



The grin on Harris' face maddened me. "Well," I said coldly, "it was a stall, was it? What is the idea?"

He laughed, without changing his attitude.

"This happens to be our turn to play, Daly," he returned, apparently well satisfied with his smartness.

"Then you have nothing to tell me?"

"Oh, yes, I have; I've got a h—l of a lot to tell you. But first of all you are going to tell me a few things. Push back your right sleeve to the elbow, shirt and all."

"What's that for?"

"Never you mind what it's for; you do what I say, if you know what is best for yourself."

I looked at the faces of the others, but they were hard as flint. My hesitancy caused Harris to lower his feet, and sit up angrily.

"Push up that sleeve, you, or I'll have Waldron do it for you. We've got you foul, you fool!"

I stripped back my sleeve, exposing my right forearm, yet never removing my eyes from their faces. Harris and Costigan bent forward, intent on the operation, but Waldron never shifted his position. Harris slapped a hand on the desk, and gave utterance to an oath.

"By G—d, Dan, we're right. This bird's not Daly!"

"Not in a thousand years he ain't. He's sure a dead-ringer, though."

Harris straightened up, the same hateful grin still exposing his teeth.

"We've got your number this time, son," he announced. "Harry Daly has a tattooed anchor on his right arm. I didn't know it, but Dan did. I'll tell you what made us wise. In the shindig over at Perond's tonight, a card-cage was jarred loose from your pocket. There was only one kind of card inside, and that wasn't Daly by a d—n sight. I told Dan about it, and he was for getting a squint at that right arm. Said for me to call you up at the number you gave me, believing that if I threw in 'em enough you'd come over here. I asked for 'G 145,' the operator there named yer, and it was the same name what was on them cards. So now we know yer're a dirty liar and spy, Mister Philip Severn."

"You called me Daly yourself, Harris," I said quietly, realizing the game was up, but not yet sure of their intentions. "I merely let it go."

"Sure; but what was the game? You ain't no fly-cop?"

"Nothing of the kind."

"Then you was after the dough. That's what I thought; you and the girl are in cahoots. Well, what did you do with it?"

I shook my head, but this only angered Costigan.

"Ah, stow that," he broke in roughly. "We know you never got it, but she did. There ain't no other way it could have been done. The dame left with Alva. George here saw her go out with him. Then the next morning the guy was found dead, his pockets rifled, and the bag of cash gone. How was he croaked—do you know? Punctured from behind with some sorter sharp instrument, no bigger than a hat-pin. It looked like a woman's job, but she got away clean. And what then? The next night she turns up with you over at Perond's blowing in the coin, and the two of yer havin' a h—l of a time. That proves yer were together, don't it?"

"We're not going to blow this to the police," broke in Harris, as Dan paused for breath. "That ain't the idea at all. But we want a share of that dough. You come across, and there won't be no more trouble."

"But suppose I don't? Suppose I tell you I haven't the slightest idea where that money is, or who got it? What then?"

Harris' grin was more malicious and hateful than never, but he waited and deliberately lit his stump of a cigar.

"What then?" he echoed finally.

"Well, in the first place, we've got you, haven't we? You'll squeal, believe me, before you ever get out of our hands. See here, Severn, I ain't got any direct proof that'll put you in the chair at Sing-Sing; that's true enough, but, unless the two of you cough up liberal, I'll turn something over to the police of this town what will give you a term in the jug, as necessary, and fix that fly dame of yours for all time."

"You are bluffing; you have no such proof."

"Oh, haven't I? Look here, you fool; do you know where I got that?"

He whipped something from out the concealment of an inner coat pocket, and flung it fully revealed onto the desk—an ornamental dagger, glittering in the light, which I as instantly recognized.

"Ever see that baby weapon before?"

"Yes," and I felt a sudden relief at

the discovery. "You slashed open my valise, and found it."

"Exactly; that's what I did," evidently proud of himself. "It was an easy enough trick. Just as soon as I got eyes on this pretty plaything I knew I'd got the stickey that put Alva out of business—an' I knew where it came from."

"Where?"

"Oh, h—l! do you think I ain't got any eyes? That skirt wore it in her hat when she and Alva went out together."

"Oh, did she? This same pin, was it? Say, Harris, I wish I could be as bright as you think you are. And did you happen to observe also that the lady's hat was held in place by exactly the same pin tonight when she was in Perond's? Well, it was; now how could it be in your pocket and in her hat at the same time?"

He stared at me, his mouth wide open, and I was equally amused at the expression upon the faces of the other two. I realized fully the peril I was in, and that these men would hesitate at nothing to obtain their end. Yet, in spite of all this, I was inexpressibly happy. I spiked their big gun with a single blow; moreover, I had learned the truth about her, and my faith in her innocence came back in a flood. Harris had done too much boasting; he had ruined his own case. He had placed the very weapon in my grasp which I most desired to have—absolute assurance that the girl herself was innocent. The fellow felt, and realized, the change.

"That's easy," he sneered. "She bought herself another. That proves nothing, except that she is smart enough to play safe. Neither one of you can get away on that sort of dope."

"Perhaps not; but it clears her of the murder charge."

"Oh, does it? That remains to be seen. We know who she is, and that is more than you do. Oh, h—l, I got outo that over the wire; the only thing that interested you into coming here was to learn who the dame really was. That's part of her play, as I figure it, Severn. She won't give herself away, but is just using you. When she's good and ready she means to fade, an' she'll take the dough along with her. You will have sold out for a few cheap kisses, an' that's all." He laughed coarsely. "She is stringing you for a fool. Come now, wake up, before it is too late, an' let's all get a hand in the pot; what'd yer say?"

"You still think I am that kind? One of your class?" I questioned, thoroughly angered by his sneering speech.

"One of my class? I should say not; you are the rawest kind of a mutt, but so far you've been in luck—that's all. Now your luck has changed, and yer up against it."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Blow her; tell us all you know. We'll play the game for you, and divide square."

"You will let me out of here?"

"Sure, once you give us the right steer."

"And if I refuse?"

He laughed contemptuously.

"You're not going to; you've got too d—n much sense. But just to satisfy



"And if I Refuse?"

your curiosity I'll tell you. We've got the girl spotted; we can lay our hands on her in an hour; and, believe me, we've got the goods on the young lady. Here's the stickey that did the business, and I found it right where you had hidden it away. I can find three men—they are keeping out of sight, but I can stir them up—who'll swear

that she went away alone with Alva from that factory over there; that he had the bag with him, and that the two got into the auto together. That makes one h—l of a straight case, don't it?"

"The way you put it—yes. But what good will it do you fellows to have her plinched? Where do you gain anything?"

"Time; it blocks the get-away with the swag. That's all we want. See here, Severn, we know where the stuff is planted; at least we've got an idea, but we've got to work slow and cautious in order to lift it. If it wasn't for that we wouldn't care if she skipped. If you'll help us to get quick action, we'll let the girl go, and give you a share. Take my word for it, that's a d—n sight more than you'll ever get by staiding with her."

"But if she finds out that I have turned her down?"

"She won't never find it out; we'll keep mum. Besides, yer're doin' her a good turn, keepin' her out of the electric chair. Well, there's the proposition—you can leave it, or take it."

Serious as the situation was, I could not fail to see its absurdity. This was no threat to frighten me; the fellows meant what they said, although I doubted if they really possessed the knowledge claimed so glibly. But they evidently meant to go on; they were not bluffing, for they really had an ugly case, and could undoubtedly make trouble. The evidence against the girl was strong, almost convincing; it even shook my own confidence in her innocence. The absurdity of the situation lay in my absolute ignorance. I knew even less than they pretended to know. What should I do? Pretend, manufacture some story? These fellows were criminals, suspicious and unscrupulous; they would only believe what I could prove. If they caught me in a deliberate lie, as they probably would, that would instantly end everything. I might, then, just as well fight it out with them now as later. I set my teeth, ready for what I felt sure was coming.

"You fellows have sized me up wrong," I said quietly, but firmly. "I am not the kind to squeal because of a threat. You'll find I'll protect the lady, but I'll do it in my own way—not yours. The honest truth is, I haven't anything to tell. You won't believe that, but it is so. I know less than you claim to know. I have no knowledge of where the money is, or who got it. I do not know who killed Alva; even now I haven't any suspicions worth mentioning. But I will say this plainly—I do not believe this girl did it, or that she had any hand in the robbery. I am going to stay with her till h—l freezes over, if that is what you want to know. That's my answer, Harris, and it is all I've got to give you."

"You d—d cur! we'll show you something!"

I believe the injury was a serious one. I could use my limbs. Satisfied on this point, and assured that I was alone, I braced myself on one arm, and, in a sitting posture, endeavored to survey my surroundings.

I was resting on the floor of a bare room of ordinary size, containing no vestige of furniture. The place was cold, with that indescribable chill peculiar to unmsed apartments, and through the one window, which was unshaded by a curtain, poured the direct light of an almost full moon. In this silvery light every bit of that interior stood revealed in its hideous bareness, the roughly finished walls, the patches of plaster scaled off, the dirty floor, the single door and window, the rags amid which I rested. It was a hopeless scene.

I staggered to my feet reeling a moment like a drunken man, and then finally found my way along the side wall to the window. My strength increased as I advanced, and courage was born with it—I was not dead; I might baffle those villains yet. They must have felt that I was safe enough in this place; that, even if I regained consciousness, no escape was possible, for they had left no guard. A glance without revealed the reason for such confidence. I was four stories up, a sheer brick wall below, and, at the bottom, a concrete walk. There was nothing between to cling to unless I might be the narrow coping of stone just beneath the window sill. I stared at this, almost hopefully, for an instant; then turned my eyes away with a shudder; it was scarcely as broad as the sole of my shoe and to think of creeping along there was merely the dream of a madman. The bright moonlight flooded everything about, yet I saw nothing familiar; I was evidently at the back end of a house, with others closely set on either side, and an alley beyond a small, enclosed



Uncle John's Joke

IF YOU VALUE YER SKIN DON'T RUN DOWN ANYBODY'S RELIGION.

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