

NOVEMBER



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DIME

MYSTERY

MAGAZINE

COMBINED WITH 10 STORY



TWO TOP-FLIGHT
NOVELS OF CRIME - MYSTERY

HELL COMES IN BOTTLES! | Dr. DIGGORY'S GLASS GRAVE

by WILLIAM R COX

by FREDERICK C. DAVIS

 **DIME
MYSTERY
MAGAZINE**
COMBINED WITH 10 STORY MYSTERY

NEXT ISSUE OUT NOVEMBER 3rd!

Volume 31

November, 1944

Number 1

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CHAPTER ONE

Bombs and Bottles

THE little man who ran the package store squirmed, staring at his empty shelves. "But I'm scared. And I can get by, until the war's over. California people will buy wine," he said.

Weasel Ferera's long nose twitched. He had a small head and jerky habits of motion. He had been using cocaine for ten years and it was amazing that he still lived. He said, "This ain't a jerk organization, Smith. This is big. You're protected. We got labels, bottles, everything."

Smith hesitated, avarice in his soul. He said, "The government. . . ."

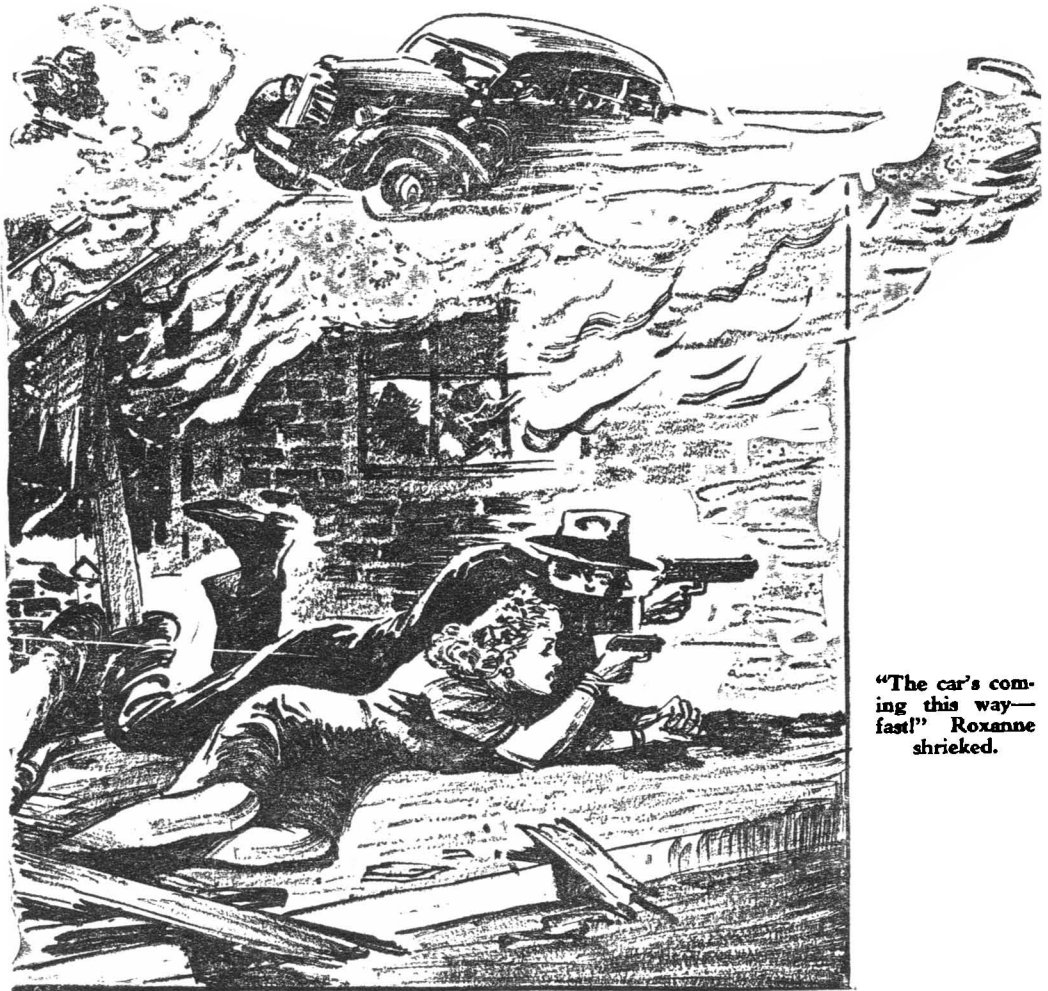
Danno Magraw spoke for the first time. "To hell with the government! To hell with bureaucrats! Take the whiskey and make a living, you damn slave!" Danno was Celtic and as big as a Sherman Tank. He had jowls like a prime boar and his beard was a stiff bristle. He glared and little Smith cowered.

Weasel said, "You remember prohibition? This is just the same. People got to have likker, don't they?"

HELL COMES IN BOTTLES!

By WILLIAM R. COX

George Grey and his murder-monger mob were reaping fabulous profits in bloodstained gold, forcing fascism down America's throat with poisoned Scotch as a chaser. . . . Could Tom Kincaid hope to smash their dark dream of Empire that stretched from Hollywood to the Atlantic, when he set them up to drinks of their own strange and deadly brew?



"The car's coming this way—fast!" Roxanne shrieked.

Danno said, "You'll take it and make a profit."

Smith signed the order blank. He watched the two walk out onto Broad Street and within him was the uneasy sensation of having let himself in for trouble. . . .

Jones, who ran a liquor store, was not so amenable. He was a sturdy, middle-aged man who growled, "No bootleg for me. The stuff's no good and it leads to worse things. I can sell wine. . . ."

Weasel said, "So you don't want any, huh?"

Danno Magraw roared, "Ye'll take it and like it!" thrusting his prognathous jaw into the face of Jones.

Jones brought up a short piece of lead pipe from beneath the counter. He slammed it against Danno's head, rammed the end into Weasel's thin midriff. He caught the two by the elbows and ran them the length of his counter, then pitched the precious pair into Chestnut Street, to the delight of Los Angeles passersby.

Three hours later an automobile turned into Chestnut Street, rode slowly to a spot in front of Jones's little liquor store. Three citizens known as Jake Krum, One Lung Tighe and Morty Wise, unsavory gents with long police records, lounged for a moment. Weasel Ferera stood across the street, pointing and nodding.

A small metal object seemed to float from nowhere across the momentarily deserted sidewalk. Jones, coming from behind his counter to sell a bottle of wine to a customer, walked smack into it—staggered. There was a loud sound, the thunder of explosion.

Jones and the customer were unidentifiable when the morgue baskets arrived.

Late that night, in an underground chamber somewheres deep in the heart of the city, the bootleg ring gathered. Weasel and Danno and the thugs sat about a table. Weasel and Danno had their reports ready; the others listened admiringly as Weasel, twitching with the itch for more cocaine, read from his sheets.

In the wall was a two-way public address system. When Weasel had finished the switch clicked and there was a moment's pause. Then a dry, precise voice said, "You are three cases short in your figures. However, that's not bad. You will continue to take orders. Again I impress upon you that this is a large scale operation. First Los Angeles, then California, then the nation shall be flooded with our product. There will be millions in it—millions!"

Weasel and Danno sat and grinned. One Lung and the gungels and shiv-men beamed with pleasure. The voice said sharply, "You are only one small gang among thousands who have organized for this work. Sugar must be acquired. Stills must be built. There is much to be done. Get out and work. Co-operation

of all units is imperative!" There was a pause. Then the dry voice asked, "Questions?" and the switch clicked.

Weasel said, "Boss, just one thing—are the cops fixed? I mean, how far can we go? I mean, is there any chance of a come-back if we just beat on a gee?"

The voice said, "Go as far as you like. If you are caught—you will be released. We do not *buy* policemen. We overpower them with force!"

Weasel whispered, "By the ghost of Dooney the Killer! It's heaven, that's what it is!"

"Beatin' cops! That's for me!" chortled One Lung. "Eemagine! What a boss we got now! Beats Capone!"

The voice crackled suddenly, "Magraw, I want you to go to Seventh and Marathon at exactly midnight. I have a special mission for you."

Magraw did not allow himself to smile. He merely said in his affected, thick brogue, "Yuss indeed, sir!"

The speaker went blank and the gang broke up, going separately and quietly about their nefarious ways. Magraw alone was solemn, thoughtful. . . .

ROXANNE QUEEN was serious, for once. The lissome blonde actress stood squarely on her neat, brown brogues and faced the two men who shifted uneasily. She said, "Tom Kincaid, you've chased George Grey for years without catching him. You've grown grey, you've been beaten and shot and stabbed. You've accomplished wonders in thwarting this character and half the police in the country now have Grey's description and believe that he must be apprehended."

Tom Kincaid, burly, tweeded slightly ruffled, grinned. "You sound like the introduction to a B-mystery picture. Come on, Rox, give us that big smile. We'll be back. I wouldn't say good-bye to a girl like you. . . ."

"The hell you wouldn't!" said the ladylike movie star.

Matt Durkin, flamboyant in a mauve sports jacket and fawn slacks, his bare feet sandaled, his slick hair shining, said flatly, "You're right, Rox."

Tom strode up and down the open porch of the house which Roxanne had built upon the Hollywood hill. It had been the nearest thing to a home Tom Kincaid had ever had. Even in the days of his coast-to-coast gambling empire, before the nefarious and ruthless George Grey had moved in to destroy his life plans, Tom had never roosted long enough in one spot to become a homebody.

He said, "Rox, you're the sweetest gal in the world. But I've got to go after George Grey. I have to destroy that man—or he'll come close to destroying America."

She said firmly, "You can spare me a few weeks. I have this new set-up with Perfect Pictures. Its my big break. I've never starred—Samuel Slope wants to build me into a big name. I want you to meet Peter Abbot, my producer. And I want you to check on the fascistic friends of Arlene Devine, who is gunning for me."

Tom said, "Samuel Slope has fifty million dollars and is crazy about you." It was amazing how difficult the thought could be to him. He scowled.

"Sure," said Matt. "And Rox is crazy about you!"

"You're damned right, I am," said Roxane Queen sturdily. "Tom promised to marry me when he caught Grey—he can at least give me some time now!"

Tom said, "There is no one like you, Rox. You can put me on a spot neater than Grey himself!"

Her mobile, humorous face softened. She had a large mouth, warm and full, which added to the almost tomboyish beauty of her. She had never cared for stardom in pictures, being content to have the boys of America crazy for her, to swing her way through secondary, serio-comic roles, always working, always making money. Only since she had met Tom Kincaid had she aspired to reach the heights, as though perfection was the least thing Tom Kincaid should have. Tom knew this, and it stirred him to depths no other woman had ever touched.

She said softly, "You'll stay—awhile!"

"Yes," he surrendered. "I'll stay. We'll check the Devine gal right away. I've got to get word of Grey—I'll put out lines. . . ."

She said, "Thank you, Tom," and shook hands like a man. He never loved her more than at that moment.

Matt moved to the rumpus room at the end of the porch and said briskly, "Good! We'll have a shorty and go to the studio." He rummaged among the bottles. "Damn! The Scotch is low again. At six bucks a bottle it'll stay low, too!"

Tom said, "The liquor situation grows tough. There is a huge black market opening up. I hear you can buy whiskey, at a price in hundreds of stores in this district—and that it is strictly bootleg."

"The gangs are bound to open up again," said Matt. "They've been playing with pin ball machines and other little rackets and they're hungry."

Tom scowled. "We all like to drink. Americans will have their whiskey, come what may. But there's a war going on. Mobs can't operate without impeding it. . . ."

"I'm not buying bootleg," said Roxanne. "I'm for quitting the stuff—not that we drink very much."

"I'm not quitting," said Matt, draining his glass. "There'll be a way out—there always is. Let's go see the beautiful Devine and your rich friends. . . ."

They drove into Hollywood, to the independent Cinema Service lot, where Perfect Pictures would be made on a lease basis. In his large, airy office President Samuel Slope met them with unctiousness, concealing his suspicion of Tom and Matt under a hearty air.

SLOPE had made his money in banking and was spending it on motion pictures. He was a soft man with a small, selfish mouth and hard, predatory eyes. Undoubtedly he would get back, with huge interest, the money he was splurging on Perfect Pictures.

A narrow-faced, ascetic man in whose dark eyes a fever burned, arose and said, "I'm Peter Abbot," as though a supreme pronouncement was being made.

Roxanne greeted him, and Tom knew he was looking at the greatest director-producer of psychological films which Hollywood had produced. Abbot was all brain, scarcely able to stand the strain of work upon his puny body. He said, simply, "It will be fine working with you, my dear. I know your capabilities well."

The door to an inner sanctum opened and Arlene Devine, with her leading man, Sidney Standerly, swept in. Arlene was a vivid brunette. Standerly was a handsome profile, at whom you had to look twice to perceive his abysmal stupidity. They moved like a king and queen to meet the others.

Samuel Slope said, "Ah! All together at last! This is the nucleus of our company—the beginning of great things. Roxanne, dearest, here is your contract. Take it home and have your lawyer read it. Arlene, Sidney, here are yours. The figures will be satisfactory, I assure you. . . . And now Peter wants to discuss the first of our ventures in cinema-making." The man's air of geniality was lost upon Tom. Underneath he perceived a watchfulness, a suspicion, directed at him and Matt, primarily, but also at the others.

Abbot talked well, delineating the story. Arlene, Roxanne and Standerly were to have equal billing in a modern triangle yarn calling for some action and much polite comedy.

Arlene was dangerous to man or beast, he knew. She had been a star for several years, attaining the highest possible spot in pictures, then she'd slipped. She had fire, she knew drama, and she was deliberately setting after Samuel Slope.

Standerly was nervous, unhappy, obviously enamored of Arlene. Slope seemed to be enjoying the situation, but certainly preferred Roxanne. Only Abbot was intent wholly upon the making of a good picture.

When Abbot had finished, Arlene said, "You'll want some character actors, good ones. How about Jason Bee and Marilyn Hale? And you can use that boy, Bob Galleon. I know them all—we work well together."

Roxanne's brown eyes slid around to rest upon Tom. Slope was saying smoothly, "Leave their names on my desk. I'm sure Peter knows them."

The director's thin face pinched tight. "I know them. I don't want them!"

Arlene was clever enough to smile. She said, "But they *are* good, aren't they, Peter dear?"

"Fine!" said Abbot shortly. "Little happiness people!"

The star was scribbling the names on a pad. Slope did not alter his set smile. He said, "I've a case of Scotch. I want you each to take a bottle. Had a time getting it! Sort of an offering—for an auspicious beginning of our new picture."

In the car Roxanne said, "Bee, Hale and Galleon are all nasty fascists. Peter can't help himself, though, if Slope hires them."

Tom was turning the bottle over in his big hands. He said, "I don't like your millionaire. This bottle of Scotch has a faked stamp."

"What?" demanded Matt incredulously. "That old gag?"

"Bootleg," said Tom succinctly. "I recognize the work of an old forger named Higginbotham. I knew him well, fifteen years ago."

A giant of a man with a protruding jaw walked along the sidewalk, turned off and went into the offices of Perfect Pictures. Inside, he turned and stared out the upper glass of the door, one hand caressing his stubborn beard. Tom Kincaid's eyes met the glare, held it until Danno Magraw drew back and proceeded to the ornate, pretentious office of Samuel Slope.

A cycle had been completed. Inside Tom a little warning buzzer began to agitate, so that the big gambler's heart beat faster and his solid jaw hardened involuntarily. The pig-like face of Danno, strange to him, had nevertheless registered upon him with the impact of a slap in the belly. The tension in the office of Samuel Slope had aroused him to a pitch of nervous sensitivity which presaged trouble and plenty of it.

Matt was saying, "Perfect Pictures is paying you plenty to make a picture Rox. Just go ahead and work—we'll watch the little grounded gremlins of local fascism. They ain't tough."

Tom spread his gambler's hands, staring down at the large, straight fingers. He could not rid himself of the feeling of impending trouble. Roxanne stopped to buy a paper and he read a headline: "ANOTHER LIQUOR STORE BOMBED."

CHAPTER TWO

Death Strikes Again!

THE man in the package shop said, "I could let you have a bottle of Scotch—but I can't sell at the ceiling, brother. You unnerstand?"

Tom said, "Sure. Let me have it."

The man went in the back and brought out a bottle of Black Horse, the brand Samuel Slope had provided. Tom glanced at the government stamp, at the state stamp. He gave the man seven-fifty and walked out. He put the bottle with a dozen others in Roxanne's car and drove slowly up towards Hollywood Hills.

Matt was already there with another dozen bottles. He had one of them open and was cheerfully sampling it. "It's been tampered with," he said. Weak as water. There's no doubt, chum, the bootleggers are in."

Tom said, "This is a big operation. I hear from New York, from Florida, from Chicago that the stuff is flooding the market. Bourbon, rye and Scotch. Four Federal Agents have been killed. The retailers are thoroughly terrorized. Fascistic elements are boldly defending the 'rights' of the people to have whiskey. The people have the old Prohibition spirit. They're buying this bootleg with their eyes open."

"Someone is getting rich as hell," Matt said. "The mob behind this is terrific. Nation-wide organization—" He paused, his mouth open.

"Yeah," nodded Tom wearily. "Who could do all this in such a short time?"

"George Grey!" said Matt.

"And we don't even have a ghost of an idea where he is," said Tom bitterly.

Matt considered for a moment. Then he said, "The little fascists down at Perfect Pictures are buying the stuff by the case and getting plastered nightly. Could be a starting point."

Tom gathered together the bottles and put them in the back of the liquor cabinet in the rumpus room. The two went out and got into Roxanne's car and drove to the Cinema Service lot.

Samuel Slope was in the corridor, talking with a big man. He stopped them with a wave of his pudgy hand and said, "Have you met the new assistant director, Danno Magraw? Lucky to get him. He's had experience abroad. This is Tom Kincaid and Matt Durkin, the famed—er—gamblers, Danno."

The deep-set eyes bored into Tom. The giant had a grip like a hand-press. He said, "Glad to know ye, byes!"

He was as phoney as a three dollar bill, Tom thought, but mean and strong. Matt put his hands in his pockets, nodded cheerily and said, "I'm Irish myself, Magraw. Nice to meet one of our lads."

Magraw said in his throaty voice, "It's a fine gang we have on the picture. Hope you drop in often!" He had the air of one much at home.

The two went into Slope's office, arm in arm. Tom and Matt walked towards Stage One, where the first scenes were being shot. They heard Peter Abbot's small, clear voice saying, "Quiet, please. Roll them!" The sound man's voice echoed, "Quiet—shooting— We're rolling!"

Tom and Matt stopped, motionless. Arlene and Standerly were on a divan. Jason Bee, an elderly actor, spoke a line, then exited left. Arlene approached Standerly registering deep love. . . . A door banged open and Roxanne appeared, a breath of fresh air, lovely, giving life to the scene. Abbot's face glowed a bit under the glaring lights as he sipped a glass of lemonade.

Arlene blew a line. Abbot's mercurial features suffused with anger. He said bitterly, "Cut!"

Roxanne wheeled, stared at Arlene. She said, "You never used to go up in your lines, sister!"

Standerly piped, "You crossed us on the timing—"

Jason Bee, a pompous, stout man, called, "Rox is chewing it up. That's four times—"

Marilyn Hale, an acrid, blondined woman, sat near the not-so-young juvenile, Bob Gal-
leon, a weak-faced, petulant man. They chor-
used, "Rox, you're pressing too hard. . . .
You've lost the cadence."

It was unprecedented for members of a company to criticize a star openly, Tom knew. He moved forward. Matt hunched his wiry shoulders and his dark face glowed with rage. Peter Abbot was standing, shocked, furious.

Samuel Slope and Danno Magraw came blithely through the door and approached the set. Roxanne, arms akimbo, shapely legs spread, was cool and dangerous. She said, "Peter, was I wrong?"

"No, my dear," said Abbot quietly.

Roxanne said, "I'm quitting. Right now." She came down, her face pale beneath the make-up, but steady-eyed. She said, "Tom, you're right about everything. Let's go."

Samuel Slope put out a hand. He said, "This will finish you, Queen. You signed the contract." He did not seem alarmed, nor anything other than slightly regretful.

Danno Magraw sneered, standing slightly to the rear and at one side. Peter Abbot said with dignity, "I do not care to go on with the present cast, Mr. Slope."

Danno's voice boomed, "Looks like an in-
surrection, sir. A plot to ruin the picture."

Slope said, "You can quit, too, Abbot."

The faces of them all were contented, Tom thought. It was a strange scene, with undercurrents running deeper than the Pacific.

Abbot came to where Roxanne held to Tom's arm and said, "Shall we go together? There is something I must tell you, Tom. I've learned of a bad angle to all this. . . ."

THEY went through the heavy door, conscious of the babble of voices behind them, of Magraw saying loudly, "We'll throw out the junk he shot and start over. I've a yarn for ye, folks—a good un!"

The outer door opened into bright California sunshine, so that they were blinded for a moment. Tom turned to locate Abbot. He saw only Roxanne and Matt.

Abbot was on the ground, crumpled in a heap. Tom bent and snatched the light form into his arms and began to run. No one was at the gate, he saw, except the studio policeman within the little watch tower, and that worthy was examining a visitor's pass. Lightly Tom sprinted, swerved, making for Roxanne's car.

Matt leaped behind the wheel of the convertible and said, "What is it, Tom?"

Tom's face was white. "Get to the hospital, quick!"

Roxanne whispered, "Poor Peter. His heart was bad."

Tom said, "Look at his face. This wasn't a heart attack. This was poison of some kind."

Peter Abbot was accustomed to suffering, but the pain in his set features was apparent to them all. Matt drove like a fiend to the nearest hospital. Tom bore his burden to the emergency room and the overworked young doctors got busy. In a half hour one of them came out and said, "Too late. It was either cyanide or prussic acid. He has obviously been ill. There will be an autopsy of course. I suppose it was self-administered?"

Tom said, "It certainly was not. Please inform Captain Jack Clarke of Homicide and tell him Kincaid brought the body in."

He led the others to the car. He said, "Someone gave it to him in the lemonade he always drank. He had learned something—he told us that."

Roxanne said, "Do you think they meant to get me, too?"

Tom shook his head. "They meant to ruin you. They got you to sign a contract, then to quit. There can only be one reason for that."

"Sure," said Matt. "On account of us. And that means the fascistic crew was behind it."

"You'll be blacklisted in pictures," said Tom flatly. "You walked out. Peter is dead—and they'll say he committed suicide because the picture was going wrong. He was sick, remember. Slope's money will carry them

through a B picture directed by Magraw—and they have the block booking through Amalgamated Players to get back some of the investment."

"But Slope is a millionaire," protested Roxanne. "He can't be tied up with these people!"

"Slope was a banker. So was Grey," said Tom grimly. "The seeds of revolution can grow a strange crop. America never really loves war. These crafty people can stir up so much trouble, sniping at the conduct of the war, bellowing for a negotiated peace, undermining the economic structure by black market operations, that anything might happen."

Roxanne said, "But it doesn't seem possible, Tom. . . ." She stopped, tears in her brown eyes. "Peter lies back there dead—and I say these things can't happen! Oh, Tom, we must do some damn thing! Anything, to pay them for killing Peter!"

CHAPTER THREE

Draw Five!

THERE'S no clue—nothing," Captain Clarke said uneasily. "We're checking sales of prussic acid. There's a crime wave, all over L. A. This bootlegging business fosters crime. . . ."

Tom said, "The poison was probably flown in from the east. You'll never prove Peter was killed. But you'd better watch this bootleg crowd."

Clarke said, "We've got Grey's description in every cop's book. Weasel Ferera is around, but we can't seem to pick him up. He's an oldtimer, a cokey."

Tom arose. "Run down every little thing. Maybe we'll get a lead somehow. This inaction is killing me."

He went out of Headquarters and got into the car. Rox and Matt were at home this evening, waiting. The three had done nothing but wait for a week. Murders, robberies, extensive bootlegging were rife throughout the country and government agencies were cracking down, but manpower was scarce and the leaks innumerable. Congress was aroused but impotent. The home front was being torn to pieces by underground, powerful forces.

Tom stopped in a little, downtown store and asked for bourbon. The man said, "Haven't got any. Won't have any."

He was a small man with rugged features and a slightly battered left ear. His name, the sign said, was "Jones."

Tom said, "Look, I'm willing to pay for it." The little man said, "You won't get it here. They killed my brother for not taking it. I'm waiting for them to get me—but I'm not taking bootleg hooch!"

Tom leaned forward. He said, "Weren't you the featherweight champion out here a few years back? Spike Jones?"

The little man said, "And I can still fight! With this!" He produced a revolver from under the counter and his grey eyes were pin-points of rage.

Tom said, "You're the man I've been looking for. Here is my phone number. I'm Kincaid, the gambler. If anyone threatens you, or even tries to sell you some bootleg whiskey, call me at once. Whoever answers, just say 'This is Spike and I'm ready.' Don't say anything else. Understand?"

Spike Jones said, "Kincaid? I know you. How's Durkin? I used to play cards with Matt, years ago. Sure, I'll call you. Workin' for the cops now, Kincaid?"

"For myself," said Tom. "I want to know who's behind all this. 'Don't kill anyone unless you have to! I want to track them down to their headquarters.'"

He took leave of the little man and got into the car and drove out Sunset. It was his first lead and he felt encouraged. Every other storekeeper had been either supplied with whiskey or cowed. Spike Jones could easily be the means of swinging the tide.

He had no hope that George Grey was in L.A. The last affair had made the ex-banker and arch criminal known to the police of Southern California.

In fact, since Roxanne's debacle at the studio, there was no reason for Tom to remain in L.A.—except that he wanted to learn who had killed Peter Abbot and to restore Roxanne to her profession.

He detoured, driving past Cinema Service, where Danno Magraw was directing Pete Abbot's picture for Perfect. The high fence and long buildings about the lot told him nothing.

IT WAS dusk, and the studio was seemingly closed. There were a couple of cars parked at the curb and Tom mechanically noted the numbers, wondering if the big Cad was Slope's and if Magraw owned the sporty Banner Eight with the top down. He slowed a bit, edging Roxanne's car toward the gutter.

He had not noticed the third car across the street, the battered small sedan. As he clambered out from behind the wheel of Roxanne's convertible, his back was half-turned. The eruption of four men, coming from each door, going into synchronized action caught him by surprise.

He saw a missile coming at him from the corner of his eye and his good reflexes caused him to duck and swing to the right. His hand went to his left arm-pit, where the pearl-handled gun snuggled in its holster. His draw was a lightning sweep of the right and his

left arm went up to shield his face. A black-jack crashed against his elbow as he fired at the nearest attacker. It spoiled his aim, but he had evaded the thrown rock and a knife slid past his sweater-vest, slicing the wool but missing his ribs.

As he brought the gun around, realizing that they wanted him alive or that he would have been dead by now, he saw a sharp-featured little man with the eyes of a hop-head, and struck out. The man went away. Tom raised his weapon and had the four of them lined up.

From behind a hand reached out and stopped him. He doubled forward, bringing this new opponent close, then kicked back with his heel. He got home on a shinbone and heard a loud bellow. Then he leaped for Rox's car and shelter from which to open a barrage.

The attack from the rear had given the enemy precious seconds. The four had leaped into the sedan and the little car bucked, then scooted ahead in second gear.

TOM straightened, looked about. He went back cautiously and examined the owner's certificates fastened to the steering post of the two automobiles he had first noted. The Cad belonged to Slope, all right. The convertible job was registered in the name of Danno Magraw.

He strode to the gate of the studio. The cop tried to stop him, but Tom waved him aside with the gun still in his hand and the watchman immediately retreated to dial the local precinct.

In the spacious office of Samuel Slope sat the President of Perfect Pictures and Danno Magraw. They glared at Tom, paled at the sight of his gun, sat very still. Slope said, "You'll be arrested for this, Kincaid."

Tom said, "Fine! That suits me." He walked through the various offices, looking in closets. After a few moments a siren sounded and three uniformed policemen came on the run. Tom said sharply to them, "I'm Kincaid. Help me look for a man hiding on the lot—a big, strong man with a scar on his shin. I kicked him, once."

Slope bleated dismay, but the cops said, "Yes, sir!" and scattered.

Tom said, "You can have me arrested later by swearing out a warrant. You see, the police are co-operating with me on this case."

"There is no case! This is sabotage!" said Slope. "Just because Roxanne Queen deserted us. . . ."

Tom said, "I'm talking about the murder of Peter Abbot. And don't tell me he killed himself." He went a step forward and suddenly faced Danno Magraw. He snapped, "And as for you, I don't like you and keep your mouth shut!"

Magraw said, "Just a mo', me bucko! Ye're not talkin' to me that way!" He reached out a big hand.

Tom backed away, then slid forward. He beat a fast right to Danno's body. Then he retreated swiftly and Danno had to chase him. Slope begged, "No! Not that! Stop, Magraw!"

Magraw abruptly obeyed, edging behind a heavy desk. Tom dropped his hands and said, "Next time I'll really clip you, Magraw. This is fair warning!"

The police came in and the sergeant said, "Couldn't find anyone, Kincaid."

Tom said, "I was attacked by five men. Four of them got away in an old crate." He described the car. "The fifth just disappeared. There are several doors through which he could get onto the lot—if he had a key. Otherwise, where could he have gone?"

The sergeant scratched his head. "I dunno."

Tom said, "Well, skip it." He jerked his head at Slope and Magraw. "Good evening gentlemen. We'll meet again."

He led the policemen outside. He said in a low voice, "Call Jack Clarke and have him put a tail on Slope and on Magraw. Make it quick, understand?"

The sergeant said, "Sure. We'll do it right now."

The police went away in the squad car. Tom drove back to Sunset and turned off into the Canyon and wound his way up the hill to the top and Roxanne's fine house. It was supertime and he was hungry for the first time in a week. He was also almost happy.

CHAPTER FOUR

Underground Rebellion!

IN THE underground chamber the loud speaker crackled and the deep voice came through. "So you failed to capture Kincaid! You fools!"

Weasel Ferera said, "We could've knocked him off. You said not to. Nobody is takin' that guy without killin' him."

The voice said, "You have been put at the head of our operations here. You have made thousands. Yet you can't bring in one man!"

They looked at one another. Morty Wise muttered, "I'd like to get a look at this character. Tellin' us!"

The voice said, "Magraw is doing special work, very important work. You four are supposed to take up the slack left by his absence. You're not doing it!"

Weasel said, "Danno had hold of him. Danno had the best chance. But Kincaid got that gat into action and Danno ran like the rest of us."

"It should not have been necessary for Magraw to enter the scuffle!" boomed the voice. "If Kincaid discovered him, all would be endangered. Do you understand? The police—the federals—no one is to be feared like Kincaid and his partner, Matt Durkin. I want them, and I want them alive. Next time, don't let either escape. Kill them if you must—but get them!"

Weasel said, "Knockin' them off would be easy, Boss."

The voice barked a short laugh. "So you think. You caught Kincaid unawares, for once. Beware next time! He will be looking for you. He won't sit at home and wait for you. He's probably combing the city for you now!"

"Boss," said Weasel earnestly, "in the old days we bumped off tougher guys than this Kincaid before breakfast. But a snatch is another thing. We ain't snatch artists, and that's a fact."

The voice said, "Enough! Men who work for me must be able to fulfill any task. I have good reasons for preferring Kincaid, Durkin and that blonde dame alive. But I must have them. Go about your regular business as usual—but bring me those three people!"

Weasel said, "There's a tough little ex-pug named Jones. He won't play ball no way we put it to him. He's got a gat: he'll use it."

"Eliminate him!" said the voice harshly. "We've playing for high stakes—higher than your feeble brain can grasp. Leave Magraw's written report on the table and go at once."

Weasel dropped a black notebook on the table. The door at the end of the subterranean chamber swung open, although there was no knob or latch. They passed through into a pitch dark hall which slanted upward at a sharp angle, through a dim storeroom, into a large liquor establishment which was closed for the night. This store had a side entrance into an arcade, part of a large office building of which this was the ground floor. One at a time, they slipped out through this side door and went in various directions, to meet at the private garage a half hour later. . . .

MATT DURKIN said, "I remember Spike Jones. He made a lot of money in the fight game, but he would draw to inside straights."

The telephone rang with startling abruptness. Tom reached for it, his face hardening. It was Captain Clarke. He said, "This Magraw is slippery. My men lost him in downtown Los Angeles. Slope went home and to bed. . . ."

"Have them drag for Magraw. I know he's tied up with something," Tom ordered.

Clarke said, "That professional Irishman has been a nuisance around Hollywood for years, but there's nothing against him on the blot-

ter. He was broke a month ago and now he seems to have dough—that's all I know about him.

"This is all very mysterious, Tom. Slope is absolutely in the clear with us. I can't let him know we're watching him or there will be trouble."

"There'll be trouble anyway," promised Tom. He hung up and joined Roxanne and Matt in the little bar. They sipped at a drink and Tom again examined the bottles of boot-leg he had acquired.

Matt said, "Higginbotham was a funny little gee. He must be pretty old by now. He always made the best labels. Remember how he used to brag?"

"Those nasty little fascists at the studio are my choice," said Roxanne. "Arlene Devine once met Franco's cousin or someone and the others are her pals. If Magraw is in it, they are too. And other financiers have been known to hunger for a fascist state besides Samuel Slope."

"It's all guessin'," said Matt. "And no action."

The telephone rang again. In Tom's ear a husky voice said, "Kincaid? This is Jones."

Tom said, "Where are you? What do you want?"

"I'm at the store," said the voice. "Can you come down?"

"I'll be right there," said Tom. He hung up the instrument and reached for his gun holster. He said, "That was not Spike Jones. We had a code message arranged. They're in his store, probably wrecking it. It's a trap . . . so let's spring it!"

Matt grabbed his .22 and a sweater. Roxanne followed them to the door. Tom stopped and said, "Bring a wrap and come along. Maybe they just want to send me away and get you. I can't take chances with this crowd."

There was no light in the Jones store and no sign of life in the neighborhood. Tom led them across the street and down the block. They stopped in a doorway and watched for a few minutes. Then Tom said, "You two wait here. I'll see what's up."

Before they could answer he was walking boldly across the street towards the little store. Matt held Roxanne by the elbow, whispering, "It's better that way. I've got him covered—and we have to take chances."

"If it's Grey's men, he'll be killed!" she said.

"When you're fightin' Grey, you're liable to be dead any minute," Matt said grimly. "That's why Tom won't marry you, baby. He's got to get Grey first."

THE door to the store was open. Tom nudged it with the muzzle of his gun and

it swung wide. He stepped within and still there was no sound, no motion. He half expected the door to close behind him, to entrap him within the small confines of the place. Nothing happened.

He could see the shelves, filled with wine bottles and some fifths of rum. He could dimly make out the little room in the rear, to which there was no door. For a long moment he crouched, ready for anything.

His nose wrinkled at a slight acrid odor. Turning, he dove towards the door. There was a rustle behind the counter.

He turned and flopped over, reaching. He got hold of a wrapped bundle and ran for the street, reaching the sidewalk just as the bomb within exploded.

He ran through the debris, and saw Matt coming. Roxanne held a revolver and was staring down the street. Matt yanked out a knife with a long blade and when Tom had put the slight sturdy figure of Spike Jones on its feet, Matt cut loose the rope which bound him and jerked the gag from his mouth. Jones stammered, "Four of 'em. They called me, said it was you. I came down and they grabbed me. They had one of them old-fashioned fuse bombs. I could see it sizzle. . . ." Dazedly, he shook his head, cold sweat upon his cheeks.

Tom said, "That type of bomb is hardest to identify. Made out of second-hand materials. Did you recognize them?"

"Got me from behind," admitted Spike. "I fell for it. I was lookin' for you and mebbe some good news."

Tom said, "Didn't you put my number down on paper?"

"Yeah," said Spike. "My memory ain't so good, sometimes."

Tom sighed. He said, "Simple, isn't it? They cracked into your store, found my name and number, called you, then called me."

Roxanne interrupted sharply, "There's an old car coming this way—fast!"

The fire sirens were still in the distance, although the little shop was a mass of wreckage and flames. The car came down on the wrong side of the street. Matt forced Roxanne down. Tom went down, rolled over, and began firing at once, afraid to wait and take aim for fear Roxanne would be hurt. But Rox was shooting her little automatic as rapidly as possible and Matt's .22 fanned slugs into the car. Spike came down beside Tom. There was a cry, the battered sedan swerved and was gone at sixty miles per hour.

Tom bent, his eyes narrowed. Spike had not arisen. Matt came and knelt to watch. Roxanne stood, her bright face clouded. Spike made one effort to get up, as though he were in the ring and was waiting for the count of nine.

The fire engines and the squad car rolled up. Spike said thickly. "They're too late ain't they?" He grinned at Tom and said, "My mistake. Shouldn't—have written—it down."

There was a hole in Spike's chest. Someone shooting from that fast moving car had been either very good or very lucky. Another possible witness gone. They had taken no chance that Spike would talk further about the men who visited him. . . .

THE coupe rolled slowly up Sunset. There was no sleep in any of the three. Roxanne carefully inserted a new clip in her tiny automatic.

"We've got to stop them, and quick," said Tom. "They are sharpshooting anyone who might lead us to their hiding place. Of course they have a secret headquarters—otherwise the police would have picked up Weasel Ferera and his pals before now."

Matt was driving. He said, "We're next. It's probably a lousy idea to go home right now. They're hittin' hard and fast."

"We could go visiting," suggested Roxanne brightly.

"It's after one," said Tom. Then he looked sharply at Roxanne. "You mean visiting suspects?"

"Like Samuel Slope," nodded the screen star. "Or even Arlene Devine."

Tom considered. Then he said, "Rox, you've been telling us there was some sort of hook-up between that crew and the bootlegging right along. And Peter Abbot had something to tell us. And there is Magraw, who certainly came from nowhere to be associated with Slope. I am beginning to wonder if you're not right."

"Wouldn't that be strange?" murmured Roxanne.

Matt said, "The big shot lives in Beverly Hills." He drove through the Strip and turned onto Cactus Drive. The street circled and the estate which Slope had rented was huge, lonely, enclosed by a brick wall covered with vines.

There was a gate and Matt parked the car. Tom unlimbered his long legs and said, "Nothing ventured, nothing gained—and all that."

Roxanne said, "Let me approach him. He still has a yen for me in spite of what happened. Arlene must have worn him down by now. She's so heavy-handed in her love making!"

Tom said reluctantly, "Go ahead. We'll be right behind you. Be careful, darling!"

"Sam isn't one to be frightened of," said Roxanne blithely. "He's the slimy but harmless type. And I have the precious little gat!"

She swung ahead and Tom watched the famed figure disappear up a winding drive towards the big house. Matt said, "There's

no gal like Rox. Let's go, chum. This may be it."

They crept along, and soon they saw Roxanne again, mounting a verandah at the front of the mansion.

Tom slipped behind an oleander bush, watching. To his amazement, the door opened promptly and Roxanne stepped within. There was a thud as the portal closed behind the girl.

Matt said, "Hey! Someone was up! She didn't even ring."

TOM was already in action swerving to the left of the house, where the porch ran around the edge and faced a large swimming pool. Matt followed. There were no lights.

Tom found steps and leaped them. He crossed the porch soundlessly, seeking a window. There were several, but all were screened on the outside and time was precious now.

Matt hissed, "This way!"

The little man was at the end of the porch. He had discovered a bathroom window, too high to reach, but unscreened. Tom ran and gave a hand to Matt's heel. The sound of falling glass within was faint, but distinct. The two froze, Matt with head and shoulders within the house, Tom supporting him.

There was a cry and then lead winged and loud reports resounded. Matt fired twice. He said, "Heave me in!"

Tom lifted mightily and the dapper figure wriggled over the sill and was gone. Tom groaned, knowing he could not follow the two people he loved most in the world. Then bullets came, clipping stucco from the building, threatening him with death.

He turned and knelt, crawling to change position. He saw a head at the end of the porch and fired. Another man fired from across the swimming pool. Tom took careful aim and heard a howl which proved his aim still good, even at night. He advanced, seeking to force the enemy into the open, reloading as he went.

All the while the ache within him grew. What was taking place inside Samuel Slope's house? Were Roxanne and Matt already dead?

He was gaining ground on them. He counted four bullets which winged their way past him, and moved again to the edge of the porch at the front. He heard the sound of a motor, and emptied his gun at three fleeing figures. One stumbled and went down, but two others lifted the wounded man and dragged him through the gate.

The porch was deserted and no more shots greeted Tom. He rushed at the front door and thrust a big shoulder against it.

The door yawned in his face. Tom went through, keeping his feet only by great effort and came about, seeking an enemy.

Matt said, "They got clean away!"

Matt was leaning against the wall, his left arm hanging limp.

Tom gasped, "Rox! Where is she?"

Matt nodded towards the living room. "In there. I never spotted a one, Tom. . . . There were three or four inside. Rox walked right into them."

Tom was already in the huge, ornate room. Roxanne lay on her side on the floor. He picked her up and made for the bathroom, found a light. He started water running and Matt came to stand in the doorway, his face pale, blood running down his arm.

There was a lump on Roxanne's head. Tom rested her gently against the tiled wall and stood, wiping the sweat from him. He put the towel about her temples and went to Matt, probing gently for the wound in his partner's arm. He said huskily, "They only conked her. . . . I don't get this. Where is everybody? Where is Slope?"

Matt said, "I wouldn't know. See if there's some bandage—my little bullet went through, I think."

Roxanne opened her eyes. She put both hands to her head and said calmly, "And look for an aspirin. I seem to have a hangover."

Matt slung his arm in a bandage and Roxanne arose, smoothing her skirt. They stared at one another, then broke for the next room. They went through the house, upstairs and down. Matt ducked outdoors and found a servant's quarters. He returned and said, "They tied up the maid and gardener. Neither saw what hit them."

Tom said, "Slope's been kidnapped!"

Roxanne took the cloth from her head and brushed at her long, golden hair. She said, "I walked into their arms. Someone slugged me. But as I went down I heard a voice."

Tom said, "Whose?"

"It said, 'Niver mind the girrul, get Slope first. She's safe 'till we come back,'" Roxanne repeated. "And there is the connecting link between the gangsters and Magraw."

"But where would they take Slope—and why?" Tom asked.

"We could catch some sleep now," said Roxanne. "Tomorrow the papers—and Jack Clarke—may know."

The police were already coming to find out about the shots in the Beverly Hills estate. Tom picked up the phone and dialed Clarke. "You'd better round up Jason Bee, Marilyn Hale and Bob Galleon and Arlene DeVine. Slope may be a victim of some strange Hollywood plot," he told him.

Clarke said wearily, "They have knocked off a couple more honest storekeepers. The rest won't testify—scared to death. It's the worst reign of terror L.A. ever saw. And I keep gettin' wires from the East. It's nation-

wide, and roarin' like a prairie fire. Congress wants to declare martial law and cut off all whiskey sales, but you know what effect that would have."

"It would throw sympathy to the bootleggers," nodded Tom. "If we could only find where Magraw took Slope—or only knew the reason. . . ."

"If wishes were horses, I'd bet on every race," mourned Clarke.

CHAPTER FIVE

Snatched from Death

SAMUEL SLOPE writhed at his bonds. "You dirty hoodlums will go to jail for life!" he said viciously.

Weasel Ferera grinned, higher than a B-17 on a fresh load of cocaine. "You won't be around to see it—if the Boss stays mad atcha," he said.

Jake Krum nursed a wounded leg and a grouch. "Mebbe we can bump off this character, huh? He made me get this bum gam."

Morty Wise caressed a lump over his left eye. One Lung came in through the door and yelled. "Shorty Teague just croaked. We kin dump him with this one, when we finish him off."

Ferera said, "Wait awhile. We ain't heard from the Boss."

Slope bellowed, "Let me out of here! Why, I own this building! I know where I am! I'll have you all electrocuted!"

Weasel casually slapped a blackjack against Slope's face. The millionaire's head bobbed and he went deathly pale, groaning as the blood ran down his thick neck. Weasel said, "That's just a sample. When you play with the Boss, you play all the way through, you welchin' rat!"

Danno threw one big leg over the corner of the table and said conversationally to Slope, "You're in this, ye know, up to yer neck, me lad. Ye've always belonged to the fascist group. Ye contributed plenty to the cause. Why back out now?"

Slope groaned, "You murdered Abbot! I found the package of prussic acid where you left it in my house the night before he died."

"After he died," corrected Magraw, grinning evilly. "Shure and I thought the cops might find it and blame you. I never trusted you, me bucko."

Slope said, "I have merely tried to maintain the political status quo. I have fostered the minorities who do not agree with certain elements of our political forces in America. . . ."

"Bah!" said Magraw. "Ye've stolen the people's money right and left and played the game to protect yerself! You're a fake, Slope! Now ye've got a chance to join the great revo-

lution, to make the country ours—and ye welch!”

The speaker in the wall crackled and Magraw was silent, his merciless eyes upon Slope. The four thugs held their breath as the bass voice came through clearly, “Samuel Slope, you refuse to join us in our battle. You refuse a paltry million to aid the cause. You balk at the forced removal of a man who threatened to expose the ramifications of our scheme. . . .”

“It was murder!” whispered Slope, staring at the impersonal throat of the loud speaker.

“War!” thundered the voice. “You further refused to call the blonde Queen woman and Kincaid to a spot where we could get them. We lost two men in the fight, Slope. You are responsible for this.”

Slope said desperately, “I didn’t know about the bootlegging ring when I hired Magraw and the others. Politics is one thing, nationwide sabotage another.”

“You can go back tomorrow,” said the voice. “You can resume making propaganda pictures. You can recover your place in the world—if you obey us. We want full co-operation in all ways. We want Perfect Pictures to help spread unrest and rebellion. We want your money and instant obedience to every command you are given. Magraw will be promoted to executive vice-president of your companies. You will aid in distributing our liquor among your associates, for instance, as a beginning. . . .”

Slope croaked, “And if—if I refuse?”

The voice did not answer, but Jake Krum perked up cheerily, and drew from his garter a slim, sharp knife. “Now, Boss?” he said hopefully.

Weasel was caressing the blackjack. Morty Wise had a gun and One Lung slipped on a pair of brass knucks.

Magraw got off the table and leaned close, his heavy jaw an inch from Slope’s face. He said almost lovingly, “And they won’t kill you at once, Samuel! Noooo! Lettle bits at a time, they will kill you!”

Slope’s eyes rolled in his head. The blood was drying on his face and his scanty hair was disarranged, giving him the dishevelled appearance of a frightened old man. He said brokenly, “All right. I give in. What do I tell the police?”

The voice boomed, “That Kincaid and his friends made an unnecessary fuss. That robbers tied up your servants and went through the house while you were away on private business with Magraw at Santa Barbara.”

“They . . . they’ll know better,” quavered Slope.

“The police never know anything!” barked the voice. “Alibis have been arranged. . . But beware of Kincaid. We have another scheme to get rid of him!”

Magraw himself cut the millionaire loose. He said, “Of course ye know what’ll happen if ye speak a word to anyone, me friend!”

“My own building!” moaned Slope. He staggered through the door and up the sloping tunnel.

Magraw supported him, saying, “How do you think we got on to you, old fool? We sold our liquor to yer own store!”

They went through the large retail establishment and Slope groaned again. He went into the arcade and Magraw had his car on a side street. Slope was shivering as though with the ague as he got in and prepared for the trip to Santa Barbara through the chilly dawn.

IT WAS late afternoon when Clarke called. Tom said, “Magraw and Slope back? Are you sure?”

“They say you made a big mistake,” said Clarke grimly. “They say they were on a business trip and they can prove it! Slope made me turn loose his actors.”

Tom leaned back. He said, “Fine! Now call off all the cops and detectives.”

“What?” said Clarke. “Are you nuts, Tom? I don’t believe them people! There’s something fishy about this. . . .”

Tom said, “Give out a statement repudiating me. Say that the police have things in hand—you know the guff. Lay off the whole case until you hear from me. Will you do that, Jack?”

After a moment Clarke said, “Okay, Tom. But call me. I’ll be waiting at the phone. I’ll give you twenty-four hours to break it. I’ll sleep right here. . . .”

Roxanne came in, stretching, dressed in slacks and a sweater. She said, “Danno’s back, eh? And he didn’t slug me? What about Slope?”

“He’s wearing plaster on his face,” said Tom. “They had him, all right. Clarke says he looked terrible.”

Matt adjusted the sling in which his left arm reposed. He said, “You’ll have to tail him, Tom. Rox and I can maybe keep you in sight.”

Tom was staring at Roxanne. He said, “Higginbotham. Weasel Ferera. Danno Magraw. Those three we know are in it.”

“Higginbotham? The legal label guy?” asked Roxanne.

“A vain little fellow,” said Tom. “Used to gamble away his money—like poor Spike Jones.”

Roxanne said, “Peter Abbot used to gamble—it was his only vice. There was a crap game on the lot, Tom!”

“A little, cocky fellow, quite old? Was he in the game?” Tom asked.

“I remember him well!” said Roxanne. “He has a wen on his neck!”

Matt said, “That’s Higgsy!”

Tom said, "We start on the Cinema Service lot where Perfect Pictures is shooting. How can we slip in?"

Roxanne said, "The cop at Gate Two. I know him."

The aged watchman at Gate Two smiled at Roxanne, took a ten dollar bill from Tom and turned his back. It was very simple.

The Perfect Picture crew was at the far end of the huge premises. They were working an interior, and there was no sign of any of them as the three tiptoed cautiously about. They passed a prop room and Roxanne held up her hand.

From within a voice called, "Shoot the five. Obey me, dice! Shower down, suckers!"

Tom motioned them to silence and stepped into the semi-dark loft room. Five men knelt about a blanket and a small figure in loud clothes rattled the dice in his hand. Tom said quietly, "Five says you don't."

"Right!" said the small, cocky man. He threw the dice on the blanket. They came up snake-eyed. He grabbed at them and said feverishly, "Shoot ten—and ten to you, wise guy."

Tom said, "Shoot, Higgy. You never could roll dice."

The little man whirled, his mouth open. The wen on his neck turned bright red. He said, "K-Kincaid!"

"Roll the bones," suggested Tom.

Higginbotham threw them limply on the blanket. He turned up a nine. His next roll was a seven. Tom pocketed the side-bet money and grinned at the workmen. He said, "Go ahead, boys. Higgy and me have a date. Awful sucker, Higgy!"

THE little man walked outside and stood against the building, facing them. He said, "I told 'em you'd be hot. I told 'em you was tough. But the Boss thinks he's big."

Tom said, "Who is the Boss?"

"I dunno," confessed Higginbotham. "But boy, he pays good!"

Tom said, "I just want to tail Magraw when he leaves. And I want to hide out until then."

"I can't do it! They kill people like flies," said the little man. "This ain't your racket, Kincaid. You and Matt was always square gamblers. This is pretty bad. I'm a little scared of it myself." He strutted a bit, like a precocious child, proud of his villainy.

Tom said admiringly, "You're pretty tough yourself. We just want to get the lay of things for a poker killing, Higgy."

"I heard the Boss don't like you," said Higginbotham. "I heard he's after you."

Tom said suggestively, "I'm thinking about opening a gambling house out here. I could use a man who knew cards and dice. No more forging labels and federal stamps!"

"Sh!" said Higginbotham nervously. "Look, Kincaid. I could hide you in my layout. Magraw don't let nobody come near there. But if I get caught. . . ."

Tom said, "I'll protect you."

Higginbotham said, "Okay, then. But don't mention them federals. They nearly got me in '30. . . ."

He led them through the loft and there were two doors and then they were on a sound stage. A voice boomed from the other side of the partition, "And now, Arlene, you come in an' pick up the whiskey and show it's bootleg, but you don't care—everyone's doin' it, see?"

The little man winked and nodded. He opened another door and they were in a small room. It contained a desk, a chair and a chest of drawers. Higginbotham opened the desk and showed Tom his working materials—ink, drawing paper, styluses of all sorts. He winked and whispered, "Abbot almost caught me once, but Magraw saw him. Then Abbot died. . . ." He grimaced.

Higginbotham said, "I'll scam. . . ."

Tom smiled. He said, "No, Higgy. You stay." He took out his revolver and held it carelessly. "I'm cautious, Higgy."

The little forger's eyes shifted. He grew pale around the lips. He said, "Magraw'll miss me. . . . I got a date with him."

"That's all right," said Tom. "I'll fix it."

Matt was already exploring the room. He found a knot hole and thrust at it with his knife. The soft pine gave way—the room was just a hastily thrown up shack with a tar paper roof for secrecy rather than quiet or shelter. Matt put an eye to the hole and chuckled.

Roxanne went and had a look. She came back and said bitterly, "Devine and Standerly are hamming like two smoke houses on an Arkansas farm."

"It won't be long," said Tom. "I just want to follow Magraw tonight. He shook the cops. Let's see him shake me."

Finally Magraw dismissed the company, all but Arlene Devine, who removed her makeup while Magraw awaited her. The set became deserted before she reappeared.

The lights went down and Magraw had Arlene by the arm, leading her off the set. Tom drew a deep breath and said, "Here we go again!"

CHAPTER SIX

Penthouse Pandemonium!

The hired car kept the gaudy convertible of Magraw in sight with ease. Arlene Devine preened herself for the gaping populace of Hollywood, as Magraw turned into Sunset started west, then swung north on Gardener as the light changed.

Tom made the corner, crossed the tracks and saw the convertible disappear into an alley. He said, "Does Devine live here?"

Roxanne said tensely, "No! Look!"

A closed, battered sedan was edging out of the next driveway. A sharp-faced man was driving northward, fortunately away from the U-Drive-It. Roxanne breathed, "Weasel Ferera, no doubt! You were right again, Tom. Higginbotham, Magraw, Ferera."

Tom said, "And Arlene Devine—so you were right, too."

The traffic grew dense and Tom was glad to ease along in the stream. It covered him for the time being. He saw the little black car swerve and stop, saw Magraw and the woman get hastily out and duck into a large office building on Chestnut Street. He waited for Ferera to make a traffic light and go on.

It was growing dark, now. Tom pulled into a parking lot and said, "What building is that?" to the attendant.

The man said, "The Slope Building, now. Moom pitcher guy just bought it earlier in the year."

Tom cocked his eyebrow at Matt and Roxanne. Higginbotham muttered, "I don't get this."

There was a cop on the corner. Tom said to him, "Take this gentleman and hold him safe in jail for me. . . . Then call Jack Clarke and say we are in the Slope Building, Kincaid, Durkin and Miss Queen."

The cop looked suspicious, then recognized Roxanne. He touched his cap, seized Higgy and bore him away, repeating Tom's message under his breath as he went. He stopped dead at the entrance to the large liquor store. There was no sight of Magraw or the woman. He said, "Why, I bought a bottle of bootleg in here, just before I went to Spike's shop!"

"We're gettin' warm, huh?" grinned Matt satirically.

Tom circled, entering the arcade. There was a side entrance to the store, he noted. He said, "It's a secret place. We know that—otherwise Ferera wouldn't get away from the cops. . . ."

He seized the other two and dragged them into a lingerie shop just as Ferera entered the arcade and made his way straight to the side door of the liquor shop. They watched Ferera go through and disappear in the rear of the store.

Tom said, "Look at those clerks. . . They're guards, too. This is going to be a tough nut to crack."

Roxanne said, "Let me. They won't know what hit them."

She tugged at her sweater, adjusted the slacks. She winked at Tom and Matt and swept into the store, her eyes wide with innocence. She said, "I want some fine, imported wines. I'm giving a party. You know me, of course?"

Two clerks almost knocked each other down, getting to her. One said, "Aren't you Miss Grable?"

"You're teasing!" drawled Roxanne, preening herself. "You know very well I am Hokie Bream!"

The third clerk edged up, bearing wine bottles. He said, "Of course, Miss Bream!" There had lately been a tasty little scandal connected with Miss Bream, Tom remembered. The clerks were googoo-eyed now scurrying to find wines.

Matt said, "This looks good." He slipped through the door and went past a stack of



Arlene Devine

cases and into the rear. Tom hesitated, then followed. He was beginning to think of Rox as an ally, and the warmth around his heart expanded. He was, he thought, a very lucky fellow. . . .

There was a guard in the rear, but Matt had already sapped him with a blackjack. Tom opened the ordinary cellarway and stared down. He muttered, "It can't be this simple. It just can't!"

HE WENT down a sloping passageway. There was a cellar, all right, but nothing of interest. Matt whispered,

"Somethin' queer here. It's too open. Grey wouldn't get caught in an alley like this."

Tom picked up an axe and quickly cracked a case labelled "California Burgundy." He picked out a bottle of Black Horse Scotch, with a Higginbotham label.

"We're on the track," he said. "Rox can't hold them much longer. They'll find the hombre you conked and there will be hell to pay."

Matt said, "Maybe Clarke and the cops'll get here."

Tom turned, eyeing the wall. Suddenly he bent, applying his eye to a crack. There was a sliver of light like a thread upon the blank wall. He threw his weight against it.

With a creak the door revolved. Steps led down to another door. A dim bulb burned in the ceiling. Tom crept down, listening intently.

From within a voice boomed, "Miss Devine, you have proved yourself. Now it is necessary to eliminate our mutual enemies, and Roxanne Queen has been allotted to you. . . ."

Matt breathed. "Grey! He's in there." Matt's lips had drawn back; the .22 quivered in his hand. His sharp eyes were dark pools; his whole body quivered, like a terrier scenting a rat. "Just break me in there! This time I'll get him!"

The voice said, "Kincaid and Durkin must be killed! There is no further chance of kidnaping them. They are on the alert, thanks to some bungling. . . ."

Matt said, "Come on, Tom. Crash in there! We'll finish that crowd if we die!"

Tom stood stock still, listening to the voice of his sworn enemy. Time and again he had trapped Grey, sure of success, eager to end the career of the greatest criminal of modern days. Each time George Grey had made good his escape.

He had to act. Upstairs anything might be happening to Roxanne. Grey, always a step ahead, might even now have had word that his guard upstairs had been overcome. The arch crook would gladly throw his minions to the wolves, speak calmly to them, yet escape himself.

Tom said, "I can't believe it. He wouldn't hole up like this!"

Matt said, "You hear him!"

Tom turned, searching the small ante-chamber in which they crouched. His gambler's hands went over the wall, probing, seeking. Within the other room the voice spoke again, "I cannot warn you often enough that Kincaid is resourceful. . . ."

There was a slight crackling sound. Grey's voice changed, became sharp. "He is around here now! Search for him! Kill him!"

Tom said, "That's a speaker! I heard static! Grey's not there!"

He pressed his gun into Matt's hand. He said, "Hold 'em pal! Keep them down here!"

He had found something. He pressed a button and machinery whirred. Slowly, an elevator dropped, pausing behind a hidden door. Again he pressed the button and the portal opened. Tom leaped within, unarmed, his blood pounding. He closed the door and the elevator started up. He heard a muffled shot, heard Matt say, "Come out and die, you rats!"

Matt had ten shots. He would not waste one, Tom knew. If they fired through the door, they might set it ajar and get sight of him, but Matt would be on the floor, comparatively safe. The little man would take a lot of killing, at any rate, Tom thought grimly.

He went up and up. This had been a freight elevator, he realized, but had been sealed for private use. A simple enough device—and somewhere above George Grey sat in safety, with some fantastic means of getting away if disaster threatened.

It seemed hours. The progress of the elevator was excruciatingly slow. What awaited

Tom could guess. Grey was certainly armed. He would be warned by the mechanism's sound, waiting for the door of the elevator to open—for Tom to appear.

He thought long and hard about Roxanne. With her lay his only hope of happiness, he knew. The gay, indomitable actress with her ready humor and warm friendliness, her courage and forthright honesty of soul, was all that Tom could ask for in the world. The elevator hesitated, seemed to sigh, paused. Tom bent forward, ready to die. . . .

THE door creaked, opening. Tom ducked low, sprang, struck it with his bulky shoulder, and leaped aside. Bullets splattered.

It was a penthouse, roosted atop the highest building in downtown Los Angeles, and furnished in Spartan simplicity—George Grey never kept records nor papers within reach. From behind a metal desk, George Grey was throwing lead from a small, hand machine-gun.

Magraw was there, armed with a revolver. The huge man tried to come forward, his jutting jaw set, seeking to throw his great weight at Tom. Tom met him, sidestepped and clipped him with a swinging right fist. With his other hand he tried to seize Magraw's gun.

Grey swore in his deep voice, "You fool! Get away from him and let me shoot him down like a damned dog!" He held the small machine gun on the desk top, raving at Magraw. "I had him, you fool! Get away!"

Magraw tried to retreat, but Tom's hands were like steel, swinging him, keeping the big man between him and Grey. Magraw brought up his knee and Tom took the blow, clutching at the gun.

Grey cried, "All right, Magraw! You brought it on yourself, you colossal fool!"

The gun chattered on the desk top, clanking against metal. Magraw shrieked once, stiffened in Tom's grasp. Grey had shot him in the back.

Tom leaned forward, picking up the body in a tackle grip, and ran forward. He threw Magraw across the desk over Grey's gun. The bullets chunked into Magraw as Grey switched the weapon on full automatic.

Then Tom was scrambling over Magraw's body, trying to reach George Grey with one hand. Never had he been so close to his prey, and the excitement rose within him, all else forgotten. To get a grip was all he asked. . .

Grey broke. He dropped the gun. He leaped backwards, a portly man of medium height, his sharp features gaunt with fear, now. There was an open window behind him. Realizing now that Tom must be unarmed, he scrambled through before Tom could untangle himself from the bloody mess which was Danno Magraw.

In an instant Tom had recovered and was

after the fleeing criminal. He found himself on a roof patio.

There was a tiny gyroplane moored beneath a canvas. Grey was throwing back the cover, moving with amazing speed, at the far end of the roof. Tom just had time to see that the plane was painted Army drab and numbered with an Army stencil. Another piece of Higginbotham artistry.

Then he was driving his big body across the intervening space. Grey was climbing into the plane. Tom made one prodigious leap and grabbed, catching Grey by the slack of his jacket. The cloth ripped, but it gave him time to gain another handhold. Grey kicked, cursing him, screaming, "You can't get me, Kincaid! You never could!"

Behind them, in the office, there were sounds. Roxanne's voice called, "Tom! Where are you!"

Tom took a kick on the head, made a mighty effort. Cloth ripped, and he tumbled backwards—Grey with him. But in the shock of the fall they fell apart, and Tom came to his knees bleeding a little, searching for his opponent.

Grey was running towards the plane. Tom dove like a football player. Grey slipped, skidded. Tom struck him with a terrific bumping motion. Grey, already gaining impetus, flew off his feet and through the air.

Tom swivelled, head down, eyes blazing. He was in time to see Grey throw up his hands with one last scream.

They had been very close to the edge, Tom saw at once. The coping was three feet high, but Grey had been going at a swift pace. As Tom stared, his enemy windmilled his arms, seeking with frantic fear to regain balance. He was on the brink of dizzy space . . . teetering back and forth.

Tom sped forward, one big hand reaching out, and caught at a torn coattail. The two stood, on the edge of the roof, space falling away to the street far beneath, Grey speechless now, the awful fear of imminent death upon him.

Tom grabbed with the other hand for a fresh grip. Grey made one convulsive jerking movement. His foot slipped and he went forward, tumbling. . . .

TOM stood, staring into space. From below came a gasping, piercing shriek, descending in volume. Roxanne called, "Tom! Where is Grey? Did you find him? Is he dead or alive?"

Tom turned away from the edge of the roof. His face was stony and deathly pale. He walked on stiff legs. Roxanne was very beautiful, he thought, staring at her. Clarke was right behind, but there was no sign of Matt Durkin.

"Matt?" Tom asked gently.

"Wounded," she said, taking Tom's hand, drawing him close. "Wounded, but he killed three of them and Clarke got the rest. . . Tom, are you all right, honey?"

Tom said to Clarke, "Phone down below. He has escaped before. By God, I'm afraid someone snatched him in midflight!"

Roxanne said, "Oh! He—he went over the edge?"

Tom said, "I knocked him over. Unintentionally—I meant to strangle him with my bare hands."

They went into the office and did not look at Danno Magraw. Clarke turned from the phone. He said quietly, "He arrived at the bottom, Tom. It's all over."

Tom said, "Yes. It's all over. Let's go down and clean up the mess. Let's get these damned fascistic fools— Let's get rid of Devine and Slope and the movie actors who are such idiots. Let's spread it all over every newspaper in the land to let people know how close we have come to internal disorganization just when victory is so near."

They came down to where Matt lay, shattered with several bullets, but conscious and grinning and tough as ever. Tom touched his friend and said, "I'm sorry you weren't in on the end, Matt. I know how desperately you wanted it."

Matt said, "You got him, didn't you? That's good enough for me. You should see Weasel—I hit him right in the eye, first shot!"

Roxanne said, softly, into Tom's ear, "So you got Grey!"

Matt winked. He said, "You got to wait until I'm out of the hospital! Then we'll have a hell of a wedding!"

Roxanne said, "We'll hoard some Scotch—not bootleg!"

"Wish I had some now," said Matt feebly. "I'm thirsty. . . ."

They took him away on a stretcher. Tom held tight to Roxanne's arm. Outside, the morgue attendants were gathering the remains of George Grey into their gruesome basket. . . .

In the car, heading for home, Roxanne said, "For a tough guy, you can be awful nice, Tom. . . . And I do love you. . . ."

He was thinking back over the days since George Grey had first crossed his path. He was thinking of wrecked lives, of broken bodies, of damage done to property and government. Her words brought him back, as she had meant them to.

He said, "You can say that again—and double in spades!"

He stopped the car in the middle of Sunset and Vine and kissed her while automobile horns squawked, cops stared and cynical passersby thought it was just another Hollywood publicity scheme. . . .