervous little bursts of sped. Con prodded Tessa and they moved across undetected. They slipped into another yard and down the side of the house. No one spoke until they reached the fence at the far end of the yard. There was no way of getting over this time.

"Give Stella a leg up, Jerry. Then I'll do the same for you," Con commanded in deadly calm. It was his calm that Tessa found more menacing than his anger or fear would have been.

Stella slipped at the top and made a noise. A dog started barking in the next yard.

"Quiet, damn you, quiet," Con whispered harshly.

Stella dropped safely over and Con used one hand to leg Jerry up. Jerry dropped down on the other side.

"Silence that blasted dog," Con called.

Tessa tensed as the barking grew more impatient for a moment then there was a sickening thud and the barking ceased. Tessa felt sick, more sick than she had when the Doctor had been shot down in front of her.

"You're next," Con snapped and bent and grabbed her roughly by the calf of the leg and hoisted her over. Tessa fell crookedly and she heard her stocking tear. Con scrambled over with very little noise.



Around to the front and they waited again. There was no one in sight. On the opposite side of the street a car was parked. A light was still burning in the house before which it stood. Jerry looked at Con as if asking a silent question.

"We'll take that car. Get over there and get that engine running. I reckon you can manage that all right," Con ordered.

"Leave it to me, Boss. I'll get it started. There ain't never been one I couldn't," Jerry said nervously.

He darted across the road and soon had the car open and within a minute the engine burst into life. The door of the house was flung open at the sound and a man called from the door: "Heh! You there. What's the idea?"

Jerry whirled the car in a tight circle across the road and Stella scrambled into the back door which Jerry flung open. Con pushed Tessa headlong into the back and dived in on top of her. The car was already moving and gathering speed as the man ran into the street and began shouting.

As they wheeled round the corner into the main road a policeman came pounding up toward them. He was too late. His whistle shrilled the alarm and a police car came racing in pursuit of them. The back door was still swinging open and Con dragged it shut as he struggled up on to the seat. Tessa was badly shaken and her nerves were ready to give way. She sat tensely up in the seat and struggled for control. The tears welled into her eyes and she burst into deep sobbing tears.

Jerry had his foot flat to the floor and they were careering along and taking the turns at terrific speeds. Stella sank back into a corner and shuddered. They were out of the worst of it she hoped.

"Shut up. You little wretch. This ain't no wedding. Save your tears till we're out of this jam," Con snarled.



## CHAPTER X

**B**ACK at the station the speaker crackled and Rick dived to his feet out of his chair. He dropped his cigarette to the floor and ground it out with his shoe. "Car 27 reporting. Hedfirt and accomplices heading down Moore Park Road. Travelling fast. We are following. Keep in touch."

"Let's go!" the Chief cried. The men rushed to the cars and Rick sprang behind the wheel of the first car. The Chief piled in beside him and Rick revved the engine and swung and hurtled down the road toward Moore Park Road. The Chief snapped the wireless on and waited. Rick took the turns on two wheels with foot on the floor. The speaker crackled and again the calm voice came through. "Car 27. Fugitives now following Anzac Parade. Travelling fast. We are following. We are not gaining. Keep in touch," and the speaker crackled to silence again.

Rick checked his speed slightly to swing into Anzac Parade and then slapped his foot down hard once more. He set the siren wailing as he crossed the junction tramlines and hurtled on.

"Take it easy Cole. We want to get there alive," the Chief barked, as Rick took a rounded turn on two wheels. "Car 27 reporting. Have turned into Gardner's Road. Still have them in sight. We are gaining. Keep in touch."

Crouched low over the wheel Rick willed the last ounce of power from the engine. He swung sharply into Gardiner's Road and skidded violently. He swung the wheel sharply and righted the car and raced on.

"Good God man! Take it easy!" cried the Chief as he scrambled up from the floor. Rick didn't seem to hear him.

All he could think of was that Conn had Tessa and back at 35 Park View Drive he had seen what Con could do in the way of cold-blooded killing. Again the speaker crackled. "Car 27 reporting. Heading down Botany Road. We are gaining slightly. Keep in touch."

"We've got them," Rick cried. "That's a dead end road, if we can keep close enough."

As he slowed to take the corner into Botany Road he caught sight



of the tail lights ahead. He straightened up and flattened the car to give its utmost. Slowly they crept up till they were no more than twenty feet behind the police car which was about a hundred yards behind the careering Con and Tessa. Rick crept level with the police car and slowly passed it without taking his eyes from the road for a second. Ahead the Sedan screeched around a corner to the left and Rick followed. Then another sharp turn to the left again and he was forced to slow to take corners. A tyre gave way at the next turn as the Sedan took the bend. The car slithered sideways across the road right in Rick's path. He jammed on the brakes and the tyres screeched on the metal street as four figures piled out of the car ahead and ran towards the yard of a factory across the street.

Rick's car crashed sickly into the Sedan and Rick was cannoned against the steering wheel. The breath escaped his body in one terrific gasp. The Chief crashed into the dash-board and was still.

Con had his automatic in Tessa's back and was forcing her to run through the foundry yard. Stella and Jerry were racing away in the lead.

When Rick got his wind back he climbed out and looked at the Chief who was dazedly scrambling out of the other door. Car 27 pulled in behind them. "Send out a message for all available cars and men," the Chief gasped. "Have the block surrounded. And have it done quickly. They mustn't slip through our fingers again. Give orders to shoot if they resist. We want them alive if at all possible."

Rick drew his revolver and checked it. "I'm going in after them. They've got Tessa with them." He growled deep in his throat, like a hound sensing the kill.

"Don't be a fool Cole. We'll have enough men here in a few minutes to get them out without you risking your neck," the Chief snapped. "Don't be a damn fool!"

But Rick's blood was up and he plunged across the street and into the foundry yard. He dodged from cover to cover and flashed his torch into the darkened places where the first light of dawn had not yet penetrated.



## CHAPTER XI

**W**ITHIN a few minutes other cars were pulling in and the Chief quickly had the entire block surrounded with the small group of men that were available. The block contained a large foundry and several smaller factories. As more men arrived the Chief strengthened the cordon until he was satisfied that there was no avenue of escape. Then he selected two men and went in after Rick.

"That damn fool Cole is in here somewhere. Hedfirt's got his girl so be careful if you have to shoot. Don't shoot unless you have to. We want this lot alive," he growled to the men with him.

Meanwhile Rick was carefully moving about and then pausing to listen for any noise that might betray the whereabouts of the criminals. As he inched further and further into the foundry the light became worse and worse.

With each step he took he became more cautious. Then he slipped and fell as a piece of pipe rolled under his foot. The sharp bark of an automatic spat out of the darkness and a bullet bit into the dirt no more than a foot from his face. He lay still, not daring to answer the shot.

He heard the sound of running feet and jumped up and dived for shelter. Crouched behind a pile of old rusty scrap he waited. No more shots came.

Then slowly he edged forward until he was within a few feet of the source of the shot. Another shot barked out of the darkness at him and he caught sight of Jerry Green's face behind the flash. Rick snapped a shot in reply and heard a cry of pain.

"Don't shoot. I'll surrender," Jerry called.

"Come out with your hands up. No funny business," Rick snapped in reply.

A moment later Jerry appeared in the murky light and Rick crouched behind his heap of scrap and flashed his torch on to Jerry. He came staggering out holding his arm. Blood trickled down over his fingers from the wound. "Yuh got me in the arm. Me gun's back there. I ain't done no killin'. I swear I ain't done no killin'," Jerry whined.

"Where are the others. Where's Tessa?" Rick snapped.



"Con got the girl. Damn fool he is. We shoulda skipped yesterday when Catface came back and told us you were on to us. Silly idiot. He got me into this. I aint' done no killin'. I swear I ain't," bleated Jerry.

Rick took a look at Jerry's arm and discovered it was only a flesh wound. He bandaged it roughly with a handkerchief and handcuffed Jerry to a heavy piece of scrap that lay alongside the pile.

"That'll keep you till the others come, I reckon," Rick said grimly.

He moved forward slowly and picked up Jerry's revolver and dropped it into his pocket. Then crouching behind a heavy machine he flashed his torch up on to the galvanised iron roof. By the reflected light he could make out dimly the general layout of the rest of the foundry. He turned out the flash and moved in again.

\* \* \* \* \*

The chief and his two men moved up cautiously and dropped flat as the two shots blasted out from ahead. In the darkness they could not tell who was shooting. They waited a couple of minutes before they crept forward.

The Chief heard a groan and called out brusquely: "That you Cole?"

"No it ain't, Jerry whined. It's me. He got me. Shot me he did."

The Chief flashed his torch and found Jerry securely cuffed to the scrap metal. He laughed as the tension broke.

"Our one-man force is doing all right so far. Josh, take this man back. Jacobs, you come with me."

"Yes Sir," Josh grunted, disappointed that he had to return.

\* \* \* \* \*

Rick was through the shed now and there was no sign of Con or Tessa. The yard was empty and surrounding it on either side was a fence five feet six tall. He was stumped.

They could have gone either way. Then he noticed an old box leaning against the fence near the shed and guessed they would have used that to get over the fence.

Carefully, not knowing what to expect, he crept across the yard and got on to the box. As he raised his head level with the top a shot blasted out and a slug whined past him just over the fence. He dropped back quickly to the ground. He couldn't get over that way. Rick picked up the heavy box and ran across the yard and clambered up on to the fence and then ran on to the roof of the shed which ran right across the yard. He edged slowly over, careful to make no sound.

At the far edge he peeped down into the factory yard next door. Stella cowered back in a corner of the bare yard, a small automatic clutched nervously in her hand.



"Drop that gun, you're covered," Rick snapped.

The gun dropped from Stella's nerveless fingers as if it was weighted down with a ton of lead. Rick dropped down into the yard and ran across.

"Where's Tessa?" he snapped.

"If you mean that little blonde skirt, Con's got her. He's gone. The stinking rat. He got me into this. I twisted my ankle trying to get over the fence. The lousy thing ran out on me. He's gone, but I hope you catch him," Stella snarled.

Rick was pondering whether to leave her or not when the Chief dropped into the yard behind him. Rick spun round, his revolver coming up.

"Take it easy, Cole. Don't go gun happy on me. Who's this?" the Chief said grimly.

"Con's girl. She's got teeth too. Took a crack at me with this little toy when I poked my head over the fence," Rick growled. "Con's still got Tessa. He's gone."

"Jacobs, take care of this one. Which way did Hedfirt go?" the Chief asked Stella.

"Over the fence. Which way do you think?" Stella shrieked out at him.

"That sort of talk won't get you anywhere. Which fence?" growled the Chief savagely, staring hard at Stella.

"That one there. He plans to go through the cordon out the back. He's got the girl. You can't shoot her," Stella laughed hysterically.

"We'll get him," the Chief vowed grimly.

\* \* \* \* \*

Two factory yards away Con was smashing the lock on the back door of the factory with an iron bar. The lock gave and the door flew open. He forced Tessa through the door in front of him and followed. Pushing her ahead of him he went through the factory to the front, where it opened on to the street through which they had come. He quietly lifted the bar and noiselessly opened the door.

"Make a sound sister and I'll drill you," he spat.

Tessa was trembling with nervous exhaustion but she dared not but do as he said. He put his left arm tightly round her and the gun deep into her back. Then he moved out through the door and into the street.

"All right coppers," he snarled. "Make a move and I'll drill the girl."

The police stood motionless as Con walked slowly toward one of the cars in the street.

"You there, copper. Get in and start her up. Get in," Con growled, his voice heavy with menace.



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When the car was purring nicely he ordered the cop out and then forced Tessa into the front seat alongside him. He plunged the car into gear and raced down the street.

The Chief and Rick dashed out the factory door together as the car turned the corner. Rick raced to the nearest car and the Chief was on his heels.

"After him men," he cried as Rick started off with a jerk.

"That dirty swine's got more cunning than a damp bush full of foxes. Any other rat would have tried to fight it out. Using Tessa like that, he knows we can't shoot or rush him," Rick cried angrily.

"We'll get him. Make no bones about that," the Chief said.

They charged down the street no more than two hundred yards behind the car Con drove. Slowly Rick gained as he risked everything at the turns. Within a mile he was within a length of Con's car. At the next bend Rick skidded madly round and straightened up on level terms with Con. Then he inched his car over slowly until the running boards were almost touching. Con snapped a shot at Rick, but the rocking of the car ruined his aim and it shattered the glass in front of him.

Again Con raised his gun to fire but Tessa heaved herself against Con and the bullet flew high. Con's car was forced to the gutter and he slammed on the brakes and dived out over the top of Tessa. He stopped to take another shot at Rick before he turned to run. It caught Rick with a stinging pain high up in his left arm.

"Rick! Rick!" he heard Tessa crying, "his gun's empty. It's empty."

Rick dropped his own revolver and raced in pursuit. Down the street he slowly gained until he was within two yards of Con. He measured the distance and took a flying dive which wrapped his arms around Con's legs. They fell hard to the road and Con rolled on top. He used his knee savagely to Rick's groin and the pain numbed him. As Con struggled to his feet Rick reached out a hand and caught the toe of Con's shoe and brought him down again.

They jumped to their feet and exchanged blows as the Chief came running up. Rick swung a mighty right that connected squarely to Con's jaw and he collapsed in a heap on the ground. The Chief panted to a stop and grinned grimly: "Nice work Cole. That's the last of them. We'll lumber this guy back with us."

The Chief bent to drag Con to his feet and then stooped closer and felt for his heart.

"Good God! he's dead. It must have been his head. He couldn't take a wallop like you just gave him after his operation."

"Dead!" Rick said dazedly. "That's a pity. I was looking forward to his trial."



Tessa ran up then and threw herself into Rick's arms. "Oh Rick! Rick! I thought we were never going to be together again," she cried. "I've been so frightened."

"I think you had best let me take you home to bed. You need some rest," Rick said sternly. But he smiled down at her and in his smile there was a wealth of tenderness and promise.

"Rick, you're hurt! You're bleeding!" Tessa cried as she noticed the spreading stain of wet blood on his left sleeve high up near the shoulder.

"It's nothing much, honey. Only a shallow flesh wound," Rick assured her.

"Inspector, he's hurt. Where's the doctor?" Tessa asked.

"Was someone wanting a doctor?" a pleasant voice asked.

Tessa turned to the genial old man who stood behind them, his face lined with years of experience that told that he had found life good.

"Yes. Oh yes," Tessa stuttered. "Rick's hurt."

"Come up to my surgery and I'll see what I can do." He nodded toward the body on the ground and asked: "Dead?"

The Chief nodded and Rick and Tessa followed the doctor.

An hour later Rick rang the bell at Tessa's flat. Marie ran to the door and opened it, her large brown eyes wide with worry.

"Tessa! Wherever have you been? I've been worried out of my wits. What's happened to you? You look as if you've been dragged through a rubbish tip."

"It's something like that Marie. But no questions now. See that Tessa gets a hot bath and is put to bed will you. Oh, and here's a sedative tablet. The Doctor said she was to take it with a glass of hot milk. Take good care of her won't you Marie?" Rick said.

"Of course. I'll ring them at work and tell them I won't be in to-day. But . . ." Marie said in a rush.

"No questions Marie. I'll tell you the whole story later. Promise?" Rick grinned.

"I promise. Why Rick, you're . . . I'm sorry. I'll put the bath on." Marie turned and ran out of the room.

Rick put his good arm tenderly round Tessa and kissed her hair.

"What do you say I get some leave and we get married?"

"Oh Rick, could you? That would be wonderful. When?" Tessa's eyes were bright as she looked up at her man.

"Well it takes three days to arrange things. How would that be? He laughed.

"Wonderful. Oh Rick, kiss me. Kiss me hard."

He was very happy to do her that favour.



Late in the afternoon Rick sat in the Chief's office and he was smiling. His left arm was in a sling.

"Well that's the end of the report. I reckon I'm free to go on vacation at last."

"Yes, Cole. You deserve it. It has been a crazy business from first to last. And by the way, the American cove has had some very nice things to say about you to the Boss. So don't be surprised if you get an advance when you return," the Chief said gruffly to conceal his pride.

"Thanks Chief. I've asked the Doc to make out a special report on the case book we found out at Park Drive. He said that such ideas as Hazel-White used has always been regarded as quackery. He was astounded when he read the case book of all the operations and the after effects. He thinks that they may have far-reaching possibilities. If they have I only hope that I'm not around. That's all." Rick grinned.

"A damn queer business Cole. Any way you look at it, it's a damn queer business," the Chief grunted.

"Well, if that's all I'll be off to see if Tessa is awake yet."

"Cole, you've got six weeks' leave due and something for the arm. Don't you bring your wife home or come worrying me until she is glad to get rid of you for a while, the Chief said sternly.

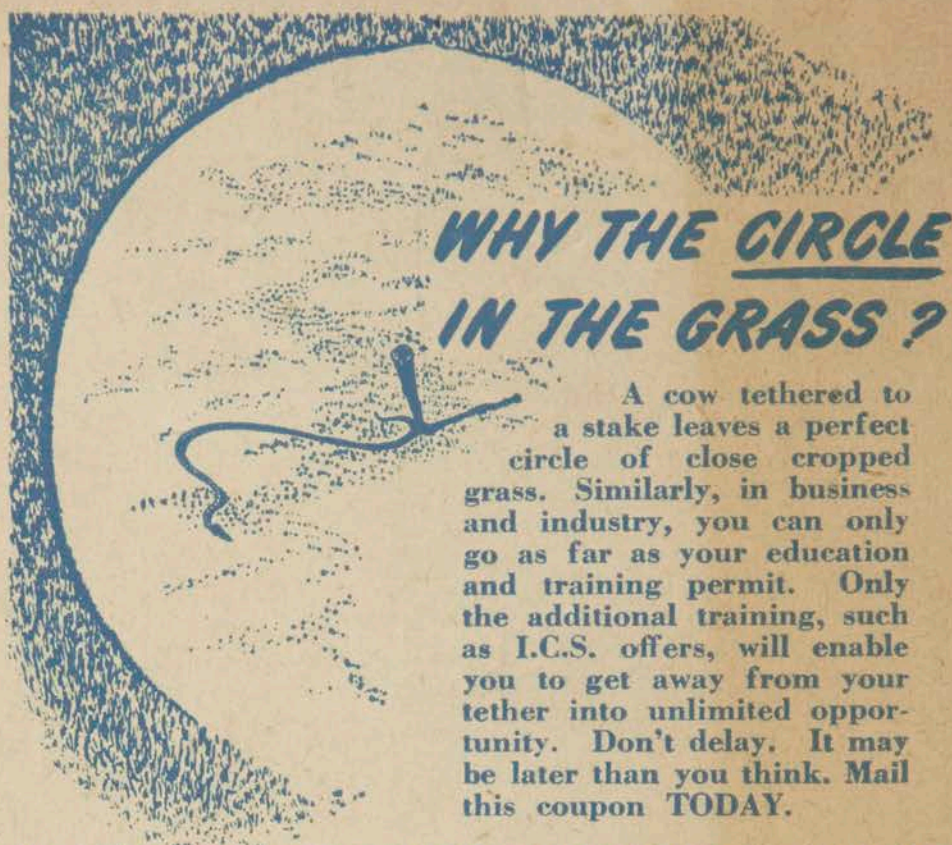
"Thanks, Chief." Rick laughed and hurried out to an important date with an altar.

THE END.









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