

knows I came out to Connecticut tonight. If you knock me in the head, it'll only be one more step toward that chair you never get up out of, on your own."

"He's so right, Arny," she said earnestly.

"He's a slick talker, Gretchen." Arny smiled, but there was nothing agreeable about it. "We can't fall for that guff. Once he got in court he'd change his tune. He wants to get even for his buddy."

Don kept anger out of his voice. "I can't do anything for Jim Preston now. But I'll make a bargain with you. Let My Grolheim go. You say you're not afraid he might testify against you. Give him the keys to his station wagon, turn him loose."

Arny asked: "What's your side of the bargain?"

"I'll show you how you can get out of a jam with no more than a slap on the wrist. If you don't think it will work, you can do what you want with me . . . so you're not taking any chance."

Gretchen Chadbourne cried: "Arny! Take him up on it! What can we lose?"

Arny said: "Let's have this allagazam—we're-in-the-clear dope first."

"No," Don said. "Let My go, first. And let me talk to him. To make sure he's all right."

"He's not." Arny hefted the gun by the barrel as if weighing its usefulness as a club. "I told you. He's gaga. I'll show you. Bring the whack in here, Gretchen."

She hurried out.

Arny said: "You can give out now, Cadee. She don't have to know."

"For my deal she does. She saved my life once. I told her I'd try to return the compliment. I mean to, if I can. If you bop me with that gun, you'll both be dead ducks. I don't happen to think she's guilty of much beyond agreeing to do a favor for a friend."

She returned, pushing Grolheim before her.

The fur buyer's eyes were bright but his skin was sallow, his facial muscles were relaxed as if he'd just wakened. He