

MURDER FOR FAME

By ROBERT LESLIE BELLEM



I said, "You're sure you don't know who wrote the note, baby?"

Her current boy-friend always bought champagne, yet it was gin that the red-haired doll spilled! Or was it water? Or vitriol? Or had she really spilled it anyway? Whatever the facts, it made copy for a movie gossip-columnist, and for Dan there were more murders to be solved.

THE girl's scream was startled, low-pitched, really more a gasp than a scream—like the sharp, indrawn breath of a filly doused with unexpected cold water. That's exactly what had happened. Someone had drenched her bare bosom.

This happened at the Coconut Grove,

where I had a date with a dame who was late. I was sitting at a corner table, waiting, soaking up Scotch and burning gaspers to kill time. The orchestra had just finished a snappy fox-trot when I noticed a couple leave the dance floor and head toward the table next to mine. The wren was red-haired; wore the most daring dinner-gown

I'd seen in ages. It had no shoulder straps at all. Her back was bare to the waist, and there was just enough material in front to cover the lower halves of her firm white breasts. She was a knock-out.

I envied the bozo with her. He was Phil Carlin, the comedian, who hadn't made a picture in more than four years. The public had almost forgotten his funny little tramp character, although at one time the battered, oversize shoes, decayed silk topper and bamboo cane had been nationally known trademarks.

I'd heard he was about to release a new comedy in a comeback effort. I put the focus on him. Minus his screen make-up, he wasn't half bad looking—for a little guy.

The red-haired doll with him I didn't recognize. I figured Carlin was up to his old tricks—taking a beautiful unknown, grooming her for the screen, giving her a boost up the ladder. He'd done it plenty of times before. Many a feminine screen star owed her start to Carlin.

I was still staring at this carrot-thatched cutie when her greenish-blue glims opened wide in sudden dismay. That's when she screamed. Her hand went to her bare chest. I saw a trickle of water coursing down into the crevice between her breasts. It made a wet stain on what there was of her gown's bodice.

Phil Carlin leaped to his feet. So did I. I reached the jane first. I saw something on the table. It was a piece of paper sticking out from beneath her plate. On the paper was a message, crudely lettered. It said: *"Next time it will be vitriol instead of water. Take warning!"*

I grabbed the cutie's napkin, dabbed it against her décolletage; blotted her wet charms as far down as I could go. That's nice work if you can get it.

In a choked voice Carlin said: "Wh—what happened?" He was pale around the

fringes.

I told him: "Keep still if you don't want a lot of stinking publicity!" Then I turned to a waiter who had hurried up.

The waiter said: "Is anything wrong, sir?"

"Beat it. The lady spilled her drink, is all."

The waiter went away. I said to Carlin: "Do you know who I am?"

"I've heard of you. You're Dan Turner, the private detective."

"Right. Now listen. Take this cupcake out of here. Wait for me in the gallery. I want to talk to you."

Carlin assisted the red-haired goddess to her feet. She was trembling as they went out.

I PICKED up the piece of paper from under her plate, thrust it into the pocket of my dinner-jacket. Then a feminine voice at my elbow said: "What's cooking, Sherlock? I scent a paragraph for my column!"

I turned; stared into the challenging peepers of Lola Lawrence, the most widely read—and widely feared—Hollywood gossip scribbler on the coast. She'd been a movie star before the talkies came in, but somehow her voice hadn't registered properly in the microphone; so she retired from the screen to write a daily studio-chatter feature for a string of newspapers. She pushed a wicked pen. Let her get hold of a piece of nasty information about a movie player, and that player's rep wasn't worth a plugged Jap yen.

I grinned at her. "Sure there's a garagraph for your column. Phil Carlin had a new mama with him. She spilled some gin down her front."

Lola raised an eyebrow. "Did you say gin? Then she couldn't have been with Phil Carlin. He always buys champagne."

I let that pass; sneaked a swivel at Lola to see if my lie had gone over. It evidently had. The look of hungry curiosity had died from her snapping brown optics. I made a mental note to cultivate her. She might give me a good newspaper break some day. And besides, she wasn't at all hard to take. She was tall and slender; and in spite of her thirty-odd years she still retained the arresting brunette beauty that had made her a screen favorite in the old silent days.

She opened a diamond-studded platinum case, took out a gold-tipped gasper, lighted it. "Who was the girl?"

I shrugged. "I don't know. I never saw her before."

She said: "You're a hell of a reporter!" And turned, ankled away. Her narrow hips swayed slinkily when she walked. I liked that.

I waited until she was out of sight. Then I went out into the gallery.

Phil Carlin and the delishful young red-haired dish were standing there waiting for me. As I approached, a guy walked past them. I thought: "This place is infested with comedians tonight!" The man was Griff McCray. Next to Chaplin and Phil Carlin he was rated the screen's funniest. He bowed stiffly to Phil and the red-haired baby. Then he went on into the Grove. I noticed Carlin's cookie seemed to turn a little pale as McCray went by her.

I walked up to the pint-sized comic. "Do you realize exactly what took place at your table just now, Mr. Carlin?"

He looked puzzled. "Why—someone must have passed behind Dorothy's chair and spilled some water on her." He remembered his manners. "By the way—Miss Dorothy Whitney, may I present Dan Turner?" Then he turned to me. "Miss Whitney plays the lead in my new picture."

"She won't play the lead in anybody's new picture if you're not careful. Nobody

passed behind her chair and spilled water on her. It was squirted—from a distance."

"Squirted? I don't understand!"

I showed him the note I'd picked up from his table. "Maybe this will make things clearer."

Carlin read the crude printing. His jaw sagged. He said: "I—I hadn't noticed this!" He turned to the Whitney skirt. "Did you?"

She shook her head. She seemed plenty scared.

I said: "If that water had been acid, Miss Whitney's pan would have burned to hellangone." I looked at her. "Got any enemies?"

"N-not that I know of."

Carlin grabbed my arm. He was so excited he stuttered. "See here, T-Turner! Dorothy's g-got to be p-protected! There's nobody in Hollywood I'd trust to look after her except you. Your reputation alone ought to keep her safe. Will you take the job?"

I said: "It'll cost you five grand." After all, I'm in this game for the kopecks. I'm saving toward a retirement fund. I want to end my days in bedroom slippers, with a highball in my fist, before somebody feeds me an overdose of .lead pills.

"Dorothy's worth a lot more than five thousand dollars to me!" Carlin said. Then he looked softly at the frail. She flushed, lowered her long lashes coquettishly.

I said: "Okay. You've hired a private strongarm. Mentally I kicked myself in the asterick for not demanding ten grand instead of five.

"What's your first move, Turner?" Carlin asked me.

"I'll take Miss Whitney home. I want to talk to her. You beat it."

I STEERED the red-haired jessie out to my jalopy in the Ambassador's parking lot; paid the attendant. Dorothy told me

the address of the apartment stash where she lived. It was further out on Wilshire. We rolled off.

After a block or two I said: "You're sure you have no idea who might have written that threatening note, baby!"

She shook her head.

I figured she was lying. The whole thing looked to me like the work of some jealous, discarded sweetheart of hers—somebody that resented her going around with Carlin. I said: "Who was your boyfriend before you took up with Phil, honey!"

She froze up. "I don't know what you're talking about!"

I grinned. "Come on, babe. I know the play. You don't want to admit there's been any other man in your life before Carlin. You know his rep. He likes 'em young and innocent. If he thought he wasn't the first guy in your career, he might hand you the gate. That's it, isn't it?"

She kept silent.

I said: "Listen. Whatever you tell me will be in strict confidence. I'm not going to shoot off my trap to Carlin or anybody else. But I've got to have the name of your former sweetie—or sweeties. When I know that, I'll know who threw water on you tonight."

"It's not so! He wouldn't—" Then she caught herself. She said: "I never went with any man until—Mr. Carlin came along."

That griped my tripes. She wasn't half as innocent as she pretended, and I knew it. I decided to prove it, just to satisfy myself I was right. I started driving with one mitt. I permitted the other to rest on her knee. She gave me a sidelong look. But she didn't push my hand away.

I said: "Have you been in Hollywood very long, Dorothy?"

"About six months—Dan," she answered me huskily. I liked the way she

pronounced my name. She said it intimately, warmly.

I let my fingers travel a few inches upward. She drew a long breath. I slipped my arm around her waist, pulled her toward me on the seat. "You've certainly got what it takes, baby."

"That's what Phil tells me," she gave me a reminder of the little comedian's prior claim. Not that I paid any attention. . . .

Presently I packed my bucket in front of her wikiup. "Mind if I go upstairs with you so we can finish our chat?" I said. She didn't object, so I escorted her to her flat. She took off her wrap, opened a cellarette, got out a bottle of Scotch. We had a drink.

I fished in my pocket for gaspers. She rummaged her vanity-bag, brought out a diamond-studded platinum case. "Have one of these," she offered.

I took one; gloomed a gander at the case. "Pretty nifty."

"Phil gave it to me."

I put it down. "Are you so loony over Carlin, hon?"

"Why shouldn't I be? He's giving me my big chance in pictures."

"Yes. But by running around with him you've started somebody gunning for you—with the threat of a dose of vitriol!"

She sat down alongside me on the chaise-longue. "I'm not afraid. Not with you to protect me."

I grinned. "Like me a little bit, sweet stuff?"

"I could like you a lot, if you . . . if you'd stop asking me any more questions about my private life." I grabbed her, kissed her, just to see what she'd do. She didn't do anything except close her glims and part her crimson lips. The labial contact sent steam sizzling all the way down to my shoestrings.

For a moment I forgot myself, forgot the threatening note, forgot Phil Carlin and

my five-grand fee. Nothing mattered except the quail I was kissing. She tangled her arms around my brisket, moaned when I caressed her. . . .

Well, what the hell. I'm as human as the next slob. And she was a damned desirable bundle.

PRESENTLY I said: "Who was the guy, kiddo?"

"Wh-what guy?"

"Don't play innocent now," I said. "You can't fool me after the test I just gave you. Lay off the malarkey. Who did you ditch when you took up with Carlin?"

She gave me an angry shove. "You heel. You promised not to ask questions if I. . . ."

"I promised no such damned thing, sister. Now come clean."

She made a bitter month. "All right. I did *air* another man when I met Phil. But I won't tell you his name."

"Why not? I won't squeal."

"Yes you would. You'd try to make trouble for him; and you'd be wrong. He isn't the type who'd threaten me. He still . . . loves me. I won't let you hound him."

I got up. "Okay, sweet. I'll be seeing you." I took a powder into the hallway. It was dark. Somebody had turned off the corridor lights.

It was probably that same somebody who sneaked up behind me, biffed me over the cranium with the butt end of an automatic.

WHEN I woke up I was in a dimly-lighted basement. My noggin felt as if it had got in the way of an earthquake; my knees were rubbery. I felt for the .32 I always carry in a shoulder holster. It was gone.

I looked at my wrist watch. I'd been unconscious approximately ten minutes. There was a door in front of me. I tried it.

It was unlocked. I opened it, barged out of the basement and up a short flight of stairs. I looked around me. I was in the lobby of the Whitney wren's apartment building. Whoever had slugged me in the upstairs corridor had merely dragged me down into the cellar.

A premonition hit me. I leaped for the stairs, took them two at a time. I gained Dorothy's floor. The door of her dugout was ajar. I plunged inside, felt my elly-bay churning. I said: "What the hell—!"

The red-haired chick lay sprawled on the floor with her glims wide open but not looking at anything. There was a nasty round tunnel in the swelling roundness of her breast where a bullet had gone all the way in to her ticker. Red gravy still leaked from the wound, thick, not yet coagulated. She was as dead as Napoleon.

But it was her map that almost made me toss my tomatoes. Some sharp disciple had dumped a jorum of acid on her lineaments. Now all you could see was a nauseous smear of burned meat. Her beauty had been wiped out like marks on a blackboard.

There was a .32 rod alongside her remainders. I made a grab for it, recognized it. It was my own heater, the one that had been swiped from my shoulder holster while I was in slumberland. I masked my mitt with a handkerchief, picked up the roscoe, sniffed its muzzle. It had been freshly fired—and the slug in Dorothy Whitney's clockworks would probably match up with its rifling.

I stood there a couple of seconds. Then I lammed at the door, yanked it open. I gulped: "Hey—" and stared into a service Colt that looked bigger than the Holland Tunnel.

The guy on the trigger end of the cannon was my friend Dave Donaldson of the homicide squad. His peepers bugged out when he tabbed me. "You, of all

people!” he rumbled. Then he stared past me, got a hinge at the Whitney doll’s carcass. He snatched my automatic and said: “Why’d you brown her, Hawkshaw?”

“Don’t be a dope. I just blew in here myself,” I lied. “How did you get on the job so damned fast!”

“Somebody in the apartment heard a couple of shots and phoned headquarters. I was cruising in a radio car.” He reached in his pocket, drew out a pair of handcuffs. “Sorry, Sherlock. Stick out your wrists.”

I said: “To hell with you!” and slugged him on the button. He staggered backward. I pinned him against the wall, popped him again for luck. I hated to do it, but I had to. He slumped like wet spaghetti. I leaped past him, raced down the corridor to the stairs. I bounced down those stairs in three dives, streaked through the lobby to the street. My bucket was parked at the curb. I slammed myself into it, hit the starter with my heel, headed for Beverly Hills.

TEN minutes later I jammed on my brakes in front of the ornate hovel where Lola Lawrence, the studio-chatter columnist, lived. I went up and rang her bell.

A maid answered. I said: “I want to talk to Miss Lawrence.”

“Yes, sir. She just got home.” She let me in. I walked into Lola’s study. The gossip writer rose to greet me. Her dark peepers snapped open.

“Well, Handsome, what brings you here?” she drawled.

“I’m after some information, Lola.” She said: “Daisies don’t tell—until they’ve had a drink.” She rang for the maid. “Bring us two highballs, Janet.”

The maid brought the makings. I sat down alongside Lola on a studio couch. She edged close to me. “What’s on your mind, Dan?”

“There’ll be something else on my mind beside what I came here for, if you don’t stop rubbing against me.”

She said: “So what? Don’t tell me I’ve lost the last ounce of my sex appeal!”

“You’ve got plenty of that,” I admitted. “But I haven’t time to investigate it right now. The cops are on my neck.”

She drew a sharp breath, took a gold-tipped gasper from her gaudy platinum case. “Cops? Have you killed somebody?”

“That’s what they seem to think.” I faced her. “Listen, Lola. Have you ever heard of a red-haired chipmunk named Dorothy Whitney?”

She thought a minute. Then she answered: “Yeah. Extra girl out at Altamount until Phil Carlin picked her up and gave her the lead in his forthcoming comeback picture. Why?”

“She was bumped in her apartment a while ago. Previously she’d received a threatening note while she was at the Cocanut Grove tonight with Carlin.”

Lola’s glims narrowed. “So that was it! And you told me she just spilled gin on herself!”

I shrugged. “Carlin had hired me to protect her. He offered me five grand for the job—and I fell down.”

Lola’s mouth broke into a sardonic smile. “You wouldn’t have collected anyway. Carlin’s about bankrupt. If his new opus doesn’t a click, he’s sunk.”

“Stew that angle. It’s my own neck I’m thinking about now. I want to know who the Whitney quail’s lover was before she hooked up with Carlin.”

“That’s easy. She was Griff McCray’s baby.”

I leaped to my pins. “The hell you gangle! Then he’s the one that chilled her!” I leaned over, kissed the Lawrence bim. Then I plunged out of the house and into my coupe.

I stopped at the nearest drug store, dived into a phone booth, dropped a nickel in the slot. I dialed police headquarters, got Dave Donaldson on the wire. "This is Dan Turner."

He said: "You son of a—"

"Stow it. I know who browned that Whitney frail. It was Griff McCray. Go out and grab him and make a name for yourself."

His curse rattled the receiver against my ear. "Listen, you double-crossing polecat. You can't get away with that. I know you croaked Griff McCray. We found his body in Miss Whitney's bathroom. You shot him when you shot her—that's why the neighbors heard two reports. Now are you coming down to give yourself up, or must we come get you?"

I didn't answer him. I just hung up. I felt like a man who's had a stepladder kicked out from under him. Griff McCray—Dorothy Whitney's ex-sweetheart—beefed in her apartment! With my own .32!

Things looked bad for me. Plenty bad.

THEN I got an idea. It hit me so hard that I almost broke my arches getting out of that telephone booth. I lunged into my jalopy, broke every speed law on the statute books as I headed for Phil Carlin's big, rambling residence in the Toluca Lake district. I stopped for only one traffic signal, and only because there was a motorcycle bull parked at that particular corner.

While I was waiting for the light to flash green I saw a newsboy with an armful of extras. The whole front page was smeared with the headline:

"FILM BEAUTY, COMEDIAN MURDERED!" below which appeared a lot of pictures of Dorothy Whitney.

The lights turned green. I stepped on the gas. Carlin's stash was totally dark when I reached it. I slammed on my brakes, burning four dollars' worth of rubber off my tires as I swerved in toward the curb in front of the house. I jumped out and ran up on the front porch; punched the bell.

There was no answer.

I rang again. And then somebody stepped up on the porch behind me. I whirled, expecting to see a dozen cops closing in.

A private watchman grinned at me through the gloom. He said: "There's nobody home here, mister."

"Nobody home?"

"No. Mr. Carlin was here but he went out again a little while ago. And tonight's the servants' night off."

I slipped him a buck. "Thanks, colonel." I went back to my jalopy, drove around aimlessly for five minutes. Then I parked half a block from Carlin's shanty and got out, took a gander up and down the street. The private watchman wasn't in sight. I started for the house.

I went up on the dark porch. The front door was locked. So was the window alongside it. But a minute's work with a nailfile fixed that. I slipped the sash open, crawled in over the sill.

The joint was blacker than the inside of a crow. I chanced my pencil flashlight, located the stairs, barged up to the bedroom floor. There were half a dozen sleeping chambers. I looked in all of them until I found what was palpably the master's quarters. Then I began pawing through the little comedian's bureau.

In the second drawer I frisked, I found what I was after. Tucked behind a pungent-smelling shaving lotion bottle were three leather covered, plush-lined cases. I opened them. Each one contained an identical object: a diamond-studded

platinum cigarette case such as the Whitney red-head had carried—and such as Lola Lawrence used for toting her gold-tipped smokes!

I closed the plush cases, shut the drawer, sneaked downstairs. I had just reached the lower hallway when I heard a sound. A key was being inserted in the front door lock.

There was no time to waste. I snapped off my flash, dived for the room through whose window I'd entered. The front portal opened. Footsteps sounded in the hallway.

I opened the window silently, slipped out onto the porch. I waited a couple of minutes in the shadows. Then I barged up to the bell; thumbed it.

The door opened. Carlin stared at me.

"You've heard about Dorothy?" I asked him.

He nodded. His puss was pallid and his lamps glared hate at me. "I thought you were going to protect her!"

"I fell down," I admitted. "But I know who bumped her, and why. It's up to you to help me put the murderer on ice."

"How?" he whispered tensely.

I said: "Listen. I want the truth. Were you ever intimate with Lola Lawrence?"

He flushed. "What of it?"

"You gave her a cigarette case similar to the one you gave Dorothy Whitney?"

He nodded. "I always give cigarette cases to—women I'm fond of."

"Lola was jealous of you, wasn't she?"

His glims narrowed. "Y-yes," he said reluctantly.

"Before you started going around with Dorothy Whitney, did Lola try to—win you back?"

"Yes." He looked at me, and a queer expression stole over his map. "Are you trying to say that Lola—"

"Yes, that's what I'm trying to tell you. She was insanely jealous of Dorothy

Whitney. And she was at the Coconut Grove this evening. It was simple enough for her to leave the threatening note on your table, squirt that water when you returned from dancing."

"But—but—"

I SAID: "Let me finish! When I came out of Dorothy's apartment stash tonight, Lola was waiting outside the door with murder in her heart and a blunt instrument in her mitt. She biffed me on the conk; dragged me down into the basement. She's big enough to do it. She stole my roscoe. Then she went back upstairs to drill the Whitney wren.

"Meanwhile, Griff McCray had entered the apartment house. He had gone up to Dorothy's flat. He was a former sweetheart of hers. He probably was visiting her to try and talk her away from you. While he was there, Lola Lawrence returned from her job of dragging me into the basement. She rang Dorothy's door bell.

"Griff McCray hid in Dorothy's bathroom. He didn't want to be discovered there with your girl. While he was hiding, Lola entered. She shot Dorothy with my gat. McCray heard the shot and leaped from his hiding place. The Lawrence she-male saw him. She realized he had witnessed the killing. There was only one thing to do—remove him. So she creamed him and made her escape."

Carlin stared at me. He licked his lips. "I—I can't believe it!" he whispered harshly.

"It's true whether you believe it or not. And you can help me capture Lola Lawrence!"

"What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to phone her. She won't be suspicious of you. Tell her you still care for her. Ask her to come here to your tepee. Meanwhile I'll call Donaldson of

the homicide squad. I'll have him planted here where he can overhear everything. When Lola arrives, I want you to make love to her. Give her the works. When she's properly softened up, get a confession out of her. Are you game?"

Carlin said: "Yes, I'm game," in a dry, vengeful voice.

I grabbed his telephone, dialed headquarters. I got Dave Donaldson on the wire. "Turner again."

Dave blew his top. "How long do you think you can keep up this damned game of hide-and-seek?" he roared. "I'll get you sooner or later. Why don't you save yourself trouble and come in voluntarily?"

I said: "Stuff it. You listen to me. In thirty minutes I'm going to turn over to you the person who cooled Dot Whitney and Griff McCray. And if I'm wrong, I'll be right here to take the rap myself, see?"

"Right here? Right where?"

"I'm at Phil Carlin's house at Toluca Lake. Now flag your diapers out here—fast!" Then I hung up, handed the phone to Carlin. His fingers trembled as he dialed Lola Lawrence's number.

Ten minutes later I heard a screech of brakes outside the door. I opened it. Dave Donaldson leaped up the porch steps. He was covering me with his .38. He had a blue bruise on his jaw where I had clipped him. I was sorry for that.

I said: "Don't be a damned fool, pal. I'm not going to lam this time. Put away your artillery and do what I tell you."

He looked at me. He said: "If you double-cross me, gumshoe, I'll kick French pastry out of you." He holstered his heater.

I turned to Phil Carlin. "Take us up to your bedroom where we can hide somewhere."

The undersized comedian led us upstairs to his room. Donaldson and I

stepped into a big closet, pulled the door almost shut. I heard the front doorbell buzz downstairs.

Carlin went to answer it.

In a moment I heard footsteps returning up the stairs. The little comic entered the bedroom. Lola Lawrence was with him. She seemed surprised, and there was a hungry expression in her peepers when she looked at Carlin.

He squared his shoulders. I knew he was plunging into the most difficult role of his career. He took Lola's wrap. His fingers lingered on her smooth, bare shoulders.

She faced him. "Well, Phil!"

Abruptly his arms went about her waist. "Lola—my dear!" he whispered to her. "This time I want you—for good—forever—!"

She swayed toward him. He kissed her and whispered: "Tonight has shown me how much you really care for me, Lola! And—we're going to close the chapter! The police will never learn that you killed Dorothy Whitney and Griff McCray out of love for me. . ."

She went suddenly white. She pushed herself free. "I—killed them? You must be mad, Phil. I—didn't—"

I KNOCKED the closet door open. "You're damned right she didn't kill them, Carlin! She couldn't have. *Because you did it yourself!*"

He sagged. Dave Donaldson leaped forward, his .38 steady in his fist. Carlin gurgled: "What—what—?" in a stricken voice.

I said: "Yes, you browned the Whitney wren and Griff McCray. It was you who maced me in the corridor outside Dorothy's flat. You dragged me into the basement, glommed my gat. You returned, bumped Dorothy. Then you discovered McCray in her bathroom and creamed him

too.”

“You lie!” the comedian blazed.

I said: “No, I don’t. You hadn’t made a picture in four years. You were broke. You’d lost your popular hold on the public. Your entire future depended on the success of your new opus—in which Dorothy Whitney plays the feminine lead. You knew that if she were mysteriously murdered, the publicity would bring the public in droves to see your picture-out of morbid curiosity to watch a dead dame acting on the screen. Your first move was tonight at the Cocoanut Grove. You planted that note at her plate; squirted water on her from a rubber bulb concealed in your duke. You’d hoped to make the front pages with that act—but it slipped a cog when I butted in and spoiled the play.”

He said, “You can’t prove it!” through his whitened kisser.

“The hell I can’t. After I upset your first plan, you decided to get me out of the road by hiring me to protect Dot Whitney. You thought maybe you could frame me into being accused of the kill. That’s why you rapped me on the thigh, stole my rod and beefed the girl with it. The murder of Griff McCray was incidental—almost

accidental. It was just his hard luck to be hiding in Dorothy’s bathroom when you croaked her.”

Carlin sneered. “Is there any more to your pipe-dream?”

I said: “Yes,” and went to the bureau drawer I had frisked earlier that night, while Carlin was out of the house. I rummaged past the three plush-lined boxes containing the platinum cigarette cases, drew forth the pungent-smelling shaving lotion bottle. It was half full. I held it up. “Here’s part of the vitriol you threw in the face of the bim you bumped.”

Carlin’s shoulders slumped. “You win, Turner.”

I looked at Dave Donaldson. “Well, chum, you’ve got your man. Does that make up for the punch in the jaw?”

He grinned sourly. “Yes, that makes up for it.”

I took Lola Lawrence by the arm. In a low voice I said: “Remember when I was out to your house tonight? You asked me whether you’d lost your sex appeal?”

She looked at me. “I remember.”

“Well, you haven’t lost it. And I’ll prove it if you’ll let me take you home.”

She let me take her home.