



Gloria Heppel rose, screaming, from behind the desk

★ ★ ★ THE BLACKOUT ★ ★ ★
★ ★ ★ MURDERS ★ ★ ★
Smashing Detective Novelet
By DAVID X. MANNERS



What was the sinister secret behind the darkness that suddenly descended in the midst of daylight, to form a cover for the crimes and deadly plots of enemy agents?

CHAPTER I

Skyway to Death

CODY HEROLD stared miserably through the plane window into the thick dark. The other passengers were settling in their seats. The Skyliner's two motors had throttled down after the takeoff, and now the city was sliding, black and pearly with light, below. Cody turned from the window, growled disgustedly to himself.

He rubbed a finger irritably alongside his slightly flattened nose. A fine thing being here, he thought. A fine thing he was about to do. He—a detective—paying blackmail to crooks!

Cody's lips tightened, and his clamped teeth made his jaw muscles twitch. The

Crook-Buster! That was the name they had given him. He liked it. He hoped they kept on calling him the Crook-Buster. But a cold knot in his stomach told him that after this job was done maybe they'd change it to the Crook-Coddler!

Cody Herold was rather big, and fairly supplied with muscles. In a clutch, he could make a try at handling himself. His tin ear and slightly flattened beak did not come from the prize-ring. Crooks didn't like him, naturally. And the police were jealous of his success, forgetting that often he paid out far more on a case than his fees brought in.

And here he was now on his way to do dirty work. To pay off money to crooks! Why? Because a worried little old man had shed tears, pleading with him. And because of a girl's pretty face. A girl. . . .

“You’ve got to help me,” the little old man had pleaded. “My name is Frank Heppel. When I was young, I was involved in some mixup. I served time. Someone has found that out. They’re threatening me now. You’ve got to stop them from revealing that I was once a common thief and holdup. You must do that!”

Cody had considered the man’s entreaty. “What makes you think that will be possible?” he said. “What makes you think I can stop them from revealing it?”

The breath and spirit and hope went out of the little man all at once. “Because I’m ready to pay what they ask! I don’t think they’ll ever ask for any more. I won’t have any more. I’m paying them every cent I have in the world!”

Cody eyed the man, his baggy clothes, his withered face, and his heart was restive. Something was not right. The setup was too pat. “Why is it worth that much to you?”

Frank Heppel’s milky-blue eyes glistened. The Adam’s apple bobbed up, then down in his throat. Hurriedly, fumblingly, he took a picture out of his inside pocket. His veined hands quivered pathetically as he held it. It was a picture of a sweet, a pretty girl. Not just a glamour-girl, but a really beautiful kid who seemed to have something to her. He recalled having seen that pretty face in the press.

“This is Gloria, my daughter,” Frank Heppel choked.

“Your daughter?” Cody straightened. “Why, I’ve seen her picture before. On the society page. Isn’t she the one marrying Polo Tom Gallant?”

Old Thomas E. Gallant’s troubles with his wild young son, Polo Tom, were more than once subject for mention in the gossip sheets. Because the Gallant family was blue-blood, staid, North Shore.

“Please!” the little man’s Adam’s apple bobbed. “That’s why—why Gloria would die if this was ever revealed about me. She doesn’t even know of it herself. I’ve tried to get my hands on these blackmailers, but it’s no use. Oh, I know you’ll say that they’ll want

to continue bleeding me. But all I want is Gloria and Tom married. That’s all—all I want. . . .”

THE powerful, even drone of the plane’s motors drummed into Cody’s consciousness. He looked down at the neatly tied package resting in his lap. He rubbed his slightly flattened nose with a finger, frowned as he remembered Frank Heppel’s giving him that package.

“Here are ten thousand dollars in unmarked bills,” Frank Heppel had said. “And here is a ticket on the Washington Diplomat. You leave Eastern City airport at 9:05 tonight. At 9:22 exactly, you are to drop the package from the plane. Please ask no questions. It must all be secret. I’ve made arrangements with the flight pilot to allow you to drop it. They think it’s for weather forecast experiments. That’s just as the blackmailers instructed. They will pick up the package. It’s a short, easy job for you, Mr. Herold. It won’t take you more than a few hours. And here’s the hundred fifty dollars—your fee. You can catch the return plane from Washington. I pray God it’ll all work out all right.”

Cody Herold stirred uneasily now. He glanced at his wrist watch. It was 9:18. Four more minutes to go. He glanced swiftly at the nine other passengers. He was thankful that only one was an acquaintance. That one was a lantern-jawed man who once was a police photographer before going into business for himself. But Zysman, the photographer, was too wrapped up in a newspaper to notice him.

Cody scowled. There was no way to drop the package from the cabin. He went forward to the pilot’s compartment. Both pilots turned at Cody’s entry, displeasure in their eyes. They looked like they didn’t know a damn thing about any package being dropped from the plane. They said as much, and—

Then it happened—with dramatic suddenness! Cody tried to get his bearings, so he wouldn’t fall. He tried to remember if

either of the pilots had turned a switch. It had been bright and cheerful here. One moment, it was light. The next, it was dark! A hollow, popping sound—that had come first, Cody remembered. Then a flash of heat. Then darkness.

One of the pilots gasped, “The lights—they’re out!”

A confusion of panicked voices came from back in the cabin. Cody dropped the package. The package with ten thousand dollars in it! He swore, began to grope for it. The pilot called for a flashlight. The copilot’s voice rose in anger. The flashlight didn’t work!

The plane lurched sharply and Cody knew the pilot couldn’t possibly see his instruments. Cody jammed his hand into his pocket and brought out a packet of matches. Hurriedly, he struck one. He heard its sputter and hiss, but it did not light. He tried another match. The same. It was as if the matches were wet, but he knew they weren’t.

Sharp, burning pain suddenly knifed Cody’s fingertips. He dropped the match he’d been holding. He’d been burned by it! But the match hadn’t been lit!

Or had it?

Cody struck again. He heard the hiss of the match head. He could feel the heat of the flame. But there was no light!

Then the plane shuddered, lurched completely out of control. It plummeted like a wounded bird. A sharp, shearing sound suddenly rent the ship as it struck something. A man cried out in terror back in the cabin. Cody felt himself hurled back, reeling. He tried to catch himself, but there was nothing to grasp. He crashed into the cabin wall, felt it rent and torn beneath him. The ship groaned in anguish, metal flying.

Cody saw Death opening its arms to him. He thought of Frank Heppel. The ten thousand dollars that was to save Gloria, his daughter, from shame and disgrace.

A shattering roar crescendoed. A crushing impact. Cody Herold knew no more.

A SHARP, jabbing pain tortured Cody’s right arm. Rising to hysterical intensity, a screaming wail drilled at his ears. Cody fluttered his eyes. He twisted where he lay.

“That lug’s too tough to kill!” a voice said sourly.

Cody looked up vacantly and saw a doctor bending over him, a stethoscope hooked in his ears. But it was not the doctor who had spoken, Cody realized, in spite of his stupor. The sharp-nosed face of Lieutenant Ira Meade of the Eastern City Police Department was floating up there behind the doc. The same sharp nose right under which Cody had tactlessly cracked too many cases.

Cody turned his head from Meade’s ugly stare, looked about dully. He was lying on the hard ground of an open lot. There was the sound of sirens on the air. Fire trucks were squirting water from several angles on a huge airplane that was a mass of consuming flame.

Cody came up with a start, memory flooding through him. There were other men lying on the ground. Other passengers from the plane! Cody remembered it all. The plane had crashed! This was a desolate factory district, within the limits of Eastern City.

Cody lifted himself to an elbow. Police cars were angled everywhere. Cops held crowds back. An interne passed among the other bodies on the ground, covered them with blankets. A cold chill went through Cody. The interne covered the bodies’ faces!

Cody heard a man speak—a man with a blue press-shield in his hatband, “Lucky you escaped with your life, Tom!”

Cody peered carefully and he recognized the man spoken to was young Polo Tom Gallant! What in hell was he doing here? What did they mean, he was lucky to have escaped with his life? Tom Gallant wasn’t on the plane!

“I couldn’t even see the plane.” Tom Gallant’s voice was constricted, shaken. “I was just passing by in my car. It came thundering down on me. I don’t think the big

tin goose missed my car or the road by more than inches before it crashed.”

“Nobody seems to have seen it!” Lieutenant Meade dragged through his sharp nose. “But I guess Cody Herold here can tell us what happened.” His tone was insinuating, “And it’s a good thing, because nobody else got out alive!”

Meade turned to the Police Commissioner, who was standing right beside him. Meade’s eyes glowed, as if to say: Watch how I handle this mug, boss. I’ll make you forget how Cody crooked me on those other cases.

Meade turned back to Cody. “Well! You went forward into the control room. What happened?”

“The lights went out.” Cody shook his head. “That’s all I know. Then there was the crash.”

Lieutenant Meade jerked a laugh. He eyed Cody accusingly. “What were you doing going forward to see the pilots?” Cody stared bewilderedly. How did Meade know he had gone forward—if there were no other survivors to tell it? What was Meade trying to insinuate?

“Yeah, we know,” the homicide lieutenant said, as if understanding Cody’s look. “One of the passengers spilled it just before he kicked off. Yeah, just what were you doing going forward?”

Cody opened his mouth, then clamped it shut. Could he speak about the blackmail payment? Frank Heppel was in just as much danger as ever. And a girl’s happiness was still involved. The girl Heppel had called Gloria. There was no point in dragging them into this.

“I went forward to have a chat,” Cody said evenly. “After all, I’m a licensed and authorized detective. I wanted to see if things were going smoothly.”

“You expect us to believe that?” Meade ripped. “You go forward—in violation of company rules. Then there’s a crash in which

eleven lives are lost! What were you doing on a plane to Washington, Herold?”

“I was going down to hold hands with my congressman!” Cody flared, and rose to his feet unsteadily.

Ira Meade appealed to the Police commissioner. He wanted Cody locked up. He swore Cody was somehow mixed up with the crash. He hitched up his sharp nose and snarled dozens of ugly, vicious questions. He was bitter with his hatred of Cody.

Cody was thinking of the ten thousand dollars he’d lost in the plane fire. What would he tell Frank Heppel?

“Excuse me,” Cody said finally to Lieutenant Meade. “I’ve got to go.”

Meade ranted. He made no move to stop Cody. He had no case against Cody Herold—yet. But the rising flame of excitement in his eyes told Cody that Meade wasn’t finished with him by a long shot.

CHAPTER II

Beware the Blackout!

ADHESIVE patches on bruises and cuts, Cody Herold thrust his wide shoulders through the crowd. Head bowed, he paused briefly by the flimsy blankets that covered broken, mangled bodies. To Cody, it was divinely miraculous that he himself had been spared. But these others—innocent men and women—had died.

Cody walked on. Narrow escapes from death, he guessed, he should accept as a matter of course. He had had them often enough. But now, mingled with his thankfulness, he felt a sense of obligation. Of duty. If this wreck had been a willful act of destruction—it was as if Providence had spared him deliberately. Spared him that he might run down those responsible for this tragedy. And he was also thankful for that chance.

Cody Herold's lips tightened grimly. There had been something strange about that darkness on the plane. It had not been ordinary darkness. It had been a complete pitch. Not even the light of the matches he had struck had penetrated it!

But why should anyone have wanted to wreck the plane? Cody had a gnawing, strange feeling that he was up against something intangible.

Cody called Frank Heppel on the phone, wondering how he was to break the news of the loss of the blackmail money. But there was no answer. Cody, at the moment, knew no other way of reaching him. The next day, however, a girl came to see Cody at his office.

Cody did not have to look twice to recognize Gloria Heppel. But in that one glance he saw her raven-wing hair, her gleaming green eyes. The proud beauty in every panting breath that heaved the bosom of her simple silk-print frock. And he saw, too, that her face was pale, distraught.

"Harbor police fished my father's body out of the bay this morning," she said. "Father had spoken highly of you. I cannot rely on the police. I want you to get Dad's killers."

It was as simple as that! She spoke it so blithely, Cody caught at his breath. And then Cody understood her manner. She was proud, self-assured, high-spirited. She was the resolute type of woman who wanted everyone to know that her mind, and not her heart, ruled her life.

Cody did not know how to tell her that her father had not been murdered. As sure as he was of his own existence, Cody knew that Frank Heppel had committed suicide. That was the one other "out" for him.

Cody did not tell her.

They accosted Cody as he was leaving his office that afternoon. They were Feds this time. The papers were headlining a Congressional investigation of the crash. But still Cody saw no value in revealing what he knew. He knew next to nothing anyway. He

saw no good reason why he should hurt Gloria Heppel.

The Feds turned Cody over to the police, and to Lieutenant Meade. Cody hewed to his story inalterably. The investigation went on for a few days. Cody was tolerant, cooperative, at first. He knew they had nothing on him. Why should he want to wreck a plane? But that someone had wrecked the plane—to kill someone on it—he felt with a growing certainty. Who, and why, were questions he would have to find answers to alone. Meade wanted only to break Cody Herold.

And when Cody was finally released, he knew that dicks were trailing him.

A GOLF game and a ninety-dollar robbery might seem like small stuff compared to an airliner tragedy. But for Warren G. Harding Rufus, it seemed like an infinitely greater disaster.

Warren Rufus rated the call to caddy for old Thomas E. Gallant when that entrepreneur and capitalist showed up for a morning round of golf at the Broadbrook Country Club.

Gallant, gray at the temples, rimless glasses, looked every inch the executive. But he was nervous and upset. He couldn't do anything with his son, Tom. He disapproved of his intended marriage to Gloria Heppel—a nobody. But what could one do with stubborn, wild children? Young Tom would have his own way.

Gallant moved off to the number one tee, and took his driving wood out of the bag that Warren Rufus held for him. "I'm playing to get things off my mind," he told the Negro. "I want to get away from my troubles."

He got off a good drive, and walked on down the fairway. He breathed deeply of the country air. "It's swell out here. No troubles. Get away from people, that's the secret."

The banker took his No.2 iron for the next stroke. He was smiling. But the next moment, he was crying out in deathly terror. He

threshed with his arms, but strong hands held him.

Gallant swore sulphurously. "Rufus! Let go of me this instant! Why have you thrown a sack over my head?"

Warren Rufus gulped a choked protest. "Sack over yo' haid! Lawsy, boss. Dey's got me, too!" Then: "Great Joshua an' Moses! The sun—the sun's done gone out!"

"Nonsense!" Gallant roared. "Let go of me, Rufus! Take away that sack!"

"Me got a sack on you?"

Gallant was trying to grab hold of the sack, but his fingers clutched thin air. His fingers touched his bare face then, his eyes. There was no sack over his head. He could see his hand if he held it directly in front of his face. But it was pitch dark!

The sun was beating down. He could feel it on the back of his neck. Yet it gave off not even a glimmer of light!

Then, abruptly, the darkness dissolved. It was dark one moment. The next, light. Thomas E. Gallant lurched and grabbed the quaking darky by the collar. Gallant began to yelp and holler. Other golfers ran up.

"This—this no-good," Gallant sputtered, "robbed me. He threw a sack over my head and robbed me of my wallet!"

Rufus had no sack. He protested that somebody had sacked him. It wasn't long before he was searched. The banker's wallet was found on him. Its money intact.

Rufus was arrested. He had no money for a lawyer. Again and again, he sobbed he was innocent. But that counted for little alongside his own admission that no one other than himself had been within a hundred yards of Gallant on the course.

Until the Caddies' Association stepped in to help him, it looked like Warren G. Harding Rufus would be in jail for quite a long time. Cody Herold, one of the Association's street-urchin members declared, was the one to help an underdog.

And by unanimous vote, it was decided that the famous private detective be called in to help clear Rufus' name, and see that justice be done.

WARREN RUFUS sat disconsolately on his jail cot, long, black hands clasped between his knees. He told Cody his story, his eyes wide, pleading for belief.

"I couldn't have thrown a sack over his haid, and then not have the sack. I swears I didn't eat the sack. All I know is it was bright and sunshiney one minute. Then black as mohlasses de next. I'd swear Mr. Gallant throwed a sack over my haid, except—"

Rufus hesitated. His eyes rolled.

"Except *what?*"

"You know how you come into a dark room, turn on de light? Well—" he declared emphatically, "—I think somebody's switched it around and found out a way of comin' into a light place—and turnin' on de dark! De sun were still shinin' down, but I couldn't see! Somebody done dat, den got to Mr. Gallant an' robbed him."

But if the purpose had been robbery, why had they returned the money? Cody rubbed a finger along the bridge of his flattened nose and tried to figure that one out as he searched for a phone booth where he could call Thomas E. Gallant. And this stuff about darkness in the daylight. Cody felt mildly insane even to think of crediting a story like that. Yet hadn't there been something on the plane before it crashed to justify such thought?

Cody made an appointment to see Gallant, then went off for a stroll near the golf course. He asked questions concerning the attack on Gallant, but from the answers he received it seemed there simply were no witnesses around. Just as there had been no one who'd seen the plane crash. It were as if that event, as well as this one, had taken place in a void, in a little world all to itself, that had no reality for anyone outside it.

“Did you see any mysterious or suspicious-looking strangers about? . . . Did you see anyone hurrying away from the course about the time of the robbery . . . Any airplane, circling about?”

It was very discouraging to Cody, asking those questions. He got no satisfaction at all until he spoke to a green-boy.

“Sure,” said the green-boy. “I was clipping the rough edges off the sixth green, and I saw it. Who wouldn’t? It was broad daylight. But there was t’ree men down there near the No. 1 hole. Not two. Looked like they was having an argument the way one of them was waving his arms. I thought they was having a picture taken. Then the third guy left. The other two didn’t pay no mind. They wasn’t even lookin’ at him. They just kept on yellin’.”

It was time for Cody’s appointment with Gallant.

“That caddy is a common thief!” exclaimed the millionaire capitalist. “He had the effrontery to throw a sack over my head!”

“You didn’t find afterwards that anything else was missing other than your wallet?” Cody suggested. “Think carefully.”

“Well,” Gallant admitted worriedly, looking at the detective over the top edge of his rimless glasses, “yes. You know I’m the head of the Metropolitan Jockey Club. I had a plan of our racetrack layout on me, and I found that was gone. It is rather valuable, but I must have misplaced it somewheres.”

“DON’T you think that somebody could have come up on you from behind, robbed you of that plan—and then planted the wallet on your caddy to confuse the issue?”

“Rubbish and nonsense!” declared the aged capitalist. “Wouldn’t I have seen that someone else come up on me, as you put it?”

“One more thing,” urged Cody. “The Metropolitan fall meeting opens Saturday. There will be better than a million dollars bet over the boards. Has it occurred to you that

there might be an attempt made to pick up part of that?”

“Ridiculous!” Gallant snorted. “Why, anybody could know the layout of the track. You’re making a mountain out of a sandpile!”

“But would they know the locations of the guards who are concealed in the betting area beneath the stands? Are you making any effort to protect yourself Saturday?”

“You’re crazy, Cody! Anyhow, this is none of your business. I’m not asking for your help. I don’t want it!”

“I’m not especially interested in helping you,” Cody retorted evenly. “But I am interested in a client of mine, a caddy, Warren G. Harding Rufus!”

Outside, Abe Kaplan was waiting with his cab for Cody Herold. Cody had once won freedom for the long-nosed cabbie on a stolen-goods frameup, and Kaplan had been a source of grateful, reliable help ever since.

Hardly had the cab started away, than Cody dropped from the car’s rear seat to the floor. A shower of smashed glass sprayed over him. A brick skinned his scalp. Abe Kaplan stopped the car with a lurch. He leaped out. He looked vainly up and down the street for whoever had hurled the brick.

Cody picked up the brick. Attached to it was a note:

Warning! Layoff if you want to stay in good health. Signed,
A Friend.

Cody tugged at his lower lip. The crash of the airliner in which eleven had perished, and the slightly-comical robbery on the golf links—they were connected then. But how? And why?

MOST of the patrons who thronged the beautiful Metropolitan Jockey Club for the opening day’s races, stopped to stare curiously at the battery of giant searchlights in the betting area, all wired up and ready to go

into action. It looked like a Hollywood publicity stunt. The only question was: How could they use such lights at the track during the day? Metropolitan was closed at night. By the fifth race, report of them had reached the clubhouse.

Old Thomas E. Gallant barged in, his eyes flaming furiously behind his polished spectacles. The close-cropped gray hair at his temples bristled.

"Take 'em out!" he roared. "Who gave you the authority for this, you—you blundering Gumshoe!"

Cody pleaded for reason. He'd spent his own good money for this hunch-plan of his. Moreover, it was really protection for Gallant and the Club.

"Rubbish! Rubbish and nonsense!" the big capitalist snorted. "Take those confounded things out of here—they're cluttering up the way!"

So, despite the fact that the fifth race was at hand, when most money was bet, and despite the fact that it meant he'd put a lot of time and cash down the soup-hole, Cody said okay. He had no other choice.

He turned to give the order to the head electrician.

And then it happened!

To Cody, it seemed that everything blotted out about him. One moment it was daylight. The next, midnight dark. Yells, screams of terror shivered the air.

"The switches!" Cody bellowed. "Throw those switches!"

Thrown switches sizzled. The searchlights came on. Five lamps of 1100 candlepower each! Enough to pierce the deepest gloom, and be visible twenty miles away!

Cody looked to them, his heart pounding. The rays of the giant searchlights came on in slow, copper-hued feebleness. And they stayed that way! All of the searchlights were on, but they gave less light than even one flickering candle!

Cody groaned. He began to sniff the air.

There was no gas. No hint of smoke or fog that could make this impenetrable dark. The sun was shining. He could plainly feel the warm beat of its rays. But no light came from it!

The crowd began milling, stampeding in superstitious fear. Men shouted, cursed. Women screamed in panic. Guns cracked sharply then.

"**R**OBBERY!" the shout went up. "*They're robbing the windows!*"

Cody could distinguish emerging shadow-shapes running from the cash booths. More guns cracked. Cries of mortal agony lifted. Cody could see better now. He saw one thug running with a black bag stuffed with paper bank notes. Cody lunged. He tackled the man at the knees.

They went down together. Cody's rights and lefts smashed the man about the face. The man wore goggles. Cody ripped them from him. It was useless to try to stop all the heisters. If he could hold this one, they had a chance to get to the bottom of all this. Cody straddled the man, kept him pinned down. Then—

What little light had returned went out completely. Cody was slugged from behind, trampled by running feet as he fell. He arose, staggering, bumping into people, into posts, in the confusion of utter dark.

Abruptly, light came back. The sun brightened in the sky. The searchlights were on—their glare blinding. Cody saw the police, the racetrack guards. He saw bodies of wounded and dead lying on the ground. A wail went up from the betting windows! They'd been cleaned out!

"Cody Herold!" the name ripped out. Cody, still staggering, turned and saw it was Thomas Gallant who had shouted at him. The racetrack head was bursting with apoplectic rage. "You and your damned magic searchlights—"

Cody swiveled quickly. He ran from

Gallant, stumbled his way through the crowd, through the paddock. His head cleared, and he became aware that men were chasing after him, shouting. But he could not stop to explain now, lose time making them understand he was after the crew now making its getaway.

Cody found Abe Kaplan's cab still waiting for him at the parking lot. Abe had brought him there.

Cody leaped into the cab, fired instructions at Abe who sat behind the wheel. But instead of hurrying into action as he usually did, the bugle-nosed cabbie shook his head.

"I'm s-sorry. I can't take you, boss."

"What you mean you can't take me? Didn't you see those thugs getting away? They cleaned out the take for the fifth race! We got to stop 'em, Abe!"

As if that declaration convinced him, Abe started up the cab, wheeled away. Cody fired questions at him in quick order. He needed any help Abe could give him in picking up the trail. But Abe was strangely silent.

Cody edged forward on the seat to look at Abe. Then the cab jerked violently out of control. Cody grabbed the wheel, climbed the seat to the front of the cab, pulled up the brake. Abe Kaplan's head had tipped over to his chest. A red blotch of blood soaked his shirt and coat front.

"Sorry, boss," he gasped. "I saw—tried to stop 'em—"

"Abe! Abe . . . !"

The blood welled in Abe's throat. Abe quivered. Then he was still.

Pale, shaken, after a fruitless search to pick up the trail, Cody at last pulled the cab over to the curb on a deserted street. He had wanted to catch those killers more than ever—and he'd failed. He hated to leave Abe unattended like this. Cody's throat was tight. But time was precious, and Abe would understand. Abe's wife and kiddies—he'd see to it that they were taken care of . . .

Cody stepped from the cab. In his pocket

was the pair of goggles he had ripped from one of the thugs. Examination of them, he had hopes, might reveal the way to lick this baffling blackout scourge. The thugs wore them—and apparently that made it possible for them to see. The late afternoon sun was still bright on the pavement. Something smashed into his face, and Cody almost missed his step and fell.

A club pounded into his skull, hard.

When Cody came to, he lay on the cold hard pavement of a back alley. The air was chill and damp. He pushed himself to a sitting position, his head throbbing. There was no sound except the rattle of a milk wagon. In the east, dawn-clouds were red in the sky. He must have lain there in the alley all night!

Cody's hand went to his pocket. The goggles were gone!

CHAPTER III

Ship to Nowhere

CODY found his way back toward the center of town, rage and self-disgust rankling inside him. In the wink of an eye, those such-and-suches could change daylight into dark. If that transformation had only been worked within the confines of the cabin of the plane that had been wrecked, he might understand it. But they did it out in the open, on a golf course, at the racetrack! It was not a gas or fog-screen they used. When the lights went up, there was no trace of anything having been used. And powerful beams were unable to cut their dark.

A pair of workmen passed Cody on the street. He saw them stare. Then they passed, he heard their hushed, excited whispers. He cast a quick glance behind. They were watching him, pointing toward him.

Cody darted into a passageway between buildings. He climbed a fence and made his way to another street. At an all-night lunch stand, he heard a radio turned to an early-

morning news broadcast.

. . . . at the Metropolitan Racetrack. Police are searching particularly for one of the holdup men whose identification they believe will prove easy. In a hand-to-hand battle at one of the robbed betting windows, this holdup man sustained a gash on the left cheek. Speculation as to the means the bandits used in darkening the betting area while perpetrating their robbery was the topic of . . .

Cody's fingers raised to his own left cheek. He had a wound there, but it was a wound that he had received in last night's attack that had left him lying unconscious in the alley. But would the police believe that?

Cody raised the collar of his coat, tugged low at his hatbrim. He could not afford to be taken by the police now. He could clear himself, but time was invaluable. And the morning headlines carried the screaming story that forced even the war news to a secondary position and made Cody's anger boil. **FIVE DEAD IN RACETRACK ROBBERY!**

At a large, dark-red brick structure near the sprawling buildings of Eastern City's charity hospital, Cody paused. A begrimed sign on rusty hinges bore the one word: *Mortuary.*

From an opportune spot, Cody waited until the man on night duty momentarily left his desk. Then Cody slipped inside. Quickly he passed the Missing Persons Bureau and an autopsy room. At this hour they were dark. Admitting himself through a door, he followed down a winding, narrow stairway whose walls were so close together that Cody's broad shoulders almost touched them. On this lower floor he passed through a room lined with stone drainage tables. He remembered the time he'd come here once before to look-in on an embalming class conducted by the City Toxicologist.

Cody passed through the shipping room, past stacks of new pine oblong boxes. He came to a room lined with many small square doors, each numbered. He passed quickly

along them, reading the cards attached to the doors. Finally, he stopped before one of them. He raised the lock-lever that held the door, and swung the door open. Grasping a handle, he swung out the tray.

He studied the body that lay there for a long minute, before shoving it back into its cell.

A HALF hour later, Cody rang the doorbell at Gloria Heppel's apartment. The door opened slowly, and Gloria Heppel stood there. Her eyes were a little puffy, as if from sleep. Or weeping. Her black long tresses hung in disarray. The red-flowered housecoat she wore brought out the green of her eyes.

Cody weighed in without preliminaries, even though her loveliness sent a wave of goose bumps over him. "What would you say, Miss Heppel, if I were to tell you that your Dad is alive? Don't tell me you identified the body at the morgue. You were probably so upset, and death changes appearances so, you could easily have made a mistake." He stared directly into her luminous green eyes. "And don't think it's good news I'm bringing you. Prepare yourself for something a lot worse—"

"You mean Dad's being mixed up with that terrible robbery that happened yesterday, don't you?" The breath went out of her. "Yes, I know Dad's alive. But he's innocent of any wrongdoing! I say that even though Dad's not my real father. He's my stepfather. Dad told me some people were after him, trying to bleed him for money. He was afraid to face them, so he went in hiding. I identified that other body because I thought it would serve as a coverup for him."

She snatched up a scrap of paper, scribbled on it with a pencil. "Dad's at this address. He's not mixed up with those crooks, I give you my word, but somehow they're trying to force him into something. Won't you please go there and try to help him?"

By back alleys and other devious routes

that would keep him clear of the police, Cody went to the address the girl had given him. He rang the bell. He did not know just how much the girl knew. Or how innocently the girl had given him this address. Frank Heppel was deep in this hellish shebang. On the doomed airliner had been someone marked for death. And Frank Heppel had played Cody Herold for a sucker. Somehow, Cody felt that package with the supposed “blackmail money” had something to do with the blackout that preceded the crash.

A car moved up from down the block as Cody waited for an answer. Then the house door opened and standing before him was—Frank Heppel!

Heppel opened his mouth to speak. But his pathetic-looking face went pale with terror.

“My God!” he gasped. “No . . . No . . . !”

Cody swiveled. A car bristling with hard faces was pulling up at the curb. Cody lunged for the porch-floor, trying to pull Heppel down with him. The burst of gunfire came quick, incisive. Lead smacked into Frank Heppel and he was dead before he fell. The weapon that had brought him down came sailing from the car window as the car sped away.

Cody picked up the now empty gun. Then he realized he had to make tracks from the scene of this killing, fast tracks! Cody was just wiping the weapon clean of his own fingerprints when the first squad car, attracted by the gunfire, yowled into view. He ransacked Heppel’s pockets.

Cody thought, a fine time I’d have explaining this one to Lieutenant Ira Meade!

He darted through a back alley before the squad car rolled to a stop.

THE bum who entered the tough dive known as Grogan’s Bar was typical of those who frequented Eastern City’s waterfront. He walked stiffly to the free lunch, and helped himself. He was big, broad, and to the casual onlooker his tin-ear and battered

nose coupled with his muscled physique marked him as the veteran of more than one brawl.

The bum bought himself a short beer and subsided at a rear table. He had been there about half an hour when a ship’s mate entered. The mate was a stocky, barrel of a man—and he moved in among the motley crowd at the bar, apparently trying to hire himself a crew. That was usually done at a hiring hall, the bum mused to himself.

The barrel-shaped mate collected himself a trio of men, then went out, casting only a cursory glance at the bum as he passed. For a moment, Cody Herold thought he had been recognized in his bum’s getup. Then the men were outside, and he knew he was safe.

Cody went outside and moved toward the dock where the men had disappeared from view. He wondered if what he had just seen had any connection with what he wanted. It was a book of matches bearing the name of Grogan’s Bar that had brought him to that place. He had found the matches when he’d ransacked Frank Heppel’s clothes.

A thunderstorm came up, and Cody found shelter in a doorway. A ship was loading at the dock, and the work went on uninterrupted. A cargo of crated guns was being loaded into the vessel’s holds. Along with a shipment of finished steel.

Cody saw the loading completed and turned away. But a very bright flash, as of lightning, brought him about. Men were hurrying aboard the freighter. Cody heard shouts and curses aboard the ship. He looked and saw men groping about the deck, arms extended, as if searching their way in the dark.

A crashing impact of fists, and Cody saw a pair of men get walloped overboard. Cody spurred for the gangplank. Before he made it, a sputtering donkey engine hoisted it away. A tough met Cody’s rush. Cody noticed that a pair of goggles dangled from about the man’s neck. He let fly a right at the man’s jaw.

Other men rushed up. They were still

wearing goggles on their eyes. Cody let fly fists in all directions. Down went one goggle-wearer. Then another. Damn it, he'd clean up on the whole lot of them!

Cody let fly a right—and then his target was gone. He could not see in the instantaneous blackness! It had dropped like a blanket over him.

Cody groped. A club crashed down on him from behind. He slumped to the dock. He came to dazedly. He did not know how long he had been out. But the ship was gone from port.

Cody staggered up. He knew a new crew was in possession of that ship! They'd undoubtedly stolen the ship and its load!

Pursuit might still stop them, Cody thought. He looked off into the gray mist of rain that had swallowed the vessel. Then he knew the hope was vain. In that thick murk, the freighter would give the slip to anyone coming after her! And if that means failed, they could always rely on—the Blackout!

Now police cars crowded the dock. Cody dodged to one side. From two of the cars, bluecoated figures piled out. Cody recognized the thin-nosed, hawkish face of Lieutenant Meade. Meade spotted him at the very moment he tried to duck from view. Meade snarled an angry shout, pointed accusingly at Cody.

“Get him!”

ONCE Meade had his hands on him, Cody knew, it would mean jail! Whether Meade actually believed he was involved in this meant little. The police officer wanted him out of the way for professional reasons. He was determined that this was one case he'd beat Cody in putting on the finishing touches.

But if that ever happened, the devil who was behind all this darkness-concealed murder and robbery would go free. For Meade, stubbornly, was the kind who would rule or ruin. And Meade moved too close ever to break this case!

Cody's straight-arm thrust stopped Meade just as the man was on him. Cody hurled a coil of rope. Like a football player through a broken field, he snake-hipped his way.

Lead whined angrily after him, screamed by his head. He vaulted a pier, made the open door of a fish shop. Workers at benches, making fillets out of haddock, turned to stare at him as he darted past and through a door on the opposite side.

The police were after him in earnest now! He'd made himself a fugitive. He'd be hunted relentlessly. The men who should be siding him in this battle were now pledged to bring him in—if they had to use bullets to do it!

Cody Herold darted in and out among the waterfront buildings, apprehension growing in him. Twice as he hid, searching policemen passed so close to him they could have touched him. He roundsided a building now—and the sound of voices stopped him. Voices muffled by the misty rain.

Cody drew near, warily. He was back again close to where the loaded freighter had been stolen. Cody saw a Japanese, nattily dressed. He was paying off money—packs of bills—to another man whom Cody could not see. But Cody did know the girl he saw there.

Gloria Heppel!

The Japanese counted off many fat packets of bills, then disappeared. The man and the girl moved toward a parked car. Momentarily, Cody watched them. Then he realized what a tremendous weapon for robbery this controlled-darkness was. First, detailed plans were studied—as of a racetrack, a bank, or a ship. Then they brought on darkness! They could work in the darkness, apparently. But what were those goggles he'd seen them wearing? How did they help them see in the dark? And why had they shot down Frank Heppel? Had Heppel perhaps attempted a double-cross? And what was the girl doing here now? That money the Jap had just paid, Cody was sure, was for the hijacking of the freighter. Those war supplies would never get

to Britain.

They were headed right now for Japan!

The two went to the waiting car, and Cody followed. He knew the risk he was running. That he be eliminated was important to them. But Cody had only to think of the murdered cabbie, Abe Kaplan—the other innocent victims—and nations battling valiantly against the scourge of fascism, to know how terribly important it was that he make what he had to do good.

The trunk on their car was locked. Cody crouched, slipped a knife blade under the latch, and worked it open. He climbed inside just as the car started off.

He kept the trunk lid partly open for air. A few minutes and the car hit a bump. The trunk lid slammed shut. Snapped locked!

From his cramped position, and with the car bouncing, Cody could not get at the lock. Soon, his throat was dry. His lungs gasped for air. He felt himself growing drowsy. Monoxide fumes!

Cody braced himself to break open the lock. He had to get out of here! He didn't want his number to come up—not now!

Cody felt his head swell up like a balloon. Energy and strength drained from his muscles. It seemed that he would float away off into space. Thousands of tiny needles pricked his arms, his legs. But he also felt strangely relaxed, comfortable. . .

It was the last thing he knew.

CHAPTER IV

Death's Dark Door!

IT WAS dark, cold, when Cody Herold came to. Breathing came hard. His body was chill and stiff, and when he tried to move, he could not. He was cramped, closed in. Then he remembered, and he knew he was still in the car's trunk. He had passed out. But apparently the car had stopped, and its motor

switched off before the deadly fumes could complete their work.

Cody tried to get at the lock. His position made that impossible. He might shout and attract attention, he knew. Then he felt in the darkness above him, and he found the trunk-door's hinges, touched the screws holding them.

After long, painful labor, Cody stepped out into a two-car garage. Beyond its inside door he heard a radio, caught snatches of the report coming over it.

“ . . . Last minute headlines . . . relating to the Jersey City dock fire . . . \$25,000,000 damage . . . guards reported sudden night descending . . . When darkness lifted, warehouses ablaze . . . suspect sabotage . . . G-men at work . . . ”

Cody shook his head, cursed. Whoever was behind this was certainly getting paid for his cute little capers. The one responsible had so far only been testing his wings for bigger and greater things to come. Now, in the pay of foreign governments, he could really go to town.

“A pair of goggles picked up by police . . . studied by them . . . Reported to be kind used by men engaged in acetylene welding . . . ”

Cody swore again. Now, not only from the crime world could this arch-fiend pick his men, but from the fifth columns as well. While he grew fat on the gravy!

Cody tried the door. It was bolted from the opposite side. Cody dropped to one knee. From his trouser cuff, he withdrew fine saw blades. A few minutes' work and he had sliced a neat hole in the door. With the aid of a wire, he slipped the bolt.

He tiptoed about a basement room now. At the sound of approaching footsteps, he flattened to a wall, snatching up a short length of pipe as he did. He wound his handkerchief about it. A man appeared through the doorway, and Cody brought the pipe down on his head. The man crumpled. Cody caught

him, gagged and bound him, and put him away for safekeeping in a closet.

It was a large closet, and there were several bags of what looked like fertilizer in it. There was also a large sign that proclaimed, DANGER—NO SMOKING!!!

Cody took a pinch of the powdery chemical from an opened sack. He smelled it. Then he stepped back into the basement room. In his pocket, with his cigarettes, was the book of matches from Grogan's Bar. He put the pinch of chemical on the cement floor and set a match to it.

The chemical flared up brilliantly, like some type of gunpowder.

Cody helped himself to a generous sample of the stuff, wrapping it tight in a piece of newspaper he picked off the floor. Moving on through the basement again, he came to a door which apparently led outside. No sound came from beyond the door, and the key was on the other side.

Cody slipped a paper under the door to catch the key which he punched from the lock. Drawing back the paper, he took the key and unlocked the door. He stepped through it, but he wasn't outside. He was in a corridor.

"Hey—you!"

The shout rang out, echoed, behind Cody. Cody spurted into a run. And at that moment, sudden darkness descended.

CODY had to stop. He felt as if he were going to dash into a wall. He tried to lash out, as hands grabbed him. But he was overpowered by their number. He felt himself being dragged by his arms. He knew he was taken through several doors. Finally a last door closed behind him. He was hauled up to his feet.

The darkness lifted then, and Cody's eyes focused in the light.

He was in a large room. There were no windows, which made him think the room might be underground. But the place was well furnished. A fireplace burned cheerily to one

side. Near the fireplace was a large desk. And seated behind the desk was—Gloria Heppel!

Her eyes were alight as she smiled at Cody. Their green depths danced. In her hands she held a newspaper. She alternated her glances between Cody and the banner headlines about disaster in New Jersey's dock fire.

She seemed to read his thoughts. "I suppose you thought I hadn't the brains?" she declared haughtily, her head held proudly high, arrogant. "You bit like a sucker, Mr. Detective. Maybe you thought you were too strong, too clever to be made a fool of by a mere woman!"

Cody nodded bitterly. "I wouldn't have thought this of you, Gloria," he admitted.

She laughed. "That fool photographer didn't know what a great thing he had. A device for turning day into night!" She laughed again, her green eyes madly bright. "He was flying to Washington to turn it over to the U. S. Government! We got rid of him in that airplane crash. We got rid of my stepdad, too. He got to be too nose-y, and just in the way! I had planned to get rid of you both at the same time when I sent you to see him, but somehow my boys slipped up. So we'll take care of you now, Mr. Detective. We've got too valuable a thing to be taking any chances."

Cody strained to pull away from the thugs holding his arms. The green-eyed girl was mad. Here was a great weapon that could be used for evil, and she possessed it.

"I should have caught on," he admitted bitterly, "when someone on the golf course told me that he thought a picture was being taken—when Thomas Gallant was being robbed of layout plans of the Metropolitan Racetrack!"

Gloria Heppel smiled. "It's not just photographer's flash powder we use. You've probably heard of the Nazis using a new type of magnesium flare. White light that illumines bombing objectives bright as day. Well, our little photographer friend, Zysman, improved

on it. He perfected a direct flash that is ten thousand times brighter than the sun. So bright it can paralyze the optic nerves temporarily, as any bright flash does to a slight degree. Our flash acts so powerfully, so instantaneously, that you are not even aware of any flash of brightness. You are only aware of—the Blackout!”

Cody understood everything now—completely. What he had mistaken for darkness was really light, light so bright that it was blinding. That was why her robber crews had worn dark goggles, for protection, and to enable them to see in the super-intense light, in what he had thought was darkness!

The women laughed. “We hate killing you, Mr. Detective,” she said. “You have too fine a body and too fine a brain. We could use both. If you only weren’t so full of fight. Perhaps if we blinded you—permanently—you would be a little more docile. Remember in the Bible—what they did to Samson?”

THERE was movement at the door, and Cody turned his head. He saw the man who stood there. Young Tom Gallant had come into the room. The full meaning of what Gloria Heppel intended struck Cody then. Gallant stared, with the vacuous eyes of a blind man. This woman had done that to him, was showing him off as an example!

Then young Tom Gallant spoke, and Cody knew he was not blind. His stare was that of a man power-drunk. Young Tom Gallant was the head of this thing! He was behind it all! Tom Gallant’s voice trembled with rage as he revealed that he was not a true son of old Tom Gallant. Old Tom Gallant had adopted him out of an orphanage, had given him his name. But now that the time had come for him to leave his fortune to his adopted son, he was going to cut him off without a cent. Cut him off because the young man liked to have a drink now and then and spend his money for a good time instead of hoarding it like a miser!

The men in the room prepared to put on

their dark goggles. Gloria Heppel put on hers. In panic, Cody reached into his pocket for some weapon he might use. He knew they’d taken his gun, his knife, from him. All his hand found was a pack of cigarettes. The package of chemical he’d taken for himself from the basement.

In desperation, Cody covered his eyes with the flat palm of his left hand.

Wild young Tom Gallant laughed. “Hands over your eyes won’t do you any good. These rays penetrate. It takes lead to stop them. That’s what’s in the glass of these goggles!”

Gallant held a large bomb now. Shaped like a pineapple. Similar, undoubtedly, to the much smaller one Cody himself had carried aboard the plane, its mechanism timed to go off at a predetermined minute. The bomb was like the one that had brought a blackout for old Thomas E. Gallant on the golf course. That had blacked out the betting area at the racetrack. The freightship. That had blacked out the New Jersey warehouses before the disastrous fire!

But this was a larger bomb than any of those. This would black out his sight permanently!

Gallant laughed. But his laugh choked off in a scream, as Cody threw something in the fire of the fireplace. The flash came before any of them had a chance to adjust their goggles.

It was the flash of the package of magnesium Cody had taken from the basement!

Cody looked about the room. A half-dozen stunned, blinded men groped about him. In the left hand that Cody took away from his eyes was the glint of something shiny. The foil from the package of cigarettes. He’d chanced using that, and it had worked to stop the rays!

Gloria Heppel rose screaming from behind her desk. Cody saw then that the flash had not blinded her. She’d had on her protective goggles! Cody moved from one thug to another, putting the silencer on them with a

chair cracked down on their skulls.

But Gloria Heppel had dashed to a switch, previously concealed by a hanging on the wall.

“I’m going to blow this place up!” she screamed. “When I throw this switch, I’ll have ten seconds in which to escape this door. All evidence will be destroyed behind me. You’ll never get me, Mister Detective!”

Gloria Heppel would blow up the place. She would destroy everything. She was mad. She cared only for herself! Her own escape! Her own precious, pretty-faced little life!

The others in the room didn’t know what was happening. But Cody knew this was it—this was for keeps. He couldn’t stop her. She would die, if necessary, but he would die—in any case!

Cody lunged for her. But already she had turned from the thrown knife switch.

The floor heaved furiously under Cody. In the same instant, the walls buckled, crumpled. A terrific detonation shattered his ears, paralyzed his nerves. He was hurled backwards, slammed down. He saw toppling walls falling on him . . .

CODY came to, and he reached out with his hands. He couldn’t see. Blackness was everywhere about him. He felt upward and his

fingers ran over walls blocked across him in a protecting arch. Miraculously they had fallen that way, saved his life.

But he could not see!

He shoved bricks, loose cement and debris from him. He began crawling. He remembered the threat of blindness, and his heart went cold. Those sacks of magnesium in the basement probably were touched off by the blast!

Then Cody saw the glimmer of light through the twisted wreckage, felt a surge of relief.

He heard voices. Men were coming toward him. Tom Gallant and his killer crew! They’d escaped too! They still had him!

But it was neither Tom Gallant or his killers, he realized as he stumbled forward and his head cleared. These men crowding up on him were G-men. Police sirens were loud on the air. These officers had been attracted here by the blast. They were asking him how he had managed to escape alive when Gloria Heppel had been killed by flying brick fifty yards outside the building.

Then Cody saw Lieutenant Ira Meade’s taut face. He thought he saw a softness in it that he had never seen there before. Maybe he and Ira could be friends now, could pull together. . .