

APR

1954

The Lock and the Key

Books by

FRANK GRUBER

Beagle Scented Murder

The Fourth Letter

The Lock and the Key

JOHNNY FLETCHER MYSTERIES

The French Key

The Laughing Fox

The Talking Clock

The Hungry Dog

The Navy Colt

The Mighty Blockhead

The Gift Horse

The Silver Tombstone

The Honest Dealer

The Whispering Master

The Scarlet Feather

SIMON LASH MYSTERIES

Simon Lash: Private Detective

The Buffalo Box

Murder '97

HISTORICAL WESTERNS

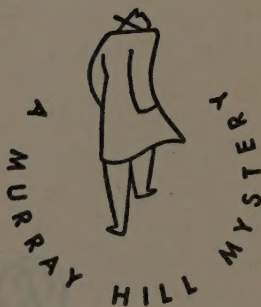
Peace Marshal

Outlaw

Fighting Man

FRANK GRUBER

The Lock and the Key



New York · Toronto

RINEHART & COMPANY, INC.

1 None of this would have happened if Tommy Dancer had won the third game. He would have paid Andy his dollar and had enough left over to pay for the lines. But his game was off tonight and he had lost the third game. So he taunted Andy into playing a fourth game and as a result was still in the bowling alley when the phone call came through.

"Telephone, Tommy," called Rudy.

"Who is it?"

"Your boss."

Tommy scowled. "Tell him I've left."

Rudy shook his head. "I already told him you were here."

Tommy put the sixteen-pound bowling ball back in the rack. "If he thinks I'm going on a call at this time of the night, he's got another think coming."

Andy, to whom Tommy imparted this, put his tongue in his cheek.

Tommy walked around Rudy's counter and stepped into the phone booth. He picked up the dangling receiver and put it to his ear. Then he pulled shut the door.

"Yes, Mr. Roan," he said into the phone.

"Tommy," came the voice of Mr. Roan, "I want you to go out on an emergency call . . ."

"But it's eleven o'clock," Tommy protested.

"I know what time it is," Mr. Roan said testily. "I wouldn't even have asked you but I've got some people here at the house and I can't go myself. It's a car key job and the woman's waiting in front of the shop, so run over right away. And look—charge her five dollars."

Tommy took the receiver from his ear, glowered at the mouthpiece and said, "All right."

He slammed the receiver onto the hook and jerked open the door.

"Business, Tommy?" Rudy asked as Tommy passed.

Tommy shrugged and, continuing down to the alley, headed for the ball rack. He picked out his ball.

"Going to finish?" Andy asked.

"Of course I am," Tommy snapped.

"You mean you . . . told him off?"

Tommy poised his ball, looked down the alley and headed for the foul line. The ball left his hand, hit the alley and rolled straight down the center . . . for a railroad.

"Goddamit," said Tommy Dancer.

Andy chuckled. "Give up?"

Tommy glared down at the two pins that remained standing. He could never pick them both off and if he didn't get a spare out of this one, he had no chance to beat Andy.

Helplessly, he turned to Andy. "All right, I owe you four bucks."

"Pay, brother!"

"I haven't got enough with me, Andy."

"Oh, yeah!"

"I'll pay you tomorrow. I'm getting a fin out of this call."

"You mean your boss is getting five."

"He's getting five," said Tommy, "and *I'm* getting five. Any woman loses her car keys this time of the night can pay ten dollars."

Andy shook his head admiringly. "Maybe the dame's a good looker. I got a notion to go along with you." Then he shook his head. "Uh-uh, any dame who's out alone at this time of night can't be much. If she was, she'd have a guy with her. And that wouldn't do me any good."

Tommy did not encourage Andy; he knew that he was right. He put on his coat, left Andy to square the bill and walked out of the bowling alleys. His Ford was parked a half block up the street and he climbed into it and headed down Melrose.

He saw her standing in front of the shop, but didn't get a good look at her until he had made a U-turn and pulled up at the curb.

She came toward the car as he was climbing out. "Are you the . . . ?"

"Yes."

Andy had been wrong. She *was* a looker. About five-four and weighing around one hundred and ten. She was a blonde and had the smoothest skin Tommy had ever seen. Her dress, what Tommy saw of it, had probably cost as much as the average girl paid for a fur coat. Her coat, of course, was mink; perfectly matched skins.

Tommy unlocked the door of the little shop and switched on the light. The girl followed him inside.

"I'm on the corner of La Brea and Melrose," she said. "I parked for a minute to run into a drugstore for some cigarettes and when I came out the keys were gone."

"You're lucky the car was still there," Tommy said.

He picked up his tool case, then opening it, fumbled over the tools. He knew that they were all in the box, but it gave him a chance covertly to study the girl. She was younger than she had seemed out on the sidewalk, not more than twenty or twenty-one. But in the light she was even prettier. Here in the dingy locksmith's shop she looked like . . . the girl of Tommy's secret thoughts and all of his dreams.

"I got the number out of the phone book," she was say-

ing. "I didn't want to wait at the drugstore because there were some men hanging around." She frowned. "They kept saying things—and whistling."

Tommy slammed down the cover of his tool box. "What kind of a car is it?"

"A convertible—a Cadillac."

A Cadillac. Naturally. Mink went well with a Cadillac.

Tommy headed for the door. She passed him as he switched off the lights and the whiff of her perfume started the pulse throbbing in his temples.

He closed the shop door and starting to walk around his car to the driver's seat, suddenly remembered a long-forgotten lesson and, turning back, opened the car door on the side nearest the curb. She looked at him in faint surprise.

"I'll drive you there."

She had expected to walk back to her car. A girl like her doesn't ride in a mechanic's car.

But she got in. Tommy closed the door and, going around the car, got in behind the wheel. He started to set down the tool box between himself and the girl, but twisted around and deposited the box in the space behind the seat.

She said: "I'm sorry to get you out this late in the evening."

"I wasn't doing anything."

The car was rolling past the Melrose Alleys. Andy was probably still inside. He had told Andy that he would soak the "dame" an extra five so that he could pay the four dollars he owed Andy.

Well, she could afford it. Mink coat, Cadillac. A rich father or . . . He shot a quick glance at her. No, it was a parent. Although, how could you tell?

"There it is!"

The car, as she had told him, was standing outside the drugstore. A newsie was selling papers on the corner and a half dozen people were waiting for the La Brea bus.

Tommy made a U-turn and parked just ahead of the Cadillac. He got his tool box and walked over to her car. He climbed in and switched on the dashboard light. *Elizabeth Targ, Foothill Boulevard, Beverly Hills, California*, said the identification card.

He opened his tool box and took out a ring of blank keys. He tried one in the lock; it wouldn't go in so he tried a second. This one would do it, with a little work.

"Can I help you?"

She was standing on the sidewalk, leaning over the rolled down window. Tommy took a flashlight from the box and handed it to her. It wasn't necessary, but she wanted to help. All right, let her do something. She flicked on the light and focused it on the lock.

Tommy got out some paper matches, struck one and held it under the blank key. It smoked up nicely and he inserted the blank into the lock. He wiggled it back and forth, then withdrew it carefully. The blacking was rubbed off in several spots.

He got out a sharp file and struck it swiftly over the key. It ate into the nicked blank and in about two minutes he wiped the key clean and used another match on it.

He tried it once more in the lock, then brought it out and examined it. Just a touch more on the second bit. He ran a smaller file lightly into the cut and inserted the key in the lock. It turned.

"Okay," he said.

"You mean . . . it's done?"

"Yes."

A man with a *Racing Form* in his hand stood behind the girl. He whistled softly. "So *that's* the way it's done!"

Tommy put his things back into the tool box and closed it. He got out of the car and the girl climbed in to try the key for herself.

The man with the *Racing Form* stepped back so he could size up Tommy. "Ain't I seen you around?" he asked.

"Probably," said Tommy.

He had seen the other, at a cafe here and there, a drive-in, the bowling alley. He was one of the boys. You saw them all the time. They were always well-dressed and freshly shaved. They usually carried a *Racing Form*. They were faces you saw around the Boulevard.

The girl was satisfied, finally, that the key would work. She slid over to the curb side of the seat and opened her purse.

"How much do I owe you?"

He had told Andy ten bucks. He said to the girl, "Five dollars."

She exposed a folded sheaf of clean, new bills and stripped off one of them. Then she fumbled around in the bottom of her purse and located a half dollar.

"Here you are." She handed him the five-dollar bill, smiled beautifully and put the half dollar into his hand. "And that's for yourself."

Tommy's palm burned where the half dollar touched. He looked down at the coin and said, "Thanks. Thanks."

She stepped on the starter and the motor turned over at once. She flashed him a final, impersonal smile and the car shot away from the curb.

Tommy remained standing where he was, looking after the car.

At his shoulder the man with the *Racing Form* whistled suggestively. "Some babel!"

It wasn't worth while ramming the half dollar down the man's filthy throat. Tommy put the money into his pocket and walked to his own car.

He drove to the dingy apartment house on Las Palmas where he had a dingy apartment with a sagging bed and a squeaking rocking chair that should have been used for kindling wood twenty years ago.

2 *Jerk* isn't quite the correct definition of *lugan*. There is a note of contempt in *jerk* that is missing in *lugan*. A *lugan*, if we must define the word, is a harmless not-so-bright character who is always around, but to whom nobody pays much attention. That was Herbie the Lugan.

He was seated on the stool, finishing his coffee and talking to Trent and Trent was eating his breakfast and paying no attention whatever to Herbie.

"You never saw anything like it," Herbie the Lugan was saying. "The dame loses her car keys, so this guy from the key shop comes up. He uses a match and a file and in less time than you could run three furlongs he's got a car key for the dame."

"What?" Trent asked absent-mindedly.

"I said, imagine a guy who can go down a hotel corridor without a passkey and open every door in about thirty seconds flat."

"Who?"

"This guy I'm telling you about, that I saw last night."

"I heard you say something about a man opening a door with a match. That's silly."

"No, no, I said he used a match. Near's I can figure it out, the match was to make the key black so that when he put it in the lock he could tell where to use the file. It was the slickest stunt you ever saw. From scratch he makes a car key."

"Well, that's a locksmith's business, making keys; isn't it?"

"I guess you're right, but it was the first time I ever saw it done. Although come to think of it, people are losing keys every day of the week and you don't hear of them breaking down their doors."

Trent nodded. "You see these little lock and key shops all around town . . ." Then he looked thoughtfully at Herbie. "You didn't happen to notice what shop this one came from?"

"No, he had a regular car without a sign on it. But I've seen the fella around."

"Where?"

"Mostly around Melrose, come to think of it. Yeah, the bowling alley below Highland."

"Make up your mind," said Andy. "If you're going to play, come on, if not let's go to a movie."

"Okay," said Tommy.

"Okay, *what?*"

"I'll play."

"Well, come on, then, get your mind off the dame."

Tommy went over the balls in the rack, found his favorite one and went to the chalk stand. Andy came over to chalk up his own hands.

"What'd she look like?"

"Like nothing I ever hope to see again in this world."

Once, over in Germany, that time I stopped one, I was out of my noggin for a few hours and I saw an angel all in white except for blood dripping down—”

“Cut it out!” cried Andy.

“Then go ahead and roll!” Tommy snarled.

Andy got his ball, ran down to the foul line and sent the big sphere hurtling toward the pins. He got seven and picked up the other three with his next ball. He looked at Tommy.

Tommy was staring down the alley, watching the pins being set up. Then he sent his own ball down and the pins went crashing. A strike.

Trent and Herbie the Lugan, who had come up, nodded approvingly.

“Not bad,” said Trent.

“Perfect,” agreed Herbie.

Andy got his ball again and made one of the worst shots of the year. With a spare, all he picked off was an end pin. With his second ball he got two pins, for a total score of thirteen.

Tommy’s second ball was a strike.

“Pretty good,” Trent said.

“Great!” Herbie chimed in.

Andy gave them a dirty look and knocked over six pins with his next two balls.

“Hold it a minute,” said Trent to Tommy. “I got a hunch he can beat you even with the start you got.”

Tommy surveyed Trent with cold disdain. “This is a private game, Mister.”

“Okay, so it’s private. But I got a five says he can beat you.”

“Save your money,” Tommy retorted and sent his ball down the alley for a third strike.

"I'll still bet you," Trent taunted.

Herbie the Lugan stared at Trent in astonishment. "I'll take that bet, Willie."

"I didn't offer it to you," Trent said coldly.

"What's the difference? I got ten bucks . . ." Then Herbie saw the look in Trent's eye and gulped hard.

Tommy Dancer stepped over. "You want to lose money so bad, it's a bet."

"You're on." Trent grinned thinly. "I'm a form player. Some horses can run when they're out in front, some can't. I size you up as a man who goes to pieces when the chips are down."

Tommy Dancer then proceeded to prove to Trent that he was a poor judge of character. He rolled two strikes, then a spare and picked up the remaining pins with the next ball, cinching his victory. Trent paid off with good grace. "I was wrong." He winked at Dancer. "I'm a man who can admit it when he's made a mistake. You roll a good game and you don't get nervous when the money's on the line."

"Thanks," Tommy said sarcastically.

"How about a drink?"

Tommy shrugged. "Beer's all they sell here."

"A beer's good enough for me." He started to turn away toward the bar at the side of the bowling alley, then looked back. "Your friend, too."

Andy hesitated, frowning, but finally followed the others to the bar.

"Beers," Trent said to the bartender. He produced a fat roll of bills from his pocket and, skimming through, found a small one, a ten-spot. He dropped it on the bar, poured out the bottle of beer and raised the glass.

"To you." He looked questioningly at Tommy Dancer.

"Tommy Dancer."

"Tommy Dancer," Trent drank some of his beer.

"What's your racket, Tommy?"

Tommy Dancer wiped beer foam from his mouth. He nodded in the direction of Herbie the Lugan who stood behind Trent. "Keys. Isn't that what your friend told you?"

"Huh?" Trent looked over his shoulder. "Oh, yeah. Herbie. Yeah, come to think of it, Herbie did mention that he saw you making a key for somebody a couple days ago."

"Last night."

"All right, last night."

Tommy drank some more of his beer and waited for Trent to continue. Which he did after a moment or two. "I got a trunk over to the apartment. I lost the key awhile ago and I hate to break open the lock. Do you suppose you could run over and make me a key?"

"I work for the Melrose Lock and Key Shop," Tommy said. "It's in the phone book."

"Sure. There are a lot of lock and key shops in the phone book," Trent said. "But this is night; they're all closed by now."

"They have night numbers for emergency cases," Tommy said.

"What do they charge—for emergency cases?"

"My boss charges five bucks."

"I'll give you ten and for all I care you don't even have to tell the boss. You can stick it in your own pocket."

"You can call the night number and get the job done for five. Granite 3-1127."

"Ah, the hell with the money," said Trent. He looked at

his watch. "And I got to run along now. Do you want to come with me and fix me up a key? Or don't you?"

Tommy looked thoughtfully at Trent, then beyond him at Herbie the Lugan. Finally he shifted to Andy. "Want to come along, Andy? It won't take me very long."

"No," said Andy promptly. A little frown creased his forehead. "Uh, Tommy, can I see you for a minute?"

Trent smiled thinly. "Ah, sure, tell him it's dangerous coming along with us. He doesn't know us from Adam. We might even be crooks—or kidnapers. You got some rich relatives, Tommy, who'd pay big ransom for you?" He sneered and took a card from his pocket. "Willis Trent, The Lehigh Apartments! If he doesn't come back in a half hour, send the cops."

"The hell with you," said Andy, and stalked off.

Trent's eyes glowed as he looked at Tommy. "I've got some people coming up to the place. Are you going to fix me up a key or aren't you?"

"Let's go," said Tommy.

The three men left the bowling alley, proceeded to Tommy's car where he got his tool kit, then walked to a very neat convertible parked a half a block away. They climbed in and Trent sent the car rolling along to Highland Avenue. He turned right on Highland and a moment later made another right turn. After a few blocks he turned left on Whitley and climbed halfway up the hill and stopped. The hill was so steep he was compelled to apply the emergency brake as well as put the car in low gear.

"The Lehigh Apartments," Trent said. "Want to call your friend before we go in?"

"No," Tommy said shortly.

"And I haven't even got a gun on me."

"Ha-ha," laughed Herbie the Lugan.

They crossed the sidewalk and entered the lobby of the apartment house. There was a small desk in one corner behind which sat an elderly white-haired man. He nodded.

"Good evening, Mr. Trent."

"Evening, Eustace," replied Trent.

"Some people been going up," said Eustace.

"Fine."

Trent led the way to an automatic elevator and the three men stepped in. Inside Trent pushed the button for five. The doors closed and the car whined up to the top floor. They got out and Trent led the way up a narrow hall around an el and to a door at the end of the corridor. From inside the apartment came the noises of a party going at full blast.

Trent pushed open the door and stepped aside for Tommy to enter. There were ten or twelve people in the apartment, most of them in the living room, but some overflowing to the terrace. A white-jacketed Filipino was serving drinks.

Trent waved at his guests. "Hi, folks! Make yourselves at home."

"We are, Will," someone called.

Trent grinned and continued on toward a bedroom door. Herbie the Lugan crowded on his heels, but when he reached the door Trent turned and, placing his hand on Herbie's chest, pushed him back. "Join the party, Herbie. Drinks and food—free."

"Oh, sure!"

Trent signaled to Tommy and they entered the bedroom. Inside Tommy surveyed the room. Some day, he thought, I'm going to have a room just like this. Silk sheets

on the bed. Or maybe it's satin. Mahogany furniture, velvet drapes. At least a dozen suits in the closet and neckties—a hundred of them, not one costing less than five dollars.

3 Trent stepped into the closet and pulled an army footlocker out into the bedroom, a strange-looking object in contrast to the rich furnishings. "All right," he said, "let's see you do your stuff."

"Do you just want it opened, or do you want it opened with a key?"

"What's the difference?"

"If you just want it opened, I can do it with a hairpin, or a paper clip. But if you want a key . . ."

"Let's see you open it with a key."

Tommy shrugged and setting his tool kit on the floor, opened it. He rummaged about a moment, found a blank key and tried it in the lock. Nodding, he withdrew it and striking a match, held the match to the key. He again inserted the blank key in the lock and after drawing it out, began applying a file. A moment later he turned the key in the lock.

"Do it again," Trent said.

"What?"

"Lock it and open it again."

Tommy snapped the lock shut, got a new blank key and matching it against the one he had just manufactured, was about to apply a file, when Trent exclaimed:

"No—do it with the match."

"I don't have to. I've already got a key made."

"Do it again," Trent persisted. He shot back his cuff and looked at his wrist watch. "I want to time you."

Tommy got to his feet. "If it's just a game . . ."

"It isn't," Trent said sharply. "I'll pay you double."

Tommy hesitated, then exhaling, got down on his knees and went through the entire procedure. When the lock was opened for the second time he got stiffly to his feet.

"Under two minutes," Trent said. "You can do that right along?"

"Depends on the lock. This one's one of the easiest. I could open it with a pick in ten seconds."

Trent took out his roll of bills and peeled off a twenty. "Here's your money."

"You could have bought a new trunk for less."

"Sure. But I wanted to see you work." He paused a moment. "I like to see a smooth operator doing his stuff."

"Any key man can do what I've done."

Trent regarded him thoughtfully. "Can any key man open *any* kind of lock?"

Tommy looked at the twenty dollar bill in his hand. He folded it lengthwise, creased it to a knife edge and folded it again. Without looking at Trent he said: "If he can't open a lock, he can drill it."

"What about you?" Trent asked. "Do you use a drill very often?"

"All right, I'm a good key man," Tommy said. "One of the best in the business. Is that what you wanted me to say."

"I like a man who's good in his job, whether he's a key man, or—or a butcher or a baker." Trent clapped Tommy on the shoulder. "Let's join the party, huh?"

"Uh, n-no," Tommy said. "I'll be running along."

"Don't be silly, you can stay for a drink or two." Then Trent grinned wryly. "It's that pal of yours. He'll think I've done something to you."

"The hell with Andy," Tommy growled.

Trent opened the living room door and stepped aside for Tommy to go through.

The party had increased in numbers, or the guests had become noisier. Tommy stopped in the living room and surveyed the party for a moment. A redhead with all that a redhead should have was giving a squat, bald man the business. A drink in one hand, from which whiskey was dribbling onto the bald man's coat, the redhead was gripping the man with her free hand, gripping his arm and leaning against him drunkenly.

Trent called to the Filipino. "Manuell!"

The white-coated servitor came over with his tray. Trent took down two glasses, one for himself. The other he pressed upon Tommy. "Here, drink this, then have another. When you get loosened up, grab yourself a girl." He nodded toward the redhead. "She came without anybody."

A slow throbbing began in Tommy's pulse. Automatically he moved the glass of whiskey to his lips and downed it in a single gulp. The waiter smilingly moved the tray so that it was easy for Tommy to take a second drink.

And then Tommy saw her. She was standing at the far end of the room, near the open door that led to the terrace; the girl for whom he had made a car key the night before. Elizabeth Targ.

She was wearing a black cocktail dress that shimmered with sequins. Her hair was done up high on her head. She had a glass in her hand, but seemed oblivious of it. Her attention was focused on someone out upon the terrace. Her face wore an expression that Tommy did not like.

He drank his second cocktail, took a third from the

convenient Filipino and started across the room. He had to pass near the redhead and the girl suddenly let go of the bald-headed man and squealed.

"A man! A sure enough, honest to gawd, man!"

She lunged for Tommy, but he evaded her and she spilled the rest of her whiskey on the bald man's suit. The man swore angrily. "If there's one thing I hate, it's a dame that can't handle her liquor."

"Says who?"

"Says me!"

But Tommy was oblivious of the fight that was beginning. He was across the room, and beside Elizabeth Targ.

"Hello," he said.

She brought her eyes from the terrace and fixed them upon Tommy. "Hello."

"I didn't know you were a friend of Mr. Trent's," Tommy said, to make conversation.

"Trent? Who's Trent?"

"The man who's giving the party."

"Oh, him." Her eyes strayed toward the terrace, then she caught herself and looked again at Tommy. "I suppose we've met somewhere."

"Yes, we have." Tommy waited a moment, then added, "Last night."

"Last night? I wasn't anywhere last night."

"I made a key for your car."

She looked at him then with more than disinterest. "Oh yes." She grimaced a little. "I—I gave you a tip, didn't I?"

"Fifty cents."

But he had lost her attention. Her eyes had gone again to the terrace and she seemed completely unaware of his

presence. Tommy waited awkwardly for her attention to return to him, but when it did not he stepped deliberately around her and looked out upon the terrace.

There were two couples outside. One stood by the parapet looking down upon the street below. The other, a tall, lean man and a girl in a flaming red dress, stood in the far corner; close together, talking animatedly.

Tommy said, almost into Elizabeth Targ's ear: "Good-looking girl."

Her head swiveled toward him. "What?"

"The girl in the red dress—she's good-looking. . . ."

"What girl?"

"The one you're watching." Tommy paused. "Or is it the man?" Tommy had crowded her too far. She gave him a withering look and walked off. Tommy watched her clear across the room, saw her accosted by Willis Trent and not become aware of it until she had passed him a couple of paces, when she stopped and attempted an apologetic smile.

Tommy lit a cigarette and when a waiter came near took another drink. Smouldering, he sipped at his liquor and cursed himself, first, for coming up here and second, for remaining. Yet there was nothing to keep him here. He'd had the drink, and more, that Trent had asked him to have. He could go; except that he had talked to her and been rebuffed.

Footsteps slithered on the cement of the terrace and a whiff of Chanel #5, although Tommy did not know it for that, assailed his nostrils. He turned and the girl in the red dress came into the room. Burnished copper hair and a heavily tanned skin went well with the red dress. Her lipstick matched it, too, except that it was smeared.

"Excuse me," Tommy said, "but your lipstick is slipping."

She stopped, looked at Tommy coolly and opened a compact. She looked at her lips, said, "Thanks," and began repairing the damage. As she worked her eyes suddenly raised from the little mirror and met Tommy's. "Do I know you?"

"I'm willing."

"Get me a drink."

The man with whom she had been on the terrace appeared behind her. He was tall, lean and swarthy. There was a good fifteen or twenty cents' worth of pomade on his hair. There was possessiveness in the way he took hold of the girl's elbow. "Let's beat it."

The girl continued to make up her lips. "I just got here."

At that moment the waiter came within signaling distance and Tommy summoned him. He replaced his empty glass on the tray, took down two filled ones. He handed one to the girl in the red dress.

"Here you are."

She flashed him a smile. "You saved my life." Then she looked over her shoulder at the swarthy man. "By the way, have you two met? Mr. Faraday . . . Mr. . . . ?" She snapped her fingers.

"Dancer."

She smiled at Tommy. "Of course. Mr. Dancer, Mr. Faraday."

The man with the pomaded hair looked at Tommy from under lowered eyebrows. "How are you?" He did not extend his hand.

Tommy nodded. "Har'ya."

That should have ended the dialogue between Tommy

and the other man, except that something within Tommy, probably the four, or was it five? drinks urged him on. He said to the girl: "I didn't get *your* name."

"Oh, didn't you? How careless of you, Earl." She looked at Faraday.

But Faraday wasn't in the mood. He pressed forward on her elbow. "Come on."

Tommy stepped into the girl's path, touched the wrist of the hand that held the compact, the one that wasn't being gripped at the moment by Faraday.

"Did you come with anybody?" he asked.

It was quite obvious that the girl was striking a match in the presence of a powder keg, but she gave Tommy a slow, tantalizing smile and said:

"The name is Flo—Florence Randall, if you want to be formal. And no, I didn't come with anybody."

Faraday said harshly: "She's with me."

"How many girls can you handle?" Tommy retorted. His eyes flickered across the room toward Elizabeth Targ. The look was not wasted on Faraday.

His eyes followed Tommy's, came back. "Look, sonny," he said, "I don't know who the hell you are, but if you're trying to pick a fight with me you're going about it the right way."

"I never backed out of a fight yet," Tommy challenged him.

Willis Trent came up from behind Tommy, and stopped so that his back was to him. He addressed Faraday: "Hello, Earl. Just get here?"

"I been here long enough," retorted Faraday.

"Like to have a talk with you," Trent said, "if you've got a minute or two."

Faraday hesitated, glowering. Then he shrugged. "All right." He turned and stepped out to the terrace. Trent followed.

Flo Randall said to Tommy: "Fun's fun, but Earl Faraday isn't fun, if you know what I mean."

"Bad medicine?"

"Mmmm."

Tommy laid his hand on the girl's wrist. "Mustn't touch?"

She did not draw her hand away, but her eyes went across the room to Elizabeth Targ. "You were needling Earl." She nodded in Elizabeth's direction. "You know her?"

"No, but I'd like to."

The girl looked at Tommy, shook her head. "I've got to go to the little girl's room." She walked off, leaving Tommy alone.

Tommy stood for a moment, holding his glass. Trent and Faraday were out on the terrace. Flo Randall had left him. Elizabeth Targ seemed to be carrying on an animated conversation with a short, heavy-set man in a loud sport coat. Tommy's vision was more than a little hazy from the drinks he had tossed off so rapidly. He felt uncomfortably warm and more than a little nauseated. He'd mixed it with the other kind and he had not come off too well. But he had a twenty dollar bill in his pocket, no, a twenty and a ten, which was more money than he was accustomed to having so late in the week.

He decided to call it an evening, and setting his glass down on a mahogany end table where it would leave a nice ring he started across the room to the bedroom, passing within two feet of Elizabeth Targ, who was completely oblivious of him.

In the bedroom he found his tool kit where he had left it and picking it up went back into the living room. No one spoke to him, no one seemed to notice him. He opened the hall door, stepped out and closed it again. He went down the corridor, turned left and after a moment reached the elevator.

It was down on the first floor and he pushed the button to summon it up to the fifth. He heard the machine whine its tedious way upwards. Finally the light appeared in the elevator door. He opened the outer metal-sheathed door and was reaching in to pull open the inner door when a voice behind him called: "Hold it." He looked over his shoulder. Elizabeth Targ, carrying her mink coat so that it dragged on the dingy carpet, was coming toward the elevator.

4 He held open the elevator doors for her and she entered without looking at him. He stepped in after her, let the doors swing shut and pushed the pearl button for 1. The elevator groaned and whined and began descending and Tommy, tingling in every nerve of his body, shot a surreptitious glance at Elizabeth Targ.

She was looking at the closed door, her mind elsewhere—in Trent's apartment, no doubt.

Tommy thought: We're all alone here in this little elevator. I wonder what'd happen if I just grabbed her—and kissed her? What would she do? He answered the questions: She's not the yelling kind and I don't think she'd slap me or try to scratch my face. She'd probably just stiffen and not do a thing. Which, Tommy decided, would be worse than active resistance. Yet he still toyed with the idea. Of

course he'd never see her again after now, but he could think about her for a long time.

Then suddenly she was looking into his eyes, coolly, impersonally and Tommy's hand came up automatically. It stopped in mid-air. She did not even seem to notice.

The elevator came to a stop at the lobby floor and Tommy, with an inaudible curse, reached past her and opened the inner door. He held it with one hand and with the other pushed open the outer. Elizabeth stepped out of the elevator into the lobby without even a nod of thanks. He followed her through the lobby and again held the street door.

Out on the sidewalk he said: "I'm sorry, I can't give you a lift. I came here in Trent's car. Mine is over on Melrose."

"That's all right, I've got my own car here."

She took a step, stopped and turned. "Maybe I can give *you* a lift."

"It's all right, I can walk down to the Boulevard."

"Don't be a fool," she said. "My car's right here."

Tommy had already seen it, the yellow Cadillac convertible. She walked to it, got in on the curb side and closing the door remained seated on the right.

Tommy came up and she said: "I don't feel like driving."

He walked around, got in behind the wheel and saw that the brass key he had made for her the night before was in the ignition lock. He turned it. "This is the way you lost your keys last night." He stepped on the starter, released the emergency brake and worked the car out into the street, making a sharp U-turn. He applied the brake as the car coasted down the hill to the next block where the street leveled off.

At Hollywood Boulevard he tooled the car toward the curb. "I can get a bus here."

"Keep driving."

"Where to?"

She made an impatient gesture. "Anywhere."

He turned right on Hollywood Boulevard, thought better of it and at Cherokee turned left and again at Sunset Boulevard. At Cahuenga he had to wait for the light, but when it became green, he turned the car right and sent it rolling toward Melrose. On Melrose he drove until he spied his own jalopy parked near the bowling alley. He pulled the Cadillac to the curb and shut off the ignition.

"What are you stopping here for?" Elizabeth asked.

"My car's across the street."

She looked at the bowling alley. "Can we get a drink in there?"

"Only beer." He turned on the ignition again. "There's a place over on La Brea."

He waited a moment but when she did not speak again he stepped on the starter and worked the car out into traffic. Five minutes later he parked on La Brea and, climbing out of the car, walked around to the curb. He opened the door for her and she got out.

The Saigon Spa had bamboo on the outside and plenty of it on the inside. The waiters were Filipinos in Malayan costumes. The place was very dark, the tiniest of yellow electric light bulbs lighting up the individual booths. Rum drinks were a specialty of the house, but Tommy still felt the drinks from Willis Trent's party and ordered bourbon and water for himself and Elizabeth.

Elizabeth, however, countermanded her own order and asked for a Demerara Dry Float.

"Pretty potent," Tommy observed.

"The idea's to get drunk, isn't it?" Elizabeth retorted.

Tommy shrugged. "Suits me."

Elizabeth looked at him sharply. "Actually you don't want to get drunk at all, but you'd like to get *me* drunk, wouldn't you?"

"*You* said that, not me."

The waiter came with the drinks and Elizabeth tasted her heavy rum drink. She made a wry face. "Tastes like molasses." She raised the glass. "How?"

Tommy drank half of his bourbon.

Elizabeth put down her glass. "Silly, isn't it?"

Tommy was deliberately dense. "The drink?"

"Being here like this." She laughed shortly. "I don't even know your name."

"Tommy Dancer."

She repeated the name. "Tommy Dancer. Mine's Elizabeth Targ."

"I got it off the wheel of your car last night."

"You remembered it?"

"I wanted to remember it."

She looked at him thoughtfully. "Why?"

"Maybe because you gave me the half dollar."

She grimaced a little at that. "Stupid of me, wasn't it?"

"I'm satisfied."

"You're satisfied with what?"

"Being here with you."

She drank some more of the rum concoction and leaned back in her seat. She regarded him thoughtfully for a long moment. "Just what do you think of me, Tommy Dancer?"

Tommy's eyes fell to the table for a moment, then sud-

denly he raised them. "I think you've had a fight with Earl Faraday and—"

"Earl Faraday!" she cried.

"I'm not exactly blind."

"Earl Faraday," she repeated in a low tense tone. "If he were here right now I'd throw this glass in his face."

"Sure," said Tommy, "you probably would at that. And if Flo Randall were also here you'd pull out her hair or scratch her face."

"Let's get out of here!" she exclaimed and got to her feet.

Tommy tossed a couple of one dollar bills on the table and followed her out of the Saigon Spa.

Outside Elizabeth got into the car and huddled down in the seat. Tommy climbed in and started the motor. "Home?"

"No." She looked at him. "Haven't you got a place?"

"Sure, but it's not much."

"It's better than sitting here in the car."

That was the last word she spoke until Tommy parked the Cadillac in front of the dingy two-story stucco apartment building on Las Palmas Street, where for \$35.00 a month he rented a one-room, kitchenette and bath apartment.

He got out of the car and walking around opened the door on her side. "You're sure you want to come in?"

"Of course I'm sure!" she snapped at him and got out.

They crossed the sidewalk and Tommy opened the door of the apartment house. He had lived here almost a year, but not until now had he been aware of the cooking smells that permeated the corridors. They climbed the stairs to the second floor and walked to the end of the hall. Tommy un-

locked the door of his apartment. He threw the door wide open and flicked on the light inside.

For just a second Elizabeth hesitated. Then she stepped into the apartment and shrugged off her mink coat. Tommy looked at the threadbare sofa, the scarred table across the room, the wide door that concealed the in-a-door bed, the blue rug that had seen better days many years ago, the open bathroom door and, on the right, the tiny kitchenette. He wondered if Elizabeth Targ had ever been in as shabby a place as this.

He closed the door. "I've got some beer in the icebox and I think there's about a half pint of rye around somewhere."

"I've had enough to drink," Elizabeth said. She turned and looked at him. "Well?"

Tommy crossed to her and knew that he was trembling violently as he took hold of her. He could feel the involuntary shudder that ran through her body. He slipped his arms about her and, holding her close, pressed his lips to hers.

There was no resistance, no returned pressure, but something exploded inside of Tommy and he was suddenly kissing her savagely; her mouth, her cheeks, her forehead, her throat. And still she made no resistance.

Then suddenly he released her and stepped back. "Damn you," he said savagely.

She cocked her head to one side. "What's the matter?"

"You know very well what's the matter."

"Did I push you away?" She came toward him and kissed him, squarely on the mouth; a long kiss, but utterly without passion.

Again it was Tommy who stepped back.

"What do you want?" she asked.

"You!"

"I'm here."

Tommy said bitterly: "You're the most beautiful girl I've ever seen. I want you more than anything in this whole goddam world. I'd crawl on my knees to you—if you didn't have Earl Faraday in your blood."

She looked at him steadily for a moment, then turned and picked up her mink coat. She put it on and held out her hand. "My keys."

"I'll drive you home."

"No."

He handed her the key and she went to the door. Opening it, she said: "Good-bye, Tommy Dancer; thanks for keeping me a virgin," and went out, leaving the door open.

Tommy stood for a moment looking at the door, then crossed and kicked it shut. Whirling, he headed for the kitchen where he found the part bottle of rye.

5 Andy Kells had a sucker. At a dollar a game he had already won three times and the sucker, in desperation, was playing a fourth game, double or nothing. In the sixth frame it looked as if Andy's score would be well over the two hundred mark. As his victim sized up the beautiful railroad he had left for himself, Andy came back to the bench where Tommy Dancer was seated, skimming through the evening edition of the morning paper.

"Too bad I'm not playing you," Andy said. "I'd like to go through that bankroll you're carrying."

"I can go through it myself."

"Your boss hears you held out on him you'll be looking for a new job."

"Might be a good thing for me. I'm getting fed up with the shop."

"What's the difference what shop you work for, Tommy? You don't spend much time in the shop anyway." Andy, who was looking off, suddenly uttered a low whistle. "Oh-oh, here comes one of your new friends."

Tommy craned his head about and saw Herbie the Lugan bearing down on him. As usual, Herbie was attired in a natty, neatly pressed suit, a flaming red necktie and as usual there was an ingratiating smile on his smoothly shaved face.

"Hi, chum!" he said cheerfully as he came up. "How's tricks?" He looked at Andy and gave him a bare nod. Andy grunted and went back to the job of polishing off his victim.

Herbie the Lugan seated himself beside Tommy and, leaning over, clapped him on the knee. "Where'd you go to so quick last night, pal?"

"Home."

"Too bad you left so early. The party got lively all of a sudden." He rolled his eyes. "There was a juicy blonde who began taking off her clothes. Which reminds me, Willis Trent says he called your place today."

"Twice." Tommy folded his newspaper. "If he's got some more locks he wants opened, why doesn't he tell Mr. Roan?"

"It ain't that, Tommy. He wants to see you."

"Why?" Tommy asked bluntly.

"How should I know? He just, well—he told me he wants to see you."

"You work for Trent?"

"It ain't that, only, you see . . ."

"I thought you might be his valet or flunky," Tommy said in as insulting a tone as he could muster.

The good cheer faded from Herbie the Lugan's face. "Wise guy, huh?"

"Run along, little man."

Herbie the Lugan got to his feet and scowled down at Tommy. "You're making a mistake, chum. Trent ain't a man you can push around."

"Trent? Oh, yeah, by the way, just who is Willis Trent? What does he do for a living?"

"That's beside the point."

"Well, just what is the point, Herbie?"

"The point is that Trent wants to see you. If you're smart you'll do what he says." And then he added, "It'd be healthy."

"Mmm," said Tommy. "I'll tell you what; answer a couple of questions and maybe I'll run over and see Trent."

Herbie the Lugan brightened. "Sure, pal, sure."

"What does Trent do for a living? That's one of the questions."

Herbie shrugged. "He's in business."

"What kind of business?"

Herbie frowned. "Just business."

"Monkey business?"

Herbie pursed up his lips and pushed them in and out in a mighty pout. "He's a right guy. You can ask anybody. They'll all tell you that Willis Trent is okay."

"Who'll tell me?"

"Anybody." Herbie the Lugan made a vague inclusive gesture that could have included anyone in the bowling alley or anyone in the state of California, for that matter.

Tommy grunted. "Who's Earl Faraday?"

A quick wince flitted across Herbie's smooth features but he said blandly: "Faraday? Who's Faraday?"

"He was at the party last night, a tall lean fellow with a lot of oil on his hair. Trent and he spent quite a little time out on the terrace."

Herbie the Lugan shook his head, then suddenly brightened and nodded. "Oh, him! I remember now. I don't know him."

"You know the girl in the red dress he was hanging around? Flo Randall?"

Herbie looked suddenly, shrewdly at Tommy. "You like her, huh?"

"Not if she's Faraday's property."

"She ain't exactly, but—" Herbie caught himself. "I mean don't let this fellow Faraday, or whatever his name is, bother you." He smiled brightly. "You goin' up to see Trent, now?"

Tommy hesitated, then throwing down his newspaper got to his feet. "Lead on, chum."

Herbie the Lugan had no car so they drove to the Lehigh Apartments in Tommy's old flivver.

Trent was at home, lounging in a big easy chair, wearing a fine brocaded dressing gown and immersed in a *Racing Form*. He got up and greeted Tommy warmly.

"Ah, Tommy, my boy. Glad you dropped in."

"I didn't drop in," Tommy said sourly. "Your friend here said I had to come or else."

"Or else what?" Trent smiled at Herbie, but there was ice in the smile. "Always the kidder, aren't you, Herbie?"

"Sure," said Herbie the Lugan. "Anything for a laugh."

"Well, here's a laugh for you, Herbie. A howl."

Trent chuckled and walked up to Herbie. His hand flicked out and the palm of it cracked across Herbie's mouth. Herbie yelped and leaped back. A little trickle of blood seeped from his mouth, down onto his chin. Herbie dabbed at it with a silk handkerchief.

"I gotta be runnin' along," he mumbled.

"That's all right, Herbie," Trent said.

Herbie shot a quick, anguished look at Tommy and made a quick exit.

When the door closed behind him, Tommy said, "I'm surprised a man'll take that."

"Herbie? He'll take anything. It's all he understands. But I didn't ask you here to talk about Herbie the Lugan. As a matter of fact, you can forget Herbie entirely. But you and I have got some things to talk about."

"What?"

"Sit down. Relax."

Trent resumed his own seat and folded his *Racing Form*. Tommy remained standing a moment, then sat down across the room from Trent. Trent studied him a moment, smiling sardonically. Then he suddenly said: "How'd you like to make a thousand dollars?"

"Fine," said Tommy grimly.

"How about *five* thousand?"

"I can make five thousand without any trouble. All I've got to do is work two years for it."

"Ah," exclaimed Trent. "Now you're talking my language."

"No," said Tommy, "I'm not. I'm willing to make five thousand by working. I don't think you had that in mind."

"Work? What the hell do you think I do?"

"I don't think you work."

"There's work," said Trent, "and work. I sit here all day and people call me on the phone and say, 'Put me down for two dollars on Silver Slippers,' or, 'What do you think of War Goddess in the fifth at Belmont?' What difference does it make what I think as long as I don't get too much money on one nag. But don't ever kid yourself that isn't work."

"You're a bookie, then." Trent nodded. "That's what I thought you were."

"Smart boy."

"Well, I'm not interested in betting on a sure thing."

"Who said anything about horses?"

"You asked me if I wanted to make five thousand dollars."

"You'll never make five grand playing the nags, Tommy, my lad. That's a tip right from the feedbox. I tell it to all my clients. You can't beat the races, but if you've got to bet, bet with me. Fair and square. I'll take your money if you've got to put it on something, because if I don't take it someone else will. But my best advice is to get yourself a safe deposit box at the bank and put your money in it."

"I put it in barrels," said Tommy. "Great big wooden barrels and whenever I fill one I take it out to the back yard and bury it in the ground."

"Play with me, Tommy, and you might do just that."

Tommy got to his feet. "I'll think about it."

"What's your hurry?" Trent asked sharply. "Sit down. Relax. I haven't told you the setup yet."

"I don't think I'd be interested."

The door buzzer whirled sharply and a white-jacketed Filipino appeared and went to the hall door. He opened it and Earl Faraday came in.

He grunted when he saw Tommy Dancer. "This Shetland Pony's the man you were telling me about?"

Trent grimaced a little. "You met him last night?"

"He was stepping on my toes." Faraday came forward and sized up Tommy with a jaundiced eye. "He doesn't hardly look smart enough."

Tommy said: "Any time, Faraday."

Faraday's lips curled in a sneer. "I'll be damned. He wants to fight."

"Easy, Tommy," Trent said quickly. "This is Earl Faraday."

"Am I supposed to be impressed?"

Faraday swore. "Dammit, Trent, I like a rib as well as the next man, but I'll be damned if I take it from a punk."

Trent beamed ingratiatingly. "Look, fellows, this is a big deal. There's enough in it for all of us, but we've got to stick together. Each of us needs the other and I suggest we don't let personalities stand in the way of a good thing."

"There are a million other locksmiths," Faraday snapped.

"Sure," said Trent. "And there are a million guys can play a fiddle, but there's only one Stokowski."

"I never heard of Stokowski playing a fiddle."

"All right, so it's Tommy Dorsey, or Benny Goodman. The point is Tommy Dancer's the best in his line. Like you are in yours, Earl."

Faraday's eyes narrowed. "Are *you* starting cracks now, Trent?"

Trent groaned. "Cut it out, Earl. I've got enough trouble now."

Faraday glowered for a moment. "All right, get on with it. You've told him about the caper?"

"Well, no, we were just nibbling around the edges when you came in."

"Then how do you know he's the man for the job?"

"I'm not," Tommy Dancer said flatly. "And if you don't mind, I'll be running along now."

Faraday strode up to Tommy Dancer, his eyes blazing like polished agates. "Look here, punk, I've had just about enough from—" He drew back his right fist, but Trent, exclaiming, sprang forward and caught the arm.

"Cut it out, Earl." He whirled on Tommy. "And you, Dancer, sit down and keep your trap shut for awhile, or by God, *I'm* going to get sore." He shoved Tommy back and stepped in between the two belligerents. "I've had enough of this. If you two can't sit down and talk business, the hell with the whole thing."

"You're talking pretty big, Trent," snarled Faraday. But there was less bite in his tone.

6 Tommy Dancer studied Trent for a moment. "All right," he said. "I'm not saying I'm going into anything, but I'll listen, anyway."

"You'll listen, hell," said Faraday. "I'm not sticking out my neck unless . . ."

"Shut up, Earl!" cried Trent. He returned to his armchair and plopped down heavily in it. Tommy and Faraday exchanged hostile glances then both went to chairs as far from each other as possible.

Trent looked from Tommy to Faraday, then back to Tommy. He said: "Can you open a safety deposit box?"

"Any lock any man can make can be opened," Tommy replied.

"That's no good. Can *you* open any lock?"

"With the right tools and enough time—yes."

"Come again. Can you open a safety deposit box, *without* the right tools and *without* enough time?"

"How'm I supposed to open it—with my teeth?"

"Cut it out, Tommy, I'm serious. Can you walk into a bank vault and open somebody else's safety deposit box—without getting caught?"

"No," said Tommy promptly. "I can't and neither can anyone else. Every one of those locks is different and besides it takes two keys, one of which is owned by the bank."

"I thought your business was *making* keys, Tommy?"

"It is, within limits. I can't go into a bank vault and make keys to open every safety deposit box—"

"Only one box."

Tommy suddenly looked sharply at Trent. "Your box?"

"Don't be a fool. I've got a key for my box."

"Maybe I'm dumb," Tommy said slowly, "but this great scheme you've been talking about—is it that I go into a bank somewhere, make a key for a certain safety deposit box, which you will then empty?"

That's the general idea, Tommy." Trent beamed again. "And you get five thousand dollars for that little job. Five thousand cold, wet smackers, just for making one little key." He coughed. "I mean, two keys. You'll have to make the bank's key, too."

Tommy exhaled heavily. "Of all the screwball ideas I've ever heard this takes the cake!"

Faraday, who had been holding himself in, exploded. "I told you the idea was no good, Trent!"

"Now, just a minute, fellows," Trent said grimly. "I never knew a caper yet that didn't have bugs in it. All right, maybe this one's got some bugs. Let's look at it. I've been

giving a lot of thought to the idea; you fellows haven't. Earl, have you got a safety deposit box?"

"Why?"

"I don't want to know where it is—or what you keep in it. I just want to know if you've got a box."

"For the sake of argument, say I've got one. Why?"

"All right, you've got a box. And you've got a key for it. Now, exactly what happens when you go to the bank and want to put something into this box—or take it out?"

Faraday shrugged. "Nothing happens. The girl gets her key and unlocks her—the bank's lock—and I unlock mine. That's all there's to it."

Trent shook his head. "That's what I meant, Earl; you haven't given this any thought. Or you, Tommy. I went to my bank this morning. Now, listen carefully." He reached into his pocket and produced a long, flat key. "Here's my key. I hold it in my hand and I step up to the safety deposit window. They've got a pad of blanks there. I fill one out, the date, the number of my box and my name. The girl takes the slip, looks up a card that's got my signature on it. She compares my signature and finds it's okay. So she writes her initials on the slip and puts the thing into one of those stamping machines, that stamps the time of the day. Then she takes out the bank's key, presses a buzzer that opens a gate that lets me behind the counter. She leads the way into the safety deposit room, takes my key and puts it in the lock of my box—Number 263. She turns the key, then she puts the bank's key into the other lock, turns that and opens the door. She pulls my box out, part way, takes out the bank's key and mine and hands my key to me. Then she steps out of the room. I take out my box and go to a table. I fool around with my box and after a minute put it away. I close the door,

which locks itself automatically, and I leave the room. The girl nods—she's kept her eye on the door of the room, all the time I'm in there—on me, too." He stopped. "Am I right, Earl?"

"I suppose so. I never paid much attention."

"Well, I did and that's what happens when you go to open a safety deposit box."

"I don't have a safety deposit box," Tommy Dancer said, "but I've opened a few—when people lost their keys."

"Ah," said Trent, "now it comes out. You *have* opened boxes."

"I've drilled them open," Tommy said bluntly. "People lose their keys and when people lose safety deposit box keys, banks don't keep those same locks. We drill out the whole tumbler and put in a new one. They charge people \$3.00 when they lose their keys, which is just about what we charge them for a new lock."

"Have you ever done any work for the Highland-Hollywood Bank?"

"No. As a matter of fact, my shop doesn't do any bank work, at the present time."

"Do they know you at the Highland-Hollywood Bank?"

"I went in to cash a check once."

"Did they cash it?"

"It was a government check and I had identification."

"Government check?"

"Terminal leave pay."

"You were in the service?"

"I'm twenty-eight years old and I've got two arms, two legs and two eyes. How could I miss?"

"How long were you in?"

"Four years."

"For the love of Mike, Trent," exclaimed Faraday. "Get on with it. Save the personal stuff for Old Home Week."

Trent ignored Faraday for the moment and concentrated his attention on Tommy. "I've told you what goes on in the bank, Tommy. Now you tell me what's wrong with the scheme—from the viewpoint of a locksmith."

"There's a hell of a lot wrong with it. First of all, they wouldn't let a stranger into their safety deposit box room. . . ."

"Who said anything about a stranger going in? I told you before Faraday showed up that you were to go and rent a box for yourself."

"What would I put in it?"

"Newspapers, for all anyone cares. The idea's to get access into the vault—legitimate access. Give you a chance to study the locks."

Tommy's eyes suddenly narrowed in thought. "Actually," he said, slowly, "if I had a key of my own, there wouldn't have to be much study. Those keys come in sets. I can make the blank from my key."

"See!" Trent cried, exultantly. "That's what I mean about taking care of the bugs. You've got your blank now, see. All you have to do is smoke it up with a match and—"

"While the girl in the bank is watching me?"

Trent smiled indulgently. "Tommy, you don't give me credit for anything, do you? I told you, I've got a box at this bank. What do you think I'm doing while you're in the vault?"

"Waiting outside with the getaway car."

"Don't be silly. There's no getaway car in this. Uh-uh, while you're in the vault, I'm out in the bank, filling out a little slip and giving it to the girl. I'm taking my time about

it and she's watching me—not you. It's a matter of timing. I keep her eyes on me for thirty seconds—maybe more. You're taking your impressions. Naturally, you're not doing any filing in there. You do that at home. We don't pull this job in one trip, you know. The stuff is there all the time, if it takes us a week, or a month."

"Which reminds me," Tommy said. "What stuff?"

Trent and Faraday exchanged quick glances, then Trent said softly, "You don't have to worry about that, Tommy. You get your five grand, hot or cold."

"Five thousand," Tommy said quietly, "for doing all the work. What does Faraday do?"

Faraday began to swear, but Trent held up a warning hand. "Faraday gets us the number of the box that we're after."

"Oh, it's one particular box, is it?"

"Do you think we're crazy? The average safety deposit box is full of insurance policies and locks of hair from Junior's first haircut. We know what's in this particular box."

"What?"

Trent hesitated. "Cash. The long green."

"How much of it?"

"Enough to give you five g's."

Tommy got to his feet. "As Faraday said, there are a million locksmiths . . ."

Trent said softly: "If you think you can back out of this now, Tommy, guess again." He rose from his chair, reached into the pocket of his dressing gown and produced a snub-nosed revolver. "You've been in the army, Tommy, you've seen lots of guns. Big guns. But you know what? This little gun kills people just as dead as a big gun."

Across the room Earl Faraday grinned cheerfully for

the first time since entering Trent's apartment. "That's just a sample, sonny boy."

Tommy knew that he had never been closer to death in his entire life than at this moment. He said, doggedly: "An even split, three ways."

Trent looked down at his little gun. "Twenty-five per cent, Tommy. I worked out this caper and I'm entitled to fifty per cent. . . ."

It was now Faraday's turn to protest. "Fifty per cent, my eye; not if he cuts in for twenty-five. Without my little contribution there's no caper at all. Besides . . ." he paused. "There'll be two hundred thousand in that box. . . ."

"Two hundred thousand dollars!" exclaimed Tommy Dancer.

"More or less. A hundred thousand at the very least." Faraday cocked his head to one side. "Forty per cent, Trent. Forty for you, forty for me and twenty for the kid. It's a good haul for all of us. . . ."

"Twenty per cent of two hundred thousand dollars—" Tommy said slowly.

"Is forty g's," Trent said, putting away his gun. "Which is as much money as you can earn in fifteen years, making locks and keys."

7 A week went by, during which Tommy Dancer lived his normal life. He reported to the little shop of the Melrose Lock and Key shop every morning and he performed whatever duties George Roan gave him. He went out on calls, opened pantry doors, garage doors and he made keys for car owners.

In the evening he bowled at the Melrose Alleys. But not every evening. Three evenings he drove his flivver out

to Beverly Hills and rolled slowly up and down Foothill Boulevard. Always he looked at a Georgian Colonial house, a huge two-story affair that contained no less than twelve rooms. There were lights in the house; sometimes every window seemed to be lighted up.

Once—once a Cadillac convertible scooted out of the driveway and turned left toward Santa Monica Boulevard. Tommy kept close behind it until the convertible parked in the only available space in front of a motion picture theatre. Tommy had to circle the block before he could find a parking place and when he walked back to the theatre he discovered that the convertible had disappeared during his absence. Elizabeth Targ had apparently just run into a drug-store instead of going into the movie as Tommy had assumed.

Then at the end of the week she summoned him. Her call and Willis Trent's were both awaiting him when he returned to the shop from a pantry-lock job.

"Fella name of Trent called while you were gone," Roan said. "Claims he's a friend of yours and says he wants you to run up to his place tonight."

Tommy nodded and then Roan handed him the little slip of paper. "And here's a car key job just telephoned in. Yellow convertible Cadillac, license 6S-5207. Parked on Las Palmas just south of Sunset."

Her car.

He took the slip of paper and carrying his tool kit went out to his flivver. He drove to Las Palmas and parked behind the convertible. He walked over and opened the door on the street side. She was slumped down behind the wheel. Her key was in the ignition lock.

"Hello, Tommy Dancer," she said. "Surprised?"

"No. I remembered your license number."

"You've got a marvelous memory."

"So have you. You remembered the key shop and—and this street."

"And you."

Tommy hesitated. "I've just come from the shop; haven't had time to get cleaned up."

"So?"

"I'd like to wash up, if . . ."

Elizabeth leaned forward and removed the key from the ignition. She handed it elaborately to Tommy.

They entered the apartment house together and as luck would have it encountered Mrs. Cox, the manager, on the lower floor. She sized up Elizabeth Targ and then gave Tommy a cool, suspicious look. "Good evening, Mr. Dancer," she said.

"Good evening, Mrs. Cox."

On the stairs going to the second floor, Tommy whispered: "My reputation's ruined—that was the landlady."

"Shall I wait outside?"

"The damage is done. Besides . . ." Tommy caught hold of Elizabeth and kissed her, a hard kiss on her lips. For just an instant she was stiff, but then relaxed and even returned the pressure. Only for a moment though before she pushed him away.

She laughed as she evaded his clawing hands. "Plenty of time for that, sonny boy."

"Sonny boy?"

"Tommy."

But Tommy remembered who had called him Sonny Boy. Earl Faraday. She had been with Faraday enough to pick up the man's pet phrases. A coldness seeped through

him and he led the way to his apartment. Inside, he nodded to a chair.

"I won't be long."

He went to the cracked chest of drawers, got out a clean shirt, socks, linen and headed for the bathroom. He showered quickly, put on the shorts and socks, then discovered that he had forgotten to bring his other suit into the bathroom. He opened the door a couple of inches.

"Close your eyes a minute. I've got to come out."

"Your suit?"

"That's right—it's in the closet."

"I'll hand it to you."

He heard her cross the room and open the closet door. There was silence for a moment, then she came to the bathroom door and handed him the suit, which was on a wire hanger, as it had come from the cleaners the day before.

He put it on and re-entered the living room.

"Mmmm," she said appraisingly, "not bad."

"Special occasion." Tommy grinned. "I suppose we'll eat somewhere."

She frowned a little. "Later. I thought we might drop in for a few minutes at a party to which I'm invited."

Suspicion stiffened Tommy. "Not at Willis Trent's?"

"Of course not," she replied quickly. "You don't know this man."

"Try his name on me."

"Paul deCamp."

He shook his head. "No, I've never heard of him." He looked at her with narrowed eyes. "I don't suppose Earl Faraday will be at this party."

"Now look, Tommy," she exclaimed, "you're not going to start harping on Faraday again, because if you are—"

"All right, I won't mention his name again. I'll take the crumbs and enjoy them."

She came to him and placing her hands on his arms stood up on her toes and kissed him on the mouth. "What do you think of the crumbs?" she asked mockingly and kissed him again.

He tried to grab her but she laughed and eluded his grasp. "Let's get to the party before everybody leaves."

Paul deCamp was apparently in the money. He lived in a luxury apartment hotel on Sunset Strip where a Filipino took your car at the door and parked it in the garage under the hotel.

His apartment consisted merely of a living room, dinette, kitchen and bedroom, but the rental was probably as much as for an ordinary ten-room house.

The party was supposed to be in the living room, but it overflowed to the other rooms. There were probably thirty or thirty-five people present when Tommy entered with Elizabeth Targ.

Paul deCamp, the host, was a smooth, soft-spoken man in his early forties. He was tall, dark and handsomer than many a movie star. He greeted Elizabeth by kissing her warmly and then when she introduced Tommy he pumped Tommy's hand.

"Are you a newcomer to Hollywood, Mr. Dancer?"

"Practically. I've only lived here about twelve years."

"How come I haven't seen you around?"

"You don't know *everybody*, Paul," Elizabeth interposed.

Paul deCamp put an arm about Elizabeth and squeezed her. "If he knows you, I want to know him," he said. Then he suddenly looked over Elizabeth's head in the direction

of the bedroom. Tommy's eyes followed. There were several people in the bedroom, some of whom were in his range. But of those he saw, he recognized none.

"Tommy," Elizabeth said, "get me a drink."

"Sure," he replied, knowing she wanted to talk to Paul deCamp. He started for the kitchen, but before he reached it, he detoured and, by-passing Elizabeth and deCamp on his return, headed for the bedroom. He was on the verge of entering when a girl came out, almost colliding with him.

It was Florence Randall. She stopped. "Hello, are you going to all the parties now?"

Tommy grinned easily. "I heard you were here, so I crashed."

"Well, crash right out again. This is the lion's den."

"Paul deCamp?"

"Get wise, handsome, get wise."

She slipped past Tommy. He hesitated a moment, then entered the bedroom. Earl Faraday stood near the heavy draperies of the windows, talking to a fat, balding man. He saw Tommy at once and his face hardened. "Excuse me," he said to the fat man, and came toward Tommy.

"What the hell are you doing here?"

"I could ask you the same thing," Tommy retorted.

Faraday said in a low, tense voice, "Get out of here as quick as you can. I mean that."

He walked abruptly away from Tommy, heading for the living room. Tommy looked at the heavy velvet window drapes, the old ivory lacquered chiffonier and chest of drawers and at the twin beds with the silk bedcovers. This was exactly the kind of apartment he was going to have himself in the very near future. And maybe he'd throw a party in it, but if he did, the bedroom would be barred.

"Tommy," said a voice behind him. "I'm ready to go."
He turned and looked at Elizabeth, standing in the doorway.

"I forgot your drink."

"I don't want one."

"I'll get one from the kitchen."

"No—I want to go now."

She took Tommy's arm, exerted pressure and they walked out to the living room. Faraday stood near the hall door, his face a mask of cold rage.

"Leaving already?" he said to Elizabeth.

"We just stopped in for a minute," Elizabeth replied coolly, "on our way to dinner."

They went out. In the hall, Tommy rang for the elevator and when it came he and Elizabeth rode down to the lobby floor. Outside, the doorman went to the house phone and called for Elizabeth's car. They were in the car, driving away, before Tommy spoke.

"You can drop me anywhere."

"What for? We're having dinner."

"It isn't necessary, now, is it?"

Elizabeth exclaimed. "Damn you, Tommy."

"You showed Faraday that you didn't give a damn about him, so I've served my purpose, haven't I?" He uttered a forced, mirthless chuckle. "And boy, was he burned!"

Elizabeth swung the car to the curb and applied the brakes. "Get out!"

Tommy swung open the door and slid to the edge of the seat. "Faraday's no good," he said tonelessly. "The worst thing in the world would be for you to get him."

"I said, get out!"

Tommy stepped out to the curb and the car shot away

so quickly that the door was slammed shut by the force of its momentum.

Looking about, Tommy discovered that he was on Sunset, near Fairfax, a good stiff walk from his apartment on Las Palmas and an even longer one to Willis Trent's place. He decided, however, that the walk would cool him off and struck off down Sunset.

Trent himself opened the door in response to Tommy's ring. "What took you so long to get around?" he demanded.

"I had a date."

Trent closed the door and went to his favorite armchair. But instead of seating himself he turned and studied Tommy with a cold eye. "So I heard. Stepping out of your class a little, aren't you?"

"What's my class?"

"The Targ dame isn't."

"Did *she* tell you?"

"Earl Faraday called a few minutes ago. You sap, haven't you figured out yet that she's his?"

"How many does he rate? The other night he was rushing a redhead."

Trent exhaled heavily and seated himself. "Sit down, Dancer. Sit down and let me give you a small lesson in arithmetic."

"I'm not in the mood for lessons tonight."

"This one'll be short and sweet and I think you need it. Women are Faraday's business. I don't know why, but they like his kind. He treats them like I wouldn't treat a dog and they like it. He slaps them in the teeth and they buy him two hundred dollar suits and wrist watches and platinum cigarette cases. . . ."

"Are you talking about Elizabeth Targ?" Tommy asked, ominously.

"I'm talking about women in general, so don't get up your hackles. Elizabeth Targ's one of a dozen women I know who've gone overboard for Faraday. I don't know whether he's gotten any money from her. Maybe not, because I hear she hasn't got much. But anyway, women are Faraday's business. Sometimes he even marries one." He paused. "That red-head, Florence Randall, she's strictly business. Understand? For all I know, Faraday's gone overboard for the Targ girl, but at the moment Faraday's broken off with her, because he's giving Flo Randall a line of his goods. He's going to get something from her—the number of a certain safety deposit box."

Tommy recoiled. "It's *her* box we're going to rob?"

Trent winced a little. "Don't be so damn crude." He shook his head. "And it isn't her box. As a matter of fact, she doesn't even know she's going to give Faraday that number."

"Then how do you know she's going to do it?"

"That's Faraday's job." Trent's lips twisted contemptuously. "He's a slimy rat. But don't get the wrong idea about him; he's a bad boy and if you keep crossing him your insurance company'll be making a payment to your nearest relative."

"I can take care of myself."

Trent grunted. "You and Faraday can carve each other into filet mignons—after we split what's in that safety deposit box. But I'm not going to let either of you spoil this caper. I mean that, Tommy. I'm thinking of that money, first last and all the time. You'll take a short grip on that temper of yours." He made an impatient gesture. "Now, let's get

down to cases. Tomorrow you go to the Hollywood-Highland Bank and rent yourself a safety deposit box . . .”

8 The banking room was about forty by fifty feet in size. On the right were the tellers. Across the rear was the insurance and real estate department. The front section of the left was railed in and contained a half dozen desks, at which sat the bank officials, who made loans and talked to the depositors on banking matters. Behind them was a small square, occupied by a couple of men who handled “notes and collections” and beyond them was a little cubbyhole, over which presided a redheaded woman of about forty. Lettering over the wicket, outside this compartment, read “Safety Deposit.”

From this compartment, you could walk directly into the vault containing the safety deposit boxes. A massive, foot-thick door stood open. Access from the bank proper was by means of a low wooden gate, which was opened from inside, by pushing an electric button. The custodian of the safety deposit vault, the redheaded woman, operated the electric button.

Tommy Dancer, carrying a large Manila folder, approached the safety deposit window. He had to wait for a moment or two while the woman inside the compartment finished adding up a set of figures on an adding machine.

“Yes?” she said, then.

“I’d like to rent a safety deposit box.”

“Are you a depositor?”

“Is it necessary to be?”

“No.” The woman reached for a card. “Will you fill this out, please?”

It was the usual bank application, requesting name,

address, business references, employer, date of birth, name of parents, including maiden name of mother.

Tommy took the card to one of the writing stands and filled it out slowly. He gave his name and address, hesitated over employer and finally wrote: George Roan. "Business references" he left blank but filled out the other spaces. He returned to the safety deposit window.

The woman gave the card a perfunctory scrutiny. "Can you give a business reference?" she asked.

"I'm sorry, I don't have any charge accounts at the stores," Tommy replied. "I always pay cash."

The woman hesitated. "I guess it's all right. The regular size boxes are six dollars per year, plus twenty per cent Federal Tax. Seven dollars and twenty cents."

Tommy took out a ten dollar bill and she gave him change. The attendant searched through a drawer of keys and brought out two, held together with a circular clip.

"Here you are, Mr. Dancer. Box three sixty-five."

Tommy held up the Manila envelope. "Could I put these things in the box now?"

"Of course. Here . . ." She slipped over a pad of small blanks, "Fill out one of these."

The blank merely required Tommy's signature and box number. He wrote it out and handed it to the woman, who took a key from her desk and pressed the electric button. "If you'll come in . . ."

Tommy stepped to the wooden gate and went through. He followed the woman into the vault which was not more than ten by ten feet in size and lined on two sides by safety deposit boxes. The attendant said: "If you'll give me your keys . . ."

Tommy handed them to her. She put one of the keys

into the lower keyhole of Box 365 and turned it. Tommy shot a quick glance over his shoulder. The woman's compartment, out in the banking room, was out of eye range, from where he stood. Good.

He turned back to the girl and discovered that she had put the bank's key into the upper keyhole. She turned it and withdrawing the key, pulled open the steel door, revealing a long black metal box. She pulled it out and handed it to Tommy.

"Just put it back when you're through and close the door," she said. "It locks automatically."

Tommy flashed her a smile and she left the little room. Tommy took the box to a high metal stand and opening it dumped in the contents of his Manila envelope, a \$50 war bond, a lapsed insurance policy for \$1,000 and the lease of his Las Palmas apartment.

He took a small white envelope from his pocket and held it in his left hand, concealed by the safety deposit box. Stepping back to the open compartment he slid the box into the slot. Then, looking over his shoulder, he reached swiftly into the small envelope and drew out a white metal key blank. He inserted it in the *top* keyhole of his box, worked it back and forth, then drawing it out, dropped it into the white envelope. He closed the door and heard the locks snap. Then turning, he slipped the white envelope into his breast pocket and left the vault.

Outside, he nodded to the girl and, leaving by the door, walked casually through the banking department to the street.

At McCadden he retrieved his car from the parking lot where he had left it, and a few minutes later he entered the Melrose Lock and Key Shop. George Roan, a stocky, middle-

aged man with close-clipped greying hair looked pointedly at the wall clock.

"Eleven-forty, Tommy," he said.

"Sorry. I couldn't seem to get up this morning."

"Or yesterday morning. What the devil's got into you lately? You haven't got any more interest in your work than a duck has teeth."

"Lay off!" Tommy snapped.

"I was figurin' on taking you into the business," Roan said, bitterly. "But the way you been actin' I think I'd be better off letting you go and getting in an apprentice."

"You do that," Tommy said coldly. He walked to a bench at the rear of the little shop and took down a metal tool box.

As he started for the door, Roan exclaimed in alarm. "Where are you going?"

"I'm taking you at your word," Tommy retorted.

The proprietor of the key shop groaned. "That's the trouble with you young fellows today, can't take a word of criticism."

Tommy stopped just within the door. "That was a little more than criticism."

"What the hell's the use of being a boss if you can't blow off steam once in a while? Forget it, and get to work. I've got to run out and talk to the Gribble people about a new burglar alarm system."

Tommy hesitated, then returned to the bench at the rear of the shop. He set down his tool kit and opened it. Roan, muttering to himself, got his hat and coat. But before he stepped to the door he frowned at Tommy's back.

"Look, Tommy, when I get back we'll talk about that partnership deal, huh?"

"All right."

Roan went out. Tommy waited a minute or two, then reached into his breast pocket and took out a white envelope. He opened it carefully and shook out a key blank that had been smoked and which now bore several whitened spots down one side. He picked it up gingerly and inserted it in a vise. Then with a file he worked rapidly for several minutes, filing notches into the key. He stopped to examine the key from time to time, changed from a large file to a small one and worked more carefully.

After about ten minutes he took the key out of the vise and held it up to the light. He studied it closely and finally nodded in satisfaction.

Grinning crookedly he dropped the key into his pocket and going to the telephone dialed a number.

A voice said in his ear: "Meestair T-r-rentes' apar-rt-ment."

"I'd like to talk to Mr. Trent," Tommy said. "Tell him it's Tommy Dancer. . . ."

Trent came on the phone a moment later. "All right?"

"All right."

"Good. I've got that number for you."

"What is it?"

There was a pause, then Trent said: "I don't think you'd better go in for a day or two. No need to call unnecessary attention to you."

"I don't agree with you, Trent. I rented the box today and it'll seem only natural if I go in the next day to put in some things."

"I'll give you the number tomorrow."

"Suit yourself," Tommy said coolly and hung up.

George Roan returned to the shop an hour later, his

face beaming with good cheer. "Got it," he exulted. "A sweet eight hundred dollar job."

"Great," said Tommy. He held up a slip of paper. "I was just going to run out. Woman lost her garage key."

"If they could carry the garages with them, they'd lose the garages," Roan said. "All right, go ahead and when you get back we'll talk about that deal."

Tommy took his tool case and left the shop. Outside he climbed into his flivver and started up Melrose. Across the street a car made a U-turn and took off after him. At Highland Tommy eased over to the right ready to make a right turn, but when the lights turned green, he gunned his motor, shot out into the intersection and made a frantic left turn in front of a through-bound car, whose driver slammed on the brakes and tooted wildly.

Tommy, oblivious, scooted south on Highland to Oakwood. A few minutes later he was back on Melrose at Highland and this time made the correct right turn.

He drove on Highland to Santa Monica where he turned right on the car tracks and went several blocks until he found a clear spot at the curb. He pulled in and, shutting off the ignition, leaned back and rested his head on the seat cushion. He closed his eyes.

Tommy dozed for a half hour then, yawning, switched on the ignition. He drove leisurely to McCadden and Hollywood Boulevard and parked his car.

Leaving the lot he strolled to Hollywood Boulevard and turned left to Highland.

9 Tommy crossed the street and entered the Hollywood-Highland Bank and walked to the Safety Deposit window. He nodded to the girl behind the counter and filled out a blank. "Want to put some papers in my box."

She pressed the door buzzer. Tommy followed her into the vault.

"Key, please."

Tommy handed the woman his keys. She put one in the lower lock of Box 365, turned the upper lock with the bank key and said to Tommy: "You oughtn't to keep both keys together. This way you lose one you lose both."

"I know."

She removed the bank's key and left the vault. Quickly Tommy drew another key from his pocket and inserted it in the upper lock. It turned smoothly. Tommy exulted to himself: "I'm the best damn key man in the country."

He removed the key as well as his own and dropped them in a pocket. He waited a moment, then closed the door of Box 365 and left the vault. Leaving the bank, he strode to the curb to cross Highland Avenue. A man stepped up beside him and said: "Hi, pal."

It was Herbie the Lugan.

A chill began to seep through Tommy's body. "What are you doing here?"

"Not a thing, chum. Not a thing."

The traffic lights turned to green and Tommy started across the street. Herbie the Lugan trotted along at his side, chattering. "Doing any more bowling lately? Used to play a pretty fair game myself. If you aren't busy some night I'd like to roll a few lines with you."

"Sure, sure," Tommy agreed.

"Tonight?"

They had reached the other side of the street. "Can't tonight."

Herbie the Lugan winked slyly. "Date, huh? Somebody said they seen you with a cute package. Blonde."

"Look, Herbie, I can't spend the day here gabbing with you. I'm a working man."

"Work?" smirked Herbie. "What's that?"

Tommy snorted and strode away from the dapper little man. He walked to McCadden. It took all of his self-control to keep from looking over his shoulder to see if Herbie was following him. As he turned on McCadden he risked a quick sideward glance, but did not see Herbie. He got his car from the parking lot and drove south toward Melrose. On Melrose he drove slowly past the bowling alley and on a sudden impulse pulled in to the curb.

He got out of his car and strode into the alley. It was shortly before noon and only one of the alleys was in use.

Rudy, the proprietor, was behind his glass-topped cigar counter. He looked at Tommy in surprise. "What are you doing here at this time of the day?"

"I got a tip on a horse," Tommy replied. "I'd like to put a couple of bucks on it."

"Haven't you got enough trouble," exclaimed Rudy. "Why don't you just take a hammer and hit yourself on the head with it? It's no worse than taking tips on horses."

"This is a sure thing."

Rudy wrinkled his face in disgust. "They're all sure things." He shrugged. "What's the nag?"

"That's the trouble. I forgot."

Rudy groaned. "He gets a tip on a horse and can't remember the horse's name!"

"It's running in the third at Belmont. Have you got a *Racing Form*? I'd know the name if I saw it."

Rudy reached under the counter and brought out a much creased *Racing Form*. He unfolded it to the Belmont page and ran down a column with his finger. "Antimacassar, Ned's Boy, Fighting Don—"

"Fighting Don, that's it."

"Fighting Don!" snorted Rudy. "That's a helluva tip. He's the favorite. He'll go to the post at even money."

"Well, I'd like to put two dollars on him just the same."

"Okay, two dollars on Fighting Don."

Tommy drew out a package of cigarettes and, putting one in his mouth, lit it. He leaned against the showcase. "You don't handle these bets yourself, Rudy? I mean, you give them to a bookie, don't you?"

Rudy looked at him suspiciously. "I've got enough trouble running this bowling alley. Joe Abbott gives me a cut, hot or cold."

"Who's Joe Abbott?"

"The bookie."

"Do I know him?"

Rudy shrugged. "He's in here often enough. Little fellow with a rogue shirt and sport coat."

"I think I've seen him. He hardly looks smart enough to be a bookie."

"What brains does it take to be a bookie? But don't worry about your two bucks. If the nag wins you'll get your money."

"I wasn't worrying; I'm just curious." Tommy took a deep drag on his cigarette and exhaled the smoke slowly.

"I suppose Abbott lays off his big bets with somebody else."

Rudy looked at Tommy irritably. "Why all the sudden interest in bookies?"

"Oh, I was just thinking about a guy for whom I did a little key work the other day. He's got a swanky joint and I was wondering if he mightn't be a bookie, or something like that. Fellow name of Trent—Willis Trent. Ever hear of him?"

Rudy looked at Tommy steadily. "Why?"

"No reason."

"Look, Tommy," the bowling alley man said. "I'm going to give you a bit of advice. The less you have to do with bookies and people like that, the better off you'll be in the long run. If you know what I mean. Don't go getting curious about people like . . . Trent." He added significantly, "It ain't healthy."

Tommy regarded Rudy steadily. "Do I look like a copper?"

"That ain't the point, Tommy," Rudy said. "I know who you are, but I'm running a business here, see. I take a couple of small bets on the horses once in awhile. I give the bets to a fellow named Joe Abbott."

"Who's Paul deCamp?"

Rudy looked past Tommy at the two men bowling in the alley twenty or twenty-five feet away. He shifted his glance from there to the door. "You're in the lock and key business, Tommy. You work for a fellow who's got a little shop up the street. You sell some Yale locks, don't you?"

"Yes, but I don't get—"

"You didn't let me finish. The Yale lock company is to *you* what Paul deCamp is to Joe Abbott."

"Mr. Big, eh?"

"He's a name you hear all the time but you don't know

him. At least not fellows like you and me. I've never seen deCamp but I've heard a lot of talk about him. I've seen his name in the papers. He's the big fellow." He looked soberly at Tommy.

Tommy laughed. "I guess it's about time I was getting back to the shop."

He nodded and started for the door. Rudy looked after him and as Tommy went out he shook his head. There was a frown on his forehead.

Back at the shop Tommy found Mr. Roan seated at a bench with a pad of paper before him which was covered with figures. He looked up as Tommy entered.

"I've been doing some figuring, Tommy," he said. "I've got a proposition. See what you think of it." He cleared his throat. "You've been getting forty-five dollars a week. I've been drawing seventy-five a week myself. You know how this business is, some weeks are good, some are bad. Some weeks we take in two hundred, maybe two-fifty. Some weeks there ain't a hundred. But it's a sweet little business. If you and I give it all we can, it could be even better. I'm thinking of cutting you in for twenty-five per cent. What do you think of that?"

Tommy frowned. "I don't see where I'd be gaining anything by that. That means in a bad week I'd only draw twenty-five dollars."

"No, no, we'd continue to draw the same amount we're drawing now. You forty-five and me seventy-five. Naturally we've got to have a backlog in the business . . . to take care of the poor weeks. We pile up the backlog from the good weeks. What I meant was, we each continue to draw the same amount of money every week, but at the end of the month we split seventy-five and twenty-five."

"It's a deal," Tommy said, "if we make my drawing account fifty dollars a week."

Mr. Roan hesitated, then nodded. "All right, partner." He held out his hand. Tommy took it even though he was thinking he would not remain a partner for very long.

Tommy Dancer left the key shop shortly before five-thirty. As he climbed into his old flivver he looked across the street and saw a beige-colored coupe at the curb. He swore under his breath but climbed into his car and drove in the direction of La Brea. At La Brea he turned right and pulled up to the curb. The beige-colored car parked a block ahead. Tommy drove in low gear a hundred feet, stopped the car and, climbing out, walked up to the car ahead. When he reached it, he stuck his head into the car and looked at a swarthy man of about thirty who was not very much surprised.

"What's the idea?" Tommy demanded.

"What's that, pal?" the man asked.

"You know damn well what I'm talking about. You've been following me."

"Me?"

"Who put you on my trail?"

"Look, bub, it's a free country or didn't you know about that?"

"I live on Las Palmas," Tommy said. "That's where I'm going now. I'm just telling you in case I happen to make a couple of quick turns and lose you."

"That's a coincidence," the man said. "I was thinking of going over to Las Palmas myself." He grinned. "Just in case you happen to see me in your neighborhood."

"On the other hand, I might be going over to North Whitley, the Lehigh Apartments. You know where Willis Trent lives?"

The swarthy man nodded. "Thanks, pal. It so happens I might be going in *that* direction, too. But don't think nothin' of it, huh?"

"Don't think anything of it if you run into a handful of knuckles," Tommy snarled.

"Are you kiddin'?"

"I'm not kidding, I'm warning you."

"Well, I'm warning *you*, bub, fightin's my business. Fists, blackjack, brass knuckles; don't make no difference to me. Catch on?"

Angrily Tommy started back to his car, got in and drove off. At Sunset he turned right and drove past Las Palmas. At the next corner he turned left and in a moment or two crossed Hollywood Boulevard, and began climbing the hill on Whitley. When he pulled up near the Lehigh Apartments, he looked back and saw the beige coupe pulling in to the curb a hundred feet away. He entered the apartment house and rode up to the fifth floor.

Trent's houseboy answered his ring at the doorbell.

"Good evening, sar."

"Mr. Trent."

"Who iss calling?"

Before Tommy could reply Trent appeared behind the Filipino, coming out of the bedroom. His eyes met Tommy's. "Oh, hello there, Tommy. Come in! Come in!"

The Filipino backed away and Tommy entered the apartment.

"Manuel," Trent exclaimed, "get us a couple of drinks."

The Filipino disappeared into the kitchen. Tommy

waited until he had gone, then burst out, "What's the idea of having me shadowed?"

Trent regarded Tommy coolly. "Do you think I'm a fool, Tommy? This is a big deal and I'm not taking any chances of anything going wrong." He smiled thinly. "For that much money I wouldn't trust my mother."

Tommy glowered at him. "Well, you're frank about it, at least."

"Why not?"

"In other words, from now on I can expect to have somebody follow me?" Tommy nodded. "Well, don't be surprised if *you* find somebody following you."

Trent chuckled. "Attaboy!"

The Filipino entered the room with a tray on which were a couple of glasses. Trent took them off the tray and handed one to Tommy. "To us!"

"Good shadowing."

Trent barely tasted his liquor. "Now, let's talk about the big plan."

Tommy looked at the Filipino but the servant was already beating a retreat to the kitchen.

"I got the box." He reached into his pocket and drew out the safety deposit box keys. The two for Box 365.

"It's going to take two trips for each key. Four altogether."

Trent frowned. "You couldn't get the impression of both keys on one trip?"

"Can I take a chance? The woman leaves the room, all right, but suppose she happens to come back? Suppose there's another customer comes into the vault?" Tommy set his whiskey glass down on a polished end table and scowled at Trent. "Of course, if *you* would come up right behind me

and keep the girl busy for a few moments, I might be able to make both impressions at the same time. I'd have to be sure that the girl would be kept busy."

Trent hesitated. "I was planning on something just like that on the last trip." He paused. "As a matter of fact I've had a box in the Hollywood-Highland Bank for the last couple of years."

Tommy drew two key blanks from his pocket. He held up one. "This is a blank for the customer's lock. This other one is for the bank's lock. I can make the impressions for both if I can count on a full sixty seconds without interruption. If you can give me that sixty seconds tomorrow and again in a couple of days I could finish the whole job in three trips. One, tomorrow, to make the impressions, another in a couple of days to test the keys and get the last changes and a third trip, well, for boodle."

Trent's eyes gleamed. "Three trips." He suddenly seated himself and looked up at Tommy. "Tomorrow, Friday and —" he paused—"Monday!"

10 When the Hollywood-Highland Bank was opened the next morning at ten o'clock, Tommy Dancer was one of the first people to enter. Only a few feet behind him was Willis Trent. Each was aware of the other, yet neither showed any signs of recognition. Trent went to one of the writing stands and filled out a deposit slip, while Tommy Dancer went to the Safety Deposit window and signed his name and the box number on one of the little slips. Then he noticed something that he had not been aware of the day before.

The woman behind the counter took his slip and put it

in a little machine that stamped the time of the day. Tommy frowned uneasily when he noticed that. He went into the safety deposit vault. As he stepped through the door, he looked over his shoulder and saw Willis Trent at the Safety Deposit window. Box 365 was opened and the attendant, nodding, left the vault. Although he was as taut as a tightly wound steel spring, Tommy Dancer went about his little job seemingly oblivious of his surroundings. He took an envelope out of his pocket and removed two prepared key blanks. One he inserted in the lower lock of Box 294, the other he inserted perfunctorily in the upper lock. He already had a key that fitted this lock perfectly but the second blank was for emergency purposes. Finished with the keys, he dropped them carefully into the white envelope and returned it to his pocket. Then he closed his own safety deposit box and left the vault.

It was nice timing. Just as he stepped through the door, the attendant approached with Willis Trent in tow. Tommy had to step sideways so that they could pass him in the narrow doorway.

Tommy went through the bank to the sidewalk and started for McCadden. As he turned into the side street he looked over his shoulder and swore roundly when he saw the swarthy man, who'd been shadowing him the day before, close on his heels. He continued on to the parking lot, got his car and drove to Melrose Avenue.

He was late again this morning. But, since he was now a partner instead of a mere employee, George Roan did not remark on it. He greeted Tommy cheerfully, "Good morning, partner."

Tommy forced a grin. "Good morning."

"How'd you like to run over to the Hadley people with me, this morning, Tommy?" Mr. Roan asked. "There's a lot of figuring to be done and you've always been pretty good at that."

Tommy shook his head. "Somebody ought to stay in the shop. Besides, you've dealt with them so far and it's just as well you continue."

"Maybe you're right. I guess I might as well run over there now."

Mr. Roan left the shop inside of five minutes. Tommy took out the envelope containing the smoked key blanks from his pocket, and went to work. He had hardly started, however, when the phone rang.

It was Willis Trent. "Get them all right, Tommy?"

"Of course, but one of them got a little rubbed."

"You won't have to take another impression?" Trent exclaimed.

"No, I don't think so. I can correct it when I go back for the fitting."

"Good. Do you think you'll get a chance to work on the keys this morning?"

Tommy looked toward the window of the shop. Undoubtedly the shadow was parked across the street and had made note of the absence of George Roan. Tommy said into the phone: "Matter of fact, I just started on them. The boss left the shop and I'll be alone until noon." Then he grimaced, as Trent cut in, "I'll run over." He hung up before Tommy could protest.

Angrily, Tommy slammed the receiver on the hook, then stepped to his work bench and began filing furiously at the key blank he had put in the vise. He finished it, got a duplicate key blank and filed it down to match the first. He

dropped the second key in a drawer then put the other smoked blank in the vise and began working slowly on it. He was still at it when the door opened and Willis Trent entered.

"How's it coming?" Trent asked eagerly.

Tommy handed Trent the finished key. "Here's one and in a minute I'll have the other."

Trent examined the key admiringly. "Damned if I see how you do it!"

Tommy gave the key in the vise two or three light strokes of the file and threw down the file.

"Do you think they'll work?" Trent asked.

Tommy shrugged. "This second one got a little blurred. But I wouldn't be a bit surprised if the first one fits just as it is, maybe just a little touch or two here and there."

Trent drew a deep breath. "I don't see how I can stand the wait."

Tommy said, "Well, shall we run back to the bank now and check on them?"

Trent shuddered. "I lost two years of my life this morning!"

Tommy studied Trent closely. It was true, the book-maker looked a little pale even now. "Tomorrow?"

"Not me. I'll go back to the bank with you on Monday. But I don't think the two of us ought to follow each other like that more than once more."

"What about Faraday?"

"He hasn't got a box at the bank."

"What about Herbie the Lugan or—" Tommy nodded toward the window—"your man across the street. They don't have to have boxes. They can just stop at the window and make an inquiry or something."

"No." Trent was positive about that. "Three people's enough in this."

"You mean they don't know about this?"

"You take me for a fool." Trent made an impatient gesture. "All right, Louie's following you. He thinks you welshed on a bet and I want you kept in sight. Come up to the apartment this evening."

Trent started to turn away, the two keys still in his hand. Tommy reached out for them, but Trent, smiling thinly, dropped the keys in his coat pocket.

Tommy exclaimed, "What's the idea?"

"I'll keep them until morning."

"But I've got to smoke them up again before I go into the bank."

"I'll meet you at a quarter of ten at Las Palmas and Yucca. You can smoke them up then."

"You really *don't* trust anyone, do you?"

"For ten bucks, yes. Maybe even for a hundred, but not for a hundred thousand, or two hundred thousand."

"You're building pretty high hopes," Tommy said. "What if there isn't that kind of money in Box 294? What if there isn't *any* money in it?"

"There'll be money in it," Trent said confidently. "There's got to be. And a lot of it."

"I hope so."

Trent left the shop and Tommy puttered about for a few minutes. Then he went back to his bench and pulling out the drawer, retrieved the key he had dropped into it before Trent's arrival. It went into his pocket to join another key that already reposed there.

The phone rang. Tommy, answering, heard George Roan's voice. "Tommy," exclaimed Roan, "jump into your

car and come over here. A problem's come up that needs some figuring. Lock up the shop."

"All right, Mr. Roan. What's the address?"

"Darned if I know," replied Roan. "But it's on Santa Monica between Gardner and La Brea; two or three blocks east of Gardner. You can't miss it; it's a two-story brick building and the name's out in front, Hadley Manufacturing Company."

"I'll be there inside of ten minutes." Tommy hung up, got his tool kit and left the shop, locking the door behind him. He carried his tool kit to his flivver and put it in, then cut across the street to the beige-colored coupe.

Louie grinned at him lazily. "How'ya, chum?"

"I'm going out on business," Tommy said. "It's on Santa Monica, a couple of blocks this side of Gardner. The Hadley Manufacturing Company. I thought I'd tell you in case you happened to get lost at a stop light. I wouldn't want you to lose your job, you know."

"Well, now, that's mighty nice of you, bub," Louie said cheerfully. "But I'll just tag along behind you, even if it don't happen to be on Santa Monica, a couple of blocks this side of Gardner."

Tommy recrossed the street and getting into his car drove it at an easy pace to Santa Monica. He had no trouble finding the plant of the Hadley Manufacturing Company. He found a parking spot nearby. Louie pulled up behind him.

"You'll have a little wait here," Tommy said, "because I've got some work to do inside."

"Waiting is the best thing I do," retorted Louie. "Take your time. I ain't got no place to go, anyhow."

Tommy entered the offices of the Hadley Manufactur-

ing Company and looking through a plate glass window behind the receptionist saw George Roan talking to a balding man in shirt sleeves.

"I'm with Mr. Roan," Tommy said to the receptionist.

"Oh, yes. You may go right in."

Tommy went through a door into the main office. There were a dozen desks and along the left side of the room a row of small, private offices.

Roan saw Tommy as he approached.

"Ah, here you are, Tommy. Mr. Hadley, Tommy Dancer, my partner."

Hadley shook hands with Tommy. "Glad to know you, Mr. Dancer. Mr. Roan's been telling me about you. Claims you're the best lock and key man in the business."

Tommy looked sharply at Roan. Praise from his former employer had been scarce in the past. As a partner he did not seem to mind giving it. It probably helped back up his sales talk.

"I'll tell you the setup here, Tommy," Roan said. "Mr. Hadley makes radar equipment which is quite valuable and some of it is rather small in size, which lends itself easily to theft. That's the reason for the burglar alarm we're going to install."

"Mr. Roan, you've been over the plant," Hadley said, "so I'll just leave you two alone. If there are any questions you want to ask I'll be in my office."

"Fine, fine," said Roan. "Let's go out to the plant, Tommy."

He led the way through a door into a large plant where some forty or fifty employees were working at machines and assembly tables.

"It's the windows I'm worried about, Tommy," Roan began. "If they were steel casement we could do the job for much less. But no, they're the old-fashioned sash windows, which are about as safe as mosquito netting."

"Mr. Roan," Tommy said, "I got a phone call just as I was leaving the shop. My aunt from Minneapolis landed in town this morning. She's downtown at the bus depot and is taking the streetcar out here to Hollywood. You know how relatives are; just because you haven't seen them in a few years they think you're going to drop everything and show them the sights. I said I'd meet her at Hollywood and Highland but all I'm going to do is take her over to my apartment and leave her there for the afternoon. Do you mind if I run over to the streetcar now? She'll be getting there in about fifteen minutes. I'll be back here in forty-five minutes or so."

George Roan looked at Tommy with some disappointment. "I was counting on you to help me figure these windows." He sighed. "Well, I guess I can work on the rest of the job while you're gone. You'll be back inside of an hour, though?"

"Sure, you can count on me, Mr. Roan." Tommy pointed to a door at the rear of the shop. "I'll just slip out the back door."

He strode quickly to the zinc-lined door at the rear of the shop, opened it and stepped out into the alley. He discovered that it led to a side street a hundred feet away. He walked swiftly to it. Before stepping out into the street he peered out cautiously and looked toward Santa Monica. Finding that the coast was clear, he came out of the alley and walked northward.

11

At the first intersection he turned right and continued on to La Brea, four or five blocks away. At La Brea he crossed the street to a filling station, intending to telephone for a taxi, but just then one came up and Tommy hailed it.

He got in and five minutes later stepped out a half block from Highland and Hollywood Avenues. He strode past the bank, turned into Hollywood Boulevard and a half block away entered a luggage shop where he bought a brief case for twelve dollars and fifty cents.

Carrying it under his arm he walked back to the bank and, entering, approached the Safety Deposit window for the fourth time that week. The attendant looked at him curiously as he filled out the little slip. At least Tommy thought she was looking at him with more than ordinary interest. But it may have been his guilty conscience.

The woman went through the usual business of unlocking his box and it seemed to Tommy that she hesitated a moment or two before leaving him alone in the vault, but he had gone this far and nothing could deter him.

He took his safety deposit box out of the compartment and deposited it on the high table just inside the door.

Then he stepped up to Box 294 and unlocked it with the keys he had made that morning. They worked perfectly but Tommy had no time to gloat over good workmanship. He carried the box to the stand, whipped open the brief case and in almost the same movement raised the lid of Paul deCamp's safety deposit box.

The sight that met his eyes brought a gasp from Tommy's throat. The box was crammed to the top with packets of money. Each packet bore the figure "100" on the top bill.

In frantic haste Tommy grabbed up handfuls of the

packets and dumped them into the brief case. It took him only moments to transfer the contents of the box to the brief case but it seemed to Tommy that he would never finish the task. At last it was done and he slammed down the cover of the box and returned it to the compartment. He closed the door and turned away. At that moment the attendant of the Safety Deposit vault entered with a middle-aged woman who had a sheaf of government bonds in a fist. Tommy was four feet from the table on which reposed the now bulging brief case.

He said: "I was just finishing."

Stepping forward he picked up his box and returned it to the compartment. He closed the door of Box 365, smiled wanly at the vault attendant and picking up his brief case left the vault.

Needles of fear were pricking his skin in a thousand points as he walked through the bank. A sudden shout, the clanging of a bell would not have been unexpected.

But Tommy reached the street safely.

He walked unseeingly down Hollywood Boulevard, his face bathed with a film of perspiration. In his hand was a fortune, but what could he do with it now that he had it. There would be repercussions, an aftermath. Tommy had to be prepared.

He passed the Lincoln Hotel, walked fifty feet beyond then suddenly whirled and, going back, entered the hotel. He carried his brief case to the rear of the big lobby and handed it to a uniformed check room attendant.

"Can I check this here for a day or two?" he asked.

"Sure thing, Mister."

The attendant took the brief case and handed Tommy a pasteboard with a number on it. Tommy deposited a quar-

ter on the counter and walked to the center of the lobby. He lit a cigarette and drew several great lungful of smoke, then caught sight of the cigar counter. He stepped up to it and laid a coin on the glass.

"Could you give me a three cent stamp?"

The girl behind the counter gave him the stamp and Tommy, smiling, walked off without the change. In another section of the lobby he found a writing desk and seated himself at it. He picked up a hotel envelope and wrote an address on it.

Wilson Targ,
General Delivery
North Hollywood, Calif.

Diagonally across the side of the envelope he wrote: "Hold until called for." He put the check room tag in the envelope and sealed it. Affixing the stamp he walked to the mail box in the lobby and dropped in the envelope.

It was done.

Outside the hotel a couple of taxis stood at the curb. Tommy stepped into one and said: "La Brea and Fountain."

Tommy re-entered the plant of The Hadley Manufacturing Company via the rear door well within the forty-five minutes he had allotted himself. He found George Roan near the front of the plant with pad and pencil making a sketch of the building.

"Back already?" Roan asked.

"I got there just as she was stepping off the streetcar."

"Good. Now, let's get this out of the way."

The noon bell rang in a few minutes, but Tommy and George Roan continued on through the noon hour and a few minutes after one completed their estimate and left the plant.

Roan climbed into his own car and Tommy proceeded to his flivver. He looked at Louie, his shadow, who was taking it easy in the beige-colored coupe.

"Back to the shop now, Louie," Tommy said.

"Be right with you," Louie replied cheerfully.

That afternoon was the longest Tommy had ever endured. But five o'clock came at last and he left the shop. Louie, of course, was right behind him as he drove to his apartment on Las Palmas.

In the lower hallway of the apartment Tommy encountered his landlady. "Oh, good evening, Mr. Dancer," she said. "I've got a message here for you somewhere."

"Message?"

"Telephone. Let me see now, where did I put it?" She searched the drawer of the low table in the hall and finally produced a little piece of paper. "Oh yes, here it is." She read it. "Miss Targ called and says to telephone her at Crestview 6-8869."

Tommy took the slip from the landlady and thrust it in his pocket. "Thanks."

"Aren't you going to telephone her now?" the landlady asked hopefully.

"No, it's not important. I'll call later."

Mrs. Cox seemed disappointed but Tommy headed for the stairs and climbed to the second floor. He entered his apartment and began stripping off his clothes. In the bathroom he shaved and took a quick shower and put on his one good suit.

Dressed, he left the apartment. He descended to the first floor and finding the corridor empty stepped to the wall telephone. He dropped in a nickel and dialed Crestview 6-8869.

A woman's voice answered, but it was not Elizabeth's. Tommy said, "May I speak to Miss Elizabeth Targ?"

"Who's calling please?"

"Tommy Dancer."

There was a slight pause then the woman's voice said, "Just a moment and I'll see if she's here."

She was. She said: "Tommy, I find that I'll be able to meet you after all."

"Where?"

"Let's see. How about right at the end of the Strip where Beverly Hills starts, at the bridle path. In about an hour and a half?"

"I'll be there."

"Good."

Tommy hung up the receiver and scowled at the phone. How much punishment could a man take? Tommy asked himself the question and answered it grimly. A lot! If it was the right woman. For Tommy there had never been another woman. He did not think there ever would be. He walked slowly out of the building and suddenly grimaced as he saw Louie standing on the sidewalk near the beige-colored coupe. He had forgotten about him.

"A little stepping out tonight, huh?" Louie asked. "I hope you make it a good place. A fellow gets tired of hanging around dumps, you know."

"I'm getting damn tired of having *you* hang around!" Tommy replied angrily.

"As to that," Louie replied, "I'm not having so much fun myself. It's a job. That's all."

Tommy stalked away from him and went to his car. He got in and, making a U-turn, chugged along to Hollywood

Boulevard. A few minutes later he got out in front of the Lehigh Apartments on Whitley.

It was probably the Filipino's afternoon off for Trent himself answered Tommy's ring. "Getting to be a regular visitor here," Trent greeted him.

"Look," Tommy said, "I'm not enjoying this any more than you are. And I'm fed up with that gorilla of yours tagging around after me wherever I go."

"Louie? He hasn't been bothering you, has he?" Trent shrugged. "I'll call him off." A faint smile flitted across his features. "Until tomorrow anyway."

"Speaking of tomorrow," Tommy said. "Let me look at those keys."

"Why?"

"Because I've been thinking of the one that I said got blurred and I don't believe it got as blurred as I thought at first. Maybe I can touch it up enough before I go back to the bank."

"You mean you might be ready to make the haul on the next trip?" Trent asked, excitedly.

Tommy nodded.

Trent reached into his pocket and brought out the two white metal keys. Tommy took them from his hand and stepped to a light. Trent followed, his eyes intently on the keys in Tommy's hand as if afraid Tommy would make them disappear or attempt a substitution. Tommy gave one of the keys only a perfunctory examination but held the other one up to the light and studied it. "I'm sure it will be all right if I just touch up this little nipple here in the second valley. You don't happen to have a file around, do you? Any kind of file."

Trent grunted. "How about a nail file?"

"All right. Let me have it."

"You serious?" Trent looked suspiciously at Tommy but produced a nail file from his pocket.

Tommy took it and ran it across one of the valleys of the key two or three times. He did a little scraping then and applied the file once or twice more.

"There, I'm sure it will work now."

"Then we can make the big try tomorrow instead of waiting until next week?"

"I don't see why not."

Trent drew a deep breath and exhaled heavily. "Whew! I hadn't counted on pulling it so soon, but I don't see why we shouldn't." He frowned heavily, "If I can only get up nerve enough to go through with it."

"I don't see where you'll have to display any nerve," Tommy said. "It's me who'll have to do the dirty work."

"I still have to be in the bank with you." Trent took the two keys from Tommy's hand and studied them. "We've got to map it out, every step."

"You'll need a suitcase to carry two hundred thousand dollars," Tommy said.

"Don't be silly. It's in a safety deposit box. Whatever the amount is, it can't take up more room than the box. I was thinking of one of those canvas sacks that cashiers carry to and from the bank. Or maybe a little Gladstone bag."

"How about a brief case?" Tommy asked quietly.

"Will it be big enough?"

"You haven't any idea how the money will be, large bills or small?"

"I suspect it will be large bills."

The doorbell whirled and Trent looked at Tommy in

surprise then shrugged and walked to the door. He opened it, revealing Earl Faraday. The man whose business was women entered the apartment.

"Am I interrupting something?" he asked mockingly.

"You were," Trent retorted. "But you'll be glad to sit in on it, I'm sure." Trent held up the two safety deposit box keys. "We've got them and we're ready to pull the job."

Faraday's eyes narrowed to slits, "When?"

"Tomorrow morning."

Faraday took the keys from Trent's hand and examined them. "You're sure they'll fit?"

"They'll fit," Tommy said.

"When did you get them?"

"I made the impressions this morning and filed down the keys during the day."

"But you haven't tested them. Are you sure they'll fit?"

"I'm sure."

"Don't worry about Tommy," Trent said. "If he says they'll fit, they'll fit. We were just talking about how we were going to manage it tomorrow. Tommy'll need a bag of some kind. Do you think a brief case will hold all the money there's likely to be in the box?"

"Two hundred thousand?" Faraday asked. "Let's see. A stack of a hundred bills, if they are more or less new, is about an inch thick. If they're hundred dollar bills they'll run about ten thousand dollars to an inch. In other words the two hundred thousand will make a pile about twenty inches by three by five." He shook his head. "I don't think a brief case will be big enough. But what about one of those little leather cases, a Boston bag?"

"Just the thing. What's more I've got one right here in the place. Wait a minute." Trent strode into the bedroom.

As Trent left the room Faraday surveyed Tommy with a cold eye.

"So now you'll be a big shot," he said mockingly.

"Does a bankroll make a big shot?" Tommy retorted, just as coldly.

"It helps. I suppose you'll buy yourself a big yellow convertible—and find yourself a blonde to match it."

"I've got the girl who's got the yellow car."

Faraday moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue.

"If you're insinuating . . ."

"I'm not insinuating. I'm telling you."

Faraday took a quick step toward Tommy. "Why, you cheap punk . . ." He took a wild swing at Tommy. The latter ducked neatly under it and planted his fist in Faraday's stomach. Faraday grunted as the wind was driven from him and he folded over forward. Tommy stepped back to land a haymaker on the other man's chin, but before he could deliver it, Willis Trent rushed out of the bedroom.

"Cut it out!" he cried. He sprang in between the two men and caught Tommy's fist. "Damn you two, can't you be left alone even a minute?"

"He swung first," Tommy said sullenly.

By that time Faraday had regained his breath. "I'll kill you for this," he choked. "I'll kill you if it's the last goddam thing I ever do."

"Make another move at me and it'll *be* the last thing you do," Tommy snarled.

Trent jerked savagely down on Tommy's arm, half swinging him away from Faraday. "After tomorrow I don't care what you two do to each other, but you're not spoiling this job just when it's ready to spring."

Tommy exhaled and drew away from Trent. "All right,"

he said, "I've played along this far, I'll see it through."

"Don't do us any favors," Faraday sneered.

"Earl!" Trent snapped. "Cut it out."

"All he did was make a couple of keys . . ."

"And all *you* did was get a safety deposit box number from another man's mistress," Tommy exclaimed.

Faraday stiffened as if he had been jolted with a charge of electricity. "What's that?" he cried, in a sudden high-pitched voice.

"You heard me!"

Trent whirled furiously on Tommy. "Get out of here, Tommy." He began pushing him toward the door. Tommy resisted for a moment then allowed himself to be propelled along. Trent whispered into his ear as he whipped open the door.

"Telephone me, later."

He shoved Tommy through the door and slammed it on him.

Tommy glowered at the closed door, then strode down the hallway to the elevator. He rode down to the lobby and stepped out to the sidewalk and the first person he saw was Louie, standing at the curb.

He groaned. "For a minute, I forgot about you."

"Too bad," grinned Louie, "on account I ain't forgotten you. Where we goin' now?"

"You're going home," Tommy said. "Trent's taking you off."

"Oh yeah?"

"Oh yeah!" Tommy pulled open the door of the apartment house. "Let's call Trent."

Louie looked sharply at Tommy, then shrugged and stepped through the door ahead of Tommy. Inside he headed

for the elevator, but Tommy called to him: "He's got a visitor; let's call him on the phone."

He headed for the desk and picked up the house phone. He nodded to the clerk behind the desk. "Mr. Trent's apartment, please."

The man made a connection on the house switchboard. A moment later Trent's voice said curtly: "Yes?"

"This is Tommy Dancer, downstairs, Trent. Louie wants to verify you're taking him off."

"Put him on," Trent said.

Tommy handed the phone to Louie, who said: "It's me, Louie. Is it okay what he says? . . . Sure, I get it, sure. . . ." He hung up and looked at Tommy. "You win, chum."

Tommy clapped him on the shoulder. "Have a good rest, pal." Turning, he strode out of the apartment house and got into his car. As he tooled it out into the street he looked toward the Lehigh Apartments and saw Louie standing in the doorway. The shadow waved at him.

12

Tommy made a U-turn and coasted down Whitley to Hollywood Boulevard, where he turned right. He drove leisurely through West Hollywood and made the curve into Beverly Hills. He saw the arch that marked the beginning of the bridle path that ran along the center of Sunset Boulevard, through Beverly Hills, but there was no car parked on either side of the street. He drove a few blocks to the Beverly Hills Hotel and there made a U-turn and drove slowly back.

The yellow Cadillac was just drawing up to the curb at the end of the bridle path. Tommy parked about a hundred feet behind it, removed the ignition key from his lock and walked up to Betty Targ's car.

She saw him through the rear vision mirror and had the door open as he came up.

"We'll use my car," she said.

Tommy got in. "Where to?"

"How about the valley?"

"Any place is all right with me."

She started up the motor and shooting out into traffic made a reckless U-turn, driving swiftly into Beverly Hills. "No party tonight," she said, shooting a swift sideward glance at Tommy.

"I know."

"What do you mean, you know?"

Tommy hesitated, then exhaled. "Here we go again. I know because I left Earl Faraday with Willis Trent just a little while ago."

She slammed on the brakes and made a quick, half-skidding turn into Coldwater Canyon. She said: "What's between you and Willis Trent?"

"I know him, that's all."

"Oh, is it? Well, do you know what Trent's business is?"

"He's a bookie."

"And you're a customer?"

"No," Tommy said, then caught himself. "I mean, I'm not much of a horseplayer."

"Then how come you and he have become so thick all of a sudden?"

"I wouldn't say we were very thick."

"There's something between you, though." She was silent a moment. "And it has to do with Earl Faraday, too."

Tommy winced. "Look, could we leave Earl Faraday behind us, for once?"

"You're the one brought in his name."

"Yes, dammit, I did."

"I just want an answer to one question, Tommy, then we can forget it all and have a good time."

"No," Tommy said bluntly.

"No, what? About having a good time?"

"No, I won't answer your question."

"You don't even know what it is, so how can you say you won't answer it?"

"I've an idea what the question's going to be."

"What is it?"

Tommy shook his head.

Betty was sending the car zooming around the curves near Mulholland Drive. The tires screeched and she waited a moment until she had reached a straight stretch in the road. Then she said:

"You've got a stubborn streak in you, Tommy Dancer. And a touch of cruelty that's going to get you into trouble one of these days."

"I haven't run across many gentle souls in my time," Tommy said.

"No, I don't imagine you have. How old are you?"

"Twenty-eight."

"You were in the army, weren't you?"

"Four years."

Betty nodded and began braking the car as it began falling down the inner slope of the mountain that led into San Fernando Valley.

"You're pretty self-sufficient, Tommy, and you've had a rough time. You can take care of yourself in a tight corner. At least you think you can, but I wonder if you really know what kind of people you're associating with."

"I've a pretty good idea."

"Then answer my question, what're you and Trent—and Earl Faraday—up to?"

"What makes you think we're up to anything?"

"Because I happen to know that Earl and Trent have never been exactly bosom friends. And you—you're not at all like either one of them." She amended that quickly. "I mean that favorably."

"Look, Betty," Tommy said, "you don't have to soft-soap me. I know the score. You and Faraday broke up and to spite him you throw yourself at the first man who came along, a common laborer."

Betty was making a sharp turn with the car, but risked a quick glance at him. "You really believe that, don't you?"

"I'm not complaining," Tommy said, with a note that belied his statement. "I said I was satisfied with the crumbs." He laughed softly. "How else could I hope to be with a girl like you?"

She kept her eyes on the road as she manipulated the turns and Tommy risked a glance at her. Her chin was high in the air and Tommy would not have been surprised if electric sparks had flickered from her taut body.

She whipped the car around the last turn and sent it zooming along the level road that ran beside the Harvard School for Boys. Ventura Boulevard was only a short distance ahead and the traffic lights were red.

She exclaimed. "I've got it!"

"Yes?"

She was slowing down for the lights ahead, but as they turned green she stepped on the gas and made a quick left turn into Ventura. She waved toward a restaurant on the left side of the boulevard. "Let's eat there; the food isn't bad and it's quiet."

She drew in to the curb on the right side of the street and parked the car. Tommy got out and, running around to the left, helped her out. She flashed him a smile, took his hand and led the way across the boulevard, dodging a couple of cars en route.

The restaurant was a big flashy one, but there were only a few cars parked at the side, for the hour was still early. Betty and Tommy entered and a headwaiter came up.

"Good evening, Miss Targ," he greeted Betty, and to Tommy: "Yes sir, this way, please."

He led them to a booth at the far end of the room, where it was dim. As they seated themselves, Betty said to Tommy: "I'd like a cocktail. A daiquiri."

"Two," Tommy said to the waiter.

"Very good, sir, and will you have dinner later?"

"Probably."

The waiter went off and Betty planted her elbows on the table and looked at Tommy over her cupped hands. "They're using you, Tommy. Trent, or maybe it was Earl, found out about your knowledge of locks and keys."

"I'm not going to answer that question," Tommy persisted stubbornly.

"You don't have to. Earl's taken up with Flo Randall. He's been giving her the rush act, at which he's very good. Behind Paul deCamp's back. It's Paul they're after. His money . . . and that's where you come in. You're going to open his safe."

"This is a nice place," Tommy said, looking about the restaurant. "Do you come here often?"

"You *can* open safes, Tommy, can't you?"

"I can open a safe," Tommy replied, "if I've got the combination."

"Then Flo Randall got it for Earl."

"That wouldn't be very healthy for Flo, would it?"

"Not if deCamp knew it. But it'd be less healthy for *you*."

"Betty," said Tommy, "I'm not going to open Paul deCamp's wall safe. Take my word—"

"How do you know it's a wall safe?"

"Isn't it?"

"It is, but how did you know?"

"I just made a guess."

"You're lying, Tommy. Or—" she searched his face shrewdly—"or evading."

Tommy was given a momentary respite when the waiter came up with the drinks. He took up his glass and looked at Betty over the top of it. "To us!"

She barely tasted the drink. "You're evading, that's it. It has something to do with Paul deCamp, but it isn't his safe. You answered that, straight." She screwed up her face in thought. "You're an expert on locks and keys, but not safes. You can open any kind of a lock. I saw you do it."

"All right," Tommy cried, "all *right!* I can open locks. I've got a gift for it. I'm the best damn lock and key man in the country. But what're you getting at?"

"You're planning to rob Paul deCamp. I don't know how but it's got something to do with locks. And Willis Trent and Earl Faraday are using you as a tool."

"Why should *you* complain about that?" Tommy lashed at her. "Faraday'll have a roll of money and he can drop Flo Randall and take you up again."

"Damn you, Tommy Dancer," Betty shot back at him. "Can't you get it through that thick skull of yours that I'm through with Earl Faraday?"

"For the moment."

"For keeps. All right, I'll admit it, I thought I was in love with him. But even then I had no illusions about him. I knew him for what he was." She made an impatient gesture and laughed. "Women are fools about their men. The more worthless they are the bigger fools they are about them. Earl Faraday was never in love with me. He thought I had money and when he found out I didn't have any, well—he didn't want me then. I'm being brutally frank about it."

Tommy stared at her. "You've got a Cadillac car—a mink coat . . ."

"And a fine house in Beverly Hills," Betty said, scornfully. "With a nice mortgage on it. . . . My father died a year ago and mother and I discovered that he had cashed in even his annuities—yes, to buy this Cadillac car and mink coat—and a lot of other things. . . . So if you think you're getting a rich girl, forget it."

"What do you mean if I think I'm getting a rich girl?"

Betty leaned back against the seat cushion and looked steadily at Tommy. "If we didn't spend all our time fighting, maybe you'd know by now . . ."

Tommy's hand shot across the table and caught hold of both of Betty's hands. For a moment she averted her eyes then raised them to meet Tommy's. A smile parted her lips.

"Hello," she said.

13 Knuckles massaged the thin panels of the door and caused a series of small explosions inside the room. Tommy Dancer rolled over in bed, groaned and opened one eye. It focused itself with some difficulty upon the cheap alarm clock beside his bed. It read 7:10.

"For the love of Mike," he exclaimed.

"Tommy," someone called outside the door.

It was the voice of Willis Trent and it shocked Tommy awake. He threw back the bed covers and swung his bare feet to the floor. He crossed swiftly to the door and shot back the night latch.

Trent pushed open the door. "Hello, Tommy," he said, easily and took in the dingy apartment in a swift glance. "Nice place you got here."

"It isn't the Lehigh," Tommy retorted.

He walked back to the bed and seated himself on it. "Why the early visit?"

"You forgot to call me back last night," Trent replied. "Remember?"

Tommy grimaced. "I didn't get in until after two."

"Out with Faraday's girl, eh?"

"I'm no good for fighting," Tommy said, "not until I've had my breakfast."

"Get dressed then and we'll go out and get a bite. I haven't had my own breakfast."

Trent seated himself in the single mohair-covered chair in the room. Tommy headed for the bathroom and taking off his pajamas stuck his head under the cold shower. Then he dried himself and dressed quickly.

When he re-entered the other room Trent was still in the mohair chair. "We worked out the details last night," he said. "Faraday's going into the bank with you."

"I thought he didn't have a box there?"

"He doesn't. That's the point. He'll step up to the window right behind you and ask about renting a box. He can take longer that way; in fact, he's going to make a point of keeping the attendant occupied until you come out. We

went over it carefully. It's a matter of seconds and if I just filled out a slip, the girl might go in too soon." He drew a deep breath. "Besides, when the kickback comes they may check over the slips and see that on two occasions a man named Trent followed one named Dancer."

Tommy shrugged. "You may be right, but—where'll *you* be?"

"Outside, in a car. Oh, don't worry, I've timed it. I'll manage to come up about thirty seconds after you've stepped into the bank; and I'll see that I'm caught by the red light. That'll be another thirty seconds. Sixty altogether. Then I'll make a slow right turn. . . ."

"You're taking it for granted that I'm waited on as soon as I enter the bank."

"You will be, if you're outside the bank when it opens. You'll be the first one at the window and Faraday will see that no one steps up right after you, except himself."

Tommy nodded thoughtfully. "Sounds all right."

"It's got to be all right. I wouldn't go through this a second time for twice what there'll be in that box."

Tommy got his coat from the closet. "You've figured everything out, Trent. What about afterwards; do we split the money and run for the tall timber?"

Trent snorted. "Are you crazy? That'd be the surest way of drawing suspicion to us. We stash the money and we continue exactly the way we are now; you go back to your lock and key shop. You don't spend a dime more than you earn; not until I give you the word. I mean that, Tommy."

"It's all right with me. Only I was thinking about Faraday . . . and Flo Randall. She's going to be one of the first to know that Paul deCamp's money is gone and she's going to remember that she gave the box number to Faraday . . ."

Trent looked steadily at Tommy. "Don't you worry about that, Tommy. Little Flo didn't *give* that number to Faraday. In fact, she doesn't know that he got it." He was silent a moment. "You've kept your mouth shut, haven't you?"

"I don't think I talk very much."

"No, you don't, Tommy. You've got a tight lip." He shook his head. "Faraday's forte is women. I don't think anyone will suspect him of a caper like this. And me—I've kept to my own line pretty closely. As a matter of fact, I hardly know deCamp. I don't think we have much to worry about from *that* end. It's the bank. The insurance people. Their dicks are pretty smart and they never quit. There are five hundred boxes in that bank and everybody who's got one will be investigated." He hesitated. "At least everyone who's been in his box during the past week."

"Week? Why, week?"

"Because deCamp goes in every Friday . . ."

"Friday! That's today."

"I know. But don't worry, he never gets up until noon."

"I rented my box this week," Tommy said slowly, "and I've been in the vault three times since—counting today."

"You'll be called on. You can expect that. But if you keep your mouth shut there isn't a thing they can prove."

"My box," Tommy said. "It's got a fifty-dollar bond in it and the lease of this apartment. If they make me open it they'll wonder what the hell I kept going back and forth for . . . and the girl may remember that I went in today with a Boston bag."

"I've thought of that." The ghost of a smile flickered across Trent's face. "That's why I filled up the Boston bag for you. You'll dump the stuff into your box. Two hundred nice, shiny silver dollars, one hundred Indian pennies and

twenty-seven dollars' worth of Navajo turquoise jewelry. Your life's savings and your hobby. Just about what they'd expect of a man in your position."

Tommy grunted his appreciation of Trent's foresight. "You haven't missed much."

"I haven't missed anything," Trent said. He got to his feet. "Are you ready?"

They left the apartment and the building. Trent had a black coupe parked at the curb nearby. "The Boston bag's in the luggage compartment, but we might as well leave it there until we eat breakfast. Where do you usually eat around here?"

"There's a little place near Highland and Sunset."

Trent frowned, then shook his head. "Get in and we'll eat at some restaurant where neither of us is known."

They got into the car and Trent drove carefully to Wilshire Boulevard, where they found a small restaurant. They had a leisurely breakfast and when they came out, Trent looked at his watch.

"Nine-ten; where do you keep your car?"

"Sometimes in the garage behind the apartment, sometimes I leave it all night out on the street. That's where it is now."

"Move it." Trent frowned. "I'll be picking you up outside the bank, but I'll drop you afterwards, so you can get down to your job at a reasonable time."

"Ten-thirty isn't reasonable."

"You've been late other mornings. You overslept."

They got back into Trent's car and drove down Highland Avenue to within a short distance of Fountain. There Trent pulled up to the curb.

He took the two safety deposit box keys from his pocket.

"Here are the keys. You've got almost forty minutes to move your car and get to the bank before it opens at ten o'clock. Faraday'll be there, but don't speak to him or show any sign of recognition."

They got out of the car and Trent opened the luggage compartment in the rear. He took out a small Boston bag and handed it to Tommy. The bag was quite heavy.

Tommy nodded and walked off. At the corner of Fountain he looked back. Trent was still standing on the curb beside his car. Tommy turned right into Fountain and walked swiftly to Las Palmas and located his car near the apartment.

He got in and deposited the Boston bag on the seat. Then he looked into the rear vision mirror, stooped forward, and groped under the seat. His fingers touched a thick Manila envelope and fished it out. He opened the Boston bag quickly and dropped the envelope into it. Then he started the motor and drove carelessly up Las Palmas to Sunset.

He turned right on Sunset, went a few blocks, then made another turn on Cahuenga. Crossing Santa Monica he found a long stretch of curbing vacant of cars and parked there.

Carrying the Boston bag he walked back to Santa Monica. A bus was coming along and he signaled it. Climbing aboard he rode to Hollywood Boulevard and there, descending, started walking toward Highland Avenue, several blocks away.

It was fifteen minutes to ten and he sauntered along easily, so that he reached the bank at three minutes to ten. A half dozen people were standing outside the door, waiting for the bank to open. One of them was Earl Faraday, who stood at the corner of the building, reading a newspaper. He paid no attention to Tommy.

Tommy took up a stand in front of the double glass doors and, looking out over the street, began whistling softly. A minute passed. Inside the bank employees moved around, taking up their positions in the tellers' compartments.

Tommy looked over his shoulder into the bank and saw a uniformed bank guard come up to the door. He turned casually.

Inside the bank, the guard looked at the wall clock and took up a post by the doors. The moments ticked away and finally the guard, with a last look at the wall clock, unlatched the glass doors.

Tommy pushed open the door and was the first customer in the bank. He headed straight for the Safety Deposit window. He set the Boston bag on the counter at his elbow and reached for the pad of blanks.

"Good morning, Mr. Dancer," the attendant said to him.

Tommy winced a little at the use of his name. "Uh, good morning." Then he added somewhat lamely: "I keep finding things at home to put in my box."

He pushed the pad to her and she tore off the slip and stamped it in the timing device. The door buzzer whirled and Tommy followed her into the safety deposit vault. Just as he went inside, he shot a glance over his shoulder and saw Earl Faraday stepping up to the safety deposit window. He exhaled softly in relief.

The custodian of the vault opened Tommy's box and left the vault. Tommy took out his box, carried it to the high table in the room and opened the Boston bag. He took from it a canvas sack filled with silver dollars, a Manila envelope in which coins rattled and a small pasteboard box. The thick envelope he had taken from under the seat of his car he left in the bag. He put the other objects in the box, re-

turned it to the compartment and closed the door. Then he took the Boston Bag and left the vault.

14

Earl Faraday was still at the safety deposit window. He was saying: "That seems like a lot of money, but I'll think it over and come back in a day or two."

Tommy walked through the bank, aware that Earl Faraday was directly behind him.

He stepped out to the sidewalk and finding the lights green, started across the street. Midway across, he had to stop as Willis Trent's coupe turned the corner in front of him. Trent braked to a stop a few yards away and Tommy quickened his steps. Earl Faraday, coming up close behind him, snatched the Boston bag from his hand.

Trent, leaning across the seat, opened the car door and Tommy ducked his head and slid into the seat. Faraday crowded him in and was barely seated before Trent was shifting into second and gunning his motor.

"Okay?" Trent asked tautly.

"Here's the bag," said Faraday grimly. He ripped it open and stared down at the contents of the Manila envelope. "What the hell!" he ejaculated.

"That's what I said inside the bank," Tommy offered. "If there's two hundred thousand in that . . ."

The car suddenly slewed sideways as Trent jerked the wheel spasmodically. "Open it," he cried hoarsely.

Faraday tore the end off the envelope and, reaching in, pulled out a sheaf of bills, all fives and tens.

"Chicken feed," he said, with a sudden catch in his throat.

They were on Hollywood Boulevard, only a couple

of blocks from the bank but Trent pulled the car to a sudden stop in front of a fire plug and, with his foot on the brake to hold the car, reached sideways and grabbed Tommy's coat with both hands.

"What're you trying to pull, Tommy?" he shouted.

"Not a goddam thing," Tommy snarled. "That's all there was in the box, that measly envelope."

Faraday was riffling the bills. "Two, maybe three hundred," he said, in a tone of awe.

"You lost your nerve," raged Trent. "You grabbed the first thing in the box and ran."

"I did not," retorted Tommy. "I took everything there was in the box—and *that* was all." He added, glowering, "Whoever told you he kept two hundred thousand in that box, gave you a bum steer."

"There wasn't two hundred thousand this week," put in Faraday, "but there was a hundred and sixty thousand. *That* I know."

"She told you wrong."

"She?"

"Flo Randall!"

"Who told you I got my information from Flo Randall?" Faraday cried.

Willis Trent groaned and grabbed the wheel again. "Let's not go into that here on the street. There's something about this stinks to high heaven and I'm going to get to the bottom of it—but not here."

He slammed the gear lever into second and the car leaped forward so suddenly that both Tommy and Faraday were hurled back against the cushions.

The car shot across La Brea and roared down Hollywood Boulevard. Faraday, beside Tommy, folded his arms

across his chest and scowled at the windshield. Between the two men, Tommy Dancer relaxed.

Trent drove past Fairfax to Laurel Canyon and turned right. He sent the car shrieking around the sharp turns, forward and upward into the hills. He reached Mulholland Drive in record time and there made a left turn.

"Where are we going?" Faraday asked, then.

"You'll see," Trent replied grimly.

He drove a half mile or so, then suddenly made a sharp right turn on a graveled road that led from Mulholland Drive up a thirty-five degree slope to the summit of a hill. After a few hundred yards on this road, the drive suddenly petered out in a graveled yard, which had a flat-roofed stucco house at the end of it.

Although a comparatively short distance from a well-traveled road the spot was as isolated as if it had been a hundred miles out in the desert. There was no other habitation within sight.

Trent braked the car to a stop and shut off the motor. He climbed out and waited for Faraday and Tommy to step to the ground. Faraday surveyed the house and the grounds.

"Whose place is this?"

"It belongs to a friend."

"Who?"

"What difference does it make?"

Faraday frowned but followed Trent toward the back door of the stuccoed house. Tommy Dancer walked between the two men. When they reached the door, Trent took out a key.

"A friend, eh?" Faraday said pointedly.

"He lets me use the place."

They went into the house, through a kitchen that

gleamed with white-enameled fixtures, through a butler's pantry into a long, pine-beamed living room. Wide plate glass windows looked out over the mountainside to Hollywood far below. A man with a rifle could shoot down into the city from here . . . and nobody would know from where the bullet came.

The room was furnished with red mohair-covered furniture, but it was completely lacking in personal effects.

"Sit down," Trent said curtly and went to a telephone at the far side of the room. He picked it up and dialed a number.

"Trent talking," he said into the phone. "I want you to come up to the Mulholland Drive place. Right away, understand?" He hung up, waited a moment and dialed again. When he got an answer he repeated his order.

Finished, he put down the phone and faced Faraday and Tommy Dancer. "Give me that money," he said to Faraday.

Faraday crossed and handed him the Manila envelope in which he had replaced the sheaf of bills. Trent slipped the money out into his hand and counted it, carefully.

"An even two hundred and fifty—in five and ten dollar bills."

"Small change for a man like deCamp," Faraday said.

Trent nodded. "He wouldn't bother to put a sum like this in a safety deposit box."

"Look," said Tommy Dancer, "that's all there was in the box. If you talk yourself blue in the face, I can't make it more. And if you think I've got some stashed in my pockets, you're welcome to search me."

"That won't be necessary . . . just yet," Trent replied.

"No? Well, then I'm leaving. I've got things to do and—"

"And what?"

Trent reached into his coat and brought out a snub-nosed .32 caliber revolver. "You'll leave when I tell you to leave."

"Where'd you get the rod?" exclaimed Faraday. "I thought we'd agreed—"

"Sure," said Trent, "we agreed. But I brought one along anyway. Just in case. And this is the case."

He gestured to Tommy with the gun. "You can sit down. This is going to take awhile."

Tommy knew that defiance would be fruitless at the moment. He crossed to the red sofa and sat down. Trent seated himself across the room in an armchair. Faraday elected to remain standing, to one side, where he could watch both Trent and Dancer.

"I don't give a damn what you say, Willis," he said, "but I'll bet everything I've got that deCamp had that money in his box this week."

"Oh, I don't doubt you, Faraday," Trent replied. "That's not the question. I know deCamp has that kind of money. I know that he's *got* to have it in his business. The question is, what became of the money? Where is it now?" He paused significantly. "In short, who pulled the double cross?"

"What double cross is there?" snapped Tommy. "The money wasn't in the box, that's all."

"The money *was* in the box," Faraday insisted. "At least it was there two days ago."

"Exactly," said Trent.

Tommy reached into his pocket and drew out the two safety deposit keys. He threw them to the floor. "There are the keys. Go back to the bank. Look for yourself."

"On that," Trent said, "I take your word. I'm quite sure

the box is empty—just as sure as I am that deCamp had a lot more money than this in the box.”

Angrily, Tommy pointed at Faraday. “You had your eye on me from the moment I stepped out of the vault. You followed me out of the bank and you grabbed the bag from me before we got into the car.”

“That’s right, Willis,” Faraday said, his forehead creasing. “He couldn’t have slipped anything to—to a confederate.”

“Confederate!” snorted Trent. “There are no damn confederates in this. I didn’t cut anyone in and with the amount of money involved, I doubt if either of you two would. But there’s been a double cross somewhere and that’s what we’re going to find out before any of us leaves this place.” He pointed to Faraday with the gun. “Let’s take a look at you first, Earl.”

“All right,” snarled Faraday, “look at me. Without my contribution there wouldn’t have been any caper in the first place. Now, how do you figure me for a double cross?”

“You might have done a very good sales job on Flo Randall,” Trent said, “so good that you didn’t figure you needed to split with anyone else.”

“You’re crazy! Even if I’d been able to get deCamp’s key from Flo, what good would that do me? I couldn’t go down to the bank and ask them to let me into deCamp’s box.”

“The box could be in the names of both deCamp and Randall,” Trent suggested.

Faraday snorted. “Paul deCamp wouldn’t trust any woman with two hundred thousand cents.”

Trent hesitated a moment, then nodded. “I think you’re right.”

He suddenly shifted to Tommy Dancer. "That leaves you, Tommy."

"Oh, does it?"

Outside, a motor, laboring, could be heard. Then it stopped and a car door slammed. Trent, his eyes narrowing, said to Tommy: "Sit tight."

A door opened and closed and feet pounded in the kitchen. Louie, Tommy's late shadow, plunged into the room. He came to an abrupt halt when he saw Trent in command of the situation.

"Oh, hello, boss," he said. "I was afraid from the way you sounded—"

"It's all right," Trent said. "I just wanted to ask you some questions."

"Now see here, Trent," Faraday interrupted. "If you're going to let him in on this—"

"Shut up, Faraday!" Trent snapped. "I'm running this show."

"Who said you were?" Faraday blustered. But a glance from Trent's steely eyes silenced him.

"Louie," Trent said softly, "when did I put you on Tommy Dancer's tail?"

"Day before yesterday. In the morning."

"All right, give us a report on his movements—like you gave me last night."

Louie took a notebook from his pocket and turning a page translated from his notes: "Left the Melrose Lock and Key Shop at eleven-thirty; drove to Melrose and Highland Avenue and started to make a right turn. I pulled up behind him and he suddenly went off to the left, in front of cars in the left lane. I couldn't make the turn and"—he looked up and scowled at Tommy—"I lost him."

"That was when you spotted him, wasn't it, Tommy?" Trent asked, pleasantly.

Tommy shook his head. "No. I remember the incident. I meant to make a left turn and was daydreaming and then all of a sudden I found myself in the right-turn lane." He shrugged. "So I made a left turn."

Trent nodded. "Skip yesterday's, Louie. Just tell about last night."

"You mean from before I followed him to your place?"

"No, after he left."

"Okay. Like you know, he got me into the building and called you on the telephone. Said you were going to pull me off—only you didn't—so I followed . . ."

Tommy cursed under his breath.

". . . He picked up this babe in Beverly Hills, right at the end of the Strip, then they went back into Beverly Hills and headed out over Coldwater Canyon. I had a hard time following them because that Cadillac sure covered the ground—"

"You were out with Betty Targi!" snarled Earl Faraday. He took a step forward, but Trent waved him back with the gun.

"Go ahead, Louie."

"Sure. They stopped in a restaurant on Ventura, just off Coldwater. They had dinner there, for about an hour or so, then they came out and went to Pete Moy's Place and from there to Mickey Cobbler's Supper Club and then to the Black Chrysanthemum and then they headed back to town and hit a couple of places on the Strip. The Bull Dog and Whistle, and the Aurora Club and then they went home." He coughed. "I mean the babe took him up to the Strip where he'd left his car. And then they . . . well, after awhile

she went off in her own car—the Cadillac—and he got into his heap and went back to his place on Las Palmas. It was after two o'clock then and when he went inside I figured he was calling it a night, so I went home myself."

Louie closed his little book and smirked at Tommy Dancer. "No hard feelings, pal?"

"No," said Tommy, "none that a good punch in the nose can't cure."

"Dinner," Willis Trent said, "in an expensive restaurant and six night clubs afterwards. Pretty steep for a man who makes about fifty dollars a week."

"I saved my money."

"And blew it all in one night?" Trent fingered the stack of bills in his hand. "Where'd you get this two-fifty?"

"I told you. From Paul deCamp's—"

"Shut up!" cried Earl Faraday, leaping to his feet. "You want to tell one more and then another and pretty soon everybody in town'll know."

"Louie's all right," said Trent. "He works for me."

"So you told him," snarled Faraday. "Who else?"

A door buzzer whirred so suddenly and unexpectedly that Faraday gave a violent start. But Trent merely nodded to Louie. "Let him in."

15

Louie trotted off in the direction of the kitchen. Faraday, making an effort to control himself, said: "Another one?"

"Yes," replied Trent. "I told you I wasn't taking any chances."

A shifty-eyed little man of five feet six or seven came into the room with Louie. "Hello, Mr. Trent," he said. "I came right away."

Trent nodded. "Fine; you know Mr. Faraday . . ."

"By sight."

"Mr. Kraft," Trent explained, "is what you might call a shamus; a private detective. . . ."

"Investigator," offered Kraft, "and you can call me Fred."

"All right, Fred. Did you bring your report along with you?"

"Yes, I thought you might want it." Kraft reached into his breast pocket and produced a folded sheet of paper. He went toward Trent to hand it to him, but Trent waved it away.

"Read it."

"Out loud?"

"Yes."

Kraft shrugged and unfolding the paper began to read: "Picked up subject at his apartment on South Reeve, in—"

"That's me," cried Faraday.

"That's right, Mr. Faraday," Kraft said.

"You had *me* shadowed?" Faraday stormed.

"Yes," snapped Trent. "Now, be quiet so we can all hear this."

His face red with rage, Faraday retreated to the mohair armchair and plopped himself down on it.

" . . . at ten-thirty, in the A.M.," Kraft pursued. "Subject came out of the garage in a convertible roadster, and drove to Packs' Park Avenue Store on Wilshire, where he picked up a young lady. A redhead—I, uh, a titian-haired young lady." He smirked. "Very beautiful. They drove down Wilshire to Santa Monica and parked on the ocean front, where they sat in the car for about an hour, watching the sad sea waves, you might say. After which time they re-

turned down Wilshire and went to subject's apartment on South Reeve. They were inside for about two hours, you might say—”

“A matinee,” suggested Tommy Dancer.

Kraft beamed at Tommy. “Very good. I, uh, didn’t catch your name . . . ?”

“Tommy Dancer,” offered Trent.

“. . . In case you have to shadow me, you might say.”

The private detective chuckled. “A pleasure, Mr. Dancer.” He cleared his throat and read again: “‘At three-twenty, subject came out of apartment with the, ah, titian-haired young lady and returned her to Packs’ Park Avenue Store, after which he drove across Beverly Hills to Foothill Boulevard. Very odd. He drove up Foothill and down Foothill, four times—’”

“Three!” snarled Faraday.

“Four,” Kraft insisted firmly. “I am never wrong on something like that. . . .” He consulted his schedule once more. “‘It was now five minutes to four and he drove to Sunset Boulevard and all the way down to Vine. He parked in a parking lot near the Brown Derby and crossed to Mike Lyman’s Place, where he had three bourbons and water’—I had two, which you will find on the expense account—‘and then he drove to Russo Cobb’s restaurant on Hollywood Boulevard and had four bourbons and bought two for a young lady, with whom he later had dinner. At ten minutes after six he suddenly left the young lady, with the dessert—although he paid the bill, and rushing out, drove to the Lehigh Apartments on North Whitley . . .’ to see you, I imagine, Mr. Trent.”

“All right,” Trent said, “he left before nine. What then?”

“That’s all, sir,” Kraft continued. “He drove to his apart-

ment on South Reeve and never came out again, although I waited until after one o'clock, as you instructed."

"Make something out of that," Faraday said, through bared teeth.

"I make something out of the redhead," Trent said calmly. "That was Flo Randall."

"We never went near the bank."

"Not yesterday," Trent sighed. "Unfortunately, Mr. Kraft didn't start to shadow you until then." He looked at Louie. "You didn't read the complete dossier on Tommy."

"Doss-doss-say? You mean the report? You only asked for last night."

"Let's hear the whole day."

Louie again took out his notebook. "Picked him up at nine-thirty in the morning. He had breakfast at a place on Highland, then went to the bank. He was inside only a few minutes, then came out and went to his shop on Melrose. You went in about a half hour later and after you left, he came out and got in his car and drove to a joint on Santa Monica, the Hadley Manufacturing Company. This was about eleven-fifteen and he stayed in there until after one o'clock. He went back to the shop then and stayed until five o'clock when he went to his apartment. He came out and went to your place. From there on I told you before."

"Make something of *that*," Tommy said pointedly.

"You knew you were being shadowed," Trent said. He hesitated. "I wonder if you knew it last night."

"Of course I knew it."

"Uh-uh," Louie cut in. "He didn't know it. I'm sure. Not the way him and the babe was—"

Faraday snarled deep in his throat and Louie looked at him in mild surprise. "Did I say something?"

"Faraday's girl," Trent offered.

"Dancer's girl," Tommy corrected.

"She ain't got red, I mean, titian hair," Louie said.

"Not the same girl." Trent made an impatient gesture. "That's beside the point." He looked at Kraft, the little private detective.

"Fred, I've got another job for you. A Miss Elizabeth Targ, who lives on Foothill Boulevard in Beverly Hills—bring her here."

Tommy said curtly: "Keep her out of this."

Trent ignored Tommy. "Get her," he said to Kraft.

"For sure, you mean?" asked Kraft. "If she wants to come or not?"

"I said, bring her!"

Kraft bobbed his head up and down and started for the kitchen. Tommy Dancer catapulted from the sofa and lunged for the little private detective. He had hold of the man's arm and was whirling him around when Louie sprang up behind him and landed a crashing blow on his ear.

Tommy went over sideways, dropped to his knees and remained there for a moment, while a roaring filled his ears. Then it cleared away suddenly and he pushed himself up from the floor.

Louie stood over him, his feet wide apart, a mocking grin on his thin lips. Tommy came up and Louie gave him his knee in the groin. Tommy went down to the floor a second time, gasping in agony.

Trent came over. "Get up!"

Fighting nausea, Tommy climbed weakly to his feet. "Slugging is Louie's trade, so get wise to yourself. Take off your coat."

Tommy blinked at him stupidly. Louie stepped around

Trent, caught hold of Tommy's coat and peeled it off his shoulders. Trent nodded to him and the swarthy man began searching the coat. While he was engaged in the task, Kraft left the room and the house.

Tommy moved heavily back to the couch and seated himself. He watched Louie go through his coat and gave the man grudging approval for the way he performed the task. Louie missed nothing. The pockets he emptied cursorily, but his real work began after that. He examined every seam in the coat, went over every inch of the lining, feeling, bending, crinkling the cloth. A scrap of paper could not have remained concealed. Finally, he tossed the coat to the floor.

"The pants," he said.

Tommy hesitated, then caught Trent's cold glance and rising, removed his trousers. Louie gave them the same examination he had given the coat, then went over Tommy's shoes and his person.

When he completed his search he shook his head. "Four bucks fifty cents, a key to safety deposit box 365, and a pawn ticket for a wrist watch, hocked for twenty."

Trent was already scanning the pawn ticket. "Two weeks ago you pawned your watch and you haven't had enough extra money to get it out. Yet last night you went to six night clubs."

"Faraday could give you the answer to that," Tommy said testily. "He's been doing it all his life." He was putting on his clothes.

"I made up my mind," said Faraday, "I'm not going to get sore at you again; not until this is over. But then I'm going to meet you somewhere." His face twitched spasmodically. "I never got a nickel from Betty Targ."

"I know you didn't," Tommy said calmly.

"That two-fifty," Trent persisted. "You got it somewhere."

Louie exclaimed, "Is that what's worrying you, boss? Hell, I couldda told you that long ago. He got it cashin' those checks last night."

Trent stared at Louie. "What checks?"

"Why, every night club they went, he cashed a check. The girl did, I mean, but she always slipped him the change. . . . Is that what's been worrying you?"

Trent swore softly. "You cleaned out the box yesterday morning and then you got together this two-fifty last night to hand to us."

"If I emptied the box," Tommy said, "why would I have to round up two hundred and fifty dollars?"

"Because the stuff was in big bills," Trent made an impatient gesture. "How do I know just what you did?" He paused a moment, then added significantly, "But you're going to tell us!"

"I can't tell you something I don't know."

Trent caught Louie's eye and the swarthy man's face lit up in anticipation. He stepped toward Tommy. "There's nothing personal in this, pal . . ."

"No," said Tommy and, ducking under Louie's sizzling right, smashed his fist into Louie's stomach. Louie let out a startled "oof" and folded over forward. He was in perfect position for an uppercut and Tommy followed through with it, but Louie, realizing his peril, rolled away from the punch and Tommy's fist merely grazed his chin.

Then Louie went to work. He fainted with his left and, when Tommy stepped up, sent him staggering with a savage right. He followed up his advantage with a left hook, then a pile-driving right that sent Tommy to his knees. Louie

didn't stop there. His style of fighting did not include sportsmanship. He was out to destroy, quickly and thoroughly. He used his fists as well as his feet . . . and when he got through with Tommy Dancer, the latter was sprawled on the floor, unconscious. A final, savage kick in the stomach did not even cause Tommy's body to quiver.

16

One moment Tommy Dancer was wrapped in the veil of unconsciousness and the next he was awake, his body a mass of screaming pain.

A series of little explosions rocked his tortured head and then a sepulchral voice said, from a great distance: "So you've come 'round?"

Through a fog Tommy Dancer saw a giant standing over him. He closed his eyes tightly, then reopened them and saw that the haze had cleared and the man standing over him was revealed in his true proportions. Willis Trent.

Beyond Trent, Tommy saw a pair of trousered legs. He rolled his eyes a little further and they focused upon slim, nyloned legs and above them the hem of a checked tweed skirt. Tommy gasped and sat up so suddenly that a groan of pain was forced from his lips.

"Tommy," Betty Targ exclaimed.

She came toward him and stooped, but Tommy, fighting nausea, rose to meet her. He was grateful for her steady hand on his arm. "Tommy," Betty said poignantly, "are you all right?"

Pain lancing through him, Tommy said: "I'm all right."

He looked around the room. Faraday leaned against the far wall, a sardonic, evil look in his eyes. But of Fred Kraft, the private detective, Tommy saw nothing. Yet he must have brought Betty Targ here.

At last Tommy's eyes came to rest upon Willis Trent's face. And if the bookie had been angry before, he was seething now.

"It's out," Trent said savagely. "Kraft got it on his radio. Paul deCamp went to the bank at eleven o'clock. One hundred and seventy-five thousand smackers . . . in one-hundred dollar bills!"

Tommy sought Betty Targ's face and saw confirmation. He pushed away from the group and, stumbling, found the sofa. He dropped heavily on it.

"Who got the money?" he asked.

Across the room, Earl Faraday laughed harshly. But Trent, shooting him an angry look, followed Tommy Dancer. He stood in front of the couch looking down. "I'm through fooling around with you, Dancer. I want to know what you did with that money . . . and I want to know it now."

Tommy sighed wearily. "Go to hell!"

Louie came up beside Trent. "Again?" he asked.

"No," replied Trent. "He's stubborn and he'll take a lot."

"Up to a point, boss," said Louie. "Up to a point. I'll make him talk."

"Sure you will, Louie," agreed Trent. "But you can do it the easy way."

He suddenly whirled and lunged for Betty Targ. He caught her by a wrist and pushed her toward Louie. "Make her yell, Louie. Loud."

Tommy propelled himself to his feet and met the stubby revolver in the hand of Trent. It was jammed into his stomach.

"Go ahead, Louie," Trent said, over his shoulder.

"You can't make—" Betty began but her words were cut short by a sudden, shrill scream of pain.

Tommy capitulated. "The money's in my box." He stepped around Trent and caught Betty in his arms, although Louie still cling to her wrist. "I merely transferred it from deCamp's box to my own."

In his arms, Betty sobbed. "I couldn't help it, Tommy, I—I didn't want to . . . you didn't have to tell them."

"It's all right, Betty," Tommy soothed her. He led her to the sofa, Louie relinquishing his grip. He sat her down and stood over her, shielding her with his own body.

Earl Faraday had come away from the wall. "I told you all the time that he had it and a lot of good it's going to do us now."

"Shut up, Faraday," snarled Trent. "I've got to think." His fists clenched, he strode across the room and back.

"All right, Dancer, you'll go down and get the money . . ."

Faraday cried out: "Have you lost your senses, Trent? They'll be watching every person who goes into that vault."

"That can't be helped," Trent grated. "It's ten minutes to two; the bank doesn't close until three. All they know is that deCamp claims some money was stolen from his safety deposit box. They can suspect everybody and anybody who's had access to the vault, but they can't stop people going to their own boxes."

"I wouldn't go into that vault today for a million dollars," Faraday said, shuddering.

"You wouldn't, but Dancer would. Because we're going to keep the girl here. He's going down to get that money and he'll come back with it . . . alone. Because we'll be waiting here . . . and watching . . ."

"And if I'm arrested?" Tommy asked.

"That'll be too bad." Trent nodded toward Betty. "For her."

Tommy Dancer drew a deep breath. "Give me the Boston bag."

"No, Tommy," cried Betty. "You can't go back there. They—they'll arrest you."

"That's a chance I'll have to take."

"The bag's in the car," said Trent. "And here's your key. Go fix up your face in the kitchen."

Tommy felt his face and discovered several bruises and some dried blood. He headed for the kitchen. Louie started to follow, but Trent signaled him back.

In the kitchen Tommy found a mirror above the sink and grimaced as he examined his face. He washed himself and took another look in the mirror. A couple of bruises still showed up, but he didn't look too unpresentable.

Louie came into the kitchen. "I'm going with you, pal."

"I can do without you."

"Sure, but how you going to get down into Hollywood from here?" He winked at Tommy. "I'll be your chauffeur, that's all."

Tommy knew that Louie had received his instructions and did not protest. They left the kitchen and crossed the yard to Louie's coupe. They got in, Louie behind the wheel. The Boston bag was on the seat. Tommy picked it up and held it on his lap.

Louie started the car, turned in the yard and in second gear began descending the steep graveled road to Mulholland Highway, some distance below.

When they neared the paved highway, Louie braked the car to a stop. "Look," he said. He leaned across Tommy and pointed upward.

Tommy turned and followed Louie's pointing finger. Although the road that led up to Trent's house was only partially in sight, due to spiraling up the hill, part of the house could be seen from this point. Sunlight flashed on plate glass window.

"See what I mean?" Louie said. "They can see anybody starting up the road and they've got two-three minutes to make a getaway."

"Where to?"

"Don't be a sucker. There's a back way out, a little tunnel that runs from the house underground to the edge of the cliff and comes out on a neat little path that you can't see from the top. I just thought I'd tell you in case you get any ideas—such as hollering copper."

"Why should I go to the police?" Tommy demanded. "I'm as guilty as Trent and Faraday."

"Sure you are, but there's the babe. Personally, I don't see babes like that myself, but in the movies guys do funny things for babes—like givin' themselves up and such."

Tommy grunted. "I just don't like to see a woman slapped around. Or a man, for that matter."

"I told you there wasn't nothing personal in that." Louie tooled the car out onto Mulholland Drive. "You got a pretty good punch yourself, you know. For an amateur."

"Thanks."

Louie let the car out and in a few minutes reached Laurel Canyon. He descended the steep, curved canyon road with his foot on the gas most of the time, braking only for the sharpest turns. The car careened wildly around several curves, the tires screeching in protest. Tommy doubted if Laurel Canyon had ever been negotiated so quickly. And

Louie continued the fast pace up Hollywood Boulevard. When they reached La Brea he slowed down.

"I'm going to let you out in front of the Masonic Temple," he said. "When you come out I'll be parked on Orchid Street, right near the Temple. You can always find a parking spot there, this time of the day. I'll be lookin' for you in five minutes, not more'n ten."

"I can't guarantee the time," Tommy retorted. "If I'm questioned it'll be a good deal longer than ten minutes."

"It's twenty-five minutes to three. The bank closes at three; I'll wait until then."

They were already passing the Roosevelt Hotel and the Masonic Temple was just beyond, within a block of the bank. Louie slowed down the car and pulled up to the curb.

Tommy got out and Louie made a sharp left turn into Orchid. Tommy took a deep breath and walked toward the bank. As he approached his step faltered.

Fred Kraft, the private detective, was standing at the corner of the building. His face was cheerful and alert and he peered in Tommy's direction, and past him, as if to see if a streetcar was approaching.

17

Tommy entered the bank. A uniformed policeman was in the rear, talking to a bank guard. Inside the enclosure, near the left front of the room, two men had chairs pulled up to the bank manager's desk and were conversing earnestly with him.

Tommy walked steadily to the Safety Deposit Window. The attendant stared at him and Tommy gritted his teeth. As he filled out the little blank he was aware that she breathed more heavily than necessary. He showed the pad

of blanks to her and she tore off his slip, looked at it and said:

"Just a moment, please."

She walked through the rear door in her cage, along a narrow passageway to the front of the bank, where the bank officers were in conference. Every instinct told Tommy to run as fast as he could, to ignore shouts. But he held his ground.

And then the attendant came back. She was followed by two men. "Will you come in, please?" She pressed the door buzzer and Tommy entered. He headed for the bank vault, but halfway to it stopped and looked back. The two men almost collided with him.

"Mr. Dancer," one of them said, "I'd like to have a few words with you."

"Go ahead," Tommy said boldly.

The man smiled wanly and nodded toward the bank vault. Tommy stepped through the door. A hatchet-faced man of about fifty who was standing in the vault sized him up sharply.

"Mr. Dancer," said the man who had accosted Tommy, "my name is Benedict and I'm the manager of this bank."

"Oh, yes?"

"This is Mr. Milner," Benedict went on, indicating the hatchet-faced man, "and Mr. Plennert. There's, ah, been, a bit of trouble and we, ah, would like—"

The man named Plennert interrupted smoothly. "If you don't mind, Mr. Benedict . . ."

Benedict exclaimed, "Of course, Mr. Plennert!"

"To put it bluntly," Plennert said, "there's been a robbery—"

"That's why I'm here," Tommy said coolly.

"What?"

"I'm getting my things out of my box. If one box's been robbed, another can be."

"Who told you a safety deposit box has been robbed?" Plennert demanded.

"I've got a radio," Tommy said pointedly.

Plennert seemed disappointed. "We didn't want it to get out, but unfortunately"—Plennert frowned at the bank manager—"Mr. Benedict inadvertently told the police."

"What else was I to do?" exclaimed Benedict. "You didn't hear Paul deCamp . . ."

"I heard him."

"After he'd cooled off."

The vault custodian came into the little room and handed Plennert several slips. He looked at them and his eyes lit up. "Mr. Dancer," he said, "you rented your box on Tuesday of this week, did you not?"

"That's what it says on the slip, doesn't it?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm unrenting it now. If a man's safety deposit box isn't safe . . ."

Tommy took his keys from his pocket and inserted one of them into the lower lock of Box #365. He looked over his shoulder at the vault attendant. "Your key . . ."

Plennert stepped forward. "Just a moment, Mr. Dancer, I'd like to ask you a couple of questions."

"I've a right to get the stuff out of my box," Tommy protested.

"Of course you have. It isn't that." Plennert frowned down at the slips in his hand. "It's just that, well, you rented the box on Tuesday, you examined it again the same day—"

"No," Tommy cut in. "I put some things into it. And

a couple more times since." He cleared his throat. "As a matter of fact, I put some money into it only this morning . . . before I heard about the robbery."

"That's what I want to talk to you about. The number of times you've come in here, well, in such a short period."

"I didn't know there were any rules as to how often you could open your box," Tommy said.

"There aren't. Only, well, don't you see there's been a—a robbery and . . ."

Tommy exclaimed in assumed astonishment. "You mean you suspect *me*?"

"No, no," Plennert said hastily. "It's only that . . . we're investigating everyone who . . . well, everyone."

He grimaced and suddenly gestured to the bank attendant. "Miss Ungerman, your key."

Miss Ungerman started to hand the key to Plennert, then caught herself and looked questioningly at Benedict, the manager of the bank. He nodded.

Plennert took the key from Miss Ungerman's hand, moved up beside Tommy and inserted it in the top lock of the box. He turned it.

Tommy nodded. "Thanks." He opened the box door and drew out the long, enameled safety deposit box. "I don't mind," he said, "you can see what I've got in it."

"You don't object?" Plennert purred.

"Why should I? I've got nothing to conceal." Tommy carried the box to the high table, set the Boston bag on it, then grinning sardonically, opened the bag and revealed the inside of it. "Nothing, see?"

He opened the safety deposit box, throwing back the long cover, so that it rested against the back of the stand. He reached in. "A fifty dollar bond . . . in *my* name." He

held it up so Plennert, Benedict and Milner could see it clearly. "The lease to my apartment . . ."

Plennert's hand shot out: "Do you mind?"

Tommy cocked his head to one side and looked at Plennert from narrowed eyes. But he handed the lease to Plennert.

Plennert looked at the lease, nodded, then shuffled the slips in his hand until he came to a card. "Ah, yes," he said.

"My address!" exclaimed Tommy. "You wanted to make sure."

"Just a routine precaution," Plennert said smoothly. He handed back the lease.

"All right," said Tommy grimly. He took out the heavy sack of silver dollars, untied the drawstring and ripped open the mouth of the bag. "Two hundred and fifty silver dollars," he announced.

Plennert peered into the sack. "Silver," he said, thoughtfully.

"I collect them," Tommy snapped. He reached again into the safety deposit box. "And Indian pennies, too. People collect all kinds of funny things—buttons, dolls, books—does this make me a crook?"

"Oh, no," Plennert said hastily. "We told you that this was mere routine—nothing personal at all. A man has a right to collect whatever he pleases."

"Thanks!" Savagely Tommy thrust the sack of silver dollars into the Boston bag. He followed with the envelope of Indian pennies, then reached for the box of Navajo jewelry. "No law against collecting this stuff, is there?" He whipped off the cover of the box.

"Jewelry," murmured Plennert.

"Indian stuff. I served at Fort Wingate for awhile. That's

near Gallup, New Mexico—this is Navajo stuff.” He sneered. “Junk to you.”

“I’m sorry, Mr. Dancer,” Plennert said stiffly. “I’m only doing a job. I happen to work for the bonding company . . .”

“Sure,” said Tommy. “No hard feelings. Well, *I’ve* got a job, too. And I’ve got to get back to it. If you don’t mind . . .”

He closed the Boston bag and slammed down the cover of his safety deposit box.

Benedict and Plennert exchanged glances. Tommy started to carry his box back to its slot in the vault wall, then stopped and looked first at Benedict, then Plennert. “Well?”

“Oh, it’s quite all right, Mr. Dancer,” Plennert said, hurriedly. “You’ve been very considerate and . . .”

Tommy slammed the long box into the slot, turned the key and withdrew it. “If you think of any other questions,” he pointed at the slips in Plennert’s hand, “you know where to reach me!”

“Yes, of course. And, ah . . .”

“ . . . Thank you, Mr. Dancer,” cut in Benedict, the bank manager. “On behalf of the bank, I want to apologize.”

“It’s all right,” said Tommy. He let his features soften for a moment. “I guess in your place, I’d do the same thing.” He shook his head. “A hundred and—what was it, fifty, thousand?” He whistled. “Whew!”

He smiled weakly and stepped toward the door. On the way, he scooped up the Boston bag and nodding again, this time to Miss Ungerman, left the vault.

In the main banking room, he shot a quick glance at the big clock on the rear wall. Five minutes to three. The bank would be closing in five minutes. Well, it was only a short walk back to Orchid.

He walked out of the bank, sent a quick look toward the corner and grimaced. Fred Kraft was gone.

The lights were green and Tommy crossed Hollywood Boulevard. He walked swiftly to the corner of Orchid and by sheer will power resisted an almost overwhelming urge to look behind him. He turned into Orchid and started diagonally across the street. A beige-colored coupe shot away from the curb and headed for him.

Tommy sprang forward and the coupe screeched to a stop as Louie slammed on the brakes. Tommy opened the door, stepped into the coupe and said, hoarsely:

"Drive!"

Louie shifted into second, stepped on the gas and zooming for the corner, made a right turn into Hollywood Boulevard. "You got it?"

"I got it!" Tommy emitted a blast of air from his lungs and wiped his perspiring forehead. "I wouldn't go through that again for all the world."

"They braced you?"

"Cops," said Tommy. "Cops and bonding company investigators."

The wheel of the car wavered a little, although Louie kept his foot heavy on the gas.

"But you got the money?" he cried.

"I *said* I got it. . . ."

"Open the bag!"

"Drive," cried Tommy. "They let me go, but how the hell do I know they aren't following? I didn't dare look back."

Louie's eyes went to the rear vision mirror. He slammed on his brakes for the La Brea boulevard stop, shifted into second and shot across the intersection.

"We'll see, now!"

Louie jammed his foot down on the gas pedal and the speedometer shot up to fifty, within a block. Louie raised it to sixty in the next couple of blocks, then suddenly braking, whipped the car around a corner, into a side street, on which there wasn't a single moving car, although two or three were parked at either curb.

18

Louie drove the one long block to Franklin at moderate speed, his eyes on the rear vision mirror. No car appeared in the rear and he turned into Franklin.

"Nobody," he said. He tooled the car to the curb and shifting into neutral, put on the emergency brakes. "Now, let's have that look."

"All right," said Tommy and raised the Boston bag, which with its load of silver jewelry and silver dollars weighed in excess of twenty pounds.

Louie saw the bag coming and cried out. And then it landed on Louie's head, with all the weight that Tommy could put behind it in the confined quarters.

Louie collapsed against the far side of the car, blood trickling from his nostrils. Tommy twisted around, caught hold of Louie and jerked him over to the right side of the car. Then he climbed over him and got behind the wheel. He released the emergency brake and, putting his feet on the clutch pedals, looked sideways at Louie. He was slumped on the seat unconscious, but to be on the safe side, Tommy pushed him down so that his body could not be seen by a passing car.

He drove down Franklin to Gardner, cut back to Hollywood Boulevard and, at a careful speed, proceeded to Laurel Canyon. He took the curves of the canyon at a fast clip and

reached Mulholland Drive in good time. On Mulholland he proceeded more slowly until he came to the graveled road that led up to Trent's house. He went up the steep road in second gear and, reaching the level ground behind the cliff house, suddenly exclaimed.

Trent's car was gone!

Tommy parked a discreet distance from the house, shut off the motor and bent over Louie. The man was breathing heavily but still unconscious. Blood, trickling from his nose, had soaked his shirt and coat.

Gingerly Tommy peeled back the left coat lapel but found no shoulder holster. As well as he could he searched the unconscious man's pockets, but Louie apparently carried no gun.

Picking up the heavy Boston bag Tommy got out of the car and headed for the house. He walked swiftly, without looking to the right or left.

He reached the kitchen door and without hesitation opened the door. He stepped into the house, shifted the Boston bag from his left hand to his right and went from the kitchen to the big living room.

He entered boldly and had taken two or three steps before he came to an abrupt halt. The room, at first glance, had appeared empty.

But now he saw someone lying on the floor at the far end of the room.

Earl Faraday . . . dead.

There was no question about it. His eyes were wide and staring and there was a round hole in the center of his forehead from which only a little blood had trickled.

Tommy set the Boston bag on the couch and crossed to what was left of the man who had made a career of women.

In death, Faraday's face was slack and Tommy wondered what women had ever seen in the man. Yet Betty Targ had believed herself in love with him.

Tommy turned away and a ripple of alarm shot through him. His ears had heard the drumming of a car outside. He ran to the kitchen, and through a window saw Fred Kraft, the private detective, climbing out of his car.

"Damn!" Tommy exclaimed.

This was no time to be stopped. Flight was called for, swift distance-eating flight. He started to turn away from the window, then Kraft's movements outside stopped him. Instead of heading for the house, Kraft was moving to the beige-colored coupe.

He took but one glance into the car, then whirling, drew a gun. He looked toward the house, seemed to hesitate, then came forward at a run.

Exclaiming, Tommy left the kitchen. In the living room he looked around for a hiding place, saw a closet door, just as the doorknob in the kitchen rattled.

Tommy stepped quickly to the closet door, opened it and entered. He pulled the door shut and stood in the dark, listening.

There was a thick rug on the living room floor, which effectively muffled the private detective's footsteps, and Tommy cursed himself for his choice of a hiding place.

He strained his ears to listen, but could hear nothing except the pounding of his own heart. Not for a full two minutes or more.

Then a voice said suddenly: "Open the door and come out with your hands up."

Tommy groaned inwardly but remained silent. The

voice outside the door, closer, went on: "I mean you, Tommy Dancer. And I've got a gun on the door . . ."

Tommy groped for the closet door and twisted the knob. He pushed open the door and faced Fred Kraft, who stood in the center of the living room. Tommy raised his hands to shoulder height and stepped out.

"Turn around," Kraft ordered.

"I'm not armed."

"I'll look for myself, if you don't mind," Kraft said, quite pleasantly.

Tommy shrugged and turned his back to the private detective. He heard the man's shoes slither on the deep pile of the rug, then the muzzle of the gun was pressed into the small of his back and a hand patted his hip, his side pockets and finally reached under his armpit and slapped both of his coat lapels. Then the feet retreated and Kraft said:

"You can turn now."

Tommy obeyed. Kraft reached into a hip pocket and brought out a pair of shiny handcuffs. "Catch," he said.

He tossed the handcuffs to Tommy. "Put them on," Kraft continued, "and let me hear them click."

"You're making a mistake," Tommy said.

"Maybe so, but I'd rather be wrong and apologize later, than be right and sorry, so—put them on!"

Tommy put one of the cuffs abouts his left wrist and clicked it shut. Then he followed with the right. Kraft beamed at him and lowering the gun, stepped forward. He took first one wrist, then the other and examined the cuffs to make sure they were properly fastened. Finally he put away his gun.

"Now, let's talk."

"There's nothing to talk about," Tommy said. "I got here about one minute before you did and found him like that."

"Then let's talk about Louie. He's out in the car, his head bashed in."

"He isn't dead."

"Perhaps not, but where's the money?" Kraft gestured toward the Boston bag, which stood open on the couch. "There's just some gewgaws in there."

"That's all there is," Tommy said, "what I had in my box at the bank."

"Uh-uh," Kraft said. "I talked to Trent on the phone, before you got to the bank. He said you were coming there to pick up one hundred and sixty thousand dollars."

"It wasn't in my box."

"Why not?"

"Because it wasn't."

"What *did* you do with it?"

Tommy exhaled wearily. "Trent couldn't make me tell that and I don't think you can."

Kraft nodded agreement. "No, I don't think so. Well, it was a good try." He sighed. "I thought this was the chance I've been waiting for all my life—to get rich quick, but it seems to have blown up in my face . . . as usual." He sighed again and crossing to the telephone, picked it up. He dialed the operator and after a moment said:

"Police Department."

Tommy exclaimed, "You're not . . . !"

Kraft covered the mouthpiece with one hand. "What else can I do? I've got to mend my fences." He took his hand off the mouthpiece and said:

"Hello, this is Fred Kraft . . . yes, the private investi-

gator." He swallowed hard. "I want to report a murder . . . No—Mulholland Drive." He nodded emphatically. "I've got the man right here. Caught him red-handed—practically. Fine." He hung up.

"I didn't kill him," Tommy raged. "He was alive when I left here with Louie. Trent killed him, or you . . . you were gone from the bank when I came out."

"The point is," said Kraft mildly, "*you* stole the money from deCamp's safety deposit box. You're a lock and key expert. The police will like that." His tongue came out and licked his lips. "Faraday fingered the job. You had a fight over the split and you killed him."

"That's what you'll tell the police . . . and how will you explain *your* being here?"

"Oh, that isn't important. Maybe I got wind of it accidentally. A stool pigeon." Kraft smirked. "I've got connections." He tugged at an old-fashioned watch fob that dangled from his right hip and drew out a large ninety-eight watch. "The police'll be here in a few minutes. Shall we make ourselves comfortable?"

He sat down in one of the armchairs. Tommy crossed to the couch and dropped heavily. His eyes went to the cushion beside him and a little ripple of hope shot through him. A hairpin lay there. Dropped by Betty Targ, no doubt, during the manhandling to which she had been subjected.

Tommy pretended to shift his position and picked up the hairpin surreptitiously. Clasp and unclasp his manacled hands he began manipulating the hairpin, squeezing the two ends together, bending them about an eighth of an inch.

A faint shout came from outside the house. Kraft sprang to his feet. "Louie!"

"He's waking up," said Tommy and thrust the bent ends of the hairpin into the lock of the left cuff. He twisted and the lock turned.

Kraft started across the room toward the kitchen, but, halfway to it, turned back. "Let him come in here . . ." He stopped, his mouth falling agape.

Tommy was coming to his feet, the handcuffs dangling from his right wrist, the sack of silver dollars, abstracted from the Boston bag, in his hand.

Kraft clawed frantically for his hip pocket, where he had stowed away his revolver in the belief that Tommy was safely shackled.

Tommy sprang toward Kraft. The little private detective backed away. "Don't!" he cried, as Tommy raised the bag of silver dollars.

Then the bag struck Kraft in the face. He was going away at the time and Tommy had not exerted his full weight behind the blow, otherwise there would have been very little left of Kraft's face. As it was, he collapsed to the floor, moaning and clawing at his bleeding face.

Brutally, Tommy stooped and turning him over, ripped the gun from the detective's hip pocket. He straightened and started for the kitchen, the bag of dollars in his left hand, Kraft's gun in his right.

He stepped into the kitchen from the living room, as Louie came in from the yard through the rear door. Louie stopped, his face a mass of dried blood, his eyes wide and staring.

"You," he said thickly.

"Step aside, Louie," Tommy said tonelessly. "I'm coming through if I have to kill you."

Louie shuffled forward. Tommy came toward him, took

one step sideways and went around Louie. He kept the gun between them and Louie, aware of it, made no move toward him.

Tommy pushed open the door, leading to the yard. "Nothing personal, pal," he said and stepped through.

In the yard he ran for the two cars that were parked within a few yards of each other. He reached the first, Kraft's, and shot a quick look at the dashboard. The ignition keys were missing. Exclaiming in annoyance, he ran around the car to Louie's.

The keys were in the ignition and he tore open the door and slipped in behind the wheel. The motor caught instantly and Tommy made a quick turn and started for the steep road that led to Mulholland Drive below.

He went down in high gear, scarcely braking, and once or twice he thought the wheels would slip out over the edge of the graveled road. But he made the descent safely and turned right on Mulholland Drive.

He was perhaps a hundred yards from the graveled road when the wail of a siren from the rear reached his ears. The police. Two minutes later and he would have been caught.

He sent the car hurtling around the turn and kept his foot down on the gas pedal. He made the curves with tires screeching.

At Coldwater Canyon he turned left and kept the car going downhill at a speed far from safe. Two blocks from Sunset Boulevard, in Beverly Hills, he pulled the car to the curb, shut off the ignition and, picking up the sack of silver dollars, got out.

19

He walked briskly to Sunset Boulevard where he turned right for one block to the taxicab stand in front of the Beverly Hills Hotel. There were two taxis in the line and Tommy got into the first one he came to.

"Wilshire and Rodeo," he told the cab driver.

The man nodded and starting up the taxi turned left into Beverly Drive and scooted across town to Wilshire. Reaching Wilshire and only one block to go over to Rodeo, Tommy thrust his hand into his pocket and discovered that he had no money. Trent had failed to return the small change Louie had taken from his pockets.

He opened the bag of silver dollars and took one out. When the cab drew up at the next corner, Tommy leaned across and handed the driver the silver dollar.

"Keep the change," he said and got out of the cab.

He crossed the street and entered the drugstore adjoining the Beverly Wilshire Hotel. At the cigar counter he saw a display of nail files and, stopping, bought one. He paid for it with a silver dollar. The price was 30 cents and he asked for four nickels in the change.

Carrying the nickels he walked back to the phone booths and entered one. He dialed the number of Trent's apartment. The Filipino answered:

"Meestair Tr-rent's apar-rtment."

"Mr. Trent, please."

"He iss not here, sarr. Who iss calling?"

Tommy hung up, scowled at the phone a moment, then dropped another nickel into the slot. A moment later George Roan's voice said: "Melrose Lock and Key Shop."

"Mr. Roan," Tommy began, "this is Tommy Dancer."

George Roan's voice said sharply: "Yes? What seems to be the trouble?"

"There's someone in the shop?" Tommy asked.

"Yes," was Roan's reply.

"Police?"

"Yes, that's right, I fix locks, but I'm afraid I can't take care of you right now."

"Look," said Tommy, "will it be all right if I call you later?"

"I think so," came Roan's reply. "I can't leave the shop right now, but if you can't get anyone else to open the door for you, you might try me again in an hour."

Tommy hung up the receiver, left the booth, then on an impulse stepped back to a high table on which reposed several telephone directories. He opened the main Los Angeles directory and turned to the R's. There were Randalls, more than two columns of them, but no Florence Randall, although there were several "F" Randalls with middle initials. Tommy was pretty sure that none of them would turn out to be Florence Randall.

He closed the book and opened the yellow classified directory. Under apartment hotels he found the building in which Paul deCamp lived, entered the booth, and dialed the number.

The apartment operator answered, giving the name of the apartment hotel. "Mr. deCamp's apartment, please," Tommy said, softly.

"Who's calling?"

"Mr. Faraday."

"Just a moment, please."

The connection was broken for a moment, then a

woman's voice said sharply: "I told you never to call me here."

"It's all right, Flo," Tommy said, "this isn't Faraday." He heard her gasp at the other end of the wire. Tommy said: "Is Paul there?"

Then Flo Randall recovered. "Who is this?"

"Listen," said Tommy, "in a few minutes you're going to get some news that's going to knock you for a loop. In fact, I'll give it to you now, so grab hold of the bed, or whatever you're near—Earl Faraday's dead. . . ." He stopped. There was no response. He said: "Are you listening?"

"Who is this?" Flo Randall cried.

"That's not important, but *this* is, so listen. DeCamp knows. . . ."

Her voice, interrupting, was suddenly shrill, bordering on hysteria. "I don't know what you're talking about and if this is a game . . ."

Tommy said harshly: "You know about deCamp's safety deposit box being robbed—all right, Faraday got the number of deCamp's box from you. . . ."

"That's a lie!" screamed Flo Randall.

"You didn't let me finish," Tommy said. "Maybe you didn't *give* him the number, but he got it as a result of you. How, you can figure out yourself. Anyway, deCamp knows about you and Faraday. . . ."

"I know who you are, now," Flo cut in. "You're Willis Trent . . ."

"Guess again. Only not now. I haven't got time. I'm just going to say one thing more. Get out of that apartment—now. And be at the southwest corner of La Brea and Sunset, at seven o'clock sharp."

"I'll do nothing of the sort."

"Suit yourself, but if you change your mind between now and then, I'll meet you there. Alone!"

Tommy returned the receiver to the hook and left the phone booth and the drugstore.

On Wilshire he walked swiftly eastward until he came to a motion picture theatre. He spent another of his silver dollars for a ticket, receiving thirty-five cents in change.

The movie was a good second-run picture, but Tommy was in no mood to enjoy it. However, he remained in the theatre for two hours and when he emerged at a quarter to six, it was dark outside.

He bought a late afternoon paper on the corner and grimaced at the headlines: ONE SLAIN IN \$160,000 DARING BANK ROBBERY.

The inverted subhead gave the gist of the story:

Local Sportsman Claiming His
Safety Deposit Box Robbed
of \$160,000 In Cash
Questioned in
Slaying.

The phrases "it is alleged," "police claim," were used several times in the body of the story. There was no positive statement about anything, according to the account. Paul deCamp, the "local sportsman" went to his safety deposit box at the Hollywood-Highland Bank at eleven o'clock that morning and immediately informed the bank officials that his box had been robbed of \$160,000 in one-hundred dollar bills.

Acting upon a tip, police raided a Mulholland Drive home and there found the murdered body of a well-known man-about-town, Earl Faraday. The police claimed that there was a connection between Earl Faraday and Paul

deCamp and were questioning the latter. Two other Hollywood figures were being sought, one a prominent sportsman and the other, according to the police innuendo, a man whose fingerprints they had found on the empty safety deposit box of Paul deCamp and who was believed to have performed the actual theft.

Tommy Dancer folded the newspaper and stared moodily at the traffic on Wilshire Boulevard. He had handled the safety deposit box of Paul deCamp with extreme care, touching only the edges, but it was possible that enough of a fingerprint had been affixed to the box. If so, it was a simple matter to identify the thief. His fingerprints were on record in Washington.

Well, it didn't matter. Tommy had gone into this with his eyes open. He had double-crossed Willis Trent and Earl Faraday as they would most certainly have double-crossed him. And now Faraday was dead.

And Tommy Dancer. . . ?

Flight.

20

An eastbound bus was coming along Wilshire. Tommy stepped off the curb and signaled. He boarded it and found a seat near the rear.

At La Brea he got off the bus, crossed the street, and climbed aboard a northbound bus.

He alighted at Fountain and strolled to Sunset, walking on the east side of the street. At Sunset he crossed to a drive-in and, sitting on a stool at the counter, had a sandwich and cup of coffee. When he finished eating he looked at the wall clock and saw that it was ten minutes to seven.

He recrossed to the east side of the street and looked

diagonally across the street to the southwest corner. Two or three people were standing at the curb, waiting for a bus, but none was a redheaded girl.

Tommy went across Sunset with the lights, walked a hundred yards or so down La Brea, then dodged a few cars and crossed to the west side of the street.

A girl was coming toward him, headed for Sunset. Flo Randall.

Tommy stopped in front of her. "Hello," he said.

"I beg your . . ." Flo Randall began, then recognized him. "You're the man was at Paul's party, with Faraday's girl. . . !"

"I was also at Willis Trent's place. We had a few words."

A sudden frown creased Flo's forehead. She looked past Tommy, toward Sunset Boulevard. He shook his head.

"I'm the man you were going to meet."

"I don't know why I'm here," Flo Randall said angrily. "If that dizzy blonde, Betty Targ, or whatever her name is, told you—"

"No," cut in Tommy. "She didn't." He paused a moment. "I've got the hundred and sixty thousand . . ."

Flo recoiled from him. Tommy said evenly: "Let's walk—and talk. . . ."

He took her arm and for a moment she walked along with him, but then she pulled away from him. "I'm parked right here. . . ."

"I prefer to walk," Tommy said, taking her arm again.

"I don't," Flo declared. "I'm not going anywhere with you. In fact, I have a good notion—"

"To yell for the police?"

"Yes. They're looking for you."

"If I'm arrested," Tommy said evenly, "I'll have to tell

them the whole story—how Earl Faraday fingered the job, how he got the number of deCamp's box from you—”

“That's a lie!”

“It isn't. *How* he got the number, I don't know—and don't care. The question is simply, can you convince Paul deCamp that Faraday didn't get it from you?” He shook his head. “Faraday's dead. That's your answer.”

Flo Randall uttered a choking cry. “What do you want from me—my life?”

“No, but my own life isn't safe. Paul deCamp knows about me and the word is out by now. I've got to disappear.”

“Do you think *I* can stay around?”

“You can go to San Francisco for awhile. Or take a trip to Mexico. The only one who's looking for you is Paul deCamp. But the police are after me. Not to mention Willis Trent.”

“What's Trent got to do with this?”

“He's the brains. He figured out the caper. Earl Faraday got the box number and I did the job.”

“You?”

“I'm a lock and key man.”

They had reached Fountain Avenue and Tommy turned Flo into the quieter street.

“Paul deCamp's got Betty Targ,” he said.

Flo stopped abruptly and looked sharply at Tommy. “What are you talking about?”

“Betty Targ.”

“Are you trying to insinuate that Paul and this Betty . . . ?”

“Not at all. DeCamp's holding her to get at me. She was with Faraday when Faraday got it.”

“Then she deserves to get what's coming to her.”

"She doesn't. Trent brought her up to the Mulholland Drive place because he couldn't make me tell where I'd hidden the money. To cut a long story short, I said I'd get the money. I went off and while I was gone, deCamp showed up. He killed Faraday and he's holding Betty, because he figures I'll come to him. . . . Well, he's right. I'll give him the money, if he turns Betty loose—unharméd. . . ."

"Then why don't you go to him?"

"Because I don't know where to reach him. And because . . . well, I don't figure to let him do to me what he did to Faraday. I thought *you* could go to him."

"Me!" cried Flo. "He'd kill me."

"I don't think so. He may be sore at you, but not a hundred and sixty thousand dollars' worth. You're safe as long as I've got the money."

"But the minute you give it to him . . ."

"You can be on your way by then. I'll promise you—he won't get the money, until you're out of his hands and until Betty Targ is safe."

Flo was silent for a moment, her eyes squinting in thought. Then she said: "What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to talk to him. Tell him I'll give him the money as soon as he releases Betty."

"Do I have to go to him?"

"Not necessarily. If you can reach him on the phone . . ."

"There's a number he gave me—a sort of a, well, hide-away. I don't know where the place is, but he told me if he didn't show up sometime I could reach him at that number, or someone there would know how to get in touch with him."

"Then call him."

"Now?"

Tommy pointed to a little drugstore on the other side

of Fountain. "There's a telephone. I'll wait out here for the answer."

Flo Randall hesitated. Then coming to a decision, she opened her purse. Tommy drew a nickel from his pocket. "This what you want?"

She smiled a wan thanks, walked away from him and crossed the street. Tommy saw her enter the little drugstore and strolled to the corner. He stopped there and, standing on the curb, teetered back and forth on his heels, like a man who is waiting for a girl. After a couple of minutes he started back down Fountain.

He cut across the street and was twenty feet from the drugstore when she came out. She shook her head as she approached.

"I couldn't get him."

"Did you get anyone?" Tommy asked quickly.

"Yes . . . a man who said he knew my voice, but wouldn't give his own name. He said Paul was still down at Police Headquarters."

Tommy groaned. "I was afraid of that."

"The man said Paul's attorney was trying to get a—a habeas corpus writ. He wanted to know where I could be reached if Paul showed up, or telephoned."

"You didn't tell him?"

"No. I said I'd call again—in an hour."

Tommy frowned at the drugstore, then reached into his pocket and brought out a nickel. "What's that number?"

Flo Randall winced. "I—I can't give it to you. I promised I wouldn't ever. . . ."

"This is no time to be coy," Tommy said testily. "We're both on the spot and we've got to move fast if we want to get off it. . . . Give me the number!"

Flo hesitated for another moment, then threw up her head. "All right, I've gone this far—it's Sunset 3-1127. . . ."

"The Valley," Tommy said, "or up in the hills. . . . Wait here."

He headed for the drugstore, entered and went to the single telephone booth at the rear of the store.

He dropped his nickel in the slot and dialed Sunset 3-1127. A gruff voice answered immediately. "Mariota Pharmacy."

Tommy blinked at the phone. "I'm calling for Paul deCamp," he said.

"Who?"

"Paul deCamp."

"Sorry," said the voice at the other end of the wire. "I don't believe I know anyone by that name. . . ."

"You know, all right," Tommy said quickly. "Flo Randall spoke to you just a few minutes ago."

There was a pause then the voice on the phone said: "You must have the wrong number. This is the Mariota Pharmacy on Riverside."

Tommy slipped the receiver back on the hook, stepped out of the booth and caught up the phone directory that hung from a chain suspended to the booth. He turned the pages to the M's and found the Mariota Pharmacy. The number was Sunset 3-1127.

He let the book fall from his hands and strode quickly to the door. Whipping it open he sprang out to the sidewalk.

Flo Randall was nowhere in sight—but red headlights were just turning into Fountain from La Brea. Gasping in shock, Tommy whirled and shot down the side street. A police siren split the night air, giving wings to Tommy's feet.

He ran a hundred feet faster than he had ever run in his life, then made a sudden swerve and sprang up a short flight of steps that led to a two-story apartment house. He tore open the door, almost knocked an elderly woman off her feet and bounded down a narrow corridor to the rear of the building. A door, leading to the backyard, stood ajar and he tore it open and ran out into a paved courtyard. There was a six-foot board fence at the rear. With a running start, Tommy got to the top of the fence in a single leap and plunged over into an adjoining yard. It was pitch dark here and he knocked over a garbage can or two in his flight, but he found a gate that opened onto a narrow walk and in turn brought him out on La Brea Street.

Cars were zooming along the boulevard, but he dodged in and out and reached the east side of the street safely. He did not stop there. He repeated the maneuver of the other street, entering an apartment house, clambering over a rear fence and going through to the next street. On the almost deserted street he walked and ran to Santa Monica and there was fortunate enough to catch a streetcar.

A few minutes later he dropped off on Cahuenga and walked quickly southward until he saw his car, still at the curb where he had parked it—was it only that morning?

The car was hot. If they knew about him, they knew the license number of the car and it would be only a matter of time before a cruising police car or motorcycle policeman spotted it. But at the moment it represented transportation and Tommy got in.

He found the car keys under the seat where he had deposited them and, starting the car, headed for Melrose Avenue. He turned left on the boulevard and drove to Van Ness. On Van Ness he turned right and made another turn at the

first street, Clinton, virtually deserted of parked cars. There were one or two however and Tommy pulled up to the curb, at a safe distance from the nearest. He waited a moment, then climbed out and approached the car.

Making sure there was no one in the machine, he walked around to the front bumper and taking the nail file that he had purchased in Beverly Hills from his pocket, he quickly loosened the little bolts that held the license plate to its holder.

With the plate in his hand he went to the rear of the car and removed the second plate.

Three minutes later, his own plates were off the car and he was putting on the stolen ones. The task completed without interruption he got into the car and drove to Rossmore and from there to Melrose. On the latter street he cut back to Cahuenga and drove through the main part of Hollywood, over Cahuenga Pass, into San Fernando Valley.

In Sherman Oaks he found a dead end street and a block from Ventura deserted the flivver.

He walked back to Ventura and Van Nuys and there boarded a bus that dropped him ten minutes later, three miles east of the town of Van Nuys, a sparsely populated district of homes, ranchettes and motels.

He turned into one of the larger motels and registering under the name of Richard Dyer—and paying four silver dollars in advance—finally found himself in a comfortably furnished room.

He locked the door on the inside and, groaning in relief, dropped on the bed. Two minutes later he was asleep.

21 The sun shining into the room awakened Tommy Dancer. He opened his eyes and for a moment stared sightlessly at the cream-colored ceiling of the motel room.

Then he exclaimed softly and sat up on the bed. A tremor shot through his body and for a moment he felt utterly drained of strength. He had felt that way once, just before stepping out of the troop carrier into the air above a Normandy field.

He got to his feet and went into the bathroom. He looked at himself in the mirror. His eyes were bloodshot, he needed a shave and his shirt had a couple of spots of blood on it. He undressed and took a shower and then put on his clothes again. In the bedroom he picked up the sack of silver and left the room.

On Van Nuys Boulevard he walked briskly toward the town of Van Nuys. On the outskirts he entered a men's furnishings store that was just opening and bought a shirt and a dark blue necktie, paying for them with silver dollars.

On the street he walked a half block and came upon a small cafe. He went in and had some ham and eggs and two cups of coffee, then went to the washroom and changed his shirt and tie. The old ones he crumpled up and threw in the used towel receptacle.

When he left the restaurant he found a taxicab standing at the curb and walked up to it.

"Can you drive me to North Hollywood?" he asked the driver.

"Sure thing."

Tommy got into the cab. "Lankershim and Chandler," he said and leaned back against the cushion.

Ten minutes later he gave the man two silver dollars, got out of the cab, and walked a half block to the main North Hollywood post office.

There were several people in line at the General Delivery window, but Tommy waited his turn quietly. When the clerk behind the window finally looked at him inquiringly, Tommy said, without a tremor: "Any mail for Wilson Targ?"

The clerk stepped to a battery of pigeonholes, reached up and brought down a stack of letters. He began shuffling through them, went clear through the stack, then went back and found a thin envelope.

He came to the window and handed the letter to Tommy. The latter nodded thanks and stepping out of the line, tore open the envelope. He abstracted the claim check from the Lincoln Hotel and threw the envelope into the wastebasket.

He left the post office and walked back to Lankershim, the main business thoroughfare in North Hollywood. Approaching a taxicab, he assumed a pronounced limp and opened the door of the cab.

He got in and said to the driver: "I want to go to Sixth and Broadway, downtown in Los Angeles, but I have to stop at the Lincoln Hotel in Hollywood to pick up a briefcase."

"Yes, sir!" exclaimed the cabby, enthusiastically, thinking of the big meter charge involved.

The cab rolled smoothly down Lankershim to Cahuenga, then over the Pass, into Hollywood. As it pulled up before the hotel Tommy took the claim check from his pocket and leaning forward, thrust it into the driver's compartment. "Do you mind running in and picking up my briefcase from

the check room?" He smiled wanly. "My leg, you know."

"Sure thing."

"Give them a quarter," Tommy added. "I'll add it to the meter."

The taxi driver got out of the cab and went into the hotel. The doorman sized up the cab and sauntered over. "Going to be here long?" he asked.

"Just a minute," Tommy replied.

"All right, sir. The reason I asked, I'm supposed to keep this place clear."

Tommy leaned back and tried to look straight ahead, down Hollywood Boulevard, but the doorman, standing on the curb, kept looking at him and Tommy's spine began to tingle.

Suddenly he looked at the doorman. "Yes?"

The man cleared his throat. "Excuse me, I was just trying to place you. Your face is familiar, but I can't seem to remember your name. You've stayed here at the hotel?"

"Not lately."

The doorman nodded. "I thought not. I'm usually very good at remembering the guests. A man stayed here only two days, four years ago, and when he came back last week, I could still call him by name."

"A good memory's a fine thing," Tommy said inanely, and then was spared by the appearance of the cab driver.

He was carrying the briefcase.

He opened the door and handed the case to Tommy. "Here you are."

"Thanks," said Tommy. He nodded to the doorman and leaned back against the cushions.

A half hour later the taxi pulled up to the curb in downtown Los Angeles. The meter read \$6.85. Tommy reached

into the driver's compartment and handed the cabby nine silver dollars.

"Silver," remarked the man. "You don't see that many in this town very often."

"I was in Las Vegas a couple of days ago," Tommy said. "Hit a dollar jackpot."

"The hell you did!" exclaimed the cabby. "I thought those things were fixed so you couldn't win."

"It's the first time I ever hit a jackpot," said Tommy, as he climbed out of the cab.

He nodded pleasantly and started to turn away, then swiveled his head and shot a look back. The cab driver was staring at him, puzzled, but even as Tommy looked his face broke in astonishment.

Tommy turned the corner, stepped into the arcade of an office building and, crossing through, emerged on the side street. He walked swiftly for three or four blocks, circling, cutting across streets, going through building arcades and finally entered a drugstore.

He walked to a battery of telephone booths, went through the change in his pockets and found a nickel.

Stepping into a booth he dialed the number of the Melrose Lock and Key Shop.

George Roan answered: "Melrose Lock and Key Shop."

"This is Tommy Dancer, Mr. Roan," Tommy said. "Are you alone in the shop?"

"Yes, Tommy!" cried Roan. "Have you seen the morning papers?"

"No, but—"

"Your picture's all over the front pages," cut in Roan. "I don't know where they got it."

"Probably from my apartment. What do the papers say?"

"There's a police dragnet out. They claim you stole a hundred and sixty thousand dollars and—and murdered a man." Roan paused. "It— isn't true, is it, Tommy?"

"I didn't kill anyone," Tommy replied. "But it's going to take a bit of working out."

"Tommy," exclaimed Roan, "come in and talk it over with me. We'll get a lawyer, a good one."

"A lawyer couldn't help me at this stage. But look, Mr. Roan, has anyone come to see you about me—I mean, anyone aside from the police?"

"No, but there was a telephone call for you last night, about ten o'clock—on the night line. A girl; she said you'd know her. The only name she'd give was Betty . . ."

Tommy inhaled sharply. "Did she leave any message?"

"No, but she said she'd call again this morning."

"Tell her to leave a number," Tommy exclaimed. "I don't know where to get in touch with her."

"You—you'll call again?"

"Yes, I will. And, Mr. Roan . . . don't worry about me. I'm all right."

He hung up before Roan could reply to that. Yes, he was all right. For the moment. But in an hour, a half hour . . .

He stared at the phone a moment, then became conscious of the sack of silver dollars in his lap. Looking through the glass door of the phone booth, he bent forward and deposited the silver dollars on the floor, under the little seat. Then he opened the briefcase and thrusting in a hand, groped for a packet of hundred dollar bills. He broke the paper band and slipped about a third of the packet into his hand. Removing it from the briefcase he thrust the bills, folding them at the same time, into his trousers pocket.

Then he snapped the briefcase shut again and stepped

out of the booth. He closed the door and walked out of the drugstore.

Somebody was going to have a rather nice haul in a little while. He doubted very much whether anyone finding two hundred dollars in silver would take the sack to the police. People were honest, but two hundred-odd dollars in unmarked silver was a strong temptation.

Outside, he walked to Figueroa Street and south into the section inhabited by that strange breed of people peculiar to California, used-car dealers, who shrieked over the radio and advertised in newspapers and on billboards and in the sky their nationalities and dispositions: The Smiling Irishman, the Grinning Greek, the Laughing Laplander, Wild Man Pritchard, Madman Muntz.

The Grinning Greek had a half block lot that contained a couple of hundred cars, ranging from brand-new "used" cars to ancient jalopies of the vintage of '29. A bevy of salesmen swooped down on Tommy as he entered the lot. A six-foot-two blond with the shoulders of a football player won. He grabbed Tommy's hand and pumped it heartily.

"Good morning, sir. Could I show you a beautiful late model Buick that we're practically giving away today?"

"That's why I'm here," Tommy said. "But I wasn't thinking of a very late model. Not too late."

"A '39, or '40, perhaps? There's a little job over here that we only got in late last night, otherwise it would already be sold. A club coupe, owned by a local doctor, an elderly man who never once drove the car above thirty-five. It's got the original paint job, a brand-new set of tires and only 18,000 miles on the speedometer . . ."

"How much was on it before it was turned back?"

The salesman clapped Tommy on the shoulder. "Ha-ha,

good joke, eh? That's what they do up the street, but not here. No, sir, not at the Grinning Greek's. And we don't turn the speedometer back to zero and let you guess. No, sir, we leave it right where it is." He grabbed Tommy's arm and pointed at a faded maroon coupe. "See that heap over there—it's got the original mileage right on the speedometer. One hundred and forty-two thousand miles. I'm not trying to sell you that car, no sir, because frankly it isn't a good buy. I'm just pointing it out to show you the way we do business." He stopped Tommy at a black coupe. "Here's the little baby I was telling you about. Eighteen thousand local miles, driven by an elderly doctor . . ." He kicked the rear bumper, winced as it wobbled and in the same tone of voice, called attention to the defect. "Bolt got a little loose. Needs a turn or two with the wrench."

"How much?" Tommy asked.

"Eighteen thousand local miles," enthused the salesman, "the sweetest running motor you ever heard in your life and guess how much we're asking?"

"How much?"

The salesman looked past Tommy, down the aisle. "Uh, I didn't see the car you drove up in."

"I didn't drive up in any."

"No? But what about the car you're trading in?"

"I'm not trading in any car. I just want to buy from scratch, for cash."

"Of course, sir, but we're awfully short of cars, you know. If we sell a car, we have to take one in on trade. Otherwise, we wouldn't have any stock after awhile, would we?"

"You buy cars right along."

"Certainly. And we sell cars, too. We're the largest used-car dealers in this block. But we like a trade-in."

"Look," said Tommy, "do you want to sell this car . . . without a trade-in, for cash? C-a-s-h, cash." He thrust his hand into his pocket and pulled out the sheaf of hundred dollar bills. "A quick sale, no arguing, no haggling."

The salesman's eyes narrowed. "You'll pay \$1895 for this car as she stands? Cash?"

"Make out your bill of sale."

The salesman held up an index finger. "This way, please."

He led Tommy to a small wooden office in which sat a secretary and a chunky, swarthy man. "Mr. Petrakis," the salesman said, "no trade-in; the black Buick club coupe, cash, \$1895 . . ."

"The '36, you mean?"

"No, sir, the '40. The one we, uh, took in only yesterday. The eighteen thousand—"

The Grinning Greek sprang to his feet. "Are you crazy, man? Eighteen ninety-five, *without* a trade-in? Why, that's one of the best cars in the place, the *best* buy for the money. We've *got* to have a *good* trade-in, to let that car go for such a price. Mr. Sandstrom, you had no right to accept such an offer."

Tommy took the money from his pocket and began counting out one hundred dollar bills. The Greek's eyes took in the money and he suddenly stopped his tirade and beamed at Tommy. "Mister, you're getting the biggest bargain of your life. You're *stealing* that wonderful job."

The secretary whisked duplicate invoices into her typewriter. "Name, please?" she said in a monotone.

"James Robertson."

"Address?"

"4531 Mariota, North Hollywood."

Ten minutes later, Tommy climbed into the 18,000-local-

mile car and drove from the used-car lot. He headed up Figueroa, passed through the heavy traffic section and came out on the parkway, which took him without a stop through South Pasadena, into Arcadia. He picked up Highway #66 and rolled along through Monrovia, Glendora, and finally into Upland, well in the heart of the orange country.

Here he parked his new car on a side street and walked two blocks to a drugstore. He bought a package of cigarettes and got two dollars' worth of small change from the cashier. Holding it in his hand, he went to a phone booth at the rear of the store, dropped in a coin and dialed the Long Distance operator.

He gave her the number of the Melrose Lock and Key Shop in Hollywood and dropped some coins into the slot. The operator made a couple of connections, then said: "Upland calling," which caused Tommy to grimace at the phone.

"Mr. Roan," Tommy said into the phone, "you know who this is. Did she call?"

"Yes," Roan replied, then pausing briefly, "I don't know if I can help you or not . . ."

"Somebody's with you!" Tommy exclaimed softly.

A sudden grunt came over the wire, then a harsh voice came on: "You're damned right someone's with him and listen here, Dancer—"

"I'm listening," Tommy said savagely.

". . . If you think you can get away with this, you've got another guess coming. The cops are looking for you and they'll shoot you on sight. And if *they* don't get you—"

"*You* will," said Tommy. "But there's a hundred and sixty thousand dollars you'll never get. And guess how much the bank will give you, if, as and when . . ."

"You'll never spend a nickel of that money," shouted the man in George Roan's shop.

"Wrong," said Tommy. "I've already spent two thousand of it." Then he could have bitten his tongue for letting that slip. "Do you want the money or not?" he snapped.

"I want it, all right."

"Then listen to me. You can have the money, what's left of it, if you let Betty Targ go."

There was a slight pause, then the voice said: "I thought so. All right, bring me the dough and you can have her."

Tommy laughed harshly. "You must think I've got holes in my head . . . or that I want one, like Earl Faraday got."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Oh, no? Well, I'm not going into it now. In fact, I think I've talked enough. I know damn well you'd just as soon the police did your dirty work for you. I'll call you later. What's your number—your private number. . . ?"

"You can call me here."

Tommy hesitated a moment, then said: "All right," and hung up the receiver.

22

He left the drugstore and walked quickly to his car, two blocks away. Climbing in, he headed back to Highway #66, but instead of turning right, he turned left. Highway #66 was the transcontinental road, that ran through the desert, into Arizona and the East. Upland was on Highway #66; anyone hunting Tommy, as a result of the phone call from Upland, would assume that he was heading for the desert, or the State line.

So Tommy doubled back on his trail. He drove discreetly, well within the State speed limit, to Monrovia and there found

a secondary paved road, State Highway #35. It was a poor road and wound its way tortuously through a series of foothills, but at length brought him into the city of San Fernando only a few miles from his starting point that morning in Van Nuys. Here he got onto a better road, Highway #6, the main inland route to the north.

It was a well-traveled road and Tommy felt uneasy driving on it, yet it led in the general direction he wanted and he kept to it through Newhall and on toward Palmdale.

And then Tommy's luck began to run out. Passing a road marker that read: *Newhall, 3 miles*, he saw ahead of him a truck slewed half across the road and ahead a sedan lying on its side in the shallow ditch that ran beside the road.

The accident had apparently occurred only moments before; the wheels of the sedan were still spinning and the truck driver was running from his vehicle to help whoever was in the automobile.

Tommy slowed down his coupe, shifted to second to pass the truck on the left side. The truck driver by then had reached the car and hearing Tommy's motor looked over his shoulder.

"Hey, Mister!" he yelled. "Help me here—they're bad off!"

Tommy groaned. Common decency would not permit him to ignore the summons, yet his own safety demanded obscurity and flight. But he stopped his car on the left side of the road and ran across to help the truck driver.

There were two people in the car, a middle-aged man behind the wheel and a girl of twelve or thirteen who was on the right side of the car—the side on which the car was resting.

The man was unconscious, the weight of his body holding down the girl, whose face was bleeding. The girl was conscious, however, conscious and whimpering.

The left car door had become jammed and the truck driver was unable to force it open. Tommy, coming up, gripped the door handle with his right hand and turning it with some effort, took hold of the window sill with his left.

"Grab hold," he said to the truck driver, "and we'll pull together. One, two . . . three!"

Steel grated against steel and the car door came up. Letting the truck driver hold it up, Tommy clambered to the top of the car and reaching down, caught hold of the unconscious man's arm. He pulled up on it, raising the body from the girl underneath, hooked both hands under the man's armpits and heaved. He brought the man's head and shoulders up to the door and then the truck driver helped lift him out and lay him on the ground.

Tommy started to climb up to the door again, but the girl's head and shoulders appeared in the opening and he was able to help her out without climbing up.

He steadied the girl on her feet and then she caught sight of the man on the ground.

"He's dead!" she wailed.

"I didn't hit them," the truck driver declared. "I was coming along, around the curve and the car was just ahead of me. I was about to pass, when all of a sudden the car seemed to go out of control. I had a hard time handling the truck, but I didn't hit them."

"I know," the girl sobbed, "it was—Dad. He—he had an attack—fell over against me and then . . ." She shuddered. "We turned over."

Tommy released the girl and, dropping to his knees, felt the unconscious man's heart. There was no beat.

He got to his feet. A car, coming from the direction of Palmdale, was pulling up on the opposite side of the road and behind it, still several hundred yards away, was a white sedan. Even as Tommy looked the police car sounded off with the siren.

Tommy gritted his teeth and patted the girl's shoulder. "Take it easy, sis," he said, "he may be only unconscious." It was a lie, but Tommy's brain was already concerned with his own problem.

The car that had stopped across the road, disgorged three people, two men and a woman. They came running across. Tommy stepped away from the girl, started across the highway, then the police car came to a screeching halt in the middle of the road, its siren expiring in a final wail.

Two policemen piled out of the car. One of them ran for the group by the wrecked car, the other cut off Tommy's escape.

"Just a minute, mister!" the policeman said.

"Better call for an ambulance," Tommy said quickly. "The man's unconscious."

The policeman nodded and stepped back to his car, but before he could climb in and put in his radio call, the other policeman got up from examining the dead man and waved to his partner.

The policeman at the car nodded and drew his report book from his pocket. "Your name, please?"

"I wasn't involved," Tommy said. "I came up a couple of minutes after it happened."

"You saw it happen, though?"

"No."

The truck driver came forward, accompanied by the second policeman. "It wasn't anybody's fault; the girl said he had a heart attack while driving."

"We've still got to make a report," said the policeman with the book. He looked at Tommy. "Your name?"

"James Robertson."

"Let me see your driver's license."

"I just told you I wasn't involved in the accident."

"I know, but it's necessary to get the names and addresses of the witnesses."

"I wasn't a witness. I didn't see it happen."

The policeman hesitated and looked at his partner. The latter shrugged. "Okay, mister."

Tommy nodded and crossed to his car. He got in behind the wheel, started the motor, then saw that the car that had brought up the two men and the woman had stopped so closely in front of his that he was blocked off. He put the gear lever in reverse, backed a few feet, then twisted the wheel all the way over to the right and inched forward.

He was just able to clear the car ahead of him and was worming out into the center of the road, when one of the policemen suddenly appeared in front of the car, his hand held up.

Tommy exclaimed softly. Keeping the car in gear, but jamming in the clutch, he waited for the policeman to come over to the side of the car.

The policeman said: "I'd like to see your driver's license."

"I told you," Tommy began, but the policeman cut him off.

"I know you told me," he snapped. "But I want to see it, just the same."

He held out his hand.

"I knew it," Tommy said bitterly. "The one day I forget it in my other clothes, I've got to stumble into something like this. If I'd just driven on instead of trying to help someone . . ."

"It's a citizen's duty to stop at an accident," the policeman said. He looked through the windows, at his mate on the other side of the road. "I'm inclined to give you a break, so if you'll just show me some other identification . . ."

Tommy pointed to the registration certificate, strapped about the steering wheel shaft.

The policeman opened the door at Tommy's side and poking in his head, read from the certificate: "James Robertson, that's what you said. But—the date's today."

"I just bought the car this morning."

The policeman straightened. "You've got the bill of sale?"

Tommy reached into his breast pocket and produced it. The policeman studied it, folded it, then unfolded it again and scowled at it.

"You understand, Mr. Robertson," he said, finally. "We work for the taxpayers of this state and it's our job to be careful. There was a broadcast just a little while ago and . . . well, if you don't mind . . ." He scowled again and stepped back. "Excuse me."

He signaled to his partner. "Pat, d'you mind stepping over. . . ?"

Tommy reached out, pulled shut the door and took his foot off the clutch. The car leaped forward and he jammed his right foot down on the accelerator.

Tommy shifted into second, swerved off the right road shoulder to miss a parked car, got back on the pavement and

went into high. He looked into the rear vision mirror and saw the policemen just piling into the white police car.

This is it, Tommy thought. Well, there could be only one end to it, but he'd give them a run for their money. You had to do that. You had to play your cards as they were dealt; you just couldn't throw them in.

A hundred yards from the scene of the accident he was doing forty. His foot jammed the accelerator down to the floorboards and the speedometer needle shot up to fifty, sixty, then seventy. It was eighty when the village of Palmdale appeared ahead.

The police car was full in his rear vision mirror, less than a quarter of a mile behind him. How would they follow him through Palmdale? At full speed, regardless of traffic and pedestrians? That would tell the tale.

Houses and stores whipped by. Tommy eased his foot off the gas pedal and the speedometer needle dropped down to seventy-five, then seventy. People stood on the sidewalks of Main Street, staring at the whizzing Buick as it shot by. The police siren was wailing thinly, warning motorists ahead.

The street was clear; a few cars were on it, but they were idling along. Grimly, Tommy pressed down again on the accelerator. He was through Palmdale safely. But the police car had not lost any ground. And now, out in the open, without another town ahead, it would cut down the distance between the two cars.

Tommy shot a glance at the instrument panel and a cry escaped his lips. The needle that showed the temperature of the water was at the very top; the 18,000-local-mile car had a flaw in its water pump. The motor was already dangerously overheated, only the speed at which he was traveling was keeping it cool enough to prevent its disintegration.

Eighty-eight. Ninety and ninety-two. Faster than Tommy had ever driven a car. Ahead, to the left, a ribbon of black cut across the sand—a secondary road, leading up into the hills.

Tommy shot a quick glance into the rear vision mirror, saw the pursuing white car an eighth of a mile behind him. Not more than that distance ahead was the secondary road.

He lifted his foot from the accelerator and his speed decreased to 90, 85, 80 . . . 75!

Another glance into the mirror. The police car was out in the middle of the highway, easing to the left, to pass and force him off on the right. It was coming at terrific speed, the policemen evidently thinking their superior speed the cause of their gain.

Tommy gritted his teeth savagely, touched the brakes and made a wild left turn off the main highway onto the secondary road. His tires screeched and he fought wildly to keep control of the wheel. He finally straightened out the car and looked into the mirror.

The police car had been coming too fast; his turn had caught them by surprise and they had overshot the road. It would take them precious seconds to stop the car, turn and come back.

Disregarding the message of the little needle on his instrument panel, Tommy again gave the Buick everything. On the rough, secondary road he brought the speedometer needle up to 80, 88 and finally to 90. He slowed briefly for a rather sharp turn, then gunned the motor again to take a grade. He looked back and saw the police car almost a mile to the rear.

He made another sharp turn and there, a hundred yards

ahead, was his salvation, a widened cut in a hillside and beyond it a narrow ravine.

He braked, almost overshot the cut, but skidded off it and hurtled into the rocky ravine, the car bounding and clanging as it hit rough ground. He brought it to a stop and began turning it furiously.

He had just completed the job when the police car shot by on the highway. Hoping that they had not seen him, Tommy waited a moment until the car had vanished around a turn, then came out upon the highway and going downhill toward Highway #6 again let out the Buick.

He slowed down for Highway #6, made the turn—to the right, toward Palmdale—and looked off up the secondary road.

The white police car was nowhere in sight.

Tommy eased his car down to a modest 65, drove into Palmdale and picked up Highway #138, that led to the east. Leaving the city limits of Palmdale he saw ahead of him a road entirely free of traffic and eased his speedometer up to 75, a speed too high for safety with the condition of his water pump or radiator, but fast enough to give him distance.

23

Ten miles from Palmdale he pulled into a tiny village and drove into a gas station. He stopped the car and steam enveloped the engine. The filling station attendant whistled.

"Got a leak in your radiator, mister!" he observed.

Tommy got out of the car and raised the hood. One glance at the water pump told him that his original suspicion had been correct. It was corroded and undoubtedly "frozen." Yet this was no time to repair it—if a repair were possible.

"It's the water pump," he said.

The filling station man whistled again. "You can't drive with that busted—crack your cylinder block."

"I know," said Tommy, "but these cars can take a lot of abuse. It'll have to do me until I get to San Berdoo."

"That's a long way from here."

"I'll fill it up with water in every town. If I drive slow, I think I can make it."

The man shrugged. "It's your car."

He got the water hose and sprayed water over the radiator, cooling it off. Then finally he took off the radiator cap and squirted water into the radiator. It was sloshed around inside and he added a little more water, then deeming it cooled off sufficiently, he filled the radiator.

Tommy had him fill the gas tank with gas, although he fretted over every moment that was used in the operation. But finally he paid for the gas and got into the car.

He drove cautiously until he was away from the filling station, then again let out the car. He held it at seventy-five, passed through another tiny village and came to a fork in the highway. He took the left road and traveled over a miserable section of road; it was paved but pockmarked with chuckholes and several times when he hit especially big ones Tommy expected the axles to break. But the only flaw in the car was the water pump, and the axles held.

He was engrossed in watching the road, when he suddenly became aware that he had passed a graveled road and, braking the car, put it into reverse and backed to the road. He looked ahead and to the rear, saw no other car in sight, and turned off.

The road, although graveled, was actually an improvement over the paved one he had left, and Tommy sent the

car hurtling along. A fork went off to the right and Tommy, keeping to the left, had to slow the Buick down to forty miles an hour. A mile or two further and a fork went off to the left and Tommy, taking the right this time, found himself on a mere trail that didn't seem to have been traveled in a week.

The motor began to wheeze and Tommy was aware of the hissing of steam. The water he had put into the radiator had vaporized. He stopped the car for a moment and the violence of the steam issuing forth alarmed him so that he started driving again.

After five minutes he topped a rise and shut off the motor. He stood there for a moment, his foot on the brake, then took it off and coasted downhill. The grade was an easy one and he coasted for a full mile, but looking ahead and seeing the steep grade he whistled softly.

He stopped the car and sized up the situation. He could see the road, a mere rutted trail winding up a steep grade, running along the side of an almost vertical cliff and disappearing behind the mountain.

He shook his head. The engine would never make that, not without a refill of water. But this was desert country and there was no water anywhere. No water, no houses, no filling stations.

There was no turning back, however, and he put the car in gear and started forward. He went a mile and the motor began to knock fiercely. The roaring of the hissing steam filled his ears. Ahead the road became even steeper. He shifted into second gear, then believing that the second gear heated the motor too much, he went back into high; the engine began to chug and miss, seemed to have no power. He shifted back into second, then finally into low.

The road had become a mere shelf running along the

side of the mountain. To the left was a sixty per cent grade, falling off into a narrow valley below, a rock-strewn, impassable valley.

The tortured motor wheezed and clanked and then something broke. Metal hit the hood of the car such a blow that Tommy, behind the wheel, flinched. He applied the emergency brakes, shut off the motor and got out of the car.

He had come at least two miles up the steep grade and although the road disappeared ahead, around the mountain, he estimated that it was at least another mile to the top. And after that . . . ?

He shook his head, became aware that the car was jerking against the emergency brakes. With a sigh he stepped to the door, opened it and reaching in, twisted the wheel. He whisked out the briefcase, then, stooping, released the emergency brakes.

The car slewed sideways and back. The rear wheels went over the edge of the road, the front of the car jerked up . . . and then the car was gone.

Tommy watched it fall. It turned over two or three times, hit a shelf and flew out into space. He counted the seconds before his ears heard the final crash as the car was smashed to bits on the valley floor below.

He drew a deep breath and started walking.

It couldn't have been past noon when Tommy Dancer started walking, yet when the sun disappeared behind the mountains in the west, he had not seen a human being. He had left the road long ago, crossed a narrow valley, climbed a steep mountain and descended into another valley and was almost across it.

He had walked perhaps fifteen miles, although he could not be sure about the distance, because some of the

going, up the mountainsides and down, had been slow traveling.

He had eaten nothing since morning, had tasted no water. In his briefcase he had one hundred and fifty-eight thousand dollars, but it could not assuage his thirst or hunger.

He sat down on an outcropping of rock and watched the darkness settle over the valley . . . and over him. He thought of the little lock and key shop on Melrose Avenue, that he had always hated; he thought of his dingy apartment on Las Palmas Street, and the empty evenings he had spent in movie theatres and bowling alleys. He thought of the hollowness of his life since his discharge from the Army—and he would, at this moment, have made a compact with the devil to give ten years of his life to go back to the day before he had met Willis Trent.

No, not quite. For on that day he had seen Betty Targ for the first time. She was the one bright spot in this entire mad pattern. But he had lost her, too. Perhaps he had even caused her death.

Somewhere in the distance a dog howled, but after a few moments, Tommy realized that it wasn't a dog, but a coyote. However, the sound was an eerie one and Tommy, shivering, got to his feet.

It was almost totally dark, but since it didn't matter in what direction he went, Tommy began walking. He stumbled over rocks and fell once or twice, but continued on. Later, he would sleep, but his brain was seething now and he knew that rest was impossible.

He was aware that he was climbing and after awhile came out on a shelf that was fairly level. The coyote howled again, much closer this time.

The shelf narrowed and descended into a canyon, then rose again and widened.

The coyote barked and then Tommy suddenly knew that it wasn't a coyote, after all. A light appeared straight ahead of him and the barking came from there.

Tommy stopped. The thing to do was to turn and put the light to his back, but the gnawing in his stomach would not be denied. It would be worse by morning. Besides, there was Fred Kraft's revolver in his side coat pocket.

The house ahead was a small one. In the yellow light he could make out its outlines. An isolated ranch house. Drawing a deep breath, he went toward it.

The dog was aware of his approach and began barking furiously, and when Tommy was about a hundred feet from the house the door was suddenly opened and a man became framed in the yellow light from within.

"Hello," he called. "Who is it?"

"A stranger," Tommy replied. "I seem to be lost."

"You sure are, mister," was the reply. "Ain't nobody ever comes up here."

Assured by that remark, Tommy quickened his footsteps. The dog rushed toward him, but was called back by his master. Tommy moved into the area of light from the house and saw that the man in the doorway was a thin, elderly man, wearing flannel trousers, white shirt and carpet slippers. A handkerchief scarf was about his neck.

"Missed the road, eh?" the man said.

"Some time ago, I guess. I've been walking for hours."

"Well, come on in and rest a spell, then I'll put you on the road." The man in the doorway cocked his head to one side. "Haven't been hunting, have you?"

Tommy shook his head. The man stepped aside and

Tommy entered the house. Inside, he shot a quick glance around. There seemed to be only one room to the place, for a bed was in one corner, a gasoline stove in another and beside it a refrigerator. A clean, bare table stood in the middle of the room and at one side of the room was another on which reposed what seemed to be an exceedingly large radio set. Food was cooking on the gasoline stove.

The old man followed Tommy into the room and closed the door, locking the dog outside.

"Sit down, pardner," he said. "I imagine you're hungry."

"I'm starving."

"You won't be long, 'cause that stew's been ready for the last ten minutes. I just didn't feel like eating before. By the way, my name's Coggeshall. I'm the caretaker here."

"Caretaker?"

"Yes. This is the Four Square Gold Mine, you know."

Tommy blinked. "I didn't see any mine."

The caretaker chuckled. "'Course not. It's a hole in the ground—a shaft running into the side of the mountain. But if it were daylight you'd see the powerhouse and the other buildings, off to the right. The mine hasn't been in operation since '42, you know."

"I didn't know."

"Government shut down all gold mines during the war and the Four Square hasn't reopened yet."

"Not worth while, eh?"

"Oh, I wouldn't say that. There's a million and a half come out of this mine. But it takes money to dig out gold and I guess the Four Square stockholders haven't kicked through with enough assessment money to start operations again. Meanwhile, I'm looking after things."

"You're here all alone?"

"And how! You're the first person's been up here in five months!"

24

Coggeshall bustled off to the stove, examined his stew and shut off the flame under it. He got dishes from a cupboard and set the table. Tommy, meanwhile, seated himself on a straight-backed chair and watched the caretaker.

Finally the food was on the table and Coggeshall brought up a stool. "Shall we eat?" he asked.

Tommy threw his briefcase onto Coggeshall's bed and pulled up his chair. Coggeshall handed him the bowl of stew. "Help yourself. I'm not hungry myself. Don't move around enough to work up an appetite. Bet you haven't eaten all day."

"I haven't," said Tommy and helped himself to a generous portion of the stew.

He ate it while Coggeshall toyed with one-fourth the amount and then urged Tommy to eat what was left in the bowl. When they were finished eating, the caretaker filled a pipe and pushed back his chair.

"Seven-thirty," he said. "Time for my chess game."

"I'm sorry, but I don't play the game."

"Oh, I didn't mean with you." Coggeshall pointed his pipestem at the radio. "I play with a shepherder up in Montana, every Saturday night . . . that's a short wave radio."

"An amateur sending and receiving set?"

Coggeshall nodded. "A rather good one, too. I built it myself, when I first came up here in '42. Don't know what I'd have done without it." He tapped his chest. "The old ticker's bad, you know. That's why I've taken this job up

here. No work, no excitement." He smiled. "Only the radio—and that's excitement enough."

Tommy stared at the radio set. "Do you listen to commercial broadcasts with that set?"

"Oh, yes. As a matter of fact, I had the seven o'clock news on when Beowulf started barking at you." He puffed rapidly on his pipe for a moment, then took it from his mouth. "You're Tommy Dancer, I imagine."

"Who?" Tommy asked, shocked.

"Tommy Dancer. There was quite a lot about you on the radio. Your description . . . the briefcase. You've got the money in there, I suppose."

Tommy took Kraft's revolver from his pocket. Coggeshall looked at it and shook his head. "You won't need that—not here. I've got six months to live, perhaps a year, if I don't have any excitement. My wants are all supplied and a thousand dollars reward money doesn't interest me. Nor, for that matter, does what you have in that briefcase."

"Yet you listened pretty carefully to what they said on the radio about—about me."

"Oh, yes. You see, they told about your encounter with the police down at Palmdale." Coggeshall gave Tommy an odd expression. "You know, of course, that Palmdale is the nearest town to this place."

"No," said Tommy, "I hadn't known. How far is it from here?"

"Eight miles."

"Eight miles!" cried Tommy. "I must have driven fifty."

"In a roundabout sort of way, no doubt. The side roads in these hills are deceptive. I understand you had trouble with the water pump at Littleneck, so you probably abandoned the car somewhere."

Tommy nodded. He got up and walked to the radio.

"Is there any news on at seven-thirty?"

"Why, yes, I imagine so, although it's almost ten minutes past the half hour now and they're probably through with, ah, the news about you. They've been talking about you at the beginning of the newscasts." He cleared his throat. "Is there anything special you wanted to know?"

"I want to know how much they know."

"Quite a lot. You left a trail of silver dollars in Los Angeles and you bought a Buick car. You stopped at the scene of an accident near Palmdale and the police became suspicious and tried to question you. You got away from them and—"

"That's enough," snapped Tommy. He scowled at the radio. "They're positive I killed Earl Faraday?"

". . . And a man named Willis Trent!"

Gasping, Tommy whirled. "Trent! He's dead?"

"The Los Angeles police found his body in the Hollywood Hills."

"And they think *I* killed him?"

"They, ah, seem quite certain about it."

Tommy looked steadily into the elderly caretaker's eyes. "What do *you* think?"

"I'm not a policeman."

"I wish you had a telephone," said Tommy, "I'd let you know who killed Faraday—and Trent."

"You want to call the police?"

"No, I want to call the murderer . . . a man named Paul deCamp."

"Oh, the man whose money . . ." Coggeshall's eyes went to the briefcase on the bed. He frowned. "If you think

calling him on the phone would help you in any way, I might be able to put through a call . . .”

“How? I don’t see any phone here.”

“There isn’t, but I think I could put through a phone call with the radio.”

“How?”

“By contacting an amateur in Los Angeles who has a telephone hookup.”

Tommy’s eyes narrowed. “You call someone on this radio who has a phone and he connects his phone to the radio, is that the idea?”

“Yes. He would get your party on the phone and you could carry on a conversation with him. The only bad feature is that it would not be a private conversation.”

“I don’t care about that, because any amateur listening in, wouldn’t know where the call came from.”

“Oh, but they would. You see, it’s necessary to give your call letters—and there’s your kilocycle band, of course.”

“Let me get this straight,” said Tommy. “I know a little about amateur radio, from the army, but I’m not an expert. You broadcast on a certain wave length and the party you contact broadcasts on *his* wave length. But what’s to prevent you from going *off* your wave length . . . ?”

“Because that would be illegal . . .” Coggeshall, looking at Tommy’s face, suddenly bit his lip. “I see what you mean.”

“Turn on your radio,” said Tommy. “Get an amateur in Hollywood, but get him on a wave length that isn’t your own and don’t give your call letters. . . .”

“I’ve got to give *some* call letters.”

“Well, give them, just as long as they aren’t your own.”

"Very well." Coggeshall crossed to the radio and flicked on a couple of switches. "Of course I'm doing this under duress. You, ah, have a gun in your hand and I am quite unarmed."

"Fine," said Tommy, putting the gun back into his pocket. "Remember that."

While the radio tubes warmed up, Coggeshall manipulated some dials on the panel of his sending outfit. He pointed to some white letters on the panel. "There's my call letters—KF16W." He pointed to a little scratch on a dial. "And there's my wave band. I'll go off it thirty or forty kilocycles."

He picked up a small microphone, flicked another switch and spoke into the microphone. "WF32W, calling WC44M." Then he grimaced and put down the microphone. "No, that won't do. WC44M knows my voice. He'd know who was talking."

He picked up a book on which was printed "Log Book." "I talked to a man about six months ago who told me he had a telephone hookup. I wrote down his call letters in this log book. I'm sure he wouldn't remember me, especially if I use different call letters. . . . Yes, here he is, WC33L. Mmm, he lives in Burbank, but that's close enough."

He took up the microphone again and began announcing the call letters of the Burbank radio amateur. He repeated them perhaps a dozen times, then reached over to the far end of the radio set and flicked another switch.

A voice came from the loudspeaker. "Hello, WF32W, this is WL98L in Glendale. Would you like me to telephone WC33L in Burbank and tell him you're calling him?"

"Yes," replied Coggeshall, "I'd appreciate it very much."

There was silence on the radio for a minute or two,

then the voice of WL98L came on again. "Hello, WF32W, I got WC33L for you and he's tuning in on your wave band."

"That's great. Thanks a million."

"No trouble at all. By the way, your signal is coming in very strong. I'd like to talk to you sometime."

"Good, perhaps later in the evening. Thanks again."

Coggeshall made a slight manipulation with a dial, then spoke into his microphone. "WF32W calling WC33L, in Burbank, California. Can you hear me?"

A new voice came over the loudspeaker. "Hello, WF32W, this is WC33L. I can hear you fine."

"Hello, WC33L, how are you? I talked to you several months ago and I believe you told me then that you had a telephone connection hooked to your radio."

"That's right. Would you like me to call somebody for you?"

"Yes, I would. It's, ah, rather an urgent call I'd like to make and I don't have a telephone myself. The number is . . ." Coggeshall looked inquiringly at Tommy.

"Granite 2-5911."

"Granite 2-5911," Coggeshall said into the microphone. "It's a Hollywood number, I think."

"Yes, it is. I can dial it. Hold on a minute."

The dialing came distinctly over the loudspeaker and then a voice that Tommy knew spoke: "Melrose Lock and Key Shop."

Tommy stepped forward and took the microphone from Coggeshall's hand. "Mr. Roan, you know who this is . . ."

Roan's voice was startled: "Yes, of course. I—I've been expecting your call all day."

"Is the party I talked to this morning in the shop?"

"No, but . . ."

Then Betty Targ's voice came over the radio, clear and sparkling. "Tommy, this is Betty."

Tommy exclaimed. "What are you doing there, Betty?"

"I've been here for hours and hours, waiting for your call, Tommy."

"You're all right?"

"Of course I am."

"What about—you know who?"

"That's why I'm here. He—he let me go, so I could tell you myself it was all right."

"He isn't there with you?"

"No. Tommy, listen—where are you?"

"I can't tell you that."

"Why not? It's all right, I tell you. He wants the, well, the money, more than anything."

"Betty," said Tommy, "it isn't as simple as that. Believe me. All right, he isn't there with you, but that doesn't mean he isn't nearby . . . if you know what I mean. Outside. You—you know about W. T.?"

There was a slight pause, then Betty's voice, sounding worried, came on again. "Yes, I know, but—well, I can't tell you about that, not over the phone. But everything's going to be all right, and Tommy—I want to come to you. No matter where you are, no matter" . . . Her voice caught for an instant—"No matter what."

Tommy said in a low tone, "There's nothing in the world I'd like more, Betty, but it won't work."

"I think it will, Tommy. I'm sure. He—he won't press that about the . . . the money."

"I wasn't thinking about the money," Tommy said. "It's the other . . ."

"But you had nothing to do with that. I *know*. I—I can

even help you prove that. We can work it out. I *know*, Tommy. I know."

Of course she knew. She had been at the Mulholland Drive place when Faraday had got it. Her word was as good as Paul deCamp's. And there was Louie. Louie had been with Tommy at the time. Louie was Trent's man and now that Trent was gone, Louie could be made to tell the truth.

Yes, but there *was* Trent. They were accusing him of that. Still, if it could be proven that Tommy had had nothing to do with Faraday's death, it would be in his favor—and against deCamp. But in a case like that, deCamp would use the money charge against him—for spite.

But he *had* stolen the money. And for that he had to pay.

Tommy said into the microphone: "All right, Betty, I'll come in."

"No, no, you mustn't!" Betty cried. "I mean, I want you to—to give up, but you mustn't come in. You know why. They're looking for you and I—I'm afraid of what would happen. I'll come to *you*, Tommy. No matter where you are, I'll come to you. But you mustn't show yourself now. Stay where you are."

Tommy looked at Coggeshall. "Just where is this place?"

"Eight miles from Palmdale. It's about six miles out on the Littleneck road. There's a wooden sign there, on the left side of the road—Four Square Mine, 2 miles. The road isn't very good, but you can't miss it."

"Did you hear that, Betty?"

"Yes, Four Square Mine. I'll be there, Tommy. My car's outside and I'm leaving right away. Don't do anything, Tommy. Just wait for me."

"I'll be waiting," Tommy said. He reached over to the panel and flicked off a switch.

Coggeshall sprang forward. "You shouldn't have turned it off. I wanted to thank WC33L."

"Thank him some other time."

Coggeshall frowned, but shrugged and turned off the other switches. "So, it's going to be all right?"

"It'll have to be all right. I didn't kill anyone."

"But you have got the money in that briefcase?"

"Yes," said Tommy, "I've got the money. I stole it from Paul deCamp's safety deposit box at the Hollywood-Highland Bank."

Coggeshall nodded thoughtfully. "This deCamp fellow, from what I heard on the radio, he's a sort of mystery man, isn't he?"

"Maybe he's mysterious to some people," Tommy said savagely, "but not to the police. They know him. And so do a lot of other people in Los Angeles and points west. They know him only too well. But it *was* his money; how he got it isn't important, at least not in this case."

"No, I guess not," agreed Coggeshall. "Still, if you ask me, I'd say this Paul deCamp is just a lowdown, doggone crook."

Tommy stared at him.

25

It was exactly nine-thirty when Coggeshall's dog, outside the house, suddenly started barking. Tommy Dancer kicked back the chair in which he had been sitting and started for the door, but Coggeshall exclaimed:

"Better let me open the door, Tommy!"

"Who else could it be but Betty Targ?"

"It's probably her, all right, but I told you that talking on the radio wasn't private."

He stepped around Tommy and opened the door. The dog began barking even more furiously.

"Down, Beowulf," the caretaker ordered.

The dog subsided and Tommy, peering through the window, saw headlights come around a turn in the steep road that led up to the mine. He watched them approach and drew the revolver from his pocket.

The headlights stopped forty or fifty yards from the cabin. A car door slammed and a voice that Tommy knew, called: "Is this the Four Square Mine?"

"Yes, it is," replied Coggeshall.

High-heeled shoes spurned gravel as Betty Targ came running toward the cabin. Tommy waited until she was within a few feet of the door, then jammed his revolver into his pocket and sprang out.

"Betty!" he cried.

She came into his arms and he felt her body tremble and quiver. "Tommy," she half sobbed. "I'm so glad to see you."

Shoes crunched on the gravel behind Betty and George Roan's voice said, coolly, "Tommy, how are you . . . ?"

Tommy released Betty and stepped back. "I didn't expect you to come along."

"Couldn't let her come up here in the mountains alone this time of night."

"Sure you weren't followed?"

"By Paul deCamp? No." Roan chuckled. "He was hanging around outside. I called the cop on the beat; Bill Pren-

tiss, you know—I play pinochle with him. He pinched deCamp for loitering.” He nodded to the caretaker’s shack. “Do you think we ought to be moving along?”

“Yes,” said Tommy. “But there’s something I want to pick up inside.”

“Sure, the money.”

Tommy headed for the cabin. Betty was at his side and behind them came Coggeshall and George Roan. Inside the cabin, Roan crowded past Tommy toward the cot on which lay the briefcase. “A hundred and sixty thousand dollars . . .” Roan took his hand out of his pocket. There was an automatic in it. “It’s a lot of money, Tommy. . . .”

Betty Targ exclaimed in sudden anguish. “Oh, *no!*”

“I could say I’m sorry,” Roan went on tonelessly. “But that wouldn’t be the truth. A hundred and sixty thousand—”

“Is a lot of money, you said,” Tommy cut in, bitterly.

“Trent sold me on the idea,” Roan went on. “He thought I’d make a good decoy to bring you in. He didn’t trust deCamp. That’s the trouble with money. You can’t trust anybody. DeCamp and Trent made a deal to share the money, after deCamp had killed Faraday. Only Trent didn’t trust deCamp. So he came to me and offered me half the money if I brought you in. But after all, if *he* didn’t trust deCamp and deCamp didn’t trust him, why should *I* have trusted either of them?”

“So you killed Trent?”

“Will it bore you if I say again, that a hundred and sixty thousand dollars is a great deal of money? As a matter of fact, it’s more than I’ve earned in my entire lifetime. And more, perhaps, than I can spend during the years that are left to me.” Roan smiled faintly. “But I don’t know, I’ll *try* to spend it. Down in Brazil.”

He moved to the cot and picked up the briefcase. With it under his left arm he faced the others. "I'm going to have some bad moments about this . . ."

"Don't be a fool, Roan," Tommy said, sharply. "You can't kill three people in cold blood."

"I never thought I could kill even one," Roan said. "But it wasn't hard, Tommy, it wasn't hard at all. And that was before I actually had the money in my hand. But now I've got it and . . ." Roan smiled fleetingly, sadly. "There was a piece in the paper only last month about a fellow who killed another fellow for only two dollars and fifty cents. Imagine that!"

"I'm imagining it," said Tommy, through his teeth—and went for the revolver in his coat pocket. He caught Roan by surprise and actually got the gun free of his pocket, before Tommy's former employer fired. But then a needle of pain pierced Tommy's right shoulder. He gasped and contracted the fingers of his hand in an effort to fire at Roan, but it was useless for the gun had fallen from his hand. It was at his feet and Tommy dropped down to scoop it up. Roan kicked it clear across the room.

"Sorry, Tommy, I wanted to give it to you nice and clean, but . . ."

A blinding light suddenly came into the little shack from outside and a voice thundered: "Hey, you, inside . . . !"

George Roan sprang to one side as if a thousand volts of electricity had suddenly struck him. "Who's that?" he cried hoarsely.

The face of the elderly caretaker twisted crookedly. "Just the police."

"The police!" cried Roan. "How . . . ?"

The voice outside bellowed: "Are you all right, Coggeshall?"

Coggeshall ignored the call outside for a moment. He said to Roan: "Why, it was that radio call, you know. . . ." He looked down at Tommy who was kneeling on the floor, his right hand hanging limply at his side. "I neglected to tell you, Tommy, that WC33L was a lieutenant in the Burbank Police Department. In his spare time he's a radio amateur. . . ."

Outside the shack, a voice blared: "We open fire in ten seconds—with a Tommy gun. . . ."

"On the other hand," said George Roan, "I probably wouldn't know how to spend that money anyway." He stepped to the open doorway. "I'm coming," he called out into the darkness. "I'm coming, shooting . . ."

He stepped out. A gun barked once—the sound of it was drowned by a roar of machine gun fire.

Coggeshall stepped to the doorway. "All right," he said.

Policemen crowded into the shack. They found Tommy Dancer seated on the floor, with Betty Targ kneeling beside him, her arms around him.

"Dancer?" one of the policemen asked.

Tommy nodded. "I'm ready."

Coggeshall came over and stooping, laid his hand on Tommy's shoulder. "I hope you make it all right, Tommy."

Betty looked up at him. There were tears in his eyes. "He'll make it," she said. "It won't be forever and I'll—I'll be waiting."

