

MURDER'S MESSENGER

By ROBERT LESLIE BELLEM

I knew what was coming,
but I couldn't break loose
from her in time to duck.



It's a big job for a detective to stop a murder from happening—especially if he gets there too late. But with the cutest quail in Hollywood cooled, her killer had to be found

THE YELLOW-HAIRED guy walked into my private office. He looked worried.

He said: "Are you Dan Turner, the private detective?"

I said: "So I've heard. What can I do for you?"

He sat down. He hauled five crisp new centuries from his billfold, tossed them on my desk in front of me. Then he said: "Can you prevent murder?"

I looked at him. I've been a private dick in Hollywood a hell of a long time, but this was the first time anybody had

ever I asked me if I knew how to stop a murder from happening. I set fire to a gasper to cover my surprise. Then I said: "Just what do you mean?"

He said: "Permit me to introduce myself, Mr. Turner. I am Konrad Vincennes. I am with Altamount Studios." There was no trace of accent to his words; but I noticed a certain precise orthodoxy of speech indicating that to him English was a foreign tongue.

And the minute he mentioned his name, I tabbed him. He was a Rumanian tenor, and Altamount had imported him to

star in musicals. He was a good-looking bird—lots of sex-appeal. The kind that spinsters and parlor-maids always fall for. He'd been in Hollywood about a month; the papers had played him up big.

"A certain young woman of my acquaintance has been threatened with death," he went on. "I want you to protect her. Her name is Ysobel LeSage."

I said: "For God's sake!" Because I knew Ysobel LeSage. At least, I knew her by reputation. She was a foreign star, too. She worked for N-D-N Productions. A swell-looker, and I don't mean maybe. She had what it took to make men leave home—and it was rumored that half the big shots of Hollywood were on the make for her.

I said: "Who's doing the threatening?"

Vincennes darted a swift look about my office, as if to make sure he wasn't being overheard. Then he lowered his voice to a semi-whisper and said: "The threat was an anonymous one. But I have reason to believe that it came from a man who occupies a high position in the motion picture industry. Yet I have no proof, and therefore I cannot go to the police with only my suspicions."

"A cinema big shot, eh?" I said. "What's his name?"

"John Sixtus, production manager of N-D-N Pictures!" the yellow-haired man answered.

I hid my incredulity behind a cloud of smoke. "John Sixtus?" I said slowly. "Why the hell should John Sixtus crave the death of Ysobel LeSage?"

Vincennes said: "He is jealous of her." Then he picked up those five crisp centuries from my desk and handed them to me. "This is your retainer, Mr. Turner, if you will accept the case."

I said: "Just what would you expect me to do?"

"You are to protect Ysobel Le Sage at

all costs!" he flung back at me, desperately.

I thought it over. I've never played body-guard to anybody. It's out of my line. But this Ysobel LeSage chicken—well, she was a knock-out; and I might have a chance to find out more about her.

I said: "All right, Vincennes. I'll go have a talk with Miss Le Sage. Where does she live?"

Vincennes gave me an address in Beverly Hills. He said: "She will be home inside an hour. You will go to her then?"

I looked at my watch. It was a little after four in the afternoon. I'd just have time to go to my stash for a shower, shave and a couple of hookers of Scotch. I said: "Okay. You've hired a gumshoe."

The yellow-haired Vincennes looked at me gratefully. "Thank you!" he whispered. "Perhaps I shall see you at Miss LeSage's house a little later."

I saw him to the door. Then I put on my hat, closed my office and went home.

I SHAVED close to the skin. No use lroughing up Ysobel Le Sage's complexion, just in case. . . . I showered and killed off about a third of a bottle of Vat 69. Then I climbed into my jalopy and headed for Beverly Hills.

While I drove, I wondered just how much truth there might be in Konrad Vincennes' suspicions of John Sixtus, the production chief of N-D-N Studios. Personally, I didn't take a hell of a lot of stock in it. Sixtus was too big a figure in Hollywood to be involved in a murder-threat plot. He was too smart—too old a hand. The whole thing sounded fantastic as the devil. But on the other hand, Konrad Vincennes had slipped me five hundred clams and there was nothing fantastic about that! I had the geetus in my pocket!

Dusk was commencing to fall when I got within a block of Ysobel LeSage's

address. Even if the air hadn't been balmy, I'd have known it was springtime; because I was subconsciously aware of asthmatic harmonies emanating from a hand-organ at the far intersection. Grind-organs always show up in Hollywood in April.

Then, over the hand-organ's wheezing melody, I heard an abrupt sound—a sharp report. It might have been an automobile's backfire. . . or the bark of a small-caliber roscoe. I stiffened. I drew in to the curb.

For a single instant I stared ahead into the twilight. Through the gathering gloom I saw a front door open in a house at the very end of the block. A tall, slender man emerged. He peered, first to the right and then to the left. Then he stepped off the porch to the pavement. He headed for the far corner.

A hunch nipped me on the Alexander. And I always follow my hunches. I opened the door of my coupe, got out, strode forward.

I saw the organ-grinder blocking the tall, slender man's path. The organ-grinder's oversized monkey, tethered to the end of a long leather cord, leaped chattering to its master's shoulder. The organ-grinder extended his battered hat toward the slender, tall man who was trying to go around him.

Then the tall man hesitated. His hand plunged into his pocket, emerged with a coin. He flung it into the extended hat; and then roughly, irritably, he shoved the hand-organ man aside and almost ran around the corner, out of sight.

I leaped ahead. I smelled something fishy. I gained the front door of the house from which the tall man had come. Its front door was still open. I took a gander at the numerals over the door. I frowned. It was the address Konrad Vincennes had given me, the house where Ysobel LeSage lived.

I whirled toward the organ-grinder.

Then I said: "What the hell—!"

The hand-organ man and his monkey had vanished while I was standing there staring at the address over the open door!

I turned and took the stone steps of the house in two jumps. Something was wrong somewhere—I sensed it. I dashed inside, through the open front door.

I raised my voice. "Miss Le Sage!" I called out.

There was no answer.

There was a living-room to my right as I stood there in the rapidly-darkening hallway. I pivoted on my heel and plunged into the room.

I felt the skin tighten at the nape of my neck.

In the fading light that filtered in through the open front window, I saw a sprawled form on the carpet at my feet. The body of a woman!

SHE lay face-upward. Her features held a hard, worldly beauty marred only by the pain-contorted twist of her rouged lips and the lifeless stare of her open, glazing glims. And I recognized her from pictures I'd seen of her.

She was Ysobel LeSage, the wren I'd been hired to guard.

She'd been clad in nothing but a thin negligee. In falling, the kimono had fallen open. I could see plenty of hips and thighs and gams—not to mention a pair of buxom breasts nestling in the mesh cups of a brassiere. . . .

I dropped to one knee, breathing hard. I pushed away the coal-black masses of hair from her white forehead. There was a round blue hole in her left temple. Blood oozed from it.

I grabbed her limp wrist. There was no flutter of pulse. I put my palm against her left breast. Her heart had stopped beating. Ysobel LeSage was as dead as a smoked herring.

I got to my feet, and my right hand felt wet, sticky. I looked at it. My fingers were all bloody where I'd pushed the girl's black hair back from her forehead. . . .

I flicked out a handkerchief, carefully wiped my mitt free of blood. Then I looked around me. Something glittered on the carpet, in the waning daylight.

It was a tiny, small-caliber gat.

Once more I yanked out my handkerchief. Very carefully I dropped it over the gun, so I wouldn't disturb any possible finger-prints. Then I picked it up, sniffed its muzzle. That rod had been recently fired!

I looked at it. And then, abruptly, a voice from the living-room doorway said: "Stand where you are! Don't make a move!"

I froze in my tracks. Then I chanced a swift gander—and I found myself staring into the hard eyes of a uniformed copper who had a service .38 in his fist. He was pointing the .38 at my gizzard.

"What's the idea, fella?" I barked at him.

He said: "You wouldn't know, would you, wise guy?" Then his eyes flickered toward the almost-naked corpse of Ysobel LeSage, on the floor. He looked at me again, sneering. "You wouldn't know anything about this dead dame, I don't suppose? And you were wiping your finger-prints off that roscoe just to pass the time away!"

I said: "See here, copper—"

He grinned at me, sardonically. "Damned lucky thing I happened to be cruising past here in my radio car when I got the flash from headquarters! Three minutes later and you'd have made your get-away!"

I narrowed my eyes. "Somebody phoned headquarters?" I asked.

"Yeah. Unfortunately for you, someone heard a shot. Heard you bumping

off this dame here. Come on now, buddy—hand me that rod!"

I said: "Catch!" Then I threw the handkerchief-covered roscoe full at his kisser.

The cop's dukes went up automatically. That's what I'd been waiting for. Now I sprang forward. My shoulder crashed into his chest and he went backward, off-balance.

While he was still staggering, I swung on him. I brought one up from my knees and let him have it right on the button. I hated to do it, but I was in a tough spot.

My knuckles took him on the point of the jaw like a charge of dynamite. He sagged like an emptied sack.

I leaped over him. I knew he was out; knew he wouldn't try to plug me in the back. When I paste a guy, he stays pasted for quite a while. I flung myself out of that living-room, into the hallway.

I catapulted full-tilt into a man who was just entering through the front door.

I STAGGERED, righted myself. My hand dived for the .32 automatic I always carry strapped under my arm-pit. I got it out. And then I lowered it. I recognized the man I'd bumped into.

It was the yellow-haired Konrad Vincennes, the Rumanian tenor who had hired me to guard Ysobel LeSage!

I said: "For God's sake! Where the hell did you come from—and how long have you been here?"

Vincennes stared at me as though he'd been slapped in the mush by a ghost. He said: "I—I just drove up here to see Ysobel—to ask her if you'd been here to talk to her. Is—is anything wrong?"

I said: "Is anything wrong?" Then I grabbed him, hauled him toward the living-room. It was dark now. I wrenched out my pocket torch, swept its circle of blue-white light over the floor, rested it for

a brief instant on Ysobel LeSage's lovely corpse.

Konrad Vincennes cried out in a stunned voice. "It—it is Ysobel—Ysobel LeSage! Oh, God. . . !" He darted past me, threw himself toward the girl's undraped body.

My arms streaked out and pinioned him. "You goddam fool!" I grated. "She's dead. You can't do her any good now!" Then I pulled him into the hallway. "We've got to get out of here!" I told him.

"But—but why?"

"There's a cop over there in the corner of the room!" I answered. "I bashed him silly. Had to. He was putting the pinch on me for murdering the LeSage girl. Let's go before he wakes up and drags us both to the clink!" I yanked the Rumanian tenor to the front door, pushed him out of the house, followed him.

"Where's your bucket?" I asked him.

"I—I came in a taxi."

"Then we'll go in mine—together," I said. I piloted Vincennes past the parked radio car in which that uniformed copper had arrived. We reached my own coupe, piled into it. I kicked the starter. We went away from there—fast.

After a while, Vincennes said: "Where are you going?"

I said: "The Hollywood *Herald* building."

"I—I don't understand," he whispered.

I said: "That uniformed shamus didn't recognize me. I'm safe enough for the present; I'm not likely to be pinched. But in the meantime I've got work to do. I've got to find out who killed Ysobel LeSage—unless I want to face a murder-rape myself!"

I flipped my heap past a red light, headed for town. Vincennes said: "I know who killed Ysobel! It was John Sixtus!"

I said: "Maybe-so. But I won't be sure until I can find a certain guy and ask some

questions."

"What do you mean?" Vincennes said.

"I saw a tall bozo running out of Ysobel LeSage's house just after that shot was fired," I answered. "And John Sixtus is a tall bozo."

"You saw his face?" the yellow-haired tenor asked me tautly.

I said: "No, dammit. But there's someone who did see him!"

"Who?"

"An organ-grinder who was playing just outside Ysobel's door. The tall guy bumped into him, gave him a coin. So now I'm going to get a newspaper picture of John Sixtus. Then I'm going to hunt up every organ-grinder in Hollywood. There can't be over three or four—they're a dying breed. But I've got to locate the one who was playing outside Ysobel LeSage's house. I've got to show him a picture of John Sixtus. If he recognizes it as the man who came running out of Ysobel's door after that shot was fired, we'll have Sixtus where the hair is short!"

Vincennes said: "Then you've got to find that organ-grinder! You must!"

"Yeah," I answered grimly. "Moreover, that grind-organ man is my own alibi. He's the only one who saw me come up to the Le Sage house *after* that shot was fired!"

JUST then I parked before the office of the Hollywood *Herald*. I got out of my hack and said: "You scram now, Vincennes. And keep your face buttoned. I'll get in touch with you if I need you."

He took it on the lam down the street. Then I went inside the newspaper building; went upstairs to the editorial department. I went back to the file-room.

A girl clerk came toward me. She was young, she had tawny hair, and she owned a carload of oomph. She wore a tailored skirt that outlined her nice, slender hips;

and her mannish silk blouse disclosed the outlines of tender young whatchallems, firm and solid. She smiled at me, lifted an eyebrow.

I grinned back and said: "Hi, toots. Have you got a good full-face picture of John Sixtus, the N-D-N executive?"

For an instant she seemed a little startled—or at least I got that impression. Then her long lashes masked her peepers. "We probably have," she answered me. Then she went to a cabinet and riffled quickly through its contents. She came back to me, handed me a newspaper photo—a picture of John Sixtus, tall, thin, commanding. She said: "Is this what you mean?"

I said: "Yeah. May I have it?"

The girl frowned. "I'm sorry, but it's against the rules to loan pictures from our files."

I looked around. There was nobody else in the little file-room. I pulled a ten-spot out of my jeans and waved it. I said: "Will this change your mind, honey?"

"No," she answered quietly. "It won't."

Then I grinned at her and slipped an arm around her waist. I accidentally touched something soft, yielding. I said "Let's get chummy, kiddo."

She drew a sharp breath. Then she stung her palm across my mush. Just for that I tightened down on her, pasted my kisser on hers.

I said: "I'm Dan Turner. Maybe you've heard of me?"

She fastened the focus on me. "Yes. I've heard of you."

I said: "Listen, darling. I need that photo of John Sixtus. A dame has been bumped off, and I think Sixtus did it. You let me have the pic and I'll see that you won't regret it."

So she gave me the picture. "You'll bring it back when you've finished with

it?" she whispered.

I GOT into my jalopy and drove to the Italian quarter of Los Angeles. I went into a little Dago grocery store. I made some inquiries. I found out that there were only three known organ-grinders left in town—last remnants of a vanishing guild. I climbed back into my coupe and started for the first one.

That call was a disappointment. So was my second try, for that matter. The first organ-grinder proved to be a one-legged hunchback. The second one was short, fat, squat. Neither could have been the one I'd seen outside Ysobel LeSage's home.

So I went to the third and last address on my list.

I rang the bell of a dirty little hovel. A good-looking Italian dame opened the door for me. She was dressed in a sleazy kimono, and she was fairly young. She had coal-black hair and flashing eyes, and her breastworks showed through the kimono—lush, buxom, soft. I looked at her and said: "Does Giuseppe Palermo live here?"

"He's-a not in," she said. But she looked as if she were lying. She looked scared.

So I figured to scare her even more—frighten the truth out of her. I flashed my special-officer badge and said: "Let me in, Sis."

I pushed past her, into the house. I walked into a tiny parlor. The Italian dame followed me; looked at me oddly. Then she said: "You wait. I get glass of wine."

She went into a back room. Pretty soon she came back with a beaker of Dago red. I tossed it past my tonsils and sat down on a horse-hair sofa. The Italian chick sat down alongside me and drew a deep sigh. I noticed that she'd allowed her kimono to fall open in front. I took a good look.

She sighed and nestled close to me. "Kiss-a me!" she hissed hotly.

So I kissed her. I've done it to lots of dames in my time, but this Italian wren had more on the ball than I've ever seen. Her arms went around my neck.

I should have known better. I should have sensed something haywire. Dames don't usually go that hog-wild so damned quickly. But the possibility of danger never entered my thoughts.

All of a sudden she let out a yelp. In Italian she hissed: "*Now get him, Giuseppe!*"

I SQUIRMED sidewise and ducked. I was just in time to get out from under a blackjack. It took me in the shoulder, instead of the noggin.

As it was, the blackjack bludgeoned against my shoulder and damn near paralyzed me. In a flash I was on my feet, dragged out my roscoe. I jammed it into the guts of a wild-eyed, bearded bozo who reeked of garlic and who was spitting out a stream of Latin cuss-words.

I said: "Drop that blackjack, louse!"

The bearded bozo dropped it. Then I looked at him and said: "Are you Giuseppe Palermo?"

"*Si!*" he answered sullenly. Then, in a torrent of words, he said: "You can't deport-a me! Just-a because I lose-a my first-a citizen papers—"

Then I got it. I said: "Oh, for God's sake!" in a disgusted voice. This Giuseppe Palermo had lost his naturalization papers—and he'd thought me to be an immigration officer!

But that wasn't what fried my tripes. The thing that got me down was the fact that Giuseppe Palermo wasn't the organ-grinder I was looking for! He had a beard; and the grind-organ man I'd seen playing outside Ysobel LeSage's home at the time of the murder was smooth-shaven!

So I grinned and put away my automatic. I said: "We both made a mistake, Giuseppe. Forget the whole thing!"

"You mean-a I'm not arrest?"

"Hell, no!" I grunted. And I went out.

I drove back to my apartment.

I switched on my living-room lights and poured myself a stiff slug of Vat 69. This organ-grinder I business had me utsnay. There were supposed to be only three in the entire Los Angeles area, and I'd seen all of them. But none of them was the one I'd seen outside the LeSage residence at the time that murder-shot was fired!

Therefore, there had to be a fourth grind-organ man. And I had to find him. If I didn't, my pants would be in a sling. I needed that missing organ-grinder to prove that I'd been outside Ysobel LeSage's place when the shot was fired! Because undoubtedly the cop I slugged would broadcast a description of me even though he didn't know my name. Pretty soon the dragout would be out for me. I tossed down another hooker of Scotch. And then my front doorbell buzzed.

I yanked the door open. Then I said: "What the hell—!"

THERE was a man standing there. He was swarthy, poorly-dressed. He had a grind-organ strapped over his shoulder. There was an over-sized monkey perched on the organ. The man was the one I'd seen in front of Ysobel LeSage's house!

He took off his battered felt hat and bowed to me. "Pardon, Signore," he said humbly. "Your name, she's-a Mist' Turner?"

I said: "You're damned right my name's Turner. Come in!"

I dragged him into my living-room. Then I said: "Who are you?"

"I am Pietro Conzono, Signore. Some friends, they tell-a me you are look for me?"

"You're cockeyed right I was looking for you!" I shot back. "Listen. Were you playing your organ in Beverly Hills this evening around five o'clock?"

He nodded. "Si, Signore."

I dragged out that picture of John Sixtus, which the tawny-haired Hollywood *Herald* girl had loaned to me. I said: "Take a squint at this, Pietro. Ever see this man before?"

His eyes widened. "*Si, si!*" he bobbed his head. "This-a man, she's-a give me whole silver dollar when he come outa de house!"

I said: "By God, that cinches it! John Sixtus murdered Ysobel LeSage!"

Then a voice from my bedroom doorway said: "John Sixtus didn't kill anybody. Put up your hands—both of you!"

I whirled—and looked into the blazing blue eyes of the tawny-haired Hollywood *Herald* girl! The blonde baby who'd loaned me that picture of John Sixtus! She had a wicked-looking little nickel-plated rod in her hand, and she was pointing it at my navel.

For a second I was too stunned to think. Then I said: "What the hell are you doing here?"

She said: "I've been hiding in your bedroom since before you came in. I've been waiting for you!"

I said: "How did you know where to find me?"

"You told me your name," she fired back at me evenly.

I said: "Okay. I suppose that explains everything."

She sneered. "You didn't realize that I might be the daughter of John Sixtus, did you? You didn't think a movie executive's daughter might be a cub newspaper girl!"

Her eyes narrowed. "Well, if you think you can blackmail my father on a trumped-up murder charge, you're wrong!"

I said: "So that's it!" Then I looked over her shoulder and yelled: "Grab her, Jenkins!"

It was an old gag. If the girl had been more experienced she might not have fallen for it. As it was, she half-turned toward the bedroom doorway behind her.



I said, "Look out!" and threw myself at the Hollywood *Herald* girl.

That's all I wanted. I leaped for her, grabbed her gun-wrist, twisted. She struck at me with her free hand; raked my cheek with her fingernails. She put up quite a struggle. Her silken blouse ripped, exposing some delicious scenery. I wound my arms around her, mashed her. Then, finally, I managed to wrench that vicious little roscoe out of her grasp. I tossed it on the table. I took a good look at her.

She was plenty lovely. The blouse was torn all the way to her waist. She was panting, so that her rounded little breasts moved up and down like corks on the ocean.

I said: "If you're John Sixtus' daughter, your father killed Ysobel LeSage!"

She went white. "You lie!" she wailed out. "He loved her—wanted to marry her!"

I started to answer; but I didn't get the chance. All of a sudden the front door of my apartment smashed inward with a hell of a crash. Three uniformed cops ploughed into the room—and my friend Dave Donaldson of the homicide squad was leading them. Dave's roscoe was out, and he meant business.

I said: "Dave—what the hell—!"

HE said: "I was afraid you'd make a mistake some day, sherlock. You didn't think we'd catch up with you so soon, did you? You forgot that your handkerchief was wrapped around that gun you threw at the cop in Ysobel LeSage's house, just before you popped him silly. We traced you through the laundry-mark."

I said: "Don't be a dope. I've got an alibi. It's this Dago organ-grinder here—" And then, even as I said it, the whole truth flashed on me. I knew the answer to the puzzle—knew who'd killed Ysobel LeSage!

But before I could make a move, something happened. There was a flash of brown fur through the air. The organ-grinder's oversized monkey had leaped from the man's shoulder, toward the table. I yelled: "Look out!" and threw myself at the tawny-haired Hollywood *Herald* girl, John Sixtus' daughter.

At the same instant, that big brown-furred monkey landed on the top of my living-room table and grabbed up the little roscoe I'd wrenched from the jane's hand.

My shoulder crashed into the blonde babe, knocked her sprawling on the floor. I went down on top of her, shielded her with my body, pinned her with my weight.

And at that split-second, the big brown

monkey raised that little roscoe and pulled its trigger.

There was a flash of yellow flame, a barking report. I felt hot lead slugging into the fleshy part of my thigh—a slug that had been intended for the tawny-haired girl.

Dave Donaldson said: "God!" and fired from the hip. His bullet smashed into the monkey's skull. The animal collapsed in a bloody heap on the table-top.

Then I yelled: "Grab that Wop—quick!" Donaldson whirled toward the organ-grinder. The Dago backed off, snarling. He had an automatic in his fist. He said: "If anybody moves, I'll kill him!"

His back was toward me. I gathered my aching muscles, leaped upright from the prone form of the tawny-haired girl. I lashed myself forward, full at the organ-grinder's spine.

My right arm smashed into his elbow. His automatic went skittering. And then one of Dave Donaldson's men put a hot pill through the guy's guts. The Dago went down, writhing.

I leaped for him, snatched at his black wig. It came away in my hands, disclosing bright yellow hair. I rolled him over, smeared away the grease-paint on his cheeks. I said: "Well, Mr. Konrad Vincennes, I guess that's that!"

Vincennes looked at me with a stupid expression in his glassy peepers.

I SAID: "Vincennes murdered Ysobel LeSage. My guess is that he was jealous because she'd thrown him over in favor of John Sixtus, her boss at N-D-N Studios. Vincennes, planning to kill Ysobel LeSage, engaged me to protect her. But that was a stall. He wanted to pin the killing on Sixtus, whom he hated. He tried to time everything so I'd see Sixtus coming out of Ysobel LeSage's house right after the death-shot was fired. He

figured that I would therefore be the chief witness against Sixtus!”

Donaldson said: “I still don’t get it!”

I said: “Vincennes had it all planned out. He had trained a large monkey to fire a small revolver at a woman’s figure—any woman. He knew John Sixtus would be visiting Ysobel LeSage this afternoon at five. Disguised as an Italian hand-organ man, Vincennes stood outside the LeSage house, permitted the monkey to climb in the LeSage front window. The monkey, according to its training, shot Ysobel LeSage, dropped the revolver and returned to Vincennes. Sixtus, seeing Ysobel LeSage dead at his feet, ran out of the house. That’s when I arrived at the scene. Proof that the monkey did the killing has just been demonstrated—plenty! The animal saw that roscoe on my table just now, grabbed it and fired at Sixtus’ daughter, here.”

Dave Donaldson went to his knees beside the prone form of the disguised Konrad Vincennes. The guy was dying, and he knew it. That police slug had torn out his navel. Donaldson said: “Have you any statement to make, Vincennes?”

The Rumanian tenor gasped out: “Mr. Turner—is right—in all—that he has—said. I—confess. . . .” Then his eyes closed wearily; he kicked the bucket.

Dave Donaldson looked at me. “How did you know that Vincennes was the organ-grinder?”

I said: “It suddenly dawned on me that I hadn’t left my name or address with anybody in the Italian section when I was

searching for the hand-organ man who’d played outside the LeSage house. In fact, nobody knew I was looking for the organ grinder—nobody except Vincennes himself! He was the only one to whom I’d told my plans. Yet the organ-grinder came here to my apartment. That’s what gave Vincennes away—only I was too dumb to see it until almost too late!”

Donaldson turned to his men. “Grab this dead guy and that monkey, boys,” he said. “We’ll get out of here and leave Turner alone. He looks like he needs some rest.”

So they went out. And then the tawny-haired daughter of John Sixtus crept toward me. “Mr. T-Turner—Dan . . .” she whispered. “You—you saved my life and you cleared my father!” Then, suddenly, she saw blood trickling through my pants-leg, where the monkey’s bullet had nicked my thigh. . . . “You’re hurt!” she gasped.

“A little,” I admitted.

“I—I’ll bandage it for you. . . .” she said.

I grinned. My thigh-wound was just a scratch; it didn’t hurt a hell of a lot. But I pretended I was in agony. I said: “I’m going to need a nurse to stay with me, baby. Have you got any other engagements?”

She blushed. For the first time, she remembered that her blouse was torn. She covered herself with her hands. Then she said: “I’ll stay here with you, if . . . if you want me to. . . .”

I said: “Get ready to take care of your patient, sweetness!”