



Red came busting thru the window. "Slut!" he screamed as the girl leaped from the gangster's lap. "Giving yourself to the rat who framed me!"

## THE DEATH KISS

by LEW MCCOY

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Just one thing could save her man from the big house sizzle-squat—lust for her gorgeous body would turn a killer into a stoolie—to put the finger of death on himself!

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THE girl paced the floor of her room like a restless leopardess. Her attractive face was set hard with desperation; the red lips, drawn to straight lines, looked as though they were about to curl back in a snarl. Waiting. . . . Nervously smoking one cigarette after another. Would Nate come? The time was growing short. In four short hours, Red, her man, would be strapped into that awful chair. At midnight he would be legally executed for killing a copper. Red had been

framed . . . she knew that. She was obsessed by a vivid picture of that big lean body lunging against the straps as the terrific current ripped through it.

"Oh, God!" she moaned. "Not that! Not that!" Would Nate come? Nate Boroni knew who killed the cop. It was her only chance to save Red. A light rapping at the door brought her to a quivering stop. She composed herself with a deep breath, whispering, "Oh, Red, dearest!" She took a quick glance into the mirror, ran a powder-puff lightly

over her face, fluffed her loose hair into luxurious abandonment, and went to the door. A bulky-shouldered figure stood in the dim-lit hallway, a slouch hat, pulled low, shaded his features. She welcomed him with a warm smile, opening the door wide.

"Hello, Nate, come in," she said invitingly. He stepped into the room, one hand in his coat pocket, his eyes darting about with suspicion.

"What's the idea of you wantin' to see me?" he asked, turning to her. "You always hated me." She gave him a slow, provocative smile.

"Yeah? Maybe you were wrong, Nate. Maybe I acted like that because . . . well, you know how Red was with me. I couldn't even look sideways."

His dark features wrinkled with amazement as her meaning came to him. His cold eyes glowed with sudden fire as he looked down upon her deliberately alluring face, and over the voluptuous symmetry of her body, not too well concealed by the filmy, black negligee she wore. His hot hands closed around her bare arms. His black, intense eyes bored into hers. "You mean you don't hate me, after all?" His powerful hands shook her in his eagerness. "Is this on the level, kid?"

She brought up a bubbling laugh. "Oh, stupid," she said. "I've always been strong for you, Nate. You've got something that gets me! But come on, sit down; I'll pour you a drink." His eyes followed her hungrily as she went over to a wall-table for the liquor. This was almost too good to be true; he had always wanted Red's moll, but she had never given him a tumble; now she was practically jumping into his lap. A deep, protective instinct within him was sounding a warning; but the clamor of his senses deafened him. Never had he wanted a woman quite so badly.

**T**HE girl, with hands that shook, poured a stiff slug of whiskey for Nate, and a smaller one for herself . . . she needed it! Nate had settled himself comfortably on the lounge. He grinned appreciatively as she moved toward him with undulating hips. "Kid, you sure got what it takes," he said, reaching for his drink. The girl lifted her glass.

"Here's how, Nate!" she cried gaily. "To . . . us!" Her thought flashed to that curtained cell in the Death Row where Red was sitting, accompanied by a quiet, watchful guard, waiting out the last few hours. A sob welled into her throat.

She downed the fiery whiskey.

**B**UT in that grim, grey pile of stone the death cells were open. Prison riot! Grey-clad men were raging through the corridors. Guns cracked viciously; convicts and guards, alike, lay huddled in the halls; the warden was held captive. Three men shot their way through the outer gate. One of them managed to plunge into the cold water of the river, the whine of bullets in his ears.

"You sure had me fooled, kid," said Nate, reaching for the girl's wrist to pull her closer. "I thought you were solid for Red." She went to one knee on the couch. His hands slid upward over her curving hips.

She laughed, short and hard. "Me? Solid for Red? I was afraid of him, Nate. I don't mind a bit of a brute in a man . . ." Her lashes lowered as her eyes traveled slowly, significantly, over his bulky, powerful torso. "But Red was . . . cruel . . ." she choked slightly, then added vindictively: "I'm glad you framed him, Nate!"

Nate's hands dropped away as he stiffened abruptly. His eyes narrowed with returning suspicion. "Who told you that?" he questioned sharply. She threw back her head and laughed softly, richly, deep in her throat.

"Nobody. I figured you were making a play for me. Who else would have had the nerve?" She sagged down against him, her face close to his, the soft mouth tremulous, letting the warm, fragrant delight of her creep into his brain. His arms went around her, pulled her down; his thick lips crushed her mouth hungrily, then dropped and fastened on the soft spot where neck melted into shoulder.

Her eyes filled with loathing; her breast tossed with a sudden access of hate. Red had always loved to kiss her there. Nate mistook her agitation for passion. He pushed her away to look at her. Her eyes were veiled, now, with false amorousness.

"Sure!" he exclaimed gloatingly, drunk with her unexpected surrender. "I croaked that cop; he knew too much! And I pinned the rap on Red; he was in my road! He'll burn for it, damn him! And I've got the moll he was so crazy about. What a break!" His arms closed around her.

The window crashed inwards. A man landed in the room, crouching, a heavy gat in his hand. A man with an unruly tangle of coppery hair. The two on the couch broke loose and leaped to their feet. The girl cried out as she faced the intruder:

"Red! . . . oh, Red! I thought you were . . ." She checked her motion to go to him at sight of his distorted face—the face of a man about to kill. Thinking only of the fact that he must not kill Nate, the girl stepped before the gangster, stretching her arms pleadingly toward Red.

"Red . . . no!" she cried in an agonized voice. "Don't shoot him; he . . ." Red's snarl interrupted her.

"Yeh. You thought I was on my way to the hot-squat, fixed for keeps! Well, I busted loose. I come back to burn down the dirty rat that framed me . . . an' I find you in his arms! You was in on it. You double-crossed me, an' I'm gonna . . ."

Nate had stood, white-faced and tense, waiting for a chance to reach for his rod. He took it now. The gun came out and flamed over the girl's shoulder. Red took a backward step as though struck a violent blow with a fist. The roar of his heavier gun was deafening in the small room. The steel-jacketed bullet slipped through the girl's soft flesh, and smashed into the gangster behind her. Nate's rod thudded to the floor as he staggered backward against the bureau.

The girl stood, swaying, staring wide-eyed at Red. One hand was clutched tightly to her breast—between her fingers crept trickles of crimson.

"Red . . . you . . . shot me!" There was only wonderment in her voice.

"No moll can . . . double-cross me an' . . . get away with it," gasped Red painfully.

"I didn't, Red, I . . ." she choked, and pointed past him. "Cassidy . . ." She collapsed to the floor.

Detective-Sergeant Cassidy stood in the doorway of the adjoining room. Too late to do any good. "A boneheaded play, Red," he observed

casually to the drooping Red. "Your moll had the goods on Nate. A dictaphone record of confession—you'd have got reprieve."

Red heard, but the voice sounded far off. He was looking down at the limp figure, crumpled on the floor. His woman—he had killed her. He dropped to his knees beside her and turned her over gently.

"Sorry, Baby . . . I was . . . wrong," he mumbled. Slowly, senses fading, he slumped down, one arm across her, his face coming to rest, his dead lips caressing the curve of neck and shoulder.

Detective Cassidy, inured to violence through his long career, looked with grim pity on this tragic finish. It was a tough break. He looked up at the wounded Nate, who was supporting himself weakly on the bureau, and spoke, half to the gangster and half to himself.

"It's a great game you guys play; with the deck stacked against you . . . and the joker pops up to trump the trick." He jerked his thumb toward the door. "Come on, Nate, we've got an armchair warmed for you upriver." He put away his gun and pulled out his bracelets.

**N**ATE, in spite of his apparent weakness, suddenly made a dash for the door. Cassidy was caught off guard by the unexpected break, but he made no move to pursue the escaping gangster. He stood still, listening. A muffled shout, a brief pause, then the sharp rat-tat-tat-tat of a machine-rifle echoed through the building. Cassidy shrugged his shoulders.

"Three of a kind," he murmured, "but the joker took the tricks."