

Detective, Adventure, and Mystery Stories

THE BLACK MASK

TWICE
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MONTH

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20 CENTS



Featuring—

“THE TENTH CLUE”

An amazing detective novelette by Dashiell Hammett

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STANLEY WEINSTEIN GROUP, 1000 17th Street, N. W., Washington, D. C. 20036

THE TENTH CLEW

A Complete Mystery-Detective Novelette

Black Mask, 1 January 1924

There were enough clues in this crime to give Mr. Hammett's nameless detective a year or so of work. But solving a mystery in that length of time didn't appeal to him. He wanted faster action—and he got it in good measure. So will you if you begin this entertaining novelette.

I

“Do you know ... Emil Bonfils?”

“Mr. Leopold Gantvoort is not at home,” the servant who opened the door said, “but his son, Mr. Charles, is—if you wish to see him.”

“No. I had an appointment with Mr. Leopold Gantvoort for nine or a little after. It's just nine now. No doubt he'll be back soon. I'll wait.”

“Very well, sir.”

He stepped aside for me to enter the house, took my overcoat and hat, guided me to a room on the second floor—Gantvoort's library—and left me. I picked up a magazine from the stack on the table, pulled an ash tray over beside me, and made myself comfortable.

An hour passed. I stopped reading and began to grow impatient. Another hour passed—and I was fidgeting.

A clock somewhere below had begun to strike eleven when a young man of twenty-five or -six, tall and slender, with remarkably white skin and very dark hair and eyes, came into the room.

“My father hasn't returned yet,” he said. “It's too bad that you should have been kept waiting all this time. Isn't there anything I could do for you? I am Charles Gantvoort.”

“No, thank you.” I got up from my chair, accepting the courteous dismissal.

“I’ll get in touch with him tomorrow.”

“I’m sorry,” he murmured, and we moved toward the door together.

As we reached the hall an extension telephone in one corner of the room we were leaving buzzed softly, and I halted in the doorway while Charles Gantvoort went over to answer it.

His back was toward me as he spoke into the instrument.

“Yes. Yes. Yes!”—sharply—“*What?* Yes”—very weakly—“Yes.”

He turned slowly around and faced me with a face that was gray and tortured, with wide shocked eyes and gaping mouth—the telephone still in his hand.

“Father,” he gasped, “is dead—killed!”

“Where? How?”

“I don’t know. That was the police. They want me to come down at once.”

He straightened his shoulders with an effort, pulling himself together, put down the telephone, and his face fell into less strained lines.

“You will pardon my—”

“Mr. Gantvoort,” I interrupted his apology, “I am connected with the Continental Detective Agency. Your father called up this afternoon and asked that a detective be sent to see him tonight. He said his life had been threatened. He hadn’t definitely engaged us, however, so unless you—”

“Certainly! You are employed! If the police haven’t already caught the murderer I want you to do everything possible to catch him.”

“All right! Let’s get down to headquarters.”

Neither of us spoke during the ride to the Hall of Justice. Gantvoort bent over the wheel of his car, sending it through the streets at a terrific speed. There were several questions that needed answers, but all his attention was required for his driving if he was to maintain the pace at which he was driving without piling us into something. So I didn’t disturb him, but hung on and kept quiet.

Half a dozen police detectives were waiting for us when we reached the detective bureau. O’Gar—a bullet-headed detective-sergeant who dresses like the village constable in a movie, wide-brimmed black hat and all, but who isn’t to be put out of the reckoning on that account—was in charge of the investigation. He and I had worked on two or three jobs together before, and hit it off excellently.

He led us into one of the small offices below the assembly room. Spread out on the flat top of a desk there were a dozen or more objects.

“I want you to look these things over carefully,” the detective-sergeant told

Gantvoort, "and pick out the ones that belonged to your father."

"But where is he?"

"Do this first," O'Gar insisted, "and then you can see him."

I looked at the things on the table while Charles Gantvoort made his selections. An empty jewel case; a memoranda book; three letters in slit envelopes that were addressed to the dead man; some other papers; a bunch of keys; a fountain pen; two white linen handkerchiefs; two pistol cartridges; a gold watch, with a gold knife and a gold pencil attached to it by a gold-and-platinum chain; two black leather wallets, one of them very new and the other worn; some money, both paper and silver; and a small portable typewriter, bent and twisted, and matted with hair and blood. Some of the other things were smeared with blood and some were clean.

Gantvoort picked out the watch and its attachments, the keys, the fountain pen, the memoranda book, the handkerchiefs, the letters and other papers, and the older wallet.

"These were father's," he told us. "I've never seen any of the others before. I don't know, of course, how much money he had with him tonight, so I can't say how much of this is his."

"You're sure none of the rest of this stuff was his?" O'Gar asked.

"I don't think so, but I'm not sure. Whipple could tell you." He turned to me. "He's the man who let you in tonight. He looked after father, and he'd know positively whether any of these other things belonged to him or not."

One of the police detectives went to the telephone to tell Whipple to come down immediately.

I resumed the questioning.

"Is anything that your father usually carried with him missing? Anything of value?"

"Not that I know of. All of the things that he might have been expected to have with him seem to be here."

"At what time tonight did he leave the house?"

"Before seven-thirty. Possibly as early as seven."

"Know where he was going?"

"He didn't tell me, but I supposed he was going to call on Miss Dexter."

The faces of the police detectives brightened, and their eyes grew sharp. I suppose mine did, too. There are many, many murders with never a woman in them anywhere; but seldom a very conspicuous killing.

“Who’s this Miss Dexter?” O’Gar took up the inquiry.

“She’s well—” Charles Gantvoort hesitated. “Well, father was on very friendly terms with her and her brother. He usually called on them—on her several evenings a week. In fact, I suspected that he intended marrying her.”

“Who and what is she?”

“Father became acquainted with them six or seven months ago. I’ve met them several times, but don’t know them very well. Miss Dexter—Creda is her given name—is about twenty-three years old, I should judge, and her brother Madden is four or five years older. He is in New York now, or on his way there, to transact some business for father.”

“Did your father tell you he was going to marry her?” O’Gar hammered away at the woman angle.

“No; but it was pretty obvious that he was very much—ah—infatuated. We had some words over it a few days ago—last week. Not a quarrel, you understand, but words. From the way he talked I feared that he meant to marry her.”

“What do you mean ‘feared’?” O’Gar snapped at that word.

Charles Gantvoort’s pale face flushed a little, and he cleared his throat embarrassedly.

“I don’t want to put the Dexters in a bad light to you. I don’t think—I’m sure they had nothing to do with father’s—with this. But I didn’t care especially for them—didn’t like them. I thought they were—well—fortune hunters, perhaps. Father wasn’t fabulously wealthy, but he had considerable means. And, while he wasn’t feeble, still he was past fifty-seven, old enough for me to feel that Creda Dexter was more interested in his money than in him.”

“How about your father’s will?”

“The last one of which I have any knowledge—drawn up two or three years ago—left everything to my wife and me jointly. Father’s attorney, Mr. Murray Abernathy, could tell you if there was a later will, but I hardly think there was.”

“Your father had retired from business, hadn’t he?”

“Yes; he turned his import and export business over to me about a year ago. He had quite a few investments scattered around, but he wasn’t actively engaged in the management of any concern.”

O’Gar tilted his village constable hat back and scratched his bullet head reflectively for a moment. Then he looked at me.

“Anything else you want to ask?”

“Yes. Mr. Gantvoort, do you know, or did you ever hear your father or anyone else speak of an Emil Bonfils?”

“No.”

“Did your father ever tell you that he had received a threatening letter? Or that he had been shot at on the street?”

“No.”

“Was your father in Paris in 1902?”

“Very likely. He used to go abroad every year up until the time of his retirement from business.”

II

“That’s Something!”

O’Gar and I took Gantvoort around to the morgue to see his father, then. The dead man wasn’t pleasant to look at, even to O’Gar and me, who hadn’t known him except by sight. I remembered him as a small wiry man, always smartly tailored, and with a brisk springiness that was far younger than his years.

He lay now with the top of his head beaten into a red and pulpy mess.

We left Gantvoort at the morgue and set out afoot for the Hall of Justice.

“What’s this deep stuff you’re pulling about Emil Bonfils and Paris in 1902?” the detective-sergeant asked as soon as we were out in the street.

“This: the dead man phoned the Agency this afternoon and said he had received a threatening letter from an Emil Bonfils with whom he had had trouble in Paris in 1902. He also said that Bonfils had shot at him the previous evening, in the street. He wanted somebody to come around and see him about it tonight. And he said that under no circumstances were the police to be let in on it—that he’d rather have Bonfils get him than have the trouble made public. That’s all he would say over the phone; and that’s how I happened to be on hand when Charles Gantvoort was notified of his father’s death.”

O’Gar stopped in the middle of the sidewalk and whistled softly.

“That’s something!” he exclaimed. “Wait till we get back to headquarters—I’ll show you something.”

Whipple was waiting in the assembly room when we arrived at headquarters. His face at first glance was as smooth and mask-like as when he had admitted me to the house on Russian Hill earlier in the evening. But beneath his perfect

servant's manner he was twitching and trembling.

We took him into the little office where we had questioned Charles Gantvoort.

Whipple verified all that the dead man's son had told us. He was positive that neither the typewriter, the jewel case, the two cartridges, or the newer wallet had belonged to Gantvoort.

We couldn't get him to put his opinion of the Dexters in words, but that he disapproved of them was easily seen. Miss Dexter, he said, had called up on the telephone three times this night at about eight o'clock, at nine, and at nine-thirty. She had asked for Mr. Leopold Gantvoort each time, but she had left no message. Whipple was of the opinion that she was expecting Gantvoort, and he had not arrived.

He knew nothing, he said, of Emil Bonfils or of any threatening letters. Gantvoort had been out the previous night from eight until midnight. Whipple had not seen him closely enough when he came home to say whether he seemed excited or not. Gantvoort usually carried about a hundred dollars in his pockets.

"Is there anything that you know of that Gantvoort had on his person tonight which isn't among these things on the desk?" O'Gar asked.

"No, sir. Everything seems to be here—watch and chain, money, memorandum book, wallet, keys, handkerchiefs, fountain pen—everything that I know of."

"Did Charles Gantvoort go out tonight?"

"No, sir. He and Mrs. Gantvoort were at home all evening."

"Positive?"

Whipple thought a moment.

"Yes, sir, I'm fairly certain. But I know Mrs. Gantvoort wasn't out. To tell the truth, I didn't see Mr. Charles from about eight o'clock until he came downstairs with this gentleman"—pointing to me—"at eleven. But I'm fairly certain he was home all evening. I think Mrs. Gantvoort said he was."

Then O'Gar put another question—one that puzzled me at the time.

"What kind of collar buttons did Mr. Gantvoort wear?"

"You mean Mr. Leopold?"

"Yes."

"Plain gold ones, made all in one piece. They had a London jeweler's mark on them."

“Would you know them if you saw them?”

“Yes, sir.”

We let Whipple go home then.

“Don’t you think,” I suggested when O’Gar and I were alone with this desk-load of evidence that didn’t mean anything at all to me yet, “it’s time you were loosening up and telling me what’s what?”

“I guess so—listen! A man named Lagerquist, a grocer, was driving through Golden Gate Park tonight, and passed a machine standing on a dark road, with its lights out. He thought there was something funny about the way the man in it was sitting at the wheel, so he told the first patrolman he met about it.

“The patrolman investigated and found Gantvoort sitting at the wheel—dead—with his head smashed in and this dingus”—putting one hand on the bloody typewriter—“on the seat beside him. That was at a quarter of ten. The doc says Gantvoort was killed—his skull crushed—with this typewriter.

“The dead man’s pockets, we found, had all been turned inside out; and all this stuff on the desk, except this new wallet, was scattered about in the car—some of it on the floor and some on the seats. This money was there too—nearly a hundred dollars of it. Among the papers was this.”

He handed me a sheet of white paper upon which the following had been typewritten:

L. F. G.—

I want what is mine. 6,000 miles and 21 years are not enough to hide you from the victim of your treachery. I mean to have what you stole.

E. B.

“L. F. G. could be Leopold F. Gantvoort,” I said. “And E. B. could be Emil Bonfils. Twenty-one years is the time from 1902 to 1923, and 6,000 miles is, roughly, the distance between Paris and San Francisco.”

I laid the letter down and picked up the jewel case. It was a black imitation leather one, lined with white satin, and unmarked in any way.

Then I examined the cartridges. There were two of them, S. W. .45-caliber, and deep crosses had been cut in their soft noses—an old trick that makes the bullet spread out like a saucer when it hits.

“These in the car, too?”

“Yep—and this.”

From a vest pocket O'Gar produced a short tuft of blond hair—hairs between an inch and two inches in length. They had been cut off, not pulled out by the roots.

“Any more?”

There seemed to be an endless stream of things.

He picked up the new wallet from the desk—the one that both Whipple and Charles Gantvoort had said did not belong to the dead man—and slid it over to me.

“That was found in the road, three or four feet from the car.”

It was of a cheap quality, and had neither manufacturer's name nor owner's initials on it. In it were two ten-dollar bills, three small newspaper clippings, and a typewritten list of six names and addresses, headed by Gantvoort's.

The three clippings were apparently from the Personal columns of three different newspapers—the type wasn't the same—and they read:

GEORGE—

Everything is fixed. Don't wait too long.

D. D. D.

R. H. T.—

They do not answer.

FLO.

CAPPY.—

Twelve on the dot and look sharp.

BINGO.

The names and addresses on the typewritten list, under Ganvoort's, were:

Quincy Heathcote, 1223 S. Jason Street, Denver; B. D. Thornton, 96 Hughes Circle, Dallas; Luther G. Randall, 615 Columbia Street, Portsmouth; J. H. Boyd Willis, 4544 Harvard Street, Boston; Hannah Hindmarsh, 218 E. 79th Street, Cleveland.

“What else?” I asked when I had studied these.

The detective-sergeant's supply hadn't been exhausted yet.

“The dead man's collar buttons—both front and back—had been taken out,

though his collar and tie were still in place. And his left shoe was gone. We hunted high and low all around, but didn't find either shoe or collar buttons."

"Is that all?"

I was prepared for anything now.

"What the hell do you want?" he growled. "Ain't that enough?"

"How about fingerprints?"

"Nothing stirring! All we found belonged to the dead man."

"How about the machine he was found in?"

"A coupe belonging to a Doctor Wallace Girargo. He phoned in at six this evening that it had been stolen from near the corner of McAllister and Polk Streets. We're checking up on him—but I think he's all right."

The things that Whipple and Charles Gantvoort had identified as belonging to the dead man told us nothing. We went over them carefully, but to no advantage. The memoranda book contained many entries, but they all seemed totally foreign to the murder. The letters were quite as irrelevant.

The serial number of the typewriter with which the murder had been committed had been removed, we found—apparently filed out of the frame.

"Well, what do you think?" O'Gar asked when we had given up our examination of our clues and sat back burning tobacco.

"I think we want to find Monsieur Emil Bonfils."

"It wouldn't hurt to do that," he grunted. "I guess our best bet is to get in touch with these five people on the list with Gantvoort's name. Suppose that's a murder list? That this Bonfils is out to get all of them?"

"Maybe. We'll get hold of them anyway. Maybe we'll find that some of them have already been killed. But whether they have been killed or are to be killed or not, it's a cinch they have some connection with this affair. I'll get off a batch of telegrams to the Agency's branches, having the names on the list taken care of. I'll try to have the three clippings traced, too."

O'Gar looked at his watch and yawned.

"It's after four. What say we knock off and get some sleep? I'll leave word for the department's expert to compare the typewriter with that letter signed E. B. and with that list to see if they were written on it. I guess they were, but we'll make sure. I'll have the park searched all around where we found Gantvoort as soon as it gets light enough to see, and maybe the missing shoe and the collar buttons will be found. And I'll have a couple of the boys out calling on all the typewriter shops in the city to see if they can get a line on this one."

I stopped at the nearest telegraph office and got off a wad of messages. Then I went home to dream of nothing even remotely connected with crime or the detecting business.

III

“A sleek kitten that dame!”

At eleven o'clock that same morning, when, brisk and fresh with five hours' sleep under my belt, I arrived at the police detective bureau, I found O'Gar slumped down at his desk, staring dazedly at a black shoe, half a dozen collar buttons, a rusty flat key, and a rumpled newspaper—all lined up before him.

“What's all this? Souvenir of your wedding?”

“Might as well be.” His voice was heavy with disgust. “Listen to this: one of the porters of the Seamen's National Bank found a package in the vestibule when he started cleaning up this morning. It was this shoe—Gantvoort's missing one—wrapped in this sheet of a five-day-old *Philadelphia Record*, and with these collar buttons and this old key in it. The heel of the shoe, you'll notice, has been pried off, and is still missing. Whipple identifies it all right, as well as two of the collar buttons, but he never saw the key before. These other four collar buttons are new, and common gold-rolled ones. The key don't look like it had had much use for a long time. What do you make of all that?”

I couldn't make anything out of it.

“How did the porter happen to turn the stuff in?”

“Oh, the whole story was in the morning papers—all about the missing shoe and collar buttons and all.”

“What did you learn about the typewriter?” I asked.

“The letter and the list were written with it, right enough; but we haven't been able to find where it came from yet. We checked up the doc who owns the coupe, and he's in the clear. We accounted for all his time last night. Lagerquist, the grocer who found Gantvoort, seems to be all right, too. What did you do?”

“Haven't had any answers to the wires I sent last night. I dropped in at the Agency on my way down this morning, and got four operatives out covering the hotels and looking up all the people named Bonfils they can find—there are two or three families by that name listed in the directory. Also I sent our New

York branch a wire to have the steamship records searched to see if an Emil Bonfils had arrived recently; and I put a cable through to our Paris correspondent to see what he could dig up over there.”

“I guess we ought to see Gantvoort’s lawyer—Abernathy—and that Dexter woman before we do anything else,” the detective-sergeant said.

“I guess so,” I agreed, “let’s tackle the lawyer first. He’s the most important one, the way things now stand.”

Murray Abernathy, attorney-at-law, was a long, stringy, slow-spoken old gentleman who still clung to starched-bosom shirts. He was too full of what he thought were professional ethics to give us as much help as we had expected; but by letting him talk—letting him ramble along in his own way—we did get a little information from him. What we got amounted to this:

The dead man and Creda Dexter had intended being married the coming Wednesday. His son and her brother were both opposed to the marriage, it seemed, so Gantvoort and the woman had planned to be married secretly in Oakland, and catch a boat for the Orient that same afternoon; figuring that by the time their lengthy honeymoon was over they could return to a son and brother who had become resigned to the marriage.

A new will had been drawn up, leaving half of Gantvoort’s estate to his new wife and half to his son and daughter-in-law. But the new will had not been signed yet, and Creda Dexter knew it had not been signed. She knew—and this was one of the few points upon which Abernathy would make a positive statement—that under the old will, still in force, everything went to Charles Gantvoort and his wife.

The Gantvoort estate, we estimated from Abernathy’s roundabout statements and allusions, amounted to about a million and a half in cash value. The attorney had never heard of Emil Bonfils, he said, and had never heard of any threats or attempts at murder directed toward the dead man. He knew nothing—or would tell us nothing—that threw any light upon the nature of the thing that the threatening letter had accused the dead man of stealing.

From Abernathy’s office we went to Creda Dexter’s apartment, in a new and expensively elegant building only a few minutes’ walk from the Gantvoort residence.

Creda Dexter was a small woman in her early twenties. The first thing you noticed about her were her eyes. They were large and deep and the color of amber, and their pupils were never at rest. Continuously they changed size,

expanded and contracted—slowly at times, suddenly at others—ranging incessantly from the size of pinheads to an extent that threatened to blot out the amber irides.

With the eyes for a guide, you discovered that she was pronouncedly feline throughout. Her every movement was the slow, smooth, sure one of a cat; and the contours of her rather pretty face, the shape of her mouth, her small nose, the set of her eyes, the swelling of her brows, were all cat-like. And the effect was heightened by the way she wore her hair, which was thick and tawny.

“Mr. Gantvoort and I,” she told us after the preliminary explanations had been disposed of, “were to have been married the day after tomorrow. His son and daughter-in-law were both opposed to the marriage, as was my brother Madden. They all seemed to think that the difference between our ages was too great. So to avoid any unpleasantness, we had planned to be married quietly and then go abroad for a year or more, feeling sure that they would all have forgotten their grievances by the time we returned.

“That was why Mr. Gantvoort persuaded Madden to go to New York. He had some business there—something to do with the disposal of his interest in a steel mill—so he used it as an excuse to get Madden out of the way until we were off on our wedding trip. Madden lived here with me, and it would have been nearly impossible for me to have made any preparations for the trip without him seeing them.”

“Was Mr. Gantvoort here last night?” I asked her.

“No. I expected him—we were going out. He usually walked over—it’s only a few blocks. When eight o’clock came and he hadn’t arrived, I telephoned his house, and Whipple told me that he had left nearly an hour before. I called up again, twice, after that. Then, this morning, I called up again before I had seen the papers, and I was told that he—”

She broke off with a catch in her voice—the only sign of sorrow she displayed throughout the interview. The impression of her we had received from Charles Gantvoort and Whipple had prepared us for a more or less elaborate display of grief on her part. But she disappointed us. There was nothing crude about her work—she didn’t even turn on the tears for us.

“Was Mr. Gantvoort here night before last?”

“Yes. He came over at a little after eight and stayed until nearly twelve. We didn’t go out.”

“Did he walk over and back?”

“Yes, so far as I know.”

“Did he ever say anything to you about his life being threatened?”

“No.”

She shook her head decisively.

“Do you know Emil Bonfils?”

“No.”

“Ever hear Mr. Gantvoort speak of him?”

“No.”

“At what hotel is your brother staying in New York?”

The restless black pupils spread out abruptly, as if they were about to overflow into the white areas of her eyes. That was the first clear indication of fear I had seen. But, outside of those tell-tale pupils, her composure was undisturbed.

“I don’t know.”

“When did he leave San Francisco?”

“Thursday—four days ago.”

O’Gar and I walked six or seven blocks in thoughtful silence after we left Creda Dexter’s apartment, and then he spoke.

“A sleek kitten—that dame! Rub her the right way, and she’ll purr pretty. Rub her the wrong way—and look out for the claws!”

“What did that flash of her eyes when I asked about her brother tell you?” I asked.

“Something—but I don’t know what! It wouldn’t hurt to look him up and see if he’s really in New York. If he is there today it’s a cinch he wasn’t here last night—even the mail planes take twenty-six or twenty-eight hours for the trip.”

“We’ll do that,” I agreed. “It looks like this Creda Dexter wasn’t any too sure that her brother wasn’t in on the killing. And there’s nothing to show that Bonfils didn’t have help. I can’t figure Creda being in on the murder, though. She knew the new will hadn’t been signed. There’d be no sense in her working herself out of that three-quarters of a million berries.”

We sent a lengthy telegram to the Continental’s New York branch, and then dropped in at the Agency to see if any replies had come to the wires I had got off the night before.

They had.

None of the people whose names appeared on the typewritten list with Gantvoort’s had been found; not the least trace had been found of any of them.

Two of the addresses given were altogether wrong. There were no houses with those numbers on those streets—and there never had been.

IV

“Maybe that ain’t so foolish!”

What was left of the afternoon, O’Gar and I spent going over the street between Gantvoort’s house on Russian Hill and the building in which the Dexters lived. We questioned everyone we could find—man, woman and child—who lived, worked, or played along any of the three routes the dead man could have taken.

We found nobody who had heard the shot that had been fired by Bonfils on the night before the murder. We found nobody who had seen anything suspicious on the night of the murder. Nobody who remembered having seen him picked up in a coupe.

Then we called at Gantvoort’s house and questioned Charles Gantvoort again, his wife, and all the servants—and we learned nothing. So far as they knew, nothing belonging to the dead man was missing—nothing small enough to be concealed in the heel of a shoe.

The shoes he had worn the night he was killed were one of three pairs made in New York for him two months before. He could have removed the heel of the left one, hollowed it out sufficiently to hide a small object in it, and then nailed it on again; though Whipple insisted that he would have noticed the effects of any tampering with the shoe unless it had been done by an expert repairman.

This field exhausted, we returned to the Agency. A telegram had just come from the New York branch, saying that none of the steamship companies’ records showed the arrival of an Emil Bonfils from either England, France, or Germany within the past six months.

The operatives who had been searching the city for Bonfils had all come in empty-handed. They had found and investigated eleven persons named Bonfils in San Francisco, Oakland, Berkeley, and Alameda. Their investigations had definitely cleared all eleven. None of these Bonfilses knew an Emil Bonfils. Combing the hotels had yielded nothing.

O’Gar and I went to dinner together—a quiet, grouchy sort of meal during which we didn’t speak six words apiece—and then came back to the Agency to

find that another wire had come in from New York.

Madden Dexter arrived McAlpin Hotel this morning with Power of Attorney to sell Gantvoort interest in B. F. and F. Iron Corporation. Denies knowledge of Emil Bonfils or of murder. Expects to finish business and leave for San Francisco tomorrow.

I let the sheet of paper upon which I had decoded the telegram slide out of my fingers, and we sat listlessly facing each other across my desk, looking vacantly each at the other, listening to the clatter of charwomen's buckets in the corridor.

"It's a funny one," O'Gar said softly to himself at last.

I nodded. It was.

"We got nine clues," he spoke again presently, "and none of them have got us a damned thing.

"Number one: the dead man called up you people and told you that he had been threatened and shot at by an Emil Bonfils that he'd had a run-in with in Paris a long time ago.

"Number two: the typewriter he was killed with and that the letter and list were written on. We're still trying to trace it, but with no breaks so far. What the hell kind of a weapon was that, anyway? It looks like this fellow Bonfils got hot and hit Gantvoort with the first thing he put his hand on. But what was the typewriter doing in a stolen car? And why were the numbers filed off it?"

I shook my head to signify that I couldn't guess the answer, and O'Gar went on enumerating our clues.

"Number three: the threatening letter, fitting in with what Gantvoort had said over the phone that afternoon.

"Number four: those two bullets with the crosses in their snoots.

"Number five: the jewel case.

"Number six: that bunch of yellow hair.

"Number seven: the fact that the dead man's shoe and collar buttons were carried away.

"Number eight: the wallet, with two ten-dollar bills, three clippings, and the list in it, found in the road.

"Number nine: finding the shoe next day, wrapped up in a five-day-old Philadelphia paper, and with the missing collar buttons, four more, and a rusty

key in it.

“That’s the list. If they mean anything at all, they mean that Emil Bonfils whoever he is—was flimflammed out of something by Gantvoort in Paris in 1902, and that Bonfils came to get it back. He picked Gantvoort up last night in a stolen car, bringing his typewriter with him—for God knows what reason! Gantvoort put up an argument, so Bonfils bashed in his noodle with the typewriter, and then went through his pockets, apparently not taking anything. He decided that what he was looking for was in Gantvoort’s left shoe, so he took the shoe away with him. And then—but there’s no sense to the collar button trick, or the phoney list, or—”

“Yes there is!” I cut in, sitting up, wide awake now. “That’s our tenth clew—the one we’re going to follow from now on. That list was, except for Gantvoort’s name and address, a fake. Our people would have found at least one of the five people whose names were on it if it had been on the level. But they didn’t find the least trace of any of them. And two of the addresses were of street numbers that didn’t exist!

“That list was faked up, put in the wallet with the clippings and twenty dollars—to make the play stronger—and planted in the road near the car to throw us off-track. And if that’s so, then it’s a hundred to one that the rest of the things were cooked up too.

“From now on I’m considering all those nine lovely clews as nine bum steers. And I’m going just exactly contrary to them. I’m looking for a man whose name isn’t Emil Bonfils, and whose initials aren’t either E or B; who isn’t French, and who wasn’t in Paris in 1902. A man who hasn’t light hair, doesn’t carry a .45-calibre pistol, and has no interest in Personal advertisements in newspapers. A man who didn’t kill Gantvoort to recover anything that could have been hidden in a shoe or on a collar button. That’s the sort of a guy I’m hunting for now!”

The detective-sergeant screwed up his little green eyes reflectively and scratched his head.

“Maybe that ain’t so foolish!” he said. “You might be right at that. Suppose you are—what then? That Dexter kitten didn’t do it—it cost her three-quarters of a million. Her brother didn’t do it—he’s in New York. And, besides, you don’t croak a guy just because you think he’s too old to marry your sister. Charles Gantvoort? He and his wife are the only ones who make any money out of the old man dying before the new will was signed. We have only their

word for it that Charles was home that night. The servants didn't see him between eight and eleven. You were there, and you didn't see him until eleven. But me and you both believe him when he says he *was* home all that evening. And neither of us think he bumped the old man off—though of course he might. Who then?"

"This Creda Dexter," I suggested, "was marrying Gantvoort for his money, wasn't she? You don't think she was in love with him, do you?"

"No. I figure, from what I saw of her, that she was in love with the million and a half."

"All right," I went on. "Now she isn't exactly homely—not by a long shot. Do you reckon Gantvoort was the only man who ever fell for her?"

"I got you! I got you!" O'Gar exclaimed. "You mean there might have been some young fellow in the running who didn't have any million and a half behind him, and who didn't take kindly to being nosed out by a man who did. Maybe—maybe."

"Well, suppose we bury all this stuff we've been working on and try out that angle."

"Suits me," he said. "Starting in the morning, then, we spend our time hunting for Gantvoort's rival for the paw of this Dexter kitten."

V

"Meet Mr. Smith."

Right or wrong, that's what we did. We stowed all those lovely clues away in a drawer, locked the drawer, and forgot them. Then we set out to find Creda Dexter's masculine acquaintances and sift them for the murderer.

But it wasn't as simple as it sounded.

All our digging into her past failed to bring to light one man who could be considered a suitor. She and her brother had been in San Francisco three years. We traced them back the length of that period, from apartment to apartment. We questioned everyone we could find who even knew her by sight. And nobody could tell us of a single man who had shown an interest in her besides Gantvoort. Nobody, apparently, had ever seen her with any man except Gantvoort or her brother.

All of which, while not getting us ahead, at least convinced us that we were

on the right trail. There must have been, we argued, at least one man in her life in those three years besides Gantvoort. She wasn't—unless we were very much mistaken—the sort of woman who would discourage masculine attention; and she was certainly endowed by nature to attract it. And if there was another man, then the very fact that he had been kept so thoroughly under cover strengthened the probability of him having been mixed up in Gantvoort's death.

We were unsuccessful in learning where the Dexters had lived before they came to San Francisco, but we weren't so very interested in their earlier life. Of course it was possible that some old-time lover had come upon the scene again recently; but in that case it should have been easier to find the recent connection than the old one.

There was no doubt, our explorations showed, that Gantvoort's son had been correct in thinking the Dexters were fortune hunters. All their activities pointed to that, although there seemed to be nothing downright criminal in their pasts.

I went up against Creda Dexter again, spending an entire afternoon in her apartment, banging away with question after question, all directed toward her former love affairs. Who had she thrown over for Gantvoort and his million and a half? And the answer was always *nobody*—an answer that I didn't choose to believe.

We had Creda Dexter shadowed night and day—and it carried us ahead not an inch. Perhaps she suspected that she was being watched. Anyway, she seldom left her apartment, and then on only the most innocent of errands. We had her apartment watched whether she was in it or not. Nobody visited it. We tapped her telephone—and all our listening-in netted us nothing. We had her mail covered—and she didn't receive a single letter, not even an advertisement.

Meanwhile, we had learned where the three clippings found in the wallet had come from—from the Personal columns of a New York, a Chicago, and a Portland newspaper. The one in the Portland paper had appeared two days before the murder, the Chicago one four days before, and the New York one five days before. All three of those papers would have been on the San Francisco newsstands the day of the murder—ready to be purchased and cut out by anyone who was looking for material to confuse detectives with.

The Agency's Paris correspondent had found no less than six Emil Bonfilses—all bloomers so far as our job was concerned—and had a line on three more.

But O'Gar and I weren't worrying over Emil Bonfils any more—that angle was dead and buried. We were plugging away at our new task—the finding of

Gantvoort's rival.

Thus the days passed, and thus the matter stood when Madden Dexter was due to arrive home from New York.

Our New York branch had kept an eye on him until he left that city, and had advised us of his departure, so I knew what train he was coming on. I wanted to put a few questions to him before his sister saw him. He could tell me what I wanted to know, and he might be willing to if I could get to him before his sister had an opportunity to shut him up.

If I had known him by sight I could have picked him up when he left his train at Oakland, but I didn't know him; and I didn't want to carry Charles Gantvoort or anyone else along with me to pick him out for me.

So I went up to Sacramento that morning, and boarded his train there. I put my card in an envelope and gave it to a messenger boy in the station. Then I followed the boy through the train, while he called out:

"Mr. Dexter! Mr. Dexter!"

In the last car—the observation-club car—a slender, dark-haired man in well-made tweeds turned from watching the station platform through a window and held out his hand to the boy.

I studied him while he nervously tore open the envelope and read my card. His chin trembled slightly just now, emphasizing the weakness of a face that couldn't have been strong at its best. Between twenty-five and thirty, I placed him; with his hair parted in the middle and slicked down; large, too-expressive brown eyes; small well-shaped nose; neat brown mustache; very red, soft lips—that type.

I dropped into the vacant chair beside him when he looked up from the card.

"You are Mr. Dexter?"

"Yes," he said. "I suppose it's about Mr. Gantvoort's death that you want to see me?"

"Uh-huh. I wanted to ask you a few questions, and since I happened to be in Sacramento, I thought that by riding back on the train with you I could ask them without taking up too much of your time."

"If there's anything I can tell you," he assured me, "I'll be only too glad to do it. But I told the New York detectives all I knew, and they didn't seem to find it of much value."

"Well, the situation has changed some since you left New York." I watched his face closely as I spoke. "What we thought of no value then may be just what

we want now.”

I paused while he moistened his lips and avoided my eyes. He may not know anything, I thought, but he’s certainly jumpy. I let him wait a few minutes while I pretended deep thoughtfulness. If I played him right, I was confident I could turn him inside out. He didn’t seem to be made of very tough material.

We were sitting with our heads close together, so that the four or five other passengers in the car wouldn’t overhear our talk; and that position was in my favor. One of the things that every detective knows is that it’s often easy to get information—even a confession—out of a feeble nature simply by putting your face close to his and talking in a loud tone. I couldn’t talk loud here, but the closeness of our faces was by itself an advantage.

“Of the men with whom your sister was acquainted,” I came out with it at last, “who, outside of Mr. Gantvoort, was the most attentive?”

He swallowed audibly, looked out of the window, fleetingly at me, and then out of the window again.

“Really, I couldn’t say.”

“All right. Let’s get at it this way. Suppose we check off one by one all the men who were interested in her and in whom she was interested.”

He continued to stare out of the window.

“Who’s first?” I pressed him.

His gaze flickered around to meet mine for a second, with a sort of timid desperation in his eyes.

“I know it sounds foolish, but I, her brother, couldn’t give you the name of even one man in whom Creda was interested before she met Gantvoort. She never, so far as I know, had the slightest feeling for any man before she met him. Of course it is possible that there may have been someone that I didn’t know anything about, but—”

It did sound foolish, right enough! The Creda Dexter I had talked to—a sleek kitten, as O’Gar had put it—didn’t impress me as being at all likely to go very long without having at least one man in tow. This pretty little guy in front of me was lying. There couldn’t be any other explanation.

I went at him tooth and nail. But when he reached Oakland early that night he was still sticking to his original statement—that Gantvoort was the only one of his sister’s suitors that he knew anything about. And I knew that I had blundered, had underrated Madden Dexter, had played my hand wrong in trying to shake him down too quickly—in driving too directly at the point I

was interested in. He was either a lot stronger than I had figured him, or his interest in concealing Gantvoort's murderer was much greater than I had thought it would be.

But I had this much: if Dexter was lying—and there couldn't be much doubt of that—then Gantvoort *had* had a rival, and Madden Dexter believed or knew that this rival had killed Gantvoort.

When we left the train at Oakland I knew I was licked, that he wasn't going to tell me what I wanted to know—not this night, anyway. But I clung to him, stuck at his side when we boarded the ferry for San Francisco, in spite of the obviousness of his desire to get away from me. There's always a chance of something unexpected happening; so I continued to ply him with questions as our boat left the slip.

Presently a man came toward where we were sitting—a big burly man in a light overcoat, carrying a black bag.

“Hello, Madden!” he greeted my companion, striding over to him with outstretched hand. “Just got in and was trying to remember your phone number,” he said, setting down his bag, as they shook hands warmly.

Madden Dexter turned to me.

“I want you to meet Mr. Smith,” he told me, and then gave my name to the big man, adding, “he's with the Continental Detective Agency here.”

That tag—clearly a warning for Smith's benefit—brought me to my feet, all watchfulness. But the ferry was crowded—a hundred persons were within sight of us, all around us. I relaxed, smiled pleasantly, and shook hands with Smith. Whoever Smith was, and whatever connection he might have with the murder—and if he hadn't any, why should Dexter have been in such a hurry to tip him off to my identity?—he couldn't do anything here. The crowd around us was all to my advantage.

That was my second mistake of the day.

Smith's left hand had gone into his overcoat pocket—or rather, through one of those vertical slits that certain styles of overcoats have so that inside pockets may be reached without unbuttoning the overcoat. His hand had gone through that slit, and his coat had fallen away far enough for me to see a snub-nosed automatic in his hand—shielded from everyone's sight but mine—pointing at my waist-line.

“Shall we go on deck?” Smith asked—and it was an order.

I hesitated. I didn't like to leave all these people who were so blindly standing

and sitting around us. But Smith's face wasn't the face of a cautious man. He had the look of one who might easily disregard the presence of a hundred witnesses.

I turned around and walked through the crowd. His right hand lay familiarly on my shoulder as he walked behind me; his left hand held his gun, under the overcoat, against my spine.

The deck was deserted. A heavy fog, wet as rain,—the fog of San Francisco Bay's winter nights,—lay over boat and water, and had driven everyone else inside. It hung about us, thick and impenetrable; I couldn't see so far as the end of the boat, in spite of the lights glowing overhead.

I stopped.

Smith prodded me in the back.

"Farther away, where we can talk," he rumbled in my ear.

I went on until I reached the rail.

The entire back of my head burned with sudden fire ... tiny points of light glittered in the blackness before me ... grew larger ... came rushing toward me. ...

VI

"Those damned horns!"

Semi-consciousness! I found myself mechanically keeping afloat somehow and trying to get out of my overcoat. The back of my head throbbed devilishly. My eyes burned. I felt heavy and logged, as if I had swallowed gallons of water.

The fog hung low and thick on the water—there was nothing else to be seen anywhere. By the time I had freed myself of the encumbering overcoat my head had cleared somewhat, but with returning consciousness came increased pain.

A light glimmered mistily off to my left, and then vanished. From out of the misty blanket, from every direction, in a dozen different keys, from near and far, fog-horns sounded. I stopped swimming and floated on my back, trying to determine my whereabouts.

After a while I picked out the moaning, evenly spaced blasts of the Alcatraz siren. But they told me nothing. They came to me out of the fog without

direction—seemed to beat down upon me from straight above.

I was somewhere in San Francisco Bay, and that was all I knew, though I suspected the current was sweeping me out toward the Golden Gate.

A little while passed, and I knew that I had left the path of the Oakland ferries—no boat had passed close to me for some time. I was glad to be out of that track. In this fog a boat was a lot more likely to run me down than to pick me up.

The water was chilling me, so I turned over and began swimming, just vigorously enough to keep my blood circulating while I saved my strength until I had a definite goal to try for.

A horn began to repeat its roaring note nearer and nearer, and presently the lights of the boat upon which it was fixed came into sight. One of the Sausalito ferries, I thought.

It came quite close to me, and I halloed until I was breathless and my throat was raw. But the boat's siren, crying its warning, drowned my shouts.

The boat went on and the fog closed in behind it.

The current was stronger now, and my attempts to attract the attention of the Sausalito ferry had left me weaker. I floated, letting the water sweep me where it would, resting.

Another light appeared ahead of me suddenly—hung there for an instant—disappeared.

I began to yell, and worked my arms and legs madly, trying to drive myself through the water to where it had been.

I never saw it again.

Weariness settled upon me, and a sense of futility. The water was no longer cold. I was warm with a comfortable, soothing numbness. My head stopped throbbing; there was no feeling at all in it now. No lights, now, but the sound of fog-horns ... fog-horns ... fog-horns ahead of me, behind me, to either side; annoying me, irritating me.

But for the moaning horns I would have ceased all effort. They had become the only disagreeable detail of my situation—the water was pleasant, fatigue was pleasant. But the horns tormented me. I cursed them petulantly and decided to swim until I could no longer hear them, and then, in the quiet of the friendly fog, go to sleep. ...

Now and then I would doze, to be goaded into wakefulness by the wailing voice of a siren.

“Those damned horns! Those damned horns!” I complained aloud, again and again.

One of them, I found presently, was bearing down upon me from behind, growing louder and stronger. I turned and waited. Lights, dim and steaming, came into view.

With exaggerated caution to avoid making the least splash, I swam off to one side. When this nuisance was past I could go to sleep. I sniggered softly to myself as the lights drew abreast, feeling a foolish triumph in my cleverness in eluding the boat. Those damned horns. . . .

Life—the hunger for life—all at once surged back into my being.

I screamed at the passing boat, and with every iota of my being struggled toward it. Between strokes I tilted up my head and screamed. . . .

VII

“You have a lot of fun, don’t you?”

When I returned to consciousness for the second time that evening, I was lying on my back on a baggage truck, which was moving. Men and women were crowding around, walking beside the truck, staring at me with curious eyes.

I sat up.

“Where are we?” I asked.

A little red-faced man in uniform answered my question.

“Just landing in Sausalito. Lay still. We’ll take you over to the hospital.”

I looked around.

“How long before this boat goes back to San Francisco?”

“Leaves right away.”

I slid off the truck and started back aboard the boat.

“I’m going with it,” I said.

Half an hour later, shivering and shaking in my wet clothes, keeping my mouth clamped tight so that my teeth wouldn’t sound like a dice-game, I climbed into a taxi at the Ferry Building and went to my flat.

There, I swallowed half a pint of whisky, rubbed myself with a coarse towel until my skin was sore, and, except for an enormous weariness and a worse headache, I felt almost human again.

I reached O’Gar by phone, asked him to come up to my flat right away, and

then called up Charles Gantvoort.

“Have you seen Madden Dexter yet?” I asked him.

“No, but I talked to him over the phone. He called me up as soon as he got in. I asked him to meet me in Mr. Abernathy’s office in the morning, so we could go over that business he transacted for father.”

“Can you call him up now and tell him that you have been called out of town—will have to leave early in the morning—and that you’d like to run over to his apartment and see him tonight?”

“Why yes, if you wish.”

“Good! Do that. I’ll call for you in a little while and go over to see him with you.”

“What is—”

“I’ll tell you about it when I see you,” I cut him off.

O’Gar arrived as I was finishing dressing.

“So he told you something?” he asked, knowing of my plan to meet Dexter on the train and question him.

“Yes,” I said with sour sarcasm, “but I came near forgetting what it was. I grilled him all the way from Sacramento to Oakland, and couldn’t get a whisper out of him. On the ferry coming over he introduces me to a man he calls Mr. Smith, and he tells Mr. Smith that I’m a gum-shoe. This, mind you, all happens in the middle of a crowded ferry! Mr. Smith puts a gun in my belly, marches me out on deck, raps me across the back of the head, and dumps me into the bay.”

“You have a lot of fun, don’t you?” O’Gar grinned, and then wrinkled his forehead. “Looks like Smith would be the man we want then—the buddy who turned the Gantvoort trick. But what the hell did he want to give himself away by chucking you overboard for?”

“Too hard for me,” I confessed, while trying to find which of my hats and caps would sit least heavily upon my bruised head. “Dexter knew I was hunting for one of his sister’s former lovers, of course. And he must have thought I knew a whole lot more than I do, or he wouldn’t have made that raw play—tipping my mitt to Smith right in front of me.

“It may be that after Dexter lost his head and made that break on the ferry, Smith figured that I’d be on to him soon, if not right away; and so he’d take a desperate chance on putting me out of the way. But we’ll know all about it in a little while,” I said, as we went down to the waiting taxi and set out for

Gantvoort's.

"You ain't counting on Smith being in sight, are you?" the detective-sergeant asked.

"No. He'll be holed up somewhere until he sees how things are going. But Madden Dexter will have to be out in the open to protect himself. He has an alibi, so he's in the clear so far as the actual killing is concerned. And with me supposed to be dead, the more he stays in the open, the safer he is. But it's a cinch that he knows what this is all about, though he wasn't necessarily involved in it. As near as I could see, he didn't go out on deck with Smith and me tonight. Anyway he'll be home. And this time he's going to talk—he's going to tell his little story!"

Charles Gantvoort was standing on his front steps when we reached his house. He climbed into our taxi and we headed for the Dexters' apartment. We didn't have time to answer any of the questions that Gantvoort was firing at us with every turning of the wheels.

"He's home and expecting you?" I asked him.

"Yes."

Then we left the taxi and went into the apartment building.

"Mr. Gantvoort to see Mr. Dexter," he told the Philippine boy at the switchboard.

The boy spoke into the phone.

"Go right up," he told us.

At the Dexters' door I stepped past Gantvoort and pressed the button.

Creda Dexter opened the door. Her amber eyes widened and her smile faded as I stepped past her into the apartment.

I walked swiftly down the little hallway and turned into the first room through whose open door a light showed.

And came face to face with Smith!

We were both surprised, but his astonishment was a lot more profound than mine. Neither of us had expected to see the other; but I had known he was still alive, while he had every reason for thinking me at the bottom of the bay.

I took advantage of his greater bewilderment to the extent of two steps toward him before he went into action.

One of his hands swept down.

I threw my right fist at his face—threw it with every ounce of my 180 pounds behind it, re-enforced by the memory of every second I had spent in the water

and every throb of my battered head.

His hand, already darting down for his pistol, came back up too late to fend off my punch.

Something clicked in my hand as it smashed into his face, and my hand went numb.

But he went down—and lay where he fell.

I jumped across his body to a door on the opposite side of the room, pulling my gun loose with my left hand.

“Dexter’s somewhere around!” I called over my shoulder to O’Gar, who with Gantvoort and Creda, was coming through the door by which I had entered. “Keep your eyes open!”

I dashed through the four other rooms of the apartment, pulling closet doors open, looking everywhere—and I found nobody.

Then I returned to where Creda Dexter was trying to revive Smith, with the assistance of O’Gar and Gantvoort.

The detective-sergeant looked over his shoulder at me.

“Who do you think this joker is?” he asked.

“My friend Mr. Smith.”

“Gantvoort says he’s Madden Dexter.”

I looked at Charles Gantvoort, who nodded his head.

“This is Madden Dexter,” he said.

VIII

“I hope you swing!”

We worked upon Dexter for nearly ten minutes before he opened his eyes.

As soon as he sat up we began to shoot questions and accusations at him, hoping to get a confession out of him before he recovered from his shakiness—but he wasn’t that shaky.

All we could get out of him was:

“Take me in if you want to. If I’ve got anything to say I’ll say it to my lawyer, and to nobody else.”

Creda Dexter, who had stepped back after her brother came to, and was standing a little way off, watching us, suddenly came forward and caught me by the arm.

“What have you got on him?” she demanded, imperatively.

“I wouldn’t want to say,” I countered, “but I don’t mind telling you this much. We’re going to give him a chance in a nice modern court-room to prove that he didn’t kill Leopold Gantvoort.”

“He was in New York!”

“He was not! He had a friend who went to New York as Madden Dexter and looked after Gantvoort’s business under that name. But if this is the real Madden Dexter then the closest he got to New York was when he met his friend on the ferry to get from him the papers connected with the B. F. & F. Iron Corporation transaction; and learned that I had stumbled upon the truth about his alibi—even if I didn’t know it myself at the time.”

She jerked around to face her brother.

“Is that on the level?” she asked him.

He sneered at her, and went on feeling with the fingers of one hand the spot on his jaw where my fist had landed.

“I’ll say all I’ve got to say to my lawyer,” he repeated.

“You will?” she shot back at him. “Well, I’ll say what I’ve got to say right now!”

She flung around to face me again.

“Madden is not my brother at all! My name is Ives. Madden and I met in St. Louis about four years ago, drifted around together for a year or so, and then came to Frisco. He was a con man—still is. He made Mr. Gantvoort’s acquaintance six or seven months ago, and was getting him all ribbed up to unload a fake invention on him. He brought him here a couple of times, and introduced me to him as his sister. We usually posed as brother and sister.

“Then, after Mr. Gantvoort had been here a couple times, Madden decided to change his game. He thought Mr. Gantvoort liked me, and that we could get more money out of him by working a fancy sort of badger-game on him. I was to lead the old man on until I had him wrapped around my finger—until we had him tied up so tight he couldn’t get away—had something on him—something good and strong. Then we were going to shake him down for plenty of money.

“Everything went along fine for a while. He fell for me—fell hard. And finally he asked me to marry him. We had never figured on that. Blackmail was our game. But when he asked me to marry him I tried to call Madden off. I admit the old man’s money had something to do with it—it influenced me—but I had come to like him a little for himself. He was mighty fine in lots of ways

—nicer than anybody I had ever known.

“So I told Madden all about it, and suggested that we drop the other plan, and that I marry Gantvoort. I promised to see that Madden was kept supplied with money—I knew I could get whatever I wanted from Mr. Gantvoort. And I was on the level with Madden. I liked Mr. Gantvoort, but Madden had found him and brought him around to me; and so I wasn’t going to run out on Madden. I was willing to do all I could for him.

“But Madden wouldn’t hear of it. He’d have got more money in the long run by doing as I suggested—but he wanted his little handful right away. And to make him more unreasonable he got one of his jealous streaks. He beat me one night!

“That settled it. I made up my mind to ditch him. I told Mr. Gantvoort that my brother was bitterly opposed to our marrying, and he could see that Madden was carrying a grudge. So he arranged to send Madden East on that steel business, to get him out of the way until we were off on our wedding trip. And we thought Madden was completely deceived—but I should have known that he would see through our scheme. We planned to be gone about a year, and by that time I thought Madden would have forgotten me—or I’d be fixed to handle him if he tried to make any trouble.

“As soon as I heard that Mr. Gantvoort had been killed I had a hunch that Madden had done it. But then it seemed like a certainty that he was in New York the next day, and I thought I had done him an injustice. And I was glad he was out of it. But now—”

She whirled around to her erstwhile confederate.

“Now I hope you swing, you big sap!”

She spun around to me again. No sleek kitten, this, but a furious, spitting cat, with claws and teeth bared.

“What kind of looking fellow was the one who went to New York for him?”

I described the man I had talked to on the train.

“Evan Felter,” she said, after a moment of thought. “He used to work with Madden. You’ll probably find him hiding in Los Angeles. Put the screws on him and he’ll spill all he knows—he’s a weak sister! The chances are he didn’t know what Madden’s game was until it was all over.”

“How do you like that?” she spat at Madden Dexter. “How do you like that for a starter? You messed up my little party, did you? Well, I’m going to spend every minute of my time from now until they pop you off helping them pop

you!”

And she did, too—with her assistance it was no trick at all to gather up the rest of the evidence we needed to hang him. And I don’t believe her enjoyment of her three-quarters of a million dollars is spoiled a bit by any qualms over what she did to Madden. She’s a very respectable woman *now*, and glad to be free of the con-man.