

**Nick Kalkas Runs Down the
Clue of the Toy Bank--and
Collides with a Murder!**

The wounded man
shot from the bed



DEATH FOR COPS

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APTAIN NICK KALKAS was picking his hat off the office tree when the phone rang. He put his hat on his head and went back to the desk. He thought he was going to be sorry he answered the phone

because he didn't want anything to come up that might break his date with his daughter. He had to help her pick out a new dress. But when he picked up the phone and heard the voice of Mike Hanley he wasn't sorry.

"You still alive, Mike?" he asked with more than casual interest. Last time he had seen Mike Hanley, Mike had been eating shrimp in a Greek restaurant owned by Nick Kalkas' fourth cousin, Charley. Mike had said he was committing suicide by eating shrimp just to deprive his wife the pleasure of murdering him.

"I don't know for sure if I'm alive," Mike Hanley said over the phone. His voice sounded as though he was at the climax of a binge. His tongue was thick and his lips lazy. "But before I'm sure I'm dead, could you come over to Simon's Subway and have one with me, Nick? I got something important to tell you."

Nick Kalkas said he would be over in twenty minutes. Probably Mike Hanley had something on the Butch Wagner business. Kalkas dialed his own residence and moistened his lips, preparing to disappoint his daughter. The kid didn't have any mother except her dad, and her dad had always been a little disappointed

that this daughter wasn't a boy. He had looked forward to seeing what kind of a cop an Irish-Greek boy would make.

May Kalkas answered the phone.

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, kid," her father said. "I can't make it tonight. I've got to meet Mr. Hanley. You remember him—the smart newspaper man. By the time I get through with him, the stores will be closed. So you pick out the dress yourself, and I'll meet you at Cousin Charley's for dinner and right after that we'll take in a movie."

"Aw, gee, skipper," May said, "you're the only one who knows what I look good in."

"You look good in anything. Now you run along."

Nick Kalkas hung up and then went out the door that said Chief of Detectives on it. Farther on, he went out the door that said Central Police Station on it, went down steps, got into his black coupe.

Nick Kalkas was a very big man, but not fat. He hadn't been at the chief's desk long enough to get fat.

His hair was still black and had to be washed every week to keep it from looking greasy. Two minutes after he shaved, his jaws still looked blue. Women were fascinated by him because he looked as though he had a past, what with his weathered skin, his dark secretive eyes with their sleepy looking eyelids. He had a past. Her name was Molly Kalkas who was dead and lived again in the eighteen-year-old daughter named May.

Kalkas drove over to Ohio Street, then east until he came to a place called

Simon's Subway, a favorite hangout for newspaper men like Mike Hanley. Mike and Nick had been friends way back when Nick was pounding a beat and Mike had ambitions to be a cub reporter. They had always played into each other's hands.

Right now they were both wondering who had killed Butch Wagner, a South Side tough who had been found up a back alley with six bullets in his chest. They both had the idea the shooting had something to do with Art Scanlon, the city's big name in gambling. Only, they had nothing but hunches to go on.

This place called Simon's Subway looked like a Pullman car that had run into the basement of a building. It was long and narrow, with booths on one side and a bar on the other.

In the second booth from the door was Mike Hanley, a little guy with pale pink hair and a face that was pale but not pink. He didn't look as sharp as he was, what with an insignificant nose and blurry blue eyes. There was a bottle of Irish and a couple of glasses on the table. One of the glasses was for Nick Kalkas and the other was being used by Mike Hanley.

Nick got in on one side of the table. Mike Hanley, his chin resting on his left palm, looked sadly around the bottle.

"Hiya," he said fondly, though he looked close to tears.

Nick Kalkas grinned. "Hi," he said with equal affection. He sat down and poured some whiskey for himself, but not so much that a stick of gum wouldn't kill the odor. May didn't like the smell of whiskey on her father's breath.

"How are you and Myrt getting along, Mike?" he asked.

"Just swell." Myrt was Mike's wife, though nobody knew why, especially Mike. "I haven't seen her in a week. I haven't been home that long, except last night when I had the stomach ache from

eating those damned shrimp. Even then I didn't turn on the light and slept on the davenport."

Mike never talked that way to anybody but Nick Kalkas. He was a very loyal little guy. Even if he must have been tight and blind when he married Myrt, he never complained any. Myrt did the complaining, about money and her health. You had to blame her disposition on her health because no normal person could have treated a swell guy like Mike Hanley the way she did.

Nick Kalkas' smile faded a little as Mike poured another drink.

"Mike, you once told me, that in the newspaper game you either stuck with the racket until you became editor, or you drank yourself to death. Are you trying to do both?"

MIKE laughed, but not as though there was anything funny. His lips grinned downward and made his whole face look bitter.

"A woman can knock hell out of a man's philosophy, or she can make something big and meaningful out of it. I guess you know Myrt."

Kalkas knew Myrt. She was a blonde with a slovenly figure that she draped with the most costly clothes Mike's pay check could afford. Her coarse-featured face had dull, lifeless skin that was covered with blemishes. Probably she hated her face more than anybody else did.

"But that isn't what we're here for," Mike said. "Nick, some time I might die. Maybe soon. There's something I don't want you to miss."

Sitting near the narrow aisle between the booths and the bar, Nick Kalkas could see the edge of the table in the next booth. He noticed a scrawny, dirty-knuckled hand in the next booth reach out and clutch the edge of the table. He noticed the hand, but

he didn't attach any particular significance to it. He was too busy watching Mike Hanley's face.

Mike looked like he was in pain. Still his lips managed to twist into a ghastly smile that mocked something, death or life, or something as sacred. It didn't look much like Mike's face. More like some stranger's.

"If I kick off soon, say today or tomorrow, there's something I've got that I want you to get hold of before anybody else does, Nick. I should have brought it here to you tonight, only I haven't been thinking lucidly today."

"Sure," Nick said.

It was the Butch Wagner business, Nick thought. Mike had something, not enough to base a police case on, but enough to make Wagner's killers start hunting Mike's scalp.

Nick looked away from Mike's face. He saw the dirty-fingered hand on the edge of the next table. He saw the hand clench, but even that got by him because he was worrying about Mike Hanley.

Nick leaned across the table.

"Listen, Mike. You'd better come across with the whole business right now. There's no use for a dramatic scoop when you're in a tough spot, you know. No newspaper is worth that. If you need protection, I'll see that you get it."

Mike's blurry eyes winced.

"This isn't for the papers," he said. "It's just for you. It's down in the basement of my house, on a shelf in the fruit cellar. It's in a kid's bank—the bank I had when I was a kid. It's a bank made in the shape of a toy safe. Bust it open with a sledge hammer when you get it, Nick."

THE man at the next table used his hand to pull himself to his feet. He turned quickly. As he went toward the door, he had both hands up, tugging his hat over his face.

Not until he had paid his check and was going toward the door did Nick Kalkas turn and look at him. When he saw who the man was, his hand shot out and closed on Mike's wrist.

"What's the matter?" Mike asked bewilderedly.

"That was Benny Mack, a pal of Art Scanlon. He was in the next booth, taking all this in! Let's go."

KALKAS stood up swiftly. Mike Hanley tried to, couldn't make it. He sank back onto the bench and dashed a hand across his forehead. He grinned, but it was a frightened sort of grin. Kalkas had never seen it on the reporter's face before.

"You pickled?" Kalkas asked. "Stick here. I'll trail the guy."

Mike Hanley stumbled to his feet. He got up as if he had a piece of shrapnel lodged somewhere inside him. He hung on to Nick's shoulder.

"I'm going with you," he said.

"You'll be in the way. Stick here," Nick told him.

Mike took more of his weight upon himself.

"I'm all right. I'm going with you, I said."

He tottered ahead of Nick and through the door. At the foot of the steps he tripped and fell. At the same time, somebody at the top of the stairs cut loose with an automatic. Slugs drilled the glass door and mushroomed out on the floor of the barroom.

Up in the street, the guy with the gun must have got the same impression Nick Kalkas had—that a slug had taken out Mike Hanley. The hood turned off his lead.

Nick went through the door and bent over Mike. Mike was struggling to get to his feet. His forehead, when Nick accidentally brushed it with the back of his

hand, felt Clammy. Nick got hold of Mike's shoulder and half lifted him to his feet.

"You still alive, Mike?"

"I guess I am," Mike said. "Anyway, I'm still talking and I don't notice any death rattle. Was that Benny Mack?"

"And high as a kite." Nick ran up the steps to the street. A taxi was pulling away from Simon's and in it was Benny Mack. People were standing around on the sidewalk, looking frightened. Benny's taxi lurched into high as though mad dogs were snapping at its tires.

Nick scrambled into his coupe and turned over the motor. He had the gears meshed, ready to go, when Mike Hanley fell against the door of the car. Nick had to hold things up until Mike got in.

"Trying to beat me to an exclusive, huh?" Mike said.

"You're not fit to travel," Nick snapped back.

But he shot the gas pedal to the floor and let the clutch bang in. Ahead, the taxi had gone through a red light. Benny had his gun at the back of the hack driver's head, Nick was willing to bet.

Kalkas opened up his siren. Traffic bunched at the intersection, leaving a hole in the center less than the width of a garage door. Nick charged at the groove, missed fenders by the thickness of a coat of paint.

He reached a clear spot half a block farther on. He had the speeding cab marked clearly as it staggered back and forth, dodging in and out among scattered cars.

"Watch if he turns left up here," Nick said to Mike. "If he does, you can bet he's heading for your house. I'll cut up the avenue and beat him to it."

Mike didn't say anything. Nick saw Benny Mack's taxi turn left as he had half expected it would. He had to let his tires

squeal to slow enough for the cut down the diagonal street to beat Mack to Hanley's house.

As the coupe swerved, Mike slid to the left and fell limply forward, his left shoulder shoving into Mike's arm. His dead weight jerked the wheel a little. The coupe nosed for a lamp post. Nick yelled, got the car straightened out in time. But Mike leaned inertly on Nick's arm.

"Stiffen your spine," Nick said. "What's the matter, Mike? You dead?"

Mike's head bounced forward, clipped the instrument board. Nick braked the car to the curb. He shoved the gear shift in the neutral slot and let the motor idle while he straightened Mike in the seat.

Mike's chin rested down on his chest. His lips were parted. Nick felt for his pulse, but there wasn't much of it. The flesh was all cold and clammy.

Something cold rushed up from Nick's stomach and interrupted the steady rhythm of his heart for an instant.

"Mike, Mike," he kept saying in a hoarse voice. He thought Mike was dying, but he didn't think that even Myrt could drive Mike to drink himself to death.

Nick Kalkas' eyes flicked along the row of street lamps marching down the, curb. At the corner was a police telephone box. He meshed his gears and spurted up to the corner. As he got out he was pulling the box key from his pocket.

He put in a call to Headquarters, ordered a radio flash to the prowler car nearest the Hanley residence. A squad was to get over to Hanley's at once because of a burglary. The burglar was Benny Mack. He was to be stopped on sight. But the boys were to watch out for Mack's gun.

THEN Kalkas got back to the coupe, turned it toward the City Hospital, crammed on the gas, let the siren howl. He passed a motorcycle cop on the way, got

the man to clear the path to the emergency entrance. There was a pair of internes waiting at the door when Nick pulled up with Mike.

"He acts like he's poisoned," Kalkas said.

An interne, helping to get Mike Hanley out of the coupe, nodded agreement. Hanley's body was convulsively rigid.

Kalkas followed the wheeled stretcher down the corridor. He watched the door of the emergency room close on the stretcher that carried Mike. There was a certain finality about the closing of that door, as though it would never open.

It opened, though, five minutes later. Nick Kalkas stopped his pacing and looked at the doctor. A question formed on his lips. He could feel the rumble of words in his throat but he couldn't bring them out.

The doctor shook his head.

"Mr. Hanley's dead, Captain. We did our best, but we were way behind time. It looks like somebody filled him up with arsenic."

KALKAS turned slowly. Slowly he went down the corridor and out the door to his coupe. Then his shoulders lifted. He got in and his foot jammed hard on the starter. He backed out of the emergency drive and headed for Mike Hanley's house.

It wasn't much of a house for the crack reporter on the town's best newspaper to have. It was a five-room frame renting for about thirty dollars a month and not worth that. Mike Hanley's money had gone to make Myrt's uninteresting figure into a clothes rack and to allow her to doctor imaginary ailments.

A police car stood in front and a score or so of curious neighbors. Cars were cruising slowly by in the street, the drivers risking fenders to get a glimpse of the

excitement, which was in no way apparent.

Nick Kalkas got out, raced up the concrete walk. Always he had got a big kick out of hearing bystanders whisper that there went Captain Kalkas. Somehow he didn't feel that way tonight.

The front door was unlocked and he pushed his way in. Helen Ives got up out of a chair, came toward the door. She stopped when she saw who it was.

Helen Ives was the woman Nick always thought Mike Hanley should have married. She had worked at his side in the newspaper game for years. She was clever and beautiful, the dusky sort of beauty who is hard to forget. She was small, too, whereas Myrt was taller than Mike.

But now Helen Ives looked tall in a deep red housecoat with a black sweater pulled over her shoulders. She lived across the street and was Myrt's best friend—Myrt's only friend.

"Where's Myrt?" Helen asked. "Where's Mike?"

"Dead," Kalkas said, not even thinking of Myrt.

Helen sat down slowly on the worn footstool. It stood before the chair Myrt usually sat in to have headaches.

"Oh," she said, "how—how horrible." She stared dry-eyed at the wall, cheeks growing pale. "Her indigestion—"

"Where are the boys?" Kalkas cut in. "The cops."

Helen waved a hand toward the basement door.

"Down there, Nick. I heard the excitement and came over. One of them is hurt. They had me call an ambulance. There was some shooting, but I don't know about that. I suppose there's news right under my nose here, but it's a little too close to home to suit me."

Kalkas heard part of this going down the steps into the basement. At the bottom

of the stairway, Harry Burgess of the radio squad was seated. His uniform coat and shirt were stripped off, a wad of bandage pressed against his side. He looked up at Nick and attempted a salute without much heart.

Kalkas looked across the basement room. A man who acted like a doctor was kneeling beside Burgess' sidekick, a cop named Hasner. It took the captain only one look to tell that Hasner was dead.

"What the hell's all this about?" Nick demanded.

"Got a call to come here and grab a burglar," Burgess explained. "The place was locked, but the guy had just smashed through a window. We went in the same way. Down in the basement was Benny Mack, hopped to the gills. Nothing could have stopped him short of an act of God and we weren't that. He gunned both of us, Hasner worse than me."

NICK went over to the fruit cellar, which was just a corner of the room closed off by two right angle walls of planks. The door was open. When Kalkas beamed his flash along the dirty shelves, he saw that they were empty. Benny Mack had got what he had come after.

Kalkas looked helplessly around the room. The whole basement was right here, furnace, laundry, coal bin. He wandered aimlessly to the laundry stove, which was just a two-burner gas hot plate. There was a washboiler on the stove, dry inside and containing wads of paper.

Nick picked up one of the pieces of paper and flattened it out. On it was an often repeated printed legend, a trademark:

"Shur-Death For Flies."

The stuff was just fly paper with the paste all off it. Kalkas let the paper fall back into the boiler.

Outside in the street he could hear the

wail of an ambulance siren. Directly overhead came the sound of a door opening and Helen Ives' scream.

Kalkas took the dozen steps in five strides. It was Myrt who had just come in the front door. Helen Ives had backed into a corner and was hanging on the back of a chair, staring at Myrt. Myrt gaped from Helen to Kalkas.

"Well, why don't you take a good look at me, both of you?" Myrt said. "What's the matter?"

Her face was pale except for the angry red blemishes. She wasn't one of those golden blondes. Her hair was like sheep's wool with a tinge of yellow in it. If it ever turned gray you wouldn't notice it for years.

Myrt stamped her foot.

"Don't look at me like that, Helen. I'm not dead yet. Not yet. What are the police doing here? Has Mike come home drunk?"

Helen came from around the chair. She took a couple of steps toward Nick Kalkas.

"He—he's—Mike's not—"

Nick understood now that Helen had thought it was Myrt who was dead. He moistened his lips. What he had to say had come easy when he had first blurted it out. Now he saw just how hard Helen was going to take it.

"Mike's dead," he said softly. "He was poisoned."

Myrt came into the middle of the room.

"Mike, dead? You're kidding me, Nick. Did he—was he murdered?"

"We don't know," Nick said. "He died in my car. He hadn't been home for a week, except last night when he was taken sick." He wanted Myrt to know that he knew how she had made hell out of home for Mike.

Myrt uttered a low moan. "What a thing to tell me right after the doctor said I must avoid—" Her hands knotted

themselves. "What'll happen to me? Who'll—"

And then she fainted. Nick Kalkas caught her and carried her to the davenport. He told Helen to go out into the kitchen and get some water.

THE next few minutes he couldn't remember clearly. He remembered that the ambulance was there at Hanley's house after the dead cop. He remembered Myrt came out of her faint and that eventually he and Helen got her into her bedroom. He remembered telling Helen to put Myrt to bed.

Then he went down to the basement and told the police, unnecessarily, not to touch anything. That was because he couldn't think of anything else to do. Then he went upstairs and into the bathroom.

In the medicine cabinet he found a bottle containing some brown fluid and bearing a druggist's label.

"For indigestion," Myrt had written across the label. There were a lot of beauty aids in the medicine cabinet.

"Beauty aids!" he said contemptuously, thinking of Myrt.

But he took the bottle of indigestion remedy into Myrt's bedroom when Helen called out that Myrt could talk to him.

Myrt was propped up by two pillows. Helen sat beside her, holding her hand. Rather, she was letting Myrt hold her hand. Nick showed Myrt the bottle.

"This yours?" he asked.

She nodded dully. "The only thing the doctors gave me that seemed to do any good."

"Mike ever take any of it?"

She shook her head. "He had the digestion of a horse, except when he ate shrimp."

"He ate shrimp yesterday," Nick said. "That's why he came home last night. I thought he might have taken some of this

medicine of yours. What's all the fly paper doing in the washboiler down in the basement?"

Myrt paled and started to cry. Nick advanced to the bed.

"Cut that out," he said. "What was it for?"

She stopped crying and flushed angrily.

"You can't take that attitude with me, Nick. I won't tell."

"That's what you think," Nick said. But he knew just how hard it would be to make her talk if she didn't want to.

"I'll tell you," Helen broke in. "She got some sort of crazy formula from an old woman who lives down the street. It was a lotion for her skin. She was supposed to soak fly paper and drain the liquid off. Of course it has a lot of arsenic in it and that's supposed to be good for the skin. Mike and I told her she shouldn't try it."

"Mike and you told me!" Myrt cried, her voice husky with rage. "Always Mike and you. Why don't you tell Nick you were in love with Mike? Don't say you weren't. I've watched you two together!"

"Shut up," Nick snapped. "Mike's death doesn't mean anything to you, but it does to me. Where's this beauty preparation made out of soaked fly paper?"

Myrt glared at Helen.

"Ask her," she accused. "She came in here yesterday evening. I was all alone and feeling miserable. She said the stuff was hurting me—the stuff with the arsenic from the fly paper in it. She went into the bathroom and said she threw it down the drain. But that isn't any reason to feel the way I do. I'm sick, really sick."

"Yeah," Nick said, "I guess you are."

He left, taking the medicine bottle with him. He drove over to the city hospital and left the bottle with the laboratory technician there.

When he went out to get Art Scanlon and Benny Mack, he went alone.

At ten o'clock he climbed the steps of Art Scanlon's apartment. Scanlon knew he was coming, just as he always knew when the cops were going to raid his gambling joints. Scanlon was alone, apparently, and that was sufficient novelty to excite suspicion.

SCANLON looked tall in his brocaded slounging robe. Also, his face looked long because his black sideburns were trimmed like the tapering blades of butcher knives. He smiled only on one side of his face because he'd had a fifth nerve operation that had left the other side dead.

"Hello, Captain," he said. "This is a surprise."

"Like hell," Kalkas retorted. He walked into the small but expensively furnished living room. "Where's Benny Mack?"

"Benny Mack?" Scanlon repeated. "Oh, yes, Benny Mack. I haven't seen him for some time. He got to running around with a pretty fast crowd."

Kalkas clicked his tongue reflectively. Looking around the room, he caught the glint of something on the floor near Scanlon's slippers. He stepped over to it and picked it up. It was what he had thought—a miniature safe dial no larger than a quarter. There was no doubt that it had come off the toy bank Mike Hanley had told Kalkas to get.

"I guess you haven't seen Benny for ten minutes," Nick said. "Mind if I look around?"

Scanlon rested the tips of his fingers on the pipe-legged end-table beside a modernistic chair.

"Not at all, Captain. Got a warrant?"

Kalkas unholstered his revolver.

"This is it," he said.

Nick walked to a closed door and put his hand on the knob. Benny Mack's metallic voice shrilled out.

"Come in and get me, copper, if I don't get you first."

Nick Kalkas pushed the door open and stepped back. Nothing happened in front of him. Behind him, though, Art Scanlon had produced a gun from somewhere. He shoved it into Nick's back.

"Go on in, Captain," he grated. "And drop the gun right there."

The gambler's gun gouged into Nick's spine. So he dropped the gun at his feet and raised his hands a little way. He walked into the bedroom.

Benny Mack lay on the bed. Scanlon's silk sheets had been ripped up to make bandages for him. He was wounded in the chest or shoulder, you couldn't tell which because the blood had spread around so. His face was white and his black eyes squinted through the smoke of a cigarette clamped between pain-tightened lips. He was holding a gun in his left hand, but the weight of it had his hand shaking. He must have lost a lot of blood.

"Well, you will play with coppers, Benny," Nick said.

"You should have seen the other guy," Benny jeered.

"I did. That's why I'm here."

Benny laughed again and winked at Scanlon. Scanlon kicked the bedroom door shut behind him.

"I think you killed Butch Wagner, too," Nick said. "He was payroll man for Art's joints. Art didn't keep his books so well that Butch couldn't hold out some extra change for himself. Art found out he was laying a nest egg for himself, so he put the finger on him. You did the rubbing out, Benny."

"You overheard the conversation between Mike Hanley and me, so you beat it over to Hanley's house. You had to get

the evidence on the Butch Wagner killing that Mike had gathered. He had that evidence tucked into a little toy bank which you swiped out of his basement.”

“Show it to him, Art,” Benny said. “Before we knock him off, I’d like to make some sense out of that stuff Hanley wrote.”

ART SCANLON came from behind Nick. His left hand went into the pocket of his lounging robe and came out with a folded piece of paper. It was creased down small enough to be squeezed through the slot of a toy bank. Art and his gun watched while Nick took the paper and unfolded it.

The note was written in Mike Hanley’s hand, which was never very easy to read.

“Monday morning—”

This, Nick suddenly remembered was Monday, though it seemed like a week since morning.

“If you get this,” the note went on, “I will be sort of dead—”

“Mean something to you?” Art Scanlon asked.

Nick’s eyes ran down through the note. “Yes, it will mean something.”

“Code or something, ain’t it?” Benny Mack asked.

“Something,” Nick said. Holding the note in one hand, he groped in his vest pocket.

“What are you looking for?” Scanlon asked suspiciously.

“A match,” Nick said. “I want to read between the lines.”

It was funny that Scanlon didn’t notice how cramped the writing was. Nothing could have been written between the lines in invisible ink.

Scanlon laughed. “So you guys use that kid stuff, do you?” He handed Nick a cigarette lighter.

“Well, the kid stuff fooled you, didn’t

it?”

Kalkas flipped the lighter into a healthy flame and brought it up under the paper. Scanlon bent over close. Even Benny’s curiosity was excited. He tried to crawl to the foot of the bed, but pain flattened him.

Nick held the paper at the tips of his fingers, but he was watching Scanlon’s eyes and gun. As though by accident, he dropped the paper. It skidded in the air, barely missed the flame of the lighter.

Scanlon tried to grab the paper in mid-air. That was when Nick drove the tall, hot flame into Scanlon’s right eye. At the same time, his left hand grabbed at the automatic.

Scanlon’s cry of pain, the noise of the speedy footwork on the floor, brought Benny Mack upright. His shaky hand found his gat at the same time Nick Kalkas got Scanlon’s gun.

He started shooting as soon as Scanlon broke away from Nick. The gambler dived for the captain’s gun lying in the doorway of the bedroom. The bullets went crazy. Nick shot once. That finished what Benny had started.

Nick twisted on his toes. Scanlon fired up from the floor the minute he snatched the cop’s gun. Scanlon got Nick through the thigh. Before the captain’s legs went out from under him, he managed to pump a couple of slugs. Suddenly the room looked like a morgue.

NICK KALKAS came out of the hospital a week later. Art Scanlon never got nearer the hospital than the morgue in back of it. Benny Mack had a chance to recover. What with the high cost of electrocution, though, it might have been better if he hadn’t had a chance.

Nick limped out of the hospital, one arm around his daughter, May. But he hurried back to the old routine, anxious to

see what would crop up in place of the Scanlon gambling joints.

After a couple of days around the office, he went out to see Helen Ives one evening. He had called her up so she would have a chance to decide whether she would be at home or not. She was at home.

She wasn't looking her usual attractive self. Her dark eyes had veiled, making her face a mask for something behind it. She was thinner, too. Nick asked her what the trouble was, though he thought he knew.

"I got my walking papers from the *Globe-Telegram*."

Nick Kalkas sat down, his hat in his hand. "What'll you do now?"

"Go over to the *Star*," she said without enthusiasm. Something had gone out of her since Mike Hanley's death.

Nick Kalkas put his hat on the floor. He rested a hand on each knee and leaned forward. His dark brows drew close together above his eyes.

"I know, Helen," he said.

"What?" she asked after a moment, without looking at him.

"Just how much you loved Mike, and just how much he loved you. He left proof of what he thought of you. I know how Mike died, so I get all the irony of it.

"The morning of the day he was going to die, he wrote me a note and put it in that toy bank he had down the basement. He wanted me to get that note, told me about it a little while before he died Monday night.

"Benny Mack overheard him talking about it, and both Benny and I misunderstood. We thought he was talking about some evidence he had got concerning the murder of Butch Wagner.

"That's part of the irony. It brought things to a head so I could shoot it out with Benny Mack and Art Scanlon. But the note Mike left me didn't have anything

to do with Scanlon. It was something personal."

Kalkas took a piece of paper out of his pocket. "Go ahead, Nick," Helen said huskily.

"'Monday morning,' he read from Mike's note. 'If you get this I'll be sort of dead. Those damned shrimp I ate yesterday. I love shrimp and they're death to me. Sunday night about eleven I started to have terrific pains. I hit the bicarbonate at a drugstore, but that didn't help the shrimp. So I went home.

"'Myrt was in bed and didn't disturb her. I didn't even turn on a light, except in the bathroom. There was some indigestion medicine there—some stuff Myrt swears by. I took a gulp of it and then went and curled up on the davenport.

"'Early this morning, I was feeling worse. And then I remembered that Myrt had been making some nutty skin lotion out of soaked fly paper. I also remembered seeing her put that fly paper skin tonic in an old medicine bottle. Knowing Myrt as I do, I knew she hadn't bothered to change labels, even though the skin tonic would contain enough arsenic to kill a horse.

"'I have taken every antidote in the book, but the poison has gone too far, I'm afraid. I'm going to see you tonight about this note and then go around to a doctor, though that won't do much good. If I come out okay, you won't see this note. If I don't, this note will show it wasn't murder or suicide, or anything for a cop to argue about. Do you get me? Just an accident.—Mike Hanley'."

Nick looked at Helen. Head down, a she was crying a little, but not making any fuss about doing it.

"So that proves what Mike thought of you," Nick said.

She quieted down quickly, made a hard little newspaper dame out of herself. "Yes? How do you figure it?"

“Well,” Kalkas said slowly, “the night Mike died, Myrt told us you had thrown all that arsenic beauty stuff down the bathroom drain. Remember? If you had really done that, Mike couldn’t have got hold of the poison by mistake. What you really did was pour the arsenic stuff into that bottle labeled indigestion remedy. That’s what the bottle had in it—arsenic. It was Myrt who was supposed to take the poison.

“After he knew he was poisoned, Mike realized what you had done. I guess maybe the two of you sometimes discussed what you would do if anything happened to Myrt. Myrt being what she was, and you and Mike being in love, that’s natural.”

HELEN lifted her head. The set of her mouth and chin was defiant.

“Well?” she demanded.

“Mike beat me to the draw,” Nick said. “If I try to tie a rap on you, this note defends you. If I throw the note away, I’ve got a better case against Myrt than I have against you.”

“What are you going to do, Nick?”

He got up and walked to the door.

“I’m a cop, not a judge or jury. And I’m certainly not God. You’ve already passed your own sentence. It’s life, isn’t it?”

That shook her badly.

“I don’t know,” she choked out. But Nick saw she did know.

“It’ll be life,” he said. “And it’ll be a tough punishment, especially when you see this evening’s *Star*. Too bad you couldn’t have waited.”

He went out. The *Star* was on the front porch of Helen’s cottage. The item Kalkas had referred to stared up at him.

HANLEY WIDOW DIES DURING OPERATION

Myrt Hanley’s ailments hadn’t all been imaginary. She had been taken to the hospital to be operated on for stomach ulcers. She hadn’t lived to come out of the anesthetic.