

Of Dice and Men!



“Alvin Hinkey” Yarn

By Joe Archibald

Alvin Hinkey, clown of the crime-busters, is no great bones when it comes to handling the dice. But he makes his point when the murdered crap shooter fades out with a snake-eyes roll.

ONE brisk morning me and Hambone Noonan chance to meet a character named Cornelius Meany who used to be a flatfoot like ourselves, but he is as prosperous-looking as a heavy underwear salesman in Little America. Meany looks at us with great pity in his eyes and shakes his noggin, all the while tossing a pair of galloping dominoes up into the air.

“Well,” Meany says, “when are you two flea brains going to prove crime does not pay? I intended, as you know, to devote my life to doing just that, but I got smart quick. Would you care to risk your pittances on a roll of the dice?”

“A crook who never was a cop is bad enough,” Hambone sniffs. “But a crook

who used to be a cop should git what Axis Sally got. Let’s git away from this awful smell, Alvin.”

Meany pulls out a roll that would clog a viaduct. “This smells, huh? It’s mint, Noonan. Gover’—mint! And I hope to triple it by tomorrer night. So long, boy scouts.”

“How I would like to git somethin’ on that snook,” Hambone says. “He went bad faster’n a raw trout left out in the sun. . . . Ah, let’s play some rummy when we git to the precinct house. I could use two bucks.”

“Gamblin’!” I snap at Hambone, “That would be sinkin’ to Meany’s level. Anyway, you have not paid back the three clams I took from you last week.”

It is quite disturbing to me, I have to

admit, as I stroll along with Noonan. More profit can be made with a pair of educated dice than a pair of handcuffs, anyway you look at it, and I feel very envious of Cornelius Meany. I stop and lift a foot and take a gander at the sole of my shoe.

"Does it look to you like they are gettin' flat, Hambone?" I ask timidly.

"In about another year they will look like mine, Alvin. Be patient."

"Huh?" I gulp. "Well, I must make a very important decision before long."

"Alvin Hinkey," Hambone says, aghast, "you are not thinkin' of—"

"I was not even thinkin' of Meany," I says, "Who cares what he's got that I haven't?"

"I do," Hambone says. "Alvin, I was offered twenty bucks the other day not to case a bookie joint, an' it is rumored there are at least three hundred in our vicinity. Twenty times three hundred— Look, we got to git hold of ourselves."

"Let's go downtown some afternoon and see the criminal persons in jail and we'll feel much better," I says.

JUST two days later Cornelius Meany is found very defunct in front of a rooming house on McClean Avenue, and me and Hambone hurry to the scene with the homicide boys. Meany has been shot through the neck, and the corpse diagnostician says the deed was committed from behind.

"Been dead for about five hours," the medical brain says. "Lot of citizens out late must have walked right past him. Guess they figured he was drunk the way he was slumped down on that step. Small bullet hole an' it got his jugular. Why—er—what is this?"

"Leave go of them!" Hambone Noonan says. "I will take care of the clues. It is just your job to tell us he is dead. A pair of dice, Alvin!"

"Yeah," a cop says. "That punk always carried a pair of bones. No matter when you saw him he was flippin' them in his paw. What do you know, huh? A pair of ones!"

"Snake eyes," I says. "It was a tough roll for Meany's last one."

"For a character about to slip over the edge into infinity," Noonan sniffs, "he sure placed the dice close together. Still envy the punk, Alvin?"

We go through the late Meany's duds and find a slip of paper in his empty wallet. It says: *Game tonight. At Fago's.*

"So?" Hambone says. "This won't take us long to solve, Alvin. Arnie Fago is the biggest gambler in the Bronx and it is possible that Meany figured to fatten that bankroll he flashed on us in Fago's joint. Meany got away with a big load of lettuce but after he went, Fago found a pair of loaded dice. Let me see those ivories, Alvin. I will make an experiment."

We watch Noonan rub the dice in his palms and then throw. He gets a five and a three. He grunts and gathers the cubes up once more. He throws a three and a two. It takes him nearly five minutes to come up with a seven.

"Catch on, Alvin?" Noonan asks, quite triumphant. "Meany slipped up like all crooks. He used his loaded dice to clean Fago and the other players, but he forgot to switch the dice back before he left. Fago or one of his boys tagged Meany and knocked him off."

"You have got to admit," I says, looking at the cops, "that Noonan sounds half bright for once, huh? Meany must have been quite amazed before he succumbed that he threw snake eyes and not a seven. Well, let's go and pick up Arnie Fago, huh?"

"What beats me," a cop says, "is why such a small bullet hole. It looks like somebody shot him with a twenty-two

calibre pistol. I didn't know there were many around here."

"Some come over with the GI's," I says. "The Nazis made 'em. But you would have to get pretty close up to kill a citizen with one. They were Kraut hideout Betsies."

ARNIE FAGO has a combination pub and bowling alley over on Central Avenue just where Yonkers begins. We get in a blitz car and go over there. Arnie has his office in back of the alleys and he is quite amazed to see so many cops calling upon him at once.

He is a hefty character who might have played pro football somewhere if they had allowed blackjacks and shivs along with shoulder harness, and the suit he is wearing must have cost him as much as an allowance on a second-hand jalopy. He has a pair of little eyes set as close together as the dots on a colon, and I am sure that if he ever said *Amen* it was done with a sneer.

"Well, what do you flatfeet want?" Arnie greets us.

"You, most likely," Noonan says, rolling his cigar around in his kisser. "Don't tell me you did not have a big crap game last night and that a citizen named Cornelius Meany did not attend and take everythin' from you and your pals but your skivvies. If you do, we won't believe you, Buster!"

"Well, well," Arnie says. "See all—know all, huh? Sure, we had a dice game and Meany cleaned us. You got the evidence, lemonhead?"

"We think *you* did, Arnie," I says. "How much did you get back from Meany? You found the loaded dice he left and put some gorillas on his trail."

"What? Them dice was loaded?" Arnie howls, yanking out a desk drawer. "I got three pairs here. Leave me take a look!"

Arnie rolls a pair and finds them legit. Then he tosses another pair that are of a yellowish hue. He throws six sevens out of nine tries. He also throws a fit. He says he will blow Meany's brains out.

"Too late and you know it, Arnie," Noonan says. "Stop puttin' on an act! You discovered the bones was loaded long ago. We're takin' you in."

I tell myself that Hambone is no dramatic critic as if Arnie is putting on an act, then he has more talent than the Barrymores.

"I didn't knock that punk off, Noonan," Arnie yelps. "How I wisht I had!"

"Search the joint," Hambone says, unconvinced.

We do. There isn't a sign of a Roscoe or a limp five-buck bill in Arnie's office.

"Who went out first, after Meany?" Hambone suddenly demands of Fago.

"Isky Pinza," Arnie says. "He lost most of the— Oh, no you don't, Noonan. I don't say another word until I git me a lawyer!"

"Ha, I foxed the bum, Alvin," Hambone says. "He already told us what we want to know. Pinza trailed Meany and bumped him off. If that snook ain't got an alibi, he's our man. Awright, Arnie, that let's you out for a while, but don't you dast leave town!"

"Huh, Isky might've at that," Fago grunts. "He lost over a grand, and was he burned! But no jury'll convict Isky if any of them ever shot craps!"

"Where does this punk live?" Hambone asks.

Fago seems quite anxious to cooperate with the law. He gives Noonan an address on East 236th Street. Meanwhile, I admire the picture of the babe on Arnie's desk. She has a figure that would win a bathing beauty contest, and her eyes would melt a pair of andirons.

“It would’ve been tough to have to leave her for twenty years to life in stir, Mr. Fago,” I says.

“Who ast you, flatfoot?” Arnie snaps.

Hambone ogles the photo and starts scratching his noggin. “I am sure I’ve seen her somewheres before, Alvin,” he says.

“Where she’s been they’d never let in a schmoe like you, Noonan,” Arnie sneers. “Go nab Isky an’ leave me alone! This joint of mine has got a rep.”

“I wondered what smelled,” a cop says, but we go out.

We drive downtown to where Isky Pinza has a rent ceiling. Isky is out and the landlady says we can wait. An hour later in comes a sharp-featured, shifty-eyed gee who almost tempts me to say, “Drop the gun, Louie!”

“Awright, don’t make a move or we’ll let you have it!” Hambone says. “Leave us all go up to your room, Isky. It is illegal to leave stiff’s lying about.”

“Cops!” Isky sniffs. “I thought it was sewer gas escapin’ I smelled outside. What’s the frame?”

“We found where you left Meany,” Hambone says as we go upstairs. “The dough he won from you was not on him, Isky. You left Arnie’s first and followed the bum. All you have to do is tell us where you was from the time the crap game ended until about seven this A.M. An’ prove you have not got the Roscoe that liquidated our victim.”

ISKY sits down on the bed in his room and grins quite aggravatingly at Noonan. “Think I can’t hit the jackpot, huh? Okay, I was with a— Look, flatfoot, unless you can prove somethin’ on me, it is none of your business.”

“I knew it, boys,” Hambone says. “This is our man. Look for a gun and a bundle of clams.”

“Ha,” Isky laughs. “I threw the gat in

the river an’ buried the dough. Go hire a deep sea diver and an excavatin’ company.”

We find nothing more deadly in Isky’s room than a nail file and nothing of more value than a dollar tie clasp.

“Givin’ me an alibi, Isky?” Noonan asks when the search ends.

“I wouldn’t give you nothin’ but arsenic, Noonan,” Isky snaps.

“Okay, we take him downtown an’ put him on the grill,” Hambone says. “Wait up, men! Did you rip up the boards in that closet? Oncet I remember a bank embezzler usin’ that trick.”

“Now, look here, Noonan!” Isky howls, and gets quite pale, “It ain’t easy to git a room an’ if I cause that old bag downstairs trouble I’ll—”

“Do like I says,” Noonan orders.

We lift a loose board in the closet, and lo and behold! we find a bundle of lettuce amounting to nearly four grand. I look at Hambone Noonan and wait for the alarm clock to go off. It has to be a dream.

“Guess you won’t never make no cracks about me bein’ dumb no more, Alvin,” Hambone gloats. “Just keep workin’ with me an’ you’ll be as big a success some day. Awright, now we have the dough that was took off the corpse, we’ll soon sweat out of Isky where the murder weapon is. Let’s go, boys.”

“Look, I can tell you where I got that dough—I mean it wasn’t the clams I lost in the crap game, Noonan!” Isky howls. “I’m innercent!”

“Yeah, like a cow lays eggs, Isky,” Hambone sneers.

“It’s a frame awright,” Isky yowls, and goes into a tantrum. “I bet Arnie Fago sicked you onto me, to cover for himself. He wanted Meany outa the way so he could be sure of havin’ no competition with that blonde babe. First, she carried the torch for that ex-flatfoot. Then she

give him the air because she figured Arnie had more scratch. But Arnie knew it wouldn't be tough for Meany to lure the chick back if he got a break an' was in the big chips."

"Shuddup!" Hambone says. "We find a timber wolf with wool on its chin and it says it wasn't near mutton. Next thing we know, you'll tell us you won that bunch of dough in a pyramid. Isky, your story sphinx! Tell the next chapter to the D.A."

"Noonan," I says, "are you certain we got the right party?"

"Alvin, this is as cut an' dried as chipped beef," Hambone snorts. "You'll never be a detective as you got sympathy for crooks. Isky lost all his money to Meany. Then Meany is killed and Isky has four grand. That's enough for me. Go away as you bother me."

"A pleasure, I assure you," I says. "I wouldn't get no credit for help makin' this pinch anyways."

I take a walk and I keep thinking about the last roll that the late Cornelius Meany made with the dice. I get more and more certain that Arnie Fago is the kind of citizen who would carve up his Aunt Mamie if he could get the right price from a medical school. I go uptown to Arnie Fago's bowling alley and roll a game. While I am aiming at a lone pin that must be nailed down, Arnie comes along and taps me on the arm.

"Well, it is Detective Hinkey," Arnie Fago says expansively. "You casin' my joint? Don't believe my story, huh? Look, to show you I got nothin' to hide, leave us go to my office and have a snort. I am not afraid of no cops."

I FOLLOW the big lug to his office and am taking my first sip of a skull buster when in walks the blonde. She has even more cheesecake in the flesh than in her photo, as her gams do not show in the

picture and they are her biggest assets. Not that her pan doesn't co-operate. She has greenish eyes that talk more than her mouth, and as far as her figure goes she must have swiped all of Venus's lines.

"Why, hello, baby," Arnie gurgles, and rushes to take her wrap. "You're just in time for a snifter. Detective Hinkey, this is Miss Cassandra De Video."

"A social call only, I trust," the babe says, draping herself on the divan near Arnie. "I hope you are not in need of a blonde alibi, sugar."

Arnie laughs and pours the dame a drink. "Looks like Isky is really in for a braisin', baby. They arrest him yet, Hinkey?"

"Yeah," I says. "The funny thing is they found the bankroll under the boards in his closet."

I look at Cassandra quick as she has spilled her grog on her pinafore and she seems quite startled about something. Then I watch her dabbing away with a hanky and see the brooch pinned on her dress. It has green sparklers in it.

"What scared you, baby?" Arnie asks, lifting his brows.

"I just pictured poor Cornelius lyin' stiff and stark, sugar," the doll says. "It is awful."

"He lied every other way," Fago sniffs. "You finish the snort, baby, an' you'll be awright. Then I was right, Hinkey. Isky trailed Meany and knocked him off an' got back the clams he lost. Open an' shut case."

"Yeah," I says.

I feel ice cubes suddenly inside me but I have not swallowed any from the glass. Little pixies with cold feet run up and down my spine. It's the brooch that the blonde is wearing that freezes me. The bauble is a gold snake all coiled up. Its noggin is thrust out and it has emeralds for eyes. Arnie notices how I gawk at the

ornament.

“Pretty, huh? I give her that brooch for her birthday. Set me back three hundred bucks, Hinkey,” Arnie brags, pouring himself another snort. “Nothin’ too good for my baby.”

“I still haven’t that mink coat, sugar,” Cassandra purrs. “So don’t order the rice for the wedding yet.”

“Give me time, baby.”

I think of the late Cornelius Meany in rigor mortis as I look at the brooch. I see the pair of dice near the corpse and then there is a fluttering of wings inside my stomach, that feel like they belong to vultures and not butterflies. A voice yells at me from the back of my dome. Snake eyes! Snake eyes was what the dying Meany left by his side. Could they have been a clue he planted? Because I was now looking at snake eyes on Cassandra’s brooch.

“You don’t look too good, Hinkey,” Arnie says.

“Huh? Er—that was quite a belt you give me, pal,” I says. “An’ it is quite warm in here. Think I’ll be runnin’ along. You don’t mind?”

“I think we’ll live through it,” the doll says.

Just a coincidence, I assure myself as I hotfoot it away from Arnie’s. Association of ideas, is all. They nabbed Isky, who was in that crap game, and found the scratch in his room. This is one time I maybe should have gone along with Noonan.

I decide to go over to McClean Avenue and look at the spot where Cornelius Meany was knocked off. If a murderer can return to the scene of a rubout, why can’t a detective? Maybe the cops overlooked a clue.

EVERYTHING is quite normal on the block where Meany was assassinated. I note that the steps on which the defunct

had been huddled have been scrubbed quite clean. I cross the street to a gin mill and grab the last inning at Ebbets Field on the video. After a bad play I turn away in disgust and look out the window. I see Arnie Fago’s babe, Cassandra, walking into an apartment house just across the street. I hurry to the bar and demand a double rye.

“Lace it with vodka,” I says. “How much coincidence can a guy stand?”

“You’re near your limit now,” the barkeep says.

I add up. The apartment house Cassandra enters is next door to the rooming house in front of which Cornelius Meany was knocked off. Meany, according to Isky, had been quite pally with the blonde.

“Did you know the character they found dead early this A.M.?” I ask the spirits vendor.

“Meany? He had it comin’, Mac. Yeah, he come here quite often. Used to buy sandwiches an’ bottled beer. Had a dame around here somewheres.”

I go over to a booth and sit down. Lights go on out in the street. I keep looking at the apartment house. Around eight P.M. a nifty boiler pulls up in front and out of it steps Arnie Fago, all rigged up for night life.

He enters the building and stays in there for nearly a half hour. Then he emerges, wearing the blonde babe on his arm. He helps her into the jalopy as if she were made of blown glass. Soon the car purrs away.

Snake eyes! I leave the bistro and cross to the apartment house. Inside the dingy lobby I see a card over a bell that reads, *Superintendent*. I push the bell hard and wait. A few seconds later a hefty character comes from in back and asks what I want.

“I am Detective Hinkey,” I says. “I must talk to you in private. About one of

your tenants.”

“Okay, come on downstairs to my office,” the super says, and I follow him. He eases himself into a chair and touches off a cigar. “Which tenant, Hinkey?”

“A blonde,” I says. “Cassandra De Video. I have to work fast so I can’t bother with no search warrant. I would like to get a gander at her boudoir.”

“That babe?” the super sniffs. “I been waiting for a chance to fix her wagon. The trouble she’s give me, Hinkey, you wouldn’t believe, an’ the insults I’ve had to take from her shouldn’t happen to a beagle hound. Let’s go up and look around. Search warrant, hah!”

We go upstairs to apartment 4C. The super opens up with a passkey and we step inside. The first thing I do is look out a window and from it I can see the spot where Cornelius Meany was found quite dead.

“Look at ‘em, Hinkey,” the super says. “Dolls by the dozen. All sizes and shapes. Maybe she makes ‘em for a living, huh? And here’s four lamp bases without shades. I’ve never seen worse in a shootin’ gallery.”

“Yeah,” I says, “maybe she does make dolls. I—what did you say, Mac?” I do a double-take in front of the window. “Did you say shootin’ gallery?”

I look out the window again and see an X in front of the house next door, and I am goose-pimpled from arches to scalp.

“Look, friend, leave me case this joint alone,” I says. “It is not good to have citizens know too much about what cops are doin’.”

“Okay, Hinkey. I sure hope you hang something on that babe.”

THE super departs and I sit down on a divan and add up some more. Shooting gallery! Alvin, you’ve got it! You have sniped more than once at the

little white ducks in the arcades, and the bullets are about the size of the one that severed Meany’s jugular!

I mop my pan with a hanky and then start ransacking the doll’s apartment. I am working in a closet fifteen minutes later when I hear voices, and they do not come out of a radio. Then the female member of the duet lets out a shriek. Arnie Fago’s basso profundo curdles my blood.

“A burglar, sugar! Don’t move! I bet the snookle is in the closet!” Arnie yowls, and out I come reaching for my Roscoe. My feet get tangled up in a negligee and I take a dive and land at Arnie’s big feet.

“It’s that flatfoot, Arnie!” the blonde yelps. “He—kill him!”

Arnie Fago seems quite nonplussed and he swings his noggin around to gape at Cassandra. It gives me time to get to my feet and it swiftly occurs to me that Arnie has no idea at all as to why Cornelius Meany was erased.

“Don’t just stand there, Arnie!” the babe howls, and thrusts a hand into her beaded bag. I know she is not after a lipstick. “Anybody has a right to kill a burglar!”

“Ah—er—sugar,” Arnie gulps, “why should a detective— Hinkey, you talk fast or I’ll—”

Bang!

The bullet from the blonde’s Betsy clips a lock of Arnie’s hair just above his right ear. It continues and goes through the crown of my new hat just before I put my noggin down and go into a clinch with Arnie.

“You big sucker!” I howl. “This pigeon knocked off Cornelius Meany!”

“What?” Arnie howls as I shove him toward the blonde. “Sugar, don’t shoot. You’ll git me!”

“Ha! You catch on easy, Buster!” Cassandra yelps. “I’m taking care of you both so’s you won’t ever talk. Give Meany

my best when you see him!”

Just before I give Arnie a terrific shove, I see the little emeralds on the brooch on the babe’s dress glitter. Her eyes look harder than the gold snake’s. A Betsy booms once more and Arnie squeals with pain just as he knocks Cassandra off her feet.

“She got me, Hinkey!” Arnie wails.

I hurdle Arnie’s bulk and cover the blonde like a collapsing pup tent. I bang her noggin against the floor once, relieve her of her artillery, and get to my feet. My legs are quite as solid under me as cooked strips of spaghetti.

“What *is* this, Hinkey?” Arnie chokes out as he gets to all fours.

“You was only playin’ around with a dame worst than the Borgias,” I sniff. “You hurt bad, Arnie?”

“It just nicked me, Hinkey,” the big citizen says. “Did you say she rubbed out Meany?”

“Yeah. Leave us look for a rifle of the kind they use in shootin’ galleries,” I says.

Arnie’s eyes bug out as he gets to his big feet. “Why, Hinkey, she has got one. We went to a joint on 125th Street a couple weeks ago an’ she won six dolls an’ two lamps. An’ the boss of the dump give her a gun for a souvenir an’ said she made Annie Oakley look like a bum. But what’s that got to do with it?”

“She’ll tell us,” I says. “After Meany cleaned you guys in that crap game, he stopped by to give the babe a laugh. He most likely flashed the roll and twitted her about givin’ such a smart dice thrower the gate. She tried to win him over with a mink coat in mind. But Meany laughed at her again an’ took off. Then— Look, she’s comin’ to, Arnie. The rest can wait.”

Cassandra is mumbling something about not seeing the truck and that the traffic light was with her anyway. But in no time her lamps lose their glaze and

suddenly everything comes back to her.

“Watch her, Arnie,” I says. “I will finish casin’ the closet to get exhibit A.”

“You snake-eyed demon!” Arnie says to the babe. “You knocked off Meany.”

“Prove it,” the blonde says.

I FIND the rifle wrapped up in a slip inside the blonde’s laundry bag and I come out admiring it. Cassandra turns as pale as the first run of maple sap.

“After Meany left,” I says, “you grabbed for this rifle and you stood over by that window and waited until he passed those steps next door. You got a bead on him and let go. Bein’ a female Nimrod, you couldn’t miss at that distance.”

“Let’s talk this over, Hinkey,” the blonde gulps. “I’ll give you three grand. I—”

“You cold-blooded bobcat!” Arnie snaps.

“One thing you didn’t figure on, baby,” I go on, “was that Meany did not die at once. Before he gasped his last, he took out his dice and placed them close beside him. A pair of one-spots, sister. Snake eyes! He made his point for the cops, hoping they would not all be dumb like Hambone Noonan. He saw you wearin’ that brooch too—with snake eyes. That pointed to you. You don’t beat a swell crap shooter like the late Cornelius Meany.”

“Well, what do you know?” Arnie Fago gasps.

The doll looks quite as healthy at the moment as three cents’ worth of dogmeat.

“I began to think, Arnie,” I says, “when I saw that brooch she is wearin’ for the first time. Snake eyes, get it?”

“Yeah,” the big character says, and wipes dew off his brow. “Smart, Hinkey! An’ Meany wasn’t so dumb, neither, was he?”

“I’ll make it five grand, Hinkey,” the

babe says.

"I am a little hard of hearin' tonight," I says, and feel sorry for Noonan.

"Hinkey," Arnie says as I walk to the phone to call a blitz wagon, "they got Isky with the bankroll. How can this babe have it, too? Isky couldn't give no alibi. We heard it on the radio while we was headed downtown before she remembered she'd forgot somethin' here."

"I have no answer for that one," I says. "Maybe we can make Isky talk if we get him loaded."

We take Cassandra De Video to the D.A. The prosecutor is not feeling in the pink as he has contracted a summer cold. Hambone Noonan comes in and he looks as if he had been dragged through a length of two-inch pipe.

"Chief, lemme use the hose on that lug," Noonan begs. "Or we can twist his arm until—Alvin, what are you doing here with Arnie?"

"This is the babe that knocked off our old sidekick Meany," I says. "Just sit quiet and let the stenog take her story down."

The blonde sings. What else could she do? We have the weapon that laid Meany away for keeps. The shooting gallery proprietor would testify that it was the artillery he had given Cassandra. We told the babe we had the bullet that erased Meany, although that was not true.

"Sure, it was the way Hinkey said it was," the blonde finally confesses. "I shot him from the corner window around two o'clock in the morning. Afterwards, I sneaked out and frisked him of the money he'd won in the dice game. Who'd ever think a lemonhead like Hinkey would catch wise like he did?"

"Crime don't pay," I says. "And flattery won't give you no lenience, sister."

"Then where the devil did Isky Pinza get that hunk of lettuce we found stashed

in his room?" Noonan howls. "This don't make no more sens than I do. What am I sayin'?"

IT IS quite late that night when me and Hambone, Arnie Fago, and Isky Pinza enter a tavern not far from the hoosegow. Isky is quite elated over beating the sizzle sofa and is in the mood to celebrate the event.

"They're on me," Arnie Fago says.

Half an hour later Isky's tongue is as loose as a burlesque comedian's pants.

"Awright, Isky," I coax, "where did you get the clams? Meany cleaned you out same as the others, didn't he?"

Isky takes another snifter and ogles me warily. "Look, palsh," he says, sweeping us with his foggy eyes, "you shwear t' keep it mum, crosch your heartsh?"

"Sure," Arnie says, "we are among friends, Isky. Have another belt."

"Yeah," Isky says. "Thanksh. Well, I sat down in that crap game with almosh two grand an' it wash dough I owed a bookie. An' that bimbo had give me twenty-four hoursh t' pay up or git measured for a concrete shports coat. So Meany cleans me an' I smell lilies, so what could I do? I ask you, palsh, what—hic—could I?"

"What did you, Isky?" I ask, all agog.

Isky grins. "Hah, you remember another crap game on that night, Arnie, ol' pal? At Nick Mazuza's? Wash invited myshelf but went to yoursh instead, Arnie. Well, when I left I saysh to myshelf I bet that game at Nick's ain't over yet. So I went over to Nicksh an' stuck the game up. Had a hansh'kiff over my kisher. Nobody reckernized me. . . . Say, how doesh a guy get a drink aroun' here, Arnie?"

"See, Hambone?" I says. "If Isky had told where he was he would have been knocked off by Nick's gorillas."

“A vicious shircle, ain’t it, palsh?” Isky says.

“I’ll see that Isky gets home okay, boys,” Arnie Fago says. “It’s been fun.”

Hambone catches on, too. “Alvin,” he says. “We are cops and cannot stand for this extortion even if Isky is a—”

“I’m a friend of Nick’s,” Arnie interrupts.

“Yeah,” Isky agrees. “I’ll shplit two ways, Arnie, ol’ pal.”

“This is where we go out, Hambone,” I says. I do not like the look in Arnie’s glimmers. They are green and hard. Yeah, snake eyes! “We bid you good evening, Arnie.”

“Smart cookie, Hinkey,” Arnie compliments.

Me and Noonan go out. Even cops have to look the other way at times. It is quite healthy any way you look at it.