

Oversight

Bruce Carno was his name, and he was lord of the dope and liquor rings in three states. Men had learned to respect the cunning brain behind those pig-like eyes, almost hidden in their rolls of fat. The gleaming, blue-black hair and the smooth-shaven jowls struck terror to the hearts of petty competitors. Those who did not respect and obey were removed, their death marked with the staccato rat-tat-tat of machine guns, their funeral graced by an enormous wreath of pink carnations, "From a Friend,"—which meant Bruce Carno.

He had battered his way to the top of the writhing heap of racketeers, to a position where a man is very likely to become vain. And Carno was vain; his every gesture shouted conceit. He had received practically no education, and his speech was composed of a few common English expressions, augmented by the dregs of a half-dozen or so foreign tongues. The one man who presumed to call him friend was "Nap" Robin, a pasty-faced little person with a hesitating walk. "Nap," in his capacity as secretary and schemer to the "King," was the only one admitted to Carno's confidence.

The room was dense with cigarette smoke. A cone of dazzling white light beat down upon the green table with its cards and chips. Three pairs of slender white hands flickered here and there over the felt, stacking chips, cutting cards and flipping them expertly into place. The only sounds were the click and swish of the game, and the subdued voices of the three players. The slender hands belonged to Gorban, Hyme and Varillo, lieutenants to the great Bruce Carno.

A phone shrilled hysterically in a corner. Varillo hastily tossed down his cards and went to answer it. The others listened intently:—a low murmuring, a sharp "yes?" from Varillo, more murmuring. Then the connection was broken, but immediately the man at the phone was calling a number. More murmuring, ending with a snappy "right!" from Varillo.

A second call was made, with the same result. Then the lieutenant returned to the table and dropped into his chair. A tiny trickle of perspiration ran down his nose.

"Get this! I've just got certain information that Robin is going to squeal. We bump him, see ?—tonight."

Gorban broke in, "But how can we ? He'll be in that cellar office of his, and you know three dicks are always stationed near there. What's more, Carno will probably be there on business himself."

Varillo leaned forward, driving home his points with upraised finger. "We'll fix that. We know for certain that Robin will be in his office late tonight, either alone or with Carno. We'll phone Carno—"

"Can't do that. He never answers the phone himself, and if Robin does, he'll smell a rat sure."

"Then we'll write a note and send it by special messenger, direct to Carno. We'll tell him about Robin, and our plan. He can get the dicks to lay off for tonight. They'll be only too glad to see another gangster snuffed out. Right ?"

"Right !"

"Now we'll do it like this—." Three sleek heads came together under the light. The plans were perfected, the note was composed and despatched. In half an hour the messenger was back; Carno had received the note.

"See now ?" said Varillo exultantly. "Everything's all set. Carno will see to the dicks, and keep away from Robin's himself. And Robin—Robin'll get his."

The gold mantel clock in the private office of Carno's secretary chimed one—one o'clock in the morning. Crouched in the darkness of the hall outside the door were three figures, Gorban, Hyme and Varillo.

"Robin's in there, I can hear him moving," whispered Varillo, after applying his ear to the keyhole. "I heard him walking up and down. Ready, Hyme ?"

"Yah," responded Hyme laconically, moving softly backwards in preparation for hurling his bulk at the door.

"Ready, Gorban ?"

"Right, Chief." Gorban stroked the smooth stock of his portable machine gun. Varillo listened at the keyhole again. All was silent. He turned to his companions.

"All right. When I drop my hand. Wait for it now."

The hand snapped down. Hyme's huge body, travelling at lightning speed, sent the door shuddering back on its hinges. Hyme threw himself on the floor in a corner.

Gorban advanced to the open door, machine gun ready for action. Varillo, peeping around the jamb of the door, caught a glimpse of the occupants of the room; Hyme lay huddled in a corner; "Nap" Robin stood by the fireplace, while close behind him was a third man, a stout figure with gleaming blue-black hair

Then the room was filled with a shattering roar. Tiny pellets of screaming lead tore their way through the air. The two men standing by the fireplace seemed to shrink in their clothes, and then crumpled to the floor. The machine gun stopped. Varillo groped his way through the acrid powder-smoke to the motionless body of Robin. One look sufficed.

"Dead."

He turned to the other figure and rolled it over on its back. Suddenly he sprang erect, face working convulsively.

"Good God, Carno !"

Gorban and Hyme advanced to the body of their dead chief, and the lieutenants, stupified, stood gazing at the body of the murdered man. A metallic voice from the door jerked the three men around.

"Up with 'em. Quick, now !"

Three detectives with vicious-looking revolvers invaded the room. Their work was not difficult, a few minutes sufficed to make the puzzled gangsters prisoners.

"You'll burn for this, me lads," growled the sergeant triumphantly. "Clear case of murder, this."

"But I don't understand," stuttered Varillo frenziedly. "We sent him a note, telling him all about our plan to kill Robin. You were supposed to be kept away."

"Is this the note ?" queried a detective, taking a crumpled piece of paper from Carno's hand.

"Yes."

"And you sent it to Carno, telling him to keep away from Robin ?"

"Yes."

The sergeant's great laugh rang out. "You fools ! You triple fools ! That was the surest way to get him to come here. Didn't you know that Robin took care of all Carno's correspondence ? Why, Carno couldn't read !"

—R. S. W., '35