

Private Detective Perry played host to a pretty blonde and an ugly corpse. The dead man left nothing—but the lovely lady left a . . .

Suicide Souvenir



By Dennis Layton

DETEKTIVE PERRY'S eyes rested expectantly on the frosted-glass panel in the door to his office. A grotesque shadow was plastered there, cast on the glass like a picture by a motion picture projector. It moved around in indecision and groped for the knob of the door.

Matt Perry half rose from his chair, pulling open the top drawer of his desk and exposing an ugly Mauser pistol which rested there, primed, loaded and ready for trouble.

The door burst open without warning. A girl plunged into the office wildly. Astonished, Perry stared at her.

Her blonde hair was blowing around crazily without a hat covering it. She was small and chic. She ran right up to the desk.

"What can I—" Perry began.

"Can't explain!" she interrupted rudely. She thrust her right hand forward and deposited something on the desk. "Hold it until you hear from me," she said swiftly.

"And don't let it get out of your hands."

"Hey," Perry exclaimed. "What in hell

is this? Just a second, lady, I want to—”

He was talking to air. She turned around and was out of the office like a wraith. Perry bit his lip. But stunned as he was by the sudden procession of events, he made up his mind in a split second. His hand dove into the desk, came up with the Mauser which he jammed deep in his coat pocket.

Then he lanced away from behind his desk and went out after her. He scuttled to the elevator bank. But he was too late.

Just as he got there, the sliding door of the shaft slammed shut. Through the small glass window in the door, he could see the cage close and the car zoom down towards the street.

“Damn!” Perry muttered.

It would be senseless to try and beat the girl down by taking the stairway. It was seven flights to the street floor of the Lanin Building. She would beat him easily.

He pressed the down button. Luckily, another car was just on its way to the main floor. It opened up. He rushed in, watched the gates close and felt his stomach rise queerly as the car sped down like a plummet.

“Hey, Joe,” Perry called to the elevator starter on the main floor as he leaped out. “Didja see a blonde? Small, no hat?”

“Yeah, Mr. Perry,” said the starter. “She went out the Fifth Avenue way. I remember her. She was a stunner.”

“How long ago?”

“Half a minute or so.”

Perry tore along the main floor to the Fifth Avenue exit. Out in the street, he searched frantically for some sign of that brilliant yellow hair. But he could find nothing like it. A line of taxicabs caught his gaze. He snapped his fingers knowingly. The girl had lammed in a cab. She wouldn't take any chances on his catching up with her.

Disappointed, Matt Perry returned to

the elevator bank. He stepped into one of the elevators and was whisked up to the seventh floor where his office was. He got out, feeling sorry for himself because he hadn't caught the girl. As he walked down the marblelike corridor of the floor, he noticed that the door at the end of his quarters was open. He had left it closed.

The Mauser appeared in his hand like magic. He stole agilely down the remainder of the hall to his office. Silently, he peered in. There was a dead man on the floor.

“What the hell!” Perry whistled. He entered, closing the door behind him and putting the big pistol away. Then he stooped down over the man.

“Toby Beck!” Perry breathed, recognizing the dead man as one of the most elusive professionals of the city. It didn't jell at all. First the girl who had left something on his desk. And now Toby Beck, gunman and chiseler, a cooling corpse on his floor.

BECK was dead. But he wasn't stiff. Rigor mortis had not begun to set in. And the flesh was warm. Perry realized that Beck had died here in the few minutes that Perry had spent below, in pursuit of the blonde. But how had he died?

Perry examined Beck, frankly baffled. There wasn't a bullet wound anywhere on Beck's body. Nor a sign of blood either. Perry turned over Beck's right hand.

In the center of the dead man's thumb there was a tiny, almost invisible drop of blood. Just that. Nothing else.

Perry got to his feet and lifted his telephone from its pedestal. He called the elevator starter in the hall below.

“Listen, Joe,” he said, “did anyone come down from the seventh while I was out?”

There was a long pause while the starter made inquiries. “No, Mr. Perry,” Joe replied finally. “You weren't out long

enough. No one came down.”

“Okay, thanks,” said Perry. He hung up.

For the first time, he noticed the thing that the frantic blonde had left on his desk. It was a bronze casket, beautifully hammered. It was about four inches long and two inches wide. The sort of thing a rich girl would put her jewels in.

Perry picked it up and looked at it. There was a little catch on the front of it where you opened the thing. Perry ran his fingers along it to open it.

Simultaneously, the telephone rang.

“Hello,” said Perry, putting the casket down for a second. “Matt Perry speaking.”

“Mr. Perry,” came a breathless feminine voice at the other end of the wire, “whatever you do—don’t open that bronze casket. I forgot to tell you when I left it—but don’t open it. It’ll kill you in a second if you do!”

“Say, what is all this?” Perry asked sharply.

“I can’t explain now,” the girl replied. “I haven’t time. They’re following me. Just hang onto that casket and don’t try to open it. And if a man named Toby Beck comes looking for it or—”

“Beck’s dead,” said Perry. “Right here in my office.”

“Oh!” he heard her cry. “He tried to cross them, the fool!” She was silent for a second. “Lock it up,” she said then. “Lock it up, Perry. Hide it!”

“Okay,” Perry replied. “But who in hell are you?”

“Call me Lois,” she answered. “Lois Ward. That’ll do until I get in touch with you.”

“But—” Perry began.

He heard a sharp click and he knew that the connection had been severed. She was gone again. And there was no use tracing the call. If she were in flight as she had said, then the call had come from a public

booth. He had the bronze casket. She said she would come for it. He had to be satisfied with that.

Perry put the casket in the top drawer of his desk and locked the drawer, placing the key in his pocket.

The corpse of Beck loomed up again. Perry realized that he’d have to report this to the homicide bureau. Otherwise, Inspector Lowery would raise the roof.

There was a knock at the door of the office.

It startled Perry only because he had not expected it. He glanced warily at the frosted glass. He could see it was a man.

“Come in,” he said, patting the bulk of the pistol in his pocket.

HE WAS right. It was a man—a huge giant of a man, uncouth and bestial. He wore a slouchy topcoat, a faded gray fedora and dirty brown shoes. A ragged cigar perched in the corner of his mouth as he eyed the corpse of Toby Beck on the floor and grunted.

“You saved me the trouble,” he said gruffly. “I was after Beck. How’d you put him away?”

“I tied him to a buzz saw,” replied Terry sarcastically. “Who in hell are you?”

The man flashed a golden badge with a spread eagle on it. “Twenty-two,” he said. “Name’s Rick McKenzie.”

“Let me see that badge,” Perry said suspiciously.

McKenzie shrugged, smiling, and handed his badge to Perry, who examined it carefully. It was the original all right. No fake. The number twenty-two was emblazoned on the shield.

“Federal operative, eh?” Perry said, handing the badge back to McKenzie. “Well, what’s in your craw?”

McKenzie pointed to the corpse. “How’d you get Beck?”

“I didn’t get him,” said Perry. “He—”

There was a pause. Perry remembered the secret the girl had left with him.

"I get it, I get it," remarked the Federal man. "He tried to open the casket, eh?"

"What casket?" asked Perry innocently.

McKenzie laughed. "Stop stalling, shamus," he said. "You're a good dick and a steady worker. Don't pick no quarrel with me. I know the dame left the bronze casket here."

Perry eyed McKenzie silently.

"Sure," the Federal man continued. "I've been on the trail of this gang for the last two months. Today, that dame tried to shake me off. She had the bronze casket. She was making a delivery. I followed her—chased her. She came here and when she left—the bronze casket wasn't with her."

There was a fishy look in the Federal man's eyes which Perry didn't like much. Perry leaned forward and said politely:

"You don't tell me."

"I do tell you!" snarled McKenzie, exasperated. "Listen, Perry. I've been pretty nice with you so far. If you get tough, I'll crack down. You've got that casket here. The dame left it here—a blonde with taking ways. Are you an accessory after the fact? Or do you hand the casket over and report this stiff to the cops?"

"What're you after?" Perry asked.

"Dope," said McKenzie.

"The birds who've been unloading the white stuff in New York, eh?" Perry was pensive. "And what's in the bronze casket—just supposing there is such a thing?"

"There's a load of heroin and coke in it," said McKenzie. "Worth about twenty grand."

"And what's the girl got to do with it?"

"She belongs to the gang. The passer."

"And who's in the gang?"

"Say," remarked McKenzie balefully,

"What is this—an inquest? Go to hell, Perry. I don't have to tell you anything. Hand over that casket!"

"Sure, sure," said Perry easily. "I'll hand it over—on one condition. You'll have to identify it."

"That's easy," grinned McKenzie. "The casket has a label on it. Alex Jerome, it says. And the address of an antique shop."

"Alex Jerome, eh?" murmured Perry. "A.J. Yep, that's all I wanted to know, brother. Now reach for your ears. And no funny tricks on account of my trigger finger has got St. Vitus dance."

The big Mauser was in Perry's hand, accurately aimed at the pit of the Federal man's stomach.

McKENZIE stared at the gun in stupefaction, his mouth agape, the shredded cigar falling to the floor. "Hey," he exclaimed, "are you nuts?"

"A little," said Perry. "We all are. But this is the first time I ever knew a Fed by the name of McKenzie—Rick McKenzie—to go around wearing a tie pin with the initials A.J. on it. Mister, you're sure careless. You oughta picked a name like Arthur Jones or something."

McKenzie laughed deeply. "Pretty smart, Perry," he complimented, sitting down in the chair in front of the desk. "Pretty damn smart!"

"Keep your paws on the arms of that chair," Perry said meaningly.

"Keep your shirt on," replied McKenzie. "No need to wave that rod at me. I'm not heeled." He paused. "Look here. Perry, how about a deal?"

Perry smiled. "A deal?"

"Yeah—a deal. You name your figure. Then hand over that bronze casket. You've got me. You've got me cold. I ain't Rick McKenzie. I never heard of such a guy. I'm Al Jerome and that's my casket."

"Sure," nodded Perry. "I knew that all

the time.”

“You did—how?”

“If a punk like Beck—who was on the inside, a member of your dope gang—didn’t know any better than to try to open the casket and get bumped off as a result, how could you, as a Fed, have known about it?”

“Sound,” nodded Jerome alias McKenzie.

“Furthermore,” continued Perry, “how come a Fed would know how much value the white stuff in the casket had? Or what kind was in there?”

“I’m not such a hot actor, eh?” said Jerome.

“No. Now where’d you get that shield?”

“Name your figure,” Jerome evaded, “and let me have the casket. After all, Perry, you lose nothing. You make a helluva lot.”

“I promised a lady,” said Perry, “that I’d hold it for her until she wanted it. Ain’t that a shame?”

“That bim!” snapped Jerome. “She’s just a double-crossing doll, Perry. She tried to put one over on me.”

“You sure have a glib tongue,” replied Perry. “I wouldn’t believe a dope peddler if he were my own father.” He reached over and picked up his telephone. “Hello, operator,” he called, “connect me with the Department of Justice in New York.”

Jerome sighed mournfully. “All right, Perry,” he said, throwing up his hands. “I did the best I could for you.” He half turned in his chair. “Let him have it, Louie!”

Perry shot his eyes towards the door just as a big hairy hand with a gun stuck in and fired twice, rapidly.

There was no sound, just a dull plopping. The long ugly gleam of a silencer on the end of the hostile gun took the voice out of the bullets.

PERRY fired the Mauser once before he dove down behind the desk away from the furious drone of the hot slugs as they whizzed past his head and chest. The telephone dropped to the desk.

At the door, the bullet from Perry’s gun smashed through the frosted glass, leaving a little hole there from which radiated jagged serpentine lines.

Beyond the frosted glass, the shadow of a man sagged. The gunman whom Jerome had instructed to kill Perry had taken Perry’s pellet in the chest through the frosted glass.

As the dead man at the door struck the floor with a thump, Jerome catapulted forward out of his chair, clawing at a shoulder holster for his own weapon. It jumped into his hand as Perry’s head bobbed, up from behind the desk, sighting along the Mauser’s barrel.

Crack!

Jerome fired blindly at the dark bulk of Perry’s skull. There was no silencer on Jerome’s revolver and it thundered like a howitzer.

Perry instinctively recoiled as the slug bit into his cheek angrily, creased a living flaming welt across his face and then sang on to splinter the floor.

The Mauser twitched three times. And Perry saw his three slugs eat into Jerome’s coat. When Perry fired, he rarely missed.

But Jerome only laughed satanically at the slash of the bullets in his chest. They did not seem to stop him at all. One more saffron lance of flame lunged at Perry.

The bullet missed. How, he never knew. At that pointblank range, Perry should have been a cadaver. But the very wildness of Jerome’s shots had saved Perry’s life.

Jerome’s revolver clicked metallicly as the hammer hit steel instead of the brass rim of a cartridge.

Perry knew it was futile to snap bullets

at Jerome's torso. The killer had on a slug-proof vest. There was his head. But Perry knew that Jerome was worth more to the government alive, rather than dead.

He jumped at Jerome, jamming his Mauser away. He knew Jerome's gun was empty. The clip had run its length. Disregarding the swinging revolver which Jerome still held in his hand, using it as a club, Perry poked the man stiffly in the face.

Jerome shrieked in pain and whizzed the revolver around at Perry's unprotected skull. Perry ducked. And he ducked clear. But he overlooked one thing.

Jerome did not hold onto the gun. He let it fly. And it zoomed at Perry with terrific force. While Perry had recoiled enough to be out of range of Jerome's swing, the revolver caught him in the right temple with a gruesome thud.

It knocked him over backwards, but not completely out. He could faintly see, through a black swirling mist which swept in front of his eyes.

He dimly made out Jerome stepping over him. He felt the killer's hands going through his pockets. Then the vague shuffling sound of an opening drawer.

Perry struggled within himself, trying to get up and stop Jerome from getting away with the bronze casket. But actually, although his striving turned over in his mind, he never moved on the floor.

Jerome took the casket out of the drawer and slipped it into his pocket where it made an awkward bulge. He stooped over Perry, his eyes blazing with fury. He reached to pick up Perry's own Mauser, discreetly tucked away in the shamus' pocket.

PERRY would have to be put away. That was evident. He knew too much. And Jerome plainly intended to do the job right then. But the slap of footsteps on the

marble floor of the hall deterred him. There he stood amidst two corpses and an unconscious man. In his pocket—the bronze casket.

His eyes flung around the room swiftly. He saw the black outline of the fire escape outside of one. Still glaring ominously at Perry's prostrate form, he leaped to the window, opened it and climbed out. He shut the window after him and disappeared so down the escape.

Almost at the same time, Joe the elevator starter, burst into the room. He took in the macabre bodies, the telephone on the floor, the bullet-ridden frosted-glass panel.

"Jeez!" he muttered.

He thought Perry was dead, too. But as if in protest to this, Perry groaned and sat up, rubbing the side of his head. His senses slowly cleared. He got to his feet, stared at the open drawer of his desk.

"You're alive," breathed Joe, as though he had seen a walking specter.

"Hell, yes," said Perry. "How'd you happen to come up, Joe?"

"Gert took your call on the switchboard downstairs," said the starter. "She was locating some number for you when she heard shots. She came out a-runnin' and sent me up."

Perry nodded. "Good work. You saved my life."

He picked up the telephone. "Hello—"

"Yes, Mr. Perry," cried a frightened female voice.

"Thanks, Gert," said Perry. "All okay now. Joe got here in time. Quick thinking. You oughta get a raise."

"I'm so glad," replied Gert tremulously. "But don't hang up yet, Mr. Perry. A call just came for you. I'll put it through."

"Right." He waited while ear-racking clicks split along the wire. Without warning, a bass, irascible voice broke into being.

"This Matt Perry's office?"

Perry tensed. He had a quick hunch. He played it. "Yeah."

"Lemme speak to McKenzie."

"Stop stallin', mug," snapped Perry, disguising his voice. "This is A.J. talkin'."

"Listen, chief," said the voice. "This is Scarotti. I got the dame—you know, the blonde bim. What'll I do with her?"

"Take her to headquarters, regular place," replied Perry. "I'll be along soon."

"Didja get the bronze casket?"

"I'll say. I hadda cook Perry. He knew too much. Beck tried to cross us. He's dead. And Perry got Louie."

"Hell!" exclaimed Scarotti. "Get away from there, chief. And get away fast. I'll see you at the store."

"Right."

Perry hung up. Joe, the starter, stared at him.

"Call the cops, Joe, will you?" Perry asked. "I've got to be on my way. Tell Inspector Lowery I'll give him the entire works when I get back."

"Y-y-yeah," faltered Joe. "B-but suppose you don't come—"

"In that case," smiled Perry, "have him look up a bird with a moniker like Alex Jerome. Get it?"

"I—I get it, Mr. Perry. Take care of yourself."

"Don't worry," said Perry grimly.

HE CAUGHT the elevator down to the main floor. As he swung out toward the street in a purposeful stride, he felt the Mauser battering his hip as it fell to and fro with the movement of his body.

There was a red taxi at the curb in front of the Lanin Building. Perry cautiously glanced around to make sure no Tommy-guns were set on him. He realized that Jerome wanted him out of the way. And the killer might have had some strong-arm men along with him other than the man called

"Louie" whom Perry had shot.

The coast-seemed clear. Perry shot out across the sidewalk and leaped into the car. "Church Street," he snapped to the driver.

"Yes, *sir!*"

Perry settled back on the cushions. Instantly an arm encircled him, dove into his coat pocket. It came out with the Mauser's snout pressed into his side.

"You're getting dull, Perry," said Jerome, laughing gutturally. "Very dull indeed."

Perry went taut. "You think so," he said.

"Yeah," said Jerome, tightening his mouth and jamming the Mauser tightly against Perry. "And don't try a break, shamus. I'll cook you right here if I have to. I'm not choosy."

"Okay, okay," said Perry nonchalantly. "I'll be good. Better give the hack driver an address, Jerome."

"Yours'll do," Jerome sneered. "The one you gave him, I mean. Church Street, eh? Right where my antique shop is located. Yeah, that suits me fine. I can't think of a better place to knock you off."

They were silent for a while as the taxi tore along.

At length, Perry asked: "How'd you spot me? Did you just wait until I came down?"

Jerome roared with laughter, never for a second relaxing the pressure on the Mauser's trigger.

"Man, are you dumb," he exclaimed. "Did I take you! Listen, you dumb flatfoot—that was *me* telephoned you in the office. I knew you'd pull off a disguise if I said I was someone else asking for A.J. I did that to decoy you downstairs. And you fell."

"Yeah," murmured Perry. "I fell. Then you didn't get the blonde girl, eh?"

"I didn't," said Jerome. "But Scarotti will." He chuckled. "Boy, did you fall for

that old gag!”

“Sure, I fell,” agreed Perry cannily. “What’re you after the dame for? She cross you? Same as Beck?”

“Naw,” grunted Jerome, his face darkening. “She’s a Fed, you sap! Lois Ward’s her moniker. She’s been on me for a coupla weeks. I wasn’t even wise. I never heard of a female Fed operative before. But today when Beck was making this delivery, she jacked him, got the casket and tore. Beck followed her. He telephoned me when she went to the Lanin Building. I knew then she was going to your office.”

“And Beck—instead of trying to get the bronze casket with its load of dope back for you—tried to open it and take it for himself,” said Perry.

“That’s right,” Jerome nodded. “He was gonna give me a sob story about how the dame had taken the stuff. But I had a protection against that. In this racket, the only one I trust is myself. And when a delivery is made, the receiver is the only one who knows the secret.”

“The secret of the needle in the casket clasp?” Perry asked casually.

“Yeah,” frowned Jerome. “How did you know?”

“A speck of blood on Beck’s thumb.”

“Yeah? And what else do you know?”

Perry shrugged. “Oh, you probably had the needle loaded like a snake’s fang. I’ll say you used prussic acid.”

“Now ain’t that bright,” remarked Jerome acidly, “You’re one bright boy, Perry, But I never heard of prussic acid being deadly through the skin.”

“No,” agreed Perry. “But if you sucked a stuck thumb and got it in your mouth, you’d be dead before you could swallow it.”

“You’re one bright boy,” grated Jerome. “You know all the answers. It’ll lighten my heart when I see your toes sticking up.”

“Who was the receiver?”

“Go to hell,” snarled Jerome. “I’ve been sitting here, answering your fool questions. Don’t think you’re baiting me, Perry. I’m not spilling anything. You’re taking your last ride—and it’s just about over.”

“Here y’are, boss,” called the hack driver. “Four bits.”

“Get out and pay him,” ordered Jerome. “No funny stuff or I’ll drop you in the street. Remember—there’s a gun in your back.”

THEY got out. Perry handed the driver a one dollar bill. The driver took it, stared at it for a second, then handed Perry fifty cents.

Perry, his eyes boring into the taxi driver’s, said: “Keep the change.”

“T’anks,” nodded the driver. He stuck the car into low gear, goosed the accelerator, and shot away in a cloud of white, oily smoke.

“Still smart,” muttered Jerome. “You play right along when you got a life to lose. All right. Turn around and got into the shop. And keep on going until I tell you to stop.”

“Sure,” said Perry.

He turned and entered the small obscure antique shop on Church Street. Alex Jerome followed closely behind him, prodding him along with the Mauser.

The front part of the shop was deserted. It was dark there, too, and replete with curios and pottery of various kinds.

“Nice place,” murmured Perry.

“Thanks.” said Jerome sardonically. “Go through that back door right ahead of us.”

They went through it. A small dank corridor led on to another room far beyond. Jerome motioned Perry silently along. They reached the back room. Jerome knocked three long ones and one quick

short one.

The door opened.

"Hello, Scarotti," said Jerome. "I brought home the bacon."

"Perry!" exclaimed the big scar-faced hulk at the door. "Chief—what in hell's happened? Where's Louie and Beck?"

"It's a long story," said Jerome. "Perry here knocked off Louie in a gunfight. Beck tried to cross us. He's dead."

"Dead? But how?"

"I ain't saying," replied Jerome. "There's a few things I have to keep to myself so's I'll have a check on you mugs," Jerome chuckled. "What the hell, Scarotti—we're the only two now. It's a bigger split—" he paused menacingly. "Unless you got other ideas?"

"Hell, no, chief," protested Scarotti, trembling and licking his lips. "You know I'm with you. I got the dame like you said."

"Lois Ward?"

"Yeah," nodded Scarotti. "She was on her way to Center Street. I let her have it on the back of the head and shoved her into a cab. She's over there on the sofa. Still out."

"What about the hack driver?"

"I took care of him."

Jerome handed the Mauser to Scarotti. "Hold it on Perry. If he moves—let him have it. He's got to go anyhow." Jerome walked to the sofa and looked down at the blonde girl. "Still out, eh?"

He pulled out his stickpin and rammed it cruelly into her leg. The girl cried in pain.

Jerome grunted. "Playing possum. I thought so. Get up, sister. You're gonna do a lot of spieling before we croak you."

Lois Ward got to her feet. She saw Perry.

"Hello," she said coolly. "Sorry to have gotten you into this mess."

"I wouldn't have missed it," replied Perry dryly, "for the world."

"These rats were crowding me," she

said. "I was near the Lanin Building. I thought of you. That casket had the evidence. I was afraid they'd lift it before I got to H.Q. So I dropped it with you."

"And here we are," smiled Perry.

JEROME'S face tightened. He wheeled on Lois Ward and grabbed her arm, twisting it slightly. "I don't want no trouble," he snarled, "getting answers. You talk and talk fast. Anyone else on the case with you?"

"My, my," Lois Ward murmured. "Look at his face, Perry. He's diabetic, don't you think?"

"Oh," sneered Jerome. "A bright girl, eh? Well, you talk fast, sister, or Scarotti will pull that trigger a couple of times and bank your boy friend on the floor."

That got her. Lois Ward's pretty face paled swiftly.

"I'll talk," she whispered.

"That's better," growled Jerome.

"Look," said Perry, "mind if I smoke a cig?" Jerome grinned. "I sure do, bright boy. I've heard about the tricks you pack up your sleeve. A cigarette makes a swell blowgun, don't it?"

"Give me one of your own then. You wouldn't refuse a fellow one last cig, would you?"

"Here's your cig." Jerome threw him one. "Watch him, Scarotti." He turned back to Lois Ward. "Who's with you on the case?"

"No one," she said.

Perry cocked his head around at Scarotti, the cigarette in his mouth. "Give me a light," he said.

Scarotti, still holding the Mauser against Perry's back, let his left hand slip into his pocket and withdrew a packet of safety matches.

"Light it yourself. No queer tricks. Or I kill."

"I don't doubt it," murmured Perry,

striking a match.

In the movement, he had slowly turned himself so that he nearly faced Scarotti directly. As he lighted the match, Perry pressed the back of his right hand against the upper pocket of his coat.

Simultaneously, a wispy stream shot out into Scarotti's beetle-browed face right out of the small pearl stickpin in Perry's tie.

Scarotti gripped at his eyes, screaming at the torture which the gas sent through his body. Perry spun around like a top. One of his hands tore the Mauser out of Scarotti's hairy paw. The other clipped the screaming man on the point of his jutting jaw and crashed him to the floor senseless.

There was a long thin bread knife on a small table in the room. Scarotti had been making a sandwich when they entered. Jerome snatched up the bread knife and threw Lois Ward back with him on the sofa, pressing the blade against the pale white skin of the girl's throat.

For a second, Perry was lost. He didn't know what to do. Lois Ward took matters in her own hands. In horror, Perry saw her twist her neck under the knife and sink her white teeth into Jerome's hand.

She drew blood. Jerome howled, infuriated, and tried to pull the knife into her throat.

But Lois Ward was smart. She had thrown herself down, a little to one side.

Perry pounced on Jerome, swung his fist. He knocked him solidly back on the sofa, unconscious.

Lois Ward jumped around and looked at him. "Some wallop! I'm glad you didn't shoot him."

Perry sighed. He felt like a wilted lily. "Nice going, pardner," he said in a small voice. "But you took a chance biting his hand."

She got to her feet and smiled. "Not so much," she said. "The fool had the dull edge of the blade against me. He didn't know it."

There was a battering at the door. The hollow reverberations of police clubs beat on it!

"You wanted him alive, eh?" Perry said.

"I'll say," replied the girl. "He's just one of a chain. We'll find out the others through him. Who's outside?"

He unlocked the door and opened it. Inspector Lowery, his burly face crimson with excitement, burst wildly into the room with two homicide bureau detectives behind him.

"I thought so," he cried. "All cleaned up! Damn you, Perry, you never give the cops a chance!"

Lois Ward's mouth was agape. "How did the police find out?"

"The driver who brought Jerome and me here," explained Perry. "I handed him a dollar bill. It's a special one I have fitted up for emergency cases. It carries a little note that says: 'Call Inspector Lowery at police headquarters and tell him Matt Perry is in trouble. Give any other information you know.' I've used the gag before."

"Yeah," said Inspector Lowery sourly. "Another one of Perry's tricks, miss. Some day he'll run outa them and—"

"I've got a million of them," said Perry, grinning broadly.