

# Big House Gambit

*By Neil Moran*

*On the way to the calaboose, those two men played a tricky game with each other and a duel with an unseen killer besides.*



THE train rumbled along. The two men sitting in a back seat looked at each other. They were manacled, but the captor was doing his best to keep the handcuffs down. Some passengers, however, had seen them and were craning their necks.

"It's a tough day to go to the Big House," the man sitting next to the window said.

"You're telling me."

The conductor came along and collected tickets from passengers who had got on at the last station. He passed the manacled men, dropped his eyes, raised them, and went on, shaking his head.

Suddenly, the man sitting next to the window complained of a pain in his head. "I don't feel good," he said. "I'm sick."

"Yeah?" The detective turned to him. The man next to the window was swaying. His eyes looked glassy. He slumped in the seat, groaning.

The detective turned, called the conductor, "See if there's a doctor on the train, will you?"

The conductor hurried along, calling out loudly. The passengers looked up, but there was evidently no doctor in that car. The conductor went into the next one.

"Is there a doctor here?" he shouted.

Heads turned. An elderly gray-haired man got up. "I'm a doctor," he said, picking up the bag that was at his feet.

"There's a man sick in the next car.

You'd better come in and see him."

The elderly gray-haired man followed the conductor, while passengers were talking to one another excitedly and pointing to the rear.

The gray-haired man stopped, looked at the detective. "This the man?" he asked, pointing to the man whose eyes were closed now.

"That's him."

"I see you have him handcuffed. You'd better remove them."

"I don't like to. This might be—"

"There's nothing to worry about here. This man may be dying."

The detective removed the handcuffs, and the gray-haired doctor opened his bag. He took out a stethoscope. "Just push him over on the seat," he said. "Let him lie there."

THE detective got up, pushed the man over. The doctor applied the instrument, and listened. The man opened his eyes.

"Where am I?" he said.

"You'll be all right," said the doctor. His fingers pushed up the eyelid of the man, and he looked at the eyeball.

"This man is very ill," he said, turning to the detective. "We've got to get him to a hospital."

"But how can we, Doctor? We're on a—"

"I know. But something should be done." The doctor turned to the conductor. "What's the next stop?"

"Newtown," said the conductor. "In

about two minutes. There's the whistle now."

"There's a hospital in Newtown. The Newtown—"

"But look," said the detective. "I was to take this guy—"

"I know, my man, but here's a case where a doctor steps in. I'll be responsible. You come along. I'll go along myself. This man might die any minute."

"What's the matter with him?"

"Heart trouble. But there might be something else. He should have a complete diagnosis."

The conductor asked, "Can I be of any assistance?"

"I don't think we'll need you," said the doctor. "The detective and I can handle this man. One on each side of him. An arm around each of our shoulders. If we can get him to a taxi."

The train was slowing down, and the conductor ran forward. He stood on the steps. He looked around and came back excitedly.

"There are taxis there," he said. "How is the man?"

"He seems to be a little better," said the doctor. Turning to the sick one, he asked, "How do you feel?"

"Not so good, Doc. I got a pain in my chest."

"We'll take care of it."

The train stopped. The detective and the gray-haired doctor helped the other man out. Passengers stared at them.

A taxicab driver stepped forward. "Okay," he said. "Where to, mister?" He looked at the gray-haired man.

"The Newtown Hospital."

"Sure, sure. See the guy is sick. If you'll just step this way—"

"Look," said the detective. "You go ahead. I'll call New York to report this. Then I'll phone the hospital, after I get orders."

"Very well," said the gray-haired doctor.

The man was assisted into the cab, the gray-haired man got in beside him. The detective, taking one last look at them, hurried toward the station.

AS the taxi rolled along, three men looked at one another. They began to laugh. "Some dumb dick," said the one who had been manacled to the detective.

"So you're Corky Corkins!" the taxicab driver said.

"I'm Corky."

"Well, boy, I'm glad to know you. This is Luke Evers, in case you didn't know."

"I didn't know. How are you, Luke? How are you, Doc?" The heavily built man was grinning.

The man who had played the part of the doctor leaned over and shook his hand. "It went easier than I thought it would," he said. "When we got word from Tony that you were coming up in that train, we planned this."

"Yeah, I knew Tony said he'd spring me," said Corky. "Where are we going?"

"Over to the hideout. Tony will be there tonight."

The taxi rolled along and at last came to a stop. The driver got out, rubbing his hands. "Here we are, gents," he said. "The meter reads one-eighty. But put it on the bill." He grinned, and offered Corky his hand. "I'm Deringo," he said. "Chauffeur for Tony."

"And a very good driver," said Corky. "Well, I don't know how to thank you guys. This is the place where I'm to stay under cover?"

"This is the place," said Deringo.

They went into the shack, and Deringo said, "It ain't much of a dump. But we got enough to eat here and smokes and newspapers. Even a radio."

"It's okay," said Corky. "I can't seem to realize it yet. Free, when I was going up to take the murder rap."

"Yeah, Tony knew that you wouldn't squeal that he was the one that did it. He said he'd go to any extreme. He said he'd get word to you how he'd spring you."

"And he certainly did," said the heavily built man. "Tony's the swellest guy that ever lived. I couldn't talk. I simply couldn't."

"But we've got to be careful," said Luke Evers. "When they find out—"

"We'll be careful," said Deringo. "Well, gents, what do you say I get some supper?"

Night came on, and Deringo lit the lamps.

Corky stood up, and looked out of the window. "That taxi," he said. "Don't you think you ought to run it in more from the road?"

"Say, I forgot about it," said Deringo. "Am I dumb? Here we were talkin' about a dumb dick, and I'm just as dumb. I'll go out and run it behind those trees."

He went out. The heavily built man looked up.

"I can't seem to realize it yet," he said. "It was the slickest trick—"

"What I was afraid of," said Evers, "was that the dumb dick would have wanted to come along with us."

"We could have handled it then."

"Sure, we could have slugged him in the taxi."

Deringo came back. "It's okay," he said. "Nothing to worry about. What do you say if we have a little game of pinochle?"

"No, I just want to sit and look around. I can't seem to realize it yet. Going up to take a murder rap. . . ."

"Tony ought to give you plenty," Deringo said, "when he sees you. Getting you out is not enough. You'll have to lay

low, Corky."

"You're telling me! But if there was ever a case, where a guy was guilty or seemed to be guilty. That night, when I picked up the gun—"

"Sure. Tony had just dropped it when he made his getaway. You came in and picked up the gun. Farrow was dead on the floor. The dame walks in and sees you. And Tony had worn gloves, you hadn't; the murdered guy was a bitter enemy of yours, you'd even been heard to say that you'd kill him, and so it was a setup. But you didn't talk, and that's what made a hit with Tony. You knew that Tony did it."

"Yes," Corky said, "I knew. So that's how it happened. I was wondering."

"What do you mean you were wondering?"

The heavily built man looked up. "About some things in this that puzzled me. That puzzled others. But there, of course, was the setup, as you said."

"You saw Tony going down the stairs, didn't you? He said he saw you."

"Yes, I saw him. And all I could say was that I was innocent. But what I meant was—"

**T**HE phone rang. Deringo lifted the receiver. "Oh, hello, Tony," he said. "Yes, he's here. Why didn't you call sooner? The cops are after you? For what? You don't know? They just dropped in and told Pete they wanted to see you. You took it on the lam? Well, where are you? In Jenny's joint? You can't get out? Sure, he's here. You want to talk to him?"

The heavily built man stepped toward the phone. He took the receiver. "Hello, Tony," he said. "That was some slick trick—"

"Corky?"

"Sure."

"You don't sound like Corky. Hey, what is this?"

“That certainly was,” the heavily built man said. “And I’ve got to hand it to you, Tony. The way you pulled this. And was he a dumb dick!”

“Hey, what is this!” said Tony. “Hey, hey, listen! Put Deringo on the phone! There’s something screwy here.”

“Sure, I’ll tell them,” said the heavily built man. “Evers is a smart guy.” Evers was grinning. “The way he played his part, Tony. You’d think he was a doctor.”

“Hey!” said Tony. “Who are you? What is this! I don’t get this.”

“Think nothing of it at all, Tony. I knew that you knew I didn’t kill the guy. And that you did. But I couldn’t talk. You know, a pal—”

“Hey—” said Tony.

“And Deringo said that he knew that you killed Farrows. I guess everybody knows it by now. Or will. Well, so long, Tony. Don’t let these dumb dicks—”

“Hey—” said Tony.

But Detective Macklin had hung up. He turned and looked at the two men who were watching him.

“Tony certainly seemed glad to hear from you,” said Deringo.

“Oh, he was overjoyed. And now, you two wise guys, take out your artillery and put it on that table.” Macklin drew a gun.

“You heard me. The show is over. A stool pigeon told us what Tony was

planning. We sent Corky up on another train. I’ve learned now that he didn’t commit this murder, but that Tony did. Well, there are plenty of other things standing against Corky.”

Deringo and Evers stared. “A dick!” gasped Deringo.

“Yeah, a dumb dick,” said Detective Macklin. “Raise your hands, both of you. And there’s another dumb dick, watching the house. The one that followed us in another taxi. The one I was with on the train. He’s waiting for the signal to come in.”

The phone rang. Macklin told Deringo to answer it. “Hello,” he said, his knees knocking together in sudden fright.

“Hey, listen,” said Tony. “What is this? What’s happening up there?”

“We’re pinched.”

“Pinched!”

“Yeah, a—”

“Hang up,” said Macklin.

Deringo hung up. “Listen,” he said. “I didn’t have anything to do with this. Only—”

“Shut up. Walk to that door and open it.”

Deringo did. Outside, the other detective was waiting.

“How are you?” he said. “Is it all right for a dumb dick to come in?”