HE THOUGHT HE WAS LICKED—THEN A TIP GOT HIM A GOOD JOB!

My raise didn’t come through. Mary might as well give up, it all looks so hopeless.

It isn’t hopeless either. Bill, why don’t you try a new field like radio?

Tom’s right—untrained man hasn’t a chance, I’m going to train for radio too. It’s today’s field of good pay opportunities.

Tom Green went into radio and he’s making good money. Too, I’ll see him right away.

Training for radio is easy and I’m getting along fast. Soon I can get a job servicing sets or installing loud speaker systems.

There’s no end to the good jobs for the trained radio man.

Bill, just mailing that coupon gave me a quick start to success in radio. Mail this one tonight.

That’s $15 I’ve made this week in spare time.

Here’s proof that my training pays.

N.R.I. training certainly pays. Our money worries are over and we’ve a bright future ahead in radio.

Oh, Bill, it’s wonderful. You’ve gone ahead so fast in radio.

I’ll train you at home in your spare time for a good radio job.

Many radio experts make $30, $50, $75 a week.

Do you want to make more money? Broadcast stations employ engineers, operators, etc., and pay up to $5,000 a year. In spare time radio business pays as much as $500 to $1,000 a year. Many radio experts own their own full or part-time radio businesses. Training for radio is not hard. Employers need trained fellows. As many men pay to get trained. You can learn at home.

In your spare time, learn to work on your radio set and you can make good money.

Here’s what radio offers you.

Mail the reply coupon now for “Rich Rewards in Radio.” It’s free.

The man who has directed the home study training of more than 100,000 men for radio has written about the opportunities.

Mail the coupon in an envelope, or paste on a post card—NOW!

J. E. Smith, President, Dept. 1DX1
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Smith: Without obligating me, send “Rich Rewards in Radio.”

This free book has helped thousands of men make more money.

J. E. Smith, President, Dept. 1DX1
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

When answering advertisements please mention Spicy Detective Stories
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To run local COFFEE AGENCY

Splendid Chance To Make Up To $60.00 in a Week

If you are married and willing to cooperate with your life partner in operating a Coffee Agency right in your own locality, send your name at once for full details about my plan—FREE.

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(Please Print or Write Plainly)

When answering advertisements please mention SPICY DETECTIVE STORIES
Johnny Harding, demon columnist, solves the mystery of the lovely girl who was so thoroughly worked over that even her identification was difficult through the bruises that covered her.

He howled as her teeth cut into his shoulder, while Johnny rocked with laughter.

The cabdriver searched his jacket meticulously, came out with an inch long cigar butt and stuck it between his thin lips. His eyes were puzzled. Parked directly before his cab was a battleship grey limousine the size of a Pullman car. From it a little man emerged. He wore a shiny tophat, a tailed coat with a white blossom in its lapel and his shoes reflected the light from the corner drugstore like twin mirrors.

He took off the tophat, tossed it to someone in the limousine. The tailed coat followed the tophat. He drew himself up, expanded a skinny chest and
beat on it with clinched fists, gazing soulfully at the sickly moon that hung in the sky like a reluctant balloon.

The cabbie gasped. Stooping low another figure emerged from the limousine. The newcomer wore a chauffeur's uniform, from gleaming putts to cocked cap, at least two sizes too small. As the light hit his face the cabbie gulped again. The nose was squashed, the eyes set deep and overshadowed by swollen, scarred brows. A cauliflower ear adorned
the left side of the massive head; the right ear hung limply like a flag at half mast.

Carefully the massive chauffeur locked the huge car while the coatless little man trotted into the shadows, stepping high like a pacing horse, skinny arms working like pistons. Fifty feet away he stopped and faced the moon again to breathe deeply. Suddenly his arms flew out—left—right—up—down—left—right—up—down. He stooped painfully, knees stiff, and touched the grimy sidewalk. Three times the maneuver was repeated, then he trotted on again until his white shirt was a grey blotch in the shadows.

Hoarsely the cabbie spoke. “Pal! Pal! Ain't you Lord Byron?”

The liveried chauffeur turned warily, his brows beetling. He chuckled, came forward hand extended. “Lewellyn Smith! My old pal Lewellyn! When did they spring you? When did—”

The two big men pumped hands vigorously but the cabbie kept staring down the sidewalk fascinated by the gyrations of the coatless little man. “Who is that?” he asked hoarsely.

“That,” said the chauffeur proudly, “is my boss. I drive his hack. He's Johnny Harding.”

“The guy that writes that junk for the Telegraph?”

“Junk! Say,” Lord Byron, the chauffeur, bristled, but before he could answer the cabbie went on.

“Is he nuts? What's wrong with him?”

Proudly Lord Byron gazed at the gyrating figure. “Naw. He's sick. The doctor told him he hadda have more exercise out in the country. Hadda get more fresh air.”

“This ain't the country, pal! What's he—”

“The hell it ain’t,” snorted Lord Byron. “It's the same thing. What's that? It's a tree, ain’t it? And look on the other side of the street. It’s two of 'em, ain't it? Two trees? And ain’t that real grass in them front yards? Lewellyn, me and the boss is busy. We ain’t got time to take no long trips so we come out here to the suburbs every night. Let’s go in and buy a coke.”

The cabbie looked uncertain. He thumbed toward the retreating figure. “What about your boss?”

“Aw, he'll be all right. He'll work down to the end of the block and back again. He needs the exercise. Come on. How's things in Dannemora?”

A FEW years previously Palmyra Avenue was advertised as a Middle Class Paradise. On either side of the dark street long rows of houses fronted by skimpy lawns stretched away as alike as soldiers in a rank. During the boom years a smart real estate developer built them cheaply and sold them dearly to white collar workers. Now an amazing number of them were empty, sad monuments to false prosperity. Only a few cars stood in the street, only a few houses showed lights.

Panting a little Johnny Harding continued his exercises down the quiet sidewalks. Once he stopped to look back for his chauffeur, shrugged and went on. Near the end of the block he paused for breath, reached for a handkerchief.

From the distance came the pad - pad - pad of running feet, the clackety-clack of heels coming hard and fast on the cement. Around the untrimmed hedge at the corner burst the flying figure of a woman. Straight for Johnny she came, her breath exploding in great wracking sobs. Almost to him she stumbled, sprawled full length on the sidewalk.
As he picked her up, quivering and trembling, he saw that her clothes hung to her white body in shreds. Her skirt was ripped; white flesh peered through. The bodice of the gown hung from her waist and twin breasts, unfettered, were dark and discolored. He got her on her feet, tried to dab at her with the handkerchief but she cowered away, shielding her face with a bruised arm.

"Don’t, don’t," she sobbed. "Don’t hit me again! Here it is, here it is!"

She thrust a crumpled wad of paper into Johnny’s hand, still begging him not to hit her. "Listen, sister," he began and paused.

The pad of approaching feet from the same direction. Around the corner whirled two men, a big one and a small one. Swiftly Johnny tried to draw the girl back into the shadows. Too late. With an oath the little man jerked the girl from Johnny's protecting arms.

"Damn you," he grated and his fist smacked viciously on bare flesh. The girl half dropped to her knees, groaning.

Johnny said, "Wait a minute, Bud," and swung at the little man. His bony fist went unerringly to its mark and the little man did a half flip to land on his shoulders. By this time the big man was in action. He grasped the front of Johnny’s stiff bosomed shirt, yelped with surprise as a stud bit into his hand and dropped the newspaperman as a pointed toe cracked against his shin.

Johnny seized the girl’s arm, pulled her away. "Run! Run!" he shouted. He was still trying to start her when the little man spoke up again.

“All right, buttinsky, all right.” The moon glinted on the gun. Johnny stuck his hands in the air, sensed the approach of the big man behind him, then all the lights and colors of the spectrum danced in a mad whirl before his eyes as some-

thing crashed against his skull. As consciousness faded he thought he heard the woman scream, but the sound seemed to come from an infinite distance.

The smell of grass in his nostrils, the thump of kettledrums in his head. Painfully he sat up, blinked about. The moon still hung overhead, the hedge still waved unclipped beside him. Like an old man he got to his feet, limped back toward the corner. The grey limousine was still parked before the solitary cab but no one was in sight.

Impatiently Johnny fumbled through his pockets for the extra key, opened the car and thumbed the button. Again. Lord Byron ambled leisurely from the drugstore in company with his friend Lewellyn Smith. Johnny eyed them sardonically.

Lord Byron was gesticulating, saying, "All right, all right, we’ll ask the boss! Listen, boss, is there more guys in Dannemora than in Sing Sing or wic-y wer-sa? This—my gosh, what happened?"

"I overdid it," said Johnny wearily. "Get in, you tramp. Haven’t I always told you to stay with me? Now lookee! Now you see—"

The slamming door cut off the rest of the tirade from the goggle eyed Lewellyn. The grey limousine slid into gear and slipped away into the shadows.

Twenty minutes later the two men stood again beside the parked car, this time a full block down the street at the same corner where Johnny had met his mishap.

Lord Byron, “You sure it wasn’t a dream or something, boss? You see there ain’t nothing down here, no place.”

“Dream, hell!” snapped Johnny. “No dream ever socked me on the head. I’ll admit there’s nothing down that cross street but a vacant lot. So it looks like
the girl ran out the back way of one of these houses, hit the alley to the cross street and then ran on up here to Palmyra, around the hedge where she bumped into me. Loan me a handkerchief, will you? I lost mine."

He mopped his brow, dabbed tenderly at the short cut in his scalp. Slowly they walked back to the limousine. Lord Byron climbed in, Johnny followed, slammed the door. "Listen, boss," started the chauffeur, "sure enough aren't there more guys in Dannemora than—"

A man materialized out of the shadows, a huge man, bulking larger because of the pale moonlight. He yelled, "Wait a minute, you!"

Now he was on the running board, peering at Johnny. "Are you the guy that was nosing around here before? Are you—"

Plunk! Johnny's bony fist caught the hooked nose. The man took a quick step backward, sprawled from the running board to the grass. Something hit the sidewalk with a crash, skidded onto the weedy lawn. Lord Byron grunted, started to open the door on his side murmuring something about getting him.

Johnny Harding caught him, jerked him back into the car and hissed, "Get going you fool. Look what he dropped!"

The inquiring stranger was tottering to his feet gazing about in the tall grass. As the clutch went in and the car leaped forward, he found the object of his search. The sawed off shotgun roared twice in the stillness. Buckshot beat against the big car as it turned the corner. Lord Byron ducked, hunched almost double over the wheel as they hit the gravel sideroad.

Johnny laughed. "Good old Mops Marriotti! And they called this a jinx car! Boy, there's nothing like an ex-big-shot's battleship even if it was bought at a police auction!"

Lord Byron grinned weakly, drew himself erect a little at a time. "Bullet proof glass is swell, ain't it?" And as an afterthought, "I don't think they want us around there, boss."

Later that night Harding sat before a small typewriter in his own apartment beating out a column of gossip for his paper and syndicate. His notes were before him but his fingers hovered over the keys uncertainly. Johnny Harding didn't care for mysteries. The affair of earlier in the night bothered him. Who had the girl been afraid of? Who had been beating her? Who were the men, the hulking brute and his dapper little companion? And why was it serious enough to blast with a sawed off shotgun?

Lord Byron crouched at another table thumbing the leaves of a World Almanac. The doorbell shrilled. At a nod from Johnny, Lord Byron left the room. Harding looked up in surprise and annoyance at his new visitor.

"Hello, Harding," the voice was shrill and high, the speaker tall and slim with a flop brimmed hat cocked over his right eye.

"I'm working, Cohn, What's on your mind?"

"Oh, nothing much, Mr. Harding. I want a favor if you don't mind. Some of the boys picked up a dead dame not long ago. Looks like a show girl. You're supposed to know everybody on the Main Stem and I wonder if you'd try to identify her for me?"

Harding watched Sergeant Cohn narrowly. He disliked the man and knew the policeman hated him. Jealousy was the basis. Once or twice in the past
Harding had succeeded in making an ass of the homicide detective. Now, with Bill Nobles, head of the squad, in a Western hospital, Cohn was tops. Further, Harding had promised Bill Nobles to do all he could to help the department. Nevertheless Johnny knew something besides mere help was on Cohn’s mind.

“Sure,” he said. “Wait till I dress. I know every dame that’s danced here in the last ten years.”

When he left the room, Cohn walked to the typewriter, peered closely at what Johnny had been writing. Lord Byron gestured toward a settee with a thick thumb, a glum expression on his face. Cohn sat down.

Harding went with Cohn in the squad car, another detective at the wheel. There was little conversation until the morgue was reached. Just inside the lobby a woman paced the floor. She was expensively clad, a thin silk dress outlining flaring hips, clinging seductively to tapering thighs. She looked up at their entry, her mouth grim, her

She had almost reached him when she stumbled, fell.
rouge spots of color, her pointed breasts rising and falling.

Harding stopped, “Marcia Fane! What in the world—”

The woman pulled away from him, drew herself as if he was something obnoxious. Her eyes glittered, her lips curled, breasts heaved tumultuously. Puzzled, Johnny paused. Cohn tapped his shoulder. Harding shrugged, turned away. Against the far wall a fat man plucked nervously at his necktie, glanced away as Johnny looked at him. The door to the morgue proper opened.

Cohn drew back the sheet. Harding’s mind worked fast; he knew better than to trust Cohn, knew something was in the air. Gazing down at the battered body of the dead woman he shook his head slowly from side to side. The face was crushed almost beyond recognition, the hair that once had been blonde was now matted with blood. The throat, the breasts, even the flat abdomen were splotched with purple and yellow.

“Beaten to death,” said Johnny slowly.

“Yeah,” said Cohn just as slowly. “Somebody worked her over and tossed her in a guy’s yard. The guy is outside now. He lives out on Palmyra, Mr. Harding.” He paused, his eyes burning into Johnny’s. His voice grew softer. “The guy heard the noise, looked out the window and saw a big grey limousine going down the street. He even got the first three numbers of the license; Mr. Harding.”

Johnny reached for the sheet, pulled it back over the body. Cohn continued. “She was gagged, Mr. Harding. Here’s what the killer used.” He handed Johnny a dirty linen handkerchief, smudged, stained with blood. Johnny didn’t take it; he knew what it was, knew that a neat J. H. was embroidered in the corner.

Standing there beside the still battered body of the murdered woman Johnny Harding told his story. Cohn listened in silence, only a sardonically raised eyebrow from time to time expressing disbelief or belief.

Concluding, Harding said, “Now, smart boy, I know how you’d like to hang something on me, know how good it would make you feel. But don’t try it, see? I never saw this woman but the one time, don’t even know now who she is. If you think you’re big enough to pin my ears back—”

“Oh no, Mr. Harding. I’m just a cop. There are some guys too big for a plain cop to touch. But I’ll tell you who the dead woman is. She’s Marcia Fane’s sister. Maybe you think Grant Fane, Marcia’s husband, is also too small to pin your ears back? Maybe you own more of this town than he does? Your story sounds fishy as hell to me but I’m not holding you. The only thing I’m going to do now is tell Grant Fane what you know about his sister-in-law. He can go on from there.”

Harding shrugged, turned away. The fat man was still in the lobby. The woman was gone. Johnny hailed a cab philosophically at the curb. Marcia had always hated him anyway, even when she was starring in a musical on the Main Stem, before she had married the town’s political boss.

If Harding worried about having Grant Fane after his scalp, his face didn’t show it as he rang his own bell. It was alright with interest, determination to beat Cohn to the punch.

Lord Byron, blinking with sleep let him into the apartment, the World Almanac still beneath his arm.
"Hello, boss. What are we pinched for?"

Johnny snorted, said, "Taking exercise," and went to the phone. He dialed a number. "Lieutenant Hogan? Johnny Harding. Listen." He told the lieutenant all that had happened. "Now Hogan, here's where you come in. I won't have a chance to work with Cohn, he hates my guts and vice versa. But I want you to find out exactly what he's done and is doing. Find out how come Marcia Fane's sister was in that neighborhood if you can and why none of the neighbors reported gunshots and excitement. Okay, thanks."

The phone clicked. Johnny lit a cigarette, tossed his hat aside and went to his bedroom. Flipping on the light he stopped in surprise, his eyes widening as he saw the confusion of the room. Drawers were open, linen and clothing littered the floor. Pictures were awry, bedclothing rumpled.

"What the hell happened?" he called and Lord Byron ambled up.

"Oh yeah. I forgot to tell you, we had company, a guy and a dame."

Johnny was speechless with anger. "Company!" he finally managed, "and you let 'em tear me up this way? What did they want? What were they doing in here?"

"Why, boss," Lord Byron's voice was mild, "I don't know. You see they came in by the fire escape and this is where I caught 'em. I got sleepy and turned out the light so they probably thought the joint was empty. I heard 'em and went in and—"

"What did you let them get away for? What?"

"Well," said Lord Byron apologetically crossing the room toward the closet, "I ain't much good with dames. I didn't even get a good look at her! She kicked me while I was grabbing at the guy and then scrambled out the window. But the guy—"

He opened the closet door, reached down to pick up the bound figure of a man and tossed him into a chair.

Arms akimbo Johnny stared down at the twisted, venomous face. Well, well," he breathed, "bad pennies always turning up! You're the little punk I socked in the nose. Now just why the hell would you and another dame be searching my apartment?"

The sallow faced man snarled. "I never saw you before in my life! I don't know what dame you're talking about. Go on, call copper, you got me. I'm a burglar. Call the cops."

"Now let me see," pondered Johnny, "what could it be? What could I have that—" He snapped his fingers. "Got it!" He dove into the closet like a terrier, emerged triumphant with the dishevelled pair of evening trousers he had worn earlier. From the left hand pocket he drew a crumpled roll of paper. "When that dame ran up to me, she said, 'Don't hit me, don't hit me, here it is!' Now, my little friend, we'll see just what's so important about these."

"Nuts! I'm a burglar and I never saw you before, wise guy. Go on call copper."

Johnny answered not at all. With puzzled eyes he gazed at the two papers that comprised the crumpled roll. They were checks on the First National Bank, blank checks, but each bore a shaky tremulous signature, G. A. Fane.

"How'd you like to tell me about these, fellow? I see a little light but still it doesn't make sense. Tell me about it, and tell me who the dame was that came in here with you."

"There was no dame," sullenly. "And
I never saw you before. Go on, call the police."

For a moment Johnny stood looking at the signed checks. "Throw him in the closet again," he said. "He's too anxious to be arrested. We'll keep him a while."

Lord Byron grinned, tossed the burglar back into the closet and shut the door. Joining Johnny he said, "His name is Cross, A. C. Cross. That's what it said on his coat label."

FIFTEEN minutes passed with Johnny sipping Scotch and soda before his table, the check spread before him, his skinny fingers making a tangled mess of his hair.

The phone rang. "Yeah, this is Harding. Oh, Lieutenant Hogan." He listened for a few seconds then cursed. "Let me get this straight. Only eight houses occupied in that block on Palmyra Street. And none of them know anything about the girl, eh? Any police characters?"

"At 5423," said Hogan, "old Katie the Weeper that used to own a few joints and hotels till we cleaned out the West Side. She claims not to have been in business since then."

"Okay," said Johnny thoughtfully. "Say, do you know a punk named Cross?"

Hogan groaned. "Ace Cross again! Hell yes, and I wish I didn't! He's a two by four racketeer that would like to be a big shot. I've had a dozen calls about him this evening and there's a bondsman here now trying to spring him and he ain't even been picked up! What—"

Johnny grinned and hung up. No wonder the little man with the sallow face wanted to go to the police station as a burglar! There, he would be sprung; here, he was safely out of the picture. The burning question was—what picture?

Again the doorbell. Again Lord Byron trotting to answer, coming back with awe and puzzled wonder on his battered features. Behind him, a woman.

Johnny scrambled to his feet, grinned wryly. "Hello, Marcia, or should I say Mrs. Fane. You're a late caller."

She stood there in the doorway, brows raised as she glanced at Lord Byron. Johnny said, "Okay, punk, beat it. I'll call you. Wait a minute, bring us a couple of highballs. Sit down Marcia and take a load off your chest."

She sat down in a Cogswell chair, kept her eyes intently on his, crossed her legs to reveal a smooth expanse of glimmering hose. Leaning forward to lift a cigarette from the table the dark cleft between her pointed breasts was plainly, frankly revealed. She lit the cigarette, smoke pouring from her nostrils.

"You never liked me, did you, Johnny Harding?"

"I like everybody until they do me dirt."

Lord Byron came in with the drinks which he set on the tabouret. At the door he paused. Johnny drooped an eye, nodded his head almost imperceptibly toward the bedroom. He resumed the conversation.

"Let's don't stall, Mrs. Fane. You've come for something. Let's have it."

The woman leaned forward again. "It's my sister, my dead sister. She wasn't bad, Johnny, just wild. Sergeant Cohn told me how you happened in on the whole affair. I want you to promise me not to write anything about her."

"What would I know about her?"

She rose, paced back and forth, full
hips quivering seductively beneath the thin material of her gown. When she paused she was directly before him.

"You know enough to make you wonder more. I'm going to lay the cards on the table with you. I'm going to tell you so you won't have to worry about it. My husband Grant Fane was madly in love with Lucille, my sister. For the past two months he's been trying to get her to go away with him. She was young, Johnny, it was all romantic to her. Three days ago she went away with him. This is the first time I've seen her since. Where he is I don't know and I don't much care. She called me early yesterday morning and said she'd left him in Chicago after a quarrel. She seemed frightened to death then. This will all never come out if you'll be still. Grant must have killed her from jealousy, or had her killed. Grant's disappearance will cause some excitement but if you'll keep still no one will connect her with it, no one will know of her foolishness. Sooner or later they'll find him and he'll pay. But she's dead, Johnny, can't you let her rest in peace—for me?"
She laid a hand on his shoulder. She was very near to him now, breasts tremulous, a look of intense pleading in her eye.

Over his shoulder she glimpsed the two checks on the table. Her eyes grew wide, her hand dropped away to reach for them. Johnny let her pick them up, then laughed.

She dropped the checks, sprang away from him and dug into her handbag. Her hand emerged with a dull automatic which she held steadily. Now her eyes held hate, pure hate, flecked with fear. "So you had them after all! I was a damned fool!"

He nodded happily, said, "You were and are! You'll never make it, Marcia!"

Her lips set grimly. "Where's Ace Cross, wise guy? Have you still got him? Turn around and walk toward the bedroom."

Hands in the air, Johnny walked slowly toward the bedroom. He felt the gun boring into his back, hoped she had a steady finger. Nevertheless he spoke cheerfully. "Yeah, Marcia. I've still got him. He's your boy friend, isn't he? You'll find him there in the closet."

He stepped into the room, pulled aside as she followed. As she passed the door, the hairy paw of Lord Byron slapped down on her wrist. The gun flew into space and a tigress wheeled on the big ex-wrestler.

He tried to hold her hands, tried to dodge her flailing, lashing heels. A pained look overspread his face as her fury pressed him back. Nails tore furrows in his cheek, a knee dug into his groin. Her dress ripped, soft breasts swayed and bobbed free. The skirt climbed higher and higher. White flesh gleamed, vibrated, lithe muscles played freely.

Lord Byron grunted, encircled her with a great bear hug. He howled as her teeth cut into his shoulder, tore her mouth away and held her helpless.

Johnny Harding rocked with laughter on the bed. "You, you," he gasped, "the guy that held Don George to a draw and can't handle a little dame!"

Lord Byron's voice was apologetic. "I never was much good with dames, boss!" And then plaintively, "Help me let loose of her."

Johnny arose, still weak with laughter.

Not long after, the huge grey limousine rolled again down Palmyra Street. Lewellyn Smith the cabbie was still on station outside the all night drugstore, watched its going with contemplative eye. It disappeared in the shadows of the street.

At the end of the block Johnny Harding crawled out, closely followed by Lord Byron. They struck down the cross street by the hedge, turned into the weed grown alley. Johnny held up his hand; Lord Byron paused anxiously.

"The way I figure it," spoke Harding sotto voce, "she couldn't have come from far. There's only eight people living on this side of the street. The cops have seen them all and there's only one suspicious character, old Katie the Weeper. But we'll look them all over just the same. Ready?"

The big man said, "You mean we're going to prowl every house in this block whether somebody lives there or not?"

Johnny said, "Keep your teeth from chattering, greaseball. If the house is empty we prowl it; if there's anyone there we don't. Come on."

The first three houses were empty. Using a tire tool for a jimmy they were easily entered. Harding's pencil flash swept through each one, finding cobwebs
and piles of dust, undisturbed for months. In the alley behind the fourth they paused. Lord Byron mopped the sweat and grime from his brow. He peered up the alley.

"Boss, it'll be daylight before we finish up. It's getting grey now. There's a dozen—Hey! Somebody burning something!"

From the chimney of the fifth house black smoke was spiralling. Johnny stood still for a moment, deep in thought. Why a furnace fire in the summer time? Why—

The back gate was locked. They went over the fence. A grape arbor led from the back gate toward the house. Through this they sulked on noiseless feet, turned left to the east of the house. A faint light glowed in a basement window. Cautiously Johnny peered into the room below, Lord Byron hunkering at his heels. Johnny turned suddenly, put his hand over his mouth unsuccessfully and was intensely sick.

"What's the matter boss?" Lord Byron said hoarsely. "It's only a dame cooking meat. You been drinking? You—"

"All right, snoopers, get up with your hands in sight!" The ray of the flashlight was intensely brilliant.

Lord Byron arose, Johnny followed. The big man with the shotgun said to Johnny, "Don't you ever get a bellyful of prowling around? Go on downstairs."

At the foot of the stairs they hesitated, were prodded on in.

Katie the Weeper looked up from her work. She wore a mother Hubbard, once grey, now crimson with blood. Her thin hair trickled despairingly over a sweaty face, a face marked deeply by dissipation, a face whose eyes were little spiteful fires of madness. She licked spittle from blue lips, tossed a red chunk of meat into the yawning furnace and said, "Now what?"

"Two snoopers, ma, the same ones. What'll I do with 'em?"

Her laugh was shrill, high. "I still got my knife and saw, ain't I?"

Johnny tried to dodge but the descending gun barrel was too fast. He crumpled to the floor.

At first he thought he was a kid again, thought his mother was burning the roast while someone was blowing a bugle in the front yard. Then his head cleared a little. He saw Lord Byron slumped and bound in a broken kitchen chair, knew that he himself was secured in the same manner.

The big man with the shotgun was listening intently at the basement door. Katie the Weeper was still tossing meat into the furnace. Outside a car horn tooted, shattered the silence. Johnny recognized the horn. It was his own. The big man with the gun disappeared, came back a few seconds later muttering, "Some guy down the block. 'Bout through, Ma?"

She grunted in answer. Johnny tried not to look at her, looked at Lord Byron instead and saw that he too had regained consciousness. Minutes passed, long minutes.

The old woman cackled, "Well, that's that. Get my saw and we'll start on these two!"

Slowly she walked toward Johnny, madness and death afire in her eyes, in her hand a long butcher knife. Johnny shut his eyes and waited.

Upstairs the doorbell rang. The old woman said, "Get it, sonny." Sonny went up the stairs. The clatter of his footsteps coming down bespoke terror.

"It's the cops," he half shouted, (Continued on page 100)
BULLETS

By STEWART GATES

YOU never can tell what will happen when you go on a case. Where it will lead. Take this case.

It started out to be an old fashioned matter of a pearl necklace between a banker and a lady. A lady whose cute specifications of face and figure got in the banker’s hair. At this time the necklace wasn’t between them. There had been other times when it hadn’t been, or much of anything else, ladies being the way they are with bankers in the money. But this time it was different.

The pearls were gone. Stolen.

And there was the old set-up. A string of little pink balls worth thirty thousand one dollar bills and there could be no collecting insurance because the lady’s husband thought all along that his wife had a pretty string of imitations.

Kay Morgan said, “Isn’t it funny that husbands and bankers are still that way?”

She was standing against the window in the Chief’s office, turned my way, the light behind her. She had on one of those frilly little silk frocks that are like summer garden party dresses, the kind women can take a sun bath in without taking them off, they’re that thin and look-through. She stood against the window with one knee slightly bent, giving me all the lines and curves of her, from toes to chin, to go dizzy over. Her thighs rose out of her stocking tops in velvety smooth columns. Kay’s got better legs than Aphrodite ever took to her bath or a date in the glen with Apollo.

She saw how I was and stuck out the pink tip of her tongue at me.

This wasn’t a case for Kay Morgan to go into with me. No denying that she was one of the Agency’s aces, or that her soft pliant little body had the strength of an adagio dancer. Her fluffy helplessness masked a chilled steel nerve, and her mind clicked eighty to the minute, whether it was engaged in fighting with me to get us out of a jam, or fighting at me when I lost my head and couldn’t help grabbing an armful of her
and PEARLS

The banker gave the pearls to the girl. The girl’s husband never knew they weren’t phony. But the toughest mob in New York knew the truth, and went into the collecting business.

It was the men on the roof we had to think of first.
when she didn’t happen to feel that way.

Jams were about all she would ever let me get into with her. Oh, yes, once or twice, after the Jerry Maxon blackmailing letters case, she let down her hair and played Santa Claus in a big way. But now, all she would give me was a lot of lip and an eyeful. No dice at all.

I told the Chief I didn’t need her. “What will the case amount to? The little lady of the old geezer’s fading love dreams has houcked the pearls and put up a yap about their being stolen because she knows he can’t squawk. All I have to do is get the goods on the dame and show her up to papa. He will realize there is nothing he can do about it, but kiss the baubles good-bye and look for another doll. Besides paying out fee, Where would this wench, Kay Morgan, with the la-la hips, fit into the picture?”

“You told me,” Kay remarked, “that my hips fit into all kinds of pictures. ’Specially the movie kind.”

“I’ll say anything when I’m full of gin.”

“You weren’t full of gin. You were full of foolish plans!”

I had a notion to take her into the private office where it was private and comfortable and give her a good working over.

“Call off the battle,” the Chief snapped. “There is more to this job than you think, Pete. In the first place old Hogarth, the banker, won’t believe any rough stuff about the lady. She is the wife of his cashier. There is more than a chance, being in the bank’s family like that, that she is on the level—about the theft. Anyhow, Hogarth has to get that pearl necklace back. It belongs to an estate. He can’t even replace it with money for then he would have to get a court order and where would the gems be for the court to have appraised? If you find the woman to be a chiseller, you’ll have to put on the screws. You may need two heads on the job.”

“Trouble is, Chief,” Kay said, “he won’t be satisfied if I only use my head.”

WE TOOK the night train for Reedsburg, the Virginia town where our tootsie-cuddly banker and his girl-friend enjoyed their stolen sweets when hubby was thinking of choir practice. We had hardly got settled in our berths when I knew we were stepping into a mess. In fact, I decided to oil my automatic.

We made this discovery, really, before we were both in our berths. Only Kay was settled. I had cut her in on the expense account for a drawing room. There is something that a drawing room does to a woman. Makes her reckless. She’s behind a door and the scenery is flying past. A drawing room is mighty small. A visitor has to sit pretty close and can find something to pick up off the floor: stocking, brassiere, or anything like that to start the conversation.

Then she said Okay, through the door, “I’m in bed and covered up.”

She lay on her back with her hands under her head, smiling her tantalizing smile. Her arms lifted her breasts until they were like little melons pushing up under her thin jacket. Her jacket fell half open. The creamy column of her throat sweeping down toward the inviting slopes of those melon-like mounds made me drunk. The fragrance of her, filling the little cubicle of space, helped, too. I had to get up and open the door for a breath of air. It was then I discovered that we were stepping into a mess.

Two berths down the aisle, just climbing in between the lower curtains, was
a heavy dark face and a big frame I knew, Benny the Barber. The cut-throat and general tough guy for Jerry Maxon’s gang of cold blooded thugs and easy money rats. Just as I recognized Benny, him not seeing me, he was reminding the porter, “Don’t let me skip Reedsburg. Get me up in time for a shave.”

“Well,” Kay said, “It doesn’t take two heads to figure out that Benny the Barber is going to the same town we are. Jerry Maxon has something on the fire in Reedsburg. Could it be possible it is the same thing we are interested in?”

“It must be,” I said. “That town couldn’t dig up two big crooked operations at once.”

Kay twisted her legs out of her berth and hung her bare feet to the floor. She wriggled her toes. When Kay wriggles her toes she is thinking hard. Benny the Barber at Reedsburg? A town not too big. There at the same time as us. It created a situation.

Less than two weeks before, Kay and I had shot our way out of the clutches of the Maxon gang and I had knocked Benny into an hour’s nighty-nighty with his own gun after he had run his thick wet lips all over Kay’s pretty little face and throat. I could have strangled him when I thought of him holding her in the crook of his arm, while he half tore off her clothes and feasted his eyes on her half-nude loveliness.

Benny would recognize us instantly. No telling how many more of Maxon’s bruisers were in the neighborhood, and some of them might know us. We were in a hot spot.

We would get into Reedsburg right after daylight. Kay suggested we go on to the next town and slip back later. “Benny and his pals, if any, won’t be standing around street-corners in the day time.” I wanted to stay and talk the thing over but Kay said, “Beat it, Big Boy. You’ve seen and done enough. You don’t want to talk.”

Reedsburg lies in the Blue Ridge foothills. Rich little town, center of the blooded horse raising belt. I wonder why people will raise blooded horses when automobiles are getting fancier every year. But they do down there. Kay says how could a girl wear riding pants and fill them out in spots like no boy could if there weren’t horses to ride. That’s the way Kay is. She can always get right at the seat of things.

There are two banks. One building is new and daring. That’s the conservative bank. The other looks old and musty. That is old man Hogarth’s bank. Kay and I had our plans made. It was only a hunch that Benny the Barber was there on the pearl necklace business, some ramifications of it, but the hunch stayed with us. She went in on a ramshackle bus that wandered around half the day to go thirty miles, and I went in on a service station truck.

I told Kay to report our arrival to Hogarth at the bank. “That’s all there is to report,” I pointed out. “Later, after I’ve seen the dame, there may be something more.”

“You bet there will be,” Kay agreed. “Only you won’t tell the banker. You won’t need to tell me because I’ll know it happened.”

“Listen, baby,” I snapped. “Whatever I do is strictly my business.”

“Why, of course, darling,” she agreed, innocent like. “And you’re pretty good at it, too.”

You can’t get the best of Kay unless she showers it on you of her own free will.
WAITED at the hotel for a telephone call from Kay. I looked over the hotel register pretty carefully and didn’t see any names or handwriting that I thought might belong to Benny the Barber or any other Maxon killers. There was a telephone girl who chewed gum and couldn’t have been more than twenty but was she built!

She wore a loose waist, with a very low collar, and when I stood over her, what I could see was plenty; and twice as enticing for being almost but those breasts of hers were not quite revealed. She knew I was getting an eyeful of nice, white flesh and blood but she was proud enough of her assets not to mind a bit. Soft and round and—well, let’s skip ‘em! Instead, I looked underneath the bench to see if her ankles were thick, but they weren’t. Her skirt had worked up. The few inches of pink and white thighs I could see were plump and luscious. But all I did was take a small eyeful. Business before pleasure—or at least during . . . .

The telephone cutie said No, there hadn’t been any men come to the hotel from New York lately. She always recognized New York men. They knew what they wanted.

“And what do they want, baby?”

She blushed. That’s a Blue Ridge Virginia town for you. They still blush. She said, “You ought to know, smarty, you’ve practically lost an eye already!”

I grinned, “I may give you a buzz, later,” I said.

Which do you think, pink pearls or the creamy kind, would go better with my skin?”

I wanted to know what the hell? She was very prim and severe. She said, “You really must use refined language to me after this. I may become a lady. And bank presidents are so refined. He wants me to read good books and hopes I’m not a forward girl, like some of his stenographers.”

“Just this, nit-wit. I am going to a boarding house at the edge of town. It is the only boarding house here that will take transients. It will be better for me than at the hotel where you are. Of course, Mr. Hogarth suggested that I stay at his house. He says it is a big place and his wife’s room is way down the hall from his. But I don’t think that would be refined. I am very fortunate, it seems, getting in to Mrs. Drayton’s—the boarding house—because only last week she was full up with three strange men who didn’t like the hotel either.”

It didn’t hit me then what Kay was hinting about three strange men. When it did, she had hung up.

I asked her a little later, “When am I to see Mrs. Prentice, the pearl lady? Anything special to say to her?”

“See her any time, gumshoe. And you know what to say special. Do you need me to tell you? Ferdinand telephoned her to see you any time you called and be nice to you.”

Good gravy! Ferdinand. President of the First National Bank, whom she’d known only three hours. Kay added, like a dumbell’s afterthought, “If you have a minute or two for anything but trying to neck her, you might ask her who was the jeweler in Richmond to whom she took the necklace a couple

KAY went to the bank just before closing, at three. She didn’t phone until after five. Two hours and more with a busy bank president!

The first thing she said was, “Oh, Pete. You know so much. Tell me.
weeks ago to have it restrung when I don’t think it needed restringing. You might ask her just what for? And oh yes, I ‘most forgot. Ask her what Benny the Barber was calling on her for this afternoon while Ferdinand kept her husband at the bank.”

I yelled, “Hey!” into the phone but the damned brat had hung up. I know what I’m going to do to that skirt when we get back to New York, if and how. I’m going to find a nice dark cellar with a lot of rats and mice and cockroaches in it and I’m going to throw her in with her wrists and ankles handcuffed.

How did she know Benny the Barber had called on the Prentice wench? What’s the use of asking until I hear

“I’m only human,” I groaned. I think she agreed with me.
from her again. Anyhow, I could gamble that she was right.

Oh, well. We mixed it up once with Benny and his chief, Maxon, and we not only came out all right, but Kay got sensible and let the stars fall on Alabama.

I WENT out to the Prentice house in the morning. Regular little town place. Begonias in the yard and magnolias and vines. I expected to meet the usual bridge-playing-woman's-club hen, maybe with a giggle and baby talk, bankers liking that kind. My mistake!

She couldn't have been much older than Kay, but was taller, riper. She still wore a negligee, orchid colored like a flame of passion, that clung seductively to the curves and hollows of young maturity. Two thoughts went through my head. The banker sure knew how to pick 'em, and how did an underpaid bank cashier ever get the nerve to talk bed and board to a creature like that?

And when she had shown me into a room and walked across the floor to a chair, I got the idea that she wasn't wearing that orchid robe that was as thin as a crepe nightie just because it was still so early in the day. She was wearing it for me!

When she walked, it caressed the winsome swell of her quivering hips and wrapped around the long, tapering lines of her shapely legs. It flew open with every step she took and made me gasp with a glimpse of the rising sweep of her unstockinged legs, up to the full rounded pinkness of her smooth thighs.

I said to myself, "Girlie, I'm going to plumb forget myself in about five minutes and that's just what you want me to do."

I decided not to mention the jeweler in Richmond or Benny the Barber for a while. She would know damn well that no man could keep his eyes off her very long. And she made it easier for me not to, by getting up from her chair and moving across the room to sit next to me on the divan where I'd dropped down.

"You will want me to tell you all about the pearls, won't you?" she said in a delightfully husky voice, with a teasing trace of Southern drawl.

"Not all about them," I said. "I know now how you got them. I was wondering, before I saw you, what made your banker friend so generous. Now I wonder he didn't give you the bank and his extra shirt."

I thought she'd give me a "don't be naughty" look for that, but instead it seemed to stab her. She bit her lip for an instant and pulled her robe across her knees. Then she slyly let the robe fall aside again, as if she were determined I shouldn't lose sight of those dimpled knee caps of hers.

I added, "Just tell me how you lost them."

THE way she gave it to me, jerky, perfect, I knew she had rehearsed carefully. "I came in one afternoon. From Reverend Lawton's church social. I put the pearls on my dresser and went down into the kitchen to start dinner so it would be ready when Harry got home. Harry is my husband. After dinner I went up to our room for something and the first thing I noticed was that my pearls were gone. I searched every place. Just every place. Harry thought I was very ill, but I didn't dare say anything to him. It was awful. I couldn't tell Mr. Hogarth until the next day. That is all. I didn't hear a sound but somebody came in and got them."

"Came in and went right up to your
bed-room and found them? Didn’t take anything else, I suppose?”

“No. My wrist watch was there, too. And a little money in my purse. They didn’t touch it. Don’t you think, isn’t it plain, that it was somebody who knew—who knew they were real and how careless I was with them because Harry thought them imitations? Maybe some of our friends?”

She was just too eager for me to agree with her. No doubt at all that Papa Hogarth’s pearls were not stolen! She leaned a little toward me in her eagerness. One side of her brassiere had slipped. I had seen her edging the strap off her shoulder when she thought I wasn’t looking. The top of one gauzy cup draped now in little wrinkles across her breast—but still did its enviable duty. There was a fragrance about her dark hair that was upsetting. I said to myself, “Be careful, baby!”

Aloud I said, “Your Harry is cashier in the bank. You look as if you’d be a little expensive for a cashier. Any chance that he might have suspected that your pearls were real and that he might be a little short in his accounts and—”

She jumped up suddenly. She forgot her negligee. It fell clear apart. Except for that loose brassiere, she had on only the briefest of panties underneath. The waistband of her panties snuggled caressingly around her waist, just above her hips. Her skin was snowy white, with the smooth texture of a pink-veined alabaster. Her full breasts made an alluring shadow in the velvet hollow between them. I held onto myself desperately.

“No, no!” she nearly screamed. “Harry would never do anything wrong at the bank. I’d never let him. I’ve done every thing—just to push him along so he’ll take Ferd—Mr. Hogarth’s place someday. He’s all honor and he must never know I’ve done—what I have. I’d do anything—anything—to spare him from knowing.”

You know, I believed in that baby that minute. Oh, she knew where the pearls were all right. But there was some reason behind her, apart from wanting to gyp Papa Hogarth. Maybe I’m soft. Kay says I still ought to be on mother’s milk. But just the same—oh, hell!

Somewhere, I knew, she was giving me a clue. Where was the danger that her Harry might find out? The banker wouldn’t peep. She wouldn’t. Yet she thought she was in danger of losing him.

All at once she sat down beside me again. Her gorgeous breasts were heaving with every breath. Her robe was still forgotten. Her legs were creamy and her flesh looked soft and warm. She bent over and her big round eyes pleaded.

“Please,” she begged, low and impassioned, “don’t hunt for the pearls. Let them stay gone. If you try to find who took them, something may happen—and Harry will learn. If you will do this for me I will—I will do anything for you. Anything you ask.”

She moved closer, determined now to use every charm she had to get me on her side. She pressed one hand to her breast, and my gaze followed the movement. Then her fingers fluttered about my shoulders; her arms, bare and warm, went around my neck and her heated breath, brushed my checks. Her knee pressed closely against mine.

Well, what would you do? I’m not made of stone either. And this baby had to be made to tell all she knew, and a woman talks easier when she’s in your arms and languid. I was missing that
early call from Kay but I didn't miss anything else.

MAYBE it was an hour, maybe half an hour, when the telephone rang. She was quiet then, in my arms, but she jumped. Her face had been serene. Now a look of terror came across it. She clutched her robe tight about her and ran to the phone. She moaned to herself. I waited and listened.

"Please—oh, won't you have mercy?" I heard her cry into the transmitter. Then a groan of resignation, and in what was a poignant whisper she said, "Yes. Yes. I'll tell you. Tomorrow morning. But you—you—"

She fell away from the phone in a faint. I picked her up and carried her back to the couch and closed her robe over her, though it did little service hiding the loveliness of that luscious body. When she came to she was frightened, wondering what I had heard. I didn't let on. I said, "I heard you bump the floor. What was it, bad news?"

She was relieved and began to arrange her lacy things. She looked up at me. "Will you—promise me now—not to look for them?"

I picked her up bodily and stood her on her feet. I put my hands on her curving waist to steady and hold her.

"I'll help," I said slowly, "but the best way is for you to play my way. Your way is nice, but mine gets results. Now then, baby. How about the Richmond jeweler, and how about Benny the Barber, or whatever name he gave you? The guy who was here yesterday to see you—big fellow, derby hat?"

That froze her body like ice. It stiffened in my arms. "How—how do you know?"

"Never mind. Give me the dope—I said I'd help you, didn't I?"

She tore free and sank onto the lounge. Suddenly she looked up, her mind made up. "The pearls were stolen from me," she said in a dead calm voice. "I took them to Richmond. I had seven pearls taken out and imitations put in. Ferdinand would never know. I wanted the money to pay off Harry's mortgage so he would be happy. I told him I expected a legacy."

"Never mind your reasons, honey."

"The Richmond jeweler gave me a name in New York to write to, a man who would buy the seven good pearls at a fair price."

"That name, baby?"

"Jerry Maxon. In a few days a man came. From Jerry Maxon. I showed him the seven pearls and then he pulled out a gun and made me get him the whole necklace. He took it. That is the truth."

"And you are afraid that if I go after this Jerry Maxon's thieves, they'll squeal to your husband?"

She buried her face in her hands and moaned. Her robe slipped to the ground. Her lovely rounded breasts shook to her sobbing.

"I am afraid of that," she sobbed. "But there's more, now. They're using the pearls to make me—Oh! tomorrow—tomorrow morning—I'll have murder on my soul—because of the pearls."

That gave me a jump. I bent over her and shook her. "Come out with it!" I shouted. "I'll save you that!"

She began to talk, her words so rushing I didn't catch them. Suddenly she stopped, and listened. She heard a noise that had escaped me. "Someone—coming to the back," she said. She motioned for me to pick up the white lacy thing that still lay on the floor. She slipped into it hurriedly. With her robe wrap-
Too late! There was only one bark, one detonation like the close bark of a backfire. I heard her smothered scream and her body, nearly nude, was just slipping to the kitchen floor when I got there, down past a table, her hand reach-

I was too late. There was one bark from a gun and she fell on the kitchen floor.

ped around her shoulders, I started to follow her but she motioned me back.

I heard her talking in the kitchen. I heard a low, thick voice. Benny the Barber! I took a leap for the hall, drawing my gun as I went.
ing crazily for support—a little heap on the floor—one hand covering an almost bare breast—gone to her death in modesty!

Benny was just climbing into a car that waited outside the high board fence that enclosed the back yard. I rained bullets at him, but the gate slammed. Only the top of the car was visible as it sped along the fence, into a tree bordered lane that led into the hills.

There was nothing I could do for the young woman but find a dress in her closet and work her into it. I had to shut my eyes. That warm flesh of her’s had been so full of life in my arms only an hour ago!

I was in a bad spot. If I reported the thing to the authorities I’d have to make explanations of myself. Why should I be calling that early in the day on the cashier’s pretty wife? I could talk about pearls, of course, but somehow that would have been letting Dawn Prentice down.

When I left the house the telephone was still hanging from its wire, off the hook where she’d left it when she fainted. Central was buzzingly complaining. I hung up the receiver. The connection between that dangling receiver and the death in the kitchen came clear to my brain. That had been Benny on the wire. She had told him something—something that was to happen tomorrow morning. He’d been holding the pearls over her head to get that dope “tomorrow morning.” He’d got his dope out of her and he’d slipped in to bump her—to keep her mouth shut!

I TRIED to find Kay. Funny, how I had the habit of hunting up that cuddly brat whenever I was in a jam. But she wasn’t at Mrs. Drayton’s. A girl there, Mrs. Drayton’s daughter, a plump full breasted maiden who sat in a hammock and didn’t seem to have anything on under her gingham dress—her legs were plump too—told me that Miss Morgan had taken the Reedsburg mail plane that morning for Richmond. I couldn’t help exploding, “What in hell does she want in Richmond?”

The girl was sore at Kay about something. She straightened out her plump legs in the hammock and smoothed her skirt. “I don’t think she wanted anything in Richmond,” she said. “I think she’s stuck on Charlie Lambert, the pilot. And she’d better not do anything to him. He’s mine. I gave her a beau last night, too. That ought to have satisfied her.”

She was sore at Kay about a Charlie Lambert, a pilot, who was probably good looking. If he was good looking he’d never escape Kay. Anyway, a pilot has to keep his hands busy at the controls when he’s up in the air. I wondered about the beau the girl had provided for Kay the night before. Some hillbilly, I thought.

I went to the banker. No other way. He went white, green, yellow. But he was a resourceful old dodger. When I had convinced him that nobody had seen me going in or out of the house, he said we would leave it just as it was for the time being.

He would keep Harry Prentice working during the lunch hour, he was very busy anyway, extra work at this time of the month, and that would be an excuse to send a messenger to the Prentice house for his lunch. The messenger could make the discovery.

He was worried about hunting for the murderer. I could see that he wanted me to lay off—to keep it a mystery. But I
had a debt to pay that pearl lady. She held nothing back from me.

I went out to Mrs. Drayton’s to wait for Kay to show up. There was nothing else I could do. I looked through the town for a glimpse of Benny, but that led nowhere of course. I didn’t know whether he had recognized me shooting at him or not. It didn’t matter now. What mattered, was what that “tomorrow morning” meant.

The Drayton girl’s name was Sylvia. She was plump all over, and just tall enough. She took me walking among elm trees that climbed up the hill-side behind the house. When I cuddled her rounded body against me it was as warm as a fresh baked cake. I asked her if she never wore any more clothes than this. She wondered how I knew but replied that it was too warm in the summer to wear anything more than was absolutely necessary. But I hardly heard her answer . . .

SHE had a date that evening with the mail pilot, who had come back from Richmond without Kay. She said she hated to go out and leave me alone, but Charlie Lambert would think something if she didn’t. When she came in, after midnight, and stole upstairs so her mother wouldn’t know she was still awake, she told me Miss Morgan had chartered a plane at Richmond to take her to Washington. She was in a hurry to get there. Now what could Kay want in Washington?

I found out in the morning when she landed in another chartered plane. First I bawled her out for running around in planes without letting me know, then I told her what had happened. She was serious. She repeated to herself—“‘Tomorrow morning?’ That’s this morning. My brain will click pretty soon.”

“When your brain clicks we ought to give a party,” I grumbled. “Now what were you doing in Washington?”

She looked at me with a funny look in her eyes. “Leaving my dress.”

“Left it in Washington? Or with the pilot?”

“Left it in Washington. At the fingerprint bureau.”

“Look,” I said. “Let’s talk sense. There’s been murder done.”

“Okay. I am talking sense. I met a man last night. In the woods. Sylvia Drayton had a beau and she sent him to bring one for me. There were two boys who stayed at the house. I wanted to know about them. He was aw’fy romantic. The dark type, and business like. Wastes no time. He just swept me off my feet. I mean he really did.”

“Oh, quit giving me a story of your sins.”

“I’m telling you about my dress—I wanted to be sure my mash was telling me his right name. They try to fool a girl, you know. So I took his finger-prints to Washington. I happened to remember that they can take them off of cloth, now, and I knew I had them on my dress. And what do you think? He didn’t give me his right name. He said it was Fred something, but it was Joe Gannon.”

“Joe Gannon! Jerry Maxon’s—”

“Yes, dearest. Jerry Maxon’s bank man. Goes after the banks—wait a minute!”

Kay started on a run for the house. “I’ve got it—this morning! What she meant. I’ll get my gun.”

She came out in a second, me standing there petrified. She started to scramble right in among trees, up hill slopes and down dales. I kept yelling after her

(Continued on page 98)
HEADLESS

A man would be nuts to turn up missing when he had a sweetheart like this, Cragin decided. But looking for a missing man and finding a corpse makes it more healthy for Cragin to be missing, too!

"YOU'RE a detective, aren't you, Mr. Cragin?" the sweet-faced little blonde with the swivel-action hips wondered as she glided from the door of the Golden Gate Detective Agency toward the battered desk from which the proprietor had hastily removed his number twelves. "You handle mysteries and so forth?"

Her blue eyes were wide with flattering awe. Cragin, appreciatively appraised her curves. She had nice ones, all the way from the sleek legs exposed as she cocked one knee over the other, to the pert, eye-filling little buds whose upper contours peeped from a camouflage of lace just south of her collar bone.

"Lady," he countered, beaming amiably, "I'll handle anything you've got!"

The disarming twinkle of his gray eyes kept her from wondering just how much "anything" included.
Laura Denton explained, "My boy friend came from Reno to be a detective. You know, he'd taken one of those correspondence courses, and got a diploma and a badge, and—did you ever take one, Mr. Cragin?"

"Maybe I should have," he wryly admitted, remembering the last blonde girl who had contrived to get a receipted bill without giving him anything negotiable in return.

"Anyway," resumed Laura, "he sud-
denly quit writing. Then his letters came back, unclaimed."

"Hell, madam," consoled Cragin, reaching for the packet she slid across the desk, "a young fellow in a strange town often does things like that!"

Tears jeweled Laura's eyes.

"Oh, but I know it's not another woman. Just read what he says in some of the letters he did write me."

Cragin read several. Mr. Gustav Erickson's spelling might not be one hundred percent, but he was expressive. His tributes to Laura's fascinations put red ants on Cragin. In a moment, his unoccupied hand was checking up on details to which the missing lover had referred with more fondness than discretion.

"Oh—Mr. Cragin—why—" Laura suddenly realized that it wasn't Gustav's familiar touch.

"That sort of made me absent-minded," apologized Cragin. But she hadn't slapped him. She merely kept his hand away from distractions. "Listen, darling, anyone who'd hide out from you must be nuts!"

"Do you really think there's some other woman?" Her fingers closed on his wrist; but that was wrath, not an effort to keep Cragin from following Erickson's trail.

"For hell's sweet sake, read this again—"

Cragin drew the golden head to his shoulder, spread the last letter out on the desk.

Erickson, a naive fellow, had written her all about the swell new job: trailing a certain Phyllis Frost and her playmate, a prominent San Francisco banker, Glenn Barrett. They both were prime hot numbers.

Nothing to do but report by telephone, and get his pay by mail. He'd never even seen his employer; a secretary had hired him.

"He musta found Barrett wasn't in one evening, and so he quit his job. Anyhow, I know that Jane by reputation, and no correspondence school dick would have a chance!"

"Oh..." Laura's eyes gleamed poignantly.

Cragin caged an armful of Laura. He kissed her in a way that made her glad she'd come to the big city. And before he found out that she had lavender rosettes on her garters, her breath was scorching his ear with short, quick gasps. For a moment he wondered whether her heart was going to hammer a hole into her brassiere—that is, if she wore one.

Laura, however, having tantalized Cragin out of all thoughts of a retainer, broke loose before the investigation went too far.

"Later, maybe..." She whispered. "Wait till I'm sure he's been playing around."

Which gave Cragin a burning incentive to get the dirt on Erickson. The gossip in the Swede's letters made it easy. As he watched Laura's hips ripple past the door jamb, he concluded that Scandinavians were dumb clucks.

THAT night he parked within a block of Glenn Barrett's house; not the big rose granite heap on the right end of Pacific Street, but a neat little place overlooking the Marina.

He cleared the wall that enclosed the Spanish patio. No sign of Erickson. He had previously investigated the missing Swede's last known address, and had drawn a blank. The fellow had faded without a trace.

The back door was open. The house was silent. Cragin headed for the ga-
The man in the violently checkered suit had connected with the wrong end of the automatic shotgun that lay on the blood-splashed Chinese rug. Shot and brains riddled the plaster. From the chin up, the barefooted victim was missing. Cragin never had realized how a man’s head can be scattered over the walls of a room.

Two ejected cartridges lay in a corner. The suicide, kicking the trigger, had blasted off the top of his head; and the twitch of his muscles had touched off a second charge. Nice work, if your stomach was strong.

Cragin had a first class case fairly flung at him. He wondered at the open window as he stepped clear of the gun and probed the victim’s pockets.

One look was enough: Glenn Barrett, the banker. Was he short in his accounts, or had Phyllis given him the air? There was another possibility, but Cragin muffed it. He turned to find the suicide note. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, they write their regrets about mussing the wall paper. Where was it?

The breeze might—

“By God, that’s it!” he turned to make a dive for the scrap of paper that had fluttered into a pool of gore.

As he did so, a pistol crackled. The slug scorched Cragin at a point corre-

sponding to the region he had checked up in trying to find how the missing Swede’s girl friend was built. He flattened, and another blast roared from the draped doorway. It nicked Cragin’s scalp; not badly, but enough to make him feel as though he had been slugged. He slumped. The switch snapped; but the sniper had overestimated his marks-

manship, otherwise he would have made better time than he did.

The detective had a pistol, but his hand first closed on the shotgun and he made the most of it.

He blasted an ounce and a quarter of pellets at the drapes. He heard feet pounding down the hallway. He let go another charge, and a third as he scram-

bled from his knees. But though the curtain was smouldering, and his own head still reeled, the back door slammed and clicked shut.

“You --- dirty ---!” yelled Cragin, charging into the dark-

ness. He flung aside the emptied shot-

gun, drew his .45, and jerked the door open.

He hosed the crest of the patio wall with slugs, but missed the dark figure that cleared it. Before he could scram-

ble after him, a motor thundered and with whining gears headed toward the Presidio.

“I’d better call the cops,” he muttered, patting his bleeding head.

A GOOD thought, but a shade need-

less. The shrilling of a police whis-

tle and the thudding of heavy feet on the paving in front told him the patrol-

man of the beat had arrived.

The door crashed open. Cragin read the accusation in the grim cop’s ruddy face, and saw him reach for his gun. It didn’t take a slide rule to dope out the answer.
Cragin, wallowing on the gore-spattered carpet, was a walking indictment for murder! His finger prints were on that damned shotgun. To hell with talking—find that blonde jane and get her to back up his story!

All in a damning, deadly second; and then the quick wits of a long line of quick thinking Cragins prompted his next move.

He raised his hands and backed to the doorjamb. His shoulder blade kicked the switch.

The pistol blast jabbed the newly made darkness. Cragin tore down the hall, ducked into a bedroom, and out a window. He landed in the adjoining yard as the cop tore into Phyllis' patio, cursing and blasting away at shadows.

Cragin lost no time in getting out of the yard. He made it as a prowler car braked to a screaming halt outside. Some neighbor had phoned in the alarm; but why the hell hadn't the shots that had killed Barrett drawn the police?

This, however, was no time for debate. Cragin made fast time to his parked car and headed for the insane tangle of streets on the uptown side of Twin Peaks.

Twin Peaks... that reminded him of Laura, somehow... but he remembered that he had forgotten to get her address. He had been certain that she'd call again to get her lover's letters, but this screwy mess left him sure of nothing at all.

It was fishy from the start. A prowler trying to knock him off: plus a suicide note, and a barefooted, headless man who had obviously kicked the shotgun trigger.

There was no pursuit. He edged into Golden Gate Park and at a fountain swabbed off the heaviest blood stains. Then he went to his office to study it all out.

"Find Phyllis Frost," he told himself. "She can tell me something about the mess. No dumb cluck of a correspondence school dick could follow a sharp number like Phyllis and her not notice it."

Obvious, that. So damn' obvious that chills raced down Cragin's spine. Laura's yarn was plumb loco, one hundred percent hooey!

She'd marched him into a set-up!

Then all the more reason for locating Phyllis. As Cragin calmed down, he began warming up again. He'd seen views of Phyllis Frost in the collection of a press photographer whose rooms were decorated with choice pictures of feminine forms without too much chiffon and other impediments.

He found Phyllis after half an hour on the telephone. It was simple: calling half a dozen night clubs, a beauty parlor, and chiming with a taxi driver stationed at one of her hangouts.

She was occupying the apartment of a girl friend who was out of town. A dame like Phyllis catches the beauty loving eye of San Francisco's hot-stuff belt entirely too much to keep in seclusion very long.

Presently Cragin was parking near her address. Until the cops identified his finger prints, he was safe enough. He had checked out to avoid immediate identification.

A negro maid with skin like pale walnut and a shape like the Queen of Sheba admitted him to the apartment. And then he saw that his ideas on well stacked women had to be revised.

Phyllis was tastefully arranged on a chaise longue, and boy, what she had draped there!

She was slim, except in spots where fullness is heartwarming. You know where they are... and her dark, long
of, had been invented before Phyllis had blossomed out to thrill a weary world. . . . He was fairly dazed trying to figure how much of the mellow curves up there beyond the inward sweep of her waist was illusion, and how much was warm loveliness. . . .

Then she smiled at the stunned look in his eyes and wondered why he was barging in.

ODDLY enough, Cragin found that his heart wasn't choking him, that he could speak and not just gurgle.

"Listen, darling. I want you to tell me a few things, quick. Your boy

"Please, darling," she murmured. "I'm sure you'll help me!"

lashed eyes were perilous pools of invitation.

Her olive-tinted flesh smiled through a haze of coral chiffon that made her look like a nymph emerging from a sea of roses. And those legs—! Cragin wondered if there wasn't some other word for them; the usual term, applying to what other woman stand on, put stockings on, and otherwise make use

friend, Barrett," he tactfully explained, "just had his head knocked off with a shotgun. How about that crackpot detective that's been following you and him around? Did Barrett have a jealous wife with a brother or something trying to avenge the family honor?"

Phyllis' dark eyes widened. For a moment her fingers gripped the arms of the chaise longue. Her heart must
have skipped a dozen beats. There was no agitation of the chiffon that half-veiled those brassiered breasts—not until she exhaled a long, shuddering sigh, and slumped back among the cushions, lashes blotting out her eyes.

That was shock—the real stuff, and no act.

Cragin was at her side as she recovered. He felt the violent tremor of her flesh, the pounding pulse at her wrist.

“Oh, good God,” she moaned, instinctively catching his hand. “I knew it—I told him—”

“Told who?” urged Cragin. “For hell’s sweet sake, pull yourself together—here, let me get you a drink—”

He reached for a decanter as she went on, “A big, shaggy haired Swede about Glenn’s size. I could see he was following me. But Glenn only laughed and said everyone stared at me anyway, and who wouldn’t follow me around? The man couldn’t be a detective, he was so dumb and open about it.

“Then he began trailing Glenn, who began to be worried. Only he laughed—it was kind of forced, I thought—saying the guy was probably just jealous of him.”

“And so what?” Cragin took the decanter from her and gargled three ounces without coughing. Seeing a woman on the verge of passing out always made him feel faint.

“So he told me to move in here, with Millie. The apple-knocker dick wouldn’t in a million years find me, he said. So I did.”

And Barrett, Cragin concluded, had gone back to the love nest to lie in wait for the crack-brained Swede. Only, he had slipped and the correspondence dick had nailed him, then planted a suicide, only to change the play and try to frame Cragin.

The fellow at least was shrewd enough to know that a phoney suicide is about the hardest thing in the world to put over convincingly.

It would be tough breaking the news to Laura, but that did not worry Cragin a great deal. Phyllis, while shocked and clinging, was not turning into a fountain of tears. She was frightened, rather than grieved—which wasn’t amazing. Hell, a girl like her would get fed up with bankers!

“When did you see Barrett the last time?” he wondered.

That was not entirely relevant, but Phyllis was too intoxicating for clear thought. The fragrance that billowed up from the slender curves to which the chiffon clung like a lover’s caress was giving Cragin desperate ideas. If she wasn’t wild about Barrett, the quicker she recovered from the shock, the better. . .

“Couple of days,” she answered.

“Careless sort of fellow,” admitted Cragin, rearranging the cushions.

That move drew Phyllis closer. The breath she inhaled preliminary to the sigh that came from her ankles pressed a pair of her most fascinating formations against Cragin’s shirt front. It was nice enough to improve on, and he did.

Phyllis was lonesome and desolate enough to relish a bit of sympathy. And she was frightened. Her dark eyes were appealing. She looked as if she wanted someone to protect her.

Cragin volunteered to take the case. He made a job of it.

“You’re hurting me,” she murmured, but her voice no longer revealed as much worry.

“They tell me I really don’t know my
own strength,” he modestly admitted.
She didn’t argue, so he did not bother
to prove that point. Finesse, as his
grandfather had explained, was more
effective than force.
Cragin kissed the hollow of her throat.
Her lips were simmering.
“Darling,” she murmured, “I know
you’ll help me. . .”
“Uuh. . . but right now. . . you
seem to get along. . . without much
guidance. . .”
Cragin was right; but his inten-
tness was a snare.
The door softly opened. As first he
thought it was Selina, the maid. But the
shapely negress could never have plas-
tered him with such vigor. A blackjack
whipped him behind the ear.

PHYL LIS’ outcry and accompanying
start jerked him clear of the main
force of the blow. He broke away from
the pale hands someone or other used
to sing about, and took a flying tackle
toward the thin, saturnine man whose
blow had nearly blotted him out.
“You damn’ double-crossing tramp!”
snarled the newcomer. “Glenn’s at the
morgue and you’re playing around.”
“Oh—Giles!” she cried. “I didn’t
know—”
“Shut up!” snapped Giles.
Which gave Cragin time to recover
and knock Giles smashing across an over-
stuffed chair.
“Listen, you hatchet-faced buzzard,”
he began. “The next time you jump at
conclusions, be sure you know what it’s
about! Who the hell are you anyway?”
“I’m Barrett’s partner,” growled Giles,
regaining his feet.
Phyllis’ glance was shifting from one
to the other.
“Get the hell out!” snapped Cragin.
“Before you’re hauled away. I’m in-
vestigating Barrett’s death—Golden
Gate Agency—”
Giles was impressed, but not in the
way Cragin had expected. The tall,
dark man’s hand moved like a snake. It
blossomed out with an automatic.
“Reach, you sap!” he commanded.
“Now turn around—or you get it!”
Cragin obeyed. He knew what was
coming, but the grim light in Giles’
black eyes left him no choice. He caught
a reflection of the blow in a mirror. He
dropped, but not in time to keep the
pistol barrel from smacking him across
the head.
And then he dropped faster.
Phyllis screamed. Her outcry was
abruptly choked. It might have been the
roaring thunder in his head which swal-
lowed up the sound as blackness envel-
oped him.
He was not out long, but the room
was empty when Cragin groped in the
whirling darkness and found the arm
of a chair.
He sat up, clambered to his knees; but
before he could gain his feet, he heard
gruff voices and the slamming of a door.
The lights blazed on. He was looking
into a pistol barrel.
A plainclothes dick from the central
station was behind the gun: Barney
Grogan, looking like Gibraltar on a
stormy night.
“Get ‘em!” shouted Cragin. They
just left—”
“Nuts!” growled Grogan. “Stick ‘em
out! Too bad, Cragin. But you left
your badge at Barrett’s house. And your
finger prints on that shotgun. Murder,
assaulting an officer, breaking and enter-
ing—”
“Listen, for hell’s sweet sake. I’m
telling you I didn’t kill him—it was sui-
cide—and they just kidnapped Barrett’s
sweetie—”
“Suicide!” Grogan snorted with his pursed lips. It really was more emphatic than any snort. His handcuffs flashed as he reached out to cage the murderer. A terrified cry distracted him.

“Oh—officer! Please don’t. If my husband ever finds out—can’t you arrest him somewhere else—”

LAURA DENTON, the vanished Swede’s girl friend, emerged from behind the lounge. She was peeled down to some extra sheer hose and a four-gore combination that left an entrancing expanse of dimpled white between her waist line and the luscious brassiere-fillers that quivered dizzyingly as she gasped for more breath.

Cragin didn’t know how she’s gotten there, and he cared less. All he knew was that Grogan’s attention was distracted by the enticing display.

The pop that followed was Cragin’s fist knocking the detective cold as an iceberg. Man and pistol thudded to the floor, one-two. But the apartment was getting hot.

“See you later!” said Cragin, diving for the door. “I think I know what happened to Erickson!”

He hadn’t the least idea, but he had no time for courtesy. Laura, however, blocked his retreat.

“Wait! I know where they’re going—that awful Frost woman and—”

“The hell you do! Tell me—quick!”

“Just a second—” Laura swivelled back to behind the lounge, emerged with an ensemble and a hat, both of which she put in place as she explained, “I was coming up here to investigate her myself—I was afraid she’d. . . sidetrack you and you’d never get any evidence—but you got here just ahead of me, so I waited until I saw a big Cadillac pull up. Then a dark look-

ing man came down with that nice looking girl, I went up—”

“To see if I’d been—sidetracked?” Cragin cut in.

“Well—anyhow, I wondered what’d happened to you, and I found you laid out with your head busted, and then I heard that big ruffian break in, so I hid and peeled down. To give you a chance to escape and carry on with the mystery—but what did happen to Gustav?”

“Where in hell did the Cadillac go?” he demanded.

“I heard him tell the chauffeur to drive like hell to Pier Number Seventeen—”

“If I had a chauffeur,” Cragin flung over his shoulder, “I’d tell him the same. Run up to my office and wait.”

He dashed down to the street, hailed a cab, and in a moment he was high-tailing out toward the Marina. It was still a murderous contradiction, but no longer as obscure as it had been. It all depended on why Phyllis had been taken in hand by Giles, whoever that louse really was!

TWENTY minutes later Cragin was on foot, and slipping through the darkness along the Marina. On the way out, he had been piecing the tangle together. He knew that Barrett’s Silver Queen, was moored at Pier Seventeen—millionaire’s row at the yacht harbor.

If that dirty rat of a Giles was going to hijack Barrett’s boat and girl friend at one crack, he had another guess coming.

Cragin heard the whirring of a winch—and that’s not spelled with an “e.” They were hoisting the mudhook. Someone was in a hurry for a midnight cruise.

He took a header from the pier and swam out toward the Silver Queen. He didn’t have a Chinaman’s chance, but
he was desperate. Unless he followed it through, he'd have a murder rap sticking like a dollar's worth of fly paper.

But luck was with Cragin. A launch was sputtering out from the pier. It was heading toward the Silver Queen. To board her, they'd have to use the Jacob's ladder. He lengthened his strokes. The angle of approach favored him; and as the launch cut in, confirming his hunch, he swam under water.

The launch shifted to parallel the yacht. He emerged. The beam of the headlight for a moment was leaving a lane of darkness between him and the side of the Silver Queen.

Whatever was above, he had to risk it. Another powerful stroke, and he was clambering up the ladder, wondering at what instant a pistol or a belaying pin would put quotes to his last speech.

But the approach of the launch again favored him. Two of the crew, leaning over the rail to cast a line, did not perceive the dripping boarder. Cragin ducked to the shadow of a ventilator as the launch raked the side of the Silver Queen. For the moment, he was in the clear.

Barrett tried to go for his armpit, but his arms were too full of Phyllis.
From cover he recognized Phyllis. Giles was leading her to the cabin. Her face was tense and worried. She didn’t seem to know whether it was a pleasure trip, or an aquatic version of a gangster’s one way ride.

Neither did Cragin; but when the *Silver Queen* put out into the channel, he worked his way to a port hole, and saw that everyone was in for a surprise. He didn’t blame Phyllis for weeping as she entered the salon.

Glenn Barrett, wearing a blatantly checkered suit, emerged from a deep chair to greet her. His head was quite in place, and he seemed none the worse for his suicide; but he walked with a stiff legged limp.

“If I ever get my boots on the seat of his pants,” muttered Cragin, “he’ll limp some more, the damn’ false alarm!”

Cragin, however, was still on the spot. Even though Barrett had not been murdered, someone had, and Grogan would turn San Francisco inside out to avenge that clout on the jaw.

“Oh—Glenn—my God,” Phyllis was dizzy and reeling.

Barrett laughed and told her someone had given her the wrong number. Giles stroked his chin and grinned knowledgeably as he cast Phyllis a reassuring glance: he did not have to tell her that there was an easy way for her to insure his discretion. The glance became appraising as it caressed the long, rippling sweep from her knees, northbound.

“Divvy up, little girl, and he’ll never know about that bird in your apartment,” was what Giles was conveying; but Phyllis was still too flabbergasted to assimilate so many ideas.

“I told you we’d go to Honduras with the Merchants & Traders Bank stuffed in my pocket,” he said, catching her in his arms. “As soon as we are well out at sea, this boat will blow up. We’ll be rescued, by arrangement, and the wreck-age will block the trail.

“In the meanwhile, here we are—with Glenn Barrett supposedly murdered in our love nest—”

The explanation was cut short. Cragin needed no further eavesdropping. He ploughed into the salon, jerking his pistol from his water logged holster.

Giles whirled, reaching for his hip. Barrett, arms filled with Phyllis, tried to go for his armpit but instead got snagged on curves of no earthly use in a battle.

That gave Cragin the breaks. Giles’ pistol spurted fire. The detective jerked aside, blasting one from the hip. The slug caught Giles amidships, knocking him against a bulkhead. When Barrett found his gun, he was looking into Cragin’s fuming weapon.

The banker’s ruddy face became the color of a weathered sail: slate gray and dingy. His hands rose. Phyllis’ eyes widened, but she did not move. Her expression changed. . . horror was blotting out her loveliness. . . her sudden pallor left her red mouth a grotesque blot.

And then a hoarse voice from without took command.

“Silver Queen, ahoy! Harbor police!”

A warning shot crackled. The engines reversed. The yacht shuddered, checked her speed, wallowed in the choppy waves.

Grogan, red faced and grim, led the boarding party.

“Where the hell’d you come from?” grumbled Cragin, surrendering his pistol. “I told you I’d get them—watch it!”

Grogan whirled, pistol ablaze; but Barrett cleared the door. He went over the side in a rattle of lead. The police cutter circled the *Silver Queen*. 
“Sound off, Cragin!” snapped Grogan.

“It all depends on your dredging Barrett from the bay,” was the answer. If the seat of his pants is riddled with shotgun slugs, he’s the guy that killed a Swede by the name of Erickson—”

“The hell!” exclaimed Grogan. “That’s what that blonde jane was telling the sergeant about, which is what sent us after you.” Then, to Phyllis, “What do you know about this?”

“How about raiding the Merchants & Traders?” Cragin cut in.

Phyllis sighed, sank into a chair, explained, “Glenn and the rest of the directors were looting the bank by lending each other money without security. Only, Glenn knew there’d be the devil to pay, so he arranged to clean the vaults and check out before the bank examiners rounded up everyone. They were playing the market and were all caught short—”

“You mean with their pants down?” Grogan cut in.

“Er. . . . yes,” admitted Phyllis.

“And speaking of pants,” demanded Cragin, as the body of Barrett was hauled over the side.

“Somebody’s husband wafted some shot right into the seat of ’em,” said the patrolman of the waterfront detail.

“And that,” said Cragin, “clears me of murder. Barrett is the guy I sifted lead at as he escaped after trying to frame me for murder.”

“That’d be none the worse for some more explaining,” challenged Grogan, frowning.

It’s this way,” Cragin elaborated. “Barrett wasn’t griped when a big Swede trailed Phyllis around. But he seemed to be worried when he himself was followed—which is cock-eyed.

“Furthermore, the missing Erickson answered an ad, was hired by his unknown employer’s secretary, phoned in his reports, and got his pay by mail. Hell, there’s nothing to it: Barrett was the guy that hired him!

“Just judging from what he spilled to Phyllis, he put on a suit that matched Erickson’s, and knocked off the correspondence dick, who was about his size. And who’d look for Barrett the embezzler?

“Just frisk this boat and I bet you’ll find enough jack to block a hay baler!”

“Begorra ye may be right,” admitted Grogan.

Cragin turned to Phyllis. “Seeing that you were kidnapped, and also surprised to see Barrett, you’re in the clear. I’ll hammer Grogan’s face in if he says I’m wrong.”

“Carry on wit’ yer work,” was Grogan’s envious response. “But ye’d better lock the door and keep that blonde sweetie outa sight! Or else she’ll be wantin’ to see if ye’re bein’ sidetracked.

“The chances are,” promised Phyllis, “he will be—”

—

“THE THIN DAME” by Robert A. Garron
will appear in our May issue
BEN MANNHEIMER was a big shot in Hollywood. He was president of Paralta Pictures. But I'd never had much love for him. So when he pulled up a chair and sat down at my table, I wasn't very cordial.

It was in Sardi's chromium-plated eatery. I was having a midnight sandwich and a snort of Vat 69. Mannheimer said: "Hello, Turner. How's the best private dick in Hollywood?"

I made a flying leap, tackled her.
Dan Turner insists that he is a detective, not a blackmailer. Yet when the dynamite is put under the hood of the car... he looks for the girl...

By ROBERT LESLIE BELLEM

He had a proposition on his mind. I could tell it from the furtive way he was acting. I said: "I'm okay, thanks. If you've got anything important on your chest, spill it."

He didn't seem to mind the chill I gave him. He grinned it off. "How would you like to make five grand?" he asked me.

I said: "You must want somebody croaked."

He looked a little startled. "No. Not quite that. I want you to get something on William Snowbring for me. Something I can hold over his head to make him drop that lawsuit against Paralta. Frame him with a skirt, or..."

I gave him a hard look. "Lawsuit, hell. It's Snowbring's wife you're interested in. Everybody's talking about the way you're running around with her. You're trying to frame him into a divorce."

Mannheimer shook his head. "You're wrong, Turner. I'm not playing Snowbring's wife, no matter what people say. But I am worried about that suit."

"No soap, Ben," I cut in. "I'm a detective, not a blackmailer artist."
He tried to argue by flashing a wad of geetus under my nose. But I waved him away. Pretty soon he got up and left. To me, the place smelled better when he was gone.

As I finished my Scotch, I thought about Mannheimer’s trouble with William Snowbring, the former star. The way things stood, Snowbring had a good chance of nicking Paralta for a million clams ... which would toss Mannheimer into receivership.

This Snowbring ham had been a big name once. But booze had bested him. A few months ago, while on a bender in Mexico, he had married a dance-hall señorita named Ysobel Ybarra, a brunette cutie with no talent but lots of ambition. She wanted to get into pictures but Snowbring objected. The newspapers had made plenty of headlines out of their romance.

Then Ben Mannheimer had released a feature production that burlesqued Snowbring’s amorous antics in a damned malicious way. Seeing a chance to collect some heavy lettuce, Snowbring was now threatening to sue Paralta Pictures for defamation of character.

Personally, I was hoping the ex-star would collect. That Paralta movie had been plenty raw. Mannheimer should never have produced it.

I paid my check, walked out of Sardi’s. The intersection of Hollywood and Vine was deserted in the yellow wisps of midnight fog. I had parked my jalopy around the corner on Vine. I strolled toward it. Then, suddenly, I said: “What the hell ... !” and started to run.

Some drunken lug was climbing into my coupe, stepping on the starter. A street-light sifted across his once-famous profile. He was William Snowbring, the very guy Ben Mannheimer and I had been discussing. Snowbring was fried to the ears, weaving back and forth behind the wheel.

I yelled: “Hey!” and made a lunge for my running-board. But Snowbring was too quick for me. He gunned the gall-bladder out of my motor. My coupe whooshed away like a red-hot comet.

I swore. Then I noticed another coupe parked just behind the spot where mine had been. It was the same make and model.

I yanked out my flash, sprayed the light on this other jalopy’s registration certificate. Just as I expected, it was made out to William Snowbring at an address in Hollywood Heights.

I realized what had happened. Snowbring, being ginned to the whiskers, had mistaken my pile of iron for his own; had driven off in the wrong go-chariot.

Well, if his key worked my car, I figured mine would operate his. I started to crawl behind the steering-wheel. I intended to chase him, make him trade heaps when I caught him.

But before I could step on the starter, things happened.

From an alleyway behind me I heard a yell: high, shrill, rasping. It was a woman’s scream of jittery fear.

I whirled. I saw a hard-looking red-haired jane struggling in the arms of a big, tough hombre. He had one hairy paw over her kisser to muffle her noise. With his other hand he was trying to hold her still.

I recognized the guy, although he had never met me. He was Lew Devine, a grafting ten-per-center; a third-grade actor’s agent who had once been Ben Mannheimer’s partner in the early days of Hollywood.
I didn’t know the auburn-haired floozie. But she was putting up a whale of a scrap. As she squirmed in Devine’s grasp, the front of her frock got torn open. One breast popped out like a luscious white melon. As an old connoisseur of shemale charms, I’m testifying this baby had something on the ball. Her map wasn’t so hot. She had flat nostrils, gold teeth. But her figure was all to the mustard.

She was trying to kick Devine where it would do the most good. Her tight skirt was up above her knees, showing about ten inches of smooth thighs. Her legs were beaucoup nifty and then some.

I heard Devine snarling: “Pipe down! Let him blow! You want us to get caught?” His free hand slid forward over her bare shoulder. He grabbed soft white flesh. He squeezed.

By that time I reached the alley. I sailed in. I popped a cargo of knuckles against Devine’s sniffer. He staggered backward, turned the jane loose.

She was in my way. I swept her aside. By accident my hand touched nude flesh. It was warm, satiny. But I didn’t have time to think about that. I plunged past her, met Devine with a poke that should have put him under ether for a week.

He had a chin like the front end of a steam roller. He ate that punch as if it had been tapioca. He came back for an encore.

He swung at me. His fist took me on the shoulder, spun me off-balance. I ducked away from him. The red-haired floozie slid by me, her left breast dancing and swinging out of the torn frock as she ran. She dived at the Snowbring coupe, raised the hood.

I wondered what the hell she was doing. My attention was away from Lew Devine for an instant.

That was all he needed. He brought out a blackjack, bopped me over the noggin. I saw a million lights. I went down, made a dent in the pavement with my face.

Over the buzzing in my ears I heard Devine say: “For God’s sake, come on before he wakes up! He don’t know either of us . . .” Then I heard running footfalls fading into silence.

AFTER a while I managed to push myself to my gams. I had a knot on the back of by skull the size of a full moon. I had staggered to the mouth of the alley. There was no trace of the gold-toothed frill or the ten-per-center who had tickled me with his blackjack. They were gone.

Then a recollection came to me. I remembered what Devine had said to the girl, just as I was about to climb into Snowbring’s coupe: “Pipe down! Let him blow! You want us to get caught?”

Suddenly I got the meaning of his words. I leaped for the parked jalopy, flashed my light on it. The hood had been opened by the flat-nosed cutie. I saw two loose wires.

I traced them back to the driver’s seat. I pulled up the cushion. Sure enough, there was a triplet of dynamite sticks attached to a wired detonator.

“Damn!” I whispered. Everything was clear to me now. The dynamite had been connected to the car’s ignition system. By stepping on the starter, the circuit would be closed and the fireworks turned loose.

And I had damned near stepped on the starter, blasted myself into the Green Pastures!
The red-haired bimbo had saved my life by yelling. Then, while I had battled Lew Devine, she had yanked the wires apart.

I set fire to a gasper to steady my nerves. I decided I'd better find William Snowbring, warn him that Devine was after his scalp.

I pulled the dynamite from under the seat, made sure there were no other explosives in the coupe. Then I re-connected the ignition system, slid in behind the wheel. I headed for Snowbring's home in Hollywood Heights.

Twelve minutes later I screeched to a stop in front of his house. I dashed up the steps, rang the bell.

Pretty soon the door opened. A sleepy-looking brunette filly put the drowsy focus on me. She said: "What ees eet you weesh?" with a chili-pepper accent.

For a second I couldn't answer her. I was too busy getting an eyeful of her Latin loveliness. She was wearing a negligee three shades thinner than a cobweb. There was a soft light behind her. I could see almost everything she owned in the way of curves. She possessed plenty.

I mean she had what it takes. Her body was the silhouette of a bachelor's dream. Her hips had just the proper flare. Her thighs lilted into legs that were almost too good to be real. I could see her breasts straining outward through the garment's sheerness, like twin invitations. Her shoulders and throat were creamy enough to eat with a spoon.

Then I got a grip on myself. This was no time for the appreciation of feminine charms. I said: "I want to see Mr. Snowbring right away. Pronto!"

The black-haired mamma said: "I am verree sorree. My hosban' ees not at home. I do not know when to expect heem."

I STIFFENED. So this was Ysobel Ybara, the dance-hall señorita who had married Snowbring in Mexico while he was plastered! I pinned my lamps on her again. The more I saw of her, the less I blamed Snowbring for falling. Or Ben Mannheimer either, if it was true that Ben was playing her. A dame like that could expectorate in my cuspidor any old afternoon.

Maybe I stared at her too long. She frowned, backed into the house. "You weel have to see my hosban' some other time," she said. She started to close the door in my face.

I said: "Wait a second, sweetness. This is damned important. Somebody tried to cool him off tonight. I think I'll wait for him, warn him."

Her dark eyes opened wide. Dazed fear slid across her beautiful face. "You say—you say somebody have try to keel my hosban' . . . ?" she gasped. Then, before I knew it, she had me by the arm. She dragged me inside the house. "I theenk I know where to find heem! Eet ees a night-club where he spend moch of hees time. I weel take you there at once!" she panted.

That was a break!

And I had another break coming, too. She still clung to my wrist as she raced upstairs. There was panic in every move she made. She seemed afraid I might leave her. She was trembling to beat hell.

She hauled me into her boudoir. She wriggled out of her negligee, right there in front of me. I got a thump out of what I saw. Her naked legs twinkled as she ran to a closet. She yanked down a dress, slipped it over her head
and smoothed it over brassiere and step-ins.

It was a swell show while it lasted. Then the frock cascaded down over her like a silken waterfall, hiding her breasts, her hips, her thighs . . .

She slipped her bare feet into spike-heeled pumps, grabbed up a light coat. "Come quick!" she whispered. She dragged me down a rear stairway, out through a back door. We pelted to a three-car garage behind the terraced yard.

She opened the sliding door, switched on a weak light. She started for a Rolls roadster. Then she tensed. She stared at a coupe in the end stall.

"Et ees my hosban's coupe! He must have joost come home!" she gasped.

I took one gander at that jalopy. My heart jumped six ways from Sunday. It was my own buzz-buggy; the one Snowbring had driven by mistake!

I said: "For God's sake!" A hunch kicked me in the hip pockets. I hauled open the coupe's door on the driver's side.

My guess was correct. William Snowbring's corpse tumbled smack into my face.

I jumped backward. His body hit the garage floor with a squidgy sprawl. His throat had been slashed from ear to ear. Fresh blood was all over him. It was a nasty mess.

I didn't need a dream-book to reconstruct what must have happened. Snowbring must have come straight home after grabbing my coupe by error. And someone had tailed him, croaked him
here in his own garage before he could climb out of the car!

Things began to click in my think-tank. I remembered Lew Devine and the gold-toothed dame in that alley behind Sardi’s. I had lost a lot of time hauling the dynamite out of Snowbring’s coupe before driving out here to Hollywood Heights. In that period, Devine would have had plenty of time to reach Snowbring’s garage.

There was one thing in my favor now. Lew Devine didn’t know that I had recognized him in Sardi’s alley. He had said as much to his red-haired girlfriend as they lammed. Well, the joke was on Devine. I knew his identity.

A SOUND brought me out of my thoughts. It was Snowbring’s Spick spouse. She let out a bleating yelp. “Madre de Dios—l!” she screamed. Then her knees went out from under her.

I caught her as she fell. She was out cold. I said: “Damn it to hell!” and lifted her in my arms. I managed to switch out the garage light, close the sliding door, snap the padlock behind me. Then I carried her back to the main house.

I raced up the rear stairway with her, dumped her on the bed in her rose-lighted boudoir. There was a phone alongside the bed. I snatched it, dialed my friend Dave Donaldson of the homicide squad.

His voice growled: “Hello. Who is it and why?”

I said: “This is Dan Turner. I’m at William Snowbring’s house in Hollywood Heights. Snowbring is deader than last Leap Year. Murdered. Yeah. Somebody helped themselves to a slice of his throat. And I think I know who did it.”

Donaldson yelped: “For the love of—! Who—”

“I’m not saying anything yet,” I snapped back. “I’ve got a personal grudge against the guy I suspect. He’s a ten-per-center around Hollywood. He almost let me blow myself into a jigsaw puzzle. I want the pleasure of nabbing him personally. You dash out here to Snowbring stab with a stiff-wagon and a medical examiner. I’ll phone you if I nail the bozo I’m after. I’ve got to find out where he lives.”

Dave said: “See here! You can’t do that! You’re not a regular cop! You—”

“Nuts,” I told him and hung up.

I took another squint at the Mex dame on the bed. She was still in a dead faint. I didn’t have time to toss water in her puss, try to bring her around. I turned, lammed downstairs, piled myself into Snowbring’s coupe where I had parked it at the curb.

I headed for Western Avenue.

At Hollywood and Western I dived into an all-night druggery, thumbed a phone-directory. Lew Devine wasn’t listed. I looked through the city directory, found the address where he lived. It was an apartment-house just off Sunset. I bought a fresh pack of gaspers, slammed myself back into the coupe and took off.

No traffic-signals were working at that late hour. And I didn’t bother with boulevard stops. I made time. Pretty soon I pelted into the building where Devine hung out.

I took the steps three at a time, reached the second floor. I came to his door.

I reached inside my coat, hauled out the .32 automatic I always carry in a shoulder-holster. I pointed it ahead of me and knocked with my left mitt.
For a minute, nothing happened but silence. Then the door opened. I shoved my roscoe forward and said: “Bullets don’t taste very good. You want a mouthful, Mr. Devine...?”

The last words stalled on the end of my tongue. And no wonder!

IT WASN’T the ten-per-center who had opened up for me. It was a dame. It was the red-haired, gold-toothed floozie whose yell had saved me from setting off those firecrackers a while before.

Her wide nostrils flattened as she drew a gasping breath of surprise. She opened her kisser. “Y-you...!”

She was wearing peek-a-boo pajamas that didn’t hide very much of her these and those. Her hand went to her left breast, mashed it flat against her heart.

I said: “Yeah, me.” I shoved her backward, entered the room, closed the door behind me. I kept her covered with my rod. I said: “Where’s Devine? I want him.”

“He—he isn’t here.”

“Oh, no? Then where the hell is he?”

“I d-don’t know.”

I put my palm flat against her face and pushed. I said: “Don’t hand me that stuff, sister. Listen. Devine’s a murderer and you know it. But I won’t drag you into the mess if I can avoid it. I owe you a good turn. You saved my bacon tonight when you yelled at me and stopped me from setting off that dynamite in Snowbring’s coupe.”

She got ivory-pale. “I don’t know what you’re talking about!”

I said: “Okay. You’re dumb. You don’t know the score. That suits me. Just tell me where to find Lew Devine. That will let you out. But make it snappy before I get sore and change the color of your eyes.”

“I—I don’t know where he is. I haven’t seen him since we ran away and left you in that alley...”

I grinned at her. “So you admit that much, do you? Well, that ties you up nice and tight, baby. It’s a confession that you had something to do with the dynamite planted in Snowbring’s jalopy. You knew it was there or you wouldn’t have screamed at me, warned me.”

Her shoulders slumped. “All right. You win. I was in on the dynamite deal. I admit it. But it ain’t such a tough rap for Lew and me, after all. Nobody got killed.”

I said: “The hell it’s not a tough rap. It’s a hanging job and you know it. Snowbring is dead. His throat was cut in his garage a while ago. Add that up on your fingers, kiddo.”

That’s where I made a mistake. I shouldn’t have spilled my guts so soon. The red-haired bimbo stiffened. A pulse stood out on her throat. She said: “Snowbring... dead...? Then Lew must have followed him and—” Suddenly she closed up like a clam with lockjaw.

I realized I’d put my foot in it. Now she wouldn’t tell me where to find her ten-per-center boy-friend. Not when he was facing a murder rap. By telling her Snowbring had been rubbed out, I had put a cork in her kisser.

Something had to be done about it. I holstered my gat, grabbed her around the waist, pinned her arms to her sides. I said: “Either you’re going to talk or you’ll wish to God you had it!”

She squirmed, wriggled, tried to get away from me. Her body was warm and soft through the thin pajamas. It sent my temperature up seven degrees.

I said: “Sweetheart, you’d better talk damned fast before I lose control of my-
They tell me I’m hard to handle when that happens.”

I slapped her hard across both cheeks, sending her reeling back against the sofa. I hopped after her fast; she expected to get muzzled up and cowered away from me. “No! No. . .!”

I clamped my mouth over her lips, and when I kiss a jane, she stays kissed a hell of a long while. This time was no exception. And I was plenty rough. I fed her everything I knew in the way of technic.

I figured she’d realize what was likely to happen next. Maybe she’d break down and tell me what I wanted to know before I went too far. But she was hardboiled. She could absorb a lot of that kind of punishment. She seemed to like cave-man stuff and before I knew it she was dishing it right back at me, boiling hot!

Right then I forgot my original purpose. I got wrapped up in my work. I poured a dozen more kisses into her; fumbled around until I had her shoulders bare. I stroked her satin-smooth skin until she quivered.

She started to moan. Her mouth pressed against mine, clung there. . . .

After a while she grinned at me. She said: “Well, you’re getting nowhere fast, ain’t you, Big Shot?”

I said: “Maybe. But I’m not through with you yet. I just went soft on you there for a while. I know some other tricks. You don’t know how real tough I can be . . . yet!”

“Torture-stuff, eh?” she said. “Well, you needn’t bother. I’ve been thinking things over. I’m going to come clean with you.”

I said: “Oh! So you’ve thought things over, huh?”

She giggled up at me. “You can make a gal think, Handsome.” Then she got serious. “Listen; I know when I’m in a spot. And I’m in one now—up to my eyebrows. To hell with Lew Devine. I can’t worry about what happens to him. I want to make a deal with you if you’re willing.”

I said: “What kind of a deal?”

Her eyes narrowed. “A while back, you said you owed me a good turn because I warned you away from that dynamite. You said you’d keep me clear of the mess if I told you where to find Devine.”

“Yeah,” I said. “And it still goes. Where is he?”

She said: “Look. I’m shooting the works. Lew Devine planted the dynamite in Snowbring’s car. I was his lookout while he did it.”

“I know that much. Get down to cases.”

She said: “Wait. You’ve accused Devine of cutting Snowbring’s throat. I wouldn’t know about that. I wasn’t with him. After you got conked in the alley behind Sardi’s, I came straight home here to Devine’s apartment. A little later, he phoned me. He said he’d be home in about an hour.” She looked at a clock on the desk at the other side of the room. “That means he ought to be showing up pretty soon.”

I got to my feet. “Are you leveling with me?”

“Sure I’m leveling. I’m trying to save my own skin. You can wait here for Lew. You can trap him. He won’t suspect that anybody’s here except me. That’s where he’ll be surprised. I’ll be gone.”

“Oh, yeah?”

She said: “Yes. I’ve shot square with you. Now live up to your promise. Turn me loose. Let me lam. Then you can wait here for Devine to show up.”
“Where’s Devine?” I demanded. “I want him!”

I figured she was telling the truth. But I wasn’t taking any chances. I said: “Baby, if you haven’t lied to me I’ll guarantee to keep your skirts clean. On the other hand, I never trust dames.” Then I made a loose fist, hit her on the point of the jaw.

She went out cold.

I LIFTED her, carried her to the bathroom, put her on the floor with a bathrobe under her to keep off the chill. I locked her in. Then I went to the front room, dialed the Snowbring house in Hollywood Heights.

A copper answered the phone. I said: “Is Lieutenant Donaldson still there?”

The cop said: “Yeah.” Then, in a minute, Dave got on the wire. He said: “Well?”

“This is Dan Turner. I’m in the apartment of a guy named Lew Devine, on Sunset.” I told him the address.

“So what?” he growled.

I said: “So get out here as fast as wheels can bring you. We’re setting a trap.” Then I hung up before he could ask a lot of unnecessary questions.

I set fire to a gasper, settled down to wait. If everything worked all right and we caught Devine, I intended turning the gold-toothed floozie loose. But if
she had fed me a bum steer, I had her where I wanted her. I felt pretty good.

I started pacing the floor. Donaldson was a hell of a long while getting there. Just for practice I decided to go through the drawers of the desk over on the other side of the room. I figured I might find something that would tell me why Lew Devine wanted to murder Snowbring.

There wasn't much in the first drawer except old papers, receipted bills. But in the lower drawer I saw an envelope. I opened it, pulled out a legal-size paper. I said: "What the hell!"

It was an agent's ten-per-cent contract: one of Devine's iron-clad forms. It was all made out, signed, witnessed. I looked at the signatures. I felt as if I'd been slugged in the mush.

Just then somebody knocked at the front door. A voice said: "Open up, Turner. It's Donaldson."

I leaped forward, let him in. He said: "What's this dope about a trap?"

"We're waiting for Lew Devine," I said. "But I just discovered something that may change my theory. I—"

Dave's eyes had been glancing around the room. Now he interrupted me. He pointed to a closet in a far corner. He said: "What the hell is that stuff trickling from under the door? Looks like blood to me."

I stared.

There was a thickish red fluid seeping out on the floor. It hadn't been there a while ago. My throat got tight. I cursed, rammed myself at the closet, yanked it open.

A propped-up corpse slumped out of the tiny space, landed at my feet with a bouncing thud.

It was Lew Devine. There was a stab-wound over his heart. He was already getting stiff with rigor mortis. Blood had welled down from his chest, finally puddled out under the closet door.

I said: "Damn! I wonder if that red-haired bimbo knew he was in here? Was she horsing me along—?" The words choked against my goozle. I whirled, slammed myself at the locked bathroom door. I wrenched it open.

THE gold-toothed floozie was gone.

So was the bathrobe I had placed under her. A window was open. It led to a fire-escape outside.

I saw something tiny, yellow, on the floor. I grabbed it up—and I had the answer to my puzzle.

I clutched Donaldson's arm, hauled him out of the apartment. "Come on, Dave! We're headed for Ben Mannheimer's house in Beverly!" I panted. "What for?" he lumbered down the stairs after me.

I said: "Shut up. Don't ask questions. I'll just tell you this much. I found a contract in Lew Devine's desk a minute ago. It was with Mannheimer's Paralta outfit. Let's get started!"

We bounced into Donaldson's official jalopy. I drove; and I didn't spare the carburetor. I souped that bus to eighty-seven; made it to Mannheimer's place in Beverly Hills in twenty minutes flat.

Dave and I sprinted for Mannheimer's front door. I told him to be quiet. I fumbled with the skeleton keys I always carry; found one that worked the lock. We went inside; sneaked up the stairs.

I saw a closed bedroom door with light trickling around its edges. Voices came from inside the room. A dame was saying: "I've got to have your copy of that contract, Ben! I didn't have time to find Devine's copy. But I'll go back and get it later. They've got to be destroyed, I tell you! Otherwise I'll be caught—"

Mannheimer's low-pitched growl
broke in. "To hell with you! Beat it. I don't want to be mixed up in this. You shouldn't have come here."

The female voice snapped back hysterically. "Listen! You promised to make me a star when Snowbring was dead. Well, he's dead. I killed him. And I had to kill Devine too, when I learned that damned Turner dick knew his identity. Now you've got to see me through! You talked me into this, and—"

I didn't wait for any more. I smashed into the door with my shoulder, went lunging into the room. Donaldson followed me. I saw Ben Mannheimer in bed. A frill was standing beside him. It was the red-haired, gold-toothed floozie who had escaped from the bathroom in Devine's flat.

She screamed, started for the open window. The bathrobe she was wearing flew out behind. Naked white legs flashed. Then the loose robe tripped her. She stumbled, landed in a heap of flailing limbs and white girl-flesh. I made a flying leap, wrapped my arms around her thrashing thighs, mashed her soft body flat with my weight. I yelled: "Put the nippers on her, Dave! You heard her confession!"

Donaldson leaned over, clicked the cuffs on her wrists. I yanked her upright. From my pocket I pulled the tiny gold object I'd picked off Devine's bathroom floor. It was a thin gold shell made to fit over the front tooth.

I pried the red-haired cutie's mouth open, flicked out the three other gold shells she was wearing. Her real teeth gleamed white, perfect. The contour of her mouth was changed.

She tried to bite my fingers. I whammed her across the kiss. Then I reached up in her nostrils, pulled out the tiny wire shapes that made her nose look flat, widened. Her sniffer resumed its natural shape—straight, aquiline.

And last I yanked the red wig from her head. It was fastened pretty tight. I pulled some of her real hair away with it. Her short black hair.

I said: "Now you look more natural, Ysobel Ybarra—or rather, Mrs. William Snowbring!"

Donaldson stared. He said: "What in God's name...?"

I said: "The whole thing is very simple. Ben Mannheimer, here, was scared of Snowbring on account of that threatened lawsuit. He wanted Snowbring out of the way. He started going around with Mrs. Snowbring; told her he'd make a movie star of her.

"But Snowbring didn't want his wife on the screen. So then Mannheimer told the dame she ought to kill her hubby. Isn't that right, Mannheimer?"

THE Paralta president was green around the fringes. He choked: "Y-yes. But I didn't—"

I said: "No. You didn't have anything to do with the actual murder of Snowbring. His wife took care of that. She had hooked up with an agent, Lew Devine. Devine got her a contract with Paralta. I found it in his desk. Here it is." I flashed the document I had found in the ten-per-center's drawer.

Donaldson looked fuddled. "I still don't see—"

I said: "Mrs. Snowbring wanted her husband out of the road so that she could be a star. The publicity she'd get as the widow of a famous murder-victim would put her over. She persuaded Lew Devine to help her. She disguised herself dropped her phoney

(Continued on page 110)
I said, "Don't wrap it, pal, I'm only going upstairs." The bottle fit snug in my right hip pocket. Outside the wind was blowing hell for leather; a man had to duck to keep the shirt on his back. It was nasty, with a fine mist that was trying to be snow and damned near doing it. Six steps to the corner, a half block to the building entrance. Another two steps and I might have made it, but the glass door of the building swung open and one hundred

Wherever Mike Cockrell goes, dames—and trouble—practically fall into his lap. And Mike has a weakness for helping dames out of trouble, especially the nasty kind of murder he finds this time.
THE COLD

and ten pounds of dynamite came hurtling out.

Me, Mike Cockrell, I weigh close to two hundred in my red flannels. You'll get an idea of the babe's speed when I tell you she crashed into my chest and knocked me down. Of course she bounced a little too. There we were, both

By
CARY MORAN

At arm's length a .45 makes a hell of a hole. It knocked him clear across the room.
of us on the sidewalk sitting there like a pair of fools staring.

Her skirt was in her lap. I'm forty-four years old but I never miss a sight like that. She was little but round. Her hose were well filled, her legs plenty white against the wet sidewalk. She was on her feet wriggling down into her skirt before I could snap out of it.

I got up, felt something warm trickling down the rear side of my pants, remembered the Scotch. I said, "Jeez! I hope that's blood."

Her purse had come open and she was scrambling for its scattered contents. I beat her to the purse. It was upside down on the sidewalk. When I picked it up one crumpled glove was in a wad beneath it. A glove and something else. A gun.

The little dame gasped, snatched the whole outfit from me. The glove still lay on the sidewalk. She shoved the cheap little automatic back into the purse, stared at me and turned hurriedly away. I never saw eyes as frantic before, eyes that brimmed with as much human fear. I hollered, "Hey, here's your glove!" But she was nearly to the corner.

I stood there for a minute staring after her, the glove in my hand. It was black—and damp. Only the dampness wasn't water. It rubbed off on my hands, left sticky, red splotches. It was blood.

I hobbled into the building, caught the elevator and let myself into the office. A piece at a time I began dragging the broken bottle from my pocket. Maybe I swore a little. That's a sad place to have a cut, and the suit cost twenty-two fifty!

I ALWAYS keep extra clothes at the office. I'd just crawled into another pair of pants, come out into the main room and eased down into a chair when the door banged open.

She stood there staring around, face white, rouge and lipstick standing out like paint on a clown's face. Then she closed the door and came in, moving like a sleep walker.

I shifted, said sourly, "You ought to be careful running around on slick sidewalks with your head down. You damned near killed me!"

Her face got even whiter. "Killed you?" Voice weak, shaky. "I never saw you before! Listen—"

She was right. She was a little heavier than the kid that hit me downstairs, she was dressed different. She wore a long kidskin coat and kept it tightly pressed about her body. Now she leaned over the desk and the coat fell partly open at the front. From the glimpse I had of rounded breasts I figured she wasn't wearing much more than that coat!

"Are you Mike Cockrell, the detective?"

"Yeah, who are you?" I was still looking at her breasts. Across the white slope of the left mound were three long scratches. One, the middle one, still oozed blood.

Her voice was steadier now. "I'm Corinne. You know, the dancer. I'm doing a specialty at Manning's."

Yeah. I'd seen her. Did a bubble dance at Manning's joint on Houston. Manning's office was in this same building. Mine was 1206, his 1234, around the ell.

From some mysterious place she came up with a bill, tossed it on the desk.

"There's a hundred dollars for a retainer. I need some help."

Looked more interesting. Now I could replace my Scotch at least. I grinned my best detective grin, said, "Okay, I'm
hired. What kind of a jam are you in, sister?"

She just stood there staring at me, her eyes getting bigger and bigger, her mouth starting to tremble. Her voice was a husky whisper. "I just killed a man," she said. She caromed off the desk, hit the floor with a thud.

When I got there I saw I was right. Beneath that fur coat she wore a solitary garment, a pair of skintight lace panties that didn't leave much to the imagination. I got her stretched out on the old couch, bathed her face and torso with a towel until she came around. The scratches on her left breast came from fingernails, all right.

She sat up straight, covered her full breasts with her palms and stared at the floor.

Reluctantly I handed her the bill. "Here, sis, you don't need a detective, you need a lawyer. Just who did you kill and why?"

Again that husky whisper. "Manning, Brooks Manning, my boss. He tried to—tried to—you know, I shot him."

"Where?"

"In the head!"

I said, "Hell! I mean where'd you shoot him? At his joint or down the hall?"

"Down the hall."

She began to moan, to rock back and forth on the couch, tears streaming down her face. I got a weakness for dames that cry. I patted her shoulder, said, "Sis, you better pull yourself together and walk straight out of here until you find a cop. You'll get off. You got a lot of this and that. Just tell the jury Manning was on the make and—"

"Listen! Maybe he isn't dead! I want you to go and see! Please!"

"Don't know? My God! Was he alone? Who else was there? Didn't you look at him?"

A FEW minutes later I walked into 1234. The legend on the door said, Brooks Manning, Impresario. There was no one in the anteroom. I tapped on the door marked private. No answer. I opened the door.

He was dead all right, as dead as Philly on Sunday. He was sitting at his desk, his head slumped down on his white shirtbosom. I leaned over to look at him. One glassy eye stared straight down at his belt buckle. The other eye wasn't there. The bullet had punched it in. There was a small red hole in the back of his head. The killer had used a small gun and the bullet had gone clear through.

The office wasn't messed up, neither was Manning. Every hair on his head was in place, his tie was perfect. The only odd thing was his coat pockets. Both of them were wrong side out. Nope, the dame's story didn't pan out. If there had been a fight it must have been a peaceful one.

Then I saw it—a lace brassiere that matched Corinne's well filled panties dangled from the limp right hand. It even had an initial in one corner. An old English C. Careful not to touch anything, I glanced about the room. The wall safe stood open. A steel filing cabinet had a middle drawer pulled out. Inside were only a few papers. Behind them the bottom of the drawer was dust covered—except for a single square in the far corner, a space about four by six. There the drawer bottom was clean.

Hell, it just didn't jibe. It smelled bad. I looked beneath the desk. Hunch, maybe. There was a little black ball of leather by the dead man's right foot. It
was a black glove. For a long while I stood there staring at it, then reached in my pocket and got its mate. I’d found one on the street when the scared little dame ran into me, one she had dropped. The other beneath a dead man’s desk.

Why, I asked myself, did the dame in my office want to confess a murder she didn’t do? I tiptoed through the door marked private, closed it behind me and was wiping the knob with my handkerchief when the outer door opened.

A man and a woman came in, both stopping in surprise at seeing me. The man was short, dressed like a Christmas tree, too effeminately. You could bet he had a handkerchief up his sleeve.

He said, “Hello, Cockrell,” sort of sneering.

I managed to grin, “Hello, Bell. Hello, Mrs. Manning.”

Bell was a dance director that worked for Manning. Mrs. Manning was ex-burlesque and looked it. For a long moment we all stood there looking at each other. Finally she said, “I must tell Brooks to watch his company. Imagine seeing you here.”

She started for the door marked private. I stopped her.

“Don’t go in there, babe. Bell, get on the phone and get some coppers up here.”

Mrs. Manning snorted. I grabbed her arm. She snatched loose. “I’ll have Brooks throw you out of here,” she screeched, eyes dilated, nostrils quivering. Accidentally my fingers slipped from the soft flesh of her arm to the harder flesh of her shoulder. I’ll swear I didn’t mean it, but the strap came down, the firm, smooth mound of her breast was exposed for a moment before she shrugged back into covering.

Before she shrugged she looked at me. Her eyes were veiled,—you know, her eyelids about half down. I didn’t give her a play. What the hell, I’ve been around.

An hour later Lieutenant Burke turned his sour puss at me and said, “You might as well sit down, Cockrell. You’re going to be here a while.”

I said, “Like hell. I don’t want to sit down. I was passing the door when I heard a shot. That’s all. I didn’t touch a thing and was fixing to call a copper when Bell and Mrs. Manning came in.”

Burke sneered, “Damned funny you’re the only one in the building that heard a shot. A .25 doesn’t make much noise.”

I said, “Hell, I’m going home. I’ve had a hard day. You know my hotel, copper. If you want me, come after me— with a charge or I’ll stick you for false arrest. You know when I kill anyone I use a gun, not a toy.” I patted the .45 beneath my left arm.

Burke’s eyes gleamed. He said, “Cockrell, what’s that on your hand? I thought you didn’t touch anything.”

Yeah. It was blood, blood from that damned damp glove.

Burke moved toward me. I said, “Burke, I had a little accident not long ago. I fell down with a quart of Scotch in my hip pocket and cut the back of my stomach.”

He looked scornful. I reached for my belt. “You damned hard head, do you want me to show you?”

Mrs. Manning moaned. Bell sat up straighter, looked interested. Burke glared at me then turned away growling.

At the door I said, “Well, toodleoo, friends. Me for home and dinner.”

I made the ell of the hall, heard hard heels coming after me. It was Burke. He said, “I’ll ride down with you, Cockrell.” I nodded.
We passed my office on the way to the elevator. The light was off. He sort of hesitated but I went on by. "Don't you wear a hat or coat in the winter time?"

I thumbed the elevator bell, said, "Naw. I can take it." We rode down together. I watched him get in a squad car and ride off, then beat it back upstairs.

Why all this foolishness? Why didn't I tell him about the dame in my office?

*Her speed had knocked even my two hundred pounds down. I glared—then I saw her little gun on the sidewalk.*
I don't know. Maybe because I knew she was lying, because I knew she hadn't killed Manning. How? Because there was the little dame on the street running from the building with a gun and a bloody glove in her purse, a little dame with the fear of God in her eye. And beneath Manning's desk was the mate to the bloody glove. Yet Corinne pumped a fake story to me admitting the killing. The thing that stuck in my mind, the thing that seemed to me to be the payoff to the whole damned thing was the fact that the two women looked alike, the little scared dame on the street and Corinne in my office. Follow me?

I opened the door. There was no light in the office until I stepped in, then all the bright lights of Broadway flared up before me eyes as the ceiling fell on my head. The floor cracked my chin, another blow on the head put me out completely.

AFTER a while I came to. The lights were really on then and the office was empty. I sat up, rubbed my sore head. The damned joint was a shambles. Papers were scattered all over the room, all the drawers and files were open, even the wastepaper basket was overturned. I reached for a handkerchief, found it on the floor, found my hip pockets turned wrong side out. The right side pocket too was dangling, my money and keys scattered.

Why, I asked myself, would the dame lay for me and knock me out? Why go through me? What was she looking for? Hell, I ought to yell copper myself, just to get even. Here I'd spent a couple of hours doing her a favor and she did this.

I got my hat and coat, grimaced when the hat hit the lump. At the door I looked around again, sniffed. Yep, there was a smell. Perfume of some kind thick and heavy. Disgusted I locked the door and went to the elevator.

They were just bringing Manning's body out and Burke was with them. He glowered, said, "I thought you didn't wear a hat or coat."

I said, "A man can change his mind, can't he?" I waited for the next elevator.

Dinner wasn't so good. I couldn't sit down comfortable and my head ached. But mostly I was worried about all that had happened. If Corinne, the dancer, had done this, if the little dame on the street had done that. I bought another bottle of Scotch but carried this one under my arm. I stopped at the phone booth, made a call, asked some questions and went home.

No mail at the desk. I took my key and Simms the clerk said, " Lucky guy on a cold night like this!"

In the elevator Oscar said, "I'm gonna be on all night, Mistah Cockrell. If you all need anything, call foh me,—please."

I opened the door, flipped the light. She was there all right, draped over the bed. Her kidskin coat lay tossed on a chair. She'd found my Scotch I'd been saving, and my best red robe. I caught myself reaching, reaching. After all, smooth white flesh, a lot of curves, invitational allurement, and that's a good word. Anyway I caught myself in time. I remember what a chump she'd tried to make of me. But she did look swell the way she was lying there. The robe had parted a little showing a lot of cuticle. Her right leg dangled from the bed, whiter than the counterpane itself.

I stood glaring down at her, hands on my hips; I reached over and shook her by the bare shoulder. She opened her eyes, looked glassy for a minute then
sat up. She said, "Hello, Mike Cockrell. I listened at the door. Much obliged."

She poured a generous drink of Scotch, tossed it off.

I said, "What door?"

"The door of Manning's office. I got worried when you didn't come back. Thanks for lying for me. I was afraid one of the cops would come to your office so I turned out the lights and scammed. What do I do now? Go ahead and give myself up?"

I HAD a drink, thinking all the time.

I said, "Get your clothes on and get out of here. You're a damned fool and I hate fools. If you've been smart you've gone on to Manning's club for the show. Now you're missing, you'll be a suspicious character. Your brassiere in his hand! Go on, get gone."

"Suspicious character? My God, I'm a murderer!" She began laughing.

I said, "What did you do with the gun?"

She got up not paying much attention to the open robe. Me neither. I was busy watching legs. The white skin of her breasts was smooth and I got a good view as she bent over her fur coat and took something, walked back and handed it to me. I stood there looking at it while I heard the bottle clinking against the glass as she poured a drink. I had to laugh, even when she glared at me.

"Baby," my voice was grave, low, "if there's one thing I know about, it's guns and murder. Hell, I make my living by them. Why don't you quit lying to me? I've seen this gun before, couldn't mistake it. It dropped out of a little dame's purse just in front of the building where me and Manning have offices.

"I made a few phone calls about you before coming up. I know who the little dame was that dropped the gun. Her name is Cara and she's your sister. You met her, got the gun and came back here."

She had nothing whatever to say while I gave it to her word for word, the collision on the slick street, the dropped purse, the frantic fear in the little dame's eyes. But when I came to the gloves, laid them on the table in front of her, she just collapsed, folded at the waist and leaned across the table.

I GAVE her a few minutes, patted her back. The robe had slipped off her shoulders. Her back was one long, gleaming, white arc. The robe kept slipping so I stood up, concentrated on the etching on the far wall and walked toward it.

But her uneven breathing called me back. I did my stuff, petted her a little. Pretty soon she quit blubbering; I poured her another drink. She drank it like water; I don't think she even tasted it.

"Now, listen," I was trying to be gentle, "I got it just about figured, but I'd like the details. Maybe it isn't so bad. Don't be so anxious for the hot squat. When you ran Cara out of Manning's office, you jerked off your own brassiere, tucked it in his hand and scratched your own breasts with your fingernails. Coming out you saw my sign, the word detective and figured to give yourself up to me. Now when you ran into Manning's office, what was your sister doing?"

"Standing there staring at him, the gun in her hand." Just a husky whisper, then she was crying again, her head buried on my shoulders shaking. I helped her along a bit and was almost glad. She was kind of sweet pressed up against me like that. Finally she hushed and I
managed to throw another drink into her and sat back to listen. It was quite a story.

"I’m thirty-one," she said and waited.

I said, "Well, well. Me, I’m forty-four. Go ahead."

She turned on me like a tigress. "I won’t let them take her, I won’t! She’s only a kid, twenty, with her life before her. After I’ve been what I’ve been, done what I’ve done, I won’t let it come to nothing! If she killed Manning, he deserved to die, the rat. Look at me, Mike Cockrell."

She sprang up, dropped the robe. I looked; you would have, too. "Look at me," she went on hysterically, "look at my body! It’s perfect, eh? Look at my waist, small, not an ounce of fat! My hips! Do I make a man want me? Could I do something better with myself? Maybe get a millionaire! Maybe a prince! But no! I’ll keep what I got! I’m a glass showcase. I’m a strip dancer, a take’em-off-girl. Yeah, a lousy strip dancer, dancing for the allurement of men.

"You know why, Mike Cockrell? Do you know why I’ve danced in honky tonks, peddled the sight of my body? Why I’ve lived in hall bedrooms and washed my own clothes?"

"For her, for Cara, so she could be somebody, so she could go to the right schools, meet the right people, have all the things from life that I couldn’t have. And now this comes up, just when she’s finished school! Just when she’s got herself engaged to marry someone that is somebody, she gets mixed up in a deal like this. I won’t have it, I tell you, I won’t have it."

I T TOOK a good half hour to get her calmed down, to get the whole sordid story. Sure, I kissed her a little, I petted her a little. You have to do those things to women. And anyway I enjoyed it and she didn’t seem to mind. It took a little time but after all, I’m a private operative; I’ve got time to spare and not much else.

Sister Cara had finished school, had moved in the best circles, none of her friends knowing her sister was a strip dancer. A few months before she had gotten herself engaged to young Phil Ashton, old man Ashton’s prize possession. Now here’s the hell of it, the funny part. Young Ashton is long on blue blood and short on brains. I guess little Cara wasn’t much different from other girls, out for all she could get. Anyway young Ashton was screwy enough to lift his old lady’s pearls for Cara to wear to a masquerade. After the dance Cara kept them. Ashton either forgot them or figured his mother wouldn’t miss them for a while, the old lady being in Europe.

Now in the meantime sister Cara comes to Manning’s nightclub and meets Brooks Manning. Brooks has a way with women. He was a dirty, thieving, little sneak, always broke, always in debt, but the dames went for him. Cara got to sneaking out with him. Brooks must have had some idea in mind that through her he could get to young Ashton for a little ackjay. Anyway Brooks found out about the necklace, soft talked Cara into letting him keep it for a few days, claiming he only wanted to pawn it until he put over a business deal. He told her he wouldn’t forget her when this business deal went over and she’d have the necklace back too.

You can imagine what happened then. There was Cara afraid to squawk, afraid to tell anyone. As long as Manning had the necklace, she had to do whatever he
asked and you can imagine what a rat like that would ask. Well, to make a long story short Mrs. Ashton was due to return from Europe. Young Phil Ashton asked for the necklace back and Cara stalled him. He got insistent and Cara

There he was in the doorway. He said: "It was me. I shot him with my little bow and arrow."
went to Corinne, the strip dancer, with the whole story.

Naturally Corinne saw all her well laid plans fading, all her sacrifices made for nothing. Mrs. Ashton was due back the next day. She bawled hell out of Cara for a no-good and told her to get that necklace or else.

Corinne worked late and slept late. When she woke up about two in the afternoon, she found Cara's note. Cara said, "I'll get the necklace or kill him." And the little Spanish automatic was gone from the drawer. You know the rest.

Anyway there it was. Corinne had thrown on a fur coat, run for Manning's office. She got there to find her sister with a gun in her hand and Manning dead in his chair. She ran Cara out, tore off her own brassiere, put it in Manning's hand and scratched her own breasts. Then she started for a copper, saw my office with the word detective on the door and barged in.

I said, "What did Cara say when you found her in Manning's office?"

CORINNE was pacing back and forth, one long, white leg at a time emerging from the folds of the robe I had wrapped around her again. Without looking at me she said, "What do you think? She began to cry. Said she couldn't find the necklace. Said she didn't shoot him. But I've caught her in so many lies, I can't believe her."

I said, "You can believe that one, babe. She didn't kill Manning."

She whirled, whitefaced, her quivering breasts rising and falling. I showed her the clip from the little Spanish gun. "In the first place," I said, "these guns are a dime a dozen off the pushcarts. You couldn't hit the Hindenburg from its own gondola with this toy. In the second place, the bullet is soft nosed and the charge is light. It probably wouldn't have penetrated Manning's skull—like the killer's bullet did. And in the third place the gun hasn't been fired. If you'd believed your sister for once you wouldn't be in this jam. But you had to go leaving fingerprints all over Manning's place and an initialed brassiere in his hands. Where's sister Cara? At home I guess, all cocked and primed with more of this fake story you been telling me."

She nodded, began to laugh. Tears streamed down her face, her breasts swayed and trembled, she sank down beside me. I know hysteries. I can take 'em or leave 'em alone. But dames are different; some require a little loving, others burn out on it. Me, I've been around. I can pick and choose. I knew when to smooth her hair. I knew when to pat her and where to pat her. So I did.

And all the time I was pouring Scotch to her. Pretty soon she was still, only her breasts heaving. I picked her up, lowered her to the bed. She opened her eyes once and I said, "I'm going out for a few minutes, babe. Try and get some sleep. I'll fix it all up." She closed her eyes.

HELL of a note wasn't it? Of course the necklace was the whole payoff. Somebody besides Manning and the two sisters knew Manning had it, wanted it. Who? Young Ashton maybe? He'd be scared enough to want to do it, but I thought of that weak chin and shook my head, I even laughed a little at the thought of Corrine's sacrificing so her sister could marry the spineless wonder.

Who had hit me in the head when I went back to my office, who had searched the place? Who had—?
On the street I grinned. It looked so damned plain now, but just to make sure I dropped by headquarters. Burke was still there, old sourpuss in person, and didn’t have much information to give me.

He said, “Yeah, it must have been the dancer at his club. Bell, the dance director says she used to be Manning’s fancy dame, said she was money hungry as hell. It was her brassiere we found in his hand and she’s missing. She used a steel jacketed bullet to drop him and put it in the right place. We’ll get her. Hot buns are dumb. She’ll turn up. I still think it’s funny you heard the shot, Cockrell. If I thought you was sticking your nose in this I’d—”

“And everybody else alibis, eh, Burke? Everybody else clean!”

“Sure.” He looked at me sort of queer but I just nodded and went out. I walked back to the hotel, went upstairs and lost my temper.

Corinne was still on the bed, out like a light. The Scotch bottle was empty. What got me sore was my room. Everything was dumped in the middle of the floor, even my clothes from the closet. Every suit I got cost twenty-five or thirty bucks, all good clothes, and there they lay in a crumpled pile. I couldn’t say a word, just stood there arms akimbo dripping fire from my eyes.

Then I got it, I sniffed.

Yep, the same odor, strong, mixed up with the smell of whiskey but plain enough at that. Emerald, I think they call it, thick and sweet.

I walked to the bed, picked Corinne up and went to the bathroom. She groaned a little when I put her in the tub. She coughed and sputtered when I turned on the shower; she sat up, mopped wet hair out of her eyes. Twenty minutes later I poured her full of tomato juice and black coffee and asked her what had happened.

She didn’t know. She’d killed the Scotch and passed out. Whoever went through my room hadn’t been bothered by sister Corinne.

The room across the hall was empty and I knew it. I picked the lock, put her in there and took everything from my room that even looked womanish, wasn’t finished any too soon. The knock I expected came, long and loud.

Sure, it was Burke. He stayed thirty minutes. Finally I got tired of it.

I said, “I don’t give a damn how many tips you get, you don’t see no dame in here, do you? Hell yes, I had company, they told you that at the desk! Why not? I pay my rent, I ain’t too old for a little fun. I had company but the dame’s gone. If somebody tipped you I had your murderess in my room, somebody lied. Where would I get her?”

Burke got up, still suspicious. “What’s the idea of all the clothes in the middle of the floor?”

I said, “I’m sending them to the cleaner, dummy. Now get out, I’m sleepy.”

He got out.

A VANT Boulevard is on the North edge of town with few houses to the block, each house with wide lawns. Brooks Manning probably trimmed a sucker for the one he used to own. The only light was upstairs, so I went up the trellis of the portico and looked in. Mrs. Manning was sitting on a couch in a sort of boudoir taking off her stockings. I remember her panties. Double exposure, you know, the kind that catch your eye and hold your eye, made for that purpose. A little radio was going full blast and her red lips were pursed.

(Continued on page 102)
SALLY, several artists' models are missing. We suspect Romani, who's a good painter but eccentric. Go get a job posing for him. "We'll be watching!"

Sounds like a peep show, Chief.

I'm a model, can I pose for you today?

You look very nice. Come in and strip.

The tough part of this is that I can't have my gun handy. I hope the Chief is close by, as he promised.

I'm ready.

MMM - what a lovely figure! You'll do, all right.

Ooh! What are you doing?

I have a special job for you, my pretty one!

This is my special studio, where I do my torture paintings.

Ooh!
The Missing-Models Mystery

That is known as "La Veglia" - the vigil. Presently, you will sink upon that point and experience exquisite agony. Then I shall paint another of my immortal canvases.

This has gone far enough, there is our man.

Quick, Chief! I can't hold up any longer!

Where are those other girls? - tell me before I choke your life out!

Ugh - Ugh! I'll tell!!

Poor kids! They're alive but out of their minds!

That devil will go up for life.

You didn't come too soon, Chief. I didn't want a point like that to drive me crazy too!

Watch for Sally in next month's Spicy Detective
It was a queer feeling for a detective to want to save the criminal. But that's the way Phil Stone felt about this girl... and he was sure she was guilty of murder.

Stone launched himself through the doorway—just in time to see the man thrust a gun at the girl on the bed.

With her disturbing violet eyes, the girl looked at Detective-Sergeant Phil Stone. "I—I don't know what happened," she faltered. "I was here in my bedroom. I heard a shot. I ran into the next room and—and saw Mr. Claypoole lying there d-dead... ."

Sacrifice
In the living-room adjoining, cops and medical examiners and reporters were swarming about the sprawled, still-warm corpse of a grey-haired man. Even in death, Karl Claypoole wore an expression of leering bestiality; the grin of a satyr. The bullet-hole through the back of his skull didn't help his appearance any.

But here in the apartment's boudoir, in the softly-shaded light, the violet-eyed

RAP

By

ELLERY WATSON
CALDER
girl seemed strangely out of place. It seemed queer that one so vibrant with life should be linked with death. She was young and somehow virginal despite the intriguing sheerness of her silken negligée. Phil Stone had a difficult time keeping his voice at the correct official pitch and his eyes from the partially-revealed glories of her sweet, nubile breasts.

"Your name is Inez Langley?" he asked.

"Y-yes."

"You were Karl Claypoole’s... er, sweetheart?"

She flushed, lowered her eyes. "I—I—y-yes."

"Claypoole paid the rent on this apartment? You just moved in here today?"

She nodded miserably. Her hair was like spun, burnished copper; her face a piquant oval shadowed now by despairing fear.

"Isn’t it true," Phil Stone persisted, "that Claypoole quarreled with you tonight? Was going to break off with you?"

"I—"

"You may as well tell the truth, Miss Langley. Your neighbor in the apartment next door heard you and Claypoole scrapping. Then, in the middle of the argument, she claims she heard a shot fired. That’s when she called headquarters. When I got here with my men, I found you here in this bedroom. Claypoole dead in the next room. A gun on the floor. It all adds up, sister. It adds up to the hot squat for you unless you quit lying and enter a plea. Then maybe you’ll get off with a third-degree rap."

HER shoulders slumped in a forlorn droop; her ripe lower lip trembled. "All right. I—I admit it. I shot him. He was going to throw me over. We quarreled. He pulled a revolver out of his pocket. I struggled for it; I was afraid he was going to k-kill me. Somehow, the gun went off..."

Phil Stone’s eyes narrowed. He hated to get rough with her. Despite her confession, she seemed so damned innocent.

But she was lying again. He knew that. "Your story’s haywire, kiddo," he clipped out. "In the first place, if Claypoole had been shot while you were struggling for the revolver, there’d be powder-marks around the wound. Instead, we know he was shot from a distance—clear across the room, probably. Besides, the bullet went through the back of his noggin. He had his back turned toward you when you croaked him."

"Oh-h-h...!" she moaned.

"Get dressed, baby," he said grimly. "I’m sorry, but I’ve got to take you down to the jug."

"V-very well," she whispered hopelessly. "I—I’ll dress. You wait for me outside the door."

"Nothing stirring!" he shook his head. "I’m not leaving you alone one minute. Go ahead and start putting your clothes on. I’m keeping an eye on you."

She flushed painfully. Embarrassment leaped into her eyes. "But—but—"

"Nix on the fake shyness, sister. I’m not the first guy who’s seen you like this. Get started."

She averted her gaze. Then, with seeming reluctance, she went to the bureau. She pawed through several drawers before she found panties, hose and a brassiere. She glanced at him, hesitated while a flush of distress spread to her face; then, defiantly, she turned her back to him and started getting into her
underthings. He saw the vague outline of her fingers tugging at stocking-tops high on her thighs. He watched avidly as she drew on her fragile, cobwebby hosiery. But when she had made the final adjustment, she dropped her robe and faced the detective.

He caught his breath sharply; no question about it: she was absolutely gorgeous. Her skin was like smooth cream; her body a flawless symphony in feminine flesh. Her legs were as symmetrically-contoured as marble from the hands of a master-sculptor; her thighs and hips were liling delights. . . . The very sight of her made Phil Stone’s blood tingle hotly.

Which gave him a sudden idea. He got up, pulled down the window-blinds, made sure the boudoir door was closed and locked. Then he approached the girl. “Listen, baby.”

“Y-yes. . . . ?”

“I like you, see? You’re a knock-out in any man’s language. You’ve got everything it takes to drive a guy bug-house. How would you like to take it on the lam out of here?”

“I. . . . I don’t understand you.”

“Sure you do. Listen. How about being nice to me a little bit? Then maybe I can let you escape. It’s a hell of a thing for a homicide copper to do—but you’ve got me thinking in circles.” He went toward her; and suddenly his arms snaked around her pliant waist. He drew her close; fastened his mouth upon her lips, leech-like. One hand slid up to her shoulder blades, and the pressure of it crushed her firm breasts against his chest.

She struggled in his grasp; tried to pull her mouth away from his questing kiss. Dancing flood-tides of sensation swept through him at her nearness; at the sweet girlishness of her body and the faint fragrance of her hair. His arm tightened; his mouth left hers and slid to the pulsing hollow of her throat.

She managed to get her right hand free; slammed her tiny, doubled fist against his cheek. “Damn you—I!” she panted. “Let me alone!”

He released her, grinning enigmatically. “Okay, kiddo. You’re the doctor.” He stepped back while she finished dressing.

Then he took her into the next room, turned her over to a pair of uniformed men. “Run her down to headquarters,” he ordered. “Book her on a homicide charge.”

There were tears in her violet eyes as they led her away.

A LITTLE later, after the meat-wagon had carted off Karl Claypoole’s corpse and everyone else had departed, Phil Stone took another look about the apartment of death. Then he went out; stalked up a flight of stairs; rapped on a door.

It opened. A tall man stared out. “Stone! What on earth brings you here at this ungodly hour of the night, old man?”

“Hello, Lundgren. Listen. I want you to do me a favor. You’re a hell of a good attorney, and I’ve got a case I want you to handle for me. But keep my name out of it, of course.”

“A case?”

“Yes. You know Karl Claypoole, the cabaret owner?”

“I ought to. I used to handle some work for him.”

“Well, he just got knocked off in an apartment downstairs a while ago. We’ve pinched the dame who occupied the joint with him. She was his light-o’-love; name’s Inez Langley. It looks bad for her; but I feel sort of sorry for
the kid. As a personal favor to me, I want you to act as her mouthpiece. Try to get her off with a self-defense plea or something. I'll foot the bill out of my own pocket."

Steve Lundgren looked startled. "That's a funny one! You put the collar on a dame for murder, and then you hire a lawyer to get her out from under the rap. What did you do, fall for the cutie?"

"Maybe. Anyhow, will you take the case?"

"Sure—for you, Phil. I'll go down to the hoosegow and have a talk with her right away."

"Much obliged!" The detective-sergeant turned, went back downstairs. Once more he walked toward the apartment where death had struck. But he passed by its door; went to the adjoining flat. He rapped softly.

He was admitted by a bleached-blonde, over-rouged girl who looked to be in her early thirties—a lush, voluptuous creature whose diaphanous negligee concealed very little of her feminine blandishments. Through the revealing thinness of the robe, Phil Stone observed that she wore nothing else except glove-silk snuggies.

He smiled at her. "You're Miss Maizie Medland, aren't you? You're the one who heard that murder next door and then phoned for the cops?"

"Yes."

"I'm Stone—homicide squad." He flashed his tin. "May I have a little talk with you?"

There was something furtive in her mascara-fringed eyes. Her demeanor was one of sullen watchfulness. "I've already told my story to the bulls—the police."

"Sure. I know. But I want to hear it again."

With a surly nod she admitted him to the apartment. He sank down on the divan. "In the first place, you say you heard Karl Claypoole and Inez Langley come into the next-door apartment about an hour ago? And they were squabbling?"

"Damn right they were squabbling. He was telling her he was all washed up with her. Then she started to scream and call him all kinds of names. After that I heard a shot. I phoned the coppers. That's all I know."

"You didn't happen to know Claypoole yourself, by any chance?"

"No!" she ground out. But her voice sounded uneasy.

He studied her. Through her negligee he could see the voluptuous fullness of her breasts and the lush arches of her silk-garbed hips. Her face, despite the lines drawn by dissipation, was still blatantly pretty in a petulant, sophisticated way. She'd been around; he could see that. She knew the ropes; knew all the answers.

Over on the table, he noticed a fat scrap-book and photo-album combined. His eyes narrowed. He had to see the contents of that leather-bound book. He had a sudden hunch he'd find out what he wanted to know if he somehow got a chance to thumb through its pages.

He moved over on the divan. "Sit down here a minute, baby," he invited. "There's something I want to say to you."

She looked at him suspiciously as she sat beside him. "What's on your mind?"

"Listen, kiddo. I'm out to make a rep for myself, see? I'm a sergeant now; the next move upward is a lieutenantcy. That's what I'm shooting for."

"So what?"
"Damn you!" she gasped. "Leave me alone!"

"So this. If you're willing to give me a little co-operation, you and I can go places together. Plenty."

"What kind of co-operation, copper?"

"Help me pin this murder-rap on Inez Langley. Of course, your testimony will already be damaging enough. But if I can walk into court and spring an eye-witness to the killing, it'll be a plume in my bonnet, get me?"

"An eye-witness, huh? But I've already told you I didn't see anything. I
just heard that fight between Claypoole and his girl; then the shot. That’s all I know.”

“Yeah. But suppose you were to lie a little? In the first place, we already know Inez Langley bumped Claypoole; so anything you might say will just help pin the blame where it belongs—on her shoulders. Now, here’s what I want. I want you to testify that when you heard Claypoole and the Langley wren scrapping, you went out into the corridor. I want you to say their front door was open and you peeped in. I want you to testify that you saw her put a slug through him.”

“That would be perjury, copper.”

“Sure. What of it? It’ll just help me make my case stronger; give me a boost up the ladder for having solved this murder.”

“What do I get out of it?” she demanded.

“Dough. Five yards.”

“Five hundred, eh? I don’t get this. Why should you slip me that much jack?”

“Maybe because I like you!” he retorted. His arm slid around her shoulders, and his hand dropped down along her arm, tightened. The pressure brought him against the yielding warmth of a generous breast through her negligee. She drew a deep breath. “You’re a fresh dick.”

“Sure I’m fresh. I believe in making hay while the sun shines.”

“I’m not hay and the sun isn’t shining.”

“No, you’re not hay. But you’re plenty sweet. Come on—slip us a kiss.”

He smeared his mouth against her lipstick; felt her lips part moistly, trembling. He kissed her throat, felt the pounding blood heat her smooth skin to a glow.

Suddenly her arms locked around his neck as her negligee fell open. “Damn you, copper—!” she moaned. . . .

LATER, while the girl was out of the room, Stone grabbed the chance to look around. He heard water running. Under cover of the sound, he leaped to his feet; snatched at the photo-album and scrap-book. Swiftly he scanned page after page. His lips tightened.

There was a clipping from an old newspaper—a San Francisco sheet. A half-tone picture was above the clipping. It showed a blonde girl in scant, dancer’s costume, and the caption said: “Tessie Tilford, featured performer at the Karl Claypoole Klub . . . .”

Phil Stone smiled grimly. He remembered, now. Karl Claypoole, the murdered man, had once owned a cabaret in Frisco. And while this newspaper photograph was captioned with the name Tessie Tilford, the girl’s features were those of the woman who now called herself Maizie Medland!

So Maizie Medland had once worked in one of Claypoole’s joints!

Again he thumbed through the pages. At last he found a snap-shot. It showed the blonde girl and Karl Claypoole together, arms locked.

The detective-sergeant closed the album. He had found out plenty. He had discovered that Maizie Medland lied when she said she didn’t know the murdered cabaret-owner . . . .

He stared at the window of her living-room. It led out to a fire-escape balcony which ran past the windows of the adjoining apartment where Claypoole had been rubbed out. Phil Stone began to get an idea.

He called: “Listen, Maizie-baby. I’ve got to beat it. I’ll be seeing you—maybe
later tonight.” Before she could answer, he walked out of the flat.

But he didn’t go very far. He stopped at the door of the murder-apartment; opened it with the key he had taken when he left the place a while before. He walked in; snapped on the lights.

He squinted at the blood-stain on the living-room rug, where Claypoole’s corpse had sprawled. Then he looked at the window leading out upon the fire-escape balcony: the same balcony which ran past Maizie Medland’s apartment next door. It would have been a simple matter for a killer to hide out there on that balcony and fire a shot through the open window . . . .

Whistling tunelessly, Stone next strode into the boudoir where he had arrested Inez Langley. His eyes searched the chamber. Then, suddenly, he hunched his shoulders.

The boudoir window was open; and he remembered that it had been closed when he left the apartment an hour or so previously. Now, what did that mean?

Then he saw something else. It was a small-sized door in the far wall of the room; a door not over two feet square, partially open. He went to it, drawing his flashlight.

The opening led into a laundry-chute. Soiled clothing could be dropped here, later to be collected by the laundryman in the basement of the building. Phil Stone whirled, dashed from the room. He went pelting downstairs to the basement; found the bottom of the laundry-chute. He rummaged around in a basket at the mouth of the chute . . . .

“So!” he grunted. He snatched at a wadded bundle of feminine clothing— a frock, a brassiere, a pair of step-ins.

In the middle of the wad he found a handbag of tooled leather.

In the brilliant white circle of light from his flash, he opened the bag; saw a couple of letters in their canceled envelopes. Both were addressed:

“Miss Jacqueline Langley
Apt. 652, Clarendon Arms,
1125 Boulevard Way,
City.”

Phil Stone drew a sharp breath. “Jacqueline Langley!” he muttered. And the copper-haired girl he had arrested for the murder of Karl Claypoole was named Inez Langley!

Langley! Langley! The name dinned in his ears. He turned, raced to the street-floor, dashed out into the night. He found a cruising cab; signalled it. “Eleven-twenty-five Boulevard Way, cousin. Step on it.” He flashed his badge.

The taxi lurched forward. A little later, the detective sergeant got out in front of the Clarendon Arms. “Wait here,” he said to the cabby. Then he legged inside the building; took the automatic elevator to the sixth floor.

He sprinted to a door marked 652; gathered his muscles. With a mighty crash, he catapulted against the portal; smashed the lock from its keeper. He went thundering into the room as the door sagged on its bent hinges.

There came a feminine scream. Phil Stone stared into the white features of a girl—a copper-haired girl. For a single instant he thought it was the one he had arrested and sent to jail. Then he noticed faint traces of dissimilarity. This doll was a little more slender. Her face was just a little weaker, more worldly. And her eyes were green, rather than violet.

She was dressed in a tailleured trav-
cling-costume; had a packed Gladstone in her hand. But when she saw the detective, she dropped the bag; plunged her tiny fingers into her purse. She yanked out a small, toy-like automatic. "You'll never get me, copper—" she panted. She squeezed the trigger.

STONE ducked as the weapon's small caliber muzzle spat fire. He felt a lead slug pluck at his sleeve. Then he dived in. With one hand he knocked the girl's gun aside. Then he popped her in the jaw with his loose right fist. It wasn't a hard blow—not hard enough to break her jaw. But it knocked her unconscious. She sagged, slumped.

The detective caught her in his arms. He turned, raced for the apartment's door; carried his limp burden down the staircase. He didn't risk using the automatic elevator; someone might see him lugging the senseless girl and ask embarrassing questions. He had no time to answer any queries now. He had work to do!

At last he had the green-eyed girl out of the building. He carried her to the waiting taxi; dumped her into the tonneau. He climbed in after her; spoke an address to the driver. His own address.

Ten minutes later, Phil Stone carried the still-unconscious girl into his flat. He took her into his bedroom; placed her on the bed. He tore a sheet into strips, fastened her so that she couldn't move. He gagged her.

He pelted out again; had himself driven down to headquarters. At the jail, he held hurried colloquy with a turnkey. "I'll accept full responsibility!" he finished.

The turnkey shrugged. "It's your funeral, Phil." He went down an iron-barred corridor; came back a moment later with the Langley girl whom Phil Stone had originally arrested.

Stone looked into her violet eyes; studied her features. He swore softly under his breath when he saw how much she looked like that other wren—the one he had left tied up in his apartment a few moments ago. But there was no time to go into that now. He took her arm. "Come along with me, Miss Langley."

"Wh-where are you t-taking me . . . ?"
"You'll find out."

Outside, in the speeding taxi, she shivered against him. "I—I want to thank you for sending that attorney, Mr. Lundgren, to see me. He says maybe he can get me off with only five years—"

"Maybe he'll get you off with less than that, baby. I've got a brand-new angle on this Claypoole killing that's going to smash the case wide open—and clear you, or I'm a liar!"

"Y-you mean—"

"Don't ask questions. Here we are at my place. Come on upstairs and keep your mouth buttoned."

He led her up to his flat; took her into his bathroom and locked the door on her. Then he went to his phone; dialed Steve Lundgren, the attorney.

"Hello?" Lundgren's voice came over the wire.

"Steve? This is Phil Stone. Listen close. I want you to deliver a message for me. On the floor under you, in the flat next to the one where Karl Claypoole got rubbed out, there's a bleached-blonde bimbo by the name of Maizie Medland. I want you to go down and tell her something for me."

"Okay. What shall I tell her?"

"Tell her the deal's off between her and me. Tell her I've got a real honest-to-God eyewitness to the murder of Karl
Claypoole right here in my own apartment. A girl who saw the murder-shot being fired from the open window."

"Good God, Phil! You mean you've actually got somebody who saw—"

"Yeah. Unfortunately, this dame I'm holding here in my joint is unconscious just now. I had to pop her in the jaw. But when she comes to, she'll spill. I'm sure of it— because if she doesn't, she'll face the murder-rap herself!"

The lawyer's voice was grim. "If

that's the case, why drag this Maizie Medland into it? Why tell her anything about it?"

"Listen, Steve. The Medland bimbo is the one who claims to have heard the murder-shot in that adjoining apartment. She's the one who called the police."

"I still don't get it."

"Well, look. I found out that the Medland dame used to be Karl Claypoole's mistress, see? Or anyhow, she was thick with him in the old days in Frisco. I've got a sneaking hunch she's the one that did the killing herself. And
as soon as this dame in my apartment regains consciousness, I’ll be sure. But meanwhile, I want Maizie Medland to know she’s about to be uncovered. Maybe she’ll take a chance and come to my joint and try to stop this girl’s mouth with a bullet—catch on?

“I see. You’re trying to bait Maizie Medland into a trap. Is that it?”

“Yeah.”

“Okay. I’ll go down and tell her what you’ve told me to say.” The attorney rang off.

PHIL STONE settled back to wait.

Ten minutes passed like so many creeping snails. Then, suddenly, his phone jingled.

He answered it. “Yes?”

“Phil—for God’s sake! This is Steve Lundgren. I just went down to the Medland woman’s flat—and found her dead! I’m calling from my own place. You’d better hurry over here!”

Phil Stone swore as he slammed up his receiver. Maizie Medland dead! That knocked his theories into a cocked hat! He leaped for the door, hurled himself downstairs.

At the lobby, the night desk-clerk hailed him. “You get your call okay from that gentleman here in the lobby a minute ago, Mr. Stone?”

The detective-sergeant stiffened.

“Phone-call from here in the lobby?”

“Yes, sir. Gentleman rang you from the desk here; then he took the automatic elevator and went up—”

But Phil Stone wasn’t listening. A surging fear in his heart, he was slamming back up the stairs. He reached his floor, lanced down the hallway to his door. From within his apartment came a muffled feminine shriek—

He smashed himself inside; dived for the bedroom. He was just in time to see Steve Lundgren jam an automatic at the trussed girl on the bed. She screamed again. The attorney’s finger tightened on the trigger—

And then he saw Phil Stone. He whirled. “Keep ’em high, Stone! And say your prayers! As long as you’ve seen this much, I’ll have to plug you too—!”

“Then you’re the one!” the detective-sergeant gasped. “You killed Claypoole—”

“Sure I bumped him! He did me dirty in a couple of business deals. I was gunning for him. I found out he’d just rented a love-nest in my apartment-house; so I sneaked down the fire-escape and croaked him through the window; tossed the gun in the room after I put a slug through his skull. And now, since this dame here saw me do it, I’m going to rub her out—and you too!”

He fired.

But even as he fingered his trigger, Phil Stone launched himself sidewise. The slug missed him. He caromed into a chair. He grabbed it, raised it—and hurled it full at the lawyer’s head.

Lundgren fired again. His bullet splatted into the chair that was hurtling toward him; and then the piece of furniture smashed into his head. He crumpled; went down.

Phil Stone leaped in; grabbed the fallen man’s gun. “God almighty!” he whispered unevenly. “And I thought it was Maizie Medland all the time!” He whirled, went to the bathroom, unlocked the door. He yanked the violet-eyed Langley girl into the room.

She saw the other girl strapped to the bed. Her eyes widened. “Inez—!”

Phil Stone grunted. “I thought so! That girl on the bed is your twin sister, isn’t she? Her name’s Inez Langley; and you’re really Jacqueline Langley!”

“Y—yes . . . .”
"Inez, here, was Karl Claypoole's mistress. He was setting her up in an apartment love-nest. You didn't want her to string with him; and you went to her apartment tonight to talk her into leaving him. Isn't that right?"

"Yes—"

"You were waiting for her in her boudoir. She entered the apartment with Karl Claypoole. A shot was fired. You rushed out and saw Claypoole dead, and your sister standing over him. The death-gun was on the floor. You jumped at the conclusion that your sister had shot Claypoole. You hid your sister in a closet of the boudoir; and then you decided to take the rap for her. A sacrifice rap—so that she could escape later."

"Y-yes. Inez had a sweetheart in our old home town in the middle west. I wanted her to go back to him, marry him, be respectable. I knew he'd never marry her if he ever found out about her and Claypoole. . . . and that she had been in a scandal. So I was going to take her place; stand trial for the killing . . . ."

"Sure," Phil Stone nodded. "I got wise that you weren't the real Inez Langley when I watched you getting dressed. First, you didn't seem to know what drawer your underthings were in. Then, when you put on your clothing, they didn't quite fit. That's when I got my hunch. So I tried to make love to you—and you socked me in the mush. That proved you weren't a chippie; otherwise you'd have played ball with pleasure, in order to escape."

The girl blushed.

The detective went on. "After I sent you to the jug, I found where you'd taken off your own clothes and tossed them down the laundry-chute. That's where I got your real name and address—from your discarded pocketbook. I found out you weren't Inez Langley. You were Jacqueline Langley. And when I saw a window open in the boudoir of that apartment, I knew that the real Inez Langley must have got away by the fire-escape after everybody had gone."

"Th-that's how you t-traced my sister . . . ?"

"Sure. I found her in your apartment at the Clarendon Arms, just getting ready to lam. I brought her here. Meanwhile, I thought I knew the identity of the real murderer. I thought it was a dame named Maizie Medland. She used to be Karl Claypoole's sweetie in the old days out in Frisco; and I figured she had killed Claypoole and was trying to pin the rap on the woman who had stolen him from her. I was wrong as hell about that. She was willing enough to pin the rap on her former lover's present mistress, all right; but she wasn't guilty of firing the shot that killed Claypoole."

"The real killer was Steve Lundgren, here. But I never suspected him. In fact, I even hired him to be your lawyer! And of course he jumped at the chance, because if he acted as attorney for the accused murderer, nobody would suspect him of the crime!"

"Then I set a trap for Maizie Medland. Or at least I thought I did. But actually, it was Lundgren who took advantage of it. He was afraid someone would spill and implicate him. For all he knew, I was handing him a straight story about having a girl here who had seen the murderer's face through the apartment window. So he came here to kill the one person who might put him in the hot squat."

"He phoned me just now from the lobby downstairs. He lied; told me he

(Continued on page 112)
Death Plays

Do you know the famous Bill Carter game of "Knock-knock!" Well, maybe I didn't originate it, but my innovations will keep the Carter version alive long after all others have demised.

You know the game. She says, "Knock-knock!" and you say, "Who's there?" and she-says, "Hiawatha!" and you say, "Hiawatha who?" and she says "Hi'watha nice-th girl 'till I met you!" And then you say, "Knock-knock!" and she says, "Who's there . . ." It goes on for hours and hours.

But the Carter innovation? Now, brother, you have asked and it shall be

"Listen," I said, "listen to me if you don't want to die!"

Bill Carter tries to help a girl out of a murder frame by taking charge of a corpse .... And he nearly becomes one himself!
Knock-Knock

By N. Wooten Poge
given unto you! In the first place, you don’t use your knuckles to knock with. You use the palms of your hands with the fingers tucked under a bit. And you ‘don’t knock on doors, not if you’re playing it with a comely wench—and in the Carter version you usually are. If you get just the right rhythm with your “Knock-knock!” you discover a marvelous response. A little practice, the right technique. The right girl . . . and there you are! Simple?

Rosy Carstairs was a girl any guy would like to knock-knock with, but it took plenty of the right technique—the famous Carter technique. Rosy owned a gasoline station which she ran herself, doing said running in bib overalls and not much else. She piled her red hair high up on her head and when I got the first glimpse—rear view—I didn’t mind my assignment in Jamesborough a damn bit. But that was before death chiseled in on my little game, knocking with his bony hands . . .

From behind, Rosy was a lot of suntan and a swell pair of hips when she bent over the fruit stand she also ran. I walked up and my hands—Well, just for safety, I shoved them down in my pockets. I said “Knock knock!” and didn’t touch her. I swear I didn’t. Rosy turns quick and bumps right into me. Did you ever see bib overalls on a girl who was built? They gape in the nicest places!

I hand Rosy the lie. I’ve got all framed, that I was sent up to interview her and get pictures of the legal secretary who makes a big living running a gasoline station—in overalls. The truth is, little Rosy had been confidential secretary—and so on—to a lawyer named Parkinson who is hand-in-pocket with Boss Hykim in running Jamesborough. It’s my job to get the low and filthy, which Rosy knows, on Hykim.

WELL, I take Rosy inside the filling station for an interview and I keep watching her lips. I mean her lips. They’re ripe looking and they pout just a little. I thought I’d go crazy, watching them. I give her that “Knock knock” about “Hiram nuts about you.” She laughs a little and I give her another and this time I aim a knock right at her. Rosy flushes and steps back, cocking her right fist like she knows how to use it.

I reach out again. Rosy cusses and I grab her right fist just in time. But when I tuck that fist behind her and pull her close, she’s g a s p i n g—from struggling. A shoulder strap slips. I look right down into her green eyes and let go her fist, so I can get a couple of handfuls of all girl . . . and what a girl!

“Oh, don’t!” Rosy gasps. “Oh, you mustn’t! Heavens, Billie! Somebody might see!”

My arms are trying to hug all of her at once now, and what they feel is soft and warm and quivering. I imprison those swell lips of hers with mine and mash them. I get a kick way down to my toes. . . . And outside, by the pumps, an automobile horn blows.

It didn’t sound like death to me right then. It didn’t even sound like “Knock-knock!” But it was.

Rosy rips out of my arms, breathless, flushed, and stares out at the streamlined sedan that’s rolled up to the red pumps.

“That witch!” she spits out.

“Never mind, honeychile,” I whisper, “she’ll be gone soon and we can pick it up right where we left off!”

Rosy pouts her lips at me, squeals when I grab and ducks out the door.
Then I get a look at the girl in the car, and I know her, of course. It’s Gladys Mears who got Rosy’s job as confidential secretary—and so on—to Lawyer Parkinson. I’ve heard about Gladys, same as other things in this town, from the detective who did preliminary work for the Press. And I figure I may as well add her to my collection. The detective couldn’t bribe Gladys, but maybe the Carter technique. . . .

I see Gladys wave a twenty dollar bill under Rosy’s nose and point toward the fruit stand. Rosy goes slowly away, rolling her hips, and I began to have doubts about Gladys. After all, maybe I could get more out of Rosy. Information, I mean. Rosy hands an apple to Gladys and Gladys bites it before she surrenders the twenty dollar bill.

Rosy and I pass in the doorway when she comes in to make change and the doorway is a close fit. I “Knock-knock” in passing and Rosy gasps, cusses up at me, grinning. I’m so fascinated, watching Rosy, that I stumble over a water can on the way to the car and almost break my head open against a pump. Then I reach Gladys Mears’ car and say, “Knock knock” on the door. Gladys is leaning on the wheel, very relaxed. She doesn’t look up, and I open the door and touch her shoulder, sort of playful-like.

Gladys looked up that time. Her head rolled over like her neck was broken and she slumped out from behind the wheel right into my arms. And when she looked up she didn’t see or say anything. Dead people don’t!

Once I’m getting no kick out of hugging a honey. I lean over her face and I get a whiff of scent that isn’t perfume. I look at her lips and there are little patches of white on them—and the smell of bitter almonds!

I know that smell, and the bluish color of her face. You don’t handle murders for the Press and not learn a few things like that. Gladys Mears has been poisoned with the good old-fashioned kill ‘em quick, cyanide!

The Carter brain works fast at a time like that. I decided, quick as that, this was no place for Mrs. Carter’s boy William. I shoved Gladys back into the front seat. Rosy came with change, stood by me and her fingers hurt my arm they take hold so hard.

“What’s the matter with Gladys?” she demands. Her voice breaks.

I grin at her, my lips feeling stiff.

“What would you say was wrong with her, Rosy?” I ask. “After you give her cyanide!”

I look at her and she’s still swell to gaze on. Hell, I’ve kissed a murdereress before this! But a poisoner. . . .

For a moment what I say doesn’t seem to percolate, then Rosy gasps and the only color left about her face is her hair. She rips out a good old-fashioned cuss word.

“What’d she do that here for?” She hangs onto me with both hands. “Listen, I’ve got to get her away from here. If they find her dead at my place, it’s curtains for Rosy. Everybody knows I hate her guts for taking my job with Parkinson!”

And right there, the famous Carter brain gets an idea. If I could get this baby on a spot and squeeze her—for information, I mean—I could smash this town wide open!

“Easiest thing in the world, Rosy,” I
tell her. "I just shove Gladys over and drive away! But there ought to be something in it for the old maestro!"


I slip an arm around her, feeling my mouth go dry as my hands get the taut suppleness of her back. She may be a poisoner; but she's all woman! I take a look around, cautious, and the only man in sight is the last man on earth I want to see. He's Hiram Mills, detective sergeant of the Jamesborough police, and so crooked he keeps his right arm handcuffed to protect his left hand's money. He is also the sidekick of old man Parkinson. His collector of protection dough! But the dead Gladys has slid down out of sight.

"There's Sergeant Mills," I mention, chummy, in Rosy's ear. "Honey, I'm glad to do this little thing for you, but after all... You're just telling me everything will be lovely. Do I look trustful?"

"I'll be grateful!" Rosy says it warm and close against my mouth.

"Sure," I say, dry mouthed again. "Sure, but you give me a little piece of paper saying you told me to remove a corpus from your place!"

Rosy stiffened, "Do I look crazy?" she snapped.

"Just scared, baby," I assure her. "But perhaps I'd better call over Sergeant Mills. It will be safer." I start an arm upward to signal him, but not too fast. Rosy drags it down. "No, no," she whispers. "I'll... I'll do what you say." She dashes inside the office and comes back with the paper which I read just to be sure it's all right.

"But I can have it back, can't I, Billie?" Rosy begs, leaning very close. "I can buy it back, can't I, Billie?"

So I tell her sure, which I mean, but not the same way she does. She can buy it back by spilling what she knows about the political crooks of Jamesborough. Of course, I may want a token payment first! I give Rosy a squeeze and get behind the wheel. Gladys isn't interested and a newspaper man soon gets over being squeamish about a corpse. I wink at Rosy... And it's her back I'm winking at! She's turned that sun-tanned expanse on me and is running like a champion, back past the office, over the hills and far away.

I say, "Hey!"

RIGHT close to me a man curses, "Put them straight up, wise guy," he says, getting tough. "I reckon we got you with the goods all right, all right!"

It's Detective Sergeant Mills! He hunches me out of the car with his gun and his eyes are ugly. "So you killed Gladys," he whispers. "You killed Gladys!"

Right then I begin to wonder just who did kill Gladys! Beforehand, I've been too busy taking full advantage of the situation for the sake of the dear old Press to worry about the murder. Right now the question loomed pretty big. Did Rosy do it? She'd be a sap to kill Gladys right here on her own reservation, but maybe she figured the apple with the poison on it wouldn't be eaten until Gladys had gone away. But how would she know Gladys was coming for an apple?

"Say, did Gladys eat fruit here regular?" I ask the sergeant.

Mills glared at me, a square-faced lad with little eyes too close together. "Naw!" he growls, "and don't think you can pin this on somebody else! Lawyer Parkinson knows your mob's been trying to buy her out! You killed Gladys to keep her from blabbing who your mob is!"
I think of the note Rosy gave me and realize it doesn’t mean a thing. If she’s guilty of murder, I’m equally guilty as an accessory after the fact. And I see the newspaper’s detective hasn’t been as cute as he thought.

I begin talking at this broad-shouldered sergeant with the gun, but he don’t answer. He slams my shoulders up against a gasoline pump, gives me the quick frisk and leaves me clean of everything. Including my wallet—and Rosy’s note! It wasn’t only that, but I’m not used to taking a mauling off of any man. Including cops. He had me mad.

"Take her away, Bill!" she pleaded. "They’ll think I killed her!" But I only laughed—then!

While he’s reading Rosy’s note, my wallet meantime tucked under his arm, I keep my hands over my head. But I move them. The nozzle of the electric gasoline pump is just overhead. It’s
one of those automatic dings which, when you lift the nozzle loose, starts the pump.

I yank said nozzle up and point it in the general direction of Sergeant Mills’ face. The pump pumps—and the gasoline hits Mills dead center. A bull’s eye, so to speak.

The gun flies one way, my wallet another and Sergeant Mills goes backward, screaming curses and dabbing at his face with both hands. I stop long enough to snatch my wallet—He’s hung onto the note—and take off the same way Rosy went.

It’s pretty close to supper time when I’ve made sure of shaking off pursuers for the nonce. I pant into a restaurant and put on the feedbag. And do some thinking.

Mrs. Carter’s little boy William is in a spot. Not only is the investigation at a standstill, but my neck is right square in the murder noose. And every feeling I had put out is lopped off short. Gladys is dead. Rosy has left for parts unknown. And here am I—empty-hand-ed! I call the Press, but the M.E. just cusses. He points out, politely, that if I would keep my hands off the girls.

Right then, I get the glimmering of an idea so hot I hang up on the M.E. It could have been Rosy that killed Gladys, but with Sergeant Mills happening along so neatly, with the motive all figured, it looks to me more like a Boss Hykim maneuver to shut Gladys’ mouth, and Rosy’s at the same time. Thoughts of Hykim lead me naturally to Lawyer Parkinson. And I know Sergeant Mills calls regularly on Parkinson to deliver the protection dough he’s collected. It’s true he usually goes to Parkinson’s home rather than his office. That looks like a good hunch to me, too. Besides, Parkinson has a good looking wife!

Supper finished, I had me done over at a barber shop and set out for Edge Creek district where Parkinson had a regular mansion. Unless I missed out badly, Parkinson would be too busy figuring out with Boss Hykim the answers to the Gladys Mears question for him to be at home. I’d just drop in on Elise Parkinson and see if she knew hubby for the rat he was, politically as well as amatorially speaking. It might be that wifey, having been told all, would be generous—with information, of course.

I sent in a card reading, “I know all about the Gladys Mears case,” and the butler said, suavely, wouldn’t I come right up? And me the best second story worker that ever invaded the sanctity of any man’s home—in his absence! Mrs. Parkinson didn’t rise to welcome me.

She is stretched out, pale and lan- quid, on a chaise longue that’s all pale blue silk and white fluff. She’s pretty much like that herself. The flimsy stuff of which her negligee is made is pale blue, edged in white maribou which throws the cutest shadows into the valley of her breasts! The silk drapes. Hell, it clings. With difficulty, I lift my eyes to her face.

Blue eyes with shadows under them and red-golden hair in a tangle about her face. A warm, tremulous mouth. She lifts a hand to me and the silk slides back along the arm. I clicked my heels in the best Carter manner and kissed the hand. It was soft and cuddly and fragrant, just the way she’d be. What in hell, I asked myself, did Parkinson want with Gladys or Rosy when he had this at home? I had to hold on with both hands—to my self restraint.

“You know something,” murmurs
Elise Parkinson, “about poor Gladys?” She says it low. You have to lean closer, to hear. Yes, I leaned closer. She had put some musky perfume behind her ears.

“I know everything about her!” I lie calmly, “and about Rosy Carstairs, too.”

“So?” Elise pouts her lips a little. Oh, she’s not as kittenish as she sounds, and I know it. Back of those languishing blue eyes, there’s a cold gleam. Elise is going to pump me if she can, same as I mean to pump her. But there’s ways of getting the cold gleam out of her eyes. Let this old withered hand tell you! I lean forward some more.

“God how a man could do the things to you that Parkinson has done!” I whisper.

Her blue eyes open a little with the intention of making me dizzy and I sit up straight, suddenly. I remember that perfume of hers now. How in the hell did I ever forget it? The odor about her is—bitter almonds! The scent of old kill ’em quick, cyanide! My hands close hard on her arms just above the elbow. Elise gasps, her eyes fly wide.

“Where’s the cyanide?” I snap at her.

Elise shook her head. “What?” And I can tell she’s scared. “Cyanide? What do you mean?”

I shake her a little. Just for emphasis of course. “Listen, Elise,” I say it fast. “Gladys Mears was killed by cyanide poisoning because she knows too much. Just now when I bent over you, I smelled cyanide again! Think, think fast! What have you got about you that might touch your lips?”

Her eyes close and I shake her again and the blue silk slides. Her shoulder is smooth as old ivory, but warm.

Warm, man! The smell of her breast is an invitation to accept which a man would die. Might die, I suddenly realize. That odor of almonds.

I bend close, closer. No doubt about it. The scent comes from her lips! But she isn’t dead. And she hasn’t tasted of the poison or she would be dead! I understand then. Her lips are freshly touched up with a rouge stick. I snatch up a fold of her negligee and rub it hard across her mouth, holding the lips apart while I do it. Of course, it was accidental that her negligee came unfastened.

Elise Parkinson’s eyes are wide and angry. When I take the silk away, her lips are pale and bruised, but the almond odor is gone. And the negligee, unheeded, is wide open, only clenching to Elise by its sleazy shoulder straps. What I see of that gal makes my eyes pop and my voice shake.

“Darling,” I stutter, watching the robe settle slowly . . . “Darling, you just escaped being murdered by a poison lipstick. There was cyanide in it!”

Her hand was groping for her negligee. But she was hampered a bit because by this time I had my arms around her and the velvet skin of her back was warming my hands. “No, no,” she whispered. “You . . . mustn’t!”

I was sitting on the side of the chaise longue and leaning over her. Her hands were on my chest, pushing, but only half-heartedly. I ran my hand up through her hair roughly—and kissed her. I ran my hand down over her shoulder—and kissed her. Elise moaned—and kissed me! She rolled toward me with a white, sinuous twist of her body and stopped reaching to hold her negligee closed. She had other uses for her hands.

“Oh, you must stop!” she whispered,
kissing me some more. "You must stop. You must—protect me from myself!" Her writhing lips were so tight against mine I could hardly understand her words.

I laughed at her. Me protect her! I was getting a hell of a kick out of this, but I wasn't losing control of the situation. Not yet. I could do what I wanted now with Elise. But she had to tell—what she had almost been murdered to prevent her from telling! I pretended to avoid her mouth and she dragged my head down with both clutching hands.

"Hell, don't you know that your husband never hires a secretary he can't keep? Don't you know that's why Gladys Mears squeezed Rosy out of his office, and off his lap? Because he liked Gladys' looks better . . . ."

She stopped kissing, her breath hot on my mouth, arms still tightly about my neck. "You're lying," she whispered.

I shook my head at her, and dragged my lips, teasing, across hers. Her arms jerked tight. "Honest, honeychile," I assured her. "It sounds like a lie I know, with you at home, but it's the truth. Let's get back at him, you and I. We'll rip the hide off him. You and what you know of Boss Hykim! Me and the power I swing!"

IN HER eyes, I catch that cold gleam again. It scared me. After the way I'd worked over her, after the warmth of the way she'd responded. When a woman can come cold-blooded through the Carter technique, it's time for Mrs. Carter's little boy to look out!

I was already warned before she murmured, "What power do you swing, lover?"

I grinned at her and stepped back from her. "Wait until I lock the door, baby, and I'll tell you all I know about a lot of things!" I whisper. Her arms cling to my shoulders, but I pretend not to notice that. Before I reach the door, I heard her feet thud to the floor. It was the Carter brain that saved me then. I took a nose-dive into the hall, landed rolling and got around the corner of the doorjamb just in time. The bark of her little automatic was spiteful and hard.

"Help!" she screams, sounding frightened. "Help, I'm being attacked!"

Her feet were coming fast across the room and there wasn't much cover in that hall. She stood in the doorway, trying to hold the negligee across her breasts, pointing her gun. Her eyes were narrow and hard. Yes, sir, I could see her eyes even when she made such a pretty picture there in the doorway. You can see plenty all at once when it's death looking at you!

I did the only thing I could do. When I rolled into the hall and heard her coming, I ripped off my shoe. When she popped out of the door, I let it fly, straight at her pretty face! A pretty woman can't stand that. Her face means too much to her. Elise fired but it was, subconsciously, at the shoe. She flung up her arms before her face—and I hit her in a long diving tackle that rolled us over and over across the floor of her boudoir. I leaned over and got the gun. I stood over her, my hand drawn back to hang one on her mouth. I was sore as hell.

From the doorway a man's voice said dryly, "All right, Carter, drop that gun!" I glanced over my shoulder and he had me cold. I dropped it. Parkinson was bony and tall with that thin, white
neck that his kind always have. His voice rasped, "Damn you, Elise, what's the idea of rolling around the floor with this punk? And you let him get a gun!"

Elise got up slowly, lithe as a cat.

There was only one thing I could do: a woman likes her beauty; I slipped off my shoe and aimed for her face. Then I tackled her.
God, what a beautiful body she had! She pulled the negligee about her white legs and breast with the same slow languorous movements.

"Shut up, Jim," she said mildly. "I phoned you I'd hold him until you got here and I did. I want the five thousand you promised."

Parkinson rasped, "You'll get it. I always pay you, don't I?"

I heard all of this dizzily. Part of it was plain. Elise had called Parkinson before she let me come upstairs. She had been playing me for a sucker to hold me all this time. But the rest of it didn't make sense—and then, suddenly, it did. A lot of things I hadn't understood became very clear. These two might be married, but there was no man-and-wife business here. Consequently, any idea I might have formed about Elise Parkinson killing out of jealousy was all wet. And yet—that poison on her lips! Elise was laughing, and it was a coarse, ugly sound.

"You better pay!" she said. She lolled across the room, stopped to light a cigarette and went trailing out the door with the smoke hazing around her head. She had dragged the negligee tight. I had to sigh. Such hips! Soft, rounded curves that rippled under the revealing silk. Clear now, wasn't it? Elise had blackmailed Parkinson into marrying her. She held something over his head, and all she cared about was bleeding him. Not a pretty picture. I remembered that cold gleam in her passionate eyes and I shuddered. I felt a little drawn toward Parkinson.

"Friend," I said to him, "I think I prefer you and your gun!"

Parkinson had a high, bald forehead that was criss-crossed with a hundred wrinkles when he frowned. He took me down stairs and along a dark, high hall to an office whose walls were book-lined and windowless. I walked ahead of him at his insistent request and, in the door, I stopped, staring. Rosy had been pretty swell in the bib-overalls, but in a shiny white silk dress, tight over her breast, with her silk legs crossed like that, she made my mouth water. Even after the little set-to upstairs that should have soured me on all women she could make my mouth water.

She sneered at me. "You're a swell egg," she said, "letting Sergeant Mills get that paper. Now, I suppose, I'll have to buy it off him, damn his guts, unless Parkinson can call him off."

Parkinson shoved me over alongside Rosy. I saw a roll of bills on his desk. Parkinson laid the gun down carefully and began counting the roll of bills, wetting his thumb every now and then on the tip of his tongue.

"The jam you got me in," Rosy goes on, "I have to go to a gyp lawyer like Parkinson to get out of. He's going to take me for my last damned cent. Look at him count my dough!"

Parkinson looked up and showed his gums. It was a smile. "No, dear, I'll leave you the gas station so you can make more money for me!"

I was slumped down in the chair, studying Parkinson. A sucker for a good-looking girl—and Elise had a hold over him. Elise was milking him dry, in spite of all the graft he took in for Boss Hykim. It must be murder at least, and she must have the evidence salted away where it would pop up to damn him if she died. I saw why they were married. It kept her from testifying . . . But the evidence was still a threat or Parkinson would have killed her long ago. His bunch had killed Gladys Mears . . .
That poison on Elise’s lips... I sat up suddenly.

"Parkinson!" I snapped, "was Elise down at your office today?"

Parkinson paused, his thumb on his way to his mouth. "I believe so," he said, "She came to get some money, Miss Mears said."

"To get some—or leave some, Parkinson?" I cried. "To leave the money Mills had brought her. Parkinson, if you value your life, don’t wet your thumb on your tongue again!"

PARKINSON stared at me, then down at his thumb as if it were a snake. I turned to Rose. "In that roll of money, Rosy, is the twenty dollar bill you got from Gladys Mears today, isn’t it?"

Rosy wrinkled her forehead. Her eyes were narrow. "So what?" she demanded. "How in the hell do I know?"

"Listen," I turned to Parkinson. "Give me a chance alone with Elise. You can listen in from anywhere you like—and I’ll prove to you how she killed Gladys Mears. Did you know that Sergeant Mills has been coming to your house almost every night?" I was guessing about the Elise-Mills tieup, but his appearance at Rosy’s was damned funny!

Parkinson frowned and shook his head as if none of this made sense. "I know why Mills comes here."

I laugh at him, getting to my feet. I was excited. This was the biggest story of a life-time, if I played the cards right.

"Parkinson," I say, "why did you fight with Boss Hykim?"

Even Rosy looks startled at that. Parkinson jerks to his feet. "Damn it, who has been talking?" he demanded. He leveled the gun. "You’ll talk, Carter, or by God, I’ll gut-shoot you! And don’t let my face fool you! I can kill if I have to!"

"Sure!" I soothed him. "Sure, you can. But you don’t want to kill me. I didn’t know that you and Hykim had a fight. I guessed it. Doesn’t that prove that I know what I’m talking about? Listen, give me a chance with Elise, and I’ll make her confess what she did. I tell you she’s crossing you!"

I stepped forward and held out a hand, "Is it a bargain? Hell, man you can shoot me any time if I fail. I’m still a burglar or something in this house and Elise will swear I attacked her. Listen, what can you lose?"

Parkinson stared at me. He looked down at the money on his desk and shook his head. "I still don’t get it," he muttered, "but if Elise..." His face brightened. Here was a way out for him in his trouble with Elise, out of the hold she had over him. If he could prove her guilty of murdering Gladys... That was what I wanted him to see and that was what he did see. He saw a whole lot more than that, but I didn’t know it until later, dumb fool that I was. And it almost cost me my life!

I winked at Rosy and be damned if she wasn’t scowling at me! I bent close to her. "Don’t be jealous, honeychile!" I whispered. "I’ll still let you buy that paper back from me."

Rosy slapped at my face, but her scowl was complicated by a grin. And yet it was a grin I didn’t like. All at once I began to get cold feet on the thing I had set myself to do. A man with a gun who could shoot me at any time with impunity, a man who thought I knew too much about him. And a girl who could wriggle out of a murder charge by helping to frame me! I started to sit down again.

(Continued on page 105)
Even though the multi-millionaire is dying, he still has strength to put his curse on the man who loves his ward ...
DEATH

As he screamed, he swayed uncertainly; his knees buckled...

A BLACK coupe, its license plate bearing the official red cross medical seal, drew up before the palatial residence of Alton Waring.

The motor died, lights snapped off. A young, good-looking man stepped briskly up the walk, his instrument bag swinging from his right hand. He pressed the pearl bell button on the door panel, heard a faint tinkle within the house. A moment later the door opened and the tired face of Mrs. Estes, Alton Waring's housekeeper, looked out.

"Oh, you got here quickly," she said. "Come in."

Dr. Mark Patten stepped into the hallway, removed his hat and coat.
"You’d better go right up," Mrs. Estes said.

The physician glanced towards the tight-closed doors of Alton Waring’s study. Loud voices—the retired multi-millionaire’s and another—emanated from the room.

"Armand is back from Mexico," Mrs. Estes whispered. "They’ve been fighting like that for two hours. You’d better go up before he sees you. He’s in a vile humor."

Dr. Patten nodded, mounted the stairs. The housekeeper followed, crossed in front of him on reaching the landing, led the way into a bedroom.

Ann Drake’s pale white face blended almost perfectly with the pillow-slip that was its background. Only her young, soft lips, rougeless yet crimson, broke the deadly pallor with a vivid splash of warm color. She smiled as Mark Patten approached the bed, set his bag on a chair.

"At your mercy," she said weakly.

The physician sat down on the edge of the bed, reached for her right wrist. "What seems to be the trouble?"

"Everything. My chest is as tight as a drum head. I can’t eat, sleep, breathe, drink or think. I’m washed out, washed up and what have you."

He brought out a watch, took her pulse. "Now, supposing you make the diagnoses, prescribe and predict the prognosis. When did you succumb?"

Alton Waring’s ward sighed. "This morning. I woke up feeling utterly useless. I—"

A thermometer bulb beneath her tongue cut off further speech. Dr. Patten nodded to Mrs. Estes. The housekeeper backed out of the room, closed the door quietly. The moment the latch clicked, Mark Patten leaned closer to Ann Drake. His hands gripped her shoulders, caressing, through the shoulder straps of her silk pajama top, the velvet softness of her flesh.

"I’ll do all the talking now," he said. "This house is poison to you, Ann. Everything about it is wrong. You’re stifling. You need life and air. Why don’t you give in and marry me? I’ll show you a new horizon, a new existence. Alton Waring is draining you of all that is fresh and clean."

The voluptuously full contours of Ann’s breasts lifted the light coverlet. Mark Patten’s fingers tingled and his breath quickened as he watched, and unconsciously his fingers dug into the thrilling warmth of her shoulders. A protesting frown crossed her face. He removed his hands, plucked out the thermometer.

"I hardly think my condition requires massage," she said.

Mark Patten returned the thermometer to its case, dropped it in his bag. "Temperature?" Ann queried.

"I’m the only one with temperature!" Without warning his arms were about her, his mouth jammed hard against her open lips. Through the coverlet he felt the warm touch of a silk-sheathed breast, and his lips bruised hers fervently. Ann heard footsteps in the hall. Mark Patten heard nothing but the mad beat of his heart, the roaring of hot blood in his temples. Ann tried to struggle loose but her desperate writhing availed nothing against his strength.

The door swung open and Alton Waring, gray, dour, stoop-shouldered, glared like a malevolent ogre.

Mark Patten heard the asthmatic intake of the old man’s breath. He bounced back from the bed, whirled to face Alton Waring. The multi-millionaire’s
face was blue. He staggered into the room, one bony fist upraised.

"You!" he panted. "You!"

Behind Alton Waring, his half-brother, Armand, smiled out of black, almond eyes. It was a leering, twisted smile. A half-smoked cigarette dangled from the corner of his thin-lipped mouth.

"I was treating Miss Drake," Mark Patten said huskily.

"Get out!" the old man screamed. "I told you never to set foot in this house. "Get out!"

He took one step forward, swayed uncertainly. Mark Patten knew the apoplectic signs but he made no move to assist. Alton Waring's knees buckled, his lower jaw dropped and stiffened. He fell heavily, rolling over on his side.

Only then did the young physician move. He motioned to the startled renegade half-brother. "Carry him into his room," he directed. Mrs. Estes gaped from the open door. "Some warm water, Mrs. Estes," he snapped. "Quickly."

Armand Waring lifted the old man. Mrs. Estes hurried down the steps. Mark Patten turned back to the bed, gripped the handle of his black bag.

"He may not survive this one," he said softly. "I hope, for your sake, and for—" He bit his lower lip. "I hope it's the end. I'll be back."

Alton Waring was stretched like a corpse on the candlewick spread of his bed when Mark Patten entered the room. Armand Waring, palpably nervous, leaned over him. Moulton, the multi-millionaire's butler and personal valet, hovered close in hawk-nosed silence. Mrs. Estes came in with a bowl of warm water, placed it on the night table.

The physician set his bag down on the bed, brought out a bottle of ammonia. "A glass," he said.

The housekeeper produced one. "Fill it half-full with water," Mark Patten said. He spilled some of the ammonia into the glass. The mixture was cloudy. He leaned over Alton Waring, lifted him with his left arm, forced the rim of the glass between the wizened lips.

Alton Waring's eyelids rolled up. He seemed to stiffen momentarily. Mark Patten emptied the contents of the glass down his throat, lowered him to the bed.

"He'll be all right. Just leave him alone for a while. When he wakes up give him a hot toddy with plenty of brandy or rum. Get a blanket, Mrs. Estes, and cover him."

Moulton tip-toed out of the room. Armand Waring followed. The physician remained until the housekeeper returned with a warm quilt. He placed it over the old man's body, tucked it in under his chin.

"That's fine," he said softly, following the housekeeper out of the room, closing the door gently.

"I'm sorry this happened," Mrs. Estes said. "Maybe I shouldn't have called you."

Mark Patten touched her cheek, smiled. "Don't worry about it." He passed into Ann's room, stopped short when he saw Armand Waring at the bedside. "Miss Drake requires complete rest," he said sharply.

Armand Waring turned. His black, pomaded hair glistened. His lips curled in a sneer. "Evidently your advice isn't considered very important around here," he countered.

The muscles of Mark's cheeks tightened. It would have been a pleasure to push his fist into that suave, sneering face. But he held himself in check.
“I happen to be attending Miss Drake!” he snapped.
“So my brother noticed. Is that how you attend all your female patients?”

In one motion Mark dropped his bag and let fly with a hard-knuckled right fist. Armand Waring ducked but the blow caught him on the temple, knocked him against the wall. He came at Mark, roaring like a stuck bull. The doctor set himself, jabbed with his left, threw a deadly punch with his right. It struck the other directly on the point of the jaw, dropped him cold.

Mark Patten rubbed his knuckles. He glanced at Ann. “I’m sorry,” he said softly. “I lost my temper.” He reached down, clutched the back of Armand Waring’s jacket, dragged him out to the hall. Returning, he picked up his bag.
“Take two aspirin every four hours. Plenty of liquids. Go light on solid foods. You’ll be all right by morning.”

Pink circles burned in Ann Drake’s cheeks. “What—what about—”

“He’s all right. Just a slight stroke—unfortunately. I’ll call Mrs. Estes in the morning. If you need me, don’t hesitate. I’m not afraid of Alton Waring.” Quickly, he stepped to the bedside, leaned over, kissed her forehead.
“Good-bye.”

The housekeeper was waiting in the lower hall. Terror lights gleamed in her pale blue eyes. Her hands trembled as she offered Mark Patten his topcoat.
“Why did you do that?” she questioned.

The physician scowled. “Because I’m a fool! I never did like the slimy eel!” He paused, his hand on the doorknob.
“Let me know if Ann’s uncomfortable. I’ll come whether he likes it or not! Don’t tell him you called me. Say I just dropped in.”

Mrs. Estes closed the door behind him, held her hand to her forehead, quivered. She waited until the doctor’s car moved away from the curb, then walked back to the kitchen.

On the second floor, Armand Waring sat up, rubbed his chin. His face was horribly twisted as he rose, stumbled into Ann Drake’s room. He pointed a finger at her.

“You’ll suffer for that!” he barked. “I’ll make you and that young squirt eat mud! I’ll be the boss damn’ soon and then you’ll sing a different tune!”

He stumbled forward to the bed, gripped the frightened girl’s arms with cruel fingers. “I get what I want, understand? You look plenty good to me and that’s all that counts!”

A scream rose in Ann’s throat but died before it reached her lips. She cringed from the leering mouth, the hot, eager eyes. Suddenly his taloned fingers caught in the neckline of her pajama top, ripped the silk down almost to her stomach. Her breasts, firm and full, swung clear. Two red scratches streaked her white skin.

Breathing hoarsely, Armand Waring burned his gaze into her. He clutched her. A muted cry escaped Ann’s lips. She pulled one hand free, raked her sharp finger-nails across his cheek, left four jagged trails of blood.

Footsteps on the stairs frightened Armand Waring away from the bed. He jerked a handkerchief from his pocket, held it to his bleeding cheek.

“You wait!” he snarled. “You’ll get yours!”

Gasping, Mrs. Estes ran into the room. “I—I heard you scream, Ann!”

Ann forced a pitiful smile. “No, it was nothing, dear.”

Armand Waring slunk out of the
room. Mrs. Estes came to the side of the bed. "You did scream, Ann!"

The girl’s breasts rose and fell tumultuously. She leaned back, closed her

*With the last ounce of his strength he dug his fingers into the other’s windpipe.*
eyes. "It—it was nothing," she whispered. "Please draw the blinds. I'll try to sleep."

IT WAS long past midnight when Mark Patten's phone rang. He scrambled out of bed, answered it. Mrs. Estes' voice, tremulously unnatural, came over the wire.

"Come... come... over at... once!"

"What's happened?"

"Mr. Waring! He—he's dead... murdered!"

DR. McCALL, the medical examiner, was turning Alton Waring's stiff corpse over on its stomach when Mark entered the bedroom. The coverlet underneath the body was dark red with congealed blood. Mark gaped. The handle of a small pocket knife protruded from Alton Waring's back.

Inspector Kerrigan looked up as Mark stepped into the room. They knew each other casually. Once before they had met on an assault case Mark was treating.

"Hello, Doc," Kerrigan greeted. "Who buzzed you?"

"The—the housekeeper."

The detective pointed to the carmine smeared corpse. "Pretty piece of business, huh?"

McCall stood erect. "We'll require a complete autopsy, Inspector. The knife would have caused death, of that I'm certain. However—"

"I'll call the stiff wagon," Kerrigan interrupted. He turned to Mark. "Supposing you wait downstairs for me, Doc." He closed the door behind Mark. "You'll do the autopsy immediately and check on the contents of the glass, won't you?"

The medical examiner nodded. "Yes, I will."

Kerrigan leaned over the body, wrapped a handkerchief around the handle of the knife, pulled it gently. The blade came out with a sucking noise. He wiped it clean of blood, held it by the steel tip. It was not the ordinary type of pocket knife. Its single blade did not jack into the handle but slid vertically. A spring catch released it. A tiny piece of lint was caught in the catch. Kerrigan leaned over the bed again. Neither the coverlet nor the pillow slip was torn. He wrapped the knife carefully, dropped it into an envelope, placed the envelope in his inside pocket.

"Call me as soon as you check the stuff in the glass," he said.

McCall packed up. "It'll probably be a good half-hour before I can analyze it."

"I'll be here."

IN Alton Waring's sombre, dark-paneled study, Biff Kerrigan lit the stub of his cigar, blew a funnel of heavy smoke. He swung one leg over the corner of the dead man's desk, motioned Mark Patten into a chair.

"Waring's brother was telling me you were here when the old man keeled over, Doc."

The physician nodded. "Yes. Mr. Waring suffered from apoplexy. He had a stroke while I was attending his ward, Miss Drake."

"You treated him?"

"Just administered an ammonia draught."

"That's all?"

"Yes."

"How did Waring happen to get the stroke?"
Mark Patten flushed. "Over-excitement."

Kerrigan gazed at the glowing tip of his cigar. "Waring ordered you out of the house, didn't he?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

The young physician gnawed at his lower lip. "Mr. Waring never liked me."

"How did it happen you were called to take care of his ward?"

"The housekeeper called me."

"You were—er—intimate with Miss Drake, Doc?" Kerrigan's steel-gray eyes peered from narrow slits.

Mark Patten jerked forward. The muscles of his jaw twitched. "I was friendly with Miss Drake."

The detective's manner changed. "Let's drop the hokum, Doc. Waring caught you with his ward. He ordered you out of the joint. He keeled over. His brother carried him to his room. You spilled something into a glass and fed it to him. Then you left. Two hours later the housekeeper walks into the room and finds Waring dead."

Patten paled. "But—but he was stabbed! You don't think—"

"I'm paid to produce, Doc. All my thinking is on my own hook. You see, we're not sure that knife in Waring's back killed him. You heard what McCall said."

Patten's eyes bulged. "And—and you think I gave him poison!" He relaxed, laughed softly.

Kerrigan frowned. "I wouldn't chuckle yet, Doc."

"What do you mean?"

"You wanted to marry Miss Drake, didn't you, Doc?"

"Supposing I did?"

"The old man objected and he was her guardian."

Patten nodded. "I get your point. I fed Alton Waring poison to remove the obstacle. That's how they do it in detective stories, Inspector. Dr. McCall's autopsy will show nothing but spirits of ammonia in Waring's stomach because that was the only drug I gave him. Fortunately both Mrs. Estes and Armand Waring were present at the time, not to mention the butler, or I'd be accused of putting the knife in his back."

Kerrigan smiled. "I'm not accusing you of anything, Doc. Don't get me wrong. I'm just checking everything, savvy? McCall took the glass you used. He'll analyze what was left in it."

"And in the meantime?"

"Just stick around. You might go up and see the girl. I understand she fainted when she heard the old man was murdered." Kerrigan reached for the phone, called the morgue.

As he stepped out of the study, Mark Patten almost collided with Armand Waring. The dead man's foppish half-brother sneered.

"So they got you, didn't they?"

Mark held himself in check. Again he would have thoroughly enjoyed beating the man to a pulp, but this time his self-control worked. He started up the steps. Waring grabbed his arm.

"You can't go up there!" he growled.

Mark swung his instrument bag. It cracked against the side of Waring's head, sent him reeling. The sound of the impact brought Kerrigan out into the hall just in time to see Armand Waring stagger against the wall.

"He struck me!" he screamed. "That's the second time! Not only did he kill my brother but—"

Mark wheeled, leaped to the landing. Kerrigan's big body separated them.

(Continued on page 115)
BULLETS AND PEARLS

(Continued from page 27)

what the hell. She yelled back. "Be ready to shoot. First face you see. And shoot quick."

BRUSH tore her dress into shreds, she was that wild in her going. She was running like a little fawn, body all white and gleaming in the sun shafts. Only stepins covered her even a little bit—not a scrap of the dress was left. She didn't stop and let me catch up with her until we came to a path. Breathless, she waited, listening. Then she whispered in staccato jerks.

"'Tomorrow morning'—she meant on the phone to Benny, that the bank is shipping a hundred thousand in currency by plane this morning—Charlie Lambert's plane—Charlie told me—to the Federal Reserve at Richmond. She'd know from her husband. Benny threatened her with the pearls and made her tell. Joe Gannon and his pals stopped at Mrs. Drayton's. They are near here now, hiding. I think in a house—I saw it from the air yesterday, from Charlie Lambert's plane. It's the only place they could be where they would be near enough for one of them to leave Sylvia last night and be back in half an hour with Joe. And Pete—do you know what I think? I'm sure. Charlie Lambert will have that money in the plane—he skims the Ridge at fifty feet right over the old house. They'll shoot him down."

I hadn't no time to answer that. Far away the drone of a motor sounded. Charlie Lambert was coming in the mail plane—hundred thousand—skim the Ridge at fifty feet—

"There!" Kay whispered when we'd crept along the path. "The house. See? There's a car waiting for the get away."

I recognized the car. Benny the Barber's. It had carried him away from the murder of Dawn Prentice.

"All right, toots! You stay back. I'll ambush and rouse 'em out with a shot. Anyhow, I'll occupy 'em while the plane's going over."

"Where do you get that 'I' stuff?" Kay snapped. "Maybe you think they ought not to see me in my scanties?"

I COULDN'T stop her. She crept along beside me, then slipped to the other side of the path. Suddenly her gun barked. A face came to the door—a frightened face. Its owner carried a machine gun. I sent a bullet into it. Kay began to fire and I saw that two men had been flat on the roof where we couldn't see them. They raised to look over, startled, then dropped back.

Benny the Barber came running out. I could hear him curse. "Let me have him," I yelled at Kay, and I got him. He'll never kill anybody else.

The two on the roof were splattering bullets all around us now, shooting over the eaves. God. If they'd get Kay! Little Kay. Half naked little sprite. Her bras-siere all crooked. Scratches on these pert little breasts of hers, where the sunlight danced on their white curves.

I jumped into the path to draw the fire. One head raised at just the wrong second, because my gun was lifted. The head fell back and the body rolled and plunked onto the ground writhing. Then a bullet got me and I went down, not bad off, but breathless.
I heard Kay’s scream. She leaped into the path and stood over me. Actually straddled me. Her gun was spitting and bullets were lifting dust all around—but she told at last. The shooting from the roof stopped.

Suddenly the woods roared with the rumble of Charlie Lambert’s plane motors. Like a hawk the mail plane lifted from the valley to the north and skimmed gracefully over the roof of the abandoned house. The pilot must have

“I saw then that we were getting into a mess. The guy was Benny the Barber!”
seen Kay, for he rose higher and circled. She waved him on. What a nice little thinking he must have done on the rest of the trip—a half naked, curvy little body like that waving up to him out of the hills.

When the plane was out of sight Kay looked down at me. Damned if she wasn't crying! She got down on a knee in the dust and kissed me.

Kay got up then and pulled her brassiere into place.

"You big bum," she snapped. "You can't ever be nice, can you? Always staring, even when you're croaking, like I hope you a'

I groaned. "I love you. I can't help it."

WE FOUND the pearls safe in Benny's pocket. Even the seven Dawn Prentice had hoped to sell for the mortgage. We explained our knowledge of the planned hold up, shooting the mail plane down, well enough to get away with it. We let the murder of Dawn Prentice remain a mystery. So Papa Banker was okay. Not much wiser, though, for he wanted to meet Kay in New York some time and go to the museum.

MURDER FOR EXERCISE

(Continued from page 15)

"What'll we do? What'll we do?" The doorbell peeped again. The sound of heavy beating on the door, crash of impatient fists.

"Do," screamed the old lady, "we'll fight of course! It'll only be two men, a prow'l car. We can take them!" She slid to the door, half crouched behind it the knife still in her hand. The man called Sonny stepped close to Lord Byron, shotgun raised. The door upstairs crashed in, there sounded the heavy tread of feet.

Johnny saw Lord Byron rock forward in his chair until he rested on his feet. He saw the chauffeur's face twist and tense and as footsteps clattered at the head of the stair, saw Lord Byron dive forward, chair and all against the man with the shotgun.

The shotgun exploded as Sonny went down. Johnny screamed, "Behind the door! Behind the door! Look out! Look out!"

NOT much later they were in Katie the Weeper's parlor. Sergeant Cohn nodded at Lewellyn Smith, the curious cabbie. "We were prowling the neighborhood, too, Harding, when this guy found us. He said he'd followed your car down here, waited a while and blew your horn, thinking maybe something was wrong. So that's that. Now you tell me."

Johnny glowed at the cab driver. "Thanks, pal. It was a good hunch. Without it we'd have been in the furnace!" He shuddered, looked inquiringly at Sergeant Cohn who appeared a little white himself.

Cohn said, "Enough. A few bones,
teeth and things like that. Enough to establish a corpus delicti."

Johnny said, "Here it is. Marcia Fane has been running around with that little guy, Cross. Grant Fane didn't care much because he was crazy about Lucille, Marcia's sister. I've known that for weeks. After all I'm a gossip columnist! Marcia and Cross got Fane out here to this house by forcing Lucille to call him. Then they made Fane write a bunch of checks, torturing and beating Lucille to make him sign them. That's the only way I can figure it. The girl, Lucille, broke away twice. Once with a couple of checks she'd picked up. That's when I ran into her. The second time they had gagged her. She got as far as some guy's lawn and dropped dead. Cross and Marcia knew it was all up then, so they bumped Fane and Katie the Weeper and her precious son were getting rid of him when we came up. When you get Cross and get him to talking, you'll find out I'm about right on every angle!"

"It's my dead sister," she said. "She wasn't bad. . . . Promise me not to write anything about her."
“And I'll get him, too,” swore Sergeant Cohn, “if I have to finecomb the town.”

“Never mind that,” Johnny's voice was weary. “Just come out to my place. I got Marcia and Cross both in my closet waiting for you.”

There was an expression of intense disgust on the police sergeant's face as the little man walked from the room. At the door a hand tugged at Johnny's sleeve.

“Okay, what is it Lewellyn?”

“I just thought,” said the cabbie, “if you ever need a chauffeur you'd keep me in mind. You got one but he's too dumb for a guy like you. Sometimes you ought to explain things to him. He thinks—”

“I'll prove it,” broke in Lord Byron. “Boss, are there more guys in Dannemora than—”

“You're both wrong,” snapped Johnny. “The fullest place is the joint where they keep guys under observation, the nuts! Come on, before I'm headed for there myself.”

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**KILLER IN THE COLD**

*(Continued from page 63)*

in a whistle. Not a very sorrowful widow. I oozed along the portico, threw a light in the next room. It was her bedroom. The screen gave easily.

The first thing I noticed inside was the odor. The flash found the bottle on the dressing table. It was emerald, all right. I started in methodically, went through all the drawers. Even her underwear smelled like that damned perfume.

Pretty soon I slid to the door, listened for a minute. A dance orchestra was on the radio, from a distance I could hear Mrs. Manning singing with it. Then the sound of running water. I opened the door.

I was waiting for her when she came out of the bathroom in a rubber cap, a bath towel and not much else. She looked like the wrath of God without makeup. Ex-burleycuers get fat in the wrong places once they quit dancing.

She sort of screamed, dropped the towel, snatched it up again and began squawking. I turned off the radio, sat down on the couch again and said, “Quit playing. It's all over. Who killed Brooks, you or Bell?”

That stopped her. She managed a cigarette and a sneer, managed to say, “Why would one of us kill him, sap?”

“For a necklace worth about a hundred grand.”

I couldn't see her eyes for the cigarette smoke. She said softly, “Prove it.”

I lit a smoke myself. “I know Manning had the necklace. I can prove that, sister. And after he was murdered the necklace was gone. I saw the spot in the filing cabinet where he kept it. Neither one of the C sisters got it, I know that. But you and Bell came in too promptly after the killing and the only alibis you have are each other. You both say you were at a picture show and Bell had seat stubs. That's easy. Bell buys two tickets, walks out the side entrance and meets you. Perfect. Then you go to Manning's office, one of you
A blackjack descended on his head as he opened the door.
shoots him, and you scram. The rest of it, the C sisters, was just a break for you. Right?"

She stood up. "Maybe. But prove it, prove any of it. And where's the necklace?"

I had to laugh. She looked like hell in that bath towel and no war paint. "Leave it to a woman to pull a double cross. You and Bell didn't find the necklace in the office, did you? How do I know? Because you kept on looking for it. Who knew I discovered the corpse? Only the cops and you. That one is easy. When I went back to my own office later on, I was sapped and someone searched me. Later on the same parties went through my hotel room. They suspected me, Cockrell, of lifting that necklace myself! So it had to be you and Bell. You two were the only outsiders that knew about me. Besides, there's the perfume."

"Prove it." That's all she said. I got sore. I said, "I don't have to prove it. I'm a tough dick. I get confessions, see? Who shot Manning, you or Bell?"

I had her by the arm, twisted it behind her back. I should have socked her; I got ready to.

Then Bell said, "It was me. I shot him, Cockrell." He was standing in the door, a mean little gun in his hand and his eyes were filled with that well known killer's light. "I shot him with my little bow and arrow."

I let her loose, said, "Nice of you to tell me. Come on, we'll go tell Burke."

He shook his head. "I expect to talk to Burke later, Cockrell. I'm going to call him up here and let him look at your dead body. I'll tell him I caught you prowling and thought you were a burglar. Want to give me the necklace now or do I take it off your body?"

"Oh yeah, the necklace! Careful of that trigger, I'm getting you the necklace." Slowly, slowly I reached in my side pocket, drew out the necklace. Mrs. Manning's eyes were laying out on her cheeks like grapes, her breasts were rising and falling like floating balloons. Bell just grinned.

I said, "Funny about the necklace, Bell. You killed Manning for it. While you were killing him, the dame here lifted it. Yeah, she crossed you. She went with you to search my office and my room just for a stall. Know where I found the necklace?"

She was making funny noises in her throat. Bell was still grinning. "I found it tucked down in that pint size perfume flagon she has on her dressing table. Found it about ten minutes ago. If you think I'm lying, smell it."

I held it toward him. He looked from me to the woman. She was still trying to talk. He stepped toward me, reached for the necklace. I dropped it. He made a mistake. His eyes flickered for a second.

At arms length a .45 makes a hell of a hole. It knocked him clear across the room, spattered patent leather hair all over the wall. Awful messy. Mrs. Manning screamed once, then flopped to the floor, just as I reached for the phone.

THIRTY minutes later she sat in a corner of the couch, an old lady, beaten and wilted. A copper was taking down her confession in shorthand. He said, "Sign here." She signed.

Burke glowered at me. "I knew you was mixed up in this," he said. "I'll have to keep the necklace for a while, you know that."

"Shove it up your left nostril," I told him, hand on the doorknob. "It isn't missing any more anyway. I don't give a damn what kind of a jam young Ash-
ton gets into. I hope his old lady tans his fanny. So long, numbskull."

Corinne was still in the room across the hall from mine. She shivered like hell in the taxi going home. I had to help her out a little; it was a damned cold night.

She unlocked the door of her apartment, still sort of speechless. Sister Cara and Phil Ashton were quite a picture on the little divan. Sister Cara blinked in the light and grinned. She said, "It’s all right. We’re married."

Corinne just stood there a minute. Then she turned to me, said, "Can we go back to the hotel?"

I said sure. I was glad of it. It was a damned cold night.

"Get up!" Parkinson ordered grimly from behind the gun. "You’re going upstairs and have your chance with Elise, you lucky dog!" He laughed and the sound made my flesh crawl. "You lucky dog!"

I went upstairs with his laughter in my ears. He nodded toward a door. "That’s her room," he said. "I’ll be on the balcony. And this door will be locked—from outside!"

He faded away into the dimness of the hall, but I knew his gun was on my back. I reached out my hand to the door and knocked. I said, "Knock knock!" My voice didn’t sound funny. I didn’t feel funny either. I said it again before Elise walked up to the inside of the door and said, "Who’s there?"

And then it was funny. Not the gun and the fact that Parkinson had me cold meat, but the game I had to play.

Elise didn’t laugh. She ripped open the door with the little gun in her hand. I grinned at her. "It wouldn’t do any good to shoot me," I told her. "I’ve got the story all written down and put where it will do the most good if you rub me out."

Elise said woodenly, "Come in."

I walked in, closed the door and heard the lock turned behind me. Parkinson was keeping his promise! I was locked in with Elise—and Parkinson would be on the balcony outside her window. As I strolled past Elise and stopped to light a cigarette, my eyes went to the balcony door, a full-length French window. It was open and the curtains were lacy, fanning in the night breeze. The lights were low and rose-tinted by the bed. Elise ground the gun muzzle into my kidney.

"Just what are you talking about?" she demanded, her voice vicious, but worried.

I turned around and grinned at her, "Just a nick-name," I assured her. "My pals down in Miami all call me Poison Bill."
She jabbed the gun into my belly, "Be funny, damn you!" she rasped. "Be funny, and I'll blow you wide open!"

For once, Mrs. Carter's little boy didn't feel like laughing, but I managed it. I looked her straight in the eye and talked out smoke. I said, "I think poison would be more your style than a gun, Elise." I didn't keep my voice soft either. I wanted Parkinson, outside the window, to hear. "Besides being a newspaper man, Elise—" I liked the way she gasped with surprise. So they still didn't know what 'my mob' was! "I also write fiction," I went on, "and I just finished a story about a beautiful wife who sold her husband to his partners in crime. They were getting worried about him because he was too fond of women. He was always letting women get a hold over him. And the partners—curious, wasn't it, that I should name the villain Boss Hykim?—decided to get rid of the husband."

Elise started to touch her tongue to her lips, didn't do it and looked scared. She didn't have lipstick on now, but she had probably forgotten that.

"Exactly, darling," I said, "when you use cyanide of potassium for a lipstick, you can't lick your lips! But if you're careful, and don't put it too near the inner edge, you're safe enough."

Elise's eyes were as wide as they could stretch. She took a step backward and my hand dropped. I let the cigarette
sear her hand and took the gun away from her very neatly. Elise let out a choked scream and stood with her hand flung up to her mouth.

“You see, honeychile,” I went on, “when I sent up word that I knew about Gladys Mears, you thought maybe I did, and you planned to kill me the same way you killed Gladys—with cyanide. You put it on you own lips and figured you’d keep them closed when you kissed me, eh Elise? It would kill me before I could do you any harm . . . .”

Elise shook her head violently. “I didn’t mean to kill Gladys Mears,” she whispered hoarsely, “I swear I didn’t!”

I had the gun in my hand and I was moving closer to Elise. She was still a gorgeous thing. Too bad her husband was out there on the balcony. She was so willing now. She would be so willing to try to bribe me in any way I liked. She let her shoulder slide out of her negligee and her eyes got sly, just seeing whether she could bribe me. Hell, suppose her husband was out there! I put an arm around her waist.

“Listen, baby,” I said, “women are just a pain in the neck to me. What I want is dough. How much was Hykim going to pay you to kill your husband?”

Elise shook her head. “You’ve got me all wrong, Billie,” she whispered.

“Sure, I’ve got you all wrong,” I said. “Suppose I were to tell you that the twenty dollar bill you took from the graft Mills brought, the bill you soaked in cyanide and then gave to Gladys Mears for your husband.—Graft money that you know your husband would count—is downstairs on his desk now. After a while, he’ll count it, the way he always does, wetting his thumb on his tongue. It was only an accident he didn’t count it before, the accident of Gladys Mears taking that particular twenty dollar bill for herself. How much will you pay me, Elise, not to tell him that bill is poisoned?”

Elise wrapped her arms around my neck. The negligee slipped entirely free of her gorgeous shoulders and slid to the floor. She plastered herself against me, ran her fingers through my hair, stroked my back. Her breasts quivered against me.

“Anything!” she gasped. “Anything! I’ll give you anything.”

I stood rigid. She arched her back. Hell, I was doing some gasping on my own! “What I want is the old do-re-mi!” I insisted. “How much? I’ll settle for half of what Boss Hykim will pay you!”

God, what a woman! I could hardly think! Her whole lithe, seductive body was clinging to me, her lips were wet and hot on mine, her hands moving, caressing, insinuating . . . never still a moment.

To hell with pumping her now! I’d get the answers later.

“You’re a smart man,” Elise whispered. “You and I could go places together. We can get twice what Hykim offered out of this. Twice as much as he offered me to kill Parkinson, if you . . . .”

The crash of the gun outside seemed to knock her head over on her shoulder. But it was the bullet from the gun, of course. I let the jerk of her body slam me to the floor and the second shot aimed at me, went over my head. You see the game Parkinson was playing? I saw it pretty plain in that split second before the second shot. He could kill his wife, and claim he was shooting at
me! He could go to Boss Hykim with Rosy as a witness to his wife’s confession and force Hykim to cover him up. With that as a hold, he could block whatever it was Elise held over his head. He could damned near become kingpin of Jamesborough! And all of that just by shooting me—as I should have seen long ago. Unfortunately for him, I wasn’t playing the cards that way.

I went down to the floor and the little gun I had snatched from Elise went off just where and when I intended it to. I couldn’t miss that broad wrinkled forehead. Parkinson swayed back in the French doorway, then pitched forward. I was already wiping my fingerprints off the little gun, tucking it into Elise’s hand. They shot it out with each other, see? It was plain for anybody to see. But I felt a little regretful as I stepped over that gorgeous, half-naked white body curled up there on the floor . . . .

Rosy was shivering out on the balcony, I stopped by Parkinson and pulled out the roll of bills, fumbled through it.

“Which is the poisoned bill you got from Gladys Mears?” I demanded.

Rosy said she didn’t know and I stood up and slapped her across the mouth. “Snap out of it, baby,” I said roughly. “We’ve got a complete out from here. We just get out of town tonight and an anonymous note tips off the police that the twenty dollar bill found in Parkinson’s hand was the one that poisoned Gladys when the apple juice moistened her hand. Parkinson’s wife was jealous and he found out about her killing Gladys. So they shot it out. We’ll be in the clear completely. Now, which bill?”

Rosy said hoarsely, “I marked it with red ink in one corner.”

I found the bill and left it in Parkinson’s hand, but I took the rest. I’d earned it, hadn’t I? And I took the key from the outside of Elise’s door and put it near her on the floor. We went down through the silent house, Rosy and I.

Somewhere a woman was screams and the police would come pretty quick, but it was nothing for us to worry about. Parkinson had dismissed the butler when he came home because he didn’t know just what he had to do. But Rosy and I knew what to do. We skipped across lots and headed for a car she had and the open road.

I could send the story and make the anonymous telephone call from the next town. And a tourist camp would do for Rosy and me tonight . . . I looked at Rosy out of the corner of my eye as we sped along. It didn’t seem to matter now that she had known about the poison bill, that she had given it to Parkinson though she knew how he counted money. She had been willing for him to be killed as Elise had plotted it, because he had thrown her over and she believed herself reasonably safe. And it didn’t matter. Because Rosy’s eyes were on me, admiring, the way a woman’s eyes should be when they gaze on Bill Carter. The Great Carter. I laughed and found a nice dark lane to park.
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DEATH FOR A NAME

(Continued from page 51)

accent. She and Devine planted dynamite in Snowbring's jalopy.

"But the scheme didn't jell because Snowbring drove away in the wrong car. Then I came along, started to set off the bomb. Mrs. Snowbring lost her nerve. She yelled, warned me. Then Devine bopped me with a blackjack, left me unconscious. He didn't know I had recognized him. Neither did Mrs. Snowbring."

Ysobel Ybarra-Snowbring spat at me.

"You rat!"

I shrugged. "She and Devine trailed Snowbring out to his garage," I continued to Donaldson. "They cut his throat. Then Devine went home to his apartment while Mrs. Snowbring sneaked into her own boudoir, took off her disguise.

"Shortly afterward, I showed up. I didn't recognize Mrs. Snowbring as the red-haired floozie because her make-up had been too perfect. She was startled to see me. She put on an act, let me discover her husband's corpse. Then she pretended to faint. She overheard me phoning headquarters. From what I said over the phone, she realized I had Lew Devine's number: knew I had recognized him. When I left her house, she saw she was in a jam. If I put the collar on Devine he might break down, spill his guts, implicate her.

"So she had to kill him to shut his mouth. She got up, disguised herself again, drove hellity-larrup to Devine's flat. She beat me there because I lost some time looking up his address and buying cigarettes. She knifed Devine, stuffed his body in the closet. She was

"I never trust dames," I said. I made a loose fist and slugged her."
just starting to look for that contract when I arrived.

"She put on another act for me; fooled me again. And when I locked her in the bathroom, she escaped."

Donaldson said: "But how did you link Mannheimer in the deal? How did you know—"

I set fire to a gasper. "When I found that contract in Devine's desk, I began to catch wise. It was a contract with Paralta Pictures to star Mrs. Snowbring. I remembered how Mannheimer had been playing around with her. Then when we found Devine's corpse I was almost sure of my ground. That false gold tooth on the bathroom floor cinched things. I knew Mrs. Snowbring was the red-haired dame in disguise. And I knew she'd come here to Mannheimer's house, try to get his copy of that contract and destroy it. The contract linked her with her husband's death; supplied the motive. She was hoping she could find Devine's copy later, burn it. But we beat her to it."

Ben Mannheimer bleated: "You've got it exactly right, Turner! I'll testify to it if it will save me from jail! I—"

I turned away from him, looked at Dave Donaldson. I said: "You clear up the details, Dave. I'm leaving. I still think it smells bad when Mannheimer's around."

---

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was home in his own apartment. He lied about Maizie Medland being dead—didn’t you, Lundgren?"

THE bruised, battered attorney sat up.

He scowled. “Yes, damn you! The Medland woman isn’t dead. That was just a trick to get you out of this joint so I could come up here and bump off the dame you said had seen me . . . .”

Phil Stone nodded as he slipped the bracelets on Lundgren’s wrists. Then he went to the bed, released the real Inez Langley. He said: “Kiddo, I don’t think much of you. You were going to let your innocent sister take the rap for you, and you deserve a damn good push in the face. But as long as things turned out okay, I’m going to let you go. Get to hell out of here.”

The green-eyed sister got up, left.

Then the violet-eyed Jacqueline Langley looked at Phil Stone. “H-how can I ever thank you . . . ?” she whispered.

He smiled at her. “You might let me visit you some time, baby,” he whispered.

She blushed and lowered her demure eyes. “Y-yes. I might . . . .”

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May Issue on Sale
March 21st
"Hold on, Doc," he said quietly. "You go upstairs. And you," nodding to Waring, "come into the study."

White with rage, Mark Patten entered Ann's bedroom. He stopped short. A young, fair-haired man was bending over the bed, his arms beneath her, half lifting her slim body to his. His lips were gently kissing Ann's cheek. Her hands were holding his head, her fingers roaming caressingly.

"I—I beg your pardon," Mark blurted.

The youth shot up, smiled feebly. Ann reached for his hand. "Mark, I'd like you to meet Roger Saunders. Roger, this is Dr. Patten."

Roger Saunders came around the bed. Mark took his hand, felt the firm warmth of it.

"Roger came in unexpectedly from New York," Ann said.

The physician ignored the explanation. "Inspector Kerrigan said you had fainted."

"Yes, but I'm all right now. The—the shock of it all. Seeing him drop right in this room and—and then—the other,"

Downstairs, the bell rang. Heavy feet plodded up the steps. Two morgue attendants, bearing a black box, passed the door. Ann covered her eyes, groaned sickeningly. Roger Saunders dropped down beside her, crushed her soft body in his arms, whispered consolingly.

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Mark turned, walked out of the room. His heart felt like lead in his chest. So there had been another. All along she had used her guardian’s objection as an excuse. The dream castle he had constructed tumbled about his ears. Energy seemed to drain from his body. He watched the macabre box being carried down again, heavy with its dead flesh. Moulton, the butler, came out of the death chamber. His face was gray.

“Isn’t it frightful, sir?”

Mark nodded. “Yes, Moulton. Where’s Mrs. Estes?”

“In her room, sir.”

“Will you tell her I’d like to see her downstairs in the library.”

“Yes, sir.”

The study door opened as Mark came down the steps. Armand Waring walked out. Kerrigan followed.

“Oh, there you are, Doc,” the detective said. “Could I see you for a moment?”

In the study, Kerrigan lit a fresh cigar, puffed on it for a moment or two. Then his sharp eyes met Mark’s.

“This is plenty tough for me, Patten, but it has to be done. Doc McCall found bichloride of mercury in that glass!”

The physician paled. The pupils of his eyes dilated. “No!” he gasped. “It’s impossible!”

Kerrigan shrugged. “That’s the report.”

“But, good God, man, what reason would I have for murdering Alton Waring? I knew he had one foot in the grave! Another stroke or two and he would have gone.”

“I’ll come to that, Doc,” the detective said. “But first we’ll have a little meeting. You wait here.”

Ten minutes later, Biff Kerrigan faced the assembled company from behind Alton Waring’s desk. Mrs. Estes and the butler sat like graven images. Armand Waring puffed arrogantly on a cigarette. Mark Patten, his lips dry and cracked, watched the detective out of too-bright eyes. Ann Drake, a gayly colored Afghan about her shoulders, huddled in a chair behind which stood Roger Saunders.

Kerrigan cleared his throat. “One of you murdered Alton Waring,” he said bluntly.

Mrs. Estes gasped. Ann Drake’s body tightened.

The detective opened a manila envelope on the desk, withdrew some legal

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documents: “Before we go into that, there are a few other matters I’d like to clean up. Alton Waring left a will. I have it here.” He looked at Mrs. Estes. “How long were you in Mr. Waring’s employ, Mrs. Estes?”

The housekeeper raised her head. “Twenty years,” she whispered.

Kerrigan spread the will on his knee. “Do you have any children, Mrs. Estes?”

There was a hush. All eyes turned to the housekeeper. Her lips trembled. “Yes, one.”

“The child’s father?”

“He—he’s not living.”

Kerrigan leaned forward. “I’ve asked you these questions, Mrs. Estes, because of the wording of Alton Waring’s bequest. He left you the proceeds of a $20,000 insurance policy containing a double indemnity clause in the event of violent death. The bequest further states that if one penny of the money goes to your child while you live the entire amount is to revert back to the estate! Why did Mr. Waring detest your child, Mrs. Estes?”

The housekeeper sobbed, dabbed at her eyes with a balled handkerchief. “I—I don’t know.”

“What is your child?”

The silence was heavy and intense. Mrs. Estes’ breath came in hysterical gasps. Suddenly she stiffened. “What difference does it make? My child doesn’t enter into this!”

Kerrigan nodded. “All right.” He directed his gray eyes at Ann Drake. “And you, Miss Drake, are left the proceeds of a $100,000 insurance policy also containing a double indemnity clause, provided you do not marry Dr. Mark Patton!”

There was no response from either Ann or the physician. Kerrigan swung
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ARMAND Waring shot to his feet. His eyes bulged like a frog’s. “It’s a lie!” he screamed. “It’s a lie!”

Kerrigan motioned him down. “Take it easy, handsome. The poison didn’t kill him. It was the knife. You didn’t, by any chance, roll him over and—”

Ann Drake slumped in her chair. Mark Patten was at her side in a moment. “This girl will have to go back to bed,” he snapped.

“Okay, Doc. We’re about ready to break up anyway. You can all hit the hay. Tomorrow’s another day. I’d like to see you for a minute, Doc.”

Roger Saunders lifted Ann in his arms, carried her out of the room. The warm weight of her was a thrilling burden, and her thighs were soft, pressing his forearm. The afghan fell away, revealing her soft breasts under the silk of her pajama top. Armand Waring left. The others followed. Kerrigan closed the door.

“I’m sorry about that poison business, Doc,” he said. “I knew you’d have brains enough not to leave the glass there. When McCall verified the fact that the knife killed the old man, I was certain Armand Waring planted the poison. You see, he knew about the double indemnity clause in the insurance policy. He and his brother had a battle in this study early this evening, didn’t they?

“Evidently it was about money. The old man refused to give Armand another cent. He told him he’d have money when he died, showed him the policy. We found Armand’s prints on the paper. He had handled it, read it. Miss Drake was sick in bed, Mrs. Estes had no reason for killing the old man, you weren’t even here, the butler has been checked thoroughly. He had a perfect alibi. That leaves Armand Waring. But
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April Issue On Sale March 3rd
if he used the knife, why would he follow it up with poison?"

"To involve me."

"Yes, but if you had used poison would it have been likely that you used a knife, too? There are a lot of things still unexplained."

"What about that young boy—Saunders?"

"He got here before Mrs. Estes discovered Waring dead. An hour before. But both he and Miss Drake say he was with her every minute of the time. You knew him, didn't you?"

The physician's jaw set hard. "No, I didn't."

Kerrigan's eyebrows arched. He glanced at his bandaged finger. "Maybe the morning will bring something up. You'd better turn in."

Mrs. Estes was waiting in the hall.

"I have a room ready for you, Dr. Patten," she said softly.

"Take good care of him, Mother," Kerrigan said.

The housekeeper paled. She swayed uncertainly, caught herself. "Er—yes, of course," she blurted.

"I'm leaving two men here. I'll be back as early as I can. Nobody is to leave the house."

Mark Patten walked slowly up the stairs. Ann's door was ajar. A lamp was burning on a night table beside her bed. He stopped to look in. She was cuddled in Roger Saunders' arms, lifting her ruby lips to his mouth. The lush fullness of her sensitive breasts were crushed against him.

Mark turned away, sick. He followed the housekeeper into the bedroom. "I—I know how you feel," she murmured.

He forced a smile. "You're sweet."

"She never told me about him. She met him in New York. I always thought that—"

"So did I. But, tell me, what are you going to do with all your money?"

Mrs. Estes shook her head. "All my money. I'm going to leave it to my son. He's struggled hard for many years. He can use it now to travel and forget." Her eyes glistened. "I—I'm proud of him. She backed to the door. "Good-night."

SLEEP was impossible. Mark tossed restlessly for hours. Finally he dozed, only to be awakened by the creaking of wood outside his window. He leaped out of bed, peered through the pane. A dark shadowed figure was mov—
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ing along the roof of the sun parlor, flush with the bedroom windows. Mark donned his robe, raised the sash quietly. Peering out into the night he could no longer see the figure. He climbed to the roof, crouched against the building wall. A faint, muffled cry reached him. One of the windows along the roof gave off a faint, orange light.

Down on hands and knees, Mark crawled towards it. He heard a man's deep, husky voice, listened.

"I told you I'd pay you back! Now if you don't come across I'll kill your other lover, see? And who do you think they'll pin it on? The doctor!" There was a momentary pause. Mark recognized the voice. It was Armand War ing's!

He crept closer to the window sill, raised himself so that he could look into the room. Waring was seated on the bed, pinning Ann down with his hands. Suddenly he ripped the front of her pajama top away, buried his lips in the softness of her white throat. She writhed under the wet caress. The white mounds of her breasts were half exposed and crushed bruisingly in his embrace.

Mark threw caution to the winds. He dove through the open window, landed heavily. Waring shot to his feet. A revolver gleamed in his hand. It roared. Mark felt the bullet rip into his stomach like the white-hot point of a poker. He lunged forward, closed with Waring. Again the gun went off but this time its lethal lead pinged into the wall.

Blood was pouring out of Mark's stomach; hot blood. It seemed as though a giant hand had reached into him and was ripping out his guts. His fingers clutched at Waring's throat. With the last ounce of his waning strength he dug his thumbs into the man's windpipe. Another moment... another
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THE HOUSE OF 7 DRAGONS
MARK PATTEN cracked leaden eyelids. He was stretched on a bed. Inspector Kerrigan leaned over him.

"Don't talk, Doc," he said. "Just shake your head. I'll ask you questions."

"Waring," the physician mumbled.

"Dead. You strangled him. Listen to me. You killed Alton Waring, didn't you? Stabbed him with that trick knife while you were giving him the ammonia?"

"Yes."

"I thought you did. There was a piece of lint stuck to the catch on the knife. It came from the roll of bandage in your instrument bag. I matched it to the bandage you used on my finger. Why did you kill him?"

"Because... of... of... Ann."

"You didn't know he was—?"

A plainclothes man entered the room. He whispered to Kerrigan, handed him a slip of paper. He glanced at the physician holding Mark Patten's wrist.

"Another minute," the doctor whispered.

Kerrigan nodded, turned away. The seconds ticked by. There was a low, gasping rattle. Kerrigan turned back. Mark Patten was dead.

Inspector Kerrigan had a reputation for being hard. But when he spoke there was a catch in his voice.

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He pulled the bed cover over Mark Patten's head.
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