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# *Spicy* DETECTIVE



**FOR NO  
RANSOM**

by *Robert A. Garron*



# OH BOY! DON'T I FEEL GREAT!

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# Spicy DETECTIVE STORIES



October, 1940

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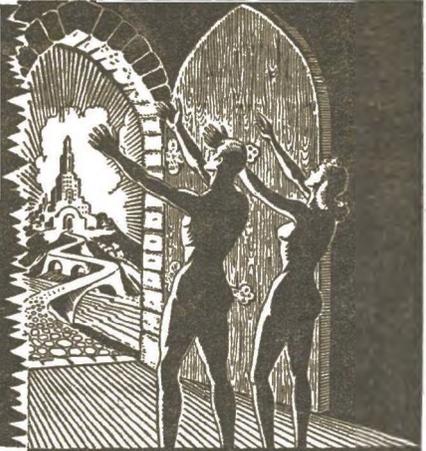
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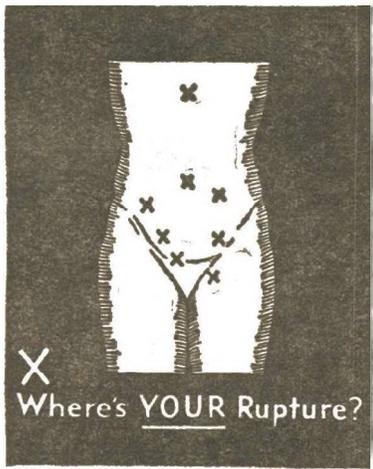
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# Dog Trouble

**T**HERE have been times—even if he does pay me damned well—when I've wished P. Arthur Tuttle had stuck to the horses and never got himself a lucky break in the theatrical game. You remember him, of course, the Golden Kid, not too many years ago? How he had that magic touch with a horse that let him bring an ordinary plater home three or four lengths ahead of real horses? Yeah, the Golden Kid, they called him, because even after he quit riding,

*I dodged, but I wasn't fast enough, and the bottle caught me over the eye.*



everything he touched turned to gold!

He'd never even been backstage in a theater, but he angeled the

## By WALLACE KAYTON

*They called him The Golden Kid because everything he touched turned to gold. But, lucky as he was, he had no idea of what went on behind the mask his wife wore all the time, nor did he understand what went on inside her heart*



play "As Handsome Does" and the critics panned it so hard that the public came to see how come—and the damned play ran three years.

That kind of guy. No use to mention the revues he's put on since. Big stuff, gigantic, colossal, and all that. When bigger revues are made, P. Arthur Tuttle will make them!

Anyway — me, Stacey, I've known the Golden Kid ever since he was an apprentice rider, what with me at one time being an investigator for the Racing Association. Once or twice I helped him out of what promised to be a jam — and he never forgot it. I still wish, at times, though that he'd stuck to horses. Being personal trouble shooter for a guy like him, a guy as prominent as him, is not all that it's cracked up to be. Like today.

I was riled and upset because he got me out of bed before eight o'clock, and roared over the phone at me. There was no use to roar. I told him all right, with as much dignity as I could muster in my sleep, that if it was absolutely necessary to be at his house before nine I could probably make it. I showered and shaved and drank my breakfast, wheeled the hack out of the garage and was there—five minutes early.

From the start, I knew something was wrong. Very few people went to the Kid's own home—on account of Helen. Helen was his wife. And Helen didn't like visitors. She had a permanent frown against the world and I don't blame her a bit—which same reason will come out in a minute.

So when the frozen-faced butler opened the door I said, "Jeeves, tell your master I await and I'll have a drink, quick." I didn't get the drink so quick because the mas-

ter, Tuttle himself, was already awaiting me. In the library. To understand that library you got to know Art Tuttle. He was one jockey that never gained weight when he quit the tack room permanently.

He was, I suppose, about five feet high, and even after eight years of good living he wouldn't tip the beam at more than one five wringing wet. He hated being little, hated it like hell. He wore those built up shoes, he smoked the biggest cigars he could have made, he forced himself to talk bass, and he bought the biggest of everything. His car was specially made — stock models not reaching the size he liked. His desk, in this library, must have covered maybe six feet less than a square acre, and the smallest books to be seen were the Encyclopedia Britannicas that stood behind the desk.

I sat down, sighing, and waited. He took the big cigar out of the buttonhole that was his mouth, and said, "It's Helen. I need a hundred grand by tonight and she won't let me have it. Without the dough, I'm sunk. We open the Water Pageant in three days, Stacey, and the contractors are holding me up for cash on the barrelhead—or no opening. I got to have a hundred grand."

I tried to be jocose about it, what with having seen him pull that much out of his hat before. I told him I could let him have maybe two dollars and a quarter, and he got sore. He jumped, he began pacing the floor, waving the cigar, and forgot himself so much that his voice grew shrill and high. "This," he raved, "is no time to joke, Stacey! I'm about to lose my

show, I'm about to lose my home, about to lose my wife!"

And no sooner had he said *wife* than the door opened and the frozen-faced butler said, "Mrs. Tuttle and Dr. Adams, sir." He held the door aside, and Mrs. Helen Tuttle came in leaning on the arm of Dr. Eustace Adams. I guess I got to my feet somehow, gasping, for it was the first time I'd seen Helen Tuttle since the accident, three years ago. I'd forgotten how beautiful she had been. I say had been because—well, she wasn't, after the accident.

**T**HE inside of that thing never came clear out, but, to make you understand this, I reckon I'll have to slow down and tell you the details. Helen was old man Madison's daughter—which means she was worth several millions in her own name when the Golden Kid married her. Why she married him I never could figure, what with her being tops as far as society and money both went, and him being a little pint-sized ex-jockey with a tendency for making dough. But she did. And the Kid, Tuttle, well he played dames like he played horses—he played the field. I don't even remember the name of the tramp she caught him with—on the third floor of a third rate hotel. She didn't raise a lot of hell, or make a lot of threats. As far as I can recall—or ever knew—the details, she simply said, "I'm sorry, Arthur, sorry for both of us."

Then she'd crossed the room and gone right out the window. Without raising it. Call it good luck, or call it bad luck, but there was an awning over the sidewalk to break

her fall. She didn't die—but she left her face among the shattered window glass on the third floor with the Golden Kid and his tramp. Since that time she stayed home. I understood she wore masks, life-like masks, made by a nationally famous artist, of the thinnest of materials.

But there was nothing wrong with her body, revealed as it was by that thin negligee. She didn't walk across the room, she flowed, and from the part in that negligee one long slender leg at a time emerged. White shoulders peeped through the thin material, and the little bow of ribbon in the valley between her breasts simply accentuated their perfect moulding.

Tuttle leaped for her arm, his eyes looking like those of a faithful pooch, and the two men helped her into a chair. Dr. Adams nodded. I nodded back, my eyes still on Mrs. Tuttle, fascinated, I suppose, for while her face was pretty—with the mask—it was like, like, hell! There was no life to it, of course! If you can imagine one of those perfect mannikins out of Sak's or Bonwit's walking around on a living body, you'll get what I mean.

Tuttle said loudly, "Helen, darling, you remember Joe Stacey?"

She turned toward me, then. Her voice had the toneless quality of a the partially deaf person, the person that fails to hear himself speaking. She said, "I remember Mr. Stacey. I'd rather you hadn't called him, but since you have." She shrugged. The negligee slipped from one white shoulder. It was like marble, blue-veined marble. And it was Dr. Adams who leaned

over tenderly and readjusted it, Dr. Adams who got the dull-voiced thank you. She said, "Doctor, have you met Mr. Stacey?"

He said sure, he'd known Stacey a long time. Which was true enough. Doc was as big as a truck driver, with a truck driver's face, but he had the hands of a violin player, a damned good fiddler. What he couldn't do with a scalpel just wasn't done, that's all, and with it, he was a hale-fellow-well-met with all the right boys in town. Nice guy, doc.

Helen Tuttle pointed that mask at me and said, "Mr. Stacey, I suppose you think it's a whim of a silly woman for me to raise so much Ned about a black pearl worth at the most, ten or eleven thousand dollars. But after all, it's a matter of sentiment. The Madison fortune was founded on that pearl. I treasured it above any of my other jewelry. There's only one thing that could have happened to it—" She waved her pink tipped hand at her floor-pacing husband.

He stopped, he almost glared at her. And again he forgot his bass. He shrilled, "By damn, I don't have your pearl! If it's gone, I tell you—I tell you I don't have it!"

Dr. Adams said, "Please, Mr. Tuttle, Mrs. Tuttle mustn't be excited." He touched her shoulder protectingly.

Tuttle came across to her, took her hand. Loudly, because of her deafness, he said, "My dear, can't we talk about this later? It's beside the issue. I need one hundred thousand dollars badly, badly, to save me from ruin."

She arose. "I shouldn't have

come down, Arthur. I really shouldn't. It's a matter of principle, Arthur. I went to my safe to get you bonds to cover. I saw the black pearl was gone. No one else but you and I have access to that safe. Hence—you have my pearl. You'd want it only for one reason; I know that reason. Suppose you return my pearl, and we'll speak of the money again, Arthur." She laid those slender fingers on Adams' arm, said, "Will you help me, Eustace?"

He helped her.

**T**HIS time I didn't have to ask for a drink. The Golden Kid poured a couple of tumblers of Scotch from a half gallon flagon. We drank. He said, "What do I do now?"

I said, "You better get the pearl. From the way you said it, I figure you had the damned thing but you don't have it now. Knowing you, that leads to what? You gave it away. Knowing you again, you gave it to a babe. All you have to do is get it from the babe. Simple. Like that."

He filled up the tumblers again. He groaned, and it wasn't a jockey sized groan. It was a leviathan noise. He said, "Look, Stacey. I did. I gave it to Monette Ingerman. She claims it's lost—or rather that she can't give it back, on account of her husband wouldn't stand for it, he'd find out there'd been something between us—and kill both of us!"

"And that makes no sense at all! Monette Ingerman! And her husband, Carlos! If you had to play around with some of the Ingerman trio, why didn't you pick Fran-



*She said, "I'm sorry!" and went right out the window.*

celle. At least she's not married. What the hell did she do with the pearl?"

"Hercules has it." And when my brows went up, "Hercules, her pooch! The damned fool swallowed it, she claims, and still has it!"

I got up grimly. "She's nuts. Suppose we get Hercules and do a little operating! The idea—"

"Hercules," said the Golden Kid nervously, "is the apple of Carlos Ingerman's eye! Getting him would be like getting Carlos' right arm. And about as safe." He saw me headed for the door. "Where are you going?"

"To see the Ingermans, chump. And maybe operate on Hercules!"

I DROVE slow uptown, trying to figure something out of the screwy mess. The Ingerman Trio, if you ever saw the Water Carnival in which they starred, consisted of Monette, Francelle, and Carlos. Monette being Mrs. Ingerman, Francelle being some sort of cousin. Nice act, spectacular and all that, wire walking, high flying—trapeze and rings—over the water tank, with a lot of flash diving as a climax. Carlos, I knew, was a tough and an ugly customer, intensely jealous of his wife. Which goes to show you what judgment the boss showed.

Francelle could have been approached, damned easily, but no, he had to go pick on Monette, married to the most jealous guy in the world. A pearl given to her is swallowed by Hercules, Carlos' dog. The dog keeps the pearl. The dog can't be touched without telling Carlos. Tell Carlos the dog has the pearl and he knows some-

thing is up between his wife and the Golden Kid! Nuts! And likewise—nuts again!

Francelle let me in. She got out of bed to do it. And she was still wearing what laughingly passed for a nightgown. Very few women look good early in the morning. Francelle was one of the few. She was tall, as tall as me. Her hair was sort of, well, disarrayed, and she was all pink and rosy with sleep. The nightgown could just as well have been made of cellophane, and when she trotted back down the hall ahead of me, it was easy to figure out just why the paying customers always got such a kick out of the Ingerman trio. She had what it takes, if you follow me.

She stopped long enough to get a pair of feathered mules, then, still disdaining anything further than the gown, she invited me into the kitchen for coffee. Once it was perking, I tore my eyes away long enough to say, "Honey, where's the rest of them?"

"Sleeping," she pouted. "Didn't you come to see me?" She sort of raised her arm then and patted her blonde hair, so that her breasts came out in profile. Sort of like a bird preening. And I thought for a minute I had come to see her sure enough!

But I said, "Nope, I got some serious business with Monette. Reckon I could see her without waking Carlos. This is personal."

She didn't say for sure. But we drank a cup of coffee, and in a few moments she said, "Come on. I'll see what I can do for you, if you *must* see her."

So down the hall we went again, and while I paused, she opened a

door as softly as possible. Not softly enough. Inside the bedroom something said, "Yap! Yap! Yap!"

And I saw Hercules, the four-pound Chihuahua, right in the middle of the big bed. Carlos lay on one side of him, Monette on the other. He yapped again and Carlos grumbled in his sleep, reached out a hamlike hand and cuffed the pooch. The pooch whined and lay down. Francelle went in, closing the door after her. So I went up into the front room, and while I was waiting, found Carlos' rum and threw some down to chase the Golden Kid's Scotch. It made me feel better. And when Monette came in, I was ready for her.

**M**ONETTE was a smaller edition of Francelle, with curves and soft depressions practically in the same spots. She, too, was a blonde, but just a bit more worn around the edges than Francelle. It was easy to see why Arthur Tuttle had gone for her, but not easy to see why he'd gone so far as to give her a black pearl that would jam him with his wife.

I said, "Let's don't play around, baby. I want that black pearl that the Golden Kid gave you in a minute of weakness." So she crossed her legs and lit a cigarette and blew smoke at me. "You wouldn't like to see Tuttle lose his home and his wife over it, would you? You wouldn't like to see him go broke?"

She blew some more smoke and asked how come. I told her. I got a little loud and she shushed me, gesturing toward the bedroom. She nodded and beamed. She said, "I knew he really loved me! I knew it, but I had to be sure! You see,

once in conversation I asked him what his wife's most precious possession was and he mentioned that pearl! So—well, I asked him for it, and love his little heart, he brought it to me!"

She beamed and smiled and smirked and preened herself. She was the kind of gal that really enjoyed making a fellow make a fool of himself over her!

So I said, coldly, "Babe, I don't think much of the Hercules story. I'm not in love with you. The thing couldn't be worth over eight or ten grand. I understand it wasn't perfect. Suppose you give it to me, I take it back, and the Golden Kid keeps his home and his business. You—well, I'll see you get any dough within reason!"

She got up and walked over to a desk. I felt good. I figured she'd been reasoned with and was willing to produce the pearl. Instead she came back with four pictures. They were X-rays, damned plain ones, of the pooch, Hercules. Now me, I've been around. I've seen the elephant and heard the owl. I've had the delerium tremens. But never in my life have I ever heard of anything like this proving to be true! For, so help me, the pearl was visible in the pictures!

**N**OW we talked pretty plain, I, Monette and I, and neither one of us laughed. This was serious business. The dog had been watched incessantly. Twice a week since he swallowed the damned thing, he'd been X-rayed. According to Monette, nothing more could be done! According to me, something had to be done, and done damned quick, to save the boss his

home, his wife and his business.

"An operation!" she snapped, shocked at the very idea. "Just what in the world could we tell Carlos? You don't understand how he feels about that dog. He thinks the dog brings him luck or something. He'd sooner cut off an arm than let him be touched!"

"I'll steal him," I said. That's all I could think of. She shook her head.

"You see where he sleeps. He's with that pooch night and day—he or I. And it'd be worth my life to tell him what it's all about. Or to let him get stolen. You don't know how suspicious Carlos is."

Well, sir, I argued for an hour. If ever a dame was afraid of a man, she was afraid of Carlos. According to her, the guy was practically a master mind, he'd be suspicious about any damned thing that happened out of the way. He'd choke her to death by inches if he ever thought she'd trifled, and he'd take Tuttle apart a piece at a time and whip him to death with the pieces. So I had an inspiration. I said, "Suppose the pooch got sick. Would Carlos let me take him to a doctor?"

"Maybe, if he went with you." And when I asked her if she could slip Hercules out of the room without awakening Carlos, she said maybe. So I got on the phone and got the Blue Cross Vet. Doc Stover owes me plenty of favors. The idea was that I'd bring him a pooch and he'd swear he had to operate to save the pooch's life.

When I got back, she had Hercules. The damned Chihuahua looked more like a rat than a dog, only he was fawn-colored. He

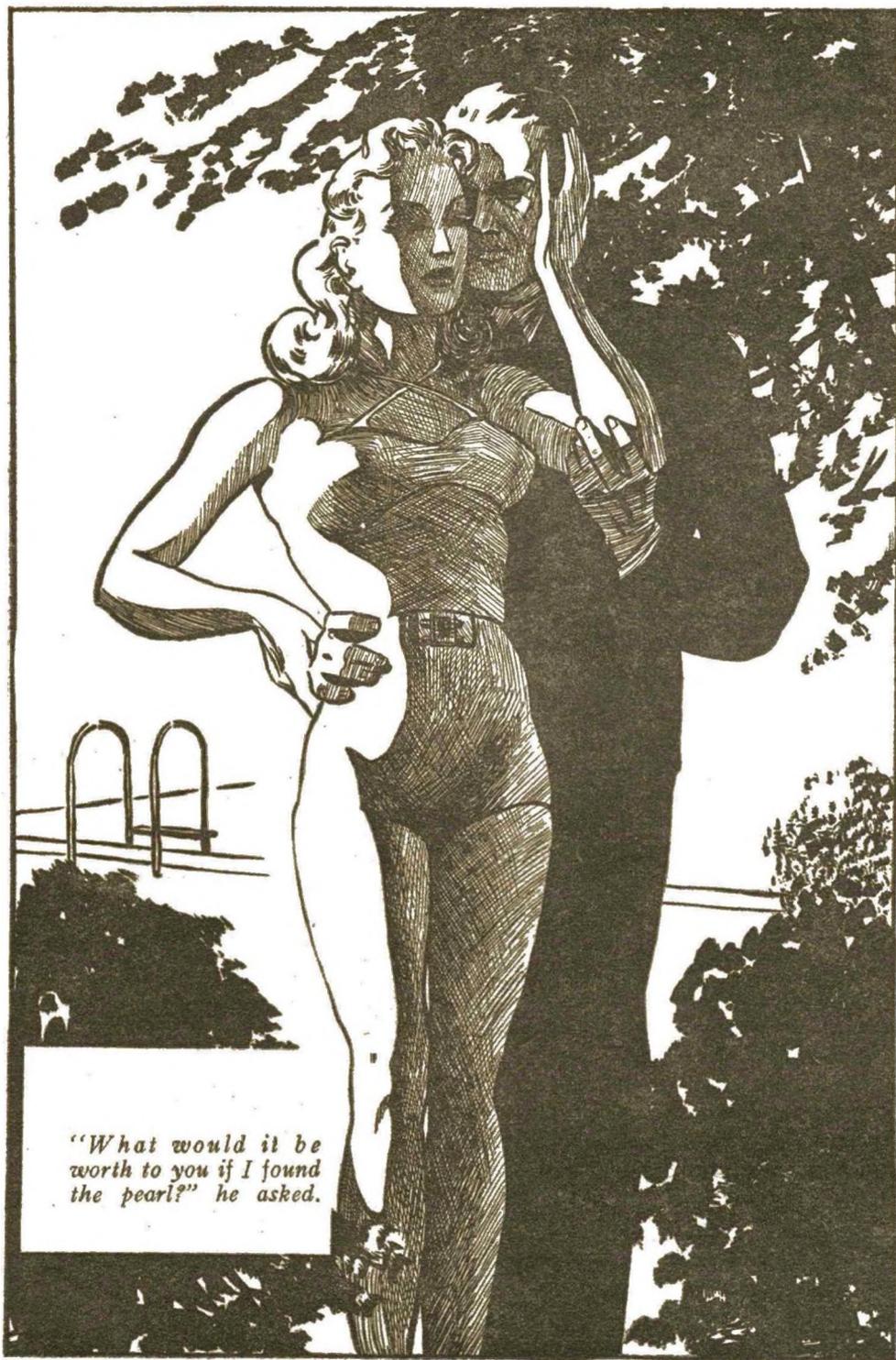
pulled back his lips and growled at me, and his black, beady eyes bulged more than ever. Right from the start Hercules hated my intestines. I got me a piece of soap from the bathroom, I kneaded it soft between my fingers, and tearing up a cigarette, moulded in a bunch of tobacco. The whole thing wasn't bigger around than a marble, but it was powerful enough, I figured, to make Hercules feel under the weather.

Making the pooch get it down was something else again. He didn't want me within ten feet of him. Twice he bit me before I could stick the stuff down his throat and clamp his jaws shut so he had to swallow.

Hercules was sick. There was no doubt of that. In fact Hercules was so shriekingly sick that Carlos bounded out of the bedroom in his BVDs, which same were his sleeping garments. There was Hercules, rolling over and over on the floor, wailing and coughing and gagging and gasping. Me, I yelled, "He's bad sick, Carlos! Maybe he's dying! Let's get him to the doctor, quick!"

He fell for it. He was shaking the pooch and petting it and practically crying over it. He grabbed it up and carried it into his bedroom, in order to get himself some pants or something, and I winked at the scared Monette. That wink simply meant that everything was fine and dandy, that Doc Stover, the vet, would do the rest, that I'd get the black pearl, that Tuttle would get it next, that Helen Tuttle would end up with it and the show would be saved.

But Monette was scared. She lacked faith. She shot up out of



*"What would it be worth to you if I found the pearl?" he asked.*

that chair and she ran to me, saying, "Don't let him beat me! Don't let him!" She flung her arms around my neck and damned near climbed me! Now here is a funny thing. With her pressed so warmly up against me, appealing to me, with her body flat against mine and, you might say, only that thin negligee separating us, I forgot all about the damned pooch and the damned pearl. I've been a sucker for a crying woman all my life, and this one was going to town! When she pointed her face at me, I kissed her.

And the jealous Carlos came out of the bedroom. He had something in his hand. Hercules, the Chihuahua, was at his feet, and Hercules had quit his spasms. Now Carlos is a bigger guy than me. He does not train on Scotch and rum and rye. And he has muscles that bulk, instead of running like quicksilver under thumb pressure.

Hercules said, "Yappity yap yap," and ran across the room and buried his teeth in my left ankle before I could get untangled from Monette. I jumped. Monette sailed across the room and plumped into a corner, the negligee flying sky high in a swell exhibition that the cash customers paid \$2.20 many times to see. Carlos said in a choked voice, "So! So! First you try to poison my Hercules! This I have taken from his stricken throat! And now you try to make love to my wife!"

**B**EFORE I could answer or deny either, he picked up the rum bottle and threw it. He almost missed me. By whirling a bit, I practically dodged it. It caught me

partially over the right eye, that was all. Blood spurted and I didn't even notice it. When a man is busy keeping a madman at arm's length, he doesn't care for blood, and Carlos was a mad man! He was damned near frothing at the mouth. Personally, during the later years I've gotten to the point where I don't care to be manhandled, and Carlos was all man. I bounced off the wall with my rod in my hand.

Do you think a rod stopped him? Hell, no! And I couldn't shoot him! So I cold-cocked him with the barrel, and he must have knocked the downstairs chandelier down when he hit. Across the room came Monette, to flop down beside him, cussing me in twenty different languages. In pops Francelle—this time dressed in a little suit.

She said, "Come on, Stacey, come on, honey, let's go while we can." Me, I thought it was a good idea to go, too. I stuck the .38 back beneath my arm, looked for my hat. While I was getting it, Carlos opened his eyes and groaned. I was pretty mad myself by then. Pulling somebody else's chestnuts out of the fire is always unpleasant. And hell, I'd been willing to cover Monette up as well, and what did I get? Cussed in twenty languages and a bleeding bust in the head.

Carlos called, "—— and the next time, you loafer, I see you around my wife or my dog, I choke you to death!"

And I answered, "And the next time you make a pass at me, I'll blow you right from between your ears."

What Monette said isn't printable. But the pooch, Hercules, only yapped.

**F**UNNY how a guy can wake up suddenly and find he's been liking a certain woman all along. Here I'd known Francelle for months, maybe years, and to me she was just a big healthy blonde with plenty of oomph. But not for me. Yet in the car when she wiped the blood off my head, with her arm around my shoulders and one soft breast against me, she said, with her eyes blazing, "The lice! All of them lice!"

And I noted then that we felt the same way about a lot of people. She just didn't say the Ingermans were lice. She thought everybody concerned was in the same category. Hell, I enjoyed it. So I kissed her, too.

After a while when we stopped for a drink, she said, "Honey, that's an awfully small apartment, if you see what I mean."

I did. I knew she'd heard all the details. I said, "You think then that the pooch swallowed the pearl?"

She said, "I wouldn't know. But it could have happened, I know. I was there. She dropped something—and the greedy pooch guzzled it up! Will the Golden Kid really lose everything unless he returns it to his wife?"

I admitted that it looked like it. She said slowly, "Carlos cheats on Monette. He will run after anything with skirts. I think it is a bad conscience that makes him so jealous." She waited a minute, sipping her phosphate. "As a matter of fact, honey, he's continually and consistently making passes at me!"

Me, I bristled. She went on. "I

was just thinking. Do you know Portland Park?"

I did. Everybody did. She said, "Sometimes he meets women there. He takes Hercules for a walk every night, you know, and it's a perfect excuse."

So she explained her plan. I remember saying, sort of awestricken, "And you'd do that for me? Take a chance like that? Why?"

The reason why was in her eyes. And here I'd been missing her all these months. So I kissed her. Right there in the joint. Not one of those little sloppy kisses, a little peck, but full on a pair of warm, moist loose lips that persisted in moving gently from side to side! And when we came to, all the barflies and the bartender clapped and cheered. Which same called for a round of drinks on the house, and what with one thing and another—which is none of your business—it was well after lunch before I got to the Golden Kid's.

Old frozen puss, the butler, said the marster was engaged. And would I wait. I would. But I wandered out of the study onto the flagstones, down through the roses toward the swimming pool, for no particular reason. I was taking a drink and the ice clinking must have filled my ears, as well as the glass itself stopping my vision. Anyway I was right up on them, merely a few bushes between us, when I heard the babble of voices. I stopped. Maybe I shouldn't have listened. For the voice I heard was undeniably that of Helen Tuttle. And it wasn't blank and toneless like I'd heard it before! It was warm and vibrant and warried.

She was saying, "Darling, you

simply don't understand! Of course I like you, but not in that way. I married Arthur—for better or for worse. I—well, there's something in me that makes me stick. I couldn't divorce him!"

"Not even when you know he gave that pearl—your favorite—to a cheap woman, a married woman at that?"

"But I don't know that he did, darling! After all—"

"Helen, listen to me." I parted the bushes. Dr. Eustace Adams was standing with his hands on Helen's lissome shoulders, staring down into her face. He shook her gently. "I tell you the woman's dog has got that pearl right now. I'm a fairly good friend of hers. She brought the dog to me, I have X-rayed him four times in the past two weeks. Why should you go on tied to a cheater, a cheap fellow with women?"

I thought, oh, oh! So he knows, too! But why should he want to marry a woman that's such a monstrosity as far as her face is concerned. They came out into a little opening, arm in arm then, and I saw some of the reasons. True, she still wore a mask. This one was rubber, made for swimming. So was the scanty little suit she wore. About the only thing it didn't reveal—as far as reasons a man might want to marry her were concerned—was the fact that she possessed a pot full of dough of her own. She had everything, everything!

She said softly, "I've some pride, a peculiar pride. Something I did, some need I couldn't fulfill sent Arthur from me the first time—and I lost my head. As well as my

face." I shuddered there in the bushes. "Since he's done it all over again, there's something else lacking, something I hope I can soon make up to him!"

He stopped, she stopped. "All right," he said gently. "Suppose I can bring you the pearl. Suppose you can slip it back, brazen it off, be the forgiving wife. What would it be worth to you that way?"

She breathed, "Anything! I say anything, because as peculiar as it may sound, I don't want to be convinced he ran about with this Ingerman woman. I could regain that pearl and dismiss the whole thing from my mind! Then—oh, Eustace, if you only would! Anything you might ask would be yours!"

Eustace. Sure. Dr. Eustace Adams, my old pal. And from the hungry way he took her into his arms and held her beautiful body pressed so closely, I began wondering and worrying if the guy might not ask too much. Providing he could get the pearl! And if Monette brought the pooch to be X-rayed twice a week, most certainly he was in a spot to get the pearl. He could kill Hercules and claim it was an accident. Easy going. I had to get the damned thing for a couple of reasons now. Once for the Golden Kid. And once for his wife's virtue!

**I** WAITED until they strolled on—away from the house—then started toward it myself. I met the butler. "The phone, sir," he said with cold disapproval. "If you'll use the one in the hall, please."

I did. It was Francelle. She said, "Honey, I've just been think-

*"To hell with you!" she said. She took off the glasses, and both her eyes had been blackened.*



ing. How much money did you say we'd have to have before we could marry?"

"I mentioned ten grand, baby. So you could quit the act."

"All right, you listen to me. I've got a damned good hunch you'll get it tonight, understand, that our plan will work! Suppose you make

Tuttle pay you that much, or promise to, for the return of the thing. Then I can quit, and we can get married tomorrow!"

After all, considering what it would be worth to Tuttle to get it, ten grand wasn't too much. I agreed. And the sound of angry

voices approaching made me chop it short and step back into the little curtained niche with the instrument.

"I say to hell with you," the Golden Kid was roaring angrily. "I wouldn't divorce Helen, and I'd fight her divorcing me! I wouldn't marry you under any circumstances, d'ya hear?"

Evidently Monette Ingerman heard. Her voice was cold and low. She said, "Not getting that pearl will cost you plenty. Everything. And by God, since you've been so screwy about it—let's see you get it! In plain words, you little tyke, to hell with you!"

It was hot in the niche. I peeped out. She was dressed as usual, brief skirt, nice waist—and a pair of dark glasses. She snatched them off and I saw both eyes were blacked. Beautifully.

"Somebody is going to pay for the beating I took on account of you, small time. You and your pearl! I'll peddle it somewhere, if not to you. I know a guy that would love to have it!"

She stormed toward the front door, the butler solemnly bobbing up from nowhere to open it for her. I stepped out of the niche. Arthur groaned, he said, "What you doing? What are you finding out? Why are you loafing?"

Okay, put yourself in my place. I'd just seen his wife getting in a bad spot. All day I'd realized he was getting in deeper and deeper, and hell, I liked the little squirt. In spite of my new found humidity for Francelle, I couldn't put the bee on him for ten grand for a sure thing.

So I patted his back and told him

hell, come tomorrow I'd have his poil for him if I had to slice up Hercules to get it. Which was exactly what I intended doing. I didn't stay but ten minutes or so. He was too upset. I told him Carlos would be tough, told him how he watched that damned pooch, and he said hell, he'd do it himself if I was scared, even if he had to kill Carlos to get at the pooch!

When I got to the corner I passed a Yellow, pulled up at a changing light. Monette, blue glasses and all was in the backseat. She was holding an overnight case on her lap. I didn't even blow the horn.

**O**KAY, Portland Park, around eight o'clock, with plenty of moon overhead and plenty of love-making couples around. The only thing I hated about this was that Francelle would have to sit on a bench letting that damned Carlos make love to her while I operated on Hercules in the bushes somewhere. I hated that plenty. She'd said east of the summerhouse, about fifty feet from the fountain. I crept into the bushes by that fountain, and started for the summerhouse. At first I thought there was nobody in there. But there was.

Hercules was lying over in the shadow of a column. Little Hercules wouldn't snarl at anybody any more. Or bite any one. True, I had the idea of operating on him myself, but seeing the poor little devil lying there ripped from one end to the other—hell it did something to me. Almost inadvertently I stepped in from my shelter. And stumbled over Carlos. As dead as

the dog. Stabbed, as far as I could see, two or three times, and the handle of the weapon was still sticking in his chest. Not that you could see it very well.

There was a man's handkerchief draped over it. And lying beside the corpse was something that glittered and gleamed in the mesh of moonlight strained through the roof of free leaves. I picked it up. It was a compact. And the initials were F.S. Francelle Sloan—Sloan being her real name.

God, I like to have fainted. Francelle! She'd come here determined maybe to do the job herself. And she couldn't stand Carlos' pawing and petting. She'd killed him, and determined to finish what she started, she'd butchered the porch. I heard voices approaching, and the sound of feet scuffling on the gravel path. I dropped that compact in my pocket and faded out of the picture. Just in time.

"Come on now," a heavy voice was coaxing, "the two of yez have been drinking. Too much to drink, ain't it, now?"

"Drinking hell," snorted a man. "We saw them—right here in the summer-house." And a woman's quivering voice saying, "A man, with a knife in him, and a dog, a little dog ripped to pieces!"

Gentlemen, I faded, like a wraith. Francelle, Francelle, that's all I could think of, all I could see. Once in the car I broke sixteen traffic laws getting to the Ingerman apartment. Up the stairs double time, and in front of the hall door I paused. The door was standing open half a foot. I thumbed the bell. Nothing happened. I stepped inside. And there was the smell

and sense of emptiness around that place, from one end to the other.

It was the noise that got me. Like a coathanger falling in a closet in the bedroom. Upset, sure I was upset. For the joint had been searched, torn apart from end to end! I leveled the .38 on that closet and I said, "Come on out. You're covered. Who or whatever you are."

Francelle came out. Wide eyed, tearful, scared to death. She said, "Honey, honey, why did you do it?"

"Do it?" I holstered the gun, wiped the sweat off my brow. "I didn't do it! Hell, he and Hercules were dead when I got there. I picked this up."

I handed her the compact. She began crying. "I didn't do it, Joe! He was dead when I got there, too! I must have dropped the compact when I leaned over him! I—I—thought you were the killer."

So we straightened that out—me holding her pretty close. And she explained that in panic she'd headed for home. The front door had been left open and the place had been torn up—just like it was now!

"The pearl," she began tearfully. But I stopped her. To hell with the pearl! I was thinking of a murder charge, thinking that maybe somebody else knew Carlos had made plenty of passes at Francelle, thinking that maybe she'd left some other little clue around the dead bodies. All I was thinking of was the woman I loved. I said, "Quick, honey. I've got to raise a little bump on your head. It's the only safe thing. But first, your

*(Continued on page 94)*

## By ROBERT A. GARRON

**A**LMOST certain that she was being followed, Edie Barrett abruptly crossed the sidewalk at right angles and stood watching the reflection of passers-by in a shop window. She entered the small lingerie shop and bought a pair of stockings while she looked out.

The man who was following her, Lester Marks, was shrewd enough in his profession, and he wasn't going to be taken in by that amateurish trick. He continued on his way. He was a private investigator, altogether unscrupulous according to circumstances. The present assignment intrigued him, because he was receiving a fee too generous for the degree of snooping required. His employer, Otto Fleischer, had discovered the girl's beat and pointed her out. The rest was up to Marks: Get her name, address, circumstances.

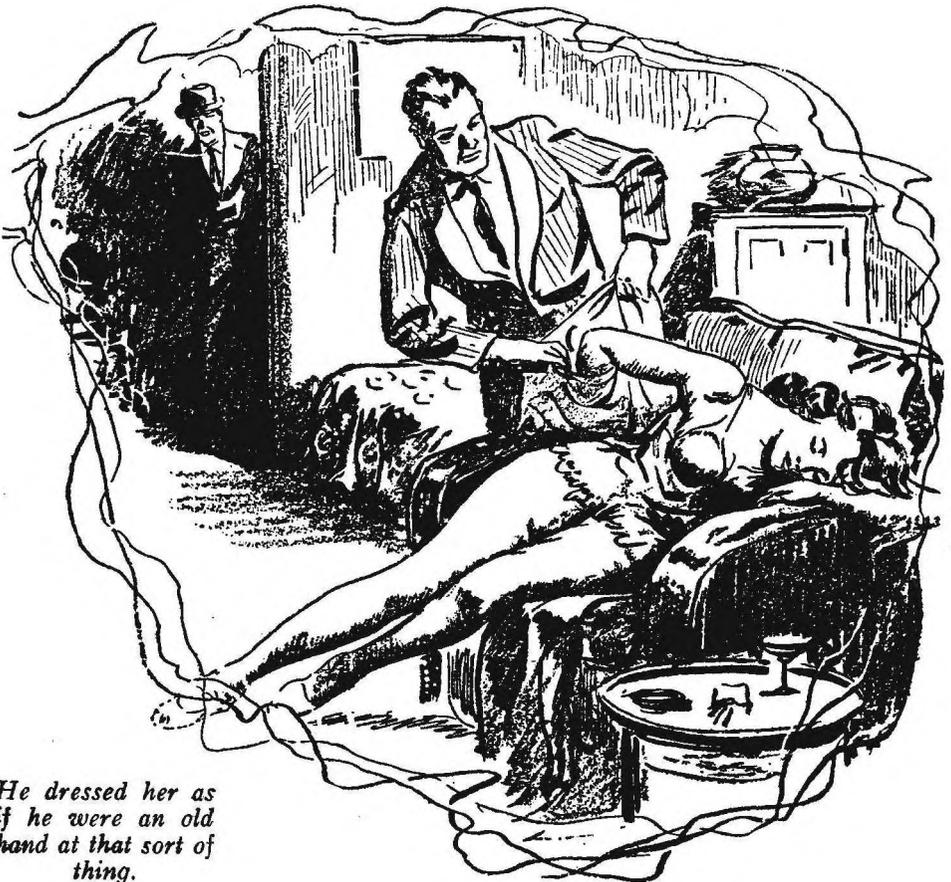


All Marks knew about her so far was that she was scandalously well-proportioned. He hadn't feasted his eyes on anything so yum-yum in quite some time, so he could guess in a general way what Fleischer was up to. Dawdling with a cigarette at the corner, he spotted Edie again at ten minutes of one.

When she crossed the street, he stayed on his side. He saw her use

# FOR NO RANSOM

*Fleischer had laid his plans with consummate skill, and the kidnaping went through without a hitch. Only the accident of a voice heard over the radio told Phil where his sweetheart was*



*He dressed her as if he were an old hand at that sort of thing.*

the employees' entrance of a department store, and nodded. After a couple of drinks he visited the store to spot her, having given her time enough to put her stuff in her locker and get back on the job. He failed to sight her anywhere in the store, for the reason that she was a junior executive in the training department and seldom appeared on the floor.

Marks killed the afternoon in an upstairs danceland, not dancing with the hostesses, but sitting at a table in the dim light with the prettiest girl. That is, with the required railing between them but not necessarily separating them. On the expense account. The girl wore a black dress without shoulder straps, fitting just tight enough so that it wouldn't peel away from her young bosom. Her name was Luella, and she agreed that it was a gyp for him to put out fourteen dollars for such business as she was able to do with him, but if he would like to meet her on such and such a corner . . . Marks knew about those wholly imaginary corners.

**A** FEW minutes after six, he was back on the job, having spotted Edie in the crowd of employees piling out of the department store. The rest was easy.

She hurried into a subway entrance and took an express train which he made also. She got out at Fourteenth Street, and he took the exit across the street from the one she used. He followed her down into the village, and, as he passed by casually, he saw her enter a four-story house converted into

apartments. He came back; propped both elbows on an iron railing and crossed his legs; shortly he saw lights go on in a pair of windows on the third floor. He crossed the street and looked at the names on the row of mailboxes. The box from which she had taken a couple of envelopes bore the name Edith B. Barrett. He noticed that there were two blank nameplates. In a few minutes he was in a phone booth talking to Fleischer.

Edie was on the phone, also, talking with big Phil Evanson. As soon as Phil was able to see things her way, they would get married. Both were stubborn, and she was not going to quit her job no matter how much money he had. First she wanted to do something. Call it a career. There was a major advancement for her in the offing, in fashion, in which she was good. They were delaying in making up their minds only because she was so young. Married, she wouldn't get that job, because she would cease to be a good "risk". Babies eventually, not right yet. She was young, there was plenty of time.

"So you don't want me around just as a plain-ordinary girl-friend, huh?" she had asked with mock melancholy.

"You know what I want you for," he had replied, sourly.

"What for?" she teased.

"On account of a voice with little silver bells in it. There isn't any such voice; as the guy from Texas remarked, I won't believe it even if I see it; I've got to get hold of it in my hands."

Tonight.

**T**ONIGHT she was saying, "Phil, I'm sure a man has been following me."

"It's me," he said darkly. "Me, with my little butterfly net."

"I'm serious." She told him about the episode uptown.

"Don't you know by this time that you've got legs?" he asked. "Quite some legs, and so on."

"When I got in just now, I peeked out the window. And a man was coming across from the other side of the street. He was in the foyer for only a minute, and then he went away."

"Did he ring your bell?"

"No, but I think he was the same man."

"What does he look like?"

"I couldn't see. You know how dark it is on this street."

"You're working too hard. Quit."

"I'm going to get that fashion job."

"Do you want me to come down?"

"Please. And can you stay? Do you mind the little hall room? I've got the craziest feeling that something's going to happen to me."

A crazy plot was hatching, but she had forgotten about her scare when Fleischer, called "Fleshy" by those who knew him well, knocked on her door one night the following week.

"**W**H/O is it?" she called.

No answer, but there was a determined knock again.

She crossed the floor from the sofa, where she had just done her nails. She had taken the little bottles of lacquer and polish remover and the other equipment back to

the bedroom, and had been walking up and down idly, making gestures with her spread fingers to hasten the drying process. Alone tonight, with no girl friend in for dinner and the evening, she was in pajamas which clung to her with their silken thinness. But she was still in high heels and wore stockings, ready to get into a dress in a rush if Phil called and wanted to go out. He was working on something important, but he was the kind of man who finished things sooner than he expected.

She opened the door enough to look into the hall. Shyly, a man backed away to the railing of the stair-well. He was in his middle thirties, and he wore an obviously new bathrobe in dark gray pin-corduroy. The tassels of a belt hung, and were as alive as quick-silver. Under his arm was a carton of cigarettes. He wasn't tall, no taller than she was with her high heels. He was perfectly nice; his round blue eyes were innocent, and he smiled apprehensively.

"I have the apartment below," he said. "I've just had a terrible fight with my sister. May I come in for a moment and have a cigarette?"

"I'm sorry, but I'm going out in a few minutes."

"I feel ashamed of myself," he said, looking at the floor. "She's a paralytic, and there's nothing to do but just wait. She doesn't sleep, and so I can't. Please let me come in and sit for just a few minutes."

He was sincere, and she was sympathetic; there was no danger with a man of such mild appearance. She opened the door wide,

and he entered and took a straight-backed chair in a corner. He opened a pack of cigarettes from the carton, following her with his beaten-dog eyes.

Eddie busied herself in the kitchen, though there was nothing to improve the room's neatness. She returned to the living room, looked hard at her guest. He was smoking. She sat down and picked up a magazine.

Fleischer said apologetically, "My name is Orrin Fleming. I'm a stockbroker, or I was. Retired. Pardon me, Miss Barrett, but I wonder about something. I want to show you something. May I?" He went over to her, taking something from a pocket of his robe, a wad of bills, separating a thousand dollar note from more of the same. "I knew I'd annoy you, so I brought up the cigarettes for you. I want to give you this. Do you know the difference between genuine and counterfeit?"

The way he presented the bank-note made her take it, and she tried to return it and failed.

"No, that's genuine," he said. "May I stay?"

Eddie stood up. "What do you want?"

"Please. I know I'm doing this all wrong. That's yours, if you'll just let me stay. . . ."

AS she got over her incredulity she realized that she was being propositioned. He stated his case embarrassedly. He was not married, though he wanted to be. Plenty of money. Girls were easy to find, but he didn't want that kind. Someone with character. He was backing away a little and

looked unhappy. He was retired, and for two years had been traveling for no purpose but to find a wife. He realized that he was not attractive to women. . . .

"I'm sorry," Eddie said. "I don't like this at all. Anyhow, I'm engaged to be married. Will you please go?"

She gave back the thousand dollar note, though it would have bought considerable merchandise. He accepted the bill.

"It was a mistake," he said with a sigh, "and I apologize. I just thought you might understand, and I didn't want to lose the chance." She felt a little sorry for him. It didn't occur to her that it wasn't a custom to prowl around with thousand dollar bills in the pocket of a bathrobe, because he changed tactics so swiftly. He grinned. "You know, the real reason I came up here was your heels. Forget the other part." He smiled more at her expression and explained, "Down below, it sounds as though someone keeps on tapping across the rooms with a mallet. On the floor. It's the high heels, and I don't suppose a girl really thinks about it. Any more than your heart beating."

The hardwood floor was bare. "I'm sorry," Eddie said, contrite. "The rugs have gone to the cleaners. I'm terribly sorry."

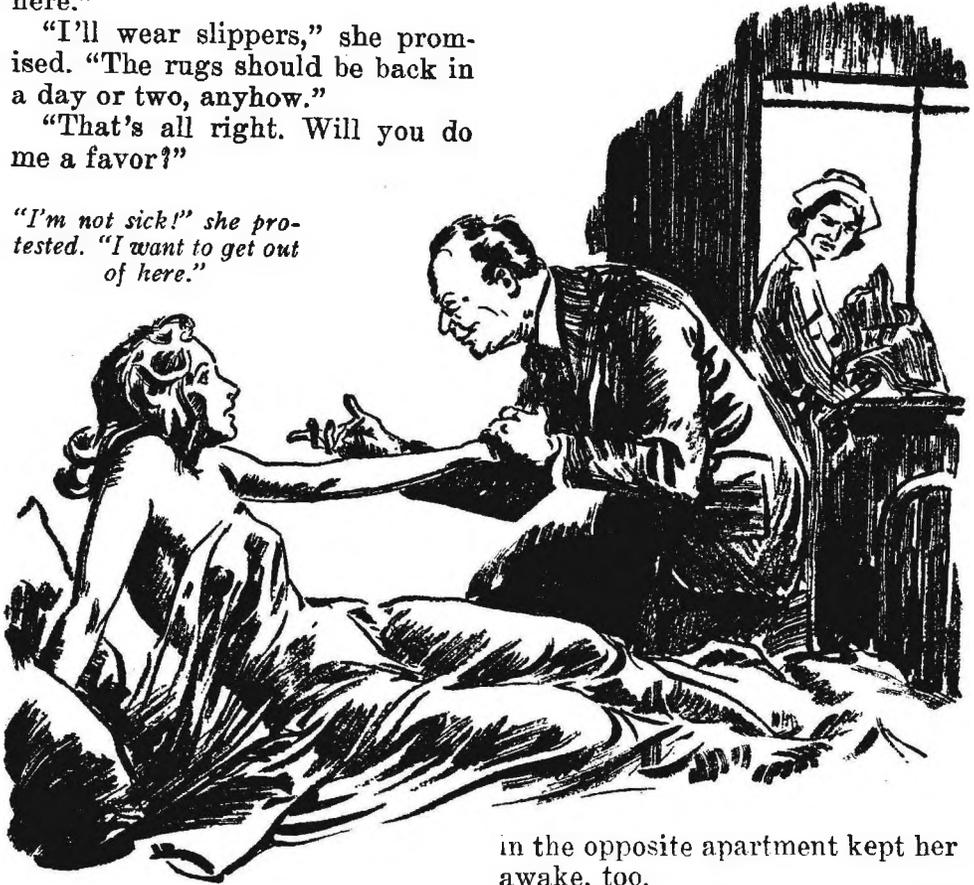
Fleischer said mischievously, "Then you sit down to read a magazine or something, then go to bed. We go to bed early, and when you let your shoes drop on the floor, that wakes us up again. Don't be embarrassed. . . . After all, you can't be in two places at the same time; you aren't down below to hear

yourself walking on the floor up here."

"I'll wear slippers," she promised. "The rugs should be back in a day or two, anyhow."

"That's all right. Will you do me a favor?"

*"I'm not sick!" she protested. "I want to get out of here."*



Edie looked at him, ready to refuse.

"Will you come down and have a drink with us? With me, rather; my sister is in bed." Edie was shaking her head, trying to interrupt, but he was anticipating her. "I think you're a charming girl, and I want Isabel to see you. My sister. She's awake, and waiting. She'll know you're not the one who's throwing the wild parties, with all the tramping of feet, and tap-dancing."

"The people across the hall," she said. Now and then the parties

in the opposite apartment kept her awake, too.

"Will you please come down? She scarcely ever sees anyone but me, and she's alone all day."

"I'll have to change," Edie said.

"Oh, don't bother. You said you were going out. Just drop in for a minute or two, and she'll be glad." He added wryly, "I almost spoiled everything, didn't I?"

**T**HE apartment below was a replica of her own. The bedroom, dark, was the middle room like hers. The only difference was in the height of ceilings.

"This way," he directed her, and called into the darkness, "Isabel!"

Her heart beat fast, and suddenly she knew this was all wrong. As she turned intending to dart past him, he clapped a hand expertly across her face. Filling her lungs to scream, she got the sharp, thick, sickening sweetness of chloroform.

She fought savagely, and fought her way into a midnight filled with a droning whine like a huge bee endlessly swinging past her in rhythm to the beat of her heart.

When she slumped, and it was soon, Fleischer scooped her up and dropped her on the divan. He turned the lights on. From concealment in the shower just beyond stepped Lester Marks, the detective.

"Quite a babe!" he exclaimed. "Quite . . . a . . . babe! I didn't think it would work. I thought the girl had a brain."

"You don't know me; what I want, I get."

"You've got something now, all right. Mh!"

"Her apartment's open. Go up and get a dress and a coat. We're not hanging around."

"You think this is going to work, eh?"

They had talked things over.

"I know it's going to work. Go on, now."

While he was gone, Fleischer took a hypodermic syringe and stuck the needle in Edie's arm, squeezed the plunger down. When the drug wore off, she would get another shot. He was a retired M.D., not a broker. Marks returned with garments, and hung around in the doorway to watch.

"This doesn't concern you," said

Fleischer. "Get yourself a drink or something. Beat it."

Fleischer dressed her as though he had done things like this all his life. For a long moment he contemplated her. Approvingly he inspected the flawless symmetry of her breast, nodded, let his eyes roam on like a connoisseur appraising a special museum piece. Nothing more breathtaking could be asked for in feminine shape. And she worked in a department store. He shook his head.

Having dressed her, he carried her in his arms to the living room.

"OUT on the street," he ordered Marks. "Give me the sign when everything's clear."

"Wait a minute, doc," Marks dickered. "What you're doing will get the whole book thrown at you, and me, too, because I'm an accessory. This is kidnapping."

"True, though not for ransom."

"And the Mann act and several other things. You're pretty well heeled—how about forking over a couple thousand bucks as a bonus? It'll help me forget seeing a swell dame like that go out of circulation."

"I was pretty sure you'd try something like this," Fleischer said calmly. "Don't you think I had you investigated first? Do you remember a certain murder of four years ago? You were an accessory in that, also, I think."

"Must have been some other guy," Marks said without alarm, "but we'll skip it. I only made a suggestion."

"You're still working for me, and you'll get paid well," Fleischer said. "You stay in town and

keep an ear open. You've got my address and phone number. Don't let that Evanson get out of sight. Birds like that are bright sometimes."

"You still think you can get by with it."

"I'll take her little brain apart and put it back together again the way I want it. Get out on the street; I've got a lot of driving to do."

There was more than twelve hundred miles of driving ahead, and he intended to do it non-stop.

**H**E took the Holland Tunnel. Before the first stop for gas, he kissed Edie deliberately, and in the mirror was satisfied with the nearly perfect print of her soft mouth on his cheek. As though she had kissed him good-night.

His mind was clockwork. He was not excited. What he was doing was rather extraordinary, but not more difficult than a first-rate operation, and he never bungled his surgery. He cut, he sewed up, and the patient's recovery was uneventful. Of course, he couldn't get by with a job like this on a well-known actress for example—too loud a hue-and-cry—but with Edie Barrett he could. Her score was perfect in every particular. The idea was A-B-C in simplicity: When he had become wealthy enough to retire he had sold his practice; with his money there were various things to do, such as traveling, preferably with a feminine companion; the companion had to be exceptional. Edie was it. He regarded her as property.

If obtaining her by fair means wouldn't do, foul would. He didn't

like to waste time, either, and had cut the knot of this situation just as with one slice of the scalpel he could lift a breast and saw through the ribs in a heart case. The possibilities of plastic surgery on Edie's face occurred to him, but he wanted her unchanged, as she was. Physically unchanged, anyhow. If there was a strain of madness in Fleischer, what?

He smiled, resting a broad hand on Edie's knee and stroking her possessively; she was slumped beside him. In order to keep her from falling forward he sat her on the edge of the seat. That made her dress ride up, and her legs rested in naive positions, white skin showing above the tops of her stockings. Smooth, soft and firm at the same time, miraculous.

In Ohio a cop stopped him, driving in ahead of him on his bike. Fleischer kept his arm around her.

"**M**AYBE they let you drive that fast where you come from," the trooper said, "but you can't do it here."

"I'm sorry, officer. My wife's sick, and I was in a hurry to get home." Edie's face was turned down against his leg and her hair hung over her cheek.

"How fast were you going?"

"Eighty miles an hour," Fleischer answered. "The highway is fast, and there isn't much traffic."

The cop noted the print of lipstick on Fleischer's cheek, and put away a notebook he had taken out.

"Have you been drinking?"

"No, officer. I think you'd smell it if I had. You don't want me to breathe in your face."

"Keep it down to sixty. And

you'd better use both hands when you're driving."

"She keeps slipping down off the seat."

"Both hands on the wheel. Put her in the back seat. All right, get along."

Fleischer got to his destination, Stallings, a city of about two hundred thousand, without further incident. With Edie cradled in his arms, doped again, he was met at the back door by a blond girl wearing a nurse's uniform. Hortense Wallace. His look was appraising, hers hating, as he passed her.

**L**ATE as it was, Phil Evanson turned the key in the lock. He had a key to Edie's apartment, just as she had one to his studio. He'd finished his job ahead of time. There was a light burning when he entered. So that he wouldn't frighten her he sang, "It's me, it's me, it's me. Edie!"

After closing the door he called, "Hey!"

After a tour of exploration and finding her not in, he stuck his face at the bathroom mirror. He'd cut himself shaving, and washed off the line of blood with hot water. He was a big fellow, casually dressed with open collar and shoes scuffed. His suit was costly but not in perfect press. His usual appearance. Dark brown hair which he combed with his fingers, blue eyes set on a level. Very strong hands and arms, and powerful shoulders. He had inherited considerable money, which was vanishing check by check in the direction of a playboy brother in California whom a couple of girls had got onto.

Phil supported himself, carving stuff in wood. He made it hard for himself, doing panels, miniatures, large figures; he took orders for such things as jewel boxes, figure-heads for a millionaire's mantel-piece, complete stage settings in miniature, scene by scene for a permanent exhibit, anything interesting. His work was in museums. He used woods like ebony and teak and the tough, close-grained woods of strange names, found in the jungles. He was forever sharpening knives and chisels, and sweating while he made beautiful shapes out of wood hard as iron. His palms were hard with callouses, and he could break bones in a hand he shook if he wanted to. He wore a permanent frown from squinting closely and constantly, but he wasn't wearing glasses yet.

He made himself a drink, and smoked. He smoked half a pack of cigarettes and consumed another drink before he fell asleep in his chair. Awaking alone, he used the telephone to call his own apartment. There was no answer. He fell asleep again, which is easy to do in exhaustion. He awakened, went home. There was light in the sky.

He had breakfast, making it himself. He walked around the studio, kicking shavings and chips and the litter of wood aside. Wondering where Edie had been last night tightened his chest with a pang of jealousy. At eleven o'clock the phone rang.

It was one of the girls in the training department at the store, one who knew how things were between Phil and Edie.

"This is Helen Daley, at Me-



*Very business-like, the watchman returned her to the house.*

Cann's," she reported. "Eddie didn't come in this morning, and she doesn't answer the phone. Do you know if there's anything wrong?"

**P**HIL called the police department that day, making a deadline for himself first of three, then four, then five o'clock, hoping she would call. He called headquarters from Eddie's.

He was questioned closely, though the manner of the two plainclothesmen was offhand. Less than a day. Possibly an accident case. Check on the hospitals, and

so on. Have a date with her last night?

"No." He had a key to the place, and told them so.

They looked around cursorily. Phil had a vision of her being hit by a taxi, and lying mangled in a gutter somewhere.

"Don't start worrying yet. It's early," one of the dicks told him. "Maybe she's just staying with a girl-friend. You two weren't quarreling or anything, were you?"

"Oh, hell!" said Phil, looking at him.

So they went over and looked around Phil's place.

There was nothing, and then and

afterward he saw that they knew he was worried and innocent, and nothing else.

Three days, five, two weeks. Phil wasn't working any more. The Bureau of Missing Persons sent a man up in person to tell Phil to stop phoning, that as soon as they found out anything about Edith Barrett they would get in touch with him.

He listened to a radio broadcast:

"Missing since April 11th—" in a low, rough voice—"Edith Barrett, B-A-R-R-E-T-T, twenty-three years of age; height five feet eight inches; weight approximately one hundred twenty-six pounds; color of eyes dark gray; brown hair. When last seen, wore dark blue woolen dress and blue shoes, and blue coat with a gray fur collar." Phil had given that information, because he knew her wardrobe, and certain things were missing.

His eyes took on a sunken look; the skin blued because he worried and he wasn't getting much sleep.

He went to the rental agency handling Edie's building, and found out the name of the man who had the apartment below hers. The police had done that already. The man renting it was Orrin Fleming, taking the apartment at a special rate for a couple of weeks only.

No clues. Nothing. Nothing.

**E**DIIE awakened in a white room, in a hospital bed. At the window, glancing at a newspaper, was Hortense Wallace in a starched white uniform. Against the sunlight her fine legs continued in silhouette all the way up to their

meeting place. Edie sat bolt upright, groggy and scared; Hortense came over at once and sat on the edge of the bed.

"What's the matter? I—Where are my clothes?" She was incoherent with panic. Finding herself naked, she covered her exposed breasts with the sheet.

"Everything's all right, darling," Hortense said calmly.

"I'm not sick!" Edie protested. "I want to get out of here! Something's happened. Where's the telephone?"

"I'll ask Dr. Fleischer. Just a moment."

Fleischer entered the room. Recognizing him, Edie drew the sheet tighter and shivered. In a low, strained voice she asked, "What did you do?"

He frowned, smiling with puzzlement.

"What did you have in mind?" he fenced cautiously.

"Last night—" she began, and swallowed.

"I've been out of town for two days," he said gently. "Did you have a nightmare? Tell me about it, dear."

"I want to use a telephone."

"No, please," he refused, shaking his head. "Wait a little while."

"You mean I'm a prisoner?"

"Certainly not. Now I'll go over it again, and we'll see whether we can't jog your memory a little bit. Will you listen?"

She had to, and listened with lips parted in incredulity.

His story was that she was suffering from shock, and her mind was a blank from just before the shock till now. The reason: Phil Evanson's getting married to one

of the girls on his string. He has given up trying to persuade Edie to quit her job.

A cop had found her wandering, dazed and drunk, and taken her to a hospital where Fleischer was on the staff. He had fallen in love with her, and, when it appeared that she was well, they were married. Then came the relapse, and he took her to the family home here in Stallings. This room had been fitted up for her benefit.

"I'm married to you?" she demanded.

He pulled at a fat ear-lobe and said mildly, "Yes."

"I don't believe it; it's preposterous. Let me phone Phil."

He shook his head sorrowfully. "I've told you several times, dear, that you can't reach him. He's honeymooning in South America. And so will we when you're well."

**D**URING the day she was allowed to wear pajamas, but they were taken from her at night by Hortense, because she was told that once she had climbed out the window. Without any clothing at all, of course she could not. Hortense was sorry; she only worked here.

The night of the full moon, Edie figured that there ought to be at least a pair of overalls hanging on a line somewhere, so she took Hortense's cue and climbed out the window. From a little piece of roof below it was an easy drop to the ground. The night was still and warm. For a moment she was a poised white statue, luminous where the moonlight touched her smooth skin. It would be easier to go down the alley hunting for

any kind of apparel hanging on lines, than climbing fences and inevitably cutting her tender skin. She ran back on the grass toward the garage.

A shadow disengaged itself from the deeper shadows there and seized her. A man. So near freedom, she fought. The man simply flung his arms around her, and hung on. When she still fought he brought her to the ground; she quieted except for the trembling, nearly in a faint with pain. He was a watchman hired by Fleischer for just this occasion. The situation had been engineered to persuade Edie that she couldn't escape. The watchman had been given to understand that Mrs. Fleischer had a streak of genuine lunacy. Moon madness. When there was a full moon she would disrobe and go cavorting in the moonlight. The watchman made sure that Edie was well in hand, then returned her to the house when a window lighted up in the rear.

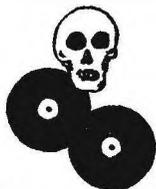
The days slipped by. Weeks. She questioned Fleischer's story and repeatedly rejected it, but inevitably she tolerated his increasingly possessive presence. She began to believe what he told. His experiment succeeded to the point where she would receive his kiss of good night passively. Though she remained passive and apparently bewildered, the successive hurdles were negotiated one by one. At length she was pronounced "well," with all the implications.

He dismissed Hortense after they had appeared in public a number of times, he and Edie.

He paid her well, giving her a

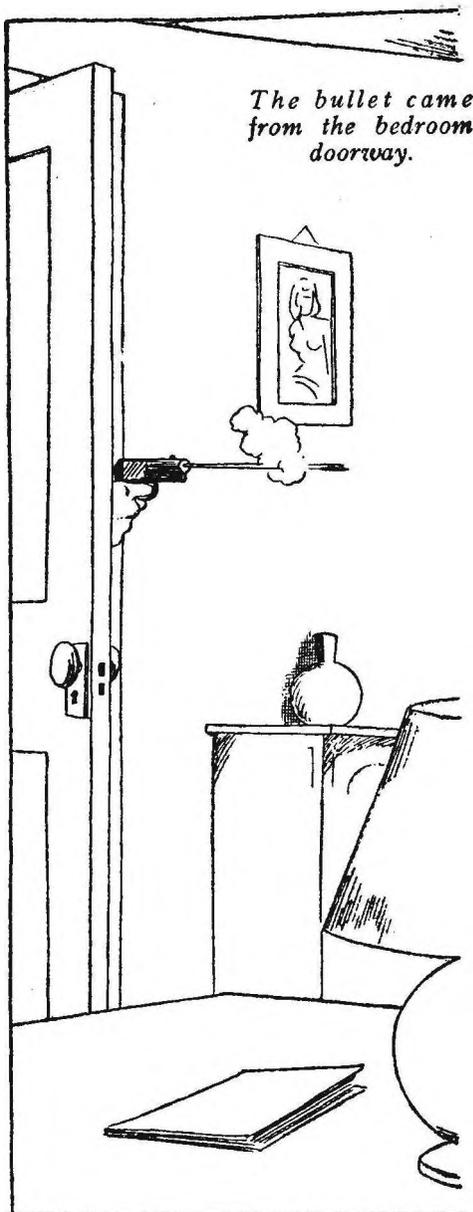
*(Continued on page 100)*

# DEATH'S BLUE DISCS



By  
**ROBERT LESLIE  
BELLEM**

*Dan Turner could see no other way out. He must take the law in his own hands; but he figured it was worth the risk if it would get Judy Prescott out of the jam she was in*



**S**OMETIMES a guy has to take the law in his own hands—and this was one of the times. It was early evening when I anchored my jalopy near the isolated bungalow in Laurel Canyon, switched off my head lamps, and made sure my .32 roscie was easy in its shoulder rig. Not that I ex-

pected to do any blasting; but you never can tell what might happen when you're running the brand of bluff I was about to pull.

Alongside me, Judy Prescott shivered and said: "Mr. Turner—Dan—you'll be e-careful, won't you? I wouldn't want you to get in trouble on my account . . ."



“Sure I’ll be careful,” I said. “I’ve been a private dick in Hollywood too many years to be caught with my slacks at half staff. Besides, you’re paying me a fee for this job. And I’m accustomed to running risks. You quit worrying and wait here for me; I won’t be gone long.”

She shivered again; I could feel her warm figure trembling against me, and I got a copious bang out of the contact. Judy was a nifty little brunette dish, all cuddlesome contours and come-hither curves—especially where her fuzzy Angora sweater was stretched taut by firm, pulsating mounds. In contrast to

the blackness of her hair, her piquant puss looked pale, wan. That was to be expected, considering the pickle she was in. Her career as a singing star in Stormer Productions, her entire cinema future, depended on my success during the next few minutes.

I started to clamber out of my bucket, aim myself toward the bungalow ahead. A blackmailer calling herself Trix Warren hung out in that stash—and I was about to lower the boom on her. But first I hesitated long enough to say: "You're certain this is the address, Judy?"

"Yes. It's wh-where she told me to bring the money."

I scowled. "When this Warren female phoned you, she claimed she had two master discs—phonograph recordings—that you made for a clandestine platter company about a year ago. Right?"

Judy nodded forlornly. She looked so damned woeful I felt like grabbing her in my arms, soothing her with kisses. She was the sort of wren that arouses a man's protective instincts. But I restrained my wayward impulses, kept my mitts to myself. I said: "At the time you waxed these ditties twelve months ago, you were an extra girl struggling to keep beans on the table for yourself and your kid sister, Kitty. The going was tough; you jumped at the chance to sing a couple of numbers for fifty seeds apiece. That much dough looked important to you."

"I w-was broke . . ."

"But it was dirty geetus," I said. "The songs were bluer than hell. If you hadn't been so hard

up you wouldn't have sung them."

"Oh-h-h, no!"

I SAID: "A week after you war-  
bled this risqué stuff you got your big break. Lew Stormer, the shoestring producer, hired you for a minor role in a musical quickie. You clicked. Stormer gave you a starring contract at a steady increase in salary until now you're dragging down three grand a week. Which is tops for an independent outfit like Stormer's."

She nodded.

"Out of your first decent paycheck," I summed up, "you bought back the blue records you'd made; suppressed them. You were told the master discs had been destroyed. But now this Trix Warren dame—a person you've never even met—is trying to shake you down. She says she has those master records and threatens to release them to the Hays office unless you pay her fifty grand."

"And I haven't g-got that much!" Judy whimpered. "But if those songs are made public they'll ruin me . . ."

"They won't be made public," I said. "I'll get them back if I have to jerk somebody apart." Then I ankleed away from the car.

I reached the house, thumbed the bell. Nobody answered—which seemed damned screwy because I could see lights inside. On a hunch I tried the door, found it unlatched. I barged into the living room and felt my glims suddenly popping. I gasped: "What the hell!"

The room was a mess. Chairs were overturned; books and papers were scattered to hellangone.

Near an upset table lay a red-haired, voluptuous jane in ripped silk pajamas. The top of her noggin was blown open; blood and sticky brains made a puddle under her. She looked deader than a fried trout.

I didn't bother to fumble for her pulse. I could see it was useless. Besides, I had my eye on another sprawled figure across the room; a feminine figure huddled in a limp heap. The instant I glued the focus on her, I tabbed her. She was Judy Prescott's kid sister, Kitty.

Kitty's golden hair was in tumbled disarray; her dress was torn to strips as if in some terrific battle. I could see the snowy curves through a wisp of ruined bandeau; her stems were slender and shapely in laddered chiffon where the hem of her skirt had ridden northward beyond her knees. I catapulted toward her, leaned over, jammed my palm against the resilient region of her heart.

I drew a deep breath of relief when I found her ticker was beating. She wasn't croaked; merely unconscious. I rolled her over, looked for possible wounds. I didn't find any. All I saw was sleek, velvety skin and a lot of enticing allurements.

**B**UT I didn't have time to enjoy the scenery. There were other things on my mind. Near Kitty's right hand there was a .28 Belgian automatic that smelled of burned powder when I sniffed its muzzle. And clenched in her dainty left duke were two busted wax phonograph discs.

That spelled plenty to me. The dame whose dome was blown open

must have been the blackmailer, Trix Warren. And the shattered platters in Kitty's grasp were obviously the two master records of the blue ditties Judy Prescott had warbled a year ago.

It all added up to make grim sense. Evidently Kitty had found out her older sister was being shaken down and had come here to swipe the off-color discs. The Warren jane must have surprised her, tried to stop her. There had been a fracas. In self-defense, Kitty Prescott had drilled the red-haired bimbo and then fainted.

Well, according to my notion, the Trix Warren she-louse had got what she deserved. And I couldn't bring myself to let Kitty face a murder beef for a kill that struck me as entirely justifiable. Sure, I'm a private snoop with a badge and a license; I'm sworn to uphold the laws and statutes. But this was different. Judy Prescott's sister deserved a break and I made up my mind to give it to her.

I grabbed the record-fragments and the Belgian roscoe; pocketed them. I took a swivel around the room to make sure there weren't any other clues. Then I lifted Kitty in my arms, lugged her out of the bungalow toward my parked heap. She was a sweet burden. I drew a thump out of carrying her.

**J**UDY PRESCOTT bounced out of my coupe like a brunette bombshell when she saw me coming. "It—it's Kitty!" she gasped. "My God — what happened?"

I said: "Cork it, kiddo. We've got to get her home before hell froths over. Get behind that wheel

and drive. Soup this bucket!"

She kicked the starter. I climbed in alongside her, held Kitty on my lap. My fingers accidentally sank into pliant softness as I supported the blonde doll. The sensation was damned nice.

Judy headed for her modest two-story tepee this side of Westwood Village. Presently we reached the shebang. There was a maroon sedan parked in the driveway. A guy got out of the sedan, came toward us. "Judy!" he said.

I recognized him as Judy flew into his arms. He was her fiance, Art Melville, a script writer for Altamount and a hell of a good egg. A look of bewilderment came over his handsome pan when he stared over Judy's shoulder and saw me toting Kitty out of my jalopy. He said: "Dan Turner! What the devil goes on?"

"Tell you later," I grunted. "Open the door, Judy."

She did. I carried her unconscious sister inside and upstairs to a boudoir. Art Melville and Judy followed me. But before they could say anything the doorbell rang downstairs.

I felt my gullet tightening. Maybe the cops had caught hep to the Laurel Canyon kill, I thought. Maybe they'd followed my chariot and were about to make a pinch. I said: "Quick, Judy — go down and see who it is. You too, Art."

They pelted down the steps. I watched over the banister; -saw Judy opening the portal. But it wasn't a cop who ankled in. It was a dwarfish slug with an eagle-beak beezer and soft, gentle glims. Judy said: "Why, h-hello, Mr. Stormer . . ."

I breathed easier when I knew who her visitor was. Lew Stormer ran the studio where Judy Prescott starred; there wasn't an ounce of harm in him. I went back to Kitty's boudoir.

She was still senseless. I began rubbing her temples, chafing her wrists. Presently her long golden lashes fluttered. She stared up at me. She cringed.

"Please — no — d-don't arrest me!" she whimpered. Then she twined her arms around my neck, spooned me an unexpected kiss that sent live steam sizzling past my tonsils. "I d-don't w-want to go to j-jail—!"

She clung to me, welded her delectable form to my chest; her lips were hot and parted and succulent on my kisser. I felt my temperature coming up; after all, I'm as human as the next slob. But I pushed her back and said: "Look, sweet stuff. You needn't be scared. I'm not going to put the nab on you for croaking that Warren broad."

Her peepers widened open. "Y-you aren't going to arrest me? Even though you know I k-killed her?"

"You were trying to save Judy's career," I said. "That rates a medal in my book. If I've got anything to say about it, you won't even come under suspicion. Now give your nerves a nap. They need it." I blew her a kiss; left her.

**W**HEN I ankled downstairs, Judy was waiting for me in the hall. "Dan!" she whispered. "What's wrong with Kitty? What happened in that bungalow?"



*"It's Kitty!" she gasped. "What happened?"*

You've got to tell me!"

I set fire to a gasper. Then I spilled the whole works. It seemed the best thing to do.

When I finished, Judy's pan was sallow around the fringes. "Kitty . . . a murderer? My God . . . this ruins everything!" she moaned.

I said: "How come?"

"Lew Stormer's waiting in the library to see her. He—he promised Kitty a role in my next pic-

ture; she could have had a chance to make a star of herself the same as I've done. But now . . ."

I said: "Hold tight, Judy. If Stormer wants to give your sister a break in pictures, let him. Nobody's going to know anything about what happened tonight in Laurel Canyon. I'll cover for you. You can trust me."

"You m-mean . . .?"

"I mean I'm going to keep Kit-

ty's name out of it; yours too."

Her dark eyes glistened. "You're s-swell, Dan!" she whispered; and she came close to me, gave me a quick kiss of gratitude.

I said: "Forget it. Make an excuse to get rid of Lew Stormer until Kitty's had time to calm down. Meanwhile I'm going back to that bungalow to make sure I didn't leave any loose clues." Then I barged out to my heap, aimed it toward Laurel Canyon.

It seemed funny as hell for me to be covering a murder; the idea pinched bruises on my conscience until I considered how much Kitty Prescott deserved the help I was giving her. That made me feel a lot better. I braked my bucket to a stop about a block away from the death-bungalow; got out.

Then I froze. Somebody was coming out of that cottage. A  
- dame.

**L**IGHT from inside the joint bathed her puss as she closed the front door after her. I recognized her. She was Loline Meade, a bit-player. I'd been on parties with her in the old days, knew her pretty damned well. But what the hell had she been doing in that house? And why was she leaving it so calmly when she couldn't have helped seeing the Warren woman's corpse in the living room? Any ordinary wren would have dashed out of that tepee with the shrieking meemies; but Loline Meade looked as passive as a cold storage oyster.

I started after her. But before I took three steps a maroon sedan drove up behind my jalopy. Some-

body said: "Just a minute, shamus."

I pivoted; saw a guy coming toward me. He was Art Melville—Judy Prescott's fiance. "What the hell are *you* doing here?" I asked him.

He said: "I'm doing this," and slugged me on the whiskers. I wasn't expecting it; didn't have time to get set. His knuckles erupted against my chin, rocked my noggin back. I swayed like a drunk. He measured me, corked me again. I felt myself toppling. Then I didn't feel anything at all. I went bye-bye.

When I woke up, Melville and his maroon sedan were gone. And by that time there was no trace of Loline Meade, the quail who had barged so calmly out of the murder-cottage. I was all alone in the gloom.

I staggered upright, tried to shake away the bee-hive questions that buzzed in my think-tank. In the first place, why had Loline Meade been in that house? What, if anything, had she done about the murdered dame? And finally, why had Art Melville tailed me here to Laurel Canyon and put the slugs to me?

Maybe I'd find the answers inside the bungalow, I thought. So I stumbled toward the stash, opened the front door, walked in. Then I gasped: "What the hell!"

**T**HERE wasn't any corpse in the living room. It had vanished.

For a minute I thought maybe I was punch-drunk. Regardless of gender, defunct blackmailers can't get up and walk away from the scene of their demise. Yet the

red-haired Trix Warren's carcass was definitely absent.

It was fantastic as hell. I knew Loline Meade couldn't have glommed Trix Warren's remainders; all she'd carried out of the house was a thing that looked like an overnight bag. Then I considered Art Melville. Could he have made off with the corpse in his maroon sedan while I was listening to the birdies? Was that the reason he had knocked me coo-coo?

At least it was a theory. Perhaps he had wanted to dispose of the corpus delicti in order to shield Kitty Prescott, his future sister-in-law. But that didn't explain why he had bashed me. And I still couldn't savvy where that bit-player, Loline Meade, meshed into the picture.

Out of habit, I made a blurry frisk of the bungalow. The only thing I located to indicate a murder had ever been committed in the joint was a gooey mess of brains in a garbage can under the kitchen sink. When I saw it, I almost tossed my cookies. It reminded me of the way the Warren she-male had looked in death—with her skull blown open and her grey matter leaking out.

As things stacked up, it appeared that some maniac had performed a cerebral autopsy on the dead dame. But who? And why? It couldn't have been the cops; there was no indication that the law had been smelling around. Besides, police medical examiners don't usually leave a victim's parts in a garbage can . . .

I took another gander; did some fast thinking. An idea swatted me. I said: "By God! I won-

der—!" and dashed out to my pile of iron; headed back toward Westwood.

I reached Judy Prescott's wiki-up, rang her bell. She looked like a ghost when she let me in; her dark peepers seemed harried, haunted. "Dan!" she whispered. "Thank God you came back!"

I pinned the focus on her. "Has something gone haywire?"

"Y-yes." She poked an envelope at me. "This j-just came by special messenger. Open it. Look at it."

I flipped the flap, dug out a typewritten note and two candid camera prints. The pictures hit me like a punch in the teeth. They were flashbulb snaps of an interior room; the living room of that Laurel Canyon bungalow. The first one showed Kitty Prescott aiming a roscoe at Trix Warren, triggering a slub at her. You could see the flame-streak belching out of the muzzle like a thin tongue. The second print showed the Warren broad falling forward with her cranium blasted open. Kitty was standing to one side, watching her go down.

Judy moaned: "Read the n-note . . ."

I did. It said:

*"Miss Judith Prescott—*

*The enclosed snaps will prove my thorough knowledge of your sister's crime. I was on hand when she committed murder and I took these pictures for proof in case of need. I might add that I have hidden the dead woman's body where I can easily lead the police to it if necessary. But you need have no*

*fear if you act sensibly. All I ask is two-thirds of your weekly salary from now on. Later you will be told how to make the payments; and if you miss a single one, these pictures will be handed to the authorities along with the whereabouts of the corpse.*

*Signed, THE EYE."*

Judy took the note back when I finished scanning it. She sobbed: "I'll have to p-pay—and go on paying! I can't put Kitty in danger of arrest when she was only t-trying to help me . . .!"

"No, you can't," I admitted. "It looks as if this is going to cost you two grand a week; maybe more if Lew Stormer boosts your wages." Then I took her hands, held them. I said: "Look, hon. Would you be willing to have me get you out from under this mess—even though it might mean putting the finger on someone you love?"

She stared at me. Her lips thinned. "You d-don't mean—?" Then her voice firmed. "For Kitty's sake, my answer is yes. I want you to—to do whatever should be done!"

**T**HAT was the answer I wanted. I went back outside; headed for downtown Hollywood. After a while I gumshoed into a second-rate apartment building; walked up to the third floor. I tapped on the door of Loline Meade's flat.

Loline was wearing a sheer nightie and a frilly negligee when she opened up. Soft light came from within the room; silhouetted her lush curves. I could see the swelling sweep of her hips, the tapered daintiness of her gams, the

bold hillocks of her breast through gossamer chiffon. She looked delicious. She also looked damned startled when she tabbed me.

"Wh-why, hello, Hawkshaw!" she said. "What on earth brings you here? I haven't seen you in ages!"

I followed her to a divan, pulled her down beside me. "I get around eventually," I grinned. "How's your private stock these days?"

"Some Vat 69 in the cellarette. I'll get you a snort." She undulated across the room, came back and handed me a tippie of my favorite juice. She poured herself one, raised it. "To old times."

I downed my slug and said: "No. To crime." I made my voice carry a double meaning.

"Crime?" she said. Some of the pink drained out of her puss. "You're always talking business. Why not relax?" Then she nestled close to me and wriggled my arm around her waist.

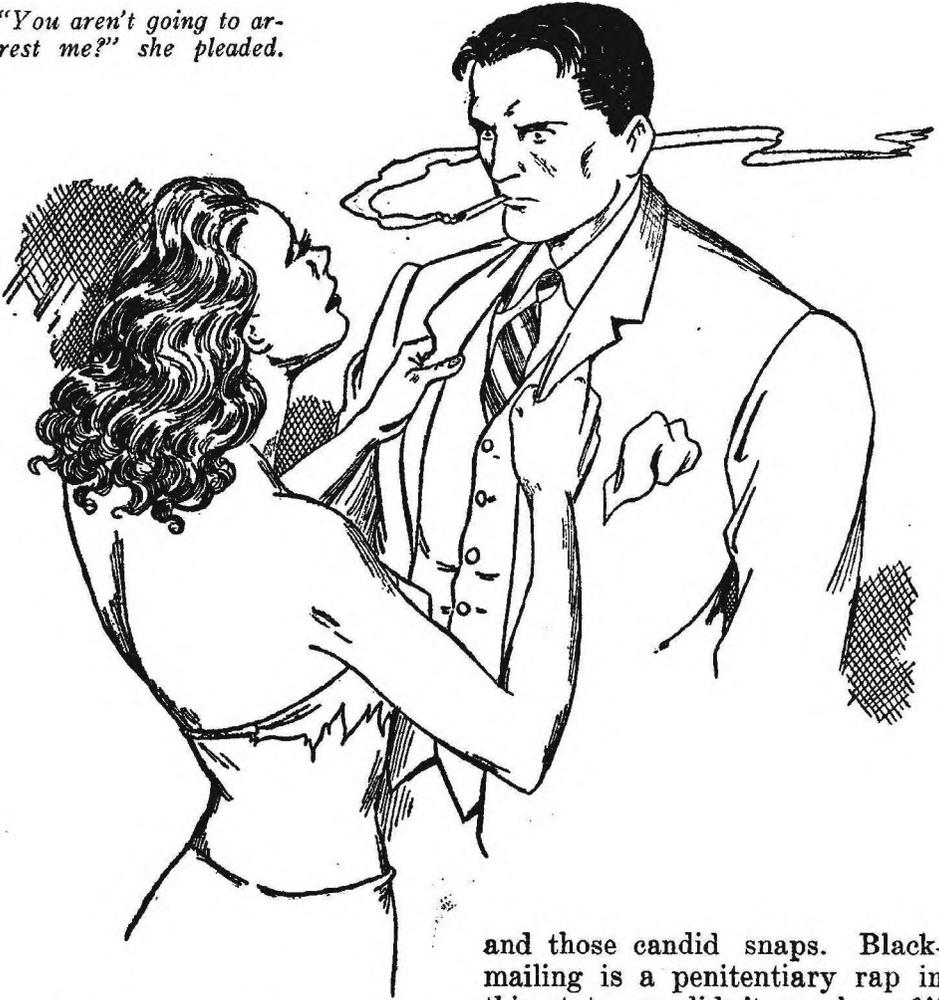
Her nearness was damned pleasant. I decided on a system of shock treatment: maybe I could scare her into spilling what I wanted to know if I spread some oil before I cracked down. So I tightened my embrace. I tilted her chin back, glued a kiss on her moist lips. Her tongue fluttered on an indrawn breath: "M-m-m! You still know how, don't you?"

I said: "Instinct, babe," and ran a mitt over her shoulder.

The negligee pulled half open. "Instinct? You mean practise!" she giggled. But she didn't try to close the kimono.

I jammed her backward; pinned her. "Too bad you won't get any of it in prison," I rasped.

*"You aren't going to arrest me?" she pleaded.*



She stiffened. "P-prison—?"

"You heard me. There's a nice cell waiting for you up at Tehachapi, kiddo. You'll be in it for a hell of a long stretch."

"Wh-what do you mean? Let me up!" She squirmed, tried to get away from me.

I slipped her across the map. My fingers left red marks on her palm. I said: "The joke's over, kiddo. I saw you leaving that Laurel Canyon bungalow tonight. I know all about the Trix Warren deal,

and those candid snaps. Black-mailing is a penitentiary rap in this state—or didn't you know?"

"You—you wouldn't send me up!"

"The hell I wouldn't. Unless you come clean with me right now."

She put her arms around me, tried to pull me against her. "Please—don't make me t-tell! I c-can't! I'll be . . . nice to you . . . if you'll let me alone . . ."

I said: "Ixnay. I want the whole story about what happened in Laurel Canyon. Otherwise you're going to the gow."

"I can't tell you! I d-don't dare!"

"Take your choice," I said. "It's up to you. If you go on fronting for this other party, you'll do it behind bars."

Her mouth opened; words started to blurt. Then she stared beyond me. Her glims got glassy with terror. "No—oh, my God—don't shoot—!" she shrilled.

I tried to spring upright. Her grasp tangled me. From the bedroom doorway a roscoe yammered: "Ka-chow! Chow!" and I felt a sledgehammer nipping my noggin. Blackness exploded in waves through my nooks and cranies. I slumped forward; passed out.

**I** WOKE up with a corpse under me. Loline Meade's corpse. A slug had tunneled through her forehead, sent her to glory. My own head throbbed like a toothache where that second bullet had creased me. Only a cargo of typical Turner luck had kept me from being meat for the undertaker.

I swayed off the davenport, stood up. My knees quivered like overcooked spaghetti and there was blood on my temple; my own gore. It was sticky, thick, starting to congeal. That told me I'd been unconscious quite a while.

I yanked out my roscoe. It was a futile gesture; I knew it even before I frisked the flat. Whoever had shot Loline was long gone. The killer had lammed after triggering those two pills; had powdered under the impression that I'd been creamed along with the Meade jessie.

But that was a hell of a big mis-

take. I was alive—and I was thirsty for a damned big drink of vengeance. I made for the phone on the other side of the room; dialed Judy Prescott's number.

Judy answered in person. I said: "Hi, toots. Dan Turner calling. You alone?"

"No-no," her answer seemed guarded. "Art Melville is here with me. He came just a little while ago . . ." I could tell from her tone that she wasn't exactly pleased.

"And Kitty?" I said.

"In the library talking to Lew Stormer about her part in my new picture," Judy said. "Wh-why?"

I said: "You'll find out," and rang off. I twirled the dial again; got a connection with police headquarters and asked for my friend Dave Donaldson of the homicide squad.

His voice rasped over the wire. "Lieutenant Donaldson."

I said: "This is Turner. I've got a nice fresh kill for you. A cutie named Loline Meade. I almost got a dose of the same gun-poison myself," I tacked on grimly.

Dave let out a bellowing yelp. "Great Gahd! Where are you? How did it happen and why? Who did it?"

I said: "Meet me in Westrood right away and I'll dish out all the answers." I gave him Judy Prescott's address, told him to make it snappy. Then I hung up, whirled, heaved my heft out of the apartment. I went down to my leaping Lena and goosed the tripes out of it.

**M**Y brakes showered sparks in front of the Prescott tepee

just as Donaldson's official police-department sedan came up behind me. He lumbered out of his equipage; lunged toward me. He said: "Okay, brain-guy. Let's have it."

"Hold your toupee on," I said. "And keep your hog-leg handy. I think we're about to make a pinch." I led him to Judy's front door; fingered the jingle-button.

Judy opened up. I grabbed her by the hand, hauled her toward the library. Kitty Prescott and Lew Stormer and Art Melville stared at me as I barged in. The shrimp-sized producer got a bewildered look in his gentle glims; the blonde Kitty turned pale around the borders when she spotted Donaldson and his badge. And then Art Melville's eyebrows pulled together in a thundercloud scowl. "Get your hands off Judy!" he snarled. He moved toward me.

I said: "Pipe down with the jealousy stuff. I'm about to put the arm on a killer."

The instant the words were out of my kisser, Judy Prescott went nuts. "Damn you for a double crossing louse!" she screeched. "You promised you wouldn't tell—!" Then she clawed at me with her fingernails like a brunette wildcat.

I hated to slug her, but I had to. I made a loose fist and popped her on the dimple. She flew backward, landed in an overstuffed easy chair. Her skirt flurried upward to her thighs; pink step-ins winked coyly against creamy flesh . . .

Art Melville said: "You stinking son!" and picked up a brass book-end, tried to beam me with it. Little Lew Stormer grabbed his arm, stopped him. Then Melville

shook off the undersized studio executive, tried to get at me again. But he froze when he saw Dave Donaldson's service .38 making faces at him.

I said: "Okay, everybody. Quiet down. This is a murder beef."

"It is not!" Kitty Prescott yowled. "You're haywire if you think—"

I tossed a grin at the blonde doll. "Thanks for admitting it," I said. "You're right. There was no murder committed in Laurel Canyon tonight. But there was a genuine rub-out in Loline Meade's stash. *Lew Stormer, you're under arrest for croaking Loline.*"

The diminutive movie mogul blew his topper. His eaglebeak nostrils widened; his eyes got full of hellfire. "You'll never pin it on me!" he yeped. And he drew a heater; triggered a slug at me.

But his shot went wild—because Dave Donaldson fired first. Dave sent a .38 cannonball through Stormer's skinny chest. The impact smashed the producer back against the wall, pinned him there for a second. Then the little bozo slumped, fell, started coughing up red froth. "God . . . God . . . !" he moaned.

**I** STOOD over him and said: "Too bad, mister. You wanted to save a few grand—and now you're paying with your life."

His glims glared into mine; his kisser formed voiceless curses.

I said: "There never were any master records of Judy Prescott's blue songs. When she bought back those records a long while ago, the original discs were destroyed by

(Continued on page 103)

# SALLY THE SLEUTH



# River Trail

by  
BARRERUX



Watch for New Adventures of Sally — Next Month!



*It seemed incredible that the golf ball could have killed him, yet Bob knew it had. And somehow, he was sure, Sylvia Ames was implicated*

# Murder Tees

By  
LAURENCE DONOVAN **Off**



*He pounded out two slugs, and the shooting stopped.*

**B**OB CONANT'S prospective client landed in his arms, legs first. She was Wanda Hale. Conant had known her for several months as the prim, little secretary to Mrs. J. Roller Morton, the aging, invalid wife of the tycoon of New Field valley. He had suspected she might have

looks under her horn-rimmed glasses and her tightly combed hair.

But Conant had never even imagined she had such dandy legs. The big hands of the oil county detective slid along tapering curves. He had the sensation of his palms rubbing over snow-

white velvet. He had to catch her that way, for she came plunging through bushes over a sharp bank.

The bushes hiked up and ripped her skimpy skirt. Conant's hands gripped her just in time to check her fall, and just short of the peachy-pink froth of lace and silk enclosing her hips.

Conant weighed close to one-ninety, all hard muscles. Her unexpected appearance and swift descent rolled him to his back. Her tight, secretarial hair-do went flying from its pins and the sun flickered on a tousled, reddish halo around the delicate oval of her face.

"Good gracious!" she gasped, her naturally red lips puckering with surprise. "I didn't expect to meet you so suddenly, Mr. Conant."

Her eyes, he could see now, were widely spaced, a liquid brown, and frightened. Conant's coat was off, for the Oklahoma sun was batting close to a hundred. His thin silk shirt and her thinner silk waist, torn by the bushes, seemed like nothing at all between his muscled breast and the firmness of her bosom. He could feel the wild throbbing of her heart.

Conant's gray eyes twinkled as his tingling skin chilled with the girl's trembling nearness. He couldn't have helped kissing her puckered lips, if he had tried, and he didn't try. For five seconds Wanda Hale attempted to turn her head aside, then for another long five seconds her lips were parted, eager and responsive, and her arms clung about Conant's neck.

He lifted her to her feet. "I can't—can't imagine what made

me do that," she said huskily. "Why, Mr. Conant—"

"Yeah," he grinned. "It was kind o' spontaneous, but I can't say I'm sorry. What happened, Wanda, to send you crashing down here into the rough? From what little I've known you, you're not the excitable kind."

SHE was fixing her little skirt the best she could, but there were still inches of lovely flesh showing above her rounded knees.

"It's Mr. Morton," she said. "You're his friend, and more or less in his pay as oil company detective, and I asked you to meet me here on the country club course because I didn't want to be seen going to your office in New Field."

"I can understand that," he said, for New Field was a hell roaring, boomer oil town. "But what started you running?"

"I noticed two strange men following me," said Wanda. "I slipped into the trees and bushes of the rough on the thirteenth green. The men tried to find me, but I threw them off. About Mr. Morton. He is about to commit a murder, Mr. Conant."

"Everyone in New Field valley calls me Bob," he suggested. "You haven't been having a fantastic dream, have you, Wanda? Old J. Roller is as peaceful as they come."

"He cleaned and loaded a revolver last night in his library, and he didn't know I heard him talking aloud to himself," she said. "He was more upset than I've ever seen him, and he kept saying he would kill someone, but he didn't speak any name."

"He's playing his afternoon

round now?" questioned Conant. "You think he has a loaded gun on him?"

"Yes, I saw him on the thirteenth green as I got away from the two men watching me. I left Mrs. Morton in the car, where she could watch the players. I must hurry back, but you were the only one I could trust, and that's why I phoned you to meet me here."

They were in the scrubby woods, a short distance from the fourteenth green of the New Field Country Club. Voices of golfers could be heard calling out and laughing. The club course was nearly always filled at this hour.

Conant keened his ears for any movement near them and he scanned the bit of woods.

"You'd best get back to Mrs. Morton, Wanda," he advised, and he was suddenly conscious that he wanted to prolong this interview. He had too damn' much of a desire to take the slim, exciting body of Wanda Hale in his arms again, and somehow he imagined she was feeling the same way.

"Yes," she said. "I must get some clothes from the clubhouse. Mrs. Morton will be impatient. Could you—would you meet me tonight, Mr. Conant? I'd like to know what happens, if you talk to Mr. Morton."

"I'll meet you," he said instantly. "The name still is Bob. How about the lake boathouse, say at ten o'clock?"

Her eyes widened a little, but she smiled.

"There'll be no one about at that hour," she said softly. "I don't—well yes, Bob. I want to know very much what you discover."

She left him, moving as lightly as a deer, and skirting the outer fringe of the wooded rough, following the club driveway as she passed from his sight. Conant was starting toward the green, going through the small trees when a woman screamed. Another woman's added her shrill voice of terror to the first outcry.

Some man shouted and other voices arose in a sudden bedlam of excitement. Conant lunged forward, seeing several figures running across the smooth, clipped grass of the fourteenth green.

"Good God! It's J. Roller, he—"

"Stand back. Give him air—"

"Doc Simms—Doc Simms! Come back here, quick—!"

CONANT was on the green now. He saw fifty or more men and women centering toward a forming group near the middle of the course. With Wanda Hale's apprehension for J. Roller Morton in mind, Conant wondered if there could have been a gunshot he had not heard.

His ears were keen. He was sure there had been nothing louder in the past few seconds than the crack of a clubhead on a ball. He snapped his eyes from face to face as he wedged in among the throng around a big man lying on the grass. Knowing every resident of New Field who frequented the country club, Conant became conscious of a pair of strange faces.

Thinking of Wanda Hale having been strangely trailed, he made a note to check upon these two men as soon as he learned more of what had happened. He wedged on into the group.

J. Roller Morton, tycoon of New Field valley, was as dead as he would ever be. Blood streaked with gray oozed from a smashing wound that had cracked his skull over the right ear. Scarlet fluid threaded from his nose and mouth.

Old J. Roller's big body lay nerveless and motionless. Death apparently had been instantaneous. Jim Colter, the oil company superintendent, had been playing the round with J. Roller.

"There wasn't anyone closer to us than a hundred yards or more, back on the thirteenth," said Colter. "No one called out, 'Fore.' It seemed to me that ball must have come out of the rough over to the right, but it was coming so fast I didn't see it until I heard one awful crack, and J. Roller groaned and fell down. I saw the ball then bounce away."

Dr. Thad Simms was a fussy, little man and nervous. He was kneeling beside old J. Roller.

"Couldn't have killed him quicker if it had been a bullet," he said, arising slowly. "Seems incredible that the toughest bone could be smashed like that by a golf ball that must have been dropping and nearly spent to be at the level of his head. It would be more credible if someone had driven that ball from only a few yards away."

Doc Simms was looking straight at Colter. The oil super was dark-eyed, black-haired and swarthy. Conant saw a deep flush that might have been anger flood Colter's neck and face.

"I get what you mean, Doc," he said harshly. "And we were playing without caddies. J. Roller always insisted on packing his own

clubs for the exercise. But the ball came from over in the rough close to the main highway, and I was so close to J. Roller that I heard the whistle of it before it struck him."

Doc Simms was on his knees again, hand feeling J. Roller's breast under his shirt, although there wasn't a chance of a heart beat. Doc said, "What's this? That's a funny one."

He was holding a newly polished revolver he had taken from inside the dead J. Roller's coat. There being no other law present, Conant stepped forward.

"I'll take that, doc," he said.

He thumbed open the gun. It was a six-shooter of an old pattern. Five cartridges fell into his hand. Old J. Roller had known how to load a gun to keep the hammer on a safety hole.

"What is it? Somebody said Uncle Roller was hurt—oh!"

**T**HE girl who pushed in, speaking in a throaty voice, had a face a little drawn by too many nights of lost sleep, but darkly pretty and alluring, with midnight eyes like glowing coals, set off by curling black hair. Her short golf skirt and tight waist brought out breath-taking curves of a willowy figure that seemed to sway slightly as she spoke.

She was Sylvia Ames, the niece of old J. Roller. Her face went a little white, but Conant saw that her coppery, outdoor hands were steady enough on the handle of an iron that she must have been using to drive out of the rough. He noted quickly that she had come from the same direction as himself.



*His prospective client landed in his arms, legs first!*

Sylvia Ames was silent, her mouth a grim, straight slash of red, as she was told what had happened. Conant did not speak, but his eyes were upon the girl's face when she seemed against her will to half turn and scrutinize him closely.

Had she been over there in the scrubby woods of the rough, close enough to have seen and heard his meeting with Wanda Hale?

She turned away quickly, and Conant was sure she must have seen that meeting. He decided to let that rest for the time. Another little matter engaged him now.

Highly morbid interest had been holding all eyes upon the dead man. Conant eased back, glancing about for the two strangers he had noticed. They had withdrawn from the group, and he saw two men going among the trees, making toward the county highway.

Conant quested the ground. Apparently no one had thought of looking for the death ball itself. He saw a white, little sphere back of a man's heels.

Conant adroitly got the ball between his number nines. He retrieved it so quickly that he believed he had been unnoticed. Then the intentness of Sylvia Ames' glowing eyes fixed upon him made sure she had seen his find. She turned away, giving no more evidence of interest.

As Conant pocketed the ball, a bareheaded young fellow with a slick mane of almost baby yellow hair and bloodshot, hangover eyes, came around the edge of the group. Leaves caught on the bag slung over his shoulder indicated he had

just come from the rough not far away.

He was Ralph Morton, the nephew of old J. Roller, and reputed to have been his favorite heir. Rumor had it, though, that J. Roller had been rumbling threats to disinherit his blond nephew since he had become involved with the wiles of a gorgeous trollop out of Tulsa, and had been hitting the wrong end of the percentage in the games at the High Hat gambling hell, New Field's only gilded gyp joint.

Conant saw that Ralph Morton was more than a little drunk. But he saw the youth's shoulders square up, and heard him swear savagely, as he saw the body of his uncle.

Then he heard young Morton say, "Dammit! I was in the rough, hunting a lost ball! I was playing around alone! I saw two women on the thirteenth green behind my uncle and Colter! They were both dubs, so that ball didn't come from there!"

Conant thought Morton sobered quickly, possibly too quickly. Of all those about, Conant was aware that only Sylvia Ames and Ralph Morton seemed to have been in a position to have driven the death ball, and both were expert, long driving players.

Young Morton's next outburst came as a surprise.

"Hell!" grated J. Roller's nephew. "I don't believe it was an accident! I—"

Doc Ames was the county's deputy coroner. He interrupted, "If you know anything, Ralph, save it. This isn't a time to be voicing groundless suspicions. I'll

talk to you privately later." Conant recalled that young Morton and Sylvia Ames were probably the only two persons who stood to benefit by old J. Roller's death. Young Morton's blurted, angry suspicion could be covering up. He could be drawing the reddest of all red herrings across the possible trail of a crime, the feigned accusation of possible murder coming from himself to direct investigation elsewhere.

"Conant!" called out Doc Simmas.

But Conant was hurrying away across the green and gave no evidence he had heard. He did not want to divulge the little he already knew, until he discovered more. His thought right now was for Wanda Hale.

**I**F THE word of old J. Roller's death had not already been flashed back to the clubhouse, Wanda would soon know of it. It was his hunch that it would be wise for her to keep silent concerning J. Roller's mysterious purpose in carrying a loaded gun.

Conant saw the Morton sedan parked by itself just off the driveway, among the trees where the aging and invalid Mrs. Morton always enjoyed watching the play while J. Roller made his daily round. Conant was sure that Wanda would have returned to Mrs. Morton by this time, and if she had heard of J. Roller's death, she would doubtless be either consoling her mistress, or be striving to break the news of the tragedy gently.

Drawn to the scene of the death, no one had apparently thought of the invalid Mrs. Morton or gone to

the closed car in which she sat. Conant crossed among the trees. His eyes searched for Wanda Hale. He saw only Mrs. Morton sitting queerly and stiffly upright in the cushioned corner of the rear seat.

Conant's spine suddenly went icy. He quickened his stride. As he opened the door, he saw that Mrs. Morton's roundish, plump face had turned the color of purple clay. Her mouth sagged open. Her eye-lids were half closed, and the eye-balls were almost the same ghastly color as her skin.

Conant wasted no time feeling for the woman's pulse.

"Apoplexy," he muttered. "She's been suffering with high blood pressure. Undoubtedly she heard and saw enough to know what happened. Perhaps she was watching J. Roller when he was hit. It was too much for—"

Conant ceased speaking abruptly. He shot probing glances all about. The scrub trees were thinly scattered here. There was no one near the Morton car, and there was no place of concealment for fifty yards or more in any direction. The highway lay a short distance off, white and shimmering hot under the one-hundred-degree sun.

"Well, bigod!" slapped from Conant's tongue, as he peered more closely into the gruesome face of the dead woman.

He had been sure she had died swiftly, naturally, of apoplexy. A shock like that could have done it. But he knew now that she hadn't. A single, red drop of blood glinted in the lash of the dead woman's right eye.

Conant glanced quickly over his shoulder, made sure he was un-

observed, then he touched a handkerchief to the drop, removing it.

"Murder," he said softly. "And there won't be a single clue to other than a natural death with that drop of blood gone. When the time comes, I can have an autopsy that'll show where the death instrument went into the brain."

For Conant was sure a pointed murder weapon had penetrated the brain. For sheer nerve in execution, this was as bold a murder as Conant ever had come upon. He knew that either a needle or some other point had been forced under the lifted eye-lid, between the eyeball and the rim of the socket.

Ruptured blood vessels gave the same effect as a stroke of apoplexy. The Japanese use a sharpened bamboo splinter, Conant recalled. In this case it might have been a steel needle, but it had been used by an expert.

Conant didn't want to think as he did, but his suspicion was inescapable.

Once more the two persons who stood to benefit most by J. Roller's death, and more surely by the coincidental death of his wife, named themselves in his mind.

**R**ALPH MORTON, dissipated, and a little drunk, had come from the rough. Thinking it over, the young man had been rather slow to arrive on the scene, when excitement had been running over the golf course like a wave.

Sylvia Ames? Dammit, was Conant's thought. The hotblooded, wild playgirl of New Field had known something she wasn't telling when he had seen her. Those glowing eyes had been brooding,

scrutinizing him, and watchful of every incident.

He was sure she had seen him pick up the deadly golf ball. He saw two women and Doc Simms crossing toward the Morton car. As they came on, he took the death ball from his pocket and examined it closely. He grunted suddenly and moved out into the bright sunlight.

"A Red Seal, common enough," he muttered, turning the ball over slowly. "A bit of hair and skin and blood. And not a single, damn' abrasion or the slightest mark where a clubhead has ever touched. But—"

The ball was brand new. Evidently it never had taken the blow of a club, and certainly not such a drive as would have sent it shooting like an oversize death bullet. But there were several curious, straight little scratches along the sides of the hard rubber.

"Murder, two ways," grated Conant, and turned to meet Doc Simms.

"She must have heard too much, and the shock came as swiftly as a bullet splitting her brain," Conant said to doc. "Looks like apoplexy."

Doc Simms nodded, making a perfunctory examination with nervous hands.

"I've been expecting her to go that way," he said. "I had warned her against any excitement because of high blood pressure. But where is Wanda Hale? She seldom left her alone."

Conant was sharply recalled to the fact that Wanda Hale had not returned. He said she might be



*He emptied his gun, but his brain was dazed.*

at the clubhouse, some distance away, and promptly started in that direction. As he crossed the first green, he saw Sylvia Ames again.

The willowy, vivid girl had been going toward the Morton car, following Doc Simms. Conant saw

her halt and turn to look after him. His cocked eye noted that she took two or three steps, as if to follow and overtake him, but for some reason she changed her mind and turned abruptly back toward the dead Mrs. Morton.

**B**OB CONANT'S insides felt frozen. The woman attendant at the clubhouse said she had not seen Wanda Hale.

"I'm sure she hasn't been in the clubhouse at any time," said the woman. "I did see her in the Morton car when Mr. Morton came up. Miss Hale was driving, and she turned back to park the car without getting out."

Conant's brain was doing queer flipflops. Wanda Hale had been followed when she had come to meet him. She had not reached the clubhouse. And it was certain she would not have voluntarily remained away from Mrs. Morton.

Conant heard the siren of a county police car. He started to leave the clubhouse. Something inside warned him that the double murder of the Mortons had been too aptly timed to have been committed by other than the cleverest of crooks. Although young Ralph Morton and Sylvia Ames must come directly under suspicion, Conant was convinced that if either was involved, then the smartest of killers had been hired for the job.

"If this is what I believe it to be," he said softly, "to broadcast an alarm over the disappearance of Wanda Hale would probably be her death warrant." He added in a husky whisper, "if she isn't already dead, and that means—"

Art Carlin, manager of the New Field Country Club who had a piece of several other enterprises in the oil boomer town, said, "Conant! Just a minute, Conant!"

Carlin's eyes looked desperately worried, and smaller than ever above the bulging roll of his

cheeks. He was broad, fat-paunched and nearly baldheaded. Anxiety rode his voice until he spoke haltingly.

"For God's sake, Conant!" he exclaimed. "This accident to the Mortons is ruinous! I heard you asking for Wanda Hale! Do you think—has she disappeared? Conant, for the love of Pete what have you found out? Nobody seems to know who drove the ball that hit J. Roller!"

Carlin's evident selfish thought of the business of the country club rubbed Conant the wrong way. Carlin stood there, locking his fat hands together.

"Nothing has happened to Miss Hale so far as I know, Carlin," he said shortly. "Possibly she may have cut across the grounds and gone to the Morton home for something Mrs. Morton wanted. I don't know who drove the death ball, and I have an idea that whoever did it was out in the rough, and doesn't feel much like admitting it."

At that moment, young Ralph Morton strode into the clubhouse, and on across to the locker room. Carlin stepped close to Conant.

"I heard someone say J. Roller was carrying a loaded gun when he was killed," he said. "I thought maybe—well—you haven't heard of him having trouble with anyone, have you? If it turns out his death wasn't an accident, I might as well close the club for—"

"To hell with you and your club!" snapped Conant. "Any time one of your members dies, I'll bet you make a bee line for the dues book to make sure he's paid up! I hear you have a piece of the

High Hat club! It'd look smarter if you worried more about the hell that's brewed down there!"

Carlin gulped air like a fish out of water. Conant turned and hurried from the club. He noted as he did that Carlin slid across toward the locker room.

"Probably he'll try and pump Ralph Morton—"

Conant's own words brought a sudden thought. He wondered how much young Morton owed in gambling debts. That might be an angle. Conant deliberately evaded the regular county police.

He had decided it would be useless to look for Wanda Hale in the vicinity of the club grounds. If she had been seized, he was convinced she would be held, if she were alive, in one of New Field's many dives.

**T**HE sun had dropped. Conant drove furiously through gathering dusk toward the hell roaring town with its streets of oily, black muck. He was near the outskirts when a closed car meeting him, suddenly swerved, crowding him toward the shallow ditch.

Taken by surprise, Conant tried desperately to control the car with one hand, while he fished the automatic from his shoulder holster, Snaky, blue fire tongued at him as the closed car's fenders ground into his roadster. Conant slouched down, but a slug left a numb line across his scalp.

He could feel the blood well forth, as the roadster flipped into the ditch and plowed along on its side. It went all the way over on its top and Conant, dazed but still

conscious, was thrown clear. The shriek of brakes hit his ears.

The closed car was stopping. There was no other car in sight at the moment. Conant heard a car door slam. His quick wit informed him the probable reason he was wanted.

As feet pounded along the concrete, Conant flipped the death golf ball from his pocket. The open end of a tile drain pipe under the highway was only three or four feet away. Conant tossed the ball and heard it clunk dully inside the pipe.

He closed his eyes and played very dead. Two men were bending over him. Slitted eyes revealed the faces of the two strangers he had seen on the golf course. Conant was tempted to make a try for his automatic, or for old J. Roller's revolver in his pocket.

A sudden kick that seemed to tear off an ear stopped that before he got his hands moving.

"Frisk him, grab it, and we'll lam!" snarled one of the men.

Hands plunged into his pockets. They took his gun and J. Roller's. Both men swore heavily when they failed to find the ball.

"Damn 'im!" said one. "Maybe he's passed it along to someone else! We take him—"

A county police siren screamed from up the highway. The law car evidently was coming fast. Conant's attackers left him on the jump. Apparently they did not care to be spotted alongside the wrecked roadster that would undoubtedly stop the police car.

"We'll have to pick him up later!" rasped one of the thugs.

*(Continued on page 106)*



*One man was out to kill him, but the detective could give no thought to this when other lives were being lost. There was a girl he shouldn't have thought about, either but he did . . .*

I WAS in the Phi Delt house talking to Jerry Riggs and Carl Starr, two of the upper classmen when Jiggy, the janitor, rapped on the door of Strang's room. I smelled trouble immediately when he said that Dean Dennis wanted to see me right away. Jiggy was unusually excited.

In the hall, out of earshot of the two boys, Jiggy said, hoarsely: "They want you in the Chem lab right waaay, Mr. Wade. Professor Trendle's been murdered."

*My shot caught him  
in the shoulder and  
spun him around.*



By  
GEORGE  
SHUTE

# MURDER on the CAMPUS

On the way past Frat Row he told me what he knew about it.

Fifteen minutes earlier a co-ed had entered the lab and found the body. Jiggys had been looking over some bad steam pipes in the Science Building and had heard her scream. He notified the Dean, who sent Jiggys for me.

Dora Burke, the co-ed, who was taking a post graduate course and also assisted Trendle on his notes, was standing near Dean Dennis

when we came in. Her face was white and taut.

Trendle's body was face down among a litter of broken bottles that had either spilled from the table when he reached for support or, in a fight, had been knocked from their perch. Chemicals spotted his long white coat.

I turned the body over. Trendle's eyes were open and staring. A small man, he looked like a grotesque spider, huddled there on the

floor. The Burke girl turned her head away.

I didn't blame her. Trendle wasn't exactly pretty. His face was purplish and his tongue protruded. I returned him to the position in which I had found him and said:

"Strangled. Probably from behind. Chances are he never saw his killer."

The Dean said: "What do you think should be done, Wade? Need we notify the police?"

"I'm afraid we'd better. You see, before getting this job as sort of a campus Sherlock to keep the wilder boys and girls of Webster University away from the town's tempters, I had been a pretty good dick myself.

There was a public pay phone in the hall. Headquarters said they'd send a couple of the boys over right away. I asked them to keep it as quiet as possible. I didn't want reporters and photographers all over the place if I could help it.

**WHEN** I got back to the room,

Dora Burke was wiping her eyes. Jigggy was staring at her and the Dean was shaking his head dolefully. I noticed that a button had come undone on her blouse, showing a patch of white, satiny skin.

Dora Burke was as beautiful as she was intelligent. She was tall and blonde, usually dressed in a neat business suit with a white silk blouse that nestled contentedly against the soft, rounded contours of her ample breasts. She seemed to favor tight clothing and such being the case nothing much was left to the imagination as far as

tapering thighs, well-rounded calves and slender ankles go.

She looked up as I came in and I thought she was going to say something. It was the Dean, however, who spoke:

"I suppose the newspapers will be here, too, Ben? That won't be so good for the college."

I explained that I was trying to keep them off as long as possible. He half-smiled and said: "That's very thoughtful of you, Ben."

I said: "Aw forget it, Boss. I think you ought to go home now. The cops can find you there as well as here. I'll just ask Miss Burke here a couple of questions before they come."

The Dean said good-night and went out. I felt sorry for him, having a thing like this happen. He was a regular guy. When I was retired from the force after Jerky Iago shot me as full of holes as a fish net, I almost went nuts until the Dean created this job of campus cop for me. It wasn't exactly a soft touch, but it wasn't hard, either. And it gave me a chance to pick up the health the doctors said I wouldn't enjoy again after what Iago handed me before I sent him to the big house.

I noticed Jigggy staring at the body out of his heavy-lensed glasses and sent him off for a sheet with which to cover the body.

Dora Burke was jittery from being in the same room with the corpse so I asked her to come outside. She flashed me a sad smile of gratitude as I closed the door behind us.

"You ought to get a grip on yourself, Dora." I said, as we stood

in the hall. "You'll make yourself sick shaking like that."

She started crying. "I can't help it. Why did it have to happen to him of all people? Especially now when he was working on a big experiment."

"What kind of an experiment?"

She shook her head. "I don't know. All I did was take down the formulas and symbols he gave me every night. We have been working here in the lab for almost a month now. There was something he had to get down on paper and he was very secretive about it."

"Hmm." I said. "Maybe someone else was interested, too, if it was that important."

**A** GAIN, she shook her head. "He was a great and a kind man, Ben," she said. "He had no enemies, you know that."

I said I did. "All I'm trying to do, Dora," I explained, "is to establish a motive. Someone wanted Professor Trendle out of the way. When murder happens, it's usually for some reason, which the killer believes is important enough to gamble his own life against the victims."

She gave me a half-hearted smile. "You've been memorizing Agatha Christie again, Ben. Or is it Mary Roberts Rhinehart?" My little spiel temporarily helped her to forget.

"I'm quoting Ben Wade, the campus cop," I said. "And if someone in this place had a reason for killing Trendle I'll find him. Now tell me, what were Trendle's habits? Did he have any hobbies, anything like that?"

She bit her lip and tears welled in her eyes. She said:

"I know you're trying to help, Ben. But can't you see I don't want to talk about it. Not now." Her shoulders began to tremble. She wanted comforting and she wanted it bad. So when I sort of touched her shoulder and she came closer to me, I guess I can't be blamed if my arms opened and she found a shoulder.

I was as surprised as she probably was. I had taken her to town once or twice to dinner and we were a little more than casual acquaintances. But, honest, we'd never been this close before. Not even in my car.

My heart began pumping away like a stepped up engine and my red corpuscles were hurtling through my veins as I felt the softness of her breast against my chest. Her hair smelled clean and fresh and the taut skirt which cut into my knee brought into my mind pictures of soft, satiny skin on thighs perfect in their symmetry. Every line and curve of her body seemed to flow beneath my comforting hands.

I wondered whether she had heard my muttered curse as my ears caught the scream of a siren. She looked up suddenly and said: "I'd better go, Ben."

"Okay, honey." I said. "That would be the boys." I wished all the police sirens were in the ocean some place. "Now you go on back to your place. I'll call if they need you. Otherwise I'll drop in a little later."

My heart commenced bouncing again as I saw her smile. Then she turned and went down the hall,

her stockings flashing. She had beautiful legs, that girl.

**H**ENNESTER and Farber came running in from the entrance door. Dora Burke had gone out the back way. Both of the boys were old buddies of mine.

Hennester said: "Where's the stiff?"

"In here," I said, opening the door. "He's —

Farber and Hennester were right behind me. As my voice caught and my head started to spin I heard Farber say:

"What's the matter, Ben?"

I pointed to the spot on the floor and struggled to speak. Finally the words came:

"The body. It's gone." I started talking wildly, babbling, I guess. Hennester's hand across my face brought me out of it. Hennester said:

"Get a grip on yourself, Ben. Have you been in the room all the time? Maybe the murderer came back."

Reason returned to me. I was feeling a little weak, but much calmer. The doctors hadn't been all wrong after all. I knew that I'd have to be careful of too much excitement.

I told them about being out in the hall with Dora Burke because I didn't want her hysterical over the body. Farber was walking over to the other side of the room. There was a door on the far end, connecting with another lab.

Farber said: "Where do these doors go, Ben?"

"Outside," I said. I felt like a fool. If I had been on the force and committed a boner like leaving

a room before the medical examiner came in, there would have been a nice suspension. "That's probably what happened. While I was outside the door, the murderer was inside the other lab. Maybe he had been there all the time, listening."

Hennester grinned. "Don't be so bitter about it, Ben. Mistakes happen. And whoever carted off the body is going to have a helluva time getting to places with it. Incidentally, who's this, a spook?"

**H**E was looking at Jiggsey who had come into the room. A dirty sheet was draped over his stooped shoulders and he dragged his leg as he walked toward me. Then he noticed that the body was gone! He stared and gasped: "Where is it?"

"I wish I knew. Boys, this is Jiggsey, the official janitor. I sent him out for that nice clean sheet he's using as a tent."

Farber asked Jiggsey a couple of questions. I listened in. Jiggsey told the same story I had heard. He had been working on some steam pipes when Dora Burke had screamed.

Perspiration was pouring from Farber's face. He was a pretty beefy gent anyway. And it was hot in the lab. I wiped my face with a handkerchief.

"What are you trying to do in here?" Farber asked Jiggsey. "Give us a Turkish bath."

Jiggsey stared owlishly at him. "The thermostatic control is acting crazy lately. I'll fix it."

He handed the sheet to me and went out, a sort of pathetic figure with his bent shoulders and dragging leg.

*I heard her scream  
and the fireworks  
went off.*



Farber said: "Been here long?"  
"Before my time," I said. "I think four years in all. He's not a bad janitor from what I can gather."

"We'll want him in court when we find that body."

"He'll be there." I had an inspiration. "Listen, fellows," I said. "That body can't be far away. I've got an idea it's around the buildings someplace. Suppose I get a couple of the college boys to help us look for it. Then, if we don't find it, very few people will know what happened."

They thought a moment then Farber shrugged and said:

"Okay by us, Ben. We'll go through this side of the building. You get the college boys started and meet us here in an hour." They started off and I headed across the campus. Hennester called after me: "Hey, Ben, I knew there was something I wanted to tell you. Jerky Iago broke stir a couple of days ago."

I didn't like that a bit. The guy had sworn to get me and he was one of the type that could really nurse a grudge.

The door to Jerry Riggs' room was open and I was surprised to see him in there. "Where's Carl?" I asked.

He nodded toward the other room. "He's been typing a thesis for some time. Asked me not to disturb him until he finished. But what happened to you?"

Briefly, I told him. "You've got to keep it quiet," I warned, "because we've got to find the body before the newspapers get wind of the story. That's why I need you and Carl. I'll go call him."

"No, wait," Jerry said. "We can probably do without him. I know this thing he's working on is important, and he's working like the devil to get it out."

There was no disputing that. Through the walls adjoining came the rattle of keys and the ping of the typewriter bell.

I said okay, that he could work and if we needed him badly enough we could call him later. With that, Jerry and I went back on the campus. I didn't have the vaguest idea of where to start looking and said so to Jerry.

Jerry grinned: "I guess there are very few spots I don't know around here after four years and with this moon out they couldn't dump it any place on the ground. In bushes and things like that." He took a deep breath. "Gosh, this air feels good. It was pretty stuffy in the room for a while. I can't figure out why they put on more oil on a night like this. They shouldn't be burning so much."

**B**URNING! The word registered in my mind like a traffic cop's warning. Burning! The ideal thing to ruin a beautiful *corpus delicti!* I started running, Jerry after me, asking what had happened.

"I've got a hunch," I panted as we raced toward the engineering plant, which was housed separately.

And what a hunch it turned out to be.

There was no one in the basement when we tore down there. Jiggsey was probably out joining the searchers. I opened the furnace door and blinked at the blinding, steady, flame. There wasn't a trace of anything in that inferno. But after we shut the fire off, we found what we were looking for, a tiny pile of ashes.

Jerry's face was white as I pointed the macabre mound out. "You think . . .?" he stammered.

"I'd bet on it. But just the same I'm going to have the medical examiner look it over and make sure it's a human. Here, get something to put them in." The furnace had been a coal burner once and there was still an ash pit from which we could collect the little pile of ashes.

Jerry looked around the room. On a small work table was the sheet Jiggsey had brought upstairs. He got it and I wrapped up the remains.

"That murderer wasn't very smart," I said. "Or he would have stuck around and picked up the ashes."

"Either that," amended Jerry, "or someone came along before he or she could do it and scared 'em

away. Maybe it was Jiggsey, coming for the sheet."

"To do that he would have had to wait for Jiggsey to leave. The murderer took the body while I was outside the room. He would probably have gone into the furnace room *after* Jiggsey."

Jerry shook his head. "Maybe you're right. But what are you going to do now?"

"Send this into town. Want to take it in?"

He looked a little scared, swallowed hard and said: "Well . . . ye-es." I could see he didn't really want to go. He wasn't the type could take it. But I had to give the boy credit for trying.

Jiggsey came in just then and I said: "Here, maybe Jiggsey can take it in."

Jiggsey looked up. "We found the body," I said. "Cremated."

He blinked hard and said, hoarsely: "Burned to death?"

I nodded, said I was going to send in the ashes I had picked up and would he go. He was just nodding his head when Jerry blurted: "I'll take them in, Mr. Wade."

**I** GAVE him the ashes and he went out, saying he was going to the garage and get his car. I said I'd see him when he came back. Then, to Jiggsey I said: "Are those detectives still searching?"

"Yes."

"You'd better go and tell them. I've got to get a look into Trendle's rooms."

Jiggsey left me outside and I walked over to Trendle's place on Faculty Row, about a block away from Dora Burke's apartment.

Trendle lived on the top floor of

the house. His door was unlocked and I switched on the light. What I saw made me gasp with amazement. His apartment had been rifled and everything was topsyturvy. Notes and books littered the floor, mingling with shirts and stuff that had been pulled out of drawers. There wasn't a spot that hadn't been frisked, even to the bathroom where the medicine chest had been turned practically inside out.

Whatever had been looked for was damned important to the seeker and there wasn't any doubt in my mind but that the murderer had been there! And not too long ago either!

I bent over, looked through some of the stuff. The notes were mostly chemical formulas, all Greek to me. I pushed them aside and was just about to go through the drawers when a small, black book caught my eye. It had gilt-edged covers and the glint as the light caught it made me pick it up.

At first I thought it was a book of chemical formulas like the rest when suddenly I noticed a German "7" and then it hit me. This was some kind of code book!

I took it over under the light, examined it carefully. There were no distinguishing marks on it, no name or anything. I started to stuff it into my pocket when I heard a light step on the stair. Someone was coming in!

I snapped off the light quickly, and, with gun, in hand, stood against the wall. As the door opened slowly, a slight figure came into the room.

"All right, up with them." I

snapped the words as I buttoned the light.

Carl Starr was as surprised as I was.

"Mr. Wade!" His eyes on the gun were wide. I put the gun away. He said:

"I thought you'd be here. So I came over."

"Oh, Jiggsy told you?"

He nodded. "I was working in my room. When I got finished I came out to find you, thinking I might help."

I said there wasn't much he could do and started out. He seemed inclined to follow me. That was something I didn't want because I was going over to Dora Burke's place.

"I've got a stop to make around the block," I said. "See you later."

He said good night and I went along.

**A** BLOCK away from Faculty Row there's a bunch of old brownstone houses. These had been converted into small apartments for students and it was in one of these, on the second floor, that Dora Burke lived.

I pressed Dora Burke's button and the door click sounded. She was waiting for me by the time I got up the flight of stairs and seeing her framed in the doorway, wearing one of those transparent negligees that the light shone through set my pulse hopping as it hadn't done in a long time. And, as I came closer, I saw the firm breasts, delightful mounds perfectly-formed. Her thighs were symmetrical and curvaceous and beneath her well turned calves were slender ankles.

"I've been hoping you'd come, Ben," she said. "I've got a bad case of the jitters."

Inside, she had a bottle of Scotch, a siphon, a bowl of ice and some glasses. There were a couple of bottles of soda, also.

I did the pouring and certainly needed the first. When she asked me about the body, she sure took on the shakes when I gave her the whole business; the corpse missing and then finding the ashes. "It's horrible, Ben, horrible," she whispered, putting her hands to her face. "They must have wanted to kill him awful bad."

I handed her another drink and she quieted down a bit, enough to ask: "What will you do, Ben? Do you think you can find the murderer?"

I patted her arm and thrilled to the soft, satiny flesh. She was close to me, so close I could smell the clean freshness of her hair, and when, in the next instant, I got a flash of her eyes and saw what was in them, I drew her closer. She moaned a bit at my grip but wasn't inclined to pull away.

Her lips were warm and moist and I felt the eagerness in her. Her breath came in short gasps and her bosom rose and fell against my chest so that I could feel its firmness. With a sigh she went limp in my arms and I pressed my lips savagely on hers. . . .

And then fireworks went off and in the distance I heard a scream!

**D**ORA was bathing my aching head when I came to on the sofa. I started to talk but she put a drink to my lips. I noticed an ugly red welt on her face and the



*Someone called up and told her that her father was dead!*

negligee she had been wearing was pretty well ripped, something she didn't seem to notice—or care to notice—even though almost the entire upper half of her body was exposed.

The drink made me feel better.

"I tried to warn you," she said, answering my question. "He came in through the window and hit you with this."

I looked at what she handed me. "Why that's a Maxim silencer," I said. "But—"

"Then he hit me," she said. "I couldn't see his face because he wore a white handkerchief over it." She touched her face. "I think I managed to claw him up a bit before he knocked me out."

I reached for another drink, tried to figure the thing out. "He

must have been after something," Dora said.

I slid my hand into my coat pocket. The code book was gone!

"I'll say he was after something. A book I found in Professor Trendle's room."

"A book?"

I explained. She said she knew nothing about it. I said: "But what I don't understand is how anyone knew I had it. No one—" Suddenly, I remembered. But it seemed absurd. Carl Starr had come into the room. But that had been *after*



I found the book and I hadn't mentioned it to him! Still, it was worth a check-up.

"You didn't get a look at his face then?" I asked.

She shook her head. "I was too scared to notice anything, and I guess he was too if he left his black-jack."

"You're right, honey. Whoever it was, it wasn't any professional. He didn't even take my gat."

I picked up my hat, figuring on dropping back to Carl Starr's room and, at the same time, find out if Jerry Riggs had returned. With reluctance I left. Only a copper could get breaks like this.

Outside, I heard a "Hey, Ben," and a guy came running toward me. It was Farber.

"There's been another murder," he said. "That kid you had helping us."

"Starr?" I gasped.

"No. This one's named Riggs. Don't tell me you found one, too."

I shook my head and it still hurt. With Farber I went over to the garage where the students kept their cars. It was an old dormitory building that had been remodeled.

**JERRY RIGGS** was slumped down in the front seat of his coupe. Farber's flash showed a bruise on top of his head. "But that ain't what killed him," he said. "It was carbon monoxide gas. The guy was locked in here when I broke in. I come in by accident because I didn't know until Hennester caught up with me that the body had been found cremated."

I ran the flash over the car. The

sheet containing the ashes was gone!

And now I nearly went nuts. First Trendle gets bumped off, then Riggs, and how I missed, instead of getting just a sock on the head—well, that was something I figured I'd never know.

"I sent for the medical examiner," Farber said. "He'll probably be along any minute. That janitor went to get him on the phone."

"Jiggysy?" I had a wild idea. All of a sudden it came to me that he and I were the only ones who had known what Jerry Riggs had been carrying off the campus.

Farber was looking at me. "Listen, Red," I said. "When I sent Riggs off, only the janitor knew what he had. I want to talk to him right away."

"No dice," Farber said. "He's in the clear. He was with me for quite some time. I met up with him on the other side of the campus after he had told Hennester about our finding the cremated body. He's in the clear."

Well, that one floored me. I looked again at Jerry's head. The bruise was on the left side of his temple. And it proved one thing: whomever had hit him was known to Jerry! He could even have been talking to him when he got slugged. Then, the murderer closed the car doors after starting the engine and let the gas do its stuff.

I told Farber about the guy who had sapped me and was showing him the silencer when a scream broke loose, close by.

We ran out of the garage. Outside, we saw a girl struggling with two men—Jiggysy and Hennester. As we came closer, Hennester sud-

denly hauled off and slapped her face. She moaned a little and then stayed quiet.

"She's hysterical," Hennester said. "It's Trendle's daughter, Iris."

I stared at him. I hadn't even known Trendle was married, much less had a daughter. And even in the moonlight I could see that she was a pretty dish. She had red hair and a trim figure, sort of on the lines of a racing yacht. She was wearing a tweed suit with a white blouse against which small, firm breasts fought. In her struggles, the blouse had ripped a little and my heart beat fast as I glimpsed the softness of the white mound that was exposed, heaving as she tried to control her hysteria.

Hennester introduced me. It was hard trying to understand her because she really was hysterical. But I managed to gather that she went to a boarding school about twenty-five miles away and someone had called up earlier and said her father was dead and to come right away.

"Poor dad," she whimpered. "Poor dad. He shouldn't have done it."

"Done what?"

Her shoulders shook. "He was doing some kind of work for the Government," she said. "And they had warned him that spies might try to steal his formula. It was for a new kind of bomb."

Farber spoke first. "There's your motive."

"You haven't any idea who these enemies might have been, have you?" I asked. "Had he ever spoken of them to you?"

She shook her head. I said: "Your father."

IT brought on hysteria again. She screamed and started to run away. Hennester lunged for her, knocking over Jiggys in the excitement. I helped him to his feet and brushed him off a little. By then, Hennester and Farber had gotten ahold of her. Tears were streaming down her cheeks.

Farber said: "We've got to do something about her. Keep her someplace."

"Wait a minute," I said. "Look, Farber, take her over to Dora Burke's. Dora was her father's assistant. She'll take care of her." I gave him the address and he walked across the campus with the girl.

Hennester scratched his head. "I've seen 'em go off the handle," he said, "but never like that one." He grinned. "Ben, you should have stayed on the force if you intended to solve murders every night."

"This one isn't solved yet," I said. "But I'm going to work on something now." In back of my mind was still the thought of talking to Carl Starr. I couldn't get rid of the idea he had showed up at Trendle's place too easily. Then I remembered Jiggys. I asked him if he had told Starr where I had been. He said he had and acted surprised at the question. "Something wrong?"

"Nope."

The headlights of a car drew up then. It was the medical examiner. He didn't supply anything too new, except that he said Jerry

*(Continued on page 116)*

# A FINGER ON HIMSELF

**S** MOKING a cigarette on the porch of her bungalow set fifty yards back from the road, Mary Rawson saw the car pass, the broom of headlights sweeping on into the night-blanketed woods. Since she wasn't psychic, but only a very personable young woman making a living out of her fashion drawings, she felt no uneasiness, no premonition of who or what was in that car. So in a minute she tossed the cigarette butt aside and went back into the house for an after-dinner cocktail with her model and companion, blonde and just as personable Fay Wendell.

Meantime the stolen roadster containing Finny Dykes and his conscience made the top of the next hill, ran out of gas, and coasted along the twisting road with Finny cursing it. Having killed the two detectives who were taking him to the state penitentiary to begin a life sentence, and escaped, Finny by no means liked the idea of being stranded. Without car, without money, without prospects.

He could have been called Rat, Stoolie, or one of several smelly

handles, but he had picked up "Finny" because of his way of gesturing flabbily with his hands after the manner of a goldfish in argument. He had earned a life sentence only because he had put the finger on four others who had gone to the chair on his evidence, and the last thing in this world he wanted was to arrive at the pen and be knifed in the back at the first opportunity of men who hated a squealer. Ergo, Finny twisted the roadster off the road and into a clump of bushes with its last spurt of momentum. There he turned off the headlights and considered.

**T**HERE had been a house back there up the road. He'd seen the lights. Where there was a house there might be a car he could use, and money with which to equip it with gas and be on his urgent way.

Moreover he might find out where he was, for, too clever to keep to the main highways, he had got his directions fouled in this damned network of hill roads. One

*Finny Dykes had sent more than one man to the chair by squealing, but in trying to rob two girls in a lonely house, he out-smarted himself*



*She stood indecisive;  
then, heart pounding, be-  
gan to circle the house.*

just like another. No lights. He didn't know whether he was traveling north or south. Almost a whole state lay between him and the point where he had got this car. Thumbing a ride, he had promptly slugged the driver and heaved the body into a culvert further on.

After staring through the bright headlights for so long, he was almost blind as he stumbled back over the stony ground to the road. It was a cockeyed road, wandering over slate and granite and outcrops that were often as high as

curbing. Once he fell on his knees and the heels of his hands. He did rip out a blistering curse that time.

**By CLEMENT LAKE**

A hundred feet farther on he located the wink of light ahead and his way was easier.

Mary Rawson's bungalow was an abbreviation of native American architecture; massive hand-hewn beams showed here and there. Peeping through one of the living room windows near the porch, Finny Dykes could hardly believe in such a stroke of luck.

Mary was working at a big drawing table, and Fay Wendell yawned musically with a glass of beer in her hand. A layout of isolated luxury. Pickings, no less.

"Sleepy," murmured Fay.

"Well, I've got to get this damned drawing done tonight. Promised it. But you don't need to stay up, Fay."

Fay answered by taking a cigarette from a pack on the table; this she lighted and sat down silkily in a cushioned maple chair, crossed her lovely legs revealingly. Finny stared and moistened thin, lean lips.

He didn't realize yet just what he had stumbled into, but he did have a good idea that anyone isolated in a comfortable joint like this kept a supply of folding money on hand. Moreover, as he had circled the house, he had noticed a brand new sedan of a popular small make, with a tankful of gas. A car like a million others and just what he needed. Two things he wanted primarily—the keys to the wagon, and whatever money was in the house.

**H**E WAS right about the money, for Mary usually kept about eight hundred dollars on hand;

there was no bank in the nearby small town.

All the windows were heavily screened. Back door bolted. The only way of entering was through the open front doorway. Cautiously Finny shied from the idea of rushing the door until he knew more about the occupants of the house, and how many.

Mary's shoulders and the beautiful young modeling of her back gleamed bare. From her girlish, firm breasts down to her hips, the dress seemed to be painted onto her torso. Only the sensuous upper curves of her thighs were contoured by the yardage of the skirt, but Finny could imagine what those long legs were like. And imagine he did. This girl was not more than twenty-two or three, and there was fresh, sweet eagerness in her features and in her figure.

Fay Wendell was an ash blonde. As she sat carelessly with her skirt and slip above her knees, Finny had a pulse-quickenning view of the creamy curves of crossed thighs. A pair of peaches!

Squinting around, Finny located the telephone, then returned his gaze to the chief reason why he was shy about entering by the front door. This reason consisted in one of the largest pistols he had seen in some while. It lay on the drawing table where Mary Rawson was working. The ugly weapon was a .357 Magnum, and Finny added it to the list of things he meant to acquire here.

Leaving the window, he circled to the back of the house, intent on cutting the telephone line. Therefore he didn't hear the ring of the

phone as he searched for the line in the foggy darkness. He found it and fumbled for a pair of pliers in his pocket, contemplating with relish the surprise he was going to hand both those girls.

FROM the twenty-third floor of a building in the heart of the city, where Dan Slade maintained a suite which included an office and a gorgeous blonde secretary, he put through the call which resulted in the ding-ding out in Mary Rawson's bungalow.

Dan looked about as much like an art editor for a popular magazine as does a detective who has just retired from the prize ring. Nevertheless it was a hobby of his, and he was a good art editor, though needless to say he didn't maintain such a suite and such a secretary and such parties as he threw, all on his salary. No, that was thanks to his being heeled with a fat inheritance to do with as he willed, and he willed to have all sorts of fun with it, and willing or no, to get into numerous jams for which it seemed he just had a knack. Well, witness this call, though he didn't know yet what he was getting into . . .

"Hello, Miss Rawson . . . I've seen your drawings—like them a lot. How about doing some for us—or letting us have some you've already done?"

"Why—I'd love it!" Mary said excitedly.

"Sorry to call you so late, but my hours are all wrong lately, what with extra work"—his secretary, a Miss Lenore Lee, smiled broadly—"but now look—if you're

interested in this job, what about—Hello? Hello?"

Finny had got in the work with his pliers.

"Cut off, damn it," said Dan to Miss Lee.

"Cut off, damn it," said Mary to Fay Wendell.

Presently Dan had got the operator's report that Mary's line was out of order.

"The hell with it," he grumbled. And because when Dan Slade wanted something he went after it in the most direct way, he signaled the hotel operator and ordered his car from the garage.

"Foul night . . . Want me to go along?" suggested Lenore Lee hopefully.

"Guess not. It'll be pretty monotonous."

When he was gone, Lenore said bitterly, "Oh, hell," and wondered when the blind fool was going to wake up and notice the assortment of desirable attributes she was displaying for him continually.

FINNY DYKES was an accomplished mimic, and with this talent he had entertained his fellow convicts during his two penitentiary stretches. He could imitate the voices of other persons, the tones of some musical instruments, and the cries of birds and animals.

In the misty gloom just outside the window he lapped his lips and worked them, took a breath, and let go with a caterwaul. Not a *mew* or a *meow*, but the hollow gurgling "Mr-r-ro-o-oug! R-r-rh!" of an alley tom.

"My God!" Mary almost jumped. Then she laughed. "It's that big

yellow tomcat again, Fay. Want to get some milk for him?"

"I'd like to give him a saucer of beer."

Finny let go again with a nasal, melancholy yowl and scuttled down a path into the woods which began a stone's toss down the slope from the house.

The porch lights flashed on and Fay unlatched the screen door and appeared juggling a bowl of milk. And revealed herself to Finny in an evening dress cut something like Mary's. The light behind her silhouetted perfect legs.

"Kitty, kitty, kitty!" she called.

Again Finny produced a luring cry with the hint of a purr in it.

Fay's heels clicked on the way down the wooden steps, made blunter sounds on the dirt path. "Come, kitty-kitty!"

"Mr-rrh?" inquired Finny subtly.

"Come on, kitty—damn you!" She stood for a moment on the path, then proceeded further toward the woods, calling.

And Finny jumped her with fierce silence and clapped a hand over her mouth.

Milk spilled, the bowl tumbled away. And Fay fought more furiously than she had ever fought in her twenty-one years. She was healthy and strong and she put up a tussle, heaving, twisting, clawing his face and trying repeatedly to put him out of commission with her knee.

Entangled in the creepers, they piled into a tree and tumbled to the ground. For an instant Fay ripped herself free, but before she could catch enough breath to scream, Finny found her chin with

a long uppercut that stretched her on the round cold.

He turned her over and commenced to strip her methodically and not without some enthusiasm. Off came the shoes, and he skinned the stockings from her handsome legs. He was going to do this up thoroughly, his mind intent on robbery of the house and getting away with the car. But the sordid avenues of his mind were not without their side alleys, and the sight of Fay Wendell, disheveled but lovely, sprawled on the ground beneath him, more than suggested dalliance that he thought he couldn't afford. . . . He let his eyes rove over her, the sweeping rich curves of torso and thighs, the firm lifting contours of her breasts, half revealed by the ripped dress.

She moved defensively as she came to, and methodically he clipped her again. He went on to secure her ankles and wrists with her stockings, then left her unconscious and ghosted up the path and crouched in the shadow next to the porch. He hadn't long to wait.

**M**ARY appeared at the door, wondering what was keeping Fay so long, and called her name. Then twice more, sharply.

She stood indecisive, not exactly reassured by the night which seemed to be enclosing the house like a gigantic, soft, silent hand. Finally, heart pounding, she descended to the path and began a circuit of the house. And she had left her pistol on the drawing table.

Once she was around the corner of the house, Finny climbed silently over the porch railing and

ducked through the screen door. Wasting no time, he snatched the pistol and vanished into the dining room, from where he could see through both the front windows and the back ones, and hence follow Mary's progress.

Shrugging, uneasy, she reentered the house, possibly with the intention of getting her pistol, which she saw immediately was missing. With hardly a trace of hesitation, she sat down at the drawing board and bent over the unfinished drawing. Breathing fast, she untacked it and turned it over and in India ink she scribbled, "Help! Something has happened to Fay Wendell, my model. My gun has been stolen. Someone is in the house. Mary Rawson."

Laying the pen down she stared at the telephone, but she guessed now at what had cut her off with Dan Slade. Some prowler had cut the wire, and it was useless to think of calling for help, even if she could reach the phone. Unwilling to turn her head and look for him, she found it turning without her will, and gooseflesh spread over her body as she saw Finny Dykes standing in the doorway of the dining room.

His slash of a mouth was curved in a gloating smile, but on his right cheek were two red scratches left by Fay's fingernails.

Frantic, Mary sprang to her feet with a tense, choked scream. One look at Finny outweighed the threat of the gun he held on her, and she dashed for the front door, hoping to lose him in the foggy night outside.

Finny sprang too, and caught her around the waist from behind.

He flung her back into the room, and she tripped on her own skirt and fell hard, tripped again before she could regain her feet.

"Get out!" she sobbed, hysterical. "Get out!"

"Sure," mocked Finny. "Oh, sure!"

HE looked her all over as though she were something he were going to buy in a store, and she shrank from the ugly meaning in his eyes. With horror and loathing, she thought she had never before seen such an ugly, depraved face as Finny's.

He sneered, "You don't like my puss, eh, baby? That don't bother me."

Mary backed away trembling. "What did you do with Fay?"

Finny grinned raveningly. "She's taking a nap down in the woods," he informed her. His eyes lingered on Mary's breasts, which seemed to be raised into even firmer mounds by the fright which tightened the skin of her whole body.

Her eyes were dark pools of fear as she retreated before him. Her skirt whispered with the quivering movement of her legs.

Finny lunged at her abruptly, but in a frenzy of twisting, she eluded him. She didn't waste her strength on screaming, which she knew to be useless. Anyhow, she knew without trying that her throat was too choked to scream. She took refuge behind a heavy maple table, her eyes glassy with fear, her breasts atremble with panic.

Finny grinned. This was as easy as springing a flock of nickels from

a pay telephone. He growled and slapped his meaty hand down hard on the table, as though to jump over it, and as she started back, he caught her in a flying tackle a dozen feet from the door.

They skidded almost into the bedroom, and Finny picked her up and dumped her on the bed, where she lay quivering and moaning. He gloated over her but said craftily, cajolingly: "Be nice and you'll get off easier. I just want money and the keys to the car. See?" But his eyes were on her and the wolf stuck out all over him. Red Riding Hood didn't believe a word he said.

But there was nothing else she could do. It would delay him, so she stuttered that the keys and money were in the evening bag on the dresser. Finny glanced at it, then leaned over and belted her one across the face hard enough to make her head ring until he had finished his job. "Just to let you know I mean business," he said unpleasantly.

Finny found the small fold of bills in the purse, and the keys, which he stuffed into his pocket. He also copped the little jewelry lying on the dresser, and still unsatisfied, he yanked out the drawers and dumped a pile of smart, filmy underthings on the rug. Under a neat pile of assorted panties he found a pack of about eight hundred bucks. Moreover there was a jewel box there whose contents made his eyes glitter. Into his pockets went these trinkets too. Nice haul.

But he was still greedy, with his eyes on Mary's shrinking, quivering figure. He slouched over to

the bed and leaned over her. He said confidentially, "I'm gonna lock you in here, just to keep you quiet." And he grabbed her. Convulsed with unimaginable terror, Mary broke away and tumbled from the bed. Catching her from behind again, Finny slapped her across the face as he lifted her, then flung her to the floor. Showing her his fist, he breathed:

"I'd just as soon let you have it now, baby, if you'd rather have it that way."

Mary felt her mouth trembling uncontrollably. She couldn't speak. She could hardly breathe. All the motions she made seemed to be galvanic, like a frog-leg kicking when touched by an electric current. Her breath escaped in a funny succession of sobs.

"Shut it!" Finny snarled. "You hear?"

He caught hold of her dress and ripped. Then with an animal sound, he kissed her squarely on the bruised lips. Mary twisted violently, and then she collapsed, limp, in a faint . . .

**P**REOCCUPIED as he was, Finny was on his feet in an instant. Out on the driveway, gravel was hissing under tires! "Who is it?" he snarled.

"I don't know," moaned Mary.

Finny retrieved the Magnum from the dresser and cautioned venomously, "You do what I tell you!"

Out in the living room, Dan Slade, seeing no one and having a playful way of announcing himself, started whistling: "Your Boy Has Come Home, Mama."

Finny whispered, "Say, 'Is that

you, Fay?—and make it good.”

Mary called, “Is that you, Fay?” but it wasn’t very good because she couldn’t control her voice too well.

Outside the door, Dan paused. He had noticed several things before coming in, and one of them was the clipped phone wires and a man’s footprints leading from them. But now he said apologetically:

“It’s Dan Slade, Miss Rawson. Didn’t see anyone, so I whistled for directions.”

At Finny’s instruction, Mary said, “Oh, yes—of course. Just a minute.”

Finny planted the gun in Mary’s belly, gave another order, and planted himself to one side of the door.

“You can come in now!” Mary called hysterically.

Shrugging, Dan turned the knob and swung the door open. As he stood there staring at her, she screamed, “Look out! He’s behind the door!”

He had expected something like this but the sight of Mary’s disordered loveliness left him, for the moment, flatfooted. Dan got slugged by the barrel of Finny’s weapon, but he moved in time to take a glancing blow. Even so, he went down, out for an instant, and Finny leaped over him and sped out of the house into the night, having everything he wanted right in his pockets, without taking on more trouble.

Dan got to his feet blindly, staggering. At the front door he saw the taillights of Mary’s car scooting down the drive toward the road and he yelled to Mary: “Get

on the phone. Get the marshal in Wayside and tell him Finny Dykes is going through in your car.”

“The phone is dead!”

“Get on it anyway. I’ll splice the wires.”

He looped around to the side of the house, dragged out his penknife and set to work. In two minutes Mary had the marshal on the phone, and when she hung up she said to Dan, “He won’t get very far anyway. There’s an airlock in the master cylinder of my car; I left it in the yard for the garage man to pick up in the morning. By the time that beast gets to Wayside, the plunger will lock the brakes and he’ll have to go in second or low gear.” She added furiously, thinking of the handling she had received: “Let’s chase him!”

Dan said: “That’s an idea. I wish you’d told me about the airlock before.”

“He’s got my gun.”

“And I’ve got one myself,” Dan assured her. “Can you shoot?”

“I wouldn’t have a gun I didn’t know how to use, and I can shoot.”

In his car, he gave her the gun and they got away fast, pebbles bouncing like bullets on the fenders.

**H**ALF a mile before they would reach Wayside, they rounded the last curve and saw her car boiling along in second gear with clouds of smoke billowing from the brake linings. Bill Steuben, the town marshal, was just backing his touring car across the road and Finny socked a slug from the Magnum his way. What it did to the power plant stalled the marshal’s

*(Continued on page 125)*

# RUNAWAY MURDER

*It was supposed to be an inside job, and the fur thieves had a girl on the inside. But they didn't have her quite where they wanted her...*

THEY had caught Dot just after she had stepped from the shower and dusted herself with powder. The kimona she had drawn around her was very thin, and as Cal's nose twitched and he started pawing her, Dot cursed the day she had ever put herself in the power of these two.

Cal and Tim, they were, and they had plans laid to crack Burley's tomorrow night. Hence, they had dropped in to see her and to remind her that she was going to fix things for them to get inside the store, and that she'd better play nice or else.

The "else" was related to a three thousand dollar coat Dot had borrowed during her time as a model at Burley's, and forgotten to return. Somehow Cal and Tim had found out about this and decided the knowledge was worth more to them than to the police. It was enough to scare Dot into anything short of murder.

But there were several pleasant possibilities this side of murder and the boys weren't slow to see them. Once inside her apartment, they had had a little drink and now Cal began to push Dot around in a

very friendly sort of way. But very friendly! Why, he argued, be satisfied with furs alone, when a cute babe like this could be made to shiver inside her very smooth and tempting skin?

It might have been that perfume... or it might have been the stimulating way Dot was squirming to get loose that sent his mind further along such channels.

"Leave me alone, you ape!" Dot twisted harder—and just as uselessly. "You ought to have better sense than to come here anyway—what if somebody should see you?"

Tim smirked from the sidelines. "Don't hand us that, honey. You must be used to seein' boy friends, 'cause the elevator moke just winked."

Cal held Dot and kissed her hungrily on the neck. She tried to bite him and only succeeded in giving him a chance to mash her lips with a mouth caustic with tobacco and whiskey.

During this kiss, the kimona was pulled half open and more than a hint of Dot's silken, fragrant skin flashed into view as she twisted to escape his arms. Then she was crushed bruisingly against him

# By ERIC TRIMM

*She was thrown to the couch and she kicked frenziedly while she could.*



and surrendered helplessly to his brute strength.

Suddenly she got one hand free and hooked it into the side of his face. Cal swore. She was thrown back on the couch and kicked him. Tim, laughing, stepped up behind her and caught both wrists, drew them up to her shoulder blades. She stood up abruptly.

"Oh . . . don't!" Dot bit her lip, whimpering with the pain of what seemed to be two dislocated shoulders.

"Sure, let's stop!" Cal growled. He kissed her hard, square on the mouth, while she couldn't move one way or the other. Her lips writhed in distaste beneath his.

Cal didn't like it so well. The red mark still stung his cheek where she had socked him. He grinned.

"Let 'er go," he ordered. "Let 'er fight. It won't do her any good."

And it didn't . . .

**T**HE store closed at ten, and up to this time, Dot posed with a group of three models in the window. These three figures were wax images of Dot herself; the moulds had been made from her own body.

Up to a few months ago, she had eaten precariously through her work as a model, doing an occasional wax figure job. In some way she had got this idea while looking at a magazine illustration consisting of a photographed tableau of wax figures.

And now she drew a steady and not too bad salary for making up to resemble these imitations of herself, and posing motionless among them.

Despite heavy make-up—high rouge, violet eye-shadows, long cloth lashes—there was just enough life about her, even when perfectly motionless, to arouse window-gazers' curiosity.

Now here she was, at ten minutes till ten, and through the fringe of phoney lashes she could see Tim, staring at her through the plate glass window with a leering smirk on his face. And she felt as though her blood were turning green with pure hate.

Shortly after ten, Dot disappeared into the ladies' room, which happened conveniently to be near the back of the store, where the wax figures were left for the night. In the morning the window dresser would change their costumes for a new day, but tonight they would retain their furs—just as Dot planned to.

She stalled in the ladies' room, without removing her make-up, until the coast was clear, then slipped out and took her place quietly among the wax figures. She stood there motionless, facing forward while some of the figures faced the wall.

She didn't bat a cloth lash as she heard old Mr. Burley pass her a yard away, inspecting the store before locking up for the night.

The thing she didn't like about all this was that she might be left holding the bag—and a hell of a lot Tim and Cal cared about that! One of them had watched her pose and taken the layout of the joint and then conceived what he thought was a bright idea. No breaking and entering—just an inside job. The store could not be opened from the inside without

keys, but there was a small, impregnable and heavily barred window at the rear. You couldn't fish for furs from the outside, either, but Dot could drag them to the window and pass them out. Then emerge from the dressing room in the morning after two or three other girls had arrived . . .

The catch was, Dot figured, that the robbery might be discovered too soon and she would be caught. It was strictly a small-time haul anyway, for most of the furs were locked in a vault whose combination she didn't know.

For five minutes after she heard the big front gates clang after Burley, Dot didn't relax; when she did turn around, with a heavy sigh of relief, it was only to meet the suavely smiling approval of Horace Wright, the window dresser.

**D**OT nearly fainted. Why, he must have been up to her trick all the time — must have been watching her all these minutes when she had posed so studiously! Horace grinned triumphantly. "Hello, baby. You've reminded me often enough—without saying anything at all—that you aren't a wax figure. In fact my mind's been on it! But now you try to convince me you are one. What's the idea?"

Dot stood there limply, breathing hard, warmer than ever in the silver fox cape. Horace, still grinning, stepped up to her and slid it off her shoulders. She stood numbly, without protest.

She didn't think to wonder how he happened to be there. She only knew that her own presence was plenty damning.

"You must be," he smirked, "very warm in this, sweetheart. You wouldn't by any chance have been planning to make off with it, would you . . . ?"

Dot started, for she knew several ways of making off with a fur, and had used one of them once. To her astonishment, Horace mentioned that very one.

"Why not wrap it up and mail it to yourself? There's a postoffice substation in the store, with a package box. And you might have enough stamps in your purse. It wouldn't be missed before the morning collection was made."

She gasped. Did he know about that other coat? The window dresser went on as if he knew everything about her. And now he had her where he wanted her. She was forced to think of all those times she had avoided every little pass he made at her. Now when he leaned over and kissed her, casually, as though he had every right to do so, she didn't know what to do. She winced, but didn't draw away. He had her.

Actually Horace didn't know about that other coat, but he had his suspicions. And when he had caught onto her trick tonight, quite by accident, he had become more suspicious than ever and determined to do a little investigating on his own. He might be able to turn his knowledge to more advantage to himself than if he gave it to the owner of the store.

One thing Dot did know at the moment—she was in one hell of a spot and might easily find herself in a worse one if she didn't play ball with Horace. Hence, she didn't try to turn away when he

kissed her. She didn't like him; he was too smooth, played around with too many other girls, reminded her in numberless small ways of the kind of louse she detested. However, she had only been politely cool, up to now, not wanting to make trouble even though her job didn't depend on him at all.

**A**T THIS moment she wanted to make plenty trouble, but didn't dare, and Horace knew that.

His lips worked tastingly over hers, as though comparing them with all the others he had kissed. His arms were tight enough to force her unwillingly close, mashing the curves of her body warm against his own.

"Come on, baby—I'm that bad, am I? Warm up!" His voice was smooth, but with an undertone of venom. His vanity was always hungry, and this didn't feed it at all—not this way she held herself uncompromisingly stiff and unyielding in his arms, compressing her lips as though he were something odious. But then, he rationalized, the more she disliked him, the more kick he ought to get out of subduing her!

Dot, however, didn't warm up—willingly. She twisted herself from his arms, sobbing, "Don't!"

Horace growled something and caught the neckline of her dress, ripped it downward to the waist. Even then, Dot had time to remember that the dress belonged to the shop. But the underthings were her own, the lacy underthings that caressed the enticing contours of her figure with delicate gauze.

She put up her hands to hold the torn dress together, and Horace

clawed swiftly at her, tore one strap of the brassiere. Trying still to protect herself, Dot retreated among the wax figures.

"So I'm not good enough for you!" Horace snarled. He leaped for her. "You like jail better than you like me, maybe."

"All right," Dot stopped, sullenly. "You've got me."

Dot decided that she'd do anything to give herself time to think. At eleven o'clock, maybe before, Cal and Tim would show up. And no matter what happened, it looked to her as though she was going to be the loser. While she was wondering what she could do about it, Horace had finished ripping the store's dress off her. And now she stood in only slippers and long, sheer stockings and the underthings that seemed to give her less protection than nothing at all.

Horace tried to grab her in his arms—and on one last impulse Dot dodged back, twisting to one side, and caught her high heel in the thick rug. But it wasn't the rug that smacked the back of her head. It was the iron pipe frame of a hanger rack.

Heart pounding with fright, Horace stopped dead. He didn't want anything to do with killing a girl. But a second examination proved her heart still beating strongly. He hated to take his hand away from the pulsing spot . . . and why should he?

This put a different—and better—light on things. A girl unconscious couldn't be nearly so high hat as one who merely hated his guts but was afraid of him. He slipped his arms beneath her, lifted the limp, white body, and

when her head lolled back, he kissed the smooth throat where he could feel the throbbing of her pulse against his mouth . . .

AS IT happened, Horace had one girl who liked him better than Dot did. Her name was Tessie Lane, and she was quick on the trigger; literally. Only her poor aim, and Horace's cracking her on the jaw before the second shot, had prevented her from drilling one of the girls she had found in his apartment.

Now Tessie knew about Dot—had watched her in the show window. And with an intuition she had, Tessie knew that Horace hadn't got anywhere with Dot yet, though he was trying. There were many other reasons besides this that Tessie would have got a kick out of slipping a knife between his ribs. She had plenty to tell him tonight, and when he stood her up—having forgotten all about her when he noticed Dot staying behind in the store—Tessie did just what she had intended to threaten him with doing.

She called Guy Weaver, a detective lieutenant who had taken her out several times in the past, and made an insistent date with him. Weaver was on duty; he drove straight to the restaurant in his roadster, and he hadn't driven her half a block before she told him that Horace was planning to rob Burley's.

"Well for God's sake—why didn't you say so over the phone?"

"Well—it's not for tonight, anyway."

Weaver shrugged. "Then for

the love of— Well, why all the excitement tonight then?"

"Have you forgotten"—Tessie melted close to him, pressed the curve of one warm breast against his arm—"How we used to be?"

Weaver licked his lips. He hadn't forgotten. But he said, "What's that got to do with it?"

"Just this. He's done me some dirty tricks and I'd like to see him decorating a cell for a long time. You can do it—all you have to do is catch him when he tries to pull the job."

Weaver stared at her curiously. Funny what jealous women would do. But quite aside from his personal feelings in this case, he couldn't pass up his official duties. "Looks good to me, baby," he said. "But what about this—you sure nothing's being pulled tonight?"

"Oh, no. I'd know about it if there were."

Weaver laughed. "That's what you think. You mightn't know any more about it than Horace knows about your seeing me right now. Just for curiosity we'll drive past. It's only a few blocks."

They drove past Burley's, saw nothing from the front. But there was an alley which ran past the rear of the store, and Weaver turned into this. Almost at once he saw the parked sedan beneath the grilled window of the fur store. A man was standing atop the sedan.

WHEN Dot opened her eyes—she was out only a few minutes—her head ached sharply from the blow on the iron rack. Her mouth ached too, from the bruising weight of another mouth. She

tried to squirm out of Horace's arms, gasping, "I'll kill you, damn you!" but he held her . . .

It was only after a few minutes that Dot looked frantically at her wrist watch. It was ten minutes until eleven—and now at last an idea came to her. Maybe some day, please heaven, she'd be able to kill this beast in a slow and pleasant way to her—way. But right now she would make an accomplice of him.

"How the devil," she forced herself to say flippantly, "do we get out of this place?"

"Master keys for the door and gate," Horace announced, fishing these articles from his pocket. They were on a ring. "But what makes you think you can use them?"

She said quietly: "Two men are coming here to rob this place at eleven o'clock. I'm supposed to help them. They—forced me. Call the police and we can pretend we laid a trap for them. They'll be here soon!"

"Why should I pretend any such thing?" Horace asked nastily. "That would let you out of a jam, and what would it get me?"

Dot leaned close and brushed his lips with hers. "What," she murmured, "do you think? You won't always catch me when I've knocked myself out, will you?"

This sounded all right to Horace and he was on the point of saying so, but didn't have the chance.

He didn't have a chance for the simple reason that an automatic was lined on him through the iron bars of the little window in the rear, where Cal and Tim had already arrived, early. Cal had been parked atop the car for five min-

utes wondering what to do, but now that Dot was conscious it took only her proposition to make Cal sure of this double-crossing.

He poked a silenced automatic through the bars and snicked a shot at her, and it was just at this moment that Weaver's roadster slipped into the alley, making enough noise and disturbance to ruin Cal's aim.

The bullet intended for Dot thudded into Horace's chest and he stumbled back coughing blood, and sat down. Dot ducked back in a frenzy, expecting a bullet herself. But then she heard three shots from the alley, not silenced. When she looked again at Horace, he was dead.

Dot knelt and tore the two keys from his hand and started to run for the front door. Then she remembered that she would be a sensation on the street and she snatched up a coat from the hanger and wrapped it around her semi-nudity.

She opened the front door and the gate and instantly the burglar alarm overhead burst into a wild shriek. A siren. Dot left the doors open, took the keys, and ran.

Turning the corner, the next minute she was on the outside of the small crowd drawn by the shots from the alley.

**A**T THE wheel, Tim had fired only when he saw the glint of a gun in Weaver's fist; but unfortunately his windshield was not bullet proof like that of the police car, and Weaver's slug had bored into his mouth. Cal had fired from the top of the sedan into the side of the roadster. The bullet caught

Tessie just above the collarbone and darted down into her body.

Weaver felt for her pulse. There wasn't any. "The poor little fool," he muttered. "Just because some guy stands her up, this is what she gets."

When he saw the inside of the store, the rest of it looked simple enough. Tonight had been Horace's night, whether Tessie thought so or not, and his accomplices were waiting outside. All of them—all three of the gang—were dead now. The guy on the sedan must have thought—when he saw the police car—that Horace was

pulling a fast one on him, and drilled him. Well, whatever he thought, they were dead, and that was that.

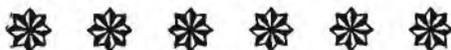
After a week or more had passed, and Dot had had time to think it over, the only thing she really regretted was that it hadn't been another mink coat she had snatched so hurriedly when she escaped. It was just her luck to grab up a skunk fur when she had a chance at all the furs in the shop.

However, she couldn't kick too much. Here she was. And look at Horace. Look at Cal. Look at Tim!

*In Our Next Issue—*

**"THE WIDOW  
WEARS SCARLET"**

by Justin Case



**MURDER'S ESCORTS**

by

**Robert Leslie Bellem**

# TOO SMART

**P**ATROLMAN TIMOTHY PATRICK KELLY'S mind was a carefree blank as he walked, whistling, on his rounds. It was a residential, suburban section of the city, and all good citizens had been long in bed.

And then the girl appeared, and Kelly's mind was no longer blank nor carefree. In the first place, the girl was running as if chased by friends—and there could be no reasonable occasion for any girl to be running at that time of night in a deserted street in conventional, peaceful Laurel Heights. In the second place—something Kelly hadn't been aware of until she passed under an arc-light on her approach to him—the girl was dressed in nothing but the sheerest imaginable of nightgowns!

That fact might have daunted a weaker man than the young patrolman. He, however, didn't hesitate, but hurried to meet her.

Dark as it was, he could now see that her hair was a red that was fierier than his own; he could see the alluring quiver of firm, full breasts as she ran; he could appreciate the flare of her hips and the delightful taper of startlingly white legs.

Her pouting lips were parted as if to scream, but no sound came forth—suggesting that she was out of breath.

Kelly reached her, and her hand caught at the sleeve of his uniform coat. He slid an arm halfway around her slender waist to steady her.

"Officer—!" she gasped. "There's a burglar in my house!"

Kelly's hand moved part way to his gun. "Where?" he demanded. "Show me!"

**T**HE house was only a couple of hundred yards away, a single-story bungalow set back a little way from the street.

"Wait here on the porch," Kelly whispered. "And don't worry. Everything's under control!"

The front door was ajar, opening directly into a cozy living room, which was deserted. His .38 drawn, Kelly made for the door into an adjoining bedroom. At first glance, there was no one here either.

The officer snapped the light-switch, bringing to life a single pink-shaded floor lamp in one corner. He saw no one, nor was there anybody in the only closet.

Back through the living-room he headed for the kitchenette. From it a door opened into a small yard, and Kelly could hear running footsteps fading in the distance.

Chagrined, he came back again to the living-room. Contrary to his orders, the girl had come into the

*She was a clever girl, to outwit a cop for the purpose of robbing a bank. But he was a smart cop, and she had a few things to learn!*

## By HARCOURT WEEMS

*He saw the gun, but he'd been expecting this. "It's a pleasure!" he said.*



house. Under the indoor lights she was even more beautiful than she had been on the street.

The girl said, "I'm almost glad he's gone!" but Kelly hardly heard

her words, so intent was he on his study of her person.

Apparently she had forgotten how nearly nude she was, but the patrolman was young and he was human, and he couldn't overlook so obvious a fact.

He'd noticed that her eyes were a lovely, challenging blue, and he'd gone on from there to appraise the lilting, provocative curves of her fresh young body. Vibrant, rounded breasts rose and fell with her excited breathing. Her hips were wide enough to be gloriously feminine, yet not so wide that they betrayed her splendid youth. Her thighs and lower legs were fashioned in a manner that would have carried Kelly into ecstasy if the girl hadn't interrupted his frank scrutiny.

She blushed. "I—I'm sorry!" she cried, and tried to cover her breasts with her hands. They flattened under the pressure of her palms.

It was Kelly's turn to be embarrassed now. There'd been nothing taught at the Police School from which he'd just been graduated that told him how to handle a situation like this. He took off his cap awkwardly and stood twisting it in his fingers.

He tried to think of something to say that would relieve the tension. He said, "I'm afraid your burglar got away. Maybe you'd better see if he stole anything."

The girl came back from the bedroom where she'd found a silly, non-concealing negligee. "I think we scared him away before he had a chance. I'd just gone to bed when I heard him out here. I dashed through the living room to

look for help, and he disappeared into the kitchenette."

"Can you describe him?"

"I'm sorry. I was so scared I hardly looked at him."

The patrolman took a reluctant step toward the front door. "I'll report the matter to headquarters," he said. "Perhaps I'd better drop in tomorrow to make sure that he didn't get anything."

The girl said, "That'll be fine. But can't I mix you a drink before you go?"

Kelly shook his head. "Against regulations, miss."

"Then won't you stay just a little while? He might come back, and I'm afraid."

**K**ELLY sat down on the arm of a chair. "Maybe a few minutes then. But I'll have to be off on my beat soon. Maybe the burglar will break in somewhere else in the neighborhood."

The girl came over beside him. "Oh, thank you! At least, I feel quite safe when you're here!"

Against his better judgment Terry slipped an arm around her slender waist. He could feel the warmth of her flesh through her scanty covering. She sighed and surged closer. Just how it happened Kelly didn't know, but suddenly both her arms were clinging around his neck and he could feel the pulsations of her eager lips on his mouth. His heart began to hammer within him and he drew her fiercely against him. Her breasts were like soft cushions, changing shape where they strained to his chest. His head whirled from the intoxicating scent of her hair. He made to pull her

down on his lap, when a harsh voice said, "Nice going, Bobbie!"

He tried to turn, but at that instant something crashed heavily on his skull. He was aware of his face-down plunge to the floor when consciousness left him.

**H**E WAS stretched out on a modernistic divan when his senses returned. His coat was gone and his own handcuffs clamped him to the tubular steel framework of the divan. The girl was nowhere in sight, and a weasel-faced man was in the act of stripping Kelly's uniform pants off over his shoes.

Kelly lay there in sullen, angry silence while the man dressed himself in the policeman's uniform. The man tossed a blanket over Kelly just as the red-headed girl came out of the bedroom. She was completely dressed now in a form-fitting flowered frock that accentuated every breath-taking curve of her figure.

The man grunted, examined Kelly's service .38, and thrust it into the holster strapped to his belt. With a cursory glance at the officer, he turned to Bobbie.

"You got all the details, Bobbie? You're to drive to the alley entrance by the Empire Bank. Park, but keep your motor running, and your lights off. I'll come along as if I were the cop on the beat. The night watchman will let me in when I rap. When I get inside, I'll take care of him. It won't take me ten minutes to turn that safe inside out.

"There's only one other thing for you to remember. If anything happens while I'm inside, you

sound the horn three times. And be ready to pick me up!" He put on Kelly's cap. "Let's get going," he said. "Your boy-friend's there to stay!"

Kelly heard the front door close behind them, while his brain raced in circles. The Empire Bank was less than six blocks away. Its robbery, on his beat, would put him on the spot for fair!

He had one out, one slim chance, and everything depended on something he'd learned at Police School! It had been designed for just such emergencies as this. The question was, could he work it?

**H**E hunched his frame up on the divan, drawing his feet up high under him. Sweat stood out on his forehead with the exertion of doubling up his body, so that he could get his feet close to his manacled hands.

His fingers plucked at the shoelace of his left shoe while he cursed inwardly. His back ached with the strain. The knot held stubbornly. At the expense of a torn fingernail, he finally made it, and contrived to slip off the shoe.

For a couple of seconds he relaxed, breathing deeply. Then holding the shoe in one handcuffed hand, he clawed at the insole just over the heel with the other hand.

In a cleverly designed recess there was a duplicate key to his handcuffs!

Kelly had to hold the key in his teeth while he twisted at the lock, but the trick worked! He leaped to his feet and started for the telephone, but stopped abruptly. Even if he gave the warning of the bank robbery to headquarters, he'd still

have a lot of explaining to do. If, on the other hand, he could capture the robbers himself, he needn't confess how easily he'd been taken in by a woman.

He dressed hurriedly in the clothes of the man who had slugged him, and dashed from the house. He slowed to a walk a block before he came to the bank building.

Near the alley mouth he could make out the unlighted car with idling motor. There was still time! Keeping in shadow, he managed to glide back of the car to the bank's entrance. The door was slightly ajar.

Kelly slipped into the interior darkness and fumbled until he'd found the body of the night-watchman. The man's chest was slippery with blood. Dead! Gritting his teeth, the patrolman probed under the man's coat and found the shoulder-holster automatic.

As silently as he'd entered, Kelly worked his way back to the street, to the parked car. He came up on the side away from the bank. The girl's eyes were set anxiously on the bank door.

**K**ELLY leaped, with both powerful hands streaking for the girl's dainty neck. There was only a faint sound as he choked off her attempt to scream. He increased the pressure of his fingers until she slumped down on the seat, unconscious. Kelly snapped his handcuffs over her wrists and tore a long strip from the front of her dress to gag her.

All that accomplished, he blew three sharp blasts on the car's horn.

Hurrying footsteps echoed from the front of the bank. A blue-uniformed figure appeared, running. "Step on it, Bobbie! Get going!"

Patrolman Kelly leveled the watchman's automatic. "Hold it!" he cried. "Put 'em up!"

The weasel-faced man hesitated and a hand started for his belt.

Kelly didn't pull his punch when he cracked down with all his weight behind the automatic. The man collapsed in a curious folding movement.

Kelly picked him up and tossed him into the rear of the car, slamming him again on the head for good measure.

More leisurely now, Kelly got behind the wheel and drove easily back to the house where he had been trapped. Although success had attended him all the way, he was still angry.

Herding the girl ahead of him with the gun, he carried the unconscious robber inside. Grinning, he tossed his male prisoner to the floor and began to reexchange clothing. Modestly, the girl averted hate-filled eyes.

Dressed again in the uniform of which he was so proud, Patrolman Timothy Patrick Kelly laughed exultingly at the girl.

She tore the gag from her mouth with her manacled hands. Suddenly her eyes grew languorous and frankly inviting. "Now you've got your man, the man who robbed the bank, you don't have to arrest me, do you?"

Kelly's expression was grim. "Do you know that he killed the watchman?"

"No-no!" Her hand went to her heart where the officer had torn

her dress. "I didn't know that!" All color drained from her face. "I-I'm glad you got him! He forced me to help him steal, but I never thought he was a killer!"

She came close to Kelly so that he once more inhaled her heady perfume. "You don't have to take me in with him, do you? Won't you take off these handcuffs?"

Kelly was young and Kelly was human. Her pleading made him waver. "Why should I let you loose?" he asked.

"So you can put the handcuffs on him. He might come to, and he's dangerous! I'm not."

"And if I do?"

Her eyes were bold. "You'll never regret it."

Kelly smiled. She *was* a delicious dish! His temples were throbbing and his temperature was rising.

**H**E DUG for his keys and took off the cuffs from the girl. When he arose from securing the man on the floor, she was seated on the divan. Somehow her torn dress had slid so low on one shoulder that the upper slope of one

breast was all velvety invitation.

Kelly threw himself down beside her. Her body was pliant and yielding, her kiss even sweeter and fiercer than he had remembered it. He could feel little trembling thrills run down her entire length. She moaned softly. . . .

**T**HE girl's right hand snaked easily off the divan and opened quietly a small compartment in the little stand at one side. Kelly got the glint of light on the steel barrel of the revolver she snatched out, but he'd been half expecting it.

"It's a pleasure!" he grinned. His fist caught her on the jaw with a force that snapped her head back on her shoulders and buried her more deeply in the pillows on the divan.

Kelly was still grinning. "And she thought she could work the same trick twice on a Kelly!" he marveled. His grin broadened. "For that she'll have to pay twice." His eyes showed pleasant recollection. "When I get her down to headquarters, they'll take charge of her second payment!"

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(See page 126 of this magazine for full description)

## DOG TROUBLE

(Continued from page 21)

watch." I wanted an alibi for her, see!

I SET the watch back to seven thirty-two. And I smacked it with the butt of the gun, stopping it. I said, "Get this straight. I'm going to knock you out by an overturned chair. You'll only be out a couple of minutes. As soon as you get rid of the cobwebs, call copper. Tell them a masked man came in, sapped you, and tore up the place. Get it? They'll think because of your watch that you were hit at 7:32 and you'll be in the clear."

"The pearl," she began again, and I whirled her around and sapped her, behind the pretty ear. I hated to do it, but it was the only safe way. I figured she wouldn't snap out of it for a few minutes, but soon enough. I went on down the way I'd come up, fortunately meeting no one, and I got away safely.

Frozen Puss, the butler, answered the door. Mr. Tuttle was out. Mrs. Tuttle, he supposed, was in bed. I went in for a drink, much to Frozen Puss' disgust. And I wasn't finished with it yet when Tuttle came. I never saw him any madder. He said, "Wait till I go change these clothes. My shoes are killing me. I want to see you!"

I waited three drinks. He came back in a gown and slippers, scowling and black. "Where you been?" he demanded, pouring his own tumbler full. And before I could answer, "I always figure when a

man wants something done well he ought to do it himself. Only I played in hard luck."

Then, sticking out his little pouter pigeon breast, he admitted that he'd burglarized the Ingerman apartment. "I was looking for Carlos, I was going to tell him everything about it," admitted, around his big cigar. "There was nobody home, so I went in. And the more I got to thinking about a dog swallowing that pearl and retaining it, the screwier it sounded." Out came more smoke. "So I went through the apartment, like a vacuum cleaner. The pearl wasn't there."

Now look, I thought fast. Should I tell her? God knows, he was in jam enough without more worry. He walked over and turned on the radio, scowling. He rocked back and forth on his built-up slippers and we listened to number three on the Hit Parade. Before number two came along, the doorbell pealed. In a minute Frozen Puss, worried, tried to announce that someone wanted to see his boss, but Detective Lieutenant French and three or four other plain-clothes boys pushed in.

There wasn't much to it. The boss said it was none of their business where he was tonight. He said yes, that bit of rubbery looking stuff looked like one of his poor wife's masks. He said yes, that looked like one of his handkerchiefs. At least it had his monogram, and the little Golden Kid

that he marked his personal stuff with.

"Tonight," said French calmly, "the husband of a woman you've been fooling around with, met what appeared to me a woman in Portland Park. At least a woman was seen going in there after he and his dog entered." Mister, I felt sinking. "The man and his pooch were both cut to death, Tuttle. And the knife that did the killing was also from your kitchen, bearing your Golden Kid. The guy's name was Carlos Ingerman. Want to make a statement?"

Now the boss is a game little guy. He stuck to them for damned near half an hour. Then one of the boys came downstairs and said, "Remember the footprints, lieutenant? With the high heels? This pair of shoes was upstairs, and there's gravel caught in the welts. Notice the height of the heels."

Which, of course, finished him off. They got ready to take the boss away, leaving me to call his attorney, leaving me to wonder if the little devil did do it. You can't tell about these small guys. Sure, he'd come in the front way a bit of time ago dressed like a man. But he had keys to back doors around here and side doors. Hell, he could have dolled up like a babe, knocked off Ingerman and the pooch to get his pearl that meant his home, show, wife and everything else, come back and slipped in the side or the back to use me for an alibi.

**S**OMEONE called French to the phone. He was gone a long time. I'll say this for the boss,

the Golden Kid, he didn't flinch. And while he was gone, his wife came into the room.

She said, "There's no use pretending now, Arthur. I can hear. My hearing has been all right for months. And I overheard all that was said." She put her arms around him, and he held her plenty tight and close. There was a woman."

"You mustn't worry about a thing, darling!"

"Of course not!" And that was all he wanted to know. He was still kissing her when French came back.

French said, "That was part of the detail I sent to Ingerman's home. Cops had already called there in response to an assault and robbery alarm. No use to deny it, Tuttle, you left your prints all over the place. You knocked out a woman, Francelle Sloan, and you searched the joint — for what, I don't know. That was around seven thirty. Then you beat it fast to the park, killed Ingerman and the dog, rode around a bit, maybe ditching the female clothes. Then back here and in the front way to use Stacey for an alibi. Now what?"

- "Nothing at all," snapped the Golden Kid. "If you're taking me, you are."

"I hate to do it," said French, "you're a big man. But murder is murder. Mrs. Ingerman made a statement. She said you threatened to kill her husband, that you were a logical suspect and said she can give a reason. She didn't, over the phone. She will, later."

He nodded, and they took him. Mrs. Tuttle, God love her, came

back from the door, ran up the steps without even speaking. I couldn't see any need of hanging around there. I called Tuttle's lawyer, got in the car and went back to the Ingerman apartment. The place was dark. There wasn't even a police car parked in front. So me, I went down to the Greek's and wasted a couple of nearly fatal hours putting two and two together over a flock of Scotches.

**T**HE hell of it was, anyone on the trail of that pearl, including myself, could have knocked off Ingerman. Hell, I could have myself. Francelle could have, though I believed her story and hoped she believed mine. There were plenty of leaks in each that a good copper like French could uncover. After what Mrs. Tuttle told Doc Adams, she might even have done it. Still there was the incontrovertible fact of the high-heeled men's shoes. And I suddenly remembered that changing of clothes when he came in.

Suppose, I thought, he had to kill Ingerman to get at the pooch. Suppose he got the pearl from the pooch, that the retaining story was true. Then, when he came home, he'd beaten it into his wife's safe and restored the damned thing. I got me on the phone to find out if he had or not. And by God, this late, Helen Tuttle wasn't in. The butler said she'd gone out an hour ago!

I went to the station where they were holding the boss. Those shoes were sticking in my mind, and—I don't mind saying it—by laying a little money around, I got to see them! And by God I was never

so happy in my life! Never! For I figured to myself that the boss hadn't worn those shoes at all! Sure they were his! But the boss is the most fastidious guy in the world! I've seen him throw a shirt away because a button came off. That pair of shoes would have been in the garbage long ago if he'd have gotten around to it! They'd pulled loose in several places, and they were considerably stained.

A few moments later with a little more dough, I saw the Golden Kid. He said, "Yes, Stacey, Helen and I talked over the pearl after you left. I never realized how she felt about it. It's a symbol to her. She'd do anything for it, anything. It made me feel like a dog. That's really why I started out, started to get it by hook or crook. It wasn't the money part any more, just that I knew how much she thought of it, and me—hell, like the cheap tout I am, I gave it to a two for a quarter chippie!"

I said, "Boss, you didn't wear that pair of shoes they're holding as evidence! Don't kid me!"

He caught me by the lapels then and he shook me, little as he was. He grated, "The hell I didn't! And don't you go around popping off or I'll come out of the death house to get you, do you hear?"

Hell, I heard, heard with my eyes full of tears. For I got him. I realized why he hadn't put up much argument. He'd told her where the pearl was, he'd found how wild she was about it. And when French showed him that mask of hers, he'd figured it was his wife that killed Ingerman and was willing to take the rap for it!

It took me another half hour of riding around to settle my mind. Somebody that had access to the Tuttle place wore those shoes, took a Tuttle knife, took Mrs. Tuttle's mask — and killed for the pearl. Who? Sure, it looked plain to me. Dr. Eustace Adams, who had been promised anything he wanted by a lovely woman if he'd show up with the pearl! But Doc Adams was built like a truck driver. Could he have crowded his feet into the Golden Kid's shoes?

**T**HE front of his house was dark. I rang the bell. Nothing happened. I tried the door and it worked. Once in the hallway I saw the streak of light beneath the door at the end. Down I went, my gun in my hand. I called, "Doc, this is Joe Stacey. I know you're in there."

There was a buzz of voices, then Doc Adams quavered, "Come in, Stacey."

I opened the door and stepped in, gun in hand. Adams was there all right. I had a chance for a couple of brief looksees. Adams was bound in a chair, frantic eyed, his shirt and coat pulled away from his chest. There was a woman bound hand and foot in another chair in the same manner, with her dress pulled back, or cut back, so that her breasts, firm and full and proud, were tremblingly visible. I didn't know her. And I didn't get a chance to look closer because the whole damned ceiling seemed to drop on my head. I went out like a whole battery of lights, to the accompaniment of screams from the babe, yells from Doc Adams, and raucous laughter behind me.

**A**FTER a while, the babble of voices brought me back. I didn't open my eyes yet, I listened. I was still too groggy to gather my muscles; all I could do was hold it. A woman was saying, "So you love her, do you, love her? How'd you like to see me strip the skin off that body, how'd you like to see me hack her face up the way it was hacked once."

I opened my eyes slightly. From the corners I saw—Monette Ingerman. She had a gun in her left hand. She had a long knife in her right, and with the point of that knife she was slowly, slowly tracing a red pattern on the beautiful throat of Helen Tuttle.

Helen Tuttle! So, her face was healing, Adams had performed his usual miracles! No wonder he had loved her! And she'd kept on wearing masks, for Art Tuttle's sake, meaning to come to him when she was once more whole and beautiful. What a woman!

Adams said, "You're demented! I tell you the dog never swallowed the pearl! It was just a damned fool notion of mine, just a practical joke. I doctored the negatives! Just for the hell of the thing. When you kept coming back, I thought you'd caught on, thought you were just pretending too, in order to beat Tuttle out of his property! Maybe I thought I'd get a cut! Maybe I thought I hated Tuttle so much on Helen's account that I wanted you to swindle him! I tried to find you tonight and you were gone. I wanted the pearl myself, for Helen's sake!"

I looked at his feet. He couldn't

have crowded them into a pair of nines!

Helen said, "Surely, my dear, the pearl doesn't matter. What can you do with it now? If you meant to sell it to me—?"

Monette laughed wildly. She glared about the room. There was madness in her eyes, and so help me, spittle, white froth on her lips. She shrilled, "I've got to have it now! I've got to sell it somewhere! I've got to have the money!"

Helen said, "Let us go, my dear! I'll give you money!"

"No, no," whimpered Monette. "I'm afraid." She straightened up, giggled as she drew the knife across Helen's throat again. She wheeled on Doc Adams. "So, so, the pooch didn't swallow the pearl, henh? Ingerman didn't pick it up. He didn't even notice. Francelle was there but she didn't pick it up. She didn't notice either. Damn you, I'm going to kill you!"

I think she would have, before I could get to her, but the peeling of the doorball again broke the tension. She paused, the knife raised high. She wheeled toward the door, dropped the knife, started for that door with her gun leveled.

So I tripped her. It was like the cowboy lassoing the wildcat. It was all right until I went to let loose. She fought with the strength of ten women, and big as I am I believed she'd have taken me, if it hadn't been for Francelle. Francelle walloped her over the head with the heel of her slipper, and Monette passed out as I'd passed out before.

**A**FTER awhile we called the police. Francelle had finished explaining. Monette had been so hysterical explaining about how the robbery must have happened—she'd come home a bit after I knocked Francelle out and left her—that Francelle got suspicious. And she, that is Monette, was too damned vindictive about blaming the murder on the Golden Kid, too. So Francelle, afterward, had followed her. She'd come to Adam's house first. Then Mrs. Tuttle. And when I came in, and stayed so long, Francelle took a chance and rang the doorbell.

Mrs. Tuttle said, "But we're losing sight of the main thing and the police will be here any minute. I came because I thought maybe Eustace knew something about the pearl—?"

Friend Eustace flushed. "It was just that I loved you so, Helen," he said humbly. "I knew the woman, Mrs. Ingerman, had the pearl, because she told me how she got it. The dog theory was absurd. But it had worked with her so well that I thought maybe I could at least pick up those pictures and convince you that the dog had really swallowed it. I'm—God, I'm sorry."

Monette, subdued and sullen, said, "All right, all right. The cops are coming. But my husband is still dead—and the Kid'll hang for it."

Francelle said, "The pearl—" But I stopped her.

I said, "Monette, quit stalling. I've got you. You really thought the pearl was in Hercules. You tried to get Tuttle to promise to marry you, you tried to blackmail

him, this afternoon. I saw you go out. Yet ten minutes later, I passed you in a cab, only as far as the corner."

Everybody was watching me.

"Which means, you came back into the house by a side or back entrance. You managed to get that knife. You found one of Helen's masks. And you got a pair of the Kid's shoes!"

"Prove it, prove it," she squealed.

I nodded. "Dr. Adams, didn't you call her or something, saying that you'd pay real money for that pearl?" He nodded. I stopped his speech.

"So, Monette, being sore at Carlos because he beat you, and finding you had a market for the pearl, you took the mask and the knife and the Kid's handkerchief, which you'd also stolen, and met your husband in the park! You killed him, you killed Hercules. The person that killed Ingerman had to hate him so much that she came back and stuck the knife in him after he was already dead! For the pooch had to be killed afterward! Who hated him that way? You."

"Prove it, prove it!"

I said, "I can prove this. Whoever killed Ingerman wore Tuttle's shoes. You're the only person in the thing that could even squeeze in them. It ought to have been easy to slip back and put them in his closet after the killings, to grab a cab home and find Francelle, to be there when the police arrived. Your feet are going to hang you, honey!"

And again, by cracky, old Francelle with that handy slipper had

to drop her when she leaped for the window.

SO, at six thirty, the Golden Kid came home. You should have seen him gathering his wife into his arms, you should have heard both of them crying and making a lot of promises. I didn't hear or see much of it. After all, I was busy with Francelle. Then they called us, after awhile.

I took the check. It was for ten grand. I said, "What the hell, boss?"

He grinned. He said, "I understand a clever young lady wanted you to ask me ten grand for the restoration of the pearl that meant so much?"

I said, "But gee, you were so piled up with trouble that—"

He said, "Take the check, Stacey, I've got the pearl!"

His wife held out her hand, and by God, she had the pearl.

A voice behind me said, "I tried to tell you three times that I had it. Had it in the heel of the slipper I cracked Monette with. The night she dropped it out of her purse, the pooch didn't swallow it. It rolled beneath my chair. After awhile I picked it up—and I've had it ever since!"

I got stern. I chucked her beneath the chin. I said, "And you! Having it all the time, wanted me to hold up poor Mr. Tuttle for ten grand for it! Why? Why?"

Mrs. Tuttle said, "Nuts!" Distinctly. "When a woman wants a man, she'll do anything to get him! I understand that was to promote a marriage. Please consider it a wedding present from the Tuttles. Mr. and Mrs. Tuttle!"

# FOR NO RANSOM

(Continued from page 33)

bonus. In return he got, "Thanks, you—— — I hope she knows how to flavor soup so you won't taste the poison in it."

"The way you poisoned that old lady?" he asked. "There wasn't as much money as you expected, was there? I wouldn't do any more poisoning, and I certainly wouldn't think of making any trouble for Uncle Otto."

"So long, Fleshy." Only her eyes cursed him this time.

If Fleischer were performing a delicate job of surgery, his most effective instruments were his kindness and generosity. He never raised his voice to Edie, and he bought her the most expensive clothes obtainable, originals. Edie accepted the fact that she had suffered a mental shock, and his shrewd and subtle reiteration of the "facts" in her case history convinced her, though she knew she would never be really happy again.

The summer was hot, and they talked of going to a resort in northern Minnesota.

**T**HREE months almost to the day.

Phil Evanson was mooning in his studio with a drink and a cigarette. There was a dance program on the radio, and the evening was getting older. This was the incredible break; if it hadn't come, he never would have seen Edie again.

There was a pause between numbers, and the blurred conversation mingled with other sounds in a

nightclub somewhere. Through that muffled farrago of noise came a man's voice clearly, asking, "Tired? Let's go back to the table."

The girl said, "All right. I need a drink, Otto. Lots of ice."

For an instant Phil sat paralyzed, then exploded from his chair, knocking his drink to the floor. He scrutinized the illuminated dial of the radio as though it were a new thing. In succession he looked up the dial setting in the evening paper's radio column, found the station, found the number in the directory, and phoned.

"What program is on now?" he asked.

He was informed that it was a well-known orchestra barnstorming, playing now at Hollister's Tavern in the city of Stallings, in the midwest.

After he hung up he sat, wondering whether his ears had tricked him into recognizing Edie's voice. He thought of calling the police, but ten words of a girl's voice on the radio was nothing to go on. Twelve hundred miles away in a nightclub; not Edie. It just wasn't possible for her to go off on a tangent like that. Nevertheless, ten thousand persons or more, for various reasons, were enumerated as missing in New York every year.

With sudden decision Phil packed a suitcase hurriedly but neatly. He phoned again, found that he had just missed a plane-connection bus, but he got to the airport via taxi in time. Another

taxi just made it, and Lester Marks stooped through the door in the tail of the plane directly behind Phil.

It was seven hours to Stallings, after a change at Chicago to another line. This flight was express.

In Stallings the driver of the plane-connection bus asked for destinations, since it was a policy to deliver passengers to doorsteps. Phil said he would let the driver know where he was getting out.

In midtown Stallings he called up, "Here, driver."

He got out at a main intersection known as Seven Corners, and there were seven. He looked around, looked at shop windows, and liked the town.

There was a taxi handy, and Phil said, "Hollister's."

"Nothing going on there now, Mac. Ain't open."

"That's all right."

Hollister's Tavern was near the edge of town, but the drive wasn't long nor the fare steep. On the way, Phil glanced through the rear window to make sure that there was a following taxi, the same which Lester had taken.

**H**OLLISTER'S was being cleaned up by men who looked weary. Chairs were stacked on tables, and the bartender looked as though he hadn't slept for a week and had been drinking his nose into a ruby color all the while. Phil ordered a cocktail, early as it was, and for once he got fresh lemon juice in it. In strolled Marks, who got change from the barkeep and went to a telephone booth. When he had closed the door to

dial, Phil was there to open it and ask, "Who're you calling?"

"Get out of here before I give you one," said Marks. He had to warn Fleischer that somehow Phil had gotten wise, or at least was getting close.

"I've seen you several times," said Phil, "and each time you make me think more of a maggot, for some reason or other." He sounded reflective.

Marks hit out straight. Phil anticipated the blow and got aside to haul Marks out of the phone booth by the throat. The detective swung again, and Phil socked him hard. Marks turned away and went into a table, knocking it over, and chairs rattled down on top of him. He didn't get up.

**I**T WAS afternoon before Phil got through explaining to Detective Dan Morrissey, before he was released. The charge against him was assault. Marks was in the police hospital with a fractured skull, and, if he died, the charge would be manslaughter. Phil had prevented Marks from getting in touch with Fleischer to warn him; he rented a car from an agency, and drove back through the now blistering afternoon to Hollister's. The orchestra was there, practicing. Morrissey was along.

It was the pianist who remembered, because Edie was so good looking. Dr. and Mrs. Fleischer dined often here.

"Hell," said Morrissey, "you're out on a limb, and you'd better hope that private dick doesn't die. Doc Fleischer is people in this town. He married the girl in New York."

"He did."

"Yeah."

"I guess I'm wrong."

"You sure as hell are."

All the men in the orchestra were sweating; their shirts were dark under their armpits, and the music they made was lazy. The man on the saxophone was just breathing and no more.

When he was turned loose on his own recognizance, Phil drove to Fleischer's house. It was a doorway meeting, and Phil wasn't allowed in. He was thinking of the names—Orrin Fleming and Otto Fleischer. Similar.

"I would like to speak to Mrs. Fleischer," he announced.

"Would you?" Fleischer returned coldly. "Why?"

"I'm an old friend of hers from New York. Will you ask her whether she'll see Phil Evanson?"

Fleischer shook his head. "Sorry, my young friend, but my wife happens to be not at home. Good day."

It was quiet enough so that Phil heard movement within the house, a door closing.

"Good day," he said, and turned his back.

A long distance call to New York resulted in no information about Fleischer's marriage.

For a couple of days he kept close watch on Fleischer's house and got nowhere. Deciding that he wasn't going at it the right way, he took up a stand where he could watch the entrance to Hollister's Tavern.

**I**T WAS a quarter past eight of another fine evening when he spotted Fleischer driving into the

parking lot at the side of the place.

Phil followed and parked; he smoked a cigarette to give them time enough to get settled at a table. As yet he hadn't had a good look at Edie.

The main room was a square of tables surrounding a large dance floor. His roving glance picked them out at a table mid way along the side toward the orchestra. It was Edie, all right. With his heart bumping in his chest he moseyed down there and just stood, feasting his eyes.

When she looked up, her eyes fixed on him, and for a moment her face was stone. Then she slumped forward in a faint. Her breasts raked across the table edge and she went to the floor.

Fleischer went into action at once, picking her up and taking her outside swiftly; he hadn't seen Phil.

Outside, Edie revived at once, and Fleischer stood her on her feet. At that point Phil got a good grip on Fleischer's shoulder and yanked him around.

With recognition, Fleischer promptly hit him. Then they were at it, and it was a match for about a dozen blows until Phil caught Fleischer squarely in the face with his right. The doctor went down backwards on the cinders.

Phil was grabbed from behind, and Morrissey complained, "At it again. Always going around hitting people. What's this all about, now?"

"What do you say we find out? Ask him."

"Nothing like a good try," Fleischer muttered through bleeding

lips. Getting off the ground, he took in the situation and bolted for his car.

"Well, it's your game, not mine," Phil snapped.

Morrissey let go, and was in his own machine in pursuit just after Fleischer went beaming out of the lot.

Phil turned to Edie, who was standing big-eyed in the darkness, bare shoulders agleam above breasts held snug in the tight bodice of a long dress.

They sat in the rear seat of his rented car for better comfort. He started her from the beginning, from Fleischer's visiting her apartment, luring her below and chloroforming her.

"I wouldn't believe it if it hadn't

happened," he said, amazed. "He must be insane."

"So that's all," she said forlornly.

"He said you were married. Didn't you ask to see the marriage certificate?"

"He said it was in New York with a lot of other papers. Anyhow, there was really something hypnotic about him, Phil."

They were as close together as they could get, and his kiss was tender. "You were in his house when I went up there and tried to see you, and you heard me," he accused. "Why didn't you speak up?"

"Because I knew you wouldn't want me any more."

"Hm." After a silence, "So. What am I acting like?"

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## DEATH'S BLUE DISCS

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(Continued from page 45)

the company that had made them.

"But you found out that they had once existed; and you schemed up a blackmail stunt. Judy was your top star; in fact, your only star. Until you got her under contract you were nothing but a shoe-string operator on Poverty Row. Judy's success pulled your quickie company into the upper brackets.

"She was worth plenty of lettuce; yet all you paid her was three thousand clams a week. Buttons. And even then you weren't satisfied. You wanted to save two-thirds of that sum; wanted her services for a lousy grand."

Stormer choked another oath.

I said: "You worked through Judy's kid sister. Kitty was envious of Judy's screen success; wanted to be a star in her own right. You promised her a chance if she'd play ball—and she fell for it. You started by basing a fake shake-down on certain phonograph discs that didn't exist.

"The next step was for Kitty to pretend she'd killed the blackmailer. That murder was phoney; was staged only so you could take snapshots showing Kitty as a murderer. You knew Judy would pay any sum to keep the kid out of prison."

Judy turned, stared at her shiv-

ering blonde sister. "You — you were in the scheme to blackmail me? Oh-h-h, Kitty . . . !"

I kept on talking to Stormer. I said: "There never was a jane named Trix Warren. All you did was to rent that Laurel Canyon bungalow and hire a bit-player named Loline Meade to play the role of corpse. Loline wore a red wig and false top-skull over her real noggin. That was a simple makeup trick. Inside the top-skull you placed a calf-brain from some butcher shop. Then you chopped the whole thing open; it gave the appearance of a wren with her head busted by a bullet."

"You . . . think you're . . . smart . . . !" Stormer gasped.

I said: "Smart enough to recognize a calf-brain when I saw it in that garbage can. That was my tip-off. I knew the Laurel Canyon kill was a fake. And I asked myself who could possibly benefit.

"Then when Judy showed me the blackmail letter she had received, I had my answer. I realized Kitty was a part of the phony murder; she'd posed willingly for the fake snapshots. But there had to be a third party in the setup; someone who'd snapped the pix.

"That third party was you, Lew Stormer. You'd offered Kitty a movie job; that was her motivation. And your own motive was a desire to save two-thirds of the salary you were paying Judy."

He coughed again; the sound rattled in his perforated lungs. "I wish . . . I'd killed you . . . when I . . . had the chance . . . !" he wheezed.

I SAID: "You tried to. That was in Loline Meade's joint. You must have been in her boudoir when I called on her. Maybe you were paying her off for enacting the role of corpse in Laurel Canyon. But when I began to put the pressure on her, you got scared. You were afraid she'd spill the beans, implicate you. A blackmail rap would wreck you and your producing company. You'd lose Judy Prescott, your one big money-maker.

"So you took the obvious way out. You croaked Loline Meade to keep her from talking. You tried to cool me, too—but you missed. And now you're washed up."

He was more than washed up. He was dead. I don't think he even heard my final summing-up. He had already stopped breathing.

Art Melville strode toward me, awkwardly. "Listen, Dan. I hope you don't think I was mixed up in it," he said.

"Sure not," I told him. "You slugged me because you'd seen Judy giving me a grateful kiss—and you were jealous. Forget it."

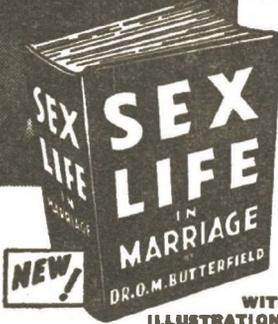
I stuck out my mitt. He shook it. Then I heard a whimpering sound behind me. I turned; saw that Kitty Prescott had got down on her knees in front of Judy. "Sis . . . please . . . don't have me arrested! I — I'm sorry I let Stormer talk me into the blackmail thing . . . and I didn't have anything to do with murder! Oh-h-h . . . won't you forgive me . . . ?"

If I had been Judy Prescott I'd have kicked that two-timing blonde doll square in the smeller. But Judy lifted Kitty, put her arms around her. "I forgive you."

"Huh, ME read  
a book on **SEX?**"



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## MURDER TEES OFF

(Continued from page 59)

Conant heard them turn their car quickly. It shot back down the highway toward New Field. Conant judged if he was to remain in the clear to find Wanda Hale, he must move fast. He felt in the tile drain for the death golf ball, but failed to touch it.

The police car was sending light beams around a curve only a hundred yards away, as Conant scrambled from the ditch and ran lightly across the weed-grown field. The county police would identify his roadster, but he could be free for awhile to make a tour of one or two hell-holes of the boomer town.

For one thing, he wanted to talk to that Tulsa trollop, Edna, whose mature gorgeousness was reported to have started young Ralph Morton along a rocky road. It being June, his watch showed the time to be five after nine o'clock, although night had fallen only a short time before. Before he started on his planned round of the dives, he had to replace his lost automatic.

He suddenly thought, more wishfully than hopefully, that perhaps Wanda Hale might still be free. Possibly she had been cut off from the clubhouse or the Morton car, and had wisely stayed clear of those who might have been watching for her.

CONANT called his boarding house, to have the landlady's boy bring him the box containing

a brace of automatics, from his room.

"Have there been any calls, Mrs. Rogan?" he added without much hope.

His heart suddenly began pumping double time. His whole body tingled.

"Yes, Mr. Conant," said his landlady. "Just a few minutes ago, a Miss Hale called. She said if you came in, to tell you, you must be at the lake boathouse at ten, if possible. She said to tell you she would wait until eleven. Mr. Conant, do you think it's proper—"

But Conant had pronged the receiver. He avoided the narrow, black muck of the main street, with its catwalks thronged with boomers, drillers, welders, and roustabouts. Five minutes later he drove a closed "for hire" car through a back alley and toward the county highway.

When he was two miles out, he was convinced no lights were following him. His mind turned to what Wanda Hale would have to tell him. He realized he was glowing inside because she was safe and he was to see her again within a few minutes.

Dammit! The softness of her body, the warmth of her lips, the husky sweetness of her voice had got him this afternoon. Murders and a deep sinister menace hanging over Wanda Hale, himself and probably others, remained to be solved.

Just now all that came second in importance to seeing Wanda Hale, to holding her in his arms again.

The New Field valley lake was a mile long. All of it was in the three-mile estate of the late J. Roller Morton. The booming oil valley was a depression seven miles long, with its rich pool pierced by piping fifteen thousand feet down.

Old J. Roller had been content with the millions in royalties he collected from the four miles in the lower valley. He had rigidly reserved the upper three miles, although it also lay over the pool of black gold. He had transformed its wooded grounds and its spring-fed lake into a virtual paradise for that sun-baked section of central Oklahoma.

As Conant glimpsed the lake, rippling and sparkling under a slowly rising moon, he recalled that old J. Roller had incurred considerable enmity and bitterness because of his determined reservation of the estate. He remembered that Jim Colter, the company super, had been one of a group that had some time before attempted to change J. Roller's stand against any drilling above the four-mile strip leased to the company.

Conant was thinking more of Wanda Hale than all of the tragedy of the day, but he did take a minute out to wonder what would happen to old J. Roller's prized estate, now that it was about to pass into the hands of young Ralph Morton and Sylvia Ames?

"They'll probably dump it as fast as possible and start spending high and wide," he said softly. "There may be legal restrictions,

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but it's a dollar to a dime there'll be drills sinking in the upper valley before next Christmas."

CONANT parked his car under the trees, some distance from where the shadow of the boathouse showed at the foot of a long, sloping piece of lawn and shrubbery. He moved cautiously, keeping to the shadows. Near the boathouse, he halted and listened for several minutes, but heard no one.

Keeping to the shadows, he pushed open the shoreward door of the boathouse. He knew he was in the long locker room. He stepped inside, and quickly to one side. His fingers rested upon the butt of the automatic in his side pocket.

He called out softly, "Wanda! Wanda Hale!"

His heart pounded and still he was cold all over when a husky whisper came so close by it startled him.

"Bob! Oh, Bob! I thought you would never get here!"

His hand fell away from his automatic, for the girl's shadowy figure moved toward him. He could see her white face, and the white, reaching hands. She came into his arms with a long, deep sob, her hands locking behind his neck. His mouth was upon the soft, moist lips and her quivering body was moulded against him there in the darkness.

All at once, although he had believed this was what he hoped for and had wanted, the throbbing movement of the sinuous figure, the more than willing curve of her pliant back and the pressure of her warm, round thighs, informed him of the truth. True, he had

wanted Wanda Hale and he had believed she wanted him, but this madness of demand surging through the girl was never that of Wanda.

He freed her lips, would have put her arms away.

"Yes, Bob Conant—" The voice of Sylvia Ames breathed hoarsely, sweet and thick. "I know—you expected Wanda—I heard you plan to meet her—I knew she couldn't be here—I phoned a message for you—then I waited—Bob Conant please—I'll make it worth your while—, first, there's me, Bob—I love you, Bob—"

Every grain of good sense told him he was in a trap, and every fiber of his body was responding to Sylvia Ames' abandonment of herself to his arms. The unexpected madness of it twisted his normally clear mind. Well, why not?

Once she believed he returned her feeling for him, Sylvia Ames might talk. If he played her game to the end, she might become the means of saving Wanda Hale. For Sylvia must know where Wanda had been taken.

"A'right," he mumbled quickly, and crushed her savagely to him.

The glorious curves of her weaving body pressed closer. She seemed to be drawing out his heart with the eager clinging of her lips, until he buried his face against her soft throat.

Fantastic murder, tragedy, sinister menace, even the vision of lovely Wanda Hale faded out on the storm that swept through him with pounding pulses. Sylvia Ames moaned softly—

**B**UT minutes later, the self-contempt of revulsion caused Conant to hold the quivering girl at arms' length. She whimpered a little, but cool words suddenly shaped on her lips.

"You'll tell me, Bob darling," she said. "Tell me where you hid the golf ball? I'll—"

"Damn you!" grated Conant. "I might have—"

He slapped her roughly with his flat hand, causing her to stagger away from him. It was the sudden heat of his temper that probably saved his life.

A flashlight beam speared from the thick blackness at the end of the locker room. Guttural voices cursed. An automatic crackled. Conant threw himself flat, a gun coming into his hand. Before he could squeeze the trigger, a voice rapped out, "Rub out the dame now! We'll never get a better chance!"

Conant's gun and two other automatics made thunderous noise in the narrow locker room. Conant drove his slugs at the source of the flashlight beam. But before glass shattered and darkness shrouded the space, Sylvia Ames gave a gurgling scream.

Conant went sick all over. He saw the streaking red left by two slugs, one across the soft, white throat, and the other across the smooth flat waist. Sylvia Ames gave only that one scream, and as blackness came down upon him, Conant knew she had died almost instantly.

He emptied his gun, started to reach for his second weapon. His brain was dazed. Clearly Sylvia Ames had been bait for a trap, and



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just as plainly, the killers had ruthlessly plotted her murder. They had intended all the time that she must be removed.

Conant's bitter thinking was snapped off abruptly. Evidently the gunmen were well sheltered, or at least he had done no more than smash their light. A weight descended abruptly upon the back of his head and ground his face into the floor.

His consciousness was blacked out and he felt no pain. As his senses faded, Conant was but dimly aware that he had thrust his second still loaded automatic under the waistband of his trousers, lying close along his groin.

**T**HE blow on his head bound his senses for only two or three minutes, or so Conant guessed. Perhaps it was the name of Wanda Hale, spoken harshly that served as a sudden stimulant.

"Okay, sister! Have it your own sweet way!" a strange voice put out. "But when they find Wanda Hale, and Sylvia Ames, and this nosey dick, your burned bones will look pretty much alike! We know you saw the golf ball shot that killed Morton! And when we hid the high compression tube that shot it, you watched, and you hid it some other place!"

Another voice that surged through Conant with awakening rage, spoke more softly.

"This is the last chance to save your skin," the man in the darkness said. "Tell us where the compression gun is to be found, and agree to play up to Bob Conant and get that golf ball from him, and you'll not get only a break,

but we'll pay you enough to travel a long distance."

The tone of Wanda Hale's reply informed Conant that the lovely girl must be suffering extreme agony. Her refusal to comply with the request seemed to be coming from a choked, constricted throat.

"No—no! You'll kill me, anyway! You killed Sylvia Ames, and she was helping you! You don't intend that Bob Conant or I shall live! You want only one person, and that's Ralph Morton! He's the one—"

There was a swishing blow. The choked moan of the girl went through Bob Conant like liquid fire. But he compelled himself to lie still. He had little chance against several killers in the darkness, without knowing the setup at the other end of the long locker room.

He became conscious that the automatic he had emptied had been taken. But he had the comforting feel of the other loaded gun against his leg, where he was half lying upon it.

"Okay, boss!" snarled one of the killers. "I've dumped the gasoline. This old boathouse'll go up fast and hot. We're ready to fade out, and you can be back where you belong. If they make out anything at all from the burned bones, it will look as if this Sylvia Ames was torturing Wanda Hale, and this Conant barged in and there was a fight and a fire."

"Right, Joker!" spoke the boss. "And the slugs through Sylvia Ames' throat and stomach won't ever be found. Conant hasn't any lead in him either. There'll be a lot of guessing, but not one definite

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thing. We'll have to take a chance on the compression gun remaining hidden. No one's looking for it, anyway."

Conant restrained a mad impulse to draw the automatic and start shooting. He knew now that the death golf ball had been fired from a high compression tube of some sort. Wanda Hale had seen the killing, and had taken the unusual weapon after the murderer had hidden it.

Undoubtedly Sylvia Ames had been a party to some of the crime. The wild playgirl must have imagined she would share with her cousin, Ralph Morton, in the J. Roller Morton fortune. But Conant reasoned all to a logical conclusion quickly.

Sylvia Ames was no longer useful to the killers. Her sharing in the Morton fortune and estate might prove a handicap to their plans. On the other hand, Ralph Morton, with his mountainous debts, was without doubt in a position to be controlled easily.

The gambling, woman-crazy youngster would have to square up, and it was likely that all he would want would be plenty of money to squander on that Tulsa trollop and to gamble away.

"Yes," thought Conant. "Unless it is blocked, drills will be down and the paradise of the Morton estate will be spotted with oil rigs and black with muck before Christmas comes."

Perhaps five seconds of thinking. Conant was judging his best chance shrewdly. He gripped the hidden automatic, ready in case of a slip-up. The killers might bash in his skull to make more certain

he would be burned in the boat-house. He had to chance them believing him still unconscious.

"Light 'er up!" snarled a voice.

A MATCH glowed. Almost instantly there was a whooshing explosion, and fire leaked across the farther end of the boat-house locker room. Conant had to exert every ounce of his will to remain inert.

For between him and the jumping blaze was the slim, lovely white figure of Wanda Hale. The peach-pink scanties, and the pink brassiere binding her firm, young breasts were her only clothing.

"Damn 'em to hell!" gritted through Conant's teeth.

For the girl was suspended by the wrists with a rope over a beam, her toes barely touching the floor. Across her flat, ivory waist and over her curving back were bloody red welts. It was evident that the girl had displayed unbreakable nerve in refusing to divulge where she had hidden the queer death weapon.

Her beautiful body swayed, turned slowly, highlighted now by the spreading fire. Conant saw three men now, three killers who were laughing ghoulishly and moving toward him and the shore exit.

Still he waited. They were three to one, and he had to be sure, even if he were forced to do some shooting. They clumped heavily away from Wanda Hale.

One said, "I hope that damn' dick wakes up in time to know he's being roasted alive."

"Stop!" screamed Wanda Hale. "No! Please! Don't do that to

Bob! Wait! I'll tell—the compression gun is—”

The leader of the three men laughed long and loudly.

“Save it!” he taunted. “You’re a few seconds too late!”

Wanda was writhing, screaming. The three killers were alongside Conant now. Conant judged the gasoline fed fire would reach Wanda Hale within less than two minutes.

“I guess he’s out for keeps,” growled one of the men.

He drove a hard toe into Conant’s ribs. Conant’s teeth locked against any reaction or groan.

“Yeah,” the killer said. “He’ll wake up in hell. Come on, Joker, we’ll take that cut across country and back to Chi before the cops start clutterin’ up the scenery.”

The three were at the doorway. One looked down at the blood bathed body of Sylvia Ames and grunted, “Too bad she had to be rubbed out. And, boss, we’ve got the ten grand, but if the rest of the hundred isn’t coming along when you begin pumping oil up here, we’ll be calling.”

“You’ll get it on the dot,” was the reply.

**C**ONANT reared to his knees.

From that position, he deliberately split one man’s spine just below his skull. He had to conserve his shots. The second hired killer dropped instantly, and he was quick with his rod. Red slashes lashed at Conant and slugs chewed the floor. Something like a hot iron touched his neck.

He pounded two slugs straight at the red slashes. The shooting

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stopped and the killer screamed once.

The third figure, that of the boss himself, was outside. He was running heavily away when Conant staggered to the door. Conant judged he had but two bullets left. The fleeing boss of the murder-drive to seize the Morton estate showed thick, lumbering legs in the moonlight.

Conant let drive at the legs. From the scream and the sudden crumpling of the broad figure, Conant was sure he had smashed bones. His own dizziness was forgotten. He whipped out his knife, and ten seconds later a rolling wave of fire was blistering his face as he cut Wanda Hale down.

He cradled her soft, limp body to him, his clothes smoking as he staggered to the open air. He made it only far enough to be away from danger of the fire. The body of Sylvia Ames was being cremated swiftly. He had no time to return for her.

**P**OLICE sirens screamed a mile away on the highway. Voices were coming closer. The boat-house, with its store of gasoline, was a banner of flame lighting the lake.

Not far away, a broad figure was trying to crawl, the legs dragging like empty sacks. And Sylvia Ames was being converted to charred bone.

Wanda Hale opened wide, brown eyes. She seemed to imagine she was in another world.

"I tried—tried," she murmured. "But they got you, too, Bob. I didn't mind for myself—"

He clamped his mouth upon her

hot, dry lips. From her trembling he knew she was beginning to realize they were still alive.

Fat Art Carlin was still trying to crawl, but he wasn't getting anywhere. The police cars had stopped and men were pouring down the hill.

"We're all right, Wanda, darling," whispered Conant. "Carlin had Ralph Morton sewed up with debts. He had to remove everybody between young Morton and the fortune, with the estate. It's the millions under old J. Roller's reserved ground he was driving for."

"Ralph didn't know—?"

Wanda Hale's voice quivered. Conant said, he was sure young Morton was the weak victim and not of the caliber to be a killer.

The girl's arms were around Conant's neck. "You do love me, don't you, Bob?" she whispered.

"Let anyone ever try to take you from me," he gritted. "We're being married tomorrow as soon as New Field wakes up."

"Then I can tell you, Bob," she murmured happily. "I'll need you badly. You see Mr. Morton changed his wills recently. I was to have a third of his fortune, sharing with Sylvia Ames and Ralph, for the care of Mrs. Morton. In event of one dying, I was to share with the other, administer the estate."

"Good God!" groaned Conant. "Then I couldn't—"

"You will, or I won't take a penny of it," flashed Wanda Hale. "I don't know anything about administering an estate and—Bob! With all that money, I'll have to have some one."

He nodded slowly. "Yes, I suppose so," he admitted.

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# MURDER ON THE CAMPUS

(Continued from page 71)

had been dead about two hours. Which meant he had died not long after I sent him on the errand.

I was feeling pretty lousy and needed a drink badly. I invited Hennessee over to my place to have one but he said he was going into town to make a report.

So I went back to my place, a neat little house a couple of doors away from the Dean's which the college gave me rent free. After the drink, I meant to talk to Carl Starr.

I went into the house, snapped on the hall light and hung my coat and shoulder rig on a peg. Then I went into the library where I kept a small bar and switched on the lights.

I stepped back and held my hands up in the air as somebody snarled: "Reach, copper!"

I couldn't help blinking. Jerry Iago stood there, his face cold and his eyes beady. The scar on his face that always stood out white when he was mad was just that way.

Iago said: "I was thinking maybe you wouldn't show up, copper." He had a wicked looking .32 in his fist and it didn't move a fraction of an inch.

I said: "I would have come soon if I had known you were here."

He grinned. "You would have come quicker than that if you know what I know about a certain murder."

I stared at him. "So you did it."

He laughed. "Not me, copper. I ain't done my murder yet."

It was quite a joke to him.

I knew there was no use trying to waltz out of the spot I was in. But if I could stall for time, I figured, something might happen. Besides, he had seen the murderer.

"Think fast, copper," he said. "I ain't got much time."

"Okay," I said. "I'm it. But who killed Professor Trendle?"

He shrugged. "I wouldn't know the guy again, maybe. But he was a small fellow and he came up behind him and strangled him."

A small fellow! Then my hunch had been right. It was Starr! He was small and slight. I remembered he had come into Jerry's room and invited us in his place. He could easily have committed the murder and come back.

**I**AGO cut in. "Hey, come to life. I'm going to give it to you now, copper." He grinned. "I'll have to borrow one of your bath towels to kill the noise. I dropped my silencer some place when I was looking for you. That only goes to show you can't be nice to some coppers."

"I know you did," I said. "I found it after you walloped me. It's a wonder you didn't shoot then."

He glared at me. "You gone nuts? This is the first time I seen you tonight."

"What!" I stepped back again

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as he pushed the gun forward. "You didn't slug me in Dora Burke's apartment and take a code book."

"I don't know the dame. But what's this gag about you finding my silencer?" He was interested.

And it was the chance I had been waiting for. I tried to make it casual as I reached into my hip pocket. He didn't realize what was happening until then.

I whipped out the rubber, caught him on the wrist and his gun clattered to the floor. My punch caught him right on the button and he went out without making a sound.

I picked up his gun, put it in my pocket and took out a pair of cuffs from a desk drawer. Then I dragged him into my bathroom and cuffed him to the steam pipe where he'd stay until I got back. Now I was sure I wanted to see Carl Starr and if Iago could identify him the case was closed.

My wind was painning me by the time I had run over to Starr's flat. As I approached it, I could hear his typewriter still clicking. I knocked on the door and, receiving no answer tried the knob. The door was locked. I yelled: "Carl! Carl!" Then, I broke it open.

Every light in the place was on. But Carl Starr wasn't sitting at the typewriter. No one was there. The typewriter was covered and yet the room was filled with keys clicking and the typewriter bell pinging.

And then I got it. On the phonograph was a record with one of those repeating units on it!

And that attachment had been Carl Starr's alibi!

And it was on because it was an alibi!

My mind flashed back to what Jerry Riggs' had told me, about Carl Starr working. Carl had wanted to go someplace and he had arranged an alibi beforehand, not knowing what might come up.

But where had he intended going? And what was he doing now? Was he out on some deviltry? I knew now that his showing up in Trendle's apartment hadn't been an accident. I cursed my stupidity for not seeing it before. He had said Jiggsey had told him where I'd be. But if Jerry hadn't spoken to him, then it was impossible for Jiggsey to have done so. Carl Starr had lied to me!

I looked around the room and my eyes fell on a half-opened bathroom door. They stayed there for a moment because a shoe was sticking out.

Then I pushed through the door. Carl Starr was lying on the floor, face down, and in his outstretched hand was a vial that smelled yet of prussic acid.

Carl Starr had taken his own life! He had wanted to die!

**I** RUMMAGED through the bathroom. No note. But going through his pockets I found something that had me guessing. It was a note written in English, but with that same Germanic script I had seen on the code book. It was addressed to a Herr Stahremberg, and said: "The time is growing short. Remember the penalty." That was all.

I put the note in my pocket and turned Starr over on his back. And then I got it: there was a long

scratch on his mouth and, in falling on the floor, his head had cracked.

But it was that long scratch around his mouth that jolted me to reality. It had been placed there by Dora Burke's fingers! And Carl Starr was the intruder who had stolen the code book from my pocket after conking me!

Then, probably fearing investigation, he had gotten jittery and killed himself. That was the only possible motive I could give. It wasn't any too strong, I realized, because facing a jail sentence didn't seem to me enough justification for taking a life.

Taking a life! A bright light registered in my brain. I'd know Carl Starr through Jerry and the latter had told me how sensitive he was. A brilliant student, especially in chemistry, he was a little neurotic. And if anyone were forcing him to do something, the strain would undoubtedly prove too much. He could have killed Jerry Riggs—he had plenty of time and an apparently fool-proof ability—and even been recognized doing it. Then, in a fit of remorse he had come back here to kill himself.

The only thing that had me puzzled was why he didn't leave a note. Usually, a suicide does so; especially if there's something on the conscience, or a grudge against the world is harbored.

And in Carl Starr's case, the only reason he didn't was because he must have been afraid of someone; a mysterious person who could cause him harm even after death!

I racked my brain trying to make things dovetail. Leaning

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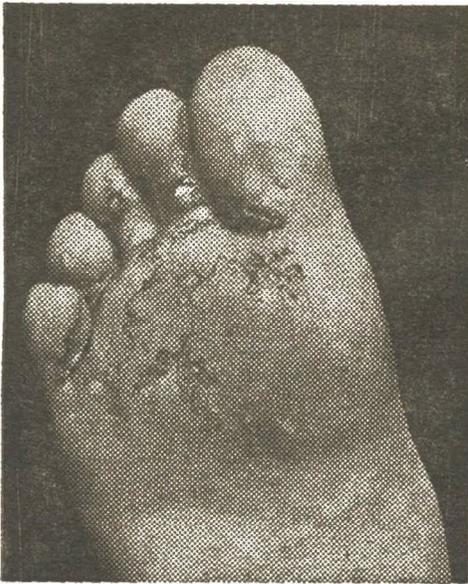
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against the washbowl of the bathroom, the bright light overhead fell on my sleeve and I saw that a stain of blood from Carl's head had attached itself to my blue serge suit.

I washed it off and then went over the suit looking for more stains. There was nothing but a patch of white just below my knees. I started brushing it off when suddenly its texture beneath my fingers registered in my mind.

Ashes!

I rubbed them through my fingers and then went over Carl Starr's clothes. They were clean. And he didn't smoke, so they hadn't come from him. Perspiration poured from my forehead as I stood up and carefully gathered the specks together. The medical examiner could tell me if they were human ashes as I suspected.

AS I brushed perspiration from my face, I suddenly remembered something: how it had been so hot in the chem lab, as though extra heat had been turned on. And it could have been turned on if a person wanted to cremate a dead man in a hurry.

But who? My mind raced. And where had I gotten these ashes. I tried to put the night's events in sequence: there had been the heat, then Dora, then Jerry's body being discovered, and Iris Trendle showing up. . . .

I almost yelled. Iris Trendle! She had been trying to get away from Farber and pushed into Jiggsy, whom I helped to his feet.

Jiggsy! He had been the only one with whom I had had actual contact after leaving Dora Burke's

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place. But it seemed absurd, suspecting Jiggys. After all, he had been around most of the time, and knew most of what had gone on. Hell, he had a good alibi. He had been with Farber when Iris Trendle was found wandering about the campus.

About the only person who didn't have an alibi—if she should happen to need one—was Iris Trendle. She had said someone called to notify her of her father's death and asked that she come right down to the college. But who had called her. Certainly not me or Farber or Hennester. Neither of us knew Trendle had a daughter. No—it had to be someone who—

Finally I got it. Someone who wanted to see her awfully bad! Someone who might think she knew what her father had been working on at the time of his murder! A cold-blooded killer had invited her into a trap.

And right now she was in Dora Burke's apartment, where anyone could get at her, just as Carl Starr had gotten to me!

I raced out of the house and down the street, thankful that Dora Burke didn't live too far away. I was fighting for my second wind as I approached the house. At first I figured on going in the front door, but realizing that if anyone wanted to make a getaway they'd go down the fire escape, I decided to go up it.

I vaulted the fence and leaped up toward the bottom rung of the escape. There was a light on in Dora's room as I reached the second floor.

Someone screamed as I pushed in. I ducked as a gun roared and

slivers of glass jammed into my face, almost spoiling my aim.

Almost, but not quite. My shot caught Jiggys on the shoulder and spun him around. The whole scene registered on my brain in a fraction of a second as Jiggys slumped to the floor.

**I**RIS TRENDLE was back against the sofa, blood coming from her mouth. Her clothes had been ripped and looking at her made me almost forget my danger. The white blouse was in shreds, half baring her breasts, and the tweed skirt had split, one side showing white flesh above stocking tops, while the other side was almost completely exposed, revealing her thigh.

I bounced over and caught Dora Burke flush on the jaw as she struggled for the gun Jiggys had dropped. My fingers closed over her wrist and I held on and lifted her off her feet, the skirt she was wearing going over her head. With a low moan she collapsed on the floor, half on Jiggys's unconscious body.

The Trendle girl tried to struggle to her feet. Her eyes were wide with fear. I pushed her back against the sofa and poured a drink into her. The color came back to her face and she gasped: "They killed him . . . they. . . ."

It was hard to believe Dora Burke had been in on it. But reaching for that gun had convinced me. Yet, I said hoarsely: "Dora, too."

Iris Trendle nodded. Weakly, she said: "She and that man worked together. He is a spy for a foreign power and she was working for him. They were after Dad's

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new bomb formula that he had been working on secretly for the Government. They . . ." She stopped short suddenly and clutched my arm. "Carl," she gasped. "Did . . . they . . .?"

I stared at her. "Carl?"

"They said they were going to kill him unless I told them where Dad kept his private papers."

I said: "So Starr figured in this, too. I had an idea he did."

Iris Trendle's body quivered. "No," she said. "You don't understand. I . . ."

Just then, Dora Burke came out of it. "She's right, Ben. He had to do it. Okay, you found me out, so there's nothing I can do about it. But I can give him a break."

"Not now you can't," I said. "He's dead."

I was sorry then as I said that. Iris Trendle screamed, then fainted.

Dora shrugged. "She loved him," she said. Carl Starr's real name is Stahremberg. He was here on a scholarship exchange. Jiggsy used him as a spy in the chem lab on the threat of causing harm to his father who is still in his native country. Carl couldn't do anything about it. If he refused, his father died." She looked at me. "He was a nice kid, too, and you had to shoot him."

"I didn't," I said. "He killed himself after murdering his friend, Jerry Riggs." She didn't say anything then, so I knew I was right.

**J**UST then, the door burst open and Farber came in, his gun out. "Somebody phoned there was shooting here," he began. It stopped short as his eyes fell on

Jiggsy and Dora Burke. "What's in . . ."

I pointed to them. "They're your murderers," I said. "Jiggsy killed Trendle and had Dora Burke find the body to give him an alibi. Then, when Dora and I stood outside waiting for Jiggsy to come back with a sheet, he retraced his steps, came in and stole the body and cremated it."

Dora Burke laughed harshly. I felt foolish looking at her. What a sap I had been, playing right into her hands. She had seen Carl Starr come in the window and hadn't warned me. That sock she had gotten, to, had been staged.

"You've got to prove he killed Professor Trendle," she said. "After all, where's the body?"

Farber said: "She's right, Ben."

"She's right so far," I said. "But if you'll go to my house, you'll find Jerky Iago there. He was gunning for me and saw the whole thing."

Dora Burke's face went white and as Farber hauled her and Jiggsy to their feet, it was all she could do to stand. Jiggsy just glared at me and hung onto his shattered shoulder. Farber took them out and I walked over to Iris Trendle.

A drink of whiskey brought her around. She hung onto me for support, forgetting that she was almost unclothed. I knew it was useless to try to move her at the moment and, anyway, Farber could take care of things.

So I tried to comfort her, explaining to her that everything would turn out okay in time.

And you know, in time, it did. Red-haired girls are pretty smart!

# A FINGER ON HIMSELF

(Continued from page 79)

car, and Finny shot through the gap left at the side of the road.

At which the marshal blasted through his rear window with a sawed-off shotgun. Back in Dan's car, Mary had Dan's gun poked out the window ready to fire, but she didn't have to. For her own car piled into the ditch. And Finny Dykes didn't crawl out. He wouldn't crawl anywhere from now on.

**A**FTER they had put Fay Wendell to bed with a sleeping pill, Dan and Mary retired to the living room of the bungalow, and Mary showed no disposition to make Dan go home right away and deprive herself of the protection of a man in the house. In fact, at the moment, she had the full protection of his arms, tight around her. After a while, she sighed:

"Am I glad you found that note I left!"

"What note?"

"You mean you didn't? On the drawing board; I scribbled a note about somebody being in the house and left it there."

"Didn't see it," Dan admitted.

"Then how'd you know Finny Dykes was here?"

Dan chuckled. "Finny was a finger man; a rat; a squealer. He put the finger on lots of guys before he finally put it on himself. When he ran his stolen car into

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