



"In the middle of my stunt, my feet slipped and we went down. To botch the trick thoroughly, he fell with the envelope pinned under him."

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
BUD BRIGGS.

I had the address, but I had tipped my mitt. There was no way for this man to miss knowing that I had been trying to get that address.

I dusted myself off while he put his envelope through a slot. He didn't come back past me, but went on down toward the Mission Street exit. I couldn't let him get away with what he knew. I didn't want Ashcraft tipped off before I got to him. I set out after the little man again.

Just as I reached his side he turned his head to see if he was being followed.

"Hello, Micky!" I hailed him. "How's everything in Chi?"

"You got me wrong. I don't know nothin' about Chi."

His eyes were pale blue, with needle-point pupils—the eyes of a heroin or morphine user.

"Quit stalling." I walked along at his side. "You fell off the rattler this morning."

He stopped on the sidewalk and faced me.

"Me? Who do you think I am?"

"You're Micky Parker. The Dutchman gave us the rap that you were headed for San Francisco."

"You're cuckoo," he sneered. "I don't know what the hell you're talkin' about!"

That was nothing—neither did I. I raised my right hand in my overcoat pocket.

"Now I'll tell one," I growled at him. "And keep your hands away from your clothes or I'll blow the brains out of you."

He flinched away from my bulging pocket.

"Hey, listen, brother!" he begged. "You got me wrong—on the level. My name ain't Micky Parker, an' I ain't been in Chi in six years. I been here in Frisco for a solid year, an' that's the truth."

"You got to show me."

"I can do it," he exclaimed, all eagerness. "You come down the drag with me, an' I'll show you. My name's Ryan, an' I been livin' aroun' the corner here on Sixth Street for six or eight months."

This particular Ryan led me around to a house on Sixth Street, where the landlady assured me that her tenant had to her positive knowledge been in San Francisco for months. If I had been really suspicious, I couldn't have taken the woman's word for it, but as it was I pretended to be satisfied.

That seemed to be all right then. Mr. Ryan had been led astray, had been convinced that I had mistaken him for another crook, and that I was not interested in the Ashcraft letter. I would be safe—reasonably safe—in letting the situation go as it stood. But loose ends worry me. This bird was a hop-head, and he had given me a phoney name, so . . .

"What do you do for a living?" I asked him.

"I ain't been doin' nothin' for a coupla months," he pattered, "but I expect to open a lunch room with a fella nex' week."

"Let's go up to your room," I suggested. "I want to talk to you."

He had two rooms and a kitchen on the third floor. They were dirty, foul-smelling rooms.

"Where's Ashcraft?" I threw at him.

He jerked, and then looked at the floor.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he mumbled.

"You'd better figure it out," I advised him, "or there's a nice cool cell down in the booby-hatch that will be wrapped around you."

"You ain't got nothin' on me."

"What of that? How'd you like to do a thirty or a sixty on a vag charge?"

"Vag, hell!" he snarled, looking up at me. "I've got five hundred smacks in my kick."

I grinned down at him.

"You know better than that, Ryan. You've got no job. You can't show where your money comes from."

I had this bird figured as a dope peddler. If he was, the chances were that he would be willing to sell Ashcraft out to save himself.

"If I were you," I went on, "I'd be a nice, obliging fellow and do my talking now. You're—"

He twisted sideways in his chair and one of his hands went behind him.

I kicked him out of his chair.

The foot that I aimed at his jaw took him on the chest and carried him over backward. I pulled the chair off him and took his gun. Then I went back to my seat on the corner of the table.

He got up snivelling.

"I'll tell you. I didn't know there was nothin' wrong. This Ashcraft tol' me he was jus' stringin' his wife along. He give me ten bucks a throw to get his letter ever' month an' send it to him in Tiajuana. I knowed him here, an' when he went south six months ago—he's got a girl down there—I promised I'd do it for him. I

knowned it was money, but I didn't know there was nothin' wrong."

"What sort of a hombre is this Ashcraft? What's his graft?"

"I don't know. He's an Englishman, an' mostly goes by the name of Ed Bohannon. He hits the hop. I don't use it myself—that was a good one—but you know how it is in a burg like this, a man runs into all kinds of people. I don't know nothin' about what he's up to."

That was all I could get out of him. However, I had learned that Bohannon was Ashcraft, and not another go-between, and that was something.

Ryan squawked his head off when he found that I was going to vag him anyway.

"You said you'd spring me if I talked," he wailed.

"I did not. But if I had—when a gent flashes a rod on me I figure it cancels any agreement we might have had. Come on."

I couldn't afford to let him run around loose until I got in touch with Ashcraft. He would have been sending a telegram before I was three blocks away, and my quarry would be on his merry way to points north, east, south and west.

It was a good hunch I played in nabbing Ryan. When he was fingerprinted at the Hall of Justice, he turned out to be one Fred Rooney, alias "Jamocha," a pedler and smuggler who had crashed out of the Federal prison at Leavenworth.

"Will you sew him up for a couple of days?" I asked the captain of the city gaol.

"Sure," the captain promised. "The Federal people won't take him off our hands for two or three days. I'll keep him air-tight till then."

From the gaol I went up to Vance Richmond's office and turned my news over to him.

"Ashcraft is getting his mail in Tiajuana. He's living down there under the name of Ed Bohannon, and maybe has a woman there. I've just thrown one of his friends in the cooler."

"Was that necessary?" Richmond asked. "We're really trying to help Ashcraft, you know."

"I could have spared this bird," I admitted. "But what for? If Ashcraft can be brought back to his wife, he's better off with some of his shady friends out of the way. If he can't, what's the difference?"

(TURN OVER PAGE.)

"Ashcraft had disappeared, and Mrs. Ashcraft had been mailing him money for a year. She wants to end this devilish uncertainty."

