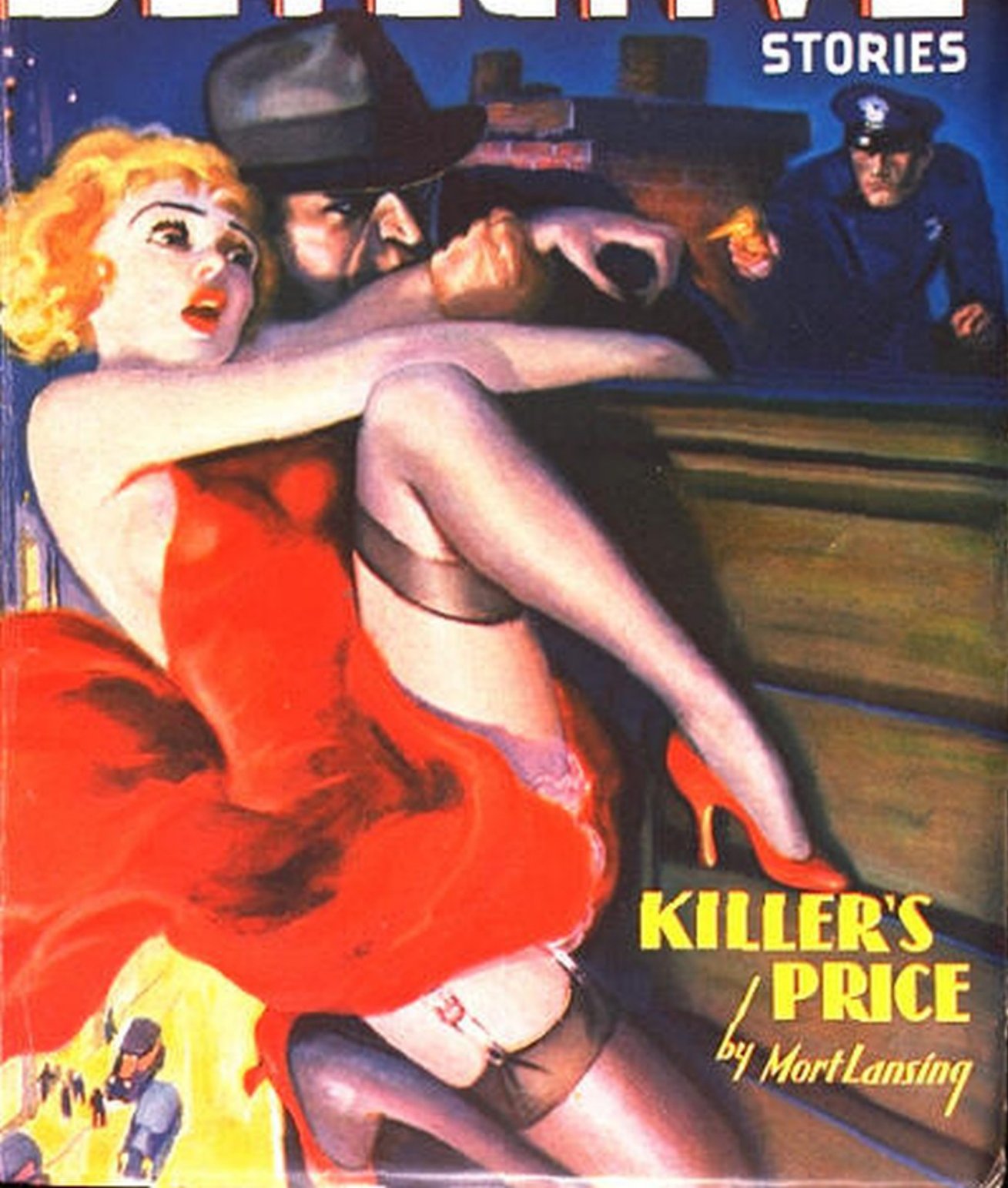


★ NOV 25c

# *SPICY* DETECTIVE STORIES



**KILLER'S  
PRICE**  
*by Mort Lansing*



# Read what happened



**YES!**

I'll take your training. That's what S. J. Ebert said. He is making good money and has found success in Radio.

to these  
two men  
when I said:



**NO!**

I'm not interested. That's what this fellow said. Today he would be ashamed if I gave you his real name.

## I will Train You at Home in Spare Time for a GOOD JOB IN RADIO

These two fellows had the same chance. Each clipped and sent me a coupon, like the one in this ad. They got my book on Radio's opportunities. S. J. Ebert, 104-B Quadrangle, University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, saw that Radio offered him a real chance. He enrolled. The other fellow, whom we will call John Doe, wrote that he wasn't interested. He was just one of those fellows who wants a better job, better pay, but never does anything about it. One of the many who spend their lives in a low-pay, no-future job, because they haven't the ambition, the determination, the action it takes to succeed.

But read what S. J. Ebert wrote me and remember that John Doe had the same chance: "Upon graduation I accepted a job as serviceman and within three weeks was made Service Manager. This job paid me \$40 to \$50 a week compared with \$18 I earned in a shoe factory before. Eight months later I went with station KWCR as operator. From there I went to KTNT. Now I am Radio Engineer with WSUI. I certainly recommend the N. R. I. to all interested in the greatest field of all, Radio."

Get Ready for Jobs Like These.

Many Radio Experts Make  
\$30, \$50, \$75 a Week

Do you want to make more money?  
Broadcasting stations employ engi-



"I WANT TO HELP YOU. If you are earning less than \$30 a week I believe I can raise your pay. However, I will let you decide that. Let me show you what I have done for others, what I am prepared to do for you. Get my book, read it over, and decide one way or another."  
J. E. Smith

neers, operators, station managers and pay up to \$5,000 a year. Spare time Radio set servicing pays as much as \$200 to \$500 a year—full time Radio servicing jobs pay as much as \$30, \$50, \$75 a week. Many Radio Experts own their own full time or part time Radio businesses. Radio manufacturers and jobbers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, engineers, servicemen, paying up to \$5,000 a year. Radio operators on ships get good pay and see the world besides. Automobile, police, aviation, commercial Radio and loud speaker systems offer good opportunities now and for the future. Television promises many good jobs soon. Men who have taken N. R. I. Training are holding good jobs in all these branches of Radio.

Many Make \$5, \$10, \$15 a  
Week Extra in Spare Time  
While Learning

Practically every neighborhood needs a good spare time serviceman. The day you enroll I start sending you Extra Money Job Sheets. They show you how to do Radio repair jobs that you can cash in on quickly. Throughout your training I send you plans and ideas that have made good spare time money for hundreds of fellows. I send you special Radio equipment and show you how to conduct experiments and build circuits which illustrate important Radio principles. My training gives you valuable, practical experience, while learning.

Get My 64-Page Book Free

Mail the coupon now for "Rich Rewards in Radio." It's free to anyone over 16 years old. It describes Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television: tells about my Training for Radio and Television: shows you actual letters from men I have trained, telling what they are doing and earning; tells about my Money Back Agreement. MAIL THE COUPON in an envelope, or paste it on a penny postcard—NOW!

J. E. SMITH, President  
National Radio Institute,  
Dept. 6MX1 Washington, D. C.

**MAIL THIS NOW**

**Rich Rewards in Radio**

**FOR FREE BOOK OF FACTS ABOUT RADIO**

J. E. SMITH, President, National Radio Institute, Dept. 6MX1, Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Smith: Without obligating me, send "Rich Rewards in Radio," which points out the spare time and full time opportunities in Radio and explains your 50-50 method of training men at home in spare time to become Radio Experts. (Please write plainly.)

Name..... Age.....

Address.....

City..... State.....





# Spicy DETECTIVE STORIES



November, 1936

Vol. 6, No. 1

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IMPROVES YOUR APPEARANCE 100%



**FREE TRIAL!**

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An inexpensive pleasant way to safeguard health!



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### \$1.00 DOWN PAYMENT BUYS IT!

HEALTH RAY MFG. CO., INC.

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Send me full details of your special FREE TRIAL OFFER on the Health Ray Sun Lamp.

Name   
Please write Mr., Mrs., or Miss

Address

City  State

Use Coupon or SEND Penny POST CARD!

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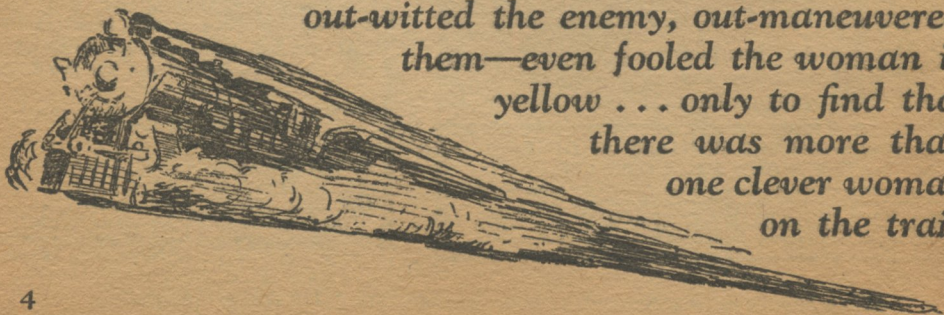




# The WOMAN

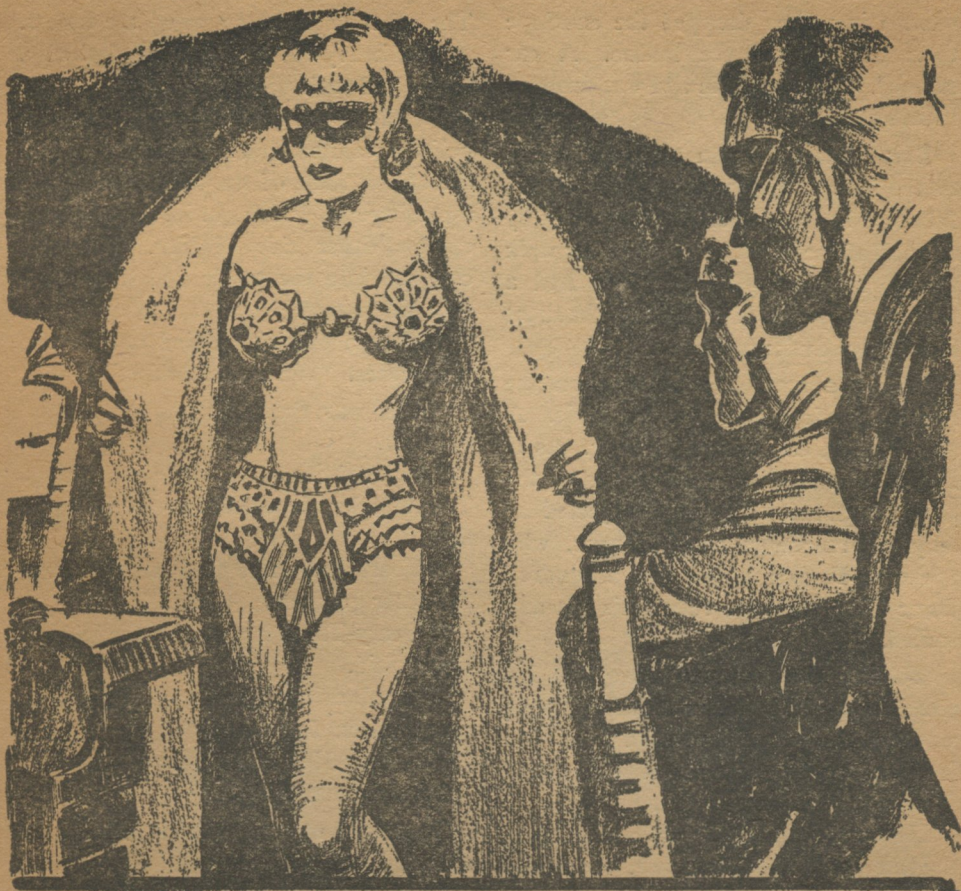
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Those papers would have been valuable to any country, and Breck had to recover them. He out-witted the enemy, out-maneuvered them—even fooled the woman in yellow . . . only to find that there was more than one clever woman on the train





By ALAN ANDERSON



# in YELLOW

---

PARIS. Noon of a summer's day. In a third floor room of a modern hotel, Breck Douglas stood on a chair behind the closed door. His six feet two enabled him to see over the open transom. He'd been there two hours. Alert, tense, vigilant.

A room door opened. A woman in a yellow dress stepped into the deserted corridor. She was a young woman. A stunning brunette. Small, shapely, very

chic. Beneath one arm she carried a long gray envelope. She walked with feline grace.

Breck wet his lips. His heart started pounding. He'd crossed the ocean to get that envelope. But he knew her resourcefulness too well to try to take the envelope from her. That would be a fast road to sure death.

Instead he watched until his eyes ached. There was an American type mail



chute between the two elevators. The woman in yellow dropped the envelope there and pushed the button. A car stopped. She stepped in and was dropped from sight.

Breck left the room and almost ran to the lobby. She was still there. He followed her to the street. Standing by the wall of the hotel, he watched her walk away. The swing of her hips had a seductive rhythm. Hell! She might shoot him before dusk; or he her.

Nearby a man was working on the street. Breck glanced at his tools. A shovel, pick, and sledge hammer. As if drunk, he walked over and picked up the sledge hammer. The man objected as only a Frenchman could. Breck, who spoke no French, tossed him a hundred franc bill. The man raised his hat and smiled.

Holding the hammer along his leg where it would be less noticeable, Breck wandered back into the lobby. The space in front of the elevators was deserted. Now was the time.

He walked there, stopped, and grabbed the hilt of the sledge hammer. He swung in a vicious arc and, backed by the two hundred pounds of his twisting body, the heavy hammer head connected with the mail box with a hell of a racket. It broke into a million pieces. A lot of letters fluttered to the floor.

There it was! The gray envelope. It lay face up. He stooped for it, his eyes straining. He caught the city and country. Belgrade. Yugoslavia. On the left was written: "Via the Simplon Orient Express."

**J**UST as his fingers touched the envelope, a hand caught his arm and jerked him erect. A heavy-set and sputtering Frenchman held him powerless. A crowd was gathering. Through it came

two gendarmes. One collared Breck. The other began to scoop up the letters.

The heavy-set Frenchman flashed a badge and took possession of the letters. He spoke to the gendarmes who listened politely, saluted, and dragged Breck into the street. One of the policeman hailed a passing cab. Breck got in. A gendarme sat on either side of him. The taxi chugged into the traffic and turned off on a side street.

"What a break!" wailed one of the gendarmes. "We almost had it."

"Who was the guy?" Breck wanted to know.

"A postal inspector. The real thing. Tough luck. He would have to be there then."

"What'll happen to the letters?" asked the other gendarme.

"Twenty-Three is watching the lobby," Breck said.

The cab driver was a typical Frenchman; short, full faced, with a walrus moustache. He turned.

"We're being trailed."

The three men in back were too well schooled to turn.

"Lose them," Breck said, "and take us to the rendezvous."

"The Orient Express leaves at five fifty-three," said one of the men disguised as a gendarme, who'd memorized train schedules.

No one replied. The cab darted in and out of traffic, dashed up and down side streets, and finally stopped before a wine shop in a shabby district of Montmartre. They piled out and went into the shadowy interior.

The old woman knitting by the front window did not look up. They went up the back stairs, stopped before a door, and lifted masks from the wall which they put on. The fewer who could recognize you on sight, the better.



Breck opened the door and they went in. Five men, all masked, were playing poker. A fat man stood by the front window watching the street.

"A tough break, chief," Breck said. "A postal inspector had to be in the lobby. Any news?"

The chief, a tall lanky fellow, drew three cards.

"Twenty-Three phoned. The letters were taken to the post office. They'll be canceled and in the sacks by now."

"It's a gray envelope," Breck said. "A foot long by five inches wide. Addressed to Belgrade via the Orient Express. Handwriting in backhand. Black ink."

All glanced at their watches.

"I crossed with the woman in yellow," Breck said. "I searched her cabin a hundred times. How she got it in, I don't know."

"But she did," said the chief. "Unless we get that envelope, there's bound to be war in Europe. Cracking the mail car on the Simplon Oriental would be like opening the Bank of France. But we've got to."

"I'll tackle it, chief," Breck said.

The chief turned to one of the men playing poker.

"Go to *Wagons-Lits-Cooks* and get six first-class passages to Athens. Not more than two to a coach, understand. I want you spread out."

The man departed. The chief consulted a map.

"Number Thirty-One will go as a French army officer. The rest as civilians. I have an operative coming from London. She'll be in the coach with Eight."

Breck frowned. He was Eight. Well, he supposed, a woman might come in handy.

"Woman coming in," said the man at the window.

"Sixty-Seven from London," the chief said.

A FEW minutes later a woman entered the room. She was masked but wore no hat. Hair the color of corn silk, and as fine, was brushed back behind small ears. Blue eyes surveyed them. She wore a white coat which she held so closely about her that it moulded the fine arc of her hips.

"I expected you sooner," said the chief.

"I came by plane as quickly as possible," she said.

With that, she flipped open the coat. A white satin girdle hugged her hips. a theatrical bandeau encompassed her breasts. She wore nothing else save high-heeled slippers. Her very long legs were bare. White legs, slender, yet well shaped. Nice calves, thin ankles, firm thighs. Her waist was narrow, her shoulders broad. A physical beauty.

She closed the coat. The display had been, Breck knew, to convince the chief of her rush to get there. A night club dancer, he supposed. The sight had left him giddy.

"Is my suitcase handy?" she asked.

Like the rest of them she would have a packed suitcase in all of the European capitals. In Paris they were cared for by the taxi driver.

"They're in the cab," said the man at the window.

Someone went out and got her suitcase. She went into the bathroom to change. The men at the table were consulting the map. The man who'd been dispatched for the tickets returned.

The girl came back into the room. Now she wore a white linen suit. The skirt stretched tautly across hips and



thighs. The blouse was tented by the projection of her breast. She put on the coat and took a chair beside Breck. The chief looked at them.

"Eight speaks no French," he said. "I'll put you two in the same coach. After you leave, you can strike up an acquaintance."

He handed them their tickets and meal coupons and called off the other four to go. The one was already in his French uniform.

"Unmask!" ordered the chief. "You'll have to know each other on sight."

They unmasked and stared intently at each other. The girl's face was beautiful. Wide set eyes, an oval face, nice chin, and a luscious, full lipped mouth. You couldn't do better in Hollywood, Breck reflected.

"Tomorrow at midnight," said the chief, "you will reach Zagreb, Yugoslavia. Number Forty-Six will be held as a spy. He will demand the train be held while he contacts a United States Legation. The train will wait. Those details will be handled at this end."

Breck glanced at the girl. She was appraising his superb stature with feline intentness. It made him hot and jittery.

"While the train is there," the chief went on, "all of you will get out and walk up to the mail car. Number Eight will give the necessary instructions. Obey him."

There was a long silence. All were thinking the same thing: how vital this mission! Breck had been given leadership because on his last trip to Europe he'd broken into a high official's private car and stolen papers.

"Leave now," said the chief, "one by one."

One by one, the taxi transferred them to the smoky Gare du Nord. Breck went last, arrived safely and lifted his bag

from the cab. He got a porter and went through the necessary formalities to get aboard his train.

ALONE in the compartment, he raised the shades. There was a train across the way. He sat down and stared at the mail car. Barred windows—vertical bars and not too heavy. His strength could snap them. He'd been a lumberjack once, a cowpuncher, and a prize fighter. He was plenty tough.

The train pulled out. After Breck gave the coach porter his Canadian passport, which would save bother at frontiers, he went and washed. There was a smudge across his right hand which would not come off. He was sore as hell. That lunk-headed taxi driver had gotten the handle to his bag greasy. He went back and wiped it off and went out for dinner.

Number Sixty-Seven was there alone at a table for two. And how she was there! A slinky evening gown bared her beautiful shoulders and displayed creamy skin above her firm breasts. She was a gorgeous creature.

By luck there were no other vacant tables. Breck winked at the waiter and nodded to the table where he wanted to sit. He was taken there and seated. Sixty-Seven glanced at him idly.

"Pardon," said Breck. "I am Breckenridge Douglas of Canada."

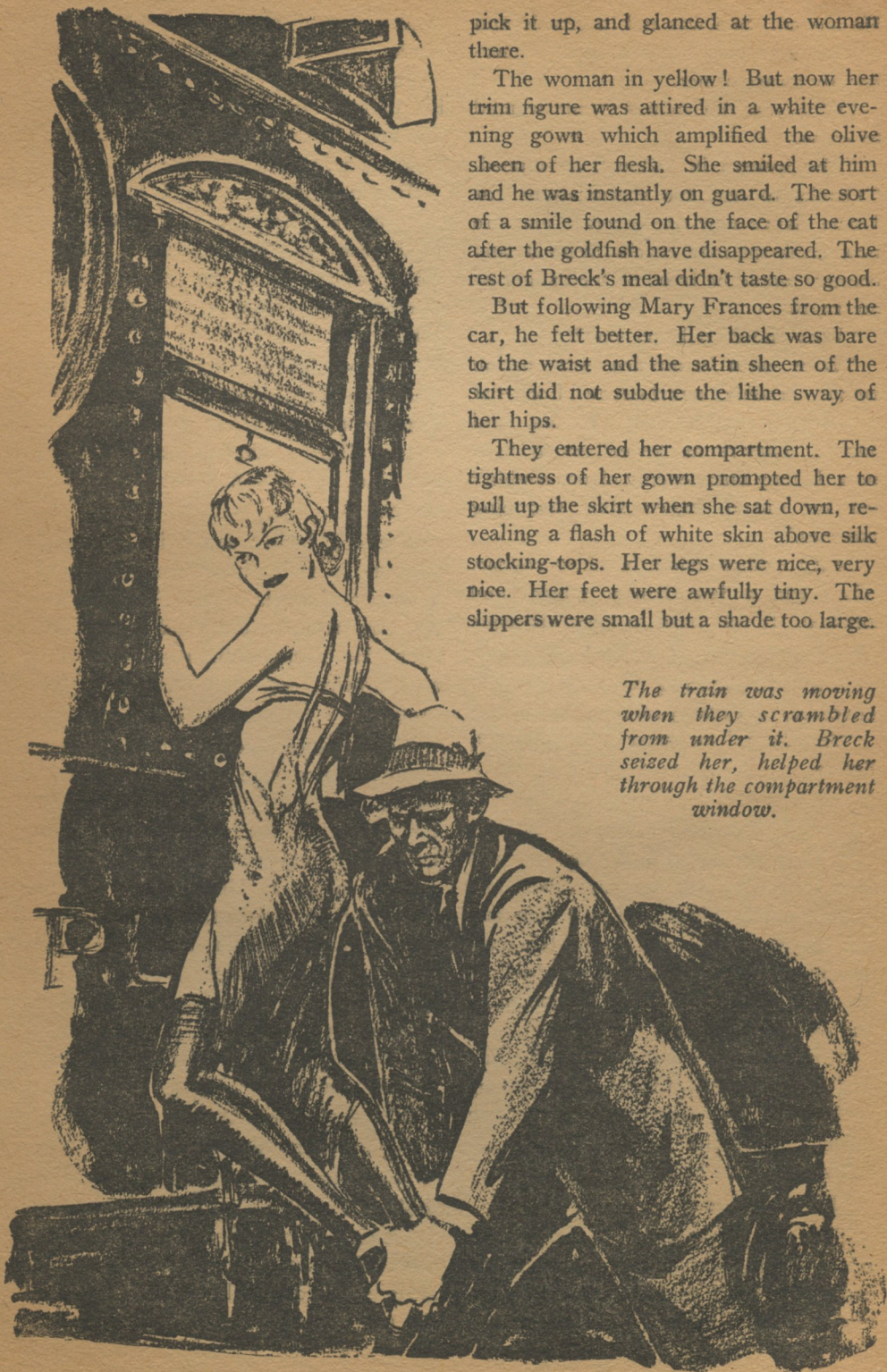
"I am Mary Frances Marsh," she told him after a hesitant moment. "I am from London."

That solved that. Neatly too. Mary Frances Marsh had almost finished her meal but she dawdled over her coffee and liquor. Breck liked good food. And the milk white shoulders were more than pleasant to look at.

"There's a woman in the aisle watching you," whispered Mary Frances.

Breck dropped his napkin, stooped to





pick it up, and glanced at the woman there.

The woman in yellow! But now her trim figure was attired in a white evening gown which amplified the olive sheen of her flesh. She smiled at him and he was instantly on guard. The sort of a smile found on the face of the cat after the goldfish have disappeared. The rest of Breck's meal didn't taste so good.

But following Mary Frances from the car, he felt better. Her back was bare to the waist and the satin sheen of the skirt did not subdue the lithe sway of her hips.

They entered her compartment. The tightness of her gown prompted her to pull up the skirt when she sat down, revealing a flash of white skin above silk stocking-tops. Her legs were nice, very nice. Her feet were awfully tiny. The slippers were small but a shade too large.

*The train was moving when they scrambled from under it. Breck seized her, helped her through the compartment window.*



He sighed. She was tall, desirable and so feminine that one was always electrically aware of her.

"Who was the woman?" she wanted to know.

"The woman in yellow," he replied. "Thanks to her, the specifications for Uncle Sam's new anti-aircraft gun are now up in the mail coach. With it, any country would be freed of the danger of air raids."

"Why should it bring war?"

"With such insurance any nation would become aggressive. Look at France, Germany, Italy, Russia, and Japan. They're all keyed up to fight now. If they knew enemy planes couldn't get far inland, they'd start swapping punches."

Mary Frances had a bottle of cognac. They had a few drinks, talked, and smoked. It was hard to keep his arms from around her. But somehow he did.

"I'd give anything if we'd get that envelope," she finally said.

"Anything?" he asked with raised eyebrows.

A SURPRISED look crossed her face.

Then she smiled and when her blue eyes looked at him they narrowed and grew limpid. He kissed her then and her lips were warm and moist. His hand smoothed the sleekness of her back as he drew her to him. Then, reluctantly, she pushed him away.

"Time enough for that later," she said and freed herself. "How about leaving me? I'd like to change into something more comfortable."

"May I come back?"

"For a minute or so."

The train was grinding to a stop. Breck left the compartment, went to the end of the coach and dropped off, planning to stretch his legs. They were at a

small French village near the Swiss border. He felt like a million bucks.

Then suddenly his heart plunged to his ankles. He wanted to turn and run like hell. With an effort he managed to look and act untroubled.

French gendarmes were taking the four other operatives from the train! With them was the woman in yellow! Then Breck saw the police officer examine the palms of his comrade's hands!

That smudge! It had been deliberately placed on the handles of the luggage to identify them! When or how didn't matter. But he felt sure that in leaving the hotel the taxi had not shaken the trailers.

The spy hadn't seen him yet. He shoved his right hand into his pocket and hopped on his coach. He dashed to his compartment. The window was half open. He opened it the rest of the way and crawled out. He dropped to the ground.

Mary Frances's compartment was two from his own. He went there swiftly on tiptoe opened the door noiselessly. Even though he was transfixed with fear, he had to appreciate the sight which greeted his gaze. She'd taken off the gown and now stood attired only in step-ins and gauzy bandeau. From that angle he could see the full length of her lovely body. Her figure was superb. Slender, softly curved; not too full but sensuously mature and feminine. Very white, gorgeously shaped.

Her window was open.

"Quick!" he ordered. "Out!"

She thought and acted plenty fast. She grabbed a negligee, but not bothering to put it on, stuck her head out of the window. His hands caught her under the armpits. He dragged her out. Clutching the negligee in one hand, she followed



him beneath the coach. On hands and knees they crawled over the cinders and ties to the front truck. Somehow she struggled into the negligee.

"When the train starts," he whispered, "get out and get out fast."

Footsteps sounded overhead. Then along the side of the track where they had crawled, traveled the brilliant circle of a flashlight. It was a gamble. If they didn't look under the coach, they'd think he and Mary Frances had escaped through the village.

AFTER a century of time, the train began to move. Frantically Mary Frances crawled out. He followed. Her compartment was moving closer. He reached out, grabbed her about the waist. Cool and solid flesh tensed against his palms. Little thrills raced through his body.

He boosted her up. She grabbed the sill. He shoved and she tumbled into the apartment. He jumped up and crawled in just as she was getting up. Her stockings were all torn to hell. He grabbed her evening gown and bunched it up for her to get into. She slipped off the negligee and hoisted her arms. He helped tug down the gown and hooked it as she arranged her hair.

She sat down. They lighted cigarettes. A knock sounded. Breck opened the door. It was the coach porter, much surprised. He addressed them in French.

"He says the police were after us."

"Look surprised and tell him we were at the station getting a drink."

She did so. The man looked dubious but he shrugged. Breck was relieved. Then they were convinced that he and the girl had escaped. They had left no instructions in case they returned. He gave the porter a hundred francs. The man left.

"I'll be back," Breck told her.

He went out and tip-toed to his compartment. He got out the tiny automatic in his vest pocket. Slowly he turned the knob. Then he shoved the door open fast.

Kneeling on the floor by his suitcase was the woman in yellow! The white evening gown had tumbled from one white shoulder in her haste.

She turned to look into the small muzzle of the automatic. Her expression did not change. She got up, restored the shoulder strap, and looked at him. Her eyes were black.

"May I have a cigarette?" she asked as casually as if she'd been his dance partner.

"I'll have to search you first," he told her.

"How?" she asked.

"I'll have to make sure you are carrying nothing," he said and secretly admired her calm. "There's only two ways—to see or to feel."

"I prefer the first," she said and calmly stooped, seized the hem of her gown and began pulling it up. Breck expected most anything. He was ready to shoot. But she took off the gown and tossed it to the seat.

She wore a thin silk chemise, no stockings and silver slippers. Her body was small, shapely but rather tomboyishly slim. Her brief undergarment was scant protection. He could practically see through it. She turned. After Mary Frances's lavish charms, he wasn't much interested.

"Kick off the slippers!" he ordered, "then you can put your dress on."

She did so. He scooped up the slippers, looked at them and tapped the heels. Nothing there. She was putting on the gown. It was too sheer to hide anything.



He glanced about. She'd brought no compact.

"We're going visiting," he told her.

"Very well," she said in her careful English.

He took her to Mary Frances's compartment. She had changed to sleazy silk pajamas and was curled up on the seat. When she saw his pistol, she got out hers and covered the woman. They were all cool, composed.

"You keep her here," Breck said, "until we reach the Swiss frontier." He turned to the captive. "Where's your compartment?"

She told him without hesitation. He knew he wouldn't find anything there. But he went up to the next coach and made the search anyway. As expected, he found nothing. Then he went back to his compartment, opened his suitcase, and took out a green capsule. He went back two compartments.

Mary Frances still had the woman covered.

"I have a better idea," Breck said. "It would be better if the Swiss guards found her in her own compartment."

**H**E TOOK her to her own quarters. There was a bottle of wine there.

"This is very unfortunate," he told her. "But I'd feel better if you were out of action for the night. This capsule will put you to sleep and that's all. No poison in it. You'll feel fine in the morning. You understand that to have you dead would cause trouble we can't afford."

"I understand. But my berth is not made up."

"You'll call the porter and have it made. We'll go up and have a drink."

She called the porter and they went up and had a drink. When they returned, the berth was made up.

"Undress and get into bed," he told her.

She slipped from the gown and crawled into bed. He poured a glass of wine and gave her the capsule. She took it and washed it down. Then she stretched out.

"Five of you might have gotten the letter. Two cannot. I am content."

Breck said nothing. He sat there for twenty minutes. Then she fell asleep. He felt her pulse. Steady. He pinched the tender flesh of her throat. She didn't move. Heartbeats remained constant. He left her, assured that she'd sleep until morning.

**M**ARY FRANCES was sitting up in bed smoking furiously. She was a very dejected young woman. Breck sat on the end of the berth and poured a drink. His brain whirled.

"Looks like we're sunk," she said.

"It does," he agreed.

"We must get that envelope," she said in desperation. "I'd give anything in the world if we'd get it."

Breck was too depressed to repeat his query. He almost wished the Swiss frontier guards would arrest them. That would solve everything. But at the border the Swiss glanced casually into the compartment and withdrew.

"My brain's numb from thinking," Breck said. "I'm going to bed."

He did so. For awhile he tossed trying to remember every way a mail car had been cracked. But he could not recall a case where it had been accomplished single-handed. Finally he fell asleep.

When he awakened, they'd already passed through the famed Simplon Tunnel and were passing the Italian lake region. He breakfasted after they had passed Stresa.



He found a very weary and sleepy-eyed Mary Frances.

"I sat up all night trying to dope something out."

"Any luck?"

"No. Did you?" she asked hopefully.

"No. You get some sleep, kid! I'll do the thinking this morning."

Milan was passed at mid-morning, Venice as they lunched. The woman in yellow was now at ease and thoroughly enjoying the trip. Breck and Mary



*Breck stared into the muzzle of an automatic. "Give them to me," she said.*



Frances were moody, lost in thought.

They stopped at Trieste at tea time and Breck got off. A tall, well knit Yugoslavian army officer got on their coach there. He had the compartment between Breck and Mary Frances. Breck noticed because he was trained to observe such things.

But as the train started, he had an inspiration! It was a typical Yankee inspiration—rash, perfectly mad and with little hope of succeeding. But Breck knew it was their only chance. He beat it to Mary Frances's compartment.

"Listen! There's an army officer in the next compartment. Go on the make for him. Take him to your compartment after dinner and get him drunk, see! Plenty drunk. Around ten tonight slip him some knockout drops. But I want him to think, when he wakes up, that he passed out. I'll give you the dope."

"You've thought of something?"

"Yes. I'm liable to end up on a marble slab at the morgue, but I've thought of something."

"I'm afraid, afraid for you," she said. "I like you, Breck. Better than anyone. If we weren't in this game, I'd like to be married to you."

"That goes double, kid."

He kissed her then; kissed her hard. She was tight against him, her arms pressing as strongly as his own. When he got through, both were shaken and breathless.

"Damn it!" he said. "I don't know which I want more. You or the letter."

"You get the letter," she said, "and you'll have me too."

"Okay! Get to work on this Yugoslavian. But don't go too far, see!"

"I shan't. I can handle him."

THERE was no trouble at the Yugoslavian border. Breck had dined alone and was gratified to see that Mary Frances had hooked the officer. The absence of the woman in yellow worried him until the porter of her car revealed that she and a man had dined in the compartment alone and were having a time of it. He didn't blame her after the nerve-wracking trip from Washington to half way across Europe.

They began the long haul through Yugoslavia with Zagreb scheduled for midnight, Belgrade for morning. Before noon they would stop at Nish where the train would split. Part would reach Istanbul via Sofia. The remainder through Salonika to Athens.

At ten o'clock Mary Frances came to Breck's compartment.

"He's out. Doped."

"Good! If his compartment is locked, bring me the key."

It was locked. She got the key.

"Stay with him until I come."

She departed. Breck got out a make-up kit and darkened his face to a Slavic swarthinness. He put on a moustache. Then he stole into the officer's compartment.

He put on a uniform. It fit. The hat was too large. He padded the band with paper. The long visor came along his nose. That pleased him. He buckled on a saber. Then sat down.

As usual his heart began to thump but, as the zero hour approached, a calculating coolness swept through his body. His heart slowed. He held out his hand. Steady as a rock. He took a swig of the liquor to give him a breath.

He glanced at his watch. Near midnight. The locomotive whistled. The brakes were applied.

Zagreb! He opened the window and switched off the lights. As the train



stopped, he leaped out. The saber tripped him but he managed not to fall. Ducking the light pouring from the windows, he went forward. On the other side he could see legs of passengers moving about.

AT THE car behind the mail coach he stopped. The other side was deserted. He crawled underneath. On the other side he glanced back. No one had seen. The crowd was some distance away.

He straightened. Then walked stiffly to the mail car and hopped up on the vestibule. The door would be locked. There was a peep hole there. He peered in. Two guards! He took a deep breath.

Then his fist pounded authoritatively. A man came to the door and peeked out. With a despairing shrug of one who continually suffered from foreign interference, the man opened the door. Breck stepped in. The other guard came up and spoke a question.

The men were close together. Breck's hands shot up, grabbed throats, and smashed two skulls together with a dismal boom. The men fell. They'd be out a half hour or more.

Work fast, but keep cool! Six mail sacks. He stared at them. One was marked: "Belgrade!" He opened it and dumped the contents on the floor.

There was the gray envelope! He scooped it up and replaced the mail. He closed the sack and put it where he'd found it. He carefully put the letter away. Time was short. He must be fast.

He stepped out on the vestibule and closed the door. He hopped to the ground. Then his heart stopped.

Six Yugoslavian soldiers were walking toward the engine. His stride never

varied. They stiffened and saluted. His mind was working now. His clumsy salute would invoke suspicion. He lurched drunkenly and saluted as if it were an effort to raise his hand. As he passed, he heard one of the men snicker.

He had to walk down the platform now. He saw no other soldiers. A few civilians looked at him casually. His step did not quicken. The third coach, the fourth! He reached his own and climbed aboard. He went to the officer's compartment and locked the door. He undressed in the dark. The train started. He put on the light, dressed, and replaced everything as he'd found it. The letter went into his inner coat pocket.

He took off the moustache and threw it out of the window.

The corridor was deserted. He locked the door and rapped on Mary Frances's compartment. She opened it. The officer was out on the floor. He handed her the key.

"Have the porter take him to his compartment, then come to mine."

She took the key. He went to his compartment and, with cold cream, removed the makeup. He felt sort of limp all over and hollow inside. He had a drink. Outside came the sounds of the porter carting the officer away.

Mary Frances came into the compartment.

"Lock the door!" he ordered.

She did so and leaned back against it. She was breathlessly excited. Color burned on her cheeks. Her eyes were wide.

"You. . . you got it?" she breathed in her soft voice.

"And how I got it!"

(Continued on page 124)



# KILLER'S

**"V**ACATION, hell," I snorted and gave the cabbie the address. Me, Mike Cockrell, private detective in a strange Gulf Coast town for a vacation, and getting called out of bed at the hotel by a dame I never

heard of! A hell of a vacation! I paid the cab on Water Street, not far from the docks.

The sign was just one word—"John's." I ducked inside, glad to get out of the fog and mist but it was al-



*Mike Cockrell was just a stranger in town looking for a vacation—but he found trouble! Trouble and women—they went together for Mike, and they cost him all his dough right at the start. But here was a chance to make plenty more, if only this girl was the right one!*



# PRICE

By MORT  
LANSING

most as bad inside as out. You could cut the smoke with a knife and the whole low room had a sort of sour, stale beer smell.

A row of booths ran down the wall, opposite the bar, extending a little far-

ther than the mahogany. Where the bar ended, a trellis work partition; back of that, a dance floor. A nickel piano was grinding out a lousy tune and a sailor was dancing with a street girl, cheek to cheek.

*One-Eye said, "Leave  
her alone, Monk." But  
Monk didn't hear. . . .*





About six feet ahead of me a big guy leaned against the bar. His nose spread the width of his face with a couple of finger-deep dents where the bridge used to be. One ear was cauliflowered and his mouth was thick-lipped, snarling. He was the bouncer.

He said, "What do you see, mac?"

I said, "Hell, I don't know, buddie. I never saw anything like it before. Is it you that smells like that?"

By that time a one-eyed bartender was swabbing the bar in front of me. I said, "Rye, and let me see the bottle."

I poured a shot and took a chance, Drizzlepuss, the bouncer, glaring and mousing.

"Hey," said a new voice, right beside me.

IT was a dame, a little dame, but not too little. Her blonde hair was headed in nine directions, her eyes looked sort of wild and woolly and the enamel on her face showed signs of wear and tear. One shoulder-strap was down and I got an eyeful of white skin that looked smooth and curvy and warm. She sort of tottered on her feet. With a hand on the bar to steady herself, she said, "Hey, you don't like me, do you, you big bum?"

I'm forty-four years old and I've been around. I've seen a lot of drunken floozies but this one looked a little different. So I only laughed and said, "You got me wrong. I never saw you before in my life."

"No man can laugh at me," she roared and kicked me in the shin. I said, "Ouch!" and she slapped the hat off my head. Drizzlepuss, the bouncer, guffawed; the one-eyed bartender grinned.

I grabbed her, held her, too damned mad to do anything. But even so, I liked the way she was kicking and squirming;

while she was putting on her act, she muttered in my ear.

"It was me who called. Get—" then I missed a few words, caught the next few—"the next booth from the end."

By that time she had pulled away, had her head down on the bar and was sobbing. Drizzlepuss, still guffawing, took her by the arm and led her to a booth. I picked up my hat, brushed the sawdust off it, and poured another shot of rye. So she was the one that called me, hunh? And Margot Sanders was in the next booth from the end! A hell of a joint for a millionaire's daughter to be in!

Drizzlepuss was back, still grinning. "Whyn't you buy your gal friend a drink, mac? She needs it. You know her, don't you?"

I said, "Oh sure—Miss Jack Dempsey. Take her a drink." I tossed a bill on the bar and headed toward the back. Two red lights flickered above two swinging doors at the rear. One door said *Maggie*, the other said *Jiggs*. I slowed by the next to the last booth.

The man was leaning over the table, his back to me. All I could see was patent leather hair and a black suit. But the dame! His hand spanned the table and he had her by the shoulder. A strap of her flame-colored evening gown had slipped low, revealing one rounded shoulder enticingly bare. Her breasts were rising and falling like she was scared. Spots of rouge looked like red circles on a whitewashed wall. Her mouth was half open, her eyes frantic. I almost stopped.

The man sensed something, released his grip and turned. He was dark, darker than I am, with black eyes, a wisp of a moustache and the smallest mouth I ever saw. Damned if I ever see how he managed to eat. His eyes were like ice.



The girl cowered back in the corner, tugged at the shoulder strap. The man took the cork-tipped cigarette from his mouth, flipped the ashes off, and got up. Without smiling he pulled the curtain on the booth.

I walked on across the dirty dance floor. The music had stopped but the sailor and his bim were still dancing, cheek to cheek, bodies moulded together. In the washroom I smoked a cigarette and kept the door open a crack. Then I went back the way I had come. The bouncer was getting a nickel from the surprised sailor to put in the piano.

AT the bar I heard someone calling "Hey, hey you!" It was the little dame that had kicked my shins. "Mush obliged for the drink. Bring two more and you can sit by me."

I winked at the bartender, took the bottle and an extra glass and went into the booth. She seated me beside her, not opposite her. I said, "What the hell is this all about? Getting me out of a warm bed at one o'clock with a crazy story about a millionaire's daughter that's going to be killed! What—"

She groaned, "We've got to get her out of here! You've got to help me."

I said as cold as I could, "Maybe you haven't heard right. I'm Mike Cockrell. Why not call the cops? I don't work for charity." I still thought she was a bum.

She leaned over and hoisted a skirt. I haven't missed a sight like that for years—sleek, well filled chiffon, white flesh gleaming above it, disappearing into seductive shadows. I was still gaping when she thrust three bills into my hand. "There's three hundred on account," she said and seized my shoulder, pressed against me. Her flesh was warm and firm—but springy. I sort of liked it.

"There'll be more in it for you when you get her out of here. Will you—?"

I'm nervous. When that first scream rang out, I jumped up, upset the whiskey and lit in the sawdust aisle ready for action. I felt the little lady tugging at my arm, shook her off. The curtain of the next to the last booth was bellying and flopping; the screams continued.

Even as I started forward, that curtain flew into the barroom proper, torn from its hangings, and two silk clad legs were waving in the air. I froze. From the tangled curtain came the head and torso of the scared dame and she was still screaming a mile a minute. Her dress had been pulled from her shoulders and bunched against her trembling breasts.

Then in the doorway of the booth Greasehead appeared, an ugly snarl on his face, his fists still doubled. A cigarette dangled from his lips, bobbed up and down when he shouted. "Slap me, will you, you little wench! Slap me!"

I started forward, plenty burnt up. Drizzlepuss, the bouncer, oozed away from the bar, blocked me, and said, "I been waiting for this, grandpa." He swung and I ducked. He got my hat and that made me sore as hell. Twice in the sawdust and it costing me three ninety-eight!

I was mad anyway and I never was much with my fists. I reached for a gat and, when Drizzlepuss came in again, slapped him hard on the wrist. He yowled, saw the roscoe and turned to beat it, so I tapped him on the scone and he flopped. Right on my hat.

By that time the brunette was on her feet, covering her breasts with her hands. Greasehead stood there glowering, but in a sort of odd way. He was looking right at my gun as I barged in. "Reach for the lights, punk," I told him and cov-



ered him, and to the girl, "Scram, sister. Out the front way!"

Greasehead started to say something. His right hand moved and I moved too. "Don't try it, buddie!" I warned.

He grinned, tight-mouthed, said, "Oh!" and began crumpling at the knees. They hit the sawdust first, then his waist, then his chest. Finally he laid his cheek down on the floor, wiggled a couple of times and lay still. What the hell? I stood there like a goof. The one-eyed bartender came running around the bar. The sailor and his girl had finally stopped dancing, were standing around bug-eyed.

One Eye looked up and said, "Hell, he's dead!"

The sailor said, "Dead!"

I swallowed sort of hard and said, "That's the first guy I ever scared to death!" I hadn't squeezed the trigger but there he was!

**T**HEN another scream behind me! I turned and dodged. Drizzlepuss was a tough guy. He could take it. He missed me with the bottle only because the dame screamed. Then the lights went out. Me and Drizzlepuss hit the sawdust. The sailor busted the little bartender and the four of us were rolling on the floor with the dead man.

I finally rolled clear, felt someone tug at my arm, started to crack down and quit just in time. "This way, this way, hurry!" It was the little blonde dame; I knew her voice. We ducked low and out the back door into the alley. The battle by the booth was still going good.

"I've got her," said the blonde. "Got her out and into my car. Hurry, there's no time to lose!"

"My hat," I panted. "I got to go back. I just bought that hat. I paid—"

"To hell with it," she said. "I'll buy

you a dozen hats. She's waiting in the car."

The car was a black sedan with plenty of chromium. Looked funny as hell knee deep in ashcans. She leaped in, got behind the wheel. I said, "Hey, where's your friend?"

She turned around too, flipped on the dome light. Somebody had been there all right, for the leather upholstery and the floor rug were covered with red, fresh blood. But as far as dames went, the back end of that car was empty as hell.

"We've got to go back, we've got to go back! They've got her again!" She was shoving me. In the distance I heard a siren, and a split second before had heard humpty nine police whistles.

I said, "Never mind my hat. We better go." So she opened the door on the other side, stepped on a garbage can and hit the alley. I cussed and went after her. We were almost to the joint when the back door flew open and a guy came running out with a gun. He saw us, pulled up and fired from his hip. I heard it buzz past and *sing* against a brick wall. I gave the little dame a shove that sent her sprawling and cracked a shot at the new guy. He hollered and beat it back into the door. The window upstairs popped up and a guy leaned out with a gun in his hand. I got him—a man knows when he hits the guy that's shooting at him.

Then I grabbed the dame by the wrist, jerked her up so hard she floped against me, and started down the alley.

"Halt in the name of the law!" roared the guy in the doorway and blazed. I made the car, jumped in dragging the dame after me. Bullets were landing all around when we made the street. I wheeled that baby into the darkness with a prayer in my heart, and I kept the



*"It's all over but the shouting," I said. But she didn't answer. She was sticky with blood.*



lights off for ten minutes of alley running. Up and down alleys, across a vacant lot, bumping and thumping and the dame never said a word. Finally I ran it into a dark parking lot that didn't do business at night. I thought the dame was asleep.

"C'mon," I said, burned up at the whole screwy affair, "it's all over but

the shouting." She didn't answer, her head lolled to one side. Something was wet and sticky on my fingers. Blood, of course. I fumbled inside her dress, found her heart beneath her breast. Thank the Lord she had one that beat. But her shoulder was a mess where a slug had nicked her.

I hated to do it, but I pushed her down



on the floorboards and beat it across the street to an all night garage. In five minutes more Peg Martin, the only guy I knew in the whole damned town, showed up with his cab in answer to my call. I did Peg a favor once, shot a guy that was about to gun him out. He pulled the cab across the street and we got the dame into it.

"Sure," he said, "I know a guy but it will cost you money." I looked down at the white face of the dame and had to do it. She looked like a fourteen year old kid in spite of the enamel, innocent like a newborn babe. I knew then she wasn't a tart after all.

I said, "Show me the joint. I got the money." I couldn't let her get in trouble.

**D**OCTOR DENT was about five feet tall and must have weighed four hundred pounds. I didn't like his looks, but what could I do? He said sure, he had a private sanitarium, this was it. This was a brownstone house out on Edison. Yes, he sometimes took people in and was very discreet about it. Ladies? Sure, what was wrong with the young lady? Accident, eh. What kind? A little round hole in the shoulder? Fell on a sharp stick? Certainly! To be sure!

Five minutes later the little blonde dame was stretched out in a bed looking like a wax doll. Doc Dent was fixing to go to work with a granite-faced old harridan he called Mrs. Taylor as aide. I said, "How long before I can get her out of here?"

He said, "About a week. Less time than that if there is no fever or infection. Your niece has a very clean—er—er—stick wound and a healthy body."

I said, "Okay, I'll call in tomorrow."

He smiled and said, "That will be in advance, Mr.—er—Jones. Four hundred dollars, please, for the first week."

I nearly passed out. I gave him the three C-notes she'd given me, dug through all my pockets and got together another one. It left me three dollars and seventy-one cents and a good luck piece, a half dime I've had for years.

Peg was still waiting. I got in and he looked at me just once, then drove off to a dump he knew and got out. When he came back, he had a quart of rye. I hit it and he hit it. Neither of us said anything. I was thinking what a chump I'd been. Getting mixed up in killings and shootings on my vacation and ending up paying a C-note out of my own pocket on account of a dame I'd never seen before! I didn't even know her name!

Peg passed the bottle back and I sucked at it, handed it back. He tilted it, coughed and said, "Feel like talking about it?"

I said, "Hell no, I don't even feel like thinking about it! Pass the bottle."

The sound of a rip saw on hard wood and somebody yelling woke me up. It was misty but the sky was a light grey, dawn. The rip saw was Peg snoring in the front seat; the yelling was a newsboy. I managed to call him, got a paper and unfolded it.

After a while Peg woke up and said, "What the hell are you groaning about?"

I said, "Never mind. It's these headlines. What's the quickest way to the river? You're going to lose a pal."

"Is something wrong, Mike?"

"No, no, I'm just tired of living. Something wrong! I just killed a man, and shot a police lieutenant through the ear! I'm accused of murdering a shy-ster lawyer named John Lebac that practically ran this town and they're tying me into the kidnaping of Old Man Sanders' daughter! Get started!"

He took me back on Ayers Street to



the dingy old Continental where I'd rented a room a few days before. It must have been around six-thirty for the night clerk was still on duty. He grinned and winked and said, "What a man! You look like you had a hard night! And you're in for more. Your sister's upstairs in your room. She don't look much like you, Mr. Cockrell."

I said, "She's only my half sister!" and took the stairs two at a time. I listened at my door before putting in the key, but couldn't hear a thing. I turned the key, and stepped in, gat ready. The curtains were pulled. I left them down, tiptoed through the joint before I went back to the bed. The only person there was a dame—in my bed, sleeping a mile a minute.

She had one arm over her head and her gown had fallen away from the whites curves of her breasts. The blanket outlined a slim waist and flaring hips and she'd kicked the covers aside with one pink tootsy-wootsy. They were half-way up about her thigh on that side. Very nice. But I wasn't interested in that dame's legs! Not me. It was her face! There was a half bottle of rye on the dresser and I nearly killed it, grinning in the mirror all the time.

"Boy," I said softly to myself in that mirror, "you get all the breaks. I just can't believe it." I spread out the paper to make sure. And there it was in headlines.

POLICE SEARCH FOR DAUGHTER OF MILLIONAIRE. MARGOT SANDERS SNATCHED FROM FAMILY ESTATE SIX DAYS AGO. POLICE JUST NOTIFIED. HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLAR RANSOM ALLEGED TO HAVE BEEN PAID KIDNAPERS. SANDERS GIRL STILL MISSING. MILLIONAIRE TURNS CASE OVER TO POLICE—POSTS

TWENTY THOUSAND DOLLAR REWARD.

Lucky! Me, Mike Cockrell with three dollars and sixty-six cents in my pocket and Margot Sanders, worth twenty grand on the hoof in my bed. For the snoozing dame was the one the lawyer, John Lebac, old scared-to-death Greasehead, had smacked last night just before he passed out! Now all I had to do was deliver her C.O.D. I picked up the rye and murdered it.

"Hey, grampa, what the hell you doing to my whiskey?"

I LIKE to dropped the bottle. The dame was sitting up glaring at me. She jumped out of the bed, and headed toward me, thin nightie clinging like wet tissue paper! Pop-eyed, I watched her, hips swinging, her whole body tense, as she advanced determinedly. She snatched the bottle out of my hand, held it to the light, then slapped me—hard.

"You damned hog," she said, "now you can trot out and get another quart."

I didn't want to smack twenty grand in the puss. I said, "Sure! Sure! Now you get right back in bed, Miss Sanders, and I'll go out for more liquor." She looked at me sort of queer. I was thinking how tough some of these high-toned rich kids are. At the door she stopped me.

"Give me a cigarette, grampa." Lying on the table was her own cigarettes in an open case. She saw me looking at them, giggled and said, "Mine aren't healthy, grampa, give me one of yours."

I lit it for her, and she said, eyes hard like flint, "When you're getting the liquor, don't make any phone calls and don't tell anyone you've got company." I didn't say anything. Talking tough she went on, "You see I was in the alley last



night. I know who killed Con, the bouncer, and shot Lieutenant Hogan in the ear!"

The blood in the car! I said, "Why didn't you wait for us? There was blood all over the car and we thought—"

She said, "Hell! I knocked a heel off my slipper and stumbled getting in. Hit my nose on the robe rack and bled like a stuck pig. I saw you and the dame come running my way so I scrambled, didn't know who you were. Go on and get the whiskey, Grampa."

To show you what I thought of the dame I spent my last three bucks on a quart of good rye. Back in the room she bummed another of my cigarettes and poured a water glass half full of rye.

She tossed it off, looked startled, choked, and came up smiling. I said, "Miss Sanders, what do you want for breakfast?" By now the gown was gone and she wore a sheer negligee of black chiffon that clung to her as she hugged it tight. Oh yeah, and thin stockings.

She stuck a hand inside the negligee and adjusted the brassiere. She said, "Grampa, I've been taking a bottle breakfast for six years. I'm happy. Say, for an old man you're pretty good in a ruckus. That's what Gladys said. She heard of you in Chicago, tough guy and all that. You really went to bat, didn't you?"

I said, "Tell me about it. I'm a little mixed up. Who's Gladys?"

The dame took another three-man snort. "Gladys is my girl friend, silly. We knew a jam was coming up and she'd heard you were in town so she called you on the phone and rang you in."

"How'd she know where I was staying?"

"She knows a lot of drunks that work

on newspapers. Gladys is a smart kid, she remembers what she hears. Don't stick to that bottle; mamma wants a drink."

We sat there talking for ten minutes, me itching all over all the time. I was afraid to mention taking her home again, but piped up once more, "How about breakfast, Miss Sanders?"

She laughed and said she wouldn't go out for a banquet, let alone breakfast.

"Buddy," she went on, "I sort of like it here. I came here on purpose. And I'm going to stay a while. See?"

I went over and sat down in a chair, watched her pace back and forth in that negligee that didn't hide the rippling curves of her at all, marveling at how tough these rich kids can be. She had the bottle in her hand and kept hitting it. That gave me an idea. Pretty soon I thought she'd get woozy and I'd deliver her and collect. She was getting woozy all right. She flopped down in my lap and put her arms around my neck and began to cry. I patted her and said, "Don't cry, Miss Sanders; everything is going to be all right now. Take another drink."

She did. The negligee slipped off one shoulder and she didn't bother with it. Her eyes were hot and bothered. She was a damned good lap-setter. I'm only forty-four and I got young ideas. I sort of hesitated for her to get up but it didn't work.

"You aren't such a bad looking guy, grampa," she said and pulled my chin up. Before I could dodge, I was kissing twenty thousand dollars worth of loose hot lips. Something inside said, "Don't be a chump, Mike Cockrell!"

I wasn't.

ABOUT thirty minutes later the whiskey was gone and the dame wasn't



*She shot again, but One-Eye was already diving low. He hit her hard.*



out yet. I was out—out of cigarettes. I walked over to her case, started to get one of hers and she stopped me, hand on my arm. "For the love of God, Mike, put that fag down."

Puzzled, I dropped it and she put her



arms around my neck again and said, "I'm just beginning to appreciate you, Mike, and I don't want to lose you!" After a while I managed to pull away and wipe the lipstick off my mouth.

I said, "Listen, Miss Sanders, let me take you home. Your old man and your mother are out there at the house worrying to death. Let me take you, Miss Sanders."

She said, "What the hell you calling me? You been doing that all morning! I'm Babe Dumont, Mike, and if you want to know I'm the baby that knocked John Lebac over last night. The rat!"

Dumfounded I sat down on the bed. "What are you doing here, then?"

She grinned and said, "You're supposed to be a tough guy, Mike Cockrell. A sort of legalized gunman. I got it on you. Hogan won't appreciate getting his ear blown off and he'll sock a murder charge on you for killing Con, the bouncer. So what? I got to hole up a few days until my boy friend can get me out of town. John Lebac's got plenty of mob that would like to find me. But you're going to take care of me or I squawk my head off to the police."

"What about the Sanders kid?"

"She was in the car in the alley when I got there. I didn't want any part of a kidnaping so I dumped her behind some garbage cans. I suppose Lebac's gang got her back."

"Is she the reason you killed John Lebac?"

She grinned. "Naw. What the hell? I killed him for ten grand, baby. I'm working for a little fellow that would like to have John's place. Understand?"

I started for the door. "Where you going?"

"Damned if I know, any place away from here. I don't want any of this screwy mixup." I felt plenty bad, twenty

grand having gone up the spout. With my hand on the knob she stopped me.

"Step out that door and I tip off the police. You'll be thrown in the jug here and face the hot squad and even if you beat the rap you're a ruined man!"

I said, "Nuts," and opened the door. I stepped back fast and reached for the ceiling.

The one-eyed bartender slouched in, a roscoe in his hand, followed by a boy friend with an automatic and murder in his dopey eyes. "Keep Cockrell covered, Waldo," said One Eye and grinned at the woman. "Hello, Babe."

She didn't say a word. "Smart, ain't you," he went on, "but not smart as me. You see I knew Cockrell from St. Louis, saw him shoot Stony Brooks in a saloon where I was working. He stuck up for you at the joint so I figured it out. And sure enough here you are! Get your clothes on, Babe."

I said, "Take it easy. What's this all about?"

"Watch him, Waldo. If he moves, burn him down. What's it all about? Why nothing, only some of the boys would like to see Babe. She knocked off the boss last night. Don't you read the newspapers?"

I said, "Nuts. I was there. He dropped dead, scared to death!"

"Guys like John Lebac don't scare," said One Eye. "You ought to keep up with things." He stuck the gun in his coat pocket, pulled out a paper and tapped it with a long finger. "John Lebac didn't have heart trouble, sap. The autopsy showed he was poisoned. They analyzed the cigarette he was smoking and found sixty-five percent oil of nicotine had been dropped under the cork tip. The dame gave him the cigarette. He smoked Camels. Come on, Babe, get dressed; the boys are waiting."



Babe shrugged, turned to a little overnight bag that stood on the washstand and pulled out a dress. One Eye started to say something to me and the dame's voice cracked out.

She said, "Waldo!" Waldo whirled. The little gun she had said *spat* and Waldo dropped his rod with a surprised look on his face. There was a little blue hole between his eyes. She shot again but One Eye was diving for her, low. He hit her knee-high and they went down, clawing, scratching, rolling over and over on the floor in a welter of long legs and black lace and grey suit.

**F**OR a minute I watched, then I picked up Waldo's gun and dove out the window. I made two flights of fire escape in nothing flat and ran like hell down the alley. Before I hit the street I stuck Waldo's .32 in the middle of my back, between waist band and vest. I already had a gat beneath each arm.

I grabbed a cab and fifteen minutes later pulled up in front of Doc Dent's.

A jig answered the door. I pushed right by. At the end of the hall, Doc Dent, fat as a pig, his little eyes gleaming. He said, "Good morning, Mr.—er—er—Brown."

I said, "I want to go upstairs and see my niece. How is she?"

He said, "She isn't here, Mr.—er—er Jones. You see she felt sufficiently well this morning to leave. She said to tell you this, word for word. '*I said through the booth, not in it!*'"

It sounded screwy. I snapped, "Dent, you're lying. I'm going up."

He said, "No you're not, Mr. Smith." So I wopped him on the paunch. It felt like hitting a pillow. He grunted and I socked his middle chin. He dropped like a bed bolster and looked cockeyed. I made the steps.

*Sure enough the girl was gone.*

Downstairs again. I shook Doc Dent's fat shoulder but his eyes stayed crossed. So I dug in his pocket and came out with a fat wallet. I didn't take it all—just two hundred, figuring that was reasonable.

In the hall the jig was talking on the phone, ashy, wild eyed. He saw me coming and yelled, "Hurry, hurry!" I grabbed the phone, hung it up.

"Who you calling?"

"I—I—I calling my gal fren', mistah. I—" I wopped him for luck. Then I grabbed the Doc's yellow topcoat and a derby off the hall tree and hit the sidewalk. I jumped in the cab and said, "Step on it, mug, any place away from here." As we turned the corner I could hear police sirens.

Screwy as hell, wasn't it? I sank down in the cab and tried to think. All I could think of was the message the little blonde Gladys had left with fat Doc. "*I said through the booth, not in it.*" Then I began to get mad. For a private dick with a reputation like mine I was getting pushed around a hell of a lot! And me on vacation!

So I said to the driver, "You know John's place down on Water Street?"

He did. By the time we got there I had on Doc's coat and hat and a pair of cheaters I'd found in the pocket. The hat must have been an eight and a half for it sat on my ears. The coat hit me between my waist and my knees and would have wrapped around three of us.

Another bartender was on duty. He walked up with his dirty rag and I groaned, "What a head, what a head! Give me a shot, quick."

He grinned, poured a shot and said, "A little of the hair, eh?"

"Whatta night, whatta night," I

*(Continued on page 98)*



# MURDER for

By  
ROBERT  
LESLIE  
BELLEM



expensive Hispano roadster along at a merry clip.

Ben had good reason to hit the bottle. As president of Metrovox Studios, he was up to his ventricles in grief.

To begin with, Sally Lorton, one of his most promising young starlets, had disappeared the day before. That's why I was in the picture. Ben was hiring me to find her.

But on top of the Lorton cutie's vanishing act, Metrovox Studios were just about bankrupt. In another few days the

**I**T was after midnight, and I was as drunk as a fiddler's witch.

So was Ben Crofton, alongside me; but he wasn't too boiled to tool his



# METROVOX



*"No, I'm not screwy,"  
I said. And in two  
seconds Donaldson  
had her handcuffed.*



**The movie company stood to make a cool million if Stella LaValle died. And the girl did die—in a messy way! It's Dan Turner's job to unravel the riddle, and there are two girls who could help him.**

sheriff would be padlocking the place. Then Ben Crofton would be out on his neck—unless something altered the situa-

tion.

"... Such as somebody bumping off Stella LaValle," he hiccupped to me as



he whooshed the Hispano around a corner into Wilshire.

Of course that was just drunken talk, but I was fried enough to string along. I said: "Why Stella LaValle? I thought you and she were room-mates. Besides, she's your biggest star."

Ben said: "Room-mates, hell! I ditched that part of it some time ago. Besides, her latest two pix didn't even draw ants."

"So you'd like to see her croaked, huh?" I said jocularly. "Then you wouldn't be saddled with her whopping salary."

Ben said: "More than that, Turner. If Stella kicked the bucket, Metrovox would collect a cool million of her life insurance. It would pull us out of the hole." Then he grinned and added: "Of course I'm only fooling."

Just then we passed a tall apartment building. It was the stash where Stella LaValle had a whole upper floor for living quarters. There was a dark alley alongside, and I got an idea. I said: "Stop a minute, Ben, I gotta see a man about a dog."

He slapped on his brakes. I got out of the Hispano, walked into the alley. My foot slipped into something soft and yielding.

I said: "What the hell—!" and yanked out my pencil flashlight. I snapped it on. Then I felt a little sick, and I suddenly wasn't swacked any more.

**I** TURNED, ran to the parked Hispano. I said: "Holy smoke, Ben—you got your wish!"

"Got my wish?"

I said: "*Yeah. Stella LaValle's in that alley, all smashed to hellangone. She's dead as day before yesterday!*"

He got sober damned quick. **He**

popped out of his car, grabbed my arm. "My God, Dan—you're joking!"

"Am I?" I hauled him to the alley, sprayed my flash.

Crofton let loose a moaning urp from somewhere near his insteps. He said: "That's not . . . oh, God! It is! *It's Stella!*"

She wasn't very pretty to look at. She was naked except for thin chiffon step-ins and a wisp of a brassiere. She must have fallen a hell of a long distance. When she'd hit the alley's cement paving, parts of her had splattered all over. It was a spewy mess. The lower half of her face was all caved in, and her jet-black eyes were wide, staring. Her white skin, where there wasn't blood on it, gleamed in my flash-glow. So did her long, famous silver-blonde hair. She was wearing fancy step-ins with S. LaV. embroidered in chip diamonds. At a thousand bucks per copy, Stella LaValle's step-ins had made plenty of publicity in the past.

Ben Crofton hung to my arm. "Dan—this is awful!"

I said: "Yeah. Plenty." I pulled him out of the alley, into the apartment-building. I shoved him into the elevator and said: "Fourteenth!" to the operator.

Up on the fourteenth floor I hammered hell out of Stella LaValle's door. Pretty soon it opened. A dame stared out at me.

She was a Filipino, sort of taller than the average. Her nostrils were flat and wide, but she was pretty just the same. Her skin was the color of coffee with a lot of cream in it. I could almost see through her thin pajamas.

I said: "Who are you, sister?"

She didn't have any accent. She said: "I—I am Rosita. Miss LaValle's per-



sonal maid." Her grey eyes widened. "What do you want?"

I palmed my private detective's tin and shoved past her. I made a bee-line for Stella LaValle's boudoir, walked in. I saw an open window. It was directly over the alley. I looked outward, downward.

Ben Crofton said: "You—you think she fell out accidentally?"

"Maybe," I told him. I picked up the phone, dialed police headquarters. Meanwhile, Rosita, the Filipino wren, took one gander out the window. Then she let out a yipping bleat. "*Madre de Dios!* Miss LaValle—Miss LaValle—!"

I PUT my hand on her shoulder, shoved her into an overstuffed chair. Then into the phone I said: "Give me Dave Donaldson, homicide squad."

"He's off duty tonight."

I said: "Nuts!" and dialed Dave at his home. I got him. "Dave, this is Dan Turner. Stella LaValle, the movie star, is dead. She either fell or was pushed out her boudoir window. You'd better bring a meat-wagon and come look things over." I hung up before he could answer me.

Over on a chair, Ben Crofton was moaning: "Stella! Oh, my God! Stella!"

I said: "Shut up. After all, you net a million fish out of her insurance. That's a lot of geetus. It'll save Metrovox from going under."

He stared at me. "Good God! You talk of money at a time like this. . . !"

I said: "Sure. After all, you're hiring me to find that cutie who disappeared—Sally Lorton. Now you'll be able to pay me the five grand fee in case I find her."

"To hell with Sally Lorton!" Ben whispered harshly. "Don't you realize Stella LaValle is lying downstairs, dead. . . ?" He seemed pretty busted up.

I looked away from him, put the focus on the Filipino maid. She interested me. She had nice legs and slim hips, and I could see the curve of her breast through the silk of her pajamas. I said: "Well, Rosita—what do you know about all this? Did you hear Miss LaValle scream or anything when she fell?"

"No—no! I was asleep in my room! I heard nothing!" She ran nervous tan fingers through her black hair.

IN a few minutes Dave Donaldson bounced in. I pulled him to one side and said: "Dave, I've got a hunch this is murder."

He said: "Good lord, Dan! Who—?"

I said: "Well, Ben Crofton stands to gain a million bucks through the LaValle dame's death."

"You think he—?"

I shook my head. "No. He was with me all evening, lapping up Scotch."

"Then what in the hell—?"

I said: "Take it easy. Listen. Do me a favor. Throw a scare into that Gugu maid. Pretend you're going to hold her. You can even go so far as to accuse her of tossing Stella LaValle out the window. Frighten the hell out of her—and keep her here until I get back. I won't be gone long."

Dave went over, grabbed Rosita's arms. "Why did you kill your mistress?" he snarled at her.

I didn't wait to hear her squealing denial. I went downstairs to the lobby, picked up a phone. I dialed the number of a guy I knew: Fritz Cranston. He made sizzling shorts for the stag-smoker and South American trade.

I said: "Fritz, this is Dan Turner. Listen. A few years ago, didn't you make a couple of hot reels with a Filipino wren named Rosita doing the leads?"



"Sure. She danced a hula for me in her birthday suit. Good-looking baby, for a Gugu. Swell stems and a figure that'd knock your eye out."

"What became of her?"

"She quit the racket, went to work for Stella LaValle as a maid. Why?"

I said: "Look. Do me a favor. Dig out one of those reels for me. I'll be by your place after a while so you can run it off in your projector. I want to see something."

"You bet, Turner. I'll be waiting for you."

I rang off, went back up to the fourteenth floor. I walked into Stella LaValle's apartment, tipped Donaldson the wink. He was still pouring the business to Rosita; but he quit when I signaled him.

I pulled him out into the hall and said: "Listen. Lay off that Filipino wren now. Take a run-out powder. Get your men out of here. Ben Crofton, too. Leave me here alone with Rosita. I want to talk to her. After a while, I'll leave her here. I want you to post a man downstairs; and if Rosita leaves after I do, have her tailed. Find out where she goes. Got me?"

Dave said: "Sure. But I wish to God you'd tell me what's on your mind."

"Five thousand bucks," I said. I turned away from him.

WHEN Dave and Ben Crofton and the others had lammed, I went into the boudoir where Rosita was, I said: "Baby you're in a jam."

"Why—why should I be in a jam?" she wanted to know. Her grey eyes looked troubled.

"Because you're liable to be pinched for croaking Stella LaValle, that's why," I told her. "After all, you were the only one in here with her at the time she went out the window."

"But—but I know nothing! I was asleep—I!"

"Sure. I know. But try and make the flatfeet believe that."

She said: "Wh-what am I going to do?"

"Well," I looked her over carefully, "maybe I might help you. I'm not a regular shamus. I'm a private dick. My name's Dan Turner."

"B-but I have no money to pay you, Mr. Turner—"

I said: "Maybe I don't want money." I put a hand on her shoulder, pulled her toward me.

She understood. She was a wise baby. And she was falling for my line of blarney. I was glad of that, because there were certain things I wanted to find out about her. For one thing, I wanted to see better what she looked like beneath the pajamas.

I put my palm under her chin and tilted it. Then I aimed my kisser for her lips. She didn't back away. She parted her lips and gave me everything.

That did things to me. Things I wasn't expecting. I'd started out in a perfectly calm way, but my ideas got sidetracked when she pressed up against me. She started clinging, and that always drives me uts-nay.

After all, I'm human. What the hell?

Maybe ten minutes later, she was straightening her pajama jacket. By that time I knew what I was doing, and I took a good gander at the way she was built.

Then I said: "Kiddo, you're okay. I'm going to help you out from under this rap." I blew her a kiss and walked out.

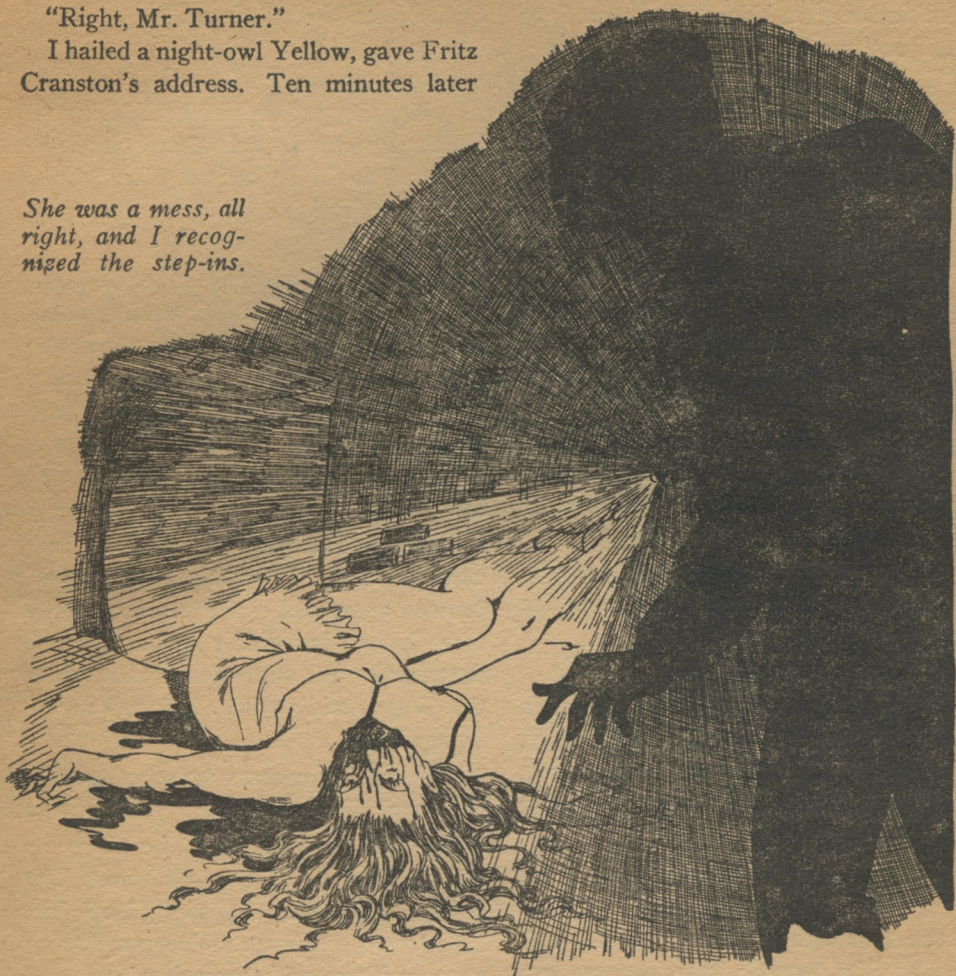
Downstairs, I spotted the plainclothes bull that Donaldson had planted at the entrance. I said to him: "Be sure and keep an eye peeled. If that Filipino doll comes out, don't lose her."



"Right, Mr. Turner."

I hailed a night-owl Yellow, gave Fritz Cranston's address. Ten minutes later

*She was a mess, all right, and I recognized the step-ins.*



Cranston was leading me into his living-room. He had a portable movie-projector all set up.

"This is the first film I made of the Rosita wren," he said. He started the machinery going, snapped off the room lights.

On the miniature screen a chocolate-colored, luscious bit of feminine fluff appeared. She started peeling off her duds. First she wiggled her dress off over her head. Then she smirked for a minute into the camera-lens, her dark eyes challenging. Next her hands fluttered toward

her tight brassiere. She went through all the strip-tease motions.

Finally the brassiere came loose. She let it flutter from her fingers. Then she broke into an honest-to-gosh hooch dance. I got a kick out of watching it, even if it was only on celluloid.

When she got through shimmying, I could see she knew her stuff like nobody's business. I didn't wait to watch her kick off any more duds.

I said: "Okay, Fritz. I've seen plenty. Thanks."

He said: "But wait a minute, Turner,



there's some more! You'll see an act here that'll curl your toenails."

"Some other time, thanks," I said. I went out, got into the taxi which had waited for me. I'd found out a lot of things, but most of them didn't quite make sense—yet.

**T**HE night-owl Yellow ferried me back to Wilshire. I got out in front of the apartment where Stella LaValle had lived. I saw the plainclothes copper still standing at the entrance.

I said: "Did the Gugu cutie come out?"

"No. Nobody's left while you were gone—except a red-haired dame with plenty on the ball."

"Okay." I went inside, elevatored myself to the fourteenth. I knocked on the LaValle door.

Nobody answered.

I whispered: "What the hell!" and a premonition hit me. I backed off, hunched my shoulders, batted myself at the door. It gave way. I went stumbling into the living-room.

Something went: "*Blam!*" and a hot slug zizzed past my left ear. I ducked, hit the floor with my pan. I tried to yank out the .32 automatic I always carry in a shoulder-holster. But I wasn't in position. There came another "*Blam!*" from the boudoir door. A bullet hit the floor, must have struck a knot in the wood. It ricocheted, creased me on the noggin. I saw a billion Neon lights; then I didn't see anything. I was out.

**W**HEN I got my brains unscrambled, all the lights were out. I staggered to my dogs, found the switch, clicked it. I looked around; didn't see anybody. I walked woozily to a sideboard, found a bottle of Vat 69. I let about a pint of it cascade down my throat, and after that

I felt better. I set fire to a gasper, went into the boudoir.

I saw a hat on the floor.

I picked it up. The initials "B.C." were inside. I recognized the head-piece. It belonged to Ben Crofton. He'd been wearing it tonight, while we were out gargling Scotch.

But I couldn't be sure whether he'd left his hat here in the boudoir earlier, when he and I first came into the apartment together, or whether he'd accidentally dropped it more recently. If the last were true, then Ben was the bird who had tossed two lead love-tokens in my direction.

Whoever had done the shooting, he'd lammed now. I searched the whole damned apartment—fourteen rooms and three baths—but didn't find a trace of the trigger-guy. But when I walked into the Gugu maid's room, I found something else—

I found her carcass stretched out on the floor.

She had been knifed. The chiv was still sticking out of her left breast. The pajamas had been ripped half off her. Her brown eyes were wide open, staring at the ceiling—without seeing it.

I said: "Good God!" and looked her over. There were bruises on her upper body; and on her shoulders and arms, too.

Her flesh was cold when I felt it. Her arms and legs were stiffened. She'd never do any more unpeeled hula-dances before anybody's movie camera.

I grabbed for the phone, called police headquarters. Donaldson was there, waiting for some word from me. He said: "What have you found out, Dan?"

"Plenty," I told him. "Rosita, Stella LaValle's Filipino maid, has been knocked off colder than a cucumber. Her



corpse is up here in the LaValle apartment with a chiv sticking out of it. You'd better send the meat-wagon out on another trip."

Dave gasped: "I'll be damned! You wait there for me!"

I said: "Nix, pal. I've got work to do. Somebody took a couple of pot shots at me when I came in here. I can see I'm going to earn my five grand."

"What five grand?"

"I'll tell you later," I said. I hung up.

THINGS were beginning to mesh in my mental cog-wheels now. I went into the front room, killed off what was left of that bottle of Vat 69. My head was still buzzing where that ricochetting slug had caromed off me, and when I looked in a mirror I saw blood on my face. I went to the nearest bathroom, washed it off. Then I stuck a match-flame against a fresh gasper and went downstairs to the street.

I had a taxi drive me around to my own apartment so I could get out my own coupe. Driving my jalopy is cheaper than paying out dough to cab-drivers, the way I figure. And I'm all for saving the old geetus. I'm trying to accumulate a retirement fund and get out of this racket before somebody bores a hole in me with a mushroomed slug.

I slid in under my wheel, stepped on the starter. Then I headed for a bungalow court just off LaBrea. It was where Sally Lorton, Ben Crofton's missing red-haired starlet lived. Or rather, where she'd lived before she disappeared the day before.

I walked up to the door of her bungalow and rang the bell. The cutie who had shared the house with Sally Lorton let me in. Her name was Madge Bond.

She was a tall, willowy brunette with plenty of hills and valleys in the proper

spots. All she had on when she opened the door was a peach-colored satin nightgown. It clung plenty tight.

She said: "Oh. You again."

"Yeah," I told her. "Busy?"

She flushed. "Certainly not. That is, I'm just busy sleeping. What do you want?"

"I want to come in. I want to ask you some questions about Sally Lorton."

"You asked all the questions in the dictionary today. What more is there?"

I followed her into her living-room and squatted on the divan. I offered her a gasper, took one myself. I said: "Honey, I don't think you shot straight with me today when I questioned you about Sally Lorton."

She got huffy. "What do you mean, I didn't shoot straight with you? Are you insinuating I'm a liar?"

"No, of course not. But maybe you were just covering up for her a little; trying to save her rep."

"Her rep's A-number-one, wise guy."

"How about yours?" I grinned at her. I grabbed her wrist and pulled her down alongside me; put my arm around her.

SHE raised her palm, cracked me across the cheek. "Keep your damn' paws to yourself!"

I said: "Okay, okay. Have it your way. Only I want you to come clean when I ask you one question."

Her eyes flashed. "I'll come clean, all right. But you can't get anything out of me by pawing around. I know the way you work on girls to get them to talk. I've heard of your methods."

I shrugged and said: "All right. Let it lay. What I want to know is this: Was Sally Lorton intimate with Ben Crofton? Is that how-come he was pushing her up the ladder toward stardom?"



"No. I told you once. Sally Lorton's straight as a string."

"Sure. I know you told me that. But maybe you made a mistake."

"I don't make mistakes about my friends!" she said. She was superior as hell.

I got up. "Which is Sally's bedroom?"

Madge Bond got sort of pale around the gills. Her eyes went to a closed door—which told me what I wanted to know. Then she sprang at me. "You can't go in there! It isn't necessary! You don't have to snoop around—"

"Go to hell, baby," I said. I gave her a shove and went into the missing Sally Lorton's room. I made for a clothes-closet, opened it. I rummaged around until I found a pair of masculine pajamas with "B. C." stitched on the jacket pocket.

I went back out to Madge Bond. "If Sally wasn't on boudoir terms with Ben Crofton, how does it happen his pajamas are in here?"

"You're a liar. Those aren't Ben Crofton's pajamas."

I got sore. I made a grab for her, bounced her on the divan. The low-cut front of her nightgown ripped half open, and gave me a tantalizing glimpse of creamy flesh. Then I dragged the cigarette out of my kisser.

I said: "Kiddo, unless you kick through with the truth, I'm going to burn my initials into that nice soft skin of yours!"

She tried to fight me off, but I was too much for her. After all, I'm six feet two and I tip the beam at two hundred even. She didn't have a chance.

She started to moan. "D-don't b-burn me!"

I said: "Okay, then. Spill the patter. What about Sally Lorton and Ben Crofton?"

"Y-yes! They were . . . intimate . . . ! He ditched Stella for her. . . ."

I said: "So! Then Sally and the LaValle dame were rivals for Ben's affections, huh?" Then I whispered: "A red-haired wren came out of the LaValle apartment building tonight while I was gone, according to the plainclothes shamus. And Sally Lorton is red-headed . . . !"

Madge stared at me. "Wh-what are you talking about?"

"I think I know where Sally is!" I told her. I got up, put on my hat. "So-long, sweetie. Next time be nice to me and I won't play so rough." I went out.

I piled into my jalopy, drove hell-for-leather to the nearest all-night lunch-counter. I grabbed the public phone, slipped a buffalo into the slot, dialed Dave Donaldson.

"Listen, Dave!" I said. "Meet me in five minutes." I told him where I was. "I think I'm going to hand you the murderer of that Filipino wren."

He said: "Hot damn! Is it the same one that tossed Stella LaValle out the window?"

"The same," I told him. "Take the lead out of your ears. I'm waiting. We may be too late even now."

**I** WENT out, stood on the corner. In five minutes, Donaldson screeched up in his official sedan. He tore off five dollars' worth of tax-payers' rubber from his tires, slapping on his brakes. I bounced in alongside him. I said:

"Out to Ben Crofton's place in Beverly. Get heavy-footed, son."

"Jeest!" he said, slapping into second and juicing his motor. "Then it was Ben Crofton who—"

I didn't answer him. I was too busy hanging onto the doorhandle while he





*I took a good gander and I saw things!*

whizzed his jalopy up to 78 by the speedometer.

As soon as I got settled, I said, "Dave, this is a long hunch I'm playing. I don't

want any wise-cracks out of your kisser in case I'm wrong."

He said: "Go to hell, you big ape."

We hit a winding road leading up to



the hills back of Beverly, where Crofton's big Spanish-stucco house was located. I reached forward, snapped off Donaldson's headlights. "Take it slow," I told him. "Kill your motor and coast the rest of the way."

He did. We parked a little way this side of Crofton's house. I got out; pulled Donaldson with me. "No noise!" I whispered. "And get your roscoe ready."

He nodded. We tiptoed up to the house. It was all dark except for one light burning in a window upstairs on the second floor.

I tried the front door. It was locked, of course. I looked up; saw two silhouettes on the lighted window-shade of that one window. A man's and a woman's.

I fished in my pocket, got out the chain of master-keys I always carry in case of emergency. I tried several. One worked. The front door opened.

"Quiet now!" I whispered to Donaldson. We went inside. I found the stairway. We started up. At the head of the stairs there was a square hall. I saw light trickling around the edges of a door. I crept toward it, with Donaldson at my heels. We listened—

Ben Crofton's voice was saying: "But good God, baby! You don't mean you—"

"Yes! Yes, Ben! I did it! I killed her; and I killed Rosita, the maid. I did it for you, darling. Now you'll never think of her again. She won't have you. You're mine—all mine! Stella is dead. You'll collect her insurance. You'll keep control of Metrovox Studios. And we'll be together. . . .!"

I bashed myself at the door, thumped it open. Ben Crofton and a red-haired cutie sprang apart. I yelled: "Grab her, Dave! You heard what she said! She confessed both murders! Now get her—quick! *That's Stella LaValle!*"

Donaldson moved like an overfed bear; but he was fast on his feet just the same. In two seconds he had Stella handcuffed; had her pinioned against the wall. But he had a funny expression on his pan. He was saying: "Stella La Valle. . . .? You must be screwy, Turner! Stella LaValle was killed! She was tossed out her apartment window. . . .!"

I said: "No, I'm not screwy. I'll go over the whole thing for you. In the first place, Stella loved Ben Crofton. She was his biggest star, before her box-office started falling off. Also, she was the girl-friend. But they quarreled, and he ditched her. He took up with a younger girl named Sally Lorton."

Crofton stared at me. His mush was sort of pasty-white.

I went on: "Stella LaValle brooded. She decided to do something about it. She wanted Sally out of the way. She wanted Ben back. And she thought of a way she might win him back to her. A financial way."

"Financial way?" Donaldson choked.

"Sure. By fixing it so he'd get a million bucks and save his studio from bankruptcy."

Dave said: "Jeest!"

"Well," I said, "the first thing Stella did was abduct Sally Lorton, her rival. She killed the Lorton girl—which explains her disappearance."

"Then Stella started working on Sally's corpse. She dyed the dead girl's red hair to a silvery-platinum blonde, matching her own. She hid the corpse somewhere in her apartment up there on the fourteenth floor, waiting for night-fall tonight."

"Her next move was to stick a chiv into the ribs of Rosita, her Filipino maid. That made a second corpse she had to hide."



"Then, tonight, she dressed Sally's blondined cadaver in a pair of her own diamond-embroidered step-ins and threw the corpse out her boudoir window. The fourteen-story fall smashed the murdered girl's features beyond hope of identification; but the platinum hair and diamond-studded step-ins were enough to establish the corpse's identity as Stella LaValle. At least, that's the way Stella figured. And in that way, Stella's insurance would go to Metrovox even though she herself was really still alive. Catch on?"

DAVE nodded, looking sort of dumb.

"Next," I said, "Stella stained herself all over; gave herself a chocolate-colored complexion. She inserted wires in her nostrils to make them wide and flat; and she put on a black wig. Then she was all ready to impersonate the Gugo maid she had killed. You see, such an impersonation would keep anybody from discovering her true identity. It would keep the cops from finding out that she was really Stella LaValle—and still alive. That way, the police would never suspect that the corpse in the alley wasn't the real Stella."

Donaldson just stared at me.

I said: "Well, just about that time, Ben Crofton and I stepped into the mess. We discovered the corpse in the alley. The upper part of the dead girl's face hadn't been smashed; and when Ben saw her coal-black eyes he knew it wasn't really Stella. *Because Stella, being a natural blonde, has light grey eyes!*

"But Ben was a fast thinker. At first he started to yep that the dead girl wasn't Stella; but he happened to remember that million-buck insurance policy. So he switched his tune; pretended to identify the corpse as that of the

LaValle dame. He saw a chance to grab a million clams.

"Then Ben and I went upstairs. Stella LaValle, disguised as a Filipino wren, let us in. I noticed her grey eyes, first thing. That didn't seem right to me. Filipinos have brown eyes, usually. I rigged up an excuse to make love to the disguised dame, so I could get her peeled to the buff. I noticed a few places where the brown stain had sort of smeared; hadn't been applied evenly. *The white skin showed through.*

"Next I had a guy run off a movie for me. A film of the real Rosita. It showed the Gugu cutie having dark eyes. Which proved to me that the Filipino maid in Stella's apartment was a fake; wasn't the real Rosita at all.

"I went back to the apartment to force the truth out of her and unmask her. Somebody shot at me. That somebody was *you*, Ben Crofton!"

Ben sank into a chair. "Y-yes. I—I had gone back there to see if I c-could find Stella. I knew she must still be alive. You batted the door open just as I stumbled over a naked corpse in the maid's room. I got panicky. I was afraid I'd be caught and accused of the killing. I—I shot at you—"

"And missed, except for that ricocheting slug!" I grunted. "Well, anyhow, while I was unconscious you got away. When I came to, I found the real Rosita's body. Her flesh was cold, her limbs stiff. She'd been dead a long time. Hours. That told me plenty. It told me she wasn't the one who had let me make love to her a while before."

"I GOT the whole damned story then. I realized that Stella LaValle had merely dragged Rosita's corpse from its hiding-place, planted it in that room

(Continued on page 107)



# TRAITOR'S



“**L**IFE is madman's equation, and X is anything at all,” reflected Clint Freeman as he strode down the drive that led to Miramonte, a somber heap of gray masonry, lost in ten acres of woodland overlooking the Hudson. “Opening the wrong door

plus braining Cyrus Hartley plus a ghost equals me pretending I'm Norma's chauffeur.”

But it wasn't as mad as it sounded.

The wrong door was opened half a dozen years ago, at a moment when Norma was not quite in her chignon



# GOLD . . .

By HAMLIN DALY

*Freeman's gun spoke—but the phantom seemed unaffected.*



Men had been killed for the treasure, and now torture threatened a girl. Could Clint Freeman defeat the terror closing in on her?



nightgown, and very completely out of anything else. All he remembered was her lovely legs, and the surprise in her wide blue eyes. There must have been more, but Norma had moved so fast that Freeman had ever afterward wanted a longer look . . .

The murder of her father had brought her from California to live at Miramonte.

And the ghost that haunted Miramonte, driving Norma to desperation, had led Clint Freeman to come in place of the private investigator she had asked him to find.

Freeman, though thrilled at the chance of opening another door by mistake, shivered as he approached the haunted pile that brooded over an unsolved murder.

The maid who answered his ring had olive skin and a lovely face framed in very black, soft hair. Her long lashes half concealed the devils that lurked in her black eyes.

She wore a trim uniform that failed to disguise her blossoming curves, and her shapely ankles and silken calves would stop traffic in any man's town.

Her voice made Freeman feel as if she had kissed him; though all she said was, "Miss Hartley is expecting you."

He followed the twinkling ankles up stairs and to the door of Norma Hartley's sitting room.

NORMA'S apricot velvet *robe d'intérieur* treacherously invited the eye in half a dozen vital places, yet cheated each probing glance. She was blond and shapely, but her wide blue eyes were somber and her smile was haunted by the evil shadow that hung over Miramonte.

"It's awfully sweet of you to help me, Clint."

"I'd face any number of ghosts to

welcome you back from the west coast," he said, catching her in his arms.

He was now too near Norma to see more than her eyes; but the contours that rounded out the exotic velvet clung closely enough to fill in the missing details of that one stolen, haunting glimpse.

He needed no eye to visualize the gracious inward sweep at her waist, the haughty firmness, and the luscious roundness of her figure.

She was trying to avoid his lips, but his kisses smothered protests that were contradicted by the quickening of her breath. The intricate draping of her robe yielded to spontaneous caresses. He felt the ecstatic shudder, then, that raced along her body.

The relaxation of apparent surrender tricked him. As he shifted to draw her closer than ever, she broke from his embrace, misty-eyed, panting—but determined.

"Don't, Clint," she protested. "Oh, I just can't! I'm engaged—on account of father's death, it's not been announced—"

He saw that she meant it, that no mere subterfuge could have stemmed her emotion. He regretfully regarded her lovely form, flushed and dishevelled and ruefully queried, "Love at first sight?"

She nodded.

"I met him while in San Francisco, preparing to come east. Captain Eric von Wirz—he's ever so distinguished!

"Now, about this chauffeur job. I'll have Diane—that's my maid—fix you a room down the hall. The gardener is scared silly and refuses to stay in his lodge any more, so there'll be nothing conspicuous about your being in the house."

"But this ghost, Norma? That's silly!"



"Wait and see," she somberly answered. "In the meanwhile, carry on with the stall, and tinker with the Hispano."

Diane led the way to his room, which was not far from the study in which Cyrus Hartley had been bludgeoned to death.

Norma's rebuff had left him reckless and restless, and the devils were dancing in Diane's eyes.

"Listen—" He caught her by the arm. "What's all this stuff about ghosts?"

"If you're afraid, I guess I could keep you company this evening," she mocked. "Right now, I double as cook, butler, and housekeeper. I'd do almost anything to keep from adding chauffeuring to the list."

Freeman spent an hour tinkering with the peacock-blue Hispano and listening to Harris, the gnarled old gardener, who spat tobacco juice and watched every move. He had a walrus mustache, and very sharp blue eyes.

"Gardening," he griped, "is a pain, but when an electrician can't get any work, it's better than nothing."

Freeman was heartily relieved when Diane told him it was time to eat.

"You and Harris get yours in the butler's pantry, and it's supper. *Madame* gets the same grub in the dining room, and it's dinner," she explained.

"I won't tell you what you're going to get, or where, but you'll like it," he countered.

Diane evaded his playful gesture, but he was still thinking of her when Norma entered the spacious dining room.

Her face was tense, and her eyes were apprehensive. She reminded him of a lovely spectre returning to a tomb.

He wondered for a moment at the absence of Harris.

Then he tried to eat; but moment by

moment Miramonte became more and more oppressing.

A GRISLY, gurgling wail from the dining room jerked him to his feet. That long drawn, choking cry could have come from no human throat. It had the piercing note of a fire siren, and the volume of a surging sea. It seemed at the same time to come up from the dumb-waiter shaft and likewise, down from the service stairway. A terrific, interminable cry.

As Freeman plunged toward the doorway, he collided with a firm, rounded feminine shape, and heard Diane cry out, "Look—it's back again!"

Oddly enough, there was not a tremor in her voice.

A tall, phosphorescent shape glowed in the far shadows of the dining room. It throbbed and pulsed with hideous animation. Its outline became a spectral green as it slowly advanced toward the table. Though vaguely human in shape, it was over seven feet tall.

The specter moved toward Norma. Her white shoulders and gleaming bodice of sequins marked her in the gloom.

A long shapeless arm pointed toward the side entrance of the dining room.

Then the apparition became articulate: "Leave, or the vengeance that struck your father will crush you. Be warned and leave this house to the powers who have gained dominion over it."

Freeman jerked his automatic into line. The pantry thundered with its echoing blasts. Three shots in the tick of a watch—but the shape did not drop, nor did its warning falter.

The hair on the back of Freeman's neck was twitching and crawling, and cold chills raced down his spine.

He nerved himself, and advanced



toward the apparition, firing as he moved.

The lights flashed on. The apparition was gone.

Freeman's fire had chewed a hatful of plaster from the further wall of the dining room. His bullets centered in two groups, each no larger than the palm of his hand.

Norma was pale and rigid. Diane's eyes gleamed strangely, but her olive skin had not changed color.

Freeman remembered his part, and solicitously inquired, "Are you all right, Miss Hartley?"

A wrathful yell from the dumbwaiter shaft drowned her answer. For a moment it was choked, then it rose to a high pitched, prolonged shriek.

Freeman cork-screwed down the treacherously winding service stairs. Halfway to the basement, the cry was abruptly cut off. There was a sudden thud, a sinister rustling, a faint scraping as of feet swiftly slipping over concrete.

When he reached the lower level, Freeman halted. Harris was sprawled on the floor. His head was a gory pulp; and the splashing of blood and brains almost prevented recognition.

One hand clutched a length of insulated wire which led into the further darkness. One end was cut. Freeman noted the fact, but had no time to grasp its significance.

The lights again blinked out. He felt, rather than heard a presence in the darkness. He flung himself aside.

A pistol cracked. Lead raked his ribs. He whipped about, jerking his automatic into line; but there was not a sign of motion until a sudden draught of air, accompanied by a muffled thud told him that a heavy door had been closed somewhere in the basement. The lights went on again. But the gardener

no longer clutched a length of wire.

What had happened to it? Why had it been moved?

Freeman returned to the dining room.

"Better call the police, Miss Hartley," he said. "Harris was killed. I nearly was blotted out myself. I'll be in my room, if the cops want to see me. I want to study this out."

Freeman likewise wanted to reload his clip. Although he had not expected extended small arms practice, he had a handful of loose .45's in the bottom of his suitcase.

AS he fished them out, a scarcely perceptible draft warned him that the door of his room was opening. Freeman whirled, snatching his unloaded automatic.

Diane was at the threshold. He caught her hand, and drew her to the arm of his chair.

"What's the trouble?"

"I'm dreadfully frightened." Her voice was tremulous. "And what killed poor Harris?"

Odd—the spectre hadn't worried her!

Her fingers sank into his forearm. He could feel the tremor that shook her shapely body. She was clinging to him like a length of silk.

"I haven't the least idea," he evaded. "Getting worried enough to check out?"

Another shudder, and the way Diane's supple body rippled, Freeman figured that the height of luxury would be to keep her frightened from now on. He drew her closer, just by way of reassurance, and the sensation was devastating.

"You're so competent," she murmured, breathing the words into his ear in a way that made him shiver slightly and hold her tighter. "But you're no more chauffeur than I am. No one who





*"Thought I'd drink your doped coffee, huh?" His open hand sent her sprawling.*

could throw that much lead into that small a patch would bother driving anyone's car!"

"So what?" That wasn't hot repartee, but her breath stirring against his cheek and the warm movement of her breast burned him up like a four lane highway, and he could tell from Diane's quickened breathing that she liked it.

"If you're a detective, I'll feel safer staying here with Miss Hartley. Otherwise, I'm checking out."

It didn't take Freeman long to get the next answer—

"Hell, yes. I'm a detective. Probing into mysteries is my specialty."

"As if I don't know that," she blissfully sighed. "But if you don't stop



right now, there'll be no mystery left—oh—don't, Clint—”

So he had to kiss her to silence her protests. . . .

The way she responded to treatment was dizzying; but a tapping at the door dissolved the huddle. Diane untangled herself and ducked into a closet.

Norma Hartley was in the hall.

“The police are here,” she said. “Didn't you hear them tramping into the hall?”

“No. I was thinking.”

He headed for the stairway, wondering if his thoughts matched Diane's.

The police were waiting in the first floor vestibule. Standing somewhat apart from them was a tall, dark-haired man with a prominent nose that jutted from a bony face. He was not good looking, but his manner was distinguished. He was reserved, but his pride of possession was as obvious as though he had taken Norma in his arms.

They exchanged perturbed whispers as the cops listened to Freeman's account of the gardener's death.

“The guy's dead all right,” agreed the law. “But that disappearing piece of wire is screwy. One of them illusions, like that ghost you thought you was shooting at.”

“But damn it,” persisted Freeman, “Harris was an electrician. He noticed something odd, investigated it, and was killed to keep him quiet. That shot in the dark was to make me dive for cover while someone grabbed that tell tale wire.”

“What'd it be there for, anyhow?” demanded the sergeant.

“The ghost,” submitted Freeman, “might be an electrically operated illusion.”

“Maybe so, but we're not engineers. We'll have the wiring inspector look

the place over in the morning and see if he can find stuff that'd juggle the lights and make those noises.”

Then, to Norma: “We done everything we can. And if you have any more trouble, give us a ring.”

Freeman snorted, then remembered his position.

As the police left, Norma beckoned to him.

“This is Captain Eric von Wirz,” she said. “He will stay here to watch. After you have put his car in the garage, you may arrange to divide the night between you.”

So this was the bird who had outranked him with Norma. Freeman's task brought his resentment to the verge of spontaneous combustion. Parking that horse-faced foreigner's car!

ON his way to his room he had to pass Norma's suite. She was conducting a post mortem with the captain.

“No Eric. I will not leave Miramonte. Particularly since the ghost seems to be an electrical trick.”

“How do you know it's a trick? There may be a curse on this house. Evil elementals. Let's leave and spend the winter on the Riviera—”

“No, I'm going to find out what was behind father's terrible death.”

Freeman could not understand von Wirz' reply. To listen from the hallway would be conspicuous. Instead of going to his own room, he stepped into the study where Norma's father had been found with a crushed skull. He softly opened a window, worked his way along the ledge, and finally reached the balcony opening from Norma's suite.

She had ceased arguing. The drapes at the window did not give a complete view, but Freeman saw that von Wirz was using effective persuasion. No



wonder her voice was an inarticulate murmur!

He retreated from his perch. Eavesdropping was tough on the nerves. Once back in the study, he grinned sourly. To hell with Norma . . . particularly when Diane had such a fascinating way of shaping a kiss with her nether lip . . . she needed protection against ghosts if anyone did!

He stepped to the door, but halted in midstride. He heard a half-hearted, abruptly terminated tinkle. It was the telephone on Hartley's desk. Someone had lifted the receiver of one of the extensions.

Norma certainly would not be phoning! Then who?

He lifted the receiver. The operator had made the connection. A man was answering.

"They'll be here tonight, Dmitri," replied Diane. There was no mistaking her voice. "This is your chance. I'll see that the door of the study is unlocked so you can come in through the underground passageway."

They—Norma and von Wirz. Dmitri—Diane's accomplice in trickery. No wonder she had not been alarmed by the phosphorescent apparition. Aware of Norma's determination to defy the terrors of Miramonte, Diane was calling for a showdown.

But where was the secret passage leading into the study? Hunting it would be slow. If Diane came to Freeman's room to check up on him, he should be there, so that she would not suspect him of prowling.

He hastened to his room, sat down on the bed, and resumed reloading his pistol. One of the cartridges was wet. That was curious. He closely scrutinized it. Moisture was oozing from the brass case. Someone had drilled a tiny hole through

the metal and had not quite perfectly plugged it with yellow wax. The entire seven cartridges had been doctored.

With a sharpened match end he pushed the wax plug inward. The powder was dripping wet.

Ghosts, hell! Diane was a fast worker. Freeman, however, found two stray cartridges wedged into a rolled up pair of socks. The joke would be on the next spectre.

He tiptoed down the hall, tapped softly at Diane's door. It opened into a half gloom. There was a sensuous rustling of silk as she slipped into his arms. Her eyes glowed and her lips were a scarlet promise.

"I did want to slip over to your end of the house," she murmured, "but I hesitated on account of your having to stand guard the last part of the night."

"To hell with cat naps," he answered. Her suave curves, separated from him only by a film of embroidered silk, made him forget the treachery that had enraged him.

The only light in the room was the patch of moonglow filtering in through the Gothic window. Amber-shadowed curves smiled through the frivolous laces of the yoke of her gown, and in that glamorous glow he could just discern the soft expanses that slipped into the sinuous curve of her waist, flared out graciously before they swooped to the trim ankles and tiny feet.

For a moment, as he drew her to him, he could not believe the treachery he had overheard. Her long lashes half veiled her misty eyes, and her slow, shuddering exhalation of breath could not have been feigned. . . .

It was still too early for the surprise attack . . . Make the most of this moment . . . warn von Wirz later—



"SWEETHEART," she finally whispered, "you're going to be terribly sleepy watching the last half of the night. You'd better go to your room. I'm going to make some coffee. Miss Hartley has been too frightened to sleep nights, and she usually rings for some at this time."

"After you've left," said Freeman.

He heard her tap at Norma's door, then von Wirz' voice: "Maybe I'd better go with her to the kitchen."

Presently they went down stairs. Von Wirz, despite his qualms, was a cool customer.

Freeman snapped on the light. There was no telephone. Following a hunch, he stepped into the clothes closet. In the far corner, obscured by a thicket of soft garments, he saw a bracket on which stood a phone. It was not a standard instrument, but an outlaw that was wired to the house line. No wonder Diane, listening in on outgoing messages, had guessed that he was not a chauffeur.

He hastened to his room. Presently Diane appeared and set a tray on the table.

"It'll soon be time for you to go on watch," she said. "But there's another night, tomorrow..."

Another one of those toenail-curling kisses. Freeman licked the rouge from his mouth, lifted the coffee to his lips. It was fairly boiling.

He waited for it to cool. Some people liked it blistering, but he didn't.

He again picked up the cup; but he abruptly set it down. Since coffee was one of Norma's habits, Diane would take that into account in her arrangement with Dmitri. And nothing would be simpler than drugging it!

He dashed barefooted to Norma's suite. Von Wirz sat slumped in a chair.

His mouth sagged, and his face was a grayish white.

Norma was out cold, huddled on a lounge, her gown hunched up above her knees, her negligee slipping from shoulders bruised by ardent kisses.

Their cups were emptied. He cautiously tasted the dregs. He could just detect the taste of chloral hydrate. It was not poisonous except in heavy overdoses.

If he tried to revive von Wirz and Norma, he might be caught off guard by Dmitri's arrival. Better wait for him in the study. Diane, confident that he was out cold, would not suspect.

Freeman scrutinized the walls of the study, looking for a secret panel, but the effort was wasted. The only opening was the door of an old fashioned, built-in wall safe. He would have to wait.

He crouched beneath Cyrus Hartley's desk. Minutes dragged . . . and dragged . . . he felt the wrathful presence of Norma's father, silently begging for vengeance . . . his brains had splashed that desk. . . .

Freeman became tense as he sensed a presence. A soft, metallic whispering sent shudders racing through his veins. Then he saw the door of the safe swing silently outward.

He emerged from cover. He shifted a metal wastebasket. At the scraping sound, there was a low-voiced but human oath. A man was clearing the door of the safe.

He jerked a pistol from his hip. Freeman, his weapon already drawn, lunged and slashed down with the barrel. The intruder's automatic thudded to the carpet.

Though one hand was paralyzed, he lashed out with the other. Freeman wanted him alive. Instead of firing, he dropped his pistol and closed in. The



Again the rawhide  
thong hissed to liek  
about that writhing,  
suspended length of  
agony.





invader's blow knocked him backward across the desk. A knife descended.

Freeman wriggled clear. The point chunked into the desk. Freeman drew one knee up to his chest, booted the enemy in the pit of his stomach, sending him catapulting across the room. He followed through, cracking down with the barrel of his automatic.

Freeman snapped on the lights. His opponent was burly, with a grim, grizzled face, and close cropped white hair.

Retrieving the flashlight, he played it into the safe. The back had been cut out to open into a narrow staircase that descended into the foundations of the building.

Freeman shouldered his captive, and carried him to his own room. There he tore up a sheet, bound and gagged Dmitri.

Now to give Diane the works.

"You damn, double-crossing floozie," he growled, pouncing into her room and catching her by the arm. "You thought I'd drink your doped coffee, eh?"

Her dark eyes widened with alarm. His open hand knocked her sprawling into a corner, a tangle of silk and bare legs.

"That's just a sample," he threatened. "Get on your feet, or I'll bust you wide open—"

"Oh, Clint," she cried, "do listen to me—"

"Shut up!" he snarled, jerking her to her feet and toward the door. "Come and try some of your own mixture. I've settled Dmitri for keeps!"

"Look out!" she cried, her free hand pointing over his shoulder. "Behind you—"

That was an old one. He laughed sourly. Diane desperately repeated, "Cliff—look out—"

She flung herself at him to shove him

aside. Too late, he learned that the warning was *bona fide*.

A crushing blow from the rear drove him to his knees. Another smack across the head. Diane's scream was abruptly throttled. The rumbling in Freeman's ears was absorbed in a dizzy whirl of blackness.

WHEN Freeman recovered, he was lying on a concrete floor, near the mouth of an oil-burning furnace. He was in the basement of Miramonte, bound hand and foot.

Three men were gathered about Norma, who lay sprawled on the floor, unconscious, and clad only in the scraps of her nightgown.

The tallest of the trio was Captain Eric von Wirz. He was still pale and groggy.

"Mikhail," he said to a squat, swarthy fellow with bristling black hair, "dump some cold water on her. She'll snap out of it."

"I'm enjoying the scenery," chuckled Mikhail, turning to nudge his companion. "Eh, Ivan?"

Ivan's expressionless face was as square as his shoulders. He grunted. His small eyes avariciously regarded Norma's bare loveliness.

"There's plenty of that for everyone," snapped von Wirz. "Business first."

As they revived Norma, Freeman wondered why her treacherous fiancé, the leader of the enemy, had been drugged.

Struggling vainly against his bonds, he rolled against a warm, feminine body. His back was to her. He could tell from the rigid position of her legs that she likewise was bound.

She whispered in his ear, "Cliff, maybe I can bite the cords from your wrists."



Diane, and a prisoner! That completed the insanity of the evening.

He felt her teeth working on his bonds. She ceased—just in time to avoid the shifting glance of von Wirz.

"All right, Freeman," he barked. "Who's your chief? How did he get wise to us?"

"I'm a chauffeur," countered Freeman. "Look at my papers."

"We already have," was the grim reply. "That's how we know you were hired by the Russian secret police. You're going to tell where your chief is. So we can settle with him before he has us murdered and grabs the treasure."

"What treasure?" demanded Freeman.

"You never heard of the forty million dollars in gold taken from Manchuria when Admiral Kolchak's treasure train was looted in 1920?" sneered von Wirz. "Most of it was smuggled to Europe, but a million of it is still buried in this estate."

"That's why it's haunted. You were too damn' wise, guessing that the ghost was mechanically operated switches, electrically transcribed voices, and fluorescent chemicals worked into the plaster, so that when invisible ultra violet rays played on it, the ghost appeared."

"Clever device, but you'll never inspect it! By varying the density and composition of the chemicals, the glow cropped out gradually, and in a darkened room, the increase of size gave the effect of motion."

"Why don't you dig the damn' treasure?" flared Freeman.

"The men who buried the gold died with their secret. This is a ten-acre estate. Searching it will take time. That's why I tried to get her away. Now she has to sign a deed to the place."

"Watch us persuade her. By that

time, you'll be ready to betray the Russian secret service."

"All right, Ivan—is she conscious?"

As von Wirz turned to his assistants, he took a document from his pocket.

Mikhail jerked Norma upright. She tried to pull the tattered yoke of her nightgown together. Von Wirz chuckled grimly at her incredulous recognition.

"Sorry, sweetheart. Business and pleasure won't mix. Sign on the dotted line."

"Don't!" croaked Freeman. "They'll kill you the minute you scratch your name!"

A kick knocked him breathless, but his warning had registered. Norma shook her head.

VON WIRZ beckoned to his assistants. Mikhail passed a rope over the bridging between the floor joists, lashed it to Norma's wrists, and took up the slack until her toes barely touched the concrete.

Ivan came forward with a whip made of rawhide belt lacing weighted with small stove bolts. It was an improvised Russian knout which could peel the hide from an ox.

He made a lazy gesture. A terrible shudder racked Norma's soft body as the knotted thongs bit in, and the iron weighted ends flicked around, cutting and tearing her sides, drawing red drops that trickled down to her hips.

"Not so hard," cautioned von Wirz.

Another lash: A gurgling, sobbing gasp penetrated the gag. Von Wirz turned to Freeman.

"You didn't have use for your gun, after all," he taunted, laying Freeman's automatic on a ledge. "I shouldn't have bothered tampering with the ammuni-

(Continued on page 107)



# MURDER IN MUSIC

By  
CARY MORAN



THE FAT man said, "Damn it!" He straightened up from the green-covered table, wiped the perspiration from his face, and glared at the tittering onlookers.

Jarnegan threw the apple core in the cuspidor, swallowed, chalked his cue gravely and thoroughly.

"Eight ball in the side," he murmured, stroked the ivory cueball with the precision of a master, and watched nonchalantly as the black eight ball doubled the corners and sped for the side pocket like a homing pigeon. The cue ball caromed off to smash into the collected balls, scattering them all over the table. Jarnegan smirked as it stopped near the front rail in perfect position for any one of a half dozen easy shots.

The fat man groaned and sat down in a chair.

Jarnegan ran the table down to a



*The dead girl's arm was perspiring blood! And there was the little doll and the feathered drum. To the negro it was voodoo—but to Jarnegan it was murder*

*Truxton backed away. "I said leave her alone," repeated the man with the gun.*



solitary ball, tapped the butt of his cue on the floor to summon the attendant. Grinning, the negro racked the balls. Jarnegan concentrated on the next shot, brows close together.

A sudden scuffling noise from the front of the hall disconcerted him; he straightened half angrily. A man was shouldering his way through the on-lookers on the run, blubbering, half sobbing.

"The sheriff—where's the sheriff? I got to find the sheriff!"

The fat man, Sheriff Jud Tolliver, struggled from his chair against the wall. "That's me, son, what's on your—?"



His twinkling little eyes grew as wide as his mouth at sight of the terrified figure before him.

THE newcomer wore an undershirt, grey checked pants with the suspenders hanging down, and a pair of red leather bedroom slippers. Half of his face was lather-covered. One hand was tightly clenched against his breath. The other, gesticulating so wildly that the onlookers made a nervous circle about him a good arm's length away, held an open razor that glinted and flickered in the subdued light.

"Put that shiv down," shouted the sheriff, edging away himself, "and tell me what's wrong. C'mon now!"

The man seemed to notice the razor for the first time.

"It's Wanda. Wanda," he sobbed. "She's dead! And I'm to go next. Oh, God, you've got to save me! I—"

He collapsed, crumpled senselessly, the razor sliding across the floor beneath the pool table.

Tolliver knelt at his side, said, "Somebody get water or something!"

Jarnegan reached down for the razor, looked at it closely and folded it, stuck it in his pocket.

Water was brought, the man was revived.

"The hotel—at the hotel! She's dead, I tell you, dead! And I'm marked next! Look, it's—"

He unclenched the other fist. There in the palm of his hand was a little rubber doll some three inches in height. About its neck was tied a tiny drum, made from a stained spool. "It's me, it's me!" shrieked the man. "Look at me! The sword!"

Through the heart of the rubber doll was a pin. The head of the pin held a tiny red feather against the doll's breast.

Sam, the negro who racked the balls groaned, rolled his eyes piteously.

"What is it, Sam?" asked Tolliver. Sam was ashen.

"Obeah, Mistah Tolliver! It's voodoo, suah as youah bawn!"

He turned, fled toward the back of the room. Tolliver tried to raise the gibbering man from the floor.

"What hotel? Who's Wanda? Who killed her? Where—?"

The newcomer's eyes seemed to start from his head. His breath came spasmodically, his thick chest heaved, his fingers clawed, convulsively at his throat.

Dropping suddenly to the floor he continued to thrash, to gag, to fight for breath before the startled eyes of the onlookers. By the time Tolliver knelt beside him, he was dead.

"Get a doctor, for God's sake," grated Tolliver, and, as an onlooker departed on the run, "Does anyone know him? Who is he?"

"It's the drum player from the New Orleans orchestra. The one that's to play the big dance tonight. They're all staying at the Stanton Hotel."

Jarnegan was leaning against the pool table watching, his eyes seemingly blank. At the speaker's last words, he edged to the rim of the crowd, faded swiftly for the back door.

A doctor appeared shortly after his departure, opened his little black bag beside the man on the floor. Presently he looked up at the perspiring sheriff and shook his head.

"He's dead, Jud. Looks like heart failure. What happened?"

The sheriff told him. The doctor nodded slowly.

"I've heard of cases like that—fellow actually scared to death. Some organic heart trouble and then this voodoo scare on top of it. Who'd you say he was?"



"My God," said the sheriff, "I forgot! He said another one was dead back at the hotel! Where's Jarnegan? Jarnegan? Jarnegan? Damn it!" He shook his head grimly, ambled from the poolroom like a young elephant.

A CROSS town Jarnegan was pulling his battered roadster to a stop before the Stanton Hotel, the town's newest and most pretentious hostelry. To the clerk at the desk he said, "What's the room number of that drum player with the Creole troubadours? I forget his name."

"Oh, you mean Mr. Saxon. He's in 1234. Shall I ring him for you?"

"Never mind. He's expecting me."

1234 didn't answer his knock. He tried again, louder. He fumbled through his pockets for a small leather case, extracted a peculiarly shaped steel wire, and thrust it into the lock.

Across the hall a little farther down, a door opened. A soft voice said, "What do you think you're doing?"

Jarnegan whirled and grinned. The speaker was a girl, tall, as tall as Jarnegan and lithe with a jungle litheness that reminded him of a prowling cat. Her eyes were green in an oval, olive-tinted face. Her red lips curled accusingly.

"Looking for something, lady. What do you care?"

"The man is out. I heard him leave. I'm Oma Trudeau, with the same outfit. Do you want to leave any word?"

She wore a white negligee, sheer and clinging. One slender hand held it negligently clasped at a creamy throat, so loosely clasped that the sloping white skin above her rounded breasts was frankly visible. Caught tightly at the waist, the gown flared lyre-like over full hips, outlining the long, curving line from hip to ankle.

Jarnegan said, "I just left Saxon. He sent me to get some things."

He turned his back on the girl, fumbled at the door with the specially bent piece of steel, picked steadily away. Still working, he became conscious of the girl at his elbow, caught the aroma of her scented body.

"He would have given you a key if he sent you! Now get away from that door, you thief."

Something hard prodded him in the back. He cracked a sickly grin, said, "Okay, sister. Don't get nervous with that gun."

"Back up, toward me, and don't try to be funny. Now turn and walk into my room."

He preceded her into the room the sickly grin still persisting. She closed the door, leaned against it, then shrugged and walked toward him. A long, shapely leg swept through the opening in the skirt of the negligee.

"Well," he said, "why don't you call the police? If I'm a thief, why not turn me in?"

"You're a thief, all right," she spoke contemplatively, reaching for a cigarette, holding the gun steadily on him. "No one but a thief carries burglar tools like you've got. As for turning you in—maybe we can make a deal."

Jarnegan said, "Can I smoke?" She tossed him the lighted cigarette, reached for another. "What do you want stolen, sis? Like you say, maybe we can make a deal."

SHE spoke slowly, green eyes burning into Jarnegan's. "I'll let you go if you'll enter a certain room in this hotel for me. If you refuse, I'll call the police and have you arrested for attempted burglary."



Jarnegan said, "Let's hear the rest of it. What do I have to lift?"

"A coat brush that's lying on the bureau in room 1220. That's very simple."

"Well," he said slowly, "I don't want any trouble with the police, of course."

She tossed the gun on the table. "Get going. It's the black coat brush that belongs in the room, like all the others. Just pick the lock, bring the brush to me, and get on your way."

Jarnegan eyed the bottle that sat on the table, grinned insinuatingly.

The green eyes glared at him, but red lips formed a smile. "Okay, we'll take a drink on it."

They did.

Jarnegan said, "What else happens when I get back? Do I have to scam right away?"

His eyes probed the thin negligee boldly from the creamy kneecap too carelessly exposed to the swelling curves above, hardly concealed by their covering. She grinned, stretched lazily.

"What a nerve! What a man! Get the thing I sent for, then come back and talk to me."

He opened the door, turned to grin at her again. Her answering smile was a challenge and a promise, but her eyes were desperate. Softly he closed the door behind him, turned toward the small numbered end of the hall.

The elevator gate banged open with a clang. Sheriff Jed Tolliver barged around the ell, puffing and blowing, followed by a white-faced hotel manager who jangled a bunch of keys.

"Jarnegan! Damn you, where'd you run out to? I been looking all over for you! This is going to be one for you! Come on now, don't run out on me again."

He grabbed Jarnegan by the lapel

while the trembling manager fumbled with key after key at the lock of room 1234. The door swung open, the manager stepped aside. Tolliver plunged in, still tugging Jarnegan along.

SHE lay across the once white bed, golden hair forming a halo on the crumpled pillow. One arm covered her breasts, only glimpses of satiny skin peeping forth; the other was folded beneath her body. Wispy chiffon, her only garment, clung tightly to flaring hips. One well rounded leg was drawn beneath her as if in agony, the other stretching away stiff and rigid toward the foot of the bed. Her lips were contorted with unendurable pain.

From the point of the right jaw down beneath the chin and nearly to the lobe of the right ear ran a gaping eight inch cut. The bed beneath her head and shoulders was a crimson, viscous mess.

Tolliver breathed audibly through his nose. Jarnegan ran forward, leaned over the corpse. Gently he rolled it over. The right arm flopped clumsily from its hiding place. It was swollen nearly twice its normal size, and rapidly blackening. The veins that led from it into her body protruded like whipcords. Every pore of the arm sweated but the exudation was deep red rather than colorless. The arm was perspiring—*blood*.

The hotel manager blubbered in the background. Tolliver's eyes were horror-stricken. He reached for the jumbled bedclothes. Jarnegan struck his hand away.

"You want to die, you fat fool? Don't touch anything! Get up on a chair!"

A heavy water bottle stood on the bureau. Jarnegan seized it by its neck, grabbed in his breast pocket for a fountain pen flashlight. Cautiously he peered beneath the bed, the tiny finger of light



darting here and there. He straightened with a snap.

"Grab hold of this bed, both of you, one on each end and when I give the word, *jerk*. Jerk and jump, just in case I miss!"

"Wh-wha-wha—?" stuttered the manager, but took his post beneath Jarnegan's glare.

"Now!" shouted Jarnegan, leaping

*Jarnegan leaped into the air as the bed moved. He swung the jar. . . .*





high in the air—toward the bed. The bed rolled out nearly four feet. Jarnegan nearly jumped over it. He lit beside the corpse with a force that bounced the dead woman a foot in the air, staggered a moment, caught his balance then hurler the water bottle downward with a force that splintered it against the floor.

He peered closely. "Got him, by God, I got him! Smashed his head!"

Cautiously he leaned over, his hand disappearing from view. When he arose, both Tolliver and the hotel manager gurgled in their throats, started for the door. Jarnegan held a sixteen inch snake by its tail. The smashed head still throbbled from side to side.

"It's a *fer-de-lance*," he said. "I spent two years in the West Indies and I've seen four or five natives die from its bite. That's how the dame here was killed."

The sheriff said, "Hell, she had her throat cut! You can see that!"

"Yeah. But maybe that was an afterthought. Or maybe the snakebite was an afterthought. Either way, get the coroner up here and you—" to the hotel manager—"get every member of the orchestra together in your office. We'll find out who's missing."

The only missing members of the orchestra were dead—Saxon, the drum player, and Wanda Hewlett, blues singer. The rest gathered in the office of the Stanton, shaken and ill at ease.

ALL business, Jarnegan took their names, their past histories and their alibis for the past hour. There were nine in all, including Phil Truxton, manager and advance agent; Emil Lozano, the leader; Oma Trudeau, featured dancer; and six musicians.

The six musicians alibied each other. They had been holding a heated crap

game in room 1054 for two hours. Truxton proved by the cigar stand girl that he had just entered the hotel, claimed he had been taking a walk.

The same girl said she had seen him leave a full hour earlier as well as return. Lozano, the leader, was still in bed and had to be awakened. Jarnegan turned to Oma Trudeau.

She sat across the room in a low chair, still clad in the same negligee. Her long legs were crossed, revealing a shimmering expanse of chiffon. Jarnegan grinned.

"We'll pass you, lady. You look all right to me, but I'll see you later. You can all go back to your rooms but Truxton. Don't try to leave the hotel, any of you, until I give the word. I'll see the coroner for the exact time of death and if any of your stories stink, I'll look you up personally."

The last person to leave the office was Oma. She held the negligee tightly across svelte hips that rippled sinuously as she moved. At the doorway she looked back over her shoulder at the grinning Jarnegan. Her eyes were enigmatic as the door closed.

"Were Miss Hewlett and the drummer Saxon living together?"

Truxton hesitated. "Yeah, to be frank, they were. Have been for a couple of months."

"Who'd she pal around with before that?"

"Emil, the leader."

"And this drummer, was he a lady's man?"

"Well, he used to play around with Oma before the blonde joined up as a singer. He—"

Half an hour later, Jarnegan found Tolliver still in the murder room, just hanging up the phone. The sheriff said, "Either the snakebite or the cut throat



could have caused death. No fingerprints except some smudged ones on the window that opens to the fire escape. It was unlocked. What did *you* find out?"

Jarnegan said nothing, simply grinned and turned away. The sheriff watched him go moodily.

Jarnegan walked across the hall, tapped lightly on the door of 1235. No one answered. He tapped again, louder, tried the knob. To his surprise, it gave. He walked in.

A shower that sang in the bathroom was suddenly turned off. A voice shouted, "Who is it, you, Phil?"

Jarnegan said, "It ain't Phil."

A muffled exclamation. She emerged from the bathroom tearing the bathing cap from her hair, green eyes alight with anger. The negligee, wet now, clung to the lithe curves of her body.

"You!" she gasped, green eyes blazing with anger. "You liar, you! What do you want now?"

JARNEGAN grinned mildly, pulled a clothes brush from his pocket and tossed it on the table. "Why, we made a deal, didn't we? I brought you the clothes brush out of 1220."

She walked toward him angrily, so angrily that Jarnegan drew away in fright that wasn't entirely assumed.

"You let me think you were a thief when all the time you were a murder investigator! You—"

"Now wait a minute, lady, wait a minute! I never told you I was a thief. You took it for granted. Here's the brush you wanted. Now what do I get? Remember our bargain?"

Her eyes drilled into his, she half smiled. "Well, if you're going to be foolish!"

She sank down on the edge of the bed, reached for a cigarette. Jarnegan

shrugged. "Not so foolish!" He sat down beside her, lit the smoke for her. Her shoulder was against his. As she leaned to the match a soft strand of her hair brushed against his forehead. He trembled a little, then flipped the match away and took her in his arms. . . .

A HALF hour later he said goodbye at the door.

"And it's all right for me to do some shopping, honey?"

He nodded. "Sure, it's all right. Go ahead. I'll see you again before you go, eh, babe?" He patted her cheek, slid his hand down her arm from shoulder to wrist, and winked.

Softly she closed the door behind him. But not until he had slipped a narrow strip of thick cellophane across the lock. He walked loudly away, his heels thumping on the carpet. He heard a tiny click as the latch of the lock was released, and grinned. He waited a full minute, tip-toed back across the hallway to listen at the door. From inside came a steady *tap-tap-tap* followed by a more vigorous crash.

He opened the door boldly. The lock had failed to snap against the cellophane.

The woman Oma had a long knife, was hacking viciously at the wooden coat brush. Her face whitened.

"How did you—?"

"Excuse me," said Jarnegan, "I forgot my cigarettes." He picked them up from the table and with a wave of his hand was gone, leaving her gaping.

Back in the murder room. "Okay, Tolliver, nothing's been touched but the body?"

"That's right. Where in the hell have you been? The county pays you money for investigating murders and you run all over the place, leaving me to do your work. Gee!"



Jarnegan picked an empty safety match box from the ashtray, turned it over and over in his hand, dropped it into his pocket. He pulled Saxon's luggage from the closet, examined it closely piece by piece. In the closet corner he pondered, slit-eyed, over a curious object. It was a round drum, made from a polished piece of hollow log, both ends covered with tightly stretched skin. Its sides bore mystic hieroglyphies, and clumps of red feathers.

"What the Hell is that?" grunted Tolliver.

"Looks like a voodoo drum," said Jarnegan, shaking it. "I saw a lot of them in Haiti. It's—hmmmm."

Beneath a cunningly arranged tuft of feathers was a hole an inch in diameter. He put the drum back in the closet as an idea took hold, flirted an airy hand in farewell at the cursing sheriff.

At the desk in the lobby he asked, "Who's in 1220?"

"Mr. Truxton, sir."

"Call him. Tell him he's wanted in the lobby by the sheriff."

The clerk turned away. Jarnegan waited at the elevator till the manager of the Creole Troubadours stepped out, an anxious look on his long face. Once his back was turned, Jarnegan slid into the empty car, said, "Twelve, and hurry it up."

THREE minutes later he was again in the lobby, sitting in an inconspicuous corner, an outspread newspaper covering the entire upper part of his body. Through a rent in the paper he watched Oma Trudeau get out of the elevator, leave her key at the desk, and sail majestically out of the lobby. He dropped his paper, followed her.

She made two stops. One at a music store, the other at a soda fountain. As

soon as the sandwich and malted milk were placed before her, Jarnegan headed back for the music store. She had purchased a package of victrola needles.

At the shack Jarnegan called his office, he placed the real clothes brush from Room 1220 before him on the desk and reached into a drawer for a small chisel. The brush given Oma Trudeau had been lifted from the murder room! A few moments later he had the county coroner on the phone.

"Doc? Jarnegan. I want a detailed description of every wound on both bodies. Not just major wounds but everywhere the skin is broken. And I want an autopsy on the body of the guy that was supposed to be scared to death."

He hung up, dialed another number. "Western Union. Take this wire to *Billboard*, the theatrical magazine in Chicago: 'Please wire at our expense all details concerning careers of following musicians. Important.'"

He gave the names of everyone connected with the orchestra.

"Then take this same wire to the nine different places I'll list later. 'Chief of Police: Wire all information you have concerning history and antecedents of—.' Fill in the same names I've given you on the *Billboard* wire. Here's a list of the towns they go to, and don't get them balled up."

Presently Jarnegan fumbled in a brown paper sack and withdrew an apple, which he polished complacently on his coat sleeve. Tolliver came in.

"By God, have you been here all this time? I've been looking all over for you! What are we going to do with that gang? Keep them penned up in the hotel? One of them killed the dame and slipped the drum player that voodoo charm! I'm in favor of putting them all in the can."



Jarnegan said, "Let's go play some pool. I'll spot you ten points."

At dinner he sat across the table from Truxton, Oma Trudeau, and Lozano, the dark leader. "Saxon undoubtedly killed the dame himself," he said slowly. "Jealous quarrel or something. Any way all you people are alibied. I'm going

*Behind Jarnegan someone said: "Lay your gun down and put your hands up!"*





to let you go. Of course the dance here is off. Where do you go next?"

Lozano named the town, a neighboring city. "And we'll have to play it tomorrow night, worse luck, and no drummer!"

"I'll play 'em myself." Lozano's face was flushed. "We need the money and I haven't time to get another man."

On the opposite side of the table Jarnegan watched Oma Trudeau. She kept her eyes demurely on her plate, but at Lozano's last remark she glanced up, looked at him curiously, green irises seeming to flash fire. Jarnegan made a mental note.

Truxton said, "It's white of you people to let us go, Jarnegan. I think poor Saxon killed her with the razor. Where the snake came from I don't know, but I realize you could keep us here indefinitely for investigation."

Jarnegan waved a hand. "Oh, you aren't going far. I'll have it all worked out by tomorrow or the next day. If I need you, I can get you, don't worry about that!"

Nearly noon the next day, Jarnegan sat at his battered desk, Jud Tolliver across from him. Between them lay the few clues to the mysterious death of the two performers.

Tolliver said, "You're taking an awful chance letting her go. Where was the needle?"

Jarnegan picked up the razor Saxon had dropped in the poolhall, opened it, "Right here." He picked up a new victrola needle, stuck it into the space left by the blade and pushed it home with a nail file. The tiny point protruded an infinitesimal distance on the other side. Not enough to be noticeable, but enough to prick a man's palm or fingers should he handle it long enough.

"Voodoo poison," mused Jarnegan.

"I've heard of it, seen the effects before. Something like South American *curare* only it works slower. That's what got poor Saxon. He was an athlete; that's why the dames fell for him. I knew it wasn't heart failure!"

"And this dancing dame out buying victrola needles and looking up a flask of the poison hidden in a clothes brush handle! And you let her go!"

Jarnegan shook his head. "It doesn't fit. She had her eyes on room 1234, but as soon as she found out I was a picklock she wanted me to go steal the brush! If it was hers, why didn't she get it herself? And where does the snake fit in? According to these reports Emil Lozano himself was the only one of the gang ever in the West Indies. Nope, I'll play a little game of waiting and watching. I'm going to their dance tonight over in Rumsford."

HE left that evening, made Rumsford about seven. He walked into the lobby of the only pretentious hotel there, handed an envelope to the clerk and said, "Put this in Miss Trudeau's box, please." The clerk put the empty envelope in box 456 as Jarnegan watched.

Shortly, "Might as well register, I guess. Give me something on four. How about 458?"

"Sure."

Jarnegan paid in advance, went up in the elevator.

Once inside his room he went directly to the window. The fire escape served both 456 and 458. Jarnegan raised the sash. From the next room came the monotonous *throb-throb-throb* of jungle music, shrilling reeds whirling music high, resonant drums pulsing it, in a cadence that pounded with the regular beat of surging tide.

Puzzled, he listened. The music



stopped for a moment, then broke forth again. Outside darkness had overtaken day. There was no moon, the night was heavy, black.

Cautiously Jarnegan climbed out on the fire escape, took a couple of soft steps, and listened intently. The window of 456 was also raised. In the center of the room on a square table sat a portable phonograph grinding the voodoo music into the air.

Clad in clinging, sheer underwear Oma Trudeau whirled and gyrated before the table. Her eyes were dreamy, far away. Every movement of her lithe body was serpentine, from the tips of her fingers to her high heels. Muscles twitched and throbbed beneath sleek olive skin. Beneath the scanty covering, soft flesh swayed and rocked in mad rhythm.

Tap-tap-tap at the door. She switched off the music, grabbed a thin wrapper from the bed and opened the door. The newcomer was Phil Truxton.

His long horselike face was twisted into a snarl, his eyes were wild and menacing. The girl drew herself up haughtily. He tried to seize her shoulder but she drew away contemptuously.

"Damn you," he half screamed. "So it's going to be Emil after all! I just met him in the grill and he told me. Going to marry him, eh, after all I've done for you! You little slut! Wind me around your finger, get everything I've got, then throw me over. You'll never get away with it! I'm going to the police! I'll tell them what he did! He killed Wanda and you know it! That snake was his! He put it in Saxon's drum! Afterwards he cut Wanda's throat. I'll see that you don't marry him, damn you!"

"You lie! And I'm not going to marry Emil. Saxon was the only man I ever

really loved. You ought to know that! You and your dirty schemes to get me."

"And I'll have you, too, damn you!" He ripped viciously at the wrapper, heedless of the tapering fingers that dug furrows in his cheeks.

Jarnegan squatted silently and watched, eyes aglow. Clutching the torn wrapper, the girl pulled it ineffectively about herself, attempting to cover the white skin that had been revealed in flashes.

"Don't touch her, Truxton. Get out!"

Emil Lozano, orchestra leader, was in the doorway, a flat gun in his hand. "I said get out!" he repeated.

Face suffused with rage, Truxton tore out of the room. Jarnegan leaned closer to hear and see. The girl walked to Emil, put her hands on his shoulders, and peered into his eyes.

"Emil, did you kill Wanda? Did—?"

THE man looked away miserably, his head bowed. "I put the *fer-de-lance* in the room. I was mad, crazy, Oma! I knew I had no chance with you as long as Saxon lived, and I knew how miserable it made you to see him living with her, loving her. I had the snake sent from Haiti. He was almost dead when he got here but I put him in Saxon's voodoo drum. I—put the voodoo doll in his bathroom to divert suspicion! I—"

She turned away from him, weeping, tears pouring down her face.

Behind Jarnegan some one said, "Lay the gun down at your feet and put your hands up!"

Jarnegan laid the gun down, turned slowly, hands aloft. He stared into the demoniac eyes of Phil Truxton in the window of 458. Truxton giggled, saliva drolling from his quivering lips.

"I hate to bump you, shamus, but

(Continued on page 104)



# SALLY THE SLEUTH

NOW THAT WE'VE GOT TONY, THE RIGHT HAND MAN OF 'KATIE THE KILLER', WE'LL HOLD HIM FOR A WHILE BEFORE TURNING HIM OVER TO THE POLICE. GET INTO KATIE'S PLACE AND FIND OUT IF SHE'S BEHIND THOSE BOND THIEVES

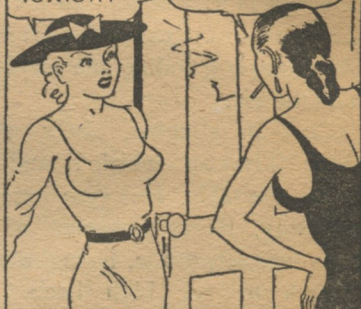


OKAY, CHIEF

THEY DON'T KNOW WE HAVE TONY, SO I THINK I'LL PLAY A BOLD GAME



I'M AN OLD FRIEND OF TONY'S. THE COPS ARE AFTER ME AND HE TOLD ME I COULD HIDE HERE UNTIL TONIGHT



SO HE LIKES BLONDES — THE RAT!

ALL RIGHT — YOU LAY LOW HERE UNTIL HE COMES BACK, THEN I'LL SEE WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT



THE CHIEF WAS RIGHT. HERE'S A FORTUNE IN STOLEN BONDS



HEY KATIE — DEY GOT TONY!



WHAT! WHEN? THIS LOOKS FISHY

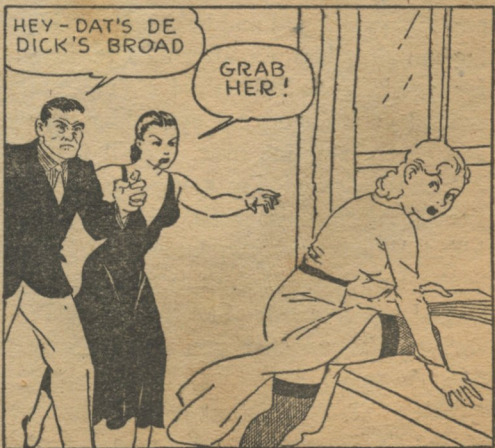
DE PRIVATE DICK IS HOLDIN' HIM TO MAKE HIM SQUEAL

IF HE DOES — DAMN HIM!



HEY — DAT'S DE DICK'S BROAD

GRAB HER!



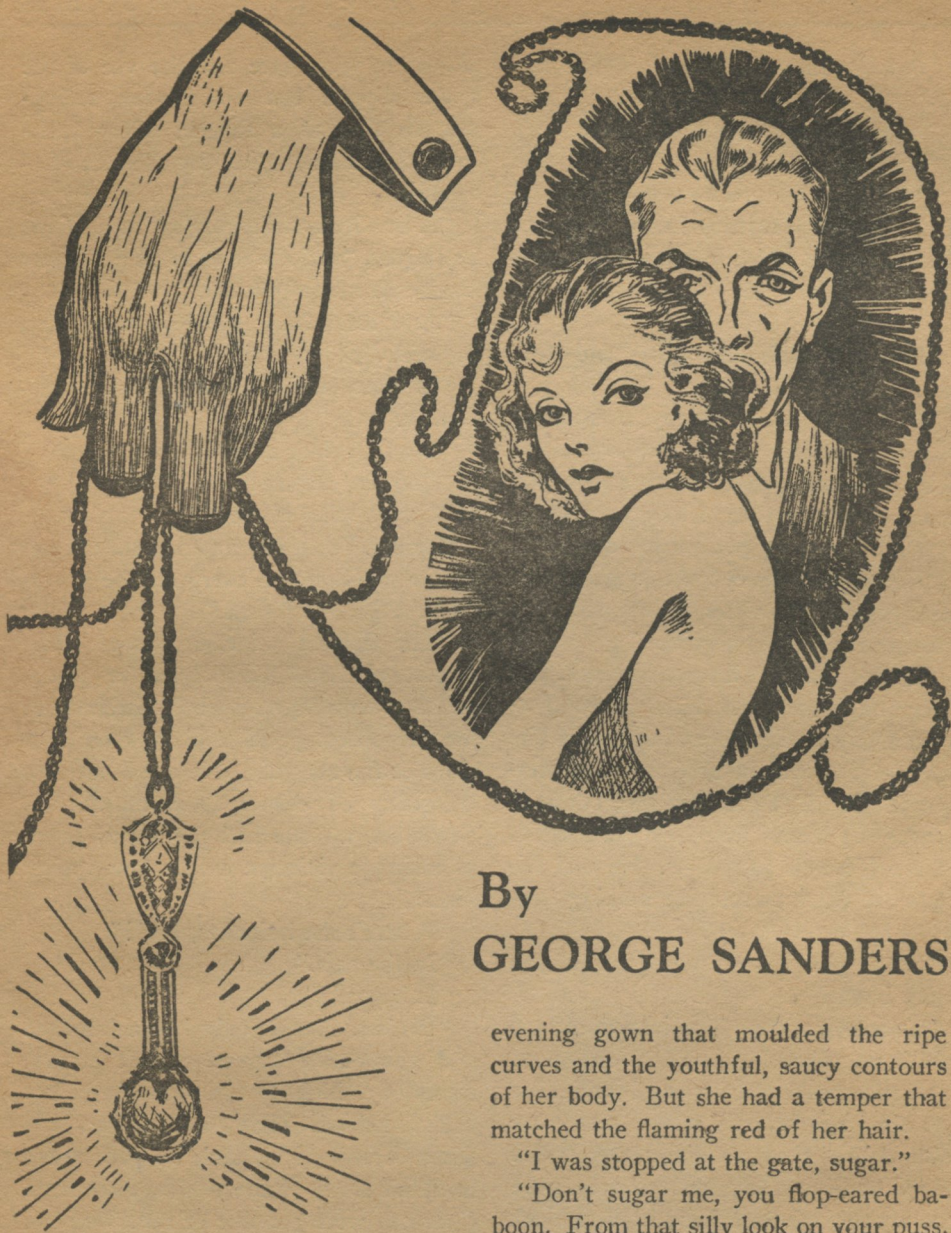


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By  
GEORGE SANDERS

evening gown that moulded the ripe curves and the youthful, saucy contours of her body. But she had a temper that matched the flaming red of her hair.

"I was stopped at the gate, sugar."

"Don't sugar me, you flop-eared baboon. From that silly look on your puss, you've either been guzzling or out helling around with some bim."

"A martini, honey. One, just one—honest."

"Washed down with a pint of rum, I suppose. Well, tuck this under your bonnet, stupid. Lay off the booze or half the Tate-Ware Private Detective Agency will end up back of the eight ball. And where'd you get that tuxedo?"

**D**IANA WARE was madder than hell!

"So you decided to come! Listen, you fish-faced punk! I suppose you think the Courtneys'd hold up a dance for a tin-badged private dick they could get for a dime a dozen."

Hartley Tate grinned. Diana looked like a million bucks in the black satin



"A tailor made it, sweet. A good tailor."

"A good tailor for circus horses."

"Aw, honey . . ."

"Shut up! There's a dance inside and Mrs. Richard Courtney has a belly-full of champagne. If she were five years younger, I suppose she'd do a fan dance."

"Honey, Kitty's only thirty and she's nice."

"Nice enough to marry a hundred million smackers. You men make me sick. You see a doll like that give you an eyeful and you have to marry her."

"Dick Courtney got himself a honey."

"Honey for money! Anyway, Courtney's sotsed, his wife's tanked and she's wearing the Taveta necklace."

Hartley Tate lost his good humor. The Taveta necklace! One hundred and forty perfectly matched, flawless blue white diamonds. It was insured for four hundred thousand. Twice that couldn't have bought the stones that had belonged to a French king's paramour. He and Diana were there to see that nothing happened to that necklace!

"What you let her wear it for, you dumb cluck?"

"Courtney's idea. The insurance man said it was okay."

Hartley grabbed Diana and jerked her into the huge hallway where rugs were ankle deep. They went to the ballroom where some six hundred couples were dancing to the hottest band in New York brought to the Long Island Estate by young Courtney who liked to strut the dog.

MRS. COURTNEY was dancing with an oily haired gigolo. The white evening dress fitted her like a veneer of paint; clung about hips and thighs with a drum-like tension. Her

shoulders were bare and the vee of the gown dipped low to display satiny-smooth skin as a superb, milky background for the glittering Taveta diamonds.

"A hundred million bucks," said Diana in disgust, "and she used to do a shimmy in a tenth rate night club."

"And for a buck she'd do a strip on the table."

"Is that all?" asked Diana suspiciously.

"Who's vulgar now?"

"Can the chatter!"

"Okay. Who's here?"

Society. From the cream to the cheese. A few punks who'd carry off the silverware. Also the Count."

"The Count!" Hartley gasped. The almost mythical Count was a plenty handsome young man who'd hatched out the smoothest jewel robberies on both sides of the Atlantic. He was known to be guilty of crimes from murder on down but no one had proved as much as a simple violation of the law against him.

"Where's the imitation, Red?"

"In the safe."

"Is it good?"

"Perfect. But it only has a hundred and thirty-nine stones. Don't worry, sonny boy. Nobody can count them."

That helped. Then the Count and the other criminals bound to be there wouldn't know if the necklace on Mrs. Courtney were genuine or not. Besides, he and Diana weren't the only private dicks who had their eyes peeled.

"Dance, gorgeous?"

"Sure, dope. That's an order isn't it?"

They began to dance. Diana's hair gave off an exotic perfume that had driven him nuts before he'd taken three steps. Her smooth, bare back was cool



to the touch and her vibrant body nestled nicely against him.

"Diana, honey. I'm nuts about you. Marry me?"

"No. And don't get sloppy or I'll rap you a sock in the puss."

Hartley sighed. No use to argue. They'd been over that before. The agency had to be showing a good profit before Diana'd even consider talking of marriage. A hard woman. Harder than hell. Plenty hot blood in her veins, too. But she never went out of control.

"Listen, Hart! Slip this between those big ears of yours and stop mooning. I've a faint suspicion that the Count is due to make prize saps of the bunch of us."

"Where is he?"

She nodded to a tall, perfectly dressed young man lounging against the wall. He was a handsome guy all right, even if there were streaks of gray at his temples. His eyes were sardonic, amused. Hartley Tate didn't feel so hot. The Count had that expression that proclaimed that he knew the place was lousy with dicks and that he intended to snatch the necklace anyway.

The dance ended.

"Listen, Red! I'll mosey around. Try and make up to the Count."

SHE nodded and he left the ballroom.

For awhile he wandered around getting the lay of the land. Leaving the house proper, he ventured into the adjoining servant's wing. There was a narrow corridor there and, at the far end, which connected with the ballroom, stood a cute, chestnut-haired maid.

Hartley ankled up. The girl was visibly embarrassed and stood there holding a heavy tray upon which rested a filled punch bowl. Her black satin costume was tight across the hips and nicely

rounded knees peeped through sheer chiffon beneath the skirt.

"Ah, m'ieur," she said with a becoming blush as he arrived. "My garter, she fall. I cannot feex. You hold ze tray, yes?"

Hartley glanced down. About a slim ankle hung a bright red garter. He grinned. The babe was a honey.

"Listen, Frenchy," he said very seriously. "I'm afraid to hold the tray—afraid I'll drop it. How about me fixing the garter?"

"Ah, yes!" she said with a twinkle. "I think maybe so I let. But you take too long, no?"

"Oh no," said Hartley and dropped to his knees. The babe had swell legs. His fingers tingled as he started the garter up. This was the nuts! A break for him and the gal seemed to like it. She giggled and squirmed.

"That is not a necklace, m'sieur!"

At the word necklace he snapped the garter into place. Too late! With a dismal boom the heavy tray cracked down on the top of his head! Lightning flashed through his brain. He grabbed a sleek leg for support. A dimpled knee had been lovely to look at—but a sock in the mouth with it wasn't so funny. He measured his length on the floor.

WHEN he came to, Hartley Tate knew he'd been searched. But his hands and feet were unshackled. He pretended unconsciousness until he regained better control of his faculties. Then he opened his eyes.

He was in some sort of cellar room. There was a table there. On it, and swinging one shapely leg, was the maid. But now she wore a flowered dress; a slinky evening gown. What a sap! Right into a trap like a dim-witted rat.



"Try and make up with the Count," said a voice heavy with disgust.

His eyes turned that way. Diana! He'd often dreamed of her unclothed beauty. Well, it was no vision he gaped at now.

She was sitting there attired in nothing but tiny step-ins, skimpy bandeau, hose, and slippers. She was too damned mad to realize the extent of her nudity.

Her hands were on the floor, displaying with beautiful frankness, the superb breadth of her shoulders and the fine glossy flesh of a figure that was young, solid, and firmly rounded. Her legs were lithe, slender, their tapered length gleaming through filmy hosiery. Her flesh was flawless, taut skinned and held the high lights of whiteness that belongs only to youth. She was twenty-one.

Offered a sight he'd often dreamed about but never expected to see, Hartley looked and looked. Then he laughed. That burned up Diana. She crossed her arms over her breasts and moved one leg to a less revealing position.

"You dirty-minded, filthy-moraled moron! I think. . . ."

"We will dispense with your thoughts," clipped a voice.

The Count! He stood back of his woman who'd pretended to be a maid. Hartley was no fool. He knew that his laughter had scored a triumph. The Count couldn't understand it. He gave Hartley a hard look.

"Where's the Taveta?"

"Mrs. Courtney's wearing it," sneered Hartley.

"Don't be a fool! She's wearing the imitations. Your partner, Miss Ware, had the originals."

"Sure," Hartley agreed, "she always wears them about in her ear. Don't be a fool! They're in the safe."

"Okay," said the Count to his babe, "let's go."

"And leave them?"

"Their absence would mean trouble. Besides," he gave Hartley a dirty look, "the Tate-Ware Agency isn't going to admit they were a couple of chumps."

They went out. Hartley scrambled to his feet. Diana beat him to it. She was up and in her dress before he could get to her side. Her cheeks were flaming.

"I suppose some female made a sap out of you!"

"Ah, sweet! Well—what happened to you?"

"The Count took me out on the terrace and cracked my conk."

"He did?" said Hartley very quietly. "He did?"

"He's got more crust," Diana rambled on, "than six tons of bread. I'd like to chew his ears off, the fat head!"

"Let's go, sugar!"

They went upstairs. Ross Yates, supervising the policing of the place, was in the hall.

"Where've you been?" he asked.

"Out frying some eggs," said Diana.

"Listen, Ross!" Hartley cut in. "How about the lights?"

"Okay. I've got a man stationed at the fuse box."

"Put a man on my partner," said Diana, "he's female conscious again."

"Ditch the wise cracks," Ross warned. "Get it through your skulls that the Taveta necklace is a perfect haul for a crook. Each diamond is worth a fortune and could be easily disposed of."

"What are we suppose to do?" asked Diana. "Drag in a pack of blood-hounds?"

"Sugar," Hartley hastened to say, "let's you and me dance, huh?"



THEY went into the ballroom just as a dance ended. The band struck up a tango and the lard-haired dope dancing with Mrs. Courtney began strutting his stuff. He'd bend her low, twirl her and do everything but use her as a floor mop. Hartley, who could tango about as well as he could play a flute, stood there with Diana watching.



*There was no question. She didn't have the diamonds.*

The Count came up, smiled and made a bow to Diana.

"May I have this tango," said the guy.

"You . . . you," sputtered the enraged Hartley, "you big slob. If you think. . ."

"Shut up!" warned Diana. "I like to tango. Go roll your hoop down an alley!"

With that she smiled and drifted into the arms of the smooth Count, melting against him invitingly. Hartley burned up. But he could do nothing but stand there like a chump and watch them glide



around the floor. The Count could dance. Diana followed him with ease. Hartley, disgusted, ambled over to a table creaking with bottles of liquor. Dick Courtney was there supercharging himself with champagne. Hartley had a couple of brandies.

A cute little blonde breezed over. She was higher than a kite. Hartley gave her the once over. A hot number, he decided. He resolved to be true to Diana—for a change.

"Hello, honey," he heard himself say.

"Hello, handsome! Lonesome?"

"Awful lonesome. How about you?"

"Me, too."

"I know a cure for that. How about it?"

"Let's get drunk first."

"You *are* drunk, blondie."

"Not drunk enough, handsome."

The tango ended and the band began a fox trot. Hartley glanced at the floor. Diana and the Count were dancing near Mrs. Courtney and the gigolo but other couples were closing in. Dick Courtney let out a couple of cheeps and folded up like an accordion. Hartley shoved him under the table, grabbed the blonde, and whirled her out on the floor.

Then it happened! Then came the catastrophe! Then came that which had been guarded against!

The lights went out!

**I**NSTANTLY there was confusion and the excited babble of voices. The blonde threw her arms around Hartley, held him close and planted a gooey kiss on his neck. Her soft body was tight against him. He tried to push her away and his hands, encountering yielding softness, made her squirm. She giggled sillily and held him tighter. He was frantic! With an effort he broke free.

He shoved his way to where he'd last

seen Mrs. Courtney. Bodies impeded his progress. He started knocking persons aside. A guy punched him one in the eye. He went on. His feet struck a prostrate body. He pitched forward. A sharp slipper rammed down on his hand. He grabbed wildly, clutched cloth and began to pull himself up. A woman screamed as the fabric parted. His hands thrashed out and touched a woman's hip. She yelped again. Then a slipper struck his ribs. A woman fell on top of him. Her knee pounded down on the back of his head. His face connected with the floor. His nose flattened.

"Let me up!" he started to yell.

But someone else joined them on the floor. And another. It was a mess. Hartley lay under a pile of flailing arms and legs. He struggled. His hand touched a bare, soft leg to bring a healthy scream. A woman's bare arm banged him in the face as he managed to turn over.

Then came a measure of order as men began lighting matches.

Hartley and the others got up. The woman on top of him was a black-haired girl whose dress had been half ripped off and who now stood trying to cover her partially exposed body with her hands, and trying to look composed. Hartley got up and a guy grabbed him.

"What's the idea of tearing my wife's dress!"

Hartley, boiling mad, socked him. Then he shoved people aside and with a lighted match in his hand went to the center of the floor, where it was still dark.

Then he saw Diana!

She had the Count face down on the floor, was kneeling across his back and had a hard half-nelson on him. Her skirt was up to display the gorgeous length of her nice legs and one strap



had fallen to reveal the naked beauty of her shoulders. Hartley grinned.

"Nice, honey, nice. Where's your fan?"

"Do something!" she snarled at him. "Don't stand there like a dope!"

HE GOT out handcuffs and shackled the Count. Ross Yates came through the mob with a flashlight. Hartley hailed him. The four of them went out to the hall where servants were placing lighted candles on tables. They took the Count into the den where the insurance man was pacing the floor.

"Where's Mrs. Courtney?" Hartley asked Ross.

"In the powder room."

"Is she all right?"

"She's fine, swell. She's deader than a doornail."

"The necklace?"

"Gone. Vanished. Disappeared. Where's Dick Courtney?"

"Under the liquor table. He's out—cold!"

Ross Yates stuck his head into the hall and ordered a man to drag Dick Courtney in. Then he came back and faced the Count.

"How'd you kill her?"

"He couldn't have killed her," Diana objected.

"Why not?"

"When the lights went out I flopped him on the floor and held him there."

"A perfect alibi, huh?" said Hartley thoughtfully. "The one man who couldn't have done it. No wonder you like to tango, Count."

"Your partner," said the Count, "is a very strong woman."

"She has nice legs," said Hartley for no reason at all.

"Hart," said Diana, "your face looks

as if it went through a meat grinder. Go slop some water on it."

"Nix!" Ross cut in. "You'll have to be searched, all of you. Even a private dick might get itchy fingers for the Taveta."

"Why you sour-pussed heel!" said Diana. "How about being searched yourself?"

"Okay," said Ross and began peeling off his duds. Diana went to the end of the room while Ross and Hartley stripped and examined each other's clothing. They dressed and then searched the Count. Nothing was found.

"Diana, honey," Hartley called, "come over and peel."

Diana came over.

"I'll peel for a woman but not for you mugs."

"Do I have to be searched?" asked the insurance guy who'd been marching around.

"No," snapped Ross. "We're the only ones who left the ballroom. My men are keeping the crowd in there."

"What the hell's wrong with the lights?" Hartley asked.

"Diana," Ross said, "if you don't strip, I'll have to lock you up until a police-woman's free."

"What's wrong with the lights?" Hartley bellyached.

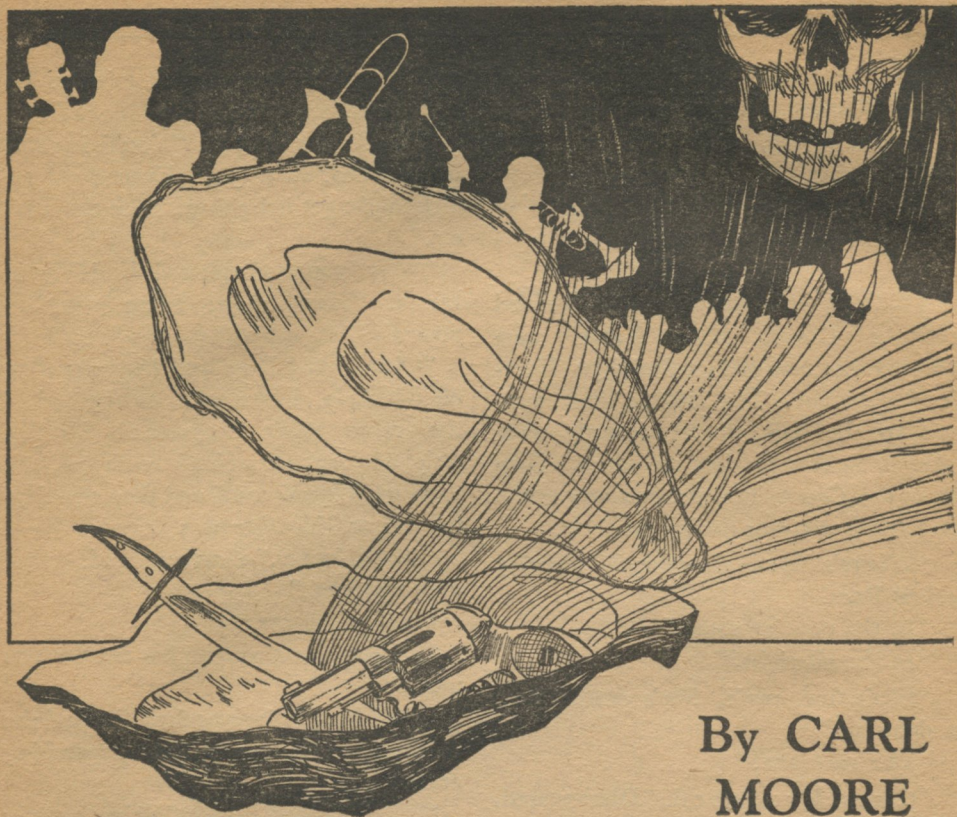
"They're out," said Diana with a scowl.

"The chauffeur's an electrician," said Ross, "I sent him to fix the lights. Come on, Diana! Strip!"

"All right, damn it!" she raged and grabbed the hem of her skirt. With a deft motion she flopped it over her head and gave it to Ross. She stood there in nothing but dainty underthings, and hose, as she kicked off her slippers. She turned for them. Eyes popped. Her

*(Continued on page 101)*





By CARL  
MOORE

# DEATH on the

**L**UIGI'S was crowded, as always. The lights were dim, the floor-show in progress, six semi-nude chorines prancing and posturing for the benefit of those at the ringside tables.

At the long black and chromium bar that ran along the east wall a solitary woman toyed with a cocktail. Her dress was extreme, daring, hardly covering soft rounded breasts. It was backless to reveal smooth white flesh from rounded shoulders almost to the small tapered waistline.

She half sat on the padded stool, gaz-

ing in the mirror at a little man who sat alone at a table in a dark corner. The little man was gesturing vigorously with his right hand. Puzzled, she gazed down, saw that her gown had been pinched to the stool as she sat down, that a long length of spiderweb chiffoned leg was attracting more attention than the floor-show, shadowy chiffon topped by a gleaming inch of white flesh.

Nora Fanning, girl Friday to the town's most popular columnist, made a moué in the mirror, pulled the dress down a scant three inches, and grinned





*To protect a woman's honor Philip Ashton has allowed himself to be hooked into a crooked lottery racket. Johnny Harding, ace columnist—the man who understands women!—attempts to save the public's money!*

# HALF SHELL

impudently. Sitting alone at the darkened table, Johnny Harding shrugged hopelessly, turned wearily back to the floorshow.

A woman came unobtrusively from the restroom on the right. For a moment she stood there glancing about, then located Johnny Harding and moved toward him. Her hips were liquid beneath the tight sheath of her expensive gown, her whole body vibrant and alluring. Walking toward him, she anxiously scanned every face visible in the dim

light. Just as applause broke out for the floorshow, she sank down at Johnny Harding's table.

NORA Fanning slid off the stool, went swiftly to the checkstand and asked a question. A second later she ran to the front of the nightclub, questioned the doorman, favored him with a radiant smile as he answered.

At the table, Johnny Harding said, "Hello, Gloria," quietly, and gazed at his companion.



Her breasts heaved, her lips were twisted in a half snarl. "Well, I came, didn't I? You thought I'd be afraid!"

"Why, no," quietly again from the little man. "I've accused you of lots of things, Gloria, but never of lack of nerve." He beckoned a waiter. "I've ordered, what will you have?"

"Scotch, double." The waiter cat-footed away. Harding's eyes found his secretary, Nora Fanning, once more back on her stool at the bar. She shook her head from side to side. Harding grinned. The signal meant that his companion had come alone.

Gloria Glane's voice interrupted. "The rat! We've never been friends, Johnny Harding, but I'm doing you a favor tonight. I've got the dope—enough stuff to send him up for the rest of his yellow life, and you can have it. But you've got to promise one thing!"

Johnny nodded, his eyes inscrutable.

"You've got to promise to stick the whole gang. No matter how big a man's name is, he's got to go like the rest of them! I don't mind telling you, you're going to be surprised. One of the biggest names in America heads this list I've got and he's the man I'm after, damn him!"

The waiter arrived, put the drink before the lady, a tremendous iced platter before Johnny Harding.

"Who?" asked Johnny softly leaning across the table.

She reached in her bosom, extracted a folded piece of paper. Johnny reached eagerly. Suddenly the woman snatched the paper back, thrust it into her bosom, her eyes darting across the room, her breath hissing through her teeth.

A dapper, baldheaded man, immaculately dressed, had entered the cafe, leaned against the bar. Beside him lounged six feet three of dinner-coated gorilla, his

little eyes peering about the dimly lighted room, a snarl on his lips. The bald-headed man was smiling convivially at Nora Fanning, who frowned into the mirror.

"Benny Frey," said Johnny. "Benny and his bodyguard! Don't be scared, just act natural."

"He'll suspect if he sees us together," the woman half whimpered. The soft voice of the waiter broke in.

"Everything is satisfactory, Mr. Harding? The cocktail, the oysters?"

"Sure, sure, Henri. The oysters look delicious. Nothing like Lynnhavens!" Jocosely he continued to the woman, "Will you have an oyster, Gloria?"

The woman gulped her drink, laughed harshly, too loud, too strained. "I certainly will," she giggled and seized a fork, leaned across the table and dug a succulent oyster from its half shell. The waiter smiled, moved away a few feet to lean against a pillar.

Gloria Glane groaned, "I'm afraid, I'm afraid."

**S**UDDENLY her eyes grew startled. She pushed back her chair so viciously that it clattered to the floor.

"Ah! ah! ah!" she choked and gripped her throat tightly in both hands. The scream that rang from her loose lips was one of agony and pain, the zenith of suffering. Everyone turned. Chairs scraped. Even the music stopped. Again that scream. Harding leaped to his feet, the waiter sprang forward.

"Ah! ah! ah!" screeched the former Follies beauty, fell over her chair, struggled to her feet. There was no restraining her. Like a tortured animal she tore loose from those who tried to hold her, ran blindly across the room, and brought up with a crash against the square pillar.

"Lights, damn it, lights!" roared



Johnny Harding as he sprang after her.

Instead of flaming higher the lights went out.

There were other screams in the blackness, the sound of crashing dishes, falling chairs. Plunging forward Harding caromed off a pair of shoulders, rebounded from the pillar itself, and stumbled over the fallen woman. His face crashed against the floor. The lights came on just as he got to his feet.

Gloria Glane lay sprawled grotesquely, her face a bloody mass, at the base of the pillar. Her hands were gripped tightly at her throat. Even through the mass of blood the agony of her death was evident, eyes protruding wildly, reddened mouth contorted by pain, white teeth firmly clamped on a full lower lip. Johnny stared fascinated. The daring gown had been ripped from her shoulders, now crumpled about her waist, exposing young white breasts that would rise and fall no more.

The frantic Luigi, accompanied by a bluecoated copper, pushed through the crowd. The copper knelt beside the woman, placed a rough hand on her heart. "She's dead," he said just as a square-shouldered man in a derby hat pushed through the crowd. "She's dead as hell, Mr. Nobles."

Bill Nobles, head of the homicide squad, glanced about, caught sight of Johnny wiping blood from a dripping nose. He grinned. "What happened to you, Paul Pry? Stand back, folks, while the survivor gives the details."

Johnny frowned. "It was oysters," he said. "I had half a dozen Lynnhavens. She ate one and—"

"No, no," wailed Luigi, "my oysters are of the best, they are of the freshest, they—"

NOBLES was crowding through the gaping onlookers, following Johnny Harding toward the table where he had been seated. "She reached over and got one——" explained Johnny and stopped. On the platter of finely chipped, garnished ice, reposed six oyster shells. Each shell was empty. Johnny blustered as Nobles raised his brows. "I never touched them," he began and suddenly whirled away toward the kitchen.

"Where——?" began Nobles, matching him stride for stride.

"The pantry," barked Johnny over his shoulder. "Something screwy about this." He pushed through the crowd of cooks and kitchen help, led Nobles through the swinging door into the deserted kitchen. To the right a series of huge iceboxes, making an alcove. He stepped into this pantry, drew back so violently as to bump Bill Nobles.

"What is it?"

Johnny stepped aside, Bill Nobles barged in. A white-clad figure sprawled face downward on the tiled floor of the pantry. Callously Nobles turned it over, saw a brown face, a mop of tousled black hair. The hilt of a knife protruded from the hollow between collar bone and neck base.

Nobles felt the pulse, shook his head, withdrew a handkerchief from his pocket to wrap the handle. Then cautiously he pulled. The knife held. He placed a hand on the dead man's neck and tugged mightily. Johnny Harding turned his head and retched. A little at a time, as if reluctant to let loose, the knife slipped out. A welter of blood followed its unwilling exit. Nobles' face was white as he arose to lay it on the zinc bench. It was a sandwich knife, fourteen inches long.

"*Madre de Dios,*" gasped a voice. Johnny whirled, gazed into the face of a









he did with the money! Nobody showed. So—"

SHE was standing before him now, her breasts rising and falling, her eyes flashing in excitement. "You fool! You little fool! They'll bump you off! Can't you see those oysters were meant for you, can't you see——?"

Johnny grinned wryly, started to speak. The phone interrupted. He picked it up.

"Hello, hello. Yes, this is—Hello, Bill! What did you find? Ohhhhhhhh." His eyes narrowed, his mouth twisted. "Hydrocyanic acid, eh. Okay. Thanks. No, I've told you the only things that happened, I'm not holding out. What are you going to do? Close Luigi's place and question all employees? Thanks."

The phone clicked. He lit a cigarette.

"Babe," he said, "that cinches it. Someone puts hydrocyanic acid in an oyster meant for me. The dame gets it. The lights go out. The rest of the oysters disappear. The list the dame was giving me—the list of the next winners, already fixed, damn it—disappears—and a pantry boy is murdered. Do you follow me?"

The girl was tense, excited. "You think Benny Frey——?"

"I don't know. Who was close to the table? The waiter, Henri, Frey, and his bodyguard. Somebody persuaded the pantry boy to put the stuff in the oysters, then bumped him to keep him from talking. Captain Kidd stuff! Listen, baby, I've got clothes in the closet there. While I change, get Luigi on the phone and find out where Henri the waiter lives. I've got to see that punk."

He disappeared into an anteroom while Nora Fanning, all excitement, rattled the hook of the phone.



THIRTY minutes later the cab let him out in front of a brownstone with a dim light burning in the hallway. Harding examined the mailboxes closely, tiptoed up the broad stairs to the third floor. For long minutes he listened at a dark door. No sound. Cautiously he tried the knob. To his surprise the door was open. Blackness omnipotent, bleak, inside. Should he—

He pushed the door open, fumbled for the light. He gasped, started back. In the very center of the floor, half sprawled over the small table, was Henri, the waiter. Henri would never give Johnny Harding the information he desired, for Henri was pinned to that table by a knife that pierced his contorted body and sank deep into the hard wood.

The apartment was a shambles. Pictures were awry, drawers were open, papers scattered about, rugs pulled back. Through a doorway he saw a bedroom, the covers tossed to the floor, the mattress a ripped thing bereft of padding. So Henri had gone the way of the pantry boy!

Johnny touched him, started to turn him over, then jerked back as he noted the blood on his own hands. *The corpse was still warm.* He hurried to an adjoining bathroom, turned on the water. The water roared into the bowl as he rubbed his hands with soap.

The water did not go down. He turned it off, peered closer, saw a grey mass in the drain. With a nail file he pried it loose. It was an oyster. He sniffed at it, recognized the odor of almonds, and dropped it in his pocket, drying his hands on a dirty bathtowel.

As he came out of the bathroom into the darkened bedroom, the corpse on the living room table drew his eyes as a lodestone draws steel filings. He sensed rather than saw the darker blotch in the

blackness, sensed movement. Instinct made him dodge sideways so that the descending blackjack got his shoulder rather than his temple. But before he could roll, the assailant was on him, the shotbag rose and fell again, this time with greater precision. Johnny Harding pressed his face against the carpet and quivered once—then lay still.

WHEN he awakened, day had started. Sun beat in an eastern window to throw its heat and light on his throbbing head. Johnny groaned, and sat up, shook his head from side to side. The first thing he noticed was a roll of paper between the fingers of his right hand. Slowly he unrolled it, focused his eyes. It was a note. It said:

"Even you ought to know we mean business now. Lay off and collect a grand a month for being wise. Keep on, and end up with a belly full of lead.

"You Know Who."

He grinned wryly, managed to make his feet totter back into the bathroom. Cold water in handfuls eased the ache in his head, a swiftly running comb smoothed the hair back into place. A few minutes later he hailed a cab in front of the place, gave an address.

Not long afterward, the cab drew up in front of a huge apartment house. Johnny paid the cabby, handed him a small package done up crudely in an old envelope. "Take this to the *Daily Telegraph* office," he said, "and give it to Miss Nora Fanning. Tell her to hang on to it until she hears from me."

He added another bill to the fare, watched the cab roar away and walked up a few steps that led to Philip Ashton's apartment. Philip Ashton, society blueblood, polo player, retired bank president, whose name decorated the lit-



erature of the Monthly Treasure Hunt, the supposed Legitimate Lottery which Johnny Harding knew was crooked.

A man answered the bell. No, Mr. Ashton wasn't seeing anyone this morning, not even a special representative of the press. With his foot in the door, Johnny's right hand suddenly shot forward, cupped the frozen faced servant's chin and shoved him violently backward. The door swung to: Johnny stepped in. Disregarding the fallen servant he walked down the hallway shouting, "Mr. Ashton, Mr. Ashton."

HE found Philip Ashton, white-faced with rage, at his breakfast table. A dream in negligee sat opposite him, a dream with blonde hair, baby blue eyes, and pouting lips.

"This is an outrage," sputtered Philip Ashton, on his feet.

"It certainly is," agreed Johnny and grinned at the girl who smiled back. "I want to talk to you, Ashton. I'm Harding of the *Telegraph*. Can we talk alone about *your lottery*?"

The man sputtered, seized a glass of water and drank it. Then stiffly he walked into a living room, followed by Johnny Harding.

"Can I have a drink?" asked the little newspaper man, noting a tabouret. Without waiting for an answer, he tossed one off. Finished he said, "I'll use your phone, Ashton." He did.

"Homicide department? Bill Nobles, please. Hello, Bill? Johnny. I've got a hunch that if you'll go out to 1523 Weymouth, third floor rear you'll find something interesting. A dead man, Bill. A guy named Henri, that used to be a waiter at Luigi's. I'll call back." He hung up, grinned.

Ashton's face turned white. Johnny said, "That's three, Ashton. Three mur-

ders, three cold blooded killings, all due to you. Because you went crooked, because you let your name be mixed in this lottery business! Listen, did you ever see the electric chair? You know what they do? They shave your head and split your trouser leg, and they put a mask over your face. An electrode on your shaven head, another on your bare leg—"

"Stop!" Ashton poured himself a double drink, gulped it. "You mean they can hold *me* for murder?" As Johnny nodded his head, the man groaned, buried his face in his hands.

"Ah, God, what will I do, what will I do!"

Johnny Harding let him go for a moment. Then he spoke. "Ashton, I've known about you for years. Your name was always held up before us as impeccable, the real blueblood of this town. The time has come now to cut yourself loose from this thing. I know you're in it because you can't help yourself. Who is holding something over your head and what is it he's holding?"

"I—can't tell—you," groaned the man.

"Sure you can," said Johnny. "You'll get protection. I'm giving my word. I know some racketeer is behind this. The drawings are fakes. The men that win the jack turn it back in. Tell me all the details. You've got to do it, man."

"I can't tell you, Harding, because—" The man's face was suddenly old. He arose, walked feebly to the wall, swung a picture aside and disclosed a wall safe.

From it he extracted several papers, walked wearily back to Harding and dropped them on the table. "That's the reason," he said hoarsely. "There's nothing I can do, Harding, nothing at all."

THE first was a photograph. Harding gasped at the glossy print. It pic-



tured the laughing face of a beautiful girl whom he recognized. She was seated on the lap of a man in a big chair. Her skirt was in her lap, disclosing long curved legs, stockings topped by white. The hanging shoulderstraps revealed much of her upper body, frankly, unashamed. One arm was about the man's neck, the other grasped a whiskey bottle which she waved aloft. *The girl was the blonde he had seen at the breakfast table with Philip Ashton. The man was Benny Frey.*

Johnny turned it over, picked up the second paper. He whistled audibly between his teeth as Ashton reached for the liquor bottle. The second paper was a wedding certificate, showing that Mildred Inez Ashton had been united in the holy bonds of matrimony with Benjamin Alfred Frey on August 31st by Justice Eli Marshall of Greenport.

He flipped it aside, picked up the third and last paper. It was a letter, reading, "Ashton. These speak for themselves. Obey our instructions to the letter or the newspapers get the whole story. Of course your daughter was drunk when it happened, but what's the difference? Tear these up if you like; one's a photostat, the other merely a print." It was unsigned.

JOHNNY grunted and laid the three on the table. "I see, Ashton. Rather than endanger the girl's reputation, you allow your name to be used as the head of a phony lottery. Have you checked all this? If my reports are right, and I think they are, that precious daughter of yours hasn't much reputation to lose anyway!"

Philip Ashton groaned. "She's my daughter, Harding. I love her. She isn't bad, just a little wild. I can't let

them publish this! I can't! I can't! Why she's just a baby!"

Again Harding grunted, thinking of the blonde at the breakfast table, with soft enticing curves, eyes that held knowledge of the ways of the world. A baby! Still he answered slowly.

"Okay, Ashton. You've done your part. I said you'd get protection. I give you my word that none of this will appear in the papers. But I'll break that louse, Benny Frey if—Say, by the way, why did Gloria Glane hate you so?"

Ashton flushed. Slowly he said, "Miss Glane was a very dear friend of mine up until a few months ago, when I found she was a bad influence on my daughter. After we parted, she—"

"Okay," said Johnny and reached for the phone.

Presently, "Nora? Johnny. Listen, get Eli Marshall, the marrying Justice of Greenport on the phone and ask him if he married Mildred Ashton and Benny Frey on August 31st. I'll call you back. If you can't get him, go out there." He hung up, got to his feet before she could retort.

Ashton said, "Now what?"

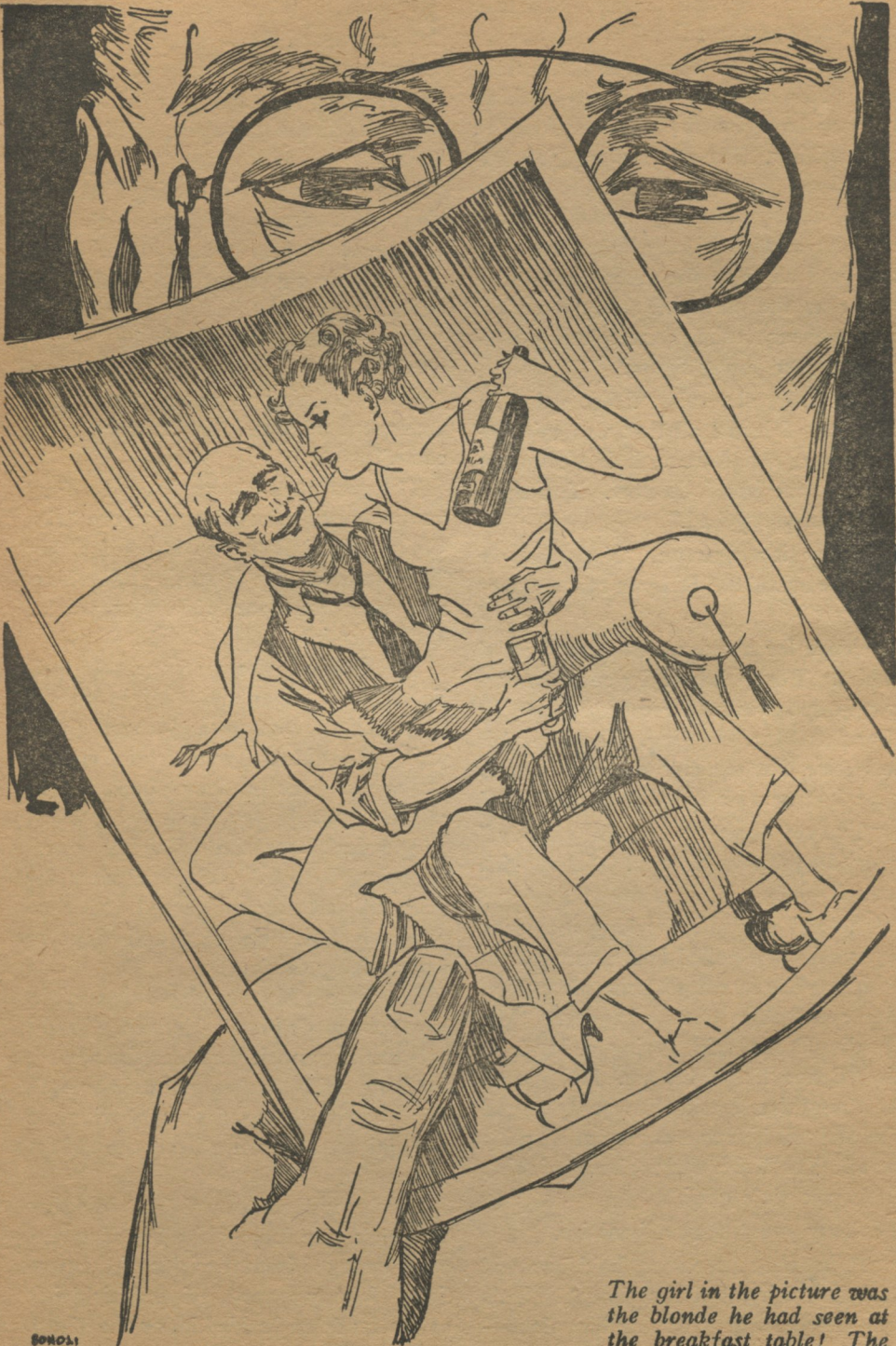
Harding dialed another number. "Nobles? Harding. Don't bother me with damned fool question but get a bunch of cops out to Philip Ashton's house as soon as possible. Guard him constantly. I think someone will try to knock him off!"

Again the phone clicked. Johnny seized his hat, "I'm on my way, Ashton. Sit tight and I'll be seeing you."

Ashton, colorless, a defeated and hopeless man sat with his head bowed.

Harding made the front of the house, signaled a passing cab. A long, low roadster slid into the stop ahead of the cab. The woman behind the wheel threw open the door.





*The girl in the picture was the blonde he had seen at the breakfast table! The man was Benny Frey!*



"Get in," she said smiling. "I'll take you where you're going."

Johnny got in. It was Mildred Ashton. From the corner of his eye, waiting for her to open the conversation, he watched her. She was smiling, full lips half parted, eyes alert. Her dress hung above knees gleaming through glossy chiffon, and her long, rounded legs stretched away to the clutch and accelerator as the car sped through traffic. Her sweater outlined the alluring contours of her young figure.

Eventually she said, "I listened, Mr. Harding. I heard all that was said between you and father. I didn't understand before but I do now. You must think I'm pretty bad."

Johnny lit a cigarette. "Nope, kid, we all make mistakes. Did you really marry that rat?"

Silence for a second, then she turned to him. "I don't know. I went on a party and got drunk. I remember nothing after that. Mr. Harding, if I did, and if he's using that as a club over my father's head, how can I help? I'll do anything."

"You've done too much already," snorted Johnny bitterly. "You rich brats!"

The girl was still for long moments. Eventually she pulled into a vacant spot at the curb before a glittering drugstore. Her eyes held a touch of appeal. "Mr. Harding," she said, laying a hand on his, "Benny Frey likes me. He'll do almost anything I ask. I'm going to call him and tell him to meet me at a spot I know. You'll be there ahead of him. Have you got a gun?"

Johnny grunted an affirmative.

"Then when he comes, hold him up! Beat the truth out of him, the rat! That's your only chance of getting him alone—when he comes to see me."

**B**EFORE Johnny could protest, she was out of the car, running into the drugstore. He sat there smoking, turning the thing over and over for long moments, until she came out, smiling jubilantly.

"He's coming, he's coming!" she exclaimed, tossing a package to the seat and clambering in. She slid the car in gear, let the clutch out and headed into traffic.

Johnny said, "Where is he to meet you?"

"Oh," dodging around a truck, "at an apartment of mine. Don't worry, he'll come."

The apartment was on South St. Paul, an unimposing building of dirty brick. On the third floor she inserted a key. "Welcome to my house," she grinned and flung the door wide. Johnny followed her in.

She opened the package. It held Scotch and ginger ale. "Might as well have a little comfort and cheer as we wait," she said, and went for ice cubes.

She was gone too long. Impatient he called, "Miss Ashton, Miss Ashton."

A voice from the adjoining room. "Coming, Johnny." A second later she emerged and Johnny gasped. "It's so damnably hot," she said and went to work mixing drinks.

She wore a black negligee that might have been made from spiderweb. Caught only at the waist, it parted as she moved, tempting with flashes of satin-smooth skin, warm pulsing flesh that vibrated and quivered as she stirred the drinks vigorously.

As she walked toward him bringing his drink, one long white leg after another emerged from the folds of the negligee. Johnny gasped, gripped his drink as she sat down beside him on the divan. She folded one leg beneath her, revealing



inches of white flesh as if unintentionally. She raised the glass, "To rats," she said, "to rats of every variety."

Johnny gulped and drank. He said, "What time did Frey agree to meet you here?"

"At noon."

The clock read 10:55. Johnny shifted uneasily. Suddenly the girl leaned her head on the arm of the divan and began to sob.

He waited a moment, said stiffly, "There's nothing to cry about, Miss Ashton. I—"

"You don't understand, Johnny, you don't understand! Everybody thinks I'm no good, thinks I'm immoral! I can't help how I feel, can I, Johnny? If things just rise up in me—"

"There, there," he soothed and patted her shoulder.

"I want to die, I want to die," she moaned and turned, suddenly flinging her arms about his surprised neck. He tried to dodge, tried to pull away. Soft young flesh burned against him, round arms pulled him closer. In another moment she had wriggled and shifted herself onto his lap.

"I want to die," she moaned. "They all hate me, despise me, even you!"

"I don't despise—" he managed, then her mouth found his. Her lips were loose, an avid flame, her body an enveloping cloak of fire.

Presently she drew away. "You don't hate me," she breathed. He groaned and drew her back, sought her mouth. Her lips parted moistly beneath his. Again Harding groaned.

MINUTES later she drew away again. Through bleared eyes, Johnny Harding gazed at her. He had not heard the key in the lock, the click of the door-knob. When he turned, following her

gaze, he looked directly into the scornful eyes of Nora Fanning, who stood white faced and tense just inside the door. Behind her, gun in hand, stood Benny Frey, an evil smile on his lips.

Benny spoke. "Excuse me, please. Are we butting in? Stick 'em up, Harding!"

Mildred Ashton arose smiling. She said, "Gee, Benny, I thought you'd never come. So you got the dame, too!"

Benny nodded, dodged Mildred's outstretched arms, and walked toward Harding. He took Johnny's .32 from his shoulder holster, tossed it contemptuously across the room, where it lit in a Cogswell chair. "Stay off, baby, don't get in line. Thanks for calling. Well, Harding, you got your nose in too deep this time, didn't you? You and this babe here, your secretary. She's not a bad number!" His little eyes undressed the white faced Nora. "I picked her up just as she was starting for Greenport to see the Justice of the Peace."

Harding, hands in air, said, "You're all washed up, Benny. I got the dope on you and I've turned it over to my paper. The next edition will see the Ashton Treasure Hunt blown sky high. You're finished."

Frey laughed. "No, no, don't stall, Johnny! A week from today is the drawing and I can hang on that long. Know what you're fooling with? Know what that last week's ticket sales will bring? Half a million, Harding, and you won't stand in the way!"

"What are you going to do?"

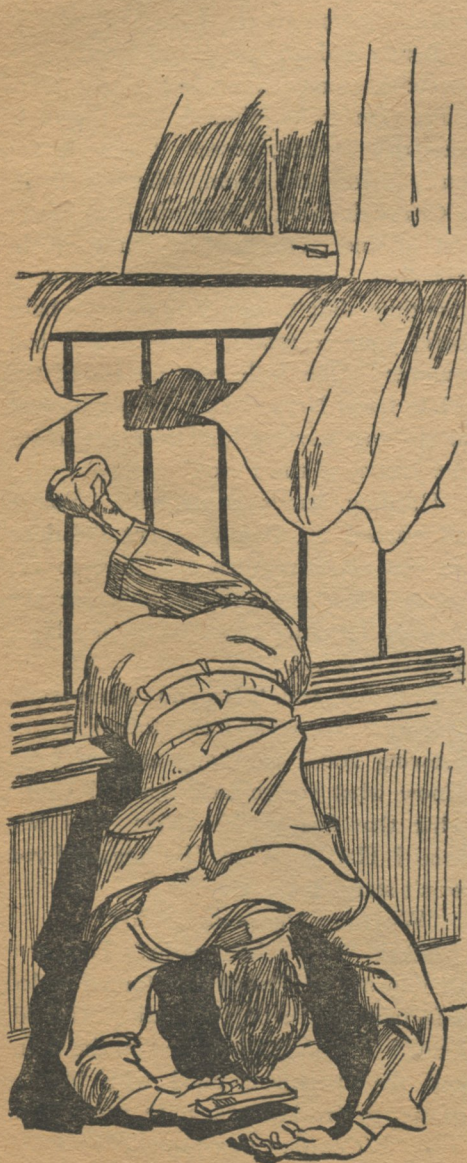
"Do? What's left to do? This is a soundproof apartment and for an added safeguard—turn on the radio, Mildred, loud!" As the girl switched on the radio and the apartment filled with blaring music, the racketeer's voice rose. "I'm

(Continued on page 120)



# The 15<sup>th</sup>

*In fourteen of the dead man's pockets there was something. What had the lower vest pocket held? Handrahan knows that one of the three women in the case holds the secret*



PATROLMAN Angus Mac-laren shot a blast through his whistle to start the crosstown flow of traffic at Seventh Avenue. The red cab at the head of the line was blocking the street; all the cars jammed behind set up a frantic hooting and howling with their horns. The patrolman's whistle shrieked again. He batted the air with his mighty right arm; then his face turned copper with fury and he hiked up to the cab to climb all over the driver.

There was a passenger in the cab, a well-padded gentleman of fifty-odd winters who was engaged in staring at the second button of Mac-laren's uniform. The flag was up, the driver absent, and the pink-jowled gentleman was very, very dead. A small blue hole was countersunk in the middle of the forehead. There was blood. A trickle of it crawled down past the Roman nose like a red angleworm. Mac-laren's face roughened with goose-flesh and lost its color. He said, "Well, I'll be a—"

He let traffic go to hell, heaved himself into the cab, and did his best to burn the tread off the tires in the sprint to headquarters. It was very thoughtful of the driver to



# POCKET

*First the concussion. Then a man fell in the window and landed on his head!*

By  
ROBERT A.  
GARRON





leave the keys in the ignition and the motor running.

"If it wasn't for the bullet wounds," Chief Hughes remarked, "I'd say he was knocked down and run over. Look how he's battered around the head and shoulders. He must have put up a hell of a fight."

"J. Wilson Bannon, vice-president of Lord's. That's lingerie, isn't it?" Sergeant Handrahan queried.

"Panties, brassieres, slips, hose, and all that stuff. Yeah. But he wasn't any softie."

"No. This driver turned into an alley somewhere, leaned into the back seat and slugged him. But he didn't stay slugged. They had a go of it then, and the driver shot him in the stomach. Bannon kept right on tangling, and the driver shot him through the head. Then he props Bannon up to look natural, runs the cab to Seventh and scrams. Maclaren didn't see anyone leave the cab, and no one else did either. This is a screwloose homicide if I ever saw one."

"Got the driver?"

"Felix Koven; a little runt with a puss so mean he looks as though he could bite his mother's ears off. Bennie Sourby went after him." Handrahan lifted the combination piece from the telephone set on his desk and dialed the Wellesley Garage, still talking to Hughes. "There's nobody home on this case. The Lord Building is closed, and the maid up at the Bannon residence doesn't know where Mrs. Bannon is. If she's in on this, she's dumb not to be home right now. Hello, Wellesley? Police Head-

quarters; if Sourby is still there put him on."

"I'll break that bird," Hughes threatened. "If he thinks he's going to put this case to bed all by his little lonesome, I'll stick him right back into a uniform."

"Hello, Sourby?" Handrahan barked. "What are you doing over there? What are you waiting for?"

SOURBY squawked, explaining, "This Koven mug just come in. He's got'n egg on his dome like a baseball. He says he picked up a fare around five-thirty near the Lord Building, and this fare slugged him and hijacked his hack. The manager here says no driver of his ever shot a fare, and they're both getting tough. How many guys do you think I am, anyhow?"

"The driver claims he wasn't in the hack. Someone slugged him and took it away from him," Handrahan told Hughes. "All right, Sourby. Bring in Koven for questioning; that's all we want him for."

Handrahan stood up and crammed on his hat. He said, "All men are liars and all men are fools, and that goes for women. Bennie Sourby was probably giving Koven the works when I called, and the Bannon maid knows damned well where Mrs. Bannon is."

"And Bannon was the fare that put the bump on Koven's dome," Hughes added. "Thank God this thing is open and shut. We can put a crimp in this rumble before it gets started. Have you seen the extras?"

"Not to look at. Murders are like women; they're all the same."



"Yes, they're are different, at that," Hughes admitted. "The fact is, nothing in Bannon's pockets was touched; he had a platinum watch in a hunting case, a platinum pencil, an emerald ring, and a hundred and seventy-four fish in his wallet. So it looks like Mrs. Bannon. Bring her back with you."

"That's what I had in mind," Handrahan confessed dryly, pulling down the brim of his hat. "Call me at the Bannon place and let me know what you wring out of Koven."

A SIMPLE plot easy to unravel, Handrahan thought, as he hiked down the corridor and went outside to his car. Bannon was not robbed; therefore the killer was either in the hire of Mrs. Bannon or someone in the Lord company. But anyone in line for advancement at Lord's would probably not risk putting himself under suspicion in a scheme like this. On the other hand, Mrs. Bannon ought to be smarter than to try such a bald means of getting hold of her husband's estate.

If Koven was the murderer, in Mrs. Bannon's hire, he had done a dangerous thing in reporting back to his office instead of taking it on the lam. Again, that was a smart, an innocent thing to do. . . .

The Bannon murder ran so true to form that it was phony. The idea was getting deeper into Handrahan's hair as he neared the Bannon place on the Drive. He was slowing when the sedan drew alongside and crowded him. The windows of the other machine were down. Handrahan's were not. The

other driver stuck a thirty-eight automatic through the window and began firing point-blank.

The first bullet skinned under Handrahan's nose. Spontaneously he chucked himself downward to the floor-boards, cramming himself under the steering column. He held on to the lower round of the steering wheel and turned it sharply; with his other hand he jammed the accelerator pedal down as far as it would go.

The car leaped forward screwily and hurdled the curbing while the gunman emptied his whole clip. One slug slanted into the instrument board and smashed the speedometer. Chips of glass showered on Handrahan's arms and shoulders. The car bucked to a violent, rending stop as it slewed through the grass squarely into one of the big trees on the boulevard.

The sergeant blundered out of the car, drawing his gun. He looked around groggily for a target, but his man had rounded the next corner; all Handrahan saw was the rear end of the machine as it got away across town.

The shock had pitched him into the steering post and nearly opened his scalp; he returned to his machine swearing and rubbing the young goose-egg growing on the side of his head. The bumper had bent like a piece of wire, and the left fender was crumpled. Headlight shattered. The left front wheel was thrown far out of alignment, but the car would still run under its own power.

Handrahan backed it from the boulevard into the Drive and ordered two machines with drivers



who had stopped to rubberneck to get on their way. Handrahan continued forward on the Drive, passed the intersection and stopped in front of the Bannon mansion on the corner. He hiked up the walk brushing the powdered glass from his jacket. All the bullets but one had passed through the windows of the car, and that lone bullet had barely nicked the frame of the door.

**B**ANNON'S murder, he decided, was very definitely a plant. At point-blank range, the gunman had missed him entirely. An obvious move to take him off the scent. The gunman had tried to kill him, but hadn't tried too hard. And it looked very much like the work of the amateur who had bungled the murder of Bannon. The man was a lousy shot, not a professional.

Handrahan had to let the knocker sound twice more before the maid opened the door. She was young, with a sweet body, a fluff of honey-blond hair. The robe she wore had been hastily restrained with a silk rope; what Handrahan could see of her shoulders and the first prominence of youthful contours was dewy and fragrant, as though she had just come from the bath. She had.

"I want to see Mrs. Bannon," said Handrahan.

"She's not at home." The maid felt back a little.

"All right. Got to use the telephone. D'you mind showing me where you keep it?" He stuck out his fist and opened it so that she could see the gleam of his badge nestled in the palm. She nodded

and he stepped all the way in, closing the massive door behind himself.

A looker, he thought, as he followed her into a spacious hall and through it into a sumptuous living room. Bannon never had to go far. . . . This little bim had a dandy pair of legs; the damp robe clung to her revealingly as she walked, and hid nothing of her firm, rounded hips.



Taking the telephone, Handrahan dialed headquarters; the maid remained near, and the sergeant saw no particular reason why he should chase her away. She sat on the arm of an oversize lounge near the telephone stand and swung her left leg; with each swing the parted robe slipped a trifle farther, disclosing a little more of that white



thigh, and a little more. The girl didn't seem to be aware of it, as though she felt entirely innocent about herself.

"Handrahan," he said when he got Chief Hughes. "Have you got Sourby and Koven down there yet?"

"Yes, they're here," Hughes answered. "Koven sticks to his story. He can even describe the fellow who slugged him."

"Let's have it."

"Routine description. About five feet ten, blond hair. A nose, a mouth, a chin, eyes, and ears. Two hands and two feet. He was wearing a tan-like double breasted. That's medium tan, I guess."

"Nothing else? How about a short, bluish scar on the bridge of his nose? Or was it grease?"

"Say, what is this? You didn't see that guy, did you?"



*It was a short, stiff  
one on the side of the  
jaw.*

Sokol



"I did, and he shot at me, and he missed me so many times you'd laugh. Koven must be telling a straight yarn. Send Sourby up here with that car of his."

"Getting into trouble?"

Handrahan slanted a look at the maid perched on the lounge and said, "Not exactly. I'm going after Mrs. Bannon in Sourby's car. Mine is full of holes and I want him to run it down to the garage."

"He'll like that."

Handrahan hung up, and gave the maid a thoughtful grin. She blushed and stood up, straightening the robe. The sergeant hiked over to the lounge and dropped himself in it, extending his legs.

"Where's Mrs. Bannon?" he asked.

"I don't know. Really I don't," she protested.

NICE voice. Handrahan said, "Sit down here for a minute, youngster. You can't lie worth a damn in spite of those blue eyes of yours. Mr. Bannon has been murdered."

"Oh-h-h," the girl said, sitting down in the nook of the lounge. Her eyes were very wide. "But you don't think Mrs. Bannon—?"

"No. Did you hear that shooting?"

"I thought it must be a car back-firing."

"Someone is trying very hard to put Mrs. Bannon in a hole. Someone wants us to think that Mrs. Bannon hired him to kill her husband, and the murderer bungled the job." Handrahan was thinking aloud. "The man we're after is either a homicidal maniac, or else—

Listen, youngster. Did Mr. Bannon carry anything around with him that was worth a lot of money? Some object like a jewel? A diamond or emerald or something?"

"Why, not that I know of."

"Ever handle his clothes? Hang them up and stuff?"

"Yes," she admitted demurely.

"But I never noticed anything special, and I never heard of anything that he carried."

Handrahan idly touched the robe covering the girl's knee and found that it would slip up in spite of the fact that it was damp. She didn't mind, and it wasn't that she didn't dare mind. She quivered slightly; her breathing quickened, and she watched him with an almost imperceptible smile.

"Where's Mrs. Bannon, blue-eyes?" said Handrahan. "Who's the man?"

"Well, Mr. Emory—"

"Wallace Emory, up here on the Drive? So that's the way it is, eh? So. Mr. Bannon wasn't expected home tonight."

"No, Mr. Handrahan."

"Where was he going? Come on, tell uncle."

The sergeant was not an ugly man and had his own shrewd ways of obtaining information; also, he was human. The girl moved closer in response to the slightest pressure of his hand; her arms were hugged deliciously to her sides, her shoulders raised, so that he saw the full satin curves of her torso.

"Mr. Bannon was going to be at Glenda Haworth's," she said. Her voice trembled slightly.

"Who is Glenda Haworth?"

"His secretary."



"At Lord's? Where does she live?"

"At 1428 Cleveland Avenue. Apartment 3A."

"You know all the answers, don't you, sweetheart? Where were you going when I knocked?"

"Out. Really, Lieutenant Handrahan, just out." She laughed.

"So that's the kind of him you are." His arm tightened around her. "That's why you were disappointed when I told you Mr. Bannon had been murdered. You were getting ready to go down to his secretary's when I got here."

"Oh, no, Captain Handrahan."

"Like hell! You've been checking up on Bannon for weeks. Your little game of blackmail was just about ripe, but some outsider cut in and left you out in the cold. This is a dandy set-up, I must say. You would have had both Mr. and Mrs. Bannon on the spot and you were going to play the game both ways."

"Oh, no, Sergeant Handrahan." She looked at him steadily with tears forming in her eyes. Wide eyes. Sergeant Handrahan was a sucker for tears, and her scarlet lips trembled invitingly. Spontaneously their lips were crushed together moistly, intimately. As though in defense, she allowed her body to melt against his. . . .

She was wearing an inconsequential, lacy trifle. Handrahan turned down the hem of the garment so that the label was revealed: Lord's. Though she accepted gifts from Bannon she was ready to blackmail him. It was in her voice. The orchid garment was the filmiest, most expensive Lord product, not the kind that would be

included ordinarily in a maid's budget. Handrahan whipped his open hand across her face, and she flinched without saying anything.

"You little tramp," he said with soft anger.

She closed her eyes and didn't move at all.

"A MAN is likely to have fifteen pockets in his clothes, not including his overcoat," Handrahan said to Bennie Sourby. Sourby was riding five blocks up the drive with him to Wallace Emory's. "And if he wants to be fancy he can have from twenty-three to twenty-seven pockets. Bannon had fifteen, and there was something in every pocket but one. That was a lower vest pocket. What was in it?"

"His watch."

"Oh, for the— We found his watch on him, and it was solid platinum, too. What pocket was it in?"

"The right," Sourby guessed, sweating.

"Wrong. Can't you remember anything?" The sergeant stopped the car in front of Emory's, forcing Sourby out ahead of him. He left the motor running, and the door open. "Take my car down to the garage and get them working on it. Get hold of a car and meet me at 1428 Cleveland. That's an apartment house. I'll be in 3A."

"Yessir."

"Well?"

"Write it down, damn it! 1428 Cleveland."

Sourby jerked a notebook out of his pocket and wrote down the address. Handrahan was already hik-



ing into the vestibule of the Emory place. Sourby put away the notebook, stared lugubriously after the sergeant, turned and began trotting purposefully back to Handrahan's riddled car five blocks down the Drive.

The butler who answered Handrahan's ring had a stiff withered countenance like a raisin.

"Let me speak to Mrs. Bannon," the sergeant requested.

"Mr. Emory is not at home, sir," the butler said frigidly.

"Nuts," said Handrahan, and pushed in. The butler made in ineffectual pass at him. Handrahan simply stared the old fellow down, produced his badge for authority, and headed for the staircase curving up from the hall. It was past eight o'clock, and dark outside. The table in the dining room on his right was not yet cleared; they would be upstairs.

THE stairs were lushly carpeted and Handrahan went up without any sound. Fancy brass railing. Mrs. Bannon's tinkling laughter sounded through the second door on his right in the upper hall. He turned the knob and opened the door. Young Wallace Emory was huskier than Handrahan, but he was soused. He turned, jumping up from the arm of the chair in which Mrs. Bannon was sitting and lurched toward the doorway.

"Get out of here!" he raged thickly. "What do you mean by coming in here? I'll show you!" He took a wild swing at Handrahan. The sergeant ducked and gave him a short, stiff one on the side of the jaw. Emory closed his eyes;

his knees buckled, and he piled into the floor against the wall. Handrahan straddled the body, astonished, and turned Emory over on his back. The man immediately began to snore. Dead drunk. All he needed was that little tap on the jaw.

Mrs. Bannon held a cocktail; she leaned forward in the chair, swaying. She wore a filmy peignoir, through which were visible the delicate shadows of bandeau and lacy briefs.

"Mrs. Bannon!" Handrahan said harshly.

She turned up to him a young face as laughing as wine.

"Your husband has been murdered," he said.

The cocktail fell out of her hand and make a dark smear on the rug. Her expression remained the same, bubbling with mirth.

"I said your husband has been murdered!" Handrahan repeated violently. "What are you laughing at?"

She inhaled deeply and exclaimed passionately, "What do you want me to do? Tell you that I killed him? I'm glad he's dead!" She hurled herself at him and struck childish blows at him with her fists. Handrahan captured her wrists, held tightly until she stopped struggling.

"That maid of yours," he said impatiently, "was all set to blackmail both of you. Playing one against the other. You'd better can her."

Mrs. Bannon swayed against him. She didn't speak.

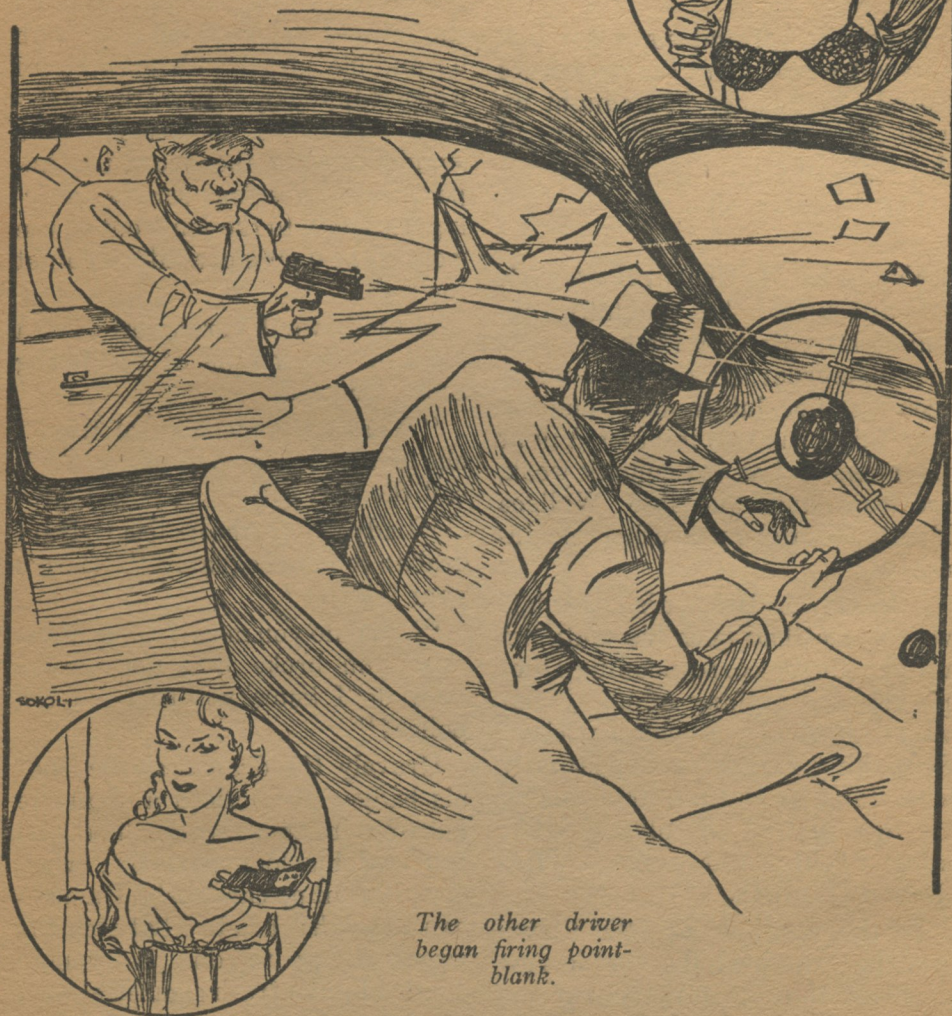
"Did you hear me?" Handrahan demanded.

Her pretty, weak face was tor-



tured. "Yes. You're hurting my wrists. Let me go."

"Let you go? Why, I'm holding you up!" Handrahan said tersely. He bent suddenly, caught Mrs. Ban-



*The other driver  
began firing point-  
blank.*

non behind the knees, and swept her off the floor. He carried her into the bedroom adjoining the den and dumped her on the bed. She was plastered, but not nearly so much so as Emory. She stared up at him with drunken resentment.

"What was your husband carrying in that vest pocket?"

"How do I know what he was carrying in his pockets?" she answered furiously. "I don't know and I don't care! I hate him!"

"For the love of Pete, stop



screaming! This is a murder, and I've got to find things out. Do you get it? You don't have to hate your husband any more. He's dead!" Handrahan roared. "What did the killer take out of his pocket? Wake up!"

He shook her and made her soft curves tremble. But her eyes were closed. The liquor had caught up with her and she was soft all through. Out.

Handrahan swore.

ON the way to Glenda Haworth's apartment he mentally absolved Mrs. Bannon from any part in the murder. She was a weak, reckless, dissolute woman, and the only thing she was interested in at the moment was the equally weak, reckless, and dissolute Wallace Emory. But she was otherwise innocent.

Pockets. In Bannon's lower left vest pocket had been his platinum watch. In the corresponding right pocket was nothing at all. What would fit nicely in such a pocket? Something expensive. Apparently something he had acquired during the day, and which only the killer knew about. And perhaps Miss Glenda Haworth.

In the vestibule at 1428 Cleveland he examined the double row of black buttons for the various apartments in the building. He rang the bell of an apartment on the ground floor. The buzzer clicked. He entered; a matronly woman opened the door on his right and gazed at him inquiringly as he passed along the hall. Handrahan tipped his hat generously.

"Excuse me," he said politely. "I forgot my key."

He ascended the stairs imperturbably to the third floor, found apartment 3A, and tried the knob. It opened about three inches; the guard chain tautened and stopped the inward swing of the door with an audible jar. Handrahan heard a scuffle in the interior of the apartment. At once he launched his weight against the door; the impact jerked the four screws securing the chain to the jamb out of the wood. The door smacked in against the wall.

Miss Haworth sprang up from a chair in the middle of the living room, alarmed.

"What's the meaning of this?" she demanded imperiously. "I'll call the police!"

"Lady, I *am* the police," Handrahan retorted equably. "Where's your friend?"

"What do you mean? I was alone until you broke that door open. How do I know you're from the police?"

Gravely Handrahan showed her his badge. He noticed a cigarette burning in an ashtray. The girl followed his look covertly; when she picked it up carelessly, Handrahan shook his head. That was the wrong thing to do. A woman doesn't light a fresh cigarette when she hears someone trying to open her door. Nor does she put the cigarette down in a handy ashtray. She just forgets that she has a smoke in her hand, and usually lets out a well of alarm.

"What do you want?" she demanded breathlessly.



"WHAT do you think I want?" Handrahan countered. He closed the door to a crack and advanced into the room. "Where did you hide it?"

"I haven't hidden anything!" she denied fearfully. "What are you talking about?"

"That little business your friend picked out of the old gentleman's vest pocket," Handrahan hazarded grimly. He spoke emphatically, as though he knew the whole secret.

"Oh, what are you talking about?" she cried. "Why did you come here?"

"Come through, sister. Bannon regained consciousness long enough to tell us what happened to him."

"He didn't!" Miss Haworth exclaimed frantically.

"Oh. So you know all about it, do you?" he cooed.

She gazed at him stiffly for an instant, and then her face became a smiling mask. She said musically, "Of course. The story is in all the newspapers on the stands right now."

There was no late paper in sight in the apartment.

"All right," Handrahan sighed. "Mind if I look through the place?"

"Go ahead. I suppose you have a right to."

The apartment was a two-room affair, exclusive of bath and a small kitchen. The place was tastefully, and in some respects luxuriously, furnished. And there were a thousand and one different hiding places for a small object. Handrahan took a turn through the place and came back to the living room.

This was the largest room, and had two high windows overlooking a rear courtyard in which there was a pool and rock-garden.

The window on the left gave on to the regulation fire-escape, and iron framework of ladders and platforms serving the seven stories of the house. Bannon's secretary stood at the rear of the living room near the windows. She was nervously quiet, nervous with her cigarette.

The secret of the missing object was in the air of the room. Handrahan gazed casually about, mystified. Then, mingled with the girl's own personal fragrance in the air, he identified the faint, elusive reek of a candle that had been blown out. A pair of candles, tall, ornamental black ones, stood on the mantel of a small fireplace. One of the candles had been used; the tip was still faintly warm. On the hearth were a few droppings of the black wax.

Handrahan hunkered down and looked into the fireplace. On the bed of ashes and a few cigarette butts rested an ash that interested him. It was a crisp, black ash arranged in loops like wire. He picked it up gingerly. He decided that originally this had been some kind of cord. It was braided, not twisted; the individual strands could still be followed. The crisp texture of the ash told him that it had been silk.

GLEND A HAWORTH advanced to the studio couch with hips swaying deliberately. She sat down gracefully and began laughing. "Is

(Continued on page 110)



# KILLER'S PRICE

(Continued from page 27)

groaned and slopped the liquor all over the bar.

"You ought to take a shot of salts." He was real sympathetic.

I groaned and said, "Excuse me," tottered through the joint and hit the door marked *Jiggs*. With the door open a crack I waited a minute.

The bartender went on shining glasses. There was no one else in the saloon. So I wobbled back to the bar, took another drink and groaned. I said, "Is it all right to sit down a little while?" and, before he could answer, I wobbled to the next booth from the end and slopped down. He started to say something but I laid my head on the table and faked a pass out.

He came over and looked at me. I thought for a minute I was going to have to let him have it but he decided I was just another drunk with a hangover and went back of the bar.

"*I said through the booth, not in it.*" I began feeling the panel at the back of the booth. With my pocket knife I found a crack along the right edge and slipped the blade up and down. Pretty soon I hit the bolt that held it in place. With my head still down on the table I picked and picked, till at last I heard the bolt slip. It took about half a second to ooze through the open panel.

**D**ARKNESS and a flight of steps, me on tiptoe and a gat in my hand. A long hall with light beneath a door at the end. Now I was at the door, listening. Then something cold poked into my right kidney and a voice said, "Drop the

gun." I dropped it. "Open the door and go in." I did.

One Eye, the bartender, was sitting at a table counting bills. He said, "Hello, Mike Cockrell. Frisk him, Monk, and tie him up." Monk frisked me, got the other gun from my armpit and tied my wrists behind me with a piece of rope. He shoved me down in a chair.

On a cot right across from me was the little blonde dame, Gladys, Doc Dent's patient, tied and gagged. Her eyes were frantic. The big gorilla named Monk walked toward her, reached down and gave her a good pinch and guffawed when she squirmed away.

I said, "Leave her alone, mug." He grinned and sat down beside her, tearing at her dress.

Wearily, One Eye said, "Leave her alone, Monk. Go on outside, I'll call you. I promised you could have her, didn't I? We got work to do. We got to bump this mug and the kid."

Monk went out, glowering at me. Trying to be as calm as possible, I said, "Well, One Eye, I hate to die curious. I'm all in the mud about this. Just who is the dame anyway, and what did you do with Babe?"

One Eye pushed a stack of dough aside. "What you know won't hurt you. You ain't never going to tell anybody. Babe is still at the hotel, dead, I hope, the slut! I got away the same way you did. This dame here is a wise dame. Her name is Gladys Hastings and she's one of them nosey newspaper reporters. Someway she got a tip on the Sanders' kidnaping and found John Lebac was





behind it. So she came down here to the joint and worked up an acquaintance with Babe. That's how she got on the inside. Now she's got to pay for being nosey. The racket's over and I'm all that's left besides Monk." He grinned, and I knew Monk wouldn't be left long. "So I'm fixing for the finale, then I'm going to fade."

He had the jack—Sanders' hundred

*"Reach for the light, punk," I told him.  
And to the girl: "Scram, sister!"*



grand tied in a neat bundle. He hollered, "Monk!" Monk came in grinning. "Take the dame in the next room with the kid and bump them both off."

Monk said, "Aw, boss, you told me I could—"

"All right," snapped One Eye. "Fifteen minutes, but that's all." Monk picked the writhing Gladys from the bunk and disappeared in the other room. One Eye grinned and started fooling around with a handbag in the corner. From the other room I heard muffled groans and screams, the coarse laughter of Monk.

BY that time I had Waldo's automatic in my tied hands. I had stuck it between my vest and belt in the back, remember? But I was doing a lot of thinking. Could I get away with it? *I had to.* I turned it until the muzzle was right against one strand of rope. When the dame hollered once more and Monk laughed, I couldn't wait. I leaned forward and pulled the trigger.

One Eye whirled, tugging at his pocket. His gat hung and I guess that saved my life for I had to pull like hell to loosen the rest of the rope. He shot first but I was diving sideways and he only nicked my shoulder. After I fired again, he wasn't in the picture any more.

I wheeled in time to see Monk coming out of the other room, coming ablazing. I dropped him with one through the guts and let him have another in the eye for luck, as he was falling.

Gladys Hastings was cowering in the other room, holding a yellow-headed little girl of about twelve years close to

her breast. That guy Monk had torn nearly all her clothes off her. When I saw the welts and the fingernail scratches on that white body, I damned near shot Monk again.

Gladys said, "You sap, if you could understand English this wouldn't have happened! Now let's get upstairs."

The bartender had scrambled. There was no one in the saloon. I stood behind the bar and poured a drink while she called her paper and told them to rush a photographer before she called the police.

"Say," I told her, "call the Continental Hotel and see if the cops found a dead jane in my room. It was your friend, Babe." Then I told her the story while she dialed the number. She asked and turned with a grin.

"Babe is tough," she said. "The only person found in the room was a dead thug named Waldo. She must have scrambled like you and One Eye did. Pour me a drink."

She walked behind the bar. After a while she said, "We'd have made this last night if you hadn't been so dumb. I said *through the booth, not in it.*"

I felt pretty good cutting in on that reward and all. I said, "Aw, babe, don't be mad! I thought you said *in the booth*. How was I to know? I'm a stranger here!" I reached for her.

After a while she said, "You may be a stranger here but you know your way around, Mike Cockrell."

I kissed her again, pretty thorough, and said, "That's sign language in any man's town, honey."

She said, "Let's talk it some more."

Next Month! --- "DEATH'S CATSPAW"



# THE TAVETA NECKLACE

(Continued from page 73)

youthful body was gorgeous, slim, very white, very alluring. The thin stepins obviously could not hide the necklace.

"I told you she had nice legs," said Hartley.

"That's not all that's nice," mused the Count.

SHE was too enraged to speak. While they watched in an appreciative silence, she put on the gown. All sighed.

"Are we going to do something," Diana almost yelled, "or shall we sit down and shoot a hand of bridge?"

"Make it a cent a point and I'm in," said the Count.

"Listen, punk!" snarled Ross. "We'll sweat it out of you. How'd you bump off Mrs. Courtney? Where's the necklace?"

"And where are the lights?" added Diana with a sneer. "Don't be a sap, Ross! He won't talk!"

"We've got to do something," wailed the insurance guy. "We've got the necklace covered for four hundred thousand."

"Sharpen your pencil and write a check," Diana suggested, then turned to Ross. "Did you put someone with the body? Watch out or they'll steal that next."

"Mike's with her," Ross said, "and nobody's going to put their paws on her until we get the coroner."

"You'll have to search everybody in the ballroom," said Hartley. "What a job! What a job!"

"We can't do anything until we get the lights."

"We can try and dope it out," Diana

suggested. "How about the crook throwing it out of the window?"

"Don't be a chump!" Hartley cut in. "The windows don't open. The joint's air-conditioned."

"Well," Diana went on, "there could have been a confederate in the hall. The necklace could be thrown out."

"Nuts! Throw that far in the dark?"

"Listen," Ross cut in, "if you two master minds will stop dopping this out, we'll get organized."

"The thief might have swallowed it," Diana mused.

"A walrus couldn't swallow all that ice," said Hartley.

"Shut up!" Ross yelled just as the door opened and two men half dragged Dick Courtney in. He was all shot to hell.

"My wife. My necklace," he kept mumbling. "The Taveta necklace. God, what will father say? It's been in the family for generations."

"It's out of the family now, all right," said Diana.

"You must have hired a crook to watch the light switch," said Hartley to Ross.

"This is awful!" bleated the insurance guy. "I'm sure that a gang that killed a woman to get the necklace will have the jewels away from here by this time. I have the authority and I'll offer a twenty-five thousand dollar reward for the return of the necklace."

"Sure we won't find it, eh?" said Diana with a sneer.

"I'll offer the same," wailed Dick Courtney. "My father! What will my father say?"



"Plenty," observed Diana.

"Stop the chatter!" said Ross. "We've got to get organized."

"You'll have to wait for the lights," said the Count.

"I'm damned sick of hearing about the lights," Ross raved.

"What's the legal set up out here?" Hartley asked. "Who will have jurisdiction? Where's the coroner coming from?"

"The county seat," snapped Ross. "It's ten miles away."

One of Ross's men came in and put something on the desk. They crowded around. There lay pieces of glass and a needle.

"A hypodermic needle," said someone. "That's what killed her. An injection of something."

"The user threw it against the wall," said the man.

"And only twelve hundred suspects," Diana observed.

"Where's your girl friend?" Hartley asked the Count.

"She got bored and went home."

Hartley knew he wasn't bluffing. The girl would be gone.

Then the lights came on!

"Ha!" said Diana. "Now we get to work."

They left the Count and Courtney in the room and went into the hallway.

AS AGREED, when the lights failed or there was any attempt to steal the necklace, detectives would block every exit to the ballroom and to the house itself. Now they stood around ignoring the angry murmurs of those in the ballroom.

Ross, Hartley, and Diana talked a minute in the hall. Then a man came

through the front door. It was the chauffeur.

"We used to have poles," he explained to Ross, "but Mr. Courtney had all the wires put in a cable which was buried in the ground. Well, a man dug the cable up and cut the wires. He's dead. Plenty of juice in the cable. It got him."

Hartley wandered around while Ross and Diana prepared to find rooms to search the guests. Hartley was at the front door when the morgue wagon arrived.

The coroner, a fussy little man, with his assistant came bustling up the steps.

"What's wrong?" he asked Hartley.

"Death. Murder."

"Where's the body?"

"In the powder room wherever that is," said Hartley and looked around. He saw Mike guarding a door and pointed it out. He walked down the hallway with the coroner just as Diana and Ross came from a room.

"Coroner's here," he called to them.

Then he stopped. A curious look crossed his face and his mouth opened.

"What the hell's wrong with you?" Diana asked.

Hartley whipped out his pistol and covered the coroner and his assistant!

"Get them up!" he ordered.

Surprised, they raised their hands. Ross was too amazed to object.

"Take this gat and keep them covered!" Hartley ordered Diana. "I want a look at that body."

She took the gun and kept the men covered. Hartley went into the powder room. He was gone a few seconds. When he came out, he took the gun and herded the men into the den. Ross and Diana followed him as if he'd suddenly gone crazy.



IT LAY glittering brightly against the dark background of the desk top. All there stared at it with mouths agape.

"I'll take your checks, gentlemen," said Hartley to the insurance man and Dick Courtney.

Then came a chorus of questions. Hartley shrugged and said nothing until the checks were safely in his pocket.

"Smooth," he explained, "very smooth. The Count's work although we can't pin it on him unless these men squeal. That murder, now? Why murder Mrs. Courtney when a good sock in the jaw would get the diamonds? The answer is simple. A dead Mrs. Courtney would be the only one to leave without a search. Then why not kill her, plant the

*He started up—but too late. The tray bounced off his head.*



In the room Hartley dumfounded them by calmly reaching into his pocket and tossing something onto the desk.

The Taveta necklace!

necklace on her where it wouldn't be seen and recover it later?"

"But . . ." sputtered Ross.

"I get it," said Diana. These men



aren't the coroner and his assistant. They're part of the gang."

"Right. There was only one slip up. The guy who cut the wire was accidentally killed."

"What had that to do with it?" Ross asked.

"He was to douse the lights long enough for the killing. The lights were off about fifty minutes, weren't they?"

"Yes."

"Facts, just plain facts. The County seat is ten miles away. The so called coroner was here five minutes after the lights went on. That's too fast."

"You're crazy," Ross snorted. "If the coroner was called as soon as the body was discovered, he'd have plenty of time to make it."

"Remember what the chauffeur said? The wires had been put in the cable? *All wires*. That cable was cut wasn't it?"

"Yes, but . . . ."

"*And wasn't the telephone wire cut too?* How could anyone call the coroner? They didn't, couldn't. He was sitting out there in the phony morgue wagon.

He knew the murder would take place as soon as the lights were doused. He didn't dare wait too long because he had to beat the real coroner here."

There was a long silence.

"That's all gents," said Diana. "Scram."

They left the room. She and Hartley were alone.

"Why'd the Count search us?"

"A neat trick to make us think he didn't know Mrs. Courtney was wearing the genuine necklace. Sugar, going to let down your hair?"

"I was just thinking about that myself. You know, you're not such a bad egg, Hart, after all."

"Well then honey, how about it?"

"Let's get drunk first."

Then Hartley remembered. That was just what the blonde had said a while back. And nothing had come of it. He wasn't going to let *this* chance slip.

"Nothing doing honey. We get drunk *afterwards*." And he reached for her. She landed in his arms with a bang. And she stayed there!

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## MURDER IN MUSIC

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(Continued from page 63)

you've got my place. Come in here, I need the spot you're using to shoot a rat!"

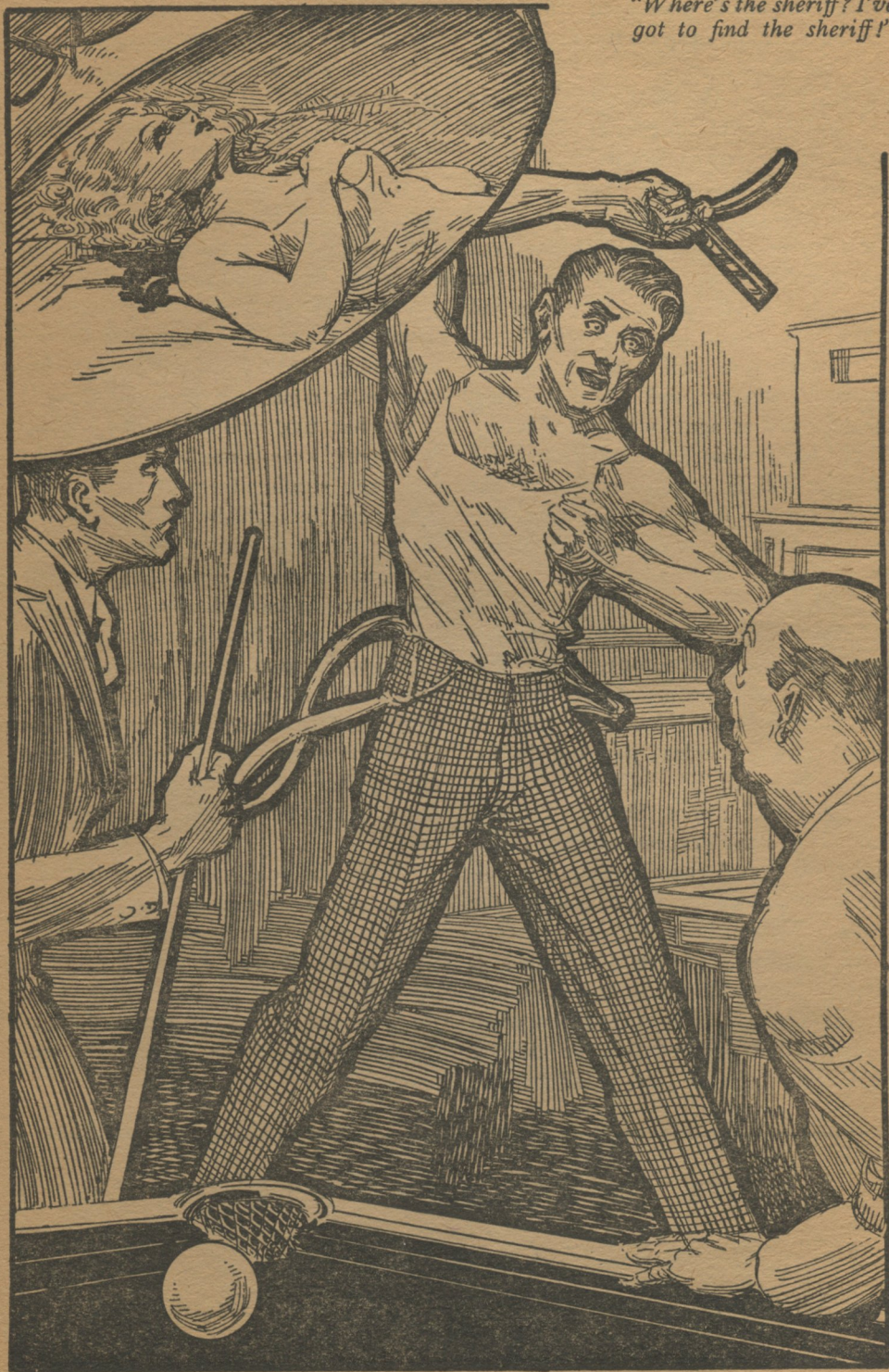
On hands and knees Jarnegan crawled toward him, leaving the police special where it dropped. As he thrust his head in the window, Truxton hit him hard behind the ear. Jarnegan rolled inside, knocked over a heavy ashstand and lay still. Truxton slobbered, peered down at him and giggled again, went out the window muttering to himself.

Fighting back the cobwebs of unconsciousness, Jarnegan quit playing dead. He struggled to his feet, tried to steady himself. His head rang like a bell. At his feet lay the glass from the heavy ashstand. He clutched it, dove for the window just as a shot rang out. A woman's scream shrilled in the next room.

He thrust his head out of the window, hurled the ashtray. It caught Truxton on the side of the head just as he was starting to go through the window. He



*"Where's the sheriff? I've  
got to find the sheriff!"*





looked surprised, glass-eyed, then huddled in a sudden heap on the fire escape.

NEAR noon the next day Jarnegan said, "I'll bank the nine." The nine rolled in the corner pocket and Jarnegan chalked his cue. There was no sound from the circle of onlookers.

Sitting in a chair against the wall, cut between his knees, Tolliver said, "For the love of God, go on. Who's in jail where? Who did what and why?"

"Combination off the fourteen," grunted Jarnegan and made the shot, straightened up again with raised brows. "Why like he said, Lozano put the snake and the doll in Saxon's room. But he didn't cut the dame's throat. He honestly thought Saxon himself did it and then dropped dead!"

"Did he?"

"Aw, Saxon was poisoned off his razor, stupid. The autopsy shows that now. And sticking around the edge of that voodoo drum I found six more of those poison needles, just put in for Lozano's benefit."

"By God," swore Sheriff Tolliver, "then it was the Trudeau woman. That's right, she tipped you off where the poison was hidden in the handle of the brush. Did you bring her in?"

"She's here," grunted Jarnegan, studying the table. "But it wasn't her. It was Truxton. I suspected him when I found that match box. He claimed he'd never been in 1234 at all but the

match box was his. The striking surface on the left side was the only one used. Truxton was the only left-handed lug in the outfit."

"But his alibi," persisted Tolliver. "And his motive?"

"Easy! He left the hotel and went back upstairs by the service entrance, cut the dame's throat to make it look bad for Saxon in case the poison razor didn't get him. He was nuts, crazy over this Trudeau dame. He figured if he did something for her, something big like murder, he'd get over the top. I thought it was her, too, especially when I found her buying victrola needles, but Truxton had been stealing them from her. He got drunk the night before and told her he had plenty of poison in the handle of that brush and offered to bump off both Saxon and Wanda Hewlet if she'd play ball with him. That's how she knew.

"I got Truxton in jail over in Rumsford. Emil Lozano's in the hospital, if they want to file charges against him about the snake. But I think the dame already had her throat cut when the dopey snake bit her. I'm banking the nine."

"I thought you said you brought the dame, Oma Trudeau, back!" The sheriff's voice was bewildered.

Jarnegan threw down his stick, glanced hurriedly at the clock. "Gee, I'm glad you mentioned that. I'm taking her places at one o'clock. Be seeing you."

## SPICY WESTERN STORIES!

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# MURDER FOR METROVOX

(Continued from page 39)

after everybody had left. Then Stella soaked off her chocolate disguise with alcohol, put on a red wig, got dressed and walked out into the night, free as air. The plainclothes guy at the apartment entrance saw her go—and never suspected who she was.

"There was just one more thing I had to find out. I learned it from the missing Sally Lorton's house-mate, Madge Bond. I discovered that Sally had been intimate with Ben; had been the cause of his ditching the LaValle dame.

"It all added up. If the dead girl in the alley wasn't Stella, it had to be Sally! Besides, I remembered that Sally Lorton had coal-black eyes—same as that corpse in the alley. Therefore, Stella LaValle was loose—with two murders on her conscience.

"What would she be likely to do? I figured she'd come here to Ben Crofton, tell him everything and make him take her back. Disguised, with maybe some facial surgery, she could have married him later—and never been suspected."

Dave Donaldson said: "Damn! And we just got here in time to hear her spill her guts!"

"Yeah," I said. I looked at Ben Crofton. "Well, Ben, I found your missing Sally Lorton for you. She's on a marble slab at the morgue, with bleached platinum hair and a smashed up face. You owe me five grand."

He paid me, later, out of the insurance he collected when they hanged Stella LaValle.

# TRAITOR'S GOLD

(Continued from page 51)

tion. Where did you say your chief was?"

Freeman cursed.

Von Wirz gestured to Ivan. The rawhide thong again licked about the grotesquely writhing, suspended length of agony. The flimsy gown, water drenched, clung tight as the skin which every deadly stroke was stripping from her in long, gory welts.

"Don't sign!" yelled Freeman.

Diane was making progress on his bonds. If Norma could endure the torture, there might yet be a chance. Her torment was skillfully controlled. One

full blow of the scourge would kill her outright, or render her unconscious. Von Wirz was an artist. He directed the lashing with the nice touch of an orchestra leader.

Mikhail watched with an admiring gleam in his eyes, and licked his lips appreciatively as the blood trickled down Norma's legs. There wouldn't be much left, but the spectacle was entrancing. . . .

Freeman's wrists were free.

"Good God, if I can only reach my ankles now without being noticed—"

Norma had cracked. Ivan and Mik-



hail were lowering her. Von Wirz pushed a table from the further shadows. His free hand dragged a chair. Norma, dropping into it, slumped forward. The pen fell from her fingers.

"Pour a drink into her," snapped von Wirz.

The attention of the torturers now centered on the lacerated wreck.

Freeman drew his knees up, trying to reach the knots at his ankles. Battered and cramped, the effort was vain. Norma was reviving. The prospect of further scourging would make her sign, though she knew that they would then kill her to insure silence.

Diane's whisper reached into his despair: "There's a bit of broken glass in some rubbish at my knee."

He reached back, and found it.

Norma was still too weak to sign. Freeman desperately slashed at the cords. His ankles were gashed and blood-drenched. The rope resisted the awkward weapon.

Another stroke—almost through! Then Freeman froze.

A man was clearing the threshold: the invader whom Freeman had ambushed. The one whom he had mistaken for Dmitri, Diane's ally. But Diane was a victim, not an accomplice. It was insane.

He had his knife and pistol. He looked squarely at Freeman, noting his liberated hands.

God, get it over! Norma was setting a pen to the line—

The newcomer leaped like a panther, landing at Freeman's feet.

"Steady," he growled. "Hold still—"

"Dmitri!" gasped Diane.

Dmitri's elbow knocked down an iron bar near the furnace. As it clanged to the concrete, his knife liberated Freeman. The basement became a deadly blur of action.

Von Wirz drew his pistol. Dmitri's weapon blazed. Von Wirz, recoiling, jerked a second shot. As Dmitri charged, Mikhail and Ivan went into action.

THE gray-haired invader jerked back, spinning on his heel, knocked out of step by a slung from a roaring gun. Freeman snatched the two-foot iron bar, flailed it across von Wirz' head. It popped like a melon.

Dmitri, pistol emptied, tore in with his knife, ripping upward. Ivan, slashed from hip to chest, dropped in a tangle of dislodged spare parts.

Mikhail, pivoting, shifted his rattling pistol.

Freeman flung himself aside, but lead raked him. The spurting flame set his shirt on fire. He slipped in a pool of blood. And then Dmitri, knife in hand, closed in like a striking leopard. They piled in a kicking tangle, but as they flattened to the concrete, a rush of blood drenched Freeman.

He dragged himself clear of Mikhail's lifeless body.

Dmitri rose to his knees, slumped forward, still snarling and gasping. The blade slipped from his fingers. Freeman snatched it and slashed Diane's bonds.

"Vengeance," Dmitri coughed. "Kolchak is avenged. . . ."

The fierce flare died from his eyes.

Diane helped Freeman carry Norma from the slaughter room. And as they waited for her to regain her senses, Diane explained:

"Dmitri was one of Kolchak's officers. When the admiral was betrayed by members of his staff, Dmitri swore he would hunt them down.

"In Paris he heard that von Wirz was making a try for the undiscovered million in gold. He followed. To help





*They were out cold  
—their cups emptied.*

him, I took this position as a maid. I'm his niece.

"Dmitri did not want to kill von Wirz until he could trap the accomplices. He had only one chance, working as a private executioner. When you exposed the ghost tonight, I knew von Wirz would get desperate. So I phoned Dmitri.

"I drugged you and Miss Hartley so that there would be no witnesses when



Dmitri ambushed and executed the traitors.

"To throw von Wirz off guard, I put faked Russian papers into your suitcase. Suspecting you, he'd think me harmless.

"If you'd not waylaid Dmitri, everything would have worked out. You'll forgive me for drugging you—"

"I will, for an encore on that selection in your room," agreed Freeman.

And then he turned deep red. Norma's rapid recovery caught them off guard.

She smiled wanly and said, "But be sure you learn her real name, Clint. . . . I made a terrible mistake that way. Now, about that gold—"

"Traitor's gold, Norma," said Freeman, regaining his breath. "They killed your father for it. It ought to be yours. As you heard, I've taken my share."

"That was only a small down payment," Diane corrected; and her glowing eyes were a promise.

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## THE 15th POCKET

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*(Continued from page 97)*

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this the usual police procedure?" she asked sarcastically. "Aren't you going to pull out my drawers and look through my things?"

Handrahan scowled at her. The position she had assumed on the couch was frankly tempting, distracting, which was exactly what she meant it to be. Her dress was of ribbed silk; the skirt was full, and the waist was artfully snug, so that the conformation of her body was easily discernible. She sat in a beckoning position, and hadn't troubled to arrange the loose skirt which had been drawn up and revealed a glimpse of white skin above her stocking-top. More of that exceptional view might be forthcoming. Handrahan reflected morosely that in such a dress a woman was more shameless than in the altogether.

There were three women in this case, and none of them reacted to Bannon's murder with any grief.

The maid was disappointed because the neat fabric of her blackmail scheme was blown sky-high. Mrs. Bannon responded with hysterical gratification. And this Haworth dame was strictly indifferent. Damn their scheming, selfish, hard little hearts!

Handrahan passed Glenda on his way to the windows and bent to look out. He saw the ebon gleam of the garden pool in full moonlight, heard the thin murmur of water entering the pool from the supply pipe. Nothing else was audible but the slurred sounds of distant traffic.

On the stone coping of the window, which made a curb with the platform of the fire escape, was a fresh leather scar. It had been made by a man's shoe, probably by Glenda's accomplice when Handrahan flushed him from the apartment by his unexpected entry. The man with the mark on his nose.





GEE... I'd sure like to have real **HE-MAN** muscles!

So would I, but it takes a long while

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**D**ON'T get the idea that it takes a lot of time and hard work for you to get smashing strength and powerful muscular development! And don't fool yourself into thinking that you need dumbbells, stretchers or any other such contraptions!

Both of these ideas are all bunk—and I have **PROVED** it. All I need is 7 days to prove what I can do for you! And I don't need any apparatus either. In fact, I have no sympathy with apparatus at all—don't believe in it. It is artificial—and it may strain your heart or other vital organs for life!

## NATURAL Methods Are All I Need

On this page you will see an actual photo of how I look today. This picture has not been changed in any way. No muscles have been "painted on." This photograph is the camera's honest proof of what I have done for MY body. I myself am ready to prove what my secret of Dynamic Tension can do for **YOURS!**

To look at me now you wouldn't recognize me as the same man I was a few years ago. Then I was a physical wreck, a 97-pound weakling—flat chested, spindly legs, arms and legs like pipestems.

I was worried—and I had a right to be. I decided to study myself, to do something about my body. Then I made a discovery. I found a new way to build myself up. A way that was simple, natural, quick and sure! "Dynamic Tension" is what I called it.

I put this secret to work. And in a short time I had the kind of body you see here—the body which has twice won the title of "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

## This Secret Has Helped Thousands

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The killer logically had an apartment in this building. Even now Glenda's lover was probably listening from one of the near-by windows just as Handrahan was listening. He grinned sardonically.

**S**TRAIGHTENING, he moved to the other window, from which he had a view of the pool and garden unobstructed by the fire escape

gratings. The scanty foliage of starved vines clung to the wall on the right of the window. Handrahan noticed a small wood shaving in the corner formed by the coping with the brick wall. Keeping his find to himself Handrahan turned with the comment, "Nice garden you've got down there."

*Handrahan slapped  
her, "You little  
tramp!"*





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# SPICY-ADVENTURE STORIES

NOVEMBER ISSUE ON SALE OCTOBER 2nd



Glenda's responding languor and slow smile betrayed her vast relief. "Can't we be friends, captain?" she begged invitingly. "Really, there's nothing in the apartment I shouldn't have."

That was the strict truth; the object was stashed outside the apartment. Handrahan said, "The name is Ed Handrahan. Did you ever hear of a set line?"

She shook her head, honestly perplexed.

"It's a way of catching fish," the sergeant explained cryptically. He consulted his watch. "I told a pal of mine to call for me here. If you tell him a time, he never takes more than a minute spread, so he'll be here in ten minutes."

"Well-I-I?" said Glenda. She turned sinuously so as to rise from the studio couch on the side nearest Handrahan. Her long shapely legs were disclosed in a brief glimpse before her heels touched the floor and she stood up. And the creamy smoothness of her thighs was terminated only by one of those cobwebby mauve trifles bearing the Lord label. Only the hinting glimpse, and the full skirt fell from the snugly-tailored waist and hips again in straight folds.

Handrahan let his eyes inspect her while he smiled appreciatively. Irrelevantly he asked, "Are there any fish in the pool down there?"

"I don't think so," Glenda breathed, as though fish were no concern of hers. She swayed challengingly close to him as though through some mere urge of volition and not through any forward use of her legs.

"What, no goldfish?" Handrahan persisted.

"Do you care?"

"Mmmh."

The kiss and embrace was managed with such skill that it was happening before Handrahan realized it. His arms naturally embraced her, with his hands flat against the modeling of her back. Her lips parted as his right arm slipped downward unarrested to her waist. Her firm, ripe figure was pressed harder and harder against him as though she wanted to feel the hurt of the embrace. It was something entirely new to Sergeant Handrahan, and not exactly unpleasant. The embrace was so ardent that a bell of warning rang dimly in his brain.

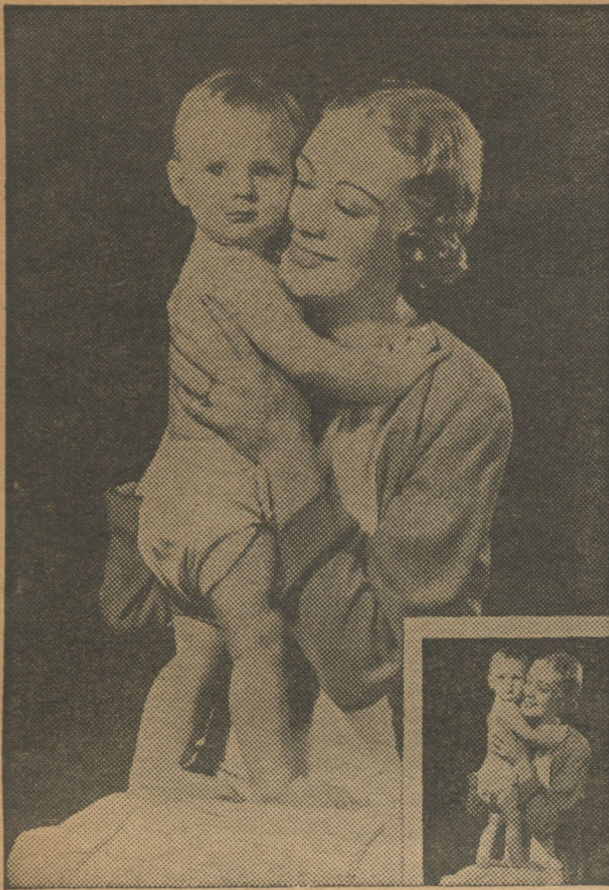
Bannon's secretary was obviously the servant of her own passions, the kind of girl that Handrahan would call jail-bait. He was using her without compunction, using her own trick of distracting her from the secret he had discovered, until Sourby arrived. Cool still, he reflected that all women were most certainly alike, or at least had like potentialities. But he realized with annoyance that the closeness of Glenda's vibrant, pulsing body was getting him; and her soft lips were quivering moistly against his.

There was a terrific, hollow concussion in the room. For an instant Handrahan didn't know whether a bomb had gone off in his head or whether in a blind gust of temper he had knocked the girl down.

Neither.

Glenda broke away from him with a terrified wrench and





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screamed. The man with the blue scar on his nose fell into the room and landed on his head. He remained as he fell, with his legs still hooked over the window sill. But now he had another blue mark on his wicked face, a bullet hole exactly in the middle of his forehead, between the eyes. An automatic was still vised in his right fist.

Having closed the door behind himself, Bennie Sourby calmly walked into the room and returned his pistol to the holster which kept it handily under his left arm.

"Excuse me for not knockin'," he said apologetically. "But that guy was squattin' on the fire escape with a mean look in his eye. He was drawing a bead right between your wings." Sourby, too, had thought it was a good idea to ring the wrong bell in order to get in.

"All right, Hawkeye," Handrahan said. "Do you have to go around proving what an expert shot you are? Why didn't you get him in the arm?"

"Gosh, I'm sorry, sergeant," Sourby pleaded. "I just didn't think."

"How the hell are we going to make a rap stick on this girl? All she'll get now is a suspended sentence, you lug."

Sourby almost wrung his hands with remorse.

Handrahan repaired to the window and explored among the vines outside. A wooden peg had been driven into a hole in the mortar between the bricks, and a groove cut in the projecting end. Black fishline was firmly secured in the groove. Handrahan caught the line

hanging from the peg and began to haul it in. The object tied to the other end of the line was at the bottom of the pool in the garden.

Behind him on the studio couch Glenda Haworth swore furiously, using a word Handrahan had never heard a girl use before. Then she became thoroughly composed, steeling herself to bluff the game all the way through to the end.

The object which came up and into the room, dangling from the end of the fishline, was the hunting case for a man's watch. Snap covers in front and back, hinged. Wax had been melted around the stem and the lids, making the case watertight.

"What the hell?" Handrahan snapped, dumbfounded.

He pried open the back lid, then the inner lid protecting the works. There weren't any works. In the empty case were two pieces of heavy bond paper folded to the size of large postage stamps, and covered with more or less familiar engraving. Handrahan unfolded them and let out an astonished whistle. They were banknotes, each of ten thousand dollars denomination.

"Jeez, what a screwy way of carrying around dough," Sourby said with his eyes popping.

"Bonus money," said Handrahan. "Funny I never thought of that." He showed Sourby the engraving on the inner lid, which read: "In Appreciation." Then, in script, "Samuel Lord." An old American custom, adhered to by whimsical old Lord, of retiring the annual bonus proportionately out





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**November Issue**

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**October 10th**



of the company's earnings after inventory. The more gossamer the Lord line of lingerie became, in shorts and bandeaus and hose that were like tinted mist, the heavier the return flow of profits.

"Not a bad idea," Handrahan admitted. "The fishline was almost invisible in those vines, and I never would have found it if I hadn't been looking for it. That ticker could have sunk into the mud down there in the drink, and this dame and the stiff could have waited a year for the heat to blow over. This kind of fishline never wears out."

Glenda Haworth rose as though hypnotized by the two extraordin-

ary bills in Handrahan's big paws. Her slender hands strayed upward on the tight bodice of her dress in an unconscious, revealing gesture, momentarily supporting the confined swell of her breasts from below. Breathing rigidly she said, "That's my money. Mr. Bannon gave it to me. It's mine; give it to me."

Handrahan's smile quirked.

"I dunno," he mused sardonically, thinking of the full-blown kiss with which she had thought she was bribing him. "If you can convince a judge and jury that you're asking and getting twenty grand per, sister, it's okay by me!"

**"BRING HOME THE BODY"**

**"HEADLESS CORPSE"**

**"SEALED DEATH"**

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well as "give it"!



# DEATH ON THE HALF SHELL

(Continued from page 85)

going to bump you, Harding, you and the girl, too. I've got to do it."

His eyes were bleak, pinpoints of light. Harding cringed involuntarily as he saw the knuckle whiten, saw the finger clamp down on the trigger.

THE doorbell rang, rang again. Frey turned, walked slowly toward the door, gun in hand. He drew the bolt, grasped the knob, pulled the door wide, gun leveled.

Philip Ashton stepped in, his face as white as death itself, his eyes vivid, his mouth grim.

"By God!" said Frey grimly. "Come in, Ashton."

The tall aristocrat glanced around the room. His voice was level, scarcely discernible above the blare of the radio. "This is a surprise," he said and walked toward the radio.

Fred waved the gun, shrilled, "Stop where you are!" but the tall greyhead kept on going. The radio was switched off. Ashton turned.

"This," he repeated, "is a surprise. Harding, after you left me, I looked out the window and saw you get in Mildred's car. She did not know I was aware of this apartment, did not know I knew she had it. I was suspicious because I know my daughter. But I put it out of mind. I got to thinking what a yellow fool I'd been, what a cowardly poltroon to give in to this man without a struggle. So I slipped out past your police guard, drove to Greenport and saw Justice Marshall. I found," he turned to his white-faced daughter, "that

no ceremony had ever been performed between you and this man!"

The girl shrieked, "Not married! We have to be married! He said we were married, showed me the certificate. He—"

"A lie, my dear." Her father's voice was still, cold. The girl sank down in the Cogswell chair.

"Well," snarled Frey, "what are you going to do about it?" The gun was steady.

"I'm going to kill you," said Ashton and walked forward.

"Hold it," grated Frey, "I'll burn you!"

Ashton did not answer. His hands were extended in front of him, his arms crooked, his fingers like talons, claws. There was no fear in his face, no feeling, no expression that was human. He was an automaton.

The gun spoke. Philip Ashton started back, as if slapped by a gigantic hand, caught his balance, and again started the grim advance. His facial expression did not change. When the second shot spat, Nora Fanning screamed.

Benny Frey crouched in the corner, his mouth contorted, his eyes bleak with fear, the smoking gun in his hand. The swaying figure before him tottered. The lips of Philip Ashton opened, a flow of blood emerged, but the talon-like hands remained extended. The man walked forward.

Carefully, cautiously, Benny Frey raised the automatic. The swaying, wavering avenger came on, stumbled, stopped, smiled, sprawled on the carpet.



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"Don't stall, Johnny. This is a soundproof apartment—and you know what's comin'."



Frey lowered the gun with a snarl to administer the *coup de grace*.

But it wasn't Benny Frey's gun that spoke. At the sound of the report, Benny Frey staggered backward. His knees weakened, gave, hit the carpet first, followed by his stomach, his chest, his shoulders. It was somehow like a

slow motion picture. Benny Frey, a small blue hole between his eyes, laid his cheek on the carpet beside the man he had killed.

Mildred Ashton, before the Cogswell chair, dropped the smoking gun and began to laugh. Her laughter was mad, insane, filling the room.



TEN minutes later Johnny Harding wiped the sweat from his brow and spoke to Bill Nobles and the room full of coppers.

"So there you are, Bill. Frey was holding blackmail over Ashton's head, made him allow the use of his name with this crooked lottery. Ashton's name meant everything. They'd sell the tickets for this Treasure Hunt, then be damned sure some of Benny Frey's friends won the big prizes, which were kicked back into the pot.

"I panned the whole thing in my column. Benny paid Henri, the waiter, to load my oysters with hydrocyanic acid. By mistake Gloria Glane got the dose intended for me and died. Benny himself flipped the lights, sent his gorilla back to knock off the pantry boy—who incidentally had been bribed by Henri. In the confusion, Henri, also scared, got the list Gloria meant for me, and also stole the doped oysters. Then, afraid that Henri would squawk, Benny knocked him off.

"The dame, Milred Ashton, was a wild one. She adored Benny. Damned if I know why but women are screwy. When she found Benny threw a fast one, that he hadn't really married her, she shot him. Does that cover it? All you have to do is find Benny Frey's gorilla."

"We did," said Bill Nobles shortly. "Found him in his room with a knife in his jugular. Looks like this Benny Frey didn't want *anyone* to talk. My God, listen to that!"

From the other room, where Johnny had locked her, came the high-pitched laughter of Mildred Ashton, who had burned the candle at both ends and found the middle bitter. Nobles started toward the door.

"Hey, Johnny," he called.

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A New Magazine!

SPICY WESTERN STORIES

Coming Soon!

Johnny Harding was arguing with Nora Fanning, trying to get a word in edgewise.

"And to think," the indignant redhead was saying, "even in a case of life and death I bust in on you and find you fooling around with another dame! You, the man that claimed he was through with women, that said—"

"Aw, baby," pleaded Johnny, "it was business, business, I tell you!"

"Monkey business," snorted the redhead and prim-lipped stalked from the room.

Johnny Harding, hatless, coatless, pleading and begging, trotted after her. The last words that reached Bill Nobles' ear were, "But, listen, babe, I can explain—"

## THE WOMAN IN YELLOW

(Continued from page 15)

"That's swell. Perfectly swell!" Then her voice became sharp, threatening. "Give it to me!"

And Breck Douglas found himself looking into the big bore of a Luger pistol!

IT WAS the worst set-back of his career. Now, little things made sense. His brain spun. He had one chance of success. To react in a manner to disturb her.

He smiled at her as if she'd asked for a drink.

"Why, sure. Sure!"



He took out the gray envelope and handed it to her. If he'd have gone for his gun, she'd have drilled him. Think fast, his brain warned, and he was doing so. That pistol, now. She was, he saw, rather shaken by his strange behavior.

"We're not dummies," he told her. "You're not Sixty-Seven. You were late, because flying from Berlin takes longer than flying from London."

He'd scored. He saw it in her eyes. It never occurred to her that the pistol had been the giveaway.

"Your clothes were too tight."

"I might have grown heavier."

Breck's brain was working now.

"A woman's vain about small feet. She'd never buy slippers too large. Yours were."

"But. . . but why?"

"The same game you played on us. If we failed, we'd give you a crack at the letter, then take it. How come you speak real American?"

"I went to school there for ten years. My father was in the diplomatic service. But what's in this letter?"

"Blank paper," Breck lied. "The real letter is destroyed."

"Take your automatic and throw it out the window."

Her eyes were grim as he did so. Then, still covering him, she managed to open the letter with her left hand. Breck felt sick. The jig was up. She had to prove what he'd said.

She took out several folded sheets and shook them until they opened. Then she held them at eye level so she could keep an eye on him. Breck could see the blue smudge of the letterhead. Somehow it was familiar.

"Blank stationery from the steam-

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Box 35, Swanton, Ohio Dept. H.

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ship," she amazed him by saying. "You were right."

"I made up a dummy," Breck lied, his heart beginning a furious pumping. Now everything made sense.

"You have won," said the girl and lowered the pistol. She was dispirited; glum. "I played right into your hands."

"Let's have a drink," Breck said.

"All right!" She came over and sat down.

Breck gently took the letter from her hand.

"Just so it won't be an unpleasant reminder," he said and began tearing it into shreds. She watched without interest. He went to the window and let the fragments flutter into the wind. By morning they'd cover half of the country. Then he poured her a drink. It seemed to steady her.

"I suppose it wasn't true when you said you liked me."

"I do like you," she protested. "Very much."

"I know how you feel, kid," he said. "and I know how you Prussians are on honor. I'm crazy about you, I want you. But you can forget what you said."

Her cheeks colored.

"No. It was a bargain. I like you. I want to carry it out not because of honor, but because I like you."

Breck was incredulous.

"You mean that?"

She stood up.

"Yes. I want to clean my compartment up. Will you stop in for . . . for a drink in, say, ten minutes?"

"Will I!" he exclaimed. "Will I! My darling. I think Athens would be swell. We don't get there until the day after tomorrow.



"Athens will be lovely now," she smiled but evaded his rush and slipped into the corridor. "Ten minutes, mind you!"

BRECK knew what to do with those ten minutes. He went up to the compartment of the woman in yellow and knocked. After awhile the door opened. She had on a silk robe and was a little drunk. He knew there was a man there. He motioned her into the deserted corridor.

"You're slick," he told her. "I know why we didn't find the specifications on the voyage over."

"Why?"

*"Because they were written on the ship stationery in invisible ink. You simply had them unfolded on the pile of stationery the company puts on every cabin desk. We probably moved them a hundred times during our search."*

He wheeled and left a very dumb-founded woman. In time she'd realize that he'd snatched the letter.

He opened Mary Frances's door. She stood there attired in thin black pajamas through which he could glimpse the firm creaminess of her flesh. He stared at the shadowy outline of her lovely body and his throat contracted.

Then she was in his arms and he was smothering her face with burning kisses. Her response was eager; breath-taking. At last she managed to speak.

"Let's forget everything but this night."

"And the nights to come," he softly added.

Breck Douglas was not fool enough to tell her that she'd had the priceless specifications in her hands a short time ago. That would be crowding success too far. It would embitter her. She was far too lovely to be embittered.

He locked the door.

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I WAS then a 97 pound weakling. He was heavier, stronger, plenty tough. But I just couldn't pass up his direct challenge. A crowd gathered around to watch the slaughter. And what a trimming I got! He put more smashing power behind that one hand of his than I had in my whole body. It was the most embarrassing thing that ever happened to me!

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Just give me your measure—and I'll give you proof in just 7 days that I can make you a NEW MAN! Then I'll start new inches of massive power pushing out your chest—build up your shoulders to champion huskiness—put regular mountains of useful muscle on your biceps—give you a strong back—make those stomach muscles of yours hard ridges!

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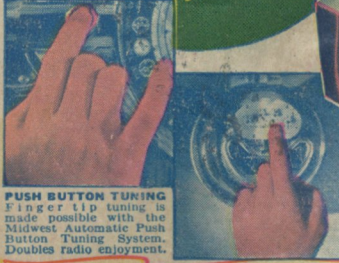
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