

# SPEAKEASY

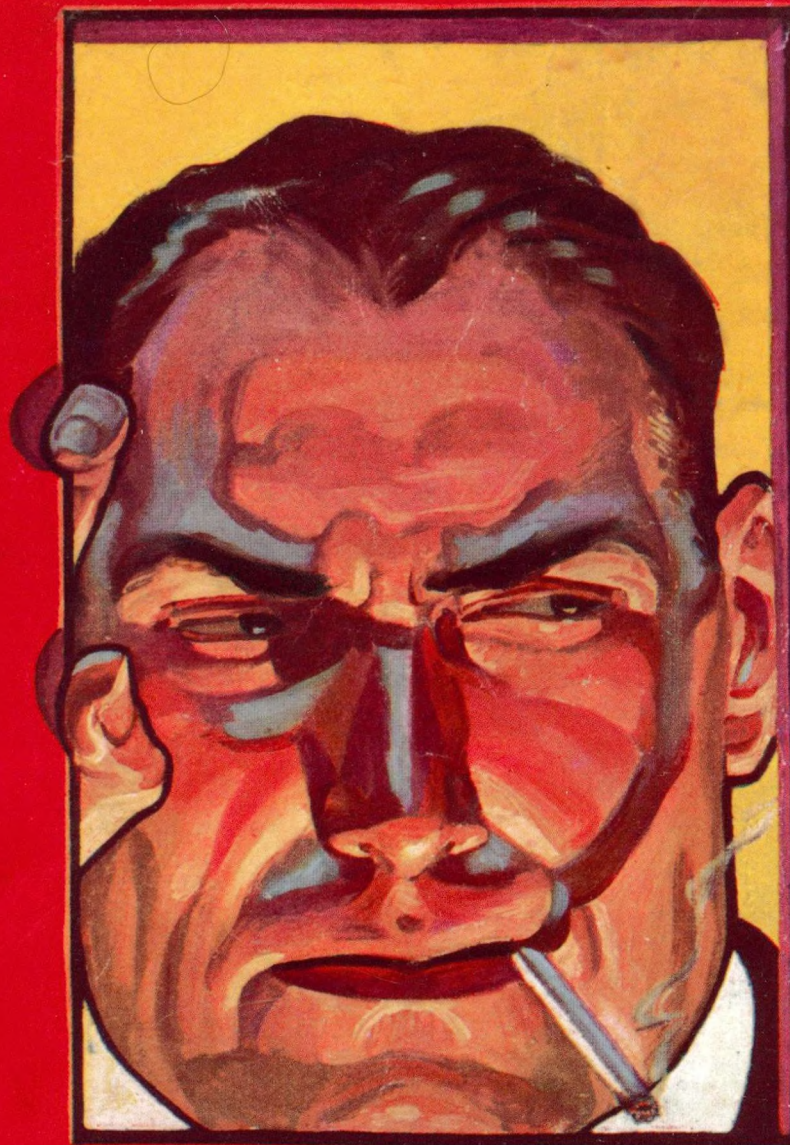
## STORIES

AN ILLUSTRATED MAGAZINE

OCTOBER - NOVEMBER  
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**Sucker Bait**  
By C. B. Yorke



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*By Valentine Van Tyne*



there clawing frantically  
was ... "the THING!"

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**SPEAKEASY STORIES**

PUBLISHED BY HAROLD HERSEY

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VOL. I

OCTOBER-NOVEMBER, 1931

No. 4

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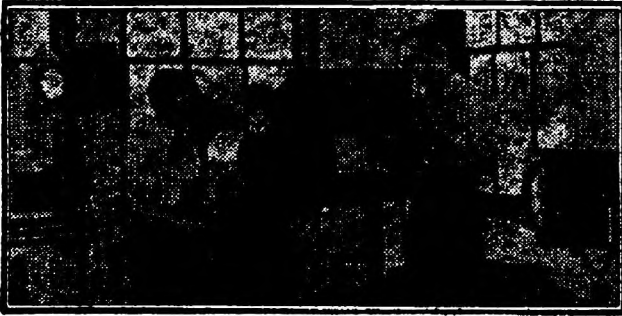
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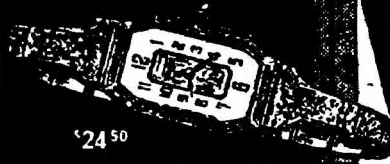
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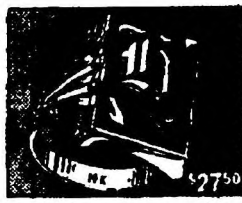
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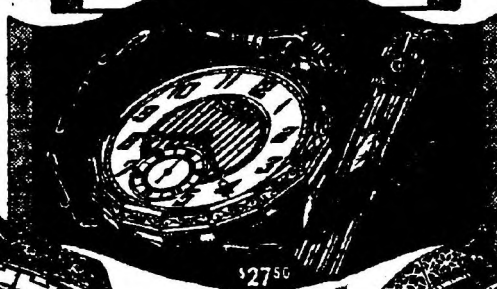
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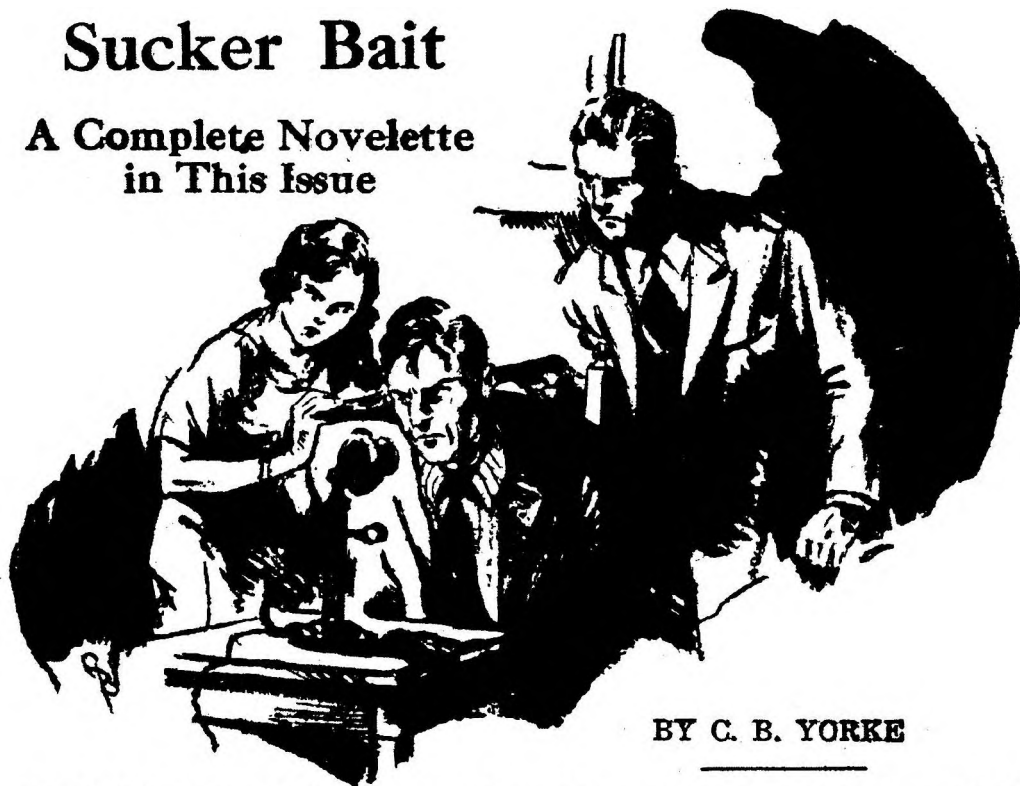
# ROYAL DIAMOND & WATCH CO.

ADDRESS DEPT. 83-X  
170 BROADWAY, NEW YORK



# Sucker Bait

A Complete Novelette  
in This Issue



BY C. B. YORKE

*It didn't take Blaine a very long time to find out that stealin' another guy's frail wasn't like takin' candy from a baby—especially when his moniker was "Iron" Gates!!!*

**G**EDGE "IRON" GATES was a short, powerful man with wide shoulders, massive torso, and broad thick hands. He stood close to the multi-colored chiffon drapery that masked the tiny balcony overlooking the crowded main room of the Club Welcome.

For several minutes he remained motionless, black eyes narrowed on a girl and a man who sat at one of the wall tables on the floor below him. Then he ran square-tipped fingers through short cropped iron-gray hair, and called softly:

"Ed. Come here."

A small door at the rear of the balcony opened. Iron Gates did not turn as a tall, thin man in evening clothes entered, closed the door, and then joined him at the low brass railing at the front of the balcony.

"Send Doris up," ordered Gates, "after her next number."

"Check," said Ed.

"Tell her it's important," Gates continued.

"Check."

"And don't get freak with her on the way up."

The thin man smiled faintly and repeated: "Check."

When Ed had departed Iron Gates stepped back from the railing and seated himself at a small table that held an assortment of bottles and glasses. But he did not drink. He touched fire to a cigarette, nodding thoughtfully while he watched ribbons of smoke ascend in the still air.

The balcony had been his pet idea in designing the Club Welcome. Here he was absolute monarch. From his position overlooking the tables, the

## SPEAKEASY STORIES

orchestra, and the small square of dance floor, he directed the activities of the score of hostesses who baited suckers into buying more drinks than they would if left to their own resources.

**F**ROM midnight until dawn Gates watched the money and liquor flow freely. The chiffon curtain, suspended from a brass rod across the front of the balcony and falling well below the bottom of the low railing, allowed him to see everything on the floor below without being seen.

He had planned that vantage point carefully. The brilliant light in the main room made visibility from the tables or the dance floor impossible. Behind the filmy barrier of chiffon Iron Gates was safely out of sight in the mellow light of the balcony.

When the lights in the main room were dimmed for the floor show the cluster of bulbs in the balcony were also dimmed. Prying eyes down in the main room never learned the exact position of Iron Gates while he was in the balcony.

A private stairway led from his office on the ground floor to the balcony. Two gunmen at the foot of the stairs, and another outside the small door made attack almost impossible while Gates was on duty in the balcony. Fearless at times to the point of rashness, he was also a careful man.

For twenty-six years he had made his way through the devious maze of the underworld. At forty-seven he was a Big Shot. Prohibition and a pair of ready guns had given him his real chance, and he had taken it.

The Club Welcome was his final gesture of contempt towards the law. Close alliance with district and city political leaders, careful distribution of money and alluring promises of more to come, gave him almost free rein in conducting a hot spot that was hot in the night life of the city.

Once or twice there had been feeble complaints from patrons who had been taken for their rolls, framed with a hostess, and blackmailed into paying more to keep the tongues of Iron Gates and a few trusted lieutenants quiet. But the complaints had been dropped and the police looked the other way while the Club Welcome continued to reap a harvest.

Iron Gates had not been entirely original in his method of operating the night club. Others had tried the same thing on a smaller scale. It only remained for him to go the whole hog and make blackmail and sucker baiting a fine art.

The dimming of the lights brought Iron Gates to his feet again. Crushing out his cigarette, he advanced to the chiffon curtain and watched a spotlight throw white brilliance on one corner of the dance floor.

The hush of silence settled over the crowded room. The orchestra began a dreamy waltz, saxophones and clarinets blending in soft harmony. A moment later the girl, who had been sitting at the table with the man who had held Gates' attention, glided into the light.

Gates reached behind him and drew a chair up close to the railing. He crossed his arms and rested his square jaw on the brass while he watched the slender, supple form of the girl move through the dance.

In the glare of the spot, golden highlights appeared in her brown hair. She danced with her head thrown back, eyes closed, her lips a vivid scarlet against the whiteness of her face. A long, gleaming dress of white satin clung close to her body as she moved across the polished floor.

Doris Creighton knew that the old fashioned solo waltz was not exactly the type of entertainment expected of a night club hostess. She also knew that only the kindness of Iron Gates gave her the opportunity to dance as

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she did. Every other dance number in the floor show was built along the usual suggestive lines.

**A**FTER two encores Doris bowed herself off the floor and started down the narrow corridor towards the dressing rooms at the rear. She was still breathing hard from the exertion of the dance, her heart pounding painfully at her ribs. Vaguely she wondered how long she could keep it up without cracking under the strain.

Long fingers closed around her left arm. She turned and looked up into the smirking face of Ed.

"Iron wants you," he clipped. He jerked his head and added, "Upstairs."

She arched thin brows faintly. "Right away?"

"Yeah. He's waiting."

"But I can't—"

"Iron said for you to come up," continued Ed. "Better do it."

She pulled her arm from his grasp, frowned, then shrugged white shoulders. The tall, thin man's smile broadened.

"All right," she said resignedly. "Get going."

Doris followed the thin gangster through the darkened maze of tables towards the front of the club. A chorus number with a torch singer held the floor, but she did not glance aside. The two gunmen in the office watched her climb the private stairs behind Ed.

"Boss isn't feeling so good tonight," whispered Ed as they gained the head of the stairs.

"Thanks," returned Doris. "I'll tell him you said so."

The tall, thin one laughed softly and held open the little door. Doris stepped over the threshold and paused uncertainly in the dim light.

Iron Gates got up, swung the chair back to its place by the table, and

came forward. The door closed behind her.

"You danced swell tonight," he beamed, stretching big hands towards her. "You're great! I'll put you on Broadway yet."

Doris did not resist when Gates grasped her hands and pulled her towards the table. When she was seated she looked up at him while he started to mix drinks.

"None for me," she said quietly.

"Come on," he coaxed. "Just a short one."

"No. What did you want to see me about?"

Gates cleared his throat and gave her a quick glance in the uncertain light. Two years ago he had thought he owned her, body and soul. Now, her aloofness frightened him strangely. He had never told her about it, but he felt that she knew it.

He waited until he had a drink in his hand and was seated across the little table from her. Then he said:

"Give me a break, Doris."

She laughed bitterly. "Another one?"

"Ah, don't be that way. I can do a lot for you."

"You have," she replied. "You've done plenty. The only thing you've forgotten so far is to put me on the spot."

"Now, listen. You—"

"Forget it," Doris interrupted in a tired voice. "You didn't call me up here to go over all that again. We're finished. Speak your piece, and I'll get back to work."



**I**RON GATES straightened slightly. The music stopped and the lights came on again. Over the rim of his

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glass he noticed that the girl's blue eyes were cold, listless. He kept his voice low, but it was harsh when he asked:

"When you going to stop stalling?"

"Stalling?"

"That's what I said."

Doris kept her eyes on Gates' broad face. The big man put down the glass, fumbled for a cigarette.

"You mean the boy downstairs?" she asked softly.

"Right. You've been playing him along for three weeks—almost every night. What is it—love?"

A slow smile curved her lips. She lowered her eyes to her hands on the tablecloth, then looked up at him quickly again.

"What if it is?" she challenged.

"Don't be a sap. The guy's got dough, but you don't have to marry him to get it."

"That's right," she nodded, accepting a cigarette. "I don't have to marry him to get his money—for you."

"Ah, that's all in the game. You'll get used to it."

"Yes, it's all in the game." She paused until she had the cigarette smouldering. "All in the game. What's the matter, Iron? Think I'm getting soft—letting you down?"

"Well," Gates said slowly. "I wouldn't say that exactly, but—hell, Dorry, you can't fall in love with every sucker you meet here."

"I fell for you," she reminded him. "And—"

She shrugged. Gates lifted his glass, drank, then pulled at his cigarette. He inhaled deeply and said:

"We could be happy again."

Doris Creighton shook her head slowly. "No, Iron. We tried it, and it didn't work. Maybe I'm old fashioned. I don't know, I've got to be everything in a man's life, or nothing. You're not bad. Just must play around. That doesn't go with me."

"Give me another chance," urged Gates, "and I'll marry you."

She narrowed her eyes slightly and looked deep into his. Gates shifted uneasily in the chair. He wondered why he continued to make a fool of himself over her every chance he got.

"Nothing doing, Iron," she said softly. "You're just talking. That wasn't on your mind when you sent Ed down for me. You were going to give me hell for not rolling the sucker downstairs. Well, I'm not so sure he's a sucker."

"But, listen," continued Gates, slow anger rising to the surface. "You said you'd play the game if I let you on here as—"

"As sucker bait?" Doris Creighton broke in quickly. She laughed harshly. "Yes—sucker bait! A pretty face and a beautiful body to lure dumb guys into spending their cash for bum champagne at twenty bucks a quart! Well, I'm—"

"You're tired, Doris," placated Gates.

"Damned right I'm tired!" she flared, her voice low and sneering. "Eight, ten hours a day in this dump would make anybody tired. And I'm getting tired of hearing your line about Broadway. I fell for that kind of stuff once, but I don't do it a second time. Broadway! You knew I didn't have a chance on Broadway—me, with only one dance I can do! I fell for your line, and when you got tired of me you gave me the air. Great, big-hearted Iron—"

"I'm letting you stay on here," Gates interrupted menacingly.

"Yeah, you're letting me stay on here. Why?" She crushed out her cigarette and got to her feet swiftly. "Why? Only because you can keep an eye on me here. I know what'd happen to me if I tried to break away. I'd get gunned out, and you'd send flowers. Yes, you would!"

Gates stood up, stepped around the

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table and got big fingers over her wrists. He pulled her close to him. She stared up at him stolidly, but fear came into her eyes.

"I'm giving you your last chance, Doris," he warned. "I don't do that usually, but you're different. Maybe I did play around, but you walked out on me. You're not a bad kid. You're just dumb. I'll forget what you've been saying. You get that sap downstairs in the back room tonight, and we'll call everything square. Fair enough?"

**D**ORIS CREIGHTON kept her eyes wide while she thought swiftly. The man downstairs was little more than a boy. She had met him three weeks ago and she knew it had been love at first sight.

After her affair with Gates she had thought she could never love again. But the last three weeks had proved her wrong. She had spent long hours trying to plan a way to escape from Gates' power, but fear of him and his gunmen had kept her from yielding to the entreaties of young Vincent Blaine to marry him.

Now she knew she could not tell Gates that she would not let young Blaine be taken for his roll. Gates had let her work at the Club Welcome, dancing her solo number four times a night for room and board.

She knew she was not a star act, never would be. But her dance was received favorably by the crowd, probably because it was so unusual. The applause salved her vanity, and until she had met young Blaine she had not objected to playing hostess for what money she could get on a percentage of the drinks.

That was all different now. She had not been exactly young and innocent when she had met Gates, but association with him had crushed her. But when she broke with him she had realized that she knew too much to leave him entirely.

Only that strange fascination that she exerted on Gates had caused him to be lenient with her. Other women had broken with the mob, and had stopped a bullet for their trouble. Gates might do that to her yet, but she felt that she was safe so long as she was still a part of the Gates mob. As a hostess and dancer at the Club Welcome she was still within the pale.

Now, there was nothing to do but assent to Gates' proposition. Doris Creighton knew she would never go through with the agreement, but she nodded slowly.

Gates loosened his grip on her wrists. She stepped back from him and saw him glance at his watch.

"It's not quite two," he said. "I'll give you till four to get the sap plastered. Take him back to the bar. I'll have a cab at the side door. When he passes out you'll get your cut on the take. Okay?"

"Maybe he doesn't have much of a roll," she suggested.

The big man chuckled. "Know who the guy is?"

"Vincent Blaine—at least, that's what he said his name was."

"Tell you about his old man?"

Doris shook her head. She did not think it necessary to admit that she knew young Blaine was a millionaire in his own right.

"Well, old man Blaine just owns a couple of banks, three or four railroads, some copper mines, and a few other things," explained Gates. "The youngster spends money like water at the other hot spots, but he doesn't do it here. It's up to you to get him plastered. See? That's why I'm forgetting what you said tonight. Be a good girl and do this job nice, and we'll call it square all around."

Gates stepped back to the table and dropped his cigarette in the ash tray. The girl made a helpless gesture with her hands as he turned back to her.

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"All right," she agreed in a thin voice. "But don't hurt the kid."

"No, no," Gates laughed. "Ben won't hurt him. Just a little tap behind the ear. Now, beat it."

The girl moved back to the door, then paused as Gates followed her.

"I'm being easy on you, kid," he rumbled, staring at her hard, "but the next time it'll be different. If you know what's good for you, don't muff this job. And don't blow off your mouth again to Iron Gates. I don't like it. See? I'm giving you your last chance. Run along now, and be a good girl."

Doris Creighton half-closed her eyes. Then she nodded slowly and said:

"Okay, Iron. Watch me."

**T**HE moment she left the balcony she knew that she was taking her life in her hands. Not that it mattered much to anybody except, possibly, Vincent Blaine.

But while she went down the stairs and out through the private office she told herself that she was no longer going to be sucker bait for Iron Gates and his Club Welcome.

Vincent Blaine stood up and held a chair for Doris as she returned to his table. When they were seated he leaned towards her and asked quietly:

"How long have you got to do it?"

Doris looked at him with frightened eyes. Blaine smiled at her easily.

"What do you mean?" she inquired, vainly trying to keep the nervousness that gripped her out of her voice.

"Don't try to stall me off, Doris," he continued. "I know all about it."

"Where—how did you—"

"No," he smiled, shaking his head slowly. "I didn't sneak up and listen outside the door. I don't have to do that to know that I'm to be taken for my roll tonight. I see it in your face."

"You know—about the balcony?" she asked in a thin voice.

"Sure. Known about it all along. Did Iron Gates get hard with you—threaten you?"

"You know him?"

"When I see him—yes," Blaine paused, got a cigarette going. "I'm in the know on a few things. You don't hit the high spots in this town and not learn something, if you're half awake. Iron Gates framed one of my friends. I came here to get Gates, and found you."

"But I'm not going to—"

"Oh, yes, you are," Blaine broke in quickly. "How long did he give you to do it? Tell me."

"Until four," she answered weakly, not daring to meet his gaze.

Blaine reached across the table and covered her hands with big fingers. He was a tall, lanky man, sparsely built, but big boned. He had brown hair and smiling brown eyes that contrasted strangely with his stubborn, thin lipped mouth and long, lean jaw.

"Fine," he said quietly. "We've got lots of time. Let's get started."

He paused and looked around for a waiter while he took his hand from hers. She started to say something, but he waved her down.

"Don't argue. You're going to get me drunk. Then something's going to happen. I don't know what, but you'll have a safe out. I'll see to that, Waiter!"

A man in a threadbare tuxedo sidled up to the table.

"Champagne," ordered Blaine. "And make it good."

**T**HE WAITER smiled and departed. Doris looked up at the balcony at the far end of the room, then tried to escape Blaine's smiling eyes.

"He's watching you from behind that curtain," continued Blaine softly. "Act natural. You've been trying for almost three weeks to get out of doing what you're going to do tonight. I'm not sore at you. You can't help it if

## SUCKER BAIT

Gates called for a showdown. So don't worry. Just let me handle this."

"But you'll never get out of here alive," she breathed.

"Maybe not," Blaine conceded, "but I'll bend Iron Gates while I'm trying. You don't know me very well."

"But he's got—"

"Gunmen?" Blaine laughed confidently. "Sure, but I'm not bad with a gun myself. Maybe it won't come to that, though. Gates isn't so dumb. A killing here would close the place up, at least for a while. He'd lose money on that."

"And you don't think I—"

"I know you had nothing to do with it, Doris. Forget it, and let me run this show. I know more about you than you think I do."

"You've been spying on me?" she asked quickly, almost angrily.

Blaine motioned for silence with a big hand. The waiter returned with a bottle, pulled the cork, and filled a pair of goblets. When he was gone Blaine said:

"Don't get sore, Doris. I had a private dick check up on you. It just didn't seem natural that a night club—well, that a girl didn't jump at the chance to marry a millionaire. I understand now why you've been refusing me. That's another reason why I'm glad Gates called for a showdown tonight. Here's luck—for both of us."

They drank, and were silent for a moment. Blaine filled his glass again, glanced at the crowded dance floor, then said:

"Tell me the details."

Doris moved her head slightly from left to right. "You'd better go."

"Not without you, and you can't get out of here yet. How does Gates want you to work it? Tell me."

"It's not nice," she whispered.

"Better tell me," he urged, "so I won't make a mistake."

"And you really mean to take me—away?"

"Yes. Now, don't argue. Tell me how Gates works this racket."

"Well, I'm supposed to—" She paused, then shook her head. "No. Let's get out of here now."

"It's a little too late for that," he said quietly. "Look and see how much Gates thinks of me—and you."

Doris raised her eyes and noticed for the first time that two men in tuxedos had taken the second table from them along the wall. She recognized them as two of Gates' paid gunmen. The men shifted their eyes quickly as she glanced in their direction.

"And there's another pair of the boys behind you," said Blaine. "We've got to stick, and make it look natural. Gates is rushing things. Let's dance while you tell me what's supposed to happen."

She nodded and got up. When they were in the crowd on the dance floor Blaine whispered:

"Give it to me straight. And make it fast. Gates doesn't trust you."

"I'm sorry I got you into this," she said softly without glancing up.

"Forget it. You supposed to frame me?"

"Yes. In one of the back rooms. If you're not drunk enough, somebody taps you with a blackjack. While you're out they take a picture of you with me in your arms. After that—blackmail."

"Great," breathed Blaine.

Doris glanced up quickly and met his smiling eyes.

"I mean," he explained quickly, "the part about holding you in my arms."

"But you won't know it," she replied, moving closer to him.

"Won't I?" he continued. "We'll see about th—" He broke off suddenly and increased the pressure of his arm around her waist. "Careful. Look who's with us."

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**B**LAINÉ shuffled through the crowd, turning so Doris could see past his shoulder. She sucked in her breath sharply at the sight of Iron Gates dancing near them with one of the hostesses. Gates frowned at her and shook his head quickly while he kept his distance.

"He must think I'm a prize package," said Blaine a moment later.

"I don't think so," answered Doris in a whisper. "It's just— well, I practically told him I like you a lot and he's probably jealous. I—I used to be his woman."

"Let's don't talk about that," said Blaine quickly, holding her closer. "That's all in the past—before I knew you. Only the present and the future count."

They were silent for a few minutes. Finally Doris said:

"There won't be a future."

"Nonsense."

"You'll have to make a break for it. I can't go through—"

"You'll come with me?" he interrupted.

"Perhaps." She paused, then added, "But I don't see how."

"Listen," he whispered sharply. "You know this place. How can we make it?"

"My room's in the back," Doris offered. "It's not far to the ground."

"Good. This dance'll be over in a minute. Let's move that way."

They squeezed through the crowd towards the rear edge of the dance floor. At the right of the orchestra platform a corridor led to the rear of the building. Along one side of the corridor was the bar. Along the other side were the dressing rooms for the entertainers. Doris Creighton lived in one of these.

When the music stopped a few moments later Doris and young Blaine joined in the applause for an encore. Then as the orchestra struck up another tune Blaine breathed:

"Now! Run!"

Lifting the front of her dress, Doris Creighton started past the orchestra platform. Over her shoulder she caught a glimpse of Iron Gates shoving his way through the crowd. After that she did not look back while she raced down the corridor that was deserted at the moment.

Running feet pounded along close behind her. She did not know that Blaine had slipped an automatic from his hip pocket, holding it close to his body while he ran.

The deep voice of Iron Gates sounded behind them. A swarthy faced waiter stepped through the door that led to the bar, and paused uncertainly as Doris swept by him. Blaine half turned, and brought the mouth of the gun down across the waiter's nose.

Checking his pace slightly, Blaine saw the waiter stagger and clutch at his face. A moment later the waiter crashed into Gates. The big man roared as he tripped and went down. The gun in his hand exploded. Lead chipped plaster from the ceiling.



**D**ORIS swung the door of her room open as Blaine spurted, then paused in the doorway. He half raised the gun, but Doris pulled him into the room as a second shot roared in the corridor. The bullet bored into the door frame.

Locking the door, Doris got a grip on Blaine's arm and guided him across the dark room. Blaine heaved at a window. The sash stuck. Blaine cursed, broke the glass, and swept the splinters from the frame with the gun.

"Car parked on the side street—to the right," he breathed, lifting the girl through the opening and lowering her to the alley five feet below.



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The door sagged, groaned under the impact of a heavy body from the corridor. Blaine paused long enough to send two quick shots in the direction of the door. Then he went out through the window and raced down the alley beside Doris Creighton.

"Any particular place you want to go?" inquired Blaine fifteen minutes later as he drove the big sedan through Central Park.

Doris was silent for a moment. All signs of pursuit had been left behind, but she had not yet fully recovered from the suddenness of her flight from the Club Welcome.

She had not intended to go with Blaine. Then on the spur of the moment, when she saw Iron Gates dancing near her, she had decided that anything was better than remaining to face his wrath.

He could tolerate her as long as she obeyed him, but once she flouted his orders and let young Blaine escape she realized that she would be near sudden and unexpected death from that time on.

Now she glanced at Blaine and decided that she had taken the only possible way out. He was not merely feeding her a line. He had risked his life to get her away from Gates.

"I've got friends," she said in answer to his question, "but I don't think they'll want to see me now."

"Then they're not friends," snapped Blaine. "Not yours, anyway. Maybe they think more of Gates than—"

"Yes," Doris said in a tired voice. "You seem to be the only real friend I've known for a long time."

Blaine chuckled. "Then don't argue about where I'm taking you."

Doris Creighton did not argue, but she was slightly surprised when Blaine drove across town and a few minutes later stopped the car in front of a tall apartment building on Park

Avenue. Five minutes later they stepped from an elevator on the top floor and went up a short flight of stairs to a penthouse apartment.

"What do you think of the little shack?" asked Blaine when they stood in the lavishly furnished living room.

Doris looked around slowly, then smiled faintly. "It's nice, but do you think—"

"Listen, young lady," said Blaine, his stern tone of voice belied by his smiling eyes, "you're living in the twentieth century. It's quite all right for you to stay here. The manager knows better than to complain, and my Jap doesn't speak English sometimes."

"But I haven't any clothes and—"

"We'll take care of all that in the morning," laughed Blaine. "Better get acquainted with the place, late as it is, because you'll be staying here permanently if I have my way."

"Listen, Vin," Doris said quickly, raising troubled eyes to his. "Be sensible. Iron Gates will know where I've gone and perhaps—"

"He might make trouble, Doris," interposed Blaine, nodding grimly, "but not tonight. It's too near daylight. I didn't want to do this tonight, but when Gates started to close in on me that way—well, there was just no other way out of it. So don't worry. Leave that to me. Sit down for a moment while I get William up and rush some sandwiches and coffee."

"William?"

"Yes, the Jap. He was born here and knows English better than a billiard cue. I couldn't pronounce his real name so I lengthened it to William."

They laughed, and during the next hour or so Blaine carefully kept the conversation away from Iron Gates and the Club Welcome. But he was worried. The mob leader was not the sort of man who took defeat easily.

## SPEAKEASY STORIES

**W**HEN Doris opened her eyes the following morning sunlight was streaming through the open casement windows of the guest room. The hands of a small mother-of-pearl clock on the nightstand beside the bed pointed to twenty minutes after ten.

Doris yawned, stretched luxuriously, and started to squirm deeper under the covers. The next moment she sat up straight, working frantically to get her hands out of the sleeves of a pyjama coat six sizes too large for her as a knock sounded at the door.

After a moment she said, "Come," and waited breathlessly.

The door opened and a youthful Japanese entered, balancing a napkin covered bed-table. He smiled, said, "Good morning, miss," and approached the bed.

Doris waited until he had arranged the table across the bed and had removed the napkin, disclosing orange juice, toast, scrambled eggs, and coffee. Then she said:

"Is Mr. Blaine here?"

"No, miss. He—"

"Right on deck," broke in Vincent Blaine as he came into the room, still wearing his hat and carrying an assortment of boxes and packages. "Just got back from a hard day's work. Any phone calls, William?"

"No, sir," answered the Jap, and left the room.

Doris smiled, looked at the packages, then frowned. "Work?"

"It was for me," laughed Blaine, depositing his burdens on the foot of the bed. "I had to guess what size you took in everything, but you can exchange what doesn't fit."

"You shouldn't have done that."

"Well, I might as well get used to buying clothes for you. But I'm not taking anything back. Not me. Hard enough to pick them out. I'll give you an hour to get dressed. Then we're heading for City Hall. The office can get along without me today. Hurry."

**A**FTER breakfast Doris paused long enough at the windows to marvel at the expanse of real lawn that covered the flat roof outside. A low marble balustrade ran along the front of the building and ivy-covered brick walls were visible between boxed evergreens at intervals along the sides of the roof.

She forgot Iron Gates and the Club Welcome while she bathed and dressed. But when she went out to the living room Vincent Blaine greeted her with a forced smile.

"Everything all right?" he inquired solicitously.

"Yes," she replied, then added quickly, "What's happened?"

"Iron Gates phoned," he said without smiling. "Wanted to know whether you were here. I told him you were, and he hung up quick."

"You shouldn't have—"

"But I did. I wanted him to know so he wouldn't start anything funny."

"He'll send the police here," Doris exclaimed. "Your people—"

"Don't worry about mother and dad," Blaine interrupted. "Whatever I do is okay with them. They'll like you. And don't worry about Gates sending the police. All cops in New York aren't crooked. Gates will probably want to handle this his own way. That'll suit me fine because we're going to City Hall."

"No," Doris objected. "Later, perhaps, but not right away. Iron will be expecting that, and maybe have some of his mob down there to gun us out."

Blaine laughed. "You read the papers too much. Why—"

"Listen, Vin," she said earnestly. "I'm telling you straight. I've been on the inside of things too long. You think nothing like that could happen to you, but it might. Other men have been shot down. I know. That's why Iron didn't want me out of his sight. I know too much about him, remember."

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"Perhaps you're right," agreed Blaine after a moment of silence. "Gates is just sore at me, but he fears you."

"I know he does," murmured Doris. "I've wondered why he let me live—after I stopped—He thought I might take him back, but I didn't and now—"

"Well, let's don't worry about it. Just—"

"You'd better let me go away until this blows over," she suggested. "That would be best. I don't want anything to happen to you because of me."

"No. You can't do that. You're safe enough as long as we're together. And Gates can't watch the whole city. Tell you what we'll do today."

"We're staying right here," asserted Doris, nodding thoughtfully.

"But we can't—"

"Yes, we can, and we've got to," she went on, overriding his objections. "Listen to me. I got you into this mess, and I'm going to help you get out. You'll have to do the hard part, but you can get a couple of cops or dicks to help you. That'll make it easier."

Blaine frowned. "What are you talking about?"

"I'm going to talk plain. You won't get mad, will you?"

He smiled faintly. "I couldn't get mad at you."

"Be sensible," she urged, her voice low and serious. "You think this is all a lark. It isn't. We're both in a jam—in a tighter place than you realize. I know Iron Gates. And I don't want to die, Vin. See? I'm not a coward. It's just that I don't want to muff my chance for happiness with you. And we won't be safe anyplace so long as Iron is looking for me. Please, listen to me!"

"All right," he nodded slowly. "I'm listening."

"We might get out of here safely, and we might not," she continued,

speaking rapidly and earnestly. "We just can't take the chance. Iron knows that I'm here, and he probably has a man watching the entrance downstairs. And even if we do get out, it's only postponing what's coming. Now, here's my idea.

"Stay here in the apartment with me. No, don't interrupt. Wait till I finish. Stay here and let Iron make the first move. I know him pretty well, and I know he won't hesitate long if he thinks he can get away with it. He's after me—not you. If I don't show myself he'll send somebody up here to make sure that I haven't left."

**B**LAINÉ narrowed his eyes speculatively. "I think I see what you mean. But I can't let you do that, Dorry. It just isn't right."

"It's perfectly all right, and it's no more dangerous than your plan to try to run away. Maybe we do, and maybe we don't get away without getting hurt. I'm not running to the police and telling everything I know, but I couldn't make Iron believe that if I tried."

"Now, don't be foolish," began Blaine.

"I'm not foolish," insisted Doris. "You've never been in a mob, never known a lot of things you'd give anything you had not to know. You've just been on the outside, looking in around the edges. I know what I'm talking about. Once you've been on the inside, once a man's told you about things that even the police don't suspect about him, then you've got a mighty slim chance of ever breaking away from the man or his mob without trouble. And I'm not safe—nor you, either—until Iron Gates is in jail or—"

"But I couldn't kill him in cold blood," objected Blaine.

"You won't have to kill him," she explained quickly. "All you have to do is get him to fall into the trap, then spring it on him. With your money

## SPEAKEASY STORIES

and your friends you can exert a lot of influence. Get Iron in jail, and you can keep him there long enough to let us get away. But as long as he's free we don't have much of a chance. Don't you understand, Vin?"

"I guess you're right," he agreed slowly. "You think—"

"Yes," she nodded vigorously. "I'm sure we can get him to come here. Iron made me bait suckers in his night club, and I think I'm bait enough to get him to fall into our trap. You can charge housebreaking, Sullivan violation, anything you can think of. Iron Gates is hard-boiled and as tough as they make them, but he's a sucker for women—always was. He'll go a long way to try to shut me up."

"He probably would," mused Blaine, remembering the exchange of shots with Gates. "Guess it won't hurt anything to try your idea, Doris, but it seems like a waste of time."

"Then you'd better get a private dick or some cops up here to help you," she suggested. "Iron probably won't come alone."

"No. I'll take a chance on that. If the building's watched, Gates might be tipped off that I've got visitors. We'll do it alone, maybe get William to help."

**T**HE hours passed slowly while Doris and Blaine waited to see whether the wild plan would bring results. Both knew that what she had said about how Gates felt towards her was doubtless true, and after the first discussion neither of them mentioned the big man again.

Shortly after two o'clock Blaine went down to the lobby. He did not leave the building, but when he returned to the penthouse he reported that a man was loitering at each end of the building, with a third patrolling the opposite side of the street.

Doris nodded, but said nothing. It

was evident that Iron Gates was reacting to the situation just as she had predicted. A hard man, accustomed to gain by force what he could not accomplish by milder means, she knew that it was only a matter of time before he would come to the apartment for her, or send some of his gunmen.

After the visit to the lobby Blaine explained the situation to the Jap. The little fellow grinned and nodded knowingly, and Blaine knew he could count on him for any help that might be needed.

It was a few minutes after four when the bell of the outer door rang sharply in the rear of the apartment. The Jap came along the corridor, thrust his head into the living room, and grinned at Blaine while he hefted a stubby automatic in his right hand.

Blaine shot a quick glance at Doris, then followed the Jap to the outer door, getting the gun from his hip pocket into his right hand as he went. The Jap slipped his own gun in the right side pocket of his jacket, then paused at the door as the bell shrilled faintly again.

Taking up a position at the side of the door so that he would be hidden when the door was opened, Blaine nodded to the Jap. The Jap took his right hand from his pocket and eased the door open a few inches before Blaine could stop him.

"Mr. Blaine in?" demanded a sharp voice.

"Yes, sir," answered the Jap suavely. "Will you step in?"

He swung the door wide, blocking Blaine from sight. Doris, watching from the doorway of the living room, drew in her breath and froze as the tall form of Ed loomed behind the shorter man who stepped into the corridor.

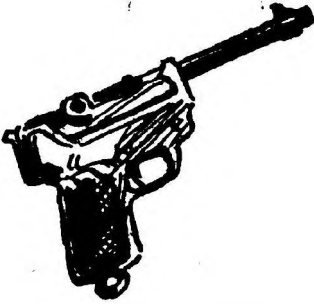
"Up with 'em, yellow man?" snapped the short one, digging a gun into the Jap's side.

## SUCKER BAIT

He should not have done that. As the tall gangster half turned to close the door the Jap side-stepped swiftly and got his hands on the short man's wrist just above the gun. At the same instant Blaine stepped forward, bringing his gun down hard above Ed's left ear.

The short man cursed, groaned. His gun fell from his fingers. He tried to swing his left, then clutched at his right wrist as a spasm of pain shot through his arm. The tall man slumped to the floor without a sound.

"Quiet, you!" warned Blaine, prodding the short man in the back with his gun. "Good boy, William. Take their gats and bring some rope. Fast."



**T**HE Jap grinned, picked up the two guns, then disappeared down the corridor. The short man glared at Blaine, but said nothing as he nursed his sprained wrist. A moment later the Jap returned with a stout clothesline.

When Ed and the short man were bound and gagged Blaine smiled down at them and put away his gun.

"Next time come shooting," he advised. "And don't poke guns in any Japs. Keep clear. Jiu-jitsu is fast."

The short man moaned and choked on the gag as he tried to talk. Ed lay still, unconscious to the world.

"Now what?" asked Blaine as Doris joined him in the corridor.

She frowned and looked at the two men on the floor. Then she smiled her thanks to the Jap and looked up at Blaine.

"Better get them out of sight," she

advised. "There may be more coming."

Doris waited until Blaine had deposited the two men in one corner of the living room. Then she took him aside.

"You'll have to let the police in on this now," she said quietly.

"Not yet," objected Blaine. "I've got an idea myself. William, bring some cold water."

When the Jap brought a pitcher of cold water Blaine slushed it over Ed's head. The Jap wagged his head and hurriedly brought a mop and towels, and dabbed at the wet rug and floor.

A moment later the tall gangster stirred and opened his eyes. Blaine pulled him up, carried him across the room, and dumped him into a chair. Doris frowned and stayed close to Blaine.

"This the guy who took you up to Gates last night?" he asked.

Doris nodded. Blaine got out his gun and tapped the muzzle against Ed's chest.

"I'm taking the gag off you," he said quietly. "One yelp and I'll give you the works. I've got a license to carry this thing and I know how to use it. Follow orders and you'll live long enough to face a judge. Get it?"

The man in the chair nodded slowly. He let cold eyes move over Doris, then leered up at Blaine.

"All right," continued Blaine. "I'm getting Iron Gates on the phone. He's your boss. You talk to him nice and say what I tell you to. Doris, you'll hold the receiver and listen in on Gates."

Doris nodded nervously and watched Blaine remove the gag from Ed's mouth. With the aid of the Jap, Blaine carried the tall man out into the corridor and placed him in a straight-backed chair before the telephone on a little table.

"Where's Gates waiting for you?" asked Blaine.

## SPEAKEASY STORIES

"Club Welcome," growled Ed.

"Okay, Doris. Call the number and get Gates on the wire."

**D**ORIS lifted the receiver and dialed the number of the Club Welcome with a steady hand. While she waited for the connection to be made Blaine said:

"You, guy, tell Gates you're in my place and nobody's home. Tell him to come right up here—you think Doris and I will be back soon. That's what the Jap told you. See?"

Ed nodded and paled slightly as Blaine pressed the nose of the automatic against the back of his neck. Doris frowned as she spoke softly into the transmitter when a voice answered. A moment later she turned, put down the receiver, and looked up at Blaine with wide blue eyes.

"Iron isn't at the Club Welcome," she said in a low voice.

Blaine prodded Ed with the gun. "Where's Gates waiting for you?"

"The Club Welcome, I told you."

"Yeah? Come clean, guy! Where?"

"Maybe he went down to Joe's place," muttered Ed. "You know the number, Doris. Call it."

Blaine nodded, and Doris dialed another number. After a moment she nodded and pressed the receiver against Ed's left ear, bending so that her head was close to his while she listened to the voice of Iron Gates come over the wire.

Under the persuasion of the gun at his neck the tall gangster delivered Blaine's message in a low voice as directed. When Gates hung up, Doris replaced the receiver and glanced at Blaine.

"He's busy now," she said softly. "Said to get us when we came in and he'd be up after dark."

Blaine smiled coldly, shoved the gag back into Ed's mouth, and tied it tightly into place. Then after he

had returned the tall man to the corner of the living room he said:

"That'll suit me fine. We'll take some of that iron out of him before we turn him over to the cops."

"He won't be alone," Doris remarked, wondering what Blaine planned to do.

Blaine grinned and looked down at the men on the floor. "We've got two of them already. I guess we can handle another pair of suckers."

"But—"

"Forget it," advised Blaine, leading her out through French windows and on to the lawn atop the roof. "William will watch those birds. I want to show you a sunset that you don't see often in New York. You'll get used to them later, perhaps, but the first few times—"

Doris laughed nervously. Blaine paused and smiled down at her.

"You just want me to keep from worrying," she nodded. "But I can't help it. Gates is dangerous, and you won't believe me."

"I do," he said quickly. "But never cross rivers or close gates until you come to them."

She smiled faintly and then was silent while she watched darkness settle over the city from the top of the apartment building, and wondered whether Gates would actually come to the apartment. Blaine, busy with his own thoughts, did not try to make her talk.

The presence of Ed and the other gangster had proved to her that she had not underestimated Gates' desire to remove her as soon as possible. Only swift action had averted sudden death. Perhaps, she reflected, Blaine would not be so lucky in dealing with Gates.

But the hours passed and Gates did not come to the apartment. After a somber dinner in the living room where they could watch the prisoners on the floor Doris tried to read a mag-

## SUCKER BAIT

azine, but the printed words did not register on her brain and she forgot to even turn the pages.

Seated in a big chair, Blaine ignored Doris. He smoked steadily and watched the men on the floor vainly try to break their bonds. Finally at nine o'clock he got up and pushed the chair back along the wall.

**D**ORIS was on her feet instantly and met him in the center of the room. The Jap had cleared away the table and was busy in the pantry and kitchen.

"Looks like I played a blank," said Blaine, shaking his head disappointedly. "Might have known Gates would be too wise to show up."

"He might have heard us at the phone," Doris murmured.

"Don't think so. The tall guy's neck is skinny, but it didn't make any noise against the gun."

"You can't be serious," she chided. "Just a kid—always trying to get a laugh."

"I'm twenty-five. You can't expect me to act like sixty."

"You might try it once," suggested Doris. "I get you into a lot of trouble and all you do is smile about it."

"All right," snapped Blaine. "I won't smile." He jerked his head towards the men on the floor and added, "Think I'll call the police and have the wagon sent around for these."

Doris nodded slowly. Blaine turned and took a step toward the corridor. Suddenly a deep voice filled the room.

"Hold it, you!"

Blaine whirled, right hand streaking for his gun as he crouched. Doris gasped, then leaped in front of Blaine as he broad, hard face of Iron Gates loomed at the partly open French windows.

Cursing, Blaine tried to push her aside. The gun in Gates' hand cracked.

Doris sat down in a heap on the floor as Blaine fired once. The bullet struck the barrel of Gates' gun, tearing the weapon from his fingers.

Blaine raised his automatic for a second shot. Then his gun jammed.

With a roar of rage Iron Gates charged into the room. Blaine heaved the useless gun, but missed. Then he met Gates just inside the windows, and they went down in a tangle of threshing arms and legs.

From her position on the floor Doris Creighton watched the rolling bodies of the men as they fought in front of the French windows. She gripped her right leg hard with both hands just above the knee.

Her face was bloodless but she did not utter a sound. Slowly red seeped through her dress and stained her fingers.

A moment later Blaine and Gates rolled out on to the lawn. Doris held her breath, but when there were no more shots she knew that Iron Gates had come alone to the roof.

Slowly she dragged herself across the floor towards the open windows. The two men had rolled beyond the faint illumination cast across the lawn by the light in the room. At the threshold of the windows she stopped, exhausted. Her leg ached dully.

Hoarse breathing, grunts, and the sound of flesh striking flesh came to her from the night. She swallowed hard and fought down the dizziness that assailed her. She tried to pull herself out on to the grass, but her arms were suddenly very weak.

Minutes passed. The sounds of fighting became fainter. Once the booming voice of Iron Gates came to her, but the sound was cut short in the middle of a curse.

Blinking her eyes steadily, she tried to clear the film that threatened to settle over them. Then she remembered the gun that Gates had lost.

## SPEAKEASY STORIES

Slowly she moved her head, but the objects in the room were blurred.

**F**IGHTING hard to keep her head up, she listened to the noise of the fight recede into the distance towards the front of the roof. Finally there was silence, broken only by the sound of her own heavy breathing.

Gradually her arms relaxed. The pain in her leg seemed far away, hardly a part of herself. She stretched out at the edge of the rug, keeping her eyes open with a great effort while she listened for sounds that did not come from the darkness outside the windows.

Suddenly she struggled up until she had elbows propped on the floor, holding her head up with her cupped hands. Into the light that streamed through the open windows staggered the figure of Vincent Blaine.

His left eye was closed. Coat, shirt and trousers were in ribbons. His necktie was askew on his bare neck. Slowly he licked blood from his

swollen lips and forced a smile while he knelt beside her.

"Hurt—bad?" he asked between gulps for air.

"Got it—through—the leg," answered Doris, and slumped slowly to the floor. "Where's—Iron?"

Blaine's good eye clouded. His broken lips ceased smiling.

"On the street—by now," he husked. "Went over—the front wall."

Doris Creighton shuddered, and fainted. Slowly Blaine forced himself to his feet. He gazed down at the girl on the floor for a moment. Then he held his body stiff and straight, and went out on the roof again.

A moment later he returned with the limp body of the Jap in his arms. He stepped past the girl and tottered across the room while he muttered brokenly:

"Sucker fell for—the bait. Gotta call cops. William slugged—Doris hurt. Must stay on my feet. Must stay on my feet. Must . . . ."

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## “Diamonds of Death”

A Complete Novelette in This Issue

By VALENTINE VAN TYNE

*Lane was a pen pusher lookin' for inspiration—but not in his wildest yarns did things happen as fast and furiously as they did to him after that eventful night at the Golden Slipper!!!*

### CHAPTER I

#### THE GOLDEN SLIPPER

**L**AKE CITY'S High Street is Lake City's Broadway, the heart of a district of a million of blinking and glaring lights, a street of a million vices.

Around and along High Street, within an area of much less than a quarter square mile, one can find

gigantic mercantile houses, manufacturers of world repute, financial institutions known nationally and internationally, movietone palaces of the highest order, vaudeville houses, burlesque shows, waxmuseums, majestic hostelries, dingy hovels of vice masquerading behind age-faded signs that proclaim them “hotels,” exclusive night clubs, honkeytonks, gambling halls de-luxe. Almost in the geo-

## SPEAKEASY STORIES

graphical center of this area stands the city hall building, grim-façaded, yet tolerant.

Of the notorious night clubs within a stone's throw of High Street and city hall none is more widely known than the *Golden Slipper*.

Within its spacious, gilded rooms, racketeers, gunmen, grafting politicians, women of loose morals, prey upon the suckers who seem ever-willing to pay tribute to Lake City's gigantic organizations of crime and vice.

Many a substantial fortune has changed hands across its gaming tables, many a cold-blooded murder and gang reprisal, daring holdup, cunning confidence-scheme, has been hatched across a bottle of synthetic gin. Several of Lake City's most sensational divorce scandals had their beginning at one of its tables or in one of its secluded booths and private dining rooms.

And because the *Golden Slipper* is the kind of place it is, a playground for the wicked and the gullible, Harvey Lane frequently could be found there of an evening. There he sought and found the inspiration and material for the sort of stories he wrote and which the public loved to read.

**W**ITH many of the men and women whose aliases send shivers through the veins of the readers of Lake City's newspapers almost daily, whose character-portrayals provided the readers of his stories with a thrill, he had speaking acquaintance. They were fully aware of his identity and his vocation. To them he was merely another form of racketeer.

With him they would share a bottle, touch upon such phases of their activities as might prove of interest to him, confident that he could not and would not betray them, because despite their seemingly easy manner of speech, they were extremely cautious how

much and just how they told of it. Sometimes they also offered welcome criticism.

The night of October 25th, Harvey Lane handed the sallow-faced youth who frisked all comers for possible weapons in the tiny ante-room off the main dining room a .38 automatic pistol and was the instant recipient of a questioning look.

"I think I killed the beast that chewed my pup to hamburger last week, Joe," Lane explained with a grim smile. "At least, I threw a couple of shots at him and had the pleasure of seeing him make a bee-line for the woods, yelping for fare-you-well."

The next moment Joe pressed the button that signalled the guard on the other side of the steel door that another guest was awaiting admittance, and Lane entered the dining room.

"A little crowded this evening, Mr. Lane," the guard informed him. "But I don't suppose you'll mind sharing a table with one of the boys. Mike Andrews over there looks like he wouldn't mind having company."

"He's interesting company," Lane said amiably and followed one of the waiters to the table where a middle-aged, well dressed man, who might have been a prominent business man instead of one of the country's most notorious racketeers and fences, was seemingly bored.

At sight of Lane, Andrews' face broke into a huge smile and he extended a fat, over-manicured hand.

"Well, how's tricks with you, Lane?" he demanded genially. "I read that yarn you spun about that attempted robbery of the Metropole National Bank. Wasn't so bad, even if no hustler I know would go to all the trouble that guy Kruger went to, only to get beat by the cops. Why do you have to give the cops the breaks all the time, Lane?"

"That's what the public expects, Andrews. Give them what they want and they're your friends."

## "DIAMONDS OF DEATH"

"I guess that's right, too. It's all a racket."

"What'll you have, Mr. Lane?" the waiter inquired solicitously. "We've got some extra choice Canadian ginger ale."

"A bottle of Canadian ginger ale it is, Toni."

That such an order was a flagrant violation of a constitutional amendment did not seem to worry Lane. Why should it? Prohibition was not popular with the masses. Almost everyone he knew violated it in some form or other. Even people whom he knew to be avowed prohibitionists in public sneaked a drink occasionally in the privacy of their own or someone's home. Wasn't it one of the indirect results of prohibition that had made him a success as an author? So why be hypocritical?

"How's business with you, Andrews?" Lane queried.

"Kinda tight right now. Everything's taking a slump."

"Diamonds and such things, too?"

Andrews smiled wistfully.

"I should say so! Can pick 'em up for almost nothing. But there's no dough in the handling of 'em. Nobody's buyin'. If I had your talent maybe I'd switch to your racket for a change."

"It's tight, too," laughed Lane.

"Somebody wants you on the 'phone, Mr. Andrews!" the waiter announced.

**W**HEN Andrews returned his face was grim. Gone was the genial smile. Instead his lips were set in a hard, thin line. There was fear in his eyes as they roamed the faces about the vast room and on the dance floor. Beads of perspiration stood upon his brow.

"Bad news, Andrews?" Lane inquired sympathetically.

"Yeah!"

Like an automaton, Andrews dropped into his chair and with trembling hand poured himself a stiff drink. Lane knew those symptoms only too well. He had seen others collapse under sudden terror. Invariably their names appeared in flaring headlines shortly afterward, like:

"SO-AND-SO TAKEN FOR RIDE"

One of the painted, seductive young women, whose duty it is to see that the house gets its full share of the suckers' bankrolls, slid into the chair beside Lane.

"Hello, boy friend," she giggled, reached for Lane's bottle and glass and stowed away a drink that would have choked Lane. "You know, boy friend," she went on with professional interest, "you oughta write some yarns about good-lookin' gun-molls."

"Maybe I will some day, Mabel, when I get the inspiration."

"Hell, Lane! I can give you all the inspiration you need, an' if you want to use my name it's all right, too. Why don't you come up to my diggin's an' I'll spill ya some hot stuff. An' what I mean some real hot stuff. How about it, Andrews?"

"I guess she could," Andrews grunted with a venomous look at the girl.

"Maybe I will some time, Mabel," Harry said.

"If you do, boy friend, you'll write the best yarn of the month. See if I ain't right," she promised enthusiastically.

"Say, woman!" and Andrews glared his disgust and displeasure. "If it's all the same with Lane, cop a sneak. We want to talk in private. Catch yourself some suckers."

"Well, I'll be damned!" Mabel started out of her chair, her enameled arm lashing out with the speed of lightning, her hand missing Andrews' chin by a matter of inches when Lane gripped her arm.

## SPEAKEASY STORIES

"Better leave us, Mabel," he urged quietly. "Andrews isn't feeling so well."

Mabel's eyes flamed fury and contempt, and the string of epithets that flowed from her lips would have scorched Satan.

"If it wasn't for you, Lane," she flung at him, "I'd slap his kisser till the echo would jar his corns. The idea him insultin' me like that."

Then she hipped her way across the room toward more congenial and fertile fields."

"Damn her impudence!" Andrews muttered as he gulped another drink. It was plainly to be seen that he was on the ragged erge of nerves—desperation.

"Lane," he said presently, "I'm in a jam."

"Feds or—"

"No! Some of the boys!"

Lane tensed with comprehension.

"Threaten you?"

"Plenty! My life ain't worth a plugged penny. But maybe I can put one over on 'em."

He gulped another drink. It seemed to lend him a false courage, sharpen his mind.

"Have you got your car, Lane?" he asked presently.

"Out front."

A grim, calculating smile flitted across Andrews' ashen face.

"Mind taking me home, Lane? I'll make it worth your while."

Lane did not fancy the idea of taking Andrews home. But he could not muster the courage to refuse. Maybe, he reasoned, if he did take the man home it might at least temporarily keep him out of the clutches of whoever was after him.

"Glad to," he assured.

"Then let's highball, Lane. If I can get home I'm safe. Maybe we can make it."



### CHAPTER II

#### A MURDER MIXUP

OUT in the anteroom Lane received his stubnosed automatic, Andrews a larger edition of the same model, silencer-equipped.

"I'll meet you around the corner," Andrews suggested.

A few minutes later he climbed in beside Lane.

"Maybe we can make it, Lane," Andrews said with a grim smile. "They probably haven't traced me to the Golden Rooster."

"But I thought that telephone call—"

"From a pal, Lane," Andrews confided. "He got a rumble that they're after me. Now step on it, friend."

Lane stepped on it. It was twelve-thirty by the clock on the tower of the Lake Shore Railroad when he swung into Lake Shore Boulevard, speeding north. Fifteen minutes and he would deposit Andrews in front of his apartment.

A traffic light forced him to stop. It increased Andrews' nervousness. Like a ferret his eyes darted from car to car, as they rolled up alongside and behind them, searching, fearing to see faces that were familiar, faces he did not want to see.

The light changed and Lane gunned his engine. The powerful car leaped away and soon out-distanced the string of cars behind them.

## "DIAMONDS OF DEATH"

Ten blocks and again the light changed on them. It was the last one until they would be within a few blocks of Andrews' apartment. Lane was glad of it. Andrews' nervousness was becoming irritating.

Again they got away with the snap that within three blocks left the other cars behind.

Lane swung into Mercer Avenue and had driven two blocks when Andrews gave a gasp of alarm. One look into the rear vision mirror above the windshield and Lane saw the cause for the man's agitation.

A large touring car was bearing down upon them at a tremendous rate of speed. For a fraction of an instant he caught a glimpse of something that glittered ominously in the hand of the man beside the driver. Then an arm appeared around the frame of the windshield.

A livid flash of flame and the rear window of Lane's car was shattered to powder. The bullet angled upward and out through the top.

"For God's sake, step on 'er, Lane!" Andrews pleaded with terror-choked voice. "You gotta outrun 'em."

The request was unnecessary. Lane had already pushed the accelerator button clear to the floorboard, and was racing down the street at better than eighty miles an hour, hoping that he would have the right-of-way for the next few blocks until he could outdistance the car behind. But that proved an impossibility within a few moments. That car was far superior to his in speed.

Two blocks more and they would have to stop for a traffic light. To do that would mean that he would have to turn Andrews over to the men in that car.

Two more shots splattered against the back of his car.

"Hang on, Andrews!" Lane shouted with desperation.

The car lurched for an instant under slammed-on brakes, then whirled

around the next corner in a wide arc that sent it up on the sidewalk for a few yards before he was able to slow her sufficiently to bring her back into the street.

But unexpected as the turn had been, it afforded him a few seconds' advantage. The gangster car shot almost past the street intersection before its driver could bring it to a stop, and by the time he backed and made the turn, Lane was five blocks in the lead.

Three more blocks and they would come to a railroad crossing. A switch engine was blocking their path on the far track. Lane gave a groan of despair. Andrews shouted frantically that the pursuers were gaining on them.

A shrill blast of the engine's whistle and it began to move back.

**F**ROM behind the warehouse that ran parallel with the tracks came the wailing blasts of another engine. The glare of a brilliant headlight illumined the tracks ahead. The rumble and clatter of a speeding train over-reached the purr of Lane's engine.

A fiery streamer of smoke and steam gave Lane the position of the oncoming train. It would be a matter of split seconds between his crashing the wooden safety gates and hurtling across the tracks to safety for Andrews, or to be rammed by that hurtling juggernaut of steam and steel, and perhaps be killed instantly.

Grimly Lane held his foot on the accelerator-button, racing straight for the shadowy figure of the watchman waving his red lantern.

"I'm going to crash those gates, Andrews!" he shouted. "Keep your head down. There'll be plenty glass flying."

The frantic yells of the crossing watchman, darting to the side of the road, blended with the crash of the wooden barriers. The iron leg and

## SPEAKEASY STORIES

safety lantern struck the windshield with the velocity of a cannonball. Splintered glass rushed inward with the cold night air, inflicting numerous little cuts on Lane's hands, and a small gash on the side of his face. Andrews had ducked below the dashboard.

Out of the corner of his eye Lane saw the glaring light of the locomotive less than a hundred feet away as he hurled across its path, crashed through the second gate and to safety for Andrews.

Then the crashing of the other gate, the clatter and rumble of the train hurtling past behind, and above those sounds the squeal of jammed-on brakes.

With a heart of ice, Lane raced straight on for three blocks, then swung off into a side street. That the other car had not crashed into the train he was assured when Andrews gave a sharp exclamation:

"They're coming after us, Lane!"

"Let 'em come!" Lane snapped. "Hang on! I'm going to make the next turn."

Like a madman Lane piloted his car over a zigzag route that soon would throw even the most astute pursuer off his track, and a few minutes later was within a few blocks of Andrews' apartment.

But the intense strain of the last few minutes was beginning to tell heavily, and he welcomed Andrews' suggestion:

"Better put this boat in that garage down Ramsey street, an' get 'er fixed up, Lane. I'll stand the damages. Then let's go up to the apartment an' have a coupla snorts. They won't bother us up there."

"I hope not," said Lane in a hoarse whisper. "I don't think I'll ever want to go through anything like this again. But if it's saved your life."

Andrews' fingers gripped Lane's arm until it pained, and his eyes sparkled with admiration.

"You've sure got guts, Lane. And

thanks to you. If they get me, you can feel honestly that it wasn't any fault o' yours, an' if there's anything I can do for you any time, just whistle."

As Lane turned down Ramsey street to drive his car to the garage another car came tearing toward them at terrific speed. At sight of it Lane and Andrews gave exclamations of alarm:

"That's them!"

To complete the turn and flee would be futile, to speed past the gangster car meant risking a raking fire from Tommy guns. It was Andrews who made the grim decision as the other car began to slow down and swerved into their path so as to prevent Lane's passing.

"You might as well stop, Lane. I guess it's no use. They outsmarted us by heading straight for the apartment after they lost the trail."

**A** SUDDEN glare of light as the gangster car veered, an ear-splitting screech, and three men tumbled from its interior as Lane's car came to a stop. Two of them carried Tommyguns, the third a long-nosed automatic, silencer-equipped. Their faces bore expressions of diabolical elation. Fires of murder danced in their eyes.

Andrews, with a mumbled curse, had caught hold of the door handle with his right hand while his left dived deep into the side-pocket.

But Lane did not notice this. His eyes were wide with genuine terror as the ugly snout of a Tommygun poked through the window at his side and a chill voice snapped an order:

"Up with 'em, buddy, if ya know what's healthy!"

The other two had darted around the car and intercepted Andrews as he climbed out.

"Up with 'em, you double-crossin' rat!" rasped the tall youth, jamming the automatic against Andrews' side.

"Can the double-crossin' rat stuff!"

## "DIAMONDS OF DEATH"

Andrews snapped savagely. "You might say that same thing to the wrong guy some time."

"Yeah?" leered the other. "If ya ain't a double-crossin' rat, then where ya got it?"

"Since you figure that I double-crossed you, you ought to be smart enough to figure where I got it. If you don't, try an' find out."

"We'll see about that, Andrews," sneered the one with the Tommygun. "March over to our bus, wise guy, an' we'll go for a little ride. Maybe you'll change your mind."

"All the rides you an'—" he paused an instant, then went on, "your rod-slingin' rat-friends can't make me spill where it is. Now let's march."

With the swagger of defiance and resignation to the fate that he knew to be his, Andrews walked to the gangster car, flinging over his shoulder:

"Thanks for the help, Lane. Probably you'll get paid for what you did for me tonight."

It was as he partly turned to utter a word of encouragement to Andrews that Lane became aware of the figure coming toward them from the corner. The gangster covering him became conscious of its presence at the same instant and uttered the warning:

"A cop, Tate! Chuck the type-writers!"

The next instant two Tommyguns landed in Lane's car and the youth on the running board admonished:

"Better watch your tongue, Lane. You might live longer if you do."

Andrews had been shoved into the gangster car and the others were following. But the officer, having become suspicious, suddenly broke into a run with gun in one hand and night stick in the other, leaped to the running board of the gangster car.

"Just a minute, boys," he said. "What's going on here?"

The driver started to slam the gear shift lever home, but the patrolman

was determined not to have his inquisition ended thus. What he had already seen was sufficient to forget formality and politeness. A sharp rap with his night stick and the gangster's hand released the lever.

"Now step out of this car," the patrolman ordered.

"But listen officer, we ain't done a damn thing."

"No? Well just step right out, boys, an' we'll see. There's somethin' going on here that needs a little explaining."

**T**HE gangsters piled out, perhaps in the hope of bluffing the officer, but managing to keep Andrews between them.

"Over by this boat, boys!" the patrolman waved them toward Lane's car, then becoming aware of Lane slumped behind the wheel, added: "An' you come outa there too, feller. How come this car's all wrecked?"

"Him an' our friend here," it was Tate doing the explaining, pointing at Andrews, "got into a little argument."

"An argument, eh?" the officer's eyes surveyed the car and Lane critically. "Rammed your fist an' head through the windshield an' the rear-window, did you, buddy?"

"That's how he cut his hand," Tate offered, but there was something in his voice that sent an icy chill through Lane.

"I see," the patrolman said, stepped up to the car, looked within and grunted: "Well, look at all the artillery. That explains the kind of an argument."

For a moment his back was to the gangsters; a fatal mistake.

Tate's hand dived into his pocket, came into view with a stub-nosed automatic. Twice the gun coughed sinisterly, spewing orange-colored tongues of flame at the officer's back. With a guttural cry the patrolman swung partly around and staggered

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under the impact of the bullets. His service-gun roared, but the bullet splashed against the brick wall of the building across the street. The next instant he crumpled at the knees and sank in a lifeless heap.

"Pile in!" Tate snarled at the others, turning his weapon upon Lane who stood rooted to the spot with horror at such wanton killing.

Lane saw the bloodlust in the fellow's eyes, saw the blunt nose of the gun thrust upward, saw the tensing of the finger upon the trigger, realized that he was face to face with death. Another moment, and—

Lane's eyes narrowed. His mouth drew into a tight line. Something seemed to snap in his brain. Death! No, he wasn't going to be shot down like a helpless creature, without at least making an effort at defense.

His right hand suddenly streaked out. There followed the lurid flash and that sinister little cough, but the bullet sped past his ear as his fist jarred the gangster's arm with a tremendous blow.

In coordination with the motion of his right was the powerful drive of the left that caught the gangster in the pit of the stomach, sent him reeling backward and asprawl of the fallen policeman with a grunt of pain. With a clatter that sounded like a voice shouting encouragement the automatic landed under Lane's car, slid out of reach.

"Hey y . . . ." the exclamation was rammed down the youth's throat as Andrews whirled and delivered a smashing blow to the face.

Out of the corner of the eye Lane saw the third go for his gun in a shoulder holster. With a savage snarl he whirled, driving with both fists that landed on chin and chest. The gangster pitched face down as if dead.

**T**A TE had scrambled to his feet and was rushing Lane from the side. Before Lane could turn and

block the blow it caught him behind the ear with brain-jarring force.

For an instant a red fog blurred his vision, but instinctively he leaped out of reach of those pile-driver blows. Only dimly could he see that Andrews was holding his own with the third gangster. Then that sickening dizziness cleared away.

Tate was coming at him with face distorted hideously, blood dripping from the split lips. Lane swung to meet him. The gangster wielded a blackjack, was aiming it at Lane's head. It landed with a glancing blow on his shoulder with a paralyzing force. Again both of Lane's fists found their mark, and for the second time Tate went sprawling. This time he lay quite still.

Andrews, badly winded, was making feeble effort to ward off the lightning-fast blows from his antagonist.

With a leap and two bone-crushing blows Lane ended the fight.

A shrill voice, replete with horror, rent the night from a window in the building across the street.

"Poooleeece! Poooleeece!"

"Let's lam, Lane!" Andrews snapped with heaving breath. "Another minute or two an' the bulls'll be thick around here."

A second and Lane was behind the wheel.

"Poooleeece! Poooleeece!"

Again that eery cry rose shrill and piercing through the night.

"To the garage, Lane!" ordered Andrews as he snatched up the two Tommyguns and hurled them into the street.

Then a cry of horror froze on Lane's lips as he saw one of those guns land beside Tate, saw the gangster's hand dart out and snatch it up.

Andrews, ignorant of the danger, was running around the back of the car, was leaping for the running-board when Pete squeezed the trigger.

With the gun's death-chatter mingled the throaty cry of Andrews



## "DIAMONDS OF DEATH"

as the bullets ate their way into his body.

With a dull crash he landed on the running-board of the car. Hands that were no longer under nerve-control pounded the fender as the lifeless form slid to the street.

A hail of slugs drilled through the back of the car, whined past Lane's head.

"Poooleeeeee! Poooleeeeee!"

That eery cry died on the wind as Lane raced down-street intent only to put as much distance between himself and the gangsters and the police, and to find safe harborage for his car.



### CHAPTER THREE

#### LANE RECEIVES A VISITOR

**T**WENTY minutes later, Lane drove into a side-street on the South side, and into a small garage.

"Well, what in the world's happened to you, Mr. Lane?" the night manager, a genial sort of fellow, inquired with genuine anxiety. "I expected you'd get into a jam sooner or later mixing with those toughs."

"I guess you were right," Lane said with a sickly attempt at a smile. "I finally got into a jam, Simpson, an' what a jam it's likely to turn out to be."

Knowing that he could trust the man, Lane told him as briefly as possible what had happened since twelve thirty.

"An' if you think it won't get you into any jam, I'd like to have your help, Simpson," he concluded.

"I'll move the boat out to the lot with the junk, Mr. Lane, an' fix 'er up. That'll be safer'n doing it here. That woman or that crossing-watchman might have just picked up your numbers. If I were you I'd report the car stolen an' try an' keep out of this mess if it's possible. It's unlikely that those fellows would squeal to the police."

"And Gaffney'll provide me with an alibi," Lane said hopefully.

"Step into the office and I'll fix that cheek of yours, Mr. Lane, and you might call Gaffney on the phone. It's best not to lose any time."

"Better come over here right away, Lane," Gaffney said over the wire in a voice that filled Lane with foreboding. "I don't want to talk too much over the phone."

A half hour and Lane was back at the Golden Slipper. Once more Joe checked his gun, but there was a questioning look on his face.

"Mr. Lane," he muttered. "I wish I had known what was up, an' I wouldn't 'a' told that dick that you an' Andrews left together."

Lane's face went ashen.

"What dick, Joe?" he breathed.

"Callahan came around about forty minutes ago an' wanted to know where he could find Andrews. Said it was something sorta important. Since him an' Andrews were kinda friendly I didn't think it would do any harm to tell him that you an' him left together."

"My God, Joe, an' they bumped off Andrews."

"Good Gosh, Lane! You better talk to the boss right away. Maybe he can figure a way out."

But Gaffney couldn't.

"The only thing to do is wait an' see how much the bulls find out. If

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they come after you I'll know, an' I'll do all I can to help, but if I were you I'd disappear for a day or so, not on account o' the cops, but that mob, whoever they are. They'll be after you, if I don't miss my guess. Got any idea at all who they might be?"

"There was something vaguely familiar about this Pete, but for the life of me I can't place him."

"Ever saw him with Andrews before?"

"I don't know, Gaffney. But I don't think so. I don't think they belong to any of the local mobs."

**A**FTER Lane had sat brooding over a bottle of double-strength ginger ale, for what had seemed to him ages, Mabel again hipped her way across the room and slid into the chair beside him. This time he welcomed her companionship.

"My God, Harvey," she exclaimed, her voice vibrant with sympathy, "you look like you been in a little war."

"I guess I have, Mabel," Lane smiled.

"On account o' Andrews I bet."

"What makes you think that?"

"Hell, Lane, I'm wise to a few things. I thought maybe he got in Dutch with somebody the way he acted tonight, an' had a good notion to warn you not to go with him. But after the way he talked I figured it was none o' my business."

Lane sighed wearily.

"I wish you had, Mabel," he said. "But I suppose I wouldn't have paid any attention to it. I never could refuse a man a favor when I see he was in need of one real bad."

Mabel leaned back in her chair and for a long moment studied the face of the man before her. Her hand reached out for Lane's glass. She half raised it to her lips and then replaced it in front of Lane untouched. A peculiar, baffled expression crossed her face,

gave way to a ghost of a smile as she nodded her head imperceptibly.

"Listen, Lane," she leaned forward and spoke earnestly. "Maybe I can help you out a little. For all you went through with tonight you'd probably want to have a hand in finding the guys responsible for Andrews' bump-off."

"I would," Lane smiled frigidly, his fist tapping the table sharply. And there was determination in his eyes.

"Then tell me the whole works, Lane. If I can help you I swear I won't spill the beans. Women have got a reputation that they can't keep a secret, but I know a lot o' guys that'd take a squat in the hot seat if some dame would spill what she knows."

"I guess that's right, too," Lane agreed heartily, then launched upon the recital, while Mabel listened with puckered brows, her mouth hardening into a cruel line, her mellow eyes burning into his as if she were probing for the truth of everything he said.

"Listen, Lane," she said when he had concluded. "You leave this place an' drive to my dump. I'll be out there in about half an hour or so, just as soon as I can get away from here without makin' anybody suspicious, but I think I can give you something to work on. The way it looks to me you're going to be in deep unless you can beat those guys to it. I ain't quite sure, but I think I know who this Pete-guy is. I'll probably know a little more by the time I get home."

With a movement that could have hardly been observed even by the closest watcher her hand stole under the table, and a moment later she placed the key to her apartment in his hand and gave him the address.

"Now beat it out there, boy friend. It'll probably be the safest place for you tonight anyway. If I'm a little late don't worry. I might run onto something."

## "DIAMONDS OF DEATH"

**M**ABEL'S hunch that she might know who Pete was had failed to bear fruit. Although she was reasonably certain of the gangster's identity she had been unable to get the rumble she had hoped to get. Nor was she able to throw any light upon a possible motive for Andrew's murder.

Telephoning Gaffney, Lane received the startling news that the shooting of Patrolman Blake had the police running in circles. According to one eyewitness the patrolman had been shot down by one of five men, one of whom had been killed apparently after an altercation among the five, and when he was on the verge of fleeing from the scene of the murder with a man in dark clothes driving a large sedan. The other three then picked up the dead man, put him in their car, a large touring, and fled cityward. The police so far had been unable to pick up any definite clews.

On the way to his suburban bungalow Lane had breakfast and bought a paper. The only new development was a statement given police by the crossing-watchman. He declared that a large sedan with two men in it crashed his gates and barely missed being struck by train number 22. A large touring car with three or four occupants had been in pursuit of the sedan, and resumed the chase as soon as the train had sped past.

The watchman, in his excitement, had taken no notice of either car's license numbers. Based upon this information the police theory was, that the pursuers of that sedan finally caught up with it and that the patrolman had been shot when he came upon the two cars and began an investigation.

Lane felt greatly relieved. Perhaps this would be the end of the night's dreadful business, unless the body of Andrews should be found. For the present at least Lane had no desire to go to the police. He wanted to think

everything over very carefully. Sometimes the police were very inconsiderate with victims of circumstantial evidence.

His being present at the killing of the policeman, without anyone to vouch for his innocence, might place him in a rather difficult position. On the other hand there was the possibility that the gangsters would look him up to assure themselves that he would not talk. If they did, he would stand a chance to establish their identity and in that way probably help the police clear up the situation.

But Lane had scarcely removed his topcoat and hat when a car came up the driveway. The driver was detective Callahan, a pleasant-faced young man, who bore the reputation of knowing his Lake City better than any other member of the department, uniformed or plainclothes. Besides he was regarded as being levelheaded and a square-shooter; a man who does not jump at conclusions hastily.

The fact that Callahan was alone was encouragement to Lane. He might confide his troubles in the detective.

"Lane," Callahan inquired after they were seated in the cozy little sitting room. "Have you any idea where I can find Andrews?"

Lane shook his head with a grim little smile.

"No, I haven't, Callahan," he replied.

"Where'd you take him to last night?"

Lane studied the question for a moment.

"He asked me to take him home, but when we were within a few blocks of his apartment he changed his mind."

The detective leaned forward and sucked on his cigar.

"And where did you take him from there, Lane?" he queried.

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**L**ANE reflected. This was a critical moment. Should he make a clear breast of everything now or should he wait and see how much Callahan might suspect or know. He decided upon the latter.

"For certain reasons, I don't think I ought to answer that question for the present," he replied.

"Not even if I told you that I suspect that Andrews was probably murdered last night?"

"Possibly somebody played a hoax on you, Callahan."

"They might," Callahan agreed. "It wouldn't be the first time that I went on a wild goose chase, but—" he paused, looked at Lane intently as if weighing his capacity to keep a secret, rolling his cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other.

"But I really think the guy who called me up last night knew what he was talking about. I got it that Andrews got himself in a jam with some New York mob over some ice. Maybe you didn't know Andrews as well as I do. He is one of the biggest diamond fences in the country, allegedly, of course, we haven't been able to prove it on him, and we heard whispers from time to time that he would go to great lengths sometimes to get hold of stones.

"It's been said that his turnover last year ran way over a million and a half as his end. I admit that he's been a sort of worry to the department. Too slick to be caught with the goods, and too bold to die a natural death, if you get what I mean. I tried last night to tip him off. I called him at the Golden Slipper, and after he wouldn't listen until I got through I went there.

"The two of you had left. There seems to be about three hundred thousand worth of diamonds involved in this trouble between Andrews and this New York outfit, and New York wants that mob worse'n we do, Andrews. I thought that possibly I could

make a little dicker with him and do New York authorities a favor.

"I went to his apartment twice and he wasn't there. I tried every place I could think of but couldn't get trace of him."

"Even the morgue?" Lane asked with grim humor.

"Even the morgue," Callahan admitted. "But I've got a strong hunch, Lane, that Andrews was bumped off by those New York toughs."

The telephone rang and Lane went to answer it, glad to get away from those keen, searching eyes. Somehow he felt that Callahan suspected a great deal, and that his visit was the result of more than a hunch. Callahan no doubt knew all about the developments in the murder of the patrolman.

The very fact that it had been committed within three blocks of Andrews' home would suggest tremendous possibilities to the detective. At this thought Lane shuddered. It no doubt would suggest to Callahan that Andrews was the man slain and carried off by the gunmen, and the identity of the man in dark clothes who drove off in the large sedan.

**I**F LANE had resolved to confide everything in Callahan he, perforce, changed his mind while he listened to the suave voice that came over the wire.

"If that dick asks any questions about last night, Lane, we'd advise you to keep your mouth shut. It's too bad you had to be foolish enough to try and be a party to that guy putting one over on us. But we won't hold it against you. Wise guys sometimes are dumb. We'll be seeing you soon, Lane, so remember—silence has kept many a slug from drilling a guy that was dumb. Is that clear?"

"Perfectly!" Lane said succinctly.

"Then just remember that, Lane."

"Oh, I will, old top."

When Lane returned to the room

## "DIAMONDS OF DEATH"

Callahan was absorbed in the blowing of smoke rings, at which he was a total failure.

"Never could blow one of them," he commented with a chuckle, made a few more attempts and gave it up, and went back to the subject under discussion. "Did Andrews tell you where he was going when he left you, Lane?" he queried.

"No, he didn't," Lane replied. "He just seemed to have decided that he wasn't going home, and I wasn't particularly interested to find out his destination."

That, Lane thought was as good an answer as he could give, and certainly was as near the truth as he cared to admit just then.

"Well I guess that's all then, Lane," Callahan announced. "If you should get a line on him let me know. I might drop around again."

"You do that, Callahan," Lane said almost cheerfully to have gotten out of this interview that easily. "There are times when I like company like you to drop in, you know."

And then Lane was due for a shock. He was escorting Callahan to the door, had his hand on the knob when the detective laid restraining fingers upon it.

"If they should come around, Lane," he said in a whisper, eyes twinkling merrily, "be careful. They're a tough crowd. Maybe I'll be on hand."

With a chuckle he opened the door and sped down the steps to his car.

### CHAPTER IV

#### WHERE ARE THE DIAMONDS

A FEW minutes later Lane received another telephone call.

"Since that dick seems to have a notion that he's going to get us into a crack, Lane, we'll have to ask you to come to us instead of us coming to you. But remember what I said about slugs and dumb guys."

"Aw, cut the chatter. Where do you want me to come!" Lane snapped impatiently. "I want to get this damned business over with."

"Better step on the soft pedal a little, friend," the voice admonished. "You're damn lucky I'm willing to let you get off the way I am. It ain't often I get kind hearted that way. Now listen to what I'm going to say." He gave an address in a disreputable neighborhood on the West side, and admonished: "And keep your lamps peeled on that dick. If he follows you, lead him anywhere but there. Get me!"

A faint chill sensation pricked Lane's neck. Both rage and fear battled within him, and resentment. But what was he to do?

"I got you!" he snapped.

"Time yourself so you'll be there at eight o'clock," and a metallic click told Lane that the other had hung up.

At no time during his trip to the West side did Lane see anything of Callahan, but he remembered a remark some one made at the Golden Slipper not so very long ago, that Callahan could trail a man around the world and never be nearer to him than a mile, and still not lose sight of him. No doubt that was an exaggeration, but it spoke amply for the detective's skill as a shadow.

Within two blocks of his destination Lane left his cab, loitered for several minutes in the poolroom on the corner until the clock hands stood at three minutes to eight. Then he sauntered down the street in search of the address given him.

It proved to be an old brownstone house, plentifully placarded with "For Sale" signs and election posters. As he approached it two men stepped from the doorway.

"This way, Mr. Lane," one said, and Lane recognized the suave voice of the telephone. The fellow was a rather handsome youth, well dressed, hard-

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eyed. A gunman of the worst sort, Lane classified him.

"And make it snappy!" urged the other as he stepped behind Lane and shot searching looks up and down the street.

Lane followed the former through the musty-smelling hallway to the rear of the house, into the kitchen, where a third man was waiting for them. This individual instantly ran deft hands over Lane and relieved him of his automatic.

"You'll get this back whenever the boss says so," the suave voiced one assured him. "And now we'll have to blindfold you, Mr. Lane. It isn't much of a ride, but we can't take any chances. Boss' orders, you know."

"I understand," said Lane wondering if Callahan had trailed him to this house, and if so, if these men might have arranged this rendezvous to lure the detective into a trap. In the latter event it probably would mean another cold-blooded murder, since Callahan seemed to know a great deal about these fellows, and they in turn undoubtedly were aware of this knowledge.

Blindfolded as he was, Lane was only vaguely able to judge direction when two of the gangsters marched him from the house into the open, to the backyard. A creak of rusty hinges, a turn to the right and they made their way down an alley.

"Careful now, friend," the suave voice admonished. "This bus is a little low."

**A**FTER a few minutes of riding Lane felt reasonably sure that they were out on a highway and going at a fast clip. The car evidently was a heavy one, judging from the smoothness of its riding qualities and the deep, powerful drone of its engine, a sedan.

The drive must have consumed nearly thirty minutes, when the suave voice again addressed him.

"Here we are, Mr. Lane. Be careful how you talk to the boss. He hasn't got much patience at times."

"Thanks for the tip, friend," Lane said with a rueful smile. "I'll remember it."

Up four steps, a series of four raps, code-fashion, on a wooden door, a whispered word or two, and they entered the house. The savory odor of cooking filled the air. The clatter of dishes and pans came from the left of them as they walked along the hallway. Up a flight of fifteen steps, along another hall, and into a room.

"Here he is, boss," the suave voice announced.

"He is smart then, Pete?" There was sarcasm in that oily tongued query. Sarcasm, irony, and cruelty.

"He ain't dumb," came the reply. "Tony'll attend to that dick if he should have followed this egg."

"That's fine, Pete. Take off the blind, Joe, and leave us alone."

It was several moments after the blindfold had been removed until Lane's eyes became accustomed to the strong sunlight that flooded the luxuriously furnished room through three large windows overlooking a several-acre expanse of well cared for lawn bordered on all three sides by woods that effectively obscured all view into distance.

In a sumptuous leather-covered armchair, near one of the windows, sat a swarthy complexioned, rotund little man, with beady eyes and brutal countenance. He was eyeing Lane with displeasure.

"Sit down, Lane!" he ordered, pointing to a chair opposite his. "There are several questions I want to ask you and it's for that reason that I had you brought here."

"That hardly needs explanation."

"Better soft-pedal, friend," the other half wheezed, half purred. "Fellows who get belligerent with me usually regret it."

"I heard something like that down-

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stairs. If you have any intention of asking questions, ask them and let's get this over with. I don't like your manner any more'n you do mine."

An over-manicured forefinger was thrust under Lane's nose, and those beady eyes narrowed to ominous slits.

"I'll ask my questions whenever I'm good and ready. As far as keeping you here, no matter how long that may be, it will not inconvenience me in the least, but it might you," said the other. "So be patient, Lane. Be patient. And remember that there are exactly six guns trained on you, guns in the hands of individuals who have never missed such an excellent mark."

At this bold as well as cold-blooded statement that he was prepared to have others commit murder, Lane laughed. "You," he said, "seem to have the upper hand, and realize it. But I must insist that you ask your questions and get this thing over with. I don't like company such as this."

"No doubt you don't," the other chuckled diabolically. "And to prove to you that I am accommodating, here is question number one: How did you come to drive Andrews home last night?"

"He asked me to."

"And he gave you a reason?"

"Nothing more than that he was in a jam," Lane replied grimly.

The beady eyes turned ceilingward as a faint grin crossed that repulsive face.

"And you have no idea other than that?"

**L**ANE was conscious of the menace contained in that query. It was like a double-edged blade—dangerous either way he answered it.

The other's eyes had closed completely as if he wished to rely solely upon his hearing to detect the truth or lie in Lane's reply.

"Knowing a little about the man's business, possibilities would suggest

themselves, don't you think?" Lane replied.

The beady little eyes snapped open, focussed on Lane.

"Yes," the other said with almost effusive amiability, "they would, Mr. Lane. I can't deny that. And I must admit that you are quite clever in your way. That same cleverness, I think, will influence you to cooperate with me."

"How?"

The other studied the pattern of the deep-piled rug for a moment.

"Where is your car, Mr. Lane? The one you drove last night. I know that the other is laid up for repairs, which fact I am pointing out to you in the hope that it will make it clear to you that to try to deceive me would be the height of foolishness."

"It's laid up, too," Lane said.

"And where, Lane? I want to have a look at it for the same reason that Andrews feared death last night, and for the same reason that Mabel's apartment was searched after you left and that right now two of my men are searching your bungalow."

"You murderous, sneaking hound!" Lane cried. His fighting jaw protruded, and he was on the verge of hurling himself at the little fat man, when a familiar coughing sound came from the left of him and a bullet drilled into the heavy wood frame of his chair directly under his hand. With a curse of despair he dropped back.

"One more such move, Lane," the other grated with purpling face, "and you'll be just so much feed for the fish. Where is that car?"

Lane stared at him. If he told, there was the chance that the garage man might be in a position to call the police. But what did this man want to look at his car for? He had said that he wanted to do so for the same reason that he had searched Mabel's apartment, was searching his own bungalow. Had Andrews carried some

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diamonds? The diamonds Callahan had said were worth three hundred thousand dollars? That explained why the gangsters had removed the body of Andrews, but evidently they had not found the diamonds in his possession. Well, as far as he knew, Andrews had not left the diamonds in his car, so what harm could it do to tell where his car was.

"McGovern's Garage on Peasley Street," Lane said.

**T**HERE sounded an imperative knock on the door, and the suave-voiced Pete stepped into the room, his face betraying a perturbed frame of mind.

For a moment he stood just within the door, his eyes rivetted questioningly upon Lane. Then at a gesture from his boss he advanced to his side and reported:

"That damn dick an' Toni shot it out, boss. Both of 'em croaked before the bull on the beat got to the house."

The fat man shrugged his shoulders and a cruel smile flitted across his face.

"Dead men don't talk, do they?" he said.

"I don't think so," said Pete with a voice that sounded strained. "But the rumble is that the dick wasn't dead when Donovan got there, and that it's likely he knew who is behind the Andrews disappearance, also the bump-off of that harness bull."

"Anything else?"

"Callahan knew that this egg was driving that sedan and that he kept a date with us, an' that we might have kidnaped him on suspicion that he knows what Andrews did with the ice."

"Callahan evidently was a good dick," commented the other dryly. "And since things are breaking as fast as all that, take Lane to the guest room downstairs and let's take a look at his car. There isn't very much—"

**S**OUNDS of querulous voices in the hallway clipped off his words and a deep color of anger swept across his face as he listened to the argument.

"The hell with you!" a stentorian voice that, somehow sounded familiar to Lane was saying. The next instant sounds of a lively scuffle drifted into the room, then a dull thud, as of a body falling.

The next moment the door was fairly ripped open and an ashen-faced man of burly physique rushed into the room. Lane could not repress the gasp of astonishment that came to his lips at sight of one of Lake City's former Councilmen, whose resignation was the result of sweeping investigations made into corrupt alliances between the police department, influential politicians and the underworld. In his hand he held a formidable automatic, silencer-equipped, and murder was in his eyes.

"What's the idea o' your pryin' to keep me out of my rooms, McCoy?" he demanded, brandishing his weapon threateningly.

For an instant McCoy's face tensed, then went white with rage. With a snarl he leaped out of his chair, raised his left hand to his breast.

Lane thought he was going for a gun, but the next instant realized that the motion had been a signal to the hidden gunmen. The ex-chief of police knew what that gesture meant.

With a vicious curse he levelled his gun at the gangster chief and pulled the trigger. But he was a fraction of a second too late. Three little coughing sounds sounded through the room, followed by as many dull PLOPS as the bullets buried themselves in human flesh. A gurgling grunt, another convulsive jerk of the trigger finger that sent the second bullet into the ceiling, and the man sagged at the knees, and collapsed in a shapeless heap on the carpet.

With a curse McCoy tore off his coat



## "DIAMONDS OF DEATH"

and pulled up his shirt sleeve and began sucking the blood where the first bullet had plowed across the skin of his forearm.

Then realizing that Lane was still in the room and had been a witness to the shooting, he snapped an order:

"Take him into the basement until we get a look at his car. If I find what we're after I'll call. You know what to do with him."

Pete nodded, jerked his head ordering Lane to precede him, and they left the room.

Down the short hall they went to the rear stairs, where another gangster, with Tommygun across his arm joined them and changed place with Pete.

A few moments and Lane stared at the grimy concrete block wall of a large basement room, furnished with a cheap kitchen table, a chair and an army cot. There was no window, and the door through which he had entered was of heavy steel construction and secured by a lock that he could not break down with anything less than a battering ram.

"If I find what we're after, I'll call. You know what to do with him."

Lane muttered savagely. "The murdering beast! He certainly lives up to his reputation as New York's Butcher."

From above came sounds of men rushing downstairs. A door slammed shut. Then an indistinct sound as of a car speeding away from the house, followed by deep silence; a silence that Lane likened to the ominous silence of the death house, while the prisoner awaited execution.

"But," he communed grimly to himself, "one isn't dead until dead, and death sometimes gets cheated. Pete is still in the house, waiting for that call. Things haven't gone so well with McCoy. Maybe Pete would listen to a little proposition."

### CHAPTER V

#### HOLE OF DEATH

**A**FTER what had seemed hours to Lane, but what in reality was less than an hour, footsteps approached the steel door. A moment later a key grated in the lock.

Weaponless as he was, Lane seized upon the opportunity to make an attempt to get out of this place or be killed while trying.

Silent as a cat he slipped across the stone floor, flattened himself against the wall, arm drawn back to strike the moment whoever it might be opened the door and stepped through the opening.

But before the door opened he discovered the futility of his attempt.

"Step up in front of the door where I can see you, Lane," Pete ordered. "That trick you're trying to pull won't work."

A man will cling to hope as long as there is life. To be thus defeated by a tiny little hole in the steel door, through which Pete was watching the interior of the room, was disappointing indeed, but at that it did not mean the end of everything. As Lane judged by Pete's voice he had not come down in his capacity as executioner, but probably merely to see that everything was in order.

A little heart to heart talk, made more impressive by the little roll Lane had on his person, and a promise of more if released, plus the promise of a start to beat the police, might do the trick.

"All right, Pete," Lane said, affecting an amused laugh, "I guess you're smarter than I thought you were," and stepped out in front of the door.

A moment, and it opened, and Pete, automatic in hand, entered, and closed the door behind him.

"Sit in that chair, Lane!" he ordered. "I want to talk to you a minute. And no funny business or I'll let you have it."

## SPEAKEASY STORIES

Pete's voice had lost its suavity and sounded chill. His eyes, too, betrayed desperation. The gun pointed unwaveringly at Lane, and to try to disobey that order would be folly. So he obeyed.

Pete stood a good six feet away from him.

"Lane," he went on in that same frigid tone, "you're in a tight jam, an' if I were you I'd tell what I done with what Andrews gave you last night. It might let you get off with a whole skin."

"But supposing I don't even know what you're talking about," Lane said smilingly.

"You know all right. An' I think you know where the stuff is. Three hundred grand worth of ice could save an egg like you from a sudden fade-out."

There was nothing in Pete's tone to betray whether he was trying to make an overture to Lane with a view to double-crossing McCoy or whether he was sincere in his suggestion that if Lane did know the whereabouts of the missing diamonds, the revelation of their whereabouts might be the means of saving his life. Lane decided to grope his way.

"Even if I knew where the diamonds are, I wouldn't have any assurance that I would be allowed to leave this place after telling about it," he said.

**F**OR an instant a ghost of a smile illumined the gangster's face. The first sign of encouragement to Lane.

"Oh, I don't know, Lane," he said in cautiously lowered tone. "I would go a hell of a long ways to get my hands on that much ice."

"Even to giving me a chance to get away from this place?" Lane seized the point eagerly.

Again that ghost of a smile flitted across Pete's face, and an eager light gleamed in his eyes.

"You're too smart an egg to be

bumped off," he admitted dryly. "You ain't done anybody any harm but yourself, an' I doubt whether you would do a guy any harm that gave you a break."

"I wouldn't if I could help it. Neither would I try to put one over on a guy who would try to give me a chance for my life, Pete. For that reason, I tell you that I don't have any more idea where the diamonds are than you or McCoy have.

"I didn't know the fuss was about diamonds until Callahan dropped a remark to that effect and until McCoy made the crack. The best I could do, put you in the way of a few dollars, and give you a start before I went to the cops. I can't very well get out of doing that, with Callahan leaving that note."

With deliberation Lane reached in his hip pocket, brought forth his wallet, and laid it on the table.

"There's around four 'centuries in that, Pete. It isn't much, but in a pinch it might get you a long ways off before the bulls get around."

"It might," said Pete, with the same ghost of a smile, but a friendlier light had crept into his eyes. For a little time they were focussed on the wallet. Then he stepped forward, laid his pistol on the table, extracted the bills, counted them, and slipped them into his pocket. "I'll have a look around upstairs and see if—"

"You might better stay right where you are, Pete, and keep your hands off that rod. You, Lane, heist yours!"

It was McCoy's wheezing, purring voice. He was standing in the door, and behind him were two gunmen, one of whom Lane recognized as Tate.

How long McCoy had been standing in the door Lane could not tell, but even if he had been there only long enough to overhear Pete's last remark, and had seen him pocket the money, it would mean but one thing for Pete—Death! Even to try to lie out of it would do the gangster no good.

## "DIAMONDS OF DEATH"

A sickening nausea gripped the pit of Lane's stomach as he looked at those leering faces, and into the mouths of those two automatics that were trained upon him and Pete. A slight gesture from McCoy, a sudden move from Pete and those two guns would belch flame and steel.

"And just what did you intend doing after you had gone upstairs and looked around, my friend?" McCoy asked, a smile on his tight lips, his face impassive. "Maybe you have an explanation."

Pete stood there for a moment, his face a ghastly gray, and stared at the floor.

"All the explanations I could give you wouldn't do any good, McCoy. I know you too well for that. So since it's all the same to me, let 'em loose an' get it over with. I've been sick an' tired o' this damn business for a long time, anyway."

"Oh, I see!" McCoy said languidly, as he stepped into the room, the two gunmen following like two sinister shadows, step for step. "And because you are sick and tired of this game you thought that possibly you could double-cross me. I believe I remember others who tried that, too, and you for one ought to know what happened to them. Only I wonder if we couldn't do this thing in a more novel way. Let's say—"

"Oh, McCoy! McCOY! THE BULLS!"

McCOY, startled by that terror-filled voice that reverberated through the house, made an abrupt movement. He partly turned to shout something in reply, and in so doing brushed against Tate until the gangster's gun was pointed away from Pete.

Quick as a flash of lightning Pete's right hand dropped, leaped out and struck up the automatic. Almost in the same movement its muzzle spewed a lurid spurt of flame and two

steel slugs thudded into human flesh.

With a piercing yell of surprise and pain Tate reeled and fell.

McCoy gave a bull-like roar as he whirled and snatched at a gun in a shoulder holster.

But four more shots had sped across the room, passing each other on wings of death. Pete, with no more than a deep-throated grunt, swayed for an instant, then pitched forward, dead. The sickening thud of his head striking the concrete floor blended with the death-moan that came from the other gunman as Pete's bullets tore into his breast. An instant and he, too, collapsed.

With the first sign of movement on Pete's part Lane, too, seized his opportunity to make at least one last bid for life. Weaponless as he was, he knew that to rush at McCoy would be foolhardy. But instinct will provide a man with weapons as effective, if not as deadly as a gun.

Without a sound, Lane leaped out of his chair, whirled and brought the chair up over his head in a wide arc.

A loud, explosive sound, followed by stygian darkness and the tinkling sound of splintered glass falling to the stony floor, as the chair demolished the only light in the room. With the same movement Lane leaped around the table.

Three times McCoy's gun boomed its vicious song of death and three bullets splashed against the stone wall but a few feet from the spot where Lane had been an instant before.

Again McCoy's gun boomed, its lurid tongue of fire leaping almost straight for Lane. But the chair, hurled with the strength and precision of desperation, intercepted and deflected the bullet as it hurled through the air. The fifth bark of McCoy's gun mingled with the crash and bumping of the chair as it found its mark, ripping the flaming pistol from its victim's fingers, inflicting a crunching, stunning blow to the head.

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From above came the crack of scattered shots as the gangsters met the charge of bluecoats and detectives that numbered more than a score. Trapped, as they were, with the house surrounded on all sides, death from a police bullet was considered preferable to death in the electric chair.

But if Lane had expected that bone-crushing impact of the chair to clear his passage from the room he was disappointed. By the time he had darted around the table and in the direction of that dimly outlined doorway, McCoy had recovered sufficiently to block his path.

**R**EALIZING that if he and Lane fell into the hands of police alive, Lane was in possession of enough knowledge of the murder of Andrews and the patrolman to send him to the chair, McCoy was determined to either die trying or silence Lane forever.

Powerful as it was, that first blow that caught Lane squarely in the chest had little effect. Stepping back out of the way of McCoy's follow-up blow, Lane came in with two tremendous blows to the head that brought angry grunts and inflicted brutal punishment.

Silently Lane fought in that inky blackness, his blows directed by McCoy's labored breathing as he danced around vainly trying to get in a telling blow.

Then Lane tripped over the inert figure of Tate and went sprawling. McCoy, with a snarl of rage, seized his opportunity to make a desperate bid for possession of his gun, and instinct guided his groping hand.

Lane, expecting his adversary to follow up his advantage, but failing to have that beefy body come crashing after him, sensed the other's purpose and with a twist of his body rolled out of the way of those lurid flashes of fire that barely missed his cheek and sent bullets ricocheting with that weird, enervating whine.

Then with all the strength he could muster he kicked at that streak of flame. He felt the tug of the bullet as it ripped a slice out of his rubber heel and spent itself harmlessly against the far wall. With a sickening thud his foot caught McCoy in the groin.

A bull-like roar of pain, the clatter of the gun striking stone, a hoarse moan, as McCoy clawed at empty air and fought against that numbing red fog that precedes oblivion. Then the crash of his body, and silence, save for the labored breathing.

With but one thought in mind—to escape death if possible—Lane rose and leaped after his fallen foe. Two vicious jabs just behind the ear would prevent any possibility of McCoy's returning to consciousness for some time.

For one glorious moment Lane was the victor. McCoy probably would not come to for a half hour, if Lane was any judge of the symptoms of the completeness of a knockout. Now a gun, and upstairs!

But even as he groped for the gun one of the two gangsters had dropped, a light flashed on in the hallway outside, and out of the corner of his eye Lane saw the terror-distorted face of one of the gangsters who had been with Pete the night before.

A blinding flash, a deafening explosion and Lane felt himself spun partly around, as a sharp pain shot from his left elbow to his shoulder. A second flash, but instinctively Lane had leaped aside, and the bullet fanned past his cheek.

The next instant he had swung around and pressed the trigger of his own gun. His shot was not a matter of expert marksmanship, but luck was with Lane. The bullet struck the gangster squarely, sent him backward against the wall, where he slid down into a grotesque heap.

"What the hell's goin' on down there?" a strained voice demanded from the head of the stairs.

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"Come on down an' find out!" Lane shouted back, his voice thick and hoarse from the intense nervous strain of the last few hours.

At the same time he leaped out into the hall to intercept the newcomer.

The sharp, splitting crack of the gangster's gun blended with the spiteful bark of Lane's heavier caliber. Both bullets missed their mark, and the next squeeze on the trigger on the part of the gangster brought an insane curse of rage. The gun was empty. But Lane's finger had already pressed the trigger and his bullet found its mark.

The gangster uttered one sobbing curse, then crumpled and bumped down the stairs.

### CHAPTER VI

#### THE REWARD

**N**OT until then was Lane aware of the fact that everything had gone still upstairs, that no further shots were coming from outside. The intense oppressiveness of the silence filled him with a fierce joy. These last two gangsters must have been all that had remained of McCoy's men upstairs, coming down probably to tell their boss of the disaster that had overtaken him and them.

Even as Lane raced up the stairs a terrific blow shattered a door, and a moment later a gruff voice thundered a demand:

"If there's anybody in here alive, stick 'em up before you come in sight, or we'll pulverize you!"

Unwittingly Lane darted around the corner upstairs into the hall, and two thunderous explosions and the hot breeze of speeding steel rushing uncomfortably close to him, made him stop in his track, a feeble shout of warning issuing from his throat:

"It's Lane, Donovan! Save your lead!"

"You damned fool!" Donovan

roared back in disgust. "Can't you understand English?"

"Sure I can, but I didn't think you were blind," Lane muttered.

"I ain't," Donovan broke into a grim chuckle as he came toward Lane. "But those slugs were. Damn good thing for you I didn't expect you comin' around that corner like a shot outa hell." He had brought up before Lane, and laid a friendly hand on the young man's shoulder. His keen eyes had observed the crimson trickle that coursed down the back of Lane's hand. "Musta had a scrap."

"Several," Lane laughed grimly. "An' they weren't paper. I had to plug two of 'em. Three of 'em finished each other, McCoy is in the basement."

"Dead, too?"

"Knocked out."

"Take a look around, and some of you go down in the basement," Donovan ordered his men. "I'll get Lane's story an' see he gets that arm fixed. Come on, youngster," he said to Lane. "This ain't no place for you now."

As they drove to the nearest doctor, Lane recited his experiences from the time he and Andrews left the Golden Slipper, and then ventured to inquire how Donovan had gotten the tip where McCoy was holed up.

Donnovan's voice was strangely tender when he replied:

"Callahan's been getting pretty close to McCoy, an' got a tip just before he went out to see you, where he might be. He figured that telephone call you got was from them, and instead of coming straight out here thought it might be better to trail you, an' see that they didn't bump you off. But he got to the house a little too late, and he and that gorilla they had left there shot it out. Callahan gave us the address before he cashed in, also telling us where your car is.

"I suppose they nailed some of McCoy's guns at that garage, an' it's my guess that McCoy got wind of our

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being in the neighborhood an' high-balled back out here to take it on the lam, only to run into a lot more trouble'n he figured a guy like you could stir up."



**S**OMEHOW Lane felt no elation at this unvarnished compliment from the man who was considered one of the toughest on the force, and a man who accepted gun-play as matter of fact. Lane felt only conscious of a sickening nausea at the thought that he had killed two men. Of course, he had acted in self-defense, but human life is human life, and as he looked at it, the taking of it is nothing to be proud of or deserve praise.

"And," he asked, "did you find the diamonds?"

"Not unless they're in your car," Donovan grunted. "We frisked Andrews' joint last night with a fine tooth comb and didn't find a trace of them. We know he brought them from New York yesterday after he got them from the Wop that double-crossed McCoy. McCoy missed Andrews in New York an' came here by plane. Slater furnished the guns to go after Andrews. Him an' McCoy have been working together for some time. Andrews went direct to the Golden Slipper from the station."

"Maybe he checked his baggage."

"If he did, nobody saw him, an' those guys have a damn good memory an' most of 'em know Andrews."

"Maybe somebody else checked them for him."

"Then where's the check? But don't think for a minute that Andrews would trust somebody else with three hundred grand worth of ice. We'll just have to wait till they turn up."

This angle of the mystery was

solved three weeks later, accidentally.

Lane, being of an economic nature (most authors have to be) and being an adept in the art of caring for his own car, was making some adjustments on the valves. To do this properly, he had bought a tiny instrument, no more than three finely tempered blades of steel ground to the ten thousandth part of an inch in thickness, a feeler-gauge. This instrument he kept in a small tool-roll, which reposed in the right-hand front pocket.

In removing this roll it came undone and the elusive gauge slipped into a crack between the cover material and the steel framing, out of sight as well as reach. To retrieve it Lane had to remove part of the door covering and when he extracted the gauge his fingers encountered another object. A small piece of stiff cardboard, one edge of which was corrugated.

One look at it and Lane's eyes went wide with astonishment and understanding. Here was the solution to the missing diamonds. It was a baggage-slip issued at the Union Station at Cleveland on the day Andrews traveled to Lake City from New York.

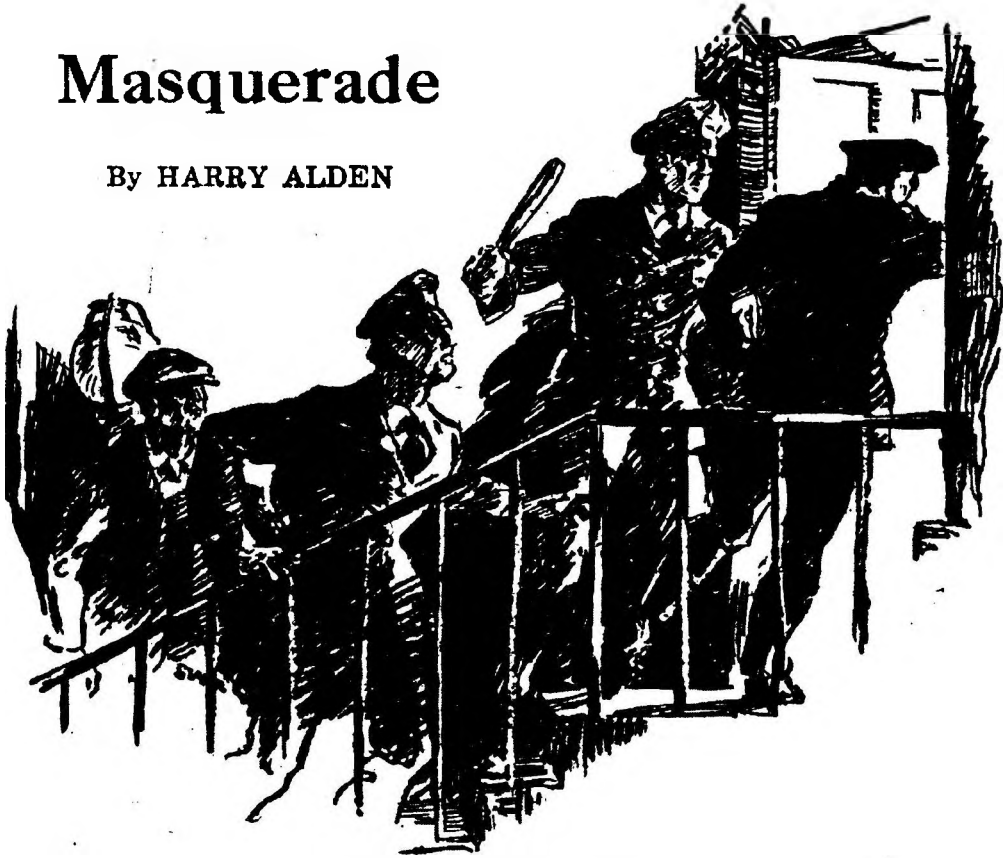
Six hours later, in the office of Inspector of Detectives Morris at Headquarters, Lane was informed that he was entitled to a reward of ten thousand dollars that had been offered by an insurance company for the recovery of the missing diamonds. The entire lot having been recovered in a small box Andrews had checked in Cleveland while en route.

"An' I guess you earned it, my boy," the Inspector commented genially. "And any time the writing business hits a snag, maybe you could find a job with the department. I think you'd do."

"I might at that, Inspector," Lane said, glowing with his good fortune, for after all, ten thousand dollars is a sizable sum even in these days of highly inflated values, and walked out of the office.

# Masquerade

By HARRY ALDEN



*It took a darn clever red-head to keep the dicks guessin'—but as the saying goes, you can fool some of the people some of the time——*

**M**IDNIGHT. The crack of a pistol. Sergeant Jack Griffith looked down the Avenue as he stood on the steps of the Station House.

A roadster racing uptown toward him. Behind it raced a taxi with a cop swinging from its side. The cop's pistol cracked again. Griffith knew the roadster was trying to escape from the law.

He jumped for the police car parked in front of the station with patrolman Johnson at the wheel. Johnson stepped on the gas and the car jumped forward as the roadster dashed alongside. They caught a glimpse of two young fellows within, one, clean shaven, dressed in gray;

the other, with a small cropped moustache, dressed in brown.

"Give that skunk Griffith, the gat, Pete," muttered the one in gray.

Pete, in brown, leaned across and fired out the window but the shot was wild.

A side street close by. The roadster dashed half way across it, then unexpectedly dived to the right and into it, jerking around in that direction so sharply it jumped up on the far curb. Metal jangled. It righted and sped east through the cross street. The move was so reckless the police car could not follow, but shot past the corner and had to be checked with squealing brake and backed to the intersection to take up the chase. This de-

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lay enabled the roadster to get a lead, and also permitted the pursuing taxi to swing to the east after it and take second place.

Another dizzy turn uptown at Second Avenue. The three cars were now strung out in a row, the police car last, but nosing up on the taxi.

A slithering angle to the west. The long block between Second and Third.

"What's the dope?" asked Griffith as the cars lurched.

"Don't know exactly," shouted the cop on the taxi. "Those mugs used a gat at the foot of the elevated stairs at Park Place and tried a getaway. Didn't have time to find out whether they drilled anybody. I jumped this damned rattletrap and took after 'em."

"Hay, you bum cop, this is a swell bus," protested the commandeered chauffeur, his eyes alight with the unholy joy of breaking the speed law with a patrolman aboard and a police sergeant racing alongside. "Look out, they're going north again," warned Griffith, as the roadster jerked to the right at Third Avenue.

**T**HE two pursuing cars were then side by side racing toward the corner, the police car to the left of the other. There would be crash and disaster if they attempted to turn north in that position. Johnson jammed on the brakes enough to let the taxi forge ahead, then released it and the two cars swung around the corner one behind the other with not a foot between them.

On Third Avenue, a hundred feet or so north and at the right curb, the roadster was rolling to a stop with the power off. The two men were running up a stoop. They disappeared into a recessed doorway before the cops could fire. The door slammed shut after them. The cops were a minute too late.

When they jumped up the stoop, the bolt on the inside had already been

shot home. Johnson flung his weight against the door. It was solid and held. Campbell added his athletic bulk. The door still held. Another minute lost.

The clamor had awakened the block and tousled heads were at all the windows. A window was flung up on the ground floor of the house.

"Open this door," ordered Griffith. Another minute or two dragged by as they waited and in those minutes Griffith gave his orders.

"Officer, when we're in, you scoot through to the back and cut off their getaway there. Pick up your heels in doing it. Johnson, you take the roof; take it on the jump. I'll go through the inside."

It was a neighborhood of racketeers and gangsters so it would be "going through the inside" that a gat might poke out of a doorway and plug a hole. Therefore Griffith assigned this part of the work to himself.

"Rap for help," he commanded as they waited for the door to open.

The patrolman pounded on the stone stoop with his club. Answering raps came from north and south. Other cops were coming on the run from their posts.

There was the thumping of bare feet along the hall inside. The bolts shot back. The three cops surged through the door, bowling over the one who opened it, and they left him sprawling on the floor in his nightg, with bare legs kicking.

Inside the house bedlam. Wailing women, bawling kids, men muttering and vengeful, for their lives were not an open book. The room doors were filled.

Griffith walked up the stairs slowly, pistol in hand, eyes alert, paying no attention to the open doors filled with men, women and kids, for those who showed themselves openly were palpably innocent. On the third floor back was a closed door. He tried the knob. Locked. Without further an-



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nouncement he flung himself against it, and the lock gave way. He threw the ray of a flash into the dark room. His pistol jerked up and covered—an angry red-headed girl.

Her dress, apparently just taken off, was on the bed. "What do you mean, you bum, busting into a lady's room when she's undressing?" That was her greeting to a police sergeant.

Griffith heard the pounding of boots coming up the stairs and knew the cops from the other posts had arrived.

"Beg pardon, Miss, I thought you might have company I'm looking for," he grinned as he crossed the room and snapped on the light.

"What do you think I am, you big slob," she raged. "I'm decent. If you're looking for them that ain't, get out of here."

A couple of cops appeared in the doorway. They appreciated the girl, who was easy to look at, especially as she was.

"Have some men go through the rest of the house," Griffith directed the cops. "We want to arrest two youngsters for speeding, that's all. They've got gats, so be careful. Round up everybody who looks as though he could drive a car over fifty. One of you go down to the front door and stay there. Nobody to go out. Understand? The other one go up on the roof and relieve patrolman Johnson. Tell him to phone for the patrol and a squad, and find out if any dope has come in the station about this racket. Then he's to come here. I'm going to have a chat with the little lady."

**I**T WAS in the early winter. Cold. Griffith had observed that the red-headed girl had apparently taken off her dress with the lower sash of the window wide open and this did not seem quite the natural thing to do.

She may have seen his glance in that direction for she closed the sash, and as she did so, he saw her head go

outside a little and she looked right and left and down.

"Better put on your dress, Miss," he suggested.

"So you're going to make a social call, are you?" She slipped on the dress, clothing herself a little more but not much. "Why pick on me? Can't a girl go to bed in her own room without you fly cops giving her the once over? If you want to see 'em half naked, spend three dollars and go to the Scandals instead of trying to get a free show."

She was mad all over. Her red hair sizzled. Griffith studied her. Hair fiery, curled crisply; temper fiery, blazed easily; eyes blue, unafraid—totally unafraid. She had freckles, a batch of them, and no make-up—positively no make-up on cheeks, lips or nose. A smudge of dirt on her upper lip which looked as though it had been there for a while. She WAS easy to look at; decidedly. She stood with her back to the window and glared at him.

"Rather late for a young lady to be going to bed, ain't it, Miss?" he inquired courteously.

"What's that to you; you ain't my guardian," snapped the girl.

"More's the pity." Griffith said it cheerfully. "Anything I can do for you?"

"Yes. Get out of my room."

"What's your business?"

"None of yours," she retorted.

He grinned. "I'd rather have you tell me here than at the station house."

The girl called him an unprintable name but accepted the inevitable. "Well, if you want to know, suppose I've got to tell you, but get this straight—you can't date me up, if that's what you're after. I'm night hostess at the cafe d'Esty."

"In the Bronx. Black and tan," announced Griffith, scowling, for he hated to think the young girl had sunk to that level.

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Throughout the house a tumult now. The patrol wagon had come and the cops were making a thorough search from room to room, not only in that particular building but in the adjacent ones, in case the two mugs might have swung across a fire escape during the minutes before the cop reached the back yard.

Patrolman Johnson came into the room and handed the sergeant a note. It read: "Park Place Elevated ticket office held up and robbed. Patrolman John Casey shot at foot of stairs. Dead. From description of employee at change window, both murderers, young; short; both dark hair; one slim with small black or dark mustache, dressed in brown suit and brown, soft hat; one stocky, smooth-shaved, dressed in gray, with gray, soft hat. No identification other than above."

Griffith's head shook sadly as he read. "That's too bad. I knew Casey."

"Say, what's the lowdown?" asked the girl.

"Just a little rumpus downtown," he responded. "Two youngsters got gay with a gat and plugged one of our men." He looked at her keenly. "The worst of it is, he's got a wife and two small kids. Pretty tough on them."



**T**HE GIRL cringed away and for an instant the hard eyes softened; then she shrugged indifferently. "What's that got to do with me?"

"The killers came in this house," he informed her. "I thought perhaps they might have made their getaway through your room."

"How could they have done that?" she answered. "You know my door was locked and I was half undressed when you busted in. They couldn't have got in here."

"Not without your knowing it."

Again she flamed. "Say— Do you think I'm a cage for a gang of murderers?"

"That's just what I'm trying to find out," he answered serenely. "You won't have any objection to our examining your closet?"

She sneered. "Go as far as you like. Look in the bureau drawers—in my handbag. Perhaps you'll find 'em."

Griffith did go through the bureau, for it might contain a gat, but there was nothing incriminating in the drawers; only the usual—girl's frills. Johnson had looked into the closet, which was the only real place of concealment, but as Griffith expected from the red-head's willingness to have it examined, nothing was discovered.

After looking through the bureau, he went casually to the window and glanced through the glass. "Our man's down in the back yard," he said in explanation of doing so. "They couldn't have gone over the back fence." Then he sauntered to the table and picked up her handbag lying there. He grinned at the girl. "While the cop's seeing whether they crawled through a rat hole in your closet, I'll look in your bag as you told me to, and see if they're hiding there."

The girl's eyes were fixed on him and she did not smile at the joke.

As he swung the bag around and fumbled with it, the catch came open, but he glanced down quickly and closed it at once. Then he stooped and looked under the bed.

At this she jeered. "My Gawd, I

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thought only old maids hoped to find a man under the bed."

He laughed; had evidently lost serious interest in the situation. "Mind telling me your name?"

"Marie Rehan. My father was French."

"Like hell he was. You didn't get those blue eyes and freckles from any place but Ireland—Mamie Regan."

"You've got my nationality O.K.," she admitted.

When the search was completed and the sergeant came out of the house, the police were grouped around the door awaiting orders.

"Get this mob back into their houses and indoors," he commanded, and as the curious were being shooed away, he took a few cops aside and gave them secret instructions. Then to the other cops he shouted so everyone listening could hear, "Show's all over, boys. Take the patrol back," and, turning to Johnson, he spoke loudly, "Come on, Tom. Nothing more doing here tonight; we'll drive down to the station."

Arrived there, a plainclothes man was called into the private office. A young fellow who looked like an oily-haired Wop and would not arouse the suspicion of a "hostess" if she happened to notice him hanging around. She would think he was simply a sheik trying to date her up. He was wised up as to Mamie Regan's appearance; told to go up to her house without disclosing his presence there. "Don't lose sight of her if she comes out of that house tonight, or you'll lose your job," was the terse command.

**T**HEN Sergeant Griffith was alone with Johnson. "As soon as the d'Esty opens in the morning, have someone get in touch there and find out what time she left her job tonight. She may be playing straight, for she naturally would have left there after midnight and would have reached her

room about the time we broke in, so there's nothing really suspicious in our finding her undressing.

"There are two things that ain't so good for little Mamie. The first is—a freckled-faced flapper doesn't act as hostess at a night club without daubing paint and powder over the freckles, and Mamie didn't have any make-up on, and she couldn't have washed it off in her room before we got there, or the dirt on her lip would have come off in the wash.

"You noticed that smudge, didn't you, Tom? The second thing is—a dame doesn't usually undress and stand around half naked in a COLD room at one or two o'clock in the morning WITH THE WINDOW OPEN. As I dope it out, one of those murderers was her boy-friend, and he took his pal to her room and the two went out her window and got into the next house before we broke in.

"I looked out, making believe I was seeing if our man was in the yard, and it would have been a cinch for two active young rats to swing over to the next fire escape. Now as to Mamie herself. I don't want her questioned. If one of the killers IS her boy-friend and she thinks she ain't suspected of being in the know, she may try to communicate with him—and then—"

His fists clenched. "By God, I'll send Casey's murderers to the chair if it's the last thing I do." He was silent and sad-faced a moment. "Tell the detectives to trail Mamie to see whether she gets change for bills when she rides in the subway, or whether she has plenty of nickels and small change. She didn't have any in her pocketbook tonight when I opened it—accidentally—to see; but they may lead her up with 'em later so she can pass off the haul."

The campaign was planned.

Mamie had seen the patrol go away loaded with cops after the guards around the building had all been

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withdrawn. "The dirty bum," she muttered. She had seen Griffith drive away. "The louse," was her designation. But she had not seen other cops sneak back again under Griffith's orders, and surround the house as before, front, back and the roof.

She crept noiselessly up the ladder to the scuttle, pushed it up, and keeping her head concealed in shadow so she would not be identified if anybody were there, looked across the roofs. Nobody in sight. It was a dark night, and keeping in the black shadows of chimneys and dividing walls, she sneaked across the roofs to the fourth house above; opened the scuttle there and went partially down the ladder within, and closed the scuttle after her.

She was still on the ladder, slipping the hooks through the eyes to keep the scuttle down, when the tin roof snapped over her head. It snapped again. She heard fingers rubbing against the scuttle on the outside, trying to open it.

That told her a lot. The cops had not ALL been withdrawn as she supposed; some had been left to watch. Griffith had fooled her. One of the dicks had seen her come down the scuttle. She was being trailed. She was cold. Shivered. It would be the chair for her boy-friend, Bill Mahoney, if he were caught.

Stealthy as a cat she was in his room. It was unlighted, but from the glow through the window, she could see he was in bed undressed, to avoid suspicion if that house were searched.

"Billie; oh, Billie, I've made a mistake; a bad one," she whispered. "That stinker Griffith made me think he'd taken the bulls away, but he must have left one on the roof and he saw me come in here. You've got to sneak quick—damned quick. The gate in the back fence; get out through the house in the next street. They ain't watching there, I guess. Make it on the jump, Billie; hurry."

He was up and, jerking on a different suit, had already given the gray one and the gray hat to a pal in the house who would put them out of the way so they could not be traced back to him.

As he dressed she gave him the low-down as to what had happened in her room.

His eyes narrowed to slits. "How about Pete?"

"To hell with Pete," she flung back. "He can take care of himself."

HE PUT on a cap in place of the gray hat. "Listen, I'll be at Number 3 if you want me—One-Eye Sullivan's joint. He'll hide me in the fort and give me grub. He's a blood sucker, but I've got the coin to pay him."

He sifted as a ghost down the stairs. From the black window she saw his dim shadow drift across the yard and through the loose board arranged for getaways. From the yard, he would go through another house and come out on another street, where he could walk off unobserved.

He was gone. She turned on the light in the room. Wanted it light there so she could see what was going to happen. Something would happen. That lousy dick who had tried to get the scuttle open, he'd do something and do it quick.

Damn it, she was trapped in that rotten room like a rat in a hole, and she'd have to stay there and take what was coming to her. They'd find out now Bill Mahoney was her boy-friend for they'd find her in his room. Well, what of it? That didn't prove he'd plugged a guy in Park Place two hours before.

She flopped down on Bill's bed.

The dick who had tried to get the scuttle open, had skulked back to the roof of the house he was guarding, crawled to the front cornice and with the shielded ray of his flash signaled. The Wop dick came from the shadow

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of the doorway opposite, and still keeping in the shadow, gave the answering flash. From the roof, the dick flashed the information that Mamie Regan was in the fourth house up the street.

From the corner box, the Wop dick phoned the station.

Sergeant Griffith was still there. In a few minutes the second house was noiselessly surrounded.

The janitor was routed out of bed, and in the basement, the sergeant, the Wop dick and a patrolman got information. **THEY HAD THE MEN.** A hall bedroom on the fourth floor back was the rendezvous. It was rented and occupied by a young bootlegger, Bill Mahoney; short, stocky, clean-shaven, dark hair. He had worn a gray suit and a gray, soft hat that day.

The other was his cousin, Pete, who lived in Philadelphia and visited him at times. He was about the same height, but slimmer and with a small black mustache. He had called on Bill the evening before and had worn a brown suit and brown, soft hat. The janitor had seen the two go out about ten-thirty and, so far as he knew they had not come back.

Sergeant Griffith was elated. "The two bums came back over the roof so you didn't see them," he informed the janitor. "They're up in Bill's room now, and a red-headed girl is there wising 'em up as to what happened in her house after they made their getaway from there. We'll bag 'em both."

Silently the sergeant, the Wop dick and the cop crept up the flights of stairs, pistols drawn and ready.

When they reached the fourth floor, the cop was sent on up to the roof with instructions to shoot down at anyone attempting to make a getaway by the fire escape.

Griffith gave him time to get in position; then listened at the door of the room. He could hear a movement

within, and inserted a pass key noiselessly. Luckily the other key was not in the lock on the inside. He turned the key. A click. He pushed the door open but kept himself concealed, for two murderers with gats were probably inside. The light was burning. No sound came from within. He peered cautiously through the crack at the hinge of the door.

On the bed was Mamie Regan. She lay with body half raised, staring wide-eyed at the open door.

**G**RIFFITH swore. The little red-head had beaten them to it again; had given the tip in time for Bill and Pete to make another getaway. She was always just one jump ahead of the cops.

He motioned for the Wop dick to keep concealed, for if seen by Mamie, his usefulness as her trailer would be at an end.

Then he stepped through the open doorway.

Mamie gasped; then smiled. Her former anger toward him seemed to have vanished. "Please to meet you again, sarge, but nothing doing tonight. I'm waiting for my boy-friend, Bill Mahoney, to come home. He's late."

Then Griffith gasped. The little snip admitted it—Bill Mahoney was her boy-friend. That frank admission raised a doubt in his mind as to whether Bill had really been one of the Park Place murderers.

"What do you want to see Bill Mahoney for?" he blurted out. A fool question under the circumstances. He realized that as soon as he asked it.

The girl sat up on the edge of the bed and looked at him brazenly. Her lips curled. "What does a girl usually want to see her boy-friend for at this time of night?"

Absolutely devoid of morality. That was apparent. The black and tan joint; her boy-friend's room at two o'clock in the morning. She was only

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a slip of a girl though, and Griffith's face grew hot because he had forced her to the confession.

She got up and came toward him. Her voice had lost its hardness; the blue eyes had softened. "You've got the idea in your nut, sarge, that Bill and his cousin Pete from Philly did that killing downtown, ain't you?" she asked.

"I didn't know there was such a kid as Bill Mahoney until you just told me," he lied in answer.

"Well, you know it now, and if you think he deliberately murdered that cop, I don't—and I know Bill intimately." There was a short, hard laugh. Her eyes became defiant. "You've caught me in his room, and I'll tell you frankly, it ain't the first time I've been here and it ain't going to be the last, for I'm dead stuck on Bill and he thinks I'm the swellest kid in town. I suppose you're going to take me to the station house and lock me up." The blue eyes flashed determination. "But you won't get anything out of me if you break me to pieces."

Griffith did some quick thinking. The girl would be a clam. They couldn't break her. She wouldn't give Bill away then or at any other time. No use trying to make her.

"Get back to your own home," he ordered curtly, and then escorted her there.

She went to her room, flopped into bed and slept like a log, not hearing anything that happened in her house until the alarm clock jangled in the early afternoon.

When she opened her door and went down the stairs she saw a strange man in the next room. A young, white-livered sap, with horn-rimmed glasses. She wanted to find out about that and pumped the janitor.

The sap was a printer on the night shift of the World, who had seen the vacancy sign in the front window as

he was coming home from work that morning. The janitor was outside sweeping the sidewalk and the printer had enquired about a room.

"What time was it?" asked Mamie.

"Oh, I don't know. About half past eight or nine," said the janitor casually.

"Shoot," said Mamie, her eyes becoming shrewd.



**H**E wanted a room in the back of the house where he would not be disturbed by street noises, as he worked all night and had to sleep all morning to make up. He didn't earn much so he had to take a small room. The one next to Mamie's suited him. He was yawning and half dead for want of sleep then, for he had been working all night, and proposed taking the room at once and going to bed.

In the afternoon when he woke up, he would go uptown and get his duds from his room there, which was too far away from his work. He had the dough to pay a week's rent in advance, so the proposal had been satisfactory to the janitor.

It sounded all right but at "Brunch" Mamie did some eating and more thinking. Eight-thirty or nine was too early for a night printer to be coming home from his job. She knew the night shifts finished before daybreak. Not so good.

As she came up the stairs after eat-

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ing, she was humming, "I want a big boy of my own." She flung the sap a "Hullo, kid," as she was unlocking her door. He threw a "Hullo" back, and upon appraising her, looked as though he wanted to talk, so Mamie leaned against the side of his open door and talked. The talk consisted of pumping him.

In the procession of boy-friends that had marched through her young life, Mamie had known one who made sense out of pi on the Journal and who had babbled incessantly about the details of his job. In three minutes of gab, this present type-setter had said something about his work which did not jibe exactly with what the former boy-friend had told her about the printing business.

Then Mamie got down to brass tacks. She went into his room and sat on the bed, legs crossed, so he might see something nice. The sap was young and human. She saw he looked with appreciation at what was shown him. But he sidestepped the subject of his work on the World whenever she tried to get him to talk about it. Funny. Every guy she had ever known had raved about himself and his work until it made her sick.

In fifteen minutes she had spotted the sap as a dick placed there to watch her.

Then she stretched out full length on his bed, revealing herself quite a little, and he began to get dizzy. She saw that too, and continued to worm things out of him which confirmed her suspicion. Yep, she was being watched. O. K. She'd do some watching herself, and she'd make that sap give up his guts.

Before she left him he had promised to come up to the d'Esty on his first night off, and let her show him how to dance. He danced a little but not very well.

In her room again, with the door locked, Mamie was worried. With the damned dick in the next room,

she would have to watch her eye-teeth, you bet. He would be wise to it, if she made a slip. Her room might be searched again, and more thoroughly this time. Her eyes were like ice at the thought and flickered to the bottom of the bureau. Her lips became nasty.

She pulled down the shade; hung a handkerchief over the door knob so the sap couldn't peek through the key hole. Went to a concealed compartment in the bottom of the bureau, which Griffith and the cops had not discovered in their search the night before. From this she took certain properties. Then noiselessly staged a scene. When it was completed she opened the door again.

**I**N ABOUT an hour she heard the sap open his door. When he passed hers, she was standing by a table. On it was a fluffy dress of frills and ruffles, a large cardboard laundry box, empty, and a used sheet of common brown wrapping paper.

"Come in, Big Boy," she invited. "Will you help me pack, if you're not too busy doing nothing."

"Sure thing," he answered. "Never too busy to help a blue-eyed baby girl."

"Hey. Cut it out. How do you get that way?" she countered.

From the closet she got two pairs of dainty slippers. "When you dance half the night, you've got to have an extra pair. The way those guys walk all over your feet is fierce," she explained. She wrapped the slippers in the brown paper and tied the package with a piece of string she found in the top bureau drawer after rummaging.

He saw her do it; knew there was nothing but two pairs of slippers in the package.

"Had to have this dry cleaned," she informed him, holding up the fluffy dress. "The d'Esty's a dirty place. You get filthy there. I've got another

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dress in the closet just like this one. Got 'em cheap at a bargain stampede in a swell joint on Broadway. A host-ess has to have a couple to look decent."

As she talked, she folded the dress carefully and placed it in the laundry box, and put the cover on.

He saw her do all this and knew there was nothing inside but the clean dress.

Then she rummaged through the drawer again but could not find a suitable piece of twine and swore vehemently. "Got a piece of young rope long enough to go around this, so my scenery won't get dumped out and mussed?"

The sap thought he had and went to his room to look for it.

Quick as a flash the box and the package were thrown into the closet, and an identical box and package were substituted on the table. The closet door was quickly locked and the key put into her handbag, so he could not snoop. All this before he returned with the twine.

While she held the box shut, he tied it securely. Of course he knew what was inside.

From a corner she brought a suitcase and opened it. He saw it was empty. She put the box and package inside and locked the case. He was watching her all the time she was doing this. She put the key of the suitcase in her purse.

"Ain't you going uptown a little early today?" he asked to get information.

"Yea h," she answered frankly. "I'm dead tired and there's such a hell of a racket in this shack, I can't sleep. There's a room upstairs in the d'Esty—you know—I can use."

He was a swell guy and knew how to treat a lady. Carried the suitcase downstairs for her, and thought the heaviness, considering the things put in it, was caused by the weight of the case itself.

At the landing below she looked in her handbag for a handky and didn't find one. "Wait a minute, Honey. Forgot my nose-wipe."

Upstairs she ran for it, while he waited on the landing. Bang went the door of her room as though she were peeved at having to go back. He heard that. The key in the lock turned without noise. He didn't hear that.

She opened the closet, yanked the fluffy dress out of the laundry box, and hung it up with other dresses. She had told him she had TWO JUST ALIKE. If he searched and found this one there, he would think it was the other one. The slippers she unwrapped from the package; threw the paper down amongst other waste in the closet.

It could not be identified. The slippers she put with others on the closet floor. The sap didn't know how many pairs she had and could not identify those two. The closet she left unlocked when everything was O.K., so it would not appear there was anything in it she wanted to hide. The sap could now search all he wanted and to hell with him.

She unlocked the room door noiselessly; yanked it open impetuously, and ran down the stairs blowing her nose.

"'Scuse me for keeping you waiting, Honey. Had to hunt for a clean one." Referring to the nose-wipe.

When the printer left her at the front stoop, the Wop dick took up the trail and she went directly to d'Esty, and she did there exactly as she said she would—went to a room and slept. Nothing suspicious in that.

But Griffith had found out that on the night of the murder, Mamie had not remained on her job until the closing hour, but had left the night club early—about nine-thirty on account of a sick headache.

"That don't look so good for little Mamie," he commented. "Left the d'Esty at nine-thirty on account of a



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headache. Was just going to bed at one in the morning. The cold air from that open window must have cured her headache."

**L**ATER in the afternoon the printer DID search her room thoroughly, but found nothing incriminating. He discovered the secret compartment in the bottom of the bureau but there was nothing in it.

His report stated that he had seen M. R. pack certain enumerated articles in her suitcase and take them out of the house; that he had closely watched everything she put in the grip and there was nothing suspicious; that later he had searched her room thoroughly and had found nothing incriminating or suspicious; that there was a secret compartment in the bureau which had evidently been unused as there was nothing in it.

Then Griffith went up in the air and hit the ceiling. "How in hell do they expect us to catch crooks, when they give us boneheads as dicks." And he described that particular one with precision and in detail, both as to personality and ancestry.

"Secret drawer, empty. Suitcase full. That don't mean a thing to him; oh, no! Of course that fool dick saw what she PUT in the suitcase. What I'd like to know is what she TOOK OUT of it. Bet she sent him out of the room after that piece of string, so she could swap boxes. He's certainly made a mess of it and it's too late to remedy it."

After the explosion, Griffith got himself in hand. His eyes twinkled and he grinned cheerfully. "Well, Johnson, at least we KNOW he's a bonehead—that's one point gained—so we'll use him as a bonehead. Understand?"

The dick's report stated further that he had thrown M. R. entirely off her guard and she was willing to go out with him for a social evening.

This restored Griffith's tranquility entirely. "Yeah? And I'll know when they have that social evening, and I'll be there personally to see their sociability. I'm betting a big red apple Mamie will lead that sap a merry dance; she's the kid that can do it."

Then his face became grave and grim. "Poor Casey; I saw his little widow and two orphaned kiddies this morning. By God, I'll spoil that red-head's fun, and make her show us the way to her boy-friend and his cousin. Pete's in a hole in Philly, I suppose, for we can't find a trace of him around this burg."

A few days later the printer was summoned to a private conference with Griffith and complimented almost with effusion on the excellent way he had covered the case. He had done nothing but mess it up. He became chesty when the sergeant divulged secret information which was not to be spilled under any circumstances. Then Griffith suggested the printer ought to spend a social evening with Mamie Regan to see if he could pump anything out of her.



**U**NDER this suggestion the sap accepted her invitation to the d'Esty, and that night she certainly made him see soap bubbles and rainbows. How she could dance. Oh, boy! And how she could snuggle when she danced. Wow! Soft arms around his neck. Warm cheek against his. Peaches and cream. Her lips. Oh!

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The dancing and the hootch and the place put the printer on the slide.

The place. Lights garish—red, green and yellow—the glare of the nigger jungle. The wail of the sax. The jazz with the heart of Africa in the throb. The lithe bronze bodies of the cabaret, almost nude. The touch of Mamie's soft skin. Hot dog. Wow.

The printer lost his bearings entirely. Maudlin with gin, he asserted didactically he was going to stay there with her until midnight and then they would go to some other joint and make more whoopie. "We'll stay here till midnight," he repeated ponderously, leering at her.

The way he said it made Mamie feel that midnight meant something—that midnight was important. She hadn't lost HER head a bit. She had only made him lose his. She was going to find out whether it was important for him to keep her in THE D'ESTY until midnight.

"Let's go NOW," she slurred, pretending the effect of booze herself.

"A' right, kid," he slithered, sprawling over the table toward her. He staggered half up from his chair to go.

Nope. That was the wrong dope. It was not important for them to stay in the d'Esty until twelve. Perhaps it was only important he should keep her with him SOMEWHERE until then. She would see.

"Gawd, I just thought of somethin', Big Boy," she gasped. "What time's it?"

He laboriously pulled his watch from the pocket and focussing his eyes with gravity, struggling to draw the two dials together into one. "Ten o'clock, I guess, Baby. 'Bout that anyway. Hands of watch don't match."

She got up. "I've got a grease ball I'm stringin' along here, Big Boy. Promized to be wiz him 'at ten. Gotter shay bye-bye to yer, Honey. See yer smother night."

He was not too soused to under-

stand that. Grabbed her around the body and held her. "No; no. Can't do zat, Baby. Yer gotter shay wiz me till midnight."

Midnight again. Yep, there was something in it. She had to find out what. He was drunk enough to spill the beans if she worked him right, but she must not make him angry.

"A' right," she acquiesced in slurred speech. "Let th' damned grease ball go. I'll stay wiz you, Sweetheart." She sat down again and snuggled over his face. "Why d'yer only want me till midnight, Honey? Don't yer want me always?"

"Sure thing, wan' yer always," he answered amorously. "Got orders ter keep yer till midnight."

From hot, Mamie went cold. Something WAS going to happen that night—before twelve. She sized him up through half shut eyes. He was too far gone to realize she was trying to pump him.

"Why d'yer wan' me till midnight?" she asked boldly.

"Well, little blue-eyed baby girl, I'll tell yer," he slurred. "I'm not an or'nary guy. Get close over, baby, so I c'n whisper to yer."

It was coming. Mamie's heart thumped as he sprawled against her and talked with inebriated confidence. "I got a frien' on the p'lice force, I have. I'm a guy that c'n get a guy to get a nize baby like you out er trouble when yer get in it."

"IS THAT SO?" Stunned amazement. "You're some kid. Who's yer p'lice frien'?"

He leaned close to her; put his lips against her ear and rubbed it with them. "Sarjen' Jack Griffis," he whispered. Then drew back and looked at her with half soused pride, "What d'yer know about that?"

"That's great," she answered, and if he had been sober he would have felt her quiver as he hugged her.

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"But wazzat gotter do wiz you'n me, Honey Boy?"

"I'll tell yer," he said solemnly, "Sarj's tryin' ter run in a young kid he thinks you're interested in." He stopped and looked at her with what he thought was affection but was only idiocy. "Y' don' care for that other guy any more, now you've got me f'r yer boy-frien', doyer, Baby?" He asked sadly.

Nerves on edge, Mamie wanted to scream, but forced herself to snuggle up against him. "Don' care a bit f'r him now, Big Boy. You're th' hot stuff wiz me. Does Griffiss know where this ozzer guys is? I don't. Ain't seen him for weeks."

"Sure he knows; tol' me so himself," responded the printer proudly. "Didn't tell me where, but tol' me he knew. Jus' foun' it out this mornin' an' asked me t' show yer a good time t'night till he run yer boy frien' in."

**T**HE LIGHTS blurred before Mamie Regan's eyes. The room spun around and grew dark. That would never do. She'd got to get a grip on herself. Must get clear brained. The bulls knew of number Three. How in hell did they find out. Never mind how they found out. They knew it. By midnight Billie would be jugged and then—Gawd; it was after ten.

"'Scuse me, Honey; be right back. Order two more gins f'r us. Here's somethin' t' 'member me by f'r a minute." She pressed her lips against his, and he, through bleared eyes saw her go into the ladies' room.

Then he sat by the table stupidly and waited for her to come out.

As matter of fact Sergeant Griffith did not know where Bill Mahoney was hiding, but he assured the printer he did and reasoned that the printer would spill the beans to Mamie and when she knew he was about to round up her boy-friend she would at once rush to him to warn him, and

if she could be trailed, she would lead the cops to the hiding place.

He went up to the Black and Tan in plain clothes, got hold of the proprietor secretly, and with forcible words made him understand that he was to play straight with the police that night or the d'Esty would be closed up pronto, slap-bang, for good and for ever.

Mamie Regan was not to be tipped off in any way, shape or manner whatever, and that Mamie was not to be permitted by any hook or crook to get out of the joint in any way but the front entrance, and that she was to be allowed to go out the front entrance whenever she wanted to. The proprietor understood thoroughly when Griffith got through talking to him.

The sergeant was secretly given a place in a small private room with a peep hole commanding the dance hall, and saw the printer gradually lose whatever brains he had under the seduction of Mamie and the gin. He counted on this. Finally he saw Mamie go to the ladies' room.

Like the dick he waited for her to come out. His plans were laid; but Mamie did not appear.

In a few minutes, a short, slim young man with a cropped moustache and dressed in a natty brown suit and with a brown soft hat pulled low, came from somewhere at the back of the dance hall, keeping rather close to the wall. Griffith did not pay any attention to him until he saw the youngster glance toward the soused dick as he walked along. Glanced toward him again. Once more. Was apparently interested in that particular souse.

"It's Cousin Pete from Philly," flashed through the sergeant's mind. "The redhead's been hiding him around here somewhere, and that's why we've got no trace of him in Philly. She's a wise little gazabo, damn her, and she's sent Pete out to

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warn her boy friend, for fear she would be trailed if she went herself."

He had to trust that Pete, from out of town, might not be sufficiently familiar with the members of the New York police force to recognize, in plain clothes, one of its many sergeants.

He jumped to the front of the house and in the concealment of an awning, was just in time to see the one in brown run across the sidewalk to a taxi waiting at the entrance.

He was close enough to hear the chauffeur say, "Sorry, sir. This one's engaged by another party."

Griffith signalled. The chauffeur saw it.

"But I ain't going to lose a fare waiting for them blokes any longer. Jump in, sir. Where'll I take you to?"

"Go ahead; tell you later." The one in brown jumped in and the taxi started, but not very fast.

The one in brown did not know his chauffeur was a dick in disguise, with instructions not to let anybody hire that particular taxi but Mamie Regan, and that it was Griffith's signal which had shown the chauffeur the order was changed and that he was to take the one in brown in Mamie's place. He had also been instructed to drive slowly until sure that another waiting taxi was ready to take up the trail.

This one swung into the vacant place at the entrance. Griffith jumped in from the concealment of the awning without being seen. The Wop dick was inside. The chauffeur of this car was also a dick in disguise. The trail was being followed. There would be four members of the police force to confront the two killers when Bill's hole was discovered.

**B**REAKING speed laws the two taxis whirled from the Bronx. The stop-go signals caused the first machine to halt occasionally and this enabled the pursuing one to keep it

in sight. If a stop signal intervened between the two machines, the sergeant's shield opened the way for the second one.

Down to the lower East Side sped the two. The river front. Seconds vital. The first taxi whirled around the corner and checked in front of a stone house, with the trailing taxi so close behind that it sped on and around the corner below to avoid suspicion.

Griffith had seen the one in brown jump out and run into the corner house—an old stone building which was still standing solid after a century, as a reminder of the durability with which past generations fashioned things.

In the front room, a gang of long-shoremen were tanking up. One Eye Sullivan was slinging the suds across the bar as though the Volstead had not been enacted. He jerked his thumb over his shoulder at the one in brown, and he went through to the back room and down a rickety flight of stairs into the cobwebbed cellar.

In the back corner of the cellar and on the side toward the cross street, was a small square room, not quite eight by eight—a stone flat-arched roof, and with walls of solid stone, massive as the building itself. The room had only one entrance, closed by a heavy door of age-colored oak and secured with big bolts on the inside.

In each of the two walls projecting into the cellar was a narrow slot between heavy stones, beveled outward and commanding the whole cellar and the steps coming down into it. In the wall facing the cross street was a similar slot just above the curb level. The room was a fort within a fortress. In the fourth wall, facing the back yard was a low doorway, opening into a tunnel that led underground and came up in a shed at the back of the yard.

The shed had a door opening into the next yard, and there were loose

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boards in the successive dividing fences along the block. It was a place to be defended as long as necessary, and then a sure getaway through the tunnel and then through any of the houses on the cross street.

The one in brown pounded on the door of the small stone room. It took a moment for Bill to slip back the bolts. A moment's delay. The two were inside and the heavy door bumped shut behind them. It took another moment to bolt it.

When Griffith jumped from his taxi as it squealed to a stop around the corner below, he knew the two rats were trapped in One Eye Sullivan's place—the toughest joint on the water front, and when you said that, you said a mouthful. Filled with wharf rats, thugs, murderers, gunmen, racketeers—always. That is what the police sergeant had to tackle with three other men—the Wop dick and the two in disguise as chauffeurs.

"Phone the patrol to get here damned quick," he ordered the chauffeur. "Then come up and watch the front of Sullivan's joint and see no-one gets out the windows. Have your gun out and shoot—shoot quick; don't ask any questions first."

The chauffeur was off the seat and at the police phone on the corner.

**G**RIFFITH and the Wop took Water Street on the sprint. As he was running, Griffith gave instructions. "When we're in, you go through to the back yard. I know this joint. There's a shed in the yard over the entrance of a tunnel. We had the tunnel filled up after the last raid, but I bet it's open again. Get in that shed pronto and don't let anybody get out of that tunnel. I'll take care of the front room."

It was in the front room the gang of the underworld would be found. The sergeant against the mob. And how the mob would like to croak Jack

Griffith. It was almost worth frying in the chair to send him to hell first.

"Don't do it alone, Sarg, wait for the patrol," advised the Wop running. "They'll bop you off sure; they're all gunning for you special."

"O.K." grinned Griffith. "You boys give me a swell funeral. These bums will send the lilies."

They had reached the other taxi still waiting in front of the entrance.

To its chauffeur Griffith said, "Get around in the cross street pronto. Watch down the block as far as you can. Those houses are all connected, for a getaway."

Pistol ready, this disguised chauffeur was out of the taxi and around the corner.

Griffith flung the front door open and stepped into the room first, ahead of the Wop. If there were any plugging done by the mob, the first one in would be the one plugged. Griffith saw a gat jerk up in a far corner but the sergeant's pistol cracked first and the thug's arm dropped before he could fire, the blood spurting from his smashed wrist.

"Put up your guns, boys," ordered One Eye. "These ain't hijackers. It's me good friend Jack Griffith. Sorry for the mistake, sergeant, but you hadn't oughter have busted in without knocking."

Griffith cursed him up hill and down and told him where he got off.

The Wop dick had jumped through the room, to cover the back of the joint and the tunnel in the yard.

Griffith was alone in the front. Around him were at least a dozen. Murderers all. All with gats. Each one yearning to be the mug to croak him; but all cowed by one man's courage.

"Stick up your mitts, you filthy rats and line up along that wall," he ordered and his pistol flickered over them all. He saw a hand jerk toward a shoulder where he knew a gat was slung for quick use. His pistol cracked

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again and the thug squirmed on the floor with a bullet through his leg.

"Hell, Jack, don't be rough with the boys," said One Eye reproachfully. "They don't mean no harm."

Griffith's gun flickered in his direction and at its crack, a bottle popped in two behind One Eye. "Is that friendly?" he asked as his hands went up.

Griffith smiled grimly. "Reminds me of the time when I was here before, you old son-of-a-gun."

"Boys, we better do whatever the sergeant tells us to," advised One Eye. "He means business."

The brutes were lined up along the wall with their arms above their heads.

"Now, One Eye, frisk 'em," Griffith ordered. "Take the junk off of them—all of it. If I find a gat or a knife on one of 'em after you get through, I'll drill out your other eye."

"It's a cold world," sighed One Eye as he began throwing dirks and gats down on the floor, frisking the thugs expertly and thoroughly, while Griffith kept the bunch under his pistol. He stood in the front room, in a position where he could look into the back and see the door opening upon



the yard and the steps leading to the cellar and also the stairway coming from above. Nobody could get in or out of the back without his plugging them.

**H**E HEARD the crack of a gat in the cellar. Then he was content. It told him the killers were down there and had been located by the Wop dick. They would stay there until the patrol came and the cops rounded them up. That was that.

"You rats ain't in on the know in this racket," Griffith informed the thugs along the wall. "When I get what I want, you can all go. I'll keep your shooting irons and stickers as souvenirs, and I'll forget about the violation of the Sullivan law."

This eased their minds and took away the desire of plugging.

"You're a square guy, Sarg," said a scrubby-bearded one in appreciation.

Griffith was cheerful. He had trapped the two rats who had murdered poor Casey, and they'd get the chair sure. "Just like the old days, One Eye, when I plugged at you and you plugged at me."

The police patrol clanged up. Patrolman Johnson was in the lead as the cops surged through the front door, pistols out.

"Bill and Pete are down in the cellar; get 'em, boys," Griffith ordered crisply.

A cop started down the cellar stairs. A gat cracked through the slot in the wall of the little stone room and the cop waltzed up the steps pronto as a piece of wood splintered off close to his legs.

Another cop had dashed out into the yard to reinforce the Wop on guard at the end of the tunnel.

"Better not go down," advised the Wop. There was moist blood on his trousers leg. "I tried it and they drilled me."

It was this shot which Griffith had heard, telling him the murderers were in the cellar.

He lay down on his stomach by the stairs opening in the back room and put his head through to reconnoitre.

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There was a crack and a hole through his cap and his head popped up.

The toughs along the wall snickered.

"Get those eggs in the patrol and take them to the station, then bring the patrol back," ordered Griffith. "They're having too much fun out of this show."

That was done but they were released when the fracas was over as Griffith had promised. He never broke a promise.

One Eye treated the situation diplomatically. "Jack, you and me know each other, and I ought to tell you we've made some improvements in the cellar since you called here the last time." Then he explained that the beveled slots had been cut in the stone walls to make the little room more defensible since the police had cornered the last gang of thugs there.

Griffith thereupon described One Eye in language which should not be repeated. "We'll not risk our men any more, Johnson," he ordered. "We've got 'em trapped. All we've got to do is to smoke 'em out. It may take a while, but there's no use getting killed doing it."

**A** CORDON of police was thrown around the house and guards around the block, to keep back the curious who had tumbled into the streets, aroused by the pistol shots and the appearance of the police in force.

Griffith lighted a cigar and consulted with patrolman Johnson.

One Eye pushed a couple of glasses of suds along the bar and the sergeant and patrolman saw no harm in testing its per cent of alcohol while they talked.

"Just like the old days before the war, Jack," commented One Eye.

"You go to hell," responded the sergeant.

After he and Johnson had consulted and the suds were gone, the

patrolman said, "It might work, chief, but it's dangerous."

"We'll try it, and if it don't, we'll use the grenades as a last resort. I don't want to make a mess of the mugs if we can help it. Who's a good one to do the shooting?"

"Lombardi's a crack shot with the rifle. We've got a couple in the patrol."

"O.K. He can do the shooting, I'll be the decoy." Griffith's voice was calm as he spoke, his face untroubled, although he was about to place himself in front of a gat held by a killer.

Johnson was grave. "The bums shoot straight," he said with meaning.

Griffith did not under-rate the danger. He did not joke. That would have been mock heroics. The thing had to be done, and as sergeant in command he was the one who would do it.

Johnson went to a window that looked across the side street and stood there watching grimly.

Griffith and Lombardi got a rifle from the patrol wagon and walked entirely around the block. Then they entered a house on the opposite side of the cross street so far along the block that their entrance could not be seen by the two in the cellar. They went through that house to the back yard, and over the fences until they were in the corner-house opposite the stone one.

Lombardi went down in the cellar and took his post, rifle in hand and cocked, inside a low basement window which commanded the slot opposite from which the killer's bullets might come.

Griffith went upstairs and came out the front door, which was just beside the basement window where Lombardi was watching unseen. He was in direct line of a bullet from the slot in the old stone building.

Bill Mahoney, peeking through the

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slot, saw him. "Here's where I croak that snake, Jack Griffith, before I die," he muttered. With face close to the slot he leveled the gat before his eye.

It cracked.

Griffith reeled.

At the same instant Lombardi's rifle spit fire from the basement window and the bullet went straight through the slot of the old stone house opposite.

**T**HERE was a shrill scream in the cellar; then sobs and crying.

At the sound, Johnson wheeled sharply from the window, as Griffith dashed across the street and in the front door. "Only a scratch in the side," he shouted. "Lombardi croaked one of 'em. Perhaps the other will give up now." His face went blank at the sound of the heartbroken crying in the cellar.

"That's a woman's voice, sergeant," said Johnson.

"It was Pete came in here," stammered Griffith. "How in hell—" Then light dawned in his mind, "Kick me; I'm a lobster. I saw that smudge of dirt on the redhead's upper lip in her room that night. It was where the false moustache was stuck on. The

brown suit and hat; the men's shoes; the black wig—that's what she had in the suit case she took up to the d'Esty."

He made for the tunnel in the back yard and would have jumped down into danger, but the cop barred his way.

"Wait, chief, let me go first."

Griffith knocked him aside. "That's my part of the game."

He jumped down; looked along the tunnel. In the dim light of the little room he could see two forms, one on top of the other.

He crept along the tunnel, holding the pistol ready, if either murderer should move. When he was in the stone room he stood erect.

On the floor, Bill Mahoney was stretched, a round hole in his forehead, the blood oozing out.

Holding the dead body tight and sobbing, was the one in brown. The black wig had fallen off and the red hair was rumpled.

"Come on, Marnie," said the sergeant gently. "We'll get you off with a term in the Refuge. It won't be the chair."

"I don't care what you do with me, you dirty bum; you've killed Billie," screamed the girl.

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## Strictly Business

A Complete Novelette in this Issue

By J. B. LAWRENCE

*For two years things had been going along quietly—no gang wars—no hijackin'—no killin's—an unspoken truce had been declared—Until the night the rats got Crandon—Then there was a different tale to tell!!!*

### CHAPTER I

#### THE RAID

**T**HE minute he stepped into the room, Curly felt it. Like an electric shock, the queer premonition of danger struck him, and unconsciously his hand made a quick movement toward the slight bulge in his evening clothes that covered his shoulder holster.

For weeks queer indefinite rumors had filtered in; a word here, a shifty glance there, never anything definite,

but sultry, disquieting reports. Behind the impassive face that he turned to his lieutenants, Curly recognized the signs. The clouds were gathering, and the storm was imminent. Was the first move to come here, tonight?

His hand dropped to his side, and he cursed himself for a nervous fool. No one knew his face—no one knew he was here. A quick glance around showed his own men scattered through the crowd, and he fought down the feeling of uneasiness.

Hands deep in the pockets of his

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dinner coat he threaded his way slowly through the tables, making his tall, broad-shouldered frame as inconspicuous as possible. Dropping into the seat that Frisco had reserved for him, he turned his attention to the revue that was in full swing on the polished floor in the center of the club.

Still the feeling persisted, and he could not shake it off. Two years of almost uninterrupted tranquillity had not made him careless. No one knew better than Curly Larramie the ever-present danger that dogs the footsteps of the successful racketeer.

More than one pair of envious eyes were turned toward the power that Curly wielded in the nation's greatest metropolis, and only the fear of swift and painful retribution kept greedy fingers from dipping into the rich tribute that flowed, day by day, into his already well-lined coffers.

The weaknesses that had sent a Weiss, a Diamond, a Rothstein to their finish, he avoided studiously. Women, he shunned like the plague; for dissipation he had only the utmost contempt; above all, he sidestepped the ego-swelling publicity that flung the names and faces of other underworld figures in the public eye.

**F**ROM his luxurious Central Park apartment, Curly ruled in secrecy. Less than a dozen men knew his saturnine features, and only the most trusted of his lieutenants ever knew where the grey-eyed czar made his headquarters.

For Curly knew only too well that he was in constant danger of the treachery that hangs like a Damoclean sword over the heads of the great in the underworld. Nothing he could do could fully obviate the constant menace of the double-cross, and affluence had not dulled his keen perceptions of that inevitable peril.

Even here, in a night club that he owned, lock, stock and proprietor, he depended on no one. Apparently idle,

his eyes searched the faces of every member of the motley crowd that filled the room, alert for the first sign of menace.

The orchestra swung into a dreamy, exotic melody, and the lights dimmed for the revue's jungle number. Suddenly, under cover of the darkness, Curly caught a stealthy movement at one of the tables. His sharp glance picked out three men, slowly rising from their chairs.

The eyes of all three bored straight across the room, and for a moment Curly thought that he was the object of the scrutiny. Every muscle tense, he slid his chair slowly back from the table, his hand creeping toward the bosom of his shirt. Then, with a start, he realized they were looking past him, toward the door to the rear, and in a flash, he swung round.

Too late, he saw the slim white hand, reaching up for the light switch, and even as he leaped to his feet, the club was plunged into darkness. The deafening orange stabs of an automatic pistol leaped out of the sudden silence, and Curly's hand dug to his armpit, as he made a lightning-like spring across the floor.

So quick was his move that the girl had no chance to escape, and catching her slim arm, Curly crashed his fist into her jaw, and she dropped like a rock. Furiously, he groped for the switch, and a single curse broke from his lips as he failed at first to find it.

A woman's shriek cut through the air, and a crashing of overturning tables; a warning cry from the doorman ended in a horrible bubbling cough, and the door was swinging open, as the lights flashed on.

Curly's rod blazed toward the entrance, and two or three of his men ran with him toward the stairs, firing as they went. The roar of a starting automobile sounded as they dashed down the steps, and as they tumbled

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into the street, a long black sedan shot away from the curb.

Their guns roared again and again, and little white marks sprang up along the windows of the car, but the car drew rapidly away, its bullet-proof glass turning aside the lead harmlessly. In a second it swung around a corner, the exhaust gave a startled roar, and the killers disappeared into the night.

Police whistles sounded, and the clump of running footsteps. For a moment, Curly stood motionless on the curb, apparently lost in thought. Then, slipping his rod back into its holster, he turned on his heel, and made his way quickly back inside the club.



**A**T THE top of the stairs, the body of Gorilla Joe, the doorman, was lying in the center of an ugly dark splotch on the carpet, his throat slashed from ear to ear. Curly did not even glance at the lifeless hulk. Hands deep in the pockets of his coat, his face an expressionless mask, he made his way down the aisle, unmindful of the terrified glances of the erstwhile merry-makers.

Panic-stricken, the guests had crowded back against the wall, shrinking away from the fatal table where the bullet-riddled body of Arthur Crandon lay slumped across the snowy tablecloth. As Curly stopped before the sagging figure, the silence

was so intense that the sound of his foot against a shattered glass on the floor sounded like a pistol shot. After one long glance, he turned and proceeded down the aisle, followed by the two gunmen. The crowd scattered like frightened sheep out of his way.

The unconscious body of the girl he had struck down was lying across the leather seat at the rear of the room, and two anxious women, palpably strangers, were trying to restore her to her senses. Curly paused beside the seat, and with a quick motion of his head, brought two of his men to his side.

"Into the office," he commended curtly.

The two gunmen pushed the frightened women aside, and supporting the drooping body between them, passed through the door at the rear. Curly took a quick step after them, when suddenly, with a rush of feet, the police came up the stairs. Curly half-turned toward the women, and at the menace in his steel-gray eyes, they instinctively drew back.

"You ladies," he said slowly, "saw no girl here tonight. It would not be healthy for you if you did. Understand?" Without waiting for a reply, he pushed open the swinging door, and followed the others out of the room, paying not the slightest attention to the half-dozen bluecoats that were pouring through the front door.

Inside the office, he moved like lightning. His long white fingers fastened on the girl's arm with a cruel grip, and he shook her roughly. Almost instantly she opened her eyes, and he yanked her to her feet. A swift stride brought him to the side of the fireplace, and his fingers fumbled with the ornamentation.

With a barely audible whirring, a section of the wall slid aside, disclosing a gaping passageway, and he half-pushed, half-threw the girl into the opening. At the threshold, he turned to the two men.

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"Tell Frisco I want to see him when he gets out of here. Give me your rods." The two men obediently passed over their weapons, and Curly laid them on a shelf behind him. "You two keep your ears open, and your mouths shut, understand?" A peremptory pounding sounded on the door, and with a second whirring the panel slid again into place.

**I**T WAS almost dawn when Curly, half-carrying the fainting girl, stepped across the threshold of his own apartment. He dumped her unceremoniously onto a couch in the living room, and his bodyguard, Spinner Matchelli, set about restoring her to consciousness.

Under his expert ministrations, she finally sat up and stared about her confusedly. At a nod from Curly, Spinner retired to the door, and the girl's eyes fell on the tall figure of her captor. Recollection returned almost instantly, and her gaze shifted uneasily to the floor. Curly wasted no words.

"Talk, sister," he commanded.

The girl's face took on a sullen expression. "Whaddayuh mean talk?"

"Who're you working for? Who put Crandon on the spot?"

"I—I dunno."

Curly's eyes narrowed. "I've got no time to fool with you, sister. Don't stall."

She avoided his gaze. "Well, I'm tellin' yuh! I dunno who did it. A fellah I useta know in Chi offered me five yards fer the job. I dunno who he was workin' fer."

"What's this guy's name?"

She hesitated. "Danny Ryan."

"Was he one of the rods in the club?"

"Yeah. I guess so."

"And you don't know who his connection is?"

"No."

Curly eyed her impatiently. "Listen, sister: you're the punkest liar I ever

listened to in my life. Now cut out this hooley, and come across, or you're going to get into trouble, understand?"

The girl glanced up defiantly. "I told yuh all I know."

Curly's lips compressed into a straight line. "You damned little rat," he said evenly, "I'll give you one more chance. For the last time, who hired you to douse the lights at the club?"

"I dunno, I told yuh."

Curly, his patience at an end, glanced toward the waiting Spinner. The big gorilla stepped once more into the room, a heavy whip dangling from his hand.

As the girl caught sight of the whip, she uttered a strangled cry, and scrambled frantically to her feet. Her blue eyes, wide with terror, she looked for a way of escape. Finding none, she burst into a torrent of terrified sobs, shrinking back against the wall.

"No," she wailed, "no, don't whip me!"

"Are you going to spill it?"

"I did, I did!" She shrank back in the corner, as the Spinner advanced relentlessly, "I dunno no more . . ."

**C**URLY stepped angrily forward and with one sweep of his powerful hand, ripped the dress bodily from her back. "Let her have it, Spinner!"

"Crack!" A livid welt sprang up across her creamy back, as Spinner brought the whip down. The girl shrieked in agony, and fell to the floor, her hand shielding her face, straining against the oaken panel of the wall. Curly laid a restraining hand on the big Italian's arm.

"What about it, rat? Ready to talk yet?"

The girl could not speak, but she nodded dumbly. Curly motioned to a table in the corner, and the Spinner hastily poured a stiff drink of brandy. Curly handed it to her without a word, and she gulped it down eagerly. Slowly, she rose to her feet, and made her

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way shakily back to the couch. She took a cigarette from Curly's extended case and lit it from his lighter. Her sobs subsided, and she sat hunched over on the seat, drawing great puffs from the cigarette. She spoke in a low husky voice:

"Greaser Cardi. He wanted Crandon rubbed out."

Curly's eyes narrowed. "Those weren't Greaser's rods in Frisco's night club."

"No. He brought three torpedoes from Chi. He didn't want yuh to know he was puttin' the heat on Crandon."

Curly's hands once more slid into his coat pockets; he spat out the cigarette in his mouth, and ground it with his heel into the costly oriental rug. "What's his angle?"

"He figures to muscle in on yer racket, I guess. He knew Crandon was yer protection in the City Hall, and he wanted him outa the way."

Curly grunted. He did not consider it necessary to tell the girl that Crandon was only one of half-a-dozen in the D. A.'s office that jumped when he snapped his fingers. If they had spotted Myers, the chief, now . . .

"How'd they know Crandon was my man?"

"Don't ask me. I never saw this mob till yesterday."

"Why didn't he turn the heat on me?"

"The poor mug couldn't find no-buddy to put the finger on yuh. No-buddy seemed tuh know what yuh looked like."

Curly smiled. They would have a hell of a hard time finding anybody that knew his face.

"Where d'you come in, sister?" he asked.

She shrugged. "On the lam from Chi. Friend o' mine sent me tuh Greaser. He offers me two grand, and a regular connection if I pull the job."

A buzzer in the corner sounded. Curly seemed to ignore it. He looked speculatively at the girl.

"Sorry I had to treat you a little roughly, sister."

"Sure. It's awright. I know how it is."

The buzzing became more insistent. Curly stepped across the floor and removed the receiver of the telephone.

"Curly talking," he said tersely. He listened for a minute. "O. K. Come over here, right away." He hung up, and turned back to the girl.

"Well, sister, that's all I want from you. Spinner'll dump you wherever you say. You'll have to put up with a blindfold, on the way. It wouldn't do for you to remember where I live. You'll have to scram now; I'm expecting some men to talk business."

THE girl looked down at her bare torso, covered only by the narrow band of silk. In spite of her best efforts, her lip quivered a little.

"Gees, Curly . . . Greaser'll put me on the spot, sure as hell, when he finds out I squawked."

"Well, what am I supposed to do? Burst into tears?"

"N—No. Yuh—yuh couldn't gimme a connection er somethin' could yuh? So I wouldn't have tuh go back tuh Greaser?" Her blue eyes looked timorously up into his face. Curly eyed her without expression for a long minute.

"Sister, you're good!" he said finally, "maybe I can use you. I'll see how your story checks up. Spinner!"

The big gorilla, who had been hovering in the background, stepped forward.

"Take this dame to the bedroom at the end o' the hall, and see she doesn't get out, and nobody else gets in. Get it?" The bodyguard nodded, and the girl rose from the couch.

"Yer awful sweet to do this, Curly, I'll—"

"Nix on that stuff, sister," he said shortly. "This is strictly business, if any." The girl hesitated a moment,

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then followed the Spinner from the room.

Curly stood watching the fire, a puzzled expression in his eyes. He shook his head slowly, and a flitting smile came and went on his face, as the clatter of boots in the hall outside announced the presence of his underlings.

A moment later they came into the room; Frisco Penny, the ostensible proprietor of the Gilded Goose night club, and the two lieutenants, Bert Hyman and Gabber Schultz.

"Well, what'd the flatties find?" Curly addressed the question abruptly to Frisco, before they had even settled themselves.

"Nuthin'," the Sicilian spat into the grate.

"Any of you birds recognize the rods that burned Crandon?"

There was an embarrassed silence. Curly's lips compressed into a straight line.

"You damn bunch of boneheads! Why don't you keep your eyes open? How long do you think we'll last if our own protection starts getting bumped off in our own joints? Who've we got working in Greaser Cardi's mob, Frisco?"

"Aw, hell, Curly, them guys wasn't Greaser's—"

"Shut up, Hyman. Who have we, Frisco?"

"Frankie Sparling, Curly. Whatsa angle?"

"Gabber, you get some of your men, get in touch with Sparling, and put those three torpedoes on the spot within a week. Do you get it?"

Gabber scratched his head. "Gees, Curly, yuh're way ahead o' me. Yuh mean them rods was Greaser's men?"

"Smart boy!"

"Gosh—I—well, O. K., if yuh say so, Curly, only it don't make sense."

"Why not?" Curly's tone was biting.

"Well, Cripes, Curly, this mug

Cardi ain't got the guts tuh try and pull a fast one on you."

"Aw button up yer lip, Gabber," said Frisco disgustedly, "Curly knows what he's talkin' about."

"Awright, awright." The Gabber jammed on his hat. "Only I'm tellin' yuh—it don't make sense that Greaser'd try and cross the Big Shot."

"How long do you think I'll be a Big Shot, Gabber, if these mugs bump off my protection in the City Hall?"

There was no answer to this. The Gabber flushed.

"Get going," suggested Curly. The Gabber went out.

As the door closed behind him, Frisco stuck a cigar in his mouth and applied a match. "Honest tuh Gawd, Curly, I don't get this. Where did Greaser Cardi get all the big ideas so sudden?"

A slight frown appeared on Curly's brow. He picked up a silver ornament from the table and balanced it absently in his hand.

"Somebody," he said, "must have been feeding him meat."

## CHAPTER II

### THE DAME GETS A BREAK

THE slim handsome young man that sat waiting impatiently next morning in Curly's drawing room looked more like a bond salesman than the trusted lieutenant of New York's most-feared racketeer. Duke Hammond was the one man completely in Curly's confidence. Gang leaders like Hyman and Schultz, important figures in their own circles though they might be, took orders from Curly, and followed his plans. They profited mightily thereby, and were content to do as they were told, without inquiring into the whys and wherefores. Duke alone had the privilege of questioning Curly, and Duke alone was privy to the inmost plans of the boss racketeer.

To Duke was entrusted the delicate

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question of negotiating for protection, the collecting from lesser lieutenants, and the carrying out of any administration of discipline that seemed essential. For Curly's purposes, the blond young tailor's model would have been perfect, but for an unfortunate taste for the cup that cheers. In spite of this failing, however, The Duke was invaluable to Curly, and as warm a friendship as Curly ever permitted himself, existed between the two.

After a moment, Curly entered hurriedly, tying a silk dressing robe about him.

"Hello, Duke," he said warmly, "Sure am glad to see you. Get my message?"

"Yeah. My boy slipped it to me O. K."

They shook hands and Curly motioned him into a chair.

"What's all the excitement, Curly?"

"Didn't you read the papers this morning, you chump? They put Crandon on the spot last night in the Gilded Goose. My tip says Greaser Cardi."

The Duke gave a low whistle. "That mug's gettin' awful ambitious, ain't he?"

"Looks like." Curly lit a cigarette and regarded the Duke narrowly. "Doesn't it smell funny to you, Duke?"

"Yeah, now that yuh mention it, it does. Better let me ankle down and see Myers."

Curly deliberated for a moment. "I think we better keep away from the D. A.'s office till this thing is cleared up, Duke. I don't . . ." He was interrupted by the buzzing of the telephone. With a gesture of annoyance, he crossed to the corner.

"Curly talking." He listened intently to the torrent of words that came over the wire. His teeth came together with a snap. "Who did it?" Then "Are you absolutely sure, Hyman? . . . O. K. I'll call you later." He hung up, and turned to his lieutenant. For a moment, little white spots appeared

at the corners of his jaws, but when he spoke, his voice was expressionless.

"Two of Bert Hyman's rods were plugged in Brooklyn this morning while they were collecting from the cigar stores."

**T**HE DUKE flushed, and cursed angrily. "More o' Greaser's work, I s'pose!"

Curly looked at him evenly. "No. Shag Bernstein."

"What!" A look of bewilderment was on The Duke's face as he jumped to his feet. "What the hell's goin' on, Curly, fer Cripes sake?"

Curly turned and stood looking into the fire for a moment. "Some of the boys getting out of line, I guess, Duke. I've been kind of expecting it, as a matter of fact. We've had no trouble for over eighteen months now. It's about time somebody got ambitious."

"D'yuh think these mugs are gettin' together, er anythin'?"

"Yes. It looks as though they are." Curly replied slowly, "I wonder who had the guts to start this monkey business anyway. Certainly not Cardi or Bernstein. There's somebody behind this, Duke, that's not showing himself. Those rats wouldn't try and pull a fast one on me unless they had somebody to protect them."

"Lemme go see Myers, Curly—maybe he can give us an angle. If anybody's tryin' to muscle you out, they're sure to try and proposition Myers."

Curly shook his head firmly. "Nothing doing, Duke. If I have to run bawling to the D. A. every time anybody starts something, then it's time somebody else took over my rackets."

"But Curly, yuh gotta do somethin'. All the jinny's and gamblin' joints in town'll be duckin' if they think we're buffaloes. We'll be out on our ear if somethin' doesn't happen to Bernstein and Cardi, quick!"

"Don't get excited, Duke. Plenty is

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going to happen to those two right away. We've had a nice quiet town for a long time, and everybody's been happy, but if these mugs want to start something, that's all right with me. We'll see how they feel, after I get through with Bernstein and Cardi."

"What's the lay?" The Duke said excitedly, "Whatcha plannin' tuh do to them?"

"I'll let you wait and see, Duke. Whatever it is, you and I have got to do it ourselves. You can't tell who's fixing to rat on us, and we don't want to take any chances. There's plenty of these punks would ditch us if they thought they could get away with it."

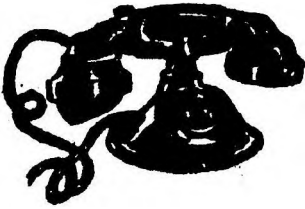
"Sure, sure, Curly. That's O. K. with me. What . . ."

"Can you lay yer hands on thirty rods you can absolutely trust?"

"Yeah, sure, why?"

"You get them, and meet me at the stash in Brooklyn at seven tonight. And listen—bring some rope, heavy stuff, and plenty of it, and a half-dozen Tommy-guns. We'll see if this damn bunch of second-story workers can muscle in on me and get away with it!"

"Aw, come on, Curly, slip a guy—what's the lay? Why the . . ." The telephone buzzed impatiently, and Curly picked up the receiver.



"**C**URLY talking," he said wearily. Then his tone brightened. "Oh, how are you, Gabber?" There was a pause. "What! Nice work, Gabber! Keep after the other one. Greaser? No, I'll look after him myself. You sit tight, and look out for rats in your mob. O. K., Gabber." He replaced the instrument, and a wry smile twisted his mouth.

"Gabber Schultz got two o' the rods that burned Crandon. Plugged them on the Staten Island ferry, and made a clean lam."

"Well, that's the first good news I've heard for a week. About tonight, Curly, why the rope?"

A gleam came into Curly's eye. "I'll let you guess till tonight, Duke. These mugs don't figure I'll pull any rough stuff, I guess. Think we've been having it our own way so long, we've forgotten how to throw lead around. After tomorrow, maybe they'll have a different slant on the 'sitation.' I'll throw a scare into them they won't forget in a hurry."

Duke shrugged his shoulders. "I'm glad they got under your skin, anyhow," he said simply, "When's Crandon's funeral?"

"Friday, I suppose. But a lot of things can happen between now and then."

"Yeah." The Duke grinned, "It looks like about the busiest three days this town's seen in a long time." He carefully adjusted the soft felt hat on his blond curly hair. "Well, if you don't want me for nuthin' else, I guess I may as well scram. See yuh at seven, eh?"

"Yeah. So long, Duke," they shook hands, "and ixnay on the oozbay, see?"

"O. K., Curly." He went out.

**A**BOUT four o'clock it began to snow, and by five a regular blizzard had developed. Curly looked at his watch with ill-concealed impatience, as the dusk deepened into blackness outside his window.

Finally, he heard the ring of the bell, and the mutter of voices in the hall. A moment later Frisco came hurrying in.

"Sorry I'm late, Curly. Had a hell of a time getting the dope you wanted."

"Get it?"

"Sure." Frisco pulled a slip of





*She was lying on the bed when Curly entered the room.*

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paper from his pocket, "Bernstein hangs out at his own speak, on Flatbush Avenue. Here's the address. Cardi's usually around Bugs Rogers down on Christopher street."

"Yes, go on."

"Bernstein usually has about twenty to thirty rods around his jinny. He lives upstairs over it. Cardi's mob all make Rogers' their hangout."

"O. K. Frisco, thanks. S'pose you heard about Hyman's rods being bumped in Brooklyn."

"Yeah. Whatcha gonna do, Curly?"

"Watch the papers, Frisco." He picked up the slip that Frisco had left on the table, and began emptying his pockets of everything else.

"Well, I'll be seeing you, Frisco," he said pointedly.

"Eh?" Frisco blinked, "Oh, O. K., Curly. I'll be at the joint in case yuh want me. Kin I get in touch wit' you here?"

"Not till later, Frisco, much later."

"Party?"

"Yes. A necking party."

Frisco's eyes widened. "You—a necking party!" he exclaimed incredulously. Then a slow grin broke on his face, "That little broad yuh brought outa my joint, eh? Well, I'll be damned!" He turned and left the room, chuckling.

Curly stood stock-still, a frown of annoyance on his forehead. He had forgotten all about the girl in his spare bedroom!

She was lying on the bed, asleep, when Curly entered the room. For a moment, he stood looking down at her, her arms flung wide, and her unbobbed hair a corn-coloured cloud against the pillow. The coverlet that she had thrown over her had fallen to the floor, and she was clad only in her scanties. Curly shook his head in amazement, as he noted the budding curves of her slim, yet rounded body. The girl was only a child!

With rare delicacy, he stooped and

restored the eiderdown before he woke her.

She yawned, stretched herself luxuriously like a cat, and sat up, the events of the night before apparently forgotten.

"Hello, big boy," she said brightly, "Got a cigarette? What time is it?"

Curly gravely proffered his case, his face expressionless. "After six, sister." He flipped his lighter open, and she took a light.

"Well, have yuh made up your mind what's gonna happen to little me yet?" She demanded, exhaling a blue cloud.

Curly eyed her steadily. Under his scrutiny some of her gayety evaporated.

"Yes," he said quietly, "I'm going to give you a break."

"A break?" she asked, "What kind of a break?"

"I'm going to let you put the finger on Greaser Cardi for me."

**T**HE girl paled. "Gosh, Curly . . ." she caught his eye, and was silent.

"I think you've got brains, sister, but I'm not taking any chances on your double-crossing me. If you got away last night, what were you supposed to do?"

"Meet Greaser at Bugs Rogers' jinny."

"Any reason you can't show up there now, and give him a story about being tailed by a flattie er something?"

"No. I guess I could get away with it. The poor mugs ga-ga about me."

"And you?"

"Bah!" She waved a disdainful hand.

"O. K. You have Greaser on the corner of Christopher and Seventh, anytime between eight and ten tonight. I'll attend to the rest."

"Where do I get off?"

Curly hesitated. "Two grand, and the best job you ever had in your life."

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Her eyes dilated suspiciously, "Lookin' after you?"

"Listen, sister," said Curly patiently, "I told you once this was strictly business, if any." He glanced at his watch. "You scram out of here inside half an hour. If you pull this job, come back up here. If you don't, you better start traveling." Without further words, he turned on his heel and left her.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE NOOSE

**T**HE DUKE let out a grunt of relief, and tucked his watch away, as Curly walked into the flat that served as the Brooklyn headquarters.

"Wow, Curly. I was just beginning to get nervous. Yer a few minutes late," he commented.

"Yeah, got tied up. These the men?" He looked around at the hard-faced crew sitting in various attitudes about the room. There was no mistaking their profession. Cold-eyed killers, every one of them. "Can you depend on them in a pinch?"

"Absolutely."

"Good. Let me talk to the two smartest."

The Duke motioned to a pair in the corner, and they approached. "Shall I tell them who you are?" he asked sotto voce. Curly nodded.

"Close in, fellows," The Duke motioned them nearer, "This is Curly Morgan, the Big Shot himself."

The eyes of the two gunmen widened. They murmured their pleasure. "The boss asked me to point out the two smartest mugs in the mob. I picked you two. See yuh don't disappoint me. Shoot, Curly."

Curly looked the pair over, and was satisfied.

"Got a boiler for these fellows, Duke?"

"Sure. They can pick one up at the garage."

"O. K. Listen, boys. I want you to go over to New York. Sometime be-

tween eight and ten, a dame will have Greaser Cardi on the corner of Seventh and Christopher. Pick him up but don't 'spot' him. Understand?"

They nodded assent.

"O. K. The moll's on the up and up, see? Don't hurt her, and if she wants to come, bring her along. We'll wait here for you till ten-thirty, and if you don't show we'll come after you. Don't come back till you get Cardi. Watch your step and use your heads. Get it?"

They did. After a hurried conference with The Duke, they went out.

The Duke locked the door behind them. "What now, chief?"

"Got that rope?"

"Sure; and the Tommies." He pointed to a corner, where a huge coil of two-and-a-half inch rope rested on the floor, beside four black suitcases.

"O. K., here's the lay." The men crowded round.

**N**INE O'CLOCK was striking from a nearby fire station tower, when two dark figures, their features hidden beneath low-pulled caps and the collars of their overcoats turned up around their ears, stepped out of a touring car on Perry Street. Reaching into the tonneau, they hauled out two black suitcases, and banging the door shut, proceeded up the steps of a shabby rooming house on the east side of the street. The car remained at the curb.

In answer to their ring, a seedy-looking old man opened the door and peered out suspiciously. Apparently satisfied, he took the chain off the door, and led the way up a rickety flight of stairs to the second floor. Without a word, he unlocked the room facing the rear, and stood aside for them to enter. The shorter of the two newcomers handed the old man an envelope, and they passed inside.

They ignored the single electric light bulb hanging from the center

## SPEAKEASY STORIES

of the ceiling, and in the darkness, proceeded to open the black bags. In a few minutes, two murderous-looking muzzles poked their way through the slightly opened window.

"Draw yer bead, Shorty," whispered the other.

The man so addressed knelt for a few seconds at each of the two machine guns. Then, apparently satisfied, stepped back. "Whatsa time?"

The luminous dial of a watch was visible for a moment. "Twenty after nine," came the whisper.

"O. K. Ten minutes to wait. On the ground floor, ain't it?"

"Yeah. The boss said be sure and keep them low. That's the joint." He pointed to the four-story structure directly before them. "Gimme a butt, will yuh?"

One block east, on Flatbush Avenue, a sinister curtained sedan drew slowly toward the sign which swung in the winter wind. "Cigars, tobacco, and cigarettés" was the commonplace legend that marked the headquarters of Shag Bernstein. Here too, a muttered inquiry for the time met with the same response—"Twenty after nine." The car came to a cautious halt some doors away from the building that contained the Brooklyn gangster's speakeasy.

From his eminence atop this building The Duke observed with satisfaction the activities both front and rear, and stepping noiselessly across the tar-papered roof, reported to Curly, who was occupied with a tape measure and a long coil of rope.

"All set, chief," he said in almost inaudible tones.

"O. K." Curly slashed the rope with a pocket knife. "Sling this around that chimney near the front, and see it's tied tight." He flung a loose end to his lieutenant, and picking up the coils carried them across toward the brick abutment.

When the rope was in position, they hurried back toward the little pent-

house structure that housed the door leading downward. A cautious pressure showed it to be locked from the inside. The Duke grinned, and the two men looked at their watches. Curly slowly drew his left glove from his pocket, and slipped it on. In the other hand, he held a short, stub-nosed, automatic.

The Duke glanced around, estimating the distance that separated Curly from the chimney at the front, and himself from the ventilating shaft at the rear, and nodded in silent satisfaction. Both men peered intently at their wrist-watches, and stood waiting. Slowly, Curly raised his gat in the air, his eyes glued to the second hand of the dial.

**CRACK!**

**T**HEN pandemonium broke loose.

A roaring, racking, hammering split the night open, as the machine guns in the rear went into action. The bullets rattled and crashed against the walls of the downstairs speakeasy, shattering the windows, and lighting the rear yards with the vicious orange flashes of the explosions. From within came shrieks of pain and fright, and through the suddenly windowless sashes came the crashing of tables, and the hoarse shouts of panic-stricken men, as the screaming lead met it's mark.

Almost immediately, from the front of the store, there began a similar rattle of death. The glass front of the cigar store crumpled like paper, as the leaden slugs tore their way through the tawdry windows. Those who had broken through in a mad effort to escape the flying death in the rear were mowed down like wheat, and the gangsters within found themselves caught between two fires.

To the ears of the two men waiting above came the sound of crashing footsteps, as the trapped men rushed up the stairs. The Duke stooped, and from a box at his feet, took an oval,

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hard object. Curly's gloved hand came from his pocket, and he slowly clenched his fist.

The door before them rattled, as a key was frantically turned in the lock, and with a rush, a flying figure jumped out upon the roof. Curly swung from his knees, and his fist crashed into the jaw of the man with all the force of his muscular body behind it, and the figure dropped like a poled ox. The Duke's rod roared into the open doorway, and the two leading men crumpled to the ground.

The others, now utterly panic-stricken, fought madly to escape this new menace. With a shout of warning, Duke slammed the pineapple square into the centre of the milling, cursing crowd, slammed shut the door, and fell on his face behind the ventilator, just as the little pent-house structure rose in a cloud of roaring flame.

Immediately he jumped to his feet, and ran to where Curly, almost to the front of the building, had crouched behind the chimney. The prone figure of the man Curly had slugged lay at his feet. A flashlight appeared like magic in the hand of the lieutenant, and a hoarse cry of triumph broke from his lips.

"It's Bernstein all right!" he shouted.

Curly's hand shot out, and he grasped the already prepared noose. It went quickly around the neck of the unconscious man, and the slip-knot drew tight. Between them, they picked up the gangster, carried him to the edge of the roof, and with a heave, shot him over.

For one grisly second, the body hurtled downward, then, with a crack that could be heard even above the rattle of the Tommys, the rope, securely fastened around the chimney, snapped tight. Shag Bernstein dangled, dead, before the doorway of his own hangout!

Like two wraiths, the racketeer and his lieutenant sped across the roofs.

Four buildings away, a hospitable open door welcomed them, and they ran down a flight of stairs, making for a room at the rear of the building.

Bursting through the door, they clambered out through the window, onto a long ladder that completely spanned the two yards below, terminating in a similar room in the house directly behind. It was the work of seconds to make their way across, down the stairs, and out onto Perry street.

The black sedan was coughing at the curb, and the door flew open as they approached. The sound of firing had ceased from the other side of the block, and as Curly and The Duke clambered aboard, the second car shot around the corner ahead of them.

"Follow them!" directed Curly, and with a roar, they shot forward.

## CHAPTER IV

### CURLY TAKES A CHANCE

**B**ACK in the Brooklyn hangout, Curly paced the floor impatiently, waiting for a report from the two men he had sent to get Cardi. The men were in high spirits, several bottles had appeared from somewhere, and they were celebrating as noisily as they thought expedient in the presence of the boss. The hands of the clock moved slowly forward, but there was no sign of the two gunmen.

Ten-thirty passed. Quarter to eleven. Then, as his watch pointed to eleven o'clock, Curly beckoned the Duke over to him.

"Get five men in one of those cars, Duke. Tell the rest they can scam."

The Duke obeyed without parley, and in a few minutes they were speeding in a loaded sedan across the bridge.

For some unexplainable reason, Curly felt a sense of disappointment. That the little broad had double-crossed him seemed unquestionable.

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Angrily, he told himself that there was nothing surprising in that—that he had expected it all along. But somehow, he could not convince himself. He had trusted the girl, and she had ratted on him, and nothing he could say to himself could change it. Curly shook his head sadly. He, Curly Larramie, veteran racketeer, tricked by a dame!

True, the cross had not amounted to much—yet. But somehow Curly could not get rid of the thought that it was a disaster. Why, he could not say, but a sense of hopelessness swept over him, and threatened to swamp him. Furiously, he put it aside. The girl would die, and that was the end of that. Hell, she *was* pretty . . .

The car at length swung off Waverly Place, and started slowly up Christopher. Curly was forced to devote all his attention to the business in hand, and his sharp eyes peered through the gloom. They circled the block once, and as they made a second circuit, he caught sight of two lurking figures near the corner.

"Take a look, Duke." Curly indicated the pair.

"Swing that searchlight around, Trigger," commanded the Duke in a low voice, and as the beam of light caught the pair in passing, "Those are our men, Curly," he said with some surprise.

"Get them over here."

Answering some signal from Duke, the two men came up to the car. To Curly's inquiries, they replied that they had been there since nine-thirty, and that no one remotely answering to the description of Greaser Cardi had come within their range of vision.

Curly received this news in puzzled silence. This did not fit in with his previous conclusions. If the girl had spilled her guts to Greaser, why had the two gunmen not been molested? The veriest dumb-bell would know that Curly would have someone waiting on the corner to nab the Greaser

when she steered him there. Something was wrong, somewhere. Curly stepped lightly out of the car.

"What the hell yuh doin', Curly?" asked The Duke anxiously, scrambling out after him, "Where yuh goin'?"

Curly smiled at the worried tone in his lieutenant's voice. "I'm going in and see what's keeping Cardi," he said in a matter-of-fact tone.

The Duke regarded him open-mouthed.

"Hell's bells!" he exclaimed, "are yuh crazy?" Then, as Curly stood buttoning his gloves, "Yuh ain't serious, are yuh, Curly?"

"Yes, of course. Why not?"

"But . . . but . . . fer Cripes sake, Curly . . ." spluttered the flabbergasted Duke.

"Yes?" said Curly courteously.

"They—they'll burn us down the minute we put our mugs in the door. Gees, Curly, they know they're onna spot, and they'll plug us sure!"

"Probably you're right, Duke. But you see, as it happens, nobody in that mob has ever seen me. They don't know my face from Adam. I can walk in, have a drink, take a look around, and walk out. No danger in that is there?"

"But—but me? They know my mug like a book!"

"You? Oh, well, that's all right. You're not coming. I'm going alone. Wait here!"

Without waiting for the speechless Duke to recover his wits, Curly turned on his heel, and strode towards the entrance to Bugs Rogers' speakeasy.

## CHAPTER V

### THREE WISE GUYS

IN THE brilliantly lighted den of his Long Island home, Randall Myers was entertaining two friends. They were seated around a card table, playing draw poker for insignificant stakes, but they seemed somehow, un-

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interested in the game, for the eyes of all three continually turned, as though against their will, toward the telephone in the corner.

Commissioner Lenox, the ends of his walrus moustache damp from continual dipping in the schooner of beer beside him, at length threw down his cards.

"Hell, Myers, nobody's interested in this game. Where the hell is Bernstein? He was due here at eleven thirty, and it's after twelve now!"

Myers, his beady eyes shifting under the powerful gaze of the policeman, shrugged his shoulders. "How do I know? He'll be here presently, and the others with him. Eh, Sammy?"

The eyes of the two turned to the third member of the party, a little weasel-faced man, who glared sullenly at the table. "Yeah, I guess so," he replied hesitantly, "unless the Big Shot got him, er somethin'."

Myers regarded him with scorn. "What's the matter, Sammy, yellow?"

"Naw, I ain't yellah, yuh big punk, but I wisht tuh God I'd never come in on this deal. We'll probably all end up wit' a dose o' hot lead inna belly. Hell, nobody even knows what Curly Larramie looks like. You can't muscle in on his racket till yuh put him and that smooth-faced guy Duke outa the way, and how yuh gonna get him onna spot?"

"I know what he looks like," spoke up the prosecutor blusteringly, "We'll put him on the spot if necessary. Hell, we got enough men in his organization workin' with us so we can't miss. Half the mobs he controls are just about ready to duck over to us. And now that we got rid o' Crandon, the rest o' the boys'll do just as I say. And there's a cool million in it every year for each of us!"

"Sure!" the commissioner echoed heartily, his eyes gleaming at the mention of money. "It's a cinch, Sammy! Curly'll just send his red-hot down to

Myers to squawk about Bernstein burning down two o' his collectors, and Myers'll stall him off. Hell, before he knows where he's at, we'll ease him right off the map. Soon's the other mobs see that they can get away with it, they'll all fall in line with us. Why should we let a guy like Curly get away with all the dough? Hell, we're the ones that—"

The telephone was ringing lustily in the corner. All three men sprang to their feet, so nervous were they. Myers answered, and as he listened, they saw his face go white. As he hung up, his hand was shaking so that he could hardly put the receiver in place.

"What is it, Myers?" the commissioner snapped. "For God's sake don't stand there like a mummy. What's happened?"

The attorney swallowed hard, and beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead. "Bernstein—they hung him!" he managed to stammer.

"What?" The commissioner's eyes were popping from his forehead, "How—where . . . ?"



**M**YERS poured himself a strong drink of Scotch from the bottle, and hastily gulped it down. "A mob opened fire on Shag's joint, front and rear, and when the boys tried for the roof, they smothered them with a bomb. They got Shag somehow, and hung him, from the chimney, with a long rope, so . . . he dangled . . . dangled right in front of . . . the joint." Myers hand strayed to his col-

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lar. He could feel the noose tightening around his own fat throat.

Fear was in the face of all three, but the commissioner's harsh voice recalled them to reality.

"Well, what about it?" he demanded irritably, "just because one cheap mob gets wiped out, don't mean we're licked, does it?"

Now that actual peril had come upon them, the man they called Sammy was coolest of them all. "Sid-down, fer Cripes sake, will yuh, Myers? We're in this thing too deep tuh get out now, any of us, and there's only one thing tuh do, like I been telin' yuh all along. That's tuh wipe out Curly!"

"Easy to say," sneered Lenox, "but how yuh gonna do it? Hell, there's a thousand guys in New York that'd croak him if they got the chance, but he's too damn smart fer them."

"Aw, pipe down, will yuh?" said Sammy angrily. "If yuh'll close yer trap a sec, I'll tell yuh how." The other subsided, chewing at a fat cigar. Sammy went on.

"Somehow, Curly found out the rods that plugged Crandon in the Gilded Goose. We know that, because he put them on the spot this A. M. Gabber Schultz is workin' real close to the Big Shot," he explained. "Now, chances are, he knows Greaser hired 'em from Chi. The little moll that was in on the job showed up about seven tonight. Curly caught her before she could lam, and he took her over tuh his dump. She says she played dumb an' got away wit' it." He winked one eye, leering evilly, "I guess we know how she got away wit' it, awright, but if she don't wanna say so, well, what the hell? Anyhow, she says Curly kinda thought it might be Greaser that done it, and knowin' him like I do, I'd say he'd prob'ly be gunnin' fer Greaser on the chance."

"Well, what the hell?" Myers broke in shortly, his courage returning. "What's that gotta do with getting

Curly? Hell, if everybody that pulls a job fer us gets the business, who we gonna get to do anything?"

"Yeah," said Lenox, "I don't see—"

Again the telephone was ringing. The three men looked at each other in consternation. Sammy voiced the thought uppermost in the mind of each.

"Cripes," he breathed, "he musta got Cardi!"

Myers stepped toward the instrument hesitantly, as though afraid it would bite him, and placed the receiver to his ear. His greeting was short, and breathless silence held the room, as the voice at the other end conveyed the message.

The effect on the prosecutor was startling. From fear, his expression changed to astonishment, to excited joy, and as he hung up, to dazed unbelief. He turned to his cronies, and fairly shouted:

"THEY'VE GOT CURLY LAR-  
RAMIE AT BUGS ROGER'S  
SPEAK!"

### CHAPTER VI

#### VICTORY!

CURLY'S first thought when he struggled back to consciousness was that somebody had sawed the top of his skull off. A band of fire seemed to run around his skull, taking in his forehead and part of his nose.

An attempt to reach up and find out what was torturing him, disclosed that his hands were securely tied behind him, and further investigation showed his feet also lashed together. He was lying on a bare wood floor, and the room was apparently pitch dark. He groaned, as a fresh wave of pain racked his head. To his surprise, he heard a chair scrape, and a rough voice spoke:

"Are yuh awake?"

"Yes," Curly replied, "I'm awake. What the hell's on my head?"

"Yer skimmer, fer Cripes sake!"

"Well, take it off, will you? How'd



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it get jammed down on my eyes like that?"

"You yanked it down when Hyman hit yuh onna dome. We couldn't get it off. I guess yuh didn't want nobody tuh see yer mug." Curly felt the man's hands on the brim of the hat. "Here, wiggle yer head, will yuh?" The hat came off.

"Thanks fellah." Curly drew a long breath of relief, and memory crowded back on him. So Hyman had double-crossed him too! Who next, for Cripes sake?

Something seemed to be knocking at the door of his mind but he could not quite get it. He went back to the moment when he and Duke left the Brooklyn stash in the sedan.

The men he had sent for Greaser Cardi were still patrolling the corner when he got there so Curly had determined to walk boldly in and see if he could find out what had happened. So far everything was clear, but right there memory left a blank. He addressed the hard-looking gangster that was apparently his guard, once more.

"You know who I am, fellah?"

"Yeah, sure. Yer Curly Larramie, used tuh be the Big Shot around this town." He broke open his rod, examined it, and laid it on his knee.

Curly blinked. "Used to be? What do you mean used to be? How long have I been here?"

The guard lit a cigarette, and replied in an off-hand manner, "Oh, you just been here about fifteen minutes, but yer goin' fer a ride when the boss gets here."

"Who's the boss?"

The gangster shrugged. "I dunno. I'm workin' fer Greaser Cardi. Some Big Shot's comin' out to give yuh the O.O., then you get the business."

Curly thought this over for a minute. "How'd I get here, big boy?"

"Search me. You just walked intuh the jinny downstairs and Hyman seen yuh. He give the office tuh one o' the

boys and he crowned yuh." He looked quizzically at the prone figure for a moment. "What the hell'd yuh come here fer, anyhow? Didn't yuh know Greaser was gunnin' fer yuh?"

"No." Curly thought rapidly. This big dummy apparently was not on the inside. Curly had a shrewd suspicion that his present post was not given him because of any startling intelligence, "What do you want most in the world, big boy?" he asked abruptly.

The other regarded him with a twisted smile. "Just what Cardi's givin' me fer this job," he said with finality.

"I'll double his offer."

"Can't be done."

**T**HIS was a new one to Curly. "Why not? I can pay out ten times all Cardi can raise and never feel it. Get me out of here, and you name your own price."

"Cardi's the only one that's got my price."

Curly frowned in perplexity. "What the hell are you talking about, fellah? What's Greaser got I haven't?"

The big gorilla's eyes gleamed for a moment. Then he smiled crookedly. "The smoothest little skirt I ever see in my life. She double-crossed Cardi er somethin' and he was gonna put her on the spot. He's gonna let me take her back tuh Chi, when I go."

Curly's face displayed none of the elation he felt. So the little frail had been on the level with him! The thought gave him new strength somehow. Out of all this mess of double-crossing, this kid had come to the front for him!

"How about a drink o' water, fellah? I'm burnin' up."

The guard looked puzzled. He let the rod slip into his pocket, and stood up irresolutely. "Well, I dunno. I'll see." He went to the door and stuck his head out.

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"Hey," he shouted, "the guy wants a drink o' water. How about it?"

The answer was inaudible to Curly, but his guard drew back inside. "They'll bring one up in a minute."

Curly waited with impatience, till a knock on the door announced that the drink had arrived. With a start, he realized that he could not have much more time. The Big Shot, whoever he was, that was on his way to see him, could not be much longer.

His guard took the water in through the door, and approaching Curly, knelt down awkwardly to put the glass to his lips. Curly pretended to try and drink this way for a moment, then shook his head. The man took the glass away from his lips.

"Lift me up, won't you, fellah? I can't drink the damn stuff that way."

"O. K." After a moment's hesitation, the other assented. He placed a big arm around Curly's shoulders, and heaved him to a sitting position. This way it was much easier, and Curly drank eagerly. Then something happened, apparently for without warning, Curly toppled over sideways, knocking the glass from the astonished gangster's hand, and falling, seemingly unconscious on the floor, his twisted position causing him to flop over like a decapitated chicken.

**T**HE guard sprang up, cursing; his rod in his hand. Then seeing that his prisoner made no move, he approached cautiously. Curly seemed to be out cold, so he rolled him back to his former position, and kicked the pieces of the shattered tumbler into the corner. But not before Curly had secured a jagged piece, about the size of a quarter, which he held in his closed hand, the while he pretended to be utterly oblivious of what was going on.

The guard regarded him stupidly for a moment, scratched his head, and finally shuffled back to his chair.

Curly let a few moments elapse.

Then he groaned, and started coughing. The cough developed proportions; Curly choked, gasped. He writhed and twisted, the racking cough seemed about to strangle him. The gangster, his feeble intellect almost run out, once more approached, dubiously. His brain could not cope with the situation, and Curly cried in sobbing tones.

"My throat—throat—loosen—collar—" The gangster, a look of consternation on his bovine face, bent down.

In a flash, Curly was on his feet, the severed cords falling away as he leaped up, and his hands closed about the guard's throat in a grip of steel before he could utter a sound. The man's heavy fist swung against Curly's jaw, again and again, and he struggled madly to tear the fingers from his throat, but Curly, unmindful, only dug deeper, deeper into the leathery throat.

Frantically, the man raked his fingers across Curly's face, leaving deep, red marks, searching for the racketeer's eyes, but Curly only ducked, and with almost superhuman strength drove the man's head slowly backward. The gangster's struggles grew slowly weaker, his face purpled, and suddenly he went limp in Curly's hands. There had not been a sound that could be heard further than the door!

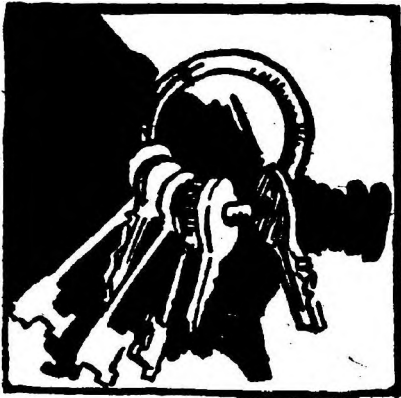
Curly eased the now senseless body to the floor, and pulled the man's rod from his pocket. With his handkerchief, he staunched the flow of blood from his own face, and mopped his streaming brow. Then, carefully wrapping the handkerchief around the butt of the pistol, he crashed the weapon down on the man's forehead. He could take no chances on his awakening too soon.

To change clothes with the unconscious guard was the work of but a few moments, and pulling the greasy cap down on his eyes, Curly made for the door. His hand came in contact with a bunch of keys in the trousers

## STRICTLY BUSINESS

pocket, and he pulled them out curiously.

Suddenly he realized that he held in his hand the means that would enable him to turn this apparent defeat into the most startling victory! Curly did not have spies in Cardi's mob for nothing. He knew what was concealed on this floor, and the keys he held were undoubtedly the keys to the other rooms opening into the hall.



**O**UTSIDE, the hall seemed deserted. Curly cautiously closed the door behind him, taking the additional precaution of locking it. His rubber soled shoes made no sound as he stepped cautiously down the dimly lighted passageway, the rod ready in his hand.

On each side, he could see four doors. Besides the one he had just quitted, he saw there were only two of them closed, and he felt sure that the one he was seeking was on this floor.

A few strides took him to the first closed portal, and to his delight, it swung open under the first key he tried. But there was nothing of interest within. It was evidently a bedroom, and in a very untidy condition.

Fully conscious that the precious moments were slipping away, Curly tried key after key in the lock of the one remaining door, and little beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead, as one after another, they failed

to fit. There were only two keys left on the ring, when at last he felt the bolt slip back under his fingers, and the door swung quietly open, its well-oiled hinges making no sound.

One glance was all he required to tell him that his surmise was correct. He was gazing into the armory of Cardi's mob!

Automatics, revolvers, blackjacks. Tommy-guns in their canvas covers; heavily padded containers of soup; pineapples, dynamite sticks; enough to blow an army to kingdom come. All packed carefully, but all ready for instant use. And, as if to make the picture complete, a heavy coil of fuse lay on the floor. A quick estimate told Curly that there must be about sixty feet in the coils, and he could not repress a chuckle of satisfaction. He stopped to pick it up, and the smile froze on his face. Heavy footsteps were coming up the stairs!

Curly's hand darted into the box at his feet, and he helped himself to a black leather blackjack. The next instant he was inside the bedroom he had just unlocked. The window had been daubed with paint, and the room was in semi-darkness. As the steps came up the hall, he prayed that they would not notice the opened door of the armory. Then, with a start, he realized that the steps were coming directly toward the room he was in.

He drew back against the wall, and crouched in the gloom. Two men entered.

Curly swung the blackjack hard, on the skull of the rear man. There was a soft thud as he slumped to the carpet, and the other whirled round, to find himself looking into the business end of Curly's rod. Automatically, his hands went up.

"Make a sound, you rat, and I'll plug you!" snapped Curly, "Turn around!"

The bewildered gangster turned, and before he could realize what was happening, the blackjack once more

## SPEAKEASY STORIES

hissed through the air. Curly laid him gently on the floor beside his friend.

**H**E WAS back in the armory in a second, working feverishly. The carefully corked tins of soup, he opened gingerly, and the sticks of dynamite he laid around in little stacks on the floor. A barrel of gunpowder that he had not noticed before, caught his eye, and a bung in the side came away easily in his hand. One end of the fuse he jammed through the bung-hole, and half inserted the wooden plug again, to hold it secure. Then, unwinding the coil as he went, he moved silently toward the rear stairs, till he estimated there was enough fuse paid out to burn for ten minutes. There he cracked the fuse across his knee, and dug in his pocket for a match.

He looked down, and to his delight, a shaft of fresh air struck him in the face. There was a door directly below him, and the door was open. Quickly, he struck the match, and applied it to the fuse. The fire started its spluttering way toward the closet.

Making no sound, Curly, his rod ready for instant action, slipped quickly down the stairs. He gained the first floor, and found no one in sight. The open door was in the basement. As he bent over to listen, the muffled sound of voices came to his ears. Somebody was in a room almost directly below him. He would have to pass by the door to that room, to reach freedom. He still had several minutes, but Curly had no intention of wasting time. He slipped cautiously down the steps. One creaked under him, and he held his breath.

But no one had apparently heard it, and he resumed his descent. Painfully, step by step, he made his way downward.

At last the bottom step—and the open door before him. From the door at his left came the sound of voices, and they were heated now. Somebody

was having an argument. Curly smiled grimly. They would finish that argument in hell!

He slipped by the door, and was on the threshold of the exit when suddenly the blood froze in his veins. A shrill cry of agony reached his ears, and the voice was that of a woman! For the second time, he had almost forgotten the little broad.

A furious curse broke from his lips, and with one spring, he turned and launched himself at the door. No time to fool, now!

The door flew open under his onslaught, and in a split second Curly took in the scene. Myers, his flabby face a mask of fear, cowered in a corner. The police commissioner Lenox, stood stock-still, his wits paralyzed, while Sammy and the Greaser went for their rods.

They never touched them. Curly's rod barked twice, so close together that it almost seemed like one shot, and the two gangsters seemed to fall almost into each other's arms. The hands of the two officials were high in the air, and Myers was trying vainly to find his voice.

**F**RANTICALLY, Curly looked around for the girl. Suddenly he saw her, beside the fireplace, where she lay bound, her bare feet mute testimony of the fiendish torture they had been putting her to. Curly leaped across the room, snatched a knife from the table and cut the ropes. She moaned, and tried to rise, but her strength had not yet returned, and she could not move herself.

The two men in the corner had started to move toward Curly, but at a wave of his rod, they jumped hastily back. For a moment, Curly was baffled. Then, he stooped to pick up the girl, and to his surprise, she gave him a shove sideways, just as the butt of a pistol whistled past his head. It fell on his shoulder with numbing force, and the pistol dropped from his

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nerveless fingers. He swung round, to gaze into the tight-lipped face of—  
The Duke!

"My God!" gasped Curly, "You, Duke. You too!"

The Duke swallowed hard. "Sorry Curly. When yuh're gone I'm the Big Shot. I gotta let yuh have it!"

Fascinated, Curly's eyes dropped to the butt of Duke's pistol. For what seemed an eternity, he saw the finger close on the trigger. He nerved himself for the shock of the bullet, when suddenly, a roar sounded behind him, then another and another. The Duke staggered, his hands folded over his stomach, he sank slowly to his knees, and flopped over on his face.

In amazement, Curly turned to where the girl was sitting on the floor, the rod she had taken from the dead Sammy in her hand, trained on the shivering police commissioner and the prosecutor.

With a shout of delight, Curly picked her up in his arms, threw her over his shoulder, and ran for the door.

From above came the sound of running footsteps, but so quick had been the whole scene that no one had yet had time to reach the basement level. Curly slammed shut the door and raced out into the yard, the sweet-scented bundle hardly noticeable on his powerful shoulders. As he clambered over the fence, the roar of shots sounded in his ears, bullets singed by him, but it was pitch dark in the yard, and Curly knew they could not see him. He ducked, dodged, across the lawn, in a zigzag course, keeping out of the rays from the street lamp that shone into the next yard, till he suddenly saw an opening.

Like a streak, he darted into the street, sending an astonished pedestrian rolling into the gutter. A grunt of relief broke from his lips as he saw the car still where he had left it, and with a supreme effort, he sprinted toward it.

The driver, evidently awaiting the arrival of someone, Curly never knew who, was in readiness, and swung the rear door open as he ran up.

"Move, fellah!" gasped Curly, "pay no attention to the lights! Quick!"

The well-trained driver wasted no words, but slammed the accelerator to the floor, and the car fairly leaped forward. Across Seventh Avenue, through a red light,—and they had just one second to spare!

**T**HE next instant, a roar like a giant avalanche struck their ears, and a huge pillar of flaming masonry hurtled skyward, bathing for an instant the whole district in white light. The crash of falling timbers and the screams of terror of dying men made the night hideous, and Curly turned away from the sight, remorseful. But there was no use worrying about it.

"Move, fellah," he commanded halfheartedly. "Up to Central Park West."

For the first time, Curly turned all his attention to the girl sitting dry-eyed beside him. A tremendous wave of admiration and gratitude swept over him, and his words stuck in his throat.

"Gosh, sister," he managed to say, "you won't be sorry about what you did for me tonight. I—I—well I never expected to find a dame that— well, anyhow, you can write your own ticket, as far as I'm concerned. I—well— thanks a hell of a lot."

"I guess yuh lost some o' yer best men tonight, eh Curly?"

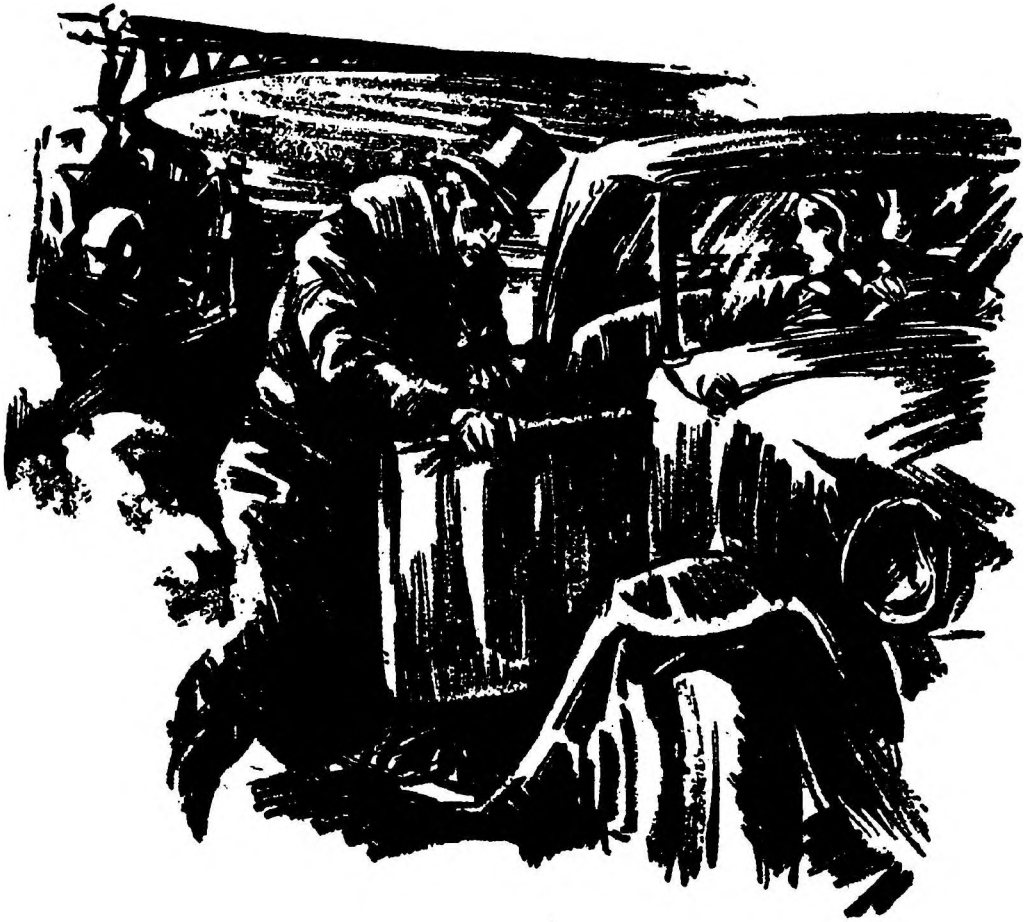
Curly laughed flatly. "Yes, I guess I did."

"D'yuh think yuh can gimme that connection we were talkin' about, the other day, Curly?" she asked.

Curly turned protestingly.

"Connection? Hell, sister, you own the works," he replied huskily.

"And— and is it—strictly business, Curly? Is it—oh, ouch!—oh, Curly dear—oh—"



## Doubling for Chiko

By HAL STEVENS

*Just a millionaire playboy caught in a tight spot because of his uncanny resemblance to Chiko the Wop! Now, what could a poor guy do but defend himself?*

**J**. BLEEKER STEWART, owner of more kale than he could spend legitimately, voluntarily submitted to highway robbery at the Race Horse, a night club with prices exaggerated so an average bank roll was a flivver. He had asked Jack Fenton to meet him there and push along the spending.

Being a millionaire, J. Bleeker had never recognized the value of time

any more than money, and if the other fellow—or girl as the case might be—was peeved at his being an hour or so late—Well, when a millionaire begins to spend his money on you lavishly, you can't stay peeved long.

A crisp, cold moonlight night in December. Bleeker's overcoat was of choice fur and his chin buried in the upturned, collar. The biting cold

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nipped his forehead, so the glossy topper was pulled down close to the eyes.

When he ultimately entered the Race Horse—late as usual—he glanced towards Fenton's embonpoint, slumped in a plush chair at one side of the glittering foyer, the carved arms preventing the rotund body from toppling over. Sawmill sounds came from the lips.

Bleeker determined to deposit his hat and coat with the peroxide check girl first and kick Fenton in the shins afterward.

She was pretty, and he was determining approximately how much of the prettiness was natural and how much artificial, which accounted for a collision with a bulk coming in the opposite direction. At the impact his face jerked toward this man, and he saw the other head also turned aside, so concluded the collision was accidental on the part of both.

Then the other face turned toward his—a face that J. Bleeker was certain belonged in Hell's Kitchen, and had no business in an exclusive night club in the upper Fifties.

The next moment he saw he was mistaken about the man's having no business there—his mission was one of business solely, not pleasure.

The gray eyes bored into his own like chilled steel. The muttered words from between thick lips were spit out at him. "You're late, you lousy Wop."

**T**HE criticism of being late was the usual one, but the designation as a vermin-covered Italian, applied to J. Bleeker Stewart was something to be resented. True his mother had been a Cuban and he had inherited the olive skin and black hair and eyes, but his pride was in his father's Scotch-American ancestry. His lips opened to respond, but got no further.

"Shut yer trap," muttered the other.

J. Bleeker's trap clicked shut for there was something impelling in the tone, but the hands in the pockets of the fur coat clenched.

"If yer'd tried to run out on us, yer'd have looked in de black hole before mornin'," the man informed him with decision. "Now git dis and git it straight. You takes de coin when I cops it. Dare ain't nothin' else for you to do but look pretty."

It was all done so quietly that the little peroxide thought the two men were exchanging apologies for the collision.

Bleeker felt someone brush against the back of his coat.

Muttered words shot into his ears from behind. "Let 'er go, Bill."

"O.K., Red," muttered Bill, the gray-eyed one, and strode across the oriental rug and into the door of the office at the right marked—"Manager—Private."

From behind J. Bleeker, one with flaming hair strode across the rug to the cubist doorway. Through it came scintillating light; the strains of jazz; the clink of glasses and the clatter of plates; high pitched laughter of exhilaration.

For an instant Bleeker swayed a little dizzily and twirled his cane. Such language in the Race Horse, with its exclusive patronage, was unbelievable. If the highballs he had already had at his club caused him to see and hear such unrealities, it might not be advisable for him to imbibe more with Jack Fenton.

His eyes turned to the somnolent one hissing in the chair at the left, and a man was standing beside the chair with his right hand raised to his left shoulder and under the coat.

There were no others in the foyer.

Then things happened all at once and all around him.

In the private office the thud of something. A moan.

## SPEAKEASY STORIES

Fenton's eyes opened at the sound, and the man beside him snapped into action. His hand jerked from the left shoulder and had a gat in it. The gat poked into Fenton's ribs. "Hands up, Fatty," commanded the gunman, and with popping eyes, Fenton tried to touch the ceiling with his pudgy fingers. In the gunman's other hand a second gat covered the peroxide. "Don't squawk, sister, and you won't get hurt. Let out a yell, and I'll pop you," the gunman informed her.

The girl promptly flopped on the floor in a complete fadeaway.

In the cubist doorway stood Red, a gat behind his back, prepared to jerk it to the front and plug, if anyone inside should discover something unusual was happening in the foyer.

No one was paying any attention to J. Bleeker Stewart. He was completely ignored.

The gunman at the left had turned his back toward him when the check girl passed out of the picture, and was facing Fenton, covering him with the gat. Red's back was toward him also. Bill was out of sight in the private office.

J. Bleeker's face set hard, as it did when he was on safari in Africa and jungle beasts were close. He had a gat in his pocket, and a police permit to carry it was in his wallet. He wasn't going to let three rotten gunmen pull off a stunt like that.

He could plug Red and the other thug through the back before they could wheel toward him; Bill he could plug as he leaped out of the private office at the sound of the shooting. The gat came out of his pocket pronto.

**A**T THE motion the gunman's head flecked in his direction. Bleeker expected the gat would fleck around too, but instead the thug muttered, "Don't lose your nut, Chiko. I've got the fat slob covered."

Bleeker's brain whirled a moment.

He was not J. Bleeker Stewart. He was Chiko. Who the hell was Chiko?

That moment's hesitation was fatal. The door of the private office flung open. Bill strode straight toward him, gat in one hand, a small steel cash box in the other. Bleeker became tense. The next instant Bill's gat would spit flame, and his own gat must crack first.

Bill's eyes darted down to Bleeker's gun but he did not raise his own. Instead he muttered, "Put up that iron, you fool."

Useless to attempt to plug now. One of them would get him before he could croak the three. The gat went back into J. Bleeker's pocket.

From the cubist doorway Red was backing toward him and toward the revolving door at the entrance. From Fenton's side the third gunman was also backing while keeping Jack covered.

The three thugs came together close around him.

Then Fenton, inert and flabby before, did a fool thing.

A look of horror came into his eyes as he saw his friend surrounded by three vicious gunmen and at their mercy. He realized Bleeker's desperate plight. The fat form jumped out of the chair and sprang toward the group, with a mad impulse to rescue.

Red's gat flecked in Fenton's direction and spit flame.

Bleeker saw the look of horror in Jack's eyes turn to one of agony; a pudgy hand clutched at his fat side; and the soft form slumped on the rug and squirmed there.

At the crack of the gat, the band inside snapped off the jazz. There were screams and cries.

Red sent bullets crashing through the crystal chandeliers in the dining room to cow the mob.

Bleeker felt the steel box pushed between his arm and his side. In-



## DOUBLING FOR CHIKO

stinctively he clamped his arm against it to hold it there, as he was crowded by the gunmen into the frame of the revolving door. It spun around and spewed him out into the street; the next revolving compartment threw Bill out against him, and other compartments threw out the two remaining gunmen.

J. Bleeker Stewart had faced the charging lion and shot the leaping tiger. His nerve steeled in danger, where death might be upon him the next moment. Now his eyes narrowed and went hard, and he became alert and keen.

He saw the emblazoned doorman step up with dignity to find out if anything was wrong. Bill's fist shot out and the dignitary was sprawled on the sidewalk.

A high-powered sedan rolled up to the canopy. He saw the driver's hand reach out and fling open the back door, and the next moment he was crowded across the sidewalk, and thrust through the open door; flung into the far corner of the back seat, and Bill jumbled in on top of him; Red on top of the two. The third gunman leaped to the seat beside the driver. The doors crashed shut. The car spun forward and wormed through traffic.

Throughout the fracas the glossy hat had stayed atop his head, pulled down toward the eyes. Gripping the box under one arm, he kept his chin buried in the up-turned coat collar, and snuggled deep into the corner. He was Chiko. So long as he remained Chiko, so long he might expect to live.

The moment it was discovered he was J. Bleeker Stewart, or someone other than Chiko, that moment the gats would spit inside the sedan, and he would go out through the door and make a smear on the asphalt, for he had just seen the four thugs commit murder and they would not let him live to tell what he had seen.

**B**AT was the third gunman; the driver was Lefty. This he learned while Bill and Bat were cursing Red for using his gat inside, and telling Lefty in clipped sentences what had happened there—a fat guy had been croaked and the hot seat was ahead of them if they were caught.

"You'll sit in it too, yer Wop, if yer try to double cross us," muttered Bill to Chiko out of the side of his mouth without turning eyes in his direction.

J. Bleeker thought not, but he was sure death would come to him some other way if his identity were discovered.

Bill and Bat were so busy villifying the red-headed one for his indiscretion, they paid no attention to Chiko. Red was too busy defending himself. Lefty had all he could attend to worming the speeding car in and out of traffic and doubling on the red lights so as not to halt.

The row gave Bleeker a few moments to pull himself together. He must remain Chiko if he wanted to live and if he only knew who Chiko was he might prolong life a while. As a play-boy he had dabbled in amateur theatricals, like everything else, and could act a role.

Chiko was a Wop, he knew that much. He had been called a lousy Wop when mistaken for Chiko. He could speak Italian and assume the tough Wop dialect. Chiko the Wop was manifestly a gunman. J. Bleeker was a detective-magazine fan, and knew a little of the fiction argot. He hoped it was correct, and would deceive the real thing.

The speeding car was dodging stop signals expertly and humming through 59th Street toward the Queensboro Bridge.

Profanity and obscenity toward Red were exhausted.

Out of the corners of his eyes

## SPEAKEASY STORIES

Bleeker saw Bill's cold gray ones glare toward him. He pressed himself into the darkest corner and concealed his face as much as possible.

"Well, yer Nut, yer pulled a gun in dare yerself," Bill growled.

Bleeker growled in response, and that seemed to be all Bill expected and he apparently saw no change in Chiko's usual appearance.

"Yer late and I oughter lam yer in de jaw an' spoil yer pretty face," Bill announced. Then his raving anger went and he became coldly vicious. "I began to think yer'd carried out yer threat to cut de gang. If yer had, yer'd 'a looked in de little black hole before sunrise. Git dat, and git it straight. Once wid us, always wid us. Dat's de gag. Savvy?"

Again J. Bleeker thought not, but remained silent.

He noted the three had put their gats back into the holsters under the left shoulder, and doubtless Lefty had one there too, but they were all unprepared to fire quickly. He hugged the cash box to greater security under his arm, his hand went inside the fur coat and his own gat was clutched in his fingers. He resolved that when his body smeared the pavement, a couple of other sprawled bodies would go out the open door along with his own.

Perhaps a quick shot through the back of the driver's head would send the speeding car crashing into something, and in the omelet he might come out with a broken leg or two, and not too much smashed up to be worth something afterward. He determined to risk it as soon as something appeared to crash into. It must be something substantial, so the wreck would be a splintering one and maim the thugs beyond the possibility of plugging. Probably he would be maimed too, but a lion might do that on his next big game hunt.

THE car was swinging across the bridge by the time he came to a decision, and he had to wait until it reached the other end before carrying out the plan. If he plugged the driver while they were on the bridge, the car would crash through the side rail, and the black waters of the East River far below would close over them all.

As the car whirled along, Bill muttered to him again. This time the tone was more friendly. "Listen, Chiko, de plan's been changed. Four of us jumps into anudder car parked on de Plaza, so's to throw de bulls off de trail. You takes de box and sneaks into de roadster, so if de bulls nabs us dare won't be no swag on us, an' we've got an alibi and a judge fixed, yer takes de north road, and we swings off in a circle to de south. Yer meets us beyond Elmhurst where de Black Stump Road comes into French Meadow. Know de place?"

"Sure," muttered Bleeker, and he sensed that Bill discovered no change in Chiko's voice. His own plan changed too. Let him once get into that roadster with the four gunmen spinning away on a different route, and the roadster would hum to the nearest police station. At the junction of the Black Stump Road, Bill and his friends would find, in addition to the roadster, a car full of cops who could plug as quickly as they.

Those who were not killed by the cops in the melee would sit in the hot seat for the ruthless murder of Fenton—Poor Jack, who had the fool idea he could rescue him from three gunmen. If he could only keep on being Chiko until he got into that roadster.

Then Bleeker's new plan collapsed at Bill's muttered words. "Maureen will be in de roadster on de north side of de Plaza, ready to whiz yer up past de Brewster plant."

## DOUBLING FOR CHIKO

So he would not be alone in the roadster. If it were to be a thug at the wheel, he would send a bullet crashing through his brain with as little compunction as into the hide of a thick skinned rhinoceros in the jungle, but he knew he could not shoot down a girl in cold blood, even if she were a bobbed-haired bandit and a member of a gang of killers. And who was this girl who was going to whiz Chiko away?

Light filtered into his brain. He remembered the flaring lights of the Du Barry night club. "MAUREEN—CHIKO." He had read the announcement below the lights. MAUREEN Stanley and CHIKO Gaspari—Terpsichorean Artists—Direct from the Follies Bergere." Probably Chiko really came from New York's little Italy and Maureen from the Bronx.

Once he had gone to the Du Barry to watch the pair dance. From a "ring-side" table, he had seen Maureen—seen very much of her—smooth skinned and lithe; blue eyes; golden hair; the face of an angel and apparently the brain of a devil. Devil she might be, but he knew he could not put a gat against her sinuous body and send a bullet plowing through the soft flesh.

At the night club a companion had told him he was Chiko's double and J. Bleeker Stewart's aristocratic nose had lifted at the comparison with a Dago.

Now Bleeker grinned. He would be Chiko, and he would be alone in the roadster under the silver moon with Maureen. At the Du Barry he had thought Maureen not half bad, and if he could not persuade her that he himself was not half bad, when he had her alone with him in a car, humming along under the naked, cackling trees in the moonlight—Well—then J. Bleeker Stewart had lost his art. The situation from being tragic had become thrilling.

UNDER the black centipede of the elevated structure at the Plaza the sedan checked behind another. The four gunmen were out the doors. J. Bleeker was out too. On the opposite corner by the Brewster clock tower, was the roadster.

He walked toward it nonchalantly, the steel box tucked under his arm. No need for running across the Plaza. He was Chiko Gaspari of the Follies out for a joy ride with his dancing partner. An innocent diversion. If the cop at the Jackson Avenue crossing saw a man sauntering casually across the Plaza to a parked roadster, he would not have a suspicion anything was wrong.

Bill's voice growled after him, "Maureen knows the signals."

Into the roadster he climbed unhurried, and snuggled down in the low seat beside the girl, his hat low over the eyes and the chin buried in the up-turned coat collar, for it was necessary Maureen should not discover, while the thugs were around.

He saw their car streak away.

The hood of the roadster was up, but the moonlight filtered in and glinted on Maureen's golden hair, and outlined the perfect profile. She was prettier than he thought.

She leaned over and kissed his cheek. There was some advantage in being Chiko.

"Chiko, you said you would not be there; you promised me you would cut the gang." The voice was low and Maureen seemed disappointed and depressed that he had participated in the robbery. She was not altogether devil.

Then it flashed through his mind that Chiko had NOT been there. He HAD kept his promise. Bill had detailed what would happen to Chiko if he cut the gang by not being there—the little round hole before sunrise. He began to admire Chiko who had kept his promise to Maureen, knowing this too.

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And into what tragic mess had he got Maureen by butting in—in Chiko's place. When they found out the substitution, the gang would believe the girl in a frame up, not only to have Chiko cut the gang but to cop all the swag—and in 1930 girls were put on the spot by gangs equally with men.

"Well, why don't you answer me?" Maureen snapped, peeved at his silence.

He summoned his best Wop accent that she might not discover too soon. "Maureen, it is for you I have a shock. Keep your eyes on the road and your hand on the wheel when I tell you, that we may not be two scrambled eggs in the ditch."

As a street lamp flashed by the car window, he saw the lips smile, but her eyes were fixed steadfast on the road that jumped to meet the speeding car. "Spit it out, Big Boy," she said, "I'll keep a grip on myself and the wheel."

"I am not—Chiko. I am—someone else."

She gasped. Her blue eyes flecked in his direction, but she kept the car steady as it sped on.

He took off his hat and she saw he was someone she had never met before. Then he told her in detail what had happened, and he never admired a girl's nerve more than he admired the nerve of that one, who guided the car straight as an arrow through the deserted moon-lit street as she listened to astounding things.

Her voice was steady too when he finished, and she asked. "What are you going to do with me? Turn me over to the cops?" Then her eyes flashed viciously to his an instant. "You'll have a hell of a time doing that little thing, Big Boy. I'll dump us both into the ditch first."

"I'm going to have you drive the car to the Elmhurst Avenue subway station so you can get back to New York and be clear of this mess," he informed her.

"Then what are you going to do?" she pressed.

**H**IS lips set. "I'm going to do up this gang tonight or they're going to do me up."

"You're a nut," she snapped. "If you meet 'em again and reach for your gat, you'll be Swiss cheese before your hand touches it."

"Listen," he responded, not flippantly but with gravity. "They're bound to find out I'm not Chiko. The check girl at the Race Horse knows me, and my real name will be in all the papers in the morning as kidnapped. The gang will find out then, if they don't before. I've seen them commit a murder. I can identify all of them. My testimony will send them to the electric chair."

"What's the answer, young lady? They'll put me on the spot before the D. A. can put me on the witness stand. If I don't get them tonight my executors will collect my life insurance within a few days. Night is the best time to hunt jungle beasts and I'm going gunning for them."

The girl's face was set now and her lips tight. "Suits me," she said crisply. "I'll stay with you."

He gasped audibly at the courage. "No, you won't," he countered. "Though I may have participated in a stick-up and murder involuntarily, I haven't got so low as to let a girl get croaked in helping me out of a mess."

She responded promptly. "Well, Big Boy, I've listened to your spiel and got your slant on the proposition. Now, listen to me and get mine. Where do you think I would get off if I rolled into New York on the subway tonight. I'd roll right out again tomorrow night on a one way ride. At the present moment I'm supposed to be playing the game with my boy friend Chiko and Bill Mulligan's gang. They'll get wise that I wasn't with my boy friend at all, but with a guy

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that will spill the beans to the cops as soon as he gets a chance.

"Yep, they'll get wise to it all right. Then what will happen to me, if they find I've sneaked back to the berg and let the guy go gunning around Long Island after them? Put that pill in your pipe and smoke it, Big Boy. I stay with you."

Bleeker knew she was right. "Guess we've got to stick together or we'll both be playing harps."

There was a hard laugh. "You're optimistic about being in the orchestra. I haven't got any such illusion. It's the pitch fork and furnaces for me, when I let go the life line."

Then she informed him, so he might not have any illusion about the present. "We've got to deal with four of the worst gunmen in New York, and when you've said that you've said a mouthful. Mulligan is leading them himself, and it's a big roll you've got there in that little tin box."

"Bill's got his whole gang with him—Bat Hennessy, Red O'Brien and Lefty Larry. Larry shoots with the left, but he can plug a hole through a quarter across the room. They can all do that. They all shoot on the tick too. While your hand's crawling up your nice white shirt to get your gat, they'll be putting more holes in it for your pearl studs."

J. Bleeker Stewart chuckled—couldn't help it.

Her eyes darted to his an instant, astonished, then darted back to the road.

She gave him advice. "Don't get your friends the cops in to jug them. They've got a couple of judges fixed to let 'em out on bail whatever the charge is. Half an hour's freedom is all they need, to say good night to both of us." Then her face went hard as granite. "They've got to be croaked—all four if we want to live."

Bleeker had been lolling in the seat. Now he snapped into the keen hunter of wild animals. "How about your

gas?" he asked sharply. "We don't know how much driving we may have to do."

"Don't think there's a great deal in the tank," she responded.

"Stop at the next gas station and make sure."

"Then what?" she asked.

"Then we'll meet Bill Mulligan and his mob at the junction of the Black Stump Road according to program, and give them the surprise of their lives."

**T**HEY veered south toward Elmhurst, and in a spot with no houses around, the lamps of a gas station flared into view. It was two hours after midnight. No other cars, so no chance of the roadster and Maureen being identified. Bleeker did not care about his own identification.

As they approached the station slowly he saw, through the open door, a telephone booth inside. His own safety and Maureen's depended upon putting the whole gang out of existence and not putting them in jail, and the police would only make arrests unless it was necessary for them to shoot in a melee.

The gang had to be tackled without the cops in order to accomplish the essential result, but Bleeker wanted the police to have an inkling of what was going on, and above all, he wanted to give them the names of the killers, so in case he failed, the cops could then finish up the job. He didn't tell Maureen this however.

They pulled up and he got out of the car, with hat off and face disclosed. The boys at the gas station, if they recognized him, would simply grin at J. Bleeker Stewart, play-boy, out on a joy ride with his lady friend at two o'clock in the morning.

While the tank was being filled by one of the boys, Bleeker went openly into the phone booth, and found that his old friend, Captain Tim Campbell was at the home precinct.

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"Thank God," Campbell's relieved voice came over the wire as he got the name and recognized the voice. "I was afraid the skunks had put you on the spot."

The word of the stick-up and kidnapping of J. Bleeker Stewart had got the veteran Captain out of bed and down to the station pronto to take personal charge of the search, for he liked the play-boy immensely. He gave the information that Jack Fenton had only been winged by a bullet in the side, and the doctors reported the wound not dangerous. That relieved Bleeker.

He gave the Captain the names of the gang, but said nothing about Maureen being with him, for he wanted to keep her out of the mess as much as possible. Then imparted the information that he was on his way to keep an appointment with Bill and his gang at the Black Stump Road and pop them off. He heard Campbell yell at the other end, "You damned idiot, you'll—" His phone went back on the hook and cut off the rest. That was that.

Being inside the booth, he could not see that while he was talking, one of the boys had come to a work bench just beside it, and was puttering around with automobile parts, his head close to the booth.

As the phone clicked back on the hook, the boy went quickly outside and muttered to the other one, who had then completed filling the tank.

When Bleeker came out the booth, one of the boys was standing on each side of the garage door. He turned to one to pay the bill.

**S**OMETHING landed on his back, and a blow crushed to his jaw from behind. The impact and the vicious punch sent him down on his knees. He saw an iron bar whirling above his head. It was swinging down. He perked his head aside and the bar crashed on his left shoulder, but the

heavy fur coat saved a fracture. His left arm tingled and went numb. With his right, he grabbed for a leg in front of him. Jerked it, and the thug flopped down on his back.

Bleeker was on top of him. The other thug on top of both. The one on top was a slugger. Hard blows. Stunning blows. One crashed again to the jaw and a stab of pain went through it. One crashed against his eye and it began to close. His head was reeling under the pounding. In addition to flailing with his uninjured arm, Bleeker began lunging with his knees and feet.

The thug on the ground grunted, and his face twisted in pain as a knee jammed into his stomach. Bleeker struggled to his knees and flung the thug off his back. Half way up on his feet, and the thug was back on him. He went down again. The one on the ground was again in fighting trim. The fur coat impeded Bleeker's action, but dulled the crushing blows. The three were a mass of kicking legs and punching arms rolling around on the ground.

The blows on the head were dazing him. He realized he was getting the worst of it. The thugs were hard muscled; quick as cats; vicious as tigers. Fists, knees, feet, all were thudding on him. His own were flailing too. Each was fighting to maim. Blood was trickling down his face from a hard-knuckled slash across the forehead.

His eyes flickered toward the car. Maureen was out of it, standing by the side. He wished she had sense enough to step on the gas and spin to the nearest police booth for help, instead of standing there dumbly staring at the mix up. His muscles strained and he threw the man off his back for an instant.

Maureen's hand jerked up and something glinted in it. There was a crack, a spurt of flame, and the thug he had just thrown off gave a yell of

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pain, and slumped to the ground writhing. "Not a half bad shot for a girl," thought Bleeker.

At the crack of the gat, the thug on the ground under him flicked a glance in that direction. Bleeker's fist crunched on the jaw, and the thug's hold relaxed. Bleeker wrenched himself up on his knees again. There was a little space between the two bodies.

The gat cracked. He saw the thug's shoulder wince as the ball crashed into the flesh. Bleeker jerked himself free. Maureen shot straight. On Safari, she would stop a leaping lion as it sprang to her.

He was staggering to his feet; reeling toward the car.

The thug with the damaged shoulder was on his feet. Bleeker saw Maureen was covering both thugs with the gat; flicking it toward each of them alternately. But apparently they had had enough. The one with the arm dangling was supporting the other who limped. They went inside the garage.

Bleeker reeled around to the right of the roadster. "You'll have to drive, Maureen. My left arm is out of commission temporarily," he informed her.

She jumped to the wheel.

He slumped down into the right seat. Blood was trickling down his face from the slash on the forehead. There was a cut in his lip that spilled blood.

The roadster shot away, Maureen crouched over the wheel.

"Are you going on with it?" Her voice was sharp.

"You bet, he responded grimly.

"Good." She spoke with equal grimness, and the car hummed through the silver moonlight, along the quiet country road. They were in the metropolitan city fighting jungle beasts.

**H**IS brain was clearing and he felt himself for damages. Investigation showed nothing broken. A hand-

kerchief around his head stopped the trickle of blood from getting into his eyes and blinding him. His right arm was intact and could shoot straight. The numbness was going out of the left one. He could wriggle the fingers and the arm would soon be in commission again.

He was almost as good as new from a utilitarian standpoint, but he was not ornamental. One eye was almost closed; lip cracked open; his nose was swelling; he could feel a puffy bag around the bruised eye.

As they were about to round a bend, he looked through the back window. All the lights were out in the gas station. A car was rolling out its driveway. He believed the attack to be an attempted robbery of a rich play-boy by two young thugs who hoped to get a big roll, and the thugs were undoubtedly making their getaway.

They would probably spurt into Manhattan, and out again through the tube into Jersey, and lose themselves in some other berg before the alarm could be broadcast.

The lamps of the car turned in their direction, and flared along the road in the far distance just as the roadster swung around the bend under Maureen's expertness. The two thugs instead of running away were trailing them. Bleeker sensed the import.

They had overheard his conversation in the booth with Campbell, and they were hooked up in some way with the Mulligan gang. That might account for the isolated gas station being open in the early morning hour when no regular customers could be expected. It meant there were two more thugs to be taken care of. Enemies in front and behind as well. He did not tell Maureen. No need of unnerving her.

"Bill said you knew the signals," he informed her. "What are they?"

"The flash light. One long and two short. The flash is on the seat," she answered crisply.

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He tried the light inside the car and found he could work it with his left hand. That left the right free to handle the gat.

"You're to give them the signal when you see a car at the junction," she informed him. "If it's their car, they'll flash an answer through the back window." Then she asked, "What then?"

He had a campaign planned. "Come up on them slowly. If they're moving, go somewhat faster than they are so as to slide by them. At the first crack of a gat, jam on the gas and shoot ahead. It's got to be over in five seconds one way or another."

One of her hands left the wheel an instant, and she placed her own gat on the seat beside her where she could grab it.

Bleeker's eyes lighted with admiration. She was going to die fighting if necessary.

He instructed her. "When the fracas begins, crouch down over the wheel so you won't get hit."

"I'll take care of myself," she snapped.

As the roadster swung into the Meadow Road, he again looked behind, and there was a flash of two lights in the distance around the last bend, just as the roadster veered. It might be an innocent car coming along the road, or it might be the thugs trailing. If it were, he wondered whether they had seen the roadster's tail light make the turn. It was a detail he had forgotten and he snapped the tail light off. If possible he wanted to fight it out with the Mulligan mob before the gas reinforcements arrived.

"Step on it," he directed, and the roadster shot forward still faster. It had been going over sixty-five.

They were whizzing along the Meadow Road from the north. He knew Black Stump entered at a broad angle, and surmised the encounter would take place around that angle.

The bulk of a car parked at the

right of the asphalt strip loomed ahead in the moonlight. Without direction, Maureen brought the roadster to slow. "She's a tactician," thought Bleeker. "Can take care of her own end without instructions."

Through the windshield he flashed the signal. Dash—dot—dot.

**T**HE parked car moved, swung up on the asphalt and hummed around the angle into Black Stump.

"Give her all you've got," muttered Bleeker.

The roadster leaped forward after the sedan.

Around the angle the other car was not over seventy-five feet ahead, still humming but the speed was slackening.

He jammed on the top hat, wincing as the pressure made pain shoot through the forehead, and stuck his head out the right window and into the moonlight, so those in the sedan might recognize Chiko.

Maureen, without instruction, brought the front wheels of the roadster up to the rear wheels of the sedan, and the roadster was sliding by.

Bleeker's eyes flashed just an instant in her direction. She was crouching low over the wheel, her body slumped down in the driver's seat; protecting herself as much as possible and taking no unnecessary risk. Her lips were set and her eyes steady.

Bill Mulligan's brutal face glowered from the back window of the sedan: A gat glinted in his hand. He was prepared for anything that might happen.

The windows of the roadster were open. Bleeker raised his gat cautiously and concealed it in the front of the fur coat.

Maureen swerved the car close to the side of the other racing one as it slid alongside.

Then Bleeker's gat cracked. A little black hole came in Bill Mulligan's forehead. The steel eyes had the sur-



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prise of unexpected death in them, and the brutal face disappeared in the blackness of the car.

At the crack, Maureen's foot came down on the gas. At the crack, Lefty at the wheel of the sedan, jerked his head toward the roadster in terror.

Another crack and Lefty slumped over the wheel.

The roadster darted forward under the gas.

The sedan, out of control, plowed up the gravel beside the asphalt. With clang of riven metal and crash of splintered wood, it roared against a telephone pole and snapped it off.

At the crash Maureen jammed on the brake and they rolled slowly to see what had happened.

Looking through the back window, they saw two black forms stagger from the wreckage; one stumbled in the roadway; went down on the knees; staggered up again.

Spruts of flame came from the two figures, but the bullets singed by harmlessly; and Maureen speeded up to get out of range.

"Only got two of 'em," muttered J. Bleeker Stewart, the big game hunter, disappointed at the size of the bag.

"What do we do next?" asked Maureen without a quiver in her voice.

A pair of lights glared into Black Stump behind them. The gas house boys.

"Change places with me," Bleeker directed sharply. "I know this section."

The car was rolling slowly as the exchange was made; then it shot forward again.

"Those two at the gas station are hooked up with the Mulligan gang. You only winged them, and they've been trailing us," he informed her. "We've got just as many to croak as we had at first."

"Sorry," she said calmly. "I ought to have killed them, but—but I couldn't. I thought if I just plugged them in the leg or arm and put them

out of action it would do just as well. I—I'm not a killer."

"You're all right," he said with conviction. "We'll circle around and have another try at it. We've got the rest of the night to bag our game."

THEY saw the sedan halt beside the wreck; the two in the road-way climbed into it, and it started forward after them. The four thugs were out for a killing the same as J. Bleeker.

Black Stump road was as straight as an arrow. White in the moonlight. Open country on either side. No chance of concealment or an ambush. A running fight would not do, for the gunmen could shoot as straight as they, and the roadster's gas tank was in the rear and vulnerable. If the car were disabled, the four could sneak up under cover and pop them off conveniently.

Bleeker was sure he had the faster car and could pull ahead and escape whenever he desired, but escape that night meant death the next one or some other night soon, for both Maureen and himself. He had to kill them that night.

He snapped on the tail light again, for now, when the two forces had united, he did not want the thugs to lose the trail until he had led them—somewhere.

He swung the roadster to the right at the junction of Black Stump and Queens. Queens was an open road too. No concealment. Bright moonlight.

He knew Red O'Brien was still alive and in the game, and believed he would not give up the chase. He was right.

Maureen informed him the two lights had flashed out of Black Stump and had turned in their direction on Queens Boulevard. The four were still following. The red tail light would show them which way the roadster went. On one side of the road was a row of trees but Bleeker kept the

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roadster out of the shadow and in the moonlight so the trailers could not help seeing it.

There was a sharp angle where Queens Boulevard and Rocky Hill Road met. Bleeker swung to the left around that corner. The turn could be plainly seen by the gang.

Just beyond the corner he swung to the left again, and into a farm lane. That turn would NOT be seen by the gang, for they had not then entered Rocky Hill.

He knew the lane for he had blundered into it once before, when exploring. There were close trees on both sides and dense scrub. The trees and scrub extended to the very edge of Rocky Hill. The lane itself led back to a farm house inhabited by a weatherbeaten farmer and his stoopshouldered wife and a brood of kids. Back of the barn, the lane ran into an old wood road, rough but still passable, and this circled back to Rocky Hill.

In the lane he brought the roadster to a squealing stop and backed it almost to the entrance, so the trees and scrub would conceal its presence there, until the sedan, dashing along Rocky Hill was almost on top of it.

"Take the wheel, Maureen, and be ready to step on it!" he directed, and as he got out the girl slid into the driver's seat.

Before he shot he had to be sure it was the thug's car. To kill innocent joy riders would be a fatal error.

He crouched by the side of the roadster at the back, gat in hand and waited in the silence.

There was the crackle of twigs in the cold, the snap of brittle branches, the sigh of the wind in the leafless trees.

Maureen was tense over the wheel, gripping it, and her foot was on the lever.

A moment only, and they heard the squeal of the brake and the skid of wheels on the asphalt at the junction;

then the hum of a car along Rocky Hill.

It would pass as a flash. The driver would be in the seat nearer to him. Bleeker had shot at the flash of a partridge and brought it down; had wheeled and brought down another bird of the covey. It was "good hunting" tonight. He hummed Mowgli's hunting song.

**W**ITH a humming roar the sedan flashed by. A shaft of moonlight showed one of the gas boys at the wheel.

The gat cracked. He saw the man at the wheel slump.

The gat cracked again. A yell of pain came from the sedan.

There were answering cracks and spurts of flame, but the bullets only zinged on metal and did not touch a human target.

Bleeker was back in the roadster as the crash of crumpling iron and wood told them the sedan had gone into the ditch.

The roadster lurched over the rough farm lane.

"What do we do now?" asked Maureen.

"Follow the lane and turn to the left at a wood road; we circle back on Rocky Hill and bag a couple more birds as we swoop by them again. Better let me drive through the lane."

As the roadster bumped and swayed over the ruts, he prepared to take the wheel, for he knew the exact location of the wood road, and wanted to swing into it without delay in order to finish the bag, while the survivors were still bewildered by the crash.

The roadster's motor sputtered and went dead.

"No gas," he muttered.

"Shot through the tank," gasped the girl, showing her alarm—for the thugs were not all dead. They did not know how many could still fight, and with the car disabled they themselves could no longer force the battle,

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but would have to wait until the thugs sneaked upon them, and could plug from the protection of the trees and black scrub.

Then Maureen steadied and examined her gat calmly. "What do we do next," she asked in a firm voice.

"Are you game for something that—that may not work?"

"Try me," she answered.

"I'm a beast and have shot you and you're dying." he announced, and stripping the blood soaked handkerchief from his head, he dabbed her forehead and cheek, making her face pitiable. "Stand in the moonlight so they'll be sure to recognize you and see you're badly wounded. Cling to the car door as though you are fainting. Scream to them for help as soon as I am out of sight. Tell them I ran away after shooting you. I'll try to do the rest."

He sifted into the black scrub beside the lane. The girl clung weakly to the car door, her blood stained face revealed in the moon light.

"Bill—for God's sake—help me."

He saw black shadows stealing along the lane, keeping in the protection of the trunks. He could only distinguish two, but there might be more.

The girl's face was ghastly in the moonlight, turned in the direction of the skulking figures.

"Help me—Bill—Red. He shot me—I'm dying." The agonized voice rang again. Then she moaned with pain.

At the cry, one of the black figures dashed toward her recklessly. The other followed. Without concealment they ran to the side of the swaying girl.

"Where's Bill," she gasped, as Red O'Brien stood near her, gat in hand.

"Bill's dead," he muttered.

"Hullo, Bat," gasped the dying girl, trying to smile. "Where's the rest?"

"Dead. All our gang 'cept me and Red," Bat muttered—"And the two

boys at the gas station, croaked too."

So Maureen got the information that they had only two to deal with.

"What's the lousy Wop done to you, Maureen?" demanded Red.

"Wanted the whole swag himself, damn him," rasped the girl. "Made me drive him around at the point of the gat, so he could plug you. Then when he couldn't use me any more, knocked me over the head, and shot me. I—I'm going."

**T**HE hand upon the door relaxed. She fell flat on the ground so Bleeker could fire without hitting her.

From a tree a spurt of red flame and a crack.

Bat Hennessy slumped lifeless.

Red wheeled and his gat came up to plug at—blackness.

Another dart of flame from a tree. Another crack.

Red O'Brien followed the rest of the Mulligan gang.

Maureen scrambled to her feet, staggered and clung to Bleeker, trembling, crying hysterically, her nerve giving way only when the danger was over.

Bleeker's voice was sharp. "Pull yourself together, Maureen, we're not safe yet."

"They're all dead." The voice quivered and he could feel her shiver as he held her.

"There's the farm house at the end of the lane. They've heard the racket and likely to be out with a shot gun. They'll shoot and they won't care what they shoot. Hide in the scrub behind a tree."

At once the girl was steel again. Jumped to the side and was invisible as the black scrub closed around her.

Bleeker ran along the lane, with arms above his head, keeping in the moonlight as much as possible, so anyone might see he was not going to shoot.

The windows of the farm house

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came into view. The moonlight shone on a big white night gown at one of them. Smaller white night gowns whimpering at another window.

The farmer's voice quavered. "Throw up your hands, dern you, or I'll blow your brains out." The moonlight glinting on the barrel of a gun showed the ability to make good the threat.

"Got 'em up," yelled Bleeker, advancing into the yard so as to be clearly visible.

"What the heck's all that racket about down thar?" demanded the farmer.

"Been held up by a gang of thugs in your lane," Bleeker informed.

"What the Sam Hill you doing in my lane this time o' night? Got a girl with you?"

"No," yelled Bleeker. "Listen, I've croaked a couple of them."

"Perhaps you have and perhaps you aint," countered the farmer. "Perhaps you're a blamed gunman yourself. I ain't coming out thar to find out."

"Don't want you to," Bleeker assured him. "Have you got a telephone in your house?"

"Of course." The farmer was insulted by the doubt. "Do you think we're a lot of country rubes out here, We're New Yorkers. My farm's inside the city limits."

"Yeah?" drawled Bleeker. "Well, then call up the nearest police station and get the cops over here pronto."

**J. BLEEKER STEWART** walked back toward the roadster. Then his eyes blinked in doubt. In the bright moonlight beside the car, he saw himself standing in top hat and fur coat, holding Maureen close. Her arms were around his neck and her lips were pressed against his.

It was not until he was close to them, that the top hat raised and J. Bleeker had his second sight of Chiko

Gaspari—the first had been at the Du Barry.

"Well, I'll be damned," he gasped. "I've doubled for you tonight, Chiko, and if I ever want a man to double for me, I'll know where to come. How did you get here?"

"When I find out what happen, I am crazy and I start for Maureen," explained the Wop.

"How did you trail us?" demanded Bleeker.

"I know about the spot where Bill was to be at Black Stump Road. A crowd was there and two dead men and a smashed car. I do not stay, for Maureen she is not there. I drive away from there, crazy again. I drive anywhere. The night she is still, and I hear gats crack on Rocky Hill Road. I come along then like hell. I find two dead men and a car that is a wreck on Rocky Hill. Then I hear more gats crack in here. I come. There are two more dead men." A smile came to the handsome face. "You hold damned funny poker cards, Mr. Stewart—three pair in one hand."

He held out his own. "I am so grateful. Maureen she is everything to me. It is for her I go straight evermore—and that gets you in a scrape. I live only for her. She is one brave girl."

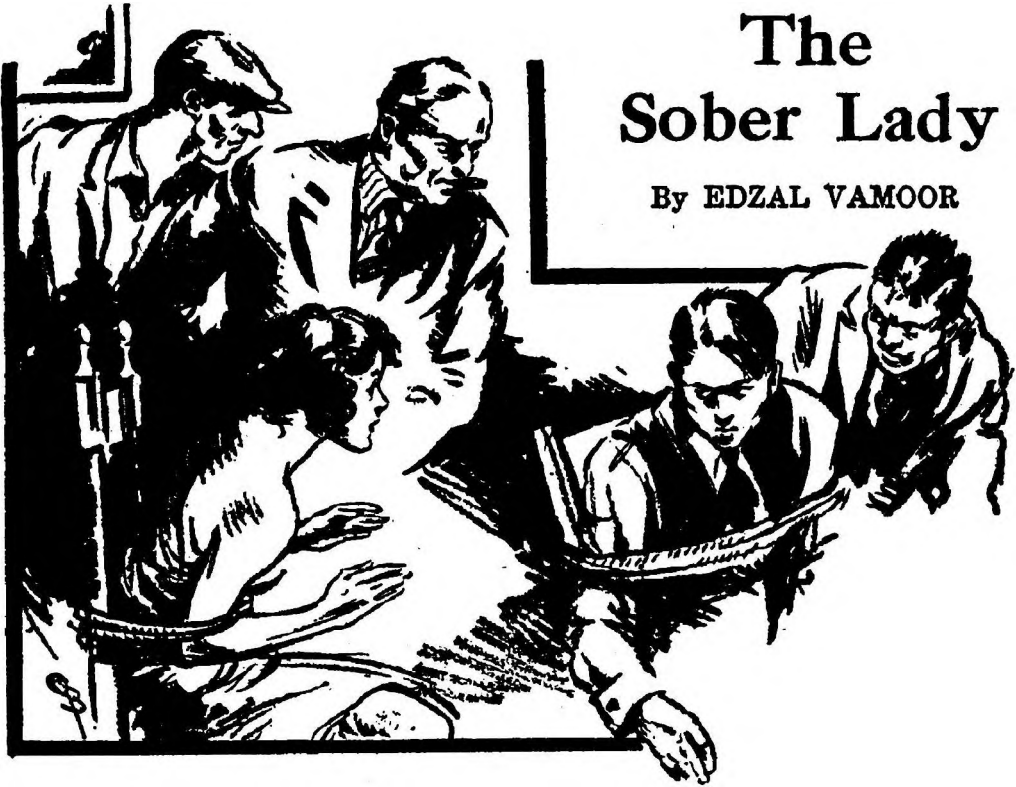
"I know it," snapped Bleeker. "Cut out the mush and get her away from here pronto. The cops are on their way. She needn't be here when they come. Everyone who knows she's been in this racket is dead, except you and me. Understand?"

Chiko shook the hand that was clasping his heartily. "I go quick," he said. "Maureen and I we will be married tomorrow. Then you come and see us in our home that I may thank you the way I want to."

He studied J. Bleeker Stewart's similarity and smiled happily, "But I hope my wife she does not get her husband mixed up with her friend again."

# The Sober Lady

By EDZAL VAMoor



*Fearlessly, The Sober Lady entered the doors of "Hell" on a mysterious errand—nobody knew who she was or what she was after—it was a dangerous mission, but she didn't give up until she had reached her goal!!!*

**T**HE day had been hectic. Every clue that promised to lead to the slayer of the blackmailing Peggy Arneau had ended up against the same stone wall. The dashing ex-actress who had been so free in her relations with married men as a basis for blackmail had been last seen alive in the speakeasy operated by Joe Bandoni behind his new grotto cafe.

Peggy had gone there to keep an appointment with some man—but who was he? Every effort we had made to get Joe Bandoni to talk had failed. I had tried, my city editor had tried, the managing editor himself had tried, but Joe's lips remained sealed.

I had tossed the story of the day's

developments in the case—meager as they were—on Blair's desk just before the midnight deadline, and then had gone out for a bit of fresh air. I turned toward Central Park and walked on and on, groping for solution.

How to find the open sesame to unseal Joe Bandoni's lips, when it might be as much as Joe's life was worth. And Joe loved life, for the dapper bootlegger and cafe-owner was but three months married to the beautiful Rosa Lucci. It was maddening.

Then a red glow caught my eye. *HELL*. Four red letters and the outlines of His Plutonic Majesty in tubes of soft Neon brilliance. Joe Bandoni's new grotto cafe.

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Its appearance startled me a little. I hadn't realized I was so near Peggy Arneau's last living rendezvous. I thought I was still walking toward Central Park.

For a moment I stood gazing at the sign. Then I started down the dimly-lighted staircase toward the rhythmic drone of a saxophone. Step by step I sank deeper and deeper into gray-blue clouds of smoke. On the bottom step I paused. Before me was a scene of white shoulders, faces pale and faces highly rouged; bright eyes behind glowing cigarettes, wing collars and bow ties; swaying musicians, dishes, glasses, bottles—bottles everywhere. Then the voice of a uniformed attendant obtruded.

"Sorry, sir," pointing to a wall notice, "but we do not admit gentlemen unaccompanied by ladies during the evening."

I swore softly to myself. "I forgot all about your silly old rule," I said.

"Very sorry, sir—"

"Oh, that's all right," I said in resignation. "Next time I'll bring an accompanist."

**W**ITH that I turned. But I had negotiated only a couple steps when I halted. Coming down the staircase was a girl of dark, piquant face and the figure of a Pavlova. She descended past me, a regal figure, head erect, eyes straight ahead. Mechanically I paused and turned. I saw the attendant bow, saw the same courteous smile which had greeted me, and heard the words of regret.

"I'm very sorry, madame, but we do not admit ladies without escorts at this hour."

She did not answer. She only stood motionless, silent. Like some sylvan princess on ocean cliff at early dawn to watch the sun rise up and bathe the world in light.

"But," spoke up the attendant again, and this time with a gesture that was statesmanship, "if you

would care to come in with this gentleman—who also is alone—"

Recklessly, I took an eager step forward.

"Shall we!" I said.

Deliberately she surveyed me. Her eyes traveled from my head to my shoes and then back again. Then the dark, statuesque feature relaxed into soft, dimpled contours, and the gay light of romance sparkled in her eyes.

"Let's—!"

In the booth to which a beaming head-waiter assigned us, she slipped off a light wrap and remarked she had heard the music and had decided to drop in. But my eyes were on the exquisite shoulders.

"Lovely—" I breathed in admiration.

The color rose in her cheeks. "You like the lines?" she smiled.

"Aphrodite was a piker in comparison," I told her, and I meant it too. "May I introduce myself, my name is Paul Elder. What's yours?"

"Paul Elder—of the Times? The one who's writing all the stories about the Peggy Arneau murder?"

"Hooray—somebody actually reads my stuff."

"I didn't say I liked them," she twitted.

"Well, at least you read them," I returned.

Her delicate eyebrows elevated. "I read all your stories about Mary Lane and the man found in the reservoir—and the one about—Judge Courtwright—"

"I didn't have anything to do with the Courtwright case except for that one story. I insisted that the office let me write *that* one."

"You did?"

"I certainly did. The coroner's verdict of suicide was just a lot of boloney. Killed himself in a moment of intoxication, applesauce! I covered the courthouse for a good length of time and I got to know the old judge pretty well.

## THE SOBER LADY

"His philosophy never included self-destruction. Of course he drank, but never to such an extent that—" There I paused abruptly. "Say, what's the idea of fanning my vanity by making me talk about myself when you're the real subject of interest. Who are you? Come on, speak up, you're being interviewed."

"Must people always be identified?" she returned with gentle badinage. "Can't they sometimes be just sociable?"

"Say—" I exclaimed enthusiastically, "you sound like a regular fellow. Now you'll have to tell me who you are—"



**A** PENSIVE look entered her dark eyes, and the long lashes rose and fell and then rose again.

"Just—just a girl who's engaged to be married—and sort of—wonders," she murmured whimsically.

She drew off her gloves and disclosed a brilliant solitaire.

"Hell's bells! Every time I meet a real fellow she's either married or engaged to be. No justice in this world!"

"Justice is scarce at times," she assented moodily. Then with a quick, little laugh she cast her gaze on the scene around us. "This place is rather interesting, I've never been here before."

"Haven't? It's the bootleg joint just back of this where Peggy was supposed to have met some man the night she disappeared. After that she wasn't seen again until her body was found, a week later, in the old swamp."

Her eyes widened a little. "That's right, it is, isn't it?"

An olive-skinned waiter appeared and we ordered sandwiches and coffee.

"But a couple glasses of orange juice first," I said. "Nice fresh juice from nice fresh oranges. And if you tell me there's only ginger ale left I'll snip off your headline and toss it into the hell-box."

The waiter departed, grinning. The girl's eyes danced, and her soft, musical laughter made the gentle rise and fall of exquisite shoulders a calisthenic symphony.

When the orange juice arrived I drew a hip flask from my pocket.

"This," I told her, "is God's divine first aid to conviviality. Mine by courtesy of prescription."

"I don't use it," she said with a smile.

"In this modern age!"

She only shook her head. "I don't mind it in others," she answered simply. "But for myself, somehow I don't relish the prospect of—"

"Going blotto," I supplied.

"Put it that way if you wish."

"Ho, by the beard of Adam's grandfather," I protested, "I've never been guilty of a single stagger. But a drink now and then—why, sweet lady, alcohol was God's divine gift to man."

"Your name is Paul, after the Apostle, and as an Apostle I suppose the Lord does confide in you," she offered with a little bantering smile. "But isn't it a bit like, well, sort of lulling the faculties to sleep drop by drop—?"

"What an arid little philosopher! If you were a photograph, do you know what caption I'd place above your head?"

Her eyes danced with teasing. "Hot and Dry."

I chuckled but I shook my head. "No. The Sober Lady."

"From Hades," with a twinkling

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laugh. "But really, though, I don't mind if you drink."

I shook my head. "When in Rome," I said, "one should be Mussolini-minded." I raised my glass of orange juice. "Shall me—to the spirits of Bryan and Volstead." She followed suit and our glasses clinked. "And to the Sober Lady—creature of lovely mystery."

"Thank you," she said, coloring again, and we drank.

**T**HEN sandwiches and coffee came and we started munching. The orchestra struck up a waltz and I asked quizzically, "Is dancing also taboo—?"

"Good Lord!" she laughed.

She melted into my arms and the contact thrilled me. She moved with a faultless grace that made her a part of me, and my blood tingled. My lips brushed a wisp of raven hair from a cameo ear and I whispered, "Now I am intoxicated."

"With orange juice!"

"No, tormentress, with the Sober Lady!"

A soft little laugh emerging from lovely lips ended abruptly. "Who's the little dark man with the mustache over there?" she asked in a whisper.

I glanced quickly over her shoulder.

"Oh, that's Joe Bandoni, the proprietor, the man who could tell about Peggy, if he would. And that's his wife Rosa with him. Nice chap if he's on your side. Otherwise, well, the gentleman is credited with a charming Chicago gun record—why, Sober Lady? What's the matter?" For she had suddenly begun to tremble in my arms.

"Oh—please, let's sit down—"

In the booth she threw her head against the wainscoting, while I rubbed her hands and urged her to have some coffee.

"I—I'll be all right in a moment," she said in spent voice. "I—I'm just tired—"

"But—"

"I—I'm awfully tired," she breathed.

"Shall we go?"

"Please."

The cool air, as we reached the sidewalk, seemed to revive her somewhat.

"I'm all right now," in more normal voice. "It—it's so stuffy down there—"

I raised my hand to signal a taxi, but she spoke up.

"My car's across the street, the long, gray one with lights sprouting from the fenders. I'll take you home."

"You'll take *me!*"

"I can't very well desert my car, can I?"

"So be it, the queen can do no wrong."

She handled the wheel with the touch of the master. For a time we rode in silence. But I couldn't get her sudden faintness out of my mind.

"Won't you tell me what's the matter?" I asked.

"Nothing—nothing—"

"Very well," I said determinedly. "But remember this, in my business when we want to know things we proceed to find out. We're not always successful. But in this case—well, by tomorrow I'm going to know who you are and then . . . Turn the next corner . . . That's it . . . Third apartment building on the right . . . Right here."

**T**HE CAR halted at the curb.

"Please," she said with an appealing look, "I don't want you to try to find out."

"But why all this secrecy?" I insisted.

"Please. I know your name and where to find you, and if the spirit moves—" Again she was silent. Then, "When you step from the machine, please don't look back."



## THE SOBER LADY

"You don't want me to see the license number?"

She nodded. "You see, I—I have little silly sort of pride—"

I hesitated a long time. But finally I agreed.

"Thank you," she said sincerely.

And then I found myself speaking in a voice that sounded strange to my ears.

"I'm going to say good night now, Sober Lady. I hope it's not good-bye. But before I go, one thing—"

"What—?"

"This," I said. My arms reached out and enfolded her, and my lips found hers and clung. Then gently I released her. "You're not angry with me?"

She shook her head and a half-startled glow shone in her eyes, and when her voice came again it was through tremulous lips scarcely above a whisper.

"I wasn't going to tell you, but our meeting tonight wasn't accidental."

"What—!" I cried.

"I followed you. I wanted to see what you were like before I—" She left the sentence unfinished. "And now—"

My hands rose to her shoulders and turned her toward me.

"Now you've got to tell me who you are. You've got to!"

"Oh, please, you promised. Please go now—" she begged.

I didn't want to, but I did. "Good night," I said, and I know my voice sounded stranger than before.

"Good night," she murmured.

I stepped from the machine and started for the entrance. Behind me, as I fought the power of a thousand magnets to make me look around, rose the faint hum of the motor. Then there was a whistling rush of air as the car gained momentum. And then silence. The Sober Lady had been swallowed in the night . . . .

FOR the next two weeks I begrudged every moment's absence from within sound of home or office telephone. Ever before me were the startled dark eyes and the warm, unforgettable lips. But not until Bill Blair, my city editor, with good-natured gibe asked me "What's all the mooning about?" did I realize my mood was apparent.

Thereupon I plunged more vigorously than ever into the Arneau case, hoping to find relief from my own thoughts. But every clue only led to the inevitable stone wall—Joe Bandoni. But every persuasive effort we applied to him brought the same response.

"I don't know a thing! I hadn't seen Peggy there for weeks!"

Even a promise of immunity tendered by District Attorney Allan Street failed to evoke interest. The Peggy Arneau story began to shrink, and even the bull-dog Jack Shannon, managing editor, began to shake his head dubiously. Standing beside Blair at the city desk he said ruefully:

"Well, Bill, I guess it begins to look like we're licked."

I joined in Blair's nod.

"Unless we could get Rosa Bandoni to talk," I suggested. "She might know something. But I guess there's not much chance of that, either."

Blair chuckled. "Why not? You're a tall, handsome devil. Maybe you could try a Boy Delilah on her. From what I hear of Rosa—"

"Oh, yeah?" I said. "And have some nice boy here write my obituary? No, thanks, I have too much respect for Joe's marksmanship. And besides," as the dark eyes of the Sober Lady rose before me, "I prefer my women with a few brains."

Shannon laughed and went back to his private office.

Then I felt a touch on my arm and an office boy was holding out a package.

"Special delivery for you," he said.

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"Dynamite from Vicker, be careful," teased Blair.

"Not through the mail from that fox," I snorted. "He'd send sugar and pray for quick diabetes. And besides, it's postmarked San Francisco."

Dan Vicker—Dynamo Dan, we called him—was chief of police. He hadn't liked me ever since the time, four months ago, when I wrote a story about protected speakeasies. Many indications pointed toward him as a grafter, but he was too clever to let his activities appear on the surface.

As I opened the package I began to frown. Attached to a little roll of film, vest-pocket size, was a typewritten note:

"Snapped near Judge Courtwright's home the week before his death."

I handed it to Blair.

"What do you make of this, Watson?"

Blair scrutinized and shook his head. Cranks and eccentrics were numerous.

"Some nut probably. But maybe we better print them up and see. A good city editor never rejects a possibility, you know, Sherlock." Then in musing voice, "That Courtwright suicide was a funny one at that, wasn't it?"

"Suicide boloney."

"You're prejudiced, Paul. You were daffy on the judge and if you'd had your way he'd have been chief justice. Boy!" he yelled, and the boy came on the run. "Have these printed up right away."

Fifteen minutes later "Bing" Spooner, autocrat of the dark-room, appeared with the wet prints in his hand and a chip on his shoulder.

"What's the big idea of all these amateur street views? Didn't we print enough Courtwright stuff two years ago?"

Blair spread the prints on the desk.

"Hmm—the things are all auto-graphed, too. When was that—by

gum that's right, these were taken just the week before. Recognize the handwriting, Paul?"

I shook my head. One was a view of a residence. Another of spacious grounds showing a massive garden vase. A third showed a garden hedge. But as my eye caught the fourth I leaned closer. It showed a man leaning against a telephone post.

"Joe Bandoni!" I exclaimed.

"Bandoni—"

"Joe's supposed to have a Chicago gun record, you know."

Blair stared up at me. "But why the devil should anyone want to bump off a swell guy like old Judge Courtwright? A guy that wouldn't handle liquor cases because he liked to hoist a few himself—"

**W**E TOOK the prints into Shannon's office. He scrutinized carefully.

"What do you think?" he asked. "Do you suppose Joe—" But the telephone at his elbow interrupted. "Hello. Who? Oh, just a moment. For you, Paul, very charming voice."

I took the receiver. "Hello—" Then my heart pounded. "Why, Sober Lady! Where have you been? Where are you—what—?"

"Please listen very carefully." Her voice was low and I had to strain to hear. "Rosa Bandoni spent Monday and Thursday afternoons at the Idlewilde roadhouse with Dan Vicker. I thought the information might be of some use to you. Did you hear everything I said?"

"Yes—"

"Good-bye," she said.

"Wait—wait—for God's sake—" A thousand questions cried out for answer, but she had already hung up.

"What's the matter?" said Shannon.

"Dan Vicker's running around with Rosa Bandoni—spent two afternoons this week at the Idlewilde with her—"

## THE SOBER LADY

Shannon's eyes took on an odd little glow.

"Maybe we're not licked yet. This may be better than a Boy Delilah. Who was that called you?"

I shook my head. "I don't know. We danced one night in Joe Bandoni's cafe. Then she drove me home, wouldn't tell me who she was, and made me promise not to try to find out. She turned down a drink, so I called her the Sober Lady."

"Wouldn't be stringing you?"

The memory of a kiss that hadn't lost its freshness rose in her defense.

"No," I said emphatically. "Not she—"

"Good!" said Shannon. "Let's rib up Joe again. Tell him we can do something for him, maybe he'll open up. Paul, you drop in on Joe right away. Bring him up here if he decides to talk. Let's corner this yarn."

Fifteen minutes later I found Bandoni behind his mahogany office desk, smoking nervously at a slender, brown cigar.

"Hello, Joe—" I greeted him.

"What do you want?"

"Oh, just passing by and dropped in for a little chat."

"Listen, you, I don't know a thing! I never knew a thing. I never will know a thing. Get that and get it straight!"

"No need for getting upset, Joe, I'm no copper trying to third-degree you. All I want is a little hint as to which way the wind blows and I'll do the rest—"

"I don't know a thing!"

**I** ROSE with a shrug. "Well," observing him out of the corner of my eye as I turned, "I just wanted to kill a little time. But if your temperament prevents, why that's that. Good-bye, Joe—and say hello to the charming Rosa for me—"

"Rosa—?" he snapped.

At the tone of voice I slid back into the chair.

"You do know, don't you?"

"Know what?" he demanded.

"Cut the comedy, Joe. You know what I mean. Rosa and Dan Vicker."

"It's a lie!"

"Maybe—but I don't think the little bird who told me tells lies."

He leaned suddenly forward. "Who is she—what's her name—who told you?"

"Oh—" I was on the verge of revealing that it was the girl I met in *Hell*, his own cafe, but caught myself. "Just a charming voice over the telephone."

"Some woman called me too!"

I stared back at him. Things were becoming complicated.

"What did she tell you, Joe?"

"She's crazy—it's a lie!"

"But suppose it's true, Joe, just suppose?"

He gripped the arms of his chair and his eyes flamed.

"I'd—I'd—" he began fiercely, only to sink back. "It's a damned lie—just somebody's spite—"

"What's the matter, Joe? Dan got something on you besides the liquor racket? Something really serious?"

"No! He hasn't got a thing on me. Not a thing. Nobody's got a thing on me. Now get out of here. Beat it!"

I felt this was no time to toss in anything about the snapshots and rose.

"So long, Joe."

"Good-bye!"

I felt a little more hopeful when I got back to the office and reported to Blair.

"Begins to look like something, Bill, Joe won't talk yet. But just give him time to mool over things a bit. Jealousy and suspicion do queer things to the Latin temperament. It won't be long now."

"Well, I think we'll put a tail on Rosa—some good gumshoe artist. Find her with Dan and get Joe to come and have a peek. Maybe that'll

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make him a bit more friendly toward us."

"Yeah—" I said dryly. "Open up a couple gun barrels. And no one left to tell the tale."

"Think I'll try it anyway. Never can tell."

For the next three days an operative followed Rosa Bandoni whenever she stepped from her home. On the afternoon of the fourth day he came in to report Joe and Rosa had had a passionate quarrel, and Rosa had stormed from the house. As he started to follow her Joe rushed out, jumped into his machine and drove off at high speed. He followed Rosa to a drug store, where she entered a telephone booth. But her conversation was brief. For when he had edged over beside the booth she was already saying good-bye. Then she made some purchases and he followed her back to the house. Joe apparently was still absent.

Blair's fingers drummed a tattoo on his desk.

"Suppose you have another try at Joe, Paul."

I PROCEEDED to the cafe. In the little hallway leading to Joe's office I halted before the heavy door and was about to knock when a woman's vehement voice filtered through the massive oak construction.

"I wouldn't go back to Dan now if he were the last man on earth! No man can throw me over that way—not even for your Rosa—and get away with it—not with Millie Nolan! I'm not out after her, I'm out after him! Why do you suppose I came here that first night? I wanted to find out who she was. Well, it was Rosa, and here I am and you're going to keep mum about my coming here—" There was a moment of absolute silence. Then the woman's voice again: "Well, Joe Bandoni—how about it!"

I decided to knock.

"Who's there?" called Bandoni sharply.

"It's Paul Elder, Joe, I—"

"I'm busy, some other time!" he snapped irritably.

"But listen, Joe, I've got something important to tell you—" I was determined to get inside, I must catch a glimpse of Vicker's girl; she too might play our game.

"I've heard that stall before. Good-bye!"

With a shrug I turned away. But instead of leaving I took a seat in the dining room facing the office and told the waiter I was to keep an appointment with the owner. I sat there for about five minutes with my eyes glued to the door.

Then I leaped to my feet. Joe and the woman had emerged from the office through a rear door and were moving rapidly toward the rear exit. And then a sudden sinking sensation caught my heart.

As the woman turned at the foot of the steps for a quick backward glance I emitted a gasp.

It was the Sober Lady!

Then with a quick-caught breath I started after them.

But by the time I reached the sidewalk they were already speeding off in a taxicab. I hailed another and ordered pursuit. But after a six block chase Joe Bandoni and the Sober Lady had vanished.

I can't describe what I felt at the moment. My voice was just a sort of hoarse whisper as I ordered the driver to the Times' office. The Sober Lady was Vicker's girl! My whole world seemed to be tumbling about my ears.

I don't know how I ever kept Blair from seeing that something was wrong. Perhaps he did. I know he looked at me with narrowed eyes, but he didn't ask any personal questions, and I offered no explanations.

Shortly after ten o'clock that night the police reporter telephoned that

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Bandoni had visited Vicker's office, and there had been a stormy interview. Its purport was only guessed at, but not determined.

Joe had emerged from the office with the face of a boiled lobster and answered questions with a snarl. Vicker himself only laughed it off and said it was nothing. "But they can't kid me," the police reporter concluded, "somethin's up, sure as shootin'—"

**F**OR the rest of the evening the Times staff from Shannon to the youngest office boy was on edge. The air seemed charged. But nothing developed. And my own emotions are better imagined than described. The Sober Lady—whose lips had given themselves to mine—was Millie Nolan—Vicker's girl.

At a quarter to eleven the following evening when I picked up the receiver to answer the telephone, I sat up with a start. It was the Sober Lady.

"Paul," she said, "don't ask questions. And listen carefully, I haven't time to repeat. I'm being followed and I must get rid of something before it's too late. I'm in a booth at Tenth and Broadway. I shall start walking on the left hand side of the street toward your office. I shall have a newspaper rolled up under my right arm, a copy of the Times of yesterday.

"I want you to roll up another one and contrive to exchange it for mine without indicating recognition. I shall drop mine on the sidewalk as we pass each other. Please hurry. Good-bye."

The receiver clicked in my ear before I could offer a word.

Vicker's girl! But the memory of a pair of dark eyes, and a pair of warm lips touching mine, drove me to comply. Hastily rolling up a copy of the Times I rushed out of the office. When I reached Broadway and Sixteenth

street I caught sight of her. I slackened my pace. When I was almost abreast of her I caught her quick, warning glance, and I saw the paper drop to the sidewalk. Stooping quickly with my own I made the exchange.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," I said, "you dropped your paper."

"Oh," with a look of surprise, "thank you." Then in a whisper that showed scarcely a movement of her lips, "Hurry—"

Tightly clutching the paper I turned the next corner, walked half way to Main street and caught a cab to the office.

It was not until I was moving up the stairs to the editorial department that I began to unroll the paper. Inside was an envelope. I ripped it open and found another. Across the face of this one was written the following:

If anything happens to me give this to the District Attorney.

(signed) Joe Bandoni.

I took the remaining steps three at a time and raced to the city desk. As I plunged through the office door I saw Blair leap excitedly from his telephone and rush into Shannon's office.

"Joe Bandoni's been bumped off! Body just picked out of the Glenwood ravine by one of the sheriff's men!" I heard him yell.

I burst into Shannon's office behind him and thrust the letter into the managing editor's hand.

"Look at this—!"

With one silent glance Shannon snatched up a little card and his swiftly moving finger halted half way down a list of silent telephone numbers.

"Haymarket 0757 . . . ." It was District Attorney Allan Street's private residence-line. "Blair," looking up as he waited, "have Bill Moon and a photographer shoot out to the Glenwood ravine. Paul, you're on your

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way to Vicker's office. Give him the works.

"How about keeping order in the city—sheriff's office finding bodies inside the city limits—why in hell can't the city be a safe place to live in! Don't say anything about this letter. Tobin to Bandoni's house. Bring Rosa in here. Tom Kelly to . . . Hello . . . Allan? Jack Shannon. Bring a couple of your strong-arm men and come down to the Times office right away. No, not over the phone. Don't ask questions. Come on—hurry—!"

That's all I caught as I dashed for the stairs, bound for police headquarters.



**O**N THE main floor the voice of a girl doing a late night trick in the circulation office stopped me as I was opening the door to the street.

"Oh, Mr. Elder, the operator has a call for you—"

"Who is it!"

The girl spoke into the transmitter.

"A lady who won't give her name, she says it's very important—"

I leaped forward and snatched off the receiver from the nearest counter phone. "This is Paul Elder, give me that call . . . Hello—Hello—Sober Lady—!"

"Paul—Paul—" excitedly, "they're coming into the yard! Oh, hurry—please hurry—"

"Who is—where—where are you—?" I cried frantically.

"It's 1007 Idlewilde Drive. Hurry, I've got to go—"

"Yes—yes—1007 Idlewilde Drive—Hello—Hello—"

But she had hastily hung up the receiver.

I dashed outside and hailed the first taxicab.

"Ten hundred seven Idlewilde Drive and for God's sake, step on it!"

On Idlewilde Drive I thrust a bill into the driver's hand.

"My name's Paul Elder," I said tersely. "If I'm not out in about five minutes phone the city editor of the Times and tell him I need help."

Then I looked up and emitted an exclamation. It was the old Judge Courtwright residence. My heart began to pound. Was this a trap set for me! But I couldn't yield to that belief. The Sober Lady never would have given me the Joe Bandoni letter if she were trying to trap—but perhaps the letter itself was a ruse!

Nevertheless, quickly, cautiously I moved into the grounds. Stealthily I made my way up the three rear steps to the back porch. To my surprise the door opened at my touch. Creeping through a dark vestibule I moved toward the front of the house. Another door intervened and I opened it softly.

A beam of light came through and I held my breath. Then I pushed the door a little wider. The shadow of a man stretched out across the floor, a long shadow, arm extended, pistol in hand. Hardly daring to breathe I crept a couple steps farther forward. Then with a leap I caught the man's wrist and tore the gun from his hand.

The next moment I heard an oath and something came down on my head, and everything turned black.

When I regained consciousness I found myself bound hand and foot in a chair at the front end of the drawing room. Everything was blurred. And the first thought that came to me was very bitter. A beautiful girl with

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a pair of warm red lips had entrapped me. The thought weighed on my heart and in my brain. And the one kiss she had given me—it had seemed so real.

Then as the blurr cleared away I emitted a choking gasp. Bound hand and foot in a chair opposite me, with three masked, armed men about her, her hair disheveled, her dress torn, her face bruised, was the Sober Lady.

**O**NLY my gag prevented me from giving way to a cry of ecstatic happiness. The Sober Lady had not helped to trap me!

I saw one of the men twist her arm, and her head tilted back and her face showed writhing pain. I tried to cry out but I achieved only a hoarse gurgle. I strained against my bonds, and I could feel the sweat pouring out all over my body. But the effort was futile, and I only fell back exhausted.

The men held a whispered conference, then one of them addressed her:

"Tough nut to crack, are you? Well, we know of a nice painless way to make you talk." He drew a bottle from his pocket. "You're going to drink, then you'll babble." His arms encircled her head and bent it back, while his fingers gripped her nostrils. "Nice and painless."

Her teeth were set and her face turned purple in her fight for breath. Then her mouth burst open for air. The bottle tilted. She sputtered and choked. But some of the liquor found its destination. The man released her for a moment.

I struggled and strained and groaned, but to no avail.

The performance was repeated. Again she sputtered and choked. But again some of the liquor was swallowed. So again and again after the sixth drink she swallowed unresistingly. The man stepped back, observing her. Her body was relaxing. Then slowly into her eyes

came the rising glow of alcohol. And then words came—

"Sssh!—whasha got me tied for—?" The man's only answer was to proffer another drink. She swallowed without protest. Her eyes grew wider and began to sparkle and to dance. "Gosh—three big men with gunsh—s-sho thrilling—whee-ee-ee—s-shay—whasha got me tied for—?"

Without a word the man released her bonds. She rose unsteadily, swayed for a moment, and then slumped to an overstuffed chair. Weak laughter came from her throat.

"Ha-ha-ha—the villian unhandsh me—sho funny—sho funny—'magine me being drunk—whee-ee-ee—" Limp arms rose to touch her hair and fell back again. "S-shay, I'm a sight—"

"Where's Joe Bandoni's letter!" came the demand.

"Like to know, woudln'tsha—ha-ha—I fooled him—told him I was Vicker'sh sweetheart—and he shwallowed it—ha-ha-ha—thought he could get away with it—kill my father—"

My eyes suddenly popped. She must be Judge Courtwright's daughter! Judge Courtwright—it *had* been murder!

Rage took possession of me, and I fought against the things that bound me as I hadn't fought before, but it was all futile.

"Have another drink," said the man.

She gulped it down.

"What'd you do with the Bandoni letter?" he demanded.

"Ha-ha-ha—thought he could get away with it. But I s-saw him that night in the cafe—Hell—isn't that a s-swell name for a cafe—and I know he wash the man I s-saw watching the corner—and I found' the s-shnapshots—and s-sent them to s-shomebody to s-send them here. And I know who put him up to it too—it wash Dan Vicker—"

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I grew rigid, staring. Dan Vicker! But she was babbling on. "Thash why Joe wash afraid to tell about Peggy Arneau. Vicker'sh awfully s-smart—he thinksh—but my Paul—I bet he knowsh Vicker killed Peggy—Joe told mesh—sho him-self—"

**T**HEN I began to tremble. For I suddenly realized that whether or not they could learn anything from her, her life was already forfeit. But try as I might, the bonds would not yield. I sank back exhausted.

Then I saw the man grasping her shoulders.

"Who's Paul?" he demanded, and my body grew tense again.

"Ho-ho-ho—you'd like to know, know why Vicker had Joe kill my father? Sh-sh, it's a secret—Dad wash going to call the grand jury—found out the chief wash naughty—" She raised a playful finger and waved it unsteadily before them. "Chief wash naughty boy—collecting money from bad men and bad girlish—"

"Where's that letter?"

Her laughter echoed in high soprano. "Joke'sh on you. I gave it to my Paul. Ha-ha-ha—right in front of your nosesh. Know my Paul? Dad ushed to say he wash the best fellow in the world—always wanted me to meet Paul—but I wash too shtuck up then—"

"Where's Paul!" the man demanded.

And then suddenly she was laughing hysterically. "I knew my Paul'd come to shave me—" Her eyes found mine. "You did—didn'tsha Paul—didn'tsha—?"

With that her head fell forward; she had lost consciousness.

The trio veered sharply and I saw three figures behind three guns looming larger and larger.

"So you're Paul, eh!" snapped the leader. "Come on, you rat! Give us that letter."

But I could only gurgle through my gag.

With a jerk it was torn away. I felt a sharp twinge of pain shoot through the corner of my mouth and sensed the salty velvet taste of blood.

"Search him!"

When the search proved futile the leader's hand slashed against my face.

"Listen, you skunk! I'm going to count ten. If you don't tell us what you did with that letter you and the girl are both going for a ride without moving out of this house! Did you hear that?"

I was still dazed. But I realized that a truthful answer to his question would not save us. We knew too much, particularly the girl. I was exhausted. The blow on the head, the gagging, the strain of watching them torture the girl I loved, had well-nigh exhausted me. One thought began to pound in my brain. I must spar for time.

"I haven't got it," I said weakly.

"One," said the man. "Where is that letter?"

"I haven't got it." I must spar for time, that thought kept turning over and over. The taxi driver must have phoned the office long ago . . . I felt drowsy, I could hardly keep my eyes open . . .

"Two—where is that letter?"

"I haven't got it—" The drowsiness was beginning to overwhelm me. In a sort of daze I sensed a peculiar sensation at the back of my head and deduced the blow might have drawn considerable blood.

The man's arm drew back and his fist crashed against my jaw. The lights of all the world seemed to die in that instant. When they came on again I could feel my head rolling groggily from side to side.

"Three—where's that letter?"

"It's in my—" I mumbled, as I tried to fight the drowsiness again.



## THE SOBER LADY

Once again through a gathering darkness I saw the heavy fist draw back. Then from somewhere, countless miles away, it seemed, came faint sounds like tinkling window glass and pistol shots—and the man's fist loomed very large. And then again everything was very black and very still.

**W**HEN I regained consciousness I was on a hospital bed. At first everything was hazy, and I saw a leering black monstrosity suspended above my head. The haze cleared and I recognized it as a telephone transmitter. Then I saw Blair sitting beside me.

Memory swept in and I cried out: "Where is she—is she all right!"

Blair grinned and nodded across the room. A cheery voice across the room rose to answer.

"Hello, Paul. The Sober Lady's right here in the other twin bed. Her record for sobriety is spoiled, but the doctor says we'll be all right in a couple hours and we can go home—with just a few patches here and there—"

"Thank God for that," I said fervently. Then to Blair: "How'd things turn out!"

"Perfect, boy, perfect," was the enthusiastic answer. "Full story in the extra, how the Times busted up the vice ring, you know, the old hokum. Joe's confession sinks Vicker for the Courtwright and Peggy Arneau affairs.

"The gentle Danny's now under guard down the hall with three charges of murder and one of lead—lead by Rosa Bandoni. Rosa didn't mind cheating a little on Joe, but she didn't like the idea of losing him altogether. And did she talk a mouthful! And you go to Washington as Times correspondent first of next month—"

"Huh!" I gasped.

"Straight from Shannon and the old man. And now you're going to talk into the transmitter. How I, Paul Elder, reporter for the Times, aided by Carmen Courtwright, daughter of the late jurist, did what I did so the Times could make this town a better place in which to bring up nice children. Put it on thick. Fastest steno in the office on the typewriter at the other end. Now spill—"

"Hell's bells—but it's her story," I protested.

"Make her the heroine—that's all right—but hurry—!"

I thought rapidly for a moment and then I said abruptly:

"Wait, the yarn isn't complete yet." I turned on my side and called out, "Oh, Sober Lady—"

"Yes, Apostle—"

"Are you hopelessly, irrevocably engaged to somebody?"

"I sent the ring back to London three days ago."

"Well, then, unless you offer anything to the contrary you're engaged again and going to Washington with me. Do I hear anything to the contrary!"

"Utter silence," she offered in mock-dramatic voice.

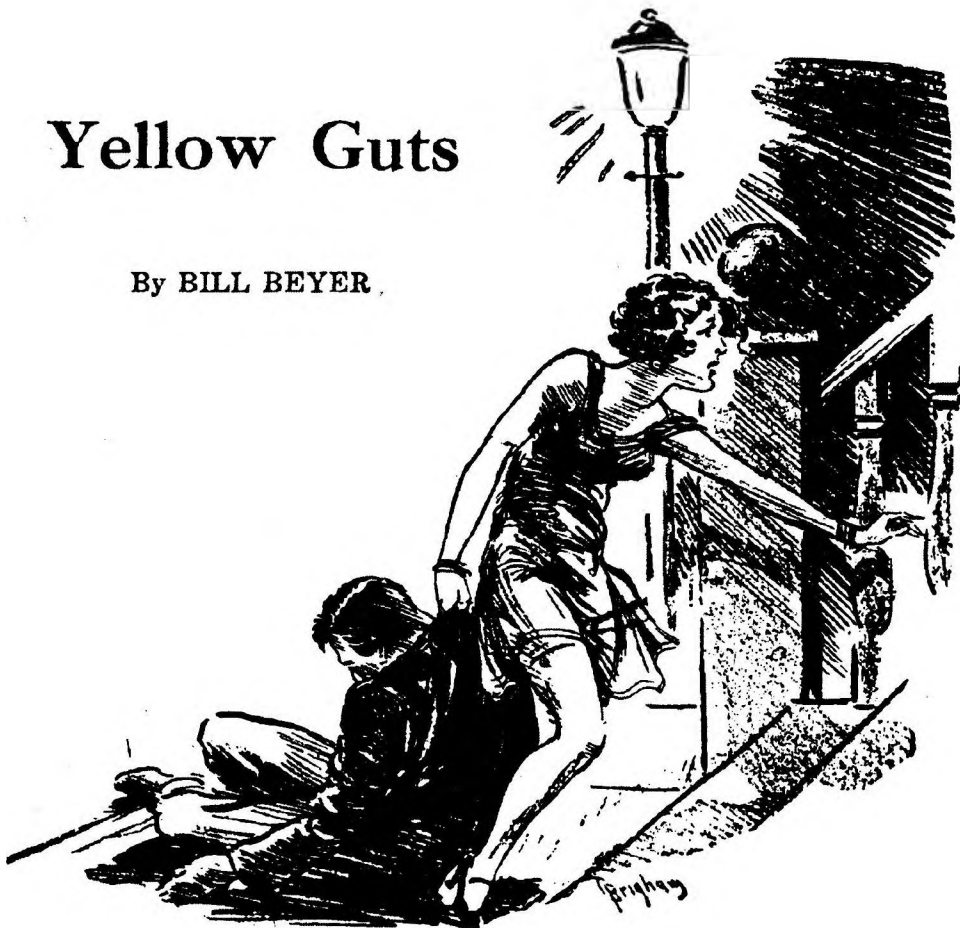
"Whoopee—!" I cried, and grasped the transmitter, only to have Blair snatch it quickly out of my hand.

"Miss Best, Blair talking, lemme have Shannon . . . Hello, Jack? Here's a pip for the new lead! The hero's just proposed to the heroine and she says yes. To be married just before they leave for Washington. I'll say the yarn's a wow! Now give me the steno again—hello, Miss Best—here we come—" He handed back the transmitter. "Now shoot fast—"

And I did, while the heroine, suddenly visible as she sat up in bed, blushed adorably.

# Yellow Guts

By BILL BEYER.



*"Yellow guts—that's what them crooks are—all of 'em!" said the Dick. And he believed it, too—until he saw Giant Peters walk up the stairs with a rose crushed in his hand.*

**C**ARMENCITA had come to be an important fixture in a certain gay speakeasy on Delancy Street, and the thrill of importance suited her temperament. The spontaneous joy of singing, dancing, entertaining was life to her. And besides, the activities conducted by Steel Morgan on the two floors above the joy parlor supplied her tingling nerves with the proper balance of grim drama. Carmencita's father had been a captain in the army, her mother a dancer.

Not that it is to be understood that Carmencita had ever been above the

ground floor of the dive, in those rooms upstairs, rooms of death and secrets. Steel Morgan adhered strictly to the adamant policy of the underworld. No women mixed with the real business of his establishment. But often Steel Morgan stopped to sit over a shot of whiskey with her, and the Chief's attentions made her the envy of the other girls that entertained at the place, and made Carmencita foolishly happy.

She could not know that Morgan's interest extended no further than information he could get from the girl. He was quick to see that she

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was intensely eager to play even a small part in his business, business that to her was but a series of exciting episodes. And Carmencita's flat was on the same street as the hangout of Midge Drake, almost directly opposite, in fact. She was only too willing to be observant and pass on anything that she thought he might be interested in.

Though the girl never learned anything from the Chief, there was another source that kept her better informed, and allowed her to taste at second hand, at least, the tense and quivering life of gangdom. This was "Giant" Peters, Morgan's lieutenant. The big gangster was clay in her subtle fingers, and Carmencita's unconscious charm had more effect on him than on the Boss.

From him she learned how the night before the two big leaders of the district, Steel Morgan and Midge Drake, had been in conference. Carmencita with a graceful gesture of her tiny hand waved aside the word "conference" that seemed to her to smack more of business than romance. The details interested her. The two leaders had been long in dispute. So far it had been verbal. But it had come to a head.

**T**HE previous evening they had agreed to meet. The hangout of neither gang would do as a meeting place. A restaurant in the vicinity had been selected. There the two had arrived exactly at the appointed hour.

Each had approached on foot and alone. Each had nodded stiffly and entered the eating house. But immediately after, two groups of men had followed through the same doorway, and each of these groups had sat at separate tables near where the two intense and watchful men were engaged in rapid and whispered conversation. The men in each separate group had gone through the conventions of ordering food. But it re-

mained before them untasted. Every hand rested under the line of the tables, and every eye was alert for a single unnecessary move.

"And what happened then," asked Carmencita who had been following the story avidly.

"Nothing," said Peters, looking at the girl vacantly. He could not understand how anyone could have expected anything to happen. "Nobody was damn fool enough to start anything there," he continued. "Nothin' happened as far as the Chief was concerned either. He hadn't been sittin' opposite that damn double crosser Midge very long when the boys saw him get all red in the face like he does when he's damn sore about somethin' or when he's puttin' a rat on the spot. It was just a minute after that he got up from the table and walked out of the place. The rest of our bunch followed. That's all."

But Carmencita knew that it was not the end of the incident. That flush on Steel Morgan's face had meant something, and it wasn't going to be long before whatever had caused it would be wiped out. She had watched morose looking men go up and down the stairs that evening and she felt the seething excitement in the atmosphere. When she left the speakeasy however, much later, there was nothing but silence from the floors above.

The impending climax had gotten into her veins and stirred her blood. She descended from the taxi before the house in which she lived, and rushed up the stairs. Movement was necessary for her now. It was impossible to think of sleep. She stood at the window in her darkened room and looked out into the night. She had not paused to turn on the lights. Her interest centered on a squat brick house on the opposite side of the street not far distant.

She left the window once to pace the floor exuberantly. She almost danced over the ragged carpet. Sud-

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denly she rushed back to the window. An unmistakable sound, not far in the distance had reached her ear. Before she reached her position of watching, the single noise had swelled into a rapid blending of sharp sound.

Carmencita looked out. The dark yard behind the low brick house had suddenly burst into fitful streaks of flame. Next it a dilapidated dwelling was being razed, and through the opening afforded she had a view of the battle. The streaks of color fascinated her, momentary shafts of yellow light, of livid blue, of deadly crimson.

By this time the windows in the back of the house were spewing answering fire and lead. Then suddenly from the roof of the building perpetual spurts of blazing death seemed to skyrocket down to the ground below. Only an occasional wail of sudden, agonizing pain showed that there was more fiendish precision behind the two machine guns that had started there, than there could be in a harmless firework. Raking lead vomited out with the flame.

**T**HE girl pushed up the window at which she stood that she might miss none of the raging, savage fight. She could now hear the sputter, the hissing as of demons, as well as the continual staccato chorus. She closed her eyes a moment that she might take in nothing but the dissonances of sound. One arm stretched above her head, the other rested languorously on her hip. Like an infernal ballet it seemed, and she felt she must dance to accompany it.

Before she had moved a step, she tensed and an expression almost of fear crossed her face. A cry cut the air, shrill, piercing, dying. She made the sign of the cross then hurriedly closed the window. She had become sane again. She covered her eyes to block out the sight and something of the superstition of her race, filled her

with a sudden disgust of the thing that was taking place.

When she looked again the blood was cold in her veins. Almost involuntarily she saw what was happening. Two cars had swept noiselessly and swiftly along the deserted street below, and come to a halt before the house under fire. From each nosed the long slim barrels of big guns, and in a second they were combing the front of the low house. The glass of the windows was riddled and smashed, and from the falling, twanging wreckage blazed the answering defense.

Abruptly the girl's eyes took in another sight. A man was crossing the street towards the house on the run. Carmencita gasped, then looked again. She knew the man. All she could see of him was his back, but a street light showed the swing of broad shoulders under the brown serge suit, the black derby atilt at an angle she recognized. . . It was Giant Peters.

At the same instant she caught the cold glitter of a gat shoved farther from one of the windows. It was covering the figure that was rushing towards it. A scream rasped from her throat as the thing fired rapidly several times. She stopped to see no more. She was racing down the stairs.

Carmencita pushed open the front door of her house. Then she paused, peering intently down the street. She saw what she had expected to see, a big figure in a brown suit stretched motionless under the lamppost.

Swiftly the girl darted across the street, and keeping close to the building approached the spot. Still the sprawled body did not move, and she could see a blotch of ghastly crimson seeping in an ever widening circle near the shoulder. That was all she noticed.

Carmencita hauled the man quickly into the shadows. Then she tried to

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lift him, but the big weight was too much for her. It was not far to her own doorstep. She seized the collar of the coat desperately, and raising the head and shoulders from the ground, proceeded to drag him along.

Only once she stopped. It was before crossing the lighted street. Then summoning all her strength, she made the remaining distance as rapidly as it was possible for her. To get her burden up the one flight of stairs took considerably more time, but she refused to call for help. Once in her room, she had but to raise the still motionless figure to the bed.

As she did so her hand contacted with something cold just under the arm. It sent a chill through her. She knew well that the object must be a gat, and she felt weak as she reached to remove it and place it on the floor.



**S**UDDENLY she started back and allowed the head of the man to collapse on the floor. The half light of the room had glinted over the object attached to the side of the brown vest—a metal shield.

Immediately there was a low groan, the first sign of life from the man, as his head fell back with a thud. Carmencita paid no attention. She sprang for the electric button on the wall, and brilliant light flooded the room.

She was back beside the prostrate figure. Now she knew that she had

been misled in the half light by almost identical clothing. The face was very different from that of Giant Peters. Hastily she reached down and unpinned the shiny badge, regardless of the fact that the operation stained her slender fingers with red. She had braved the dangers on the outskirts of the gang battle . . . to save a dick. The thing fell from her hands and clanged on the bare boards in the corner of the room.

Simultaneous the noise of gunfire outside was stopped abruptly. Instead sounded the imperative whine of police sirens rushing to the scene. It may have been that sound that caused the man on the floor to open his eyes. He stared about the room, tried to move, then sank back, his eyes closing again painfully.

Carmencita saw that he was trying to speak. She caught the mumbled word "doctor," and a telephone number that she knew was Headquarters. Her sympathetic temperament made her move slowly to a wall telephone and lift the receiver. Immediately something of fierce Latin loyalty overcame the impulse. The number she spoke into the phone would connect her with Steel Morgan's hangout.

She never even bothered to glance in back of her, as she waited for the number. But she swiftly turned around when she heard the low muttering of the man again.

"Put up that receiver," she heard him say. "I know that number and it ain't the one I told you to call." A black steel automatic was held unsteadily in his hand.

The girl moved hastily to obey, terror in her dark fringed eyes. But the man had not the strength to see himself through the situation. The gat fell ominously from his nerveless hand, and he slid back to the floor.

Carmencita tiptoed closer, guardedly. She saw that the man's eyes were closed. Reaching over with a

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darting movement, she secured the automatic in her trembling fingers. The gun gave her renewed courage. Levelling it to cover the inert man before her, she stood watching him for a long time. Then, she could not be quite sure why, she stepped again to the telephone and spoke a number into the mouthpiece—the number the man had first told her to call.

As she clicked the receiver again onto the hook, she was infused with a new and sudden life. She managed to place the man carefully on the bed and remove the upper garments. In a moment she was bathing the exposed wound with a cold cloth. And then as she sat on the edge of the bed waiting for a physician to arrive, she extracted a card from the wallet inside the discarded coat of the man—because now she was frankly curious. She read a name slowly—Inspector James Dugan.

**A**LL the following day Carmencita had haunted the private room of a hospital. The man she knew now as Jimmy Dugan sat up in a chair by the window, watching her through smiling blue eyes. The girl talked incessantly, except at such times as she waited eagerly for the answers to her many questions. But never once did either mention a certain telephone number Carmencita had called the previous evening.

It was not till the room was dimmed by twilight that the girl rose and danced across the floor to the exit. Dugan called to detain her as he started to rise. But she went on. At the door she turned.

"It is now time that you eat the supper," she laughed, "and, Jimmy, Carmencita has work tonight."

"I wanted to talk to you about that," he began hurriedly. "You must not go back there. There may be danger."

Carmencita merely tossed back her

head and laughed. In the midst of it she paused only to say, "Danger?" Then she shrugged her shoulders and began the rippling laughter again. "I like to dance."

"But there is danger," Dugan insisted. "I must talk to you about that. I'm taking you to dinner now. We'll talk it over then."

Immediately the girl was intensely serious as she approached him. "You must do nothing of the kind," she urged. "You wished for to leave here this afternoon, and the doctors, they say no. They say you are to stay here until you are well."

"But I've got work to do tonight too, Carmencita. And the doctors don't know. I get a scratch on my arm and they expect me to lie in bed all day. It knocked me out for a minute, that was all. You saw that. I wouldn't stay in bed for them. Well, you're going to see now how I talk them into letting me out of here to take a lady to dinner."

"Oh, no, no," cried Carmencita as she again moved towards the door. "The doctors, they know. You must not."

Hastily she had vanished through the doorway. Faintly she heard a voice call "Wait!" after her, but she hurried on.

She ignored the open door of a taxi at the curb and the solicitations of the driver. She wanted to walk along for a while and think. And her thoughts brought her to but one conclusion. She must not return to the speakeasy that was owned by Steel Morgan.

"On the spot." She had heard the phrase many times. With her limited knowledge of English she could not figure out the stringing together of those three words, but she knew their meaning well. She had not "squealed." She would not do that. But maybe that would not be enough for Morgan. Perhaps it would be

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enough for him that she had talked with a—she could not be sure whether Dugan's profession was that of a "dick" or a "brick".

But as she walked her vivid imagination conjured up impossibly lurid dangers. She hurried on to her flat, furtively climbed the stairs, let herself in, and quickly snapped the lock behind her.

**I**NSIDE, the darkness of the place terrified her. She hurried toward the wall switch, and immediately the girl withdrew her extended hand. She was conscious of another hand reaching for the luminous button before her.

A half suppressed scream rasped from Carmencita's throat. At the same instant the room was bright with a sudden flooding of electric lights. Giant Peters stood before her. A grim smile was on his face, but his black eyes snapped maliciously.

The scream died on Carmencita's lips. She was smiling now. The abrupt appearance of the Giant was less terrifying to her than the uncertainty of the darkness had been.

"Oh, you did frighten little Carmencita," she laughed. "I did not expect. But I am so glad you come to see me," she lied charmingly.

"Yeah," drawled the Giant and there was the trace of a question in his voice and eyes. "The chief sent me around to bring you over to the joy parlor. He don't like it any too well when his entertainers don't show up, you know."

Carmencita was immediately willing to accompany him. She disliked the narrowed eyes of Giant Peters that continued to bore into her.

"I will go," she said casually. "I am so sorry that I am late tonight. I have been kept waiting. I was buying a new costume for the dance I do."

"Yeah, better bring it along then, cutie. The boss might like to see it."

Carmencita was suddenly confused. "But the costume—" she stammered, "it was not finish. I will have it tomorrow. For tonight, I must dance in the same old gown. It is a shame but—"

Peters' hand on her wrist suddenly checked her. It bruised her flesh but she still smiled.

"But Carmencita," she laughed, "she does not need the new costume. She is beautiful in anything. You must tell little Carmencita that, Giant."

"I got somethin' else to talk about besides that now." His tone was brutal and the grip on the girl's arm tightened. "I want to ask little Carmen about this."

The Giant drew an object from his pocket. She looked down and her eyes widened with terror as she saw a shiny metal badge lying flat on the man's hand.

"Maybe you can explain," Peters growled, "how this damn thing came to be layin' on the floor over in that corner."

The girl could not trust herself with a reply. She bolted rapidly for the exit. But before she could turn the snap of the lock, the Giant was on her, and his powerful hands had swung her about and now held her fast.

"That hurts," begged the girl with the trace of a wry smile on her face as she tried to wriggle herself free.

The hands on her shoulders did not relax their vise like grip. "And it's gonna hurt a lot more when the chief questions you about what you was doin' with this thing in your room. Better come across now."

Her fertile imagination would not lend her words of explanation. Perhaps it was because the girl's attention was divided. She thought she had seen the knob of the door to the hallway turn. But there had been

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no sound. She tried to listen for steps, but she could hear nothing for the Giant was again speaking.

"But I ain't gonna speak about the dirty badge," Peters was saying, "if you come across right, kid. Let's have the info about how it got here, and that's the end of it. Morgan won't even know about it. But I'll tell you straight, Carmen, I ain't givin' you up to no damn dick."



**H**IS hold on Carmencita had relaxed. He was looking down at her almost pleadingly.

"Dick. Dick," she repeated after him as though not understanding the word. She was vaguely thinking that the man to whom the shield belonged was Jimmy.

"Dick means a detective, see kid, a lousy squealer. And if you're mixin' up with one of 'em, he's gonna be wrapped around a hunk of lead before long, see?"

"Oh, yes, I understand," said the girl evasively.

"Say, don't look at me like that, kid," he told her. "You look as if you was afraid o' me." Suddenly the Giant was bending over her and held her fast in his arms. "I ain't gonna squeal to the Chief about this business. Leave it to me. I'll fix things up. You and me know each other too well to let anything like that happen. You know I'm keen about you, baby."

Carmencita felt the man's warm breath on her face and bosom. All of what he was saying might be true, but her eyes were still lit with fear, fear of ever returning to Steel Morgan's speakeasy. She struggled, but the struggle was useless.

Then she suddenly realized that it must all be a trick to get her back to the place—and take her for a ride. Other men, sent by Morgan, seemed to be closing in on her. She had seen a dim form at one of the windows. She gasped in terror, and only the big arms that held her prevented her from slumping to the floor.

The next instant there was a crash of falling glass, as the hovering form outside sprang through the window. In one leap he was almost across the room. Giant Peters tried to reach inside his coat, but before his hand could clutch his gat the intruder had ripped his arm away. The two were already in frenzied combat.

Carmencita saw only vaguely the battling men. She shrank back against the wall. And then, as the two fell and sprawled on the floor, she gave a little cry. The man who had crashed through the window was Jimmy Dugan.

Violently the fight continued on the floor. Chairs and tables were overturned. In a moment the room was a scene of wreckage.

Abruptly with a furious tug, Dugan loosed himself from the Giant's hold and was on his feet. Like a flash the Giant too, recovered and was lammung in his blows. The two men were about evenly matched as to bulk. Dugan, however, had science behind the quick, powerful wallops he packed.

But Carmencita saw soon that the odds were against the big detective. He guarded with his left, and every blow that struck that arm caused a sharp twinge of pain to register in Dugan's face. In a moment a tiny



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patch of scarlet was visible on the sleeve of his grey coat.

The girl hastily reached into the small bag that hung over her wrist. She fumbled inside a second. Then immediately she realized that her tiny gat was no longer there. Dugan had cautioned against it, and taken possession of the ominous toy. Now it could not be of service to him, and the spot of crimson on his shoulder had already increased in size.

Flattened against the wall, the girl watched the fight helplessly. Both men were savages enraged. Each knew that victory for the other might mean death, for in the pocket of each was a venomous gat that would rip into action the moment either could tear himself from the other's flaying fists. And each in his own way was struggling for his woman.

**S**UDDENLY Jimmy Dugan's fist collided brutally against the Giant's jowls so that he staggered back. Jimmy leaped forward and the fist flung out again. The Giant thudded to the carpet, limply.

Dugan stooped but a second over the fallen man. His breath was coming in painful gasps, and the agony caused by his left shoulder almost unnerved him. He saw that the Giant had stirred. From a rear pocket Dugan whipped his automatic and had him covered. Carmencita was beside Jimmy and did what she could to relieve the pressure of the coat on the wounded arm.

Both were looking down as Giant Peters slowly opened his eyes. His first move was almost instinctive. Dugan checked it.

"I got you covered, Peters," he said quietly. "Don't try reachin' for that gun you got just inside your coat."

Still with the rod levelled, Dugan backed to the telephone and spoke a number. While he waited, he allowed the gangster to rise. And then, as

Dugan turned slightly to speak into the phone again, the Giant belted for the busted window near which he was standing, and was rushing down the fire escape.

Dugan left the receiver dangling in mid air and was after him. At the window he paused. A single tearing shot came at him from below and hissed past his head into the ceiling. It was too late to follow. Weak from the reopening of the wound, he collapsed across the sill of the window.

"Yellow guts," he murmured. "That's what them guys are, all of 'em. Yellow guts!"

**I**T WAS not much later that the disheveled Giant Peters was in Steel Morgan's office on the second floor of the hangout. The chief listened to the story with a poker face.

"So that jane's been dishin' out info to that damn Dugan," he said after a full minute's pause.

"We don't know that she's been tellin' that guy anything," said Peters quickly.

Morgan looked up at him and there was grim determination on his face. "We don't—know," he said with a careless stressing of the last word, "but the dame's on the spot just the same." Steel Morgan brought his clenched fist down with brutal definiteness.

Peters remained silent. He thought it better just then.

"And I guess," continued Morgan with a sinister nonchalance, "that we better croak the dick at the same time. He's probably found out too damn much already."

"O. K., chief. I'll have it done right off. I'd be damn glad to pass him the lead myself."

"I haven't a doubt of that, Giant, but I don't need you to manage this thing for me."

Neither man spoke for some time. Morgan leaned back in his chair, deep

## SPEAKEASY STORIES

in thought, and his lieutenant stood before him, shifting uneasily from one foot to the other, waiting for further orders. Abruptly the chief looked up.

"Get the skirt here at once," he ordered. "And this time I'll send somebody that ain't nuts over the dame. Have Scar and Brady take care of that end of the job. Then keep her in the dressing room of hers downstairs. There ain't no hurry about her. We can take care of her later."

"O. K., chief," mumbled the Giant.

"Wait a minute, Giant, that ain't all. This part of the job you can take care of yourself. Get hold o' that dick friend o' hers on the phone at Headquarters or wherever the hell he goes. Get one of the skirts downstairs to do the talkin' over the wire. She's to spill in this Dugan's ear that she's been abducted, and have her give the street and number o' this joint."

"But, Boss," Peters interrupted, "if you do that Dugan will hot foot it here and Carmen will be right here herself by that time."

"Use your brain, Giant. That's just what I'm after. And get this dame that's gonna do the doublin' for her over the telephone to make it dramatic. A couple o' shrieks and the receiver banged up in the middle of it—but not before Dugan gets all the info necessary to get here."

"But say, Morgan, what you want to let him find the jane for. If—"

A yellow toothed grin was on Morgan's face. "He ain't gonna find her, see? She's gonna be downstairs like I told you, and you're gonna see this dick when he comes in and tell him we got the girl up here. Now if you use your head, Giant, you can get the point. The minute he starts up the stairs, he's finished, and all the info the dame's been spillin' goes with him. That's all, Giant."

Giant Peters bashed a misshapen hat on his head and shuffled toward the door. Before he reached it, Morgan stopped him.

"And you better issue orders," the chief was saying, "that nobody's to go up or down that staircase. There'll be men at the head of it waiting for Dugan, and I want clear range. It's up to you, Giant, to see that the first guy that comes up here is the dick himself. I don't want to fire at the wrong target."

**T**HE chief's orders were put through. Within an hour the very much frightened Carmencita, under the menace of two automatics, walked hurriedly into her dressing room in back of the speakeasy, and heard a key turn in the lock as the door was kicked shut behind her.

"Get ready to strut your stuff," laughed one of the men as she heard them walk away.

Carmencita flung herself on the one chair in the narrow room, and sat crouched there, her eyes never leaving the closed door that was the only entrance—or exit—to the room. Then gradually the last words she had heard began to repeat themselves in her brain. Was she to prepare for her dance number? Was that all this insistent summons had meant? She could not believe that, but she was afraid not to do as she had been commanded.

Automatically she rose and stripped off her street clothes. Slowly she slipped into an abbreviated costume she took from the wall. Still nothing had happened. She wished that death might come quickly if it was to come to her. Then the agonizing terror would be over, she thought, as she completed the final adjustment of the dress, and reached over to pin in her hair one of the deep red roses that lay on her dressing table.

## YELLOW GUTS

**A**T that moment Jimmy Dugan pushed open the door from the street and walked hurriedly into the dim hallway. He saw that the one man who loitered with apparent carelessness near the exit was watching every move he made, but no attempt was made to check his progress.



He strode along through the corridor as far as the stairway. There he turned through the lighted doorway into the brilliantly decorated room that was the speakeasy.

No sooner had he stepped inside than Giant Peters brushed against him.

"I don't know what you're after," Peters whispered. "But if you're looking for the dame, you'll find her upstairs. I wanna see that she gets out o' here as much as you do, bo."

For a full minute Dugan's eyes bored into the other.

"Pretty damn eager, Giant," he said finally, "to steer me somewhere else, ain't you? Guess I'll just take a look around here first."

With a wave of his hand, Dugan started on among the rows of small tables. The Giant sprang after him, his arms raised menacingly. Immediately he let them fall at his side, before Dugan had turned around.

"Don't bother about me, Giant," said Dugan affably. "I've been in speakeasies before. Guess I'll manage to get service without asking

you to escort me through the place."

With that Dugan walked slowly on. He was aware that many narrowed eyes watched his every step as he moved along. And he assumed that gats were ready to bark out at him. But he paid no attention to these things. His eyes were busy combing every inch of the huge room.

Dugan suddenly stopped dead still. His eyes were following the big form of the Giant as he walked quickly along the wall and disappeared through a curtained opening. A group of chorines were just finishing a number and were running out through the same exit Peters had taken. Dugan hastily crossed the rest of the distance, mingled with the girls and pushed his way behind the heavy velvet curtain.

Jostled by the chorus girls, Dugan edged his way in front of them, and continued down the narrow passageway. He was just in time to see one of the four doors that lined the corridor being hastily closed.

**JIMMY DUGAN** sprang towards that door, and with gat out, flung it open again. Giant Peters was there. He whirled quickly, but the detective, his automatic pressed against the other's ribs, backed him silently against the wall. The girl he had come to seek rushed forward and closed the swinging door behind the two men.

"Now, you damn yegg," said Jimmy, keeping his voice pitched low, though there was an intense and deadly undercurrent in it, "I've found Carmencita, and she wasn't where you told me to look."

"And now that you've found her, dick, what the hell are you going to do about it?" asked the gangster.

"I'm goin' to have you tell me how I'm goin' to get her out of this damn joint. See?"

For a minute the two looked steadily at each other, and in the

## SPEAKEASY STORIES

eyes of each there was deadly purpose. The Giant was the first to look away. His gaze wandered toward the girl who stood near them. He looked at her hungrily, but when he spoke, he again faced Dugan.

"I don't like you none, Dugan," he said quietly. "I guess you know that. But I will say I got a kinda respect for any guy what can pass me a knock-out like you did."

"I ain't honin' to talk about myself," Dugan interrupted quickly. "What I want to find out is how I'm goin' to get the girl away."

Carmencita laid a detaining hand on Dugan's arm. "The Giant he will help me. I know he will. It was not him, Jimmy, who brought me here."

"Yeah," drawled the Giant. "That's just what I was gettin' around to, Dugan, if you'd keep your damn mouth shut a mo. I was tellin' you what I thought of you. Well, that goes. And when you say you'll get the jane safe away from here, I know you'll do it. That's why I'm with you. Come on now."

But Dugan was still suspicious, and again wedged the automatic against the Giant. "What do you mean, 'come on'?" he asked. "Where you plannin' to take us?"

"Out o' the house, dick. See?"

"The Giant means it, Jimmy," gasped Carmencita. "I know it."

Slowly Dugan thrust the gat into his pocket, though his hand still clutched the butt. He knew it was not possible to move through the front room of the speakeasy with a gun showing. He'd have to take the chance, but he was ready for an emergency.

"Here's the lay, Dugan," said the Giant as the release of the pressure of the automatic relieved his breathing. "You walk out to the hall just as though nothing had happened. It ain't safe for the girl to go with you. I'll come along with her a minute later. Now, there's only one guy sta-

tioned near the front door. That's where you two gotta make your get-away. Well, I'll distract that guy's attention, and the attention of everybody else in the place when I start up the stairs."

"Up the stairs?" Dugan looked at the Giant a moment with dawning understanding. "Why, that's where you wanted to send me when I first came in. What's waitin' for the fellow that goes up there?"

Giant Peters stooped over and whispered so that only Jimmy Dugan could hear. "Never mind what's waitin' up there, dick," he said. "I'm on the spot anyway, if the girl gets out o' here. See?" Then aloud, "Let's get goin' now."

Dugan moved again back through the speakeasy. He had not waited in the hallway that led to the front door more than a few minutes when the Giant appeared, with Carmencita walking beside him.

"Here's somethin' that belongs to you, dick," said Peters quietly, extending a metal shield.

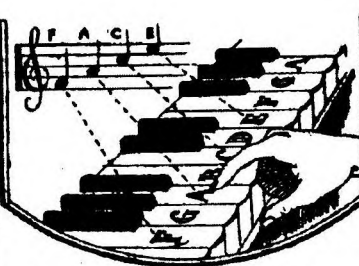
"Thanks, bo," said Jimmy. As he took it from the big gangster, he saw that there was still another object that lay in the Giant's palm. Quickly the fingers had closed over it . . . a dark red rose that had fallen from Carmencita's hair.

"Now do your stuff," said Peters with a grin. Without another word he moved slowly toward the wide staircase that led from the hall to the floor above.

Jimmy turned to watch the man who loitered at the front door. The man's eyes were intently following the Giant as he took the first step on the stairs. With Carmencita shielded by him, Dugan rushed the door and banged it behind them.

As the two ran down the steps, they heard a concentrated volley of fire behind the closed door. Only Dugan knew that sprawled at the foot of the stairs inside lay the lifeless

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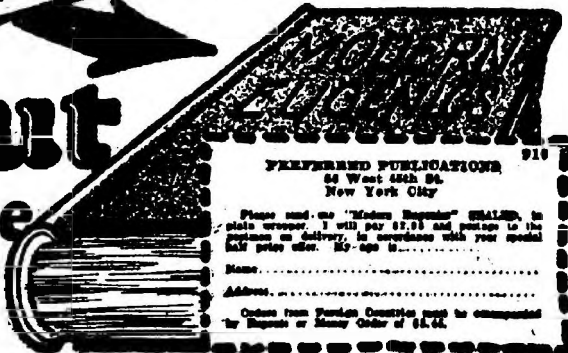
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# FREE To Men Past 40

## Amazing New Facts About The Misunderstood Subject of Rejuvenation

An extraordinary new book, based on certain discoveries about old age reveals facts which, to many men, will be amazing. Did you know that two-thirds of all men past middle age are said to have a certain seldom-mentioned disorder? Do you know the frequent cause of this decline in health?

### Common Old-Age Symptoms

Medical men know this condition as hypertrophy of the prostate gland. Science now reveals that this swollen gland—painless in itself—not only often cheats men of health, but also bears on the bladder and is often directly responsible for sciatica, back ache, pains in the legs and feet, frequent nightly rising, and dizziness, denoting high blood pressure. When allowed to run on it is frequently the cause of the dreaded disease cystitis, a very severe bladder inflammation.

### 65% Have This Gland Disorder

Prostate trouble is now reached immediately by a new kind of home treatment—a new, safe hygiene that goes directly to the gland, itself, without drugs, medicines, massage, lessons, diet or the application of electricity. It is absolutely safe. 100,000 men have used it for restoring the prostate gland to normal functioning. The principle involved in this treatment is recommended by practically all the physicians in America. Amazing recoveries are made in seven days. Another grateful effect is usually the immediate disappearance of chronic constipa-

tion. Usually the entire body is toned up. Either you feel ten years younger in seven days or the treatment costs you nothing.

### Send for FREE Book

If you have this gland trouble or if you have any of the symptoms mentioned above, you should not lose a day in writing for the scientist's free Book, "The Destroyer of Male Health." It will enable you to ask yourself certain frank questions that may reveal your true condition. Every man past 40 should make this test, as insidious prostate disorder often leads to surgery. This book is absolutely free, but mail coupon immediately, as the edition is limited. Address

**THE ELECTRO THERMAL COMPANY**  
5546 Morris Avenue                      Steubenville, Ohio

If you live West of the Rockies, address The Electro Thermal Co., 503 Van Nuys Building, Dept. 55-Z, Los Angeles, Calif. In Canada, address The Electro Thermal Co., Desk 55-Z, 53 Yonge St., Toronto, Can.

THE ELECTRO THERMAL CO.  
5546 Morris Ave., Steubenville, Ohio  
Please send me Free, and without obligation,  
a copy of your booklet, "The Destroyer of  
Male Health." Mail in plain wrapper.

Name .....

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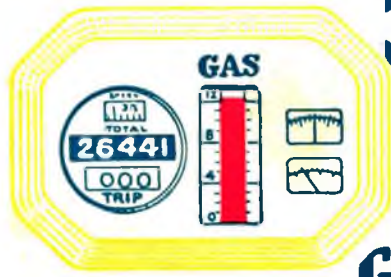
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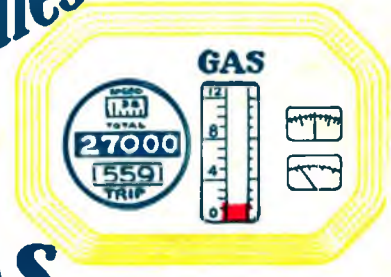


# Over the Mountains from Los Angeles

## 559 Miles



## on 11



## Gallons of GAS

Think of it! FIVE HUNDRED FIFTY-NINE MILES over rough mountainous country burning only ELEVEN GALLONS of GASOLINE. Imagine more than FIFTY MILES to the GALLON. That is what the WHIRLWIND CARBURETING DEVICE does for D. R. Gilbert, enough of a saving on just one trip to more than pay for the cost of the Whirlwind.

# THE WHIRLWIND SAVES MOTORISTS MILLIONS OF DOLLARS YEARLY

Whirlwind users, reporting the results of their tests, are amazed at the results they are getting. Letters keep streaming into the office telling of mileages all the way from 22 to 59 miles on a gallon, resulting in a saving of from 25% to 50% in gas bills alone.

Mark H. Estes writes: "I was making 17 miles to the gallon on my Pontiac Coupe. Today, with the Whirlwind, I am making 35 5/10 miles to the gallon. Am I glad I put it on? I'll say so!"

P. P. Goerzen writes: "I made an actual test both with and without a Whirlwind, getting 13 1/2 miles without and 34 6/10 miles with the Whirlwind, or a gain of 21 miles to the gallon. The longer the Whirlwind is in use on the machine the better the engine runs, has more pep and quicker starting. It makes a new engine out of an old one, and starts at the touch of the starter button."

R. J. Tulp: "The Whirlwind increased the mileage on our Ford truck from 12 to 26 miles to gallon and 25% in speed. We placed another on a Willys-Knight and increased from 12 to 17 miles per gallon."

Arthur Grant: "I have an Oakland touring car that has been giving me 15 miles to the gallon average, but I can see a great difference with the Whirlwind, as it climbs the big hills on high and gives me better than 23 miles to the gallon of gas, which is better than 50% saving in gas."

W. A. Scott: "I had my Whirlwind for three years. Winter and summer it gives the same perfect service, instant starting, smoother running, and what I have saved in gasoline these last few years has brought other luxuries which I could not have afforded previously."

Car owners all over the world are saving money every day with the Whirlwind, besides having better operating motors. Think what this means on your own car. Figure up your savings—enough for a radio—a bank account—added pleasures. Why let the Oil Companies profit by your waste? Find out about this amazing little device that will pay for itself every few weeks in gas saving alone.

### GUARANTEE

No matter what kind of a car you have—no matter how big a gas eater it is—the Whirlwind will save you money. We absolutely guarantee that the Whirlwind will more than save its cost in gasoline alone within thirty days, or the trial will cost you nothing. We invite you to test it at our risk and expense. You are to be the sole judge.

### FREE OFFER COUPON

WHIRLWIND MANUFACTURING CO.,  
999-640-A, Third Street, Milwaukee, Wis.

Gentlemen: You may send me full particulars of your Whirlwind Carbureting device and tell me how I can get one free. This does not obligate me in any way-whatsoever.

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Address .....

City .....

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Check here if you are interested in full or part time salesmen position.

### FITS ALL CARS

In just a few minutes the Whirlwind can be installed on any make of car, truck or tractor. It's actually less work than changing your oil or putting water in the battery. No drilling, tapping or changes of any kind necessary. It is guaranteed to work perfectly on any make of car, truck or tractor, large or small, new model or old model. The more you drive the more you will save.

### SALESMEN AND DISTRIBUTORS WANTED

To make up to \$100.00 a week and more.

Whirlwind men are making big profits supplying this fast-selling device that car owners cannot afford to be without. Good territory is still open. Free sample offer to workers. Full particulars sent on request. Just check the coupon.

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