

**GRIPPING, SMASHING DETECTIVE STORIES**

# ★ **BLACK MASK** ★

AUG., 1933  
20¢

**"HOSPITAL CASE"**  
By  
**ROGER TORREY**



**"DARK DEATH"**

By

**RAOUL  
WHITFIELD**

**FREDERICK NEBEL  
ERLE STANLEY GARDNER**

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*Ken Corning, fighting to break a murder frame, tangles with the killers*

# Blackmail with Lead

By  
ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

First published *Black Mask*, August 1933.



Ken Corning stopped at the battered table, which ran the length of the jail room, and looked through the coarse wire screen into the face of Sam Driver; a face that was twitching nervously.

“If I’m going to be your lawyer,” said Ken Corning, “I’ve got to have all there is to know about your case.”

Sam Driver fidgeted uncomfortably in the chair on the other side of the screened partition. He acted as though he could already feel a current of electricity coursing through the chair, burning the life from his body.

“Listen,” he said, “don’t you s’pose you could cop a plea?”

Ken Corning shook his head.

“I sounded out the deputy D. A. They want first degree or nothing and they won’t make any promises about the death penalty. That’s up to the judge.”

“Jeeze,” said Driver, “that’s no break at all.”

“You will have to give me the true facts if we’re going to get anywhere,” Corning told him.

Driver looked furtively around and then leaned forward and spoke rapidly, the words coming from the side of his lips.

“I wouldn’t have killed Harry Green for a million dollars,” he said. “We was buddies. We’d batted around together a lot. He’d give me the shirt off his back, and I’d give him my last dollar.

“We’d had a little run of luck. The cards had been breaking better for us, and we had this old flivver. We stayed at the auto camp and used the car together. I don’t know where Harry went that night. He was out on a game somewhere, but he didn’t have the car. I had the car. I drove it up to visit some relatives of mine on Hampshire Street.

“It was dark when I got there, and I stuck around and had a few drinks. Then I came out and got in the car and started out towards the automobile camp. I guess I was a little bit crooked. Anyway, a car drove up alongside, and a couple of dicks started to shake me down. They said my headlights was glaring, and I was driving funny. They looked the car over for booze, and found Harry Green’s body in the back.”

“How did it get there?” asked Corning.

“I wish I knew, boss, honest to gawd I do! It wasn’t in there when I started out with the car, I know that.”

“All right,” said Corning, wearily, “what about the money?”

“That’s another funny thing,” said Driver, lowering his eyes and shifting about in his chair nervously. “I had about five thousand bucks on me. It was in crisp new bills. The bulls claim that I got that from Harry Green; that that’s why I croaked him. Why, listen, I wouldn’t take any money from Harry. . . .”

“I’ve heard all that before,” Corning said. “How did you get the money?”

“I won it fair and square, in a poker game.”

“All right, you’ve got to produce the people who sat in that poker game.”

Driver placed his hand to his face, started tugging nervously at his mouth with the tips of his fingers.

“I can’t do that,” he said. “They were friends of Harry’s, but strangers to me. Harry introduced me to the club and I got in the game. They wouldn’t admit sitting in a poker game; not with a murder rap.”

Ken Corning drummed silently on the table, with the tips of his fingers. His steady eyes bored into the cowering optics of the man on the other side of the screen.

“Get this, Driver,” he said slowly, “and get it straight. Unless you can give me the truth on that case, and I can make something out of it, you’re going to get the death penalty.”

Driver’s lips quivered. He held them with his fingers for a moment. His eyes were shifty with panic.

“All right,” he said, “give me a chance to think things over a bit. Maybe I can work out something.”

“You’ve got to have something that you can tell a jury,” said Ken Corning slowly. “Something that the jury will believe; something that is going to sound logical, in spite of all the cross-examination a District Attorney gives you. In short, Driver, the only thing that will work is the truth.”

“But I told you the truth.”

“It doesn’t sound like it,” said Ken Corning grimly.

“To you, or to a jury?” asked Driver.

“Neither to me nor a jury,” Ken Corning said slowly.

Driver wet his lips nervously with the tip of his tongue, said nothing.

“Do you,” asked Ken Corning, taking a notebook from his pocket, “know a woman by the name of Ella Ambrose?”

Sam Driver nodded his head slowly.

“Yes,” he said, “she lives out there near where the folks are, on Hampshire Street.”

“What does she know about the case?” asked Corning.

The eyes of the prisoner sought his face, and, for the first time during the interview, became steady.

“Search me,” he said. “She can’t know anything about it.”

Corning nodded.

“Yes, she knows something about it. I can’t figure just what it is, but it’s something that she thinks is important. She wants me to come down to the house, after dark tonight, and not to let anyone know I’m coming. She sent me a message.”

Driver shook his head and made a simultaneous gesture with his shoulders and the palms of his hands.

“You better go see her,” he said. “Maybe she knows something, but be sure it’s something that’s going to help me. If it ain’t, get her out of the country.”

Corning suddenly snapped a swift question at the prisoner.

“Driver,” he said, “what did you do with the gun that killed Harry Green?”

For what seemed like three long seconds, Sam Driver sat with sagging jaw, and looked as though someone had slapped him in the face with a wet towel. His eyes bulged, and the muscles of his throat worked convulsively. Suddenly he said, all in one breath: “Jeeze, boss, I

never saw any gun. For gawd's sake, don't you go getting an idea like that through your head. How would I know what happened to the gun?"

Ken Corning got to his feet.

"That," he said, "is just a mild sample of what the District Attorney is going to do to you on cross-examination. You've got to answer the questions better than that, or you'll get murder in the first."



Wind tugged at the skirts of Ken Corning's overcoat as he stood on the dark street corner and strained his eyes at the shadowy houses, trying to see the numbers above the doors.

He moved forward, out of the circle of illumination cast by the street lamp, and became conscious of motion in the darkness.

He whirled and stood tense.

A lad of about twelve years of age came out from behind a board fence. He was leaning against the wind, and his cap was pulled down low against the tug of the gale. The light from the corner showed a young-old face, with shrewd, peering eyes, and a much frayed coat that was originally several sizes too large.

"You're Ken Corning, the big lawyer?" the boy asked.

"Yes, I'm Corning."

"My mom, she was afraid you couldn't find the place, so she sent me to wait around," said the boy.

"Who is your mother, lad?"

"Mrs. Ambrose. She's the one you're goin' to see."

Ken Corning nodded his head. "All right, son," he said, "let's go."

The boy remarked in a swiftly nervous monotone, "We'd better cut through the alley. Mom's afraid somebody may be watching the place."

"Why should they watch the place?"

"I don't know. Mom told me not to talk nothing over with you, just to bring you to the house."

The boy slipped through the gate in the fence. "Watch your step when you get around here," he warned. "There's a bunch of tin cans over there on the side."

He moved unerringly, following some path which was invisible to the lawyer's eyes. All above was smelly darkness. Houses fronted on the narrow street; houses that were cheap and unpretentious, yet were palaces beside the hovels which were scattered around the backs of the lots. All about were the sounds of human occupancy; low voices which carried through the flimsy walls of mean structures, the raucous blasts of a cheap radio which sounded from a living-room where comparative affluence announced its presence in strident tones.

The shadow grew deeper and Corning's guide was but a blotch of black moving against a dark background. Abruptly he paused.

"This is the place," said the boy, and started beating lightly with his knuckles on a door.

"Who is it?" asked thin, tired tones from the interior.

"It's me, mom."

"Did *he* come with you?"

"Yeah. Open up."

A bolt rasped back on the inside of the door, then, as the door swung open, an oblong of dim light from an oil lamp silhouetted the broad hips and shoulders of a heavy-set woman

who hulked in the doorway.

“Come in,” said the woman.

Ken Corning stepped into the dark room. The woman pushed the door shut.

“I couldn’t understand,” said Corning, cautiously, “why you didn’t come to the office.”

The woman placed a finger to her lips, looked over at the boy. “Frank,” she said, “you run over and see if Jimmy won’t let you stay with him for a while.”

The boy turned the knob, held the door against the wind, slipped out into the night.

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Ken Corning stared at the woman. She was in the early fifties. Adversity had stamped its mark upon her, and her face had set in lines of whining defiance, as though she had learned to cope with the world by aggressively protesting her rights with shrill-voiced insistence. Her features were heavy, the eyes small and sharp. The lower jaw was full and determined, but the upper part of the mouth seemed pinched, with a high, narrow roof.

“You’re defending Sam Driver?” she said.

Ken Corning nodded.

“Why didn’t you come to the office?”

“Because they got the place watched.”

“Who has?”

“I d’know. Maybe the police.”

“Why have they got the place watched?”

“I spoke out of turn,” she said.

“To whom?” Corning inquired.

“The cop on the beat. I told him that I didn’t think Sam Driver was guilty, and that I knew some stuff that would give him a break. The cop told me I’d better keep out of things that didn’t concern me. Right after that, men started to stand around in front of the house. They waited in automobiles, and poked around, as though they had business, but they didn’t fool me any. They were dicks, watching me.”

“All right,” said Ken Corning, “what do you know?”

She leered at him shrewdly.

“There’s got to be something in it for me,” she told him.

Slowly, Ken Corning shook his head.

“All the money that Sam Driver has,” he said, “is held by the law, on the theory that it belonged to Harry Green, the man he’s charged with killing. If I can get him acquitted, naturally he gets that money back. I’m going to take most of it for my fee. There’ll be some left for him and some for expenses. If he wants to make you a present after the case is over, that’s up to him.”

She twisted her fingers together and looked at Corning with avaricious eyes that took in every detail of his tailor-made clothes.

“Seems like it’s going to be pretty soft for you, if you get him off. Seems like I’d oughtta have some cash.”

“No,” said Corning, “they’d ask you about that when you got on the witness stand. If you told them I’d given you a single nickel, they’d make it appear I’d bought your evidence.”

“I wouldn’t have to tell them,” she suggested.

“You won’t get anywhere with that line. And it doesn’t listen well. If you know anything, go ahead and tell me.”

She twisted her fingers for a moment, then suddenly broke into speech.

"All right," she said. "I know Sam Driver, and I know his sister-in-law well. They've got a place here on Hampshire Street. The man's got a job, and they've got a radio 'n everything."

"Yes," said Corning. "What of it?"

"Well, Driver used to come and visit them. Sometimes he'd bring Harry Green with him. More often he'd come alone. He drove a flivver, and kept it parked out in front of the place when he was inside. I got so I knowed the flivver.

"The night of the murder, I knew that Driver was inside, at his sister-in-law's, hoisting a few. I was going uptown, and I saw a man walking up and down the sidewalk, and I figured I'd wait until he got out of the way, before I came out into view.

"I seen a new model Cadillac car come down and stop side of Driver's flivver. Guys got out that had on evening clothes. You could see the white of them in the light that came from the street lamp. There were two of them. I saw them pull something from the Cadillac and put it in the flivver. It was something heavy."

"Could you see definitely what it was?" asked Corning slowly.

"No. But it was heavy."

"How do you know the car was a Cadillac?"

"It was a Cadillac," she said, doggedly enough, "a new model Cadillac. I keep up on automobiles because my boy talks about them all the time. He knows every new car that comes out."

Ken Corning looked at her searchingly.

"You don't look like the type of woman who would be interested in a Cadillac automobile."

"I knew that new model Cadillac."

"All right. Then what happened?"

"Then," she said, "they went around to the headlights on Driver's automobile and started doing something to them with a monkey wrench or something. I thought they were car thieves that was stealing the headlights, but they were dressed too good for that."

"Go on," Corning told her.

"That's about all. I got to thinking things over, and I thought you'd ought to know."

"Got the license number on the Cadillac car?" he asked.

She shook her head rapidly.

"No," she said, "I . . ."

There was the sound of peremptory knuckles banging on the door.

"Open up!" said a gruff voice. "This is the law."

She looked in swift consternation at Ken Corning.

"You double-crossed me," she said.

Corning shook his head. He was on his feet, standing over in a corner of the room, shifting his eyes from the face of the woman to the door.

The door quivered, then banged open, shivering in the wind.

Three men pushed their way into the room. The last man shoved the door closed, and the oil light flickered and danced in the wind.

"Well," said Corning, "what's the trouble?"

The man who had been the first into the room looked at Corning.

"Nothing that concerns you, buddy," he said. "It's something that concerns the woman. She's been selling hooch."

"I have not!" said the woman.

The detective grinned.

“Got a warrant?” asked Ken Corning.

The man’s voice was scornful. “Of course I have,” he said.

“But I haven’t been selling any booze. I haven’t got any booze. I don’t know anything about . . .”

“Look around, boys,” said the man who was in charge.

“I think,” said Ken Corning, “that I’ll have to take a look at that warrant.”

“Sure,” said the officer, with elaborate sarcasm. “Go right ahead and look at it all you want to. Read it and weep.”

He took a folded paper from his pocket, passed it to Ken Corning with exaggerated courtesy.

Corning looked at the search warrant, which was duly issued and in regular form. One of the men had gone to the closet, and was bending over, sending the beam of a flashlight to the dark interior. Suddenly he called: “Okey, chief, here it is.”

The woman started to cry.

“I didn’t mean anything,” she said. “Just some stuff that I kept there to take when I wasn’t feeling good. I never sold any and I never gave any away. I’m a poor widow woman, with a little boy to support, and . . .”

The man in charge grinned at Ken Corning, then turned his eyes to the woman, and interrupted her wailing excuses.

“Get your coat on, sister,” he said. “We’ve got a car waiting outside.”

Ken Corning pulled his overcoat up around his neck.

“I’ll be seeing you boys later,” he said, and pushed his way out into the windy night.

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It was two hours later when Ken Corning arrived at the jail with a writ of *habeas corpus* and a fifteen thousand dollar bail bond, issued by a company that knew him and accepted his guarantee. Ella Ambrose was delivered into his custody.

She climbed into the car, sat at his side, and said to him: “Did you get me out?”

“Yes,” he said.

“Did they dismiss the charge?”

“No, I had to get a writ of *habeas corpus* and get you out on bail.”

“Thanks,” she remarked, after a moment.

“I want you to go to my office and make a statement,” he told her.

“Sure,” she told him, with ready loquaciousness. “But I’ve got to get back and find out about my boy. Maybe he came back and went to bed, or maybe he stayed over at his friend’s house.”

“All right,” Corning told her. “I’ll take you home first if you want.”

“I wish you would.”

He pushed the car into speed.

“Then you can come back to the office with me, and give me a statement,” he said.

“Yes,” she remarked in a colorless tone of mechanical acquiescence.

“About this Cadillac car,” said Corning. “Do you suppose . . .”

“Of course,” she said, “I couldn’t be *sure* it was a Cadillac.”

“Could you see what the men were carrying?”

“No, I couldn’t really swear that they carried anything. I saw a car stop, and then the men got out.”

“But you’re certain they carried something over and put it in Sam Driver’s automobile, is that right?”

“No, I’m not certain of it, I think they did.”

“What makes you think they did? Didn’t you *see* them?”

“No, I can’t swear that I saw them. That is, I saw them moving around, and then, after I read about the case in the papers, I got to thinking that that’s what they *might have done*.”

“Two men?” asked Corning.

“Yes, there were two men.”

“In evening clothes?”

“Well, they probably had on evening clothes. I can’t be certain about that.”

“I see,” Corning told her, and lapsed into silence. He drove her to her house, held the door open for her.

“You’re going to wait for me to go back and make a statement?” she asked.

“No,” he said gravely, “I don’t think I’ll need a statement.”

“Thanks a lot,” she said, “for what you did in getting me out.”

“Not at all,” he told her.

When she had vanished into the shadows about the cheap houses, which clustered together in the lot like freight cars in a railroad yard, Corning savagely snapped his car into gear, and drove furiously, until he came to an all-night drug-store where there was a telephone.

He put through two calls.

The first was to his office, telling Helen Vail to get a taxicab and go home. The second was to the office of the company that had written the bail bond at his request.

“On that Ella Ambrose bail on *habeas corpus*,” he told the bonding company, “I’ve lost interest in the case. I wish you’d pick up the defendant and get a release of the bail bond.”

The voice at the other end of the line chuckled.

“Sorry, old man,” it said, “but there’s been a note come through, that the case is to be dismissed and the complaint withdrawn.”

“I see,” said Ken Corning, and hung up the receiver.



oe Vare, private detective, sat in Ken Corning’s office, and looked across at the lawyer.

“I don’t get you,” he said.

“It’s simple,” Corning told him. “Go to the Cadillac agency, get the list of new car deliveries, check the people carefully, find out if one of them *might* be the sort to have had some connection either with Sam Driver, or with Harry Green.”

Vare twisted a half-smoked cigar thoughtfully, rolling it with his thumb and forefinger.

“Driver and Green were bums?” he said.

“You might call them that.”

“Think they’d have friends who drove new Cadillacs?”

Corning leaned forward.

“Get this, Vare,” he said. “This is a murder case, and the Cadillac car is a lead. In a murder case I run down *all* leads, no matter how shaky they look.” Vare got to his feet and grinned at the attorney.

“Okey,” he said. “I’m on my way.”

As the detective left the office, Helen Vail slipped through the door, closed it behind her, and said softly: "There's a Mrs. Brown out there, who wants to see you about the Driver case."

"All right," said Corning, "let's take a look at her."

Helen Vail held the door open and nodded. A woman of approximately thirty or thirty-one years of age, modishly attired, came into the office, and regarded the attorney from wide, brown eyes. She wore a brown, tight-fitting hat, brown dress, brown shoes and stockings. Her clothes gave the appearance of well-tailored wealth.

"Sit down," said Corning, as Helen Vail gently closed the door.

The woman dropped into a chair.

"What can I do for you, Mrs. Brown?"

"Nothing," she said. "I think *I* can do something for *you*."

He raised his eyebrows.

She opened her purse and took out a roll of currency, which she held in her gloved fingers.

"I'm going to be frank with you," she said.

"Yes," said Corning, "go ahead."

"You're representing a man by the name of Sam Driver, who is accused of murder?"

"Yes."

"I don't want Mr. Driver to know that I came to you."

"Does he know you, Mrs. Brown?"

"Yes," she said. "You see, I used to know Sam Driver in the old days—that was a long time ago. Our roads separated. We went different ways. He went his way and I went mine. He went down and I went up."

"All right," he said. "Go on."

"The District Attorney hasn't got much of a case against Driver. It's largely circumstantial evidence. You've beaten the prosecution once or twice in some spectacular cases. They're afraid of you. If you'll have Driver think up some good story about a fight and a killing in self-defense, the District Attorney will let Driver plead guilty to manslaughter. But if the man stands trial, he's going to be railroaded."

"What makes you think that?"

"I don't know. I know there are powerful influences at work against him, that's all."

"Where do you get your information?" asked Corning, watching her closely.

"About what?"

"About the District Attorney's office, for instance, and the powerful influences."

She shook her head, and the brown eyes softened into a twinkle as she regarded him.

"You have your professional secrets," she said. "I have mine. I'm just telling you."

"Well, then," he said, "tell me some more."

She looked down at the tips of her gloved fingers, suddenly raised her eyes, and, with an expression of utter candor on her face, said: "If he doesn't plead guilty, they're going to give him the death penalty."

"Why?" he asked.

"For lots of reasons. There's politics mixed up in it, and you know what politics are in York City."

"Yes," he told her, "I know. But why should politics be mixed up in the killing of a hobo?"

"That's something else again," she replied. "You're frightfully inquisitive for a lawyer."

"Well, what am I supposed to do?"

“Take this money. Use it as an additional fee. I don’t suppose you got much from Sam Driver. Go ahead and work out a good story with him. It’s got to be a good story with a self-defense angle to it—something that the District Attorney’s office can give to the newspapers to keep the people from making a very strong protest when they accept a plea of manslaughter.”

“Who handles the publicity?” asked Corning, still watching her narrowly.

“You fix up the story,” she said. “Your client will spill it to a newspaper reporter or the District Attorney.”

“Suppose he makes a statement that constitutes an admission to the killing, and then you’re wrong about what the District Attorney is going to do?” Corning asked.

“I’m not wrong.”

“That’s what you say. I can’t risk my client’s life on the strength of your unsupported word.”

She bit her lip for a moment.

“I hadn’t thought of that,” she said, slowly.

She looked down at the tip of her brown shoe for a few moments, then straightened and pushed the money across the desk towards Ken Corning.

“I think I can figure out a way so it will be all right,” she said.

Ken Corning regarded the roll of bills.

“I can’t take money from you,” he said, “to do what *you* think is best for my client. I’ve got to do what *I* think is best.”

“I understand that. But I know you wouldn’t take the money from me, unless you were going to play fair.”

Ken Corning reached out and took the money.

“Just a moment,” he said, moving towards the outer office, “and I’ll get you a receipt.”

Ken Corning pushed his way through the door, closed it behind him, and nodded to his secretary.

“Helen,” he said, in low, swift tones, “put on your hat, go down on the elevator and stand in the lobby of the building. When this woman comes out, tail her. See where she goes. Let me know as soon as you find out.”

She slid back her chair from the desk, and was reaching for her hat as Corning turned back towards the private office. He had a blank receipt form in his hand.

“You’ll have to give me your full name, in order to get a receipt,” he said to the woman who called herself Mrs. Brown.

“I don’t want a receipt,” she said.

Ken Corning shrugged his shoulders.

The woman got to her feet, smoothed down her skirt, and smiled at him.

“I think we understand each other,” she said.

“I’m not certain that I understand you,” he told her.

“Oh, well,” she said brightly, “I think I understand you—perfectly.”

She was very trim and straight as she marched from the office, closing the door gently after her.

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Several minutes passed, and Corning heard the door of the outer office open and close. He remembered that Helen Vail was out, and got to his feet, walked across his private office, and opened the door.



A tall, well-groomed man, with cold eyes and a smiling mouth, said: “You’re Ken Corning?”

Corning nodded.

“I’m Jerry Bigelow,” said the man, and shook hands.

As he saw there was no look of recognition on Corning’s face, he added: “The man who runs the column entitled ‘Inside Stuff’ in *The Courier*.”

Corning ushered him into the inner office, and the man sat down in a huge leather chair, crossed his knees, and tapped a cigarette on a polished thumbnail.

“I’ve got orders to mention your name in my column,” he said.

“All right,” said Corning with a grin. “Are you going to pan me, or give me a boost?”

“That’s up to you,” said the columnist.

Corning raised his eyebrows.

“You know,” said Bigelow, “I like to give the inside facts a little bit before the public gets them. I like to give it a touch of spice, and give the impression of being very much in the know.”

Corning nodded once more, silently, warily, his eyes half slitted as they watched the man who had called on him.

“Now,” Bigelow said, still smiling with his lips, but his cold eyes fastened on the smoke which curled upward from his cigarette, “there’s been some talk going around town about you. They say that you have busted a lot of precedents, fought the political ring that’s supposed to be running York City, and are making a lot of money.”

Ken Corning said nothing.

“I just thought,” remarked Bigelow, “that if I should write up a little sketch for my column that you had whipped the big boys into line, and they were going to give you a break from now on, it might do you some good.”

“What are you getting at?” Corning asked.

“Well,” Bigelow said, “you’re representing a bum and a panhandler who’s got a murder rap on him, Sam Driver. The prosecution has got a dead open-and-shut case on him, but there’s been a rumor going around that you’ve got the D. A.’s office a little jumpy because you’ve managed to get some acquittals in cases they thought were dead open-and-shut.”

“Well?” asked Corning.

“Well,” said Bigelow, “there’s talk that the District Attorney doesn’t know exactly what to do in this Driver case. He’s got some circumstantial evidence, but it doesn’t show very much. If Driver should come out and change his story, and admit that he did the killing, but claim that it was done in self-defense, because he found out that Green had been mixed up in some pretty shady stuff that Driver didn’t approve of, there’s a pretty good chance the District Attorney would figure he didn’t have enough evidence to go on with a murder case, and he might let Driver get a plea of manslaughter.”

“What makes you think the D. A. would let Driver make a manslaughter plea?” asked Corning.

“Just a little inside stuff,” Bigelow told him. “Of course I keep my ear pretty close to the ground.”

“Okey,” said Corning. “Then suppose I *don’t* have Driver put up a self-defense story, and take the rap for manslaughter. Then what’s going to happen?”

The smile left Bigelow’s lips, his cold eyes fastened directly on Ken Corning.

"I've got orders," he said, "to mention your name. If you did something that was pretty clever, I could write it up and give out the dope that you had been taken in on the inside. If you passed up a chance to make a clever play, and did something dumb, I'd probably have to write that you weren't such big-time stuff after all; that you'd let a fast one slip through your fingers because you couldn't use the old bean."

Corning got slowly to his feet.

"All right," he said, "I guess you've said all you were supposed to say, haven't you?"

Bigelow pinched out the end of his cigarette, dropped it into an ashtray, regarded Corning thoughtfully, and then said slowly: "Yes, I guess I have."

He started to walk from the office, but turned at the door.

"Let me know, will you?" he said. "Because I'm anxious to get your name in my column."

"Don't worry," Corning told him, "I'll let you know."

The telephone was ringing when Corning closed the door of his inner office, behind Bigelow's departing figure. He scooped the receiver to his ear, and heard Helen Vail's voice.

"Listen, chief," she said. "I followed her to a private automobile—a coupé. I picked up a taxi and tailed her. She got away, but I got the license number of the automobile before she gave me the slip."

"Did she know she was being followed?" asked Ken Corning.

"I don't think so, chief. It was just a bum break in the traffic."

"All right," said Corning, "what about the license number?"

"I telephoned in to the police registration department," Helen Vail said, "and got a friend of mine on the line. I didn't tell him, of course, what I wanted to know for. He gave me the registration."

"All right," said Ken Corning, "what was it?"

"The car," said Helen Vail, "is registered in the name of Stella Bixel. She's the widow of the man who was killed by the burglar in the country cabin last fall. You may remember the case . . ."

"Okey," said Ken Corning, crisply, "that's good work, Helen. Come on back to the office."



Corning looked across his desk, into the speculative eyes of Edward Millwright, the expert on handwriting, fingerprints and questioned documents, whom he had asked to come in to see him.

"Can you," he asked, "get access to the police files, or to the Bureau of Criminal Identification records?"

The handwriting expert squinted his eyes thoughtfully.

"I *have* done so," he said, "on cases where I was working with the police, and once or twice on cases where I had uncovered some evidence which the police thought would be of value."

"Could you get somebody else to look up some information for you and pass it out?"

"I might."

"All right," said Corning, "here's another question. I understand that recently they're taking fingerprints of bodies that go through the morgue."

The expert nodded.

"I am representing," said Ken Corning, "a man named Sam Driver, who is accused of the murder of Harry Green, a gambler, panhandler, and general bum. I don't think anyone ever

claimed the body of Green. I think it was finally buried, after an autopsy, at county expense. The body went through the morgue, and I think fingerprints were taken.”

“All right,” said Millwright, “what do you want me to do?”

“I want you,” said Corning, slowly, “to find out what’s funny about the case.”

“How do you mean?”

“There’s something funny about the case—something that I don’t know anything about. I don’t think it’s anything connected with Sam Driver, so I think it’s something connected with Harry Green, the murdered man. I want you to get those fingerprints and check them.”

“I could get the fingerprints,” said the expert, “the records of the morgue are open. But I’m not so certain about checking them; not the way you want them checked, anyway.”

“Don’t you know some peace officer who could wire the classification in to some of the central identification bureaus?”

“I might work that, yes.”

“All right, do that; and furthermore, I wish you to check up the fingerprints with any police bulletins that may be floating around, on unsolved crimes.”

“In other words, you think there’s something fishy about this man, Green, is that it?”

“I don’t know,” Corning said slowly, “but I’m going to find out. There’s something funny about the case, and pretty powerful influences are bringing pressure to bear on me, to make me handle it in a certain way.”

“Why should powerful influences be mixed up in a case involving a hobo?” Millwright wanted to know.

“That’s what I want to find out,” said Corning.

Millwright nodded, got to his feet.

“With any kind of luck,” he said, “I can let you know inside of twenty-four hours; otherwise, it’ll just be a slow and tedious process, with the cards stacked against me.”

He was shaking hands with Millwright, when Vare, the private detective, came into the room.

Vare waited until the door had closed behind Millwright, then sat down and pulled a list from his pocket.

“Well,” he said, “I got a list of all of the Cadillacs that have been purchased in the last year. That is, of course, those that were purchased from the agency here in the city, or those that were registered as being owned in the city.”

“Does it give us anything?” asked Corning.

“Not a thing,” Vare said. “It was a crazy proposition thinking that it would. As I understand it, you figure Sam Driver may be hooked up with somebody who bought a Cadillac. Driver’s a hobo, a crook and a murderer. The list of the fellows who bought Cadillacs reads like a social directory. Everybody on this list has got some social position, except the three fellows who have stars opposite their names—they’re bootleggers.”

“Well,” said Corning, “a bootlegger may have some connection with a murderer.”

Vare grinned.

“Try to uncover it,” he said. “Those birds work pretty fast and play ’em pretty close to their chest. Try to nose into their business, and see what happens.”

Ken Corning’s forefinger slid down the list. Abruptly it came to a stop and he looked at the detective.

“I notice,” he said, “that Harrison Burman bought a Cadillac.”

Vare nodded.

“Burman,” he said, “is the owner of *The Courier*. That’s the paper that stands in with the big shots. It comes pretty near running the town.”

“Wait a minute—wait a minute!” said Corning. A strange light of excitement was growing in his eyes.

He grabbed a pad and wrote names on it, which Vare could not see—names set in the form of a circle with short lines leading from one to the next.

In order as he scribbled, they were:

Green—Driver—Mrs. Bixel—*The Courier*—Jerry Bigelow—George Bixel—Harrison Burman. The name Burman completed the circle next to that of Green.

Ken Corning crumpled the sheet, looked at the private detective and grinned.

“Do you remember,” he asked, “a murder case that took place last October, a chap by the name of George Bixel?”

“Sure,” Vare said. “I remember something about the facts of the case. There was quite a bit of comment about it at the time. It was one of those lonely mountain cabins, and a crook pulling a hold-up, trying to get Mrs. Bixel’s jewelry. Her husband came in and tried to hold the guy for the police. The guy shot him and escaped.”

“Harrison Burman was up there in the cabin at the time, wasn’t he?” Corning asked.

Vare looked at the attorney, and his forehead puckered into a frown.

“What the hell are you driving at?”

“Nothing,” said Corning. “I’m just asking you about the case. You should remember it fairly well. It seems to me there’s a reward out for the murderer, or there was at one time.”

Vare nodded slowly.

“All right,” said Corning, “what are the facts, as nearly as you can remember them?”

“Bixel and his wife went up to the cabin,” said Vare. “It wasn’t Bixel’s cabin. It was a cabin they had secured from a friend somewhere. In fact, come to think of it, I think it was a cabin Burman had hired or owned, or something. Anyway, Bixel and his wife went up there and asked Burman to come up and join them for a week-end.

“While they were there,” he went on, “a yegg got into the room one night when Mrs. Bixel was dressing, and tried to stick her up for her jewels. George Bixel happened to come into the room. He grappled with the yegg, and Mrs. Bixel screamed. Burman was outside somewhere. He came in on the run, just as the shot was fired that killed Bixel, and the crook turned the gun on Mrs. Bixel. Burman struck at the crook and jiggled his arm so that the shot went wild. Then Burman tried to grab the man, but the man jumped to the window, took a shot at Burman, which missed, and jumped out and ran away. The police found the gun where he’d left it by the window.”

“Fingerprints on the gun?” asked Corning.

“Yes, fingerprints on the gun, and the police were able to trace it by the numbers, and I think they managed to identify the man who had pulled the job. He was an ex-convict; one who had been paroled. I can look it up in just a few minutes and let you know.”

“All right,” Corning said. “Look it up and telephone me.”

“Anything else?” asked Vare.

Corning shook his head.

“Go get that information,” he said, “and let me know as soon as you can. That’s what I’m after right now.”

Vare nodded and left the office.

Ken Corning got up from behind his desk and started pacing the floor. He paced back and forth for almost twenty minutes, and then the telephone rang. Vare's voice came to him over the wire:

"Got all the dope on that case, Corning," he said. "The convict's name was Richard Post. He's got a long criminal record, most of it for petty stuff. He was paroled from the pen on a charge of forgery, and two weeks after his parole, pulled this hold-up in the mountain cabin."

"Have the police got out dodgers for him on this Bixel murder?" asked Corning.

"Oh, sure," said Vare. "I've got one of them here in the office."

"Gives fingerprints and everything?"

"Yes. Gives his criminal record and a photograph—front and side."

"Thanks," said Corning, "I think that's all," and hung up.

He put through a call to Millwright, the handwriting expert.

"Millwright," he said, "the police have got a dodger out on a convict named Richard Post. He's wanted for murder. The dodger has got his fingerprints, taken from the jail records; also front and side photographs. I wish you'd hunt up that dodger and check it with the fingerprints of this man, Harry Green, who was murdered."

"I can do that for you in just about five minutes," Vare said. "I've got the fingerprints from the morgue records, and we keep a file of the police dodgers."

"Okey," said Corning, "I'll hold the phone."

He held the receiver to his ear, lit a cigarette, and had smoked less than one-third of it, when Millwright's excited voice came to his ears.

"Got it!" he said. "And it's a good hunch."

"The same man?" asked Corning.

"The same man. There can't be any doubt about it; the fingerprints check. The man that was murdered is the man the police have been looking for, under the name of Richard Post. He's the one who murdered George Bixel in a hold-up in a mountain cabin."

"All right," said Corning, "that's all I wanted to know."

"What do you want me to do with the information?" asked Millwright. "Pass it on to the police? They'll be interested to know that the Bixel murder case is cleared up."

Corning chuckled.

"The reason that I got you to work on this thing," he said, "instead of a man who had any police affiliations, is because I wanted to control the information, once I'd secured it."

"What do you want me to do with it?" asked Millwright.

"Lock it up tight in a safe and then forget it's there," Ken Corning said slowly. "When I want to use it, I'll ask you about it. Until then, sew it up in a sack."

Millwright's voice was dubious.

"That," he said, "is plain dynamite. It's going to get out sooner or later."

"All right," Corning said, "let's make it later. Forget that you know a thing about it."

He hung up the receiver, and grinned triumphantly.

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orning threaded his way through the narrow alleys where the little houses were crowded close together. He found the one where he had called on Mrs. Ambrose, and after searching in vain for a bell button, resorted to his knuckles.

There was no answer.

He pounded again. After a minute or two, the door of an adjoining shack opened, and a hatchet-faced woman, with sharp black eyes, stared at him.



“Are you in charge of these houses?” he asked.

“Yes, what do you want?”

“Is this the house occupied by Mrs. Ella Ambrose?”

“She’s gone.”

“Where did she go?”

“I don’t know. She packed up all of a sudden, and got out inside of an hour. I thought maybe somebody was dead or something. She wouldn’t tell any of us anything. But she paid her rent when she left.”

“Is that unusual?” asked Corning.

“It was with her,” she said. “She was away behind with her rent. She paid it all up.”

Corning stood, thinking, for a moment, then said:

“I’d like to rent this house.”

“All right,” she said, “it’s for rent if you’ve got the money. It’s cash in advance, and no wild parties. This is a respectable place, tenanted by people that are trying to get along.”

Corning pulled out his wallet. “I’ll pay a month’s rent in advance.”

“You’ll pay two months’ rent in advance,” she said, “I’ve had enough trouble with these houses.”

Corning paid the small sum demanded as rent, pocketed the receipt, received the keys to the place, and returned to open the door.

The place was furnished as he had seen it last. All that had been taken were the personal belongings of Mrs. Ambrose. The rooms still held that peculiar musty smell of stale cooking. There was the same rickety furniture with its faded upholstery, trying bravely to put up a bold front.

Corning prowled about for fifteen or twenty minutes, then locked the door, pocketed the key, returned to his car, and went to his office.

Helen Vail stared at him curiously.

“You’re going to put on a one-act skit,” he told her.

“What about?”

“You remember the Mrs. Ella Ambrose that we got out on *habeas corpus*?”

“Sure I do.”

“All right. She’s moved away.”

“Suddenly?”

“Yes.”

“I take it Santa Claus came down the chimney and gave her a big wad of coin and she moved away without leaving an address.”

“That’s exactly what happened,” said Corning. “And it just occurred to me that the person who played Santa Claus for her doesn’t know her personally.”

He tossed the key to the little shack on the desk, and said: “Get some of the oldest clothes you can find. Get your hair all snarled up and let your face go to seed. Take a little grease paint and make lines around your eyes.”

She grinned.

“Then,” he said, “go down to the place on Hampshire Street, where there’s a bunch of shacks clustered together in the back part of the block. It’s way out in the sticks. I’ll give you the address. It’s on a rent receipt somewhere.” He fished around in his pocket until he found the rent receipt, and tossed it over to her.

“Then what do I do?” she asked.

“Then,” he said, “you pretend that you’re Mrs. Ella Ambrose, and put on an act. I’ve got to write it out. Bring your book, and I’ll dictate the things I want you to say. The first thing we’ve got to do, however, is to make a decoy note.”

“What do you mean?”

“Write,” he said, “in an angular, feminine handwriting a note addressed to Harrison Burman. It will read as follows:

“‘I got to thinking things over, and I don’t know where I stand. I know well enough who’s back of the whole business. I’m going to talk with you before I go away and stay away. After I started away, I got to thinking things over. I’ve got a boy, and it ain’t fair to him, so I figured I’d come back. You’ve got to come down to my place and talk with me personally. I’ll be expecting you this evening. When you do that, I’ll be satisfied, but I ain’t going to do no wrong with a boy to bring up. Yours respectfully. Mrs. Ella Ambrose.’”

“Think he’ll fall for that?” asked Helen Vail, looking at her shorthand notes with puckered eyes.

“I don’t know,” said Corning. “If he doesn’t fall for that one, I’ll think up another one. But I think this will do the work. Write it without any punctuation and don’t use many capitals. Make it look illiterate—like the sort of letters we get from cranks.”

Helen Vail set to work.

After the letter was finished and mailed, Corning spent some time giving careful instructions to his alert secretary and having her repeat them back to him until he was satisfied.



Helen Vail sat in a dilapidated overstuffed chair in Mrs. Ambrose’s former home. She wore stockings that were shapeless, with runs in each stocking. Her dress was ill-fitting and had evidently been dyed by unskilled hands. The color was a nondescript black which seemed to have been unequally spread over brown, with the brown peeping through in places. There were deep lines etched about her mouth and her eyes. In the dim light, she seemed twenty-five years older than her real age. She was patiently

embroidering.

Knuckles sounded on the door.

“Come in,” she called.

The door pushed open, and a big man with a curiously white face, stood on the threshold.

“Mrs. Ambrose?” he asked.

“Come in,” she said, in a thin toneless voice of great weariness.

He closed the door behind him.

“I’m Harrison Burman,” he said slowly. “I got your letter.”

Helen Vail sighed. It sounded like a sigh of weariness, but it was of intense relief. The man did not know the real Ella Ambrose and had taken her at her word.

“All right,” she said. “Come in and sit down. I want to talk with you.”

Burman’s tone was cautious. “You want money?” he asked.

“No. I just want to put my mind at rest.”

“All right,” he told her irritably, “go ahead and put it at rest. You probably know that you’re double-crossing me. You’re not living up to your bargain. You had promised to be in Colorado by this time, and to stay there.”

Helen Vail acted her part perfectly.

“I can’t help it,” she said, in that same lifeless tone which is the unconscious badge of those who have given up the struggle. “I’m a mother with a boy to bring up and I want to bring him up right.”

“Well,” rasped Burman, “what is it you want?”

“I know a lot more than most people think I know,” she said.

“Have you got to go into all that?”

“Yes,” she said, “into all of it.”

“Then go ahead and get it over with.”

His hands were pushed down deep into his coat pockets.

Helen Vail kept her eyes downcast and spoke in the same weary monotone.

“I knew Sam Driver,” she said, “and Driver talked to me, and I knew Harry Green, who wasn’t Harry Green, but was Richard Post, a man wanted for murder.”

“Sure,” said Burman irritably, “we know all that. That’s why you got the money to get out of the country. If it hadn’t been for that, you wouldn’t have had a cent.”

“I know,” she said, in that patient monotone of weariness. “And I know something else. Harry Green didn’t kill George Bixel. You paid him to take the rap. You got caught with Mrs. Bixel. George Bixel, her husband, caught you, and you shot him.

“I guess you had to do it to keep him from shootin’ you. Maybe you’re to blame. Maybe you ain’t. That’s what bothers me. I got that on my conscience and I can’t sleep. You didn’t think I knew about it. You thought I just knew about planting Harry’s body in Sam Driver’s car. But I knew everything about what had happened. Sam Driver didn’t know it, because Harry never told him. Harry told me all he knew and Sam told me all *he* knew. So I knew everything.

“There you was out with another man’s wife and mixed up in a shooting. She and her husband hadn’t taken that cottage at all and have you come up to join them. You and the woman had taken that cottage and the husband found you. You was a big publisher and you couldn’t afford to get mixed in a scandal, even if you could prove that you had to kill him to keep him from killing you. So you paid Harry to take the rap for murder and get out. You made him do it. But Harry spent the money, and then he wanted to get more, so he came back and got more.

“First, you tried to scare him by saying you’d let him get tried for the murder and then he scared you by telling you to go ahead and his lawyer would show up what happened. There was a lot of things, I guess, that had to be kinda shaded over. Things that you didn’t want the authorities looking into too much, about how long you’d been up there and how long Mrs. Bixel had been up there and how long her husband had been up there.

“So Harry Green got to bleeding you for money. You couldn’t stand it. You had an argument or a fight with him and shot him. But you knew where Sam Driver was, because Harry Green had told you where he was. Harry tried to make you think that Sam Driver could be a witness for him if you ever pinched him on the murder rap.

“Well, you had somebody that helped you and you put Harry’s body in Sam’s car and then you fixed the headlights so Sam would get pinched. You knew Sam was an ex-convict and nobody’d believe him. But you did a slick stunt. You put lots of money in Harry’s pockets;

then, if anybody did know the truth, it would look like Harry had been to your place and got the money and somebody had killed him afterwards. You figured either that Sam Driver would find the body and take out the money and try to beat it—as he did—or else, if he didn't find the body until after he'd got pinched, the money would make it look like Harry Green had been to your place and gone away, in case anybody suspected what the truth was."

Burman's face was the color of bread dough, pasty and lifeless. He stared at her with glassy eyes and a mouth that sagged.

"You're absolutely crazy," he said, "you can't prove a word of it!"

"Maybe not," she said, "but, with what I know, and what Sam Driver knows we could come pretty near proving it. And I could prove that you and somebody else took Harry Green's body and dumped it into Sam Driver's car, because I seen you. I seen your Cadillac car and I know it. And I seen you. You had on evening clothes when you did it."

Burman stood staring down at her with eyes that were cold and malevolent, lips that quivered.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"I want to know that you acted right," she said. "If you did, I can shield you. But if you didn't I can't."

Burman spoke swiftly, persuasively.

"Look here," he said, "some of your facts are right and some of them are wrong. Green didn't tell you the whole truth. Green had broken into the place and tried to hold up Mrs. Bixel. I came into the room just in time and smashed Green over the head. It knocked him out and I put him in a closet.

"Then Bixel showed up and was going to shoot me. I had the gun that I'd taken from Harry Green and I shot first, that's all. When Green regained consciousness, I put it up to him that he could either take five thousand dollars in cash and dust out, or that I'd turn him in for murder and frame it on him anyway. I was desperate and I had to do it. You can understand that. The killing was in self-defense, but I had another man's wife with me and I'd killed her husband. A jury would have been hostile."

Helen Vail's voice maintained its tone of dreary weariness.

"You ain't justified yourself yet. It ain't right to have Sam Driver framed for this other murder. You had no right to kill Harry Green. You're a rich man. You could have kept on paying him money and it wouldn't have hurt you. You've got to let Sam Driver go free."

"I can't do that," he said irritably. "I've fixed it up so he can get a break. He can take a plea for manslaughter."

"Maybe the District Attorney wouldn't agree to that," said Helen Vail, in her assumed voice.

"Sure he will," said Burman. "I can get anything I want. I am a political power here and I can fix things up. I've already got word to his lawyer. All you've got to do is to get out and stay out, and things will be all right."

"Would Sam go to jail on that manslaughter charge?" asked Helen Vail in a slow, apathetic voice.

Burman cursed.

Helen Vail shook her head wearily.

"No," she said, "I've had this on my conscience and I guess I've got to tell Sam Driver's lawyer; it ain't right not to."

Burman's hand dug deeper into the right-hand pocket of his coat.

“All right,” he said, “if that’s the way you feel about it, it’s your own fault. If you’d lived up to your bargain and done what you promised to do, you wouldn’t have got into this.”

“Into what?” she asked, looking up from her embroidering.

“Into this!” snapped Burman, and jerked an automatic from the pocket of his coat.

Helen Vail flung herself to one side with a stifled scream. The door from the kitchen exploded outward, and Ken Corning shot across the room in a low-flung football tackle. Burman wavered for an instant with indecision, and indecision was fatal. Ken Corning struck him with the force of a charging bull. Burman crashed to the floor.

The gun slipped from his fingers, skidded halfway across the room and slammed against the side of the wall. Corning felt the weight of the man rolling over on him, squirmed to free himself, heard a chair crash to the floor. His hands dug into the collar of the man’s coat. He was conscious of a tugging strain at his arms, then the coat fell in folds over his face. He kicked the garment from him, rolled to his hands and knees, and was in time to see Burman plunge through the door, into the night.

Ken Corning retrieved the gun and dropped it into the pocket of the coat Burman had left behind.

“Good work, kid,” he said.

Helen Vail stared at him with her eyes wide and round.

“What’ll he do now?” she asked.

“God knows,” he told her. “But the situation has got to come to a head now. He knows that we know. He was afraid the woman knew too much, so he used his influence to get her pinched on a liquor charge. She was peddling it, and he must have had detectives watching her. Once he had her in jail, it was easy to get her not to talk in return for squaring the liquor case.”

“How much did the woman really know?” asked Helen Vail.

“Perhaps not much,” Corning said slowly. “I put two and two together, and doped out what must have happened.”

Helen Vail was staring at the tip of her shoe, her face pensive.

“What’s the matter, kid?” asked Ken Corning. “Was it asking too much of you?”

“No,” she said, “I was thinking of that Mrs. Bixel and her laughing brown eyes. I hate to see her dragged through this.”

Ken Corning’s eyes narrowed.

“Let’s go up to Burman’s house,” he said slowly, “and see if we can reach some kind of an agreement.”



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he roadster slid to the curb in front of Harrison Burman’s residence.

“You sit here,” Corning told Helen Vail.

Her lips clamped in a firm line, her face still smeared with the make-up, her hair covered with the wig, the girl shook her head determinedly.

“Nothing doing,” she said. “If he gets a chance, he’ll kill us both, to silence us.”

“Not now,” Corning told her. “Down there at the shack, when he lost his head, he would have killed you. He’s driven almost crazy. But he’ll show some sense now.”

“Just the same,” she told him, “I’m going in there with you, or you’re not going to go.”

He stood for a moment, staring at her.

He started to say something, but a woman's scream knifed through the silence of the night. "It came from the house," said Helen Vail.

Her lips had scarcely finished with the last word, when a pistol shot sounded from the house.

Ken Corning started to run towards the front steps.

"Don't!" screamed Helen Vail. "Don't go in there until you know what's happened! Keep out of it, chief, please."

Ken Corning continued to run, and Helen Vail flung herself from the automobile, gathered her ragged skirts about her, and sprinted after him.

The front door of Harrison Burman's residence opened. A woman rushed out of the house, leaving the door open. She headed down the steps, apparently running in blind panic, and without seeing the two figures who were coming up the granite stairs which led to the front porch.

Ken Corning flung out his arms and caught her in midflight, swinging her around and holding her, despite frantically beating hands and kicking feet.

Abruptly the woman ceased to struggle and stared at Ken Corning with eyes that were wide and round, a face that was white as chalk.

"You!" she exclaimed.

"Mrs. Bixel," Corning said, "tell me quickly—what happened?"

She stared at him for a moment in wordless tension, as though she had great difficulty in readjusting herself to the outer world. Then she said: "Harrison Burman shot himself."

"Any servants?" asked Corning.

She shook her head, tried to say something and, instead, made only a throaty noise.

Corning turned to Helen Vail. She answered his unspoken question with a nod. Together, they piloted the woman down the stairs and into the automobile.

"You're sure he's dead?" asked Corning.

She nodded, wordlessly.

"Did he leave any confession, or anything that would incriminate you, in connection with shooting your husband in that cabin?"

She stared at Corning with alarm manifest in her eyes.

"You're among friends," Corning told her.

"No," she said, in a low voice. "There was no confession; no writing."

Ken Corning drove her to his office. Together, he and Helen Vail quieted her and gave her coffee mixed with brandy. Later they drove her to her home.

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It was twenty-four hours later that Ken Corning called *The Courier* and got Jerry Bigelow on the line.

"You're always anxious for the real inside dope, Bigelow," he said, "and I just wanted to mention that if you thought the public would be interested in the real inside facts surrounding the suicide of Harrison Burman, they would be able to hear them when the evidence is brought out in Sam Driver's trial."

"Now just what does that mean?" asked the columnist, in a cool voice.

"It means just what I said," Corning remarked. "It means that I know the identity of the man called Green, who was murdered. It means that I know how he met his death. It means that I know what happened up in that cabin in the mountains when Bixel was killed."

"And you mean that will come out at the trial?" asked Bigelow.

“It will come out at the trial.”

“If there isn’t any trial will it come out?”

“If there is no trial,” said Ken Corning, speaking slowly and distinctly, “the facts will never be known—that is, the real facts.”

And he slid the receiver back on the hook.

Next morning, when he read his paper, he noticed with satisfaction that Jerry Bigelow, in his column given to gossip of the town, and the inside facts back of many of the political moves, made a prediction that the case against Sam Driver, accused of the murder of Harry Green, would be dismissed; that the District Attorney had relied upon circumstantial evidence which had not worked out exactly as anticipated. The columnist predicted as “hot inside stuff” that a dismissal of the case was contemplated.

Ken Corning carried the newspaper to his office, slid it over to Helen Vail.

“I saw it already, chief,” she said. “What does it mean?”

Ken Corning grinned at her.

“It means,” he said, “that the widow of Harrison Burman is in charge of the policies of the paper, and, therefore, has a great deal to say about the political activities of York City. It also means that we haven’t, as yet, discovered who the gentleman was that helped Harrison Burman put the body of Harry Green in the automobile belonging to Sam Driver.”

She looked at him with sudden consternation.

“You mean to say it was Jerry Bigelow. . . .”

Ken Corning shrugged his shoulders and walked on to his inside office. From the door he called back to her: “Never speculate about a closed case. There is always a live one coming along that will keep us busy.”

And then the door softly closed and the latch clicked.



[The end of *Blackmail With Lead* by Erle Stanley Gardner]