

A Slug for Grandma's Girl



By David X. Manners

Joe Gath, private investigator, hired a Hollywood blonde as stand-in for a corpse. But Joe found out too late that Hell's director had already cast her for the star role of a tragedy filmed in blood.

IF IT'S good news, it'll keep. If it's bad news, you don't want to hear it anyway. Here I was in Hollywood, wondering how soon I would die. I'd come to California after being wounded, tangling with a Messerschmitt 109 over the English Channel. In front of me, now, was the entrance to the Doctors' Building. I paced back and forth. In there, I knew,

was a specialist who could render a final verdict.

"Take it easy, Joe," I told myself.

There was a bullet in my heart muscle. I had been told the least excitement might cause it to move, and *out* I'd go. I'd just had plenty of excitement back in New York, for I was known there as a detective, and when a case came up I couldn't turn it

down. But I couldn't afford to crowd my luck.

And now it happened.

Tap, tap, tap, tap.

I turned. The tapping sound was made by the click of a girl's high heels, hurrying along the walk. Even in the evening dark I could see she was a Hollywood lovely, a raven-haired, sapphire-eyed lush-lush. Then I blinked. On her face was terror and fright as I'd never seen it!

Her hand clutched at her throat, as if to still the pulse there. She looked back over her shoulder in ghastly panic, half running. I looked around myself, to see at what she could be staring. I saw nothing. I didn't see anyone coming after her. And then I noticed the handkerchief lying on the walk in her wake. Automatically, I bent to pick it up, call after her. But I lost my voice at that moment.

"Take it easy," I whispered to myself. I clutched at my thudding heart.

The handkerchief was wet with fresh blood! And she'd obviously just discarded it.

I stared after her. At the corner, she was ducking into a cab. Luckily, another cab just skirted by, and the driver saw my hail.

"Get that cab," I said. "Catch up with it."

All this didn't happen in Hollywood, strictly speaking. The nebulous eastern limit of Hollywood, I guess, is technically at Vermont Avenue. This happened near Sixth and Westlake. The driver cut to Wilshire, and up through Westlake Park. But he didn't catch up with the cab. He had all he could do to keep from losing it! That cab with the dark-haired beauty in it kept turning and doubling back.

I ran up quite a bill, all the way out to the Sunset-Fairfax section, before we caught up. Then the girl got out, paid her driver. I'd slipped my own driver a bill in

payment earlier, and so I made up time there, and I was close enough to get another glimpse of her face before she turned into the dark shadow of a building.

Her pretty eyes were wide, staring. The ends of her full-lipped mouth were drawn down tight in frozen terror. And two long, clawlike scratches showed plainly on her throat. Then she disappeared into the building. It was a building similar to the bungalow-in-a-court idea. It was an unfinished quadrangle of apartments, all joined together, but each having a private entrance.

I HESITATED a moment before going in, considered the situation. What in hell business of mine was it, butting in? I couldn't go up and say, "Here's a handkerchief you dropped, which I'd like to return." Not that bloody mess!

And what in hell did I come to California for anyway? To go playing drop-the-handkerchief? To go chasing after dizzy dames who'd gotten into trouble?

But the temptation was too great. I'd been a dick too long. I drew in a long breath and went up to the door of the apartment. It was quiet and dark within. I knocked. Waited for an answer. I raised my knuckles to knock again, and then little butterflies were suddenly fluttering up my spine. Someone was groaning beyond that door!

I shoved on the door. It came open. I almost stumbled over the thing on the floor. It was she! The raven-haired pretty!

I pulled on a light, glancing at a raised window in the rear of the small studio room. Then I was down beside her, grasping her cold fingers. A raw little hole showed just below her neckline. This had nothing to do with the already clotted red gouges on her throat. There was new blood on her blouse. She'd just been shot!

I heard blood rattle in her throat, and I knew a lung had been hit. Then her eyes fluttered open, blankly. I pressed her hand.

"I'm a friend," I tried to soothe. "I'll help. If you'll only. . ."

Her red-lipped mouth opened, and the words came without the movement of her lips. "Don't tell her," she said. "Don't let her know anything's happened to me. Let her be—happy. Don't let—her know anything. Don't let—her ever—find—out . . ."

"No. No," I promised, waiting for more. But there was no more.

She was dead.

I groped weakly for the support of a chair. I looked at her beautiful, still face. Why could anyone possibly want to kill her? Apparently someone had attacked her earlier, but she'd escaped with only those bloody claw-marks on her throat. Then her attacker had waited for her to return home. He'd shot her with a silenced gun, and escaped out the open window.

I held a hand to my own sickly, thumping heart. This dead girl before me was vivid proof of how quickly a person could go out. It reminded me that I had to take it easy. I got up and looked about the room. Lying on a dresser was a picture of a beautiful blonde. Also on the dresser lay an unopened letter and a sealed telegram, and judging by postmarks, they were several days old. They were addressed to Larraine Locke.

I read both the letter and the telegram. My curiosity demanded answers to a hundred questions. The communications were from Larraine's grandmother, Bridget. I put together that young Larraine was Grandmother Bridget's only kin in the world. The grandmother was old and ill, and hadn't seen Larraine in seventeen years. She was coming to town from Salem, Massachusetts. She wanted to see Larraine, and then die happy. There had

been so much unhappiness in their lives, she wanted only this. To see her grandchild.

I tried to swallow, but my throat was tight. Somehow this thing touched my heartstrings, slightly rusty though they were. This, apparently, was someone whom Larraine didn't want to know. Her grandmother, who was coming to see her only granddaughter after a lapse of seventeen years. I'd sort of promised Larraine that her Grandma Bridget wouldn't know of this new tragedy—ever. But what could I do . . . ?

A POLICE siren, wailing in the distance, cut off the thought. At the same moment I noticed a dangling telephone receiver not far from Larraine's body, and I understood she must have made an attempt to call for help before I arrived.

The police car was drawing closer. I gave one hurried last look around the room and came up with nothing more important than a card with the address of the Hollywood Casting Agency. I jammed that, along with the letter and telegram, into my pocket, dropped the bloodstained handkerchief and skipped.

I was outside, on the sidelines, when the Georgia Street Receiving Hospital ambulance arrived. I left soon after, wondering how much they'd find out about the girl. As for myself, I had doubts about the wisdom of my mixing in this thing. What could I do, anyway? There could be nothing in this for me except trouble. Yet that intrigued me. Once a Sherlock always a Sherlock. That, and an understanding of how her aged grandmother must feel. With my bum ticker, I knew how old people felt—people whose remaining days on earth were numbered. And that this Larraine's dying thought was to spare such a person pain,

filled me with warm affection and sympathy.

Next morning they had Lorraine's picture in the paper. She was put down as a recent arrival in Hollywood. No one knew who she really was. Ginger Loring was the only name they knew for her, and that was obviously only a stage phony. They didn't even know her right name was Lorraine Locke!

I put down the paper, which I was reading in the lobby of my hotel, and stood up.

"Take it easy, Joe," I told myself.

But I knew I was going to stick my neck out. Like a boy scout I was going to carry out Lorraine's last wish. The telegram stated Grandma Bridget was to arrive at 7:10 that night on the Southern Pacific. I was going to see to it Grandma had her happy day of bliss with her "granddaughter." You know, it sort of made a person feel good inside to be able to accomplish something like that.

I told my heart to behave itself. Then I tucked the newspaper under my arm and walked down Hollywood Boulevard. When I came to the office of Hollywood Casting Agency, I turned in. The card I'd found in Lorraine's room gave me the idea of where I could get the girl I needed.

I stood near the entrance of the building, watching the actors and would-be actors come and go. I tried to pick out a likely girl for the part I had in mind from the droves I saw milling about here. Then I jerked alive. There was the blonde whose picture I'd found in Lorraine's room!

SHE'D just come out of the building. Her face was fixed in disappointment and she walked slowly away. I hurried up beside her, touched her arm. "Excuse me," I said.

She darted a look at me—just one look at my battered profile, mind you—and she

started walking faster.

I put the clamp on her arm. "Wait a minute, please," I said. "I've got to talk to you. You must help me."

I guess I sounded pitiful. Her eyes still moved a little suspiciously over me, but there was sympathy in the way her face softened and relaxed. It was a pretty face, a little on the round side. That type will usually comb her hair in a pompadour to give her added height, but this little blonde had a part, with the hair coming down on one side of her forehead. Her slippers had red heels.

Her mouth quivered. "I'm afraid I don't know you."

I remedied that with a quick introduction. Then I showed her the picture of the dead girl in the paper. It didn't register.

"You don't know her?" I exclaimed. "Well, how come I found your picture in her apartment in the Sunfax Gardens?"

"Sunfax Gardens? Oh!" She seemed to understand then. "I was thrown out of my apartment in Sunfax Gardens last week because I couldn't scrape up enough for my rent. I didn't even have a chance to get all my things. She must have taken my apartment. I guess that's how my picture still happened to be there. And I could probably use that picture in getting a job!"

I looked at her, at the hungry look in her eyes, and I quickly understood the setup.

"Crashing the films?" I said.

"Trying to," she amended. She caught a quivering lip between her teeth.

"How would you like to make fifty bucks?" I said then. "Fifty bucks for some new clothes, a couple square meals, and maybe even some new photographs to spread around among talent scouts?"

She misunderstood. I had to hurry to explain. I started at the beginning, but I changed details. I raised the ante to sixty

bucks—I'd have to hock my watch—and I assured her I was legit. All she had to do was play the role of Grandma's little girl for two or three days. I played up the humanitarian aspects, pointing out how important it was to Grandma's wellbeing. Why, it might even mean Grandma's life itself!

But I made no headway. The girl shook her head, walked off. The traffic signal was in her favor, and she started across the street. She saw the oncoming car the same time I did. She leaped back to avoid it, but the driver swerved too! I was sure it was too late for anything to save her, but instinct hurtled me forward.

My outthrust hands struck her shoulders, threw her violently forward. She sprawled to her hands and knees, and I shrank back—just as the crazy car skimmed between the two of us! Then I was at the blonde's side, helping her up.

"O-o-ohh! Look at my stocking!" she sobbed, pointing at her skinned knee, and seemingly oblivious to the fact that she had almost been run down.

I helped her hobble to the corner. "Did you see him?" she said, then. "It seemed as if he wanted to run over me! You saved my life." She clasped my arm.

I considered a moment. The "accident" had almost seemed deliberate. But how could it have been? Who would want to harm her?

"He was probably drunk," I said, dismissing it that way. Outside of a bruised knee, she wasn't hurt. "I'll pay for the stockings. And the dress . . ."

THE hem in her mustard-yellow jersey was ripped, and I took her to a tailor shop and had the damage mended. She still seemed a little shaky, and I judged it was from lack of food. She refused lunch, but she let me buy her a hot dog and a coke. By this time we were pals. I'd told

her about my getting binged out of the Air Corps by a Nazi bullet, and she'd told me about her orphaned childhood; a stepmother who'd beat her, and her total unsuccess in Hollywood.

I signed her up for the lead role in Grandma's Girl at ten bucks a day. Ten bucks was all she'd take.

"Now you forget all about the name of Ginger Loring, which is in the paper," I said. "Grandmother doesn't know that name. You're to be Lorraine Locke. Remember that. Lorraine Locke. Have you got it?"

For a moment she looked as if she didn't understand, then she caught on fast. She arched an eyebrow. "How can I miss?" she said. A balmy California zephyr toyed at the vagrant curl over her forehead, making her look very fetching indeed. "I am Lorraine Locke! I've been Lorraine Locke since I was born!"

"That's the spirit," I said. I grinned back at her. She was a real trouper. "Now this is all you'll have to know to meet Grandma, Lorraine. It isn't much . . ."

I told her a few facts, like that Grandma hadn't seen her in seventeen years, and that from Grandma's letter I gathered Grandma wouldn't know what she looked like. Lorraine couldn't have been more than three years old when Grandma saw her last. Grandma asked her to wear a pink carnation so she'd recognize her at the station.

"But Ginger's—the dead girl's—hair was black," Lorraine said. Her voice was tremulous, uneasy. "Do I have to dye mine?"

I looked troubledly at her titian-blond locks, and then inspiration struck me. "It's bleached, that's what it is!" I exclaimed. "If Grandma remembers you had black hair, you can say you bleached it!"

Lorraine had the same sapphire-blue eyes as Ginger, and that was important.

It made it all sound very cosy, as we walked down the street, but something made me keep looking over my shoulder. Either I was going batty, or my 20-20 vision was cockeyed, but with the tail of my eye I was sure I saw a burly figure dart into a concealing doorway when I looked back! Those butterflies began to flutter in my stomach, and I realized how poor Ginger must have felt the night before. But Lorraine, holding tight to my arm, was blissfully unaware that anything funny might be going on.

Yet nothing happened during the day, except that a light California dew began to fall. At 7:10, a little red-slippered Lorraine and I were in the beautiful Southern Pacific depot, waiting for the train scheduled to pull in. It pulled in, but no Grandma Bridget.

I scanned every last passenger who came off the train, without seeing one who even approximated the description of Grandma. I looked at the pink carnation Lorraine was wearing, then at her face. The poor kid was awfully scared and I wished for her sake that Grandma would show up and put an end to the suspense. Lorraine kept blinking her big blue eyes and biting at her shining crimson nails which matched the crimson of her slipper heels.

I was ready to give up when a tall man in a double-breasted chauffeur's coat and visored cap stepped up. He said "Lorraine Locke?" And quickly she took up her cue. "Will you come with me? Your grandmother arrived a little earlier than she expected. We've hired a car."

HE TOOK us out to the parking concourse and suddenly he said, "This is your grandmother."

I looked around to see if he might mean someone else. The dame he indicated was as sharp-eyed and tough-

looking a battle-puss as ever came through the wars. She had the gimlet kind of face that would positively make babies cringe in their cribs. And here I'd been picturing lavender and old lace!

"Grandma!" said Lorraine, weakly, and I shuddered with her as she went into the scare-ugly's embrace.

Grandma started to mutter all kinds of choice endearments and her words ice-skated up and down my spine. And then the payoff!

Grandma kept looking right by us, and acted as if she didn't hear us when we talked. The chauffeur tugged at my sleeve. "She's deaf and blind," he said right out loud to Lorraine and myself. "She can't hear what I'm saying now. If you want her to hear, you might try talking into that."

He pointed at a contraption hanging around her neck, and to me it looked more like a stethoscope than a speaking tube. There wasn't much conversation from then on.

We all climbed into a big black sedan she had waiting, and I felt very touched. Touched in the head! For on the way to the car I saw Grandma step out of the way to avoid a puddle. Then she looked down to see where to put her foot when she stepped in the car! She was blind—like an owl! When an auto horn honked near her, she jumped! Deaf—like a fox!

I didn't get it. There was something very horrible about this game, and I was afraid for Lorraine. That dead girl whose role she was playing had been in some terrible trouble when I'd first seen her fleeing in terror past the Doctors' Building. The marks on her throat indicated there had been at least one other attempt on her life before she was finally shot down. Was my sympathy and concern for a dying wish going to strike all of us on the rebound?

I looked at Lorraine. I couldn't do this

to an innocent girl. No good, I felt certain, was going to come out of this!

I grabbed Grandma's speaking tube and began talking fast. I explained I was Lorraine's agent, and that we had a very important engagement. Couldn't she drop us off, and we'd meet her later? Grandma acted hurt and offended, but there was nothing she could do. I was adamant.

Lorraine and I got out on Sunset, near where the first Lorraine—"Ginger"—lived. It was dark, and the drizzle made the air piercing cold. But it felt warm and comfy just to be away from that cake of ice called Grandma.

"We'll just call the whole thing off," I said to Lorraine. My whole sentiment-prompted scheme had been a flop. I tucked twenty bucks into Lorraine's bag. "I wanted to spare the old lady," I continued. "But this tough turkey called Grandma has twenty-eight-inch armored steel on her top-deck. Nothing could hurt her."

A sudden movement in the shrubbery behind me made me duck, pulling Lorraine after me.

Zi—i-i-nng!

A THROWING-KNIFE zipped into the eucalyptus tree behind where Lorraine had been a moment before! I whirled. A rocky fist clipped my jaw. My legs jitterbugged. A burly figure crashed through the shrubbery and grabbed Lorraine.

I collared Mr. Burley, and my own right fist made cranberry jelly out of his nose. He slammed a 1-A wallop into my chest, and I felt my heart do a 9-G dive. I thought of the lead souvenir in my heart muscle. Then I forgot it, and I gave out with rights and lefts to make some ersatz hamburger to go with the cranberries.

Mr. Burly landed in the shrubbery. He didn't come out. I looked for him.

"He's gone," Lorraine gasped, her blue

eyes wide.

Footsteps sounded, and we both whirled. But it was not Burley. It was Grandma's visored chauffeur.

He'd apparently seen the tail-end of the battle, and now when he saw it was over he acted like he wanted to help. He'd parked Grandma down the block. Grandma didn't know about the fight. But he wanted to know what was up. I explained the attack must have been a mistake. I didn't know what else to tell him.

"They must have thought we were somebody else," I said.

He expressed concern for us.

"Won't you come into my car?" He gestured with a knightly wave of his arm. "Can't I take you anywhere?"

Come into my parlor,
Said the spider to the fly . . .

"Oh no," I shook my head, that nursery rhyme jingling through my head. I took Lorraine's hand, led her away.

It was I who was biting nails now. What kind of a mess had I gotten Lorraine into? Had that chauffeur really come up with intention to help? How come he was so handily close? He'd driven off with granny a couple minutes before.

Lorraine smiled, tried to make it seem bright and spontaneous. Her blue eyes sparkled, but deep down in them was fear.

I studied her face. The California dew had dampened the curly lock that hung over on her forehead. She was a spunky kid.

"You're tired," I said. "It's been a strain."

I got her to my hotel and got a room for her. She'd had no decent place to stay since she was evicted from her apartment the week before. With Lorraine safe now, I breathed a little easier. I told her to lie

down and rest. She did. She promised me she would not leave the room.

I had some business to attend to, so I went downstairs to the lobby. I changed a dime into two nickels at the desk, and then sidestepped into a phone booth and put in a call to a contact I had in the local detective bureau.

I asked him if he would get the lowdown on Bridget Locke for me. "It's probably an alias," I said.

The man dug into a remarkably encyclopedic memory, and came up immediately with what I sought. Yes, he believed he knew Bridget Locke, without looking her up in the police files.

"Wasn't she arrested for an ax murder?" he mused. "Massachusetts—1904? If you want, I'll check to make sure. But as I remember, she was charged with killing her husband with a wood-ax. I think they had a poem about her going something like this:

Bridget Locke took an ax
And gave her husband forty whacks.
When the blood had ceased to run
She raised the count to forty-oue.

"Great girl, wasn't she?" he said.

I gulped as I finally pronged the phone receiver. What kind of a family had I bought into? Ax-killers!

I held a hand to my heart. It felt like it had tripped and was tumbling down stairs. "Take it easy Joe," I said to myself. "*Take it easy.*"

I TRIED to digest the ax-killer angle as I walked up the one flight to Lorraine's room. I didn't want to disturb Lorraine, but I knew I had better not let her alone this night. I could sit in a chair and watch over her as she slept. Tomorrow I'd see she got to a place of real safety. But what, exactly, was her danger? And why?

I pushed open the door to the room,

and Lorraine wasn't on the bed. I looked about the room.

"Lorraine!" I cried out.

She was gone!

I searched the room, looked out the windows in panic. Where had they taken her? I could find no trace. I stepped out into the hall. How was I going to find her now? I began to swear at my stupidity, but a sharp dig in my side cut me off. It was a gun-muzzle. Before I could mutter my surprise, a hand clapped over my mouth and a voice rasped in my ear, "Keep quiet if you want breakfast tomorrow."

It was Mr. Burley, the original Mr. five-by-five. The gun with which he was poking me was still in his pocket. He took his hand away from my mouth and marched me down through the lobby in plain sight of everybody—as if we were heading for Sunday school. I had a mild curiosity about where he was taking me.

The long, black sedan waited at the curb. The monkey-suited chauffeur was already inside, taking care of Lorraine. In the drizzly darkness, Burley slipped a pair of handcuffs on me, and booted me into the car. He kept his gun on the girl, and the chauffeur drove. The blinds in the car were drawn, and it was too dark and misty to see through the front windshield where they were taking us.

"You brutes!" was all Lorraine could say, and she chewed at her scarlet nails.

When we finally drew up to a house, Battle-ax Grandma was waiting at the door to greet us. It was going to be butchery, short and fast; I could sense that. How could I, you ask? Have you ever seen wolves with their tongues lolling, and wondered about their peace aims? Don't ask me why they wanted to kill us. I wanted to ask someone that myself.

"Bring them in here," said Grandma, hungrily. She was not "blind" or "deaf" any more. That guise had obviously been

for the purpose of avoiding answering questions that might have given her away before she'd tricked us here.

The doors and windows were all boarded up. Only the rear door, through which we were forced inside, was clear. I figured to bide my time and wait for a chance at a break. Then I realized I had no time to wait. Chauf and Burley were already unsheathing their guns for the slaughter.

Lorraine was in their line of fire, and I dove headlong at the two of them. Chauf squeezed trigger and in horror I saw Lorraine go down, clutching at her heart; I saw red fury, but that rage did me no good. Burley clouted me with his gun-barrel, and I went down.

I wasn't hurt badly, but I lay still. I'd seen a picture called *Wake Island*, and I'd learned an old Chinese trick about holding fire. I played doggo. I heard footsteps scrape in the room. I felt a hand shove at my shoulder, try to rouse me. Then after a moment there was silence. Grandma, Chauf and Burley had gone out the rear door. I could see the sentinel shadow of one of them, guarding at that portal.

I was stiff with dread when I crawled over to where Lorraine's body lay. Memory of Ginger's awful fate flooded through me.

I clasped Lorraine's soft hand and took it away from her heart. I saw no evidence of a wound.

"Lorraine," I whispered, softly.

She opened her eyes, then winked slowly, bravely.

"I'm all right," she said. "I just pretended."

Her pluck filled me with a warm glow. I whispered, "In this house you're safe if you're dead, I guess." I had to keep her that way until I cased our chances. "I guess I better kill you good."

LORRAINE looked worried as I took her bag and looked in it. I found a small bottle of red fingernail enamel. I spilled it over the front of her jersey blouse. "You're really dead now," I said. I wouldn't have dared leave her without that precaution.

I inched slowly toward the door out which the three had gone. Since this door was the only exit, they apparently weren't worried about our getting away. We were in a deserted house in a back Hollywood canyon. In the rear patio was a well. Chauf and Grandma were looking down into it, while Burly guarded the door, his gun ready in hand. Chauf had hauled up the well's bucket, and was now trying to rip loose a crossbeam cutting across the well's mouth. It was apparent their plan was to put me and Lorraine down into the well to see if we'd float.

I scuttled back into the dark. I searched for a club—for anything that would help us make a break. I wondered if I could crash through one of the boarded-up windows in the front of the house.

A groan stopped me. It came from behind a door. I pressed my shoulder against the door, and the lock snapped open easily. It was the kitchen of the house, and there in the half-light of fire reflecting from a stove I saw a little old lady bound and gagged in a chair. I'd been looking for lavender and old lace.

Here it was!

I freed her. She gasped she was Bridget Locke.

"What!" I said, and suddenly my heart realized why Ginger had wanted to spare this person pain. She was sweet and kind-faced and milky-eyed.

"They've taken me prisoner," she murmured stoutly. "My granddaughter was due to inherit an estate, which would have become mine if she were put out of the way. They want to kill her, figuring

what I'd inherit would be theirs. I've been in their power a long time."

"They'll never kill your granddaughter," I lied, thinking of poor Ginger.

"Give me a gun," Bridget Locke pleaded, straightening out of the chair. "I'll fight 'em!" She was certainly a peppery mite.

I had no gun. I looked around, and I saw a woodbox. Her eyes followed mine, and she saw what I saw in the same instant. "A hatchet!" she said. "I'll take that."

The little old woman grasped the weapon and a savage light gleamed in her old but sparkling eyes.

She'd killed her husband with an ax, my informant at the detective bureau had told me. I felt like I was living in a screwy, dream-world. But I'd play it to the hilt.

The three were still out in the patio. Chauf had at last ripped the crossbeam off the mouth of the well. I whispered for Lorraine to lie still where she was, and then I stationed Bridget Locke behind the door, but at the last minute I took the flat-headed hatchet from her and took over that post.

"Call 'em in," I said to her. "One at a time."

"Yoo-hoo!" she called through the door, just like any grandmother would.

Burley heard that low-pitched call. He stepped into the room. *Clop* went my tomahawk. Little Lorraine came out of nowhere to catch him as he fell, dragged him aside.

"Yoo-hoo!" called Bridget again.

This time, Chauf answered the summons. I began to feel like a tong-man. *Crack* went the erstwhile chauffeur's head. The fake Grandma was in the room then. Lorraine tried to handle her, but she proved the toughest of the lot. She clawed, bit and kicked like a wildcat. She wasn't

old—she was young and hard. When Bridget Locke saw my disdain to use violence, she took my gentle weapon from me and tapped the infuriated "Grandma" one on the noggin. It suddenly became very quiet in the room.

IT WAS all over. And suddenly I was filled with unhappiness. The real Grandma Bridget was a sharp article. She was no doddering, decrepit woman in her dotage, whom you could put any lightly conceived tricks over on. She was quick. I realized I could never put a fake granddaughter over with her.

"My girl, my little girl," Grandma Bridget said.

I took her arm. "Prepare for a shock," I told her. I'd have to tell her that her granddaughter—her only living kin—was dead. She'd soon enough find it out anyway on account of the inheritance. Then we were outside, into the light of outdoors.

"Grandmother!" exclaimed Lorraine then, "I remember you. I've seen your picture!"

"Lorraine, my sweet child!" said Grandma Bridget.

They embraced. My jaw dropped. I tapped Lorraine's shoulder. I didn't understand. "But—but you're not Lorraine. Not—not the real Lorraine."

"And why not?" she demanded incredulously. "I certainly am. Have you gone crazy?" She stared at me. "You know I'm Lorraine. You told me so yourself the first time we met. You did state it rather queerly, now that I remember. I was surprised how you knew. And I didn't know why you'd want me to play myself. But I figured that since you were a detective, you knew what you were doing."

I clapped a clammy hand to my eyes, and suddenly it all became clear to me.

Those letters I'd found in the dead girl's—Ginger's—apartment, were addressed to this blonde girl here. She'd moved from the apartment, and that letter and telegram apparently hadn't been forwarded. The other gal had moved into the apartment and was mistaken by the killers for Lorraine! They probably realized their mistake next morning when they saw the wrong girl's picture in the paper.

I went down to the road nearby and hailed a passing motorist. Before long, the cops were in, and everything was fixed up. Lorraine was very happy. She would get the dough she needed for clothes—and if looks meant anything it would be the open sesame to pictures for her. The inheritance came from her runaway father who had made a fortune in Chile, in copper, and died there.

At my first opportunity, I took Lorraine aside. I didn't like to be nosy, but one small item troubled me very much. I said, "Have you ever heard anything about an ax-slaying back in Massachusetts?"

Lorraine's face clouded. "It was a tragedy that blighted my whole family," she said. "It was grandpa who was slain. Circumstantial evidence caused Grandmother to be held by the police for a while, but she was soon cleared when the real killer—a housebreaker—confessed. But Grandmother was in jail long enough to learn to feel sympathy for prisoners, and

those who have spent time in prison. She tried to help them. She hired them for her personal servants.

"That fake Grandma was her maid. The burly man was her gardener. They, as well as the chauffeur, all had prison records. Her sympathy in these cases was misguided. When they found out about her money, they made her a virtual prisoner in her own house."

Everything looked clear and bright now. Then I thought of one other thing. That other girl, Ginger Loring. Her true identity had never been learned. Who was it, I wondered, Ginger hadn't wanted to find out about her death?

I spoke of it to Grandma Bridget. She was deeply moved. "At any rate," she said, "that other person hasn't learned. It is a tragic loss. But, I guess, what one doesn't know doesn't hurt one. The secret of Ginger's death seems safe."

What you don't know, doesn't hurt you, Grandma said. I thought of that next day when, again, I was pacing back and forth in front of the Doctors' Building near Sixth and Westlake, trying to make up my mind about going in and getting the verdict from that specialist about my heart. Finally, I turned away and left. What I didn't know, *perhaps* wouldn't hurt me.

Anyway, I was in a hurry. I had a date with Lorraine—and Grandma!