

"Please, mister, is your name Sergeant Carmel?"

Carmel swung around, brought his feet to the floor with a crash, and while in this sitting position found himself eye to eye with the scrawniest boy he had seen in a long time.

The boy weighed no more than sixty pounds. Still, he looked healthy enough, and he was scrubbed as if on his way to Sunday School. A cap adorned his head but red curls popped out all around it. His eyes were azure blue and a bit frightened. He prodded the unyielding floor with one shoe, scuffing the toe of it more and more with each prod.

"Well"—Carmel grinned—"don't tell me you're wanted for something?"

"No, mister," The boy shook his red head. "I ain't wanted. The man in front—the one back of the big desk, he said I should come and see you. He said I wasn't to be scared, and that cops ain't all bad."

Carmel pursed his lips. "Such a statement, coming from just another cop, can't be seriously taken, son. We've some bad ones among us."

"You ain't," the boy said promptly.

"Well, thanks." Carmel feinted a punch at the boy's chin. "Now suppose you tell me what's on your mind? My job is to serve men like you. You're a taxpayer—or will be some day. Let's have it, kid."

"I want to see my pop."

"Ah-ha!" Carmel said. "Now who is your pop?"

"Jack Kirby!"

The boy's face grew pinkish for a moment. Then it turned as stern as a twelve-year-old boy's face can be stern.

Carmel whistled softly. "So you're Jack Kirby's son. We sent a man to hunt you up, to make sure you were taken care of. Now look, son, maybe your pop doesn't want to see you."

"Maybe he does too. I know I want to see him. He ain't bad, even if you do say he killed Andy Graham."

CARMEL sighed, put an arm around the boy's shoulders and pulled him a bit closer.

"Now see here, Al—yes, I know your name—we don't say your father killed Graham. He says so himself. I guess maybe he did, too, but we don't regard him as a criminal. You know what he went through, don't you?"

"Yes, sir. He was torpedoed and lived for nineteen days on a raft and everybody else with him died and Pop got home safe."

"That's right. But not entirely safe, Al. You see, I—"

Carmel stopped talking and wondered how to tell a twelve-year-old boy that his father was a homicidal maniac.

"You gonna let me see him?" young Al asked. "Or do I have to see somebody bigger'n you?"

Carmel laughed. "Oh, no. No, I can take care of it. But first I've got to ask your father if he wants to see you. That's the rule. Stay right here. I'll be back in a couple of minutes."

He drew in a sharp breath as he walked slowly down the long corridor to the cell room. The turnkey opened the main gate.

"Bring Kirby into the visiting room," Carmel said.

Kirby soon appeared. He was a burly man with a thick neck and big arms. His face was wholesomely tanned and his eyes were deep-set and harrowed. He wore a pair of work pants, work shoes and the leather jacket he always wore when he drove trucks. He sat down without saying a word, without changing the anguished expression on his face one whit.

"Your kid is here," Carmel said. "He wants to see you."

Kirby's eyes changed then. They seemed to acquire life in them. He half arose, groaned, and sat back again wearily.

"No use, Sarge. I don't want the kid to see me in here. I don't want him to ever know that his old man is crazy. A crazy killer."

Carmel nodded. "I guess I can't blame you much. Did the psychiatrists show up yet?"

"No. Why should they hurry? I can't harm anyone else. And why should I go all through that again anyway? I know what the war did to me. It's happened to a lot of us guys. Better guys than me—only they never got to the stage where they killed a man."

Carmel took out a pack of cigarettes, extracted one and handed the rest of the pack to Kirby.

"The kid must have known about those dreams of yours," he said.

"No—no, I made sure of that. I made him sleep in a room at the end of the flat, and I locked myself into my room every night. So when those dreams came, he wouldn't hear me yelling. They were letting up—some—before this happened."

Carmel puffed on his cigarette for a full two minutes. He looked at Kirby through the haze of smoke.

"It's tough," he murmured. "Even tougher when you have a kid like Al. You should have let the Maritime Commission hospitalize you and keep you there."

Kirby jerked his head up and down nervously. "Sure—and leave my kid with his mother's folks to be raised any way at all. To be worked to death, be half starved. Don't you think I know all about them? My wife died three years ago because of an illness she contracted when she was a kid about Al's age. No, I couldn't see it. I was willing to take my chances so long as I could be with him."

"It might have worked too," Carmel

said, "if you had laid off the booze and stopped hating Andy Graham. From the reports we have, you were always okay until you drank, and then something hit you. Turned you into a killer. Like night before last when you knifed Graham. You hated him so much. Why?"

Kirby closed his eyes slowly.

"We've been all over that, Sarge," he said bitterly. "When the war came, I had a nice little trucking business with Graham as a partner. He agreed to carry on while I went into the Maritime. And he promised to take care of the kid. So what happens? I find he sold out the business, made a lot of dough, and kept every dime. He licked the kid two or three times when he asked for money—because I told him when he needed anything to see Graham."

"Tell me about what happened to make you blow your top night before last," Carmel said.

"Sure, why not? I haven't a thing to hide. I got a job when they let me out of the hospital. Working for McKinney, driving one of his eight-wheelers. It paid well. I was doing okay and saving a little so I could buy my own truck again. Then Graham put his oar in. Somebody swiped two cases of goods off my truck. Graham said they never were swiped at all. I just took them. He also said I was going into business for myself and give McKinney competition."

"And McKinney fired you," Carmel said. "I know the rest of it. You got drunk. Graham came into the cafe with a friend and took a booth. You worked up a good rage, went into the booth and stabbed him with a swivel knife."

KIRBY pressed a hand hard against his forehead. "I don't remember," he said. "I don't remember a thing except that I wanted to beat Graham up. Everything he'd ever done to me came back in one big

lump. I hated him. Sure, I killed him. I must have. With his own knife. He was using it to defend himself with. So his pal said. I took it away and shoved it into his heart. But I don't remember doing it. I was in one of those mental blackouts."

"I understand," Carmel said. "I'll send the kid away. And, Jack, don't worry about him. I'll see he's okay. I know a nice boy when I see one."

"They don't come any better," Kirby said, and his eyes glittered for a second in pride. "Thanks, Sarge. I feel a lot better."

Carmel went back to the office, pushed open the door and looked around. The boy was gone. Automatically his eyes darted to the shoulder harness which he had hung on the clothes tree in the corner. The harness was there but its holster was empty. Carmel let out a yell and stormed to the front of Headquarters.

"The kid?" Sergeant Mahoney, on desk duty, pointed at the door. "He went through there about five minutes ago like he was shot out of a gun."

"Out of a gun, my eye. *With* a gun! My thirty-eight. I'm taking a car. Be back as soon as I can."

Carmel raced around to the garage, took out a coupe and sent it rolling toward the slum area where Jack Kirby had made his home. He didn't know what the kid wanted with that gun, but if he was like his father there might be no telling what would happen.

Kirby lived on the top floor of a four-story, eight-family tenement block. Carmel ran up the steps, thinking a bit abstractly that he puffed more than usual, and that he might be getting old. He pounded on Kirby's door, stepped back, and smashed in the flimsy door.

The apartment was not badly fitted out. The living room furniture was standard mohair, old but scrupulously clean. The worn kitchen linoleum glistened like the

deck of a battleship equipped with a grouchy skipper. There were two bedrooms, one with two stout locks. When Kirby Senior, locked himself in for the night he made sure that when those bad dreams came he would stay inside the room. Or have a difficult time getting out.

But there were no signs of the kid. Carmel cursed softly. If the boy had decided to avenge his father and went after old McKinney, there would be repercussions that were bound to put Carmel on the longest and loneliest beat they could invent.

There was a light footstep behind him and he turned quickly, but he saw only a girl about Al Kirby's age. She had pigtails and a mischievous smile.

"I know where Al is if you gimme a dime," she said in one breath. .

"You bandit," Carmel grunted. "Okay, a dime it is."

She regarded him somberly for a moment. "Maybe I better ask for a quarter, mister, on account of Al has got a gun and you're awful worried."

"Where do you live?"

Carmel approached her slowly, not wanting to frighten the child. Not until he had a good firm grip on her arm.

"Downstairs with my grandma. She drinks."

"She must have fed you a pint of bourbon," Carmel said.

He lunged at her. She didn't move at all.

"Why did you do that?" she asked. "I wasn't going to run away."

Carmel held her tightly. "That's the truth, anyway. Not now you won't run. Okay, where is he?"

"Give me the quarter, mister. I won't say a word until you do."

Carmel dug a hand into his pocket, fished out a coin and put it into the palm of her hand.

“There—now talk.”

“He went over to where Mr. Graham lived before he was killed.”

Carmel tried to figure it out. Graham lived in a cheap apartment hotel. He had lived alone, so the kid wouldn't find anyone there to serve as a target. Perhaps, Carmel thought, the kid meant to vent his spleen by pumping bullets into Graham's furniture. Kids had done crazier things than that.

Carmel pushed the girl into the hallway, closed the battered door and gave up trying to fasten it shut. He had demolished the lock. The girl walked toward the steps. Carmel thought there was something odd about her. She was wearing stockings. Sheer, beautiful nylons which were sizes too big and fell wrinkled and haphazardly around her skinny legs. And nylons in this neighborhood were about as common as polar bears in Bermuda.

“Hey—you!” Carmel shouted.

THE girl gave one frightened look over her shoulder and ran. She went down those steps faster than a deer runs from a mountain lion. She was at the bottom when Carmel reached the third-floor landing.

He steadied himself, wished again that he didn't puff so much and decided to take one thing at a time. Just one at a time. Find the kid first, get the gun away from him, and then try to discover where that girl had got herself a pair of three-fifty nylons.

His car was still at the curb, which fact he construed as some minor miracle the way things were happening to him so far. He used the siren this time and swung corners on wheels that skimmed the pavement. He pulled up in front of Graham's apartment house with a jerk that knocked the wind out of him.

He ran into the lobby and found a

bored super swabbing the floor. Carmel seized him by one shoulder.

“I'm the law. Did you see a kid, kind of skinny, wearing a cap?”

“He went up about ten minutes ago. What's he done? Murdered somebody?”

“Maybe,” Carmel answered, and hoped he wasn't telling the truth. .

He had to wait while the self-service lift crawled down. It crawled back up, too—as far as the ninth floor. Carmel pushed the door back, stepped into the illy illuminated hallway and started hunting apartment numbers tacked to the various doors.

He found Graham's. The door was not locked. He opened it slowly, noiselessly and held his breath. Perhaps this would be the end of the chase. He didn't know how much longer he could take it. Chasing an armed crook was simple compared to catching up with a twelve-year-old kid.

He closed the door behind him, took the precaution of locking it and putting the key into his pocket. Then he began a room-to-room search. There wasn't a sign of the boy. In the bedroom Carmel found a locked closet door. There was no key in it. He smiled wryly.

“Okay, kid, come on out,” he called. “You can't get away.”

That drew no answer. He banged on the door as hard as he could and still there wasn't even a whimper. Carmel drew back, muttered savagely under his breath and attacked the door with a shoulder. He bounced back, tried again, and finally splintered one panel. He ripped out sections of wood, fumbled for the key which should be on the other side of the lock and found none.

He snapped on his flash and sprayed the interior of the closet with its beam. The kid certainly was not here. He exhaled slowly, snapped off the flash, then turned it on again. He had only half-noticed the

two large traveling bags, but something sticking out of one of them attracted him. He blinked several times, for what he saw was rapidly becoming the bane of his existence. A woman's stocking dangled limply alongside the suitcase.

Carmel got the door open finally, pulled out the two suitcases and opened them. He whistled shrilly, for both were stuffed with brand-new nylons. He couldn't even hazard a guess as to how many pair were there. They were packed in thin boxes, each one bearing the trade name of "Ultrasheer."

Carmel hurried into the next room and dialed Headquarters. He asked one question.

"What was the trade name of those nylons which were hijacked last week upstate?"

His memory was not slipping. These stockings in a dead man's apartment were the same brand as those thousands of pairs stolen from a truck many miles from the city. He sat down slowly, trying to think. Trying to associate facts.

Graham had not been a crook—not to Carmel's knowledge. But then, he didn't know every thief or bandit. These suitcases might be jammed with part of the loot from that hijack job in which the truck driver had been mercilessly shot to death.

Carmel shoved both suitcases under the bed. Whatever they meant, he could investigate later. Right now he had to find a crazy kid with a gun. A cop's gun. His gun! Nothing seemed more important than that.

The kid hadn't swiped the gun just for the sake of stealing something. It had been with a purpose. Graham had been his father's bitter enemy, but Graham was dead and the kid knew it. So whom did he think he had to go hunting for?

McKinney, the owner of the trucking firm where Kirby had worked and been

fired the day he had encountered Graham and killed him? Discharged through the efforts of Graham. Maybe the kid had some crazy idea that McKinney was responsible, too.

Carmel headed for the North River side of town, hunted up McKinney's warehouse and garage and went inside. McKinney was big-time, operating a fleet of more than a hundred big trucks and contracting for all sorts of long-distance haulage.

THERE was a modern and well-fitted office in the warehouse. Two men, dressed like truck drivers, were lounging about. Carmel eyed a door marked "Private" and asked for McKinney.

"Who wants to see him?" one of the men demanded.

"Carmel—Homicide," the detective said. "And snap into it. Where is he? I have reason to think he's in danger."

One man disappeared into the other office. The second blocked Carmel, and looked as if he would get tough. McKinney came to the door of his private office.

"You're a detective?" he asked. "And I'm supposed to be in some sort of danger?"

Carmel shoved the driver aside and walked up to the owner of the business. McKinney was fifty-five or so, heavily jowled, with sparse hair and a fairly benevolent expression. He was dressed as if he owned the biggest bank in town, but then Carmel reasoned, there was probably a lot of money in this business.

"Have you seen anything of a kid?" Carmel said. "About twelve years old? Jack Kirby's son."

"Why, no," McKinney said. "Should I have?"

"The kid stole a gun," Carmel explained "My gun, if you want it cold. He

swiped it for a purpose. You fired his father and started the ball rolling which ended in Andy Graham's murder. The kid may blame you."

McKinney gulped and looked around anxiously.

"Pete," he ordered one man, "get outside and watch for the kid. Any kid." He turned to Carmel. "Sergeant, what kind of a police force do we have where a twelve-year-old boy can steal a detective's gun? Certainly he's after me, and you can't reason with a child like that. I don't mind telling you, I'm frightened. He may hide anywhere, pop out and start shooting. Even if he can't shoot straight, there is a chance I'll be hit."

"My advice is to stay under cover, Mr. McKinney," Carmel said. "And about the boy's father. You did fire him, didn't you?"

"Of course I did. In the first place he was taking lists of my customers, intending to get their business when he had enough money to go in on his own. I suspect he stole freight off one of my trucks. Furthermore, when I discovered he was subject to spells where he became a virtual maniac, I knew he had to go. Imagine what would happen if he was driving one of my ten-wheelers and had one of those spells? He might kill a lot of people."

"You're right," Carmel admitted. "Just for the records, it was Graham who told you all this?"

"Yes. He thought it his duty to tell me. I had no idea Kirby was as bad as he turned out to be. He demanded to know where I'd received this information and I told him. I fired him the same day that Graham passed on his information. Now he's killed Graham, and his son is running loose with a gun. Of course he's after me."

"I'll keep hunting," Carmel said. "If I find him, I'll let you know."

He left the warehouse and went back to where his car was parked. He drove rapidly away, with one eye on the rear view mirror. He wasn't being tailed. He stopped in front of Graham's apartment house again and went up to the dead man's suite. He opened the door and left it open a crack, but he didn't go inside. He moved down the hallway to the fire stairs and concealed himself there.

He didn't have to wait long. A pair of well-known guerrillas appeared and went straight to the apartment. They eyed the open door suspiciously. One went in, the other remained outside with a hand dug into his pocket until the first man called him.

Carmel tiptoed up to the door and stepped inside. He suddenly realized he was not armed. He stuck a hand into his coat pocket and barged toward the bedroom. The pair of crooks were busy hauling out the two suitcases from beneath the bed.

"Freeze!" Carmel snapped. "Stay down that way and keep your hands right on top of those suitcases."

He was praying that they wouldn't detect the fact that he was bluffing. He approached them warily. The first thing to do was disarm the pair. Then he would feel safer.

"Hey!" one of the men suddenly shouted. "This cop ain't got a gun!"

Both of them jumped to their feet. Carmel rushed them, but he had timed it a fraction of a second too late. He did send one man flat on the floor, but the other was on his feet and had drawn a gun. He used it as a club. Carmel was half stunned by the impact of the first blow, but he fought on.

The course of battle brought him close to the living room door. He gave the man nearest him a hard shove, backed through the door and slammed it. He managed to

twist the key before the pair attacked.

CARMEL was as brave as the next detective, but he didn't believe in committing suicide. He knew they would shoot the lock off that door in a matter of seconds. He picked up the phone in the hall, dialed the operator and spoke tersely.

"This is Sergeant Carmel—Police! I want a flock of radio cars and the Emergency Squad. Fast! The address is Twenty-two-fifty-nine Waverly Avenue."

If the operator was in any manner doubtful as to the authenticity of the call, her doubts must have been punctured by the sound of guns. The lock flew out of the door and Carmel went sprinting for the one service elevator. If he could reach it, if it was still on the floor, he would have those men trapped long enough for some portion of the help he had demanded to reach him.

The elevator was there. As the car dropped, a bullet smashed through the door. Then he was going down slowly, but much faster than anyone could descend the steps.

By the time he reached the curb, a radio car howled along the street. It stopped and Carmel borrowed a gun from one patrolman. He sent both of them to guard the rear door. More cars arrived, then the Emergency truck along with Captain Burke's official sedan.

A search of the whole building began. Carmel stayed on the street explaining things.

"I've been working on the hijack case," he explained, carefully saying nothing about Al Kirby and the missing service pistol. "Acting on certain information I investigated the apartment of Andy Graham, the guy who was knifed the other night. Sure enough, I found two suitcases full of nylons. Same brand as those which were stolen."

"Good work," Burke complimented him. "You couldn't have gone wrong on the nylons. None with that trade name had been released for sale as yet. . . . Now, what about the boy who stole your gun?"

"Nothing but a prank," Carmel said. "You know how kids are. I—ah—I'll get him later. The tip on Graham was more important."

"Very well, Sergeant. But see that you get your gun back. It's bad enough when a criminal takes it away from a policeman, but a twelve-year-old boy—that's something!"

Carmel ducked, entered the building, and helped with a search that proved vain. The two gunmen had raced to the roof and got away. With them had gone the two suitcases of nylons.

Carmel decided it might not be wise to encounter Captain Burke at this particular moment. He departed via the back door.

Fifteen minutes later he was at Kirby's house again, but on the first floor this time and ringing the landlady's doorbell. She was a hefty, somewhat bedraggled specimen with a strong smell of whisky on her breath, and a slight weave in her walk.

"There is a little girl living in this building," Carmel explained. "Ten, maybe eleven years old. Pigtails, thin, and wearing nylon stockings that she must have swiped somewhere."

"Ain't seen her." The door began to close. Carmel shoved his foot into it.

"Lady, I'm the police," he said.

She regarded him stonily for a moment. "Lots of kids around here who look like that. How do I know which one you mean?"

Suddenly it came back to Carmel. The little girl said she lived here with her grandmother who, she had explained with the frankness of extreme youth, drank. This woman fitted the description well. She was old enough to be a grandmother,

and she certainly drank.

"I'm coming in," Carmel said. "Don't try to stop me or it will mean a pinch."

The woman turned her head suddenly. "Marybelle—run. Run!"

A door slammed somewhere. Carmel raced for the porch, down it and around to the alley. He encountered the pigtailed girl almost head-on. She wasn't running, and a look of intense worry on her face faded to serenity when she saw him.

"Now," he said, "suppose we have a little talk. Why didn't your grandma want me to find you?"

"She don't like cops."

Carmel grinned. "That, I realized two seconds after I saw her. Al Kirby told you to send me to Graham's house, didn't he?"

"Nope. He just said he was going there." She was shifting her weight from one foot to the other and seemed ready to make a sprint for it.

"What does your grandma do for a living, Marybelle?"

"She takes in boarders, when she gets any. That ain't often."

"Suppose you tell me where Al Kirby is now, eh?"

"Wasn't he over at Mr. Graham's?" she blurted.

"No—and I don't believe he went there at all. But he wanted me to go there. Why?"

"He didn't tell me nothing, mister. Please, if I keep talking to you, my grandma will tan me good."

SERGEANT CARMEL glanced down at her thin legs. She wasn't wearing the nylons now. "All right," he said. "You can run along. And here—a dollar for you. I'll bet that's more than Mr. Graham gave you."

"No, it ain't," she retorted. "He gave me five dollars to get him a lot of stuff he needed. And some stockings too."

"Well, Mr. Graham was much richer than I am," Carmel acknowledged. "Run along now. I'll see you later on."

Carmel returned to his car, got in, and drove straight to McKinney's warehouse. He was instantly admitted this time. McKinney regarded him sourly.

"Well, did you get him, or must I stay locked up here for the entire night?"

"He's a smart one," Carmel said. "But I figure you are his target and he's bound to come here sooner or later, so I'm going to stick around. I'm sure you'll be glad to have somebody here to stop the slugs if the kid does open fire."

Carmel sat down and lit a cigarette. He leaned back comfortably as if he intended to stay a while. McKinney growled something, bent over the papers on his desk, and fiddled with them. He may have looked as if he was at work, but Carmel knew very well that McKinney's mind was on far more serious things.

Finally he looked up. "I can't stay here all night," he said. "If you intend to act as my bodyguard, come along with me. I'm going home."

"No," Carmel said. "Not until you produce the kid. And keep your hands flat on the desk, McKinney. If you reach into the drawer, I'll let you have it. I'm armed now. You might tell that to the boys you told all about the fact that I wasn't carrying a gun a little while ago."

"What do you mean by that?" McKinney demanded. "What's this all about?"

"Three things. Hijacking, murder and kidnapping. The first one will get you ten years, the second the chair, and the third life. I wouldn't want to face the prospect of being charged with three such crimes, Mr. McKinney. Where is the boy?"

"How do I know? And I think you're as crazy as that lunatic Kirby."

"Fine. I'll be content with that."

Because Kirby isn't crazy at all. Furthermore, he did not kill Graham. You did—or had it done. . . . The hands, McKinney. Remember?"

McKinney brought his right hand into view again. Carmel's gun was centered on the man's chest.

"Lift the phone and ask somebody to bring the boy in here. If he has been hurt, I'll personally beat the stuffing out of you. If he's dead, you're dead. Get on the phone."

"But he isn't here. You're making a terrible mistake!"

"Not now. My mistake was made when I believed that Kirby had killed Graham. The fact is, Graham helped to hijack a truck upstate. Only he pinched some of the stuff and you found out about it. You started a hunt for him and he holed up in the same tenement house where Kirby lived. Oh, you found him all right. You probably even convinced him that he was forgiven. He went to a cafe, escorted by one of your boys. Kirby was there. You saw to that. And Kirby had been given the works just before. Called a thief, a maniac, and fired. You knew he'd get drunk. He always did when things went sour. You knew he'd go berserk at the sight of Graham."

"Now see here—" McKinney said, blusteringly.

"Keep quiet," barked Carmel. "Kirby acted just as you were so sure he would. He went to beat up Graham. It all happened in a booth where nobody could see much. Your boy, with Graham, just hauled out a knife, stabbed Graham, and saw that the knife got into Kirby's possession. Kirby thought he'd killed Graham. You were having murder done neatly. A man would even admit he'd killed Graham because Kirby never realized what he was doing when he was in one of those spells."

McKinney said nothing, but he was careful not to move his hands. "The kid, McKinney," Carmel said. "Now!"

McKinney slowly reached for the phone. He dialed a single number.

"Bring the kid in here," he ordered.

"You're being smart," Carmel said.

McKinney shrugged. "You wouldn't be fool enough to come here alone. The whole place is probably covered. Yes, I have the boy. I was going to beat him until he understood that stealing and playing with guns is not for children. The rest of what you say is all nonsense, and I'll stand pat on that."

"Sure," Carmel arose, and backed toward the door. He stood where he would be shielded when it opened. "Stand pat on it and see how far you get."

"There is absolutely no evidence to prove a word of that insane story," McKinney insisted. "I'm not afraid of you."

Someone tapped on the door. McKinney called a command and the door opened. A husky man in a truck driver's cap led Al Kirby into the room. Led him through the door, and then shoved him hard. The boy lost his balance and fell.

CARMEL kicked the door shut. The truck driver was trying to figure out what was wrong with McKinney, but when he heard the door close, he guessed and spun around. Carmel clipped him on the jaw with his left fist.

"I'll use the barrel of the gun next time," he warned. "Stand over against the wall. McKinney, get up and join him. Both of you face the wall, and don't move . . . Al, come here."

The boy showed signs of having been beaten. He clung to Carmel's arm tightly. "Al, you got me into this," Carmel said. "You knew all along that McKinney was a liar when he said Graham had told him

about your father.”

“Yes,” the boy said meekly. “But I ain’t saying anything else, because I ain’t a snitch. I won’t say anything else.”

“You don’t have to, Al. Not another word. Now walk over to the telephone on that desk and dial the operator. Tell her that you want a lot of policemen to come here fast.”

McKinney blurted something and started to turn. Carmel waved the gun.

“Stay put,” he warned. “I did come alone, McKinney. I was afraid you’d do something to the boy. And that you’d get rid of the nylons you had hijacked. So just stand pretty, and it would be too bad if any of your boys happened to blunder in here because I’d have to shoot you first. You and your pal.”

Carmel, with one arm around the boy’s shoulder, told the whole story to Captain Burke a few moments later.

“I figured the kid knew more than he’d told me. You see Graham had chiseled on the hijack job. He learned that McKinney had found it out, and Graham went into hiding—downstairs in the same house where Kirby lived. The kid knew it. He also knew that Graham hadn’t been out of the house for days, hadn’t used a phone because there isn’t any, and therefore he couldn’t have told McKinney about Kirby. McKinney only said that Graham had told him, so Kirby would get sore at Graham and provide the motive for the kill.

“Then he sent Kirby out—discharged. He saw to it that a driver who had been friendly with Kirby went along. This

driver made certain that Kirby drank himself in that state where his mind snapped. Then Graham was brought in. That did it.”

Burke nodded. “We’ve got enough on McKinney’s boys so some of them will crack,” he commented. “But how’d you ever get onto McKinney? No one has ever suspected him.”

“He sent a couple of punks to Graham’s address to pick up a lot of nylons Graham had kept,” Carmel explained. “The two men we tried to take there. I didn’t have a gun at the time, so I tried to bluff them. They didn’t bluff because they knew I was unarmed and they said so. The only person who could have told them was McKinney.”

“You’ll get something out of this,” Burke said. “A bar on your shoulder at least.”

Carmel smiled and pulled the boy closer.

“I’ll take it too, sir, although I’m pretty certain this lad deserves it more than I. He swiped my gun to make me follow him, and he led me a merry trail so I’d find the evidence to put things right. He wouldn’t just say that Graham couldn’t have told McKinney, because he’d be snitching on a girl friend’s grandmother. The two kids had figured that, seeing that Graham was keeping under cover, he was wanted by the police, and the girl’s grandmother would get into a jam. I’ll bring Al home. As soon as possible, send Jack Kirby home. The kid earned that much.”