



As the girl stepped into the room, the man behind the panel disappeared

DEATH IS WAITING

By
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When Grim Murder Stalks Mountain City, G-Man North Is Right on the Job to Ferret Out a Slick Fifth Column Sabotage Racket!

THE library of Jefferson Rockland's mansion was a place of shadows. The light diffused from the table lamp seemed to hesitate and shrink away from the corners of the big room as though it feared the blackness lingering there, when two men paused in the doorway.

"Mr. Rockland wishes you to wait for him here, Mr. North," the gray-haired one, obviously a butler, said to the younger man he ushered in. "He will see you presently."

"Thanks," Bob North said, low-voiced.

"I hope he won't be long?"

From the moment he had entered this house a few moments before, he had found something about the big old place that inclined him to speak in a hushed voice. As if it were an art gallery or an elaborate tomb.

He seemed rather out of place here in this gloomy spot, like some successful young business executive who had stepped off the beaten track. A meticulously groomed young business man whose neatly brushed, thick dark hair gleamed

faintly in the mellow lamplight.

Young North stepped into the library and the butler quietly retired, closing the door behind him. North heard a faint click, as though a key might have been turned in the lock. He moved slowly, his eyes fixed on the closed door.

A hint of uneasiness swept over him. When a man has been with the Federal Bureau of Investigation for nearly ten years he frequently develops a sort of sixth sense that warns him when danger is imminent. North sensed it as he looked at the closed door.

He walked over and turned the knob cautiously. He had been right—the butler had locked that door. His hand slid into a side pocket of his well-tailored suit. The cold steel of the automatic there felt good as his fingers touched it. Then suddenly he stood stock-still, as a slightly muffled voice that seemed to come out of the air reached his ears.

“In the corner behind the big chair,” it said, “death is waiting for you.”

Bob North’s eyes narrowed and his strong jaw tightened. His gaze slowly circled the room, probing into the black shadows, seeking the spot from which the voice had come. He stared at the panels of the oak wainscoting above the built-in bookcases along the east wall, waiting for the voice to speak again. But he did not hear it. Silence mocked him—made the hush that had hung over the mansion a nebulous, yet malignant thing.

Little details of his surroundings registered on his mind, though apparently they were unimportant trifles. For instance, the bottle of wine standing on the table, and the filled glass beside it. Things like that.

NORTH stared at the big chair at the far end of the room. It was half hidden in the shadows. The thick pile of

the Oriental rug made his footfalls noiseless as he walked over to the chair and circled it.

And then he saw! A stocky, gray-haired dead man, clad in trousers, white shirt, and smoking jacket. A knife had been driven through the shirt, into the man’s chest, and his blood crimsoned the shirt’s whiteness.

“Jefferson Rockland!” the G-man muttered.

He stared down at the body of the millionaire who had been such a power in Mountain City, and thoughts sped quickly through the F.B.I. man’s brain. With this man’s death, it was as though the main cogs in many vital wheels had stopped. The newspaper that Rockland had owned, the local radio station that had been backed by his money, the war production plant of which he had been president—what would happen to them now?

“He hated crime,” North thought grimly. “And now he’s been the victim of some criminal—murdered!”

Bob North knelt and examined the body.

“Still warm,” he muttered. “Hasn’t been dead long.”

North got to his feet, his brow furrowed with deep thought. Jefferson Rockland had phoned the local F.B.I. office in Mountain City and asked for a Government man to be sent out to his residence that night to talk to him. The millionaire had refused to say any more than that over the wire. Bob North had been given the assignment—his first case since arriving in town the day before.

The G-man’s frown deepened. Here was irony for you. Only that day National Crime Prevention Week had started, and the citizens of Mountain City were eager to rid their town of all crooks and racketeers. Jefferson Rockland, one of the foremost citizens in making the reform

wave a success, had been scheduled to do a series of broadcasts as part of the campaign. His paper, the *Mountain City News* had orders to play it up big all week.

"This is a job for the police," North decided. "If I knew where that voice I heard came from maybe I could give them something to go on."

He made a quick search of all the shadowy places around the big room, but found nothing. And all the time one thing was nagging at him—what a hard blow this murder would be to Jefferson Rockland's daughter, Nancy. She adored her father, from all that North had heard—and she was an only child. Her mother had been dead for five years.

North caught sight of something then, and his hand dropped to the automatic in his coat pocket. One of the panels above the bookcase had slid silently to one side and a man's head and shoulders were in the opening. He was covering Bob North with an automatic he held in both hands. And then he spoke.

"Call me Nemesis," he said. "If you don't let them think that you killed Rockland, you die!"

North's fingers tightened on his gun, but he did not pull the trigger. This "Nemesis" had him covered and while he might be able to put a bullet in that lean, sardonic face gazing at him through the opening in the paneling, there was a good chance of his dying as he did it. Which would do no good to anybody concerned.

HE WAS still standing as if turned to stone, his eyes glued to that sinister face above him when he heard the key turn in the door of the library, the only door leading into the room. It opened and Nancy Rockland stepped into the room—a brown-haired girl in a dark evening gown that set off her slender figure gracefully.

"Mr. North?" she asked, as she closed

the door behind her.

The panel above the bookshelves slid silently closed and the thin face of the man who called himself "Nemesis" disappeared. Bob North gave his attention to the girl. She had not seen the man in the panel.

"Yes, Miss Rockland," he said. "I'm Bob North, Federal Bureau of Investigation."

"Parker said you were here in the library," she said, a little disturbed. "But why should the door be locked from the outside?"

"Apparently a little whim on Parker's part—if he is your butler," said North. "I don't know why he locked the door."

"You haven't talked to Dad yet?" Nancy asked quickly.

Bob North hesitated before he answered. This girl could not see that still form lying behind the big chair at the other end of the room. And he was reluctant to tell her of the murder—now.

"No," he said truthfully. "I haven't talked to Mr. Rockland."

He wondered if Nemesis was behind the panel listening. It seemed quite likely.

"I want to help in the town's crime prevention campaign this week," said Nancy. "I've tried to talk Dad into letting me take part, but he refuses to listen." She smiled, and she was even lovelier when she smiled. "He says it is no job for a girl, particularly a girl who is engaged to John Clark."

"John Clark," North repeated. "Oh, yes. He's running for district attorney in the county election next week, isn't he, Miss Rockland?"

Nancy nodded. "And he must win!" she said emphatically. "For with John Clark and the rest of the Reform Party in office Mountain City will be a better place in which to live. I think—"

She stopped short, startled by the

sudden sound of gruff voices in the hall. She had started for the door when the gray-haired butler appeared. He drew his heels together and bowed from the waist. His square face was expressionless.

"The police are here," he said in a monotone. "In regard to Mr. Rockland's murder."

"Murder!" Nancy gasped, and clutched at the back of a chair. She clung to it as she looked around wildly. "Oh, no! You can't mean that—that Dad is dead!"

"I'm sorry, Miss Rockland, but it's true." North went closer to her and gently laid a hand on her arm. "Your father has been killed."

"Oh, no—no!" Nancy dropped into the chair, staring ahead dazedly. "It just can't be!"

But the next moment men from the Mountain City Police Department were entering the library. Four detectives and six officers in uniform. A thin-faced man had arrived with them, and North stared at him, wondering just who he was.

"I'm mighty sorry to hear about this, Miss Rockland," said the detective-sergeant in command of the police. "Can you tell me anything about it?"

"I know nothing about it!" wailed Nancy. "I—I've just heard about it!" She looked wildly about. "Where is he? Where is Dad?"

"Perhaps it's best for you not to see your father now," North said gently, and beckoned a frightened woman servant who was standing in the hall. "If your maid could take you to your room—I know what a shock this has been Miss Rockland, but if you'd go now—"

NANCY nodded and got staggeringly to her feet as he helped her. She walked out into the hall as in a daze. There the maid took charge of her and led her away.

"I'll phone Mr. Clark," Parker, the butler, murmured, as he stepped through the library door. "I should have done that when I called the police."

"Who are you?" the detective-sergeant demanded of North.

"Bob North—F.B.I.," the G-Man said, and produced his credentials. "You'll find the body over there behind that chair."

He glanced again at the thin man who had arrived with the police—and he knew that face then! The sardonic countenance of the man who had stared at him through the panel-opening and covered him with a gun. Nemesis—here in person! But there was no trace of recognition in the faces of either of the two men as they stared at each other.

The thin man must have thought it time, though, for him to say something, because he came over to Bob North then.

"I'm Ralph Heath of the Mountain City *Blade*," he introduced himself. "Saw the police come in here as I was passing, so I figured something must be going on."

"There was—and is," North said.

The police gave the body a hurried examination, then Detective-sergeant Olsen questioned North. The F.B.I. man told him that Jefferson Rockland had asked that a G-man be sent to the house that evening, and said that he had been alone in the room when he found the body. He said nothing of the voice he had heard, nor that Heath, calling himself Nemesis, had been hidden behind the panel.

The newspaperman, standing close by, did not appear much interested in Bob North's story.

"And you don't know what Mr. Rockland wanted to talk to you about?" asked the sergeant, when North had finished. "It must have been important, too. Kinda too bad you didn't get a chance for a few words with him.

"I wish I had," North said. "It would

be a big help now. But I haven't the slightest idea what he had on his mind."

The coroner who had appeared now was examining the body. The ceiling lights had been turned on and the big library was no longer a place of shadows. Heath wandered over there idly and watched.

North did not miss a move the newspaperman made. Which was why he saw a piece of paper apparently slip out of Heath's pocket accidentally and drop to the floor. The reporter reached down and picked it up, and with the same move he picked up another piece of paper from under the big chair and thrust both into his pocket.

"I've got to get back to the office," North told the sergeant. "You don't need me here now, do you, Sergeant?"

"Guess not." Olsen shook his head. "We know where to find you if we need you."

Bob North nodded and left. The hush still lingered over the house as he got his hat and topcoat in the hall and put them on. Now he understood the stillness he had sensed when he had first arrived. It had been the silence of death.

It was dark on the porch and no police had been left on guard there. North stepped into the shadows at the side of the door, dropped his automatic into the side pocket of his topcoat, and waited. The door opened and closed as a tall, thin man stepped out onto the porch.

"All right, Heath," North said and the barrel of his gun prodded the reporter's back. "Suppose you tell me why you tried to frame me and pulled that Nemesis stuff?"

"You're crazy!" growled Heath. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Too bad." North breathed a sigh. "I hoped you'd be reasonable—now it looks as if I'll have to find a way to make you talk."

BUT Ralph Heath had no intention of "talking." Suddenly he leaped forward and raced down the porch steps. He seemed sure that North would not use his gun with the police so close, and the G-man did not. But he ran swiftly in pursuit of the reporter. They were some distance away from the house when North overtook Heath and brought him down in a flying tackle.

The newspaperman's head hit the sidewalk so hard it knocked him out. North carried the unconscious man to somebody's lawn, laid him beneath a big tree and went swiftly through the fellow's pockets. He found the papers the reporter had stuffed into the pockets and whistled softly as he read one of them with the aid of a pocket flashlight.

"So that's why Rockland wanted the F.B.I.!" North thought grimly. "Nice! Very nice."

Ralph Heath moaned, sat up dazedly, and saw North standing there with the note in his hand.

"You found it then," he mumbled.

"'Jefferson Rockland,'" said North, repeating the note word for word, watching the reporter sternly, "'this is to warn you that unless you persuade John Clark that it is not advisable for him to continue as candidate for district attorney your daughter will be kidnaped and we cannot promise that you will ever again see her alive.'" The G-man placed the note in his pocket. "You and that gang you're working with must be pretty desperate, Heath."

"What do you mean?" demanded Heath as he reeled to his feet. "That kidnap threat was just a gag to get John Clark scared into not running for district attorney."

"Oh, sure," said North. "And murdering Rockland was all in fun, too."

"We had nothing to do with that!"

protested Heath. "And listen! About my being behind that paneling . . . I ran across the floor plans of Rockland's place in the office of the architect who designed the mansion months ago, and tonight I remembered there was a secret passageway leading from the cellar to the library. I—I went there—"

"Why?" demanded North curtly.

"Because I hoped I'd learn something we could use against Clark in the campaign," Heath said surlily. "I didn't kill Rockland—but I know who did it."

"I did, I suppose," snapped North.

"No." Heath shook his head. "It was that butler, Parker, I think. I heard him quarrel with Rockland about something but their voices were so low I couldn't hear what they said. Then Parker stabbed Rockland and—"

"You tell the police that?" demanded North.

"How could I, without implicating myself?" The reporter was badly frightened now. "When I peeked through the crack in the panel and saw you alone in the room I gave you that mumbo-jumbo about Nemesis. I wanted you to find the body. Oh, I was trying to frame you all right, but—"

"Sure, and you'd have kept on trying if you hadn't found out that I was a G-man," growled North. "You got scared when you discovered you were fooling around with a guy from the F.B.I."

"You're darned right," agreed Heath. "The bunch I'm working for on this election are in the saddle in this town and they plan to stay there—but they won't stand for murder."

"Why should Parker have killed Rockland?" demanded North.

"I can't figure out," said Heath, shaking his head. "Parker has no tie-up with the political crowd who are running Mountain City now. It's beyond me."

"So this," said North, "is one case where we know the butler is guilty and can't prove it unless we find a good reason for him killing Rockland. Under the circumstances, you'll be no good as a witness against Parker."

"You going to turn me over to the police?" Heath asked anxiously.

"Not yet," said North. "Run along and do your dirty work. I'll find you if I need you, Heath. I wouldn't advise you to try and get out of town."

"I'm not that big a fool," the reporter said shortly.

HEATH walked toward the street and North made no attempt to follow him. The G-man just stood there in the deep shadow beneath the tree branches. Bob North was no fool and he knew that Ralph Heath had a gun. But where the G-man was now he was not a good target.

He was thinking about all that Heath had told him. Wondering if the fellow's paper was back of him. Would the *Blade* approve of the way one of its men was working with a crowd trying to scare off John Clark, to keep him from running for office? North was not too interested in that local political angle, but there were a lot of other things he wanted to know about this town. He had learned a few things from the F.B.I. office, but there were others he had to know.

Obviously Rockland's newspaper, the *Mountain City News* and the *Mountain City Blade* on which Heath worked were rival sheets. The *Blade* obviously was controlled by the political party now in power in the town.

Bob North was thinking intensively about that gray-haired butler as he returned to his office. Was Parker guilty of the murder? One thing made North feel that the butler must be the killer. Parker had locked the door after ushering North

into the library.

"The only reason for that must have been that Parker knew Rockland was in there dead," decided North. "And wanted to keep me there while he phoned for the police."

North sighed. All he had to do was find Parker's motive for killing his employer. He didn't want to report his suspicions to the police yet, but if they had any reason to arrest Parker that would be fine. But North did not feel it wise for him to accuse the butler until he discovered Parker's motive—if he had committed the crime.

The news of Jefferson Rockland's murder put Mountain City in a state of turmoil. Too many people had depended on the millionaire for their livelihood to accept his mysterious death calmly. And such a murder certainly was not an auspicious beginning of National Crime Prevention Week.

By evening it was announced that, despite her grief over her parent's death, Nancy Rockland had become a member of the local crime prevention committee. She was going to talk over the radio at eight in a special broadcast at the local station NXY which had been owned by her father, and it was rumored that what she would have to say might blow the lid off the local political situation.

The editorial staff of the *News* had a field day. The paper hinted in articles and editorials that the men in City Hall were having a bad case of jitters.

At 7:30 that night Nancy Rockland was in one of the broadcasting studios at NXY. A white flower was in her hair and across the front of her red dress a big yellow ribbon declaimed "Fight Crime," in big black letters.

She was lovely—but defiant, because she knew she was in danger. Just half an hour before she left home she had received

a mysterious phone call. A harsh masculine voice had warned her that if she dared go through with the broadcast she would die.

Even though she had been frightened, she had not reported the call to the police. All she wanted was her chance to speak over the air to tell everybody the reason for her father's murder. That was all that mattered.

"WE'RE all ready for you, Miss Rockland," Carson Garvey, the stout station announcer, greeted her. "We thought it might be wise to have you broadcast from one of the smaller studios without an audience. So we'll use this one."

"Whatever you say," said Nancy, but she had already prepared for any trouble that might eventuate, for in one hand she carried a large handkerchief which concealed a small, fully loaded automatic.

She had an idea that stout Carson Garvey probably would be overcome with shock if he knew that.

Nancy had had difficulty in keeping John Clark from coming with her to the broadcast, but she had finally persuaded the candidate for district attorney she preferred to go alone. She had been relieved when finally her fiancé had reluctantly agreed to stay away from the station. She had not told even him about the phone call, for she did not want him to suspect she might be in danger.

Just a few minutes before she had reached Studio Number Two she had run across Ralph Heath and another man in the second floor corridor of the radio building. She had passed with head held high, and the thin-faced reporter had made no attempt to question her.

"You have a copy of your talk of course, Miss Rockland," Garvey said to her when they were alone in the small

studio. "We have to keep such things on file, you know—and the control operator has to have a copy to check while you are on the air."

"Yes, I have it." Nancy handed him two typewritten copies. "I can remember everything I'm going to say, word for word, so I won't need to read my speech."

Carson Garvey frowned as he took the papers. "But working without a script is risky," he protested. "You might be cut off the air from the control room if you don't follow your speech exactly."

"I'll take a chance," said Nancy.

The announcer nodded, and took a copy of the speech to the man in the control room. When he returned he pointed out the mike at which Nancy was to stand and adjusted it to the right height for her. Then he seated himself at a table a little behind her and looked over her speech and his own announcement. There was a second mike at one side of the table into which he would speak.

Garvey tested Nancy's voice, with the control room operator listening, then the announcer nodded as he glanced at his watch.

"We're on the air in two minutes," he said. "As soon as I finish the introduction I'll signal you to start speaking, Miss Rockland."

Nancy nodded calmly. "I'm ready."

Yet as she stood there in front of the microphone, waiting, the two minutes seemed an hour long. She was growing afraid—of what she did not quite know, but the feeling that an unseen menace lingered somewhere close by could not be shaken off.

"As a special part of the Crime Prevention Week campaign in Mountain City," began Carson Garvey at the signal they were on the air, "Miss Nancy Rockland, daughter of the late Jefferson Rockland, brings you a message which we

feel will be vital to all listeners. The next voice you hear will be that of Miss Nancy Rockland."

Nancy clutched the mike in front of her by the tubing as though she found the touch of the cold metal comforting, then quickly released it as she forced herself to speak.

"It is difficult for me to talk to you all over the air now because of circumstances which you know," she said into the mike. "I do so only because my father hated crime, and some criminal was responsible for his death."

SHE paused as though for breath before going on, but in that brief moment her eyes had grown wide. In some way Ralph Heath had entered the studio and had circled around in front of the table at which Carson Garvey sat. The thin face beneath the reporter's pulled-down hat brim was sardonic as he stared at her.

Heath placed his finger to his lips in a gesture of silence, but Nancy shook her head defiantly. Her left hand went quickly behind her back and the handkerchief covering the gun in her slender fingers floated to the floor unseen.

"I know that Jefferson Rockland died because he put too much trust in others," she went on bravely, her eyes fixed on Heath's face. "My father was murdered because—"

She faltered as she saw the abrupt hardness in Ralph Heath's thin countenance. With a small pair of wire cutters he drew from his pocket, he reached for the wire leading from the mike.

Behind Heath and the girl a hard-faced man stepped closer to Carson Garvey with an automatic raised to bring the barrel down upon the head of the stout announcer.

Nancy's left hand flashed out from

behind her back, her grip tightening on the little automatic. The gun roared, the sound loud in the silence of the studio. Heath reeled, the wire cutters dropping from his hand unused—and fear whitening his face.

“Stop it, both of you!”

Nancy spun around as she heard the commanding voice. Bob North stood in the open doorway of the studio, his gun covering the man who was about to knock out Carson Garvey.

“Don’t try it, Hogan,” North said sternly.

For an instant the man he called Hogan stood there his gun raised above Garvey’s head. Then he lowered the weapon and swung around to face the F.B.I. man.

“Finish your talk, Miss Rockland,” said North. “Everything is all right now.”

“I hope you will all pardon the slight interruption,” Nancy said into the mike, a little tremulously, but bravely. “That sound you just heard was merely something that dropped here in the studio, though it might have sounded like a shot over the air. And now I will go on with what I have to say.

“My father was killed because of sabotage in the war plant which he owned. There is not time for me to give you the details now—but the murderer has been placed under arrest. You will learn all about it in the *Mountain City News* tomorrow.” There was a mocking light in her eyes as she looked at Ralph Heath, who stood holding his side where her bullet had creased his ribs. “I can assure you that the crime was not a political one though many of you may have believed that. Thank you, and goodnight.”

Garvey signaled, and the studio was cut off the air. North was unwaveringly covering the gangster he knew as “Lug” Hogan with his gun, while Nancy’s gun was steadily on Heath.

“Sabotage at the plant,” the

newspaperman said slowly. “So that was the reason for the murder. But I thought she was going to talk about that other—that’s why we tried to stop the broadcast.”

“And you even had a known gangster like Lug Hogan working with you when you tried it,” North growled at him. “There has been sabotage at the plant—I investigated that today. Rockland knew about it, but he had not reported it to the police. And his own butler, Parker, was a member of the fifth column gang.”

“Yes, he is,” said Nancy. “Parker has been our butler only for the past six months, but my father trusted him—didn’t even suspect him. Parker must have taken the job in order to watch Dad.”

“And when Mr. Rockland phoned the F.B.I. and asked that a man be sent to the house Parker grew frightened,” North said. “Parker thought he was suspected and killed Rockland to keep him from talking.” The G-man smiled soberly. “When the police arrested Parker late this afternoon he broke down and admitted the whole thing.”

“I’ve been a fool,” muttered Heath. “District Attorney Lewiston got me into all this—gave me a thousand bucks to make sure John Clark didn’t get elected. All the rest of the crowd at City Hall didn’t seem to know anything about it.”

LUG HOGAN said nothing. He looked worried as he stared at the gun he had dropped to the floor when North covered him.

“You were not only a fool but a catspaw, Heath,” said North, and at his signal police appeared behind him at the door. “Parker confessed that Lewiston was the head of the fifth columnist gang here in town. The F.B.I. have Lewiston now. His political party had nothing to do with it.”

“Then the kidnap note to Rockland

was all Lewiston's idea!" Heath said bitterly, his gaze bleak as he watched the police enter. "He sent it! He didn't care what he pulled as long as he stayed in office! He *had* to stay if he was head of that fifth column sabotage outfit!"

Bob North nodded. "And he must have been afraid to trust you too far or he wouldn't have had Hogan working with you. Hogan is a fifth columnist."

Lug Hogan started to protest, but lapsed into silence as two detectives grabbed him and led him out of the studio. Ralph Heath sighed as two detectives moved toward him.

"Just one question before I go," he said to North. "What made you think Parker was a fifth columnist?"

"First he locked me in the library," said North, "evidently hoping I would be accused of the murder, without guessing,

of course, that you were behind the secret panel. What's more, he clicked his heels together when he bowed." The G-man grinned. "The Nazi influence no doubt."

"I've written plenty of articles proving that crime doesn't pay," the reporter said sourly as detectives led him away. "I should have believed it."

"John Clark will be elected now," Nancy said to North and smiled sadly. "Thanks for all you have done, Mr. North."

"It's my job," said North.

"My goodness!" Carson Garvey glanced at his watch and leaped to his feet. "I've got to announce the Murder Baffler program and it's on the air in three minutes in Studio Ten."

The stout announcer rushed away and Bob North smiled. Crime was the radio man's job, too.