

ATTAR OF HOMICIDE

It sounded like the least dangerous of assignments: to find a girl in a railway station by identifying her perfume. But when somebody else found her first, Barry discovered he needed more than a nose for scents to follow through

By
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Fresh from one murder, Torro approached. "They won't recognize you after this," he said.

UNIQUE Services Unlimited had promenaded mutts, taken maiden aunts on pub-crawls, and selected underpretties for bashful men's sweethearts, but until the girl-sniffing job came along it had never mixed business with murder.

Nothing, in fact, was further from the mind of Barry MacLuke, proprietor and general manager, when he clopped into his ten-by-twelve office this day at 11 A.M., his raincoat flapping around his spare frame, his spirits as sodden as his felt hat from a gray April shower.

"Morning, beautiful," said Barry to his secretary. "Why do we bother to come down here when there isn't any business?"

Judy Grant gazed at him with a hint of triumph in her hazel eyes. She had the prettiest

face Barry knew of, framed in ringlets of spun-copper, and a figure just as easy to look at.

She inquired sweetly, "How would you like to earn fifty dollars for picking a girl out of a crowd by her smell?"

Barry wrinkled a nose which was humped between the eyes and thin at the nostrils. "If she's that kind of girl—"

"By her perfume," Judy explained hastily. "She'll be drenched with an exclusive brand."

He pushed his hat to the back of his dark head and leaned his knuckles on the desk.

"Fifty dollars being fifty dollars, you may elucidate."

IT SOUNDED simple enough. A man named Hollingsby had seen Barry's four-

line ad in the *Times* and had phoned from his Park Avenue home. Hollingsby was supposed to meet a girl, the daughter of a friend who had died, at Grand Central Station when the 12:35 train arrived from Chicago. But Hollingsby had been taken ill unexpectedly and could not leave his bed, notwithstanding which he was anxious that the girl be met by someone and escorted to his house.

Her name was Mathilda Jones and the catch was that Hollingsby had never seen her and hadn't the faintest notion what she looked like. It happened, however, that he was a chemist whose hobby was distilling perfumes, and he had sent a distinctive sample which he called *Esprit d'Eternite* to the girl's father. Knowing he would recognize the scent anywhere, Hollingsby had told Mathilda, when she called him long-distance, to apply it liberally and leave the rest to him.

"He offered to pay fifty dollars for a sensitive nose," Judy finished. "I assured him you could scent *Christmas Night* from *Channel Number Five* at fifty paces. Do you feel equal to trying, or shall I call in someone?"

She nodded toward a card file containing names and telephone numbers of male and female operatives who would feed canaries, take care of babies, wheel invalids, and otherwise perform, for half the fee entailed, tasks which Barry considered beneath his dignity.

But sniffing out fifty dollars in a railroad station wasn't beneath his dignity, not with business as it had been.

"I'm off," he said. "I'll rub noses with every wench in sight. I'll round up that fee or bust."

"You're practically busted already," she reminded him. "All we have is each other, and if you start rubbing noses with other girls, we won't have that."

"Jealous," he said—and went forth unsuspectingly to rub noses with death.

BARRY'S taxi stopped in front of an old brownstone mansion in the Fifties, and a tall, hatchet-faced man, who seemed desperately hurried, tried to get into the cab before Barry was completely out. The resultant collision took Barry's breath, but not the other's.

"Clumsy fool!" the man snarled. "What you need is a lesson in manners." And he popped into the cab, calling out an address in the East Eighties.

Barry adjusted his hat and glared after the departing car for a moment, then went up the brownstone steps and rang the bell. A stout butler opened the door. The butler said, when Barry had stated his business, "Mr. Hollingsby is expecting you, sir."

It wouldn't have taken a Sherlock Holmes to deduce that the house was a chemist's. As Barry followed the servant upstairs, his nostrils were assailed by a medley of odors reminiscent of his high-school days, when Chemistry II was experimenting with sulphides.

He was ushered into a paneled chamber where an old man lay in a vast four-poster bed. Only the gaunt face was visible above the blankets, and the eyes were closed.

"Mr. Hollingsby," said the butler, "here is the man from the Unique Services place. Mr.—er—MacLuke, sir."

The eyelids of the old man fluttered up. Barry looked into faded brown eyes that focused slowly, with an effort.

"Eh, Calvert? Oh, yes, to be sure." The eyes found Barry. "MacLuke, eh? I understand you're familiar with perfumes."

"More or less," Barry said uncomfortably.

"A fascinating subject. I should have made it my life's work. Instead I spent thirty years improving motor fuels—extracting the essence from coal and petroleum to run machines—and only lately I've found the time to amuse myself. . . . What time is it?"

It was 11:55 by Barry's wrist watch.

“Good heavens! The train is due in forty minutes! Where is that phial, Calvert?”

“Here, sir.” The butler lifted a tiny bottle from a telephone table beside the bed.

“My masterpiece.” Hollingsby smiled proudly. “Smell it, MacLuke. I call it *Esprit d’Eternite*.”

Barry removed the glass stopper and sniffed. A delicate fragrance that was nevertheless penetrating made him think of flowers and sunlight and droning bees. He had thought that perfume was perfume, varying according to whether it came from Saks Fifth Avenue or Woolworth’s, and whether it were labeled “rose” or “lily-of-the-valley,” but all at once he knew better.

“I’ve never smelled anything like it.”

“You never will, young man, except when you meet Mathilda Jones. All I know about her is that she’s twenty and will be wearing this scent.”

“I’ll remember it,” Barry said confidently.

“Of course you will. Everyone who can smell at all remembers scents better than anything else. This one, light as it is, will stand out among a thousand others.” He hesitated. “But I must caution you.”

“Yes?”

“Be careful. Don’t speak Miss Jones’s name aloud. Bring her here in a cab.”

“You make it sound dangerous.”

“Her father—a fine man and a great scientist—was murdered,” said Hollingsby, “because of what she will have with her.”

Barry felt an electric tingle all along his backbone.

“I shall send my nephew, Raymond Gaston, with you,” the old man went on. “He won’t be of much help in finding Miss Jones, because he is totally lacking in a sense of smell, but his presence may be a safeguard. Call him, Calvert.”

“He left, sir, very hurriedly,” replied the butler, “in the same cab that brought this gentleman.”

“Damn!” Hollingsby grumbled. “I asked

him not to leave. Something’s queer around here, Calvert. Gaston’s behavior—my sudden illness—”

“Yes, sir.”

“However, I daresay Mr. MacLuke can get along.”

Larry said, “I’ll manage.”

HE SAT tensely during the short ride to Grand Central. Unique Services Unlimited had its strange experiences from time to time, but most of the extraordinary jobs tended to border on the ridiculous. Now for the first time there was a spice of danger added to the adventure, and Barry found it pleasant.

A rare perfume—a mysterious something of incalculable value in the keeping of a girl whose father had been murdered—a hint of peril. . . .

In the vaulted concourse of the terminal, Barry stood by the gate through which the passengers from Chicago would stream. Other people were waiting and he glanced at them idly. Two tall young men eyed him and spoke to a plump, distinguished-looking man with white hair, a white mustache, and tinted spectacles. A wiry dark man—a Spaniard, Barry guessed—watched the gate with slitted black eyes; the collar of his raincoat was turned high and his hatbrim was pulled low, but Barry could see a twisted knife-scar across his cheek.

Through the gate trotted redcaps burdened with hand luggage, and behind them came the arriving travelers. Barry edged nearer to the gate, sniffing like a hound and feeling a little silly about it. It was surprising how many aromas he could distinguish, though. A fat woman passed, ten feet away, and he caught a whiff of lavender, heavy as incense. A statuesque blonde who flung herself into the arms of a runty little fellow reeked of gardenia. He could even identify the shaving lotions some of the men had used.

Out of the tail of his eye he saw the

scarfaced dark man gesture, then walk rapidly away. He looked after the fellow, but just then the fragrance for which his olfactory nerves were keyed reached him and swept all else from his mind.

The girl from whom the fragrance emanated was small, slim and dark-haired, and wore a gray tailored suit. A veil hung from the brim of her small black hat and behind it her eyes were shadowed pools of anxiety.

Barry started toward her, but the white-haired man with the tinted spectacles was ahead of him. The man lifted his hat and said, "Miss Jones?" His mouth twitched oddly.

Barry stiffened as a hand grasped his arm. It was the hand of one of the tall men who had been talking with the white-haired one. The second tall man grasped his other arm.

"What—?" he began.

"Police," the first tall man said, flipping the lapel of his coat to show a nickel-plated badge.

"But I'm here to meet—"

"Mathilda Jones. You'll see her at headquarters. I don't know how you fit in with these crooks, chum—but I will."

Barry's heart took a power dive. If Hollingsby had tried to rope Unique Services Unlimited into a criminal deal, there would be a lot of explaining to do. Furthermore, the fifty-dollar fee would probably be uncollectible.

"Crooks?" he said. "I don't know what you mean."

"You'll find out," one of the tall men said.

THEY began walking Barry toward the main door. He said nothing, although he thought of many things to say. The girl and the white-haired man were walking ahead of them, and he kept watching their backs.

Mathilda Jones hadn't looked like a crook. She had looked exactly like what she was supposed to be—a girl worn down by a combination of grief and fear.

In Forty-second Street, a squat, slant-browed chauffeur opened the door of a glistening limousine for the white-haired man and the girl.

Barry stopped short. "That isn't a police car."

The limousine swung into traffic with its two passengers. The tall men grinned at each other. One said, "Our prisoner seems innocent, Hermie. Should we turn him loose?" And Hermie said, "If you say so, Sam." They were standing close to the door of the station and Hermie's hand moved suddenly toward Barry's face.

"Hey!" Barry yelled, and aimed a punch at the man's body. Hermie sidestepped, and Barry couldn't aim a second blow because his eyes were blinded with scalding pain. He choked, sneezed, and staggered. "Stop them!" he cried.

People gathered curiously as he rubbed fiery grains of pepper from his eyes. He peered around through a film of tears, but the tall men had vanished.

"What's the matter?" a cop demanded. "Somebody pick your pocket?"

Barry had an ugly suspicion that somebody had kidnaped Mathilda Jones, but he hesitated to make a charge as serious as that without being sure.

"They threw pepper in my face," he told the cop.

"Friends playing a joke, huh?" said the cop. "Some people got funny ideas about what's funny."

Barry blew his nose. "Yeah, friends."

He telephoned Hollingsby from a booth in the station. The old man's voice was feeble at the beginning.

"What's the matter, MacLuke? Did anything go wrong?"

"Well, Mathilda Jones got here all right, but there were others to meet her and she went with them."

"You blithering idiot!" Hollingsby shouted, his voice no longer weak. "If I'd

known you were such a fool—”

“Not so fast!” Barry snapped. “I’m in no mood to be called names. Two men grabbed me and said they were cops. How was I to know what it was all about?”

“I’ll tell you what it was all about, MacLuke. Her father had perfected a chemical product of enormous importance to the world—a concentrated motor fuel that could solve four-fifths of our transportation problems. An unscrupulous person could make millions—billions—out of it. Jones was murdered by someone who wanted to do just that, but failed to get the formula.

“His daughter was bringing Jones’ private notes to me because I had experimented along the same lines and because he trusted me. The men who met her must have been the killers or their agents. Her life won’t be worth a plugged nickel when they get the information they want. So you can see how your stupid blundering has—”

“You did the blundering,” Barry retorted. “You should have sent cops instead of me. You’d better get them on the job now. Tell them they can get my story at my office—and there won’t be any fee.”

He hung up savagely.

PLODDING slowly through the rain in the direction of his office, Barry was in no haste to report the sorry ending of things to Judy Grant. He was angry at himself for being duped so easily. More than that—because he could not stop seeing her sad, anxious face—he was tormented by the thought of what the men who had murdered her father might do to Mathilda Jones.

In the pockets of his raincoat his fists were clenched until the fingernails dug into the palms. His eyes searched faces grimly, hoping for a glimpse of the scar-faced man who had recognized Mathilda or either of the tall men who had pretended to be policemen.

It had been a miserable business from first to last. The rain—that encounter with the vile-

tempered Gaston—

Barry’s head lifted abruptly. It may have been his instant dislike of Raymond Gaston that shaped his thoughts, but even so, there were other materials for the theory he proceeded to build. The hatchet-faced one had behaved queerly, Hollingsby had said. He had been in too much of a hurry to get away from the house, and he had been suspiciously overwrought.

Just as the criminals might have bribed a member of the household to spy upon Jones in Chicago and eventually murder him, might they not have bribed a member of Hollingsby’s household in New York?

Who would have been in a more favorable position than Gaston to listen from an extension phone to his uncle’s calls and learn that Mathilda would be in Grand Central with the precious formula at a certain time? Who could more easily have drugged Hollingsby to keep him from meeting her?

Gaston had nervously shouted an East Eighty-third Street address to the taxi driver, Barry had heard it—and miraculously he remembered it!

He found the nearest hack stand and annexed the first driver in line.

The house was of faded brick, shabby, with drawn blinds. Barry surveyed it without enthusiasm as he paid the driver. If he were wrong in his suspicions, a second meeting with Gaston would not be pleasant; and if he were right, it might be ten times as unpleasant. But there was no policeman in sight and no store that would have a public telephone within two blocks. He could not explain to the police and enlist their aid, anyway, without wasting precious time.

That was what drove him up the worn steps to the door finally—the pressure of time—for heaven alone knew what terrible things might be happening to Mathilda Jones at this very moment.

HE PUSHED the bell button. There was footsteps within and the rattle of a chain bolt. The door opened a crack and a man, standing back in the shadows, said, "Yes?"

Barry said, "I'm looking for Raymond Gaston."

"You've got the right place, chum." The door swung wide, revealing the tall man called Sam, who had flashed the nickel-plated badge. "Come in."

The man's right fist held an automatic pistol and its barrel pointed at Barry's stomach. Behind him Barry saw the figure of Hermie. He went in about as willingly as he would have walked into a live volcano crater.

Sam closed and locked the door. "How did you find us?"

"Does it matter?" Barry had a vague idea that the less he told them, the better off he would be.

Sam shook his head. "Not much." He shoved Barry through a wide doorway into a living room, bare of furniture. "We're ready to lam, anyway. We'll just leave you here." He called, "Torro!"

The Spanish-looking man came out of the next room, carrying a bundle. The scar on his cheek pulsed and his white teeth showed in a mirthless grin as he looked at Barry. "So you tailed us."

Hermie said, "Tie him up. He gets the same treatment as the other."

"You bet," Torro said. He stepped to the fireplace and threw his bundle into the grate. Barry went cold, seen that the bundle consisted of a man's clothing, cut to ribbons, and splashed with a dark red stain.

He asked, "Where's Gaston?"

"He was as dumb as you," Sam replied. "He tried to butt in, too. You'll see him in a second."

Barry wet his lips. "And the girl?"

"Forget her," Hermie said complacently.

Torro produced thin, tough cord from a pocket. Under the threat of the gun Barry let his hands be tied behind him, so tightly he had

to bite his lips against the pain. He sat on the floor while his ankles were bound.

Sam pocketed the pistol. "Now you'll see Gaston, chum—but I don't think you'll recognize him." He seized Barry's collar and dragged him into the room from which Torro had emerged.

It was an empty room, except for the thing that lay on the floor—the body of a man so terribly mutilated that Barry had to look twice to be sure what it was. The white skin was dappled with gore, the fingers had been chopped from the hands, the face was a pulpy crimson horror.

"An efficient guy, Torro," Sam said. "When the body is found, maybe weeks from now, the cops will have trouble giving it a name. They can't get fingerprints without fingers, and you can see for yourself there isn't any face."

Barry shut his eyes and stopped listening. There was a feeling of deathly sickness in his throat and stomach.

He thought despairingly of Judy, waiting to hear from him—of Mathilda, at the mercy of her father's murderers—of Hollingsby, mysteriously ill, telephoning police detectives who could not possibly pick up the trail of the killers in time. . . .

"Here's our new address, Torro," he heard Hermie say. "Follow us as soon as you've finished. Be sure to burn all papers and clothes."

Torro grunted, "You bet." There were sounds of footsteps going away. A door slammed.

Barry opened his eyes. He saw Torro standing near the fireplace, taking a butcher knife and a hammer from the mantel. Both instruments were dark and sticky with blood.

NOT until that moment did the full horror of his predicament dawn on him. To die at the hands of a fiend in a deserted house—to lie naked, without face or fingers, rotting through days and nights was a thought too

terrible to bear. He wanted to shriek, to beg, to weep.

He did none of these things. Instead, without conscious planning, he rolled to his face, drew up his knees and thrust with his forehead against the floor, hurling his torso upward. With the same motion he straightened his legs, coming erect with lightning swiftness through an effort that would have been beyond him had he not been possessed by desperation.

Torro had been absorbed in contemplation of his stained tools of murder. He whirled, snarling. He crouched and raised his arms, brandishing knife and hammer.

Teetering, his body leaning forward off balance, Barry leaped headlong. He had the feeling that he was diving straight toward death, but that seemed infinitely better than waiting for death to come to him.

Torro grunted. Barry felt the shock of the hammer striking his shoulder, and then his full weight smashed against the killer and both of them hit the bricks of the fireplace and fell to the hearth. . . .

As soon as he would move again, Barry rolled till he was no longer lying across Torro's shoulders. The man was unconscious his cheek sheeted with blood from a gash in the temple, where his head had struck the corner of the mantel. His right arm was broken and doubled beneath him.

The knife had fallen ten feet away. Barry wormed his body toward it and lay on his back, so that the blood touched his bound wrists. He knew by the sickening agony that went through him with every movement that the hammer had broken his shoulder, but after slow minutes he managed to free his hands, cutting himself a dozen times.

Slicing the bonds at his feet, he arose unsteadily. He found more cord and trussed Torro, then searched the man's pockets for the address Hermie had mentioned. He found a card with the name of a Dr. Paul Graumann and a number in East Twenty-ninth Street.

Without another look at Gaston's corpse, Barry reeled out of the house and along the sidewalk, half running. He wanted a cop, a telephone, a taxicab—whichever was handiest.

The cab came first. Barry yanked the door open and gave the Twenty-ninth Street address.

"And for God's sake, hurry!" he gasped.

The driver swung into the swift flow of traffic in Lexington Avenue and beat traffic lights by split seconds. He pulled up between First and Second Avenues at a house with a neat brass plate that bore Dr. Graumann's name.

From his wallet Barry took a five-dollar bill and one of his Unique Services Unlimited cards, upon which he scribbled the address of the house he had just left. He gave them to the hacker.

"Call Miss Grant at the number printed there," he directed. "Tell her to send cops here, and also to the address written on the card, right away. Then maybe she'd better come here herself and gather up what's left of me."

The driver looked at him strangely. "I'll do it, buddy, but for your own sake I hope you're sober."

Barry went up to the house and thumbed the doorbell.

A PLUMP, bald man in a white jacket opened the door. He inquired testily, "What is it?"

"Dr. Graumann? I've hurt my shoulder. I think it's broken."

"Sorry. That's out of my line. But you'll find another doctor around the corner."

Barry spoke quickly as the door started to close. "But this is an emergency. I've been in a fight, and—"

Graumann's eyes narrowed, and Barry wondered if he saw a flicker of recognition in them, or only imagined it.

"Oh, well," the doctor said, "maybe I can treat you, after all. Come along."

Barry followed him into a room that contained a desk, glassed-in shelves of books and cabinets of gleaming metal instruments. A framed medical certificate hung on the wall, the place looked and smelled disconcertingly like a dozen other doctors' offices he had been in.

He said abruptly, "I'm looking for Mathilda Jones."

Graumann sat down behind the desk. "So? You did well to come to me. I am an alienist, you see, and this Jones person is merely a figment of your distressed imagination."

"Where are Sam and Hermie?"

"Also in your mind, poor fellow! When did you first start having these hallucinations?"

The broken shoulder hurt unmercifully as Barry turned toward a door leading back into the house. "Since you won't tell me, I'll have to look for myself."

A revolver appeared in Graumann's plump hand. "I think not. You asked for treatment and I'm going to give it to you. First an injection of a sedative—"

"Try it."

"—unless you'd prefer the injection of a lead pellet from this gun, which has cured worse cases than yours."

"You're giving yourself away," Barry said with satisfaction, "and the police will be here any minute."

"The police?" Graumann smiled bleakly. "I've practiced in this house for ten years. A lot of my patients have delusions such as yours. The police will understand when I explain."

Barry felt a chill of uncertainty. Graumann appeared genuine and his credentials would be real. The cops would hesitate to interfere. If it were not too late to save Mathilda Jones already, it might well be too late by the time the authorities could be convinced of the need for action.

Graumann took a hypodermic needle from a cabinet. "A solution of scopolamine and morphine will do it. The police will find you a little confused, a trifle bewildered."

"I'll be damned if you're going to dope me!"

"Will you?" Graumann's smile broadened. "Imagination again, my poor fellow. I assure you, in all seriousness—"

THE doorbell echoed through the house. The breath went out of Barry in a long sigh. "The cops," he said.

"Perhaps, after all, it's best." Graumann put the revolver in his hip pocket and went calmly to the front door.

As soon as the other's back was turned, Barry strode to the door that had attracted him earlier. He opened it and peered into the dusk of a curtained room in which were tables, shelves of bottles and a couch. His eyes made out a sheet-covered human form on the couch.

He winced as a hand grasped his injured shoulder. He turned to face Graumann and a police sergeant and a patrolman, the latter two in uniform.

The sergeant's gaze was frosty. He said, "A fine thing, raising hell in a doctor's office!"

Barry leaned in the doorway, breathing hard. "A kidnaper's office, you mean—and a killer's! Arrest Graumann and everyone else in the place—and be careful, because they're armed."

Graumann shook his naked head sadly. "A complete mental breakdown, Sergeant Cassidy. Bellevue Psychiatric Hospital is only a block away. Why not take him there?"

"A good idea. I'll do it. . . . Come on, son. Nobody's going to hurt you."

Barry evaded the hand that would have grasped his broken shoulder again.

"You've got to believe me! There's a kidnaped girl in the next room, dead or unconscious. Her father was murdered. Ask her about it, if she's still alive."

Cassidy frowned, peering into the dark of the other room, seeing the still figure.

"Maybe I can straighten this out," the doctor said, "Young man, can you describe this girl?"

"She's small, slim, dark, about twenty—"

"Did you also happen to see her—ah—abductors?"

"One was an elderly man with white hair and two were young fellows, tall and husky, who pretended to be detectives."

Graumann's mouth twitched oddly, and Barry started, remembering how the mouth of the white-haired man in Grand Central had twitched in exactly the same way.

"You were one of them!" he accused. "You wore a wig and mustache and tinted glasses. I know because—"

"Hold on," interrupted Cassidy. "Before you get any more brainstorm, we'll have a look at the girl. Who do you say she is, doc?"

"A patient. She comes each week for treatment, and 'tis important that she rest afterward. Please be careful not to wake her when you go in."

They entered the room on tiptoe, Cassidy following Graumann, Barry next, and the patrolman bringing up the rear.

Barry looked at the figure, his eyes widening incredulously. This was no girl of twenty, but a woman twice that old, with graying hair and a lined face. She was asleep, her breast rising and falling rhythmically beneath the sheet.

"Satisfied?" Graumann asked.

"I'm satisfied," the sergeant growled. "Come along, Napoleon. They'll take care of you where we're going."

The desperation of a trapped animal filled Barry. If they took him to the Psychiatric Hospital, the admitting doctors would make notes of his story and probably hold him for observation. In time they would decide a mistake had been made, no doubt, and release him—but hours would have passed and

Graumann and his followers would be out of the law's reach.

HE TOOK a deep breath—and a well-remembered fragrance entered his nostrils. He knew he could not be mistaken.

"She's the one!" he exclaimed. "They've powdered her hair and made up her face and doped her, but she's Mathilda Jones. I know her by her perfume!"

Cassidy grabbed his arm. "It's perfume now, eh? Come on, before Halloran and I go nutty, too!"

Barry made one more plea, not to Cassidy, but to the sleeping girl.

"Mathilda!" he shouted. "Mathilda Jones!"

"Now you've done it," growled the sergeant. "Now you've woke her up. She's moving and groaning."

The patient was turning her head from side to side. Her pale lips moved, and all of them heard the slurred words.

"Must be—careful. . . . Father murdered. Put formula—in bracelet. . . ."

Cassidy's jaw dropped. He looked at the patrolman. "Did you hear that, Halloran? Murdered, she says. Formula—"

Graumann's voice rapped out sharply behind them. "Put up your hands!" He called, "Gregor! Sam! Hermie!"

Barry saw the sergeant's hand move an inch toward the bulge of a gun beneath his tunic, then stop. His face went gray, looking at Graumann's revolver. Both he and Halloran raised their arms.

Men came into the room—the slant-browed chauffeur, the two tall ones. All of them had pistols.

Sam looked hard at Barry. "Quite a run of luck you've had, chum—but this is the end of it."

Weak with pain and dazed by repeated shocks of misfortune, Barry sagged against the shelves of drugs and medicines. He was ready to admit, to himself and whoever might be

concerned, that he had bungled everything from the start.

Graumann bent over the girl, who slept quietly again. He pulled down the sheet, slipped a silver bracelet from her wrist and twisted it in his hands. It came apart. In the hollow center was a thin roll of onionskin paper.

"The formula!" Graumann read with shining eyes what was written on the paper. "The scopolamine made her tell us in spite of herself."

Cassidy was trembling with rage. "You can't get away with this. Drop your guns and consider yourselves under arrest."

The doctor laughed. "You'll never make another arrest, sergeant. A drop of prussic acid injected intravenously—"

The doorbell pealed again. Hermie left the room at Graumann's signal, to return a moment later shepherding Judy Grant ahead of him.

"Another of them," Hermie said. "Not bad, either."

Judy's eyes glistened with indignation. There were spots of bright pink in her cheeks.

"Barry," she said, "what are these heels up to?"

He would have died willingly to save her from this death trap. It was his own fault, he told himself, for sending her that message.

He said dully, "They kidnaped the girl I was to meet. They're going to kill us."

"They are, are they?" She whirled on Sam, who stood nearest. "You'd better think again, you—you moron! You can't ever get away with it. You haven't got the sense of a two-year-old, but only a warped brain that is rotting and—"

Sam hit her. He hit her in the face with the flat of his automatic, so that she lurched across the room and fell against Graumann's knees.

That was how Sam signed his own death warrant.

Bottles from the shelves behind Barry seemed to leap into his hands of their own

accord. He was not conscious of moving, of swinging both arms without regard for his broken shoulder. He was conscious only of a red haze in front of his eyes, through which the writhing shapes of men and the pale flashes of guns were no more real than a dream.

He saw a heavy bottle smash against Sam's head, dropping him to his knees. Another streaked into the face of the slant-browed chauffeur, altering the apelike features. Then Barry stood before Sam, hammering him insanely with lefts and rights.

Half a dozen guns were packing the room with ear-stunning thunder. Cassidy was down, wounded, but still shooting. Halloran triggered a bullet at Graumann and the doctor clapped his hands to his belly and sat on the floor.

Judy screamed, "Look out, Barry!" so shrilly that he caught the words above the pandemonium. He blinked and saw Sam aiming a pistol. He leaped, but the pistol roared before he could reach it.

The slug knocked Barry backward. He did not feel the impact of his fall. . . .

HE DID not feel anything till cool fingers stroked his forehead and he opened his eyes in bed and saw Judy.

Memory flooded back, "That skunk hit you," he said.

"Darling," she told him, "that skunk is dead. Cassidy shot him just as he shot you in the shoulder you had already broken. Graumann and his chauffeur are dead, Hermie and the scar-faced man are held for murder, and Mathilda Jones and the formula are safe."

"What about me?"

She skipped the question in her haste. "Graumann dabbled in chemistry as well as doctoring crooks and furnishing them with dope and poisons and explosives. Torro was an ex-convict from New York who got a job as a handyman for Jones, learned about the motor fuel, and decided to let Graumann exploit it and split the profits," .

“Judy, wait a second.”

“Torro killed Jones, but couldn’t find the formula. Before he died, Jones told Mathilda to take it to Hollingsby. Torro knew about that and flew here to put the finger on Mathilda.

“Graumann bribed Calvert, Hollingsby’s butler. Calvert gave Hollingsby something to make him sick, so he couldn’t meet the train, and called the crooks to tell them when the girl would arrive. But Gaston overheard the call and got suspicious, and traced the phone number to the house in Eighty-third Street, and—”

“I know the rest.” Barry shuddered. “I misjudged the poor devil. But Judy—is this a nuthouse I’m in?”

“Don’t be silly! You’re in the swellest hospital in town with a corps of nurses. You’re also on the front page of every newspaper in town, which won’t hurt business a bit. And Hollingsby has presented you with a thousand-dollar check, and—”

“Never mind,” Barry sighed contentedly. “Knowing you’re safe and I’m not in the booby hatch is enough good news for one time. Imagine those cops going to send me to the laughing academy. Why, the doctors might have decided I was really off the beam!”

Her spun-copper curls brushed his face.

“But in a nice way,” she said.