

MANHUNT

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PRESSURE

by

ARNOLD ENGLISH

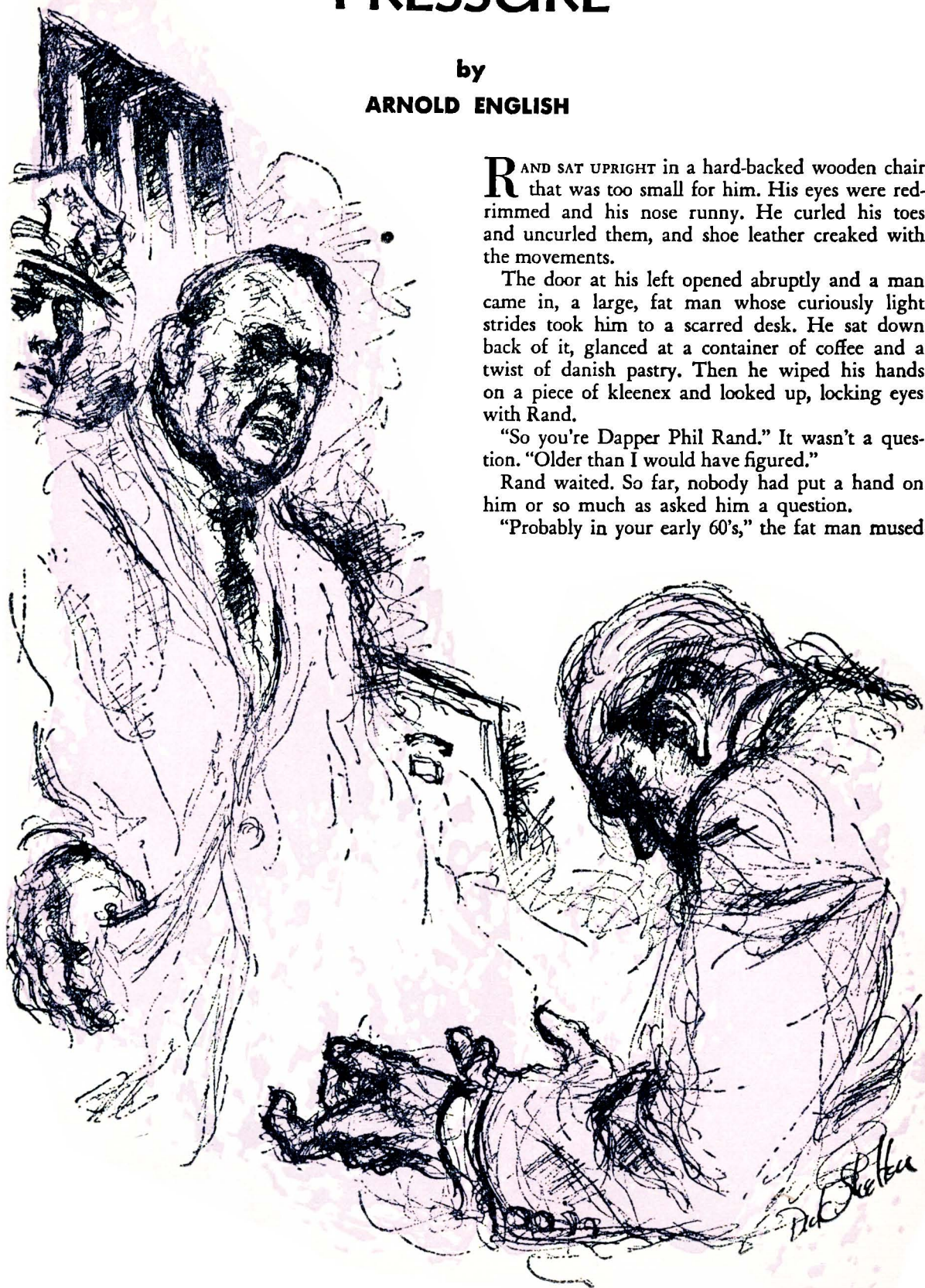
RAND SAT UPRIGHT in a hard-backed wooden chair that was too small for him. His eyes were red-rimmed and his nose runny. He curled his toes and uncurled them, and shoe leather creaked with the movements.

The door at his left opened abruptly and a man came in, a large, fat man whose curiously light strides took him to a scarred desk. He sat down back of it, glanced at a container of coffee and a twist of danish pastry. Then he wiped his hands on a piece of kleenex and looked up, locking eyes with Rand.

"So you're Dapper Phil Rand." It wasn't a question. "Older than I would have figured."

Rand waited. So far, nobody had put a hand on him or so much as asked him a question.

"Probably in your early 60's," the fat man mused



Rand used to be big time. Rand used to be a powerful guy. But now he was as good as dead . . .

out loud, stopping to sip his coffee and curse its warmth under his breath. "An old gangster. I can't imagine anybody more useless. A lot of gray hair and a reputation, maybe some money and nothing else."

Rand flushed. His lips were shut tight. He cracked his knuckles, then looked down angrily at them.

"A good rep, I'll say that much. A grade-A rep. Dapper Phil Rand is in one league with the Frankie Costellos and Lucky Lucianos. The thinkers, the planners. Number one target for a lot of cops, a guy who's at the age when he ought to be retiring and taking his wife with him to Florida."

"I never got married," Rand said angrily, "and if you want to ask questions, go ahead. Then I'll say I want a lawyer and we can start all over again."

"You know the ropes, all right." The fat cop finished the pastry, wiped his lips with a twist of wax-paper, and blew mouth steam down into the coffee container. "In and out of jails for the last ten years, Phil. Income tax raps and contempt of court. Like Frankie Costello. You're a little more polished, maybe you had a little more education—but not enough."

There was no contempt in the cop's eyes or his behavior. He was absolutely calm, swaying on his chair, cradling the coffee container, or occasionally swivelling around to look out at the quiet night and the tops of buildings that shone gray against a blood-red sky.

"We've got you on a gambling rap," he said finally. "We'll bring you up for trial. The judge will get a lot of publicity out of giving a long lecture and a stiff sentence, Phil, so you'll get both. He's up for re-election soon. A lot of the big shots are up, soon, and they've been good to cops. If we can get you to do some talking to us, it'll mean a lot to them."

Rand grunted. He looked away from the cop's bright shrewd narrowed little eyes and down to the framed studio photographs on the scarred desk.

The cop, following his glances, said, "That's the wife and that's my kid. Kid's married now and got a kid of his own. Very satisfying to a man my age, to know that he'll be leaving a grandson behind him. By the way, my name's Coffee." He looked down at the cup. "Funny, huh?"

"Get to the point." Dapper Phil Rand had the uncomfortable feeling of not knowing what to do with his hands.

"I'm practically there." Coffee gave a regretful sigh. "You know names and dates. You can send 100 people to the chair if you talk. You can tell us about dope smuggling, prostitution, counterfeiting, slot machines, everything that the Syndicate has got a hand in." Coffee's small eyes were fixed on Rand's mouth, as if willing it open. "I want you to talk."

"Can't say I blame you." Rand shrugged. "Every cop in the country would want that."

In spite of his hardness, Rand was beginning to feel friendly toward the man. They were about the same age. They knew the score. No time was being wasted on threats and other foolishness.

"All I can offer you is a chance to keep out of jail for a year and, if you want it, protection for the rest of your life."

"My life wouldn't be worth peanuts if I talked, and I wouldn't want to talk, anyhow."

"So you'll go to jail again," Coffee said heavily. "The wrong place for an old guy. Nobody cares about you and even at your age you're lucky if the homos don't bother you."

"I've been inside," Rand said, a little more tightly.

"And the kids!" Coffee shook his big head. "Tell a young kid you were a big man as far back as prohibition, and the kid laughs at you. Young punks want to make a name for themselves, today. They're crazy. In jail, your connections aren't worth a dime because a young punk could come along and cut you."

Coffee's chubby hands gestured a stabbing. The cop stroked his chin, glanced up at a nearby mirror and brushed his chin again.

"Need a shave," he rumbled. Then he looked up. "I was supposed to go over to my grandson's birthday party, tonight."

"Sorry," Rand said, then looked down, confused.

"Like I was telling you, Phil, I hate to see an older guy headed for the can again. If you talk, you'll have protection for as long as you want it. You can go to another city or state, another country, even, and start all over."

Rand looked down at the network of veins clear on the backs of his hands, and threw back his head in laughter.

"The Syndicate isn't infallible," Coffee prodded. "You can pick a spot in South America, for instance. Good place to retire. A guy can live like a king in some places on forty clams a month."

"No dice." Rand shook his head. "You don't know—never mind."

Rand had wanted to explain that what a family meant to Coffee, Rand's Syndicate connections meant to him. They had taken the same place. They were the only ones with whom he had anything in common. When he and his friends passed a private house, for instance, they would argue pleasantly about how many cribs it might hold, or if it would be an effective pad for some of the dope parties staged by pushers. If he had to live among other men, honest men, he would be a fish out of water.

"No dice," he said again, a little more sharply. "You're not playing in luck tonight. Book me, and let's get it over with."

"I'm sorry you feel that way about it, because I've got to tell you something else." Coffee glanced at his watch. "I've been given orders from the top to put on the maximum pressure to get you to talk."

"I've taken beatings, before."

"But you were a lot younger, then." Coffee shook his head. "No beatings, Phil. I don't suppose you'll talk unless you want to."

It was like a problem in arithmetic, in which various methods of reaching a solution were systematically put aside. Rand, his eyes narrowed and hands clasped in his lap, waited.

"Well," Coffee added, "the pressure's going to be applied, Phil, and it's going to be damned heavy. I know you've been pressured before, but not like this. I don't know that you can take it any more."

"I guess we'll find out."

Coffee nodded slowly. "I guess we will." Again he frowned down at his watch, then turned and called out a name. The door opened abruptly and a uniformed man came in. He was young and blond, with a full head of hair and clear eyes.

Rand looked him up and down warily. Coffee glanced back and said, amused, "Not yet, Phil."

Rand bit down profanity. To the young cop, Coffee said, "See that this man gets a meal if he wants one; or cigarettes, coffee, a shower, whatever. In half an hour exactly, you'll do what I told you, before."

The young cop nodded. Rand stood. His left foot was asleep, and his eyes throbbed. Absent-mindedly, he wiped his runny nose with the back of a hand, and at the young cop's amused look, he drew out a large handkerchief.

He was taken to a small room that was probably used for cops who wanted to take a nap. A bed, unmade, was set against one wall, with two pillows next to the headboard. On a small table, crime magazines and Western paperbacks had been placed. The one window was clean except for a comet of dust across the top left.

The young cop, hardly hiding his irritation, arranged for a meal to be followed by a whole container of milk; Rand suffered from an ulcer. Rand ate slowly with steady hands. His brows were quirked in question marks. Time and again he found himself looking furtively at the door. He was aware of the young cop's eyes resting steadily on him and alert to his every move. The young cop might as well have said it out loud: So that's what a big shot looks like, how he moves and eats.

Twenty-five minutes had passed by the time the young cop rose from a soft chair and looked down at Rand.

"Rise and shine, buddy."

Rand stared his resentment, then shut his lips tight. The young cop directed him down a smelly hallway back towards the room in which he had first been pressured by Coffee. The young cop gestured him into the next room, though. It was an office, too. Through the closed door and thin walls, they could hear murmurs and the shuffling of many feet. A lot of people inside Coffee's small office. Rand's ulcer was acting up slightly as he felt stomach tremors. He looked sullenly at the young cop's

easy steps and effortless gestures in walking around back of the desk and sitting down.

Quickly, the young cop pulled down the switch on an interoffice communicator. Sounds in the nearby office were much louder to Rand's ears. From the other room, too, the sound of something rapped hard against wood may have been slight, but in Rand's ears it was like thunder.

"Now, gents." That was Coffee's voice, big, self-assured. "You all want a statement for your papers, and I'm going to give you one that'll make history."

Mutters and murmurs. Near Rand, the young cop fingered the communicating switch, probably so that'd be able to break the connection instantly if Rand called out.

Coffee said, "Your city editors, gents, and your readers all like stories about Dapper Phil Rand. Well, we've picked him up on a gambling charge and he's facing another prison sentence."

"I'm starting to feel sorry for Rand," a reporter said. The others laughed.

"Well, gents, Phil Rand doesn't want to go back to prison. He's been in one and out the other for the past few years. Besides, a habitual criminal is subject to stiffer penalties than a first or second offender. So I've made him a little proposition."

There was silence till a reporter asked unbelievably, "And he's riding with it? Phil Rand?"

"That's it exactly, gents," Coffee said quietly. "He's co-operating."

Although Rand's eyes were on the interoffice machine, he was conscious of the young cop's stare. Rand forced himself to settle back. His left hand shook and he closed it and covered it promptly with the palm of his right. If his friends thought he'd talked, they'd kill him.

"Do you mean Rand is talking?"

"Like a canary, gents, a goddam canary." Coffee cleared his throat. "Dapper Phil Rand is a tired old guy, gents, and his previous sentences softened him up for us. At any rate, we're getting information from him that we plan to act on."

A reporter put in softly, "And just before election time, too. That's lucky as hell . . . thanks a lot."

A series of sounds indicated that the press conference was over. Scraping feet could be heard just outside the door.

Rand looked up to see the young cop's lips stretched in a grin, then looked away. Because the night had grown darker, the lighting here seemed more powerful. In the nearby buildings, as if to help the illusion, most lights had been put out. A star was a very white snowflake against the dark sky.

Suddenly Coffee called out, "Bring him in here."

The young cop was back of Rand as he stood up slowly, the way he usually did, these days. He opened the door and walked into Coffee's room, looked around wildly, then sighed.

The fat cop seemed uncomfortable. A dozen

chairs were scattered around. Smells of stale cigarette smoke hadn't yet been chased out by the opened window. Ashes were sprinkled on the floor. Coffee ran a thick finger inside his collar, then glanced at the young cop and appeared satisfied at the signal that was flashed between them.

"Okay," Coffee said. "Now take these damn chairs out of here." He clasped his hands firmly, and looked across at Rand. "You know the set-up, Phil. You'll be here for another hour. By that time information will be on the radio, at least, about what I said here. Then, if you say that it's what you want, we'll let you go. Your friends will be sure you must've talked, or you'd still be here."

Rand said thinly, "They know I wouldn't talk."

"Will they take a chance on you? Can they afford that? It's good business to take no chances. You'll be knocked off."

"I'll be all right." His voice was high.

"You don't really think so." Coffee sighed. "On the other hand, you can sit back and talk. Tell me everything you know about Syndicate operations. Then you can sneak away to South America, with my help. You can live like a king on . . ."

"I remember," Rand said quietly. "Either I talk to you, or I'm knocked off." He looked down at his watch. "How soon can I get out of here, did you say? An hour?" His voice shook.

Coffee's eyes were narrowed and briefly ugly. He pulled a piece of paper to himself and took a ball-point pen and began writing quickly. He didn't look up.

"War of nerves." Rand leaned forward. "If I get killed, people will say it's good riddance. Nobody cares what happens to me and that's the way I want it." He drew a deep breath. "The way I like it."

Coffee didn't talk to him again. At the end of an hour, he gestured with one hand . . .

Rand was given back the contents of his pockets

by the police property clerk. In front of the headquarters door he paused, looking uncertainly upstairs, then stepped out. The night had turned chilly, and Rand pulled up the lapels of his jacket. He had lived through thousands of similar nights in the past. He gazed steadily, almost hungrily, at a nearby house where people slept, then looked in vain for a cab and began to walk, quickly instead. Almost without knowing it, he was aware of steps following him. Probably one of Coffee's men. Under the next traffic light, he turned to look around.

He recognized the face. It was that of Kid McCall, a known killer who had been brought in from Chicago only three days ago for a job. Another set of steps could be heard back of them, perhaps belonging to a cop who was following, and couldn't know McCall.

Rand paused, looking down at the reflection of the red light on hard sidewalk. In the sight of his friends, Dapper Phil Rand was an old guy who had to be knocked off fast. He nodded twice, then stopped it abruptly.

He glanced up at the squat police building only a block away, then back, and to the gutter. A cab appeared suddenly, cruising. Rand took a step towards it, the instructions, "Police headquarters, fast," already crowding his lips.

Suddenly he paused. What in the world would he do in South America? He'd have no interests at all. Nobody he could talk to, nobody who'd see the world the way he did. He'd be alone in a world that was strange to him, and he was too old to change, too damned old . . .

Rand turned and began to walk towards Kid McCall. In that way, it would be easier for the Kid to get him.

If Rand presented a better target, it would be over more quickly.

