

STAR CHAMBER

By ROBERT LESLIE BELLEM

The girl had paid Dan five centuries and asked him to meet her at eight. Now her ex-husband was trying to hire him, and setting the same hour for an appointment! The whole set-up smelled to Dan, and behind it all was the stronger smell of cooking opium



I said, "Toss knives, will you?" and smacked her in the mush.

THE GRANDSTAND was jampacked. It was the last day of the racing season at Santa Anita; the final race of the afternoon. I was standing at the rail, watching the beetles through my binoculars, when somebody suddenly blammed into me from behind; almost knocked me tail over tincup.

In my game you learn to expect trouble at unexpected times. I whirled around, braced myself. My hand started toward the .32 automatic I always carry in a shoulder-holster.

Then I unaxed.

It was a dame who had barged into me. She was an auburn-haired, curvesome cutie

with violet glims, bee-stung lips and a figure like seven million bucks. She was dressed in a tweed sports outfit that was tailored to her shapely form like melted wax. The fabric fondled her rounded curves, left no doubt about the sleekness of her hips and thighs. She had the kind of gams a bachelor dreams about but seldom sees.

She said: "I—I beg your pardon!" in a loud, apologetic tone. Then, in a tense whisper, she added: "You're Dan Turner, the private detective, aren't you?"

I said: "So I've been told," and took another gander at her. "And you're Folly Hempstead, the Cosmotone star."

She got pale. "Sh-h-h-h!" she whispered frantically. She shoved a crumpled bit of paper into my mitt. "Listen. Can you meet me at eight o'clock tonight in room 513 of the Galsworthy Hotel in Hollywood?"

That surprised me a little. I don't get hotel room invitations from gorgeous she-males every day in the week. When I grabbed a third squint at the way her bonbons bulged against the tweed, I couldn't help saying yes. I could think of plenty of nice ways to pass the time with her in a private room . . .

She must have read my thoughts. "It isn't that, Mr. Turner. It's a matter of . . . life and death! The door will be unlocked for you. Don't fail me—and don't tell a soul!" Before I could answer, she squirmed through the mob and lammed.

I FORGOT to watch the horserace; didn't even see which goat copped the duke. I was too busy wondering what the hell Folly Hempstead wanted with me—and why she'd been so damned mysterious about making the date. Maybe there was some explanation in the wadded scrap of paper she'd slipped into my hand. I looked at it.

It was a five-century note. A cool half-a-grand, all in one lump!

That spelled plenty. In a way, I was

disappointed. It told me the Hempstead lovely wasn't inviting me to a boudoir joust. She had a job for me; an important job. People don't fork out five hundred plasters for nothing. Moreover, she was scared. She didn't want anyone to know she was hiring me.

Mentally I added up what I knew about her. She was the daughter of Cyrus Hempstead, president of Cosmotone Productions. But she was a damned sweet actress in her own right; had gained stardom in her latest pic. The public went for her in a large way.

She'd been married for a while to Fenimore Bray, the scenario writer; but the hitch-up had gone haywire about six months before. There had been a Reno divorce. Now the gossip columnists were saying that she was holding hands with Mack Martyn, former production chief of Cosmotone, who'd recently lost his berth because of a fuss with old man Hempstead.

There was a rumor that Folly was talking her dad into reinstating Martyn pretty quick. But there was no scandal linked to the romance. Martyn was a bachelor, and it wouldn't be long until Folly's divorce decree would become final.

Then she'd be free to marry the discharged production chief—provided her old man didn't object, which didn't seem likely.

But why the hell did she need a private gumshoe?

It was too much for me. I followed the crowds down under the grandstand, stopped at the bar for a quick snifter of Vat 69. Over the rim of my glass I spotted two guys lapping up suds at the other end of the mahogany. I almost choked.

One of the men was Fenimore Bray, the scenario writer—Folly Hempstead's ex-hubby. And the bozo with him was Mack Martyn—her next, if the gossip was correct.

It struck me funny that they'd be

drinking together in such a friendly way. Fenimore Bray was talking, laughing. Martyn was partially deaf, but apparently he had no trouble catching Bray's remarks. He wore an electrical ear gadget, with a tiny microphone slung near his binocular case.

Just as I finished my jorum, Martyn spotted me. He raised his hand and yelled: "Hi, Sherlock! Come join us in a snort."

I never turn down a drink. I ankled down the bar. Martyn said: "Dan, meet Fenimore Bray. Fen, this is Dan Turner, heaven's gift to the detective industry."

FOLLY HEMPSTEAD'S former husband was tall, muscular. He gave my hand a hell of a squeeze; almost twisted my wrist out of joint. "Glad to know you, Turner. This is a damned lucky meeting. I need a private dick. Could we get together tonight—say around eight o'clock?"

I said: "Sorry, pal. I've got a date. How about tomorrow morning at my office?"

He seemed disappointed. "Well, okay then."

I tossed off another short Scotch, kidded around for a minute and went on about my business. Driving back toward Hollywood, I tried to guess what might be on Bray's mind. It was queer he should want to see me at eight o'clock that night, when I had a secret date with his ex-wife at the same hour. It was probably coincidence, I figured; but damned odd just the same. Almost as odd as his being with Mack Martyn, who had replaced him in Folly's affections.

I had supper at the Brown Derby. Then, a little before eight, I drove my jalopy around to the Galsworthy Hotel on Franklin Street.

Just as I parked, somebody came pelting hell-for-leather out of the alley alongside the hotel. It was a jane. I caught a fleeting swivel at her pan; saw that she was a Chink cutie—and pretty as a picture. She wasn't wearing a coat; and I noticed her silk dress was torn

open in front. She was holding the edges together to keep herself covered.

There was a taxi in front of my bucket. She slammed herself into it, her nifty stems twinkling; said something to the cabby. The hack lurched away. Out of habit I put the focus on its rear license plate; made a mental note of the number. Then I looked at my strap watch. It was practically eight o'clock. I went into the hotel, took the elevator to the fifth floor.

I barged down the corridor to room 513. The door was unlocked. There was a light inside. I ankled in. Then I froze.

Folly Hempstead was stretched across the bed, stripped to her step-ins and brassiere. My throat tightened up. I said: "What the hell—!"

Her piquant puss was mottled, her throat bruised to hellangone. Her tongue stuck out like a chunk of spoiled sausage and her eyes were wide open, glassy, staring up at the ceiling without seeing it.

She was as dead as a salt mackerel. She'd been creamed.

I LEAPED to the bed, dug my fingers under her breast. Her flesh was still warm, resilient; but there weren't any heart-beats. Her lovely shoulders were black and blue and so was her cuddly torso. There were added bruises on her perfect thighs and legs, as if somebody had kicked the tripe out of her before choking her to death.

Her ripped dress was over in a corner, in shreds. She must have put up a whale of a fracas before her murderer got his fingers around her gullet. From the grotesque angle of her noggin I could tell that her vertebrae had been snapped. The killer must have had damned powerful hands.

There was a phone on the wall. I dashed to it, uncradled the receiver, dialed police headquarters. I asked for my friend Dave Donaldson of the homicide squad; got him. I

said: “This is Dan Turner. I just stumbled into a bump-off.”

“That’s a nasty habit you’ve got. “Who was croaked this time—and why?”

I told him to flag his trousers to the Galsworthy Hotel; gave him the room-number. Then I rang off, set fire to a gasper, waited.

Donaldson didn’t waste time getting on the job. He blammed into the room before I’d finished my third coffin-nail. He took one startled gander at Folly Hempstead’s corpse and almost tossed his muffins. “Jeest—!” he gulped.

I said: “Yeah. Exactly.”

“What’s the low-down?” he barked at me.

I shrugged. “I don’t know. She ran into me at the racetrack this afternoon; handed me five centuries, and asked me to meet her here at eight o’clock tonight. She told me to keep my kisser buttoned. She acted scared. When I got here, I found her remainders on the bed the way you see them now.”

“Did she say what was on her mind, this afternoon?”

“No.”

“Well, then, did you spill to anybody that you were going to meet her here?”

“No,” I repeated.

Dave said: “Well, dammit, *somebody* found it out! Say—could anybody have overheard her talking to you at the track?”

“Impossible. She whispered.”

“Then maybe she blabbed it herself before she came here.”

I said: “I don’t think so. From the way she acted, I gathered she was keeping everything absolutely mum. I’m telling you, she was scared gutless.”

Dave grunted. “Well, whatever she wanted to see you about, it’s all washed up now. You’re five hundred clams to the good. And I’ve got another stink to unravel. Nuts!”

THERE didn’t seem much I could do to help him. I said: “I think I’ll toddle home. If you want me, phone me.” I went down to my chariot, drove to my apartment stash.

I was just fitting the key in the lock when somebody tapped my shoulder from behind. It startled the clabber out of me. I spun around, balled my maulies, stared.

It was Fenimore Bray, Folly Hempstead’s ex-spouse. He looked pale, drawn. “I’ve got to see you, Turner. Tonight. Right now. I know you told me to wait until morning, but—”

I said: “Okay. Come in.” We went into my joint. “What’s eating you?” I asked him.

He paced the rug. “You’ve got to help me get Folly out of trouble,” he said.

That stiffened me. Didn’t he know she’d been cooled off? No; of course not. The newspaper extras wouldn’t be out for another hour. Meanwhile, maybe he might spill something that would give me a lead to her killer. I said: “What kind of trouble?”

He averted his peepers. “Listen. Maybe you’ll think I’m a damned fool. Folly divorced me; but I still love her. I hate to see her going to hell in a handbasket.”

“Meaning what?”

“She’s been leaning on her elbow,” he muttered.

I jammed a gasper into my teeth to cover my surprise. “Hitting the pipe?”

“Yes. Opium. Some lousy rat got her on the stuff. It’ll ruin her; wreck her. I want to hire you, Turner. I want you to find out the Chink dive where she does her dreaming. Then I want you to give your information to the Feds.”

The minute he mentioned a Chink dive, I got a funny feeling in the pit of my elly-bar. I said: “Damn me for a numb-skull!” and shoved Bray out of my apartment. I followed him. “Beat it, cousin. I’ve got a job to do!”

Then I left him standing flatfooted while I sprinted downstairs to the basement garage and piled into my coupe.

LUCK was with me. When I jammed on my brakes in front of the Galsworthy Hotel, there was a Yellow parked at the taxi-stand. I looked at the tag. It was the same hack I'd seen a while before.

I flashed my tin at the jehu. "Got a question to ask you, bud."

"Okay, shamus. Shoot."

"About an hour ago you drove a slant-eyed wren away from here. A cute little cookie with her dress torn. Where did you take her?"

"That's easy, brother." He mentioned the address of a bungalow on Curson Street.

I thanked him, piled back into my wreck. I souped the motor up to sixty and then added ten more for luck. In a few minutes I was standing on the porch of a little cottage. There was a light in one of the back rooms. But when I rang the bell, the light went out. Nobody answered.

I twisted the knob, pressed my weight against the cheap pine door. It was flimsy. It gave. I went bouncing over the threshold.

I had my roscoe in one hand, my flash in the other. I started for the rear room where the light had been—

Spang!

Something glittered toward me in a flat arc. It was a shiv. I ducked sidewise. It sliced past my ear, buried itself in the well behind me. I said: "Damn!" and bored a pencil of light into that back bedroom.

A cutie in pajamas was crouched in a corner. She was whimpering. I recognized her yellow complexion, almond optics. She was the Oriental frail who had run out of the alley alongside the Galsworthy Hotel.

I smacked into her, grabbed her.

SHE couldn't see my pan because my flash-beam was in her eyes. She

wriggled, twisted, tried to fight me off. She was slim and straight as an arrow. I could feel her solid little whatcha callems panting up and down against me. As I shoved her backward, her knees hit the edge of the bed. She lost her balance. I mashed her down with my weight, sensed yielding flesh against me in the darkness as I dropped my flash and went to work on her.

I said: "Toss knives, will you?" and smacked her across the mush. Then I gave her a belt on the other cheek for good measure. She went limp, quit struggling, started to moan. All of a sudden her bare arms snaked around my neck.

"Don't kill me!" she quavered. Her English was perfect. "Don't kill me! I'll do . . . anything . . . if you . . ." The words stopped as she fastened her succulent lips on my kisser.

I've run up against expert pash in my time; I know most of the answers. But that Chinese filly fed me a brand that was new to me. Her mouth battened on mine in a manner that made my tonsils curl up and sizzle. Her arms tightened about my brisket, and her breath scorched me like a firecracker.

I couldn't help running my fingers over her. In the darkness her skin was like velvet. She was thin, but she had curves enough to suit anybody. I found plenty of them.

It's funny how an unexpected opportunity like that can sidetrack your original purpose. For the moment I forgot about Folly Hempstead being bumped; couldn't even remember my own name and telephone number. This Oriental cupcake was teaching me things I never knew before. And after all, I'm as human as the next guy . . .

IT WAS a long time before my think-tank got back to normal. Then I grated: "Why did you slam that shiv at me, baby?"

"I—I was afraid you'd k-kill me like you killed Miss Hempstead . . ."

I jumped up on my pins. “Say! How the hell did *you* know she was chilled? And who do you think I am?” I found the wall-switch, clicked it; jammed my .32 against her tummy. “If you know who croaked the Hempstead quail, start spilling!”

She blinked at me in the light. Her dark, slanted peepers got wide when she saw the badge under my coat. “You—you’re a detective—?”

“I’m Dan Turner. Quit stalling before I start shooting dice with your front teeth.”

“*D-Dan Turner . . . ?* Then I can tell you . . . everything!” She grabbed my arm. “Listen. Miss Hempstead took me to the Galsworthy Hotel tonight to meet you—”

“Did you know in advance where you were going?”

“No. She wouldn’t tell me until we actually arrived there. She said nobody knew the meeting-place except you and herself. She wanted me to tell you about the opium-joint where I used to work, and Lystra LaSalle, and . . . the others. We waited in room 513 for you to come. Then a masked man walked in.

“He grabbed at me, tore my jacket. I got away from him. He hit Miss Hempstead with his fists; started choking her . . . I got out through the window, went down the fire-escape, came home. J-just now, when you broke in, I th-thought you were the same man—”

I broke in: “What about an opium-joint. What about Lystra LaSalle? Who was the masked man?”

She started to answer me. Suddenly she looked past my shoulder, toward the bedroom window; let out a bleep of terror. Some sixth sense told me she wasn’t fooling. My hunch made me dive for the floor. I tried to drag the Chinese cutie down with me.

I was too late. There came a hell of a clatter as a window-pane smashed inward. A roscoe sneezed: “*Chow-chow-chow!*” and one slug caught the slant-eyed wren smack

in the breast. She collapsed on top of me, coughing ketchup. The second bullet hit the overhead electric light, put it out. The third was aimed at me, but it splatted into the Asiatic frill instead. I could feel her corpse jerk under the impact. It wasn’t pleasant.

I cursed, tried to worm out from under her. By the time I made it, there wasn’t anybody at the smashed window. There was nothing outside but darkness.

I found a phone in the front room, called Dave Donaldson, told him what had happened. Then I lunged out to my parked vee-eight.

A front tire was flat. Some bright apple had let the air out of it.

I WAS five minutes putting on the spare. Then I climbed under the wheel, started rolling. My noggin was buzzing like a hive of hornets. I tried to piece things together. In the first place, Folly Hempstead had wanted to talk to me about an opium-joint; had wanted the Chinese chick—a former employee of the dive—to spill some information to me. That linked up with Fenimore Bray’s story. He claimed his ex-wife was hitting the pipe.

In the second place, Folly hadn’t told a soul that she was meeting me at the Galsworthy Hotel. She hadn’t even let the almond-eyed jane in on that—until they actually reached the place.

Yet somebody had found out where Folly was going to meet me. Armed with this information, he had gone to the hotel; choked Folly to glory. Now, how had the killer discovered where she was going to be at eight o’clock?

I couldn’t add up the answer to that one. And until I did get it figured out, I wouldn’t have a line on the murderer. I shifted my grey matter into high gear; fished around for another angle. Suddenly I remembered something the slant-eyed cutie had said to me, just before she got plugged: “. . . *tell you*

about the opium-joint where I used to work. . . and Lystra LaSalle . . . and the others . . .

Lystra LaSalle was a brunette vamp in Cosmotone pix; a top-ranking star. I'd known her in the old days, when she played bits at fifteen clams a day. We'd been on parties together. But I hadn't seen her recently, except on the screen. I didn't even know where she hung out. Just the same, she might be a lead. I decided to look her up.

I was in a residence section by that time. There wasn't a phone-booth in sight. Then a thought hit me. Mack Martyn lived just away from where I was; and until recently he'd been executive head of Cosmotone. Maybe he could tell me what I needed to know. I drove to his drop, thumbed the doorbell.

He opened the door himself. "Why—hello, Sherlock! What brings you here?"

I noticed he wasn't wearing his electrical ear gadget. I raised my voice. "I want Lystra LaSalle's address. Have you got it?" I framed the words slowly, so he could read my lips.

He nodded, smiled. He told me a number on Crenshaw. Then he said: "Is Lystra in dutch about something?"

I didn't bother to answer him. Apparently he didn't know about Folly Hempstead's death. And I didn't have time to go into details. So I said: "Thanks," and lammed back to my heap; headed for Crenshaw Boulevard.

THE LaSalle frail's wikiup was a big two-story affair on a corner lot. As I drifted up, a black sedan purred down out of the driveway, made a U-turn, headed for town. I got a gander at the driver; and a funny feeling bored through me. It was Fenimore Bray.

Now, what the hell was Folly Hempstead's former hubby doing, coming out of Lystra LaSalle's place?

I legged it to her front porch; jingled the buzzer. A maid let me in. I said: "Is Lystra

home?"

"Yes, sir. But she has already retired—"

I pushed past her, went upstairs. The LaSalle dame's boudoir door was open and she was sitting before a dresser, in negligee. Her black hair was hanging down over her shoulders; made startling contrast to the whiteness of her skin. She was plenty gorgeous in a mature way, but I noticed hollow circles under her glims; and her complexion wasn't as clear as it had been a couple years before. She was thinner, too. She still had plenty of yumph, though. It showed through the thin chiffon when I tabbed her reflection in the glass.

She spotted me; jumped up and turned around. "Dan Turner, of all people! What—"

I grinned, went to her. "Long time no see, hon. I thought I'd drop around to find out if you'd gone high-hat."

She must have remembered some of the good times we'd had together in the old days. She laughed, pouted out her red lips, arched her generous creampuffs. "I'd never go tall millinery on you, handsome. Why haven't you looked me up before this?"

I shrugged. "Just one of those things. How about a kiss to make up for lost time?"

She gave it to me without any argument. She hadn't changed much on that score. And the way she melted against me put ideas in my mind. Her negligee was fluffy, perfumed, provocative; didn't hide much. Her flesh felt warm and nice through the sheer chiffon. I felt my temperature coming up

AFTER a while I whispered: "Jeeze, I'm jittery."

"Need a drink to restore the vitality?"

"It takes more than a drink to fix me, these days," I said.

"Meaning what?"

I whispered: "Joy-smoke."

She got stiff in my arms. "Good God—you, too?"

"Yeah. But the law knocked over my

Chink joint last week. I haven't located another place yet."

Lystra said: "That's funny."

"What's funny?"

"You being on the pipe. And Fenimore Bray coming here to ask me about the same thing, a while ago."

I said: "Bray?" and pretended to be surprised. "Is he—?"

"No. But he told me that Folly's on her elbow these days. He wanted to know if I could tell him where she puffs it."

"Did you?"

She said: "Certainly not!" in a harsh rasp. "He'd have the place raided if he knew about it. I'm not cutting my own throat."

"But you do know a joint, don't you?" I made my voice sound dry.

"Yes. Are you leveling with me about wanting to cook a pill?"

I said: "Sure I'm leveling. Would I admit a thing like that for the fun of it?"

She drifted out of my arms. "Wait till I get a dress on. We'll go buy a dream."

I watched as she slipped out of the negligee, slid into satin panties and brassiere, wriggled frock over her noggin. She put her bare tootsies into pumps, jerked a coat over her shapely shoulders. "Let's go."

We went in my jalopy. She directed me over to a street just off Sunset; pointed to an old-fashioned frame residence. I parked, let her steer me to the stash. She knocked on the door. It opened. A Chinese maid smiled. "This way, Miss LaSalle."

We angled down a hallway. There was a pungent, acrid, bittersweet odor everywhere; the stink of burned *ahpien*. We passed an open door. I took a hinge into the room, saw people lying on couches, drug-dreaming. I recognized a lot of them. They were actors, actresses, Hollywood biggies; Cosmotone biggies, mostly.

The maid opened another door. "In here, Miss LaSalle." Then she turned, padded away.

Lystra went ahead of me; stepped over the threshold. I saw a flash of dull metal; heard a choked moan. Then the LaSalle wren was on the floor with her conk bashed in—and I was staring into the business end of a gat!

A guy was holding the roscoe on me; a tall bozo with big mitts and a black hood that masked his puss.

He said: "Come into my star-chamber, Mr. Turner. The chamber where stars dream sweet dreams—and snooping gumshoes meet death!"

STAR-CHAMBER was right—in the medieval sense of the word, meaning a torture-room. I was in a jam; a damned nasty jam. I knew it.

I knew I didn't stand the ghost of a chance to draw my own .32 heater. The hooded bird would plug me before my duke moved two inches. There was only one hope. Maybe he wouldn't want to shoot me because of the noise. Maybe he'd try to mace me the same way he'd bludgeoned Lystra LaSalle.

There was a closed window behind him. I got a wild idea. I said:

"Why should you croak me, mister?"

"You know too much."

I tensed my muscles, fed him a blast of words. I said: "You're damned right I know too much, *Mr. Fenimore Bray!* For one thing. I know you murdered your ex-wife, Folly Hempstead, with those powerful hands of yours! *You killed her because she was going to spill what she knew about you running a dope-den!*"

He said: "You son of a witch!" and reversed his rod, started to blam it down on my dome. That's what I'd been hoping for. I swerved, ducked—and catapulted full-tilt at the window. I took the whole damned sash with me, glass and all. I went sailing out into the night before he could get his artillery back into firing position.

I landed on my shoulder-blades in a back yard. There was a gate in the surrounding fence. I scrambled upright, catapulted toward it, made the grade. Then I was in a black alley, running like hell.

At the next corner there was a drugery. I dived for the phonebooth, dropped a jitney in the slot. I dialed Dave Donaldson, got him. I said: "Turner talking. Blast yourself out here to Sunset and Maltman—fast! Pick me up. "We're going places!"

It took him twelve minutes to reach me. I scrambled into his official heap while it was still moving. While waiting for him, I'd looked in the phone-book; found Fenimore Bray's address. Now I said: "Step on it, for cripe's sake!" and told him the street-number I wanted.

He didn't ask questions. He just drove. He kicked the kidneys out of his motor, didn't bother about traffic signals. In nothing flat we skidded to a stop in front of Bray's bungalow. There was another chariot parked up ahead. I grabbed Donaldson's arm. "Come on!"

We plunged to the front door. Just as we reached it I heard a rodney sneeze: *ka-chow!* I said: "Too late!" and hit the portal with my poundage.

IT smashed open. Dave and I launched ourselves toward an open bedroom. I saw Fenimore Bray lying on the bed with a bullet-hole in his temple, a gat near his hand, a black hood-mask on the pillow under him.

Donaldson said: "Bray! He browned himself! That proves he must have murdered—"

"Suicide hell!" I yelled. I lunged toward the bathroom with Dave at my heels. Somebody was trying to get out through the window. Donaldson pulled his service .38, squeezed the trigger. The guy at the window gasped and sagged backward, I said: "*Okay. Mack Martyn. That settles your hash!*"

Dave Donaldson's pellets had made sieves of the former movie executive's lungs. He coughed up blood. "Damn . . . you . . ."

I said: "Old man Hempstead fired you from Cosmotone. You wanted to get even. So you started an opium joint. You got a lot of Cosmotone biggies hitting the poppy. You made love to Hempstead's daughter, Folly. You put her on her elbow, too. That was your revenge on Hempstead for giving you the boot. You planned to wreck his studio by making hopheads of his best people—and his daughter!"

Donaldson stared. "I'm damned!"

I went on: "Yeah, Martyn. Then Folly found out the truth about you somehow. She realized you were wrecking her father's outfit. She was going to spill the words to me. You croaked her before she could talk, there at the Galsworthy Hotel. But that Chinese maid got away. So she was your next victim. You blasted her through her cottage window just as she was about to belch the low-down to me."

Martyn spat red. "You—you—" He writhed on the floor.

I said: "You figured that Lystra LaSalle would maybe take me to your dope-joint—because I asked you for Lystra's address. So you went there, waited. You conked Lystra, tried to conk me too. But I fooled you—and laid a trap for you. I pretended to think you were Fenimore Bray, before I escaped.

"When I powdered, you knew you were in a pickle. There was only one way out. You planned to come here, bump Bray, plant the hood-mask on him as evidence and make it look like suicide. That's exactly what I figured you'd do. Only I thought I could get here in time to save Bray. I didn't; so I that's another killing on your doorstep." I looked into the bedroom, at Bray's remnants. Poor devil; he had loved Folly Hempstead. Maybe he'd be with her in another world.

Dave Donaldson said: “But how the hell did you figure out that Martyn was guilty?”

“It was simple—and I was too damned dumb to get it at first. The whole thing hinged on how the killer had known about Folly meeting me at the Galsworthy Hotel tonight. She hadn’t told anybody; neither had I. Yet the murderer knew it.

“Then I remembered that Martyn was partially deaf. He had an ear gadget—but

like all deaf people, he could also read lips! He was at Santa Anita today. He had binoculars. He must have been watching Folly through the glasses when she spoke to me. That’s how he knew about our appointment. *He read her lips through his binoculars!*”

Martyn choked: “Smart . . . dick . . . damn you to . . . hell . . .” He croaked cursing me.