

DEC. ★ 25¢

SPICER DETECTIVE

STORIES

DOUBLE CATSPAW
by E. Hoffmann Price



YES- I'M CONVINCED
THAT I CAN MAKE GOOD
MONEY IN RADIO.
I'M GOING TO START
TRAINING FOR RADIO
RIGHT NOW.



NO- NOT ME.
I'M NOT GOING TO WASTE
MY TIME. SUCCESS IS
JUST A MATTER OF
LUCK AND I WASN'T
BORN LUCKY.

**"BILL SAID
YES"**
HE'S MAKING
GOOD MONEY
IN RADIO
NOW



**"TOM SAID
NO"**
HE'S STILL
WAITING
FOR "LUCK"



I WILL TRAIN YOU AT HOME *in Spare Time* FOR A **GOOD RADIO JOB**



J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute

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

Do you want to make more money? Broadcasting stations employ engineers, 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 servicing jobs pay as much as \$30, \$50, \$75 a week. Many Radio Experts own their own full

time or part time Radio business. Radio manufacturers and jobbers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, engineers, servicemen, paying up to \$6,000 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 I trained at home are holding good jobs in all these branches of Radio.

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

Practically every neighborhood needs a good spare time service-



man. 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 equipment which gives you practical Radio experience—shows you how to conduct experiments and build circuits which illustrate important principles used in modern Radio sets. My Free Book tells all about this.

Find Out What Radio Offers You

Mail the coupon now for "Rich Rewards in Radio." It's free to any fellow over 16 years old. It describes Radio's spare time and full time opportunities, also those coming in Television; tells about my training in 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. 6NX1
Washington, D. C.



J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute, Dept. 6NX1
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



December, 1936

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IMPROVES YOUR APPEARANCE 100%



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SUN RAYS IMPROVE YOUR HEALTH AS WELL AS YOUR APPEARANCE!

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Use Coupon or SEND Penny POST CARD!

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"Mister Killer" she called him and reminded him he had been hired to prevent murder, not to work off any private grudges. And all the time the other girl wanted a man killed!



SHE boarded the train about five minutes behind me, just before it pulled out, and swaggered through the car with a loaded redcap behind her. Every guy, young or old, including me, quit what he was doing to give her the eye. You could have heard the ashes drop off a cigar.

Her skirt looked like it had been painted on; full hips quivered like they were scared. A summer fur piece didn't hide the low neck of her dress and the low neck didn't hide much of a pair of bobbling, dancing—you know what I

"You jealous little fool!" he said and socked her.



mean. I didn't see her face the first time she passed; I didn't get that far. The second time she didn't pass. She sat down beside me and the redcap bustled around putting her three matched bags away. She tipped him a buck.

Out of the corner of my eye I watched while she pulled up her hose. It was

WINNERS'

A MIKE
COCKRELL
STORY

By
MORT
LANSING



worth while. A few minutes later she took a cigarette out of her handbag and turned to me.

"May I trouble you for a match, please?"

She could, or for my right arm by that time. I lit the match and she leaned over for the light. Instead of watching

PAYOFF —

the cigarette she kept big green eyes on me. I couldn't keep my own eyes off the shadow between her firm breasts. She grinned and held the pose for a minute. It was me that finally flushed and sat back.

WE had lunch together and dinner that night. Things got hotter and hotter. We sat on the observation platform for a half hour all by ourselves and I found out her name was Maida Knowlton, that she was headed for the same place I was, that she hated brassieres, wore a garter belt and always put a couple of drops of *Forbidden Love* perfume in her bosom. Don't let the name throw you.

I finally got time to explain that my name was John Smith, just plain John Smith, from Chicago with a little business deal at the other end of the line.

We pulled into Dallas at twenty past eight. Two redcaps yowsahed our bags, and I had Maida by the arm possessively as we went up the steps and through the corridor. Things had moved along fast enough that she kept my hand pressed plenty close. Beneath her arm I could feel the swell of her breast.

Just as we stepped through the door a blue uniformed fellow started shouting, "Telegram for Mike Cockrell! Mike Cockrell! Telegram for Mr. Cockrell."

I make no excuses. I was so damned interested in the dame, looking forward to a bottle of Scotch and a quiet nook, that I forgot I was supposed to be plain John Smith, forgot I was an agency dick on very secret and private business, traveling under an alias.

The kid bellowed again, "Telegram for Mr. Cockrell!"

I said, "Here, bub!" He saw me, grinned and slid away behind a bunch of people without another sound. I

started after him yelling, "Here! Here!" From the corner of my eye, subconsciously I guess you'd say, I saw Maida go sort of white-faced and rigid and drop her fur piece. By that time I was right beside a big marble pillar.

There wasn't any report, no spat or sharp crack. Something said, "Bzzzzz!" sailed by my left ear, slapped against the pillar and screamed away into space as it ricocheted.

A hundred feet farther on a little fat guy with a black derby dropped his suitcase and grabbed his shoulder.

He said, "Ow!" and began to cuss plenty loud. Plenty people stopped and stared at him. By that time I was behind the pillar, trying to figure who had taken a shot at me. I figured some mug with a silencer had cracked down. Women began to sniff at the little guy doing the cussing. I peeked around the post looking for Maida. She was gone. Disappeared.

THE little fat guy fell down on his face and began tearing at his collar. He rolled over and over on the floor, his eyes sticking out, his tongue turning purple, and his nails clawing great streaks down his neck. People gathered six deep. I stayed right in the middle of them, expecting another shot at any minute. My best chance was to be in the middle and I knew it.

A copper came running to push the crowd back. Somebody called an ambulance. I stuck around. The ambulance was too late. The little fat guy was dead. They finally got the morgue wagon, and a couple of boys came in and put the little fat guy in a basket and covered him up with a sheet. Somebody laid his derby hat on top of his chest and they carried him away.

I slid across the street to the Erving-

ton, stopping for a quart of Scotch and a couple of newspapers. I had three stiff slugs in my room before I got back to normal and quit cussing myself. You can see what happened. Somebody didn't want me in this man's town. They'd used the oldest gag in the world to get me to identify myself!

I took out my guns and looked 'em over. I was pretty sore. That little fat guy looked like the sort of bozo with a nice wife and three or four kids. Now, what kind of a bullet hits a guy in the shoulder and makes him die in convulsions. Easy! Somebody had popped at me with a poisoned slug! I got madder and madder. I hate like hell to be shot at.

Another drink and I thought of Maida, remembered the way she dropped that fur piece when she found out who I really was. Had she been part of it? Where did she fit in? If I ever saw *her* again! Boy! The liquor was about the same thickness and strength as water. I went to the phone.

A cool, throaty voice answered. I said, "Let me speak to Colonel Spencer."

The dame says, "He isn't feeling well now. Who is this?"

"I don't feel so well myself," I said. "Tell him the man he sent to Chicago for is in town. That's me."

She went away. In a minute I heard an extension click and a weak voiced old man said, "This is Colonel Spencer."

I said, "Colonel, this is Mike Cockrell. I'm at the Ervington. What do you want me to do?"

"You're not registered under your own name? Secrecy is—"

"Secrecy is a lot of utsnay from here on," I told him and went into detail. He sort of groaned.

"Get a cab and come out here, Cockrell. Have you read the papers?"

I hadn't. I folded them in the cab. A two inch headline screamed,

THIRD MURDER AT SPENCER DOWNS RACE TRACK

VICTIM BIG WINNER ON DAILY DOUBLE

FOR the third time in three days a killer had struck at Spencer Downs, the colonel's race track, one of the finest ever constructed in the whole country. On all three occasions the victim had been a big winner on the races, and had been struck down by a poisoned bullet while cashing winning tickets.

The cab sped on. I shuddered a little, thinking of the episode at the Union Station. One of those poisoned slugs had headed my way! The article went on to say the police seemed powerless to cope with the criminal. They called the murders crimes of a maniac and hinted that the track ought to be closed. In the back of my mind lingered the picture of the little fat guy dying on the floor of the Union Station. I stuck the paper in my pocket and turned the light off quick.

We passed Spencer Downs on the way to Colonel Spencer's mansion and even in the darkness I saw enough to convince me it was one of the showiest and costliest in the country. His house was a mile or so off the main highway on a private road some distance past the track.

A sour-pussed butler let me in. While I was trying to keep from socking him, a pair of legs came down the steps. I'm only forty-four and I like things like that. The dame was tall but not too tall, with plenty of thissa and thatta to make a guy lick his lips.

She stopped about arm's length away and said softly, "So you're Mister Cockrell, the killer!"

I gave her my best smile and said, "Wrong twice. Not *Mister* Cockrell. Mike to you. And not a killer. Mike Cockrell, private shamus, that's me!"

"You don't look so much like a killer," she said softly but there wasn't any liking in her eyes. "I've heard all about you and I've got a little advice for you. My father is the gentlest and best old man in the world. More bloodshed will kill him. If you think you can catch the maniac behind these murders and bring him to justice, all right. *But he's got to be brought in alive.* You've got to prevent further murder and *you've got to do no killing of your own.* Do you understand?"

I didn't. So I asked. It's always better that way.

SHE said, "After finding dad had sent for you I looked up your record, MISTER Cockrell. They call you a legalized gunman that never brings a yegg in alive. On your last nine cases you've been successful but you never brought in a man. You ended each of the nine by shooting the criminal. That isn't going to work here."

I said dreamily, "I remember back in 1912 I caught a pickpocket on the Jackson Park El and brought him in."

"Don't joke; I mean it! Unless you promise there'll be no more bloodshed you're not going to see my father at all."

A long while ago I worked with a Frenchman that showed me how to insult a dame when you didn't have anything to say. I started in at her toes and undressed her with my eyes, grinning all the while. When I came to her face, it was flaming red.

Before she could slap me, I said, "Little lady, when I got off the train tonight your pet killer shot at me, without giving me a chance. I got an Irish temper.

Sooner or later I'll find out who he is and I'll fill his belly full of holes. I don't use a pop gun and poison like he does. I depend on these."

I reached. And I can draw fast. Her face went white. Without another word she turned and hurried back up the stairs.

The butler said, "This way, sir," in a sort of strained voice.

Colonel Spencer was half blind, a semi-invalid for the past few years. His seamed face was lined with deep furrows of worry. Sitting beside him was a little short guy dressed up like a Christmas tree.

The colonel squinted at me and shook hands. He introduced the overdressed mug as Mr. Maloney, his partner in the track and his daughter's fiance. Maloney's hand felt like cold tripe.

"Cockrell," the colonel said, "you know most of the details. The press is crying that I ought to close my track, that a maniac is doing the killings. But most of my cash and Maloney's is tied up there. We can't close. And besides I won't be whipped by this thing."

I said, "Colonel, can you name anyone who might be doing this to you, an enemy, someone with an old grudge?"

He couldn't. Maloney sighed deeply and put the tips of his fingers together. "You've got to do something," he squeaked. "We're in desperate straits, Cockrell."

I said, "Well, there's no use to try to keep my presence secret. Somebody was tipped off to the fact that I was coming. Who knew it except you?"

The colonel shook his head. His daughter, his partner, and perhaps the butler. The butler? Been with him for years, absolutely trustworthy. I wasn't so sure.

Up popped the devil. The butler

coughed in the doorway and said, "Miss Spencer would like to see Mr. Maloney." Maloney excused himself, picked up a thick cane and limped away. He was crippled, right leg a little shorter than the left.

THE colonel and I talked on for an hour and I didn't get an angle. The thing looked more and more like the work of a maniac until he gave me the figures. With his tired voice sounding like he was talking of dimes, he explained, "You see, Cockrell, the track takes six and a half percent of the total bet. The total for the Fall meet should

*She could
have had my
right arm if
she'd wanted
it.*



run around eight million. But if I can't get the bettors to come to the track—"

I was quiet a minute trying to figure six and a half percent of eight million bucks. Then I realized that each of the three murders had been committed on a bettor, someone who had won money. Naturally the people would grow afraid to bet! But why—?

I said, "Colonel, I'll go out to the track tomorrow and try to prevent any murder or killing. Maybe I can, maybe not. All we can do is try. Either a crazy man is doing it or somebody is getting ready to put the bee on you. Someone's going to ask you to kick through with some jack."

We talked on a while and I left. A library opened to the right across the hall. I couldn't help looking in. In the glow of a soft light the lug Maloney was standing facing Spencer's daughter. Both of them were plenty mad. He said, "By God, you will or else."

Her hand flew up and cracked against his face. His glasses fell to the carpet. Then his own hand snatched out, caught at her dress. It tore, ripped away. For a moment she stood there transfixed, half naked breasts swaying, before she covered them with her hands.

I was still grinning when old Sour Puss, the butler, grabbed Maloney's arm and swung him around.

"Leave her alone," snapped the butler and there wasn't any respect in his voice. Maloney started to swing on him, thought better of it. His eyes held something funny, not just anger, but a little fear. As I went down the steps, I was wondering why a big shot like Maloney was afraid of a servant.

THE cab was waiting. We finally hit the highway again and turned left toward Dallas. At Beckley we hit a

red light. Another cab pulled beside us. The door opened, a little guy got out and stepped on our running board. When he got in, I was covering him with a .45. He grinned and sat down.

The light changed and there we sat. I had to tap on the window; the cab driver was scared.

"Go on, buddy," I said as gently as I could. "If you got a park, drive through it. I got company."

"Now that's being smart, Cockrell," said the guy and reached for his pocket. I nearly broke his ribs with the gat. He grunted, said, "Hell, I was only after a cigarette!"

I let him get one, slow. By the glow of the match I saw his face. It didn't mean a thing. Finally he said, "You can put the gun away, Cockrell, this is just a little business deal."

I said, "I feel better with a gun, punk." I went through him. The only thing he carried was a brown paper package in his right coat pocket.

"That," he said softly, "is yours."

I put my gat back in a shoulder holster, and opened the package. It was a stack of bills.

"Thanks. What do I do next?"

"Throw up the job you're on and take a case for me in Kalamazoo."

"Go on, I'm interested."

"I want you to find out something for me."

"What?"

"Oh, who killed Cock Robin, or anything that will take you a couple of weeks."

Sadly I tied the money back in its brown paper package. "Sorry, bud, I got a job."

He argued for a while. I told him, "I wouldn't throw in with a pack of murderers."

He grinned. "You got it wrong. This

hasn't got anything to do with the track murders. A friend of mine wants to pull a little deal and he's afraid of you. He's run into your methods before and he wants you out of town till he gets over the hump. But don't get us mixed up with the track killers. We want to make a killing okay, but in jack, not people."

I said, "I still don't want the job. I got one."

He sort of sighed, leaned forward and tapped on the window. The driver turned. "Head for the airport," said my little friend.

I said, "What—?" and shut up. He had a neat little gun in his hand. Had it in a garter holster all the time. So we went to the airport. I didn't have much to say. He took both my guns and dropped them in a brief case he was carrying. After a while I said, "You can put me on a plane but what makes you think I'll stay on it?"

"Well," he said gently, "for one thing, this gun. Then I'm going with you."

I got out first, the little guy right behind me. I took a couple of steps, stumbled and dropped the money package. It popped on the cement apron and the little guy glanced down. That was enough. I grabbed his gun, kneed him hard in the groin, and snapped him right on the button with a round house right. I whistled and caught the same cab.

THIRTY minutes later we were back in my room at the Ervington. The little guy was tough; he could take it. I cracked him again, then threw water on him to bring him to. He grinned and said, "What's the use of being sore? What's the use of being tough? I tried to throw some jack your way and this is what I get."

I lit a cigarette. "Buddy, I came into this town to do an honest job. As soon

as I hit the station, you guys took a pop at me with a poisoned slug. I'm going to find out who it was and fill his belly full of lead. Then I'm going to collect my fee from the colonel and go home. Now once more—who sent you?"

He said, "Santa Claus," and I socked him again. Twenty minutes later I was tired and he was out. I couldn't help sort of admiring the little punk. He could take it.

I handcuffed him to the radiator and pushed the divan over for him to sleep on after taping his mouth. He just lay there with his eyes sort of hot, never moving from me. I took a drink and was in the shower when the phone rang. It took a couple of minutes to get to it.

A voice said, "Cockrell?"

I grunted. It went on, flat, far away as if the guy was holding something over the mouthpiece of the phone. "If you aren't out of town by tomorrow night, you'll be killed with a poisoned slug. That's all."

I didn't sleep much. It was getting screwy as hell. First, someone knowing the colonel had called me in. Second, who put me on the spot, the dame Maida, or the telegraph boy? Third, why was Spencer's daughter so damned anxious I wouldn't knock off anyone, and why was she marrying a man she evidently hated? Why did the little lug on the davenport want to pay me to leave town, and, last, why did someone call up to tell me they were going to bump me if I didn't lam? It was getting too involved. So I got up, threw a blanket over the lad on the davenport, and opened the brown paper package. I laid money all over the table and called the desk for a boy.

He was a smart kid. Night hops in good hotels usually know their way about. He came in and I was buried in

a Racing Form. I grinned, tossed him a finnif and said, "Sit down." He sat down, took the drink I offered, and helped himself to a cigarette.

"How does a guy go about laying a big bet here," I asked, "without going to the track?"

He said, "How big?"

"Five or six grand maybe more, maybe less."

"Well, pal," his voice was studied, "I *might* get it down for you myself. You see—"

I laughed. "You can ride with me, kid. I'm just asking how. Who's the biggest bookie in town?"

"Flush Darrough," he said, "though most people don't know it. He's running a string of goats out at the Downs himself."

I let him go then, pretty well satisfied and pretty well mixed up farther. I'd known Flush Darrough a long time. As crooked a big time gambler as ever lived—but not a killer—not a black-mailer.

THE next morning I fed the little guy and he still wouldn't talk. So I taped him up again, rang the desk and told them I was going to sleep till noon and God help anyone that knocked on my door or rang my phone. When I left I hung a *Do Not Disturb* on the knob and walked down.

Sergeant Wilcox is a friend of mine. He let me look at all three of the murder slugs from the track as well as the one taken from the poor little fat guy at the station. They'd been poisoned with aconite.

Wilcox said, "Funny thing. They're not .22 slugs."

I raised my brows.

"Nope," said the sergeant, "they must

be out of some foreign gun. Too small for a .22."

I verified a few facts and left. By that time it was noon. I went back to the hotel and fed the little guy with all the guts. He still wouldn't talk. So I took him to the track with me. Before leaving I stood in front of a mirror and practiced going for both guns, cross-armed. By the time we left the room I knew damned well he wouldn't try to take a powder on me.

Spencer Downs was beautiful and the weather was perfect, but the grandstand was only a quarter full, the clubhouse less than that. The newspaper squawks were beginning to tell on the crowd.

The little guy's name was Horace. I walked him all over the place, hoping somebody would give me a break by trying to help him. It wasn't till after the third race that I got a break. We walked down to the paddock. Leaning over a low rail looking at a bay mare was Flush Darrough. I said to Horace, "Walk on over to Flush and tap him on the shoulder."

Horace shrugged and started out. I was about six feet behind him. He tapped Flush. Flush wheeled, started to say something, and then saw me. He said coldly, "You've made a mistake, my friend. Hello, Cockrell, what are you doing here?"

I grinned. I'd seen the light of recognition in his eye. I took a stab in the dark and said, "I came after you, Flush, been looking for you all afternoon."

"What for?"

I said, "Murder!" and waited to see what would happen.

Just then in the distance a woman screamed. People began running that way. A little guy with fish eyes shot out of the paddock and said, "I just got a phone call. The crazy killer has

knocked off another dame; She won three thousand bucks on the last race!"

Flush grinned grimly and said, "What murder?"

I turned and ran with the rest of them leaving Horace and Flush together. Wrong again!

She was dead all right, a poisoned slug in her shoulder. A copper was raising her head and her face was contorted terribly, like she had choked to death. She was lying right in front of the ten dollar payoff ticket window and scattered about were a dozen or so tickets

she had held on the long shot winner of the third race.

I stood there figuring how she'd been standing, where the slug could have come from. No one had heard the report of a gun but everyone was agreed the killer had used a silencer. Right across from the payoff window, just a

*By that time both
of them were
plenty mad.*



little to the east was the Clubhouse. I strolled over that way. I didn't understand how anyone could shoot somebody from there without being seen, but funny things happen.

ON the lower floor of the Clubhouse was the kitchen, the pantry and so forth. I walked in, turned right and found a flight of stairs leading to the main floor. To my left was a door marked *Men's Smoking Room*.

There was no one in it, but a window that looked out on the payoff windows was up a fraction of an inch. On the sill was a perfect fingerprint. I carry a little outfit for emergencies like that. I mashed up some cigarette ashes, sprinkled them over the print and covered it with a piece of black celluloid. When I took the celluloid off, I covered the ash-print with a piece of cellophane, taped it down and dropped it in my vest pocket.

As I turned to go, something clattered on the floor, sounded like I dropped a coin. I looked down. Rolling across the room toward the corner was a round piece of metal. I picked it up, saw it looked like a thimble with a flat end. The flat side was bright with tiny scratches.

The swinging door started to move slowly. I dove for a—well, a booth and stepped high. A little guy comes in and starts peering around all over the floor. While he was down on his hands and knees, I stepped out and said, "Is this what you're looking for?" I had the thimble-like thing in my hand.

The rest happened so quick it was scandalous. The little guy wheeled, still crouching, and damned if he didn't come up with a gun! Lead tore through my best hat before I could get my left hand into action. He was a smart little gun-

man. He shot once and fell sideways, knowing I'd be blazing. It was a mistake. I snapped one at his shoulder just as he dove and it caught him right between his eyes.

When the cops came, I was bending over him, going through him, and cussing my own bad luck. There wasn't a thing on him, but his face looked familiar. All the time I was trying to tell the cops who I was, I was trying to place the guy. The cop said the punk's name was Dopey Marks and that he was a tout, but when the colonel sent Maloney down to identify me, I still didn't know where I'd seen the guy!

It wasn't until the coppers had turned me loose that I placed him. *It was the face of the guy who had worn a messenger's suit and paged Mr. Cockrell the night before, when the killer tried to knock me off.* That was a little tieup at least!

We'll skip a lot of detail. Colonel Spencer jumped down my throat, the cops were on me, and I had a plenty busy evening. Just after dark I finished making a few more investigations and headed for the colonel's house. The butler let me in and actually glared at me.

I said, "Well, pickle-puss, what's wrong with you?" Maloney stepped out of the living room and glared the same way. He gestured with his cane and I went on in. Spencer and his daughter were sitting by the table, the gal with her arm around the old man's shoulders.

HERE it was in a nutshell. The killer had made his demand. The note said, "Get one hundred thousand dollars together tonight and give it to Mike Cockrell. Tell him to go to his hotel and wait. The killings will stop. Otherwise, I take one each day until your

track is closed." It looked bad for me!

Five minutes later we were still arguing. I picked a grand out of my wallet, the grand the colonel had paid me as a retainer, and tossed it on the table. I said, "To hell with the bunch of you! If I'm a crook, that goes double! This is too screwy a mess for me anyway. There's your jack, colonel, and you can stick it up your left nostril."

Maloney said sneeringly, "So you're quitting, eh? I suspected your reputation was hand made! Get you in a corner, and you quit."

"I'm quitting the colonel, yeah, you lousy punk!" I was plenty sore. "I'm on my own now. Nobody takes a shot at Mike Cockrell and gets away with it. Sure my reputation is hand made—like this!"

I had a Colt in each hand before they could bat an eye. The girl said, sneeringly, "Just a hired killer, a gunman who has to kill to keep his reputation!"

"You're right. I kill to let the crooks know they can't fool with Mike Cockrell. And I've got prints of the real murderer right in my vest pocket, prints that'll get him shot by one of these guns!"

The colonel said, "Let's don't lose our tempers, Cockrell. Put the guns away."

Maloney snorted, picked up his cane, and limped out of the room. The butler said, "Telephone, Miss Spencer." She left.

The colonel and I talked for forty or fifty minutes and I persuaded him to let the payoff go for tonight and leave the next move up to the killer. I knew what I was doing. Presently I put the grand back in my pocket and went out. The butler was nowhere to be seen. I let myself out and walked down the shrubbed walk. Just as I passed a big

tree, something exploded against my head. I dropped, dead to the world.

WHEN I came to and sat up on the gravel, the first thing I did was to check up. Guns there, money there, everything there but the fingerprint I'd taken off the window sill! I didn't even go back in the house. My cab was waiting and I grinned all the way back to the hotel.

About midnight the phone rang. I was surprised as hell while I listened. I dressed, looked at both guns, and went down the hall to 1210. I knocked at the door, one hand on a gun butt, and barged in rapid when it swung open. Maida Knowlton stood there grinning while I went through the room. She was alone.

She wore a negligee that showed every line of her body. Her breasts heaved, the gap between them was plenty alluring. She sat down on the divan and crossed her legs. Plenty pretty.

"Why did you run away?" I asked.

"Because a man made a fool of me. I heard that slug go past you, saw the fat man stop it. I knew what you'd think—that I'd put you on the spot. I was afraid."

I didn't say anything. She went on.

"A man paid me to tail you from Chicago, to get acquainted with you. I was to get you to a hotel room and slip you a Mickey Finn. This man wanted you out of the way for a few days. But he didn't tell me I was putting you on a murder spot."

"Why tell me this now?"

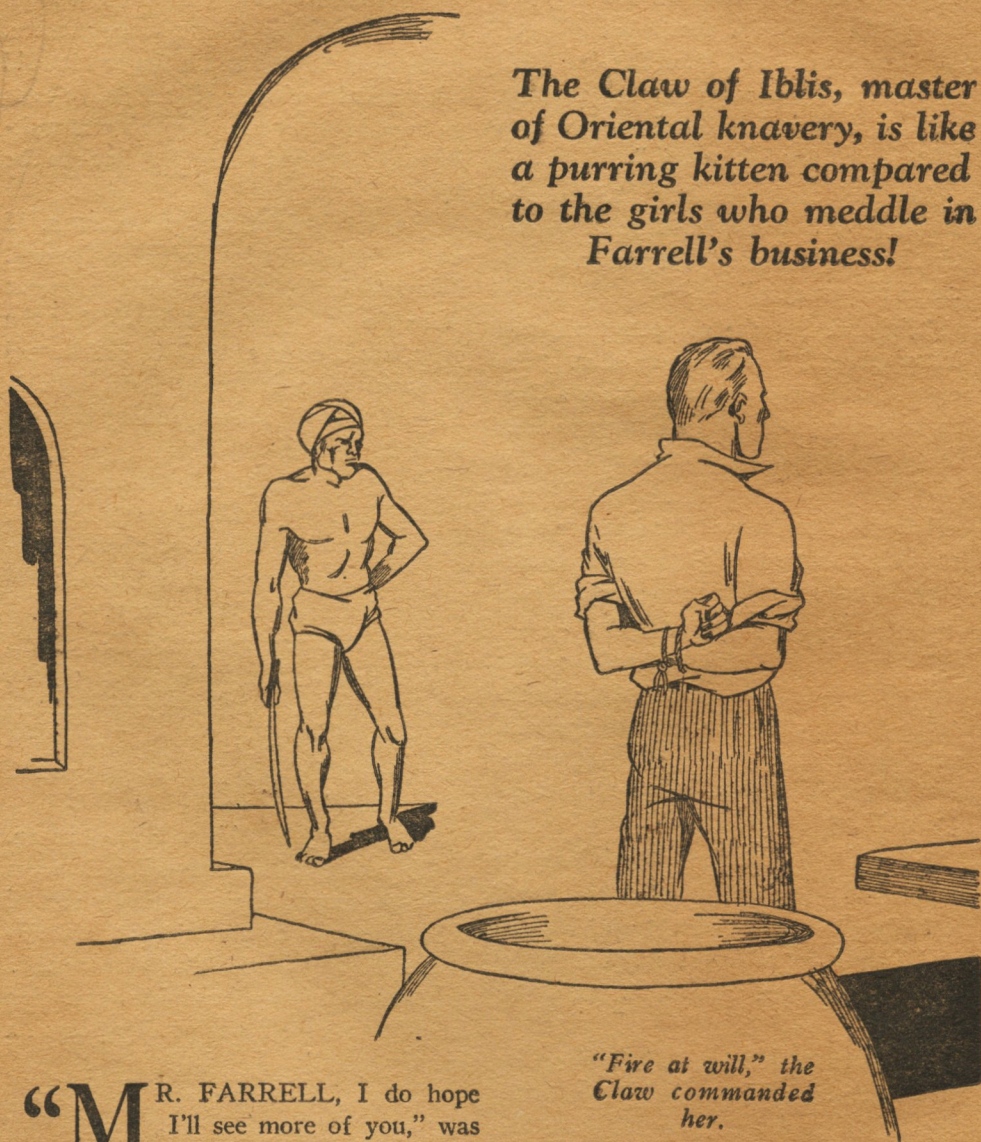
"I've got a favor I want done."

I sat still. She stood up and her eyes blazed. The negligee gaped open. "I'll give you details, Cockrell, and anything else you want if you'll do me this favor!"

(Continued on page 108)

DOUBLE

The Claw of Iblis, master of Oriental knavery, is like a purring kitten compared to the girls who meddle in Farrell's business!



“**M**R. FARRELL, I do hope I'll see more of you,” was what Madeleine said as she watched the porter stow her hand luggage into the *ghari* at the Tanjong Pagar station in Singapore, but her crimson lips and dark eyes said a great deal more—though most eloquent of all was her

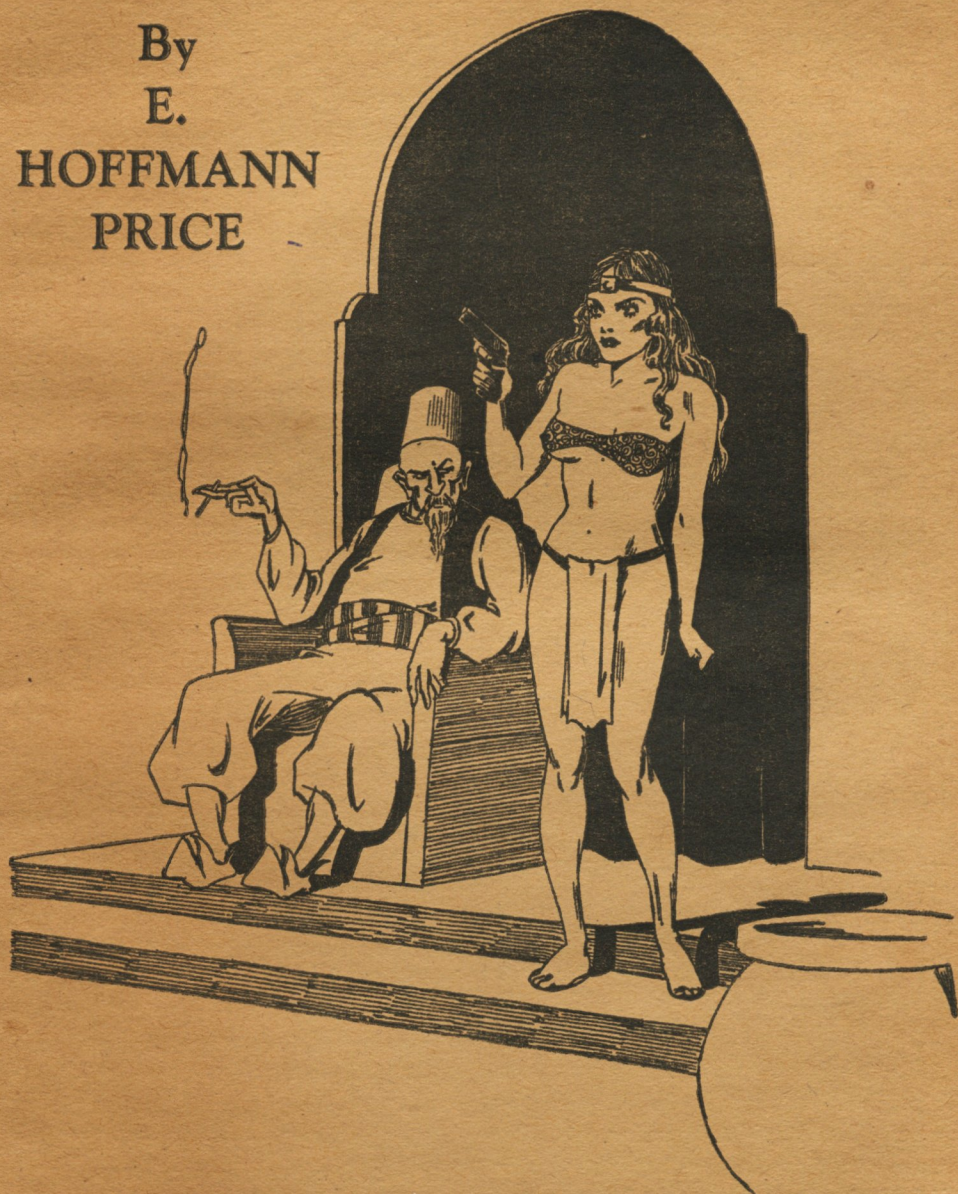
“Fire at will,” the Claw commanded her.

supple, sensuous body and its aura of radiant vitality.

“That,” smiled the tanned, broad-shouldered American, handing her into the *ghari*, “is something you can't dodge.

CATSPAW

By
E.
HOFFMANN
PRICE



I'm going to be busier than a Chinaman eating soup with chopsticks, but somehow, we'll find a chance to dance out at Tanjong Katong, and—"

"Don't forget—the Wellington," she

cut in as the coolie smacked the shaggy Shan pony across the rump and the *ghari* rolled into the traffic.

Forget? Well, rather not. The good-humored gray eyes that peered from the

shadow of the American's pith helmet narrowed acquisitively. Madeleine Fortesque had lots of it where there should be lots, and little where she should be slim. Only thing wrong with Madeleine was her way of saying no.

"If we'd only missed the express and stayed another day in Penang," he told himself, remembering how the soft white curves smiling from Madeleine's negligee had left him cross-eyed.

FARRELL'S urgent business, however, had not permitted him to miss the Singapore express. Millwood Industries, Incorporated, wanted to find out what was wrong in northern Malaya, why the Raja of Batu Gaja could not keep banditry, sabotage, and assorted assassination from playing the devil with the mines and plantations controlled by the estate of the late James Millwood.

Farrell, like many others, knew the answer: a sinister master of intrigue who for want of a more accurate name was called the Claw of Iblis. Murder in Malacca—revolt in Acheen—gun-running to Borneo—all manufactured in Singapore, but find the maker.

If Claw of Iblis—the Hand of Satan—was not precise enough, then dope out his real name.

It wasn't like a guessing contest in the states. This was *à L'orientale*: if you are wrong, you wake up wondering who laid your head between your ankles.

Farrell drove out Orchard Road to a furnished bungalow he had engaged by wire. Hotels might be safer, but also more conspicuous. And not as handy if he had to leave town in a hurry. . .

Leaving towns was his specialty. Someone once said that all he left in Moulmein was a pagoda and an oil barge, but that was unjust. He left a

Chinese merchant's daughter with pleasant memories.

AN hour later, Hop Wing, the number one boy, was stowing the luggage while Farrell donned fresh drills, a newly whitened helmet, and a .450 Webley.

A ricksha took him through the sunset glow to an estate well out on Bales-tier Road. A black Tamil as thin as a bamboo rod admitted him to the house of Wallace Crosby, the resident manager of the East Indies Trading Corporation.

They traded, all right; but while they came back from Borneo with nuts—coco and palm—they left Singapore loaded with trouble. Farrell's hunch was that Wallace Crosby must be connected with the hidden trouble-maker of South East Asia, the venomous industrial spy who blackmailed native princes, organized revolts, upset thrones for whoever could pay off.

A stocky, bald-headed man with shrewd blue eyes and a wolf-trap mouth rose from behind a rosewood desk as red as his face and extended a hard hand.

"I've been looking for you," he said, ringing for brandy and soda. "You've been doing things out here."

"I figured we ought to get together," was the response; but he knew that using Wallace Crosby as a stepping stone would be foot-blistering work. "A couple of up and at-'em Americans can turn the East Indies inside out. Look at this—"

He handed Crosby a sheaf of bills of lading and warehouse receipts.

"Ummm. . ." Crosby's eyes narrowed, then his head cocked quizzically. He demanded, "Does this stuff have to go to Sandakan? I could use it up north."

That was as good as a confession. Munitions and guns to be used—well, in Batu Gaja. But that was penny ante stuff. He wanted the man behind Crosby, the Claw of Iblis. His gray steel glance shifted about the room. He was noting details; filing cabinets, book cases, windows, doorways. A tree outside. . .

"It's tied up," temporized Farrell. "I'd get in a jam canceling that consignment. If I had more drag here—suppose I see you tomorrow?"

"Hmmm. . . ." Crosby stroked his jaw and nodded. "Do that."

Farrell headed back toward his bungalow. The papers that had built him up as a rising young smuggler were phony. Scrutiny would spill the beans.

The trader's reaction had confirmed the hunch: there was someone behind the scenes. Looting the files in the bungalow might reveal the master mind. The strictly legal records, in the company's offices in the Hong Kong & Shanghai Bank building, would be uninteresting.

In the meanwhile—just to keep from becoming jittery while awaiting the hour of the raid, he told himself—why not see more of Madeleine? As much more as he could; she had plenty worth seeing!

He drove to the nearest telephone station. There had been delay in installing one in the bungalow. He presently learned that Madeleine was not at the Wellington.

Damn it! She had lost little time in finding someone to show her the town.

Farrell returned to the bungalow. From the compound gate he saw lights in the living room. That was odd.

And why was the Number One boy beaming so expansively?

THE reason was a lovely surprise. Madeleine was smiling from the chaise longue. The soft lights coaxed warm reflections from her silken legs, and her dark eyes were a promise. Her voice was a heart-stirring murmur that was like a whisper of love. Somehow, that suggestion flashed through his mind as his glance shifted from the sleek curve of her hip to the ivory line of her throat as it swept down to meet the fascinations that rounded out the upper reaches of her bodice.

"It was so lonesome at the Wellington," she explained. "So I had the *ghari* driver go back to the station and find where your checked baggage was going to be delivered."

As if Farrell gave a happy hoot how she'd found her way!

"Take an evening off, Hop Wing!"—which was what the Number One boy had been expecting.

The Chinese servant lost little time, and Farrell lost less. The display of dimpled knees was driving him mad.

She tried to keep him at a distance, but he had profited by experience. The repulsing hand, instead of blocking his chin, failed to connect. Madeleine got the soundest kissing of her score plus four or five years. Since she couldn't effectively slap him, she decided to like it.

Madeleine, however, went beyond her intentions. She returned the caress with interest, and her arms drew him closer. When the clinch finally broke, she was gasping for breath. She had some difficulty in regaining it. She tried to say something, but her remark was inarticulate. . . .

She couldn't be strictly coherent, with someone kissing the hollow of her throat. Farrell felt the sudden rise of her breast and knew he was making a

job of it. The luxurious little sigh, and the way she hitched herself back among the cushions confirmed his suspicions.

This wasn't tracking down the trouble-maker of Malaya—but after all, the raid would be safer if delayed until quite late that night.

"I didn't bring my overnight case or anything," she deplored, although Farrell hadn't had a chance to complain on that score.

"What you did bring is plenty," he said, dismissing that irrelevancy as he tried a one arm squeeze that would leave his other hand free for—well, what would anyone do with an unoccupied lunch hook?

"**D**ARLING," she finally whispered, "I'd be ever so much more comfortable if I had a lounge robe or something to—You're terribly rough! . . ."

She proved that by wriggling out of his arms. The gleam in her misty eyes hinted that she might like being kissed some more.

"There's a mandarin robe in that trunk in the other room—I picked it up for my sister, but I'm sure she'd not mind—"

"Oh, delightful!" Then, with a malicious little smile, "Bet the frills on it make a liar of you—about the sister, I mean."

Whoever it was intended for, the dragon-embroidered garment saved the ensemble from a thorough mauling. . . and the whirring of uncounted tropical insects without drowned whatever protests Madeleine had. . . she wasn't raising her voice. . . presently she agreed with Farrell's program for the evening. . . it really was too late to go anywhere. . .

But somehow, Madeleine did cast a few furtive glances at her wrist watch.

Just a trifling distraction, but thinking of time did seem blasphemous.

Glancing over the flame of the match he struck to a cigarette, he saw her fumbling for the compact and lipstick in her handbag.

"What the hell," was his unspoken thought, noticing the second hand cosmetic on the tip of his smoke, "do I have to take off a fresh layer, that she's just becoming good and kissable?"

Madeleine's fingers were deft, but Farrell, watching time on his own account, was a shade more vigilant than he would ordinarily have been. Thus he saw her palming a small glass vial.

That was an odd note.

"This light is terrible," she complained.

He unsuccessfully tinkered with the shade. The result was glaring.

"There's a goose neck lamp on the living room table," she suggested.

He was gone only for a moment, and it took no longer to plug it in.

The tiny bottle did not feature in the complexion repairs. It had disappeared. A swift, appreciative glance told him that her hose tops were not concealing it. Presently he was certain that the flimsy brassiere had not entered the play—no, he didn't *look*. . .

He made a dive for an ashtray, knocked the handbag to the floor, cursed his own clumsiness. As he stooped to retrieve it, back turned toward Madeleine, he unsnapped the clasps.

The glance was revealing. A small automatic pistol and an emptied vial were nestled among a tangle of feminine odds and ends. His finger tips brushed the smeared stopper.

The smell identified it: tincture of opium. But why lull him to sleep? She had a pistol, if she wanted to make it permanent.



*Deftly she wrapped
the sarong around her.*

Farrell, certain that his mission in Singapore was already kicking back at him, had to compliment the unknown master of intrigue for fast work. Hell's fire, he'd been wise to Farrell ever since that day in Penang!

Madeleine's glass was full. He reached for the decanter and filled his own. The

heavy-bodied, tawny port masked all but the scantiest trace of the opiate. He sipped a bit, appreciately smacked his lips.

"Say—" He set the glass down. "I must be getting absent-minded. I'm nuts about this port myself, but maybe

you'd like a drop of *oloroso* sherry. "It's topside number one."

"Well. . . just a drop," she agreed. "My head's fairly spinning."

In a moment he was uncorking the *oloroso*. The stopper yielded with a jerk. He tipped the filled glass from the table, and knocked the empty one to the floor.

"Awfully sorry," he apologized, noting the moist glisten of her skin through the wine-soaked hosiery. "Maybe—"

"Think nothing of it," she laughed. "I'll rinse them."

Madeleine headed for the bath. Farrell emptied the decanter and goblet out the window. He refilled the former with *oloroso*. It was about the color of the tawny port. The dark glass of the sherry bottle concealed the shortage.

WHEN she returned to hang the stocking in front of the fan, Farrell was setting down a glass and smacking his lips.

"Try the *oloroso*," he invited. He refilled his own goblet from the decanter, which Madeleine of course assumed contained drugged port.

"To a nicer evening than we could possibly spend anywhere else!" she proposed, smiling over the edge of her glass.

As she watched his drink go down the hatch, Madeleine fairly smothered him with breath-taking kisses. . .

He responded nobly, until he became drowsy and languid. She stroked his hair, and whispered sleepy nothings. . .

Finally, she gently drew away, letting him slump back among the cushions. She listened to his slow breathing, then stealthily retrieved the dried hosiery.

Farrell's lids parted, but he did not watch the tempting display. He was

looking at the brilliance just below the lamp shade. He continued staring at the eye-straining glare. His lids did not drop until Madeleine, giving her ensemble a final hitch and a pat, stepped over to listen and look.

Very gently she lifted an eyelid. The pupil was contracted—not from opium, as she thought, but from staring at the glaring light. Satisfied, she slipped softly from the room.

Before Farrell dared follow Madeleine, he heard a low, trilling whistle, then the creaking wheels of a *ghari* outside the compound.

He had not counted on such complete preparation. No chance of following; not after that slap across the pony's rump! Yet he was undrugged, and he had business at Crosby's house.

Farrell donned a dark suit and set out on foot. He had covered less than half a mile when he hailed an unoccupied ricksha which he directed out Balestier Road.

A hundred yards from his destination, he dismissed his vehicle. He stealthily approached the palisade that inclosed the compound. With a thin, strong cord to lasso a paling, scaling the barrier was but a moment's work.

Farrell crept through the luxuriant vegetation and toward the tree that commanded the window of Crosby's study. But as he worked his way along the limb, a light flashed on within.

Under his breath he cursed the unexpected occupancy of the room. Then admiration checked his wrath.

A strikingly lovely Malay girl in European dress was following Crosby into the study. She had a pert little nose, great smouldering dark eyes, and lips like a pomegranate blossom; but her voice was low and wrathful.

"*Tuan*," she said, reaching into her

bosom and producing a packet of bank notes which she slapped on the desk, "what manner of thing is this? Why this marked money? By Allah, you are trying to betray us!"

"Who sent you?" snapped Crosby.

"Look at the markings!" she challenged. Her voice and gesture were an accusation.

Was she one of the crew of spies and intriguers who represented the Claw of Iblis?

Crosby hunched forward to examine the money. A silvery flicker darted from the girl's side. Her knife was buried hilt deep between Crosby's shoulders.

Like a tigress, she was behind him, looping a scarf about his face, throttling his outcry and gurgling gasp. For a moment there was a hoarse, muffled choking and the girl's panting breath as she tensed to her grim task. Then Crosby slumped forward, shuddered, and was still.

That one deftly driven stroke had done its work.

"Damn it," muttered Farrell, "nothing more to learn from Crosby!"

If he paused to loot the dead man's files, he could not follow the girl. She was worth trailing as a lead to Crosby's background. She might even serve the Claw of Iblis; but if he followed her, he would not be able to return and search the office. Once the police learned of the crime, Farrell's task was blocked.

BEFORE he could approach the problem, it became worse. A door silently opened into the room. A woman entered: Madeleine, pistol in hand.

"Back away from that desk, but don't raise your hands, or I'll shoot." Her voice was low and venomous.

She spoke fluent Malay! Farrell's teeth gritted. She had made a sap out

of him from the start, with that honeyed, "Oh, it's so sweet of you to show me the sights."

She was reaching for the telephone on the desk. Farrell's hot wrath turned to cold chills. Madeleine had drugged him, and now she was holding the Malay girl a prisoner. Could she be a police spy?

Farrell needed action. He opened his penknife, leaned toward the plantain cluster at his side and snipped one from the bunch.

A plantain is something like a banana, only three times as large, and so wooden a horse couldn't eat one raw.

As Madeleine's lips shaped a number, the plantain zipped through the window, knocking the pistol from her grasp.

Farrell followed through; but the Malay girl had the situation in hand before his feet were fairly on the carpet.

"Hang on, *sitti*," encouraged Farrell, bounding into action. "By Allah, I am your friend."

His timely intervention was all the proof the little brown sister needed at the moment. Between them, they took a drape cord and lashed Madeleine to a chair, then gagged her with the scarf that had choked Crosby's outcry.

"Next time you put opium into my wine, darling," whispered Farrell, "be damn' sure I'm not looking. That was *oloroso* I was drinking, the same as you."

Madeleine could not answer, but her eyes were blistering.

"Where are the servants?" Farrell demanded, turning to his lovely ally. "And who the devil are you?"

"*Mûnah*," she answered, "and don't worry about the servants."

He plucked the keys from Crosby's pocket, opened the filing cases, rapidly sifted the contents. In a few moments he had assembled a thick sheaf.

"That is odd plunder, *tûan*," observed Mûnah.

Despite his haste, Farrell was fascinated by that delicate oval face and the lithe, sweetly rounded figure which he could not help trying to visualize in a silken sarong, and frail jacket whose transparency a many colored shawl would only make more alluring.

She reminded him of a young tigress when she said, "It is not good to leave this woman alive—she will talk—"

Another knife blossomed in her hand. "Forget it!" snapped Farrell. "We'll be out of town before she's loose."

He followed her to the rear. A light car was parked behind the estate. She had entered by a wicket used by the servants.

"I am going to Johore Bahru," she said, "where there is less law. A *sampan* will take me across the straits."

SHE drove cross town and out the Serangoon Road. Farrell's mission had blown up before it started. His intervention in favor of Mûnah had made him an accessory after the fact of murder, and the records he had taken were merely clues to Crosby's evil background, not blueprints leading to the Claw of Iblis. With luck he might get to Siam, and finally to the states with the data that some other investigator could follow up.

Mûnah pulled up at the Moslem cemetery at the outskirts of Serangoon Village. She slipped out of her trim ensemble. For a moment she was a slender length of amber-tinted loveliness in the moon glow, a fascinating anomaly: Malay flesh adorned by ultra-western step-ins!

Then she deftly wrapped a sheer silken sarong about her hips. It was something like a skirt, only better. At

one side the edges would part at every step, revealing a shapely leg from ankle to hip.

In a moment, all her European finery was in a compact bundle at her feet.

"*Tûan*," she said, coming so close that her warmth and fragrance made him forget both peril and business for a moment, "The white woman you so foolishly let live thinks we are accomplices. It would be dangerous for us to be seen together."

"Where's your *sampan*?" he demanded.

"Waiting under cover," Mûnah answered. "I will paddle it myself."

He seated himself in the shadow of a headstone shaped like a hitching post capped by a turban, then drew her to his side.

"Listen, Mûnah," he said, "suppose I don't let you go?" She fearlessly regarded him, then replied, "You are not one to put me back in peril."

"Why did you hate Crosby?"

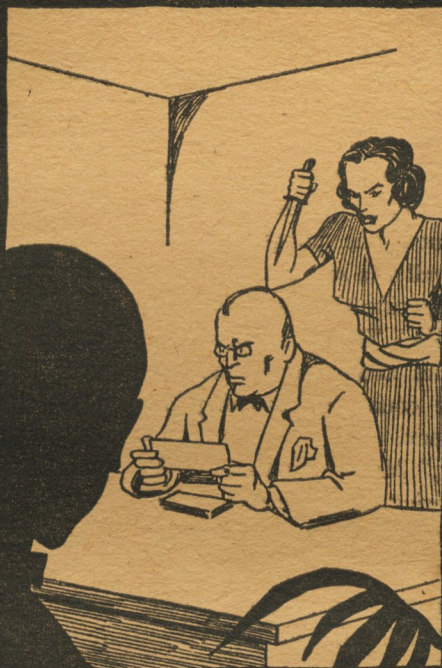
"What have you against him?" she countered. "Why did you take those papers?"

Farrell's job was to learn things, not reveal them. And Mûnah's caution might yield to persuasion. He was certain she was holding out plenty—referring to information, not what she kept packed in silk.

"Let us speak of something else," he evaded. "What difference does anything make except that presently you go your way and I go mine, and only Allah knows what our end may be."

He gathered an armful of Mûnah. She was firm-fleshed and supple. The tremor of his voice seemed to strike a responsive chord. But for him, she would still be looking into a pistol muzzle.

She returned his kiss, clung to him



Like a tigress she came up behind him.

with a fervor that sent thrills chasing each other all the way to his toenails. Farrell's thoughts rapidly shifted to mysteries only indirectly pertaining to the Claw of Iblis.

Mûnah was rapidly responding to treatment. Though slender to the eye, he learned through other senses that she was plump as a young partridge, and, like Madeleine, slender where a woman should be slim . . . he began to wish he had four arms, like the great god Siva . . . no wonder the Hindus called him a god . . . who wouldn't be,

with four hands to cover practically everything of interest, and all at once!

But Mûnah kept her head. She had slipped clear of his embrace and drew together the edges of her *sarong*, effectively blocking his ardor.

"Please don't—not now. Let me for a change speak of something else," she protested. A long, smouldering, speculative glance. Then, "Perhaps you could help me again? Though it is dangerous, and the reward will be nothing."

That last was an outright mistake, Farrell told her.

"My father, Nureddin Ali," resumed Mûnah, "is a prisoner in a house on Jalan Penang, in the hands of an enemy trying to force him to equip a pirate boat. I also was a prisoner, but I escaped and went to Crosby's bungalow to exact vengeance. Crosby trapped my father."

VENGENCE was meat and drink to a Malay. Mûnah's knife work was reasonable. But if she thought that she was using Farrell as a sap, the laugh was on her. The specifications sounded like the Claw of Iblis! This was a break.

"But why not notify the British police?" Farrell countered, catching the joker in the deck.

"My father," Mûnah explained, "already has a price on his head. He is unjustly accused. His only hope is escape and flight to Sumatra."

It was a bit too reasonable! Farrell, however, could not decline the risk. However dangerous, it must lead from Crosby to the sinister Claw.

"I'll go," he agreed; then he listened as Mûnah gave him detailed directions.

"My father's enemy has followers of all races," she concluded, "and it will be easy for you to enter. No one knows his name. He is called the Great Lord. Take this token, and use it as I described."

She handed him a Straits dollar with two of the date numerals obliterated, leaving only a nine and a three. Mûnah, resisting the advances of one of her captors, had knifed him and taken his identification tag.

"I would go myself," she added, "except that my face is too familiar, and I am only a woman. Now take this thin bladed knife. Conceal it. It may serve you."

"And you, in the meanwhile?" queried Farrell.

"To Johore Bahru," she answered. "Take my hired car. Abandon it when it has served you."

FARRELL drove back to Singapore, parked at the gas works, and set out for the native quarter on foot.

Jalan Penang was a rankly scented darkness through which turbaned figures slunk like ghosts. From a nearby courtyard came the muffled clanging of gongs, whining of moon fiddles, and the sputter of firecrackers: a Chinese funeral procession about to set out.

Farrell shuddered as he heard the eerie wailing and thumping, and muttered, "If this don't work, there's going to be another funeral, and not Chinese. . . ."

Then he squared his shoulders. The amiable Farrell grin that had fatally fooled many an enemy crinkled his face. Fate, that blind idiot, was jerking the strings.

He tapped at the door. A wrinkled Malay with betel juice drooling from the corners of his mouth answered him with an iron stare.

"Ninety-three reporting," announced Farrell, presenting the dollar.

"The third nail," recited the Malay.

"Of the ninth claw," answered Farrell, wondering if Mûnah had been right about the password. One hand was on the butt of the Webley in his coat pocket.

The Malay led him into a murky den crowded with drunkards gurgling at flasks of arrak, and hopheads pulling at the stems of opium pipes.

The Claw had a sweet place.

Farrell's guide stalked toward a blank, dirty wall. There was no perceptible

opening, but many bare feet had worn a slick streak across the rough floor. He tapped in peculiar rhythm; there was an answering tap; then he said, "Ya Abbas! Ninety-three reporting!"

A panel opened. Farrell crossed the threshold. A pistol prodded his ribs.

"Not a move, brother of a pig!" growled a voice from his side. The speaker probed his pockets, removed his pistol. "Miss Fortesque as well as the Master would like to see you."

The pistol at Farrell's back urged him into the murky glow of a single kerosene lamp suspended from the ceiling.

Madeleine Fortesque sat on a dias beside a thin, hook-nosed Arab with a henna-reddened beard and a mouth hard as a sword blade. Ignoring Mûnah's counsel had been a fatal mistake! He should have let her knife Madeleine!

Her face was drawn, pallid even in that murky yellow glow. He was trapped as surely as though he had taken the drugged wine she had set out for him.

"The third nail of the ninth claw," mocked the leather-faced Arab, "spent too much time toying in graveyards. We trailed you from Crosby's house, shortly after releasing Miss Fortesque. Despite her failure to trap you, we give her another chance to prove herself.

"If she succeeds, she will take the number you have borrowed! Pa'Bak! Gendut! Come forward!"

Two short, thick-muscle Malays appeared from a shadowed doorway. They bound Farrell's ankles with cords of hard spun silk. Then they stepped away, and so did the man whose pistol had prohibited resistance.

The last named approached the Claw and presented Farrell's Webley. The master of the show handed it to Madeleine.

"We have admitted you on probation. We cannot trust you until you have become an outlaw. Your fingerprints on the pistol that kills Farrell will guarantee your fidelity.

"The British law will not suspect you—until you fail me. Then there will be whisperings to the police.

"And you, Farrell, *Sahib*—though your feet are bound, you can hop. If you gain that door at your left before she hits you, you are free and she dies. Feminine marksmanship in this poor light will give you a chance."

SWEAT cropped out on Farrell's forehead, and his lips became dry as the red dust of Singapore.

But for those spies who had followed Madeleine, his bluff would have worked. He could have gotten within arm's reach of the Claw, nailed him with Mûnah's dagger—

"Fire at will, Miss Fortesque!" murmured the Claw, smiling maliciously as her face became a tense white mask.

Madeleine, embarking on a career of adventure, was enjoying it no more than Farrell. For just an instant, the misery on her face made him sorry for her. Then he cursed women, brown and white alike. Two in one evening, through malice and bungling, had put him on the spot.

"If I ever get out of this, I'm getting a job as a eunuch—" The grotesque thought flashed through his mind even though he knew that he could not get clear.

Madeleine's pistol was rising. He stared at the gaping muzzle, his glance catching her agonized eyes. He watched the silent motion of her lips. The guards were at her elbow, ready to block a false move.

(Continued on page 112)

By JEROME
SEVERS PERRY



*He risked his life to exact vengeance for his pal.
And now his pal's wife, whom he loved, was
putting the finger on him!*

OUTSIDE, rain was pouring down through the black night. Pelting against the dirty window of Tim Mullane's dingy third-floor bedroom. Hissing against the pane.

Tim Mullane finished applying the last of the black dye to the roots of his red hair. Surveyed himself in the cracked mirror over the bureau. He had to be

careful. Had to keep the hair-roots touched up. Mustn't let the red show. Someone might spot him as Tim Mullane, escaped convict.

He put away the bottle of dye. Then he heard something. Something that made him stiffen. A knock on his bedroom door.

He leaped for the light-switch. His

LAMMISTER*

hand dived into the pocket of his coat. Closed about the butt of his automatic. "Who's there?"

"It's me. Eunice Weldon. The girl from the next room. I need a match. Can you give me one?"

Mullane snapped the light on again. Opened the door. The girl from the ad-

joining hall bedroom came undulantly into Mullane's frowsty chamber.

A PRETTY girl, this Eunice Weldon. Pretty, but hard. Wise. Knew her way around. It showed in her eyes. In the faint lines about her pouting, rouged mouth. In the mature fullness of her

*Lammister: gangland argot for a convict escaped from the penitentiary. One who has "lammed" from "stir."



"You remind me of a guy named Mullane," she told him.

generous breasts through her thin kimono.

A blonde, Eunice Weldon. Bleached, of course. She had a too experienced look. Probably been out with plenty of men. But attractive, just the same. Nice perfume. Inviting smile. Seductive as hell, the way she swayed her lush hips.

Mullane handed her a booklet of matches. She took it. Smiled, "Thanks, big boy." Somehow, she allowed the front of her kimono to come open.

Open all the way to her waist. Open far enough to reveal a hint of pink garter-girdle about her hips. Open enough to reveal that she wore a webbed brassiere over her soft white breasts.

Mullane saw all that. Saw plenty. Couldn't keep his pulses from racing. It had been a hell of a long while since he'd held any woman in his arms. And he knew that Eunice Weldon could be plenty nice if he made a play for her.

She was challenging him with her eyes. Giving him plenty of opportunity to make the first move. Giving him plenty of chance to see what she possessed in the way of feminine charms.

But Mullane wasn't playing. Didn't dare. Sure, he wanted to reach out and grab her. Wanted to hold her soft flesh in his hands. Wanted to kiss her. That was natural enough. But he didn't make a move. Couldn't afford to get mixed up with a skirt at this stage of the game.

The blonde grinned at him. "Sorta lonely on a rainy night like this, ain't it?"

Mullane shook his head. "No. I'm not lonesome. Got work to do. Keep me busy."

The girl looked him over. "Wouldn't you like to come to my room and . . . play cards or something?"

"Not tonight."

Her eyes narrowed. "Say—ain't you Tim Mullane?"

His heart squeezed dry. What the hell was this? Who was this dame, anyhow? How had she spotted him?

He shook his head. "No. My name's Murphy," he lied. "Never heard of anybody named Tim Mullane. Why?"

"Oh, nothing. You reminded me of a guy I met once, named Mullane. But he was red-headed. Well, if you don't want to. . . . play cards, guess I'll be going. Thanks for the matches." She turned and went out.

Mullane watched her. Watched the flaunting sway of her lush hips as she walked out. He locked the door after her.

HIS face was grim. That had been a narrow squeak. Where the hell had he ever met Eunice Weldon before? He didn't remember her. But it would be dangerous to hang around here any longer. Time to lam again. Time to move to some other hide-out.

He started to pack his only bag.

Half-way through the job, he froze. Thought he heard a car stopping at the curb below his window. He scowled. Reached for his automatic.

He snapped off the light. Raised his window-shade cautiously. Peered downward through the rain-streaked pane.

He saw a black sedan parked on the far side of the cobble-stoned street. Rain dripped from it. Its motor was running. Puffs of white exhaust chuffed out behind the machine. Mullane couldn't see who was at the car's wheel.

Through his window, he stared up and down the street. No other traffic. Nothing but the steady rain pelting down in the darkness, dancing in muddy puddles.

Then the sedan's front door opened. Somebody got out. A woman. Her shape-

less, glistening black slicker couldn't conceal her feminine figure, the symmetry of her pouting breasts, the slim curves of her hips. Tim Mullane wasn't able to see her face.

But the very fact that she was a woman made Mullane feel a little easier. He drew the blind. Turned on the light. Went back to his packing.

He moved swiftly, nervously. Couldn't waste time. Had to be on the move.

The cops were after Mullane. After him for breaking out of the Big House up the river. And the bulls weren't the only ones who were on the prowl for the big, rawboned lammister. Spider Crosetti's mob was gunning for him, too.

The law wanted Mullane for lamming out of stir. Spider Crosetti's gang wanted him because in their eyes he was a stool-pigeon.

Yet you couldn't exactly call Tim Mullane a stoolie. Not if you knew him. Not if you knew the kind of work he was doing—and his reason for doing it.

Sure. He'd anonymously tipped off the cops about the lawless activities of Spider Crosetti's mob. And he would keep on doing it, to, until the last Crosetti's mobster was behind bars—or until a lead slug stopped Mullane in his tracks. But that wasn't stooling. It was vengeance.

A hard man, Tim Mullane. A man with a grim, single purpose in life: the extermination of Spider Crosetti's gang. With a purpose like that, a man *had* to be hard. Well, Mullane had all the qualifications. He'd been tough enough to go to prison on a phoney rap. And he would be tough enough to go back and serve out the balance of his sentence when he was finished with Spider Crosetti.

But until he was finished with Crosetti, he had to be damned careful. Had

to keep clear of the police—and of Crosetti's yammering tommy-guns.

No women for Tim Mullane. That's why he hadn't fallen for the blonde, inviting Eunice Weldon in the adjoining room. No dames for Mullane. No good times. No soft arms around his neck; no resilient breasts flattening upon his chest; no red, moist lips opening over his mouth. Not until he'd completed his job!

DON'T get Mullane wrong. He wasn't a woman-hater. Not by a damned sight. For that matter, he wasn't really a criminal, either, even though he'd been convicted and sent up. That conviction had been a case of shouldering a rap belonging to a dead pal. Jigger Tompkin.

Mullane and Jigger Tompkin had grown up together. Had loved the same girl. Marie O'Neill, her name was. A melon-breasted, sweet-faced, sparkling-eyed Irish girl with raven hair and the body of a slim houri from paradise.

Jigger Tompkin had been the lucky guy. Jigger had won Marie. Married her. But Tim Mullane had remained best friend of both. A man who knew how to accept defeat gracefully, even though his heart ached.

Well, after the wedding, Jigger Tompkin had gone wrong. Joined Crosetti's mob. Petered a safe. Glommed forty grand's worth of unset diamonds. The cops almost nabbed Jigger on that job. They put three slugs through his guts when he was making his getaway. Jigger had lived just long enough to drag himself to Mullane's apartment.

Tim Mullane took the diamonds—and the rap, too. Admitted committing the burglary himself. This was to save Jigger's name. To save Marie O'Neill Tompkin the humiliation of being known as the widow of a cop-slain crook.

Yeah. Tim Mullane had lied himself into the Big House on a dead friend's rap. Then, while in stir, he'd learned something. Learned that the slain Jigger Tompkin had been double-crossed on that burglary job.

It all came to Mullane through the prison grapevine. The whole story. Spider Crosetti had coveted Tompkin's raven-haired Irish wife. So the gang leader had put Jigger on the spot. Had sent Jigger to pull that jewel theft, then secretly tipped off the law.

Tim Mullane found it all out while he was in stir. That's why he busted out. He wanted revenge.

A tough assignment! Had to keep away from the cops. Had to elude Crosetti's mobsters. Had to stay under cover—and yet get enough dope on the Crosetti gunmen to put them behind stone walls.

Sure it was a tough assignment. But not too tough for a man like Tim Mullane. He was succeeding. The cops didn't know where their mysterious tips were coming from; but already they'd put the collar on four Crosetti gorillas. Thanks to Mullane's activities and anonymous tips.

Trouble was, Spider Crosetti was beginning to get a damn' good idea where the leak was. That's why the game was so dangerous for the big, grim-eyed lammister. Mullane was between two fires. On the one side, the bulls were looking for him as a jail-breaker; not knowing that he was the mysterious source of their underworld information. On the other side, Crosetti's thugs, looking for a chance to scythe Mullane down with a blast of tommy-gun slugs.

No; you can't blame Mullane for being nervous that rainy night as he packed his one bag in his dingy third-floor hide-out. You can't blame him for being glad

that it was only a dame who got out of the parked sedan on the street below. Dames aren't killers. Not usually. A man can protect himself against dames.

Tim Mullane stiffened suddenly. Someone was scratching at his door!

CAT-LIKE, he was on his feet. Automatic snaking from his coat pocket. Muscles tense. Eyes narrowed.

He went softly toward the door. That scratching sound again. A soft voice whispering "Tim. Tim Mullane!"

The lammister went pale. He knew that voice.

The voice of Marie O'Neill Tompkin. The girl he once had loved. The girl who had married his best friend, Jigger Tompkin. The raven-haired Irish colleen to save whom from heartbreak, Mullane had taken a bum prison rap!

Mullane wrenched his door open. "Marie—I"

She entered the room. Removed her wet slicker, her hat. Fluffed out her midnight hair.

Hungrily, Mullane gazed at her. Drank in the glorious slenderness of her legs and thighs and hips through her silk dress. Devoured, with his eyes, the pouting firmness of her lovely breasts beneath the tight-clinging frock. Gazed at the undimmed radiance of her elfin, provocative face.

She was prettier than she'd been two years before, when Tim Mullane had last seen her. Before he was sent up the river. Prettier, lovelier, more mature—more appealing.

She came toward him. "Tim—darling!"

Then she was in his arms. The fragrance of her hair in his nostrils. The firmness of her breasts punching against his chest. The soft woman-feel of her as he tightened his arms about her waist...



*"It's the cemetery for you two,"
a voice from the stairs
snarled.*

He bruised her lips with his mouth. Felt her breasts, firm against him. Firm with passion; with longing. "Tim—!" she panted. "It's been so very long—"

Gently he pushed her away. Sure he loved her. Wanted her. Ached for her. But she was the widow of his dead friend. Maybe she still had a little love left in her heart for Mullane. Maybe he could take her. . . . But he held back. He didn't play that way.

"What are you doing here, Marie?" he whispered.

"I—I came to warn you. Listen. Spider Crosetti's gang broke into a bank tonight. Killed a watchman. Now they're on your trail. They're going to pin the

job on you. I—I found out where you were. I came to tell you. You've got to get away, Tim. You've got to go—now!"

"Go where?"

"Hide some other place!" she came back. She looked at him. "I—I have an apartment. I'll take you there. You c-can stay overnight with m-me. Then, tomorrow, you can get out of town. . . ."

Tim Mullane's heart leaped. The thought filled him with electric tingles. Not that anything would happen. Not anything . . . wrong. But just to be near her through the long night; to feel her presence . . . that would be recompense enough for all Tim Mullane had gone through. . . .

THEN he thought of the danger. Danger to her. Being in her apartment might put her in a bad spot. Suppose Spider Crosetti traced him to her place? Suppose there was gun-play? Marie might get hurt—

"No, Marie," Tim Mullane said. "I won't go with you."

"But—you must!" she cried. Then unexpectedly, she ripped at the fastenings of her dress. Half bared her breasts to his gaze.

"Look at me, Tim!" she whispered. "Look at me. You used to love me. I'm still . . . attractive, aren't I?"

He stared at her semi-nudity. Something snapped in his mind. He went to her, put his arms about her. Felt the quivering, taut warmth of her bare flesh against him.

Long moments later, he released her. "I'll go with you," he whispered. "That's your car downstairs, isn't it? With the motor running?"

"Yes."

"Drive it down to the next corner. Wait for me. I'll slip out the back way, meet you in five or ten minutes."

She kissed him, clung to him. Gave him her lips. Then she dressed; put on her slicker, her hat. She was gone.

Tim Mullane waited five minutes, with

the light out. Then in the darkness he slipped out of his room. Down the rear stairs of the frowsy rooming-house. Out the back way. Over a fence, down the alley, through the pelting rain.

The end of the block. He emerged to the street. Saw Marie's dark sedan standing at the corner. Went toward it.

The car's rear door opened. Tim Mullane ducked his head, hunched himself inside. Something bashed down on his skull. Nitroglycerine exploded within his dazed brain. Dully, dimly, he heard a masculine chuckle. "Got him!" Then the lights went out for Tim Mullane.

WHEN he opened his eyes, he was in a bedroom. On a bed. Stripped to his underwear. Handcuffed to the bed-post.

Aching agony danced through his temples, his brain. Not entirely a physical ache. A mental pain; a dull, torturing realization that he'd been duped, tricked, trapped.

Marie! Marie O'Neill Tompkin. The girl he loved. The girl for whom he had risked his life, to get vengeance for her dead husband. She had put the finger on him!

He clenched his handcuffed fists. He knew he'd been kidnaped by Spider Crosetti's mob. No question of that. And he knew what would happen to him now.

Either they'd put a slug through his heart, or they'd turn him over to the cops. That bank robbery tonight—the robbery which Marie had mentioned. A watchman bumped off. The Crosetti gang might pin that on Mullane some way. Make him take the rap for it. Then he'd burn in the hot squat. That way, Crosetti would have him out of the road, yet not be bothered with another actual murder.

A nasty spot! Mullane knew he was

behind the eight-ball. That didn't bother him so much. But Marie—

God! He never thought she'd do a thing like this to him. But she'd done it. The kisses she had given him in his room a while ago . . . Judas-kisses. Judas-kisses, Judas-breasts, Judas-passion!

She must be tied up with the Crosetti mob, Mullane told himself. She was probably Spider Crosetti's moll. Crosetti had wanted her, from the start. That's why the gang leader had put Jigger Tompkin on the spot.

"Damn her!" Mullane whispered to himself. Yet deep in his heart he didn't mean it. No matter what Marie had done to him, he still loved her!

Suddenly he tensed. Heard voices in the next room. Heard a feminine voice saying: "Well, Spider, I nailed him for you, didn't I?"

"You sure did, babe!" came Crosetti's rasping laugh. Then the sound of a kiss.

Tim Mullane tugged at his handcuffs. If he could just get loose—get at Crosetti—!

No chance, of course. A man's flesh can be hard; but not as hard as steel bracelets. Mullane succeeded only in chafing his wrists raw; drawing blood.

He heard Crosetti's voice. "We're gonna take that louse an' frame him for killin' that bank watchman. Gonna smear his prints all over the gat I used. Mullane'll burn for the job. Damn' good riddance!"

Tim Mullane's jaw juttet. If he could just get loose—!

But he couldn't. Pain drugged his sinews, dulled his mind. Warily he closed his eyes. Must have gone unconscious again for a little while.

THEN sounds in the next room aroused him once more. A woman's

giggle. "Spider—stop it! Let's have another drink before we—"

Marie O'Neill Tompkin's voice, of course. She was still in that next room with Spider Crosetti. Handcuffed and helpless, Mullane listened.

Heard Crosetti say: "Okay, babe. 'Nother li'l drink . . ."

The slosh of whiskey in glasses. Clink of tumblers brought together. Laughter.

Marie's voice laughing: "Spider—not so damned rough!"

"Can't help it, babe! Geeze, you look goodt'me. Where y' been all my life? C'mere. Give 'nother li'l kiss. . . ."

"No! You've had enough. Take a drink instead."

"I'll have both!"

Clink of glasses again. Marie's squeal of hysterical, drunken amusement. "Now see what you've done! Spilled your drink all down the front of my dress. I'll have to take it off."

"Sure. Good idea. Go 'head, babe. Off with it. Like you better . . . without clothes. . . ."

Swish of a garment being thrown across the floor. Sound of a scuffle. Lips meeting lips. Marie whispering: "Don't squeeze me so hard, Spider. After all—"

"Aw, I ain't gonna hurt you, babe. Just wanna play a li'l. Like this. . . ."

"Spider! Quit! You're hurting me."

"Nuts, babe. Ain't gonna hurt you. Too swell a figure to ruin. Geeze, you're built swell, kiddo." Another kiss.

Handcuffed to the bed in the adjoining room, Tim Mullane felt a stab of bitterness go through his heart. So that was the kind Marie had turned out to be. A gangman's moll. A cheap, common floozie—

Through the closed door he heard her voice again. "Let's have one more drink. A big one. . . ."

"After that—?" Crosetti's rasping question.

"Anything . . . you want, Spider. . . ."

Ploek of a cork being pulled from a fresh bottle. Gurgle of whiskey sloshing into glasses. Greedy, gulping sounds. A laugh. A feminine squeal of mock dismay. Faint ripping sound of silk being torn. Then . . .

Silence. . . .

Sweat stood out on Tim Mullane's forehead. He knew what was taking place in that next room. He knew just as plainly as if his eyes had been X-rays to penetrate the intervening door. He felt sick, disillusioned. He stopped struggling against his manacles—

What was that?

RASP of a key in the lock of the door.

Creak of hinges. A streak of yellow light, widening to a ribbon as the door opened. Marie entering the room!

Marie, the girl Mullane had loved. The girl for whom he had sacrificed his liberty, gone to the Big House.

Marie—coming toward him. Coming toward him, practically nude. Her breasts bare. Her step-ins torn. Her eyes bleared. Her breath reeking with cheap whiskey. Her lips swollen, red, from kisses. . . .

She faltered over to Mullane. She had a tiny steel key in her trembling hand. A key that she inserted into his handcuffs!

Snap of metal against metal; click of unlatched fetters. Mullane's wrists were free!

"Tim—darling—!" Marie was whispering. "I had to . . . drink with Crosetti . . . had to string along with him . . . so I could steal his key, unlock you. . . ."

Mullane stared at her. Dully. Unbelievably. Her actions didn't make

sense. First she had lured him into a trap. Now she was releasing him.

He didn't understand. He could think of only one thing. "I heard . . . what went on in that other room just now!" he said slowly.

She flushed. Hung her head. Averted her eyes. "It was the only way I could . . . help you, Tim," she whispered. Then she read his disbelief in his eyes. "You—you don't think I tricked you, do you, Tim? Oh—Tim—Tim! You can't believe that! After I left you in your room in that house a while ago, I—I found that my car had been stolen. It was gone! I ran up and down the street, looking for it. Couldn't find it. Then I went back to your room to tell you. But you'd gone. Then I knew what had happened. Someone must have overheard us planning. Then that someone stole my car, parked it where you'd walk up to it. That's how you were trapped, Tim! You've got to believe me! It must have been that way!"

"Then what are you doing here?"

"I—I had an idea that Crosetti must have grabbed you. I came here to his place. I let him . . . make love to me, so that I could set you free. . . ."

Mullane staggered to his feet. His head was filled with agony where he'd been struck as he climbed into Marie's sedan a while back. All the strength seemed drained from his muscular body. All his vitality, his energy, his volition, was gone. And somehow he couldn't believe Marie's story—

Something snapped him to attention. Something in the next room. A woman's voice. A voice he seemed to remember from somewhere.

"Spider—Spider! Wake up, you damned louse! Here I go and put the finger on Mullane for you, and you get drunk on the job! Spider—!"

THAT voice! Abruptly, Mullane recognized it. The voice of the bleached blonde chippie, Eunice Weldon. The dame who had the room next to his, back at that frowsy rooming-house. The one



*His fist caught
her on the chin.*

who had come to him tonight, on the pretext of borrowing matches. The one who had allowed her kimono to fall open so he could see her breasts. The one who had accused him of being Tim Mullane.

The one who had spotted him, despite the disguise of his dyed hair.

Mullane knew the truth now. That blonde bimbo was one of Crosetti's spies. Crosetti had planted her there in that rooming-house to discover Mullane's true identity. And she hadn't been sure of herself until she had overheard Mullane and Marie making plans.

Then she'd probably put in a quick call to Crosetti.

Mullane stiffened. Strength began to flow back through his veins. "Got to get out of here!" he whispered. He drew Marie close to him; slipped a protecting arm about her lithe waist. Her flesh felt warm, sweet, to his touch. She was trembling. His hand brushed across her cheek. . . .

"There's no way out except through the room where Crosetti is!" she whispered.

Then, from that adjoining room, Crosetti's whiskey-blurred voice sounded. "Huh? Wh-what? —Say! That door's open into the next room! And where the hell's that black-haired floozie?"

Tim Mullane crouched. With one sweep of his brawny arm he knocked Marie to the floor. Bent over her. Arched his body over her trembling nudity. Gathered his muscles.

He saw Spider Crosetti come slashing into the room. The gang leader held a vicious Luger in his fist. He stared toward the bed. Didn't see Mullane. Started to turn—

TIM MULLANE lanced forward like a catapulted meteor. Bashed into Crosetti's knees. Bowled the gangster over.

Crosetti's head struck the floor. Bounced. He went limp. Mullane grabbed the fallen man's gun. Snatched at Marie's wrist. "Come on!" he snarled.

Out the door. The blond Eunice Welton tried to bar the way. Mullane's fist arced up. Caught her on the point of the chin. She crumpled.

He stood over her. Stooped. Unfastened her dress. Yanked it over her head. The blonde bimbo wasn't wearing much under that dress. But Mullane had no eyes for her unbrassiered breasts, her ungirdled hips, her white thighs. The hell with that stuff now. He flung the dress at Marie.

"Quick. Climb into that. You can't get out of here without clothes."

An unnecessary move on Tim Mullane's part. Marie had already run across the room, picked up her own frock from the divan where she'd discarded it. She dressed now—in her own clothes. But the delay had been costly.

Mullane heard someone pelting up the stairs, running along the hallway outside this room.

A harsh voice from the hallway. "Boss! Boss! Hey, Spider! Take that gat we used to rub out that night watchman an' plant it on Mullane! Quick! Then we gotta lam the hell outa here. The cops are comin'—"

Mullane leaped at the room's door, flung it open. The rat-faced gangster outside saw him. Went for his gun.

Mullane raised the Luger he had grabbed from Crosetti. Raised it, squeezed the trigger. Sent a death slug into the mobster's left eyeball.

The man spun, went down. Mullane grabbed Marie. "Now!" he rasped. He hauled her out of the room. Down the stairs.

Another bruiser at the foot of the steps. A gangster with a tommy-gun. The tommy-gun chattered. Lead chewed bits of plaster out of the wall behind Mullane.

Mullane shot from the hip. Caught

the machine-gunner square in the forehead.

Clear path to the front door now. "Come on, Marie!"

Then a sudden battering on that front door. Thud of fists and gun-butts against woodwork. "Open up for the law!"

Mullane paled. They'd get him. Send him back to the Big House up the river. Might even arrest Marie, too, for merely being with him. He turned to her. "The back way—"

From the stairs, a harsh voice snarling: "Back way, hell! The only place you two are goin' is to the cemetery!"

Mullane pivoted. Saw Crosetti standing on the steps. Spider Crosetti, with another Luger in his fist; mate to the one Mullane held.

The hammering on the front door had stopped now. In the silence, Crosetti snarled an oath. "You damn' rats! Now you get yours! An' when you're dead, I'm plantin' the gun on you that I used for killin' that bank watchman tonight. How do you like them apples?" He tightened on the trigger. Aimed at Marie.

She wailed. Mullane struck her in the face, knocked her flat. Crosetti's slug whistled over her head. Then Mullane fired before Crosetti could pull trigger again.

Fired—and sent leaden death tunneling through the gang leader's heart.

CROSETTI'S corpse came tumbling down the stairs. But the thumping, thudding sound of his falling was drowned in a renewed attack on the front door from outside. The door smashed inward. Uniformed coppers came battering into the hallway.

Tim Mullane threw down his gun. The jig was up. They had him. If for nothing else, he'd probably fry for killing Crosetti and those other gunmen—

A plain-clothes man came up to Mullane. "Take it easy, sport. We just heard Crosetti confess to the killing of that bank watchman, just before you plugged him. That clears you, Mullane."

"You—you know who I am—?"

"Sure. We've had you spotted for a week. Ever since you moved into that rooming house. But we let you alone, because you were digging up some good dope for us about the Crosetti mob. On top of that, one of the Crosetti hoods that we picked up, squealed. Told us all about how Jigger Tompkins was the guy that pulled that jewelry theft. And how you took the rap to clear Tompkins' name."

"You mean—I'm not under arrest? Not wanted? I don't have to go back to stir?"

"No. You don't have to go back, Mullane. And since you've wiped out the rest of Crosetti's gang, you won't have much to be afraid of in the way of vengeance."

Mullane turned to the dark-haired Marie Tompkins. She was staring at him with widened, shining eyes. "You—you really went to jail to save Jigger's name, Tim?"

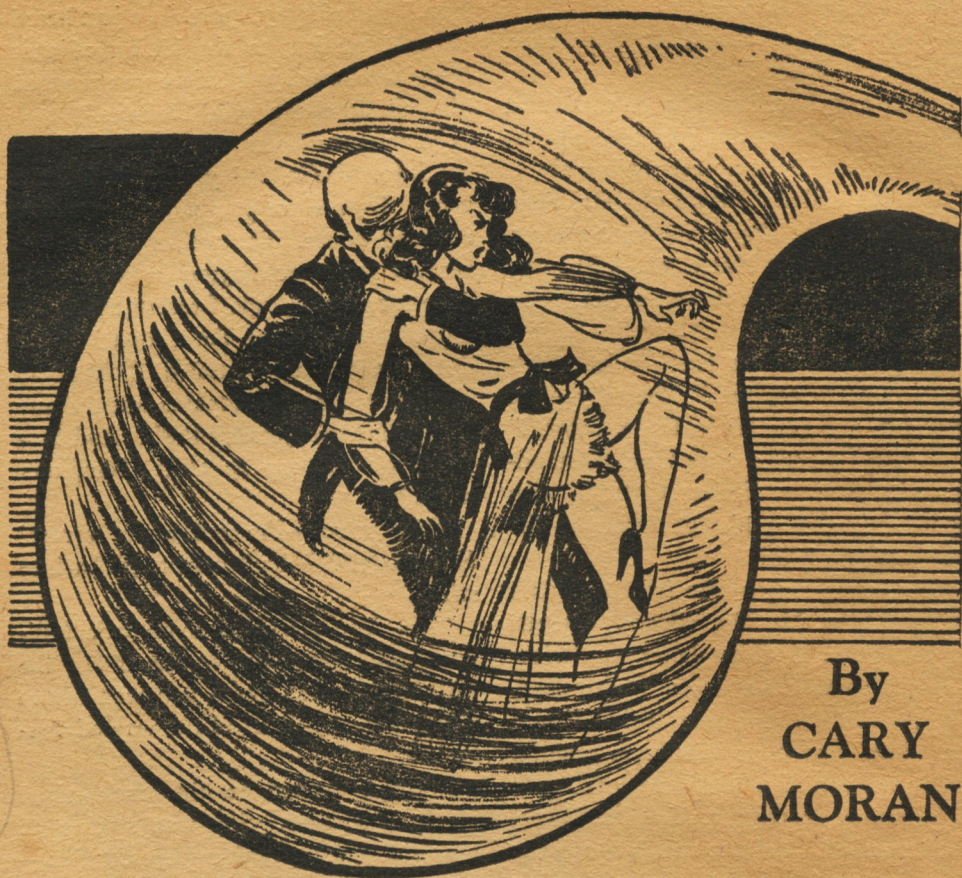
"Yes," he answered slowly.

She pressed herself against him. "Oh, Tim—Tim! I've loved you so very much. . . . From the start I knew I should have married you instead of Jigger. But . . . now . . ." she drew back in flushing shame.

"Now what?" Mullane demanded gently.

"Y—you won't want anything to d-do with me after . . . what I had to do . . . to get you free. . . ."

He slipped an arm about her waist; drew her close. "We'll forget everything about tonight," he whispered. "We'll only think about tomorrow."



By
CARY
MORAN

RADIUM

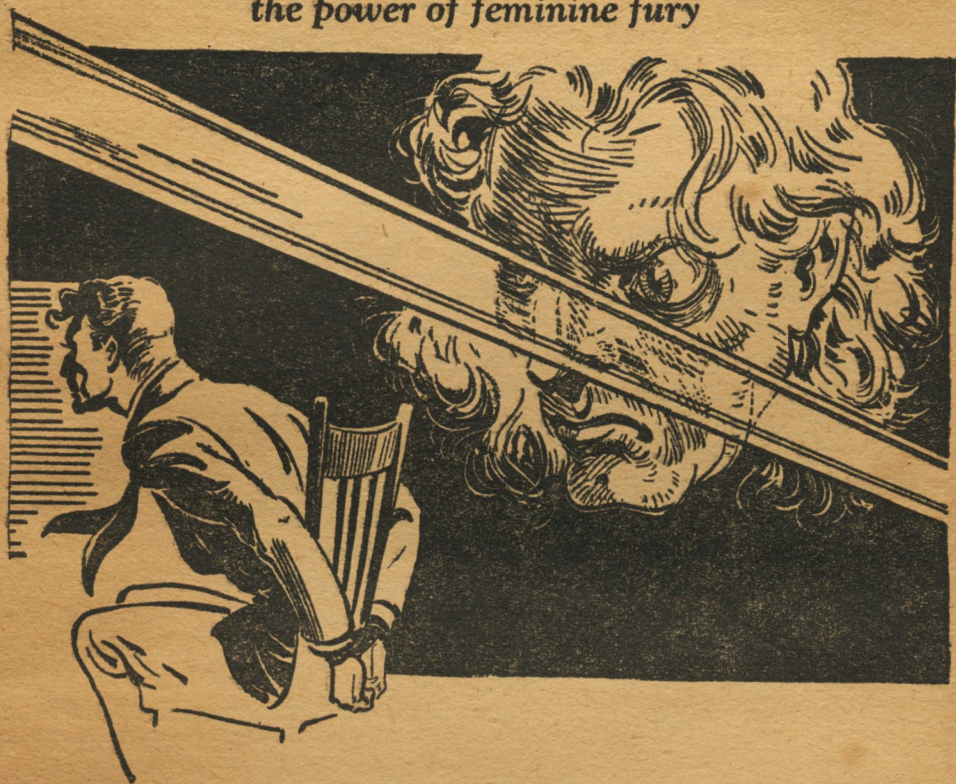
JARNEGAN sat down and gazed with approval at Sheriff Jud Tolliver's visitor. His little eyes swept from her blonde hair and pouting lips downward over rounded breasts, to the expanse of well-filled silken hosiery revealed by crossed legs. He tossed his apple core in the general direction of the sheriff's cuspidor and said, "H'ya, babe."

The blonde smirked, smoothed her skirt over a full hip, and preened her-

self, breasts jutting forth impudently. Jarnegan winked deliberately, started to speak but the sheriff interrupted.

"This is Miss Smith, Jarnegan. She was in the hospital office three weeks ago when the robber came. Remember, he conked her with a blackjack, cracked the safe, took six radium capsules, worth God knows what, and scrambled. There were twenty-four in the safe and why he only took six is more—"

There's murder to be solved, and Jarnegan's mind is on a blonde; she's still on his mind when they find her dead. Tracing the killer in a hundred grand plot puts Jarnegan into the power of feminine fury



NEMESIS

Jarnegan spat toward the cuspidor. He said, "Do you gals ever get a night off at the hospital, babe?"

The blonde smirked again. Sheriff Tolliver groaned, kicked the cuspidor closer to Jarnegan. "Now, Jarnegan, I know robbery ain't in your line but you promised to help me. I can't get a lead on this robbery at all. It's screwy. If you'll—" He broke off groaning as Jarnegan spat at the spot where the

cuspidor had been a minute before.

Jarnegan beamed. "Okay, sheriff, murder's my specialty but I'll give you a lift. But you know how it is, I got to have privacy. You go water the county prisoners while I talk to the babe. Nothing like getting right down to brass tacks."

The sheriff got to his feet suspiciously, ambled slowly toward the door. He grunted disdainfully as he passed down

the hallway, was still grunting when Jarnegan's voice stopped him.

"Hey, Jud," yelled the little man, his head protruding from the office, "is there any way to lock this door?"

"Put a chair against it, sap," said the sheriff viciously and headed toward the Elite pool hall.

THIRTY minutes later Jarnegan joined him, sat silently in a chair against the wall, his face a mask of ill humor. The sheriff sat down beside him. "What did she say?" he asked. "Did she—?"

Jarnegan glowered. "To hell with radium! To hell with robberies! What did she say?" he mimicked. "What did she say! Solve your own robbery from now on, drizzlepuss. I hope somebody steals the whole hospital; I hope they steal all the doctors and the patients and the nurses! I hope they, aw, to hell with blondes! What did she say, you ask!" He rubbed his jaw reminiscently. "You know, that dame didn't look so hefty, but she's got a right like the kick of a mule!"

He turned and walked out the door, still rubbing his jaw.

TEN minutes after one. Two deputies and three telephone operators scoured the town for Jarnegan. Out at the edge of town at the desolate Wayne estate, home of the medicine manufacturer, Sheriff Jud Toliver restrained apoplexy with an effort. The sight of Jarnegan's battered roadster pulling into the rough drive was the last straw, for seated demurely beside him was the blonde nurse, Miss Smith.

Tolliver ran to the roadster as fast as fat legs would carry him. "You—you—!" he sputtered, "I been trying to find you since ten o'clock! And then

you show up with a date. This is murder, simple! What did you bring the dame for?"

Jarnegan said, "Don't pay no attention to him, babe, he's all excited. There's only one murder out here so I won't be gone but a little while. You ain't going to mind waiting, are you?"

He slid out of the car, waved a hand in farewell and stalked off, the sheriff still protesting at his heels. Straight past the big house they walked and toward a cottage that resembled a caretaker's house near the east wall of the weed grown estate. Jarnegan noted curiously that the windows bore iron bars. They nodded at a tobacco-chewing deputy and entered the cottage through a massive door.

The dead woman lay in the exact center of the front room floor. The room was a shambles, as if a desperate struggle had taken place. The corpse was stripped almost nude, only rags of undergarments clinging to the abused body. Jarnegan knelt beside her, glanced thoughtfully at the crushed skull, the smashed features, and fumbled for a cigarette.

He said, "Okay. Tell me the rest."

The sheriff said, "Her name was Irene, Irene McComas. Her old man is named Thomas McComas. He did it."

"Old man? You mean her husband?"

"Nope, her father. He—What did you find, Luke?" This last to a fingerprint man just emerging from the bedroom.

"Not much. It looks sort of screwy. Picked up a few prints in odd places belonging to old man McComas and his daughter. Those spots where you'd naturally expect to find prints have been wiped clean. I even tried the typewriter keys and they're clean as a whistle."

Jarnegan said, "Typewriter keys?" The sheriff nodded thoughtfully, ex-

tracted a typed letter from his pocket and handed it to Jarnegan. Jarnegan unfolded it, read:

"God forgive me for doing it. I have killed my own daughter. Perhaps I am insane, perhaps the thought of my revenge has driven sanity from my mind. I had no intentions of killing her.

It wasn't signed. Jarnegan looked down at the battered body, said: "Hell. If he didn't mean to do it, he did a pretty thorough job! What's this?"

This was another note. Tolliver said, "The way I get it, McComas was a chemist that worked for Wayne for years. Wayne manufactures patent medicines, you know. Well, McComas went nuts and Wayne pensioned him off, gave him and his daughter this cottage to live in and paid all the expenses."

Jarnegan said, "Went nuts, did he? That explains the bars on the windows and the heavy door. Go on."

"So this guy McComas got away. He's crazy, crazy as a loon. Here's the note he stuck under Wayne's front door after Wayne has been keeping him, feeding him for a long time."

The second typewritten note read:

"Revenge will be mine! You have made me what I am, Wayne, and now you must pay. Your one chance to escape a fate worse than death is to raise one hundred thousand dollars by tomorrow night. You shall hear from me. If you do not do this, you and your associates will be killed, horribly mangled and burned by fire."

The note was unsigned. Jarnegan said, "A hundred grand, huh? The guy ain't so crazy. Well, I'll be seeing you, sheriff."

"Seeing me!" the sheriff almost groaned. "You gotta help me catch this guy! You've got that damned blonde on

your mind, that's all! The county pays you—"

"Sure," said Jarnegan soothingly, "pays me to solve murders. You say yourself this one is solved. Catch the guy McComas!"

HE walked rapidly into the bedroom, glanced around perfunctorily, and on into the kitchen where he made the same careless examination. When he came back," he said, "Tell the boys to haul off the body, sheriff. Then catch McComas. That's my official report."

"Come up to the house with me and talk to the Waynes at least! The dame will wait." Still arguing, still pleading, the sheriff followed him outside. Step by step they approached Jarnegan's battered roadster.

Jarnegan said, "All right. The dame ain't in the car anyway. She's probably seeing a man about a dog. I'll go in with you." To the deputy at the door of big house he said, "H'ya, Gus. Say, if you see a blonde wandering around, tell her I'll be with her in a minute."

John Wayne, manufacturer of patent medicines, paced the floor of his library. He was fat and florid, a cigar between his yellow teeth, his brow knit in worry. Across from him, nervously biting his nails on the divan was a younger man, immaculately clad, who was introduced as Martin Temple, Wayne's business partner. Pacing the floor at the east side of the room was Nancy Wayne, John Wayne's wife. Her face was white, unmarked by makeup, and her long slender body was inadequately covered by a thin negligee.

Jarnegan nodded briefly, kept his hat on, lit a cigarette. Tolliver encouraged Wayne to talk. Wayne told of McComas, told of all he had done for the man, swore that it was only his bounty that kept the

demented man from a state institution. And now—the fat man shrugged—now unless the police could protect him, all of them, all of them mind you, the wife, the partner, and Wayne himself, all faced death at the hands of a maniac!

MRS. WAYNE had paused before the French doors, had been there several moments. Jarnegan's cigarette had gone out. His little eyes were protruding. The light behind the negligee limned every line of the woman's lush, mature figure, from boldly flaring hips to heaving, generous breasts.

Wayne concluded his story. Tolliver said, "Well, what do you think, Jarnegan?"

Jarnegan spoke dreamily, his eyes sparkling. "I think it's swell. The best I ever saw. Gee!"

"Saw?" Tolliver was puzzled. He followed the direction of his friend's awe-stricken gaze. Warily he said, "Mrs. Wayne, you go sit down on the davenport. Mr. Wayne, you tell him all over again."

The sound of a commotion at the door. The butler's angry voice was saying, "But you can't go in there I tell you! The master is in conference, important—"

"Important hell, step aside before I lay you like a rug." A faint thud, a grunt, and the door burst open to reveal the deputy who had been at the porch door.

He said excitedly, "Hey, Jarnegan, I found your blonde for you!"

Jarnegan said, "I'll be right out. Tell her to wait."

"She'll wait! She's dead as hell!"

AN hour later the bodies of the two murdered women had been removed.



Jarnegan sat on the running board of his own battered roadster, the last murder weapon in his hand. Sheriff Tolliver stood beside him gloomily. In the distance could be heard the crash of bushes and ragged undergrowth, as a hurriedly deputized group of men scoured the estate for the madman, McComas.

"They'll find him, Jarnegan," consoled the sheriff. "He won't get away with it."

Jarnegan tossed the blood-stained length of pipe aside. "You know," he said bitterly, "I was just getting this dame to where she liked me. But don't depend on finding the McComas fellow, sheriff."

He got up and crawled beneath the wheel of his roadster. "I'll be back after awhile. I got to see a guy. Hey, who's that?"

A long sedan rolled out of the drive and headed toward the highway. The sheriff grunted.

"That's Temple. I let him go to town to see about their business. Somebody has to—" But he was talking to space. Jarnegan threw the roadster in gear and roared down the weed grown drive in

pursuit of Martin Temple, business partner of John Wayne.

He kept his distance all the way to town, a short block behind the speeding sedan. Twice red lights caught him but he soon made up the intervening space. Temple went first to the Harmon National Bank, was inside nearly an hour. Jarnegan sat impatiently in the battered roadster, snapped cigarette after ciga-

gathered clues concerning the two killings?"

"Sure. Tell him I've got the murderer where the hair is short. Tell him—"

The butler had hung up the receiver. Jarnegan grinned. He bought six apples in a brown paper sack at the fruit stand and headed the roadster toward the Wayne house.

Even as the battered car rolled into the grounds Jarnegan knew something was wrong. There was no deputy sheriff at the tumble-down gates. The house appeared deserted, the front door was locked. He hammered loud and long before Luke, the fingerprint man, admitted him.



rette into the gutter until his man appeared.

Temple drove directly to the tumble-down warehouse that sheltered the Wayne Medicine Laboratories and went inside.

JARNEGAN spent the next three hours between the old newspaper files at the Public Library and a telephone booth. At six-fifteen he called the Wayne house. The butler answered the phone.

Jarnegan said, "Tell the sheriff that Jarnegan will be out in a few minutes to take charge. Tell him I've got this thing right in my hand and to quit worrying."

"Yes, sir. If I may be so bold, sir, you mean for me to tell the sheriff you've



Jarnegan threw an apple core into the bushes, said, "Where the hell is everybody?"

Luke's voice was a little thick. "Dead, or soon will be. This makes three in less than twelve hours. The butler just hanged himself!"

AT seven-thirty the sheriff departed for home. He left three deputies patrolling the grounds, each armed with an automatic rifle, and Jarnegan in charge inside with an automatic vocabulary. Temple had returned and was talking to Wayne.

The little man arose from his seat before the fireplace and stretched. He started toward the door. John Wayne said, "For God's sake, Mr. Jarnegan, don't leave us alone. That maniac is smart enough to outwit those deputies. Do you realize—?"

Jarnegan laughed. "That's what I'm trying to prevent, Mr. Wayne. I want to look the house over, want to search every nook and cranny."

"The sheriff did that," protested Wayne. "I think it's much safer for us to stay close together—"

Jarnegan lit a cigarette. Wayne followed him from the room; Temple stayed behind with Mrs. Wayne. Through every room on the second floor of the decrepit old house they searched. The third floor yielded nothing—until they came to the end of the hall. A locked door barred farther investigation. Jarnegan turned to Wayne.

Wayne said, "That's my private laboratory, Mr. Jarnegan. We'll pass that up. I have some things in there I don't care to have investigated. I'm a chemist you know and—"

"Open the door, Wayne."

Wayne drew himself up. "Murder or no murder, the law can't force me to re-

veal secrets worth millions to an outsider! I—"

"Open the door, Wayne, or I'll shoot the lock off."

Wayne gulped, looked from Jarnegan's narrowed eyes to the shiny gun in his steady hand and fumbled in his pocket for the key.

As he fitted it to the lock, Jarnegan lowered the gun. Wayne, with his feet against the wall dove suddenly backward. His bald head cracked against Jarnegan's chest. Jarnegan hurtled into the opposite wall, bounced back like a rubber ball as Wayne screamed "Help! Help!"

WHEN Mrs. Wayne, Temple, and two deputies clattered up the stairs Wayne was sitting in the hallway trying to staunch the blood from a two inch gash in his head. Jarnegan was inside the laboratory nosing around, an apple in one hand, gun in the other.

Wayne said in a loud voice, "I call on all of you to witness that this man entered my laboratory over my protests and did me physical violence in so doing!"

Jarnegan peered at a box-like contraption sitting on plated legs in the center of the room. He tossed the core to the floor, lit a cigarette, and said quizzically, "Temple, what the hell is this, a doghouse?"

Eyes popping, Temple answered from the doorway. "That's a—"

Wayne shrieked, "Be still, you fool! You're giving away a billion dollars!"

Jarnegan shrugged, said to the deputy, "Take this guy down to the jailhouse. Tell Jud to book him for resisting an officer or something. Get rid of him before I shoot him! He's getting in my hair. Now what is it, Temple?"

"You put me in jail and I'll sue this

county for a billion dollars," screamed Wayne.

"You talk big money," sneered Jarnegan, "for a man that's broke! Come on, I'll take you myself!"

As they went down the steps he glanced back. Mrs. Wayne was sobbing—in the comforting arms of Martin Temple! Jarnegan paused and listened. Temple was saying, "There! There! Don't worry! Nothing can happen, I've got it all fixed."

At the car Jarnegan spoke softly into the ear of the deputy. The deputy pushed John Wayne inside and the car clattered away. At the front door of the house Jarnegan spoke to another deputy. Puzzled, the deputy nodded his head. As Jarnegan stole to the east side of the house, the deputy said in a loud voice, "What's that, Mr. Jarnegan? Sure! All right! If you say so." As Jarnegan faded out of sight he kept up the conversation as if he were talking to Jarnegan himself.

Three minutes later Jarnegan was once more inside the house. His feet made no sound on the soft carpet of the steps. Crouched in a shadow of the darkened hallway he paused and listened. He heard the muffled sobbing of Nancy Wayne, the consoling voice of Martin Temple.

"There, there," said Temple, "they won't lock him up. I wouldn't worry!"

"Lock him up! What do I care if they lock him up!" Her voice was low, tense, passionate. Softly Jarnegan stole forward until he could apply his inquisitive eye to the crack of the door. He breathed hard as he watched the amazing scene within.

MARTIN TEMPLE stood against the wall, his mild little eyes wide in amazement. From across the room

Nancy Wayne moved slowly toward him. The negligee, clasped loosely at the waist, allowed one long tapering leg to emerge as she walked, a leg milk white against the dusky folds of the garment. Before the shrinking man she paused. Her lips were parted, her eyes blazing, breasts rising and falling in real or simulated passion.

"Don't you understand, Martin," she said softly. "It isn't John I'm worrying about, it's *you*! It's you I love!"

Her hands were on his thin shoulders. He tried to pull away but she drew him closer, until her breasts were crushed to his skinny chest. "You! You! You alone," she breathed and her lips sought and found his. His whole body tensed, then suddenly his arms swept around her, drew her soft loveliness to him.

Jarnegan mopped the perspiration from his brow.

Temple was the first to break. He said, "We can't do this! It's madness. I'm Wayne's partner, his best friend!"

She said, "Don't talk, just hold me!" Suddenly she turned, started for the door. Jarnegan caught a glimpse of vibrating breasts, half exposed, long white legs emerging from the folds of the negligee, and dove around the corner. He cursed as the door clicked closed, as the key turned in the lock. Cautiously he crept back to his post, listened at the keyhole.

He heard the woman say, "Tell me truthfully, Martin, didn't you get the money to pay the madman? Didn't you draw a hundred thousand dollars from the bank today?"

The man muttered something unintelligible. She laughed triumphantly.

"Then that proves that you *do* love me! I know you aren't a coward; you're not afraid for your own safety, and you don't care for John. You are willing to

pay that madman his demands to save me from harm! Look at me, Martin, look at me. Don't you think I'm worth a hundred thousand dollars?"

Jarnegan grinned, arose, stretched. He heard footsteps within the room, heard another door open and close. Quickly he tiptoed down the hallway to the next door, listened again. She had taken him into an adjoining room, probably her own.

HE went back to the first locked door, extracted a thin, wirelike tool from his pocket and went to work. In a few seconds the door swung open. Quietly he entered the room just vacated. Directly before his eyes, hanging on the back of a chair was Martin Temple's coat. From an inner pocket he extracted a thin packet of currency. He opened it swiftly, gasped at the size of the bills, and thrust them into his own pocket. Footsteps in the next room, the sound of the woman's voice raised in pleading.

"You've got to do it, Martin! It's our only chance! We'll take the money and run away."

Jarnegan dove from the room as the connecting door opened. Without pausing to see whether or not Temple would discover the theft of the money immediately, he trotted to Wayne's laboratory, let himself in and turned on the light. Carefully he drew the shades and set about examining the box-like electrical contraption that stood in the center of the room. The fluid contents drained into a handy receptacle. He sniffed them, found them odorless and put them aside. The inside of the casket was lined with plate glass, beneath which glowed a phosphorescent metal. Wires led into the box from many angles.

Jarnegan scratched his head and walked to the table against the far wall.

The opened drawer revealed a folded paper clipped to a folded blueprint. The blueprint bore the caption, "Wayne Synthetic Radiumizer." The title of the technical paper clipped to it was, "The Manufacture of Synthetic Radium." Jarnegan grinned scornfully as he read.

The lights went out. The papers fell to the floor as Jarnegan whirled, clutching at his gun. *Seeming to swim through the air toward him was a phosphorescent face, lit by strange lights.* A gleaming hand swept aloft, something crashed against Jarnegan's head. The gun dropped from his nerveless fingers.

LIGHT in his eyes awakened him. Peering down into his face were the grim, fat-pouched eyes of John Wayne. He laughed at Jarnegan's efforts to free his bound hands, caught him by the heels, and dragged him down the hallway. The tape across Jarnegan's mouth kept him silent.

Through the bedroom door the little detective was painfully dragged by the fat man. A strange sight met his eye. Martin Temple lay across the bed unconscious, blood oozing from a cut in his forehead. Nancy Wayne, clad in an orchid dance set, industriously cleaned her nails against the vanity. "All right, John, we've got them both together now. Let me get to work!"


Wayne jerked Jarnegan to his feet, tossed him into a huge chair, and stepped back puffing. Strange lights, fires of madness, burned in the eyes of the half clad woman as she walked toward Jarnegan. She tore the tape from Jarnegan's mouth, twisted the fingers of her left hand into his hair and jerked him to a sitting position. As she leaned over him, Jarnegan saw the upper slopes of her breasts, the smooth texture of the blue-veined skin.

Jarnegan said, "In my inside coat pocket."

She slapped him viciously across both jaws, her breasts quivering, vibrating at each movement.

"You hid it some place, Jarnegan. You know it isn't on you. But you'll talk."

"Sure, I'll talk. Listen, Wayne, I know what you're pulling, I know the whole layout now. But did your wife tell



"Lock him up!" she whispered. "What do I care if they lock him up!"

"Yell all you want to," she said, smiling, licking her red lips. "This room is soundproof. Now my little friend Martin Temple came here with a hundred thousand dollars. He doesn't have it now. You thought you pulled a fast one, making me think the deputy downstairs was talking to you. You slipped back to see what you could find out. You must have taken the money while Martin and I were in this room. Now where did you put it?"

you that she is Martin's sweetheart, that she advised him to take her and the money and to scam? To double cross you while you were away? Ouch!"

A red nail on a cruel thumb bit into his eye socket. She tore and dug at his unprotected eyes, her knees grinding in his groin, her breasts pressing against him, her red lips drooling while her eyes blazed!

"Liar! Liar!" she screamed.

WAYNE pulled her off the detective, tore the shoulder straps of her brassiere in the struggle that followed.

"Don't kill him, you fool," he said. "He's the only one that knows where the money is. There's been enough killing anyway!"

"Yeah, and there'll be two more! You and the dame burning in the chair!" Jarnegan said.

Again Wayne restrained the enraged woman. Martin Temple groaned and sat up on the bed. Jarnegan shuddered. The man had been stripped to the waist. His torso was covered with red and black burns. *The woman had tortured him to make him reveal the hiding place of the money!*

Jarnegan said, "Martin Temple, we're going to die, you and I. But before we go, tell me how much money you were to invest in Wayne's synthetic radium?"

Wayne said, "I wanted five hundred grand. Might have gotten it, too—"

"But you decided Temple wasn't too much of a sucker after all, eh Wayne? You stole that radium from the hospital and were using it to sensitize a chemical, trying to sell Martin the idea that you were making it, manufacturing it! Right?"

Wayne smiled blandly. "Sure. That's right. But I had other irons in the fire such as letting McComas get me a hun-

dred thousand in case the other plan didn't pan out. Nancy, go to work on him."

Nancy Wayne, red lips wet, red tongue licking at them avidly, walked slowly toward the bound Jarnegan, a long nail-file in her hands. Her breasts swayed, quivered, vibrated, swung from side to side. Jarnegan kicked at her viciously with his bound feet. She cursed, dodged, leaped forward to light with her knees again in his lap, holding him to the chair.

Wayne laughed in the background as her hands tore the shirt and undershirt from Jarnegan's body. The pointed steel bit into his breast muscles viciously.

"Wait," gasped Jarnegan, "wait! Listen, you two. Who hit me in the head in the laboratory?"

Man and wife looked at each other inquiringly. Wayne said, "Nancy, I guess. The sheriff wouldn't hold me, so I came on home, found you there unconscious and taped you up."

Nancy Wayne said, "I? I didn't hit him."

Jarnegan began to laugh. "You're in it now, Wayne, both of you. McComas never worked for you, did he? Admit it? You poisoned him years ago on a fake radium water you manufactured. So you kept him ever since to keep his mouth shut! Now be truthful, didn't you kidnap him for an alibi for yourself, to cover up the killing of his daughter? I don't know where you hid him, but he's loose. It was McComas that clouted me in the laboratory."

"He's lying," snarled Nancy and flashed the steel again.

"How do you know it was McComas?"

"Because his face and hands were phosphorescent, a result of radium poisoning! Go look at his hiding place, the spot you were keeping him. I tell

you he's loose in this house and he's got the hundred thousand dollars!"

Wayne took three steps toward the door, jerked it open and started back. A sepulchral voice said, "Yes, Wayne, I'm loose in the house. I escaped my bonds and escaped from the cupboard where you had stuffed me."

HE was tall and thin, dressed in dirty clothes. His face even in the light was ghastly, silver white, bloodless. In his hands he held a glass retort from Wayne's laboratory. He closed the door behind him.

"You murdered my daughter, Wayne, kidnaped me, and wrote those notes yourself. You were afraid that Temple would find out about us, find out that I had been poisoned on your Radio Water. You had Temple ribbed up to put half a million in another Radio Water scheme, had even convinced him that you could manufacture the radium necessary. I've listened to the whole thing!"

Step by step he advanced toward the retreating Wayne. The woman still crouched on Jarnegan's lap. Suddenly Wayne dove for a gun that lay on the vanity. The woman leaped to her feet at the same time, and Jarnegan lashed out with his toes. They landed squarely. Nancy Wayne shot across the floor, ended up against an unyielding bedpost, and lay still.

In the meantime Wayne had whirled, gun in hand. Before he could pull the trigger, the contents of the glass retort caught him squarely in the face. He screamed, dropped the gun, and clawed at his face. The avenger was on him, stamping, kicking, clawing, and biting.

Jarnegan screamed, "Temple, Temple, get off that bed and unbind me. You've got to do it; you've got to do it."

NEARLY an hour later Jud Tolliver listened to Jarnegan in the laboratory of the Wayne home. Standing against the wall was John Wayne himself, groaning aloud, his face swathed in white bandages. Beside him was the sullen virago, his wife. Jud Tolliver stared down at the square, coffin-like machine in the middle of the room.

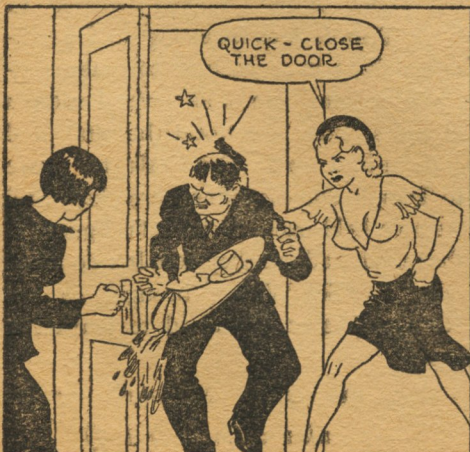
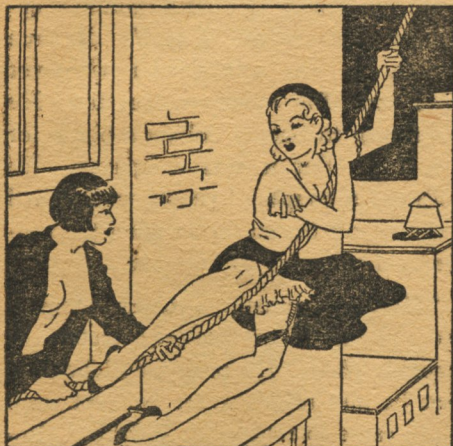
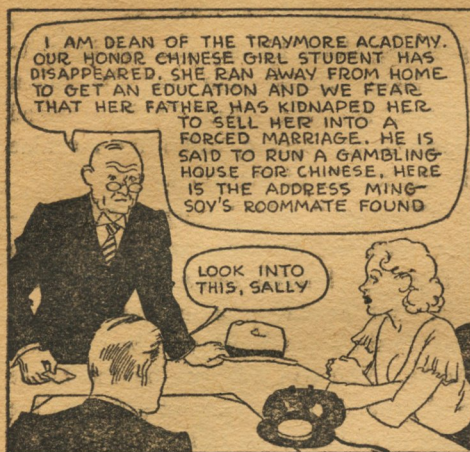
"You see," said Jarnegan, "the patent medicine business was lousy. So Wayne got himself a new partner, Temple. But Temple wouldn't put much in the business and Wayne was nearly broke. You can tell that by the house and grounds itself, without going to the bank to make sure as I did. A good many years ago Wayne put out a radium preparation known as Wayne's Radium Water. It was a tonic for whatever ailed you. Big money-maker, too. He got fifteen to twenty dollars a bottle for the stuff. But it was dangerous. He poisoned a couple of people with it and jerked it off the market, paying the people he'd poisoned to keep still.

"McComas wasn't a crazy chemist. He was one of the poisoned victims of Radium Water. His price for silence was that he and his daughter be kept until death came to relieve his suffering. Being about busted, Wayne decided to hook Temple into investing half a million dollars in a machine to make synthetic radium. He stole several radium capsules from the local hospital and radium-ized some chemicals to prove to Temple that his plans were okay. Still Temple held back, because he figured if they made radium they couldn't do much with it. So Wayne brought in the Radium Water, promised to market it again.

"He was afraid McComas or his

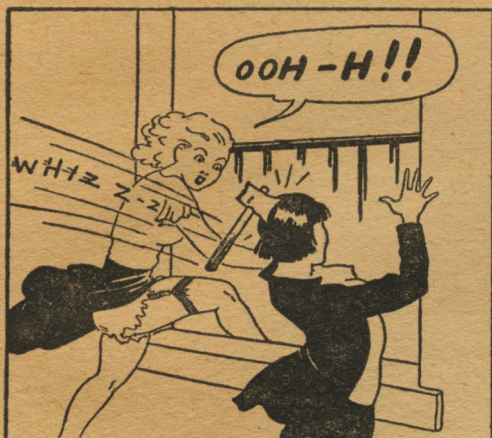
(Continued on page 114)

SALLY THE SLEUTH



Toy of Fate

by
BARREUX

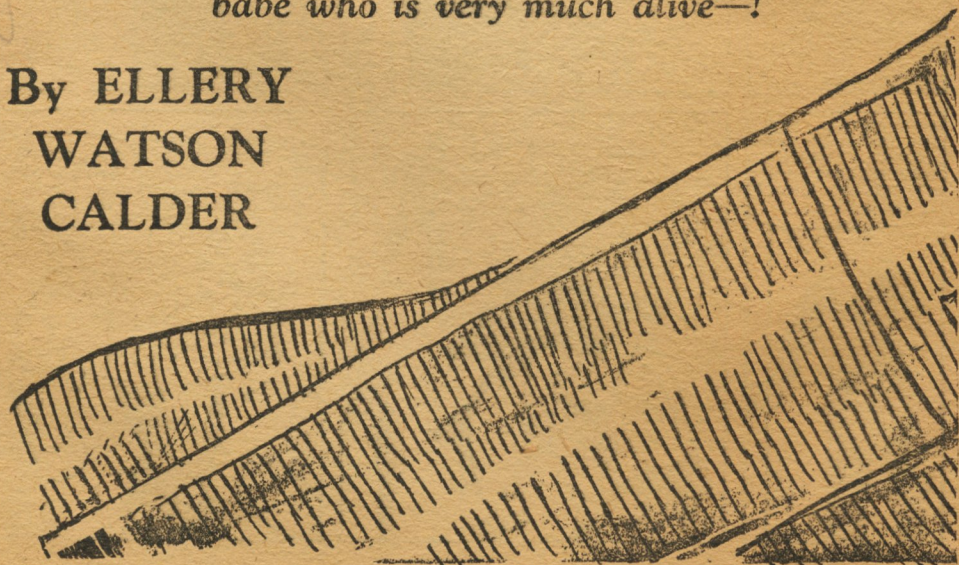
WATCH FOR SALLY IN NEXT MONTH'S SPICY DETECTIVE



*That Tommy
gun starts chat-
tering and the
window is blown
into my face.*

*A private detective is in a hell of a fix
when he loses both his car and his gun;
but when that same car shows up again
with a dead girl inside—and a lovely
babe who is very much alive—!*

By ELLERY
WATSON
CALDER



DEATH'S Passenger

I AM walking down this practically deserted highway, and the night is blacker than the inside of an African cow. As I pat my weary dogs on the cold concrete of the road, a steady and

copious stream of profane language comes out of my mouth. I tell myself that I am one hell of a poor excuse for a private detective, because no private detective should ever allow his automo-



bile to be glommed from under his nose, which is what just happens to me a little while before.

As I am walking back toward town, I keep wondering what my boss, Steve Byrne, is going to say to me for trying to pull the lone-wolf act on this case. Steve Byrne runs the detective agency that hires me, and I now realize that I make a big mistake by not taking him into my confidence. In trying to cover myself with glory by handling the matter all alone, I make one unholy mess of myself.

It all starts the previous night, when Steve Byrne gets a hurry call from old man Morfellow, the oil millionaire. It seems that Morfellow has an unexpected hundred grand in negotiable securities which he forgets to take to the bank that day; and he wants a couple of private snoops to guard his library where the bonds are to be stashed overnight.

Steve Byrne and I undertake the task of guarding old man Morfellow's safe. Steve takes the inside of the house while I cover the outside. Well, around midnight hell pops loose in the Morfellow mansion; and when the smoke clears away, Steve Byrne is stretched on the library floor with a bump on his noggin, a parlor-maid and a young girl secretary are missing from the house, and the safe is petered all to hell. The negotiable securities are gone.

Of course this gives Steve Byrne and his agency a very black eye, and Steve is more mournful than somewhat over his failure to guard old man Morfellow's property. At this point I determine to rescue Steve Byrne's reputation, all by myself.

IT so happens that I notice a high-powered gasoline vehicle driving away from the Morfellow mansion

around the time of the crime, and by accident I catch its license number. But instead of telling this to Steve, I start an investigation all by myself.

By means of the license number I trace the high-powered gasoline vehicle to a ramshackle house fifty miles out of the city, and tonight I am all set to make a single-handed raid on said house. I hope to capture the thieves, retrieve the missing securities, and find out what happens to the two dames who are missing from old man Morfellow's mansion.

Instead of which, I am held up on the road to the ramshackle house and my automobile is glommed away from me by three masked individuals with roscoes. Not only that, but they steal my tin and my automatic gat at the same time, which is piling insult on injury.

I have been walking maybe an hour since this Jesse James stuff is pulled on me, and the more I walk the sorer I get. There are five or six cars which pass me since I start ankling back to town, but none of them stops when I try to thumb a ride. In fact, my thumb is just about out of joint from wagglng it, and I am growing more disgusted by the minute.

It begins to appear that I will be compelled to hoof the entire twenty or thirty miles between me and the city, when all of a sudden I hear a gasoline vehicle coming up on me from behind; and I can tell from the sound of it that the motor is wide open and roaring.

Just at this point I reach an intersecting road where some work is being done on a culvert; and when the workmen leave their job for the day, they place a red lantern on the fresh cement work.

I am seized with a bright idea, so I grab the red lantern and park myself in the middle of the highway. I begin wav-

ing the red light in front of me.

I see the approaching gasoline vehicle's headlights bearing down on me, and I hear the brakes being applied. I keep waving the red lantern, and the motor carriage comes to a stop about three feet from the end of my smeller. I see that it is a Chevord sedan of recent vintage, like the one which is swiped from me a little while ago. I also see that there is a dame driving this Chevord.

SHE pokes her noggin out the window and says: "What is wrong? Is the road closed, mister?" Her voice sounds sort of shaky, I think to myself.

"No," I answer her truthfully. "The road is not closed; but I very strongly desire the boon of a lift back to the purlieus of the city, and this red lantern seems much more efficacious than my thumb when it comes to stopping a gasoline vehicle. I hope you do not mind," I continue; and I put down the lantern and walk up to the girl at the wheel.

At once I notice that she is not only very beautiful but very pale as well. She has chestnut-brown hair and trembling red lips, and she seems to be in the throes of one God-awful scare. However, this is not what startles me about her. What knocks me for a tail-spin is the fact that the cutie is dressed in nothing but a thin brassiere and a pair of lacy panties.

Now, I am not one to pry into affairs that do not concern me, even though I am a private snoop by profession. However, anyone will readily admit that there is something decidedly screwy about a young girl driving a practically new sedan through the night at about eighty-seven miles per hour while clad in nothing but her unmentionables.

Moreover, when said partly-unclad

cutie is of ravishing beauty of face and form, and evinces every sign of being scared sweatless, it becomes apparent that something must be haywire with the picture, and the matter demands inquiry. At least, that is the way the set-up strikes me as I look at this luscious person's semi-nudity.

However, I do not say anything just then. I merely walk around to the far side of the Chevord sedan and start to open its front door. Whereupon the chestnut-haired damosel slips into second gear and guns the living kidneys out of her motor. The sedan leaps forward as if pricked by a thistle, and very nearly leaves me flat-footed there in the middle of the highway.

But for once in my life I am fast on my gams; and I make a successful flying dive for the gasoline vehicle as it commences to gain velocity. I manage to scramble into the front seat alongside the chestnut-haired filly, and, as I settle myself down, I say: "That is no way to treat a gentleman, my dear miss. It is not only impolite, but you might have busted my neck."

She says: "H-how do I know you are a gentleman?"

"I must be," I say to her, "or by this time I will be trying to investigate certain attributes which go to fill out your whatcha-ma-callems so nicely."

She blushes in the glow of the dash-light. "I sup-suppose you're wondering why I'm un-undressed th-this way," she stammers.

I START to reply, when I hear a bump on the back floor of the sedan. I twist around, and I see that there is someone else riding with us. This someone else is another girl—and she is completely devoid of raiment. She is, in a word, naked. And she is slumped in a

heap on the rear floor of the gasoline vehicle.

The girl alongside me now says: "Y-you see, my g-girl friend and I are attending a w-wild party in a roadhouse up the highway. Th-that accounts for our b-being undressed. Th-then my girl friend passes out from too much liquor, so I am taking her to a doctor because I am afraid she is very ill."

I take another look at the naked young woman in the tonneau of the Chevord sedan; and then I reach in my pocket. I do not find my roscoe, because it is taken away from me by the three masked highwaymen who relieve me of my car a while ago. But what I do find is my old briar pipe, which I figure will do just as well. I jam the stem of the briar pipe outward through my pocket, punching it into the smooth side of the chestnut-haired girl at the wheel. Then I say:

"Baby, you will please pull over to the side of the road and make no funny moves, because I have a nervous trigger-finger and I will hate to put a bullet in you."

The chestnut-haired girl goes pale, and she swerves her wheel until I think we are going into the ditch. I grab a spoke and straighten us out. "A hold-up!" the girl chokes out.

"No," I say to her. "Not a hold-up. An arrest."

"An arrest . . . ?" she whispers. By this time she jams down on her brakes and stops the sedan at the side of the highway. She is trembling with more violence than somewhat; and despite the tightness of her mesh brassiere, this trembling is transmitted to her creamy breasts so that they shake like small, inverted bowls of gelatin dessert—only sweeter-looking. "An arrest . . . ?" she repeats.

"Yes," I respond to her grimly. "An arrest. A pinch. A collar. I am a private detective, and there are some things I wish to say to you. In the first place, three masked guys swipe my sedan about an hour ago. The three thugs are driving a larger motor vehicle at the time, but its gasoline tank runs dry because it has been punctured with bullets. So they are forced to stop; and in order to continue their lawless way, they hold me up and swipe my sedan right out of my lap. Well, baby, this happens to be the sedan they swipe from me, and what do you think of that?"

"Th-this is your c-car?" she mumbles.

"It is," I tell her truthfully, because I recognize the interior of my jalopy. "Moreover," I continue, "you prevaricate to me a minute ago when you tell me that your girl friend in the rear is merely drunk. There is a bullet hole in the back of her noggin, and she is as dead as Philadelphia on Sunday. I wish to be informed why you are driving a stolen car—my car—with a corpse in it; and if you do not cough up the information, I shall take steps."

"Oh-h-h!" the chestnut-haired filly moans. "I c-can't—I w-won't—"

"Is that so," I put a snarl in my voice. "Well, we will see whether you will or won't talk!" And I make a grab for her.

NOW, it is my experience that you can divide dames into two classes: Those who say yes and those who say no. Well, this chestnut-haired cutie looks like the kind who will always say no; and that is what I am hoping. Because my next move will not have any effect on the yes type of bimbo; but it will frighten the overlasting begorra out of the other sort.

So I make a grab at the trembling wren, and I pull her toward me. I tear

jam her down on the seat and start grabbing.

She attempts to bite and scratch me, but I am too much for her and she knows it right away. Moreover, I am entering into the spirit of the thing by this time, and I come to the conclusion that I am on the verge of having a hell of a good time. The chestnut-haired cutie is nice crushed against my chest, and she wears some sort of faint perfume that smells very nice indeed. And

*Before I can get to
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guy.*

her brassiere half off whilst kissing her on the mouth; and I say: "You may be a little uncomfortable in such close quarters but after a little while you will never know how cramped you are."

"You—you wouldn't dare—!" she pants, trying to fight me off.

"Hell, I dare anything," I say to her. And to make my meaning clear, I



as I run my hands over her shoulders—and arms—I find that her skin is like satin. In a word, she is one complete sock in the eye, and my temperature swiftly soars to the boiling point.

I kiss her again, so that her lips part under the pressure of mine. I am holding her to stop her from wiggling, and she is completely helpless. "One more minute, baby," I tell her.

"N-no! No—!" she moans.

"Then will you talk?"

"I—I—"

"Personally," I say to her, "I don't care a damn whether you talk now or not. So make up your mind rapidly."

She says: "H-how do I know you're not connected with that gang—?"

"What gang?" I ask her.

And then, before she can respond to me, somebody opens up all the spigots of hell and lets brimstone run loose.

I HEAR a cho-cho-cho-chopping noise outside the car, and I recognize the sound of a tommy-gun when it reaches my ears. Moreover, lead is spattering into the Chevord sedan like a hailstorm in January. The windows are immediately smashed to smithereens, and if I am not leaning over the chestnut-haired cutie on the front seat, we will both have the tops of our skulls blown off.

Since I do not relish the idea of being scalped by a machine-gun, I keep low; and press the girl down with my weight to protect her. Then she says: "Quick! It's them! Shoot at them—for the love of God!"

I say: "Your grammar, my dear, is lousy. You should not say: 'It's them'; you should say: 'It's they!' Moreover, how the hell can I shoot at them when I have nothing which will shoot?"

"Y-you have a gun! You pushed it

against me a minute ago, through your pocket—"

"That," I tell her ruefully, "is a briar pipe. Accept my apologies."

She moans. At the same instant, the machine-gunning ceases and the Chevord's door is torn open. I see three masked gazaboos making a grab for me; and I decide to take a chance. I spurt out of the car and tie into the nearest one. I catch him a lulu on the point of the jaw, and he staggers. But the other two pile on me, and one socks me a bash on the dome with the butt of an automatic. I see Orion, Mars, and the Southern Cross all at once. Then a black velvet curtain is lowered across my eyes, and I go to sleep.

WHEN I wake up, I feel as if I have just played a single-handed football game against Notre Dame, with the score one hundred and seven to nothing in their favor. My ribs feel caved in, my head buzzes like a hive of bees, and I have spots before my eyes the size of Grant's Tomb.

I find I am in a little room, lying on the floor, and I am trussed up like a Thanksgiving turkey. Gradually I pick up the scattered pieces of myself and put them back together, and I discover that while I am one solid bruise, I seem to have no broken bones or internal injuries. Which, if you ask me, is a major miracle.

As memory seeps back into my brain, I recall the chestnut-haired girl, my stolen sedan, the feminine corpse in the rear of said sedan, and the three masked bozos with the tommy-gun. I also recall my original purpose in being in the neighborhood. I remember wanting to recover old man Morfellow's stolen hundred grand's worth of negotiable securities—

a purpose which now seems utterly doomed to failure.

Again I curse myself for not letting my boss, Steve, in on the whole thing. If he is with me, this does not happen to me. But that is just bawling over spilled milk, and does me no good at all.

I remember having my car swiped, and starting back to town for another car and a fresh roscoe. It suddenly strikes me that the three masked gazaboos who originally glom my car are the same three who pull the tommy-gun act a little later. But there are a lot of pieces missing from the jig-saw puzzle. Who are the masked guys? Why do they machine-gun my sedan? Why do they put the snatch on me?

And—by God! I say to myself—have they also put the snatch on that chestnut-haired wren who is with me in the car when lightning strikes?

The thought of that sweet-looking cutie in the hands of a gang of thugs makes me shiver, and I start rolling across the floor of the room which is my prison. All of a sudden I bring up against something soft and yielding and sort of cold.

IN THE dim light from the transom I see that it is a naked dame. My heart leaps up in my mouth as I touch cold flesh. The dame is dead. When I place my bound hands under her breasts, I do not feel any heart-beat at all. I get goose-pimples on my spine, thinking that the masked gazaboos cool off the chestnut-haired filly.

Then I look at the dead dame's face, and I see that she is not the chestnut-haired cutie after all. She is the corpse from the back of my sedan—the one with a bullet hole through the back of her noggin.

Then, over in the far corner of the

little room, I hear a moaning whisper. I scramble over in that direction; and sure enough, there is the chestnut-haired wren, tied up like a Christmas goose the same as I am. But she is alive and conscious, which makes me feel more glad than somewhat.

I get as close to her as I can, which is pretty close indeed. All she has on still is her panties and some rope around her wrists and ankles.

But I have no time now to think about how nice her shape is; because I am looking for information. I put my mouth close to her ear and start whispering.

"Listen, kiddo," I say. "There are several thing you have got to tell me; and while you are talking, I will put my wrists down near your fingers so you can pick at the knots which hold me."

"All . . . right . . ." she comes back.

Even though her wrists are tied, she still has the use of her fingers; and she sets to work on my fetters. Meanwhile I start asking her questions. "Who are you?" I ask her.

"I—my name's Betty Hoyt," she whispers. "I'm Mr. Morfellow's private secretary."

This stiffens me. "The hell you say!" I gasp.

"Y-yes."

"Then what's this all about?" I ask her. "What are you doing here? Why are you driving my stolen car a while ago? Who is the dead dame you are carting around at that time? And why are we machine-gunned and snatched, there at the side of the highway?"

She says: "I—I'll tell you all I know. It isn't v-very much. Last night I am in my room in Mr. Morfellow's mansion. I hear a commotion downstairs. I run down, in my underwear—I am getting ready for bed at the time. Just as I reach the bottom of the stairs I see Eu-

nice Malloy, the parlor-maid. She is in her night-gown. She has run downstairs, too, when she hears the noise in the study. She reaches the study before I do, and what she sees in there must scare her.

"She starts toward me to tell me what is going on in the study, and a masked man jumps her from behind, knocks her down with his gun. Then he hits me, and when I wake up I am in an automobile traveling at a high rate of speed."

"Go on," I whisper, while Betty Hoyt keeps working at the rope around my wrist.

"Well," she pants, "I am brought here to this house in the country. I am put in one room, and Eunice Malloy, the parlor-maid is placed in another room. They take her night-gown away from her so she won't try to escape; but they leave me with my b-brassiere and p-panties. . . ."

"Then this very gang" I whisper, "is the bunch that peters old man Morfellow's safe and gets away with that hundred grand in securities!" I feel the short hairs prickling at the nape of my neck.

THE chestnut-haired Betty Hoyt continues. "There's not much else for me to tell. Tonight, I hear two of the masked men planning to rob a bank. They leave. Later, they return. I hear them say something about being in a gunfight with the police. They say their car's gas tank is punctured by bullets, and they have to steal somebody else's car to get back here to their hide-out."

"Yes," I whisper, "that matches up with what happens to me tonight. Go ahead. What about you being in my Chevord with a dead dame?"

"Th-that was Eunice Malloy, the parlor-maid," Betty Hoyt says. "You see,

as soon as the masked men get back here, I hear my room's door opening. Eunice, the maid, walks in. She has managed to get loose, and even though she is n-naked she wants to escape. She asks me to go with her. I agree. We slip out; and we get to the car which the masked men have stolen and brought here."

"Mine," I grunt.

"Y-yes. Well, I get in the car to drive it. Eunice starts to get in with me. One of the masked men spots us. He shoots. A bullet hits Eunice in the head and kills her. I drag her body into the car and get away. Th-then you st-stop me on the road with your red lantern. . . ."

"And meanwhile," I finish for her, "the masked guys have another car here and they take out after you. When they see the Chevord parked on the road they cut loose with their tommy-gun. Huh?"

"Y-yes."

"There is just one thing I do not understand," I whisper. "Why do these masked gazaboos kidnap you and the parlor-maid in the first place?"

Betty Hoyt says: "Eunice Malloy sees one of the burglars in Mr. Morfellow's study without his mask on. So they kidnap her for fear she'll identify the man later. And they grab me because they think Eunice has told me what she knows."

"Well, does she tell you?" I say.

"N-no."

JUST as Betty Hoyt says this, she manages to unravel the last knot on the rope around my wrists. I rub my hands together. "Baby," I whisper, "as soon as I get my legs untied, hell is going to pop around this joint!"

But at that instant, I hear somebody coming toward the door of the room in which we are pent. In fact, I hear two voices, both masculine. One says: "I'm

for bumping the dame and the guy right now."

The other voice says: "Yeah, but let's have some fun with the dame first. She

is a swell-looking broad, and what the hell difference will it make to her?"

I put my mouth to Betty Hoyt's ear and whisper: "Baby, don't make any holler. Let 'em drag you out of here. And don't worry, because I will rescue you before anything unpleasant happens."

She rolls herself close to me and I can feel her breasts pressing on my chest. I grab her and hold her for a minute, and she feels mighty damned sweet. I kiss her on the mouth, and then I inch myself back to the other side of the room just as the door opens.

Two masked mugs walk in. They grab the wren and drag her out. She puts up a bit of struggle to make it look

Two masked mugs barge in; they grab Betty, and she puts up a struggle. . . .



good. Then she is gone, and the door is closed again. But I do not hear it being locked. In the semi-darkness, the masked guys must assume that I am still all tied up, so they do not look for me to make any breaks.

THE minute I am alone, I start working on the ropes at my ankles. The knots are tighter than I expect, and it takes me longer than I want it to. I begin to sweat, because I keep thinking of what might happen to Betty Hoyt if I don't get out there pretty damn' soon.

At last I get the final knot untied, and I am trembling like a dog coughing beef-seeds. I get to my feet and start for the door. At that minute I hear Betty Hoyt let out a yip of fear and pain.

I yank open the door and spurt myself into a hallway. I hear Betty Hoyt yell again, louder this time. I swear and start running. I reach a room. Its door is partly open. Inside, I see Betty Hoyt on a divan, with one masked guy holding her down, and the other two standing there watching.

If I am one minute later, Betty Hoyt is a fallen woman; but fortunately I am not one minute later; I am just on time.

I go zipping into the room, and I smash into the nearest masked guy before he can say boo. I hit him on the nape of the neck with both fists, and I hear his spine snap. He goes down. I dive into his pocket and come up with his roscoe. I squeeze the trigger.

But I forget to take off the safety-catch, and I lose my chance. The masked bozo who is working on Betty Hoyt now leaps to his feet, and his rod is in his mitt. He takes a pot-shot at me. I duck. Then the other gazabo aims from the hip, and I feel a lead finger snatching at my shoulder. Fire burns down my arm, through the veins and arteries.

I am hit, but not very bad. By now I have the safety off my automatic, and I start squirting slugs all over the damned place. I drill that mugg who was about to do his stuff on Betty Hoyt. I drill him square in the mouth and send most of his molars and bicuspid out through the back of his brain. He goes down.

But the war is not yet over by one hell of a long way. I squeeze my trigger again, and nothing happens. My roscoe's clip is empty. And the remaining masked gazabo is coming at me, bringing up his gat to let me have it between the eyes.

I lash myself sidewise and his slug nips past my ear, chews a chunk out of the wall behind me. I throw my own rod full in his kisser and it almost knocks him for a goal. Blood spurts out from behind his mask. He curses me and tells me all about my ancestors—things I never know until now. Then he takes another shot at me.

I am expecting to feel his slug in my heart, but at that instant Betty Hoyt leaps to her feet and throws herself at the guy's arm. His bullet goes wild. He turns on her with a snarl and starts to pop her with his fist.

THAT is the chance I am waiting for. I go flying at him, and he whirls just in time to meet me half way. We collide like a couple of freight trains going opposite directions on the same track. You can hear the thud of us coming together from here to the Bronx.

I sink a fist into his guts, and he lets me have a knee in the groin. I feel as if I am dying. But I straighten up and cork him in the throat, and he gasps for breath. I have driven his Adam's apple half way down his gullet.

He backs away, trying to get a shot at me with his rod. I hang on to his gun-

wrist. Somehow, I twist the rod around in his hand just as it goes off. There is a muffled explosion, almost silenced by the closeness of the muzzle to the masked guy's ribs. The slug goes tunneling through his innards, and that is about the end of him. He sags to the floor.

Then I see a valise on a table. It is open. I grab it and paw through it, and there is old man Morfellow's stolen hundred grand in negotiable securities.

I turn to Betty Hoyt and say: "Baby, the case is closed. I have your boss's missing bonds, the gang is wiped out, and I redeem the reputation of the detective agency that hires me. I'll bet Steve Byrne, my own boss, will be plenty tickled."

From the floor, I hear a voice groaning: "Tickled . . . hell . . . you damned meddling . . . sap. . . ."

It is the last guy I have shot, and there is something familiar about his tone, weak as it is. I go to him and snatch away the mask—

And I see the face of Steve Byrne, my detective-agency employer!

Then I realize the truth. Steve not only runs a private detective agency, but he is head of a gang of crooks as well. When he gets that call from old man Morfellow last night, he sees a chance to pull a neat job. While supposedly guarding the Morfellow safe, he opens it and has his gang come on the scene to receive the stolen bonds. Then one of his men hits him lightly on the head

and leaves him there, to make it look good.

And it must be that the parlor maid spots Steve in the act of opening the safe; which is why he has his men kidnap her and snatch Betty at the same time.

So now I am very glad I do not take Steve into my confidence when I start out on the case by trailing the license number of the gasoline vehicle which speeds away from the Morfellow mansion last night. Because if I tell Steve Byrne what I am doing, he will stop me, inasmuch as he is the chief crook himself.

I look down at him, and I see that he will never pull another crooked deal. He is now as dead as Alaska in the winter-time.

I FEEL somebody creeping into my arms, and it is Betty. I hold her very tightly, and I say to her: "Baby, you and I will return these bonds to old man Morfellow; and maybe he will reward us with enough dough to start up a detective agency of our own."

"Our own?" she says, her eyes sort of shining and her breasts trembling against me.

"Yes," I say to her. "You and I are going to be partners from now on." We sign the bargain with a kiss, and from the way she quivers and melts against me I know right away that she will make one hell of a swell partner.

Justin Case contributes

"Death to Cops"—next month!

BRING HOME

An Eddie Pell
Story

By JOHN BARD

"Will you eat, or must you be fed?" Goya snarled, pointing to the diamonds. Now Eddie knew how the smuggling was done. Would Lela be on time!

JOSEPH COKER closed the door of his room and switched on the light. What he saw made him reach for his gat. Lying on the floor between him and the bed was the body of a girl. She was stark naked except for a tight fitting triangle of pink silk that hugged the snug harbor of her waist and hips. Her pale flat stomach sloped seductively upward toward her breasts that glowed, rounded and firm, with the pleasant flush of youth. Her face was turned away and hidden by the black cloud of her hair, but he could see the darkish spot at her temple that might have been left by a bullet.

Slipping the automatic back into his shoulder holster he took a quick step forward, dropped on one knee beside the girl's body and bent downward to listen



for her heartbeat. His ear tingled beneath the smooth of the rounded white breast. Thump, thump, thump. . . . She was still alive. And how!

At that very instant two slim arms locked around his neck. Two strong legs closed like a pair of scissors around his hips. Full breasts flattened themselves so suddenly against his chest that

THE BODY



*He knelt on
one knee by
the body.*

they cut off access to his gat. A hot, wet mouth smothered his exclamation of surprise. Then he felt the jab of an

automatic in the small of his back.

"*Quítese, Carmela!*" said a quiet voice in Mex. "Let him up!"

The legs and arms seemed to let go their hold regretfully. The mouth loosed slowly its leech-like hold. The bright face of the girl smiled devilishly up at Joe. Then she grinned at the little black-mustached Mexican who was holding the gun.

"Couldn't you wait a minute, Goya? This Gringo has a swell flavor."

Goya ignored her remark. He said, "Stand up, G-Man!"

AS COKER slowly obeyed, Goya slipped the gat from his prisoner's shoulder holster and tossed it to the girl. "No tricks!" he warned Coker. "Or I shoot you in the stomach where it hurt most."

"All right," said Joe, turning around to face his captor. "What's the reception for?"

"We always give reception to New Yorkers who visit Mexico," said Carmela, slipping into a skirt and waist that she took from under the pillows on the bed.

"We just like to ask you favor," said the little Mexican drily. He took a leather tobacco pouch from his pocket. "Please to empty that on the bed," he said.

The girl moved aside as Joe opened the draw strings of the heavy leather pouch and crossed to the bed. Holding it bottom up, he dumped the contents on the faded counterpane. Even in the pale light of the single hotel bulb he was almost dazzled by their brilliance. The little mountain of diamonds sparkled and flashed with the iridescence of forked lightning.

Joe allowed a slow sigh of appreciation to escape his lips. "At least a thousand carats," he said softly.

"A quarter of a million dollars' worth of stones," said Goya without emotion.

"And you are to have the honor, Señor Joe."

"The honor?" said Joe, puzzled.

"Si, Señor Joe, the honor of smuggling them across the border duty free."

Coker snorted. "Hah. . . I couldn't do it even if I wanted to."

"Oh, yes you can," said Goya in a peculiar voice. "And you will."

"O. K.," Joe forced a laugh. "How do I begin?"

"You begin with a *fiesta* . . . a celebration, a feast. Such a feast as you have never had before. Such food as you have never seen." He tilted the muzzle of the gat toward the pile of stones on the counterpane. "Will you eat?" snarled Goya. "Or must you be fed?"

EDDIE PELL contemplated the telegram with annoyance. Half an hour before he'd accepted a phone invitation to lunch with Lela Moore. He'd never had an engagement with her yet when something didn't happen to break it. He jabbed the yellow envelope under the leather corner of the blotting pad. He wouldn't open it till after lunch. As he closed and locked the drawer of private correspondence, he heard a footstep behind him. He swung around in his swivel chair. He grinned.

"Damn it, Lela," he said, getting up and tapping his coat above the shoulder holster. "Don't sneak up on me like that. It's dangerous."

Lela Moore said, "I know it. I love . . . danger." She walked slowly toward him, her svelte hips swaying seductively from side to side. The brown crepe dress fitted her so tightly that he could see the slight rise and fall of her stomach as she breathed. The smooth expanse of skin sloping down to the twin swells of her breast glowed white and firm above the rolled "V" neck.

"I didn't expect you so soon," said Eddie, licking his lips at this vision of loveliness that always gave him such a yen. "Who let you in?"

"I remembered that your secretary always goes down the hall to the ladies' room to primp at ten minutes to twelve. I just walked in." She stood in front of him, small, slimly voluptuous, with all the proper amounts in all the proper places.

Eddie resisted an impulse to crush her little body in a violent embrace. He just stood looking at her, licking his lips.

Lela put her small hand on his arm. "Long Distance," she said softly, "please connect me with a certain party."

Eddie could hardly believe his ears. He looked at her intently. He trembled with expectancy. Then, reaching out, he drew her to him with such violence that she gasped. He felt her hard breasts crush against his chest as his mouth closed over hers. Fire blazed around his lips and down his spine. His whole body tingled where her little figure melted against his. He could feel the retreat and advance of her warmth at each gasp for breath. He crushed her so closely that she seemed to be part of him, filling each pore, being absorbed. The world stopped. Time paused. Eddie closed his eyes at the blinding flash of ecstasy. . . .

"Eddie. . ."

"Um. . ."

"I almost forgot to tell you. McDonald wants to see you."

He pushed her away from him and grinned ruefully. "I knew there was a catch in this somewhere."

"I'm on a case. A tough case. He gave me my choice of the men in the service. I picked you."

"But I'm not in the service. I'm a private dick. What's the matter with Elmer Green?"

"Are you still jealous of Elmer, Eddie? He doesn't want me to go. He says the case is too dangerous for a woman. You used to be McDonald's best man and you speak Spanish. I need you, Eddie. Don't let me down." She held herself against him, warm and exciting.

Eddie looked down at her for a moment, then he reached for his hat. "You put me in a helluva spot. I've got more work now than I can take care of. Where does this case take you. . . ?"

Before Lela could answer, there was a sharp rap on the private office door and it opened suddenly. It was Eddie's tall blond secretary.

She said, "Does that telegram need an answer before I go to lunch?"

Eddie looked sheepishly at her and, jerking the yellow envelope from under its leather corner, ripped off one end. He read:

"Dicks who go to Mexico die of:

Typhus
Typhoid
Dysentery
Small Pox
Malaria
Bullets

"El Matador."

EDDIE studied the message for a moment without a change of expression. "I'll answer this in person," he said. The secretary closed the door.

"*El Matador*," quoted Eddie. "H'm. . . somebody else around here speaks Mex. besides me. Where does this case take you, baby?"

"First to the morgue. Then to Mexico."

He put his arm around her again and pulled her yielding body to him. "Mexico. . . . H'm. . . ." He pressed his lips against the warm white flesh above the "V" of her dress. ". . . . H'm. . . . but

you smell good. . . . Mexico. . . . That's a helluva long way. . . ."

With a swift movement she put her hand under his chin and lifted it.

"Are you going?" she asked firmly.

"The sample was delicious," murmured Eddie. "Let's go."

When they arrived at the morgue, Douglas McDonald was already there. He was a grey-haired man, so tall and gaunt that he towered even over Eddie. He pulled out a drawer in the giant refrigerator. "Remember him, Eddie?"

Eddie looked down at the body of the dead man and nodded his head slowly. His mouth tightened at the sight of the criss-crossed knife cuts on the chest and abdomen. The body had been horribly mutilated. From solar plexus to pelvis was a horrible gash. Over the heart was the dark pit of a bullet wound.

"Disfigured and disembowled," said Eddie grimly.

"Three men have come back to us like this, Eddie. Something has to be done about it."

"Sadistic reprisal?" asked Eddie.

"Judge for yourself," said McDonald, handing him a newspaper clipping pinned to a piece of white note paper. "These came by mail from Montillon, Mexico, four months ago. They were pinned together just like they are now. Lela has seen them already."

Eddie read the clipping headlines:

**"THIEVES GET THREE
MILLION DOLLAR LOOT
FROM DIAMOND TRUST
TREASURE HOUSE**

**"London, Eng.—In the most
spectacular robbery of all time
a band of organized thieves
. . . ."**

Eddie dropped his eyes to the appended note. It was short and to the point.

"Keep your G-men at home. Or we'll send them home. . . . under escort."

"El Matador."

Eddie noted the signature. "Under escort?" he puzzled aloud.

Lela said, "There must be a man to accompany a dead body when it leaves Mexico. That's Mexican law."

McDonald said, "Scotland Yard traced the gems as far as Vera Cruz, Mexico. They've been turning up in the New York diamond market ever since. We've got to find out how they're smuggled in or we'll never collect another cent of duty on precious stones. They'll all be smuggled in."

Eddie smiled grimly, "Well, get your escort ready, McDonald. Lela and I are on our way."

McDonald's voice was lighter than his heart. "Just wire me to bring home the corpse, Eddie, and I'll send Elmer after Lela."

Eddie said, "Elmer? Elmer Green? If you think you're going to send Elmer after Lela, you're crazy. I aim to bring her back alive."

FIVE days later Eddie arrived at the best hotel in Montillon alone. It was a pink, white, and blue town built of adobe and red tile and garnished with Indian laurel trees. Eddie's usually firm jaw seemed to have loosened. His taut stomach muscles had grown slack and he had developed a slight paunch. A fat stub of cigar clung to the corner of his mouth. Altogether he seemed to be a middle-aged business man on a spree without benefit of wife.

After he had been assigned to room 17, he went back to the railroad station and sent a telegram to the next little town. It read: "Offer seventeen thousand but must accept tonight."



"If you so much as bat an eyelash, I'll let you have it right in the map," the voice said. "What a shame to spoil that lovely profile!"



Most of the afternoon he spent in the *Tres Reyes* cantina across the street from the hotel. He tried *tequilla, mescal, pulque, habanera, Dos Equis, Carta Blanca, Morelia*, and *piña* beer. Surreptitiously he filled the cuspidor by his foot with alcoholic beverages while he confided tipsily to all and sundry that he had come from New York to buy diamonds.

It was almost dark as he weaved his way across the street to the hotel. He inquired at the office if his trunk had come up from the station. It had. It was in his room. He would like a *mozo* to help him unpack. The *mozo* preceded him with the key. Eddie let him open the door and go in first. While the *mozo* was unlocking the trunk, Eddie, blundering drunkenly about, searched the room thoroughly. Then he said, "*Sta bueno, hombre!*" gave the *mozo* a *tostone* and locked the door behind him.

Still pretending to be drunk for the benefit of any prying eyes, he took from the trunk a pair of wrinkled, grey looking pajamas of some coarse, basket-weave material, and a black robe. The robe and pyjamas hung straight down from his fingers as if they were weighted at the bottom. He laid them on the chair by the door and started clumsily to remove his coat, fell against the wall and struck the light switch. The light went out leaving the room almost pitch black.

Grunting and swearing drunkenly, he finally found the switch again and turned on the light. He had on the dark robe and grey pyjamas.

With a last blundering movement he pushed open his wardrobe trunk, selected a pellet that looked like a quinine capsule from a box in the top drawer, locked the trunk, and staggered down the hallway toward the community bathroom. After inspecting the bath-room to see if he was

safe from observation, he took a linen handkerchief and a small vial from one pocket of his robe.

Dampening the handkerchief at the spigot he poured a few drops of liquid from the vial onto the square of linen, rolled it into a tight ball and stuck it back into the pocket of his robe. Then, with the glass pellet that looked like a quinine capsule gripped securely in the fleshy pocket between the thumb and finger of his left hand he weaved back down the hall toward his room. He had been gone eleven minutes by his watch.

Drunkenly he fumbled for the door-knob in the dim-lit hallway. Pushing open the door he switched on the light and started for the bed. He stopped suddenly, swaying in his tracks. On the floor by the bed was the lovely figure of a girl. Except for a pale trifle of skin-tight silk that hugged the seductive curves of her hips, she was naked. She was lying limply on her side with the lovely white globules of her breasts pointing toward Eddie's blinking eyes.

He staggered toward her shaking his head as if to brush away a film from his eyes and knelt down on one knee. In attempting to listen for her heartbeat he fell forward, burying his face in the soft hollow between her breast and shoulder. The force of his fall pushed the girl onto her back. It was then that he felt the arms clinch around his neck and the firm limbs lock warmly around his waist. The hard full breasts struck his chest, burning into his flesh. A wet panting mouth closed over his with a leech-like grip. Then he felt the round muzzle of the automatic at his back.

"*Quitese, Carmela!* Let him up."

"Be careful, Goya!" warned Carmela. "He isn't really drunk."

Eddie felt a hand slide over his shoulder inside his pyjama shirt and lift

his gun from the holster. He heard the sneering words behind his back. "Nice gat, Gringo, but no good to you here. You can turn around now." He tossed Eddie's gat to Carmela who was standing at the foot of the bed.

EDDIE turned around and looked at the little black-mustached Mex. who stood covering him. His automatic had an extension on the barrel. Silencer! Eddie hadn't reckoned on that.

"What do you want, Cholo?" Eddie growled at Goya.

Goya's knuckles whitened around the butt of the gun. His finger quivered on the trigger, but he controlled himself.

"You are in Mexico, Gringo. You forget your manners."

"Among pigs," said Eddie walking slowly toward him, "one does not need manners."

Goya gritted the words, "Die, then *tonto!*" Three spits of blue flame leaped from the long barreled pistol. Eddie felt a battering ram strike him in the stomach. He smiled a kind of ghastly smile for Goya's benefit. He stopped, regained his balance and came on again. Goya's eyes widened with a puzzled fear. His fingers tightened on the trigger and stayed there. The automatic spat out its insides.

Eddie stumbled, jerked the linen handkerchief from his pocket, and fell with it over his face against the door. He felt the liquid gush from the little glass pellet as he crushed it between his thumb and fore-fingers. A faint nauseating odor began to fill the room.

Carmela said, "You didn't have to do it that way."

Goya said, "*Por Dios*, I did. He was coming for me. Come on, let's get this over with."

He took a short length of small rubber

hose and a leather tobacco pouch from his pocket. He began to unroll the hose. He grumbled, "The last time I had to pour the rocks down a G-Man I got the hose in his lungs instead of his stomach. Verde raised hell. He said he had to cut him all to pieces to find them I'd rather make them eat them What's that smell?"

Carmela was coughing. Gun in hand she made for the door sputtering, "*Quick Goya*, . . . it's . . . g-gas."

"*Santissima!*" gasped Goya trying to drag Eddie's heavy body from its place against the door. "The filthy Gringo . . . agh . . . ahhhh . . ."

Eddie heard Goyas body slump to the floor, then he felt the smack of Carmela's hand on the handkerchief that protected his nostrils as she fell. Her body lay across his, hot and pulsing. He heard the plop of his gun as it slipped from her fingers and fell at his feet. He was beginning to feel the effects of the gas in spite of the medicated handkerchief.

With an effort he sat up, the weight of the bullet proof robe and pyjamas resisting the movement of every muscle. Slipping his fingers into Carmela's warm arm pits he rolled her off him onto the floor. He was instantly sorry. Gripped in her hand was the handkerchief from over his face. He clutched at it frantically. Her grip was firm. It ripped to pieces. He held his breath as he struggled to rise. He got one hand on the doorknob and opened his mouth to cry out. No sound came. Only silence and oblivion.

IT WAS Lela's voice that brought him to. She was on her knees pressing his diaphragm to aid respiration. She had opened the transom and the windows. A breeze had dispersed most of
(Continued on page 116)

CROONER'S

I SAID: "Brother, you may be Max Amberg's secretary and you may think you're hard as hell. But if you don't let me see your boss, I'll soften you up like a dish of wet cornflakes."

The young fellow's voice climbed down

off its high-horse. "But sir, Mr. Amberg can't see you now. He's taking a bath."

"I don't give a damn what he's doing. You tell him Dan Turner wants to see him. Take the lead out of your feet."

*A voice yelled,
"Let her alone,
you rat!" And a
slug pinged
through the
doorway.*

By
**ROBERT
LESLIE
BELLEM**



CARESS

Dan Turner comes in to report one murder and finds another . . . apparently committed almost before his eyes. It looks like a tough nut to crack, and is—until Turner looks up the girl who knows everything about everybody in Hollywood



"Well . . . okay, sir. Please wait here in the living-room."

I walked into the house, started pacing the floor. The young fellow bowed to me, went upstairs. I saw some Scotch in a decanter, helped myself to a jorum to steady my nerves. From the second floor I heard: "He insists on seeing you, Mr. Amberg."

"All right, Fabian, you idiot. Send him up."

I didn't wait to be called. I started upstairs; passed Fabian, the secretary, on his way down. On the second floor I blundered into a bedroom. It wasn't Amberg's. It was a boudoir. There was a yellow-haired cutie standing before a lighted mirror, adjusting her brassiere. Her eyes looked red.

She saw me and squeaked "E-e-e-e . . . !"'

I said: "Excuse me, baby," and backed out. But even after I closed the door, I could imagine I was still looking at her lily-petal flesh, her roller-coaster curves. She was plenty gorgeous—and I had recognized her. She was Allene Raye, who played feature parts in Max Amberg's First Prize Productions.

At any other time I might have got a grin out of finding her practically naked in that room. She was as out of place in Amberg's house as Haille Selassie would be in Mussolini's private study. Amberg was supposed to be Hollywood's most confirmed bachelor.

But I didn't have time to think about it. I had something else on my mind. A murder.

I FOUND Amberg's room, walked in, heard water splashing behind a door leading into the bathroom. I said: "Hey—Max!"

The bathroom door opened on a crack.

Amberg's fat pan looked out at me. Then the door closed again; the lock clicked. Through the panel came: "Hello, Turner. You'll have to wait while I finish my shower. What's up?"

"Plenty," I told him. I wondered why he wasn't bawling hell out of me for being back in town. I said: "I want to know how many people you spilled your guts to."

From the bathroom came: "Spilled my guts to? I don't get you."

I said: "Cut out the stalling. I'm in a jam, Max. *Somebody got into my cabin at Arrowhead this afternoon and slipped a shiv in Peg Webley's ribs!*"

"Wh-what? Y-you mean—she's been . . . murdered?"

"Yeah. And nobody knew she was at Arrowhead with me except you—unless you spilled it."

"Good God, Turner! You aren't accusing *me* of—?"

"I'm not accusing anybody yet. I want to know if you told anyone where Peg Webley was."

"I—I—no! Nobody except Ronnie Randolph. Listen, Turner. Go downstairs and wait for me. I'll get dressed and come right down. We've got to go to the police about this!"

I said: "Police, hell! They already know. Those thick-skulled Arrowhead bulls think I killed her. I'm on the lam. Now snap into it. You've got to help me find out who pushed that sticker in Peg's heart." I waited a minute. When he didn't answer, I went downstairs.

Fabian, the secretary, was in the living-room. "Would you like a drink, sir, while you're waiting?"

I said: "Damned right," and took four fingers in a tumbler. Just as I tossed it passed my tonsils, something happened.

A dame screamed.

The screech came from upstairs. I said: "What the hell!" and jumped for the door. Fabian did the same thing. We collided. We both went into a tail-spin.

I heard footsteps pattering down the stairs hell-for-leather. At the same instant I heard brakes squealing outside the house. I tried to get on my feet. Fabian was all tangled in my legs. I said: "You clumsy ape!" and shoved him.

JUST then somebody flashed by in the hallway. It was Allene Raye—the blonde cutie I had seen upstairs. She went by like a greased streak. I saw the twinkle of her slender, silk-sheathed legs, the swing of her slim hips, a glint of yellow hair. Then the front door slammed with a jar that shook the house.

I scrambled to my pins, leaped after her. The lock of the front door was jammed from that slam. It took me thirty seconds to get it open. I hurled myself out to the porch, saw a black-and-chrome roadster jerk forward and go whooshing down the hill. There was a man at the wheel. A blonde dame sat beside him. I could just see her back, but I knew it was Allene because of her yellow hair. Then the roadster was gone.

I turned, almost bumped into Fabian behind me. He said: "Wh-what do you suppose happened?"

"That's what I want to know!" I barked. I brushed past him, took the stairs three at a time. I yanked my .32 automatic from the shoulder-holster where I always carry it. Amberg's bedroom door was closed. I bashed it open, plunged into the room.

I yelled: "Max!"

There wasn't any answer.

I made for the closed bathroom door.

I had a hunch there was something damned haywire on the other side of it. There was a chair in front of it, as if somebody had climbed up to look over the transom. I boosted myself up on the chair, stared over the transom, put the focus on the bathroom's interior.

I said: "God Almighty!"

Behind me, Fabian whispered: "Wh-what's wrong, Mr. Turner?"

I jumped down, faced him. I said: "Your boss is as dead as a herring!"

He went white. "Mr. Amberg . . . dead?"

"Yeah." I tried the bathroom knob. It was still locked on the inside. I backed off, gathered my muscles, hit the woodwork with my shoulder. I put every ounce of my hundred and ninety pounds behind the blow. The door caved inward.

Max Amberg was in the tub. He had a blue bruise on his left temple. The tub was full of water. The water was all crimson. Amberg's wrists were slashed open. He had died from loss of blood. There was an old-fashioned straight razor on the tiled floor alongside the tub.

I'd often heard of that method of suicide. They say it's painless. You open the veins in your wrists while you're immersed in water of body-temperature. You don't feel anything except a growing drowsiness as your blood drains out. Pretty soon you go to sleep and don't wake up.

But somehow I couldn't imagine Max Amberg bumping himself off. He wasn't the type. He was rich, successful. It didn't add up right.

I spotted another door on the far side of the tiled bathroom. I made for it, tried the knob. It was locked. The key was on the inside—my side. And I

also saw that the window was closed, fastened.

So it had to be suicide, no matter what I thought.

But why?

I couldn't figure it out. I whirled, made for the phone in the bedroom. I dialed the operator. "Police headquarters!"

IT WAS still early in the evening. I was hoping my friend Dave Donaldson of the homicide squad would be on duty. I asked for him. Sure enough, he was there. He said: "Donaldson talking."

"Dave, this is Dan Turner. Listen—"

"For the love of God! Say, Turner—do you know there's a dragnet out for you? The law up at Arrowhead claims you croaked Peg Webley, the First Prize star, in your cabin up there this afternoon."

I said: "Yes, I know. But I didn't do it. Now open your ears, Dave. I'm at Max Amberg's place in Beverly. Amberg's dead. He—"

Before I could go on, Fabian raced toward me from the bathroom. He had a slip of tissue in his hand. He yelled: "Mr. Turner—look! I just found this in there! Read it!"

I snatched the paper from his fingers, stared at it. It was written with lipstick. It said:

"Turner—

I went up to Arrowhead today and murdered Peg Webley. Now I'm taking the easiest way out. I can't explain any more.

Max Amberg."

In the telephone receiver I could hear Donaldson's voice rasping: "Turner—

Turner! Damn it to hell, are you still there? Answer me, damn you—"

I said: "Take it easy, Dave. Come on out to Amberg's place double-quick. We just found a suicide note. Amberg confesses he croaked Peg Webley. That's enough to clear me. I'll wait for you."

"You're damn' right you'll wait for me!" Dave said. He slammed up in my ear.

I looked at Fabian. He was trembling. He had the jitters. So did I. I said: "Brother, you and I are going downstairs to inhale copious snorts of Scotch!"

He said: "Y-yes, sir."

We went down to the living-room, killed what was left in the decanter. I smoked four gaspers, lit each one from the butt of the last. Then somebody pounded on the front door.

It was Dave Donaldson with two homicide bulls and a medical examiner.

Dave said: "Just what in hell happened?"

I told him everything, showed him Amberg's suicide note. I said: "That's all I know."

He said: "Wait a minute. In the first place, why were you up at Arrowhead with Peg Webley? And when you found her croaked, why did you lam down here?"

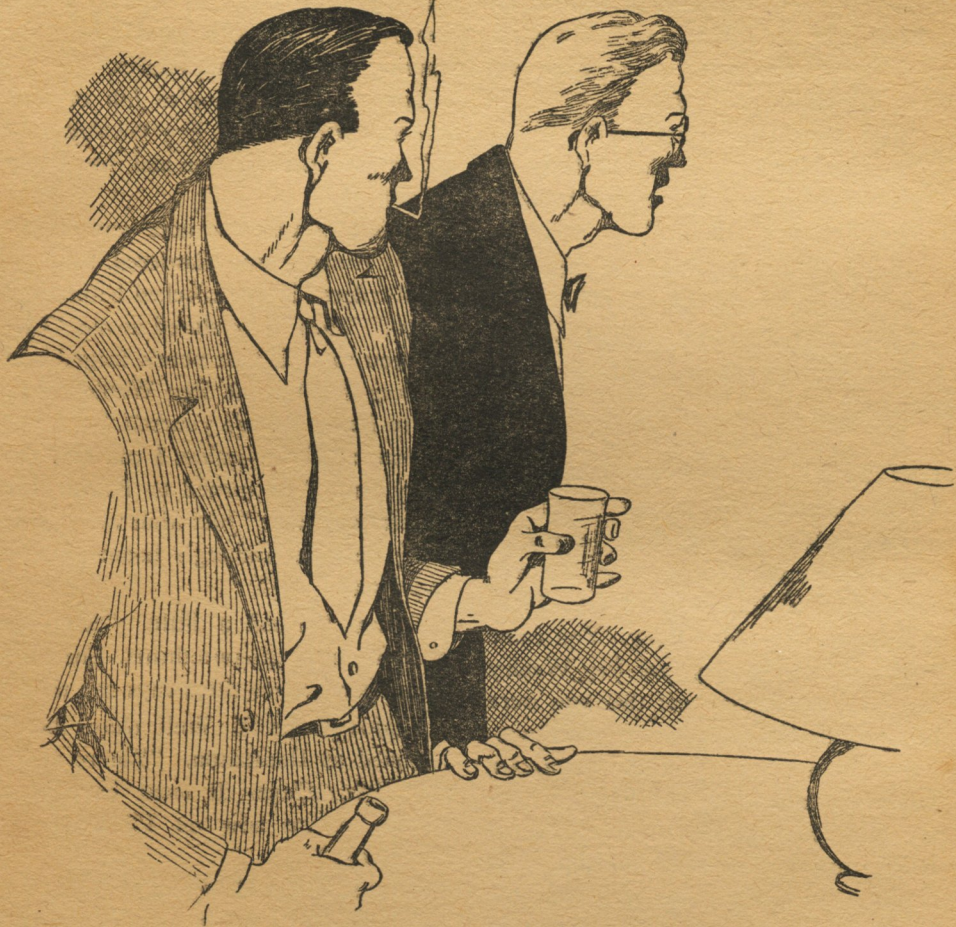
"Because Amberg had paid me five grand to take the Webley wren up in the mountains with me for two weeks," I told him.

"Five grand? Say—what the hell is this all about?"

I said: "Well, it was this way. Amberg had a contract to make one picture starring Ronnie Randolph, the crooner, and his Boston Bluestockings—one of the best dance-bands in radio. But a hitch had come up. You'll remember that Ronnie Randolph was married to Peg

*I had just tossed the
drink past my tonsils
when a dame screeched
from upstairs!*

offered me five grand if I'd get Peg
Webley out of the way for two weeks
—long enough for Ronnie to do his stuff



Webley, but they were legally separated. Peg had nicked Ronnie for beaucoup alimony—and he hadn't been paying it.

"Consequently, Ronnie was afraid to come to Hollywood to star for Max. The minute he set foot over the California line, Peg would slap the papers on him and throw him in the jug for non-payment."

Donaldson said: "Okay. Go on."

I SAID: "So Amberg came to me last week, asked me to help him. He

before the cameras, and then lam out of the state. I agreed. Peg was always pretty strong for me, so it wasn't much trouble to talk her into going with me. As long as I kept her up at my cabin, she wouldn't know her hubby was in town. She wouldn't throw a law-suit in his face."

"So what?" Donaldson grunted.

"So today I was out fishing, and when I got back to my cabin I found Peg with a knife in her heart. I was pinched, ac-

cused of bumping her. I got away. I came here to see Max."

"Why "

"Because he was the only one who knew Peg was with me. I wanted to ask him if he had told anybody. I wanted to find out who might have come up there and cooled Peg off."

"And what did Amberg say?"

"He said he hadn't told anybody of Peg's whereabouts—except her estranged hubby, Ronnie Randolph."

"Hell! Then Randolph might have gone up there and bumped her!"

I said: "That's what I thought—until I saw Amberg's note, confessing the murder."

BY THAT time we were all upstairs. Donaldson was taking a gander around while the medical examiner looked at Amberg's corpse in the tub. After a while Dave said: "Well, I can reconstruct the whole thing. You came here and told Amberg that Peg Webley had been murdered—and that you were being accused of it. So he sent you downstairs, locked himself in the bathroom, wrote his confession, and bumped himself off. Then that blonde dame, Allene Raye, came in to look for him. She climbed on a chair, squinted over the transom. She saw Amberg's corpse in the tub. It scared the hell out of her. She yelled—and took a quick powder out of the house."

I said: "Yeah. That's the way it looks. There's just one thing wrong with the theory."

"Wrong?"

"Yes, wrong. The motive."

"What do you mean, motive?"

"Well, why would Max want to go up to Arrowhead and kill Peg Webley? He didn't have any reason. And people

don't go around murdering other people without cause."

Dave said: "So what?"

I said: "So maybe Amberg didn't murder Peg. Maybe it was somebody else. Somebody who had a good reason for wanting her under the daisies."

Dave snorted. "You're full of bull. If Amberg didn't kill Peg Webley, why did he write a confession and then bump himself off?"

I said: "Maybe the note was forged. Maybe Amberg was murdered, too."

"Murdered inside a locked bathroom? Nerts!" Then Dave stared at me. "Listen, you sap. If that note's forged and Amberg didn't croak Peg Webley, then you're facing the rap yourself."

I said: "Yeah—unless I can find the guilty party." I turned to Fabian, the secretary. I said: "Just what was Allene doing here in Amberg's house—in her underwear?"

Fabian blushed a little. "She—she was Mr. Amberg's sweetheart. She often stayed here two or three days at a time."

I said: "I get it. Well, okay, then." I looked at Donaldson. "You're probably right, Dave. It must have been suicide. From now on I'll keep my kisser shut."

He said: "You'd better."

A little later I got into my jalopy and scrambled. But in spite of what I had said to Donaldson, I wasn't satisfied.

The more I thought of it, the more I was sure there was a skunk in the woodpile somewhere. Besides, both Max Amberg and Peg Webley had been friends of mine. Now they were dead. I made up my mind to find out why.

THE first thing a detective does in a murder case is to discover a motive for the killing. I asked myself who

might have had a reason for bumping Peg.

The answer was Ronnie Randolph, her estranged hubby. She had given him a lot of grief. She had put the slugs on him for plenty of alimony. Her threatened law-suits had kept him out of California, out of the movies. And she had refused him an absolute divorce, so that he couldn't marry again in case he ever fell for some other cutie. With Peg dead, Ronnie's troubles would be over. He could come to Hollywood whenever he wanted to. He wouldn't have any alimony to fork out. He could marry any bimbo he liked.

The second question I asked myself was: Had Ronnie had the opportunity to croak Peg up at my Arrowhead cabin? Again the answer was yes. Max Amberg, before he died, had told me Ronnie was the only other person who knew Peg's whereabouts.

It looked as if Randolph might be my man. At least it might be worth while investigating him a little. Maybe if I went through his effects I might find something to back up my suspicions. The trouble was, I didn't know where to find him. Because of his fear of legal entanglements, I knew he wouldn't be stopping at any of the big hotels while he was in Hollywood.

Then I thought of Kathryn Malloy.

Kathryn was chief payroll clerk at First Prize studio. She knew everything about everybody on the First Prize roster—and was a damned sweet number. I'd been on several parties with her. We got along fine.

I headed my coupe back toward her apartment on Rimpau. I stopped at a drugstore, bought a fifth of Vat 69. She liked that brand the same as I did.

When I knocked on the door of her flat, she let me in. She was a red-haired

trick with a snub nose that had freckles on it. Her eyes were always twinkling, and she had a shape that didn't need a girdle or anything else. She said: "Well, if it isn't Hawkshaw, the detec-a-tiff!"

I said: "Hi, baby. I brought a bottle." She was dressed in lounging pajamas cut low enough in front to make me want to see more. She said: "A bottle, huh? You must be looking for information. You never come here with a bottle unless you want me to tell you something."

"You guessed it, kiddo. Do you feel in the mood to give?"

She looked me over. "Not yet," she said.

"What do you mean, not yet?"

"Well, not until the bottle's empty, anyhow. I'm a demanding woman."

I grinned and said: "You're a damned sweet dish." I kissed her on the mouth.

Her lips opened under pressure. My blood began to sizzle. I don't remember giving my arms any instructions, but they went around her waist, and wherever they touched her, they tingled. Kathryn giggled a little and pushed me away. "You might at least wait until I'm half swacked. For the sake of my self-respect."

"How do you make that out?"

She poured a couple of snifters. "Well, if I let you make love to me when I'm sober, that's willing wickedness. But if I wait until I'm so fried I can't help myself, then my conscience won't bother me."

SO we killed the bottle to drown her conscience. After that I sat on the divan and pulled her alongside me. I mussed up her red hair, pulled her jacket half-way down over her dimpled shoulders. I kissed her on the side of the neck. She shivered. "M-m-m-m!"

I was enjoying myself plenty. So was

she. At least, I think she was. Because, no matter what I did, she was more help than hindrance. . . .

A LONG time later she blinked up at me and said: "Well, now what do you want to know?"

I said: "I want to know where Ronnie Randolph's staying."

"That's a deep, dark secret."

I said: "I get it. You want to be bribed some more." I started to kiss her again.

She shoved me away. "Nix. Enough is enough. —Valaine's got a bungalow at a court on Fletcher Drive." She told me the address.

I said: "Thanks, baby."

She grinned at me as I went out.

I beat it downstairs, climbed into my jalopy, headed for Fletcher Drive. I parked a half block away from the bungalow court where Ronnie Randolph was living. There was a doctor's bungalow in front, but Ronnie's place was at the rear. I walked toward it, hoping he wouldn't be home. I didn't know what I might find by going through his things, but I was hoping I'd stumble on something.

And I did.

Parked outside his place I saw a black-and-chrome roadster. It was the machine that had gone whooshing away from Max Amberg's house a while back, with Allene Raye in it!

I whispered: "Well, I'll be damned!" Then I sneaked up toward Randolph's cottage. I frowned. There was a light inside. He was home—which knocked my plans into a cocked hat.

Just on a hunch, I tiptoed around to the side of the cottage, came to the room where the light showed. The blind was down almost all the way. But by stooping, I could squint inside. I took

one quick gander. Then I said: "What the hell—!"

Randolph was in there, wearing a dressing-robe. He had a dame with him. A blonde dame.

Allene Raye!

He was holding her in his arms, kissing her, cosy as all hell! They were talking, but I couldn't hear what they said because the window was closed.

I got a sudden idea. I whirled, made for that doctor's cottage up front. It was dark. I took out my ring of master-keys, went to work on the lock of the back door. The second key worked. I got inside, found my way to the doctor's office. By the light of my flash I went through a desk, found what I'd hoped to find—a stethoscope.

I grabbed it, legged out the back way, approached Ronnie Randolph's window. I stuck the stethoscope's ear-pieces in my ears, placed the other end against the window-pane. I could hear everything as plain as hell.

RANDOLPH was saying: "But they can't suspect you of murdering him. From what you've said, it must have been suicide."

Allene said: "Y-yes . . . but Ronnie, d-darling . . . that man Turner s-saw me . . ."

"What difference does that make? Instead of worrying, we both ought to be happy as larks. Peg is dead; I won't have her on my neck any longer. And Amberg's dead too; he'll no longer have any hold over you. He can't keep you away from me; can't threaten your name with scandal by promising to tell the world how you and he were . . . were . . ."

I blinked, backed away. I'd learned plenty—and now everything was confused as hell. So Ronnie and Allene



Randolph was saying to her: "But they can't suspect you of murdering him!"

were in love! And Max Amberg had maintained a hold on Allene by threatening to blast her with scandal!

My think-tank pinwheeled. Now I had *two* murder-suspects! If Allene Raye

wanted to marry Randolph, she'd have had a motive for croaking Peg Webley. And she'd also have had reason for bumping Max. I thought of the suicide note Amberg was supposed to have

written. It had been scrawled with lipstick on tissue-paper. Who would use a lipstick for such a purpose—except a she-male?

I put the stethoscope to the window again; heard Allene saying: "Th-then you think Max really k-killed himself?"

"Of course."

"B-but I hate to think of him . . . dying . . . when he was so angry at me! He'd talked so mean to me, b-before he went in to take his bath. He m-made me cry . . . And then when I tried to make up with him, he refused to . . . to answer me . . . He wouldn't say a word . . ."

"You've got to forget all that, sweetheart. You must put it out of your mind. Nobody need ever know that you were Amberg's . . . girl. The only person who could ever let it slip is Fabian, and he won't. From what you've told me, he worships you. He wouldn't betray you. Your relationship with Amberg is buried now."

She widened her eyes, as if she'd suddenly got scared. "Wait!"

"What's wrong?"

"I—I left some th-things in Amberg's house! Some . . . negligees . . . with my monogram embroidered on them. . . ."

Randolph looked disturbed. "We'd better sneak into that place and get them, then—"

I didn't wait for any more. I pivoted, raced for my parked coupe. I smashed my heel on the starter, clashed my gears. I fed the motor all the dynamite she'd drink.

At the nearest drug-store I parked, slammed inside, wedged myself in a phone-booth. I dropped a buffalo, dialed Dave Donaldson. When he answered I said: "Dave—listen. Max Amberg was murdered. And I'm going to trap the killer for you!"

He said: "Are you screwy, Turner?"

"Hell, no, I'm not screwy. I'm going to pick you up in five minutes. Then we're going places. You be ready for me!"

He was waiting when I screeched to a stop before his joint. He climbed in alongside me. He said: "What in the name of Holy Jumping Je—"

I said: "Stow it. We're headed for Max Amberg's house. Ronnie Randolph and Allene Raye are going to burgle their way in there in a few minutes."

"So what?"

"So we're going to put the nippers on the fair Allene!" I said. "We're going to collar the murderer of Peg Webley and Max Amberg!" And I goosed my jalopy's tail, headed it toward Beverly.

I PARKED quite a distance from the Amberg mansion. Then Dave and I approached the place from the side, keeping to the shadows. My skeleton-keys let us in the rear door. I whispered for Donaldson not to make any noise. We tiptoed upstairs to the second floor.

I found the room I was looking for. The boudoir where I had first seen Allene Raye in her practically-nothings. I shoved Donaldson into a closet; hid myself behind an expensive Japanese screen. I whispered: "Don't make your play until I give the signal, Dave. *No matter what happens*, stay out of sight until I call you. Get it?"

"Got it."

The boudoir was darker than a coal-mine in hell. I felt sweat dampening my palms. Then all of a sudden I heard a sound.

Somebody was coming into the room.

I stiffened, tensed. I saw the flicker of a shaded flashlight. Allene was over

the threshold. Behind her was Ronnie Randolph, hanging back.

Allene started for the closet where Dave was hiding. Just before she reached it I hurled myself from behind the screen. I said: "Okay, you murdering chippie!" I snicked on the light-switch, leaped at the girl.

She screamed. I yanked out my handcuffs, snapped them on her wrists. Ronnie said: "What—"

I said: "Shut up! This woman is a killer! She murdered Peg Webley at Arrowhead today. She killed Max Amberg this evening. I've got enough evidence to send her to the rope ten times over!" I gave Allene a shove.

And then, from a communicating doorway, a voice roared: "Let her alone, you rat!" A gun went *Chow-Chow!* and I felt a slug spank into my left leg. I went down.

But as I fell I yelled: "Dave—get him! *Get Fabian!*"

Donaldson was out of his closet, his service .38 in his mitt. He cut lose. The .38 sounded like a cannon inside that little room. Over at the far doorway I saw a man crumple and go down, dropping his gat. It was Fabian—Max Amberg's secretary.

I dragged myself upright, held onto the bed to steady myself on my wounded gam. I unlocked Allene's handcuffs and said: "Sorry, baby. I hated to scare you. But it was the only way I could trap the man I was after."

On the floor, Fabian stirred and held his punctured guts. Blood seeped between his fingers. He coughed: "Damn . . . you—how did . . . you know . . . ?"

I said: "Allene tipped it from something she said to Ronnie Randolph a while ago. She said she'd had a fight with Max Amberg just before he went in to take his bath this evening. She said she

had tried to make up with him right after that, *but he wouldn't answer her from the bathroom.*

"She also said that you, Mr. Fabian, worshiped her. And that was all I needed."

Dave Donaldson looked at me. "I don't get it."

I SAID: "Okay. I'll explain. Fabian, here, was nutty about Allene Raye. But it was a screwy sort of love. The masochistic, self-sacrificing, self-effacing kind.

"He knew Allene wanted to break with Max, but Max wouldn't stand for it. He also knew Allene was in love with Ronnie Randolph, but Ronnie couldn't marry her as long as he was hitched to Peg.

"So Fabian decided to smooth things out for Allene. Fabian, being Max Amberg's confidential secretary, knew that I had taken Peg Webley up to Arrowhead with me. So he went to Arrowhead today and knifed her."

Donaldson scratched his head. "But what about Amberg? You claim Fabian killed him, too?"

"Yes."

"You must be bughouse. From your own story, Fabian passed you on the stairs; went down to the first floor while you talked to Amberg through the locked bathroom door. Amberg was killed—or committed suicide—after you went back downstairs. And Fabian was down there with you all the time."

I said: "Sure. That's the way it looked. But the truth is, *Max Amberg was dead when I first came to this house tonight!*"

"Huh? *What?*"

I set fire to a gasper and nodded. "Yeah. You see, Fabian had croaked

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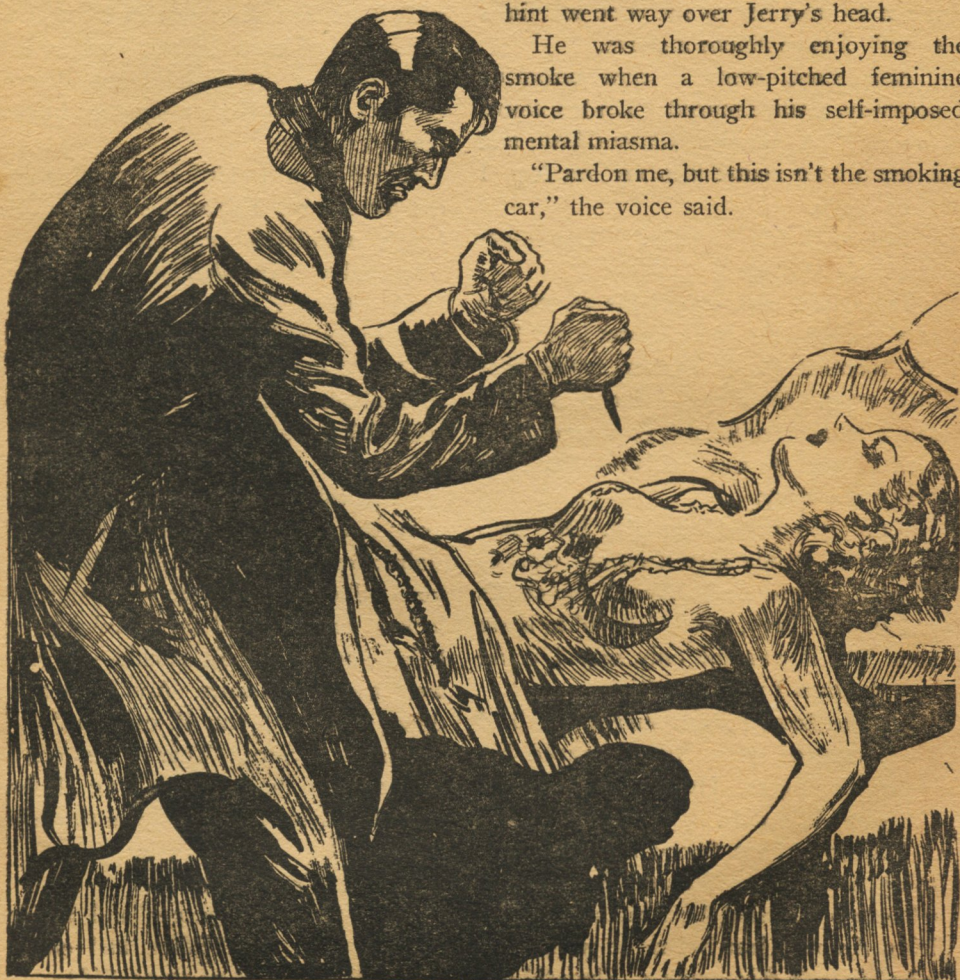
DEATH POINTS A FINGER

DETECTIVE Jerry Norton, the Amalgamated Agency's ace human bloodhound, idly flicked the pages of a magazine, paused to admire the svelte curves of a platinum blonde beneath an eggshell satin dress, closed the magazine, and looked at his watch.

It was 2:20 and the train had just pulled out of Killvale Junction. According to the time-table it was scheduled to reach Deerfield at 3:05. Jerry lit a cigarette. He took a long drag, utterly unmindful of the fact that he was not in the smoking-car. A hatchet-faced shrew across the aisle coughed harshly but the hint went way over Jerry's head.

He was thoroughly enjoying the smoke when a low-pitched feminine voice broke through his self-imposed mental miasma.

"Pardon me, but this isn't the smoking car," the voice said.



By KEN COOPER

Like vultures they gathered around their wealthy relative. And of them all, only one girl cared nothing for his money. Secretly, he made out his will. Then Death stalked through the night. Each had a motive. Circumstantial evidence indicated each in turn!

Jerry sat up with a jerk. His head twisted around and he faced a smiling, blue-eyed girl who was seated behind him.

He wasn't a moment too soon. The knife was already poised!



"I just thought I'd tell you before the conductor comes around," she said. "The smoking car is up front. I'm going there if you'd like me to show you where it is."

Jerry blinked. Was he a witness to a mirage? No, they only took place in deserts, not on railroad trains! This, to all appearances, was the real McCoy! Corn tassel hair, deep blue eyes, and ripe red lips that were fashioned for long, moist kisses.

"Er—thanks very much!" Jerry gulped.

The girl slipped out of her seat. Jerry caught a glimpse of her figure underneath a hand-knitted dress. It matched her stunning face from all angles. Two soft, rounded breasts stirred under the dress bodice, their unimpeded movement a sideshow barker for the absence of a brassiere. Her stomach curve gently, melting into gracefully arched hips.

Jerry lost no time in following her down the aisle, his eyes glued to the play in the curves under her skirt. He had to reach around her to open the car door, and, after they had crossed the platforms, to open another. Both operations brought him close to her body. A delicately faint odor of perfume teased his nostrils.

HE WAS quivering in anticipation when they reached the almost empty smoking car. She took the seat next to the window. Jerry slid in beside her.

"Now for my ulterior motive," she said, her eyes twinkling. "May I have a cigarette? I've been dying for one."

Jerry gave her one and held a lighted match. "Have you been on the train all the time?" he questioned.

She blew a spiral of smoke. "No. I got on at Killvale Junction. I changed from the Western Flyer. I'm going to Deerfield."

Jerry grinned. "So am I."

She looked at him queerly. "You aren't one of Uncle Caleb's relatives, are you? Caleb Tucker?"

"No, but that's where I'm going. I'm a private detective. Jerry Norton is my name. Dr. Tucker requested—"

Her laugh was bright and rippling. "So Uncle Caleb thinks we'll tear each other apart. What are you supposed to do?"

"I haven't the faintest idea. You seem to know more than I do. How about tipping a fellow off?"

She put her feet against the back of the seat ahead. Her chiffon-clad legs were slim and lovely. "Gladly," she said. "I'm Gloria Tucker. My father was Caleb's brother—youngest brother. He's dead now." A hard note crept into her voice. "Caleb was a pharmacist until he made a fortune out of a patent medicine. Now he spends all his time in Deerfield experimenting with chickens and guinea pigs. I think he's a little queer. Last week I received an announcement to appear in Deerfield for the reading of his will."

"Then he's *dead*!" Jerry blurted.

"No, that's the point. He isn't dead. The announcement said that he believed in having wills read prior to death. Personally, I just think he wants the satisfaction of watching his relatives' faces when he tells them they're not getting a penny of his money. He hates them all. I haven't seen him for fifteen years, but he hated my father, so I imagine he does me."

"Do you know who's likely to be there?" Jerry questioned, his curiosity piqued.

She counted off on her dainty fingertips. "There's Uncle Eben, another brother. He has a face like a very dry prune. Then there's Aunt Tess, Caleb's

only sister. She looks like your mouth feels after you suck a lemon. Then, of course, Caleb's two sons. The older one's name is Lucifer. He's fat and bald. His wife is skinny and shrewish.

"The younger son I never met, but dad used to tell me he looked like Valentino, so you can just about judge. He was sort of a very black sheep. Married a burlesque girl." She heaved a sigh. "And that's about all, except for yours truly who isn't much of a bargain."

"Why are you making the trip if you know you won't get anything?" Jerry questioned.

She shrugged. "Just to watch their faces. They're so funny."

The car door opened. "Deerfield!" the conductor bawled. "Deerfield!"

JERRY jumped up. "That's our station. We'd better go back for our bags. I don't want to ride this train any longer than necessary."

Gloria slid out into the aisle. She took one step forward and stopped short. The color drained from her cheeks and her eyes bulged. She stared at the leering, shrunk man who was hunched up in the seat behind the one she and Jerry had occupied. Bright green eyes burned in dark, sunken sockets. His cheeks were hollowed, and the skin covering them looked like crumpled gray linen.

"I heard every word!" the old man cackled. "Every word!" He wagged a bony finger. "You'll suffer, young lady!"

Gloria, blushing furiously, rushed ahead. On the platform she leaned against Jerry. "That was Uncle Eben!" she gasped. "Is my face red?"

Jerry squeezed her in half-embrace. "Deliciously so," he whispered.

Luckily for all concerned, there were two jitneys at the station. Ten minutes of rough riding brought them to the

rambling two-story farmhouse that was Dr. Caleb Tucker's residence.

A Jap house boy who introduced himself as Koyo, took their bags at the door, informing Jerry that Caleb Tucker wished to see him immediately.

As they both followed Koyo up the steps, Gloria squeezed Jerry's arm. "Look," she whispered.

Jerry looked. He could see into the living-room. A girl with flaming red hair was sitting cross-legged in a chair. Her skirts were above her knees. Patches of white thigh were visible.

"The burlesque queen," Gloria hissed under her breath.

On the second floor, Koyo showed them their rooms, adjacent to each other. Then he led Jerry along the hall to a heavy door that was distinctive in that it bore a double lock. Koyo rapped softly.

"Who is it?" a deep, bass voice boomed.

"Koyo, sir. Detective here, sir."

"Come in!"

JERRY entered a room that was tremendous. Evidently it served as bedroom and study. At a huge, walnut desk sat an old, shriveled man with dead white hair and a spade beard. He looked up from a notebook as Jerry stepped forward.

"Sit down," he said curtly.

Jerry slid into a chair. "Norton is my name, Dr. Tucker. I'm from Amalgamated."

The old man nodded. "Yes. You know why you're here?"

"No, I don't," Jerry replied.

Caleb Tucker put his slim, white fingers together. "In brief, I have called my relatives together to read them my last will and testament. I'm getting old and I may die any day. I don't want any wrangling over my grave. There-

fore, I'm telling each one of them now that they won't get a penny!"

His bright eyes flashed fire. Jerry was fascinated. Dr. Tucker wet his thin, bluish lips.

"I engaged a detective," he continued, "because I don't trust any of them. They may, in their anger, do me bodily harm. I want you to keep on your guard. They would go to any end to harm me. They're ghouls, all of them! Ghouls and parasites! All my life they have made me suffer and heaped calumny on me!"

Pink spots glowed in his cheeks. He worked his wasted fingers together, twining them like white worms.

"If they are all here, I will read the will to them at once. Unfortunately there are no trains out of Deerfield tonight. But in the morning they may go their way and leave me to die in peace."

Jerry wondered whether the old man was entirely sane. There seemed to be a slightly mad glint in his gray-green eyes and a peculiar nervous twitch about his lips. He offered his arm as Caleb Tucker rose.

ALL but Gloria were assembled in the living-room. Jerry helped Caleb Tucker into a chair and returned to the second floor. He knocked at Gloria's door, entering without waiting for an answer.

Gloria was adjusting a net brassiere as he crossed the threshold. Jerry caught a momentary glimpse of the white globes as they were cupped. Sheer chiffon panties encased her curved hips, molded to the lovely undulations they shielded.

Gloria's cheeks flushed. "Why don't you barge in?" she queried sarcastically.

Jerry stepped forward and swept her into his arms. "Lucky I did! You're stunning!"

She squirmed to release herself, and

the warmth of her half-naked body was against him, making matters much worse.

"Please let me go!" she gasped.

"One kiss!" Jerry pleaded.

"No!"

"Just one!"

Gloria relaxed and offered her moist red lips. Jerry jammed his mouth down on the hot softness. An unbelievable thrill shot through him, leaving him tingling, at the contact. Then she pulled away, but the fire in her eyes and the uncontrolled gasping of her breath indicated internal tumult.

Jerry heaved a sigh. "Thanks, darling. Now you'd better get into a dress. Your cheerful Uncle Caleb is about to read you his last will and testament."

JERRY's eyes swept the heterogeneous assemblage in the living-room as Caleb Tucker read from a document held in his bony hands. They were a queer lot from wrinkled Eben Tucker to Elliot Tucker—Caleb's youngest son—the swarthy Valentino Gloria had described with his redheaded wife whose breasts were too big for the bodice of her cream satin dress and bulged grossly.

Her husband was a fit mate for her. His skin was dark and his lips were rubbery and sensual. Jerry caught his black eyes licking at Gloria's chiffon-sheathed legs like tongued flames.

Lucifer Tucker was a pot-bellied, middle-aged nonentity. His wife, skinny and drawn, licked her lips continuously. Aunt Tess—Caleb's sister—sat prim and straight, her long, pinched face a model of Grant Wood's "American Gothic".

When each of their names was mentioned in biting, derogatory terms, they flinched. Only Gloria was composed.

Finally Caleb Tucker reached the end. ". . . and I do bequeath my entire estate, real and personal, to the Society

For Scientific Research to use as the Directors of said Society may see fit." There was a sadistic sneer of satisfaction on his thin lips as he folded the document.

Eben Tucker, the brother, came to his feet. "You're not doing the right thing, Caleb!" he croaked. "You've got no cause to treat all of us that way!" He pointed a bony, accusatory finger at Gloria. "She's the only one who deserves such punishment! Coming up on the train I heard her say that the only reason she accepted your invitation was to

laugh at us because we were funny! I heard it with my own ears!"

Jerry glanced at Gloria. Her cheeks were crimson. She dropped her eyes.

Elliot Tucker, Caleb's son, shot up. "You can't do that!" he screamed, his swarthy face livid. "You can't cut us off!" He hung over the bent old man, clenched fists upraised.

Jerry took no chances. He swung and clipped Elliot behind the ear. It was a glancing blow, but it served its purpose. Elliot spun on his heels and went down, dazed.

There was nothing else to do. His fist caught her in the jaw.



"Take—take me to my room!" Caleb Tucker gasped.

Jerry and Koyo helped him up the steps. "Keep your door locked," Jerry advised. "I'll be around if you need me."

AS he came out into the hall he saw Elliot Tucker stumbling into his room. Jerry descended to the living-room. Fritz, Elliot Tucker's wife, stepped forward. Her lips were smiling. She drew a deep breath, swelling her too mature, pendant breasts.

"Congratulations," she said. "It's about time someone knocked him off his pins."

"I—I'm sorry," Jerry mumbled, looking around for Gloria.

Fritz's belladonna-bright eyes burned. "Sorry, hell! It did my heart good!" She fingered his bicep. "You've got what it takes, haven't you?"

Jerry broke away as Gloria came down the stairs. She was wearing a coat. He followed out into the moonlit night.

"Not leaving us, are you?"

"No. I just wanted a breath of air."

"You aren't peeved about the will?"

"Of course not! I don't want his money!"

"Sore because Old Prune Face snatched on you?"

"Silly!"

Jerry slipped his arm in hers. "Whatever it is, Gloria, forget it. Life's too short. Your face doesn't look right without a smile."

"Maybe you'd better go back to the burlesque queen. She had a broad smile for you."

Jerry snorted. "Thanks for the tip! I was wondering about it. However, I've got one thing on my mind. At present I'm thinking about you and me." He stopped and swung her around so that she faced him. One arm encircling her

waist. He tilted her head back. "Don't you like me just a little bit?"

Gloria's eyes closed. "You're sweet, Jerry."

"But you don't like me enough to—"

"I'm not getting any of Uncle Caleb's money, you know."

Jerry's arm tightened. He drew her close enough to feel the softness of her breasts and the warmth of her lithe body. "I've got a job and two thousand bucks salted away, honey. We can take a swell honeymoon and make a down payment on a little house. What do you say?"

"I say you're sweet—too sweet. But you don't even know me. We just met a few hours ago."

"I know that I'm nuts about you!" Jerry's blood poured through his veins like molten lead. For a while he had thought this was just one of those things. A couple of kisses and go on from there. But now he felt as he had never felt before. It wasn't that he just wanted to kiss her because she was a girl. There was more to it.

He slid one hand down and his arm closed more firmly about her waist. It was pliant and throbbing to his touch.

"You can't let me down!" he breathed. "It's the first time I ever—"

Gloria silenced him with her moist, parted lips. The flame of her mouth left him gasping.

IT was almost midnight when they came back to the house. Koyo answered the door. The lower floor was dark.

"Where's everybody?" Jerry questioned.

"Everybody go to bed, sir," the Jap replied.

"All quiet on the western front."

Jerry nodded toward the dark living-room. "An hour?"

Gloria smiled. "No, dear. I'm tired. We'll have plenty of time tomorrow and the next day and the next."

Jerry winced glumly. "A half hour?"

Gloria shook her head negatively. "I'm going to bed."

Jerry kissed her fervently at the door of her room. Neither of them were aware that Fritzi's bright eyes were watching from across the hall.

In his room, Jerry loosened his tie, removed his jacket, fished out the magazine he had brought with him, and prepared to spend the night awake. He would have laid ten to one that nothing would happen, but he was being paid to see that nothing did, so that was that.

At one in the morning he began to get drowsy. He eyed the bed longingly, lit another cigarette to keep him from thinking of sleep. At two, just as he was about to yield to temptation, he heard the *swish-swish-swish* of slippers feet in the hallway outside his door.

He held himself rigid, listening intently. A board creaked and then a low moan seeped through the silence. Jerking his gun out of its hip holster, he opened the door quietly and stepped out into the hall. A small orange bulb gave off a dim light at one end. The hall was empty, but someone was walking down the steps to the first floor. Jerry tip-toed to the head of the stairs. He saw the faint outlines of a moving figure passing into the dark living-room. He followed down, holding his breath as he took each careful, soundless step.

Crouching behind one plush portiere, he reached his hand through and ran his fingers along the wall searching for the light switch. He found it, counted three, pushed it up. The room was flooded

from an overhead fixture. Jerry stepped from hiding, his gun leveled.

"Don't move!" he snapped, trying to bite the command off when he saw who it was directed at. Fritzi, the ex-stripper, was sitting in one corner of the couch, blinking dazedly. The fingers of her right hand were pressed to the drooping globe of her left breast. A cobweb-thin chiffon negligee was her only covering.

"Oh, did I wake you up?" she gasped. "I'm sorry. I have a terrible heart-burn. I thought maybe if I walked down here I might get rid of it. Won't you sit down and keep me company?" She patted the cushion beside her indicatively.

Jerry hesitated. "Maybe I can find you some bicarb," he said.

Her hand remained at her breast. "I don't think I'll need it. Have a cigarette?"

Jerry stepped forward, holding out a pack. She caught his wrist. "Please sit down with me."

THERE was no way of getting out of it. Jerry sat down. Almost immediately, she edged closer until her plump thigh pressed against him.

"Why did you drop me like a hot coal earlier this evening?" she questioned, leaning toward him.

Jerry tried to shift his eyes away from her semi-nudity, but he was trapped. He could see her full breasts pushing at the negligee.

"I—I had to talk to Miss Tucker on business."

"Yeah, monkey business."

"I—I think I'll turn in," he blurted.

She looped an arm around his neck. "Stay awhile. You don't have to be afraid. Elliot's dead to the world. He wouldn't give a damn anyway. How about a kiss?"

Suited the action to the word she

mashed her hot, red lips against Jerry's mouth. He tried to push her back but the yielding fullness of her breasts was against him. Her body quivered and she moaned with her mouth buried against his.

Suddenly a shrill, piercing scream cut through the dark silence. Jerry's muscles snapped taut. He tried to pull out of her arms, but Fritzi hung like a leech.

"Let go!" he barked.

Her grip tightened. Jerry did the only thing he could do. His arm pistoned back and he drove a hard fist into her face. He felt his knuckles smash against her jaw and her head snap back. Without waiting to see how much damage he had caused, Jerry yanked his gun and dashed up the steps. The orange bulb that had been burning at one end of the hall was out. The darkness was absolute.

Hugging the wall he moved forward. He tensed as his foot struck yielding softness. Down on his knees his hands moved over the crumpled body of a woman. He struck a match. Gloria's bloodless face was a white mask in the flickering yellow flame.

Somehow, Jerry managed to lift her and carry her to her bedroom. Switching on the light he leaned over her. The front of her nightgown had been ripped nearly to the waist. There were livid finger-nail marks on her white skin. Jerry put his hand out, felt for her heart. It was beating. Thank God for that.

An excited voice at the door brought him around. It was Koyo in an ankle-length nightshirt.

"I hear scream!" he gasped, almond eyes wide in terror.

"Get some cold water!" Jerry snapped.

WHILE the Jap was gone, Jerry stepped out into the hall. An icy shock hit his spine. *Dr. Caleb Tucker's door was ajar!* Fingers hard-gripped around his gun Jerry moved across the hall. He kicked the door fully open with his foot. A reading lamp was burning at the head of Caleb Tucker's bed. The doctor, his hands crossed on his chest, lay like a corpse in a sepulchre. His face was dead white and his lips were purplish-blue.

Jerry tip-toed to the bed. He reached out and touched Caleb Tucker's cheek. It was damp and cold. *The man was dead!*

Jerry's eyes swung around the room. Papers were strewn indiscriminately about Caleb Tucker's desk as though someone had been hurriedly searching for something. He looked at the door. There was a key on the *inside*.

AN hour later, Jerry and the local district attorney were conversing quietly in the death room while the medical examiner worked over Caleb Tucker's body.

A state trooper was standing guard at Gloria's door and two more guarded the rest of the dead man's relatives assembled in the living-room.

"It's murder, all right," Leland, the district attorney said. "And it looks like his son, if we can believe the girl's story."

Gloria had told how, on coming out into the hall, she had noticed Elliot Tucker entering his father's room. He had turned suddenly, seen that he was watched and lunged at her, striking her down.

Jerry gnawed at his lips. "He denies having left his bed. That's where I found him."

"What about the others? His brother and sister?"

"They were all in bed. None of them had heard Miss Tucker scream. Except the Jap."

Leland pointed to the papers around the desk. "*Someone* was in here."

The medical examiner turned to them. "Dr. Tucker died from a subcutaneous injection of poison," he said simply. He pointed to the dead man's lean thigh where the trouser leg had been rolled up. There was a minute pink pin prick on the livid skin. "That's where the poison entered the body. From all indications it seems to have been a preparation similar to digitalis—in a lethal dose. It resulted in the over-activity of Dr. Tucker's heart and the subsequent bursting of a cardiac blood vessel."

Jerry's mind raced. "Tucker experimented on guinea pigs and animals, didn't he? It might be smart to check the preparations he used."

Koyo led them to Tucker's laboratory. The medical examiner took a sample of various labeled and unlabeled liquids.

"I'll have a report on these in the morning," he said.

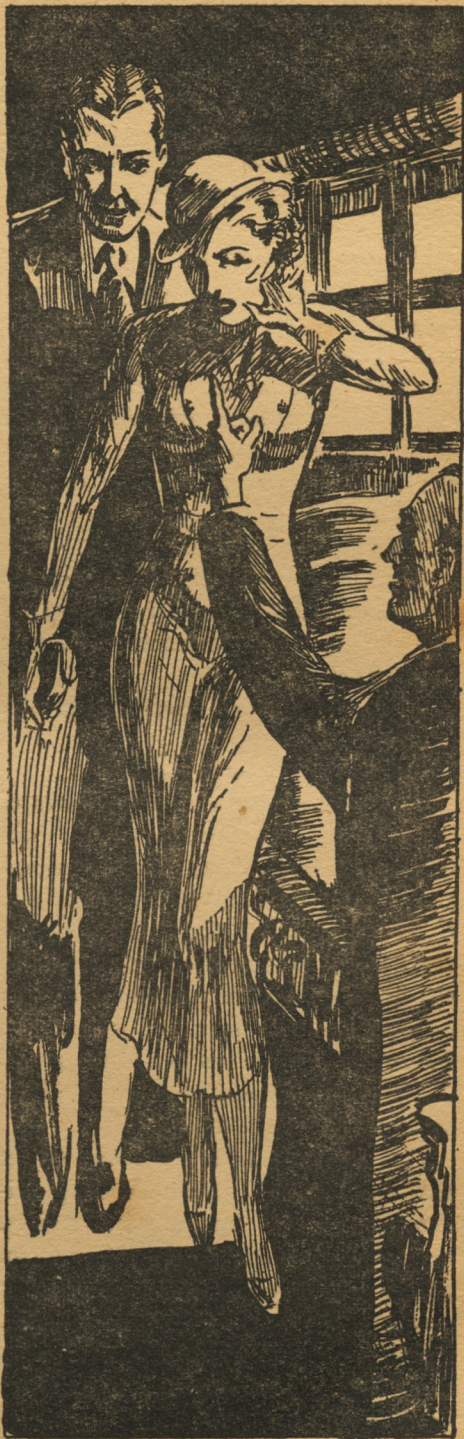
Leland returned to the living-room further to question Caleb Tucker's frightened relatives. Jerry mounted the steps to Gloria's bedroom.

She smiled wanly as he leaned over the bed. Her eyes were like live coals in the pallor of her face. Jerry closed the door and sat beside her.

"Feel any better?" he touched the tips of his fingers to her cheek.

"I'll be all right. Uncle Caleb's been murdered, hasn't he?"

Jerry nodded. "You're certain it was his son you saw at the door?"



"I heard you! You'll suffer!" the old man cackled.

"Positive. I couldn't be mistaken. I saw his face when he came at me. It was all twisted and—and horrible."

Jerry's fingers wandered down until they rested in the hollow of her shoulder. Her skin was smooth as velvet. He could feel the beginning of swelling curves.

LATER, he wondered why his eyes went to an open suitcase standing in a corner. Now, his heart froze solid as he saw the glittering silvered handle of a hypodermic syringe protruding from one of the suitcase's side pockets! He tried to check himself but Gloria felt the tightening of his fingers on her shoulder.

"What is it?" she gasped.

Jerry forced a smile. "Er—nothing. Do you feel well enough to get up? I'd like you to come downstairs and face Elliot Tucker."

She licked her dry, parched lips. "All right."

"I'll wait for you in the hall."

Alone, Jerry suffered the tortures of hell. Much as he tried to push the horrible truth away from him, it loomed large and ghastly on his mental horizon. That hypodermic! Caleb Tucker had been killed by an injection of poison. Gloria had a perfect motive for the crime. The dead man had ruined her father's life and driven him to the grave. Each fact dovetailed to form a perfect solution.

One thing he knew. He *had* to get that hypodermic. It was damning evidence. Masking his nervous anxiety, he escorted Gloria to the living-room. Elliot Tucker and his wife glared at her venomously. Jerry settled her in a chair, whispered to Leland. He retraced his steps to the second floor and darted into Gloria's room. His trembling hand snatched up the hypodermic and slipped

it into his pocket. In a cold sweat he searched the room for anything else that might be damaging. His heart was lead in his breast. He found nothing more.

Crossing the hall he ransacked the room occupied by Elliot Tucker. Then, systematically, the rooms of his older brother, Lucifer, Eben Tucker, and the crochety Aunt Tess. When he returned to the living-room, his eyes were steel hard.

He addressed Elliot Tucker. "Do you still deny being in your father's room a few minutes before he was found dead?"

Elliot snarled. "I was in bed!"

Jerry pulled a legal document from his pocket—Caleb Tucker's last will and testament. "Then how do you account for this being under your pillow? Your father's will! Where did you get it?"

All eyes bulged, but those of the accused man more than the others. His face went green. "I—I never saw it before!" he gasped.

"You're lying! You found it in your father's room! That's what you went in for! You killed him and then—"

"No!" Elliot screamed. "I didn't!"

"All right. We'll take care of you later. But just think it over. You might save yourself a lot of trouble by opening up."

"There's nothing to open! I didn't do it!"

Jerry turned to Eben and Tess Tucker, two grizzled harpies who had come to settle on carrion.

"And both of you insist you were in bed when your brother was murdered. You didn't hear Gloria scream?"

"No," Eben croaked. His sister shook her head negatively. Her pale lips trembled.

JERRY produced two small phials of a dark liquid. "Ever see these before?"

Both ancients leaned forward, the better to see. Again Tess shook her head. Eben followed suit.

"One of them was in your suitcase, Eben Tucker!" Jerry snapped. His eyes burned at Tess Tucker. "The other in *your* handbag! They couldn't possibly contain the poison that killed your brother, could they?"

The old maid screamed and fainted into a chair. Eben Tucker shook as though with the ague.

Lucifer, his fat jowls quivering like gelatine, was next. "When did your father write you last?" Jerry shot.

"He—he never wrote m-me!"

A letter came out of Jerry's inner pocket. "What about this note I found in your overcoat?" He spread the sheet of paper. "It reads: '*My dear son, Lucifer: Your communication to me informing me that I would be better off dead is interesting. I am certain you would be happy to perform the deed.*'" Jerry paused. "Never saw it before, did you?"

"N-no, s-sir."

"I didn't think so." Jerry turned to Leland. "You've got enough to hang any of them. They all hated Caleb Tucker and had motives for killing him. They knew they were being cut off without a penny." He pointed to Elliot Tucker. "He was the only one we *know* entered Caleb Tucker's room. He went in to get his father's will in order to destroy it. Either he killed him before finding the will or after."

"It's a lie!" Elliot Tucker screamed.

"You'll have plenty of chance to prove that it is," Leland said. "What do you suggest, Norton? Our jail will hold four."

Jerry knew that he was courting trouble but he wanted something to clinch the case against anyone but Gloria.

"I'd say leave them all here until morn-

ing. By that time we'll have the medical examiner's report on the samples he took. You can post guards around the house."

Jerry accompanied Gloria to her chamber. The others had gone to their separate rooms. He sat down on the bed beside her.

"I—I want to ask you something," he said. "Consider it personal and off the record."

"What is it, Jerry?"

"What did you do with the hypodermic syringe?"

Her face was blank. "Hypodermic syringe?"

"Yes. The one you had in your suitcase."

"I—I don't know what you're talking about, Jerry!"

HE slipped his arm about her waist and drew her close. Her robe gaped and glimpses of her breasts were bared by her ripped nightgown.

"You'd tell me the truth, wouldn't you?" he whispered.

Her eyes were wide in wonderment. "Of—of course, Jerry."

"That's enough." He mashed his mouth down on her lips. "Try to get some sleep."

She clung to him, body taut, breasts heaving. "But, Jerry, why did you ask—me about a hypodermic?"

"Forget it." His lips brushed her throat. "Good night."

In his room, Jerry examined the needle of the hypo syringe. It was brown stained. A cold chill gripped him. As certain as he was that Gloria had nothing to do with Caleb Tucker's murder, the cards seemed to be stacked against her. She had a motive—revenge. And what

(Continued on page 106)

DEAD MAN'S NAME

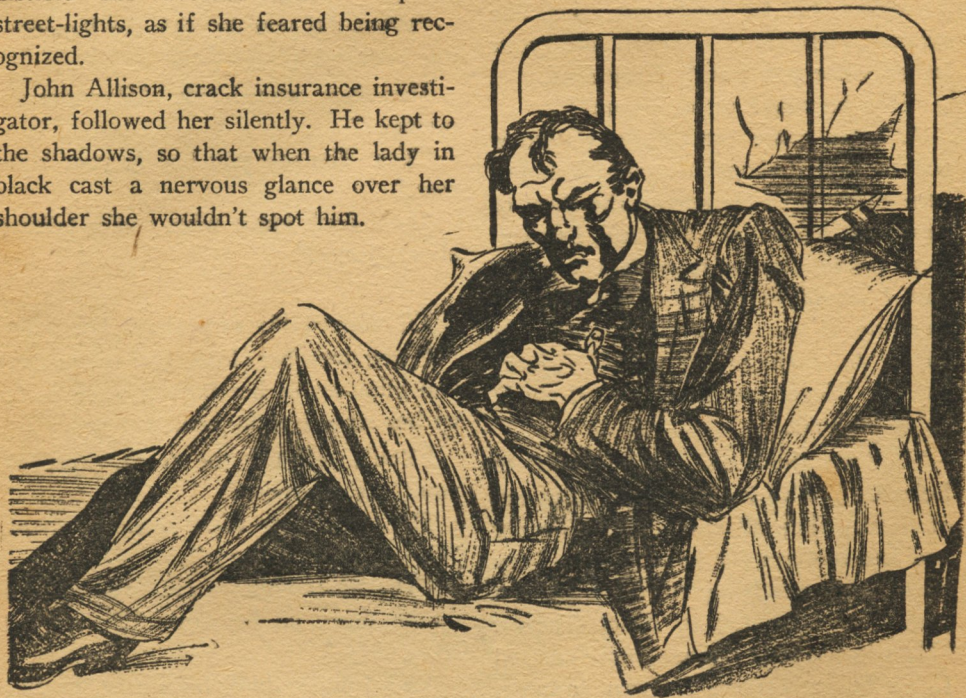
By HARLEY
L. COURT

THE lady in the black dress, black hat, and black veil moved furtively. As she walked down the dark, deserted side-street near the waterfront district she avoided the infrequent street-lights, as if she feared being recognized.

John Allison, crack insurance investigator, followed her silently. He kept to the shadows, so that when the lady in black cast a nervous glance over her shoulder she wouldn't spot him.

was paying him to be a detective, not to think.

Just the same, Allison couldn't believe in Moira Norman's guilt. She was too



Three times during the past month Allison had followed the black-garbed girl through a dark midnight to this unwholesome neighborhood; and three times, at the last minute, she had given him the slip. But this time was going to be different. He told himself grimly. He would trail her till hell froze over.

Not that he wanted to. Not for a minute did Allison believe that Moira Norman was guilty. But Allison's private convictions didn't count. His company

young, too sweet, too fragile to be a killer. As he tailed her, the insurance dick watched with appreciative eyes the sway of her slender hips, the flash of slim, chiffon-sheathed ankles beneath the black silk skirt. Beneath her black, chic hat he knew there was soft, golden hair. Under the heavy veil he knew there was a face of delicate charm—blue eyes, retrousse nose, kissable red lips. The face of an angel, really. Not a killer's face!

*The smoking gun was still in her hand. Allison grabbed her.
"Did you kill him?"*



SHE didn't know she was being followed; that was self-evident. John Allison felt like a heel. What he really

wanted to do was to go up to her and say: "Look here, Mrs. Norman—I don't know what the hell you're doing in this neighborhood, but I'd advise you to beat it and keep your actions open and above-board. Your husband was bumped off in

He couldn't believe she was guilty; she looked too young, too sweet....But Allison's job was to turn up a murderer, not to be sidetracked by a girl's charms

an auto accident three months ago, and my insurance company paid you a hundred grand, double indemnity. Now they think you rubbed your husband out to get the insurance, and they've had me on your tail for more than a month. Of course I don't believe you're guilty—but for God's sake, I wish you'd quit acting so damned suspiciously!"

That's what Allison wanted to say to her. Naturally, he didn't dare. Just the same, he didn't like the set-up.

In the first place, Moira Norman didn't look like a murderess. And she lived quietly enough in a modest apartment; hadn't splurged in a spending spree since she collected her dead husband's insurance. She didn't waltz around with a mess of gigolo companions; didn't play the merry-widow role at all. Her only companion since her bereavement had been her red-haired younger sister, Leila Dane.

Allison knew all this, for he had kept the Norman menage under strict surveillance for a month. Unobtrusively he had gathered plenty of information about Moira Norman and her sister, Leila Dane. If it came right down to cases, Allison would have said that the red-haired Dane cutie was the more suspicious of the pair. A wild, harum-scarum hoyden, this Leila Dane. Big-breasted, well-developed, more mature-looking than her older sister.

Well, to hell with Leila Dane, Allison told himself. He wasn't supposed to think about her. His job was to shadow the lady in black!

KEEPING about a half-block behind her, he never allowed her once to get out of his range of vision. Watching the lilting sway of her supple hips and thighs through her black silk skirt, he

saw her pause eventually before the entrance to a cheap waterfront hotel.

He crouched in an alley's mouth as she turned to see who might be behind her. Finding the street apparently deserted, hastily she entered the hotel.

Allison sprinted toward the door through which she had just passed. Cautiously he peered in; then he drew back as he saw someone coming down the rickety, filthy stairs from the dingy lobby on the second floor.

It was a woman who was descending; a girl. Not the lady in black, however. This was an arresting, blatant brunette who wore too much rouge, too much make-up; whose clothes conformed too tightly and revealingly to her undulant hips and heavy breasts. Allison noticed that her eyes seemed red, as if she had been crying.

He waited until she went up the street; then once more he took up the trail of Moira Norman. Pulling his slouch hat down over his alert eyes and turning up the collar of his coat, he went through the doorway and pelted upstairs.

There was no trace of the lady in black, in the hotel's foul-smelling, dirty lobby.

Allison walked over to the desk; spoke to a greasy-looking clerk who was picking his teeth. "A woman just came in here. Dressed in black. Sort of slender. Where did she go?"

The clerk shrugged without pausing in his labors with the toothpick. "Dunno."

"Oh, yeah?" Allison drawled. He palmed his badge. The clerk's eyes widened. Then the insurance dick tossed a crumbled five-spot on the desk. "Look, buddy," Allison lowered his voice. "I'm not here to make trouble for you or

anybody else, see? But I want to know about that woman."

The clerk hesitated. Then he picked up the five-spot. Room 265," he said out of the corner of his mouth. "She meets a guy in there once a week. It ain't none of my business."

Allison shoved out two more notes. Ones. "Let me have the key to the adjoining room."

"Can't. Somebody in it."

"Move him!"

"Okay!" The clerk went whistling down a narrow, dingy corridor. Pretty soon he came back to Allison, handed over a key. "Here y'are. Room 267. Help yourself. Bed ain't made, though. Had to get a guy up out of it."

"I won't be using the bed, thanks," the detective grunted. He walked down the corridor, came to Room 267, went in. He closed and locked the door after him.

THE place smelled of unwashed humanity and gin. Allison saw that there was a door communicating between his room and 265. He went to the door and pressed his ear against it.

He heard a man's coarse, rasping voice. "Cut out the stallin', sweetness. I want the grand I told you to bring. Fork it over."

Allison's eyes narrowed. This sounded like blackmail. But on what grounds could Moira Norman be blackmailed? Unless . . . she actually *had* murdered her husband, and someone knew of her guilt!

He listened again; heard Moira Norman's quavering tones:

"I—I brought the money. But last time I paid you, you said that you'd never ask for more!"

"Yeah," the rasping voice carried a sneer of sarcasm. "That's what I said.

But I got cleaned in a dice game. Fork over, honey."

"I—I ought to kill you, you b-beast!"

"You don't dare, baby. I got a letter all wrote and put in a safe place. If anything happens to me, that letter goes to the newspapers, see? And then where the hell are you?"

Moira Norman's voice caught, sobbed. "Oh-h-h-h!"

The rasping tones of her blackmailer sawed through the thin door. "I thought that'd quiet you, kiddo. An' say—as long as you're here, how about a little kiss?"

"No! How dare you?"

"Oh, nuts! Listen, sweetness, you're plenty swell, see? I go for you. I like the way your whatchacallems curve out in front. Bet you don't wear much over 'em, do you?"

"D-don't touch me—!"

"Aw, don't be so funny. I ain't gonna hurt you. I just wanna—"

IN the next room, John Allison's jaw jutted. He gathered his muscles. In another instant he would have smashed himself at the intervening, thin wooden portal. But just as he tensed to spring, a shot barked out.

It came from 265; sharp, unexpected, vicious. It burst on Allison's startled eardrums like the crack o' doom. "For the love of God!" he whispered.

In Room 265, there sounded a woman's muffled cry. Then the scraping of feet, a swift whispering. The thud of a slumping body hitting the floor. And after that—silence.

Allison bashed himself at the intervening door. It bounced him back the first time. He struck it again with his hurtling shoulder, with all the force of his two hundred pounds of brawn.

This time the woodwork splintered; a

lock groaned rustily in its ravished keeper. Allison went stumbling into the next room.

Moira Norman screamed.

The insurance detective stared at her. The front of her black dress was torn open at the throat; her unbrassiered breasts were half exposed, gleaming, small, and firm and white against the blackness of her frock.

She held a smoking, snub-nosed .32 revolver in her right hand. Smoke was trickling upward from its muzzle. Horror was in Mrs. Norman's widened blue eyes. She made no effort to cover her breasts as Allison stared at them.

Then the detective cast a swift look about the room. He saw a man's form slumped grotesquely on the bed. A sandy-haired, thug-like man, unshaven and dirty and bestial. There was a welter of blood streaming down the man's cheek from a gaping hole in his right eye-socket. A bullet had driven that eye backward into his brain.

Staring at the cadaver's bloody features, Allison suddenly recognized the murdered man. He was Gus Schwarz—and up to the time of Moira Norman's husband's death in an automobile accident, he had been the Norman family's chauffeur!

In fact, he had been driving the automobile the night of the accident!

Allison's mind began piecing things together. Had the accident been faked? Had Schwarz been a party to the plot? Had Moira Norman bribed the chauffeur to stage that accident so that her husband would be killed and she would collect double-indemnity insurance? If that were true, then Schwarz might have used his knowledge to blackmail Moira Norman—until tonight, in desperation, she shot him!

ALLISON whirled on the lady in black, grabbed the still-smoking gun from her hand. "Did you kill this bird?" he ground out.

"No! I—" she gulped. Then, dully, she said: "Y-yes. I sh-shot him . . ."

"Why?"

"He t-tried to attack me . . ."

Allison pondered. Was she telling the truth? Had she shot in self-defense? Or had she slain Gus Schwarz to stop him from blackmailing her; and then, after murdering him, torn open the front of her frock to substantiate her attack story?

Allison couldn't be sure. He reached over, pulled her torn black dress together to cover her exposed breasts. His hand brushed against the flesh of a warm shoulder and a thrill lanced through him at the contact with her smooth skin. Abruptly she was in his arms, shuddering against him, clinging to him in abject fright.

"G-get me out of this!" she gasped. "Please—for the love of God!"

He held her gently. "Moira Norman," he said, "you're in one hell of a jam, and I don't know what I can do about it."

"You—you know my name?"

"Yes. I know all about you. I know—"

Interrupting him, the room's corridor door was suddenly thrown open. Someone came darting in. "Moira—Moira darling!" a voice sobbed out.

Allison stared at the newcomer. It was a young, red-haired girl. He knew her. She was Leila Dane, Moira's younger sister.

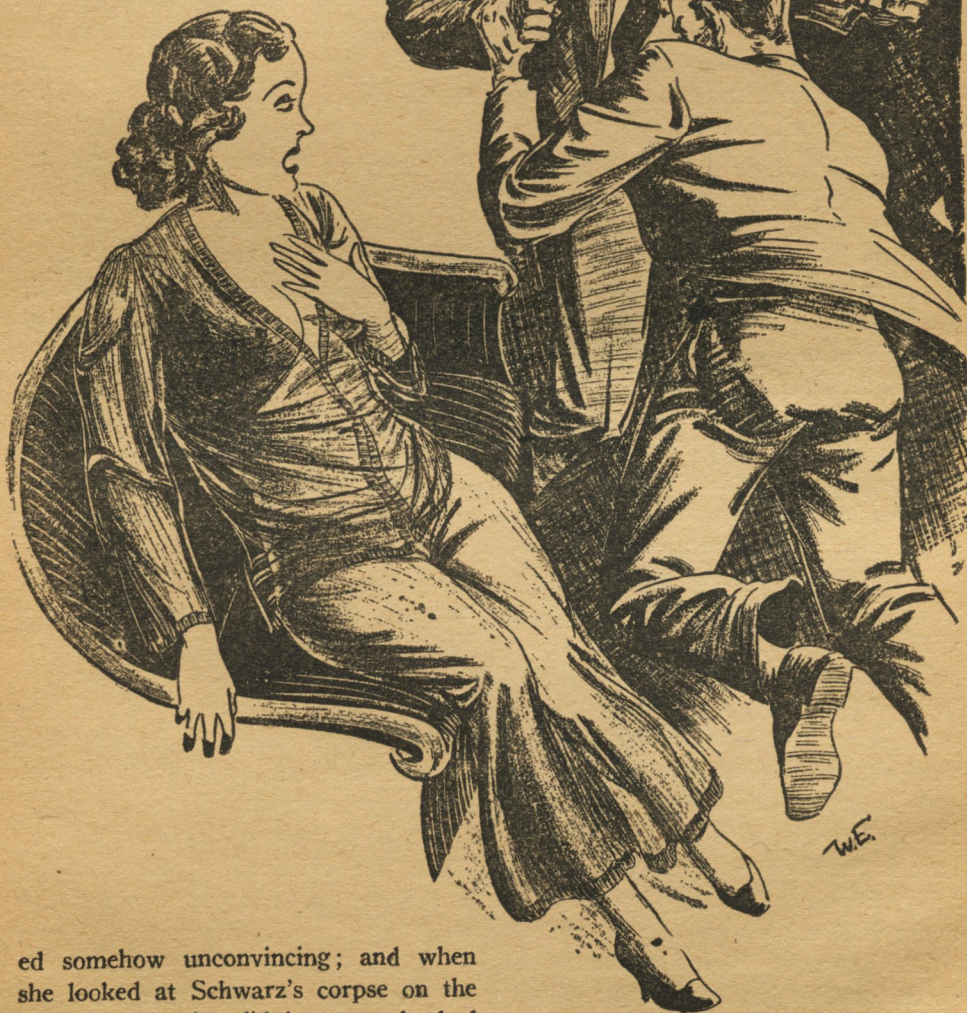
Leila Dane's face was pale against the auburn of her hair; and through her thin topcoat her rounded breasts sharply rose and fell under the stress of her emotions.

"Leila!" the lady in black gasped out,

disengaging herself from Allison's encircling arms. "Wh-what are you doing here?"

"I followed you here!" the younger girl panted. "I had a feeling that something might happen—" Her voice sound-

Allison dived—grabbed the guy's gun wrist as the slug whizzed over his head.



ed somehow unconvincing; and when she looked at Schwarz's corpse on the mussed bed, she didn't seem shocked enough. But the insurance dick said nothing.

THEN into the room sprang three more newcomers. One was the

tooth-picking clerk from the outer lobby; and with him were two uniformed policemen.

The first cop grunted an oath. "What the hell's going on here?"

"I—I shot a man," Moira Norman whispered dully.

The cop looked at the corpse. Then he saw the gun in John Allison's fist. He made a lunge for it.

Allison handed over the weapon, then flashed his own badge. "I was in the next room, officer," he volunteered. "I heard what took place. This dead man made a pass at Mrs. Norman, and she shot him in self-defense."

Doggedly the policeman responded: "Just the same I'll have to take her to headquarters."

Meanwhile the other cop was taking down information in his note-book. He got the name of the hotel clerk—Pasquale Di Vinne. He took down the name and address of John Allison and of Moira Norman's sister, Leila Dane.

Allison said: "You'll have to phone headquarters to send a morgue-wagon. Go ahead and put in your call; I'll stand watch over the corpse a minute."

The cops agreed; and they went out, taking Moira, Leila, and the hotel clerk with them.

The minute he was alone with the body of Gus Schwarz, Allison made a quick survey of the room. First he noticed the single, open window. Peering out, he saw that it gave access to a rickety fire-escape. Then, suddenly, his gaze fastened upon something pink and frilly sticking out from under the pillow at the dead man's head.

The insurance dick swiftly crossed the room, ran his hand under the pillow. He dragged out two lacy, mesh-gauze things. Two brassieres!

Now, what the devil did that mean? Two brassieres—both approximately

the same size; one a little more lacy, more obviously expensive, than the other. Nevertheless, *two* brassieres—which didn't make sense.

On impulse, Allison stuffed both fragile garments into his pocket, just as one of the coppers returned. "The meat-wagon'll be here in a minute, buddy," the bluecoat said. "Thanks for helpin' out."

Allison nodded, went to the front lobby. To the remaining officer he said: "You'll be taking Mrs. Norman with you, I suppose. So I'll escort her sister home."

And with that, the insurance detective took Leila Dane's arm and led her downstairs.

TWO blocks distant he hailed a cruising taxi; the red-haired girl whispered the address—which, of course, Allison already knew. But he didn't let on. He assisted Leila into the cab, crawled in alongside her. In his mind there was the memory of that moment he had held her sister, in his arms. Somehow, he still couldn't bring himself to believe that the lady in black was a killer!

Absently he fumbled in his pocket, into which he had stuffed those two brassieres that he'd found under Gus Schwarz's pillow. Something stuck his finger—something sharp. He felt it again. It was a tiny pin in the elastic bottom band on one of the brassieres. Allison got a sudden idea.

But he'd have to work carefully. "Miss Dane," he said slowly, "your sister's in a nasty mess. I suppose you realize that?"

"Y-yes. I know. And—you've got to do something for her!" the red-haired girl burst out. "You've got to prove that Moira didn't kill that m-man . . . !"

"You don't think Moira did the shooting?"

"I know she didn't! I'm sure she didn't! Or if she did, it was because she h-had to—!"

Allison grunted sourly. "What's it worth to you if I try to get her free?"

"Anything you ask! Anything!"

"*Anything?*" Allison put heavy, suggestive emphasis on the word.

She seemed to catch his meaning as he slipped an arm about her waist. She didn't shrink from him, rather seemed to melt closer to him. "Whatever y-you w-want . . ." she whispered wearily.

The cab stopped before her apartment. The insurance dick paid the driver; went upstairs with the girl to the apartment she shared with her sister. Allison took off his hat and topcoat, sat down on a divan. He pulled the red-haired girl down with him.

"Baby," he whispered, "I'll get your sister out of her jam if you'll be nice to me."

"I'll . . . be n-nice . . ."

HE kissed her on the mouth, and she didn't resist. Then he drew her closer, realized that her loose blouse was sliding off her shoulders while she made no move to check its descent. Almost bare to the waist she sat there, and out of the corner of his eyes he caught glimpses of dazzling white skin.

She tried to cover her breasts with her palms. He pulled her hands down. "Don't be so modest, kiddo," he whispered. "You've got nothing to be ashamed of, what I mean!"

She blushed; and permitted his gaze to dwell on her exposed charms. He simulated ardent interest in what he saw; but actually he was searching for a tiny blemish, a scratch on one flawless hillock—

He didn't find what he sought; and

somehow it puzzled him. Abruptly his hand dived into his coat pocket, fumbled there for an instant. He separated the two frilly, wispy brassieres which were in the pocket; stuffed the one with the pin in it further down. Then, grimly, he brought forth the pinless brassiere.

He held it before Leila's widening eyes. "Kiddo," he said quietly, "you left this in Gus Schwarz's room a while ago."

"Wh-what do you mean?" She drew back in sudden fear.

"Hold still!" he commanded. Then, expertly, he fitted the gauzy cups over her delicious breasts, slipped the shoulderstraps over her arms, snapped the catches. The brassiere moulded her bosom, conformed to every lilting, inviting contour. "I figured it belonged to you!" he said calmly.

She was pale. "I—I—"

"You were in that room with Schwarz!" Allison grunted. "When your sister came to see him, he probably hid you in the closet. Then when he made a pass at her, you came out of the closet and shot him. Your sister made you lam down the fire-escape; and then she picked up your gun and took the rap for you. That's about the way of it, isn't it?"

Leila was trembling violently. "You—you must have been watching—!"

"No; but I've been a dick long enough to be able to reconstruct things when they're fairly obvious."

Suddenly she threw herself upon him, pressed her trembling body close to his chest. "Listen!" she panted. "You've got to believe me! I'm going to tell the whole truth—and it's not exactly the way you think it is! You've got just part of the story straight—and now I'm going to tell everything!"

(Continued on page 120)

DEATH POINTS A FINGER

(Continued from Page 97)

could have been the murder instrument was in her suitcase.

The will under Elliot Tucker's pillow and the twin phials of brown liquid he had found in the brother's and sister's room confused Jerry. He brought the will out of his pocket and read through it carefully. It was queer that while Caleb Tucker had disposed of his estate he had made no mention as to where his money was located. Jerry waded through the dull, legal terminology. He was about to return the document to his pocket when he noticed a pencil scrawl on the back of it.

His scalp tingled as he read it. "I do hereby revoke all previous wills and testaments and do bequeath my entire estate, real and personal, to my niece, Gloria Tucker." It was signed by Caleb Tucker and dated as of 11:00 P. M. that night.

Jerry started for the door. A soft knock drew him up short. Before he could move again, the door opened and Fritz Tucker, Elliot's wife, stepped inside. She closed the door behind her. One side of her face was still red and swollen from Jerry's punch.

"I wanted to talk to you," she said quietly, coming forward. Her breasts bobbed under her negligee. Her sensuous hips swayed. "You've got my husband on a spot. You know he didn't bump his old man."

She looked dangerous. Her eyes were blood-shot and her body was tense.

"You'd better go to bed," Jerry said.

Words hissed out of her drawn lips. "Don't tell me what to do! Unless you swear you won't frame Elliot, I'll—"

Her arm shot out from behind her

back. She had a mean, stubby little automatic in her hand.

"I'll kill you!" she gasped.

Jerry's heart popped up to his throat. He didn't trust her nervous finger on the trigger. It might jerk whether she wanted it to or not. He counted ten to himself, drew a deep breath, and ducked. A timeless instant later he was off his feet, catapulting at her. He expected to hear the automatic thunder in his ear but all he heard was her gasp as his shoulder crashed into her stomach.

She hit the floor with a dull thud. The gun spun from her hand and slid under the bed. She lay still, her cheeks colorless.

JERRY pulled his own revolver and stepped out into the hall. Gloria's door was open. He reached it not a moment too soon. Elliot Tucker was leaning over Gloria's sleeping body, an open pen-knife clutched in his right hand. He wheeled and lunged with the blade as Jerry broke into the room. Jerry side-stepped and the deadly sliver of steel whistled by his arm.

It would have been easy to plow a bullet into the dark youth's chest, but Jerry wanted him alive. He clubbed the gun and smashed the barrel across Elliot's face, knocking him against the wall.

Jerry lunged at him. Another blow on the side of the head dropped the would-be killer in his tracks.

Gloria, her eyes stark with terror, broke into hysterical sobs. Jerry cradled her in his arms, comforting her with his lips pressed to the pulsating hollow of her throat.

The dull boom of a shot outside the

house stiffened him. He ran to the window, threw it open. In the moonlight he saw two of the guards carrying an inert figure.

"Who is it?" he shouted.

"The Jap!" came the reply.

A GAIN the relatives of Caleb Tucker were assembled in the dead man's drawing room. Koyo, his arm in a sling, was slumped in a chair between two state troopers. Both Elliot Tucker and his wife had bandaged heads.

Jerry addressed them in a low, even voice. "I'm honestly sorry I can't pin Caleb Tucker's murder on any of his relatives," he said. "Unfortunately, Koyo was the one who poisoned the old man and with Oriental cunning deposited clues in each of your rooms. Caleb Tucker's fortune was all in cash and Koyo alone knew where it was located." He pointed to a battered handbag. "There's a hundred thousand dollars in there."

He fastened cold eyes on Elliot Tucker. "You probably would have

killed your father if Koyo hadn't done it before you, or if Gloria hadn't interrupted. You're a killer at heart! Even though you weren't guilty of the murder you were ready to snuff out a life because you thought I might frame you."

He paused. "It might interest you to know that before he died Caleb Tucker added a codicil to his will, leaving all he had to his niece, Gloria." He smiled at Eben Tucker. "She can thank you for that, prune face! Evidently your blabbing of what you heard on the train gave the old man the idea that Gloria had spunk! And now, you can all go!"

IN the smoking car of a New York bound train, Jerry slid his arm around Gloria's waist and nuzzled his lips in her cheek.

"Now I suppose our little deal is off," he whispered. "You're rich."

She closed her eyes. "You earned it, didn't you?"

"We did," he whispered, straining her close.

Watch for these stories next month!

UNFINISHED MELODY, by Robert Leslie Bellem

DEATH TO COPS, by Justin Case

A DEAL FOR DENVER DAVE, by Ellery Watson Calder

THE APACHE, by Stewart Gates

**THE CASE OF THE DEAD PIGEONS,
by Arthur Wallace**

WINNERS' PAYOFF

(Continued from page 15)

"Shoot."

She walked toward me, placed a hand on my shoulder, and started to talk. Before the words meant much—aw, I don't know how it happened. I'm not so old and I like women. Also I like pay in advance. I had her in my arms, her breasts flattened against me, burning against me, her mouth hot on mine. She smelled swell and her breath came in great gasps. I picked her up and walked across the room, her arms about my neck all the time.

QUITE a while later, we were sitting there smoking and she was talking. "—so after doing his dirty work for him I get down here and find out he's got another dame! He's through with me, washed up. Mike, *I want him killed!*"

I nearly fell off the bed. Sometimes a man's reputation backfires. I started to say something and another voice broke in, from the window. "Hold it, Mike; hold it, Maida!"

My coat was hanging on the back of a chair covering my two shoulder holsters. The chair was twenty feet away. I said, "Okay. Come in, Horace."

The little guy came in off the fire escape, a big gun in his fist. He grinned as he walked toward the door, opened it. Flush Darrough stepped in, his face twisted in rage.

He walked straight across the room where the girl tried to cower away. Without a word he socked her, hard. Horace said, "Take it easy, Mike, take it easy."

She lay there sobbing, while he towered over her swearing. "You fool, you

jealous little fool! I've told you a million times why I didn't want Mike here. I've told you why I gave the girl a play. You know what I'm pulling off. Why don't you believe me? Why crab my play?"

I said, "You'll burn, Flush. And you too, Horace."

Flush cussed some more. He said, "Put your gun away, Horace." Horace did. "Now hand Cockrell his guns!" He did. I was plenty surprised. Flush said, "I don't want you dead! All I want is for you to get away from that track! I haven't got anything to do with those murders! I'm no killer! But now I'm afraid! Everybody, all of you, my own girl, is beginning to think I'm behind them! I've got the biggest deal of my life coming off tomorrow and I'm afraid to pull it! Afraid you'll knock me over for those killings before I can clean up!"

I said, "Sit down, Flush, and tell me. Horace, don't move. I like you but I'll shoot hell out of you. Talk, Flush."

Flush talked. He was running a ringer in the third race tomorrow, a race for two years olds, a little paint and die job that stood to net him plenty. It was the third one he'd pulled since the track opened! When he first came down, he got acquainted with Edith Spencer, gave her a big play and the kid fell for him. That gave him inside information in Spencer's own house as to whether anything was suspected or not. Maida, his real girl, couldn't see it that way, which is where the jealousy came in. As far as the murders were concerned, Flush claimed to be as much in the dark as any of us! He'd wanted me tailed and kid-

naped because he knew my reputation and was afraid I'd smell out his crooked work.

He ended up by patting Maida where good-looking dames ought to be patted. "Listen, kid, you've got to believe me! The Spencer dame don't mean a thing to me."

I was beginning to get it. No wonder she didn't want me to shoot the murderer! She, too, thought it was Flush Darrough and she was in love with him!

I started to say something when the door opened. Damndest mixup I ever saw! Edith Spencer stood there her face as white as a sheet. Behind her stood Sour Puss, the butler. Edith said, "I heard it all. It's all right. I can take it. Here's the fingerprint you left on the washroom window, Flush. Cockrell took it off and we took it off of him. The sill is clean now. We took care of that, too!" Then she began to cry.

The butler patted her on the back, pushed her aside and walked toward Flush. When he arrived, he busted Flush right in the chin. Flush rolled over a chair and before he could get up Horace cracked the butler with a blackjack. By the time we got order restored, I had a good idea.

I said, "Let's forget all these little personal differences. I came down here to get a lug that's killed five people. I don't know yet who it is. Maybe it's Flush, maybe he's stalling. But to show me his good faith he's going to let me in on the play tomorrow and he's going to loan me another grand and the services of his pal, Horace." I talked some more, but that's the way it ended.

THE next morning it rained, then it cleared up, then it rained again. Typical Texas fall. I split a pint of whiskey with Horace and began to like

him better. He had guts for a little guy. We went out to the track and I looked up the colonel and told everybody in hearing that I was Mike Cockrell and was going to catch the killer today if he dared show up.

Horace and I drank another pint of whiskey.

After the second race Horace said, "Hell, Mike, I hate to see you do it. You ain't a bad guy. It may go sour and then you'll be pushing daisies!" I tried not to think of the convulsions those poisoned slugs gave a guy. We killed the rest of the third pint.

Now here was Flush Darrough's layout. He owned a chestnut filly named Alice Ben Bolt that everybody knew couldn't run a lick. He had her entered in the third race. He'd smuggled in a five year old named Annie Laurie, a pure white filly with plenty of speed. Only Annie wasn't Annie any more. She was chestnut now, with a swell die job and she went to the post as Alice Ben Bolt!

I talked plenty loud. Horace circulated everywhere telling people Mike Cockrell had two grand on Alice Ben Bolt's nose.

People began to look at me like I was crazy, until the third race was run. Alice Ben Bolt was looking back at the field when she ambled easily under the wire, not even blowing. The payoff was \$34.60 to win, \$18.20 to place and \$15.00 to show!

Me and Horace stayed in the Clubhouse for twenty minutes after the race buying drinks for any and all and talking loud. Thirty-four grand winner! At last, still talking loud I walked toward the payoff window. The crowd had thinned out, was mostly back in the grandstand.

From the corner of my eyes I saw

Horace, right where I told him to be. In my left hand I carried a small pocket mirror, and kept my hand to my hat as I headed toward the payoff windows. I had a gun in my right pocket, my hand on the butt. Nearing the window I ached and twitched all over, every muscle in my back crawling and already feeling a poisoned slug. It might go sour at that. And then again maybe nothing would happen.

I made the window. Guess the cashier thought I was crazy because I just stood there looking in my mirror, my hand on my gun.

In the corner of the mirror I saw the windows of the washroom raise a few inches. Something black poked over the edge of the sill and I dropped to my knees, twisted and fired. Horace shot at the same time from around the corner. The black thing fell out of the washroom window.

That was all; that finished it. Horace got him through the shoulder and I was luckier, got him between the eyes even at that distance. But here's the funny part. I still had a hand-full of winning tickets on Alice Ben Bolt.

An hour later, when the excitement had died down, I went to the window. The cashier looked at the tickets and said, "Scrambola, before I call a cop." Horace tapped me on the shoulder. He said Flush and Maida sent their love and said they'd see me sometime. They were headed for Mexico.

I TOLD you how it rained off and on all day. Flush had had that damned

white horse painted with water colors. Right after the race it rained. In all the excitement no one paid much attention to the horses and a swipe saw Alice Ben Bolt turning pink. Pink race horses are sort of rare. The judges and track cops began looking for Flush Darrough, the owner, but Flush also had seen his ruined paint job and was long gone with his winnings. If I'd have cashed in right after the race, I might have kept some of the jack at least.

What? Oh, the killer. It was Maloney. He was broke and was figuring on black-mailing the colonel for a hundred grand. He knew the colonel had sent for me and he tried to get me when I hit the Union Station. The demand letters naming me as go-between were to make the colonel fire me so I'd leave town. I knew he was the killer when I found the little thimble like thing in the men's washroom. It was the tip off his cane and the cane was a high powered German spring gun that could throw a steel slug as far and as straight as a small rifle. What's that? Why didn't I turn him in when I first found out?

Well, I was pretty sore. He'd taken that shot at me in the Union Station without giving me a chance. After all I have a reputation. Give and take, that's Mike Cockrell. I'd had my share of taking and I figured it was time to give. The surest way to make the crooks fear you is to kill off a few of them. Maloney rounded out my batting average. Ten out of ten. Not bad for an old guy of forty-four.

"APACHE" by Stewart Gates—next month!

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DOUBLE CATSPAW

(Continued from page 27)

She was trying to give him a break, trying to tell him how they could both escape! But how?

He couldn't get it. The Claw was grinning and stroking his beard.

Farrell knew the mocker's promise was vain. He hopped, but not toward the door of safety. He purposely tripped, fell face forward. The Claw laughed at the sprawling intruder.

"It's jammed," complained Madeleine, vainly tugging the trigger. She handed the gun to the Claw. He reached for it. His henchman, enjoying the spectacle, crowded closer.

Then the fun ended in a hell blaze. Farrell, snatching Mūnah's dagger, hurled himself forward, instead of toward the exit. Though his ankles were bound, he sailed toward the dais in a long arc.

A pistol crackled. Not the heavy thunder of a Webley, but the spiteful smack of Madeleine's tiny weapon spraying fire and lead into the Claw! She had snatched it from her bag. His move, distracting the guards, had given her a chance.

Farrell, knife drawn, landed in the melee. The henchmen, dazed by the unexpected turn of their jest, yelled and drew blades. Farrell's dagger ripped upward. The Claw toppled over, his grin becoming a surprised gape.

Madeline, overwhelmed by the guards, was shooting wildly as Farrell made the most of the distraction. He slipped his red knife between his ankles, slashed the cord.

They were both swamped by tramping feet and probing knives. Additional ruffians came pouring in from the front

room. And then Farrell recovered the Webley. It was far from jammed. Its iron thunder blasted holes into the tangle.

And then came the pounding of heavy footfalls, booming oaths in Hindustani. Turbaned Sikhs ploughed into the melee. The Singapore police were taking charge.

Strange, how quickly they had arrived! But it was not until hours later that Farrell, back in his bungalow, realized just how odd it was that his mad raid had tripped up the Claw of Iblis and earned him and Madeleine the thanks of the Governor General of the Malay States.

"Darling," Madeleine was explaining as they regarded each other through a tangle of bandages, "What you heard me tell the police was as synthetic as your story.

"I'M really Madeleine Millwood. The corporation that sent you here is managing my late father's estates. I suspected them of pulling crooked work to make me sell out, so I came to Malaya. Dad and I lived here, years ago, which made it easy for me to scout around.

"In Penang I made contact with you as well as the agents of the Claw. I was going to join the outfit. I suspected you of being part of his organization on account of your visit to Crosby, which I tuned in on, from the compound. Seeing you dicker with him led to my play against you. That also led me to think that perhaps I'd not have to go through with the risk of meeting the Claw. But you forced that on me."

"Funny," muttered Farrell, "the police didn't find any records of the Claw's doings—"

And then the number one boy broke in to announce a visitor. Mûnah, resplendent in silken *sarong* and embroidered jacket.

"Tûan," she said, "I came to beg your pardon and Allah's—"

She stopped short. Her face froze as she saw Madeleine. Farrell reassured her, then gave her a long, pointed look. She smiled and continued, "I lied to you. My father was not a prisoner. I was working in behalf of my uncle, Raja Mahmud, of Batu Gaja. The Claw has blackmailed him on account of his anti-British activities during the world war. He forced my uncle to permit those crimes against planters and mine owners.

"So I used you as a catspaw to create a disturbance. I knew that while you slew those dogs, I could slip in by the rear and set fire to the evidence with which he extorted money and service from criminals, rajas, and white men alike! I succeeded, thanks to you and the police I called."

Then, with a malicious little smile at Madeleine, she added, "And as I promised you, there is no reward for your service. . . . But do you forgive me?"

"For the sake of that knife, yes," admitted Farrell.

Before he could find further words, she turned toward the hallway.

"So that," murmured Madeleine, who had not misèd Mûnah's flash of Malay wrath at the sight of a white woman in Farrell's arms, "is the heroine of that graveyard scenario the Claw mentioned?"

Farrell's face darkened a dozen shades.

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"Yes, damn it!" he growled. "Which makes me a double catspaw—once for Mûnah, once for you. To hell with Millwood Industries—they can mail me a check—I'll write 'em a report—no use going back—"

"Don't be stupid, darling," smiled Madeleine. "I might have been annoyed if you'd waited in that graveyard for

. . . well, sunrise . . . but how would you like to manage the Millwood Industries in Malaya?"

While Farrell had an aversion to conventional jobs, Madeleine's dark eyes were a promise of more than employment.

"I might play, if you'll forget to put opium into the wine," he agreed.

RADIUM NEMESIS

(Continued from page 51)

daughter would get to Temple and tell him what Radium Water really did, so he went to warn them. He killed the daughter in a struggle, socked the old man in the head, but kept him alive. Wayne was smart. In case he couldn't get half a million from Temple he decided to get a hundred thousand by this other method, through fear. To clinch it, Mrs. Wayne made love to Temple so he'd raise the hundred thousand rather than see her injured. So that's the way it all happened, if you see what I mean."

"But the nurse," persisted the sheriff, "and the butler."

"The nurse rode out here with me," said Jarnegan slowly. "Wayne saw her sitting in the car in the driveway and recognized her. He was afraid, he lost his head. He figured I'd brought her out here to identify him as the thief that stole the radium from the hospital, and that would spoil all his plans. So he slipped out and murdered her."

"I called the butler on the phone and told him I had the thing all solved. He told Wayne, and again Wayne lost his head. He socked the butler in the head or gave him knockout drops and then hanged him to make it look like suicide. That was to throw me off the track, to

make it look like the butler had a guilty conscience. Okay, boys, take them away. Old man McComas will be strong enough to testify, and, with what Temple and I can tell, we'll send them both to the chair, thank God!"

THE little procession started for the door. The woman looked toward Jarnegan and made a derisive noise with her tongue and lips. She turned her back, pulled a thin coat over her full hips and walked with a swing and prance that was an insult.

Jarnegan couldn't stand the temptation. He leaped forward, swung his right foot in a swift arc. The woman screamed, grabbed the abused portion of her body with both hands and turned to pour out a string of profanity.

Sheriff Jud Tolliver said reprovingly to Jarnegan, "Tch! Tch! that ain't nice, Jarnegan. What was that for?"

"That," said Jarnegan with a red face, "was for me, but this is for the nurse."

Even the sheriff couldn't hold him back. Nancy Wayne screamed and ran down the hallway, the little detective right behind her. The sheriff sighed and said, "Well, boys, let's go. Jarnegan always gets them in the end."

He wondered why his deputies snickered.

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BRING HOME THE BODY

(Continued from page 73)

the gas. Lela was speaking frantically.

"Eddie, Eddie! Speak to me, Eddie. I got your wire, Eddie. I came as quickly as I could. Oh, Eddie, am I too late? I couldn't get a car. I had to wait. For God's sake, Eddie, speak to me!"

Eddie felt her warm breath on his face and the quivering globes of her breasts pressed against his chest. He struggled to speak through a parched, dry throat. "I'm . . . all right . . . L-Lela . . . How about . . . Goya? Look out, Lela!!!"

With a mighty effort Eddie catapulted her backward. She struck Goya squarely amidship as he stood above her, knife raised, murder in his eyes. Goya careened backward across the bed, bounced off the far wall and came back screaming like a madman. Eddie snatched up the gat at his feet and let him have it . . . the whole clip.

The room resounded with the roar. Carmela came to suddenly, leaped to her feet and made for the door. Eddie stuck out a leg and tripped her. She fell forward smothering him with her lithe body, her thrashing limbs. He threw his arms around her to prevent her getting up. He felt her teeth sink into his ear.

The pain was excruciating. He almost screamed.

Drawing back his clenched fist he put a vicious handful right in the solar plexus. Her mouth dropped open releasing his bleeding ear. She crumpled without a sound.

"Quick!" barked Eddie to Lela. "Get out of here before the police arrive. Send a wire to McDonald."

Lela rushed for the door and cracked it to look out. "What shall I say, Eddie?" she whispered.

"Tell him," said Eddie grimly, "to send an escort to bring home the corpse."

IT WAS almost dark in the baggage car on the gently rolling train. So dark that you could scarcely see the man with the screwdriver carefully prying off the lid of the long pine box. The "ee-ek" of the nails as they gave way under pressure was drowned by the clacking bite of the steel trucks at the rails. The lid came off with a final squeak and the tall man laid it carefully on the floor. Then, with a smirk he looked down into the recesses of the box.

From his inside coat pocket he ex-

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tracted a roll of brown paper and tore off one end. A slender piece of steel, sharp as a razor, slid out of the torn end into his hand.

Pulling down the piece of coarse "manta" from the white face of the figure in the box the tall man spoke with quiet irony.

"Alive you were a damned nuisance, Eddie Pell. Lela couldn't get you out of her mind. But dead. . . ." He pulled the "manta" lower. ". . . Dead you're worth a fortune to me."

As the coarse sheet exposed the stomach and crossed hands of the still figure, the tall man stiffened. In the fingers of the corpse's right hand was a small black automatic. It pointed directly at the tall man's face. A soft voice said:

"If you so much as bat an eyelash, Elmer Verde, I'll let you have it right in the map. What a shame to spoil that lovely profile! It wouldn't do you any good to cut me open anyway. You wouldn't find any more than the custom's officials did at the border. The rocks you're looking for are already on a ship bound for England where they came from. Goya is dead. Your little friend, Carmela, is on her way to the "Tres Marias" islands for twenty years . . . and you, Elmer Green. . . . Don't do it, Elmer . . . stop!"

Two spurts of blue flame spit upward from the pine box. Eddie sat up and looked at the crumpled figure on the floor. Blood gushed from a great hole

"Epitaph for Elmer," said Eddie grimly to himself. "Killed by a corpse." in Elmer's forehead.

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Donaldson said: "But what about the locked bathroom?"

"That's easy. When I got through talking to the voice I thought was Amberg's, I waited a minute. But he didn't say any more. So then I left the bedroom and went back downstairs. That one-minute wait was all Fabian needed. He put Amberg's corpse back in the tub, mopped the blood from the floor and slipped out of the bathroom by the other door. He left a key on the inside of the lock—and then turned it from the outside with a pair of tweezers. Any amateur magician can do that in three seconds. Then Fabian raced down the rear stairs, met me in the living-room and offered me a drink."

Dave said: "What about the suicide note?"

"FABIAN wrote that while I was phoning you the first time. He must have grabbed Allene's lipstick from the medicine-chest and scribbled the forged confession on the spur of the moment—hoping to end the case right then and there. Having written the note, he came running out of the bathroom and handed it to me while I was still talking to you over the phone."

"And you had it all figured out, Dan?"

You aimed to trap Fabian just now by—"

"Yeah. I knew if I pretended to be arresting Allene for the killings, Fabian would make some sort of play—because he was so crazy about her. He wanted her to be free, happy."

Donaldson looked down at Fabian. "Well, son, what about it? Do you confess? You'd better ease your soul, lad. Something tells me you're not long for this world, with those .38 slugs of mine in your guts."

I knew Dave was taking the wrong road there if he expected to make the secretary talk. So I put in my two cents' worth. I said: "You may as well come clean, Fabian. If you confess, we'll keep every drop of scandal away from Miss Raye. She can marry Randolph and be happy."

That got him. He shivered. His shoulders slumped. "I—I confess," he whispered. "I did it . . . because . . . I loved . . . Allene . . ."

A week later, after my wounded leg was patched up a bit, I was best man when Allene Raye and Ronnie Randolph were married. Allene will make him a good wife. But I still think I like Kathryn Malloy better.

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DEAD MAN'S NAME

(Continued from page 105)

He calmed her hysteria with his quiet voice. "Go ahead, I'm listening. Shoot the works."

"**T**—it starts with Gus Schwarz. He was chauffeur for my sister and her husband. Moira's husband occupied a responsible position with a certain importing firm. But he . . . stole from his company; falsified the books. He took twenty thousand dollars, and he was going to run away with it. Gus Schwarz was driving him to the station, the night of the accident."

"Yes. Go on."

"Well, Schwarz wasn't hurt in the accident. Somehow he opened Mr. Norman's bag; found the stolen money. He . . . took it himself. But he told Moira about it. When Moira collected her husband's insurance, she managed to put the stolen twenty thousand dollars back into the company safe. She made it good. But meanwhile, Gus Schwarz started to blackmail her."

"Blackmail her on what grounds?"

"He threatened to tell all he knew. To blast Moira's husband's reputation. Moira loved her husband; and now that he was dead, she didn't want his name blackened. She had returned the stolen funds, but she hadn't been able to get to the company's books and erase her husband's false entries. And so, to keep Gus Schwarz from ruining a dead man's reputation for honesty, she . . . paid blackmail."

Allison nodded grimly. "So far, so good. What next?"

"I—I knew Moira was being blackmailed by Gus Schwarz. I made up my mind to do something about it; the worry was driving her frantic. Tonight,

I went to see Schwarz at his hotel. I begged him to stop bleeding my sister. At first he laughed at me. Then he said if . . . if I'd let him . . . if I'd elope with him . . . he'd stop blackmailing Moira. I agreed. . . ."

"And he put your brassiere under his pillow?"

"Y-yes. Then. . . ."

"I understand. Go on."

"Well, while I was g-getting dressed, Moira came to the door of the room. Schwarz made me hide in his closet. I finished d-dressing in the closet—"

"Without your brassiere, eh?"

She nodded. "Then, suddenly, while I was in the closet, I heard a shot. I dashed out. Moira saw me. There was a revolver on the floor, and Schwarz was d-dead. Moira made me escape d-down the fire-escape. But I j-just couldn't run away and leave her there. I came back through the front of the hotel, ran back upstairs to Schwarz's room. I found Moira in your arms—and you know the rest."

Allison nodded heavily. "I get the picture now. Moira thought you shot Schwarz from the closet, and she took the rap for you."

"Y-yes."

The insurance detective stood up. His face was mask-like. Quietly he donned his hat and topcoat. "You'll be hearing from me!" he said firmly. And as he departed, he felt Leila Dane's frightened gaze following him. . . .

DOWNSTAIRS, he found an all-night drug-store; entered its single phone-booth. He called up a certain stool pigeon who had given him valuable underworld information in the past.

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Dept. H-14

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"Listen," he said guardedly when he had got his connection. "This is John Allison. I want some dope. Do you know a cheap grafter named Gus Schwarz?"

"Yeah."

"What dames has he been running around with lately?"

"Not many, Allison. In fact, just one. A frill named Nancy LaDue—stripper in a burlesque show." The stool pigeon mentioned an address.

The insurance detective decided to risk everything on one wild throw of the dice.

"Okay," he said in a low tone. "Now get this. In exactly thirty minutes I want you to make a certain phone-call for me. . . ." And he gave the balance of his instructions in a semi-whisper.

"Gotcha, Allison!" the stoolie responded.

Allison hung up. Then he dropped another nickel, called police headquarters. He made certain requests; heard the headquarters man agree. Whistling softly, the insurance dick walked out into the night.

A cruising Yellow took him to the address which had been given him by the stool pigeon—the address of the burlesque show-girl, Nancy LaDue.

He went upstairs to her flat; knocked softly. After a while the door opened. A svelte, lush burnette girl stared out at him.

It was the same blatant brunette whom Allison had seen earlier that night coming out of the cheap waterfront hotel where Schwarz had been murdered!

Allison concealed his surprise behind a mask-like impassivity. "Miss LaDue?" he asked quietly.

"Yes."

The insurance dick palmed his badge. "Want to talk to you."

Her eyes grew hard. "I don't talk to cops."



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Allison looked her over. She was wearing thin, revealing pajamas. He could see the creamy smoothness of her legs and thighs and hips; the lush contours of her soft, ivory breasts through the gauze-like material. He put his hands on her shoulders, shoved her back into her apartment. "Baby, you'll talk to me or there will be hell to pay. I don't mean perhaps."

"I don't get you," her dark eyes flashed sullenly. "What the hell is this, anyhow—a gag?"

He closed the door behind him. "It's no gag. Your boy-friend's in a jam."

"My boy-friend? Who do you mean?"

"Gus Schwarz."

She grew a little pale; but her answer seemed to indicate that she didn't yet know of Schwarz's death. Either that or she was a damned good actress. "What's Gus in for now?" she demanded.

"Blackmail. And you're likely to be dragged into the thing unless you're plenty careful."

"Me—dragged into it? How come, copper?"

"You've been taking some of the blackmail dough yourself," Allison chanced that wild shot in the dark.

Nancy LaDue started to tremble. "Damn that lousy Gus Schwarz, anyhow! I told him he'd better look out!"

The insurance dick grinned. "Scared, aren't you?"

"I don't want to be mixed up in no mess!" she pouted. "I got a chance to go on the road with a good show. It's a chance to get out of this damn' strip-stuff. But if the cops haul me downtown for questioning, where am I?"

"That's just it, baby," Allison said softly. "That's why I'm here. To tell the truth, I'm not a headquarters dick. I'm an insurance investigator. I didn't



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come here to put the pinch on you. I came to warn you."

"You—? Say, how-come you're so damned interested in me, big boy?"

"I'VE caught your act several times. I sort of like you. I thought maybe you and I could make a deal. You treat me right, and I'll show you how to steer clear of the jam Schwarz is in."

"Oh. I see. . . !"

"Well, how about it?" Surreptitiously Allison looked at his watch. Thirty minutes had passed since his phone-call to that stool pigeon. He'd have to work pretty fast now.

Nancy LaDue gave him a hard, worldly grin. "Well, okay, big boy. Are you bashful?" She sat down on a couch; he sat beside her; slipped an arm about her; drew her close to him. He kissed her on the mouth, pried her lips apart with the roughness of his kiss. Her pajama jacket gaped and suddenly his hands were on her shoulders holding her at arm's length.

His eyes hesitated immediately under the heavy mound of her left breast. "You've scratched yourself here some way, kiddo," he whispered.

She looked down. "So I have. Well, so what?"

"Could that scratch have come—from

the pin in this brassiere?" Allison's voice was unexpectedly hard, brutal. He hauled that second brassiere out of his coat pocket—the brassiere he had taken from under the dead Gus Schwarz's pillow.

Nancy LaDue stiffened. "What—how—"

Allison grabbed her, shook her savagely. "You were in Schwarz's room with him tonight! Don't deny it! But he had another dame coming to see him, so he made you leave in a hurry. In such a hurry that you forgot to put your brassiere back on!"

"Wh-what's that got to do with—"

"Plenty!" the insurance dick snarled. "You got jealous of Gus when he had the other dame in his room. You got sore because he made you lam so he could be with her. So you hid in the adjoining room—Room 263—and opened the connecting door and shot Schwarz in cold blood! And now you're going to fry in the hot squat, baby! I know you're guilty, because I was in the adjoining room on the other side—Room 267! I heard the whole thing! You'll burn, baby! You'll burn!"

AND then, suddenly, the front door of Nancy LaDue's apartment burst open. A man came plunging into the

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room. "Like hell she'll burn, you snoop-ing rat! She didn't shoot Gus Schwarz! I did—because he was giving Nancy the run-around! He was going to run out on her; was going to beat it with some red-haired moll. So I let him have it—because Nancy, here, is my sister! I plugged Gus Schwarz—and now I'm going to plug you—!"

John Allison saw the man's gun-hand come up. Saw a finger tighten on the trigger.

Savagely, the insurance dick twisted himself sidewise, went hurtling across the floor. "No you don't, Mr. Pasquale Di Vinne!" he yelled. And he smashed into the knees of the tooth-picking hotel clerk.

The clerk's gun roared in Allison's ear; the insurance detective felt hot lead plucking at his shoulder. He grappled his adversary. His clutch slipped on the man's gun-wrist. He steeled himself for a scalding slug through his brain—

And at that precise instant, a knot of uniformed cops thundered into the room. The cops for whom Allison had arranged! The officers he had phoned for; had asked to be here at this exact moment!

Nor had their arrival been timed an instant too soon!

There came a flurry of blows, a welter of curses and kicks and grunts. And then Pasquale Di Vinne, murderer, was manacled in the arms of the law.

John Allison went out into the night. He was thinking of the lovely Moira Norman, the lady in black, and of her red-haired sister, Leila Dane. Both were darned attractive. He wondered how they'd show their appreciation. . .

He headed uptown toward their apartment to find out.

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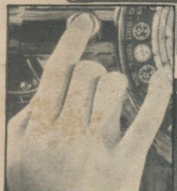
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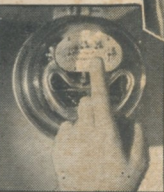
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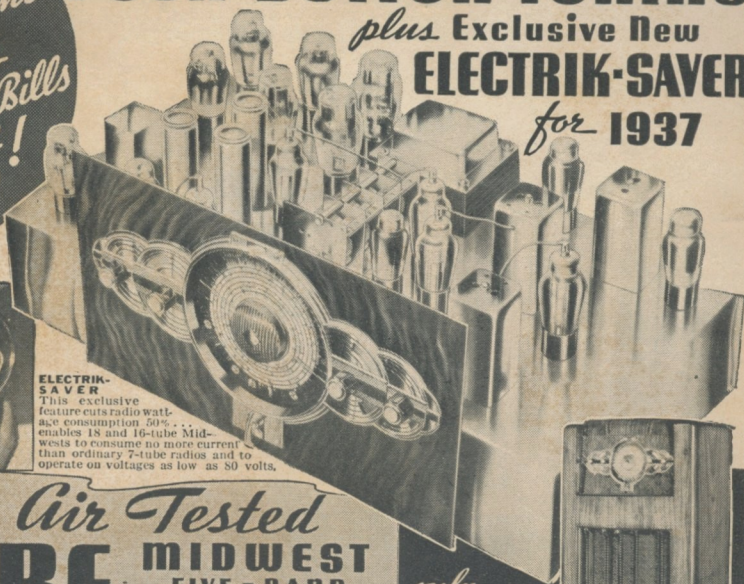
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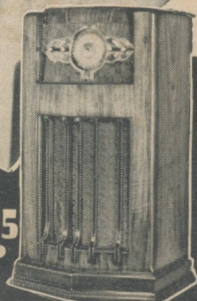


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