

**PRIVATE**

October 15¢

# DETECTIVE

**STORIES**

*Intimate Revelations of Private Investigators*



**NOMINATED**  
*for* **MURDER**

*by*  
**ROGER TORREY**

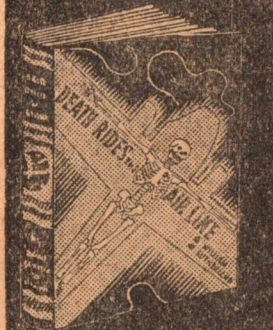


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*Inside front cover*



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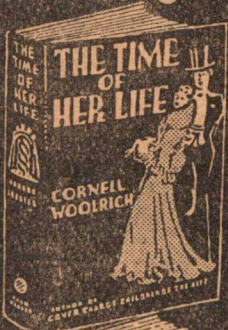
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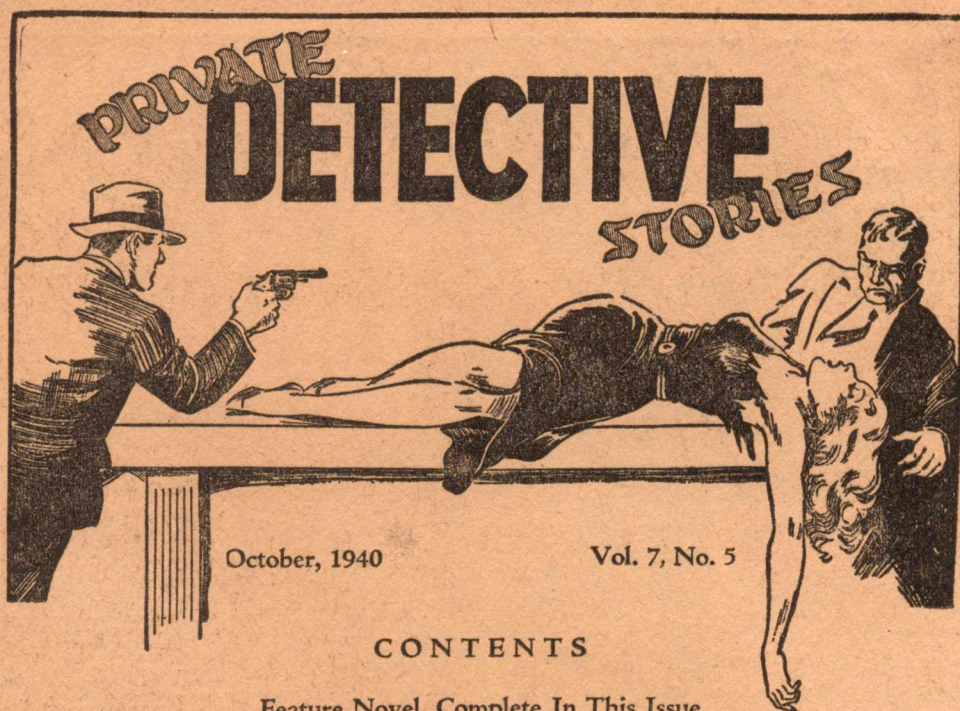
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October, 1940

Vol. 7, No. 5

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*The names and descriptions of all characters appearing in this magazine are entirely fictitious. If there is any resemblance, either in name or description, to any living person, it is purely a coincidence.*

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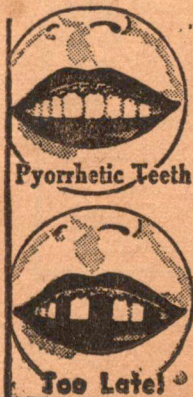
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gain the love of the opposite sex</li> <li>Unite people for marriage</li> <li>Obtain property</li> <li>Make people do your bidding</li> <li>Make any person love you, no matter who</li> <li>Get any job you want</li> <li>Make anyone lucky in any game</li> <li>Cast a spell on anyone, no matter where they are</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Get people out of low suits, courts.</li> <li>Banish all misery</li> <li>Bring happiness to broken lives</li> <li>Know what others are doing</li> <li>Gain the mastery of all things</li> <li>Bring happiness to broken homes</li> <li>Remove the source of unhappiness</li> <li>Choose your words according to client, holy methods</li> <li>Grant your desires in the silent tongue</li> </ul> |
|--|---|

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# **NOMINATED**

**for  
Murder**



**By  
ROGER  
TORREY**



*He played big brother to a fake Spanish dancer...but she wasn't fake when it came to oomph! And the threats of murder weren't fake . . . .*



WAS on all fours picking up some paper clips I'd spilled when I saw her feet through the knee-hole of the desk. I stopped swearing and stood—and I'll give her credit for not laughing. But her face was red, trying to keep from it. She must have thought I'd been

playing hide-and-seek with somebody because she looked around the office to see who else was lurking behind furniture, before she held out her hand and said, a little doubtfully:

I swung the bottle and he said, "All right, you've got me."



"Is it you are Mr. Malone? I am Miss Costello."

She had an "accent thick enough to braid and she had show girl written all over her, but I wanted to make sure.



"The Miss Costello?" I asked. "From the Frolics?"

"That is right. Carmen Costello. Only I am *not* Carmen Costello—I am Mrs. Harbin."

It wasn't making sense very fast but I told her to sit down. She waved toward the outside office and said: "I looked; there was nobody. It was alone. So I just walk in like I am announce."

Joe Smith was at the bank, checking on the overdraft, but I couldn't see any reason for bringing that up. It was almost three, but I said something about it being lunch hour and all the help being out for it. Then Miss Costello fished around in a purse that was as gaudy looking as she was herself and finally brought out two letters. She handed them over and said:

"It is I am being scared like hell now. You see? The letters! They tell you. All the time it is I am being scared now."

The letters looked like something held over from the Black Hand days. Each of them had a dagger at the top, drawn in red ink. Black ink in block letters was used, in the first, to say *ten more days you will live*. The second read *eight days left you to live*. Each was signed with another red ink dagger, and if there was anything about either that would scare a ten year old child I couldn't see it. But there are plenty in show business so dumb a ten year old could give them cards, spades, five free draws from the deck, and still win with nothing but little Casino, so I said:

"Ah-h-h-h, that's bad! Whom do you suspect?"

"What is it you mean, suspect?"

"Who's got it in for you? Who's mad at you?"

"Everybody is mad," she said, and started marking off on her fingers. "There is *my* manager. There is the theatre manager. There is the stage manager. There is the dance director—he say my feet they do not track. There is my maid. There is the hotel manager—he say too much noise all the time too much noise. There is Harbin—he say flirt, flirt, flirt, all the time."

"Now wait a minute. What's the maid mad at you for?"

MISS COSTELLO shrugged her shoulders and looked sad. "All the time she say she want a raise. And Harbin, too. All the time money. First one hundred dollars. Two hundred dollars. Five hundred dollars. One thousand dollars. All the time money, money, money."

"What's he do with all of it?"

She looked as though her heart was breaking and came out with the stinger. She said: "I don't know—I never give it to him."

I'd been just about certain but that made it no mistake. The accent had sounded like something off the stage. She'd been rolling her eyes like they were on casters. She'd been waving her hands far too much. And slamming that whiskery old gag back at me capped it. I handed her back her letters and nodded toward the door.

"I don't know what the bet was, sister," I told her, "but you won it in a walk. Now look, I'm a busy man, even if I don't look it. Go bother somebody else, before I start telling you just what a phony you are. Your act stinks, in other words."



Miss Costello started laughing, but it was an American laugh, rather than Spanish. There's a lot of difference, even if it's hard to describe. And then she brought out a very tiny handkerchief and wiped her eyes and said:

"Okey! Okey, Malone! The ten percent that thinks he owns me body and soul insists on me putting it on. And Lord, Honey, it'd surprise you how much fun it is sometimes."

"That would be your manager?"

"Yeah, sure. George Kampoulis. And believe it or not, he *is* mad at me. He's sore as a goat. And so are the rest of them, just like I told you. But I wrote the notes myself—I was going to tell you I had enemies from the old country who'd been on my track for years."

"You really want to hire a cop?"

"I really do."

I sat back and told her to tell me about it. I didn't know whether I was going to believe the yarn after I'd heard it, and I didn't know if it was anything I'd want anything to do with *if* I believed it, but I did know it was going to be fun listening to.

She was that kind of girl—the sort that could make a Mother Goose rhyme sound like drama if she wanted it that way. She was small and very dark and she looked as Spanish as one of those high-crowned hats with the silver bells hanging from the brim. She was so pretty it was almost painful. She made you wonder why one girl should have so much and all the others so little. Her voice was cute, even without the faked accent, and it turned out the eye rolling and the hand waving were either natural or

such a habit she couldn't stop them. And her story was excellent.

IN THE first place her name had been Nora Costello; she was one of the Irish so black they can pass for Spanish any time. She'd just started in show business when she'd married a guy named John Harbin, and that had been five years ago. She was vague about just where this had happened and I couldn't see that it made any difference and so didn't press her. But she said she was still nuts about him and she wasn't the least bit vague about *that*. Only it seemed she wasn't exactly living with him—she was still married to him but she was keeping him out of sight and just seeing him now and then.

I said: "That seems funny. If you're so crazy about him, why aren't you working at it?"

She made a face and said: "That's George Kampoulis' fault. You see Jack and I were separated for a while and I started going good. George had me built up as a South American wonder from a convent who hadn't ever even looked cross-eyed at a man. I just knew 'em from pictures, according to the press stuff. So when Jack and I made up, George made him stay out of sight. And George has got me on that kind of a contract and he's the kind of louse that would make it stick. It *is* good sense—the newspaper boys would kid the pa—raise hell with me if they knew how George had put one over on them the way he *did*."

It seemed she'd climbed fast under this George Kampoulis, and that while she didn't like him or any part of him she still had brains enough to realize he could make or break her.



He'd finally landed her in the top spot in the Frolics, which was the bawdiest if not the best show in town.

And he'd managed it so she was getting top money for the spot.

I said: "I still don't see just what you want a private cop for? Is it that you want this Jack you're married to tagged? D'ya think he's cheating on you?"

"Not Jack!" she said, looking as though I'd been slandering one of the Lord's angels. "Jack isn't that kind. He isn't that smart. It's the funny things that have been happening. Or rather, almost happening."

I heard the outside door slam and Joe Smith head over to his desk, so I said: "Wait a minute!" I went out, making sure the door was closed after me, and said to Joe:

"How do we stand there?"

**J**OE finished putting the bank book away and said: "Hagh! Why didn't you put down the fifty dollar check you drew to cash, last Saturday? *That's* what threw me off. I can't keep the checkbook straight if you draw checks and don't mark them down. You know the check I mean; it's a wonder to me the bank accepted it. From Wolmer's Bar and Grill. It looked like you wrote it with your left hand. Or maybe somebody was holding you up on your feet."

I made motions with my head toward the inside office and Joe got the idea. He finished softly but just as violently. "I'm getting sick and tired of you raising hell because we don't balance with the bank when it turns out to be your fault. We're seventeen ninety-six in the red."

Joe is my Aunt Kate's oldest and has a lot of leeway because of Aunt Kate having a little money in the business. I went back inside my own office and left him muttering to himself.

Miss Costello gave me an inquiring look and I said: "It's just my secretary, back from lunch. Now maybe you'd better tell me about those accidents."

Instead, she opened her purse and took out a checkbook and said: "Maybe I'd better give you something on account? So you can cover your overdraft."

It was funny and I laughed. I said: "Oh damn that Joe! He didn't know anybody was here or he wouldn't have spoken."

"What will it be?"

"I usually charge twenty a day and expenses."

She started to put the checkbook away.

"Of course in this case I'd charge only ten."

She said: "I'll make it for a hundred and I want every dime I'm charged for expenses marked down what for. I came up the hard way, Malone. I'm no fool about money, anyway. Just about men."

I said: "I'm not arguing it."

**T**HE accidents had been too regular and too often to suit her. I didn't blame her. First, a sandbag used to balance one of the drops on the stage had fallen and landed within a couple of feet of her. It was dark up in the loft where it had fallen from, and by the time she'd shaken away the crowd that came running to tell her what a narrow escape she'd had, there's been no-one



up there. Nobody had noticed a thing out of the way.

The second one was as bad. She'd met her husband somewhere and was with him in a cab, riding up to her hotel. A car had jammed the cab into the curb and a couple of guys had stuck them up and taken what money she had and what jewelry she'd been wearing. All told, the loss wasn't a hundred dollars. But one of the hold-up men had slammed at her with a gun barrel and she'd been knocked out for almost an hour. If it hadn't been for her hat, and the way she'd had her hair tucked up under it, she'd probably have had a broken head.

That was the first thing I'd ever heard in favor of the new hats.

Hubby had gotten slammed on the jaw but not as hard. Neither of them had been arguing about the hold-up and there'd been no reason for the rough stuff.

The third time somebody had doctored a bottle of whiskey she'd had in her rooms but her maid had taken the dose. Also this was the first that Miss Costello had known about her maid sneaking drinks of the Costello whiskey, it seemed. She'd rushed the maid to a hospital and had her stomach pumped out and it hadn't done the girl much harm, but the doctor had told her that only prompt action had saved the maid's life.

All this had happened within ten days.

I said: "It looks like somebody's gunning for you and no mistake. I'm supposed to find out who it is, eh?"

"Certainly. And see that nothing else happens like that."

"Now look, Miss Costello. If I was you, I'd go to the police. Honestly, I would. And it isn't that I don't want to work for you. But I'd go to the cops and in a hurry."

She looked at me as if I was crazy, and in a way I was. I needed the money and she knew it. But at the same time I didn't want it under false pretenses, even if it *did* give me a chance to stick around with the girl . . . and I was already taking an interest there.

"I don't *want* to go to the police," she said. "If I had, I'd have gone there instead of coming here. I don't want the police to know anything about it."

I said: "It's just this. If somebody's gunning for you, and it looks as though there is, there's a good chance of me being no good to you. I'd come in a bad second and seconds don't count in a thing like this. I'd maybe get the one that had already got you but that wouldn't help you. It'd be too late—that's what I'm trying to say. Suppose it's a shooting—the guy'd get first shot and that might be the one that counted. Suppose it's a thing like that sandbag—I can't watch everything. I'm trying to play fair."

"Let's say you start now," she said. "I've got to go up to the hotel and meet George Kampoulis. You come with me—you'll have to meet him sometime. I'm going to tell him you're my brother, from the Coast. He knows I'm from there and he don't know a hell of a lot else about me."

"Then you want me to work for you?"

She stood up and said: "Look, Malone! If you're that stupid,



maybe I don't. What d'ya suppose I came in here for? To hire you, that's why. All right, you've got my money—you're hired. Now come on."

I said: "Okey!"

We went out, and I said to Joe Smith: "I'll give you a ring, Joe, either here or at your house. Look after things."

Joe gave Miss Costello an up-and-down look that didn't miss a thing and I knew he was getting data stored up to give Aunt Kate. It was that kind of a look, and I knew I could expect a visit very soon from Aunt Kate.

Aunt Kate had a theory that women were bad for business. She even claimed she had proof of it.

## CHAPTER II

### No Blood Let



GEORGE KAMPOULIS was dark and swarthy and wasn't much over five feet up. But he was that much wide and almost that much through. I don't think there was an ounce of fat on him—and I hated his guts the second I saw him.

For no reason—just one of those things. Or maybe there was a little jealousy back of it.

The Costello girl sailed in, carrying it over fast, and said: "Oh, George! What d'ya think? It's my brother, Pat. Pat, this is George Kampoulis."

Kampoulis didn't put out his hand. He gave me a sour look and pointed his cigar at the girl and said:

"You Irish hell-cat! What you think you're doing I don't know. I won't ask—you'd lie like hell to me.

But it won't work. You can't get away with a guy."

I decided that if I was supposed to be a brother I'd better act like one. I bristled up and said: "Hey, you! You can't talk to my sister like that when I'm around."

"Get out then," he told me, not even bothering to look at me. "Look, Nora, it won't work. He ain't your brother—*look* at the dope. You claim you're Irish but you don't look it. So I build you up as a Spanish broad. But this bum's Irish and looks it. So it won't work." If you want him, you got to keep him out of sight. And what the hell d'ya want him for?"

She'd told me that Kampoulis was tough and she hadn't lied. She also had told me that she could handle him most of the time—and she hadn't lied about that, either.

She called him all the names I'd ever heard a man called in my life and some that were new to me. She sounded as though she meant them. She took off her hat and jumped up and down on it. When she'd worked herself up to the proper point she took off a shoe with a heel on it almost as sharp as a spike and started trying to bat him with it, and he held her off with one hand, not even bothering to take the cigar out of his mouth. He growled past this:

"Okey, okey— So he's your brother, you say. Okey, okey! Only you got to keep him out of sight, just like this guy you say is married to you. This Jack Harbin."

"So he's my brother, then," said Miss Costello, breathing hard, but putting the shoe back on. "So what d'ya want to see me about anyway, you. . . ."





One of the thugs came in the door and slammed at her with a gun barrel.

She'd thought of some more names for him.

Kampoulis put on his hat and gave me the second look he'd given me since I'd walked in. He said: "Aghghh, it can wait. You and your brother will want to talk about what kind of a thing you think you're smart enough to put over on me. But that you ain't smart enough to put anything over on me in a thousand years or a million either."

He waddled over to the door and turned there and pointed the cigar at her. He grinned, for the first time.

"Ha-ha," he said. "And what's Harbin going to think of your brother? Hey, my smart young dope? Hey? What's dear Jack going to think of this big clown? Hey?"

She started to take off her shoe again and he went out—but he didn't hurry. We heard the door slam and she said:

"By God! I didn't think of that. Maybe I should have got somebody that looks like me? Jack's got a jealous heart."

I was sore about Kampoulis. I don't claim to be a pretty man,



but most kids don't run for shelter when they see me coming. I look kind, even if my nose *has* been broken. I don't like to be called a bum and a clown.

"Maybe you should have gotten some chorus lady," I said. "There's a few of them carry a private license, though."

She laughed then. And said it wasn't her fault if I took after her father while she resembled her mother. Then the door opened again and in came a dark, sullen looking wench who was pretty in spite of it. She gave me one of the who-the-hell-are-you looks and who said to the Costello girl:

"I had to go down to the corner. Kampoulis was here when I left."

"That's fine, Marie," said Miss Costello. "This is my brother Pat. He's going to visit me for a while. That is, he'll be in town for a while, anyway."

Marie nodded at me. She didn't look at all as though she cared for me. She went into another room, which I took to be the bedroom, and Miss Costello said:

"Call me Nora, like Kampoulis does. Marie knows I'm not Spanish. And act like you're my brother. And if you make a pass at her I'll crown you."

Marie came back and I started to act brotherly right away. There was a stand with bottles and glasses, and I headed for this and picked a bottle and poured a drink. I drank it and told Nora she was a chump to get that brand—that it was lousy. I smoked cigarettes out of the box on the stand. I thought she was paying too much for the suite—and said so. I brothered around like I owned the

place and I could see Miss Costello going into a slow burn.

And when Marie went back in the bedroom she said: "You don't have to be so *damned* brotherly. After all, it's only an act."

I told her I lived a part when I played it, which got her over the mad.

And then she went in the bedroom to put on fresh make-up. We were going back downtown and get something to eat before she had to go to the show; and we were supposed to meet friend husband when that was over.

I had another couple of drinks while I waited . . . and wondered if the maid, Marie, was as mad at me as she'd acted.

**I**T WAS probably a good thing I hadn't taken more to drink. We rode the elevator down and Nora stopped at the desk to tell the clerk something. Then we went out the door, and while the doorman was whistling up a cab, somebody jostled me from behind and said:

"Look where you're going!"

I hadn't been expecting action that soon but this was so crude I couldn't miss it. If I'd turned, I'd probably have got sapped in the face. Instead, I kicked back as hard as I could and got somebody on the shin with my heel.

There'd been three of them and they'd apparently followed us out of the hotel, moving fast so they'd catch us right in front. One of them had been behind me, but he was falling when I turned. The other two were on each side of Nora Costello, and one of them was holding a regulation sap—the kind the cops carry.



Shot loaded and with a spring handle. I hit him in the belly, just as hard as I could, and when he doubled up I jerked at the gun under my arm. Nora grabbed at my arm and held it, and the guy on the far side of her swung his fist and caught her on the side of the cheek. A car that had been parked right next the cleared spot in front of the hotel swung in then and the guy I'd kicked in the shin started hobbling toward it. I was wrestling with Nora, trying to get clear, and Nora was screaming:

"No! No! No!"

The one who'd smacked Nora in the cheek reached down and got his arm under the arm of the one I'd hit in the belly, and lifted him up and the two of them started toward the car, also.

Then I broke free from Nora and got the gun clear, with Nora sort of sliding down me as I did.

The man with the bad shin was just climbing in the car and the other two were still five feet or more from it. I got the gun pointed in their general direction and said:

"Hold it, you guys!"

Then Nora jerked an ankle out from under me and I fell down on top of her.

And while I was getting clear the car went away from there fast.

It was quite a job getting away from Nora because she was hanging on for dear life with everything she had to work with. She was holding me with both hands and she had a scissors hold on my left leg with both of hers and I couldn't break it without mussing up her clothes more than they already were . . . which was no small item. She was a sight,

and there were plenty of people to look at it. A hold like that isn't a dignified looking thing at best . . . and when it's a pretty girl putting it on, with her skirt up around her waist, it's really something for the book.

The doorman was back with us by that time. So were at least twenty other people, who must have been hiding in the cracks in the sidewalk to have appeared so soon, because we'd been all alone when the fracas started.

"Ugh, ugh, ugh," said the doorman, trying to say something and sounding like a horse with the heaves.

"It's all right, Jerry," said Nora, smiling up at him. "They were trying to grab my purse, but my brother stopped them."

I got my gun back under my coat where it belonged—and not more than a dozen people saw me doing it. One dizzy looking woman started telling the crowd to call a cop because I'd been trying to shoot somebody, and I decided right there was no place to be.

"Let's get out of here," I said to Nora.

And she said: "Here's our cab, now. I've just been waiting for you to stand up and help me do the same thing."

So that was that.

**WE** HAD dinner in a little place near the show and she told me why she'd kept me from using the gun. It didn't make sense.

"You see one of them was one of the men who held Jack and I up," she said. "I recognized him."

"So-o-oo. If I'd nailed him, you'd



be out of trouble. He'd have told me what it was all about."

"You'd have killed him."

"Like hell! I'd have taken him through the ham."

"Then the paper would have gotten it."

"So what if they did?"

"There'd have been that notoriety."

"Advertising, they call it."

"The police would have held us both."

"Not for long."

She shut up then and started feeling her cheek. She had a black and blue mark there and it was swollen a little, but it wasn't bad.

"If the guy with the sap had hit you in the face, it would have broken your face in," I told her. I was quite serious.

"But he didn't. I wasn't hurt."

"You will be if this keeps up."

"I don't understand it."

I didn't either—and said so. I was more than half sore at her and didn't feel like talking, anyway. Here she was, hiring me to look after her. The first chance I had to do it she stopped me. There was something funny about it and I didn't know enough about what was going on to put my finger on the sore place.

It was a cinch that she was in danger. Even if she'd been lying about what had happened before. The business in front of the hotel had been a straight out and out slugging party and it couldn't be explained in any other way. There isn't one lady client in ten that will tell a cop all the truth, and I could see this one was no exception; there was just plenty she hadn't come out with.

So I ate my dinner and kept quiet. And then we went to the show.

### CHAPTER III

#### Wrong Protection



FROM the wings it was like any other big musical. There were a flock of comics, most of whom told dirty jokes. On the line stuff and definitely. There were a flock of pretty girls who didn't look quite so cute when you saw them up close and sweating. Their costumes had been used for some little time and weren't in quite as good shape as when the show had started. There were the usual chorus boys, with the usual percentage of little darlings among them, if the camping back and forth was any indication. There was the usual crew of bored electricians and bossy stage men. There was the usual hysterical second lead who dashed around screaming he couldn't find this and that, and who was called "Dearie" by some of the other boys and "that so-and-so" by some of the others. There was the usual call boy, running around with a watch, a cracked voice, and a tired hopeless look.

I spent my time just outside Nora's dressing room, while she and Marie were getting her ready to go on—and the rest of the time in the wings trying to spot anything wrong. A show is nothing but confusion from there at best, even if you know what's coming next, and so, for all the good I did, I might as well have been down in the corner bar where I wanted to be.

Nora sang half a dozen songs that were well on the shady side;



but she sang them in that faked accent and as if she didn't know what the words meant—and that put them over with a bang. I could see why she was tops. She did a couple of dances too, getting the same idea over.

The show was built around her anyway—she was supposed to be an innocent child who repeated just what she was told to say. A child of nature. The little princess of some lost tribe who'd been found and brought out into wicked civilization by an intrepid explorer, who was of course the male lead—and who had a tenor voice that tore me. The wrong way.

It finally ended—I took up my post outside her dressing room while she changed to meet friend husband—and then we were out of the theatre and heading straight for the rendezvous.

And it's no fun taking a girl to meet another guy . . . even if she is married to the stupid.

"How'd you like it?" she asked, but not as if it made any difference to her. And I told her it was just fine in the same kind of voice. Then she put her hand over mine and said:

"Look, Malone! Don't be sore. There's a lot going on I can't tell you about. Maybe by and by. I'm going to have it tough enough tonight, without you grouching on top of it. I'll make it up to you."

We pulled up in front of the *Ar-lisienne* and I handed her out, feeling better about the thing.

At least she'd finally admitted she was holding out on me . . . and from what else she'd said I thought I had something to look ahead to and it was more than just information.

THE place was nice but not too nice. Not the kind of place where you have to dress, but where if you did you weren't out of order. Quiet, and sort of confidential. Soft music and good service. The right hand side of the menu reading like telephone numbers. We got a booth, clear in the back, and she looked around and said:

"Jack and I meet here often. It's quiet, and most of the show crowd give it a miss. I think I'd better tell him who you really are or he'll think you're a new sweetie."

"It's an idea," I told her, looking over the card for something that wasn't in French.

And then, when I looked up, a big blond bird had her by the arm and was dragging her out of the booth. He wasn't saying a word. He had her with his left hand and he had his right all cocked and ready to smack her when he got her in position.

So I picked up the glass ash tray, which was a little hefty and slammed it in his face.

Down he went, falling backward and with blood pouring from his nose before he even hit the floor.

Nora hadn't made a sound and neither had he, except for the bump he made when he landed. But now she stared down at the guy and let out a screech that sounded like a fire siren.

Just an *E-E-E-E-E-E-E-E-E-E!* that went on and up.

"And that's that!" I said. "By and by these guys are going to get tired of heaving you around."

She said: "My God! That's my old man!"

I figured it would be either the end or the start of a perfect



evening. And it was my fault; I should have pegged the guy as her husband. After all, we were there to meet him.

There was merry hell to pay all around. The manager was there, talking about sending for the cops. I showed him my card and explained things. Nora gave him money and explained things. Friend husband snapped out of it but didn't say a word. He must have thought plenty. We finally all ended back in the private office with a doctor, who put splints on the broken nose, and after he'd left, Nora kept trying to talk to the guy and he kept brushing her away and watching me. I'd patted him all over during the time we were giving him the first aid and so I wasn't worried much about the glare.

I knew he wasn't carrying a gun.

There was still the call to make to Joe Smith, though I knew I'd catch hell for calling at that hour from Aunt Kate. I also knew I'd catch more hell if I didn't call, because she didn't think I should back up and spit without consulting her and I knew she'd want to talk about the new case. And the new girl.

And I had a notion Nora Costello wanted to explain to her wounded papa just who I was and what I was doing there. If she could make a story that would hold up.

I got the manager on his feet and moving out to the bar, the first thing I saw there was George Simpson, who works for the Donovan Agency.

"Well, well, well, Paddy Malone," he said, looking surprised. "What brings you into cafe society?"

"Just spearing a drink," I said,

going on past toward the phone booths. "I'll pop for one, as soon as I make a call."

He said: "I've waited for this day."

THE Donovan Agency is a cheap outfit and has that kind of help. I had no use for Simpson and he knew it. He liked me the same way, but I was a little curious to know what he was doing there. I got on the phone, and Aunt Kate said: "Hello!" almost before it had quit ringing at her house.

I said: "This is Pat."

"Such a time to call me!" she said, sounding plenty mad about it. "It's a quarter after one. Isn't it bad enough to say you'll call without making me stay up till an hour like this waiting for it. Who's this woman you're with . . . and can't she keep you busy?"

"I thought you'd want to know I'm still with our client."

"That woman?"

"Of course."

She gave a dirty laugh.

"That's right. So far I've protected her twice. Only the last time it was against her husband."

I got the laugh again.

"So I don't know what time I'll be down in the morning. Tell Joe to open up, just as if I wasn't coming down at all."

"He's used to it."

"She's paying us, Aunt Kate."

"I'll bet."

"For sure. A hundred, already."

"I'll believe that when I see it."

I promised she'd see the hundred the next day and hung up and went back to the bar. Simpson gave me an evil wink and said:



"Hagh! She was supposed to meet you here and she stood you up."

"By God! You *are* a detective," I told him, and ordered drinks. "And you, George? What brings you here?"

He played with his drink and sounded a little vague. "Oh just running around. You know how it is."

Right then I saw my client coming out of the manager's office with her head in the air and looking as though she could chew nails. I told George Simpson I'd be seeing him around, and followed her to the check room, and there she turned and blazed at me with:

"You see what you did? You see?"

"You hired a guard, didn't you? Am I supposed to sit there and see somebody cuff you around?" I was a little sore.

"He's jealous, is all. You're a fool. Couldn't you wait?"

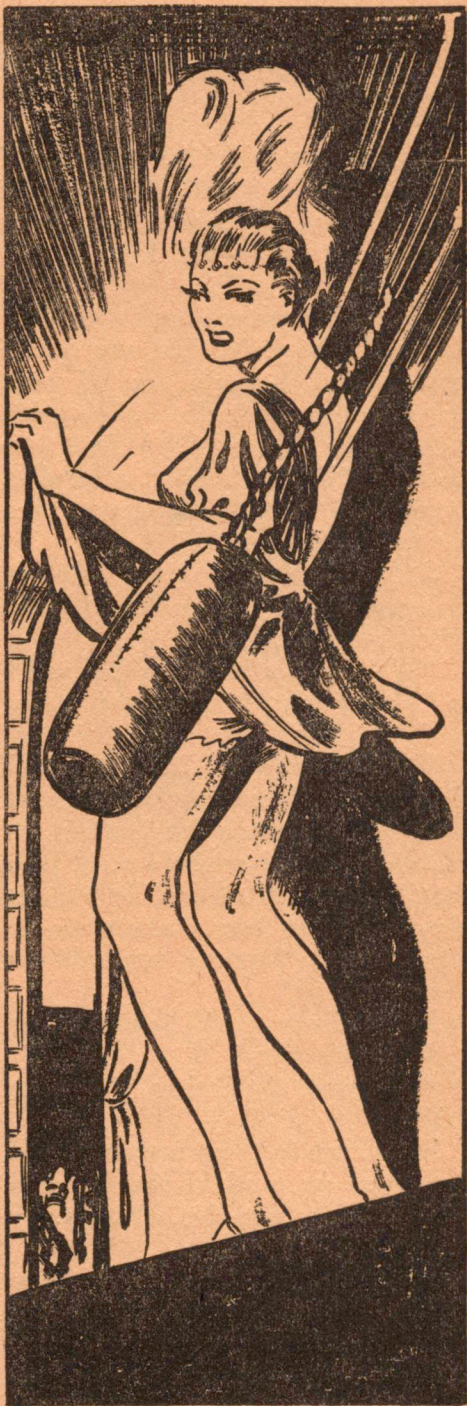
"Okey, okey! Maybe you had it coming then. Maybe I should have let him go ahead."

She grabbed at her coat and got into it without even giving me a chance to help her with it. "I'm going home. Come on."

I GOT into mine and we caught a cab in front and got to the hotel with no more trouble. But when she started to leave me at the elevator bank, I said:

"You'd better let me go up with you and look around your place. You never can tell—you might as well play it safe."

"Marie's home by now. She's up there."



She thought that sandbag dropping was no accident!



"So-o-o-o. If somebody walked in on her and wanted to wait for you, then what? Could she throw them out?"

I rode up with her and found Marie waiting and looking mad about having to. There was no one else in the suite—and I made sure of it.

"You'd better not open your door for anybody you're not sure of," I said. "And I mean sure. I can't very well camp in the hall outside your door all night. What time should I be here tomorrow, or d'ya want to hire somebody else to take on the job?"

She made her eyes big and her voice surprised. "Why should I hire somebody else?"

"Well, you called me a fool and I *did* slap your old man down, after all."

"You certainly did," she said, and didn't look too unhappy about it. I imagine he'd done the beating up business with her before. "Jack should have waited and let me explain. He just goes crazy when he gets excited. Suppose you call me about eleven?"

I said eleven would be fine so far as I was concerned.

"At eleven sharp then, Pat," she said.

Marie was in the other room and there was no need of the Pat and Nora stuff to put the act over. I said so.

She said: "After all, you've been trying. Let's leave it between us at Pat and Nora from now on, shall we?"

I told her that was fine with me and said good night. Enough had happened for one day.

## CHAPTER IV

### Murder and Motives



JOE SMITH nodded when I went in, and jerked his head toward the inside office. He had a smug look on his face which I knew came from Aunt Kate telling *him* just what she was going to tell *me*. I asked if there was any mail, making it sound very brisk, and he said:

"No, Mr. Malone. A Mr. Kampoulis is waiting." And then, under his breath: "How's the client? How'd you make out?" I ignored it. Kampoulis was sitting across from my desk and he looked even bigger in the morning light. His beard was so dark his face looked like a pen and ink drawing. It was a cinch he was wise to me, so I said:

"Ha, ha, Mr. Kampoulis. Caught on, did you?"

He pointed his cigar at me and said: "You young dope! Thinking you could put something over on George Kampoulis. As if I didn't know what was going on."

I didn't have to keep on with the brother act and for that reason I didn't have to put up with that kind of talk. The man was smart, or he'd never have put Nora Costello on the top of the heap, but that still didn't make me like him. I had no reason not to—it was just one of those personal things you can't help.

"You fat slob," I said. "You open that puss of yours again to me like that and I'll bust you in it. Who the hell d'ya think you are? Don't think you're coming in my office and throw your weight around—you don't weigh enough. If you want to



keep a civil tongue in your head and sit there and tell me what you want, why all right. If not, get out. And I'd like to throw you out."

"A speech, no less. And to me, George Kampoulis."

"To me, a louse."

This time he grinned and showed me a bunch of bad teeth. He waved the cigar and said, with a sort of grudging good nature: "Okay, okay, my young friend. I'm wrong, you're right. Old George's always wrong, the other guy's always right, but old George always comes out ahead. Now what does that little dope think she is putting over, that's what I want to know? Hey? Is it a new man is worth that much trouble to her?"

"Ask her."

He pointed the cigar at me again. "I should ask her and get lied to. Nuts! I'm coming to you—I can talk sense to you."

"Well, start."

He dragged a wallet out and acted as if this wasn't a habit. He looked pained. "It's this, my young friend. I built that girl up. All the way. I work her publicity—I get her bookings. Where they count I get her bookings. I go all the way with her. I know she is married to a louse husband and I think I can take care of him when he shows up."

"How'd you know he'd show up?"

THIS time he waved both the cigar and the wallet—the last not very far. He really had a clutch on it. "Don't they *always* show up when they smell dough? I ask you."

"So-o-o-o-?"

"So he shows up. And the 'dope

goes for him again, just as bad as ever. She won't learn. I make her keep him out of sight but she's got him around her all the time. Then I see you and I know damn' well you're not her brother. She's going again, and so what should I do about it? I say this to her and she jumps down my throat. So I come to you to talk sense."

"You said that before," I reminded him. "Why don't you begin?"

"Look, my friend. I got her primed for a job in the pictures. They are already talking contract with me. It's the big money for her. It's the big money for me. This now? Pagh! Chicken feed. Pictures is the big money."

"All right, I won't argue it."

"There is no argument. I have worked for this."

"So what d'ya want?"

"I want to know what kind of a game it is she is playing with me."

"Ask her."

This time he opened the wallet and started fishing out money. He'd pull out a bill and look at me and I'd keep my face straight. He'd pull out another; I'd still dead pan. Finally he had out a hundred and a half, spread fan wise on the desk in front of him. He said:

"That's as far as I'll go."

"That's enough. She's scared and she wants protection. A sandbag almost fell on her. She was held up and sapped. Somebody doped some whiskey she had in her place. She's afraid, and she came to me for protection. Give me the dough."

He put his hand on the money and screwed his face up until I could barely see his eyes. He laughed, but



he didn't make any noise doing it.

"She makes those things up," he said. "I don't pay for a story like that."

"The hell you don't. She isn't making anything up. You know what the story is and what isn't. Three guys tried to rough her up when we left her hotel last evening, and they'd have done it if I hadn't broken it up. Now tell me *I'm* lying and collect that smack in the puss."

"No fooling?"

"No fooling on both."

HE STILL kept his hand on the money but he'd stopped laughing. He said, very thoughtfully: "She tells me about this and I think she's dopey. Like the sandbag would be an accident. See? And like the holdup guys would be smacking her so she couldn't open her face and call the cops loud at the top of her voice. See? And I figured the maid got poisoned on something for dinner. See? The maid is definitely tramp, so what *should* I think. No fooling about guys trying to beat her up?"

"You heard me."

He pointed the cigar at me and said: "It will be her louse husband. It will be him. A louse, you understand. In spades. All the time she gives him her money. He won't work."

"Well, there's no sense in *both* of them working."

He looked suspiciously at me. "Don't rib me, my friend. I am serious. I am thinking. If she dies he gets her money. Her insurance. Everything."

"It wouldn't pay him to kill her. She'd be worth more to him after she's in pictures."

"But *now*! It's money *now*! He has to have money *now*."

"Why?"

He shrugged his shoulders and stood up without answering. He gathered the money up and held it in his hand and said.

"This makes it different. I will have to talk to her now that I think she is just not being a dope about being scared. Of course I will not pay you for what you said—I was paying to hear of something she was trying to run over on me."

I said: "If you think you're not paying, you'd better start running. And I'll catch you before you get to the door. That dough's mine and I want it."

He sighed and handed the money over. He waddled to the door and turned there and said: "I'll see you again, my young friend! I have to think this over. It is her husband back of this. I know it."

And out he went, with me counting his money. He didn't have to tell me to say nothing to Nora Costello about his call—that had been tacitly understood from the first. I had other things to talk with Nora about, anyway.

JOE SMITH perched on the desk and swung a leg back and forth as he stared down at the hundred and a half. He said: "That's going to help the bank account a lot; Aunt Kate's going to like this. It's going to make her feel a lot better. Go on—and then you busted the girl's old man with the ash tray and broke his face. What kind of a guy is he? The kind that makes it tough for you?"

"Tall and blond and handsome,"



I said. Curly hair and with a little mustache. It's the spiked kind, but it doesn't make a pansy out of him if you're old enough to understand what I mean. Weighs about twenty-two I'd say and he's built like a football player. About thirty. Good looking and the type that knows it. A louse. A tough baby."

"He sounds it."

"He's the kind not to meet up an alley if it's dark and he's behind you. He's the kind that wouldn't pass up an edge. She says he's a jealous ———, which is why he started raising hell last night."

"But he wouldn't have started to beat her up if he hadn't been crazy about her. And if he's crazy about her why both you and this Kampoulis are wrong. You both think he's the one back of these accidents that have been happening to her."

"Him being crazy about her has nothing to do with him knocking her off if it paid him enough. It's being done every day. He's the kind that could get another girl in a hurry. Easier than he could get money."

Joe Smith argued: "But he'd get more money from her after she gets in pictures. She'd start in at big money, going there from the lead in a hit show."

That's what had been bothering me—I'd said the same thing to Kampoulis. I told Joe to run along and put the money in the bank before I spent it on a great big piece of drinking, and he said, seriously:

"You couldn't do that. Aunt Kate wouldn't like it. Nor spending back on the wench."

He wasn't telling me a thing.

Joe was just getting back from the bank when the phone rang.

I told him I'd take it. It was my client and there was sheer mad panic in her voice.

She said: "My God, is it you, Malone?"

I said it was.

"You've got to meet me at the Albright Apartments, that's at the corner of Ninth and Chestnut, right away. Right away, I say. Oh hurry, hurry, hurry."

"Are you there now?"

"I'm home yet."

"Then I'll be there as soon as you are," I told her. Joe came to the door and raised his eyebrows, and I said:

"I'm going out. To the corner of Ninth and Chestnut and don't ask why. I don't know."

"Then why go?" he asked. He sounded a little bit like Aunt Kate does when she's just getting a start on laying down the law. "It looks silly to me to go someplace where you don't know why you're going. If it's a date, why don't you say so?"

"It's duty, Joe," I said. "It's calling. Calling loud."

"But Aunt Kate's coming down."

"The joke will be on her then, won't it? She'll waste the trip."

He said gloomily: "She will like hell. She'll talk to me instead of to you."

I went out thinking this was all to the good. His family thought it was cute of him to call his mother "Aunt Kate" the same as I did—and I couldn't see anything cute about it. Nor about him. Nor about Aunt Kate, for that matter. She wasn't built that way. I caught a cab, hoping Aunt Kate would take out her spite on him in spades—and



knowing Aunt Kate I figured the percentage was all with me.

We pulled in front of the Albright and I got out just as Nora Costello came from the other direction in another cab. She crossed the street, not looking to right or left, and if there'd been any traffic she'd have been a gone goose. She caught me by the arm and turned me into the Albright without stopping, and I said:

"Now what's all this?"

"Oh, hurry, hurry," she said, pulling me toward the elevator. It was one of those self-serve things and it was at the ninth, and while we waited for it to come down she broke down a little.

"It's Jack! I called him—I always call him in the morning. Even if I'm with somebody else. We talked a little and then he said to wait a minute because there was somebody at the door. Then the phone made a crashing noise and there was a lot more noise like it and I couldn't get any answer. Something's happened to Jack."

**WE** GOT in the elevator and she punched the button for the sixth, and when we got there she hurried down the hall. I figured it would be a false alarm, but I took the gun from under my arm and put it in a side coat pocket, just in case. She knocked at a door lettered 6-B, almost breaking it down, and then she grabbed at her arm and said:

"Oh my God! I just grabbed up change from the desk. I didn't take my purse. I haven't the key. I keep the key to his room . . . after all he's still the old man."

I reached past her and tried the

door. It was locked, but it was a cheap apartment house and a cheap door and it didn't look too tough.

"Will you back me up on it if I break it down?" I asked. "I don't want any charges of breaking and entering put against me—I'm in enough of a daze."

"Hurry, hurry," she said. "Of course! Oh, break it!"

By that time I was getting excited. That stuff's contagious. I backed up and measured off and landed my heel just above the latch, and the door slammed back so hard it banged against the holding wall. She started to dash in and I got her by the shoulder and jerked her behind me and got the gun from my pocket.

"Don't be a sap," I said.

Then we walked in.

There was no doubt about trouble. Trouble was all over the place. The phone was still off the hook and was making clicking noises from the floor. There was a mangy looking rug and blood all over it. More blood was splashed on the edge of a couch affair. More was on a stand by this. There was what had been a chair and it looked as though it had been bashed over somebody's head. There was a whiskey bottle, half full and with the cork in, on the floor, and there were two glasses that hadn't broken and two that had by it.

"You stay here," I said, figuring I'd find the body in either the bedroom or the bath.

She probably had the same thought. She said: "To hell with you!" and raced past me to the door on the right, with me trying to catch her just in case she should be run-



ning into something that needed heavy artillery for backing.

The bedroom hadn't been disturbed, though the bed showed signs of having been slept in.

And the bath was as clean, though somebody had shaved and there was a stick of mustache wax on the basin rim, along with shaving things.

THE kitchenette was so small nobody *could* have been killed in it—you couldn't even turn around in it.

"So there you are, lady," I said, waving around. "Something's happened, but just what?"

She started to cry, not putting her hands up to her face like most women do, but leaving them limp at her side. Her face looked like a kid's, and she was crying like a kid does when it's hurt.

"They've killed him, they've killed him," she wailed. "I knew it, I knew it. He said they would."

"Who are 'they'?"

Her face started to quiver then, first one cheek and then the other, and then her mouth. Her eyes got a glassy look and she started to tighten up. I took a step ahead and spat her across the cheek with the flat of my hand—and hard enough to sting.

"Don't do it, kid," I said. "You can't blow up now. If something's happened, let's find out what it is."

She kept crying but she lost that hysterical look and I didn't think she was going to crack up in little pieces, which was what I didn't want.

"I'm going to call the cops," I said, and started toward the phone, putting the gun back under my arm where it belonged.



Somebody poisoned the whiskey, but her maid took the drink.



She caught me and almost screamed: "Oh, don't! Don't! You mustn't!"

Then the door opened and in came Harbin. He saw me and never hesitated. He was after me before the door had slammed behind him, coming in with his head low and his hands out in front of him like a wrestler going into action. He came fast, with a sort of sliding rush, and when he came past the girl he just slammed an arm out to the side and knocked her into the wall.

## CHAPTER V

### He Reached for a Gun



I KNEW it was going to be bad and I didn't have time to go after my gun. He was on me too fast. He had me outweighed by thirty or more pounds, and he was that kind of big man who moves like a cat for all his bulk.

I put out my hands to fend him off, and he caught one wrist and yanked me toward him—and I did the only sensible thing I could do. I went right with him instead of bracing against the pull the way he'd figured I would, and that threw him off balance. It tipped his upper body back.

We hit chest against chest, and I shoved with my free hand and got a foot behind his at the same time—and over he went.

With me on top of him because he was still holding my wrist.

He'd landed easy but so had I. And I was on top with a free hand that could reach out and reach out I did. I got the half full whiskey bottle and swung it up, and he went

slack under me flat on the floor.

"You win," he said.

I broke free—still holding the bottle and making sure he didn't get a chance to kick me on the break. When I was in the clear I traded the bottle for my gun. I was sick and tired of wrestling; there was too much chance of him winning the next fall.

"You crazy ——!" I said.

Nora said: "Jack! Jack! Are you all right?"

Jack was far from all right so it was a silly question and no mistake. He had blood all over him, and while he'd gotten some of it on him while he and I were scuffling, the bulk of it had been there before. One of his cheeks were bruised, the bruise running from the top of the bone clear down to the angle of his jaw. This was swollen, and made his face lopsided. His nice spiked mustache was all over his lip, instead of being neat and natty. He'd either been cut on the upper lip or he'd bled from the nose—though I figured that last was still swollen from the smack I'd put on it before. He was favoring the hand he hadn't grabbed me with and I thought the thumb would be out of joint from the angle it was pointing. His hair was every which way and there was a cut starting high on his forehead and running back over his head. He had a bleeding ear, to cap the rest of the damage.

"What the hell you doing here?" he snarled at her. He never took his eyes away from me.

"I . . . I heard you fighting over the phone."

"Why drag this monkey in?"

"Why Jack!"



He looked away from me and turned to her then. He was shaking all over, either from anger or excitement or both. I could hardly understand him when he said:

"Get the hell out! Fast! Get him out too! Fast! Move, I tell you."

"Come on, Nora," I said. "There's liable to be trouble here."

"If you stay," he said, "there's sure to be."

I had the gun and the top hand with it, but I wasn't pressing the advantage one little bit. There was too much I didn't know and what I did was all cockeyed. And the setup in that apartment didn't look like anything I wanted any of.

"Come on, Nora," I said again.

He said to her: "I'll call you. Go on back where you belong. And watch yourself—this thing's going all to pieces—it'll be trouble for you."

She started toward the door, repeating, "You'll call me?" and Harbin said to me: "Look, Mister Nosey. I don't know who you are but keep an eye on her. There's going to be trouble. She's mixed in it. It's going to be bad, maybe."

I said: "I've figured that out."

ON THE way back to the hotel I said: "I don't get this. He saw me and made a dive for me. He didn't know whether I was friend or foe. Is he nuts?"

"He's a terrible fighter when he's mad," she said.

"That isn't it. Don't he have to have a reason? Or is he just screw-ball?"

She said: "I don't know, honest I don't. He seems sometimes to go sort of crazy like that. As if he lost

his head for a minute. Gee though, he's nice when you know him."

I thought Heaven forbid such a thing happening to me and started trying to figure where all the blood on that apartment floor had come from. Some of it from friend hubby, of course, but not all. Not nearly all.

The way he'd warned me about the girl being in danger hadn't been at all nice. It was no surprise—it wasn't that—but I didn't like the way he'd said it. He'd meant it too much.

I parked her at her place, after checking it over to see nobody was there but Marie, and then went back to the office.

And I leaned forward three times to tell the cabby to take me to the police station instead of to my office building and three times changed my mind. I had a hunch the whole thing was something for the cops—and at the same time I didn't want to doublecross the girl and kill her picture career before it started by blowing the head off some of her private business. I knew the pictures didn't take anybody mixed in a big scandal anymore and, after all, she'd hired me to try and keep things quiet.

I didn't know what to do—and ended by doing nothing. I didn't even have the satisfaction of hearing about Aunt Kate descending on the office and raising hell in my absence either—she'd changed her mind and put off the trip Joe told me.

THE show went the same that night as it had the night before. I'd picked Nora up at her hotel and



taken her directly to the theatre because she'd had dinner in her rooms, and afterward, she said:

"I want to go right straight home. Marie is staying and mending that costume I wore in the finale."

"I couldn't see anything wrong with it," I said.

"I almost came out of it, is all. It split."

"Did you hear from Jack tonight?"

"No. Not a word. So I guess everything's all right, whatever was wrong."

Now this was sour. When I'd left her at the hotel, after we'd just seen him all cut and bleeding, and after seeing the mess his apartment was in, he'd said he'd call. When I asked her if he had, she'd said he hadn't. But she hadn't seemed worried so I knew she'd lied; if he hadn't called she'd have been crazy.

That was the first lie.

When she'd gone in her dressing room and I'd stood outside on guard I'd heard the dial click on her dressing room phone, and heard her say: "Is that you, dear?"

So when she said she hadn't heard from him again it made two lies in the same place—and I started burning about it. On the way to the hotel I decided that when I'd seen her safely home I'd tell her I didn't want any more of it. Nor any part of her. That if she didn't want to tell me what it was all about, why she could get another boy.

I even had my going away speech made up.

And then we rode the elevator up and I saw somebody just leaving her suite.

There was no mistake. He was

just backing out of her door as we stepped from the elevator.

I said: "Stay here, Nora," and heard one of the other elevators whine to a stop at our floor as I did. I heard the elevator door open as I called down the hall to the prowler:

"Hey, you! Wait a minute!"

He had his back to me but he stopped . . . he knew who I was talking to all right. He stood there a second and then turned.

"Who? Me?" he asked.

I was about thirty feet from him by then. I'd been walking up to him. I had a hand up to the gun under my coat, just in case, but the guy sounded anything but war-like.

"Yes, you," I said. "What were you doing in Miss Costello's room?"

He didn't answer but he reached for his back pocket. And I thought of all that had happened and was likely to happen, and jerked down on my gun and freed it from its clip.

I said: "No! No! No!"

He didn't stop but kept reaching for his pocket. I could see the gun there as plain as if it was in sight.

**H**E STARTED to bring his hand out from under his coat tails then and I shot him, trying to catch him in that shoulder. When the slug hit him he spun half around, falling but trying to catch his balance. He crashed into the wall with his back flat against it and started to slide down, now with both hands back against it as if he was trying to put on the brakes.

"You asked for it," I said, moving up a little closer.

He sat there on the floor staring up at me, bracing his back against the wall with his empty hands. Some-



body moved up beside me and said, "You'd better not move in on him, guy! He's still dangerous."

I said: "Keep away! Keep away! I know it!"

The man on the floor reached up and felt his shoulder with his left hand, moving it up there in little jerks. The man by me said:

"Keep the gun on him and I'll circle and take his. Watch him now."

"Go ahead," I said.

He did. He was a medium sized sort of bird and dressed in the same way. Just medium. A sort of gray suit that didn't actually seem gray. The same kind of hat and the same kind of face to match.

And he seemed familiar.

And then the door beside me opened and some woman stuck her head out and saw the man sitting on the floor and saw me with the gun in my hand. She yelped once and slammed her door so fast it cut the yelp half in two.

I moved over to the front while my helper kept to the side. I didn't want to shoot the man on the floor any more. "Hold steady, guy," I said. "Don't make me do it again."

He looked up at me and began to moan, each noise he made coming out a little louder. The man in the gray suit kept well over to the side and reached for the guy's hip pocket then looked up at me with a puzzled stare.

"No gun there," he said.

When he spoke it dawned on me where I'd seen him. He'd been in the bar when I'd been talking with George Simpson—the first night I'd been with Nora Costello. The night I'd slapped her old man down with

the ash tray. I'd seen him two or three times in the lobby of her hotel and he'd ridden the elevator with us twice.

I said: "Look again. It must be there."

He looked again.

The man on the floor stopped his moaning long enough to say: "I got no gun! I'm clean!"

The cops were just getting out of the elevator by the time we'd made sure he was telling the truth. We couldn't find any gun.

And the cops couldn't, either—and they spoke of this little matter several times while I rode down to the station with them.

The man in the gray suit went along too.

## CHAPTER VI

### The Cops Are Nice



HEY didn't book me when we first went in, but that didn't mean a thing. They could do it any time during the next twenty-four hours. Officially, I was being held for investigation. And a private license hurts instead of helps when you're stuck with something like that because they figure it's gone to your head and you got careless with a gun. They let me use a phone, of course with them listening in, and I got Nora Costello.

"Look, Miss Costello," I said, making it careful because of the other big ears on the line, "I'm sorry but there's only one thing I can do. I've got to tell them why I was with you. There'll be no newspaper stuff given out if I play ball with them. If I don't, they charge me right



away and it'll be on the books where the newspapers can get at it, and then it'll be out in the open for fair. So what about it?"

"D'ya want a lawyer?" she asked. "I'll get George Kampoulis to go down with one. You were working for me, weren't you—you were protecting me, weren't you?"

Which meant she realized the cops were listening in.

"I won't need one," I told her. "Not if I tell them the whole thing."

She hesitated a second and I knew what she was thinking. She didn't want friend hubby dragged in the picture.

"I'll have to tell them about your hiring me and all," I said. "That'll clear me—they can check on why you needed a bodyguard. They'll find about the sandbag business from the show people and about the holdup from their own records. And about Marie being poisoned from the hospital. The doorman at your hotel will tell them about the three guys attacking you. How was I to know this wasn't another of the things; the guy reached for his pocket and I can prove it."

She got the idea. I hadn't said a word about Harbin, her husband.

"Do what you think best," she said.

I was in one of the general offices with a detective-sergeant named Delancey listening over my shoulder and another one named Mierz listening in on an extension.

**M**IERZ said. "All right, go ahead and tell us. It had better be good. We can book you right now on unprovoked assault with intent to kill. The guy will be all

right, unless his lung was tipped, or we could make it murder. You might get it cut to manslaughter but that would be the best you could do."

"It's tough enough without spreading it," I said. "After all, I've got a witness that the guy reached for his pocket, and I caught the guy leaving my client's room. And somebody's after her. That's what I was hired for."

"To shoot people?"

"To look after Miss Costello."

"Who was the guy you shot?"

"I never saw him before I saw him backing out of her place."

"What's his name?"

"I don't know."

"Had he threatened her?"

"I don't know."

That was the way it went. First Delancey and then Mierz would ask me something, trying to make me admit something that didn't jibe with my story. The man in the gray suit had left, along with a couple of cops, and I had a notion they were putting him through the same performance. I told them everything the Costello girl had told me and left out everything about her husband. I also left out about George Kampoulis coming down to my office.

As soon as I'd tell them anything, like about the sandbag thing that had happened to Nora, they'd send somebody out to check it. They even got somebody from her bank to verify the fact she'd given me a check for a hundred. I told them everything the Costello girl had told me and left out everything about her and me.

They were clever about it. They





She called him all the names I ever heard a man called in my life—and some that were new to me.



weren't sore. There was none of the rubber hose stuff. But they'd word their questions in such a way the answer could be taken two ways, and they had a police stenographer taking down questions and answers in a notebook.

Right at the start they'd asked me if I wanted to get in touch with my lawyer and I'd told them I didn't need one—that I'd done the shooting in what I thought was self-defense, and that a Grand Jury would back me up in it if the D. A. ever tried for an indictment.

We'd gone on like this for a couple of hours when the man in the gray suit came in with a cop. Delancey went over and talked to them. He came back and said:

"All right, Malone! The guy's name is Halstead. The slug didn't touch his lung, so you beat a possible murder charge. Now who's Halstead?"

"Never heard of him."

"Recognize these?" he asked, and came out with two of the pictures police make when bodies are found. The first showed a man doubled up behind an ash-can, but his head was tipped to the side and back so his face was in sight. There was a lot of blood on it but it was still recognizable.

A short, dark, tough looking bird of around fifty. The other was of a man flat on his back and sprawled out as if crucified. The camera had been pointing down at this honey. The man was tall and very thin and well over sixty—and he had a little chin beard as well as a mustache. Both white. His hair was streaked with blood and there was a lot more on the white shirt he wore.

I SAID I'd never seen either of them before in my life, and Delancey went back and talked with the man in the gray suit and with the other cop for awhile.

Then those two left and the questioning went on.

By that time it was after three and I was all in.

Delancey said finally: "I'm going to let this rest for awhile. We'll take it up again in the morning."

"You been giving this same sort of workout to Miss Costello?"

They both laughed, which meant somebody had.

The whole thing wasn't right. They'd been treating me too damned well. They hadn't harped too long on any one thing. There'd been no rough stuff nor sign or threat of any.

And any time a city cop gets a chance to toss a private cop around he takes it. Delancey said: "Okay, Malone! I'll take you back and show you your new home. For the night, at least."

Then another cop came in with another picture. This one came from the morgue and after a P. M. had been made on the subject. The subject was all washed and cleaned and stark naked, and there was a neat row of stitches up his middle, where he'd been put together after his insides had been taken out. They sew them cross-wise, like a shoe is laced. This one was bald-headed but still looked to be in his early thirties. He was as hairy as an ape everywhere but on the top of his head, but three little holes showed through the fur alongside the hem-stitching.

"I don't know him either," I said.

"You haven't got many friends, have you, Malone?" Mierz said,



laughing. "Ah, well, maybe you'll get out of this and even keep your ticket. There's always a chance."

"Or maybe trade the ticket for a number upstate," Delancey said. "Let's go."

I went back to the cell they gave me, wondering just what it was all about. Most of their questioning had been done in that half-kidding way. Which didn't make sense, rhyme, or reason. All I knew was that the man I'd shot was named Halstead. They hadn't told me the names of any of the three dead men they'd showed me pictures of. Nor said a word about them. They hadn't questioned me about them—they'd acted as though they believed me when I said I didn't know them.

And while both of them kept talking about booking me for attempted murder, neither of them acted as though they meant it.

It gave me something to think about before I went to sleep.

A UNIFORMED cop took me up to Delancey about ten the next morning. Delancey handed me over an envelope with the things they'd taken from me the night before, and he grinned at me very pleasantly.

"I signed for this with the property clerk for you," he said. "I've got a man over at Ballistics, picking up your gun. He'll be back in just a minute."

"That means I'm clear?" I asked curiously.

He nodded and he said I was as free as the air, and I thought it over while he put in his joke. "You and the air are about the only free things in town," he said.

"Don't I have to put up bail?"

"No bail."

"How much of it got in the papers?"

He tossed me the one that usually made the most of any possible scandal and told me to see for myself. There was just a squib, saying that a crook named Halstead had been shot by police while prowling the Stratford. And that Halstead was a known crook with a record.

Delancey watched me read it. "I thought it would sound better if we made it a cop job all the way through," he said. "This way it keeps both you and the Costello girl entirely out of it. That's better for both of you. The newspapers don't know a thing except what's there."

"That's swell."

"We don't believe in hurting anybody that shouldn't be hurt," he said. "Sit down a minute. I'm afraid we put you out of a job, Malone—but you had no business being on it in the first place. Maybe it's fair."

"I don't get that."

He said: "Your reason for being on that job was that Miss Costello was in danger. Naturally, we checked, too. Most of it was accident, we found out."

"I *still* don't get it."

"We worked on the stage hands at the theatre, and one of them admitted dropping the sandbag. He was scared about it and kept his mouth shut so he wouldn't get the gate. He was careless, but you can't hang a man for that."

"Go on."

"The hold-up was the usual thing. The same gang has been working town for three months. They always slug the customers out after they



rob 'em. We've had a dozen cases, just the same. We can discount that."

"How about her getting slugged a lot harder than the guy that was with her?"

He laughed. He said: "She'd been making quite a flash and they were probably sore because they didn't get more from her than they did. That was just temper on their part, Malone."

**H**E COULD have been right—I'd read about some of the same kind of stuff in the papers and knew there were those kind of operators working in town.

"Then what about the maid being poisoned? She *was* poisoned. She *did* drink Miss Costello's whiskey. She *did* go to the hospital and have her stomach pumped out."

Delancey laughed again. "She took a couple of slugs of that whiskey and right about that time started getting an attack of ptomaine. We talked to the doctor who worked on her, last night. Miss Costello just jumped to the conclusion that it was her whiskey that had done the poisoning. It was some clams the gal had had for dinner, instead. Or so says the medico, and he should know."

I agreed the doctor should know. A cop came in with my gun, and Delancey handed it over and I broke it and saw they'd even left me the five live shells that should have been in it.

"No beef about the gun business then?"

"No beef."

I tried once more. "Now look, Delancey! I saw this myself. We

came out of the hotel, Miss Costello and myself, and three guys started trouble. One of them had a sap—I saw it with my own eyes. The trouble was headed Miss Costello's way—not mine. The sap was for her, not for me."

He was waiting for me to mention that; I could tell by the way he leaned back in his chair and put on the know-all-the-answers look.

"That's it, Malone," he said. "It's things like that that people should go to the police with. We've got ways of breaking those things, and a private cop hasn't. Now on that, we've got the Costello maid, Marie Berle, in jail. We've got her boy friend, a man named Myers. And we're picking up three of *his* boy friends, we'll have them sometime during the day or I miss my guess. I'll ask you to come down and identify them, after we've got them, so you can expect a call. The girl was mad because Miss Costello rode her about drinking the whiskey—and just between you and me, I don't think Costello's any cinch to work for. Call it temperament or call it temper, she's got a lot of it. You should know. And this maid is a screwball wench that holds a grudge and she's got a boy friend with no more sense. So they were going to work over the Costello girl in the good old-fashioned way. Were going to slap her around some."

"You're sure of that?"

"Both the girl and the man confessed. You can read the confessions, if you want to."

"Miss Costello said one of the men looked like one of the men who'd held her up."

Delancey just laughed and I don't



blame him. The girl had been excited both times, and all that had happened was she'd picked the same type of man. Probably both men looked similar in a dim fashion—that is, they were probably about the same age, build, and coloring.

I said: "Well, thanks! I won't be running away—you can always get me at the office."

"No hard feelings then," he said, shaking hands. And, "No hard feelings," I told him, and got away from the police station in a hurry.

There was always a chance of him changing his mind.

## CHAPTER VII

### Too Easy



T WAS getting screwier by the minute. I didn't doubt but that Delancey was right when he said things that had happened to Nora Costello were accidents. They'd checked, and when the cops check a thing like that they make sure. So that was that. Of course they didn't know about her husband and whatever grief she was carrying on her shoulders because of him—or at least they hadn't said anything about it. Nor about me playing around with the girl.

That was something else.

Nothing made sense. My part in the thing particularly. I'd shot a guy who'd been prowling the Costello suite and nothing had been done about it. There'd been nothing said about what the guy had been looking for and it was a good bet the cops knew just what that was. The man was in a hospital and flat on his back, but if the cops want to find out any-

thing they'll go to a hospital or any other place to ask questions. It wasn't as though questioning would put this man Halstead in any danger of his life; he wasn't shot badly enough to make excitement an issue with the doctors working on him.

That was all passed over. And here I was, free and clear, not even with a cent of bail up, and I was the one who'd done the shooting.

They hadn't questioned me in the way they would have if things had been kosher. They'd been too nice. It ended up in one answer—I was out of jail when I should have been in.

At least for awhile.

Miss Costello was in and sent word for me to go right up. She'd been crying; I could see that the second I went through the door. "It was tough for you," I said, "but there wasn't anything I could do about it. At least there wasn't anything in the papers. Did they raise much hell with you?"

"Not any," she said. "George Kampoulis and my lawyer were here before they even started in. I just told them about the accidents and then they went away. Then they came back and took Marie away—they've got her in jail and want me to swear out a charge against her."

"You going to?"

"Lord, no! The darn fool! She'd just been seeing too many tough movies. There's trouble enough, without me making it for somebody else. And before I forget it, that fellow in your office called and wants you to call back. He called me."

I got Joe Smith on the phone and he said: "Where have you been—Aunt Kate has been worried sick



and she's been raising hell with me about it. You didn't call her and you didn't go home. She thinks you were with that woman. How'd you make out?"

"Why Joe! Miss Costello's married."

"So what! That's what Aunt Kate says."

"Let it go. I was at the police station. You tell her."

"You there now?"

"No."

"So *that's* it," he said, sounding relieved. "Two cops were waiting here for me this morning. They went through the office and your case files and everything."

"They didn't have any right to do that."

"They acted as if they did. I couldn't argue it. You in trouble, Pat?"

"The cops say no," I told him, "but I'm not so sure. But you tell Aunt Kate everything is okay. Keep quiet about the other."

I hung up and Nora Costello said: "Jack's gone again. I can't find him. He hasn't been home and he hasn't called since early this morning. About five. He sounded frantic."

This explained the signs of crying. Her voice was dull and sounded all washed out. Her eyes looked blank and a little staring and she'd put on ten years since I first saw her, if appearances counted for a thing.

I said: "I could look for him."

She asked where, which settled that.

By and by she said she was sure Jack was dead. I made a drink for both of us. She said that if he was, she was surely going to join a con-

vent if she could find one that would take her. I said that people got over everything and she said that people didn't get over things unless they *wanted* to get over them. I then thanked her for offering to send Kampoulis and a lawyer down to the jail to help me out and she said that was nothing and to forget it.

She brightened a little about there and said: "George told me about going down to see you. That must have been funny—you clipping him for a hundred and a half. It hurt him worse than losing an eye—he said so himself."

I said: "A smart guy! You gave him the brother stall and he didn't go for it but put George Simpson from the Donovan Agency on me. Simpson tailed us to the Arlisienne and I saw him there, but I didn't catch wise until I saw Kampoulis the next morning. That Kampoulis isn't taking any chances on losing his meal ticket."

She said it looked that way. And that she was going to lose her mind and therefore lose George Kampoulis his meal ticket unless she heard from Jack very soon.

ABOUT then I started telling her about what had happened at the station the night before, thinking it would take her mind off her trouble—in other words, away from Jack Harbin. And when I got to where I was describing the picture of the old fellow in the alley, the one that had been wearing the chin whiskers and the mustache, she straightened up and said:

"What's that? What's that? Say that again."

I described the man again.



It was a regulation  
sap he swung.

"That's the Deacon," she said.  
"Now listen! Did they show you a  
picture of a man that looked like  
this? About five feet five and about  
as heavy as you are."

"One eighty-five?"

"About that, I guess. Very dark  
and with a little cut up by his left  
eyebrow that makes it quirk up a





little bit? Very white teeth? About thirty-five? Very well dressed, though I don't suppose that means anything."

I said I'd seen no pictures of anybody like that and described the man behind the ash can and the one in the morgue again. She shook her head and lost interest and said, "Neither of them fit. It wouldn't be them. Oh, if Jack would call! If I'd hear *anything*."

And this after being so especially nice to me!

I'd been thinking, after she'd spoken of Kampoulis and after I'd thought of Kampoulis putting George Simpson on me for a tag. There was nothing sure about it but it was worth taking a chance with, I thought. If I was right about George Kampoulis, he wouldn't have been taking any chances with having Jack Harbin mess up his private affairs, either.

"I've got an idea that might find him," I said, "but it would cost money. Quite a bit, maybe. It might cost a guy his job and he'd want pay for it."

She stood and ran for her purse so fast it startled me. "I haven't much with me but I can give you a check. How much will I make it for?"

"Five hundred should do it. Maybe not that much—it's a cheap guy we'll be buying."

She made me a check and had to write three before she got one that would pass the bank. Her hand was shaking that much. I took it and my hat and said:

"I'll call you as soon as I know anything. Yes or no, that is."

"My God, yes," she said.

So I took a cab to the Donovan Agency.

GEORGE SIMPSON was in the corner bar, just as the office girl had said he'd be. I went in fast, and he gave me a scared look and put his hand up in front of his face for a guard and said:

"It's okay, Pal! It was a job. They told me to find out who the guy was with the Costello dame and it was you. That was all; I *swear* it."

I took him over to a booth and tried to keep things sounding normal. He was open to a proposition and smelled one before we even sat down.

"Look, George," I said. "I'm trying to find a guy and I think your agency has a tag on him. How about it? The same guy that put you on me is behind this other."

"I couldn't do that, Paddy," he said, with an expression on his face that said different. "It wouldn't be honest—it would be doublecrossing the agency. Who's the guy?"

I started talking business without beating about the bush any longer.

JOE KING was in a fruit store, across from a dirty looking string of flats. Stores below and apartments above. He was eating an apple. He was a fat, sloppy looking bird that I barely knew by sight, and there was no more expression on his flat face when he saw me than there is on a blank wall.

"Hi, boy," I said.

He grunted and finished the apple.

"Came out to see you."

"Whatever it is, I don't want to buy any of it," he said. He gave the



fruit store man a dime for two bananas and didn't bother to even offer me the other one.

"I'm buying, not selling."

"Buying what?"

"Where's Harbin?"

"Don't know him."

I said: "Now look! It's worth money to you. I've paid money to find out where you were staked out and it's worth a hundred to find out where Harbin is. I know you're on him."

"Who told you where I was?"

"Who cares? I got it the same way as this and you know it."

He finished the first banana and started peeling the second while he thought this over.

"Two hundred," he said, "and I'll throw in something extra."

I carefully counted out the two hundred.

I'll give him credit—he knew his job. He said: "Harbin's upstairs, over that cleaning place right across the street. The room number's eleven. He's been there for a little over two hours."

"And what's the extra?"

King grinned then. "He ain't alone. He picked up a guy with a busted arm, over on North Avenue, and they both came here. The guy with the bum wing is named Charley Johnson and he's a two-time loser or more. I saw him in Folsom, in California, and they don't put first-termers there."

"What were you doing in Folsom?"

"You paying for that, too?"

I said thanks and went across the street. If Joe King had done time in Folsom, and if the Donovan Agency wanted to hire him in spite

of it, that was their business. Not mine.

## CHAPTER VIII

### The Trouble Women Make



HE stairs leading up over the cleaning place were steep and not over three feet wide. The place was filthy dirty and smelled that way. The sign on the door advertised rooms for twenty-five cents and it was that kind of place. I got to the top and saw a bell with a sign by it that read *Ring—Landlady*, but I passed it and went down the hall. I had to be going the right way because that was the *only* way—the hall kept going straight on from the stairs.

Number eleven was the sixth door on the right, and I stopped by it and finally figured there was just one thing to do. I did it. I left my gun where it was, under my arm, and knocked . . . and I had a hunch I was wrong at the time.

Harbin opened the door for me so fast it was as if I was expected. He saw me and stepped back, without saying a word.

"Hello, Jack," I said. I knew that Nora had told him who I was and that I was working for her and I thought that by that time he'd have decided I was on his side. I had to act as though the welcome sign was out, anyway. And it seemed to work because he took a step back and said:

"Now you're here, come in."

I did. And sitting on the bed was the man Nora Costello had described to me. About my weight but shorter. Very dark. A twisted eyebrow that



made him look as though he saw a joke that no one else did. And very well dressed, even to the white sling that held his right arm and bandaged hand across his chest. He smiled at me, showing me the white teeth Nora had spoken of.

"Nora says that this is her brother, Charley," Harbin said. "She *said* it. Catch?" He winked at his friend.

Charley said: "Catch!" and reached out his left hand to me. He said to me, still with the grin:





"Excuse it. The other one's busted."

Harbin had just told his pal that I was a phony, but that was none of my business. I was still working for his wife, not him. I said:

"You should phone Nora. She's worried sick about you. She thinks something terrible's happened to you."

Charley Johnson laughed but Harbin didn't. Johnson said: "You'd better call in, boy. She's keeping cases on you. Next thing she'll have the Marines out."

THE walls of the place were thin and I could hear a sort of dragging set of footsteps coming down the hall. And Harbin said: "That's

While they grabbed her,  
I hit the other guy in  
the belly.





him now, Charley!" and Johnson nodded.

Then Harbin picked up a gun that had been hidden under a folded paper and showed me the front of it.

"Get back out of the way," he said, and I moved fast. He had that sort of a look on his face and I was praying he'd forget he hadn't taken my own gun. I was at the back of the room, up against the wall, when the footsteps stopped in front of the door, and Harbin didn't give whoever it was a chance to knock.

He threw the door open and said: "Come in out of the wet, Angie."

That made four of us in that small room. Angie was a tall, blond, weedy looking bird and he dragged one foot behind him. He looked at the gun in Harbin's hand and laughed, but there was nothing funny in the sound. He looked over at Charley Johnson, and the laugh stopped as though it had been chopped off.

"Ugh, you, Charley!" he said. "So it's like that!"

"It's like that!" said Johnson, very softly.

Everybody stood still, with me back against the wall and out of the center of things. But Charley Johnson's black eyes would flick over my way about every other second, and I had a notion Harbin was listening to every move I made, though he kept the gun pointed at the one called Angie.

Then, without a sound of footsteps for warning, there was another knock on the door and it was loud and firm and heavy. Harbin twisted his head toward Johnson and Johnson shook his head in a puzzled way.

Harbin said to Angie: "I'm putting this in my pocket but it's pointing your way. We're just sitting here having a drink. Play it that way."

He was almost whispering this.

"Sure, Jack," said Angie.

Harbin said: "Then open the door."

ANGIE did and there was George Kampoulis with a gun in his hand, the muzzle tipped up a little so that he could swivel it in any direction. He had a cigar in his mouth as usual, and he was bracing himself against the door casing with his free hand. The only expression on his face was when he saw me and then he seemed to tighten a little.

"I'm in time, I see," he said.

And then the party started.

Harbin, without another word being said, shot at Kampoulis. Through his pocket, which is a foolish thing to do. A gun held there is at a bad angle, and nobody in the world can hit what he aims at, shooting like that, unless luck's on his side.

It wasn't fully on Harbin's side. Kampoulis flinched a little bit and tipped his gun barrel down and let go. Harbin sat down on the floor as though somebody had hit him behind the knees. I'd yanked for my gun when Harbin shot, without any idea of who I was going to use it on as yet, and I'd just got it clear when the long tall Angie went into action. I don't know where he'd been carrying the gun, but it was in his hand when I saw it and it was lined on Charley Johnson, who was heaving himself back and sidewise on the bed.

Then Harbin shot again, from



the floor, and Kampoulis spat his cigar out and shot him again. This time Harbin went back so hard his head thudded when it hit the floor. Angie shot at Johnson and I shot Angie through the knees, figuring he wasn't playing fair shooting at a cripple. Johnson had that broken arm in the sling and I thought that should give him king's X.

You couldn't hear yourself think by then. The room was small and a gun in an enclosed place like that makes a deafening racket. And nobody was using a baby gun—everything there was in a grown-up calibre. I was watching Angie, who was down on the floor and flopping like a fish in the bottom of a boat and trying to watch Kampoulis at the same time.

**THEY** both still held guns and I didn't want one of them turned my way. Angie was rolling on the floor and pounding up and down on it with his, but he could have tipped it up in my direction if the thought came to him. Kampoulis was holding his at his side and pointing at the floor, but that didn't mean he couldn't get back in action with it.

He wasn't thinking about the gun though. He was sliding down the door casing, trying to hold himself up with the hand he had against it. Both shots of Harbin's had connected because I'd seen him shiver when both landed. He was just so big and bulky that he could stand a lot of lead. Angie wiggled himself my way about then and I kicked the gun out of his hand, and then Kampoulis' knees hit the floor and he stayed there. Kneeling like that.

Charley Johnson said: "That

damn' Jack Harbin! Always like that! Just crazy! Blows up when it gets tight!"

His voice was steady enough but it was up in the air above where it belonged. He rolled himself from the bed and took a step toward the door, watching me and watching Kampoulis, who was on his knees in the doorway. He kept turning his head from one to the other of us.

I said: "Stick around, Johnson!"

"Oh, *you!*" he said, and gave all his attention to me, swinging so his left side was facing me. "I'm getting out."

And then he shot me, the slug coming out of that mess of bandages on his right arm. It landed high but on bone, and the shock put me back against the wall and made me sick to my stomach. He turned toward the door again, and the man in the gray suit, the one who'd been in the hotel when I'd shot the prowler, stepped into sight and stood behind Kampoulis, who now had his head down.

"Don't do it, Charley," he said.

He had a gun in his hand and he was braced as though expecting to have to shoot. Johnson shrugged and said:

"All right, all right."

He started to turn, so as to bring his bandaged gun to bear.

"Watch it," I said. "He's got a gun in that phony bandage."

The gray-suited man said: "I know it! Into the wall, Charley!"

Kampoulis tipped over from his knees then, sliding out across the floor and giving a great sigh as he did. Johnson went to the wall and faced it, and as he did he said to me: "I might have known it would be a



punk like you that'd blow the top off the whole thing."

I passed out just as two more men came in the room, along with the man in the gray suit.

**I** CAME to in the middle of a crowd, but it was a different one. There was a doctor working on my shoulder and he was doing plenty of damage to me if the pain meant anything. I turned my head and he said:

"Almost through, son!"

Angie wasn't on the floor, nor Harbin, nor Kampoulis. Johnson was sitting on a chair, but the bandage was off his arm and he had handcuffs on his wrists. The man in the gray suit was talking to him and he was grinning back at him and answering everything asked.

"He's out of it," the doctor said. The man in the gray suit came over to the bed, letting one of the others with him look after Johnson. He said: "And now, Malone! We sent the others away, but I thought you might want to pick your own hospital. You've got a broken shoulder."

"The Polyclinic," I said. "And who the hell are you?"

"Government."

"How's Kampoulis?"

He shrugged. "He's still alive. Not a chance, though. Harbin's dead, and Angie Meadows went to the police hospital."

"What's it all about?"

"Well, Harbin was head of the Harper gang. You've heard of the Harper gang? He always worked under that name instead of his own."

I'd heard of the Harper gang. A really hot outfit that specialized in

banks and mail trains, with a little assorted kidnaping on the side.

The doctor said: "I'm going to give this man a sedative. So he can be taken to the Polyclinic."

"I'll see you up there, Malone," the man in the gray suit said. The doctor bunched up the skin on my arm and went to work with a needle, and after that I got sleepier and sleepier.

In fact, I didn't even know when I rode to the hospital.

**A**UNT KATE had brought me fruit and the man in the gray suit brought cigarettes. It turned out his name was Severts.

"So it was like that," he said. "We lost Harbin and had a notion his wife would tell you where he was. You seemed to be going along all right with her. That's why they let you out of the station—we put a little pressure on there. When you found him we were right behind you."

"And Kampoulis was trying to cut in on the money?"

"That's right. He'd hired the Donovan Agency to keep track of Harbin, so Harbin wouldn't make any trouble for him with the Costello girl. He was playing around there, too. He found out that Harbin was head of the Harper gang and that he still had the money from the mail truck job in San Francisco. He wanted to cut in on it. We never could *prove* that Harbin's bunch did that job but we were sure of it. Most of them went to jail after it, on various counts, and we had to wait for them to get out and go after the money."

Aunt Kate is a grim-looking



woman. She clicked her false teeth and said: "So that's why the Costello girl and he were separated. I couldn't understand it if she was so

crazy about him. He was in jail, eh?"

"Both he and Johnson," said Severt's. "State charges only, though.



This was going to be bad. And I didn't have time to go for my gun.



And only Johnson and Harbin knew where the money was hidden. The rest of the gang was waiting for their cut but they had to wait for Harbin and Johnson to get released. You saw their pictures in the station, Malone. They were a bunch of small-timers and Harbin and Johnson were afraid they'd tip off the cops in a jam, so they started putting on a campaign to clean them out. And then, also, there'd have been less shares to cut. One of them Johnson killed with his hidden gun trick—that's why he wore his arm in the sling. That was the man in the morgue. Deacon Smith and Toughy Edwards were killed in Harbin's apartment—you walked in right after the job was done—he and Johnson had just carted out the bodies. We found them in the alley back of the building. Harbin came here just to do that murder job."

"And they were going to kill this Angie, too?" Aunt Kate asked. "That's just terrible. And to think my nephew picked that time to call on them. That shows how a woman can make a fool of a man."

"They'd have killed him, too," Severts assured her. "They were fighting for big money. Enough to retire on. They didn't want a soul left alive that had a thing on them."

Aunt Kate said firmly: "That was just silly. Why didn't they just go and take the money and let the others whistle for their shares?"

"The others would have whistled to the cops, if they'd done that. Let's talk about something else. How long are you in for, Malone?"

I said the doctor thought I'd be out in a week and that I was getting along fine. Lots of company

and a good rest. Aunt Kate made a remark about the kind of company I was getting and that referred to Miss Nora Costello. Severts said he'd be running along . . . and did.

"It's all over now," I told Aunt Kate. "Nothing to do but sit back and try to collect a reward for my part in the thing. I probably won't get anything, but it's a nice thought."

"You *should* get something," she said.

"I was just the stooge. Severts did all the work. You see they thought Nora Costello knew where the money was hidden—thought that Harbin had told her. He had, but she wouldn't say a word. Not even to me! She was so crazy about the guy it hurt. As soon as he was dead she told them all about it."

"I know that."

"Well, Severts had to wait for Harbin and Johnson to get the money from the cache. It was from a Government mail truck, almost three hundred dollars worth of registered mail, and the Government keeps after a thing like that forever. I just butted into the thing through Nora Costello being scared, and Severts used me for a stooge. He let me work for Nora and just followed me—he knew she'd be in constant touch with her old man. And through him with the money. They didn't want to pick up the gang until they got their hands on that. They knew Harbin was a little nuts and always went bad in a tight place, but they also knew he wouldn't talk."

"And the man you shot in the hotel was just a prowler?"

"That's all. It was lucky he had a record. And it was lucky Severts needed me for his fall guy—I'd



have been in plenty of trouble if it hadn't been for that."

"All because of that terrible woman!"

"She was paying the fee, wasn't she?"

Aunt Kate looked stern but didn't argue it. Money means something to her, after all. The nurse bustled in then and said:

"Miss Costello is downstairs to see you."

"Send her up," I said.

Aunt Kate waited until the nurse was gone. And then she said: "I'm not going to leave until after she does. She's not a client any more, Patrick, and she's a dangerous woman. I don't want you to see her any more, Patrick."

"Why not?" I asked.

Aunt Kate said firmly: "The first thing you know she'll get you into trouble."

And so help me, she still hasn't figured out why I laughed.

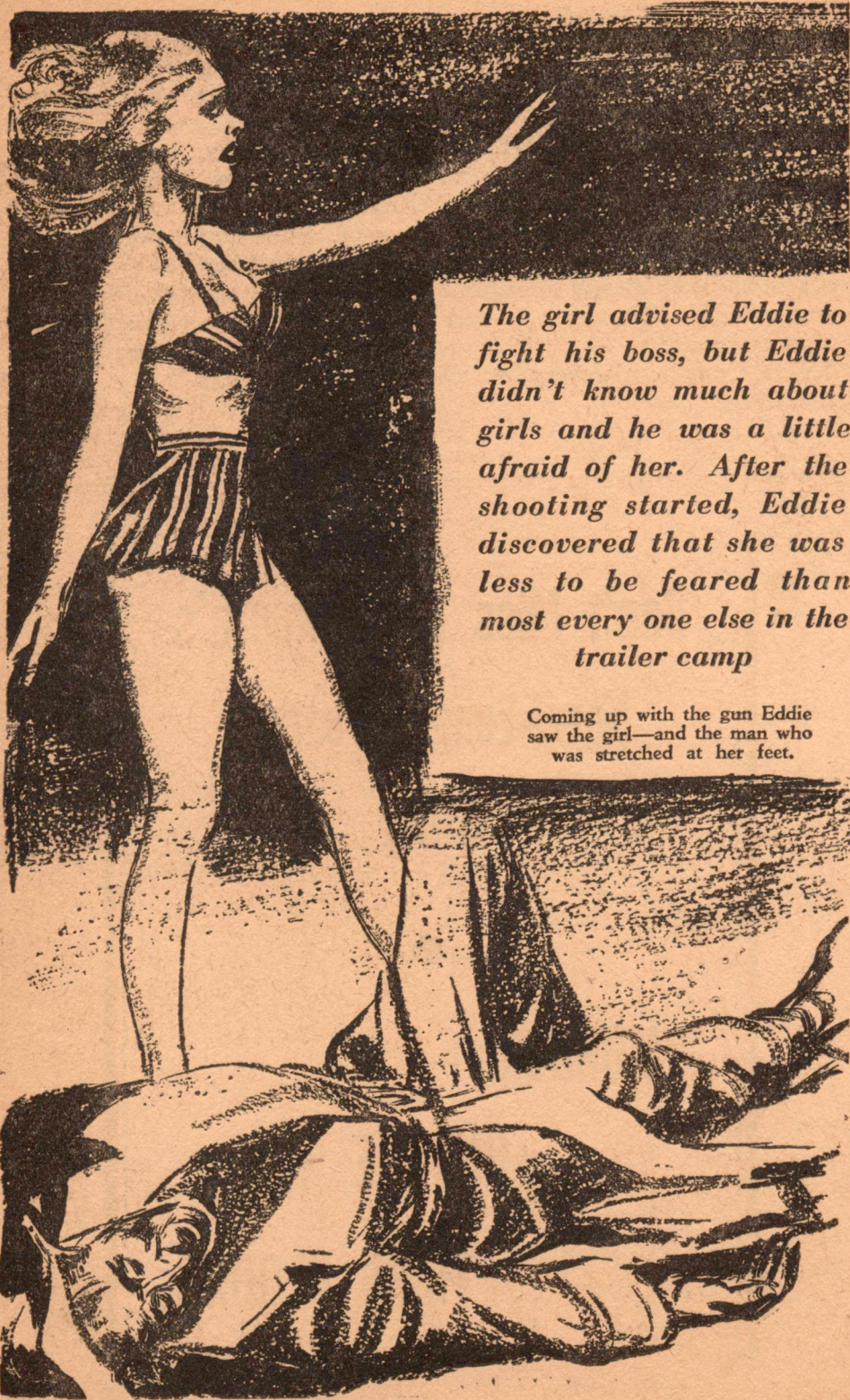
**Don't Miss Next Month's  
Novel-Length Feature  
Story**

**"MURDER**

**ON THE**

**THIRD FLOOR"**





*The girl advised Eddie to fight his boss, but Eddie didn't know much about girls and he was a little afraid of her. After the shooting started, Eddie discovered that she was less to be feared than most every one else in the trailer camp*

Coming up with the gun Eddie saw the girl—and the man who was stretched at her feet.



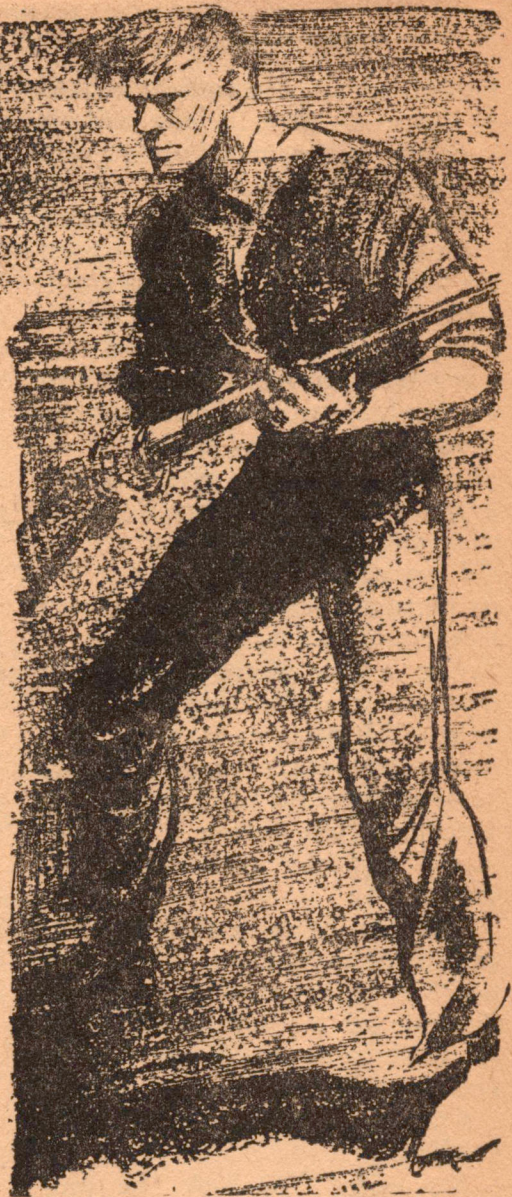
By **WILLIAM  
B. RAINEY**



**F**IVE HUNDRED is the best offer I'm going to make," Paul Bonard said. He was standing in front of the trailer-and-tourist camp office, a flabby man with loose lips and thick-lidded eyes. Above his head the fronds of a cocoanut palm clashed in the hard wind. "Five hundred isn't a bad stake," he said.

"But I don't want a stake," Ed-die Howard said. "I want a steady job. When I came here, you said—"

"The place has been losing money." Bonard walked to where his car was parked and crammed his heavy weight beneath the wheel. "I better get back over the bridge to the mainland before the storm breaks. And think over that offer. Five hundred—or nothing." There was a definite threat in his voice and



# DEATH IN AN EMPTY JAR



his little eyes were mean as he looked at Howard. Then the motor of his big coupe burst smoothly into action and he drove away.

Eddie Howard stood looking after the car, leaning a little against the increasing wind. He was a tall, well-built young man; not much more than a boy really. His face was sun-tanned and lean and pleasant, but his mouth had a discouraged droop and there was a whipped expression in his gray eyes. A few drops of rain came driving down the wind and beat against him and he did not notice them. He felt discouraged and hopeless. He had been kicked around a lot in his life, never having a job where he stood a chance of really making good until he got this place as manager of a trailer-and-tourist camp on a Florida key—and now he was being fired in September just before the winter season and the real money got started.

The rain came in thicker bursts and still he stood there. He did not notice the girl approaching from the direction of the few parked trailers, until she was beside him. "Looks like the hurricane is about to hit," she said.

"Yes."

She said, "You look like your favorite aunt had just died. What's wrong with you?"

"Mr. Bonard, the man who owns this camp, was here—and I'm out of a job. I had been hoping for a big winter. . . ."

"I thought you were here on contract."

"I am. But he wants to break it."

"To hell with him," she said. "If

you've got a contract, make him keep it. Fight him."

He turned and looked at her. She was a tall girl with honey-blond hair that whipped back in the wind now. She wore shorts (very brief shorts that left no doubt how long and slender and tapering her legs were, full and firm in the thighs) and a white shirt open at the throat. The thickening rain had made the shirt stick to her body, outlining the high, round curve of her bosom. In the open V of the shirt he could see where her smooth sun-tanned skin became abruptly milky white, and tiny blue veins marked it. She was a very beautiful girl, strangely provocative and exciting. She had been here about a week, staying in a trailer, alone. Her name was Nancy Harris and she was an artist, she said, but Eddie Howard had never seen any of her pictures.

Now she reached out and put one slim hand on Eddie's arm. "Don't let the guy kick you out if you want to stay here. You've got a contract. Make him stick to it."

"I wouldn't stand a chance. You can't lick money."

"You can't if you don't try!"

He shrugged wearily. "It's no use. Let's go into the office out of the rain."

THE cry came down wind, sudden and sharp and terrible. A single high-pitched note of agony. Then it was gone and there was only the wind and the rain driving in a steady spray.

"What was that?"

"I don't know," Eddie said.

"Maybe one of the swamp birds. . . ."

"That wasn't any bird." She was



staring into the storm, her blue eyes narrowed. "It sounded like a man."

"You go in out of the rain. I'll look around."

She said, "A person might as well forget about rain during a Florida hurricane. I'll go with you."

They crossed the narrow road and went into the trailer clearing on the far side. There were three trailers here, but none of them showed lights although the murky twilight was thickening toward darkness. They walked almost to the bay side of the island, but the cry was not repeated.

As they turned back toward the trailers, the girl said, "I went on down past those mangroves this afternoon. The storm hadn't begun then and I went swimming without benefit of a suit. I started to ask you to come along."

He gulped and felt his heart jump against his ribs—then realized she was making fun of him. He suspected she often was deliberately tempting him but he couldn't be sure. He didn't know much about girls. He had never had money enough to go with them. Nancy Harris was a year or two older than he was—and a thousand years older in experience. She excited him, and yet he was unsure of himself, and he was a little afraid.

She pretended to stumble and fall against him. For a moment he could feel the bare warmth of her body against his arm. She said, "It's rough walking in this storm," and continued to lean against him.

He began to quiver. He pulled away from her. "We better hurry on back to the office."

They went on a few yards. Nancy said, "Look. The door of Mr.

Henty's trailer is open. The place must be soaked inside."

"Wind probably blew it open. I'll close it."

He was pushing the door closed when he saw a dull gleam of something upon the floor and leaned to pick it up. It was a fragment of broken glass. The whole floor of the trailer was littered with broken glass.

"Now what the hell?" he said. He stepped inside and the girl followed and pushed the door closed. Eddie switched on the light.

Glass was scattered all over the trailer. Fragments of broken bottles, a water jug, several glasses. "Somebody went berserk," Nancy said, "and broke every bit of glass in the place."

"But there's nothing else broken, nothing else disturbed at all."

"Maybe he just liked to hear glass break. Oh, look! Here's one he missed, back of the door." She picked up an ordinary drinking glass, looked at it and put it down on the little sink. She turned then, smiling up at Eddie. Her teeth were white and smooth between her scarlet lips. Water clustered in her blond hair. Another button on the white shirt had come unfastened and he could see the full curve of her breast, the way it trembled slightly as she stood there laughing.

She said, "Somebody has broken all the glassware, but we could still play house."

HE TRIED to think of an answer, and couldn't. Since the first day he had seen her, this girl had excited him: the blue bold eyes, the full mouth, the perfect body.



Staring at her now he could feel the blood getting hot and thick in his throat. But he did not move at all.

She said, "We'll play that you're the poppa and just coming home from a day's work." She stepped close to him and held up her lips to be kissed—but her eyes were mocking him.

He didn't know that he had moved. His arms were around her, sudden, violent, crushing her against him. He could feel every curve of her body flattened against him and his mouth was hungry upon her lips. He could feel the quivers that ran through her body, feel her skin like warm satin beneath his hands.

She whispered, "Eddie. . . . You mustn't, Eddie. . . ."

He released her, trembling, and stepped back. And then he saw in her eyes that she had been deliberately teasing him, sure he would obey.

"For an inexperienced young man," she said, "you—"

Outside in the storm something screamed, a wavering cry of pain and madness.

The wind almost tore the door from Eddie's hand. He stepped outside and saw the figure running toward him through the rain and the dying light.

The thing reeled and swerved as it came, driven more by the increasing wind than by its own power. It was within ten yards of Eddie before he could be sure it was a man, running with both hands clutched against his chest, his mouth wide open though no sound came from it. It was the man who owned this trailer. H. B. Henty, of New York City, he had signed the register.

That was all Eddie Howard knew about him.

Five feet away he staggered and went to his knees. He was a short, heavily built man. His eyes were wide open now, but glazed and horrible as he stared at Eddie. His mouth worked in a gruesome effort to speak.

"The glass!" the man whispered. "The glass jar! It looks empty, but . . . You'll never know which one, unless I . . ." His mouth stayed open but the sound stopped. Between his parted lips a thin film of blood formed and grew into a bubble. Then with a gasping noise it was sucked back into his mouth and he went face down on the wet earth.

Eddie carried him into the trailer and stretched him on the bunk. He stood over him, trembling, uncertain what to do next. He had forgotten the girl until she asked, "Is he dead?"

"I don't know."

"Get out of the way." She pushed Eddie aside and bending over Henty felt for a pulse. After a few seconds she turned to Eddie. "He's dead all right."

"But how? How . . .?"

The girl was opening Henty's rain-soaked shirt. "Look," she said after a moment. Across his chest there were dozens of tiny red-rimmed holes. "It looks like somebody was working on him with a hatpin." Her blue eyes looked squarely at Eddie then. "You've got a murder on your hands," she said.

Eddie swallowed and tried to keep his eyes from the dead man on the bunk. He had never seen a dead person before. It gave him a hollow



feeling at the pit of his stomach. His gaze moved slowly around the trailer, over the broken fragments of glass on the floor, the one unbroken glass which Nancy had placed on the sink, and finally back to the dead man again.

Without warning the door of the trailer blasted open and the storm hurled itself inside. The light bulb swung violently, making shadows leap and pitch upon the walls. Then the door was closed again and a man was standing there.

HE WAS tall and slender and wore a trench coat with up-turned collar and a brown snap-brimmed hat. His wedge-shaped face fitted into the V of the up-turned collar. His nose was thin and hooked, and when he took off his coat the light fell into his eyes and Eddie Howard saw they were a bright yellow like the eyes of a cat.

The newcomer looked at Howard and then at Nancy and then at the corpse of H. B. Henty. "Dead?" he asked casually.

"I—I think so," Eddie said.

"Who killed him?"

"We don't know."

"Is he the guy who runs this trailer camp?"

"His name is Henty," Eddie said. "That's all I know about him. I'm the manager of the camp."

The newcomer said, "I was wondering where everybody was. I stopped up at the office and couldn't raise anybody. My name's Donaldson. Tom Donaldson." It had a vaguely familiar sound, but Eddie couldn't place it. "I wanted a cabin for the night."

Nancy said, "We didn't expect

any new arrivals—with a hurricane already beginning to blow. Most persons stay on the mainland this kind of weather."

Donaldson's yellow eyes regarded her for a minute. "Smart alex, huh, beautiful?"

Eddie said, "I can let you have a cabin, Mr. Donaldson. But would you stay here a few minutes while I go to the office? I—I don't know if the cops can get out here, but I've got to phone them. And maybe I shouldn't leave—" he looked toward the body and quickly away again—"shouldn't leave him lying here alone."

"Sure," Donaldson said. "I'll stay. And beautiful here can stay with me. I want to ask what *she's* doing out there during a storm."

"I stayed to see the storm on the Gulf. I'm an artist. And now I think I'll go back to the office with Eddie."

"You're going to stay with me, baby." He didn't seem to move fast but his left hand clamped on her shoulder before she could step away. She spun, struck at him, and tried to tear free. Cloth made a loud ripping sound as he snatched her backward. Then he had her by the wrist with his left hand, his fingers making white marks on her flesh. "Take it easy, beautiful. Or I'll really hurt."

She stood there, breathing hard, her teeth clenched to keep from crying out against the pain of his grip. Her shirt had ripped free from her shoulders. Her high, round bosom, covered now by nothing but a thin band of silk and lace, trembled with her breathing.

It had happened so fast that Eddie Howard had not moved. He



stared at them, gasping. "Hey!" he said finally. "What—?"

Donaldson said, "Keep your nose clean, little boy. Just go call the cops, or whatever you want to do, while I talk to the lady."

Nancy looked straight at Eddie Howard then. She said, "Make him turn me loose, Eddie."

Eddie said, "Listen, Mister. You can't—" He stopped with his mouth still open.

Donaldson's free hand had dipped into the pocket of his trench-coat, pulled out a heavy-nosed automatic. He held it quite casually, pointed at nothing, but there was a flame in his yellow eyes. He said, "Run along, little man. Or do you want to join your pal over there on the cot? Now scram. And close the door behind you."

Eddie Howard backed out of the door and closed it between him and the man with the gun. As the door closed he saw Nancy watching him, the light gleaming on her bare flesh where a few raindrops still clung, on the long tapering legs and the white, half-covered breast that rose and fell with her breathing—and there was contempt in her eyes as he closed the door.

THE storm beat at him with a thousand invisible fists as he made his way back toward the office. The wind howled in the Australian pines; the earth trembled with the distant pounding of surf, but he did not notice. He kept remembering the way Nancy had looked as she stood there, remembering the contempt in her eyes. "But what could I have done?" he asked himself. "The man would have killed me."

Yet something was stirring in him, something he didn't understand.

The office was empty though the lights burned brightly. He thought that he should feel better now. He was going to call the cops and let them settle with the man with the yellow eyes and the wedge-shaped face, let them worry about who had murdered H. B. Henty. Then he was standing there, holding the receiver and listening to the empty hum of a dead wire.

The phone was out.

And all at once Eddie Howard was grinning, feeling his heart begin to pound and surge under his ribs. And he knew now that he was glad the phone was out of order, glad he couldn't call the cops. For he was in charge here. During the next day or two, until the storm had blown itself out and a person could reach the mainland again, this was his property. Fat Paul Bonard could fire him after that, but not before then. And he would make Bonard fight like hell to fire him at all.

But before then he had other duties—to find the murderer of Henty and to settle with the man with the yellow eyes who had ripped Nancy's shirt from her shoulders. And he thought of that kiss in the trailer, of the way she had laughed at him when he released her. "Maybe she'll do something beside laugh next time," he said aloud.

He didn't know what had changed him so suddenly: that look of contempt in Nancy's eyes, the kiss, the threatened loss of a job he had hoped would be steady, the way Donaldson had sneered at him—all of them together. But he knew now that he was determined to fight a





"Is he dead?" she asked casually.

thing through for the first time in his life.

He got the shotgun from his bedroom, was slipping shells into it when the door opened and Paul

Bonard came in, water dripping from all the bulges of his raincoat. "Some damn fool had a wreck," he snarled. "Smashed one side of the bridge and weakened the whole



thing so the wind and tide got it before the storm was well started. Now I'll be stuck on this damn island for two days or more!" He stopped cursing suddenly to stare at the gun in Eddie Howard's hands. "What are you going to do?"

"Settle a little trouble," Eddie said. His lips pulled back in a grin that was tight across his teeth. "And you just stick around here in the office until I get back. There's been a murder in this trailer camp and I want everybody here together."

Even as he spoke the door had opened a second time and a man came reeling in before the storm. He pushed the door closed, turned, and said, "I just caught the word 'murder.' What's going on—something interesting?"

He was a tall, good-looking man who wore shorts, a leather jacket over a sport shirt. His name was Sam Mercer and he owned one of the three trailers in the camp, having arrived that morning.

Eddie Howard said, "Mr. Henty was killed a little while ago. You and Mr. Bonard stick around here. I'll go bring Miss Harris, and a new arrival in camp, a man named Donaldson."

Sam Mercer started slightly, "Who? What's his first name?"

"Tom Donaldson. And I think I remember now where I heard it. I've read it in the papers. There's one of the big-time Chicago crooks by the same name."

"My God!" Paul Bonard's fat face looked waxy. "Murder and gangsters! I knew I should have fired you—"

"Take it easy," Eddie said. "I'm not fired yet because I've got a con-

tract and you can't break that for a day or two. Until then I'm boss. Maybe this Donaldson isn't the Chicago gunman after all. Maybe he is. But you'll get to look at him in a few minutes."

"I'll go with you," Sam Mercer said. "I came here when I read that the hurricane was headed this way because I like excitement. It looks like I'm going to get it." He laughed joyously. "I'm already getting it—I never heard of such a wind. A piece of wire fence came along like it had wings and cut my head."

**T**HEY went out into the storm again, fighting their way into the teeth of it. Wind and rain pounded in a black solid wall against them. Sheet lightning flared for an instant and they could see the tortured shapes of Australian pines and coconut palms almost flattened against the earth. Dark bits of tree limbs whirled past upon the wind.

The first flare of determination to see this thing through was gone out of Eddie. He was afraid now, a hollow coldness deep inside his stomach. He was looking for a murderer, a person who had killed once and would not hesitate to kill again. And if he had things figured correctly, there was more than one killer in this camp now. He was not a detective. He was in dangerous waters over his depth—and he knew it.

"But I'm going to settle it," he told himself. If he let his fear conquer him now, if he gave up without fighting the thing through, he would be whipped forever. He would never stand up for himself against the world. He was afraid, but he



was not ashamed of his fear. Any man with good sense would be afraid. The important thing was to control the fear, not let it control him.

He thought of that brief moment when he had held Nancy's warm body against him. He thought of the contempt in her eyes as she watched him close the door between them. Well—there would be a different look in her eyes before this storm blew over.

The lights of Henty's trailer showed hazy through the storm. They pushed closer and saw that the front door was open. Rain had blown inside, soaking everything. The broken shards of glass scattered about the place glittered with drops of water.

But Nancy and the man with the yellow eyes were gone.

And the corpse of H. B. Henty was gone also!

Eddie stood there in the open door of the trailer and stared around him. Wind had blown things about until he could get no idea what had happened here. The glass which Nancy had left on the little sink was gone and stepping near he saw that the fragments of the glass were in the basin. But the glass had not been broken by the wind. The parts were too small for that. Somebody had deliberately and carefully smashed the glass to bits, just as they had smashed every other glass object in the trailer!

"The glass! The glass jar!" Henty had whispered, dying. "It looks empty, but . . ."

Eddie was thinking fast now. He turned around and called, "Mr. Mercer?"

"Okay." Sam Mercer had been waiting outside, but now he stepped over the sill.



SEVERAL things happened almost simultaneously: the wind struck more violently than ever and the trailer lights, connected by a cord to the office, winked and went out; a gun crashed somewhere nearby, the sound like dull thunder on the storm; the bullet plowed into the wall within inches of Eddie Howard's ear.

Sam Mercer's movement was almost equally fast. He cursed and whirled backward and into the storm again.

Eddie stood alone in the trailer, listening. The storm was gathering force. It filled the world with its howling, the thin scream of the tortured trees, the boom and shudder of the distant surf. He could hear nothing else.

He went outside and the rain and the blackness blinded him. The storm deafened him. He stood there with the shotgun poised and ready in his hands, but nothing happened. Mercer had disappeared as completely as Nancy and Tom Donaldson and the corpse of Henty had disappeared.

Eddie Howard went around the trailer to where Henty's coupe was parked. He went to the rear of the coupe and knelt on the rain-soaked earth. He was thinking, *It's a crazy idea. The whole thing's crazy. But maybe, maybe . . .* With his pocket knife he smashed the glass of the coupe's tail-light. Something cold and hard trickled out into his hand. Lightning flared then and the mass



of diamonds in his hand seemed to flame back at the sky.

He put the diamonds in his pocket, stood up, and started for the office. The storm was behind him now, driving him. Once he was blown against a pine tree before he could dodge. The earth was inches deep with water and the wind whipping across it had a thin whistle beneath the upper bellow of the storm. Once he stepped in an old gopher hole and fell sprawling, but he managed to keep the shotgun above the water. Even so, he wondered if the rain had not soaked through to the powder in his shells.

Clumped seagrasses barred his way and he started carefully feeling his way around them. The darkness was like a blanket upon his eyes. Then, abruptly, one of those queer lulls came in the storm: the wind gave a convulsive blast and slackened, the rain came in scattered clumps. To the south sheet lightning flared dull upon the sky—and in the glow of the lightning Eddie Howard saw the girl directly in front of him and the man who lay stretched at her feet.

It was Nancy and the yellow-eyed man called Donaldson. The man lay on his back and the rain and the puddled water beneath him had washed most of the blood from his head and face, and Eddie could see the way the skull was crushed on one side, battered by some heavy object.

During that long instant while the lightning hung in the sky, Eddie and the girl stood and stared at one another. The white shorts she had worn hung in tatters about her waist. Even the tiny shorts were split along one leg, showing the white firm flesh

of her thigh. Her lace brassiere was stained and torn half across in the middle. She raised one hand instinctively as if to cover her breasts, and on her fingers he saw the dark stain of blood.

The lightning burned out of the sky. The darkness rolled down again.

Eddie Howard said, "He made a mistake when he wanted to keep you, didn't he, beautiful?"

"I—I didn't kill him."

"Of course not."

"I didn't! I broke away from him and ran. For a while I hid. I was just trying to get back to the office and I found him."

"Sure," Eddie said. His voice had a tight crackling sound that made her peer closer at him through the darkness. "There have been changes made since I saw you, beautiful. I've decided to take your advice and run things myself. Now let's get on back to the office. You go first."

She came toward him instead of going the other way, came so close he could see the way her breasts trembled when she moved. She held out her hands toward him. "I'm glad you've got a gun, Eddie. I've been so afraid that—"

He touched the muzzle of the gun against her stomach. "Let's go to the office," he said. "You go first." He laughed at the dazed expression on her face then. "You were the one who told me I should take charge of things. Don't complain now, beautiful."

She said, "The last man to call me that is dead now." She turned, and with the storm at her back went toward the office where lights still burned although a falling limb had



snapped the extension to the auto trailers.

**SAM MERCER** and Paul Bonard were inside the office when they entered. Mercer leaned against the mantle, a liquor glass in his right hand. Water was still dripping from his leather jacket, puddling on the floor beneath him. His khaki shorts were so wet they looked black, but he waved his liquor glass at Eddie, looking handsome and excited. "When somebody started shooting at you," he said, "I took it on the lam. Things were getting a bit too exciting, even for me."

"It's going to be all over before much longer," Eddie said.

Paul Bonard still wore his raincoat. It was obvious that he had been in the rain again since returning here, but he offered no explanation. He just sat in a wicker chair, his fat hands in his coat pocket, and looked frightened. "What—what do you mean?" he asked.

"I know who's been doing the killing. And why."

There was utter silence in the room while the two men and the girl (she had made an effort to gather the tatters of the shirt about her) stared at Eddie Howard. Outside the storm was increasing in fury, harder than ever now. The house shook and made low groaning sounds beneath its impact. Finally Sam Mercer said, "Well, if you know, tell us."

"I plan to." Eddie was holding the shotgun with both hands, barrel across his body and slanting downward. He seemed to have forgotten that he held it. He said, "Just before Mr. Henty died I heard him

mumbling about an empty glass, or a glass that looked empty but actually contained something. And all the glassware in Henty's trailer had been smashed. There were a lot of holes in Mr. Henty's chest as if somebody had tortured him. Evidently they stuck him too deep once. When he talked to me he was dying, out of his head. He wasn't trying to tell me anything. He was just repeating over and over what he had been telling the person who tortured him."

"You mean," Nancy asked slowly, "that somebody was trying to make him tell where something was hidden?"

"Yes. And he knew that once he told, he would be killed anyway. So he stalled; he told some kind of wild lie about the thing being hidden in an apparently empty glass. They can do curious things with glass now—make it transparent from one side and not the other, make it bend light, all that sort of thing. So maybe something could be hidden in it. I heard Henty mumble, 'You'll never know which one unless I—' He was obviously trying to run a bluff and get a chance to escape. Of course, the killer couldn't be sure from the first it was a bluff. He searched Henty's trailer to make sure, and that was when Henty escaped."

"You're not making sense," Paul Bonard said. "What was this person looking for?"

"I wondered," Eddie said. "And it was that talk about glass that reminded me of the queer shadow on the tail-light glass of Henty's car. I noticed it the other night. So I broke that tail-light glass." For an instant



he held the shotgun with only one hand. His left hand dipped into his pocket and came out with the diamonds. They blazed beneath the overhead light until he slid them back in his pocket. The girl was watching them, her eyes as bright as the fire in the diamonds themselves. On Bonard's fat face had come a look of unutterable greed. Sam Mercer looked interested, alert.

"You're taking a long time to get to the nub of the matter," Mercer said. He switched his liquor glass from his right hand to his left. "The killer is probably one of us—or your friend Mr. Donaldson, that you don't seem to have found. Do you know who it is?"

"Why, yes," Eddie Howard said. "I figure that Mr. Henty was a crook and had stolen the diamonds. I figure the man who killed him was after them—and the gunman, Donaldson, was also after them. I figure the cops will be able to find some connection between the killer and those two in Chicago." His right hand slid along the stock of the gun until his finger curled around the trigger.

"The person who broke those glasses in Henty's trailer cut his finger doing it," Eddie said. "And you handed me a story about getting cut by a blown piece of wire. No! Don't reach in that pocket, Mr. Mercer!"

**O**UTSIDE, the noise of the storm roared up to a climax. That was the only warning. The lights went out. Utter darkness struck them all like a blow.

Sam Mercer's nerves had been trained to situations of this kind.

While the others stood rigid, while Eddie Howard was still motionless with surprise, his hand was snaking the gun from his pocket. He fired once, twice, swinging the muzzle to cover a wider space. He swung the gun again.

Eddie Howard fired then. He had hunted rabbits as a boy and at twenty feet with a shotgun he didn't miss. He let go with both barrels.

**T**HE storm still blew but it was gray dawn outside. Paul Bonard was drunk and getting drunker. He said, "I don't mind admitting, Eddie, I don't mind admitting a bit, I was about to make a mistake. I thought we were going to have a big winter this year and I figured if I could scare you into quitting, I could put a man here who would accept a smaller share of the profits than your contract calls for. But I see you're not the man to scare. You're the man for this job just as long as you want it!"

"Thanks," Eddie said. He finished his own drink and turned to Nancy. "Come along. We'll go see how your trailer has stood the storm. No, you can just stay here, Mr. Bonard."

They walked together through the driving rain. "You think Mr. Henty and Mercer and Donaldson all stole those diamonds together, then Henty stole them from the other two?"

"It may have been that way. Or all three may have known about them and Henty got them first and the other two trailed him. He wasn't a fighter and tried to hide. First one and then the other caught up with him here. Donaldson saw and rec-



ognized Mercer when he went to Henty's trailer with me. He took a shot at Mercer (I thought for awhile he was shooting at me) but missed him. Then Mercer must have slipped up on Donaldson in the dark—and didn't miss him."

Why had Mercer taken Henty's body away?"

"At that time he didn't know Donaldson was here. He hoped to get rid of Henty by throwing him in the Gulf. The odds were a hundred to one that the body would never be found—and without the body nothing could be proved, no matter what happened. He probably meant to do the same with Donaldson his first opportunity. It was luck you found his corpse."

They opened the door of Nancy's trailer and went in. Eddie Howard put his hands on Nancy's shoulders. Her skin was smooth and sleek as

satin beneath his fingers. He did not speak for a while. He could feel the blood running faster through his veins.

He began to tremble. He said, "Since the first time I saw you, it's excited me just to look at you. But I've always been afraid of you."

"Why?"

"Maybe I was afraid of everything. But there was a game we were playing the last time we were in a trailer together—the man of the house just come home."

He pulled her to him. She came easily, her body warm and ardent against his, her mouth eager. But after a moment she whispered, "No. Eddie, you shouldn't. . . ."

"That's not what you really mean," Eddie Howard said.

She whispered, "That's not what I really meant last time. I'm glad you finally found out."

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*Are you reading*

SUPER-DETECTIVE

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## "I Talked with God"

(Yes I did—Actually and literally)

and, as a result of that little talk with God some ten years ago, a strange new Power came into my life. After 43 years of horrible, sickening, dismal failure, this strange Power brought to me a sense of overwhelming victory, and I have been overcoming every undesirable condition of my life ever since. What a change it was. Now—I have credit at more than one bank, I own a beautiful home, own a newspaper and a large office building, and my wife and family are amply provided for after I leave for shores unknown. In addition to these material benefits, I have a sweet peace in my life. I am happy as happy can be. No circumstance ever upsets me, for I have learned how to draw upon the invisible God-Law, under any and all circumstances.

You too may find and use the same staggering Power of the God-Law that I use. It can bring to you too, whatever things are right and proper for you to have. Do you believe this? It won't cost much to find out—just a penny post-card or a letter, addressed to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 19, Moscow, Idaho, will bring you the story of the most fascinating success of the century. And the same Power I use is here for your use too. I'll be glad to tell you about it. All information about this experience will be sent you free, of course. The address again—Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 19, Moscow, Idaho. Advt. Copyright 1930 Frank B. Robinson.





# Key Witness

as told to **GEORGE SHUTE**



HEY gave Danny Pritchard something like one hundred years when all the counts against him had been totaled up. I got off easier: they gave me twenty-four hours to get out of town.

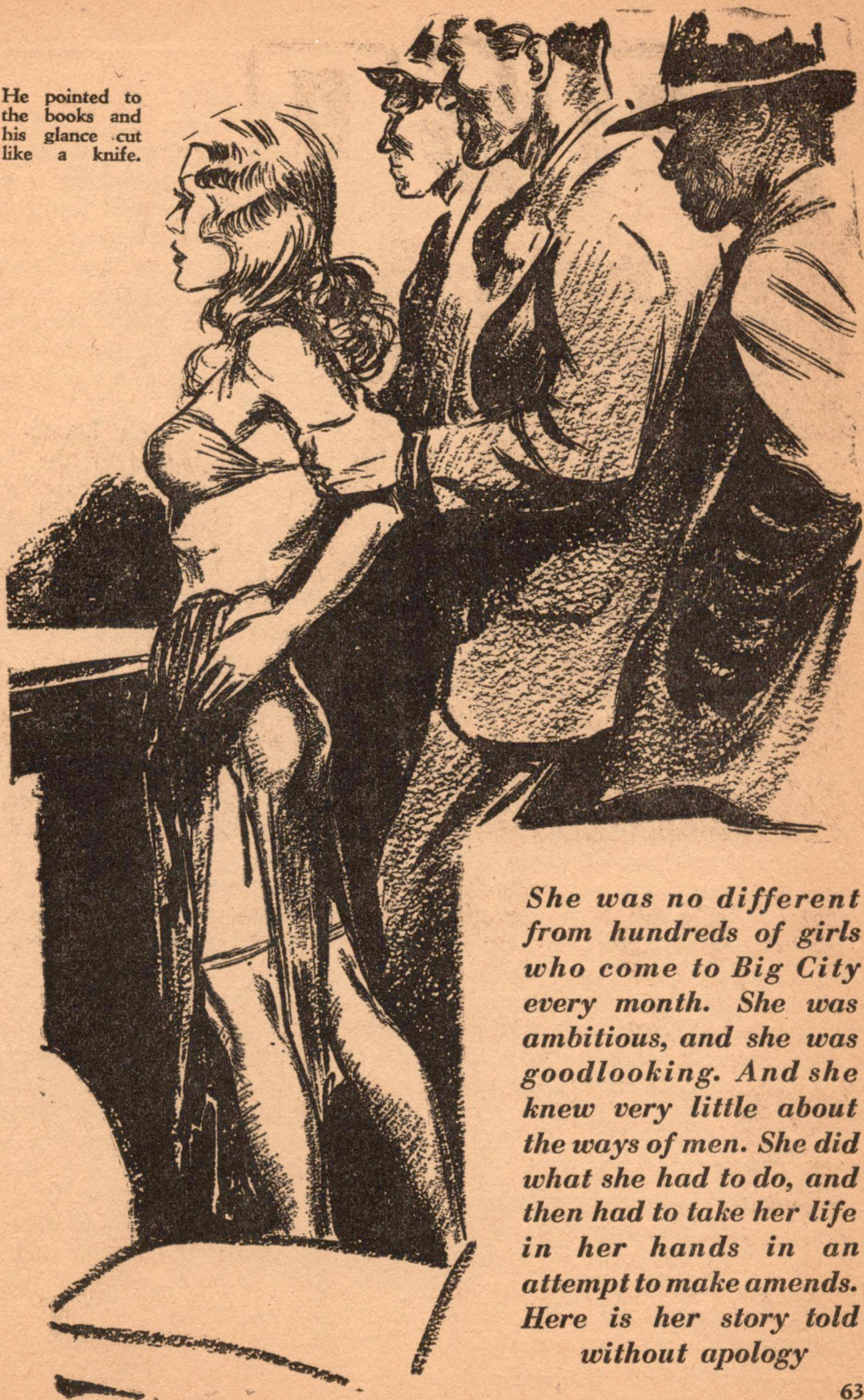
I'll never forget it, because while I was waiting for the bus that would take me to this place, one of those

nickel machines was grinding away with, "Get Out of Town—Before It's Too Late, My Love."

They should have played it earlier for me. They should have played it before I met Danny Pritchard and Trigger Spaldoni, and Margie, and all the rest. They should have played it before I began to look on every cop as something loathesome, some-



He pointed to  
the books and  
his glance cut  
like a knife.



*She was no different from hundreds of girls who come to Big City every month. She was ambitious, and she was goodlooking. And she knew very little about the ways of men. She did what she had to do, and then had to take her life in her hands in an attempt to make amends. Here is her story told without apology*



thing to be shunned and avoided.

Oh, I'm not saying that I didn't put in my share of the mess that, when stewed and brewed, poured over the front pages like rich mud, mud that was traced into headlines that said: "Girl Puts Finger on Vice Ring!" "State Has Key Witness Under Cover!" "Fear Gangdom Vengeance for Moll Who Spilled!"

"A stoolie? A gun moll? No—no—no! I'll put it in print with the same hysteria I shrieked it in the courtroom. Yes—I was one of them. I'll admit it. But I wasn't put in by the police to spy and squeal as some papers would have you believe. What happened to me happened inside, not outside. All of a sudden I saw the racket for what it was, dirty, foul-smelling, rank, a type of noxious air I had gotten so used to that when I finally breathed good clean air again, rubbed elbows with real people, I couldn't recognize it or them.

All I'm asking from you during this story is to give me a break. I feel like I know you. Certainly, after all the papers have said, after the thousands of words that have poured over the radio, after the countless pictures that have been published, you know me—Carlotta Dare. But it is because of that I'm writing this piece. I want a break. I need it. I've got to become Carlotta Dare again—the girl from a small town!

**I**T SEEMS years since I left that little mid-Western town where I spent my childhood and grew into young womanhood. It seems years since I came to New York on a bus, a suitcase in each hand, a few dollars in my purse, and a million dollars worth of optimism in my heart.

I think I still have the heart.

If I haven't, I have the scar where the heart used to be!

As I said, I came into town on a bus. I had read a good deal of the Big City in the Broadway columns and knew that there were a lot of clean, inexpensive furnished room houses operating. I bought an evening paper and looked through it, finally selecting a place in the West Sixties.

The landlady of this house, a Mrs. Sargine, seemed very nice. I paid the four dollars in advance for a week and, after she had left, started unpacking. At last I was in New York, a resident of that fabulous, exciting city about which I had read so much, of which I had dreamed so often.

The room wasn't much to look at, just a small place, looking out over a regiment of clothes-lines and clothes-poles, dingy backyards and unpainted fences. There was running water in the room and a small stove, with one gas burner, for cooking. I was supposed to use the bathroom in the hall which, Mrs. Sargine said, was used by only one other person.

That night, overcome with excitement, thrilling to the song of the city outside my window—the noise of brakes being applied, the grinding of gears, the clamor of auto horns, the steady stream of voices—I didn't sleep much.

Besides, the night was warm, and I was forced to keep my window open. The sun found me still awake. Then, I must have dozed off. When I opened my eyes again, it was noon. Too late to go job hunting.

Nevertheless, I got up, dressed



and went out. On the front stoop, a girl was sunning herself and reading a tabloid. She looked up as I came out and said: "Hello, you're new here."

I introduced myself. She said she was Margie Sabo and lived on the floor above mine. Anxious to get a look at the city, I said good-by quickly and went on.

Two weeks went by and the money with it. I was feeling pretty broke and desperate by that time. I couldn't afford replacements for the shoes I had worn out. In the five and ten I bought a pair of inner soles to keep my stockings from going to pieces on the hot pavements.

And as for food: one meal a day would have been a banquet.

I finally got to the point where I was ready to take any kind of job. I was firmly convinced that employment agencies were the bunk. Hadn't I tried for two weeks, day in and day out, to get a secretarial job?

Yes, gradually it began to dawn on me that if I was going to survive in New York, it would be only because I made enough to eat.

And so I swallowed my pride. And a little later was swallowing food in a Greek restaurant on Lexington Avenue. I was a waitress, the only one in the place, and food was on the house.

The work really wasn't tough, except during the peak hours of twelve and one-thirty, when the luncheon crowd showed up. My time was from eight in the morning until two-thirty in the afternoon.

George was a nice guy and never got fresh. The crowd wasn't bad and I learned to take their kidding and wise-cracks. Sometimes we'd be

extra busy, whenever Grand Central Palace, across the street, was running a show of some sort.

I never realized that the Auto Show could do what it did to me. And it wouldn't have happened if Danny Pritchard hadn't seen the show and then dropped into the Greek's for a cup of coffee with a friend.

The friend was Trigger Spaldoni!

LOOKING back, I wonder if I didn't feel an instinctive fear when I first saw him. He was small and wiry, with darting eyes and a dark complexion. I think his hands were the most repulsive part of him. As he used them, drinking coffee and eating a sandwich, they reminded me of two small snakes.

Danny Pritchard was just the opposite. He was tall and blond, with a good-humored, deceiving, face and blue eyes that now, as I looked at them, seemed friendly. But I was to see them later hard and cold and to discover that the good-humored face was only a mask for a heart hard as flint.

He kidded me as I brought the order over. I kidded right back, especially when he asked what a good-looking girl like myself was doing in the place.

He got the stock answer. I said: "I'm picking strawberries for our church festival."

Then he grinned. "No, I'm serious," he said. "You could make dough on Broadway, kiddo. You've got a good face and figure."

I told him to quit his kidding and went down the counter to serve clamoring customers. But when he was leaving he called me over and



handed me a card. "I'm a Broadway agent," he said. "If you want to look me up, maybe I can find a spot for you."

He left a quarter tip and went out. I put the card in my pocket, where it stayed forgotten for a day until I cleaned out my uniform before sending it off.

That's how I happened to be studying it the next day, my day off. Danny didn't know it, but he had come in at a psychological time. I had been taking a little stock of myself and come to the conclusion that being in the Greek's day after day wasn't getting me any place. I just had to have more money, had to have more time to look for a job with those things that were necessary for my continuing to live: clothes, food, and shelter. I was getting the last two now, not the first.

It was a warm day and I put on the thinnest clothes I could gather up. I had only one dress that was reasonably presentable, a blue print. I put that over my Sunday bras and panties and went down to the office on Danny's card.

The Danny Pritchard Theatrical Agency was located in an old building on Broadway, near Longacre Square.

A twenty-five cent burlesque show was on the ground floor of the ancient edifice. I went into the dingy hallway and walked back to a decrepit elevator, which crawled up to the fifth and top floor where Danny's office was.

A sallow, thin-faced girl was reading a copy of *Variety* at a desk when I came in. The walls were lined with theatrical photographs. I asked timidly for Mr. Pritchard and

she nodded toward a door marked private and told me to go right in.

Danny was telephoning as I entered. He looked up, puzzled and then, recognition returning, he nodded to me to sit down. When he finished, he came over, holding out his hand. "Well, beautiful, I never expected you'd show up. So you've decided to go into the theatre."

Timidly, I said that was the general idea. His eyes appraised me shrewdly and he asked me to stand up.

"Now raise your dress," he said. "Above the knees, please."

I must have blushed, for my face suddenly felt hot. He burst out laughing. "Oh, come on," he said. "This is part of the routine. Any agent in this business will ask you to do it." He grinned. "In this racket you never know when you'll be wearing only a string of beads, so it pays to get over that shyness."

I managed to force a smile and raise my dress. It wasn't that I was ashamed of my legs. I'm not. I'll match them with Dietrich anytime. But this was the first occasion when I had done so in front of a man. I felt my face crimsoning again as Danny suddenly bent down and I felt a coolness strike my legs above the stocking tops. Hurriedly, I pushed his hand away. "That won't be necessary," I said, stiffly. "I guess you've seen enough."

He laughed. "Don't get sore. I was just about to pay you a compliment. That's the nicest pair of pins I've seen in some time. You'll do, if forty bucks a week will satisfy you."

I stared at him. Forty dollars! I would have been satisfied with half that amount. Into my head popped



visions of what I could do with that money: clothes, food, perhaps put some of it away and, certainly, a better place to live.

Danny was staring curiously at me. "You seem surprised."

"Surprised. I'm . . . I'm . . . flabbergasted. I didn't know they were paying that much money. When do I start?"

He thought a moment, then said, hesitantly: "Well, if you go into a show, you'll have to learn to dance."

"Dance?" I smiled at him. "I'm not a bad tap dancer. I took lessons in high school."

Grinning, Danny said: "Let's see you do a time step." He walked over to a small piano on the side of the office and broke into a pick-up.



DID the step, then went into a triple, and after that an off-to-Buffalo. His smile pleased me. I knew that I had pretty good talent. In fact, my teacher had suggested that I try the stage, but I hadn't wanted to at the time. Like every girl, I had visions of marrying the boss' son and to do that I'd have to be a steno.

Danny asked me to sing, too, and seemed satisfied with my voice. "You'll do all right, kid, if you don't mind coming up the hard way."

"The hard way?" I didn't understand. He explained:

"I don't book big musicals. Right now, I have a few vaude houses, the few left, and some club shows. If you make good there, I'll see that you get a chance in the Silver Buck. My friend owns the joint and it's the biggest place on Broadway."

"Naturally," I said, "I don't ex-

pect too much. I realize I'm only an amateur."

His eyes roamed over me. "You're more than an amateur, Carlotta, you've got the real stuff." There was a huskiness in his voice as he said this. I felt a thrill run through me at the eagerness, the optimism in his eyes.

He said: "Oh, I forgot. You'll have to try on a costume. Mind?"

"Here?" I looked around the room. He grinned and pointed to a folded Japanese screen. "No, behind there. Miss Church, my secretary will help you." He called the girl's name and, when she came in, told her he wanted a costume for me.

In a few moments, she reappeared. I looked, dismayed, at the skimpy piece of black velvet, with silver spangles, that she handed me. "Do you expect me to wear this?"

Miss Church looked startled, probably the most exercise she had given her face in some time.

Danny said: "Gosh, that's a complete wardrobe compared to some of today's offerings. Apparently, you haven't seen any musicals lately."

Well, there was nothing else for me to do. With the secretary, I went behind the screen and I'm conceited enough to say that there was plenty of appreciation in Danny's eyes when he saw me.

The costume fitted me like a four-ounce boxing glove. It was cut low at the waist and I knew that if I took a deep breath, I'd be showing quite a bit. Tight-fitting around the thighs, it revealed my entire limb proportions, and, really, they're not bad. I didn't feel so nervous as I noticed Danny glancing at me quite casually and then, turning to Miss



Church, he said: "How does she look, Churchie."

"Gawjuss," she said. "Simply beautiful."

Danny smiled. "Well, I guess that does it, Carlotta. Now, there's only one other matter." He reached into his desk, brought out a paper. "The usual contract, giving me the right to represent you and take ten per cent of your earnings." His manner was very business-like. "Miss Church will witness it."

I felt just like a big Broadway star as I signed the paper. I didn't know that I was signing away my reputation!

But that part of the story comes later. And not too much later. I suppose it really began when Miss Church went outside and I went behind the screen to change back to my street clothes.

When I came out, Danny was sitting on his desk. He smiled and said: "I suppose you'll be leaving the restaurant now."

"You're wrong," I said. "I've already left it. When I signed that paper," I added.

He grinned and patted my arm affectionately. "You'll do okay if you handle yourself right. It's a tough racket but it pays off." His eyes were on my dress. "How are you fixed for ready cash. Need some clothes." He put his hand in his pocket. "I could give you an advance on the first week."

"I said no, I didn't think so. He looked so young and boyish, there in the bright sunlight flooding the room, that it was hard to think of him as a theatrical manager. To me, he should have been on some college campus.

I held out my hand. "When shall I come in again?"

"Tomorrow," he said. "You can work at an affair in Newark tomorrow night. One of my crew will drive you and the rest of the girls out. I . . ." He broke off suddenly. The man I had seen with him in the Greeks was standing in the doorway. It was my first formal meeting with Trigger Spaldoni, although then he was introduced as Mister.

THE moment I saw his eyes on me I felt a sense of fear. I didn't like it. There was something loathsome in the way he looked at me and, with a start, I realized that I had been outlining my body through the thin material of my dress. Spaldoni stared brazenly at me. Blushing, I moved over.

He grinned. "I've seen you some place before, haven't I, sugar?" His words were oily, unctuous, and he spoke out of thin lips which were formed in hard, cruel lines.

"Danny explained. "I've just hired her," he added. "I represent her in case you can use her in one of your clubs."

To me, he said: "Mr. Spaldoni has interests in a number of Broadway spots. Sometimes he gets girls from me."

I could feel Spaldoni undressing me with his eyes. I stepped back as his hands touched my shoulder, slid down the front of my dress. Angrily, I pushed it away.

He looked at me, seemingly startled. "Why, sugar, don't be afraid of Spaldoni. You're a very beautiful girl. Maybe I can use you."

I looked over at Danny. He winked. Spaldoni said:



"Look, Danny. I'm throwing a party up in my place tonight. There'll be lots of Broadway big shots along. Why don't you bring Miss Dare?"

I started to refuse. After all, I



wanted to get a good night's rest. But Danny said: "Say, that's swell of you, Mr. Spaldoni. And it won't do Carlotta any harm to meet some of the producers." He turned to me. "How about having dinner with me and then we'll see a show and go up there?"

I didn't dare refuse then. After all, Danny was giving me a pretty convincing argument. It really wouldn't hurt to see people, the kind

I wonder that I didn't feel fear of him when I first saw him.

that had made good. And I was plenty lonesome, hadn't been out since I came to the city.

So I agreed, said good-by to



Danny and Spaldoni, and went home to try to fix up my only evening gown, which I had been asked to wear.

By the time I had it freshly ironed and was standing in my birthday suit waiting for my bras and panties to dry, I was really happy for the first time since I had come to New York. I had a job with a future and everything looked as rosy as my evening gown.

I've been around a lot since that night. And had plenty of time to formulate opinions about life. One such opinion is that when Fate gets ready to give you a sucker punch, she gets you set for it but completely fooling you, closing your eyes to things as they are.

Just to give you an idea of how foolish I was then, I actually imagined Danny Pritchard falling for me, despite the fact that our relations, so far, had been purely business. Still, I had an idea that in the way he had looked at me in the office, that if I wanted to get him, it wouldn't be too hard to do.

I was still thinking of this as I went downstairs to take a taxi. Danny had insisted on paying for in advance because he had said business wouldn't let him pick me up. We were to meet in the Astor lobby.

On the way out, I met Margie Sabo, my upstairs neighbor. Though I had been living in the house eight weeks, we hadn't done much talking since the first day. She was carrying a little satchel in her hand. When she saw me, her eyes opened wide with surprise. "Well, the Dutchess is stepping out tonight." She said, good-naturedly. "Where to?"

"I've got a date," I said. "Going

to a party." I looked at her bag. "You going away."

She laughed. Her face looked wan and tired. "Nope. Going to work. I'm dancing at a club tonight."

Now it was my turn to stare. I hadn't known she was a dancer, as I remarked to her. We were going down the front steps. I said: "It's a funny thing, but I just got a dancing job, myself, today."

"Why that's swell. Where? A show?"

I started to tell her, but a loud honk from a car parked in front stopped the conversation. The car was filled with girls, but there was a man driving. He yelled:

"Hey, Margie, step on it. It's late."

Before I could tell Margie about my good fortune, she had gotten into the car.

And there again Fate played me a dirty trick. If I had told Margie that evening, perhaps things that happened later wouldn't have occurred. But I hadn't been able to.



DANNY was waiting for me in the Astor lobby when I arrived. My heart skipped a beat as I realized how handsome he looked in evening clothes. Normally good-looking, the black and white of formal attire heightened his appearance and I actually felt the other girl's eyes in the lobby looking at me enviously as we went out.

We had dinner in a charming Italian restaurant on West Forty-sixth Street, off Eighth Avenue. The place, Danny said, was once run as a



speakeasy. The manager came over and bought us a drink. He praised Danny as a fine fellow, which made me feel pretty good, that and the drinks.

After dinner, we went to "Du Barry Was a Lady." I felt, throughout the show, as though I were sitting on clouds and the people on the stage appeared to me in a rosy hue. I hadn't done much drinking back in my home town, just the usual amount any young girl will do who thinks it's smart to do so.

Consequently, when we got to Spaldoni's apartment, I felt that inner glow pretty keenly.

Spaldoni hadn't been kidding about his guests. Some of them were real big people and later on I was surprised to see a pretty well-known movie actor show up, quite plastered.

Spaldoni rushed over as we came in and, before I could stop him, had planted a kiss on my lips. I was furious, but he seemed to take the thing for granted. I was somewhat placated when I saw that no one seemed to notice his greeting.

The apartment was beautiful, a duplex arrangement, with balcony and breakfast nook. When I asked Danny how Spaldoni could afford a terraced place—after all, in my innocence I thought penthouses were only for the idle rich—he said that Spaldoni did all right with his clubs.

"And he's got a finger in lots of pies, kid. Puts dough in Broadway shows." Danny's gaze was intent. "He likes you and it would pay to be nice to him."

I shuddered. "He reminds me of a snake," I said. "I could never be nice to him, even for a career."

Danny grinned and patted my arm. "Well, you don't have to let him know. Here, try some of this champagne." He stopped a waiter.

It was the first champagne I had ever tasted. And when I found what a tingling sensation it gave me, I went for it plenty, just as every other foolish girl has done.

After that, I really threw myself into the party, which began getting hotter and hotter. I was introduced and re-introduced to people in rapid succession. Some of the theatrical people danced and sang and when Danny suggested that I, too, dance, I went right ahead.

The applause went to my head as much as the champagne. Someone suggested that the girls do a can-can and six of us lined up, kicking high and with reckless abandon. Even now I can see Spaldoni's eyes watching me greedily, and, like that night, can almost see them upon the skin showing above my stockings. I knew what was in his mind all right, I'm not that dumb. But I never figured he'd start anything.

**T**HAT happened a little later. I had left my bag in the bedroom and went in to get it. I was feeling a little dizzy and went from there into the bathroom. When I came out, Spaldoni was standing with his back to the door. In his hand was a champagne bottle with two glasses, and his eyes were bright. His tongue licked his lips greedily as he saw me. Not expecting to see anyone I had bent over and pulled up my dress to fix a snap on my garter belt.

I pulled down the dress hurriedly and started to go out. His bulk stopped me. He said: "What's the



hurry, baby? Take it easy and have a drink with me. I've been wanting to talk to you all evening." He put the bottle and glasses on a table.

I managed to get my hand on the door. It was locked! Furiously, I turned on him: "Unlock that door and let me out," I cried. "Just wait until Danny hears of this."

He grinned evilly. "He won't be able to hear," he said. "This is a sound-proof room. Just like the whole house."

I tried to slap his face, but his hand, which was like steel, grasped my wrist. I cried out in pain.

He relaxed his grip, but still held onto my wrist.

"There's nothing to be afraid of, baby," he said. "You be nice to Spaldoni and Spaldoni'll be nice to you." He pulled me closer to him and I could smell the liquor on his breath. I was terrified, but I tried to struggle, to get away from him. I screamed in terror as his arms snaked around me and I found myself looking into his piggy eyes. His lips came down hard on mine, making them smart.

Spurred on by fear and desperation, I managed to pull away, but his hand, trying to grab me, almost ripped the dress from my body. I was past caring then about my appearance, didn't worry about standing there with the upper part of my body almost entirely exposed.

My eyes, roaming wildly about the room, saw the bottle on the dresser. I grabbed it as Spaldoni lunged again, struck out wildly with it. It smashed on his head and he went down without a sound.

For a moment, I was too paralyzed to move. Then, my senses re-

turning, I knew I had to get out of that room before he came to. With trembling fingers I fumbled in his pocket and found the key. My wrap was lying on the bed and I grabbed it and went out. Danny saw me coming out and rushed over, his face concerned. "What's the matter, Carlotta? You're not leaving?"

Breathlessly, I told him what had happened. "You hit Spaldoni with a bottle?" he gasped. "You didn't . . . kill him?"

I was trembling with the reaction of the ordeal. Kill him? I might have. He looked so white and still lying there. I started to cry. "I don't know, Danny," I sobbed. "I don't know. Oh, what will I do now?"

"Here, take this and go over to my place." He pressed a key into my hand. "It's only down the next block. You can't go home just now, not in your condition. I'll go in and look at Spaldoni and come right over."

I didn't think then, I couldn't. All I knew was that I had to get out of there. Danny showed me a side exit, and I left for his place.

His two room apartment was very cosy and no one questioned me as I went there. I was pouring myself a third drink of Scotch to quiet my nerves when a key slid into the door and the next minute Danny came in. At first, looking at Danny's grave face, I was afraid the worst had happened. I had killed Spaldoni!

But, oh, the relief that surged over me when he said Spaldoni was all right! "You just knocked him out," Danny said. "And there were only a couple of small cuts on his scalp. I put him to bed."



I FELL back against the divan on which I had been sitting. Danny sat down alongside me. "It'll be all right, Carlotta," he said, his voice tender. "He had it coming to him. He was too drunk. But one thing about the guy, he doesn't harbor a grudge. I'll explain things to him tomorrow."

My hand was still shaking as Danny handed me a drink and took one for himself. I could scarcely think, I was that scared over what I had done, that scared over the things that had been happening so fast to me.

I guess I was becoming a little hysterical. I started sobbing again and when Danny put his arm around me and drew my head to his shoulder, it seemed the most natural place in the world for it to be.

Danny tried to comfort me, to tell me everything would turn out all right. "You're starting on a real career, kid," he said. "And I'm sure you're going to make good."

Oh, there were a lot more speeches like that. Speeches that quieted my nerves, speeches that conjured up pictures that were rosy and restful. Yes, Danny was a master at it, his voice low and tender, his touch caressing; so caressing that as he tilted my head and I felt his lips on mine, my whole body trembled in anticipation. He was my first and only love then, in that moment. I could feel the blood surge hotly through my body as his lips traveled down my throat. I forgot everything in that instant, forgot that I was in the apartment of a man I had met for the first time just short hours before, forgot that I had barely a dress on.

Maybe the drinks had a lot to do

with it, maybe lonesomeness had more. I had had no one to talk to, no one to comfort me. My heart was pounding madly and the room began spinning as Danny pulled me closer to him and I drank in the ardor of his kisses, pressed eagerly to him as he whispered in my ears and a strange, new sensation took possession of me. . . .



MORNING. The sunlight was streaming in the window. Outside, I heard the music of a hurdy-gurdy.

I stretched lazily and looked around. Then, like a sharp knife being imbedded in my heart, came the realization of what had happened. I looked around the bedroom. My head was aching and my mouth felt dry and my heart sank as I studied the surroundings.

"You fool, Carlotta," something whispered to me, "you little fool."

I tried to silence the voice, got shakily into my slippers. "Danny," I called. "Danny."

It was a little vague to me, just what had happened the night before. I seemed to have lost track of time some place. But yet, despite my fears and misgivings, I reached out pathetically for something I was sure was there, if only I could grasp it: Danny's love!

I loved him. I had shown him that. And surely he must love me, I told myself, he's just got to love me!

On trembling legs I went out to the living room. My heart sank to my slipper tops as I realized he wasn't there. But there was a note, perched on the dining table so that I wouldn't miss it. The note offered



small comfort. He had had an early appointment and left. I took that small comfort because I didn't know any better. It was only a crumb but in the anguish of my love-hungry heart, it was a banquet.

Everything was all right, I said to myself. Everything *is* all right. I will see him later, perhaps before evening. With a start, I realized that I was supposed to work tonight, some place in Newark, Danny had said.

While I was rummaging about for thread to repair my torn dress, there was a knock on the door.

It was a messenger boy with a package for me. I tipped the boy and opened the package. My heart leaped with joy as I saw the dress Danny had so thoughtfully sent. There was another note, too, telling me that a car would pick me up that evening at the house to take me to Newark where I was to have my first stage job.

I don't know why, then, that I didn't see any relationship to what later happened. Perhaps it was because I was mid-way between elation and depression, the former because of Danny's thoughtful present, the latter his failing to mention he'd see me.

**D**URING the afternoon, I called his office three times, only to be told he wasn't there. At six-thirty, I heard a honking outside and ran downstairs to greet the car which had come for me.

And imagine my surprise to see Margie Sabo getting into the same car!

She seemed startled. Two men were in the front seat, the man driv-

ing being the same one I had seen before. The other was a younger man, with brown hair and a nice smile. As Margie started to speak, the man at the wheel growled, "Get in the back with the other two girls. We're late." It was then that I noticed the other occupants. They were blond, the hennaed kind, and sort of peaked looking. I started to talk to Margie but she held her finger to her lips. Wondering, I acknowledged the introductions to the other two girls and the young man in front.

His name was Jimmy Ballard and he was the master-of-ceremonies for the show. The other man, the one driving, everybody called Butch. And he certainly looked it, if Butch brings to mind the bull-dog type of face.

He didn't do much talking and neither did we as the car sped through the midtown tunnel and over to the Jersey side. We made good time getting to and over the Pulaski Skyway and in about forty-five minutes, I was asking Margie, excitedly, why she had cautioned me to be quiet.

We were in our dressing room, a dank, smelly affair below stairs of what had looked like a beer garden as Butch hustled us all in. Men had been pouring into the place and, from a glimpse of a big room, I had seen it crowded with them.

The other two girls had already dressed and were using the ladies' room. Margie said: "How did you get in this racket, kid? You could have knocked me over with a glass of Three Feathers when I saw you piling into the car." Her gaze was critical. "And to think all the time I



thought you were a nice kid from a small town."

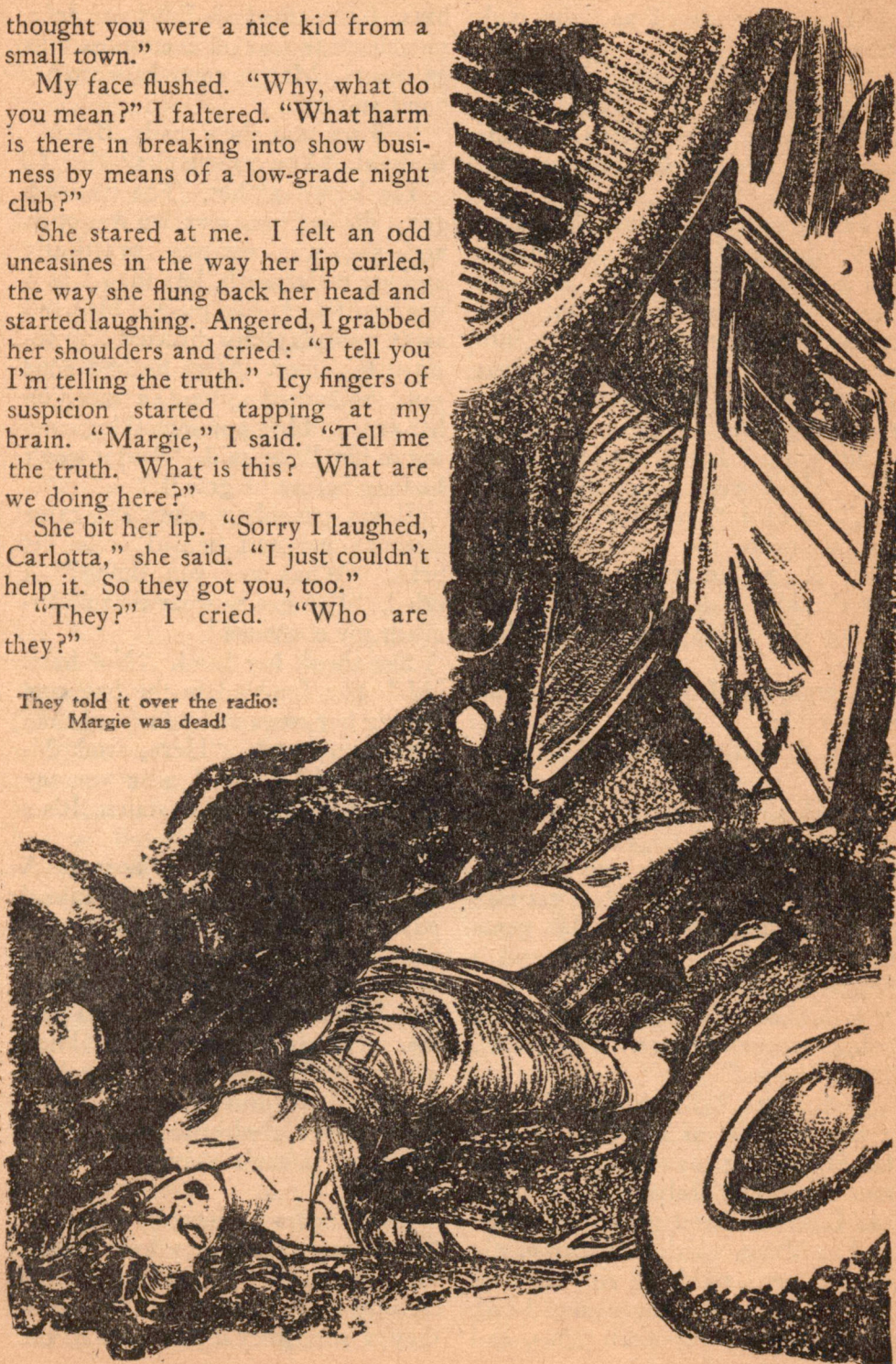
My face flushed. "Why, what do you mean?" I faltered. "What harm is there in breaking into show business by means of a low-grade night club?"

She stared at me. I felt an odd uneasiness in the way her lip curled, the way she flung back her head and started laughing. Angered, I grabbed her shoulders and cried: "I tell you I'm telling the truth." Icy fingers of suspicion started tapping at my brain. "Margie," I said. "Tell me the truth. What is this? What are we doing here?"

She bit her lip. "Sorry I laughed, Carlotta," she said. "I just couldn't help it. So they got you, too."

"They?" I cried. "Who are they?"

They told it over the radio:  
Margie was dead!





"Danny Pritchard and the mob he works for!"

"Danny Pritchard!" The cry burst from my lips. Concernedly, Margie said: "Hey, what's the matter, kid? Did he do something to you?"

I tried to stifle the sobs that came to my throat. I couldn't, I wouldn't tell her about last night! But you can't fool another woman. She seemed to understand because into her eyes came a light of wisdom that showed me she knew even without me telling her.

She put her arm around my shoulder. "Maybe something can be done, kid," she said. "I wouldn't want anyone to make the same mistake I did." She glared at me. "And don't get the idea I'm a softie. I'm not taking this thing lying down. But you—"

Margie whirled swiftly as a gruff voice said:

"Well, what about her?"

**I**T WAS Butch, glowering at Margie and me. His face was contorted with wrath and his eyes glinted evilly. "You babes get into your costumes and fast. De gents upstairs wants entertainment and it better be good."

I looked around wildly. "I'm going to get out of here," I screamed. "Right away."

"Oh, yeah," Butch's hand came across the side of my face. It was the first time a man had ever struck me. I stood paralyzed with anger and fear. His hand snaked out again and my dress, which had been partly opened, was suddenly zipped from my body, pulled over my head. Standing there in thin pants and

bras, I screamed as Butch made a movement to tear off even those thin garments. Margie came between his hand and me.

"I'll see that she's ready, Butch," she said. "You go upstairs."

He leered at her. The dressing gown she had been wearing was open and she was wearing practically nothing underneath, less than I as a matter of fact. She pushed his hand away and playfully directed him toward the door. After he had gone out, she turned around, a sneer on her face. "He's got something coming to him," she said. "And it won't be long before he gets it."

I was trembling when she came over to me and helped undo my bras. "What are you doing?" I cried. "I've got to wear that underneath my costume!"

She shook her head. "Not here, kid." She fumbled in the bag containing her costume and brought out a half pint bottle. "Here, drink this and sit still while I wise you up. That's no night club upstairs. It's a stag party!"

I heard her words in horror. A stag party! Men, filled with animal passion and liquor, all set for a good time! My stomach seemed to somersault. So that was the kind of business Danny Pritchard was in: a peddler of flesh shows! Now I knew why he had kept from me the kind of work I was to do. I could barely speak above a whisper as I said to Margie: "I can't possibly do it. I can't."

Her fingers bit into my shoulder. "They won't ask you to do too much, kid," she said. "You can handle the comedy stuff. The other two girls, they're wise, they'll take care of the



fresh guys. And little Margie can take care of herself."

My thoughts tumbled one over the other and my words were all questions as, almost sick, I got into the scant costume I had tried on the day before in Danny Pritchard's office.

The day before! It seemed like years now. It seemed as though, all of a sudden, I had grown older. Not wiser, but older. Margie's voice brought me back to reality.

"I've got to give Pritchard credit. He sure picks figures." Her eyes were on my costume. I looked into the mirror, gasped at what I saw. My breasts swelled over the deep cut of the bodice and the pants fitted tightly to my thighs. Then, as the thought of the men who were upstairs came to me, I cried: "I won't do it. I'll run out and call the police. I'll..."

Margie shook her head. "You'll probably find a couple of them upstairs in plainclothes, kid. But it won't do you any good. The higher-ups pay plenty for protection and whoever is Pritchard's boss makes sure things are okay." She came closer to me. "I've got an idea a man named Spaldoni is mixed up in this. I've never met him."

"Spaldoni!" I gasped. "Why, I know him! He tried to attack me last night in..."

I bit my lip. The door had slid silently open and Butch stood there. Whether he had heard anything, I didn't know. I figured not because he growled: "You two get on upstairs. And make it good."

Maybe you've been to a stag some time or other. Maybe not. I'm not going to try to describe it in detail.

But let me tell you something. Even now I wake up nights, with sweat bathing my body, cold clammy sweat, as I dream of what happened that evening. It seemed so incongruous, so unbelievable. There was the young fellow, Jimmy Ballard, acting as master-of-ceremonies and telling filthy jokes and cracks. I walked like a person in a dream.

Sure, there was the usual mockery. I was supposed to be doing a dance. Margie was supposed to be doing a song. And all during my dance, I felt hot hands on my body, felt the wiry steel of beards, heard the coarse laughter and smelled the whiskey breaths of men out on a little spree.

And the other two girls? I can't tell about them. What they did they did listlessly, did it in fear, I'm sure! I can't tell you the whole thing because I didn't see the rest of their act. I was supposed to be doing a dance while Margie sang. The room was noisy and filled with smoke and the clatter of glasses and all I could see in front of me were hands, pulling and tugging. I tried to scream but couldn't and as I looked at Margie she was wearing a forced smile and little else.

Suddenly, rough hands grabbed me. There was a rip, followed by coarse laughter. It was then that I screamed. My costume was off and I was standing there before hundreds of greedy, sensuous eyes with nothing on—nothing...nothing....

I seemed to be saying the words to myself as the room swam before my eyes and, dimly, I heard someone yell: "Catch her." And then there was blackness!

Somebody was pouring whiskey down my throat when I came



to and smelled a familiar odor, the dank odor of the dressing room.

It was Jimmy Ballard. Behind him I saw Butch, who when he saw me open my eyes, growled: "Get her to and bring her back upstairs. We need another dame."

Jimmy shook his head. "I don't think she can make it, Butch. Better let her rest awhile and I'll bring her up."

"She better come up soon." He turned and went out. After he had gone, I was surprised to see Jimmy Ballard place a chair against the door.

I tried to get up from the floor. Someone had put a dressing gown around me. "Here, here. You'd better lie still awhile." His eyes searched into mine. "You're new to this racket, aren't you?"

I told him how I happened to be there. He nodded. "Pritchard, eh? Too bad a kid like you fell for him."

I stared at him. "Why, how did . . . ?"

I trembled as he said: "You don't think you're the first, do you?" And then I bit my lips, said nothing for a moment.

He was looking at me sympathetically. "I guess you won't have to go upstairs again tonight, kid. Butch or no Butch."

I started to cry. "I've got to get away," I sobbed. "I'll leave the city."

His hands on my shoulders caused me to wince with pain. "That's just what you can't do, kid," he said. "You don't think they'd be that foolish to let you out of their sight. No, when they've finally finished with you, that's when you're through. Except that you don't walk out!"

For a moment, I didn't get the import of his words. Then as they hit me with horrible impact, I had to close my eyes to shut out the dizzy feeling. Into my mind flashed things I had read in newspapers of white slavery. At the time I had dismissed them as sensational stories. But now I knew—I was right in the grip of such a ring!

"But what can I do?" I cried wildly. "What can I do?"

Jimmy Ballard bent closer to me. "I may be able to help, kid. If you can keep your mouth shut and take a big chance."

His face was serious, but I burst out laughing. "You help," I cried. "You? After what I've seen you do tonight?"

His fingers bit cruelly into my shoulders. "Get a grip on yourself," he said. "Margie tells me you've met a man named Spaldoni and he went for you. Is that true?"

I told him it was. He went on: "Do you think you could get into his apartment again?"

"Are you crazy?" I cried. "Didn't Margie tell you what happened, what he tried to do with me?"

He nodded. "That's just it. You're the first girl in a long time Spaldoni has shown any interest in. I'm sure of it."

I stared at him as he said: "There's a safe in his apartment that has some books which he'd pay plenty for to get back if they were lost. If you could get those books—"

I tried to struggle to my feet. It was all I could do to cry out: "Steal them? I wouldn't go near him. Get out! Get out!"

"You don't understand," Jimmy Ballard tried to explain. "You . . ."



"I understand enough. You want me to get deeper into this thing." Wildly, I shouted: "It's another trick you and Danny Pritchard have thought up."

His hand came across my face. I felt a trickle of blood come from my lip. There was a hammering on the door then. Quickly, he kicked away the chair.

**I**T WAS Margie and the two girls. The stag was over. The three of them were almost without clothes and they sank wearily into the rickety chairs that furnished the place. I saw Jimmy Ballard whisper something to Margie. Then he went out.

Margie's face was white and drawn. She asked how I felt. I sensed she wanted to talk but didn't dare with the other two girls around. She helped me dress and in a little while Butch came to the door. "Okay, you kids. We're ready to go back."

My feet felt like lead as I moved across the floor. Outside, we started to get into the car, Margie behind me. I was wondering what would happen next and in my mind was thoughts of immediate flight if ever I got home.

Suddenly, Butch spoke to Margie. "You better take that car behind, Margie," he said. "We're picking up a couple of other passengers in Jersey City."

I could see her body stiffen. There was a black coupe parked behind us.

"Why me?" Margie asked, her voice strained. "I can go back on the train."

Butch's fist shot out. There was a low moan as Margie fell into his arms. The next minute a man ran

from the coupe and dragged her toward it.

The other two girls and I watched with horrified eyes. Butch grinned. "Anybody else got something to say?"

We got into the car. Jimmy Ballard, who came out after Margie had been driven away, was the last one in.

I'll never know how we got back. The two girls were dropped off some place in the city. As the car started again, I said to Butch: "You know my address?"

He grinned. "Sure. But you ain't going there."

I guess all the fight was out of me then. I guess I knew it was going to happen and now it had, well I just had to take it. I didn't need Butch's explanation:

"New babes get kept under cover until we can trust them. You'll sleep in the same place Ballard does."

I felt Jimmy Ballard's hand in mine, felt its pressure. I drew my hand away and retreated to a corner of the car. The scurvy rat was trying to show me he was my friend!

Our destination turned out to be Butch's apartment, a three room flat on West Forty-first Street. There was a sign over the entrance advertising furnished rooms and furnished apartments. Butch had the latter. The furnishings were ancient and smelly.

There was a bedroom, kitchen, living room, and bath. A cot and a day bed were in the living room. Butch said that he and Ballard would occupy those while I could have the bedroom. He asked whether we wanted anything to eat. Ballard said he did, but I was feeling



bad enough and felt that food would make me feel worse.

Butch laughed, pointed toward the door, where a big padlock hung from a chain. "That door gets locked when I go to bed, kid," he said. "Don't try nuttin' funny."

Escape? I was so weary, so frightened, so tired that I couldn't even think of it. All I wanted to do was lie down, try to quiet my trembling nerves.

**I** WENT into the bedroom. There was no lock on the door. I closed the door and in a minute heard music come through. Butch had switched on the radio.

There was a window in the room. We were on the third floor and that explained why Butch hadn't bothered locking me in.

I sank wearily onto the bed as the room started to spin. I felt as though I had aged fifty years. I had sort of a numb feeling, something like I imagine prizefighters must feel if an opponent is raining blows on them, blows they are powerless to protect themselves against.

Closing my eyes, I fell into a half-sleep. How long I slept, I didn't know. It was a sharp voice that woke me up and it took a moment for me to realize that it was a news announcer stridently announcing the hour's happenings.

And then, every nerve in my body seemed to freeze. What was that coming over? What was he saying?

"Flash! New Jersey police are attempting to solve the mystery death of a beautiful girl whose car was found at the base of Carron Cliff an hour ago. The only clue to the girl's identity found by authori-

ties was a bag with the initials: M. S. The girl's face was bruised horribly and—"

There was a sudden snarl then. A moment later music filtered through, as Butch hastily switched the dial.

I bit my lips to keep from crying out. Margie! They've killed Margie!

Into my confused mind poured thoughts: she talked. She knew too much! They had to kill her!

I held hard onto the bed as the room started to spin again. Blood was pumping madly through my body, pumping in rhythm: "It will happen to you. It will happen to you."

I knew now what Jimmy Ballard meant when he said that after the gang got through with a girl, she was really through!

But what would happen to me? More of tonight? Worse, perhaps?

I couldn't close my eyes. I just lay there in a trance-like state for hours, how long I'll never know.

It was only sensing someone else in the room that brought me out of it!

I sat up in bed, stiffened with fear. I hadn't taken off anything but my dress. I tried to find it in the dark, but couldn't. Hastily, I pulled the covers over my underthings. Had Butch come in?

And then I heard a whisper, warning me to be quiet.

It was Jimmy Ballard!

His hand closed over my mouth and into my ear he whispered: "Be quiet. I've got to talk fast. You heard what happened to Margie?" I nodded. He went on: "You've got to help, Carlotta. I'm really your friend. And hers too. But I can't explain that now. You've got to get



into Spaldoni's apartment. You're the only one can get by his body-guard. I got Butch steamed up to-night that Spaldoni is hot for you. He's going to call him tomorrow and say you're here. It was Butch who put the finger on Margie. He was suspicious of her. Now will you help?"

I nodded. He said no more but slipped a paper into my hand. I scarcely realized he had left. I didn't get a chance to tell him what had suddenly happened to me, the things that started running through my mind, had been there ever since I heard of Margie's death.

I had been lying there, not thinking of myself, but of Margie. How bitter her words had been, how her whole life had been ruined and shattered by this vicious ring of slavery. Yes, slavery, that's what it was as surely as there's a Hell. The same Hell we were all getting a one way ticket for.

I felt new strength surge into my body. Yes, I was in a trap and it looked as though I wouldn't get out. But the Dares have always been fighters. My people were pioneers who had paid with their blood to get their farm lands. I was determined to go on. I knew I was on the right track and that Spaldoni had made his fatal slip. He had fallen for a country girl for the first and last time.

**H**ONESTLY, I felt calm and confident next morning when I came out. Butch was cooking bacon and eggs in the kitchen. Jimmy Ballard was setting the table. He just nodded as I came in and whispered, "You've read the note."

I nodded back. The note had said that in the event I got Spaldoni's books, I was to take them to a Mr. Maloney at an address downtown. And if I got into any trouble, to call him.

Butch came out, his ugly face wreathed in a grin. "H'ya, Toots. Get a good night's sleep."

I said I had. He put down a heaping platter of bacon and eggs. We started eating and Butch said: "Hey, whyn't you tell me you was a friend of Spaldoni's?"

I said I didn't think it would interest him. It was all I could do to keep from showing my excitement when he said: "He wants to see you, Toots. We're goin' over there after breakfast."

Trying to keep my voice gay, I said: "Now you'll see what will happen to you. He's a good friend of mine."

Butch laughed coarsely. "He won't bodder me none. I had me orders." He pushed against my shoulder playfully. "You'd better put some stuff on that pan of yours. I don't t'ink he'll go for red-eyes."

I hadn't realized it before, but my face must have looked awful. This was proven when I went back into the bedroom to make up. My fingers trembled as I applied the lipstick. Was it another trap? I wasn't sure, but I was a sure thing to go through with it. I had to for Margie. I still didn't trust Jimmy Ballard.

Butch put the padlock on the outside when we left. He seemed to think this changing around was a huge joke. But for the first time, I felt sorry for Jimmy Ballard. They were going to see that he didn't get a chance for a break.



As I said earlier, it seemed like years since I first went into Danny Pritchard's office. And it seemed like years, instead of just two days, when once more I stood in Spaldoni's apartment.

There was a man with his back to us, as Spaldoni came over, an evil smile on his face. The apartment wasn't noisy nor crowded now. Butch went out on Spaldoni's order.

Spaldoni grinned at me: "So you've come back, eh, kid? I figured you would." His head carried a couple of strips of adhesive tape.

I have never had any real romantic training, but believe me, I sure tried to put on an act. Seeing Margie's face, bruised and battered, in a corner of my mind helped. I started to cry: "I had to come to you for help. It was awful, awful."

Spaldoni's lips curled. He snarled: "Hey, Danny, come here."

I stood stock still as the man at the window turned. It was Danny Pritchard! He didn't look at me. On his face, for the first time to my seeing, was a weak look, the look of a puppy that had been beaten but yet whimpers around the owner.

He said: "Yes, boss."

Spaldoni snarled: "What's the idea of sending her over there. I told you I wanted to see her private."

Danny's expression was apologetic and fearful. In a flash, I realized that I could pay in part what I owed him. He whined: "I didn't know she wasn't to go."

"That's a lie," I cried. "I told you that Mr. Spaldoni hadn't harmed me. But you insisted I go with you that night."

Spaldoni's lips spat out an oath. His fist went out and Danny tottered

against the wall as it struck. "So that's it, you rat. You took her to your place."

He whirled on me. "Isn't that right?"

"Yes," I cried. "I tried to get away but couldn't. I wanted to come back and see how you were."

OH, THE ego of men! Especially men with Romeo complexes. I hadn't missed in sizing up Spaldoni. His pride, his vanity were hurt. Another man had gotten ahead of him, taken a prize he had had his eyes on!

I couldn't even shut my eyes as Spaldoni called Danny vile epithet after vile epithet and followed it with punches. His last blow sent Danny reeling out the door, with Spaldoni after him.

When he returned, there was a smile of triumph in his eyes. I smiled back and all the time my heart was loaded with loathing. He said: Spaldoni's not a bad guy, kid. You see."

I complimented him, tried hard not to shudder as his fingers touched my arm, strayed over my body. "I go for you, kid," he said. "I think you got something. You be nice to Spaldoni and he'll be nice to you." He smiled. "How'd you like to work at my place?"

A sucker? I don't know. It's hard to explain about him, even now. Psychologists have written about how a man can fall for a certain type of woman, throw caution completely to the winds.

That's the only way I can explain Spaldoni and me. For some strange reason—and I mean strange—I had fascinated him. He wanted to possess me, Carlotta Dare, when all the



time he could have had hundreds of girls, many of them prettier.

Yes, I knew I had him, knew that I could twist him around my little finger in time. If I had been a different kind of girl, there's no telling what I might have had: money, jewels, furs.

But I didn't get them because I didn't want them! All that I could think of was Margie, even my own personal freedom was secondary. I had scarcely known her but a bond of attachment had sprung up between us. Yes, and there must have been more than that. I was doing this thing so that girls who followed my example and came to the Big Town wouldn't be trapped by snakes like Spaldoni and Danny Pritchard.

I'm not going to dwell on the week I spent in Spaldoni's apartment, a week of horror, of nights filled with terror and loathing as I felt his slimy hands on me, listened in the dark to his whispered words, tried to suppress the emotions going through me. No, I'm not going into detail about those things: his nasty little tricks, the thrill he got from savagery.

It was eight days before my chance came. In those eight days I hadn't been captive in the apartment. No, Spaldoni had let me go shopping with a bodyguard. He himself, had taken me to his club, to shows, and other places.

I didn't need to see the knowing looks on his henchmen to realize they thought me Trigger Spaldoni's girl.

And yet, despite everything, despite the careful way in which I had tried to pump him, I couldn't learn much about Spaldoni other than that

he was handy with a gun, hence his nickname of Trigger.

But the man's money making abilities were amazing. He seemed to have a finger in almost everything and the room in the apartment he used as an office was always busy with callers.

Finally, my chance came. He had given me a gorgeous pearl necklace the night before. Sometime I'd like to show you the marks that went with it. The necklace he put in the safe when I protested that I'd rather have it there than keep it in my dressing table. He laughed and went to the wall safe. For days I had been taking down the combination bit by bit.

And now I had it!

That wall safe of Spaldoni's was a masterpiece. It had a small opening, but inside was big and spacious. Here, he kept his books and ledgers as well as large sums of money.

That afternoon, he went out. I haven't mentioned that there were always a few bodyguards around the place, outside the apartment, in the lobby, and outside the house itself. Spaldoni didn't mind leaving me alone.

When I learned that he'd be out for at least a couple of hours, I decided that the time had come to try to get the books. I didn't know, then, what was in them.

WITH nervous fingers, I twirled the dial and held my breath until the lock caught and opened. The books were long and narrow and there were six of them. I had to act fast, I realized, because if Spaldoni had need of them and found them missing—



Well, what Margie caught would have been tame compared to mine.

Nevertheless, my curiosity got the better of me as I pulled out the ledgers. I rifled through the top one and gasped in horror. The names of all his places, all his girls were there, with the amounts earned!

I didn't dare stop to look further. I picked up the phone and dialed the number Jimmy Ballard had given me. I gave my name to a man who identified himself immediately as Mr. Maloney.

He seemed startled. "My God," he gasped. "We've been hoping you'd call. But fearful you were dead. Jimmy got word to us, then he disappeared. Have you got any idea where he might be?" I gave him Butch's address and hung up.

I started to pick up the books to take them into my bedroom. In my mind was a thought to hide them under the mattress, temporarily. Suddenly, I realized that in my excitement, I had forgotten to ask Maloney what it was all about. I had been so anxious to call him that I had done all the talking!

I started back to the phone and was about to dial when I heard a rough voice say: "Drop that phone."

"Danny," I gasped.

He came over, his eyes on the books. There was murder in Danny Pritchard's eyes as he saw what the books contained.

His hand snaked out, came across my face. So that's it," he snarled. "You're working for the cops!"

I tried to protest, to run away. Once more his fist struck me. The next minute, his hands were tearing at my dress, ripping it to shreds as I fought with the violence of a trapped

animal to get free, to make my way, somehow, to the hall.

And then his arm was around my neck and with his free hand he was dialing Spaldoni.

I bit his fingers. With a cry of pain, he released me. I rushed across the room and straight into the arms of one of the bodyguards. "Hold her," Danny cried. "She's a stoolie."

The guard twisted my arm cruelly. "Where's the boss?"

"At the joint," Danny said. "He wants us to bring her right over."

They took me down the service elevator into a big black sedan parked behind the apartment house. I tried to cover myself with the few rags of clothing I had left but they were about as helpful as ice cubes to an Eskimo.

There was a smile of satisfaction on Danny's face as he sat in the back with me, his fingers on my wrist.

"So you tried to doublecross Spaldoni the way you gave it to me," he leered. "Nice work, sister."

"You had it coming to you, rat," I cried, wildly. With my free hand I tried to rake his face.

The driver called back: "Havin' trouble?"

"No. I love it." Danny's face wore an expression of triumph. "Something tells me this dame is going to be public property soon."

He pulled me closer to him. I tried to fight him off but couldn't. His lips pushed hard on mine and I felt his pawing hands, tried to push him away but couldn't.

The scenes outside were a blur as the car sped along, taking side streets to avoid traffic. Danny's breath was hot on my throat, hot on my body as his lips traveled down



and his hand twisted my wrist. I tried to cry out but couldn't. Suddenly, my head started to spin and I lost consciousness.

**W**HEN I came to, I was sitting in Spaldoni's office. The books were in front of Spaldoni, who was sitting at his desk, a small automatic in his hand. His eyes were bright with hatred. I shuddered as he looked at me, shuddered at the cruelty in his thin, compressed lips.

"What were you doing with these?" He indicated the books. His words cut into me like a knife.

"I didn't . . ." I began lamely. His hand flashed across the table, full into my mouth. I felt the blood gush forth.

"What cops you working for?" He came around the desk, grabbed my hair and jerked my head until I thought my neck would snap with the pain. I couldn't answer.

There was a bodyguard in the room with him and Danny. To the bodyguard, Spaldoni said: "Take her to Butch's and give her the works until she talks." Then he turned to me. "So you played Spaldoni for a sucker, eh?"

His eyes darted to Danny. "And you lied about him."

The bodyguard jerked me to my feet. My knees and legs were so weak I could hardly stand. I cowered there, trying to be defiant, trying not to show my fear. I forgot that I had almost nothing covering my body, forgot Danny's questioning eyes. All I knew was that if they took me to Butch's I wouldn't come out alive.

Spaldoni stared at Danny. "Here," he said. "I got a better

idea. You take her to your place first. Then get her over to Butch's."

It was that thing that restored my voice. I screamed as Danny came toward me, lust and hate in his eyes. His fingers closed over my mouth as he pulled me toward him. "Don't . . . don't . . ." I sputtered. "I . . ."

His hand bit cruelly into my shoulders. I gasped for breath as he drove his fist brutally into my unprotected stomach. Bright colors appeared in front of my eyes and I felt a feeling of nausea as I pitched toward the desk.

Then a stab of flame came from Spaldoni's automatic. I heard Danny gasp, "the cops!" as a terrific roaring came into my ears. I saw Spaldoni fall over the desk, saw policemen rush into the room, their clubs swinging. Danny's face was white with terror.

And then, behind the police, I saw Jimmy Ballard!

It was then that I drew a blank.

The rest you know from the papers, how I turned States witness, how Jimmy Ballard revealed himself to me as a member of the district attorney's office, how he had managed to get into the gang as a master-of-ceremonies.

It was the books I stole that broke up the ring. Those same books, I learned, had caused Margie's death. She had agreed to help Jimmy Ballard for the same reason that I had: to save other girls from such a fate.

But that ring was wiped out only in the Big Town. There are other towns, not so big perhaps, but towns in which such crimes and vice are still rampant. They, too, must go. I can't help anymore, though.

Something happened to me after



that night in Danny Pritchard's apartment. It's as though the mud I touched won't come off. That is why I have written this story, the part the newspapers didn't tell—or maybe wouldn't tell because some politicians didn't want it to be told! Yes, politicians and even the solid citizens. Chambers of Commerce don't thrive on tales of vice.

I'm in a smaller Big Town now, trying to make a fresh start. My name is different, my clothes are dif-

ferent—yes, everything about me is different. And yet—

I met a man tonight. He came into the restaurant where I work. Joe, the counterman, says he's a pretty important guy. I know he likes me, I could see it in his eyes. I know he is attracted by me—the same look Spaldoni had in his face is there!

And I'm scared. And yet I don't want to run away. I wonder—

Did I get out of town too late?

## Listen!

“Connie found the body but she didn't mean to. That's why she screamed. Jean was as dead as a girl can be. Somebody had carved her with the one butcher knife the apartment afforded, and had done a first class job with it.”

That's how

**“Murder on the Third Floor”**

starts next month. Don't miss it!



# TROJAN Trooper

By HENRI ST. MAUR



"Get ready to jump!" I yelled, "before I hit that train!"



AGAINST the towering green of the mountains I saw the distant blue of Koehrn's convertible coupe raising dust under the hot summer sun far

down the encampment's guarded approach. I didn't want my spying to look too obvious, so I strolled over toward the parade ground where the girls' division, in middies and skirts, were starting out on a hike. I

*The girls' division of Koehrn's Troopers was good to look at but Brand knew that any one of those lovely little things could plant a bomb as surely as a full-grown man!*



watched them pass—young, lithe zealots, flaunting their brazen alien standards here almost in the shadow of New York City, and my heart was sick, for I was set on their undoing.

It didn't help any to tell myself that these girls were old enough to plant bombs, to spy out military movements, or even to worm reluctant secrets from the love-lushy lips of an infatuated sailor. I knew this impudent Camp of Fifth Columnists would go too far—had already, if we could have pinned it on them—and when that time came, I'd be the one to hang it on them.

Our government had been wonderfully patient, but if I could get the evidence I was after—with this cursed Trooper's uniform on my back—I'd have the doubtful pleasure of sending some of these blood-simple kids to the chair. Blowing up schools, institutions and homes is still murder, whether a grown man or a girl in her teens plants the dynamite.

The Commandant's blue convertible skidded to a stop in the graveled drive, but Koehn didn't get out right away. I pretended to be busy watching the girls—a sandy-haired blond amazon carrying a troop banner, and the dark, laughing tall girl beside her who played the drum. They came abreast of me, passing so close I could hear their hurried breathing and see the sunburnt throats above the middie kerchiefs. I smiled back at them, and the tall, laughing dark girl gave me a flash of teeth incredibly white between parted lips vivid with lipstick. Then the standard-bearers had passed, and I was left with a picture of how

her young, unfettered bosom pushed out the blouse in tight, revealing flutings.

Maybe it was the contrast—Life in the midst of Death. For these young girls were certainly the embodiment of life at its loveliest, and Koehn of death at its vilest.

I pretended to stroll aimlessly in the direction of his car, tugging absently at the chin-strap of my fatigue cap, as if I had something else on my mind but getting close enough to this high-handed "Leader" to catch anything he might let slip that'd help me send him to the chair.

**M**AYBE you'll say I should have stuck to my plane factory, and left this stuff to the F.B.I. But, hell, *you* find a ticking bomb in your nacelle assembly line and let me see *you* go right on manufacturing planes for the army while a bunch of rattlesnakes that your country has taken in and nurtured, goes on drilling and sneering at their adopted country's institutions almost in your own backyard. Maybe I wasn't the first one to remark on the proximity of the Trooper camps to the Jersey airplane factories, but I was going to be the first to do something about it. If I wasn't caught first and pumped full of lead.

Nobody could tell me Koehn did not know who planted that bomb in my factory. And nobody could tell me Koehn wouldn't send one of his stooges to plant another, perhaps a bigger one, as soon as he figured the heat had died down enough to make it safe to take a chance. He couldn't wait much longer, I knew. The country was getting fed up with him



and his strutting Fifth Column, and it was only a matter of weeks before they'd have to disband and go underground to continue their treacherous plotting where it would be harder to catch them at it.

I was almost abreast of the car when I saw Koehn hold up something to his companion that looked like a foot-long wire with a small cylinder at one end. I could see his gleaming eyes alight with excitement as he twirled the wire idly in one hand, as you'd twirl a pair of sun glasses. I was bursting to catch some word of their conversation. From his wrapt expression and the intent look on the face of the baby-faced fat man with him, I was certain they were talking over something important, perhaps something dangerous. At the risk of being caught eavesdropping, I had to try and overhear what I could.

I tried to walk quietly, setting my feet down warily on the turf and avoiding the noisy gravel. I didn't dare look at them now, they'd be sure to suspect something. Treacherous people trust nobody. I strained my ears. No use. All I could catch was the jumbled murmur of their voices. I took a chance, came a step closer. If they looked up and saw me standing there alone, with no possible reason for being there, I knew well enough what might happen. If they figured the jig was up, they'd kill me. And if they figured I'd overheard what they were saying, they'd figure the jig was up!

I held my breath, though my heart was thumping so loud I thought they must have heard it. Koehn's voice was raised now, and in my mind's eye I could see his slitted eyes dart-

ing sidewise under their hooded lids, see the twisted, thin-lipped mouth working under the military mustache he affected.

I caught words. "Yah, sure!" "It will, I tell you!" Murmurs and mutters. Then something that sounded like "—sentry huge—" and "cellar rate"—words so thick with guttural accent I couldn't be sure I'd heard anything at all.

I bit my lip. This was getting me nowhere. I'd taken a chance and I had nothing to show for it. To try to get closer was to make discovery certain. I didn't want to run everything now. Every second I waited here was to risk exposure and death. I must get out of there fast before they noticed me.

I started quietly back toward the parade ground, picking the soft turf and trying not to look as if I were walking on tiptoe.

Behind me a door thumped open. Boots crunched gravel. My heart jumped as with a blow. A guttural voice barked: "You! Trooper!"

I was caught.

**F**OR a flash I thought of running. I'm glad my senses came back before the impulse overcame me. Koehn was plenty jumpy just then. The Dies Committee had just called him, and I wondered that he hadn't already tried to skip. Just in time I remembered this, and the loaded pistol he carried at his belt. There were enough people who wanted to assassinate him to make good his story that I had attempted to murder him and that he had shot "in self-defense." He had a witness to swear to his story, and I'd be dead and disqualified.



I was desperate. I'll admit frankly I was shaking with fear. I knew these men. I turned as smartly as my shaking knees would let me and saluted.

Koehn came forward, his slitted eyes running over me from out their bony sockets. I stood rigid. No trooper was supposed to question Koehn. He asked the questions and gave the orders. You did what you were told and you were especially sure to ask *no* questions.

"What's your name?"

"I stammered: 'Brand, sir.'"

"Trooper Brand, what were you doing walking past my car just now?"

That was Koehn. No accusations, no upbraiding. Just a soft-voiced, insinuating question. He would order forty lashes behind the sports-hall in the same barely audible tone.

I tried to think of something—anything. I heard a voice that I recognized as my own stammering: "Ah—uh—"

The pink-faced man snarled: "Speak, dumb-head!"

"I—uh—I beg pardon, sir, but—I—uh—I was going to ask you about the glider classes and promotions from the ranks. But I saw you were busy so I tried not to disturb you—"

Koehn had his hands behind his back, feet spread, head thrust forward. I had a sudden hysterical desire to laugh. He was visualizing himself as Napoleon. That laugh would have cost me forty lashes—if not my life. I snapped out of it, you can imagine. I noticed the wire Koehn had been twirling was no longer in sight.

We stood like that, Koehn glar-

ing at me in silence, the pink-faced man looking from my face to Koehn's to see whether he should go to work on me. Not that he'd soil his gloves with any dirty, sweaty blacksnake whip. His underlings would take care of that. And volunteers were never wanting; I'd already noticed that when we'd been called out behind the sports-hall to witness "disciplining"—as a warning.

Koehn looked at the fat man. I held my breath. The fat man's pudgy lips tightened. His brows came together. I was lost.

A STOUT chattering woman with her hair in ribboned braids came up behind the men and Koehn turned. "What do you want?"

"Oh, Karl and Ernst, I've got the best news!" Her voice dropped. The men half turned. A second woman, out of breath, came across the turf from one of the buildings. The pink-faced man went to meet her and they talked excitedly. I waited for my doom.

Koehn brushed a fleck of twig from his spotless uniform and turned to take the woman's arm. He saw me. "Go, now," he said. He might have added: "I'll take care of you later." He didn't have to.

I wandered down the parade ground, not looking where I was going, wondering whether I should jump into one of the cars that lined the field and make a dash for it. It wouldn't do me any good, I decided. The guards at the gates were suspicious, and I hadn't dared to use my own car on account of the plates, which these babies could trace down



at Trenton, and, no doubt of it, would.

Perhaps walking with my head down that way was responsible for my almost bumping into a girl. I stammered something, and started to move on. I noticed then she'd dropped something—a drumstick. I picked it up and handed it to her. It was then I noticed the broken drumhead.

"Have an accident?"

She nodded. "Thank you," and took the stick I handed her. "Yes. I guess I got a little too enthusiastic."

I looked at the hole. "Lucky it didn't go straight across," I said. "They usually split. This the only head you've got?"

She nodded. Nodding shook the mass of crisp black curls that fell to her shoulders. I tried to keep my eyes from the way the drum-strap cut across her bosom, separating it into two distinct hemispheres. I saw a line of pink batiste below the tanned skin of her chest. I dragged my eyes back to the drumhead.

"Maybe I could switch heads for you," I said. "We could put the snare head on the batter side and patch the batter head with adhesive tape and use it for the snare side."

She had sort of squinty, heavy-lashed black eyes, with smiles in their corners. She looked at me with these eyes and said excitedly: "Oh, do you think you could!" She said it as if I'd just told her I could get her a screen test.

"I think so," I said. "I used to play drums before I took up saxophone. Let's go in to the restaurant. There'll be nobody there at this hour and I think I have some tape in my saxophone case."

"Oh, that's right. That's where I've seen you, in the orchestra," she laughed. "I'll bet you thought I was awfully forward, smiling at you today in the parade. I remembered your face and I thought you were somebody I'd met."

I put out my hand. "My name's Ed Brand. What do I call you?"

She put a warm palm in mine. "My name's Leah."

"Just Leah?"

"—When people do nice things for me like fixing drums, it's 'just Leah,' but my full name is Leah Vail." She laughed the mischievous laugh again. I couldn't make out whether she was innocently flirtatious or just full of the natural good spirits of a young girl. Maybe a little of both.

We went inside and I changed the heads. The snares sounded deader than I'd've liked, but Leah was enthusiastic. She gripped my hand and squeezed it hard. "Oooh, gosh, Ed, I'm so *ticked!* I had visions of not being able to take part in the parade tomorrow!"

Her eyes fell on the open saxophone case. "Say, would you do me a favor? Another favor?"

"Anything, why?"

She colored at that. I hadn't meant to make my voice sound so fervent, but I was realizing that something about this girl was extraordinarily fascinating, and it wasn't just her dark, youthful grace. To some other guy she might have been just a girl—the enamel chipped off one nail, a zipper not quite closed in the waist of her skirt and showing white skin in its gap, scuffed saddle-strap oxfords, shining bare legs, with mosquito-bites dotting the



shins. Five-and-ten cent store lipstick looking bright and unnatural against her tanned skin.

ANOTHER guy would have seen just that probably. Me, I could see only things that my eyes couldn't tell me about—the whiteness that must start in a sharp line where the batiste showed at the hollow of her bosom. The clean, slender line of diaphragm and waist, the flat slinkiness of youth at hip and flank and the slim columns of her long thighs.

"Ed!" she put a warm hand on mine. "I asked you, 'Would you play me a tune?'"

"Oh." I started. "Yes. Oh, sure. Yeah. On the saxophone, you mean? Sure."

I got it out, fitted the neck and mouthpiece, hung the strap around my neck and blew a scale. The reed was dry. I moistened it. I tried, *Bebe* and some of the Strauss waltzes. Leah sat wrapt, but I was disappointed. The reed was dull and unresponsive and I didn't have another. I told her.

"The other fellow might have some?" she suggested. "I know him, and I know he wouldn't mind if you borrowed one. Here, let me look."

She went to the other man's case, opened it and came back with a box wound with a rubber band. I opened it, took a fresh reed, moistened it, put it on the horn. It was better. I played for half an hour while Leah sat there, her eyes soft with some emotion I could not have named. When I stood up and unhooked the horn, she came to my side. I laid the horn on the piano, turned to look

for the case. But when I saw the steady, intent look on her face, I forgot about the case.

How do those things happen? I couldn't tell you. All I can remember is her looking at me in that way, and the way we both seemed to take the step that brought us eye to eye and heart to heart. She seemed to find her way into my arms as if she had never had any other destiny. I was stirred with the music I had been playing, the late shadows of afternoon in the deserted room and the sweetness of her hair, the peace of her cheek against my chest.

I lifted her chin ever so gently, bent my lips to her lips. Her eyes were closed. I could feel her hurried breathing and I had all I could do to keep my hands from feeling the mounting beat of her heart under the coarse white blouse. Her lips were hot and swollen, and she kissed as a young girl kisses, greedily, yet naively, and without artifice or coyness.

I don't know how long we stood there before she moved softly out of my arms, saying breathlessly, "No—please—" and turning her face from my pursuing kiss. I released her, breathing unsteadily myself, and drew a hand across my face. Her eyes met mine, held steadily, as if we two shared a secret that was too intimate, too sacred for shame. I noticed that her full underlip gave her face a sort of half-swooning, hungry look, as if a kiss still trembled on it.

Then she was all at once lively as a jitterbug again. I put the saxophones away, hunting around to find my mouthpiece cap. It was then I noticed the reed.





WOULD have sworn the reed, when I took it from the box along with the other new reeds, was clean and spotless. Now, putting on the cap, I noticed dark markings I was sure hadn't been there before. Even the cheapest reeds don't have bark markings at their core. I hadn't touched this reed except to wet it. It didn't make sense!

And then I got it! The idea was so stunning I was afraid I might show my emotion. I hated to exclude Leah from this, my secret, but after all—she was of the enemy. And this might be a matter of life and death.

I had to get her out of there. I took her arm and I can still remember the softness of her when the back of my hand brushed her body in passing. I gave her some excuse and watched her go with her drum down toward the girls' tents.

Back inside the restaurant I hurried to the saxophone case, unlocked it, pocketed the box of reeds along with the one on my own horn, and hurried out. I wanted to get somewhere quickly and examine the rest of those reeds.

At the door I walked right into four troopers, one of them my tent-mate. I tried to make some excuse to get away, but it was not a chance. I had to tag along, with the secret of those reeds burning in my pocket while they killed the time until dinner. After dinner my tent-mate clung like a leech. I wondered whether he was wise and was waiting to close in on me. At ten that evening I was due to play in the orchestra at the restaurant hall, now

cleared for dancing, except for booths and a few tables with checkered cloths.

At midnight a crowd came in from a moonlight swim. We were in the midst of Tales from Vienna Woods, and I saw Koehn's baby-faced aide, resplendent in his dress uniform, sweep Leah out on the floor in the fast waltz. He was holding her close and she was laughing at something he was saying. After the dance was over, he led her to a booth near the bandstand. He was sitting with a fat arm over her shoulder so near I could have tossed my saxophone in his fat lap, and I could see his palm, resting against her armpit, sliding down as if to encroach on the intimacy of her ripening body. Rage swelled my throat so that I could hardly manage my instrument.

I waited for her to shrug free of the man's pawing. Under the tablecloth I saw his pudgy fingers spread themselves on her knee.

She brushed his hand away. I looked at her face. She was smiling at him under a frown, and she protested loudly, mock-petulantly: "Now you stop that!" He leaned across, put out the dim table lamp, and pressed his muzzle against her face. This time she did not struggle, long as the kiss was, and with grinding teeth I watched his puffy hand close on the firmness of her as though he would crush the flesh to pulp in his avid fingers.

I was sick. This was Leah, that I had held in my arms but a few short hours ago, whose lovely body I had held too sacred to violate with the least presumptuous caress, and this fat pig was slaving her at will



while she returned his kiss. I was heartsick with raging despair and frustration. I hadn't confessed, even to myself, what a terrific effect this girl's kiss had had on me, how completely, in that short few moments alone this afternoon I had fallen hopelessly in love with her. And now I watched them, after an hour-odd's drinking, get up from the bench and make their way toward the exit and the cool night outside. Looking on the exaggerated swing of Leah's hips in the tight skirt, I asked myself how I could ever have failed to see her for what she was.

AFTER the music ended, I made some excuse and got down off the stand. I wanted to go somewhere and examine those reeds. My tent would do, if I could have it alone to myself for a few moments.

Luck was with me. I got a cup of water, dumped the reeds into it and drew them out, one by one. As the water brought out on each reed a digit and a word I arranged them in numerical order, adding the one I had taken originally from the box that afternoon. In a few moments I had the message complete:

"AWAITING WORD DEPARTURE OF SPECIAL FREIGHT FROM FACTORY WITH SHIPMENT NEW TYPE MOTORS. USING WHEEL DEVICE ACCORDING TO INSTRUCTIONS. WILL UNDOUBTEDLY MEAN FURTHER USEFULNESS OF CAMP ENDED. KOEHRN."

I didn't get it at first. And then I remembered the wire Koehn'd been twirling that afternoon. I tried to piece together wire, "sentry huge," and "cellar rate." I gathered up the reeds, put them back into the box, and I had the rubber band half on

the cover before I remembered that the freight load of plane motors we were shipping out of the factory was due to go this very evening.

Wheel device? Could that be the wire Koehn had been showing his fat aide? I didn't like the line about further usefulness of camp ended. It seemed to point to something pretty drastic. I made my way through the darkness of trees and deserted tents past the parked cars toward the lights of the hall.

A girl stumbled out of the shadows and almost fell at my feet. I saw that her blouse had been half torn off before I recognized Leah. She swayed against a tree, braced herself with one hand and held a flat pistol pointed unsteadily at my belt. "Get me a car, quick!" she spat.

"Leah!"

She looked at me then, with eyes that seemed to see me for the first time. Her mouth tightened a little in a bitter twist. "Oh—you." The gun tilted in her fist. "Well, I didn't ask to have it this way. You deal out death, now you've got to meet it when your turn comes up. *Get me a car, damn you!*"

"Leah," I panted. "*Leah, what is this!*" I spread my hands. "I have no car."

I saw the hand that held the pistol drop, saw her shoulders slump, heard her moaning whimper and caught her as she went limp. I shook her, lifting the pistol from her fingers. "Leah!" I shot in her ear. "What's this all about! Where's the man you were with!"

She shook her head stubbornly. "You're one of them! Why couldn't I have—you'd kill *me*, you'll help



them kill me when you find out! Oh, I tried, I tried! Why, of all the men in this camp did it have to be you! I could have shot down any other and not—and not—”

“Leah! Answer me!” My heart was pounding. My hands, holding her, seemed too weak to sustain her weight. “Leah! What are you trying to tell me?”

She faced me, tears in her eyes. “That I love you! That I’ll always love you! That rather than shoot you down I let your rotten, treacherous gang blow up a whole shipment of plane motors meant for the army—*my* army—that should be yours, if something hadn’t twisted that poor, poor brain of yours!”

**M**Y HEART leaped. “Leah! You mean you—you don’t belong to this bunch of rats. You mean you’re an undercover agent!”

“Call it a spy. This is war,” she said bitterly. “It’s what you’ll call me when you shoot me.”

“Leah!” I shook her. “Listen, Leah, you’re all wrong! I’ll help you save those planes! *We’ve* got to save them, Leah! There may still be time. *We’d’ve* heard the explosion! Tell me what you know, quick!”

She gaped at me. “You mean you’re not—not—?”

“I’m no more a Trooper than you are,” I said. “Hurry, Leah! Which way did he go? Those planes go out tonight. What is he going to do, do you know?”

“Get a car,” she gasped, and broke into a run toward the parking space. “*We’ve* got to get a car!”

I must have tried ten before I found one with the keys in the igni-

tion. We climbed in, started it, and churned the motor. “Head for the crossing!” Leah yelled over the roar.

I gave it the gun, shot out through the gates, past the guardhouse. A sentry sent a hail and a shot after us. I stood on the accelerator, burning up the road.

Leah gave it to me fast. Baby-face, suddenly suspicious of her questioning, had turned on her. She had learned this much: That Koehrn had arranged that the shipment of motors that was leaving the plane factory that night would be “delayed” in transit. When she tried to find out more, Baby-face, tired of being held off with promises, lost his temper and left her unconscious in his rage. She came to, stumbled to her feet, and was trying to get a car to follow Koehrn when she bumped into me. I got this much with the car swaying and bucking at eighty under us.

“But how are they delaying the motors?”

“Some wire thing that goes on the wheel, I think. I’ve caught snatches of their talk. But I couldn’t make out anything. *Ed!* We almost went, that time! If you kill us, we can’t do a thing!”

I was repeating over and over, “cellar rate, cellar rate.” It still made no sense. Leah shouted in my ear. “After we get past the next curve you’ve got a straight stretch for miles. Stand on the accelerator.”

Something clicked. “Cellar rate.” “Accelerate.”

“I’ve got it!” I yelled. “Now what’s ‘sentry huge?’” What has a ‘sentry huge’ to do with a wheel? I racked my brains. I thought about



the weighted wire, spinning on Koehrn's finger that afternoon—

*Centrifugal force* popped into my head.

I had it! "Sentry huge" was "Centrifuge." A centrifuge attached to the freight car wheel that would spin as the wire had on Koehrn's finger until the increased speed of the wheel would set off the dynamite they must somehow have planted in the train—!

And at that instant I heard the whistle of the engine, saw ahead the blinding rays of the headlights!

I braked hard. "*Get ready to jump!*" I yelled at Leah. "I'm going to let this thing go!"

She climbed out on the running board while I headed for the crossing. I slowed for a flash, saw her jump clear and roll in the roadside grass. Then I put on speed, climbed out on the fender, slowed with the hand throttle, jumped clear and let the car plunge ahead into the path of the oncoming train.

**I** HEARD the crash, heard the scream of the locomotive whistle, heard the grinding of brakes. I dragged myself to my feet, stumbled to the train. The engineer caught me.

"Bomb in freight car!" I managed to gasp. "Rigged to wheel! Flashlight! Quick!"

He found one. We raced along the side of the track flashing the ray at wheels.

We found it—the long wire, attached to the hub of a wheel on the tenth freight car. Wires led to a crate inside the car. It was a crude

job—but it would have done the trick had the train gotten past the crossing where it would have picked up speed enough to set off the battery spark in the centrifuge.

I untwisted the wires and made the machine harmless until the bomb squad could arrive. Then I went to look for Leah.

She was gone!

Lights up the road marked a house. I headed for it, hoping they'd have a phone. They had. A young lady was using it, they said.

Leah.

She'd beaten me to it. The cops were already on their way to pick up Koehrn, Baby-face, and to start cleaning out the rat-hole for good and all.

They got 'em too, and the evidence on the saxophone reeds Koehrn had been preparing to send across the water to his boss overseas cinched the case. A neat trick, but not quite neat enough this time. The law really clamped down. If war is declared, they get death.

Leah told me later that the hardest ordeal of all was sitting in the booth with Baby-face where I could watch them, and having to let him paw her in order to try and get the missing links in the story out of him. "When he touched me that way, and I knew you were watching," she said, "I nearly died of shame. And it was worse having to act as if I really enjoyed it."

"You're sure you're not acting now?" I said.

She snuggled closer, "It makes a difference who's doing it," was what she said.



# HOLDING A KICKER

By CLARK NELSON



WAS thinking of Patty, my red-headed secretary, as I drove toward the post office on my way to the office. If there's any better way of starting a day right than thinking of Patty, I've yet to discover it.

I think I really hoped she'd be a little late—not much, but a little. Because then I'd have an excuse for bawling her out, and when Patty gets bawled out, she gets mad. And when Patty gets mad, she gets more beautiful than usual, which is about twice as beautiful as any other girl anyway!

You ought to see Patty with her Irish up. Her sort of greenish eyes spit flame, and her breast begins to heave until you can't take your eyes from it—but then's a good time to stop getting her mad, too, because

Patty's more than a handful if her temper gets out of control!

That morning every traffic light in the city seemed to have been turned against me until I began to be afraid that I was the one who was going to be late.

Fidgeting with brake and clutch, I stood for minutes at Duane Street, straining my eyes for the light to change.

Then, just as I was getting the signal, my right-hand door jerked open, and a blond, doll-like thing, all out of breath, plopped into the seat beside me.

I turned to stare while a hundred drivers leaned on their horns behind me.

She dropped her handbag from her lap and it slid comfortably down a pair of silken legs. Perhaps that's why I saw the legs first. I didn't re-

*He was a sucker for women, and he had to admit it. Still, if he hadn't listened to that starry-eyed salesgirl, he'd have been a lot farther from rounding up the gang of bank-robbers!*



gret it. Boy, those were legs, what I mean!

My eyes traveled up something pretty special, and were rewarded with a glimpse of milky flesh above her rolled stocking tops.

Then a cop started walking toward me and distracted me and I had to set my car in motion. But I was managing to get little side glances at my uninvited passenger. Her lips were red and full and soft-looking; when her pink-tipped hands smoothed her skirt over extremely feminine hips, the action tightened her blouse over soft curves, bringing out their challenging shapeliness. She was worth any man's looking at!

Neither of us had spoken when again I noticed the handbag at our feet. I guess I blushed. The bag was identical to one I'd let a starry-eyed salesgirl talk me into buying at Frobisher's Department Store the day before.

I'd offered it to Patty, and she'd laughed at me. She'd said, "You know you didn't buy this for me. Some little baby-faced doll talked you into it. You're just a sucker for dames!" And she'd refused to accept it.

I hadn't been able to contradict her convincingly because I knew what she'd said was true, so I'd sheepishly taken the thing home and thrown it into a closet. And now this kid had its duplicate. It's a small world!

**WE WERE** getting out of a traffic tangle when the girl spoke. "You act as if you weren't glad to see me, Mr. Slater." Her voice was low, husky, with that breathless sort

of quality that always gets me in women.

I wondered how she knew my name, and I said, "Of course I'm glad to see you. Where'll we go?" I'd already forgotten about beating Patty to the office. I could always do that. This sort of thing didn't happen every day.

The girl said, "I want to talk to you—privately, very privately." She was very much in earnest.

About then I was beginning to feel that there was something vaguely familiar about her—and I'm not a man to forget his women. Again I studied her from her blond hair, down over her piquant face, the length of her perfect form encased in form-fitting robin's egg blue, to those legs that were legs in a million. But I failed completely to place her.

In a life high-lighted by lovely girls, I'd seldom run across anything as superior as this one!

She asked, "Could you take me to your apartment? I don't want to be seen at your office."

I said, "Why not?" my heart beating a little faster. Obediently, I turned my car.

We'd barely straightened out when the wail of police sirens rose above traffic discords. Automatically, I eased up on the gas pedal. One hand started toward the gun in my shoulder holster.

The girl snuggled closer. "Like an old fire-horse!" she laughed. "It isn't your party. And I want to talk to you *now*!"

My hand came back from the gun and accidentally dropped on a rounded silken knee. It was almost like touching a live wire. The per-



Patty had said. A sucker for dames!

Well, maybe she was right. But a man would be a fool to ignore a honey like this one who's practically climbed into his lap! I forgot all about Patty and headed for home.

We pulled up before my apart-



In a second those girls were a tangle of flailing legs and whipping skirts.

fume she wore drifted to my nostrils in intoxicating draughts. I could actually feel my temperature rising. And then I remembered what

ment house and I stooped for the girl's bag as she opened the car door. "Right with you," I said, and she fairly dashed across the side-



walk to the building's entrance. I followed more leisurely, trying to conceal my impatience, with the bag in my hand.

In my apartment I hung up my hat, dropped the girl's bag on a small end table by the davenport, and said, "The place is yours. Make yourself comfortable. I'm going to rustle up a couple of drinks. Then we'll have that very private talk." I tried to slide my arm around her waist, but she eased away.

I didn't try to hold her. Hell, I could be patient if I had to. I asked her then, "Aren't you going to tell me your name?" I was heading for the kitchenette.

I'm not sure she heard me. Her eyes were roaming over the room. They came to rest on the two doors in the far wall. She said, "How about letting me powder my nose?"

I told her okay. I said, "The right-hand door will take you through the bedroom. The other's a closet." I watched the intriguing sway of her hips as she glided into my bedroom, closing the door after her.

FOR a minute I forgot the drinks. I was supposed to be mixing while I attempted to figure her out. She didn't look like a tramp—there was every air of class about her—and yet there had been nothing in her manner so far, unless it was the business of eluding my arm, that would take her out of the tramp category.

I did something then that ordinarily I wouldn't have done. Although I'd seen no reason for mentioning it, the closet door beside the bedroom entrance was only one way

into the closet. The closet was long and deep, and at its farther end was another door connecting directly with the bedroom. I tiptoed into the closet.

With the first step I took I kicked the handbag the starry-eyed sales girl had sold me, and I cursed under my breath. I hoped I hadn't made too much noise. I left it where it lay and crept down to the closet's far end.

The door into the bedroom was open a whisper, far enough for me to get a look into the room. And I blinked stupidly at what I saw. The girl straightening her hair in front of the mirror wasn't the girl who had just gone in there, wasn't the girl who had climbed into my car!

That one had been dressed in a frock of robin's egg blue. This one was in tan. That one had been blond. This one was unmistakably brunette.

I shoved the door wide open and stood on the threshold, slack-jawed. She turned and smiled. And she *was* the same girl!

I saw the blond wig on the bed then, and it began to make a little sense. She asked, "Don't you like me this way?" Her small hands smoothed the material of her frock over her graceful hips. She came toward me in a sort of undulant glide, her breasts dancing.

"Sure I like you," I said. "But I think I'm entitled to an explanation."

Her eyes laughed saucily and she took my hand and pulled me to a chair. She perched on an arm of it, and this time she made no protest when I slipped an arm around her waist.



"There's really nothing to explain," she said. "I didn't want to take a chance on being recognized in the company of a detective." She bent, caught the hem of her dress, and pulled it high over those glorious legs. Though the material was tan on the outside, it was blue inside. "Reversible, you see," she said easily. "And that explains how I can be one person at one time, and somebody else at will."

There were a lot of other things that I probably should have asked her just then. But there was her nearness, her warmth, her fragrance. It all combined to fill me with a sort of giddiness. Maybe I *am* a sucker for dames.

My arm around her waist exerted the slightest possible pressure and she was in my lap. That girl was all woman! I've kissed a great many girls—but that girl whose name, even, I didn't know—could have taken the sum total that all of them had ever learned and it wouldn't add up to the first move in her technique! I wouldn't have believed it if it hadn't happened to me!

**S**O HELP me, I felt her hand slide over my chest toward my shoulder and never tumbled to what it was all about until she jumped to her feet and left me facing the muzzle of my own gun in her tiny but rock-firm hand!

"You wanted me to explain," she said. "All right. I'm Rita Guest. A couple of years ago you sent my brother Paul to Sing Sing for fifteen years for a payroll hold-up. And this is how I'm getting back at you. An hour ago the Empire Savings Bank was robbed. I'm framing you

for the job. When the cops get tipped off and come here, they'll find the blond wig, my handbag with the stolen money, and your corpse! They'll figure that you and that little tramp in your office robbed the bank!"

My heart was still pumping like mad, but it was for a different reason now. Rita Guest meant business. It was clear in the tenseness of her finger on the trigger; it was unmistakable in the menace in her eyes that had gone from laughing to a flinty hardness. And for the first time in a long while I thought of lovely Patty at my office. She, too, was to be dragged into this. All because I was a sucker for women!

I'll admit I was scared stiff. Women with guns are bad enough any time. This one, to make matters worse, was working herself up to a practically maniacal frenzy.

I tried to be calm. I said, "You say that your bag, the one I brought in from the car, has the bank money in it?"

She nodded. "Every penny of it. The mob figured I could get it away with less likelihood of getting stopped. Then I saw you. To hell with the mob! I'm paying you off for what you did to Paul!"

I stalled feebly. "You're sure the dough is in the bag? Maybe the mob played a fast one on you, hoping you'd draw the cops away from them."

More by accident than anything else, I'd apparently hit on just the right note, for I saw the flash of suspicion in her eyes. She snapped, "And maybe you found out what was in the bag when I came in here ahead of you! Get up and walk



ahead of me into the other room."

There was nothing for me to do but obey, hoping against hope that she'd look away from me for a second, or let the gun waver.

The bag was where I'd left it, on an end table by the davenport. With my own gun prodding my back, I approached it slowly. And at that moment somebody rapped on the door of my apartment!

There was a moment, so still that I could hear Rita's excited breathing. Then the knock was repeated.

"Don't make a sound!" she whispered.

I didn't. The muzzle of my gun against my spine was as big as an open grave.

A KEY grated in the lock, and sweat streamed down my forehead. So far as I knew, the janitor and I had the only keys to the apartment. If the janitor had surrendered his, it must mean the cops.

Rita Guest made a funny sound behind me as the door opened. Patty Barbour, the Patty of my office, stood in the doorway. Rita was behind me so that Patty couldn't see her gun. I wanted to warn Patty but couldn't.

"Still playing sucker, I see!" Patty said. Her lips curled in scorn. "A brunette this time!"

Rita stepped out from behind me so that my gun covered both of us. "Come in, dearie!" she ordered.

I marveled at Patty's coolness as she came in and closed the door.

Rita laughed. "What a set-up! I can shoot both of you now. I leave the woman's wig and the hand-bag—"

I knew that my voice was hoarse and strained when I made another despairing effort. "You're sure the money's in the bag?" I'd been afraid enough for myself, but with Patty here—

Rita's tone had a sneer in it. "Suppose you open it, wise guy."

The automatic pointed menacingly, and I went to work with trembling fingers. My heart almost stopped when I got it open. *The bag was empty!*

I raised my eyes to Rita slowly. She looked as if she'd just seen a ghost. All the blood had drained from her lips. Patty seemed the only calm person in the room.

Rita took a step nearer to me and waved me aside. She stared at the empty bag as if it were something entirely beyond her comprehension. I could almost read her mind while two possible explanations revolved in it. Had I taken the money, or had her own mob doublecrossed her—just as she had planned to double-cross them?

Her words came raspingly, "There was fifty thousand dollars there! You took it! You—"

I interrupted her desperately, knowing that a wrong word might be the signal to explode the gun in her hand. "But you've been with me! I haven't had a chance. Your own gang did it!" I was praying that she might not recall that minute or two when she had gone ahead of me into my bedroom.

Her face was alternately red and white, her eyes flashing wildly. Suddenly she darted to the door, and I could hear her footsteps streak down the hall.

Patty looked at me questioningly.



"She must be headed for the gang's hide-out. And she'll lead us straight to them!" I pulled away from Patty's restraining clutch and raced after her.

I reached the street just in time to see my car roar down the street in a cloud of smoke from the exhaust.

A taxi waited on the corner, and I was in it and after Rita before Patty came out of the apartment house. I got one glimpse of her flaming red head at the entrance as we rounded into the cross street.

My driver had taken me literally when I'd ordered him not to let the car ahead get out of sight.

Rita Guest drove like a wild woman; what my driver lacked in wildness he made up in reckless skill. We each of us violated every traffic law in the statute books as we chased through town. We were not more than half a block behind Rita when she pulled up before a sad-faced house in the river section.

She wasn't concerned with possible pursuit just then. She was into the building without even stopping to close the door of my car.

I wasn't more than seconds behind her. Her legs were twinkling up the rickety stairs as I came through the front door. But I didn't follow her at once. From one side a man jumped into my path, and the revolver he held was as big as a cannon. "Hold it!" he warned me.

Impotently, I held it. My muscles were bunched and quivering. Upstairs I could hear angry voices, but I couldn't distinguish words.

The man who had stopped me frisked me expertly to make sure

that I was unarmed. "Okay," he said finally. "Upstairs!"

I went up, cursing myself with every step. Again I'd proved Patty's statement. A sucker for dames! Only a woman could have got me into this mess! I realized I knew too much now for the gang ever to let me go.

My gunman captor shoved me before him down a second floor corridor. I could hear a man bellowing in a room at the far end, and strangely I recognized the voice. It was Big Mike Carter. Carter had probably been arrested more than any other man in town—on charges ranging all the way from vagrancy to homicide—but never yet had the police been able to make the charges stick.

Now I could make out his words. "You fool!" he yelled. "I told you not to come here!" I heard a thud like that of a blow on soft flesh. Something hit the floor, and I could hear a woman's whimpering. It sounded like Rita Guest.

The gunman behind me showed no emotion. He threw the door wide and shoved me in.

RITA was in a crumpled heap on the floor, and Big Mike Carter crouched over her. He turned a face purple with rage toward us as we came in.

There were two other men in the room, narrow-chested men with dope-bright eyes. They were staring at Rita avidly, eying the creamy white flesh where her dress was torn down from the throat line and where her skirt had rucked up.

She was staring up at Big Mike in abject terror, oblivious to how her



pose revealed the secret loveliness of her body's feminine curves. A thin trickle of blood ran over her chin from a corner of her mouth—that mouth that knew too much about kissing.

Her bosom heaved with her labored breathing. In spite of the predicament I was in, I couldn't repress my admiration.

Big Mike turned his attention back to the brunette. "I tell you the money was in the bag when we gave it to you!" His hairy fingers were working. "By God, if you don't come clean—"

The girl huddled back from his clawing fingers. "Honest, it was the way I said. I got in Slater's car near the post office. I had an idea of getting back at him for what he did to my brother Paul. We went to his apartment. And the bag was empty. Slater said you'd given me an empty bag and were only using me as decoy to draw the cops off."

Big Mike swung around to me. One of his hands reached out and the fingers laced into my shirt front. He shoved his jaw almost into my face. "So you got the dough!" he snarled. My hands clenched at my sides, but I didn't use them. The gun behind me was boring into my kidneys.

Big Mike was still talking. "Between you and the dame, somebody knows where the money is! And you're going to tell me, or I'm going to take you apart with my bare hands!"

He reached down and backward and twined heavy fingers in Rita's hair, pulling her to her feet. His other hand slapped her across the mouth, then busied itself, shredding

her dress even farther. His fingers were rough, bruising, and, for a moment, I had no time to admire her beauty.

My whole body went hot, then cold. There was a red mist before my eyes. Gun or no gun, I think I would have smashed him except for one thing. At that instant I realized suddenly that Big Mike wasn't looking at me. He was staring over my shoulder. The pressure of the gun behind me had lessened. The other two punks were facing the door.

Without chancing a look, I made a grab for my guard's automatic. It blasted flame as it came away in my hand. Big Mike coughed as a slug entered his chest. There was a gush of blood from his mouth.

I caught him as he fell and swung him before we as a shield. The two punks had guns out now, and I could feel Big Mike's body jerk under the impact of their bullets.

I glanced toward the door. Patty Barbour, my secretary, stood on the threshold!

I felt something sear one hip and realized a shot had passed clean through Big Mike's body. It brought me out of my daze. The automatic in my hand began adding its 'din to the inferno in the room.

One punk collapsed, screaming. The other dropped his gun while a red coating suddenly covered his whole hand. I turned my attention to the remaining man, barely aware that Rita Guest was crawling for the gun on the floor.

Patty came into the room like a whirlwind, and the two girls became a wild tangle of flailing legs and whipping skirts.

Big Mike's body was sliding from



my grasp when I got the other gunman squarely in the sights of his own automatic. His face disappeared in a blob of color. He bowed deeply, and crashed, face-first, to the floor.

Patty and Rita were still fighting madly. Their screams rose above the echoes of the shooting. I walked toward them, took two steps and stopped foolishly. There was a whining in my head that grew louder and louder like an approaching siren. It blotted out every other sound and brought with it an impenetrable darkness. I sat down to figure it out when everything faded. . . .

**T**HERE was something warm and soft under my head when I woke up. A pleasant fragrance filled my nostrils. I blinked and saw Patty's face above me. My head was in her lap.

"No, you're not dead," she said. "The police heard the shooting and came. The whole gang's dead or locked up."

My head was still fuzzy as I tried to reconstruct the sequence of events. "What brought you to my apartment in the first place?" I demanded. "And where was the money?"

She placed two fingers over my lips. "You mustn't exert yourself," she told me. "I can explain everything. I was beating you to the office this morning when I saw you stop for a traffic light. I wasn't more than ten feet from your car. I saw the girl climb into your car, and I was sore. I knew you'd take her to your apartment."

I tried to protest but she wouldn't let me. "Then I heard of the bank robbery and that a girl was involved. The more I thought of it, the more I decided that you hadn't made one of your ordinary pick-ups. And the hour was only a couple of minutes after the robbery. I put two and two together and decided to investigate."

"But the money?" I managed to inquire.

She grinned. "When you saw me at your apartment, that was my second visit. I got there first, you and your lady-friend were in the bedroom. I saw her handbag at the end of your davenport and I had a hunch. It was exactly like the one you told me you had in your clothes closet, so I switched them. Then I heard the two of you coming back and I slipped out into the hall and knocked as if I just arrived."

I digested that much. "But what about the key to my apartment?"

Patty turned a brick red. "Oh, the key. Once when you left your key-ring on your desk at the office, I had a duplicate made. You never can tell—"

I grinned and drew her head down to me. I said, "Except for a little loss of blood, I'm all right. Suppose we go back to my apartment, get the money, turn it over to the cops—and then I want to spend the rest of the day showing you that there's only one dame in the world I'm a sucker about from now on."

The pressure of her mouth on mine assured me she approved of the program.

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# DREDS OF

By MAX NEILSON



HE GULPED his drink and slammed the glass on the table, drew meaningless pictures and curlycues on the wet top with a shaking forefinger. He gulped, he shifted on the padded seat, he muttered, his cheeks turned white and his eyes, mild and blue, behind his spectacles, were harassed and wild.

Tracy Rogers, the lawyer, leaned toward him across the table. "Get a grip on yourself, Freddie. By God, this is one thing I can't get you out of; you've got to argue for yourself! Face the facts calmly; fight it out! I did my part by persuading her to come to my apartment. You'll be alone; the Jap is gone. Now collect yourself; figure what kind of a compromise you're going to try for."

"I tell you," whimpered Freddie Lovelace, "you don't know Corinna when she gets angry! Why, she'd as soon kill me as not! That woman!" His voice trickled off in a wail.

Rogers spoke dryly. "That woman wants money, not blood. I'd advise you to pay. Now look, Freddie, you

played fast and loose with her, you admit that. You led her to believe you were going to marry her!"

"But I can't marry her," wailed Freddie. "My grandmother would cut me off entirely I tell you! Entirely! A woman like Corinna Gwynne!"

"Steady, steady. Let's summarize, my boy. You have something like half a million in your own name, left to you by your mother. And providing you stay out of trouble until you're thirty, you'll get a lump sum of seven millions from your grandmother! This woman Corinna has got you, boy! She's got you by the short hair. You can pay off now, even if it's a big sum—and two years from now collect seven million from grandma, or you can squawk blackmail, cry havoc, and in the resulting publicity, lose not only your inheritance but what you've already got! She's got letters, she's got witnesses, rent receipts, paid bills!"

He looked at his watch. Freddie Lovelace looked at his own watch, almost dropped it from his shaking hands.

"Get a grip on yourself," said

*If he hadn't let the Mexican girl wheedle him into helping her worthless brother, Warburton would have been much better off. But that was before the case began to tie into the strange disappearance of a millionaire's sweetheart!*



# DESPAIR

"Better for me if you killed me, plunged this knife into my heart!" she cried.



Rogers grimly. "Get it over with now. Go up to my apartment, where she's willing to meet you. Offer to compromise. She'll settle, letters, bills, rent receipts, all. What if it does cost you a hundred grand or so? That's better than losing seven million!"

**F**REDDIE LOVELACE walked out of the tavern like a doomed man going to his execution. Somehow he hailed a cab, gave the address of the Trafton Arms, where his friend and lawyer, Rogers, had arranged the meeting. He'd been dodging Corinna Gwynne for the



past month by lies and subterfuges, and he did not relish the accusations and recriminations he knew would fly his way once he saw her.

Even the elevator boy looked at him oddly going up to ten, where Rogers lived. Before the door of the apartment, he dropped Rogers' key three times before he could insert it. Eventually he swung the door wide, stepped into the little foyer and stood there sweating.

She was there. He did not see her, but he smelled the musky, heady perfume she always wore, and almost he turned around and fled the way he had come. Her voice stopped him, husky, throaty, tingling up and down his spine.

"Freddie! Darling! Freddie!"

There was nothing else to do. He went through the little foyer into the luxurious living room, solemnly surveyed the woman on the divan with great inward trembling. Corinna Gwynne was beautiful; that, no one could deny. Her face was a white oval, marked and accented by the crimson of her mouth, the penciled lines of her brows, the crescent shadows of her lashes. Her eyes were warm brown, her hair deep yellow, buttercup yellow. She was a tall woman, as tall as Freddie himself, statuesque in her beauty. She wore a street dress of some deep red, with a neck low in the front to reveal fascinating contours. She sat, at his entrance, with one leg doubled beneath her, her left knee silken entanglement.

These things Freddie Lovelace tried not to see. After all, he was here on a different kind of business. Again she spoke, "Freddie! Darling! It's been so long!"

He tried to dodge, but was unsuccessful. She flowed swiftly across the room, thrust her arms about his neck, her soft warmth close to him, her lids half lowered, her voice dying to a whisper. "Ah, God," she murmured, "I'm so happy, Freddie. Nothing can part us now; we'll be together always!"

Freddie tried to stiffen, to pull his lips away from the demanding mouth pressed to his; to combat the unashamed ardor of the woman he had come to buy off. How could he tell her as long as he couldn't speak? He eventually broke away, went to the table for a cigarette.

That was when he saw the gun.

IT LAY in the center of the table, a black automatic, a harbinger of death, beside a brass paper knife with an inlaid handle. Dully he wondered why the gun was there, remembered seeing it in Tracy Rogers' possession several times before when the lawyer had taken one of his cross country driving trips.

He kept his eyes on the carpet as he talked, all too conscious of her heaving, tumultuous bosom, her smouldering eyes, the grim line of her red mouth. He told her that he was through with her, he told her he couldn't marry her, told her he wanted no trouble and was willing to settle any amount of money on her that she thought reasonable. Then he waited.

Her laughter, loud, hysterical, startling, rang out. "Money, money," she cried, "you speak of money and I speak of love! I'll never give you up, Freddie, never in the world! You brute, you've killed something in my soul, part of me has died.



Better for me if you plunged a knife into my heart—”

“Ssssssh,” said Freddie Lovelace, blinking behind his spectacles, a nervous finger at his lips. Somewhere in the house a clock boomed three times! “Ssssssh! Please, Corinna!” he faltered again.

“Kill me, kill me!” she shrieked wildly. She tore at her clothes, so that the dress slid down from her shoulders. It was as if she wished to bare herself for his blow. She leaped at the table, snatched the ornate paper knife, thrust it into his nerveless hands. She sank to her knees before him, eyes wild, head back, throat arched. “Kill me, kill me!” she moaned. “You’ve threatened me often enough; now do it!”

NEITHER heard the key in the lock. A fat, slatternly maid entered, a pile of towels and bed-clothes beneath her arm, stopped transfixed at the scene, her mouth dropping open. She drew herself up, as if she had her own opinion of such goings-on, growled deeply, “Maid. Clean your apartment.”

Somehow, above Corinna’s moaning pleas for death, Freddie managed to make himself heard. He managed to impart that of all the things he desired least in the world, the maid to clean the apartment headed the list. She departed in a huff, slamming the door behind her. At that moment Freddie realized how he must have looked, standing over a hysterical woman with a dagger in his hand, a mad woman pleading for death. He dropped the dagger as if it were red hot, leaped to the far side of the table.

All the hysteria seemed to have

left her now, dropped like an outworn cloak. She stood across the table from him, and she had clutched the dagger from the floor, held it in her right hand. “Coward,” she taunted, “always afraid! If you won’t do it—I will!” She raised the dagger above her.

“Ssssssh! Please,” moaned Freddie, thinking of the maid.

“I won’t be still,” she yelled shrilly. “And I won’t die alone! *I’m going to kill you! You miserable little worm!*”

She leaped for the space previously occupied by Freddie. By then he was against the far wall. She hurtled after him, knees flashing, the pointed paper knife held high above her head. Freddie screamed, dodged her, ran against the table and fell to the floor. She leaped at him, stabbed at the carpet viciously as he rolled aside. Something bit into his back. It was the black automatic. He scrambled to his feet and the gun was in his hand.

“I’ll kill you, I’ll kill you,” she screamed and sprang after him. He retreated until the wall stopped him, and as she came on, unrelentingly, he raised the gun. He squeezed the trigger.

Afterward, in his dreams, he was to remember the flat slap of that sound, to remember that he held the trigger down, his finger frozen, until the cartridge clip was emptied. Through a haze, he saw her laying there on the carpet at his feet, her skirt high about her shapely hips, her fingers clawing convulsively at the carpet. She fought her way up, agonized, her mouth twisted with pain. “I’m dying,” she moaned, “you murderer!”



Wide eyed, horrified, he saw the red blood streaming over the blue-veined marble of her skin, stood there, the gun smoking in his hand while she shuddered, moaned again and collapsed full length on the carpet.

The door flung open, Tracy Rogers took in the scene, a dead woman on the floor, Freddie Lovelace standing above her, a gun in his hand, a wisp of blue smoke coming from the barrel. Tracy Rogers was quick-witted. He slammed the door, slid the bolt into place, tossed his hat aside.

"My God," he said, "I was afraid of this when I heard the shots in the corridor." Quickly he stooped beside the woman, Corinna Gwynne. He raised her head, he turned and dragged the Spanish scarf from the grand piano that stood in the corner, shook out its folds, covered Corinna Gwynne. Rising he spoke aloud, sorrowfully, "She's dead, Fred. You've killed her!"

Thirty minuter later Fred Lovelace was roaring drunk—but he possessed no roar. He cowered alone in the bedroom of the apartment, his fingers clutching the throat of a bottle.

He tipped the bottle from time to time. It rattled against his teeth; his Adam's apple went up and down convulsively.

The door opened, Tracy Rogers came in. "Wha—wha—what?" Fred Lovelace was maudlin.

Tracy Rogers took out a handkerchief and wiped his perspiring brow. "I don't know," he shook his head. "The porter, a Mexican, wheeled the trunk out all right. I'm sending it to the Southern Pacific

depot. Later we can have it picked up, and then we can dispose of the corpse. Now get out of here, Fred; get drunk, do anything you want to do, but *don't* talk! By God, you ought to appreciate this! By disposing of the corpse for you, I'm in it as deep as you are. Pull yourself together, and above all, *keep your mouth shut!*"

WARBURTON sat back in his chair and shook his head sadly. He looked as if he were about to burst into tears. The black-headed girl in a nearby chair, the client's chair, knit her brows. "I don't see why not," she said. "You're a detective, it says so on the door!"

Warburton tried not to see the indignant rise and fall of her bosom in the cradling white sweater, that afforded such a startling contrast to the olive brownness of her skin. For the sixth time he explained, blushing furiously. "To be sure, I'm a detective, Miss—ah—Santos. But it so happens I'm not at all interested in the sort of case you have for me." He shrugged, turned redder than ever as Manuela Santos dropped her purse. As she stooped to get it, the picture he got was perfect, nor could he tear his eyes away.

She was wearing rhinestoned garters, and the clasp on each was a crystal dove in relief!

He gulped. "I'd advise you to call in the police. If your brother is missing as you say, it's something for the Missing Persons Bureau."

"The police of this town are not very sympathetic to Mexicans," she said indignantly. "I did report it, three days ago."

"What happened?" he was mildly



interested, mostly because she was so indignant.

"The sergeant asked me to go look at his etchings, and when I refused he said to hell with my brother! Said Mexicans are always disappearing anyway and that Joe was probably off on a marijuana jag, or running away with some other greaser's wife!"

Warburton was afraid she would explode. Earnestly she leaned toward him, crossing her legs in such a way that he again got a flash of the rhinestoned garters and turned redder than ever. "Mr. Warburton, Joe, my brother, was engaged to a very fine girl, loved her dearly! He had a good job, at the Trafton Arms Apartment Hotel, and a chance at a head porter's position. Why should he simply disappear? I've been to the hotel; the day he left he was wearing his uniform! He left his street clothes in the locker!"

Warburton sighed. There was something about this olive-skinned madonna that fascinated him! She arose, sensing his weakening, came swiftly about the desk and stood close to him. Her purse was open, one pink-tipped hand was in it, withdrawing a slender roll of bills, which she dropped in his lap.

"You'll help me, then? I knew you would! I can give you this much as a retainer, then if you'll let me pay the balance a little at a time—?"

He thrust the wrinkled bills into his pocket uncounted, smiled into her excited eyes. "Maybe this will be enough," he said. "Now tell me all about your brother, what did he look like, what's his fiancée's name, what was his boss' name, when did you last see him? All about it!"

RIDING out San Pedro toward the Trafton Arms, Warburton paused lawfully at a traffic light, realized that he was humming *La Paloma*! Dourly he tried to remember how long it had been since he had sung—and couldn't. Warburton was a naturally gloomy man. Not exactly a hypochondriac—but a man who always expected the worst—and usually got it. Hard luck and Warburton were usually synonymous terms. Maybe, he told himself, this little pickup case would change his luck.

The head porter of the Trafton Arms regarded the disappearance of the porter, Joe Santos, as not at all mysterious. Mexicans, he explained, do screwy things because they're screwy people. It was only by exhibiting and eventually parting with a five-dollar-bill that Warburton was permitted to look through the records covering the last day of Joe Santos' employment. The call slip itself showed that Santos went to Apartment 1022 at thirty-five minutes after three on the afternoon of June 4th. As can be done in all first-class hotels, the trunk was traced. The record showed that it had been sent to the Southern Pacific depot, as per instructions given by one Tracy Rogers. Joe Santos had not been seen since wheeling the trunk onto the sidewalk for the pickup.

Warburton scowled, went upstairs to the lobby. He found a house phone, asked for 1022. "Hello," he said, "is this Mr. Rogers' apartment?"

"Hello," cooed a voice, "popsy-wopsy. Babes' been waiting all de afternoon for a wordsie-birdsies from her popsy-wopsy. How tan



Charly-Warly tweek lovey-dovey so mean?"

Red-faced, Warburton hung up. The clerk at the desk told him that Tracy Rogers had moved a week ago, leaving 1414 University as a forwarding address. Warburton went to a telephone booth, called Rogers' office, only to find he was week-ending at Medina Lake with his mother. The cottage at the lake did *not* have a phone. Mr. Rogers often week-ended there for peace and quiet.

Again Warburton hung up. He stood there pulling the lobe of his ear reflectively. Why, he asked himself bitterly, was he fooling around with the disappearance of a *pelado* porter? He grimaced, knowing the reason well. The reason was about five feet two in height, with liquid brown eyes, with tawny skin, and crimson lips and a breath-taking figure! The reason's name was Manuela.

His luck did change a little bit from that time on. He went to the transfer company that did business with the Trafton Arms, even found the man who had picked up the trunk. His name was Gomez. When the trip was called to his attention, he remembered perfectly. First, because Santos was a friend of his and had helped him load the trunk. Second, because as he had rounded the corner, he had looked back to wave and seen Santos pause at the service entrance of the hotel, turn and go back toward a yellow cab that had just pulled to the curb, as if its passenger had called to him.

The trunk? Gomez shrugged. Certainly, he remembered checking it. He'd taken the check back to the

hotel, found Joe Santos gone, and given the check to one Smith, to put in the proper box.

Wearily, scowling more than ever—for this information cost him another five—he went back to the hotel. Smith was off duty. Doggedly Warburton went to his residence, eventually found him half tight in a pool-hall. Yes, Smith remembered. He'd taken the check as directed and given it to the clerk on duty. A swell looking blonde had been registering just then. Smith had lingered, as men usually linger about blondes. He, himself, had seen the clerk put the check in an envelope, put it in Mr. Rogers' box, 1022. This cost Warburton two bucks.

HALF an hour later, in a cab headed toward his office, he reached in his pocket and found the folded bills the Santos girl had given him. There was a soiled five and five ones. He grimaced, figuring mentally how much he had put out for information and cab fare, how much time he had expended.

In the lobby of the building that housed his office, a slender figure darted eagerly from a position against the mailbox and seized his arm.

"Mr. Warburton! I've been waiting and waiting! What did you learn?"

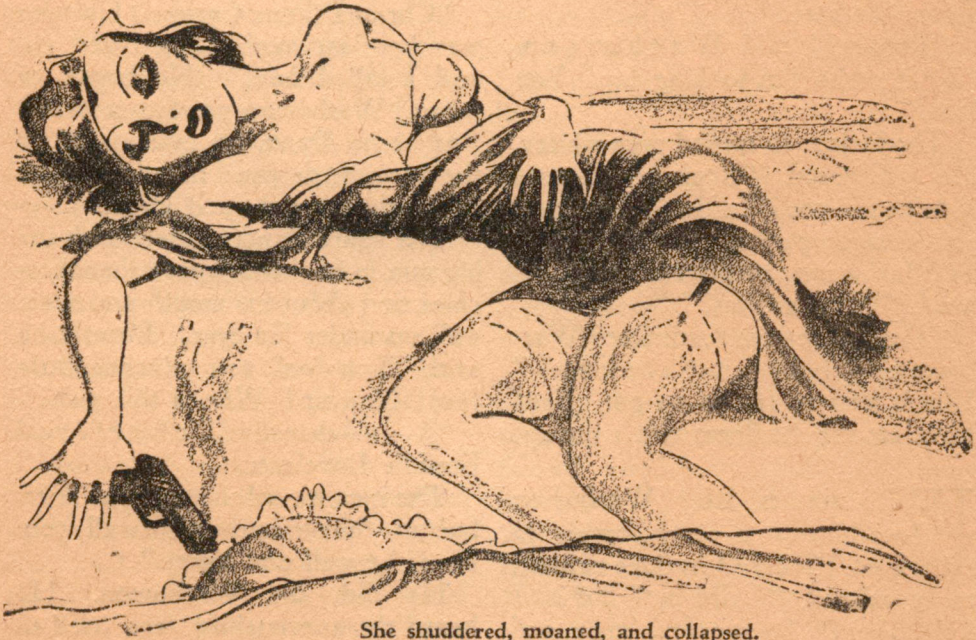
She clung to his arm, her great brown eyes staring up into his troubled ones, and it suddenly came to Warburton, as he flushed, that he hadn't learned much of anything concerning Joe Santos! He'd put out a lot of jack tracing a trunk that her brother had handled, but why? He couldn't answer that one himself.



"Did you find out anything at all about Joe?" she persisted.

"Look," he said desperately, "I was just going up to the office to try and get you on the phone. "Yes, I've learned a little about your brother. I have the greatest confidence we'll find him!" She squeezed his arm and his ears began to tingle. Automatically he turned about and

uella chattered to him, yet he missed every word. He mumbled affirmatives, varied them with vague noes, all the time miserably conscious of the fact that she sat very close to him, that the cab jolted her even closer, from time to time, until her knee, svelt and silk touched his. He was in a cold sweat by the time he reached 1414 University, was



She shuddered, moaned, and collapsed.

headed for the open air! Before he knew it he was desperately hailing a taxi, and strangely enough, when it wheeled to the curb, he found the girl, Manuela Santos, beside him on the leather seat.

"Awright, awright," said the cabby, through the dividing partition as the car behind broke into clamor, "where to, Mac, where to?"

"Where to?" answered Warburton. "Oh, why, 1414 University. Yes, that's it, 1414 University."

All the way out University Man-

thumbing the bell desperately before he realized where he was, at the new address of Tracy Rogers, the lawyer, who had moved from 1022, Trafton Arms. He had left the girl in the cab.

The door opened, a little man peered out through thick spectacles, a little man clad in a dressing robe, with ruffled hair, his face pasty white except for the brilliant red, feverish splotches on his cheek bones. He swayed there unsteadily on his feet, opened the door wide, whispered,



"Did you bring it? Come in, come in!"

Silently Warburton followed him into the gloomy house; there was nothing else to do, for the man walked away from him. The house, with its lowered shades seemed sepulchral, deserted. In the library the little man poured himself a drink, quaffed it nervously, said, "Just put it on the table, my man. When will Rogers be here?"

"Rogers?" said Warburton. "That's who I'm looking for. You him?"

The little man turned even whiter. He whispered, "Rogers? Rogers didn't send you? I'm Fred Lovelace, you have no package for me?" And as Warburton, surprised, shook his head, "Who are you?"

"I'm a detective," admitted Warburton. "I was just checking—" Which was as far as he got. Fred Lovelace hit the floor with a thump.

**F**IVE minutes later Warburton had him on a couch, trying to calm him. Freddie Lovelace refused to be calmed. "I did it, I did it, I killed her!" he moaned over and over. "But it was self-defense. She came at me with a paper knife! Somehow I found the gun in my hand and I shot her! Blood! Blood all over her! I shot her, killed her! And now they're blackmailing me; the porter found it out! He knows! He knows!"

Three times Warburton slapped him—hard—crack—crack—crack! He lay there blubbering, blubbering. Now his voice was calmer. "Take me to jail! I don't care now, I don't care for anything! I've tried to keep still to keep from getting Tracy in

trouble! It was in his apartment I shot her! Poor Corinna! I held down the trigger, seven shots! One of them hit her, killed her! Tracy was in the hall, he heard the shots and came in; he put her in a trunk and now the porter's blackmailing us! Oh, God, now I'm glad it's off my chest!"

"What was her last name?" Warburton tried to act calm.

"Corinna. Poor Corinna; Gwynne was her last name. She loved me and I killed her!" He began to moan. Warburton got him a drink. And as he drank, his eyes stared at the door, he dropped the glass to the floor, almost screamed aloud.

The figure standing there with the big gun in his hand wore a handkerchief tied about his mouth and nose, well up under his eyes. Bitterly he said, "You fool, you sniveling little fool! Shut up! Who is this man?"

"A—a—detective," chattered Freddie Lovelace.

The man waved the gun—at Warburton. "Over against the wall, you. Face the wall and hurry."

He did, did Warburton. He heard the approaching feet, tried to roll aside. The gun crashed against his skull and blackness took him completely.

**G**ROANING, he snapped out of it, to find himself free, but in darkness. He sat up, found that he was exactly where he had fallen, his hat beside him on the floor, a lump the size of an egg at the base of his brain. He turned on the light, the room was empty, the Scotch bottle shattered on the floor. Somehow he got on his feet, fumbled for his own gun, found, to his surprise, that it



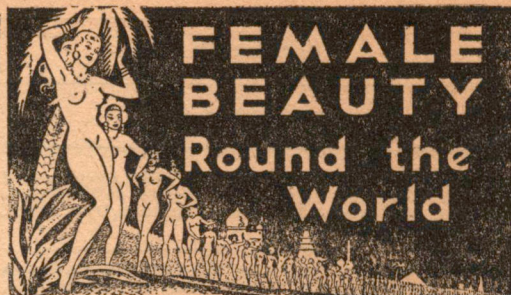
was still there. He looked at his watch, saw it was nearly seven o'clock and hurried to the street door. There was no cab parked before the house. The street was empty.

Warburton went through every room of the house—and found no one. He sat down, rubbing his head and pondered ruefully. Fred Lovelace. He remembered the name, of course, knew young Lovelace was a fairly wealthy man about town. A man who would be far wealthier once his grandmother died. He had never heard of Corinna Gwynne. He found a phone, dialed the number of a pal of his who was a reporter on a local paper.

"Sure," said his pal, "Corinna Gwynne used to be a movie actress in the old silent days. Must be around forty now. I don't know; she used to play the night spots around town with young Fred Lovelace, but I haven't seen her for a week, maybe two weeks. What's that? Hell, no, not unless she drank herself to death. Yeah, in case you didn't know it, she was the town's leading gold-digger."

Warburton hung up and turned it over and over in his mind. Fred Lovelace said he had killed Corinna Gwynne in Tracy Rogers' apartment. He'd fired seven times, he'd hit her once. Tracy Rogers, out in the hall, had heard the shots and come in. Rogers put her in a trunk and— What had he said? Now the porter's blackmailing us! The porter! The trunk, then, was the one taken from 1022, the porter was Joe Santos, brother of Manuela. Who, then, was the man with the handkerchief, the man who'd hit him, knocked him out? What had happened to Manuela? Had she simply gotten tired and gone home?

He recalled the same number, the



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pal reporter. Profanely the reporter said, Hell, yes, Tracy Rogers was in town, very much so. Hadn't he just seen him lose seven grand last night at the Bullshead Club. Lawyer? Shyster was better! Never heard of him having a big case!

Now, Warburton was a very suspicious fellow. It paid in his business. He got himself another cab, and when asked for the address, suddenly found that he didn't know where Manuela Santos lived! He knew the brother's old address however, and gave that. But Joe's landlady did not know the sister's address, either! But the brother, now! She broke into praise of the young Mexican, who, until he had met the *senorita* of his delight, had planned on entering the priesthood. Driving off, Warburton decided that according to all he could find, Joe Santos most assuredly wasn't the kind of fellow that would blackmail anyone—much less desert his fiancée, and leave his own sister in the darkness as to his whereabouts.

**A**T THE Trafton Arms, by dint of much talk and more bribery, he got himself admitted to 1022 in company with a bellboy. There were three rooms in the apartment. The bellboy stood in open-mouthed amazement while the detective ran a small flashlight over every inch of the walls, over the carpet, over the furniture. But he was even more puzzled when Warburton placed him in the hall, closed the door, only to open it several moments later and ask if he had heard anything. The bellboy shook his head, grinned, "Heck, Mister, I never heard a thing. This here joint is a regular passion's playground! Plenty sound-



proofed. You could fire a cannon in there and it would never be heard in the hall!" He took the five. Warburton went to a drive-it-yourself and got a car.

**H**ALF an hour later he was at Medina Lake—where Tracy Rogers and his mother had a lodge! The man at the tollgate, spanning the Lake Road, gave him precise directions, but strangely enough, Warburton did not drive directly to the Rogers cabin or lodge. He drove past the side road that led to it, parked at the edge of the macadam and cut across the woodland in the general direction of the place.

The moon was out in full glory, painting the resort with lemon silver. He found a pathway that led toward the lake and made the going easier. And breaking through the last bushes appearing on a bluff that overhung the lake, he looked down on a scene that took his breath away. A short pier and diving tower extended into the lake.

At first sight, he thought the goddess poised atop the tower was without clothing of any sort. Then he grinned to himself, for as she raised her arms higher above her head, he saw the faint white straps of her swimming suit. She clove the silver water, making hardly a ripple, her white body a thing of beauty and marvel. She floated on her back, and Warburton, as usual, flushed at sight of the long, soft, feminine curves, so perfectly outlined against the darker water. The water on her flesh, as she crawled out, was a million silver beads.

She picked up a huge terrycloth towel, wrapped it about her shoulders, slipped into clogs, and walked away along the narrow beach until

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the shadows hid her swinging hips from view. He went on along his chosen way himself, and not long after came to the cabin for which he searched. He knew it by the horse-shoe nailed on the south gatepost; the toll collector had told him that.

A light burned in the screened front room. The rest of the house was dark. For long moments he stood there before approaching the lighted window on the south side, and peering in. A woman stood before a mirror in the front room. She was an old woman, wearing a black silk dress, with a high neck, a white fichu about her shoulders, a white, beribboned cap on her head. She was adjusting her dark-colored glasses, wiping at her mouth with a sheet of Kleenex.

A door opened and Fred Lovelace came into the room! He was holding a bottle in one hand; he staggered slightly when he walked. The old woman paid no attention to him. He walked to within a yard of her, roared, "Tracy ought to be coming back, Grandma!"

She turned then, smiled brightly, cupped a hand about her ear and said querulously, "What? Oh, you young flatterer. Yes, I look well in black!"

"No! No!" roared Freddie Lovelace, "I said Tracy ought to be back!"

She nodded brightly, walked to a chair and sat down, taking her knitting from a stand, clicking her needles. Fred Lovelace raised the bottle, drank from it, drank deep then placed it on the table. Out in the moonlight Warburton stared. A pair of garters flashed in the lamp light, rhinestone garters. Absently Fred picked one up, peered at it.



The clasp was a 'dove. They were Manuela Santos' garters!

Now what? Warburton was a private detective. He couldn't very well break in, there might be a hundred pairs of garters like that. He knew, in his heart, that something was radically wrong—yet what was it? He was hired to look for a man named Joe Santos. How did this fit in?

He removed his coat, took off his shoulder holster and put it on the bushes. The gun he thrust beneath his belt, in the small of his back, left his coat hanging open, unbuttoned. He walked around to the front, banged on the door! No one answered. He banged again. Eventually the door opened. Grandma was there. She did not speak, she waited.

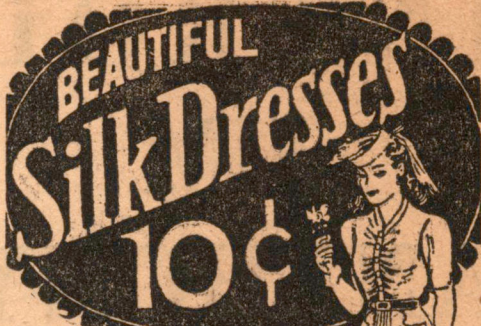
"Evening," he said loudly, "I want to see Mr. Lovelace!"

"We don't want any," she said shrilly, and tried to close the door.

"Mr. Lovelace! Mr. Lovelace!" he shouted. She shook her head. He pushed past her into the house, called, "Come on out, Fred. I know you're here. I saw you."

A BACK door slammed. Warburton ran from the front room, around the house, saw the weaving figure of Freddie Lovelace disappearing. It took, perhaps, sixty seconds to run him down. Lovelace lay there on his face, panting, crying maudlinly. "All right, all right, I'll talk. I know who you are; Tracy told me. You're working with Santos to get the money, damn you!"

Warburton slapped him, again and again. He said, "Listen, friend, you're all mistaken. I'm looking for



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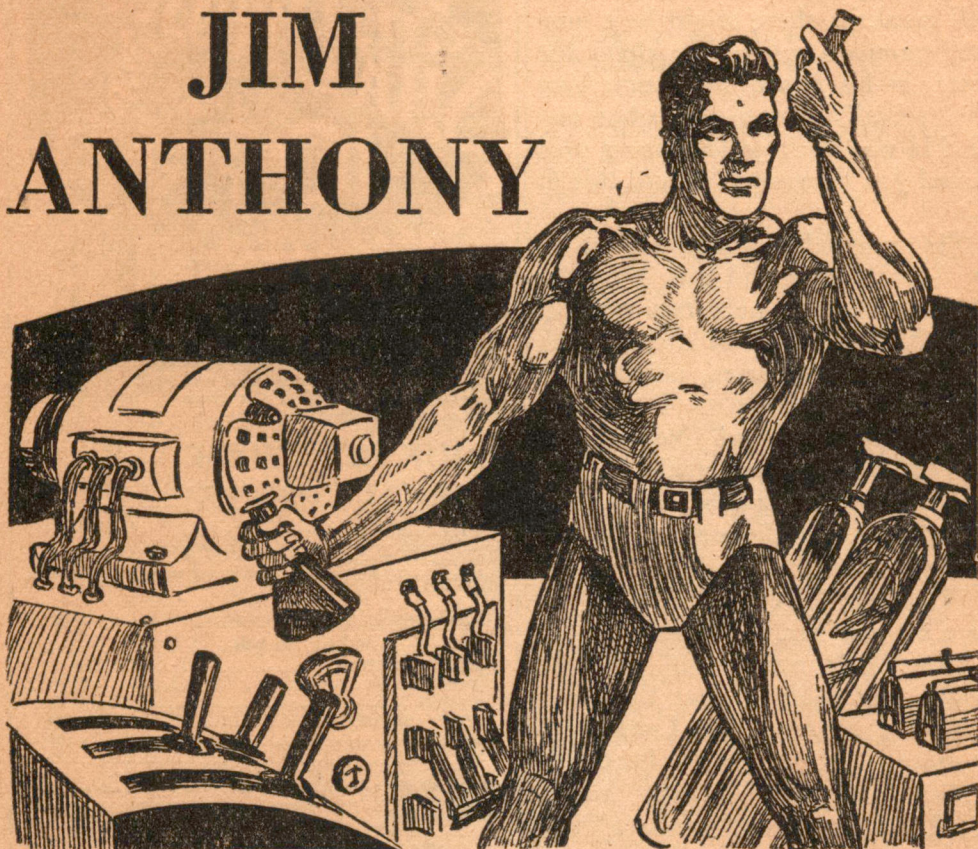
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Santos. I'm looking for his sister, too. Now you're going to tell me or else I'm going to pound hell out of you. I see a pair of garters in there like Manuela Santos'! I left her in front of your house on University. You going to talk?"

"I'll talk," whined Fred, shrinking from the clenched fist. "When you came to my house, I thought you were a city detective come to—"

"Arrest you for killing Corinna Gwynne," put in Warburton.

"I didn't mean to kill her!" Hysterics threatened again. "She was all bloody, her skin, red, red, ah, God!" Again the clenched fist.

"And after we went out of the house ah—er—Tracy—saw *her* in the cab—and that's how we knew you were all connected. Santos black-mailing us, you and his sister helping him! But we'll pay, Mister. Tracy has taken the money now, taken it where you said to leave it, you and Santos! We'll—"

"How much did you pay?"

"All of it, the whole fifty thousand! Poor Tracy, he couldn't raise a penny! I paid it all the first time you demanded money, too! Why don't you leave us alone? I can't stand it! Either turn us over to the police or quit blackmailing us!"

"Look," said Warburton, "how about Manuela?"

"She's tied up in the bedroom. Tracy thought he could make a deal with her brother as long as he had the girl. Come on, I'll show you!"

"Up with them, both of you," said a shrill voice. Grandma stood there in the path with a leveled, sawed-off shotgun. "Come on," shrilled the old lady, "you lousy dick. We'll take you back to the cottage; Tracy will know what to do with you."



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Very slowly Warburton walked by her. She said, "You, too, you sniveling rat." She waved the gun. Which was a mistake. Warburton was opposite her. As the muzzle left the region of his belt he seized it, jerked viciously. Grandma pulled the trigger and came on with the gun, to fall in a heap in the path, the gun leaping away from her. Warburton picked it up, pumped a shell into position. Looking down he saw that grandma had wonderfully shapely legs for an old lady, and he also learned that grandma's command of English profanity was not a thing of beauty, but of thoroughness.

Fred Lovelace helped brush her off, took her arm and helped her into the house, Warburton grimly bringing up the rear with the shotgun. Once in the house grandma nervously resumed her place at the window, glaring at Warburton. Warburton said, "Grandma, one more silly move out of you and I'll blow you right out from under your fichu!"

"She's deaf," said Freddie. "She can't hear you."

"The hell," grunted Warburton, and reaching into the bedroom turned on the light. The sight that caught and held his horrified eyes almost unnerved him. Manuela Santos was tied down on the bed, a towel gagging her, her eyes tormented and tortured. Clothing had been stripped from her, and red burns decorated her smooth, satiny skin. She had kicked and squirmed in her agony, and her short skirt had worked up about her knees. Warburton knew then why her garters were on the table. She was barefooted. The bottoms of her small feet were burned black.



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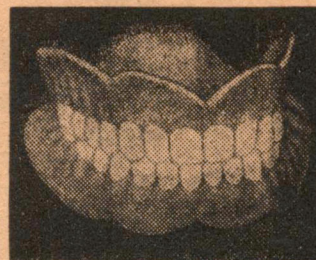
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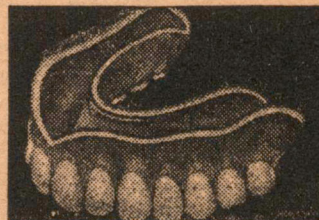
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He stood the shotgun carefully in a corner, wheeled on Fred Lovelace. Lovelace, sober now, was staring into the room, his eyes big behind his glasses. "I didn't do it," he whimpered. "They wanted to find out what she knew! It was Tracy and his mother!"

"Tracy, was it," said a new voice, and Tracy Rogers was there in person. He waved his gun, his voice was venomous. To Fred Lovelace he said, "Don't worry, kid. I paid off. We'll get rid of this dick now; he's in it with Santos. We'll get even for everything. But first we'll find out just what he's snooping around for."

"I'm looking for Santos, for Jose or Joe Santos," said Warburton, eying the shotgun.

**T**RACY ROGERS laughed grimly—for Lovelace's benefit. "Why should you be looking for your own partner?"

"Because," said Warburton meaningly, "when he left the hotel, I happened to know he'd just lifted a diamond necklace from a guest on the fourth floor. I want to find the necklace!"

"Bunk," snorted Tracy Rogers, "bunk! You know all that happened, and you'll never leave here alive anyway, so we've nothing to hide. You know Freddie killed Corinna Gwynne; you know Santos opened the trunk and found it out. He probably came to you and you're behind this blackmail thing that's bleeding me and Freddie dry. Well, we've paid off for the last time, see! Santos has probably got the money I just left in the stump for him, but you'll never enjoy any of it!" He raised the gun.



"Wait a minute," said Warburton calmly, watching grandma leave the room quietly. "You guys have got me wrong. I don't give a damn if you killed all the dames in the world. I'm after a necklace. I don't know enough to hurt you, I swear I'm not working with Santos. Give me about ten minutes to tell you what I know!"

"What you know doesn't matter," snarled Tracy, but Warburton went on desperately.

"Look, Fred Lovelace, who paid the money last time, you or Rogers?"

"Rogers, why?"

"How do you know Santos got it? Here's what really happened. Now wait, Rogers, I'm just reaching for a handkerchief." He raised the tail of his coat, snatched the gun in the small of his back and shot Tracy Rogers through the shoulder.

A moment later, possessor of both guns, he untied the girl on the bed. She began to sob, "He's dead, Joe's dead! I heard that man and his mother talking, he's dead, he's dead!"

Warburton waved the gun, kept his arm grimly, comfortingly about the trembling shoulders, thrilled at the pressure of warm, trembling flesh on his. "Fred, you've been a damned fool, all the way through. Tracy Rogers has been taking you for plenty. You say you shot a gun at Corinna seven times and hit her once?"

"I saw the blood, she was dead," moaned Freddie.

"Yeah? Then what happened to the rest of the bullets? There isn't a bullet hole in the apartment, except the three I made earlier in the evening in the divan. Incidentally, he told you he was waiting in the hall and heard your shots. He

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couldn't have heard them in the hall. The place is soundproof. He simply knew what time to come in!"

Rogers nursed his shoulder, face white. Lovelace said, "But the cleaning woman, she came in, she saw Corinna pleading with me, begging me to kill her! And my money, twenty thousand a week ago—to-night, fifty thousand!"

"Cleaning woman? Probably had her timed, probably left instructions at the office for her to come at a certain time. And the money, well, Rogers has been cutting a pretty wide swath at the gambling houses lately. That's where your money went, all except Corinna's personal cut."

"Prove it," snapped Rogers. "Damn it, he knows he killed her! He saw the corpse!"

Warburton looked from him to the trembling Lovelace. "Maybe," he said grimly, "you saw a corpse, Lovelace, but it wasn't the corpse of Corinna! She and this worm have taken you over the humps."

Rogers said slowly, brokenly, "All right, you've got me. It was blackmail. We put it over on Fred, we needed the money. The gun was loaded with blanks, Corinna had a small vial of mercurochrome and a lipstick in her right hand. Fred fired at her, fired blanks, and she smeared the stuff all over herself. But you'll never catch *her*. She's in Europe by now! Come on, take me in, you got me."

Fred Lovelace's breathing was audible.

Warburton said softly, "You'd like a rap for blackmail, wouldn't you, Rogers. But a murder rap is something else again, the chair is

something entirely different. I'm going to take you in all right. But it's going to be for murder! You had to have someone to play the role of blackmailer, so there wouldn't be any kickback with Fred. Who could fill in any better than a Mexican porter? This girl's brother! Fred might check, he might employ a private dick to get at the bottom of the blackmailing, and the report would simply be that Joe Santos was missing. Why wouldn't he quit his job if he had collected all that money? You needed a stooge, so you got Santos in a cab, and you brought him out here and killed him. There's a body in that trunk all right—the body of Santos!"

"Nuts!" said Rogers calmly. "If you want to know the truth, Corinna was crazy about Mexicans, thought they were romantic or something. She's got the greaser in Europe with her by now. Come on, take me in; my shoulder needs attention."

"First," said Warburton grimly, "we'll take a walk, and, God help you, if you make a single solitary sound!"

THERE in the shadows of the shrubbery and trees lining the lake, they waited. They saw a boat, out in the swath of silver ripples. They saw a woman, clad in a white swimming suit, a woman whose lithe, well curved body was a thing of magic in the moonlight. She came out of the water, clung to the boat for a moment drawing deep breaths that stirred her bosom, then turned over, time after time, stayed beneath the surface of the water unbelievable seconds.

Warburton left Fred Lovelace



holding a gun on Rogers, went, gun in hand to the edge of the lake. "Grandma, Grandma," he called, "it's all up now. I can blow your brains out at this distance. Come on in, I know the spot. We'll send men out to drag for the trunk—and the body of Joe Santos. Thanks for leading me to it!"

She stood in the boat for a moment, figure glistening with drops of quicksilver, stood like a palpitant shadow.

"She's deaf, she can't hear," said Fred Lovelace, open mouthed at his elbow.

"Like hell!" said Warburton.

"Now have a look at the corpse of Corinna, the woman you think you killed."

Corinna came ashore, but not silently, for Corinna's command of profanity verged on the miraculous. She paused before them, arms akimbo.

Warburton said, "Hello, Grandma."

Corinna said, to him, "To hell with you! I don't suppose there *was* any necklace?" And as Warburton shook his head, she said to Freddie Lovelace, "Hello, toots. How does it feel to be a chump?" And wheeling, she socked Warburton in the chin with a straight left that was a honey.

But riding back to town, Freddie driving, the wounded Rogers and the lightning change lady, Corinna, as well as Fred's money in the front seat, Warburton felt better. He had his arm about Manuela. He was comforting her. And though it was a sad occasion, and Warburton's mouth was grim, he enjoyed comforting her.

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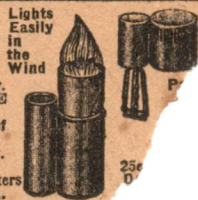
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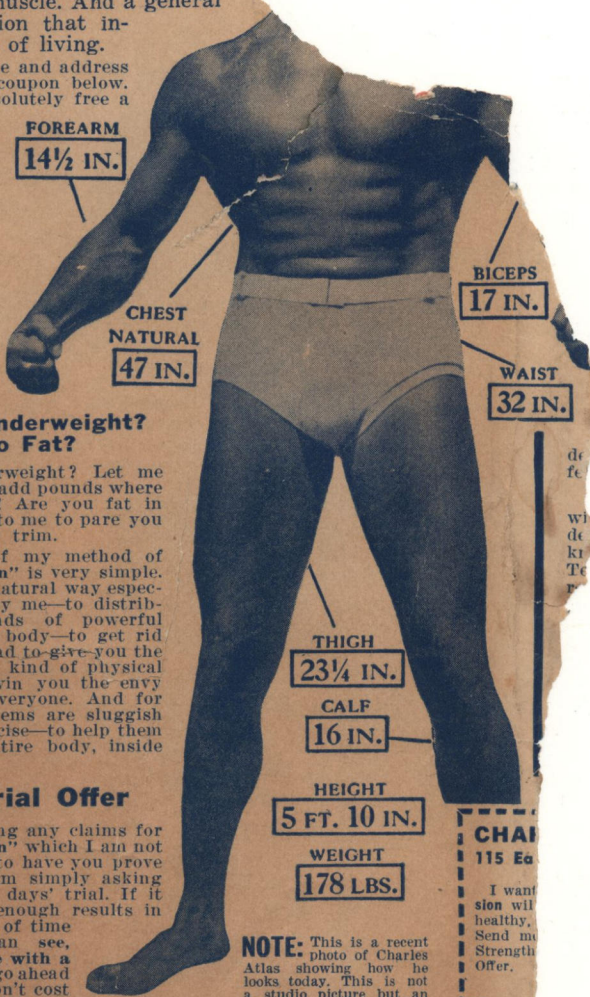
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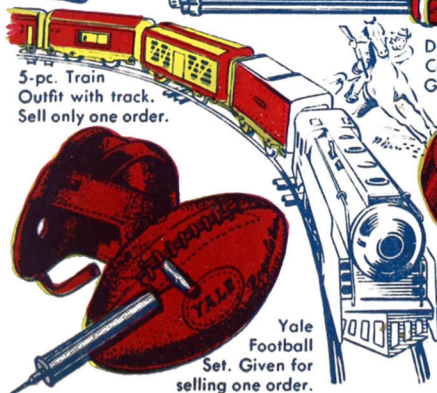


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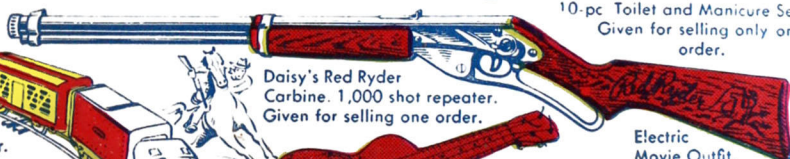
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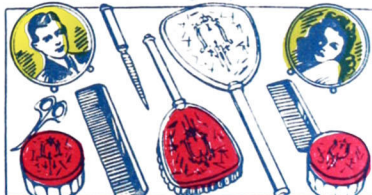
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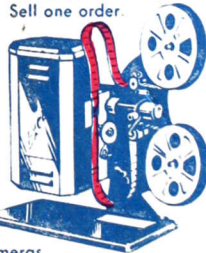


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