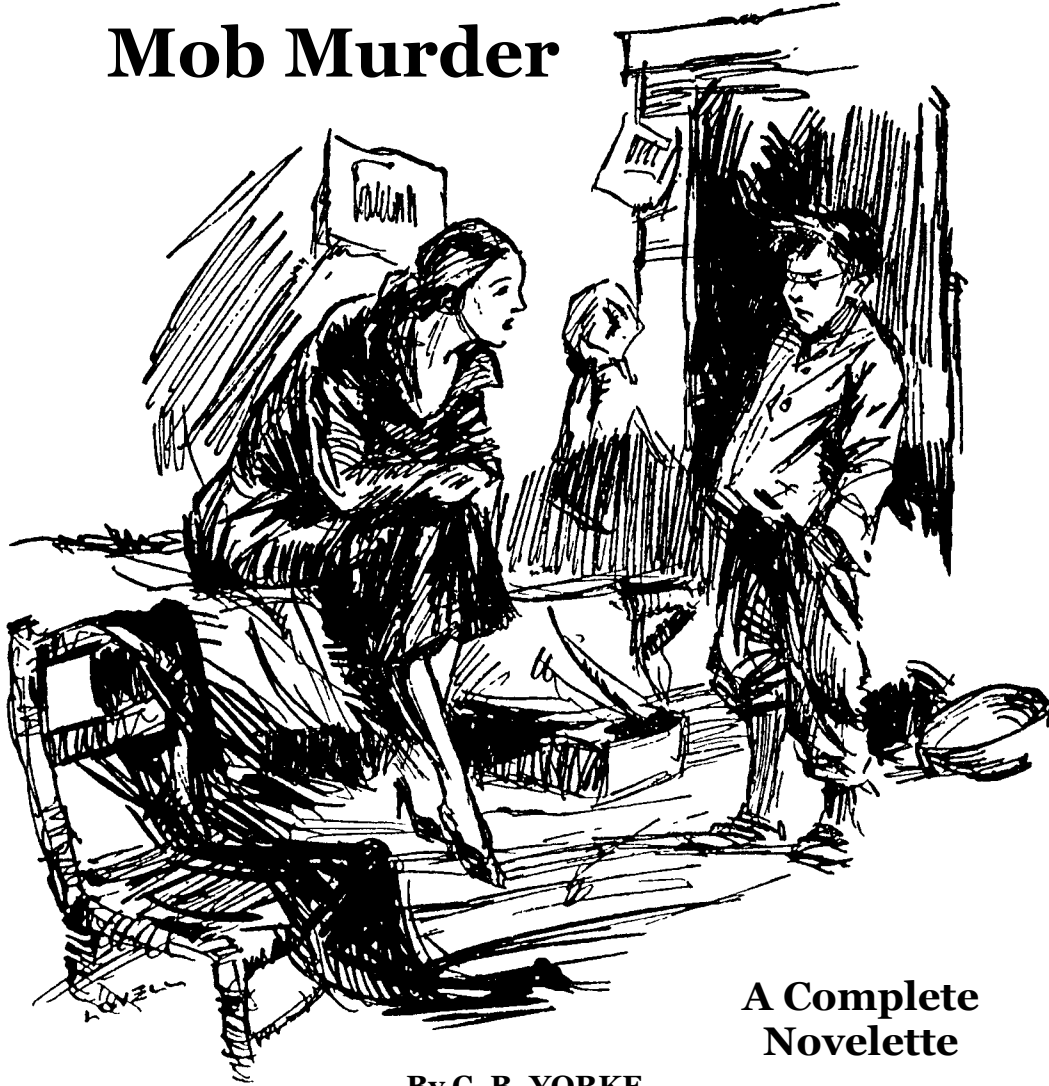


# Mob Murder



## A Complete Novelette

By C. B. YORKE

*Just out of stir, and trying to go straight—and right off she's framed for a bump-off! This is the first of a series of novelettes, each one a complete story, about Velma Dare. Look for her every month, and watch her work out her life under the hardest breaks a sweet bit of fluff with plenty of guts ever bumped against.*

### CHAPTER I THE STAGE IS SET

“I’LL get you—and the others, too!” That was a mistake. I should never have said that. But two years ago when I was convicted for a part in the Gladstone Theatre

holdup by the testimony of a yellow-bellied stoolie and a crooked dick, the words just spilled out before I knew it.

Clam Seibert was the stool who had squealed on Buck Evans and me. The dick who framed the case against us was Bert Frome. Buck and I had pulled some other jobs the cops never got wise to,

but we hadn't been near the Gladstone Theatre.

The wild story that Clam told in court hadn't amounted to much, but the fake evidence submitted by Frome had clinched the case against us.

And now, a week after I had served out my two years in stir, word had gone through the underworld that Velma Dare had put Clam Seibert on the spot!

I was worried. I admit it. I had *not* put Clam Seibert on the spot—didn't even intend to. I had come back to town with a firm determination to go straight at all costs.

That was a fine resolution, but now it looked like I wasn't going to get a chance to put it into effect. Something was brewing, and I didn't need a loud speaker to tell me that it was trouble.

Who had passed out the word that I was going to get Clam, I didn't know. I hadn't. And if Clam was shot down, I wasn't going to be blamed for the killing, not if I could help it.

Nobody had taken my threat to get Clam seriously when I had made it in court that day. The jury had just returned a verdict against me and I hadn't been in any position to make the statement good, then. Everybody except the reporters had treated that threat as a joke.

I had blurted out the words on the spur of the moment. I had meant them at the time—you'd have meant them too, if you'd been framed for a job you had never pulled—but after two years in a cell with plenty of time to think things over I had changed my mind. Women do that—often.

**S**O WHEN I returned to town I was determined to mind my own business and keep out of any jams with the cops. Buck Evans had got eight years as a result of Clam's lousy story and Bert Frome's fake evidence, and I wasn't going to be back in stir when Buck was sprung.

I'd been lucky to get only two years. I knew that. But it didn't make me feel any better when Buck got eight years for staying home with me the night that the Gladstone Theatre had been stuck up.

That wasn't right. A frame's a frame, no matter how you look at it. But sometimes you can't prove it, and this was one of those times. Our mouthpiece had tried to carry the case to a higher court, but failed. We were sunk, and we

knew it.

Bert Frome had gone to a lot of trouble to frame that evidence. And he had plenty—witnesses, fingerprints, guns, everything but the loot. He couldn't have got that from us and he knew it. We'd never had it!

So Buck and I took the rap. There was nothing else to do about it.

Frome had the right political connections to back up his crooked dealings, but what I could never understand was how Judge Porter Vanclear had let Frome and the District Attorney's office go through with the case.

Porter Vanclear was an honest judge. There was no question about that. Yes, he was so honest that he accepted the evidence submitted against Buck and me at face value—thought the defense was trying to pull a legal fast one by claiming that we were framed.

But that didn't alter the fact that the evidence was phoney. Judge Vanclear should have known Bert Frome's record better.

I wasn't so sure about the honesty of Assistant District Attorney Walter Younger. He was one of those smart, smooth men whose poker face might mean anything, anytime. He had prosecuted my case, and I'd always wondered why he'd gone through with Frome's frame-up.

But that was all ancient history. I had been convicted and I had said those words: "I'll get you—and the others, too!"

I had looked straight at Clam Seibert when I had said that in the court room, and Clam's face had become just that—clammy. But I had been foolish enough to jerk my head around to include Bert Frome, Younger, and Judge Vanclear in my threat. The reporters had written columns about that

And now I wondered who was making me a goat.

Clam Seibert was in the spot, but I hadn't put him there, that much was plain enough to me, but I was worried about what was behind it all.

On the surface there was nothing to worry about. The report was out in the underworld that Velma Dare was going to knock over the man who had stooped on me and Buck. That report wasn't true, and of course I could deny it.

I did deny it, every chance I got. But those rumors persisted.

A friendly barman in a speak had tipped me the news the second day I was back in town. I had laughed it off then, and had thought nothing about it. I was making no attempt to conceal the fact that I was finished with crime. I was going straight, and had told the barkeep as much.

But all my denials didn't stop the rumors. They only seemed to grow thicker. And after a week of hearing them on every side, I was worried.

**I**HADN'T broken away completely from the underworld even though I was going straight. I had money and I still liked to go places and see the bright lights, but I had no friends.

Buck and I had never tied up with any of the gangs or the rackets that worked the city from end to end. We had stuck pretty much to ourselves, taking our loot where we found it and being lucky enough not to get picked up too often by the bulls.

Working alone that way, I didn't know very many of the gunmen and crooks in the city, but I did know the big shots of the underworld by sight.

That is, I *had* known the men who had been big shots two years ago. Now I wasn't so sure. Death and the cops had caused quite a change during the two years I'd been in stir.



There had been a new line-up in the gangs and rackets and now there were a lot of new faces everywhere I went. I knew they all weren't just floaters. A lot of those new faces had come to stay.

And somebody somewhere was trying to use my old threat against Clam and the others for their benefit—make me the cat's paw. That didn't fit in

with my new life and my new plans.

It was only a hunch, of course. But I could make nothing else out of it. A report like that doesn't circulate so widely if there isn't something behind it. Somebody wanted the word spread—was seeing that it got around.

There was nobody I could go to in the underworld for the lowdown on it all. I'd always been a lone wolf with Buck, and now that I was trying to go straight I had ostracized myself.

But from snatches of conversation I overheard here and there I learned that Clam Seibert had become prosperous in the booze racket while I had been serving time. That was all right with me. I was minding my own business now. Clam Seibert would get his without me taking a hand. His kind always did.

For hours I tried to figure out a way to get to the source of the rumor that I was going to kill Clam. I knew my way around in the underworld, but nobody would talk. That left me out in the cold there.

I knew there was a reason behind that rumor, and I knew what would happen as soon as Clam stopped a slug. The cops would start looking for me, perhaps find me. Then it would be hard to explain that I had nothing to do with the killing.

And the next step in the hidden plan I was fighting against would be the deaths of Bert Frome, Assistant District Attorney Younger and Judge Vanclear. That was logical. I had threatened them all.

That's what worried me most. I might be able to talk the cops out of one murder charge, but when the four men died I'd be in for plenty of hell.

So I decided to see Captain Lon Colby. He'd know a lot of things about the new line-up in crime, and perhaps he could help me.

Colby was a hard, lean cop, fearless and honest. He'd been the first dick to run me in. That was seven years ago. I'd got three months for shoplifting then and when I got out Colby had told me to come to see him when I made up my mind to reform.

That granite-faced, iron-nerved cop was just that way. With him there was no middle ground; a crook was a crook until he had paid his debt to

society by serving a stretch in the pen. Then if the crook told Colby he was going to follow the straight and narrow, Colby would give him a chance.

And I needed that chance now. Clam Seibert was still alive, but he might die any day. If Clam died, I'd be—but why go over that again?

My nerves were shot from worry. I was grasping at straws. So I went down to the Central station house and popped into Captain Colby's little cubby hole that he dignified by calling an office.

I FOUND him with his feet propped up on one corner of his desk, asleep in the chair. But he opened his eyes as I closed the door.

"Hello, Cap," I said, smiling as a twinkle came into his hard brown eyes.

"Velma Dare!" he beamed, honoring me by getting up as I came over to his desk. He waved a hand toward a chair and added, "Sit down."

"Loafing on the job," I cracked as I took the chair.

He smiled at that, but snapped, "Nope. Sleeping." Then he sat down again and took a box of cigars from a drawer. "Have one?"

"Thanks. I'll stick to butts," I replied, getting cigarettes from my purse.

Colby selected a cigar and stuck it in one corner of his mouth. He put the box away and asked, "How's things?"

"Jake," I answered, and I think he knew I was lying. "How's the wife and youngsters?"

It would have broken his heart if I hadn't asked that question. His two grand passions in life were the Force and his family.

Don't get the idea that Lon Colby was soft. Nothing like that. He was as tough as they come in cops, which is plenty. But he was only human. After years of hard grind in the police machine had lifted him into plain clothes, and eventually a captaincy, he had married. He had been forty at the time and for the last five years I'd been hearing about his wife and kids whenever I met him.

"Great!" he enthused, and started telling me about the new baby—a year old now—who had been born after I'd taken my last rap.

After listening to him for five minutes I broke in on a pause.

"Guess you know why I'm here, 'Cap," I said.

"Uh-huh," he grunted, getting back to business. "Mean it?"

"Ever seen me here before?"

"Well—no," he said slowly, and looked at me for a moment with narrowed eyes. "So you're going straight, eh? That's a tough racket, Velma."

"So it seems," I snapped. "I hear I've put Clam Seibert on the spot." I didn't smile when I said that. It wasn't a joke to me.

"That's not news," he came back quickly, champing on his cigar. "I've been hearing that for a week—was on the prod twenty hours yesterday, trying to run that down."

"Thanks, Cap. Mighty nice of you. I didn't know it was that serious."

"It isn't—yet," he clipped. Then he leaned forward, jerked the cigar from his mouth and pointed the wet end at me. "Something's going to bust damned soon, and Velma Dare's going to need friends. I'm one!"

"Yeah?" That was all I could think of to say to that. I hadn't expected Captain Colby to go that far for me.

"Yes. But no tricks. I sent you up once, and I'll do it again—if you're lying to me now!" He jammed the cigar back in his mouth and tilted back in his chair.

"Be yourself, Colby," I told him, knowing that he meant every word he said. "Think I'm sap enough to tell the world—if I was giving a guy the works?"

"Maybe. There's lots of saps."

"Not in this office!" I flared.

"All right. I'm taking your word for it. Keep to the straight and narrow, and I'll do what I can to see you through. But my advice is: leave town, pronto!"

"Can't!" I snapped, but I knew he was right.

"Why not? You've got money. There's nothing to keep you here."

"Sure, I've got money," I agreed, nodding slowly. "Remember that six grand I got from Dad's estate when I was twenty-one? Well, I put it in radio and Montgomery Ward stock—pyramided, and when they skyrocketed a couple of years ago I sold out at the peak and put it all into bonds. That's the last thing I did before I took the last rap. It isn't the lack of money that's

keeping me here.”

COLBY squinted at me again. Then he asked softly: “Just want to keep your name clear? That it?”

I nodded. “You’d do the same thing yourself—if you were in my place.”

“Sure,” he said in a flat voice, “but maybe it isn’t worth the risk.”

“I think so,” I explained. “I’m still young—only twenty-five—and I’ve seen the inside of pens twice in seven years, besides that three months in the reformatory that you gave me. That’s enough. Another stretch in stir would kill my looks. I can keep them and my name, too, by seeing this through. Lamming won’t help me. I can’t fight a murder charge by long distance.”



Colby was silent for a moment. Then he said: “Good! Got a gun?”

“No. Never carry one.”

“Would you know how to use one if you had it?”

“Sure. I’m not that dumb.” I wondered what he was leading up to.

“Well, get a rod, and carry it. You may need it—any time. I’ll get you a permit.”

“Thanks,” I said, “but I’m not taking a chance. You cops build too much on circumstantial evidence, and you’re not always careful how you get it.”

My thrust brought him up straight in the chair. “We’re not all Bert Fromes,” he reminded

me coldly. His thin lips closed tight.

“I know it,” I went on evenly, “but you jump to conclusions. Frome behind this talk about me and Clam?”

Colby frowned. “Don’t know. He’s working in the fourth—captain now.”

“He’s crooked—or was,” I said as a feeler.

Nodding, Colby said: “Yeah, liquor’s made bums out of lots of cops.”

“Don’t I know it! There was Frome, presenting a lot of fake evidence to back up Clam’s wild story about that Gladstone job, and all the time he was taking graft from three or four fences and a half dozen speaks.”

“Dozens of speaks now,” agreed Colby. His hand shook as he removed the cigar from his mouth to spit. “It’s maddening!”

“Commissioner know about it?” I asked softly.

“Perhaps. I don’t know. Flaherty came up from the ranks, you know. Probably political pressure all around him now. If he loses the job as commissioner, he’s got nothing—at his age.”

“But I thought Flaherty was an honest cop,” I remarked, hoping to draw Colby out further.

“Hell! Forget it. I’m talking too much.” He smiled with his lips and then chewed on his cigar.

“And where do I come in?” I asked, pointedly.

“**Y**OU’RE to be the goat for somebody,” he said quietly. “That fool threat of yours got a lot of publicity at the time of your trial. The reporters’ll dig that up again—when Clam Seibert dies—and the rest of the cops will fall for it. You’re going to have a tough time.”

“I won’t be a fall guy!” I blazed.

“Maybe you’ll have nothing to say about it. Better lam while you’re in the clear.”

“That’s out. I’m sticking right in town until I find out who’s trying to frame me for these killings that haven’t happened—yet. When’s Clam due to go out?”

Colby got to his feet and looked down at me with cold eyes. Through closed teeth he said: “If I knew that, I’d give you the answer to a lot of things. I’d know who was behind the rumors, then. I’ve got hunches, but hunches aren’t facts. As things stand now, the stage is all set—for a killing! Better get yourself a gun, Velma!”

“No, thanks,” I said calmly, getting up and moving toward the door. “We won’t argue about that again. I’ve got a head. I can take care of myself.”

“I hope you do!” he said fervently as he held the door open for me.

I could feel his eyes on my back as I passed out and walked slowly, thoughtfully, down the corridor and out on to the street.

## CHAPTER II DEATH IN THE DARK

**I**T WAS late afternoon when I returned to my apartment. I was tired, and worried worse than ever. After leaving Colby I had gone for a long walk, had wanted to be alone to think.



But my thoughts were muddled. I couldn’t see behind that fog of rumors, and the question of who had started the report that I was going to knock over Clam Seibert couldn’t be answered by thinking.

Captain Lon Colby had told me all he knew—definitely. And that hadn’t amounted to much. But I knew the situation was serious. Colby didn’t worry about nothing, and he certainly was worried about me. His parting words had told me that.

So back at my apartment I took off my hat and light fall coat and lay down to rest before dinner. My eyes closed. My mind wandered, and I

found myself thinking about Happy Daniels.

Happy Daniels was a red-headed orphan. He had a face as innocent as a cherub, but he was as wise as only a kid of the streets can be. His father had frozen to death one winter while sleeping off a drunk in an alley. The kid had been four at the time. Then when he was six his mother had been killed by a hit-and-run driver.

Buck Evans and I had taken the kid in, had given him a home, and had sent him to school for four years. I’d never known his real name. He was always just “Happy” to us, always sunny and laughing, no matter what happened. And he would run the streets!

Winter or summer he was out. We couldn’t keep him in. Then shortly after he turned seven he disappeared for three days. We found him selling papers, and he wouldn’t return with us until we promised to let him keep his job, after school hours and during the summers. He won that argument and all others, but he lived with us after that.

Then when Buck and I were sent up for the Gladstone job Happy Daniels had run away rather than submit to being put into an orphanage by the city authorities. That was the last I’d heard of him.

Now as I lay on the bed I wondered what had become of the kid. He would be twelve now, probably a wise little imp for his age. But maybe he wouldn’t want to see me again, even though I was out of stir. Then, perhaps he’d even be glad to see me. Kids are funny that way.

That last thought, at least, was comforting. I relaxed, and slept.

The ringing of the telephone-bell awakened me. It was dark in the apartment and as I sat up I switched on the reading lamp beside the bed. The telephone-bell continued ringing.

My brain was still fogged with sleep as I looked at my wrist watch. It was ten minutes past eight. Then I got up and went into the living room, turned on a floor lamp, and picked up the telephone.

“Velma Dare?” a man’s voice asked over the wire. “This is Clam Seibert calling.”

My fingers tightened on the receiver, but I stood very still. My voice was calm as I said:

“Yes, this is Velma Dare. What do you want?”

“If you haven’t eaten yet, I’d like you to have

dinner with me.”

I stiffened, then relaxed.

“Where, Clam?” I asked without emotion.

“At the Cavalier—in an hour,” was the jaunty reply. “I’ll reserve a table. Okay?”

“Yes,” I agreed, not without hesitation.

I put down the telephone, sat down in an overstuffed chair under the light of the floor lamp, and smoked a cigarette. I was going to meet Clam Seibert face to face!

I tried to think, but I couldn’t. I’d built up so many wild theories during the past week that now when I tried to figure out the reason for Clam’s invitation to dinner, I discovered I was all thought out.

But after I had bathed I felt better. My head was clear again, but I still didn’t try to speculate about what might be behind Clam’s invitation. I’d find that out when I met him at the Cavalier.

**I** DRESSED for that engagement with great care, brushing my ebony hair until it gleamed with tiny points of light. When I had slipped on a black velvet evening gown that accentuated the dead whiteness of my skin, I looked at myself in the triple mirror of the dressing table. I looked like a ghost in black. But my lips were very red; my dark eyes very thoughtful.

So I slipped a black lace scarf over my shoulders, called a cab, and left the apartment.

The Cavalier was crowded with late diners when I arrived. An obsequious maitre d’hôtel guided me across the dining room, around the postage-stamp dance floor, to a table set in front of open casement windows that overlooked a small darkened garden, closed for the season.

I seated myself in the proffered chair, threw back the lace scarf from my shoulders, and looked around. Clam Seibert was not in sight.

Vaguely I wondered again why he had chosen the exclusive Cavalier for our meeting—the first since. I had made that foolish threat in the court room. Perhaps Clam had really made money, was getting up in the world.

As I turned to view the tables behind me, a dimple-cheeked youth with dull points of eyes at the next table smiled at me. I averted my eyes, looked past him, and then turned back to my table. For a few minutes I felt the youth’s stare boring into my back.

Then I looked up, across the room.

Clam Seibert was standing in the doorway. But it was a different Clam Seibert than I had previously known. His evening clothes were immaculate. His thin blond hair glistened from excessive pomading. A small moustache was waxed into sparkling points beneath his crooked, flat nose.

His loose-lipped mouth spread in a knowing smile as his eyes met mine. He crossed the room quickly and sat down across the table from me.

“So kind of you,” he smirked when he was settled and a waiter had taken our orders.

I watched his watery blue eyes as I said:

“Why did you ask me to meet you here?”

Clam Seibert jerked erect. For a long minute he stared at me coldly. When he spoke his voice was no longer oily.

“What do you mean by that?” he asked softly.

“Just what I said. Why did you call me—ask me here to dinner?”



Clam swore under his breath and started to get up. His little eyes had gone wide with fear. Then he settled back into the chair, his loose mouth twitching nervously. He glanced around the room and then looked back at me, hard.

“I didn’t ask you to come here,” he said hoarsely. “You invited me.”

That was a good line. My voice was flat as I said: “You’re lying, Clam—just like you did in court. What’s the game?”

“Game?” he repeated vacantly as though he hadn’t heard me clearly. “I’m giving it to you straight. I didn’t ask you to meet me here.”

I WAS silent as I thought that over. Clam Seibert ran a hand over his chalky face and went on, his words coming fast.

“Listen, Velma Dare! I’m warning you! And get it the first time! You can’t bump me off like you’ve been telling everybody around town. I’m not a small timer any more. I’m a big shot now—boss my own alky racket. I figured you were trying to trap me tonight, and I’ve got four men planted in the crowd here. One of them’s right behind you. Get that?”

I remembered the dull-eyed youth with the dimples, but I said:

“You’d better go, Clam. While you’ve got a chance.”

“Me go?” he blustered. “You can’t pull that line on me. I’m here and I’m going to stay—to watch you! I’m not getting a slug in the back from a twist who’d try to trap a guy like this.”

“That’s just the reason you should go, Clam,” I explained patiently, my eyes holding his. “You’ve walked into a trap—but I didn’t set it. I’m just the bait. And get this! I’ve never said I was going to rub you out. If I meant to, I wouldn’t tell anybody about it. I’d do it! But you’re safe with me. I’m going straight now.”

“That’s a good line,” he scoffed.

“Take it or leave it!” I snapped.

Clam laughed nervously.

“Yeah, that’s good,” he repeated. “*You* going straight! Well, you’d better. I’m almost as big as Mark Sands in this town, and one false move out of you and you’ll stop lead. My rods don’t miss!”

“Can the blah,” I sneered. “You’re just boasting. If you were half as bright as you think you are, you’d get out of here while you’ve got a chance. I’m going to stay!”

“So am I,” said Clam decisively. “Nobody in this town can bluff me!”

I opened my lips, but closed them again without speaking. After all, it was none of my business what Clam Seibert did. If he wanted to take a chance on kissing a hunk of lead, it would be no loss in my young life.

Perhaps I shouldn’t have stayed there in the Cavalier myself. That last crack of his may have

been my cue to get up and leave. But I’d walked into the same trap that had ensnared Clam Seibert to the Cavalier, and I was curious to see whether the trap would be sprung.

Frankly, I could see no point in leaving. I felt sure that I wasn’t in any immediate danger myself. The Cavalier was exclusive, but still—

I smiled to myself, although I wasn’t the least bit amused at anything as I looked toward the orchestra at the other end of the room. They were preparing to play.

“Going to dance with me, Clam?” I taunted, wondering how far his burst of bravado would carry him.

“I’m not that dumb,” he grunted. “Think I’m all ivory above the ears?”

I shrugged. You can’t do anything with that kind of conceit.

Clam Seibert took a silver cigarette case from his pocket, selected a pill, and started to put it away again. Then he remembered me and extended the case across the table. I took one of his expensive butts, tapped it absently against a thumbnail.

WITH great care he fitted his cigarette into a black onyx holder and stuck it between his teeth. Then he snapped a gold mounted lighter into flame and smiled craftily as he held it across the table for me.

I put the cigarette to my lips and leaned forward toward the little tongue of flame above Clam Seibert’s fist. I smiled back at him as the end of the cigarette touched the flame.

Then the room went black!

Perhaps I should have been surprised, but I wasn’t. I’d been looking for something to happen and when the lights went out I knew it was Clam Seibert’s funeral, not mine.

It had been timed beautifully, right to the second. Every light in that large room was blotted out with one throw of the switch, and only the tiny flame of the lighter in Clam’s hand pierced the blackness.

As I said, I’d been expecting something like that. And as the lights went out I didn’t puff on that cigarette. I merely pushed the cigarette out of my mouth with my tongue, and ducked.

But I wasn’t fast enough. Even as I felt the cigarette leave my lips there was a rustle of



movement beside my right ear.

The gun beside my head roared once. Fire shot past my eyes. The flame of the lighter was snuffed out by the force of the explosion with a suddenness that left me blinded for a moment.

I didn't wait for more. In one swift movement I was out of my chair and on the sill of the open casement window at my side. But even as I poised myself for the leap down into the little garden outside, I knew Clam Seibert was dead. The gun couldn't have missed—at that distance.

While the shot was still ringing in my ears I heard Clam's lighter strike the table. He didn't utter a sound, but I heard his hands come down on the table, claw once, and then drag the cloth and the service to the floor with a clatter of silver and tinkle of glass as he slipped lifeless from the chair.

The crowd came to life as I leaped from the sill and landed heavily on a little plot of grass eight feet below the window. A woman screamed once, and a babble of excited voices rose in terror from the darkness of the dining room above me. I didn't wait to hear more.

Racing across the garden into the deep shadow of the outside wall, I felt my way along until I found a little gate opening on to the street back of the Cavalier. The gate was unlocked. I swung it open and stepped out on to the sidewalk.

It hadn't taken me a minute to do all that. For the moment I knew I was safe. I wouldn't be missed until the lights came on again in the dining room. Then—

I smiled grimly in the darkness as I walked rapidly down the street. The men who had rubbed out Clam Seibert had been artists in the business of death. Clam had asked for it—and had got it!

But his killers had got a break they hadn't figured on. Clam had been holding the lighter when the room went black. And for the brief space of only a couple of seconds that tiny flame had illuminated his face—and mine!

### CHAPTER III ENTER HAPPY DANIELS

**T**HAT'S what was bothering me most as I walked down the street behind the Cavalier and turned down a dark side street. If it hadn't been for the little flame of the lighter, the cops

might have had a hard time identifying the woman who had been with Clam Seibert when he was shot.

But my face had been plainly illuminated by that lighter when the dining room went black. And out of that crowd there would be at least a dozen people who had seen my face—would swear that the fatal shot had been fired by me.



I couldn't blame them very much. The flash of the gun had come almost from the point where it would have been if I had had a gun in my hand. That was the one point the cops would push, and all my denials would be in vain.

It was an open and shut case against me. From now on the only thing I could do was keep under cover until I had found Clam Seibert's killer and cleared my name.

Added to those troubles was the fact that a woman in an evening dress without a wrap on a dark, side street, or any other street, might arouse suspicion. I hadn't taken time to slip the lace scarf over my shoulders as I went through that window, and now I was very conscious of my bare arms and shoulders.

The only thing in my favor was the warm night. Perhaps that was something, but I didn't think so at the time.

I left the side street at the first corner and turned down a broad avenue that was sparsely lighted. My first thought was to find a cab and put more distance between me and the Cavalier, perhaps get back to my apartment, change clothes, pack a bag, and disappear.

But there wasn't a cab in sight. Only a few private cars that passed me without stopping. So I walked, keeping to the shadows of houses and buildings as best I could.

A few minutes later I got the uneasy feeling that somebody was following me. I don't lead parades very often, but when I do I usually know it as soon as a shadow picks me up. Some sixth sense sends the warning, I guess, because I can't explain it any other way.

And leading a parade I was, but a short one.

I turned around quickly once and saw a dim form, about a block behind me, duck into a doorway. So I turned down another side street and increased my pace.

Then just as I reached the middle of the block where the darkness of the night was increased by the towering buildings on either side of me, there was a flurry of running feet behind me and somebody grabbed me by the elbow as I started to run.

I swung around suddenly, aiming a blow at the point I thought a man's chin, ought to be, but my fist only cut the air. Then I jumped as a thin voice ask:

"Say, ain't you Velma Dare?"

**I** LOOKED down and then wanted to laugh, but I didn't. The quizzical face that looked up at me was that of a boy. I took one look at him in the darkness and then grabbed his face between my hands and kissed him full on the nose.

"Happy Daniels!" I breathed, and laughed nervously. "What's the idea of following a lady?"

"Huh!" said the kid, almost contemptuously. "I *knew* that was you, Velma Dare. You can't fool me. When'd you get sprung?"

"Listen, Happy," I said quickly. "I don't have time to talk about that now—not here—I'm—in a hurry. Where and when can I see you?"

The smile vanished from Happy's round face.

"The bulls after you, Velma?" he asked, and when I didn't answer he added, "I thought so. That's why I followed you. You passed me on the corner behind the Cavalier and didn't give me a tumble. So I tailed you—thought you might need help."

That certainly sounded good to me. So I kissed him again and said:

"Yes, Happy, I do need help—bad, right at the moment. I want to put a lot of distance between me and here. I'm in a jam, Hap, and—"

"There's a cab stand down on this next comer," the kid cut in quickly. "Let's go!"

Before I could say another word he had me by the elbow, pushing me along with all the directness and force of a man. And the kid didn't reach to my shoulder.

I didn't argue about it until we reached the cab. Then when I started to give the driver the address of my apartment Happy Daniels broke in authoritatively.

"Four-sixty-seven Seneca," he piped to the driver. Then turning to me, he added, "That's where I live."

"But, Happy,—" I began.

"Get in!" he ordered, and I got in without a word.

That kid may have been only twelve years old, but he had a man's brain behind that smooth, childish face. He hadn't run the streets for nothing.

We didn't talk much during that ride. I watched the bright lights fade behind us, watched the streets become dirtier and narrower, and wondered why I was letting a kid order me around like that.

Then after we had left the cab in front of a dingy building on a filthy narrow street and I had paid the driver, Happy led the way up five flights of rickety, foul-smelling stairs, down a black hallway to the rear and into a tiny room under the roof.

When the single dim bulb was burning from the wall bracket Happy looked at me with his broad smile which I knew so well.

"Gee!" he breathed. "I never expected to have a swell dame like you calling here for help!"

For a moment I felt all hot and bothered. Perhaps I looked like a "swell dame" but I didn't feel like one. I was very conscious of my evening gown in those squalid surroundings. Then I noticed that though the spread on the little iron bed was ragged, it was clean. The floor was nothing but rough boards, but there wasn't a speck of dust any place. The plaster on the walls was cracked and broken and one corner of the broken glass in the narrow window was stuffed with newspaper, but the whole room was spotless.

"Pretty nice place you have, Happy," I said, losing some of my embarrassment as I sat down on the bed. There wasn't a chair in the little room.

"Oh, it's not so bad—better than an orphanage," he smiled. Then he became serious, thrust his hands into the pockets of his ragged trousers, sunk his little chin on to his chest, and looked at me from beneath unruly red hair,



"Now suppose you tell me why the bulls are after you," he said, dropping his voice as low as he could.

I started to laugh. It was comical the way he put on mannish airs. But instead of laughing with me, he looked hurt.

"All right, laugh!" he said sharply, his thin voice cracking. "Maybe I ain't big enough to be a dick yet, but I bet I can help you."

"Now listen, Happy," I said kindly. "It's darned nice of you to think you can help me, but I don't want to get you into trouble. I think I'd better go back to my apartment."

"No, you don't," he snapped, planting his slim body in front of the door, "I'm going to tell you something and you're going to listen to me. And don't laugh!"

**I** DIDN'T laugh any more as I heard him make his speech. He knew plenty.

"I know why the bulls are after you," he went on. "And you can't go back to that apartment—not yet anyway. That's just what the bulls'll expect you to do and they'll nab you. Get that?"

"Are you giving me advice, Happy?" I asked seriously.

"Yes, I am," he piped. "And as my first client I expect you to follow it."

"Client?" frowned at him.

"Yeah, you laughed at me and I wasn't going to tell you, but I will after all." He paused and came across the floor until he stood in front of me beside the bed. "I'm a detective now," he announced proudly.

"A what?" I was surprised and must have looked it.

"A detective. Not officially, of course," he explained quickly, "but I'm practicing—sort of a private dick. And I'm going to help you."

Somehow I believed that twelve year old kid. He said that so seriously that I couldn't laugh at the thought of accepting help from him. Clam Seibert had been killed while I was with him and I couldn't deny that I needed all the help I could get—even from a kid.

"All right, Happy," I agreed, "What's your advice?"

"Do you mean that, Velma?" he asked uncertainly.

"Sure."

"Gee, I'm glad you're going to let me in on this," he exclaimed excitedly and then became calm as he sat down beside me. "I heard that you'd been sprung, but I didn't know where you lived so I couldn't look you up. You're getting in an awful jam and me and Captain Colby's going to help you."

"Colby?" I repeated. "What's he have—"

"Oh, Colby and me's good friends," explained Happy. "He found me this place to live in after he picked me up for selling papers during school hours last winter. I promised to go to school if he'd let me live by myself. It's against the law, but Colby's a swell guy!"

"Yes, he is a swell guy, Hap," I agreed. "But you haven't told me how you're going to help me."

"Well, I've been selling papers for a long time now and I go places and hear things that other people ain't supposed to hear. So when I heard that you'd been sprung and that you were going to bump off Clam Seibert I knew you was going to need help. So I got busy on the case right away and it didn't take me long to learn a lot of

things that even Cap Colby don't know."

"What's that, Happy?"

"One of those things is that Clam's own men have sold him out."

"Who sold him out?" I asked, getting excited over the kid's story.

**H**APPY DANIELS slid to the floor and pulled a dilapidated cardboard shoe box from under the bed. He placed the box on the spread between us and took off the lid. The box was stuffed with newspaper clippings, some of them already brittle and yellowing with age, and others still very new and recent.

"This is my private Rogues' Gallery," Happy explained, and I didn't smile as he said it. "I've got every big shot's picture in here and a lot of the boys that even the cops aren't sure about."

He paused and dug under the pile of clippings and selected one which he spread out for me to read. This kid was going to be valuable to me. I felt it, and I was right.

"He's the guy who sold out Clam," said Happy, pointing to the picture above the half column story he'd clipped from a month old paper. "His name's Dimples McCann."

"Why, he's the man who—"

I stopped suddenly and wondered whether I had said too much. The picture before me was a very good likeness of the dimple-cheeked, dull-eyed youth who sat behind me in the Cavalier!

"Yeah," said Happy, nodding seriously. "He probably shot Clam tonight at the Cavalier. I saw you go in so I hung around. Dimples was already there and also a couple more of Clam's men. Then when I saw Clam go into the restaurant, I knew something was up and I stuck tight. I was lucky to find you—afterwards."

"I'll say you were lucky, Happy," I agreed, marveling at the kid's clear thinking and nerve. "And who is Dimples McCann—what does he do and where does he fit into the picture?"

"Dimples was Clam's lieutenant," said Happy, his eyes burning with excitement. "Clam started putting on airs and bragging around that he was going to control the alky racket for the whole town. Bert Frome was backing Clam and that made the real Big Shot sore. So he made a deal with Dimples and Clam's and Bert's numbers were put up.

"But they couldn't be knocked off easy-like. Bert Frome had too many political hooks in things, and the Big Shot got the idea of waiting a few months until you were sprung and then giving out the report that you were going to do plenty to Clam and Bert. Clam was shot tonight—I heard the gun and saw you come out of the garden behind the Cavalier. That right?"

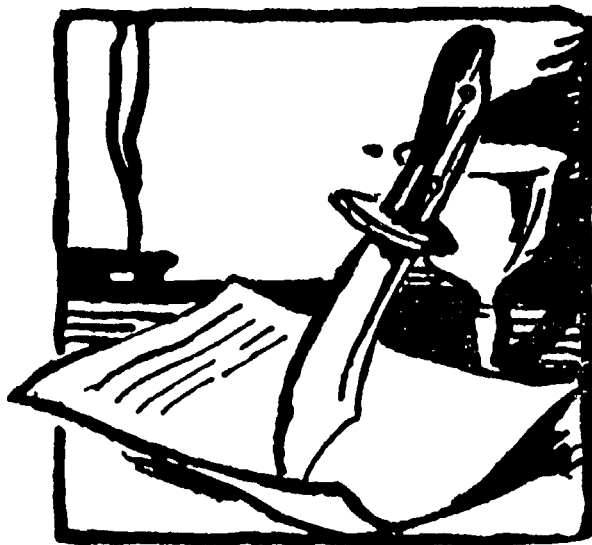
I nodded. "Tell me something, Happy," I said slowly. "I've been out of town and don't know the line-ups any more. Who is Mark Sands?"

Happy's eyes went wide with surprise as he whistled softly.

"You don't know who Mark Sands is?" he breathed. "Say, you *are* out of date. Mark Sands is *the* Big Shot—State senator and biggest fat cat in politics. He's crooked, but he's so smooth they can't touch him."

"Got a picture of Sands?" I asked.

"Sure." Happy dug into the clippings again. "Here's one."



**I** LOOKED at the smug, fat face of Mark Sands as he sat behind an enormous desk. The picture was the usual newspaper type, but even that coarse engraving hadn't erased the cunning, the pride, the self-assurance of the man. He was probably fifty, with a shock of white hair which gave him a halo of dignity that the sharp cleverness of his eyes belied. The full mouth and jutting chin spoke volumes for the drive and power of the man who had overridden all opposition, except Clam Seibert and Bert Frome.

Now Clam Seibert was dead, and I was to be

blamed for the killing. Happy Daniels and I talked for perhaps another hour and he gave me a lot of details that were useful to me later. But before I returned that newspaper picture of Mark Sands I memorized every feature so that I could never forget that face.

Perhaps I would never get the chance, but I felt that Mark Sands and I were going to have a talk some day, and when that occurred he'd learn what happened when he tried to make me the fall guy for his killings.

"But you won't get near Mark Sands," Happy concluded after a long explanation of the ramifications of the Big Shot's crime interests. "He's down in Florida now and won't be back before spring. There's no election this year and he'll be running things from long distance."

"Thanks for the tips, Happy," I said as I got up and prepared to leave him. "You certainly learn things selling papers."

He laughed in his thin voice and became a kid again. "Yes, I get around and nobody thinks anything of talking in front of me. I'm just a—dumb kid to them."

"Oh yeah?" I said, smiling. "Well, don't be too dumb, Happy. I'm going now and I'll see you again in a day or two."



"Listen, Velma," he warned as I opened the door. "Better stay here while I slip around to your place and look over the lay. Maybe some bulls'll be waiting for you."

I couldn't argue him out of that so I gave him my address and waited half an hour in his tiny room. My apartment was on the other side of town, but it didn't take Happy Daniels long to make the trip.

"Looks like everything's oke," he told me, "but I've got a cab downstairs waiting for you. Take care of yourself and come back here if you need me."

"I'll do that, Happy," I told him, and then went down the stairs to the waiting cab.

I didn't know then how soon I'd make that promise good.

#### CHAPTER IV DEATH MOVES FAST

**W**HEN I stepped out of the taxi-cab in front of my apartment house I looked at the watch on my wrist. It was eleven-thirty. Just two hours had elapsed since Clam Seibert had stopped that slug across the table from me.

The apartment house was deathly silent as I left the automatic elevator at the seventh floor and went down the corridor to my door. I didn't intend to stay there that night. The cops might look for me, but I wanted to change into clothes that would attract less attention on the street.

As the door closed behind me I snapped on the lights in the living room. Nothing had been disturbed, nobody had been there looking for me yet, so far as I could see. So I went into the bedroom.

My hand touched the light switch and the bulbs in the ceiling blazed. I took one step forward—and froze!

Beside the bed, his head and shoulders propped up against the side, lay Bert Frome. The dark stain that cut down over his shirt-front and seeped into the light blue of his street clothes told its own story. I didn't need to look for more, but I did.

I bent down beside him, felt his wrist. There was no pulse. The skin was cool, but not cold.

Deliberately I lifted the arm, let it fall gently back on to the floor. He hadn't been dead long. Rigor mortis hadn't set in yet, but that didn't mean much. It takes anywhere from an hour to six hours for a body to stiffen.

I wondered how he had met his death, how he had entered the apartment and who had been with him, or had followed him. Bert Frome hadn't killed himself.

The fat dick who had framed me was the second to die of the men whom I had threatened. Again I thought of Dimples McCann, but that didn't help me much.

Bert Frome hadn't been shot. From under a fat, drooping jowl protruded the handle of a knife that had been driven up to the hilt into the base of the bulbous neck.

I looked at the handle of the knife again. The cloisonné work seemed very familiar. Then I remembered.

The shaft of steel that had killed Frome wasn't a dagger. It was a fancy paper knife, and it was mine!

Quickly I got to my feet, moved to the other side of my bed, and started to change my clothes. I had only minutes to spare and I had to work fast. The cops might break in at any moment and find me with the body of Bert Frome. That would be hard to explain.

I'd slipped into a street dress and was reaching for a jersey turban on the shelf in the closet when I got a shock. The little red velvet beret that I had worn when I went to see Captain Colby was missing.

As I adjusted the turban over my hair I wondered who had taken that little hat, and why. Again speculation failed me. The hat was gone and no thinking about it would give me the answer to the mystery of its disappearance.

Slipping some of my more expensive jewels into my purse, I prepared to leave the apartment. I was going to take advantage of Happy Daniels' invitation to hide out at his little room.

So I turned off the light in the bedroom and went back to the living room. My hand was on the light switch when a heavy knock echoed through the silence of the apartment.

**F**OR a moment I stood very still. I thought of Clam Seibert and Bert Frome, and then as the heavy knock sounded again on the corridor-door I knew what had happened.

The bulls had closed in on me, and I was trapped in my own apartment with the body of Detective Captain Bert Frome in the next room!

There was only one thing to do, and I did it. With a firm step I crossed the room, went out into the tiny vestibule, and opened the corridor-door.

Without a word the tall, lean form of Captain Lon Colby stalked past me. He was alone. I closed the door and followed him into the living room. He didn't waste words in getting down to business.

"You lied to me, Velma Dare!" he barked, glaring down at me with blazing eyes.

"What are you talking about, Colby?" I asked calmly. I knew what he referred to, but playing dumb was my best bet.

"You told me you never carried a gun," he grated, stepping in close to me. "Know any more good jokes?"

"Yes. I also told you I knew how to use a gun, if I got one in my hands," I reminded him coldly. "But that doesn't prove that I killed Clam Seibert."

"To hell with Clam! I want you for the killings of Walter Younger and Judge Vanclear!"

The blood drained from my face. My legs suddenly felt weak. My knees trembled. Fear gripped my heart and I couldn't shake it off.

For a full minute I couldn't say a word, only look weakly at the flashing eyes of Detective Captain Lon Colby, the one guy on the Force that I considered a friend.

Then my voice returned, but it sounded flat, distant.

"And what's happened—to Bert Frome?"

That seemed to start Colby thinking and he became calmer. Finally he said:

"Well, what did happen to Frome? You ought to know."

"I *do* know," I said bitterly, hopelessly. "He's stabbed—dead in the next room, beside my bed."

Colby's wooden face didn't change expression. Perhaps, that hadn't been news to him, but I thought it was. He merely strode into the bedroom, switched on the lights and a moment later came back to me.

"That's, damned strange," he said, his voice low and hard.

I smiled grimly.

"Not so strange, Colby," I said. "A knife's as deadly as a bullet—sometimes."

His eyes softened, became quizzical. He

lowered his voice to a whisper.

“Why—did you do it, Velma?”

“God, Colby, but you’re dumb!” I blurted.

“Yeah? We’ll see about that. Come on! We’ll talk this over—at the station!”

## CHAPTER V DODGING BULLS

**F**OR a moment I couldn’t say a thing to that. Then my brain snapped back to life, and during the brief pause that followed Colby’s words I thought desperately.

Colby had fallen for that batch of rumors after all, and now that the four men I had threatened to get were dead, he actually believed I had killed them. Happy Daniels would alibi me as best he could, but I couldn’t take a chance on that alone.

Once Colby got me down to headquarters I was sunk, I knew that. The killings would be pinned on me just like Mark Sands and Dimples McCann had planned. I stared at the floor thoughtfully.

“Let’s get going,” Colby reminded me.

I looked up from the floor.

“Colby,” I warned, “if you take me out of here with you I’ll have every paper in town on your neck, razzing you. The reporters know me and I’ll tell them plenty.”

He laughed harshly.

“What do you expect me to do?” he asked. “Leave you here and let you lam—or congratulate you?”

“Velma Dare doesn’t bluff,” I told him calmly. “I didn’t kill one of the four and, damn your tough hide, Colby,—you know I didn’t!”

“Listen, Velma. I’m not here for a tea party. I’ve got witnesses who saw you when you shot down Younger as he came out of the theatre tonight, and other people saw you kill Judge Vanclear when you called him to the door of his home. And they ain’t phoney witnesses. That red velvet beret of yours couldn’t be missed.”

“I don’t—” I started, and stopped.

What was the use of arguing? Neither Colby nor any other cop would believe me when I said I no longer owned that little beret. It had been stolen from my apartment and worn by—I didn’t

know who wore it, but it had tagged me for the killings. So I changed my tune.

“Colby,” I asked seriously, “are you sure a girl killed Younger and the judge?”

“Couldn’t be surer,” he snapped. “I was home at the time, but the sergeant on the desk gave me a ring a few minutes ago, and I slipped over here on a hunch.”

“Then where did you round up those witnesses?”

“The boys got them and they’re down at headquarters now. Come on!”

He placed a hand on my right arm as he finished. Quickly I jerked out of his grasp and backed toward the light switch on the wall. I wasn’t going to go down to headquarters! That would have been suicide.

But Colby saw through my slim plan. With a dive he caught me by the shoulders and whirled me around.

“None of that!” he snapped, yellow flecks lighting his brown eyes as rage possessed him. “See how you like this!”

A hand streaked to a pocket and brought out a pair of handcuffs.

“You don’t need those, Colby,” I whispered hoarsely. “I’ll take my chances on getting framed again. Let’s go.”

“Oke,” he said, and I was surprised when he put the bracelets back in his pocket.

Perhaps he was as hurt about having to arrest me as I was to be caught in such an apparent trap as this one that I’d walked into by not taking Colby’s advice and leaving town. But I couldn’t see it that way then, and I still held to my first idea.

I was going to stay in town and fight back at Mark Sands, Dimples McCann and any other bunch of gangsters who tried to frame me to save their own skins. I was going straight and I was going to keep my name clear if I had to go to jail again to do it.

**S**O WHEN Colby put away the handcuffs I picked up my purse and moved toward the door.

“Better turn out the lights,” I suggested as I paused in the vestibule, Colby at my side.

“I’ll leave them on,” he said in a colorless

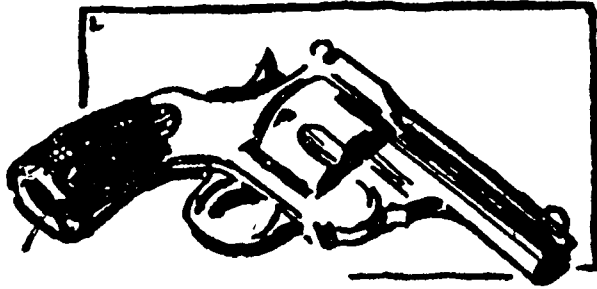


*But Colby saw through my plan . . . with a dive he caught me and whirled me around.*



voice. "Some of the boys'll want to see Bert Frome in there."

I shivered with a chill as I fitted the key into the outside lock of the door and prepared to step out into the corridor. That killing in my apartment would be hard to shake. But what could I do about it? Colby had me with the goods—or rather, the body.



Then as I pulled the corridor-door shut and started to turn the key, I got an inspiration. There was only a slim chance that Colby would fall for it, but it was worth a trial.

"Damn," I said, opening the door again and starting back into the apartment. "I forgot my money."

"You don't need any," said Colby, clutching me by the arm again. "I've got a car downstairs."

"I'm not leaving a hundred and twenty bucks here for some lousy bull to pocket," I snapped. "I'd rather take a chance on getting it back from the clerk down at the station."

"Well, make it snappy, then," he said, stepping into the living room ahead of me. "I'll wait in here."

That was the break I was looking for. As Colby stepped out of the vestibule into the living room, I stepped out into the corridor, slammed the door, and turned the key in the lock.

I didn't wait for the elevator. I went down the stairs, fast.

Colby was at the door in a flash, pounding and shouting with rage. I hated to trick him that way, but there was no reasoning with him. He thought I'd been on a killing spree, and I wasn't being a fall guy for anybody—not even Lon Colby.

When I came out of the apartment house I thought I was safe for the moment. Perhaps I was safe, but the sight of that uniformed copper standing beside the closed car at the curb startled me.

Without thinking, I started to run down the

street. It didn't take that bull long to get wise to himself and me. But he was big and probably hadn't run a footrace for years.

So I forged ahead of him fast. After a chase of half a block I thought I was going to outdistance him without a struggle. But I was wrong.

Suddenly his pounding footsteps faltered. A gun roared behind me, and a bullet clipped the bricks above my head as I reached the corner of another apartment building.

Before the big bull could get in another shot I was around the corner. Then a new sound reached my ears—the shrill blast of a police whistle.

I hadn't figured on that, but I kept running. Just the same. There was nothing else I could do.

**T**HEN when I had traversed about a half block along the second street the running figure of another cop came around the corner of the next block and started toward me. The police whistle of the first cop shrilled again, and in the distance behind me I heard his heavy feet hitting the pavement as he tried to sprint to the corner around which I had disappeared.

For a moment I thought the two cops were going to bottle me between them. There wasn't a taxi in sight, not even a parked car along the curb that I could crawl into and drive away.

But my luck still held. On the corner ahead of me the marquee of a hotel extended over the pavement and I decided to give the cops the slip.

As I checked my pace and ducked through the revolving doors into the lobby of the hotel a shout came from behind me and I knew the big cop had spotted me. The second cop was still about a half block away and I still had time to slip out the side entrance of the hotel and get away down the street.

That's where I made a mistake. There was no side entrance to that hotel, only the one entrance through which I had come. But by the time I discovered that, it was too late to get back out on the street and hope to outdistance those bulls.

It had only taken a minute to figure that out, but minutes are precious when you're running for your life, or your freedom. So I did the next best thing. I cut back through the lobby to the elevators.

I hadn't thought of that any too soon. One car

was loaded and ready to start up, and just as I stepped through the door the fat bull came through the revolving doors into the lobby. And the second cop was with him!

That made it bad, but I had dealt my cards and I couldn't get out of that elevator. So I stayed on and rode up to the fourth floor. I thought that would be about far enough.

The cops in the lobby would probably split up, one taking the stairs while the other waited below. But I had to take that chance. So I waited until the car I had left disappeared up the shaft. Then I punched the "Down" bell beside the door.

Another minute and the second car eased to a stop. The car was also loaded, but I managed to squeeze in and I started down again. I figured the cop downstairs wouldn't be looking for me to come down so soon, might even think I had a room there. And I was right. I hung back until a couple of people had left the car ahead of me when it stopped at the main floor. Then keeping myself in among the knot of people who left the elevator, I slipped past the fat cop who gave me no more than a look as I walked over to the desk, pretended that I was leaving a key, and then sauntered out of the hotel.

## CHAPTER VI

### WANTED: DIMPLES MCCANN

**H**APPY DANIELS was surprised to see me when I got back to his little room. I thought I'd stay there for the rest of the night, and Happy agreed to my plan. Then, as if on second thought, he asked:

"Why're you hiding out, Velma? Didn't you get to your apartment okay?"

"Yes, Happy," I said wearily. "I got back all right, but I almost didn't get away again."

Then I told Happy about Captain Colby thinking that I had killed Clam Seibert, Bert Frome, Walter Younger and Judge Vanclear. Happy heard me to the end of my story without saying a word.

"And what are you going to do now?" he asked as I finished.

"Keep out of the way of the cops until—" I didn't finish that sentence, but Happy guessed it.

"Until you find Dimples McCann. That it?"

he inquired, his blue eyes narrowed in thought.

"Maybe," I evaded; I didn't want to tell him too much. He was only a kid and might mix up in this and get hurt.

"Well, I'm going to help you. What time is it?"

I looked at my watch again. "Ten after twelve."

"Gee, the night's" young yet," he muttered, then looked at me. "But you gotta stay here. Every cop in town'll be looking for you, and even Cap Colby won't think about coming here."

"But, Happy—" I began.

"You do as I say," he snapped, his high voice



cracking with excitement. "You ain't been back in town long enough to know all the joints where Dimples McCann hangs out, but me—I know where to find him, and that's what I'm going to do."

"That's my job, Happy," I said, trying to talk him out of that wild idea. "A kid running around at this time of the night will get picked up by the cops."

"Cap Colby'll get me out," he returned, nodding. "Cap's a good friend of mine, and I'm going to have a talk with him about you."

"It won't do any good, Happy," I said in a tired voice. "Where does Dimples McCann live?"

"He's got a suite at the Brantley Hotel, but he won't be there—not tonight, anyway. He'll be out celebrating tonight in the speaks and night clubs and—well, I know about where to find him."

I saw that Happy Daniels had the same idea that I had. He was only playing a hunch on what he had learned about Dimples' selling out Clam Seibert, and right at the moment he didn't know how correct he really was.

After a lot more argument I saw there was no use in trying to talk the kid out of his idea. He was sure he'd find Dimples McCann, and then would slip a tip to Colby who'd sweat a confession out of the dull-eyed killer.

That sounded very nice as Happy talked about it in his little room, but it didn't make sense to me. It's one thing nowadays to arrest a known gangster and it's another thing to get him to squeal on himself and his pals. And unless he squeals the bulls can't hold him for long. That's why the gangsters pay a lot of good money to smart lawyers.

But I let Happy go on with his idea, and after he left me I did a lot of thinking.

One thing was certain. Dimples McCann had killed Clam Seibert in the Cavalier. I was sure of that, but I had no proof. Perhaps I'd get that later—when I found Dimples.

The main thing I was puzzled about was the person who had been with Bert Frome when the dick went to my apartment. Frome was in plain clothes, and if I could find the person who had induced him to go to my place, I'd have his killer.

That wasn't going to be easy, and I knew it. Perhaps I never would know exactly who did it, but I had a hunch that Dimples McCann would know something about Frome's death.

**T**HE next step would be to find the person who had stolen my red velvet beret and then had shot down Assistant District Attorney Walter Younger and Judge Porter Vanclear. Again I thought of Dimples McCann, and again I saw that I was up against a blank wall.

Just why I associated Dimples with each of the four killings I don't know—that is, exactly. I was just using the head, and the answer in each case was nobody but Dimples McCann.

Dimples had made a deal with Mark Sands, probably through one of Sands' major henchmen, to sell out Clam Seibert and Bert Frome. It was logical that not more than two or three other members of Clam's mob knew about it, otherwise Dimples and Sands wouldn't have gone to all the

trouble to frame me for the killings.

And the fact that the killings were such an important part in the plans made it pretty certain that Dimples hadn't trusted the jobs to an ordinary rod. That one brief glimpse I had had of those dull, hard eyes in the Cavalier had told me that McCann wasn't above pumping lead himself when the occasion demanded it.

This was such an occasion, as I saw it. There could be no slip-up on any of the four jobs. I had threatened to get those four men, and to make the job look like my work the four would have to die—and did die, all within a space of less than two hours.

Dimples McCann would have had plenty of time to lure Frome to my apartment, kill him with the paper cutter, steal my red velvet beret, and then get uptown, shoot Younger as he left the theatre, and reach Judge Vanclear's house in much less than two hours.

Yes, it was logical, and no matter how I tried I couldn't figure it any other way. Dimples McCann would make a nice looking woman in a dress, a coat, and that red beret. It would be a simple disguise and easy to discard.

So I decided to play that hunch. Happy Daniels had a half hour start on me, but I was going to find Dimples McCann myself. And when I found him, no lawyer would get him free with a writ of habeas corpus or any other of the many legal tricks that so effectively tied the hands of the police.

And the first step in my plans was to register and get a room at the Brantley Hotel!

The space under Happy Daniels' bed yielded a cracked and broken suitcase that at one time might have looked like leather. Now it was little more than well worn cardboard.

There was no dresser in that tiny room so I dumped Happy's few possessions—a clean shirt, an extra pair of pants and coat, some dirty handkerchiefs and a couple of dog-eared magazines—on the floor and filled the bag with a pillow and a stack of newspapers that I also found under the bed. That made it heavy enough to fool any bell hop.

A few minutes later I had arranged my hair into a simple coiffure that partly changed the contour of my face and made me look like a girl just in from the country. Then I removed most of

my makeup to complete the picture.

It wasn't much of a disguise, but it was the best I could do at the moment. The resemblance to the Velma Dare the cops knew was still fairly strong, but unless I met a bull or a dick who knew me on sight I figured I could get by.



So I left Happy Daniels' room with that old suitcase in one hand and my purse in the other. After walking five blocks I finally found a cruising cab and fifteen minutes later was at the Brantley Hotel. Big as life, I registered as "Virginia Darling" and got a room on the fourteenth floor.

I gave the bell hop long enough to get back to the lobby. Then I left the hotel and started my search for Dimples McCann.

Perhaps I shouldn't have taken the chance of going out that night, but I knew I'd have to work fast. If Happy Daniels found Dimples before I did, he'd tip Captain Colby and there'd be a raid. Then Dimples McCann would get the wind up and lam.

I didn't want that to happen. Dimples McCann was my meat, and I meant to find him first.

But visits to a dozen speaks and three night clubs netted me exactly nothing. Two of the barmen I knew were acquainted with Dimples, but

both of them claimed they hadn't seen him for days.

**T**HEN just as I left the fifteenth speak I got the clue I'd been looking for. I was coming up out of the basement of an old brownstone front when I saw Happy Daniels pass along the sidewalk, not five feet from me.

The kid didn't see me, and I was glad of that. From the way he walked, keeping to the shadows of buildings, parked cars, light posts—anything that offered cover—I knew he was tailing somebody. So I gave Happy a half block's start and then followed him.

I didn't need anybody to tell me that the man in the block ahead of Happy Daniels was Dimples McCann. Happy had started out to find Dimples, and had found him. But so had I!

So I kept in the background and shadowed Happy as he followed Dimples three more blocks and then cut down a street to the left for another two blocks.

Suddenly I lost sight of Happy and I looked ahead just in time to see Dimples McCann disappear into a two story frame building in the middle of the block.

At that distance and in the darkness I wasn't sure which doorway Dimples had gone through, but I spotted the one I thought he had entered, and then moved forward slowly. I didn't want Happy to see me. That would have spoiled my plans.

But Happy was not to be found. He had probably ducked down the alley I came to just before I reached the doorway through which I thought I had seen Dimples McCann disappear.

In front of that closed door I stopped and looked around. The houses on either side were brick and I was certain that Dimples had gone into that frame building.

I gave him five minutes and then went up the three steps to the door. Slowly I turned the knob and thrilled as the door opened to my touch. Another minute and I was in a dark hall and the door was closed behind me.

Perhaps I was crazy to try to trap Dimples without aid. But I was desperate and the rashness of my actions wasn't apparent to me at the time. What I wanted more than anything else was to trap Dimples and then beat, or scare, a confession out of him.

How I was going to do that I didn't know as I paused behind that closed door and tried to pierce the solid darkness of that hall. I had no gun, no black-jack, nothing but my two hands and my purse. But that didn't stop me from creeping forward slowly, feeling my way through that inky blackness with my hands along the wall.

I had advanced probably four feet when the toe of my right shoe struck wood. After that I didn't need eyes to tell me that a stairway was in front of me, but I waited a minute or two until I was sure that the tap of my shoe against the step hadn't been heard.

Then, keeping close to the wall to lessen the chances of squeaking steps, I crept up the stairway, every nerve tense, every sense quickened to the breaking point. But no sound came to me other than my cautious progress up the stairway.

I breathed more freely as I reached the upper landing, and paused to get my bearings. My eyes were more accustomed to the darkness now, and at the end of the upper hall I dimly saw the outline of a fire escape landing through a window probably fifteen or twenty feet away.

It was slightly lighter in the upper hall and the first thing I did was move to that window. I wanted an out on this party, if it was necessary, but I hoped I wouldn't need it.

**R**IGHT at the moment it didn't strike me as strange that such a low building should have a fire escape, or that the window at the end of the hall should be open. I found out about that later.

Suddenly the low drone of several voices came through the silence of that old house. I waited a minute and then moved back along the hall, past the head of the stairs, until I stood before a closed door that I could barely see in the denser darkness of the front part of the hall.

There wasn't a streak of light visible any place, and from the sound of the voices there was no way for me to tell whether Dimples McCann was in that room. I had never heard him talk, and I wondered whether the ten minutes or so that I had taken in creeping around had been long enough for Dimples to finish a conference and leave by that open window and the fire escape.

I wasted another five minutes debating that question before I decided to crash that door and

call for a showdown with the men in the room. If my luck held, I'd find Dimples McCann there. If I was making a mistake—

I shrugged, drew in a deep breath, and braced myself for the jolt of hitting that door. But I never made the leap.

As I poised myself, a rush of feet suddenly sounded on the stairs. A low, sharp command that carried above the noise of many feet told me that Captain Lon Colby was leading a party of dicks and cops!

For probably a second I was paralyzed by the realization that if Colby found me in that house I'd have no chance to escape like I'd had in my own apartment. That dick could be fooled that way only once. After that Colby took no chances.

Then I thought of that open window and the fire escape. Before the cops had come far enough up the stairs to see along that upper hall I was at the window and out on the fire escape. In a flash the secret of the iron framework on that low house was plain to me.

There were no steps leading down to the ground! There were only two ways to leave that iron platform: I could go back through the window, or I could go up the short ladder to the roof!

I took the roof. I couldn't go back into that hall. If I'd done that, I would have been trapped between Dimples McCann's men and the bulls and dicks on the stairs. So I climbed for the roof, hoping that no cop in the alley behind the house would spot me against the moonless sky.

A moment later as I stepped on to the roof I knew I hadn't acted any too soon. Guns roared in that hall beneath me and the hoarse shouts of fighting men stabbed through the night as I ran, bending low, toward the building that towered another story above me on the right.

Breathing a prayer that Captain Colby wouldn't stop one of those hot slugs, I searched frantically for the iron ladder that I felt should be on the side of the brick wall that adjoined the roof. But there was no ladder. I was on the roof, and couldn't get down!

The building to the left was out of the question. It went up four more stories. But I knew there was a way down from there—if I could only find it before the cops started combing that roof. That fire escape landing and the iron ladder that I

had come up weren't put on that frame building merely as decorations.

**W**ITHOUT warning I heard the tap of feet on the iron rungs of the ladder behind me. I whirled and sank down in the shadow of a short chimney as the form of a man loomed against the sky and then came across the roof toward me on the run.

As the man passed about three feet from me, my heart leaped. It was Dimples McCann!

He hadn't seen me, hadn't even looked aside as he ran to the wall of the low building adjoining the roof. I started to get up with the wild idea of fighting him with my bare hands. Then I saw something that caused me to sink back into the shelter of the chimney.



From an unlighted window about eight feet above Dimples an arm extended and let something drop. That something fell and then came to a stop with little cracking noises as the strands of a short rope ladder slapped the side of the building.

Before I could move again Dimples McCann had sprung up that tiny ladder. A moment later he stepped through the window, paused and fired one shot as a head with a cap showed above the edge of the roof on the iron ladder behind me, and then was gone.

My heart fell when I saw that rope ladder jerked up again by the unseen man in the window. I had found Dimples McCann, had almost trapped him, and had watched him slip through my

fingers.

Now I was helpless, and Dimples McCann had escaped!

## CHAPTER VII MY HANDS SLIP

**S**ILENTLY I cursed Captain Lon Colby and Happy Daniels as I crouched behind that chimney. The dick and the kid probably thought they were doing me a favor when they raided that place. I knew Happy had tipped Colby about Dimples' hangout, and I guessed that Happy had also told the captain what he knew about McCann.

But all my cursing didn't help me, and more troubles were in sight as a cop came up that iron ladder and on to the roof. Dimples McCann's single shot had missed the cop, and he was just in time to see that rope ladder disappear.

Perhaps that was why the bull didn't think of searching the rest of the roof. And I was thankful for that. I didn't want to be caught there and have to face Colby's wrath.

So I listened to the cop as he growled to himself and a few minutes later went down the iron ladder again. Not until then did I take time to admire Dimples McCann's cleverness.

That escape had been one of the smoothest I'd ever seen. I couldn't deny that. Dimples McCann and his men had brains and were using them for something else than just keeping their ears apart.

But that was as far as my admiration extended. My difficulty now was to get down off that roof. I had no rope ladder waiting for me. I'd have to take my chances with the cops.

After an hour on that roof I figured things had quieted down in the hall below me. But I didn't make any noise as I crossed the roof and started down the ladder to the platform outside the window.

My guess was good. Colby had left only one man behind to guard the house. From that I figured that Dimples had been the only man to escape out of the three or four who had been in that room.

From my position outside the window I heard that single cop moving around on the second floor. Finally I picked out his big form in the

gloom and waited until he disappeared down the hall and went into the room at the right.

Then I quickly stepped through the window and cat-footed down the stairs to the street. But I didn't breathe freely until I had a half dozen blocks behind me.

My spirits were low when I finally got back to the Brantley Hotel. I had been forced to lose almost an hour and a half on that roof and the watch on my wrist showed five minutes to four as I entered the lobby.



I knew I was taking a long chance as I went up to the desk, but I had to be certain. Dimples McCann would get out of town as soon as possible, but there was just the merest chance that he had been delayed and was still registered at the hotel.

My hopes were revived suddenly when the clerk told me that McCann was still registered, but was not in his rooms at present. Perhaps that was just the line the clerk handed out when a woman inquired for a man at that hour of the morning, but I didn't think so. The clerk didn't look bright enough for that.

At any rate, I decided to chance cornering Dimples in the lobby, if he entered. I'd lost plenty of sleep already and an hour or so more wouldn't matter. So I took up a position behind a bank of artificial palms where I could see most of the lobby and the two street entrances.

**F**IFTEEN minutes passed and I suddenly realized I'd been dozing. I couldn't have had my eyes closed more than a couple of minutes, but I had the uneasy feeling that something had happened during that brief time.

From all outward appearances not a soul had passed through the lobby, but still—

I got up, went to the desk, and again inquired

for Dimples McCann. Again I got the answer that he hadn't come in yet. But that didn't ease the feeling of imminent danger which persisted in my mind as I went back behind the palms.

This time I didn't give myself a chance to fall asleep. I stood up. I was tired, but not weary enough to fall asleep on my feet. Then to be doubly certain that I would stay awake I started strolling around.

Most of the lights were out along the rear of the lobby and I couldn't be seen very plainly as I stayed close to the wall. Suddenly I stopped. My heart skipped a beat and then pounded furiously.

To my right were a pair of velvet draperies that cut off a little writing alcove from the main lobby. And the alcove was lighted!

Quickly I took a step nearer and peered through the opening in the draperies that were not quite pulled together. One look and I stiffened with excitement.

At the little writing desk, with his back toward the draperies sat Dimples McCann!

Slowly, silently I parted the draperies and stepped into the alcove. Dimples had probably crossed the lobby during the minute or two that I had dozed behind the palms.

He didn't look up as I stopped, scarcely six feet behind him. He was bent over the writing desk, the low light on the wall being shaded so that the rays were concentrated on the desk, throwing my shadow behind me and away from him.

For a moment I paused to collect my wits. Once he looked up at the light. I gathered myself for a sudden leap, but he again bent over the desk and only the scratching of a pen on paper broke the silence.

Perhaps I was foolish, but I was suddenly possessed with an insatiable desire to know what Dimples was writing. Perhaps it was merely womanly intuition. Perhaps it was nothing but plain luck.

Call it what you will, the fact is I wanted to see what was keeping Dimples McCann from his sleep at four-thirty in the morning. And step by step I advanced across that intervening space of rug until I stood two feet behind his chair, looking over his shoulder.

I hadn't been any too soon. Dimples was just signing his name as I looked down. Then as I

glanced at the body of the letter that covered only one side of a single sheet of paper he reached for an envelope. I only saw one sentence of the letter, but that was enough.

I needed that letter, and was going to get it!

With a quick movement of my right arm I started to reach over his shoulder, my fingers outstretched for that precious letter. I moved fast, but Dimples McCann was faster.

As my arm shot past his face and my fingers closed over the bottom of the single sheet of paper, his left hand came down tight across the top of the sheet while his right streaked up under the left shoulder of his coat.

There was nothing else to do but to try to jerk that sheet free. I did just that, but the paper ripped off near the top of the sheet as I withdrew my hand and started to run.

I expected a shot in the back as I dived through those draperies and ran across the lobby. I might have gotten it if Dimples McCann hadn't done some fast thinking.

He might kill me, might recover that letter; but if I died, his whole plan of pinning those four killings on me would collapse. He needed a fall guy bad—but a live one most of all.

So he let me live, although I was sure that he'd recognized me when he jerked around as my hand closed over the letter. And as I dodged around the corner toward the elevators I saw him come out of that alcove on the run.

I beat him to the elevators with probably ten seconds to spare, and in those ten seconds the elevator boy closed the doors and I was lifted upward with a swift rush of speed. At the fourteenth floor I left the elevator and raced down the corridor to my room.

**W**HEN I had locked the door I paused long enough to read the letter through once. And I got a shock of surprise. The strip that had torn off the top of the sheet had contained nothing but the salutation! The body of the letter was in my possession!

Quickly I folded the letter and shoved it down the neck of my dress. Then I looked for some way to get out of the jam I had got myself into by stealing that sheet of paper. It wouldn't take Dimples a minute to get my room number at the desk. I had an outside room, facing an

apartment building across the street.

I had to think fast, but I wasn't fast enough.

Just as I moved toward the door with the idea of going down the stairs as Dimples came up in the elevator, a knock sounded. For a moment I was speechless as I looked frantically around the room for something that would serve as a weapon.

The knock came again, louder. Then I saw the telephone.

"Who is it?" I called, stalling for time as I stepped behind the door and reached for the telephone on the little stand beside the bed.

"Telegram—Western Union," said a harsh voice, and I almost laughed. Dimples McCann must have thought I was dumber than I looked.

The next minute I felt better. I had the telephone in my hand and was ready to receive that "telegram" which I knew would come in the form of a gun.

The telephone instrument was the usual upright type found in hotels. Carefully keeping one finger of my left hand over the hook so the girl at the switchboard downstairs would get no warning flash and listen in, I slipped off the receiver and grasped it like a club in my right hand.

All that had taken only a few seconds. Then I stepped forward, twisted the key in the lock and stepped back behind the door again.

Almost immediately the door opened, and Dimples McCann burst into the room. I swung once. The heavy receiver crashed against his right wrist. His fingers opened in a spasm of pain and the gun dropped from his hand to the floor.

Before he knew what had happened, I slammed the receiver back on the hook, snatched up the gun, and covered him.

"Take it easy, Dimples," I warned in a low voice as I replaced the telephone on the little stand with my left hand and pushed the door closed with a foot.

For a moment I thought he was going to rush me and I was glad that he had been thoughtful enough to equip the gun with a silencer. But he changed his mind and slowly raised his hands.

"I should call the cops, Dimples," I went on as I backed around him and placed myself in front of the open window so that the gun in my hand couldn't be seen from the apartment house across the street.



“But that would be too soft, I’m going to kill you, and then show this letter to the cops. Get it?”



**H**E GOT it. I thought he was mad after I hit him with the receiver of the telephone. But now his face became purple with rage and his dull eyes snapped fire. He didn’t say a word, but I saw he was waiting for a break which I didn’t intend to give him.

“You think you’re pretty smart,” I went on, slowly, tauntingly, “but you don’t know Velma Dare. I almost got pinched for your fast work tonight, but I swore I’d get you after you shot Clam Seibert. You shouldn’t have smiled at me in the Cavalier. Those dimples are a dead giveaway.”

I paused and waited for him to speak. He didn’t, so I went on.

“Better say your prayers, if you know any good ones, because those dimples are going to look damned nice—in a coffin!”

That stung him into action. I’d seen it coming, but he was quicker than I thought. His slim body seemed to streak across the room at me. I pulled the trigger once. The gun pop-coughed; but the bullet went wide, tearing a hunk of plaster from the wall.

At the same moment I sidestepped to the right and his groping arms missed me by a scant inch. I brought up the gun again for another quick shot, and then lowered it.

That leap had been over-zealous. When I

sidestepped, Dimples had crashed into the narrow sill, and before I realized it he had plunged half through the open window. He would have gone on through, but by some queer streak of luck the toes of his shoes caught on the edge of the window sill, holding him momentarily.

As my fingers closed around his ankle the toe of his left shoe slopped off the edge of the wooden sill, and for one brief moment only my braced body saved Dimples McCann from plunging to the street below.

He let out a howl of fear as he struggled frantically to brace his hands against the bricks below the narrow window sill and work himself back into the room as I tugged at his leg.

“Shut up or I’ll drop you,” I snapped, not wanting his howling to attract a crowd. “Maybe I can hold you, if you take it easy.”

He got the idea and shut up tight. Only his heavy breathing came to me as I struggled to pull him back over the sill. He wasn’t so very heavy, but I’m not built for strong-arm stuff of any kind, and after a couple of minutes my arms and fingers were aching under the strain.

Put it any way you want it, the fact remains that my tired fingers slipped for a fraction of a second, and Dimples McCann fell headlong into the night. Once a strangled cry floated up to me. Then the sharp smack of flesh against stone. Then silence.

This way the case was closed. And I had that letter signed by Dimples McCann.

#### CHAPTER VIII COLBY RELENTS

**D**AWN was breaking over the city as I walked into the Central Station and down the corridor to the little office of Detective Captain Lon Colby. I found him barking into a telephone, but as he swung around toward me I saw the night’s work had left him haggard.

He pushed back the telephone as I sank into the chair beside the desk.

“Now what’s the line?” he snapped, his tired eyes lighting with cold interest on me.

“Forget the hard boiled act, Cap,” I said quietly. “Dimples McCann is dead.”

“Yah,” he barked harshly, rubbing the

stubble on his chin with the back of a dirty hand. "Just talking to the morgue. What's that make you now?"

I didn't answer that. I merely took that torn letter out of my purse and passed it across the desk to him.

Colby's face was very serious as he read:

Everything's oke, but the bulls raided the dump and I'm lamming. V. D.'s four marked men were seen personally. Bert fell for my line about giving him a chance to make a quick arrest and I took him at V. D.'s place without a hitch. The kid's hanging out at my hotel now and before I catch the next rattler I'm tipping the bulls. I burned the red hat so there's not a chance for a fluke. See you soon.

Your old pal,

D. Mc.

When he finished reading, Colby looked at me long and earnestly. Finally he said:

"Where did you get this?"

I told him about that little scene in the alcove.

"And who was he sending it to?" Colby asked, indicating the ragged edge across the top of the paper.

"I don't know," I answered. "It ripped when I grabbed it. But with the alibi that Happy Daniels can tell you about—I was with him when Younger and Judge Vanclear were killed, you know—I think I've about cleared myself of those murder charges. Don't you?"

"Almost," he said. "I've talked with Happy and that part is convincing. And I've got the guy who pulled the light switch at the Cavalier. Got him in a little raid that Dimples slipped out of."

"I'm glad that Cavalier's job's cleared up," I said. I wasn't telling Colby that I knew all about that raid.

He nodded slowly. Then he asked:

"And Dimples McCann fell out of a window from Virginia Darling's room at the Brantley?"

"That's right, but—" I began.

"Well, forget about her," he said less sharply, "I don't know any Virginia Darling, and if I don't *know* her, I guess we'll just have to forget about that accident in her room."

Perhaps I shouldn't have done it, but I don't think that hard boiled flattie called Lon Colby minded it a bit when I kissed him full on the mouth. It meant a lot to me to know that he was still my friend, and was actually convinced that I was innocent of mob murder.