



Lorraine reached into the cigar box and drew out an automatic

Murder on the Menu

By MICHAEL O'BRIEN

When death is dished up at the Golden Harvest, a drummer and a cigarette girl make solid with the sleuth stuff!

I'M beating the skins in the band at the Golden Harvest when we get a nice murder dished up with the floor show. Jerry Kent has a good band—a small, but solid outfit and we are doing all right.

Bob Martin is my name, and I never did believe in hiding my light under a bushel, unless it was a bushel of good press notices.

“If you didn't like yourself so much maybe I'd marry you,” Lorraine Doyle told

me more than once. “But I'd hate to realize I had a rival for your affections every time I saw you looking in the mirror.”

Straight from the shoulder, and not pulling any punches. But when Lorraine spoke her mind I usually took it and liked it. She is the cigarette girl at the club. Blond and luscious—and when she goes out among the tables selling cigars and cigarettes in one of those cute costumes of

hers she's a dish, but definitely.

As I said before, I'm the drummer in the band, and we guys who sit up there on the platform night after night doing a hot number with plenty of jive and then another that's sweet and slow, see a lot. In a place like the Golden Harvest you get to know the regular patrons; by sight at least.

Sometimes I burn a little when I see some local yokel try and make a pass at Loraine, even though I know I don't need to worry. She can freeze a guy with a look.

But never mind my raving about the wren. Let's get to the murder—though I can do without homicide any time. It's a Saturday night and the club is packing them in. It's after midnight and the crowd from the theaters is drifting in strong.

"Looks like it's going to be one of those nights, boys," says Jerry Kent while we're resting between numbers. "I've got a feeling something will happen soon."

Jerry is no long-hair waving a baton at us. He plays piano with the band most every night, though we have a substitute ivory tickler when the boss feels like taking a little time out. Kent got started the hard way, and he can play every instrument in the band. He still gets a kick out of working up the arrangements on the new numbers.

It is almost time for the floor show. It is due to go on after we finish the next number. Jerry Kent tells us what we are going to play and pounds off with his foot on the floor. We get playing and couples drift out onto the floor.

I'm beating out the rhythm, with Copper on the bass and Jerry at the piano keeping right with me. We're doing a nice job with "Speak Low" but I've got a feeling there is something wrong in the club.

IT'S strange about playing in a place like that. You can tell when it is an off night,

or when the patrons in the place just aren't enjoying themselves. And when they are. But the way I am feeling now is different. Just a little creepy—like an elephant is dancing on my grave.

"Help! Murder!"

Some dame lets out the howl and then she screams good and loud. We don't stop playing because we knew that might cause a real panic in the place. I see Lang Marshall, the owner of the Golden Harvest, heading over to a table in one corner of the room.

There is a tall brunette in one of those strapless evening gowns that look like they are held on by sheer will-power, standing beside the table and she is doing the screaming. The gray-haired guy who has been sitting at the table with her is slumped back in his chair—and I get the idea he is good and dead.

Marshall is a cool number and he gets the brunette quieted down and the gray-haired guy carried away in a few seconds. Well, maybe it was longer than that, but it didn't seem so. The crowd gets over their excitement quickly and most of those on the floor keep right on dancing.

"Repeat on the chorus and out," says Jerry Kent.

We play the chorus over and then finish the number. I see Loraine wandering over near the band platform. I can hear her saying: "Cigarettes, cigars, cigarettes."

Larry Kent quietly leaves the bandstand and the rest of us follow him. We have a fifteen-minute wait before the floor show.

"Wonder what happened to that old guy," says Jerry as I catch up with him. "Maybe he dropped dead."

"You find out," I tell him, as I get the high-sign from Loraine that she wants to see me. "I'm going to talk to Loraine."

I leave Jerry and follow Loraine out into the private corridor that leads to Lang

Marshall's office and we are alone there.

"Bob!" says Loraine. "That man was murdered! Someone stuck a knife in his back. I—I saw it."

"You saw who did it, Loraine?" I ask. "That what you mean?"

"No." Loraine shakes her pretty head. "I just saw the knife in his back—and Mr. Hamilton was such a nice man. It's no wonder his niece screamed when she saw what had happened."

"Who was this Hamilton guy?" I ask. "Seems to me I've seen him around the club a lot, and always with that same dame."

"I don't know much about him," says Loraine. "I only knew him by name. But I think he must have been quite rich. He often gave me five-dollar tips. He usually came to the club one or two nights a week and always brought Norma Hamilton with him. She seemed very fond of her uncle."

A dark-haired guy steps into the corridor. He has a hard face, and I don't remember ever having seen him before. Loraine and I stop talking and just stand there looking at the stranger.

"I'm Corrigan, Police Headquarters," he says. "What do you two know about the murder?"

It wasn't what he says, but the way he says it that I don't like. There's a nasty note in his voice, and he keeps looking at us like he suspected we did the killing.

"We don't know anything about it," I say. "I was up on the band platform when it happened and Miss Doyle was selling cigarettes."

"Oh, sure," says this Corrigan. "Nobody ever does know anything when things happen in a joint like this."

He walks on back along the corridor without paying any more attention to us. He draws open the door of Lang Marshall's private office and steps inside, closing the door behind him. Loraine looks

at me and frowns. Lang Marshall doesn't like anyone, even a detective, barging into his office when he isn't there.

"The boss isn't going to be pleased," says Loraine. "But I guess that's his business."

Marshall strolls in from the outer entrance to the corridor. He doesn't look the least bit ruffled. I've never seen him when he did. He's a character. I'd heard he had been running night clubs ever since the days when the speakeasies were going full blast and always doing all right for Lang Marshall. He is good looking in a hard sort of way and might have been any age from thirty to close to fifty.

"Better get back on the floor, Loraine," he says. "And the band is getting ready for the floor show, Bob."

"Okay, Boss," I say. "A guy named Corrigan just went into your private office. Said he was from Headquarters."

MARSHALL scowls and heads for his office in a hurry. He flings open the door and just stands there for a moment, staring in. I can tell he doesn't like what he sees, though his expression doesn't change to any great extent.

He glances back at us and motions for us to join him at the-door. We walk down the corridor and stop where we can look into the office. Corrigan is seated in a chair at Marshall's desk. He doesn't make a pretty corpse.

"Another murder!" gasps Loraine.

"That's right," Marshall says softly. "I wanted you two with me as witnesses. You know this man was alive when he came into my office and I didn't see him until after he was dead. Someone might get the idea that I killed him."

"Not unless you're a magician, you didn't do it," I say. "The police still around, Boss?"

"Of course," says Marshall. "Go and

find them and bring them here, Loraine. Hurry!”

Loraine turns and runs back down the corridor. I glance at my wrist-watch. The floor show is due to start in five minutes and I know I'd better get back with the band.

I look at the dead man. Corrigan hasn't been shot and there's no knife sticking in him that I can see. I wonder how he was killed. "I've got to get back with the band, Boss," I say.

"Go ahead, Bob," says Marshall, as he steps into the office. "But remember we all found the body together."

"Sure."

I beat it back to the stand. All the rest of the boys are in their places. Jerry Kent gives me a look as I hastily seat myself at the drums. He doesn't like guys showing up at the last minute.

"The boss just found another stiff in his office," I say. "Guy named Corrigan—said he was from Police Headquarters."

"The police will take care of the investigation," says Kent. "We've got our own jobs to do here."

The master of ceremonies steps out on the floor with a portable mike in his hands and starts giving the cash customers the old buildup for the floor show. He finishes his spiel and Kent gives us the "One and—" and we go into the opening number.

I am beating it out pretty mechanically. I keep thinking about that guy Corrigan being murdered in Marshall's office the way he was. Far as I knew there had been no one in the office when he went in there and yet when Marshall opens the door a few minutes later he finds Corrigan dead.

If anyone had come out of the office after Corrigan went in, Loraine and I would have seen them. Unless . . . There had been just a few seconds there in the corridor when both Loraine and I were looking at Lang Marshall. Somebody

might have stepped out of the office then, but if they did, then surely the boss must have seen them.

The floor show runs the same length of time as usual, and seemed to be going over big with the crowd in the club. But to me it seems hours before it's over. As soon as it's finished one of the waiters comes over and speaks to Jerry Kent. He listens and nods.

"The boss wants to see you, Bob," Kent says. "Marty will sit in for you on the drums while we play the next number." Marty plays steel guitar but he can handle the drums, too. He's just fair when it comes to beating the skins. Nothing flashy like I am, but good enough to get by.

I leave the stand and the waiter leads me around the room to where Lang. Marshall is sitting alone at a table. I notice that Loraine is wandering around, selling cigarettes.

"If there's trouble, buy a cigar from me, Bob," she says in a low tone as I pass close to her. "Remember!"

"Sure," I say, though I don't get what she means by buying a cigar. I always smoke cigarettes. "I'll do that, honey."

WHEN I reach Marshall's table he motions me to sit down. There is a big mirror behind us that reflects a good bit of the room.

"I want to talk to you, Bob," says Marshall when I am seated at the table. "That guy Corrigan who was found dead in my office wasn't a detective. That stuff he gave you about being from Headquarters was just a bluff."

"Oh, I see." I don't see, but I am hoping Marshall will tell me more of it. "How did he die?"

"He was poisoned," says Marshall. "There's one strange angle to the whole thing. The police are certain now that it was Corrigan who stabbed Thomas

Hamilton in the back out here earlier tonight.”

“What makes them so sure of that?”

“They found Corrigan’s fingerprints on the knife.” Marshall frowns. “Having Hamilton killed the way he was makes it tough for me.”

“Sure,” I say. “Bad publicity for the club, having two guys murdered here.”

“Worse than that,” says Lang Marshall. “Hamilton was my silent partner. He was a broker in Wall Street, but he had invested a lot of cash in the Golden Harvest. He didn’t want anyone to know he was connected with the club though.”

“That does put you on a spot,” I tell him. “Listen, Boss. I’ve been hearing things lately.”

“About what?” Marshall looks at me poker-faced and hard-eyed.

If I had been smart I would have laughed it off—but not me. I think I’m a smart guy, so I have to stick my neck out.

“I heard the club has been using a lot of Black Market liquor,” I say. “Maybe your partner Hamilton didn’t like that.”

Marshall just sits there looking at me for a moment, then he nods.

“You’re right, Bob,” he says. “Hamilton didn’t like it, not at all. He ordered me to close up the club, and was going to report me to the authorities.”

“So you had Corrigan kill him?” I ask.

I don’t like the way Marshall is talking so freely. It don’t look good for me. I get the idea he don’t expect me to be around long enough to do any blabbing.

“If Hamilton was putting up the dough,” I say, “wasn’t that killing the goose that laid the golden eggs?”

“I didn’t need Hamilton’s money,” says Marshall. “I’ve made enough dough out of this place to keep going alone and I will.”

I see Loraine drifting over toward us.

“You and Loraine were alone in the corridor outside my office,” says Lang Marshall. “You two might have found some way to poison Corrigan.”

“Oh, sure,” I say. “Just grabbed him and poured the stuff down his throat, I suppose. And why would we kill a guy we thought was from Police Headquarters?”

“The three of you were working together,” says Marshall, and he sounds like he believed it. “You’d been blackmailing Hamilton and when he decided to turn you over to the police Corrigan killed him.”

Loraine comes closer and I motion her over to our table. “I’ll have a cigar, Loraine,” I say, giving her the tip-off something is wrong. “Let’s have one.”

“Never mind that,” Marshall says sharply. “Beat it, Loraine. I’ve got something important to talk over with Bob.”

Loraine shrugs her pretty shoulders and walks away, stepping back behind Marshall and between our table and the mirror on the wall.

“And you think you’re going to get away with that bunch of lies you made up about us?” I ask Marshall. “Why, you—”

I call him a lot of things that are not pretty and he goes into a wild rage.

He leaps to his feet, draws an automatic and aims it at me. I don’t have any gun so I just sit there gripping the arms of my chair.

Loraine reaches into the cigar box and draws out an automatic. When I see the gun I know why she had wanted me to take a cigar. Marshall doesn’t even notice her as she edges around behind him.

“Drop that gun, Mr. Marshall,” she says, sticking the muzzle of the automatic in her hand against his back. “Drop it or I’ll shoot!”

Marshall hesitates, and that is his mistake. Some of the detectives working

on the case reach him in nothing flat just as I leap up to take a sock at him. One of them grabs the gun out of his hands. By the time they get through with him he talks and admits everything.

CORRIGAN was just a cheap killer who hadn't even shown enough brains to keep his fingerprints off the knife he used to kill Hamilton. Marshall had left five thousand in cash in a drawer of his desk to pay off Corrigan for the killing. That's why Corrigan had gone into the office alone, after giving us the stall about his being from Police Headquarters.

Marshall had a poison needle all rigged up so that Corrigan got it stuck in

his finger when he opened the little box in which he had been told he would find the money.

Lorraine had a hunch the boss had a hand in the dirty work, so she had the gun ready in the cigar box.

Another crowd buys the club. The Golden Harvest is still doing a good business with good liquor—as much as it is possible to get—and Jerry Kent and the band are still there.

We have a new cigarette girl though. I finally realize I am not the bright boy I thought I was, and admit it to Lorraine. I don't want my wife to work while I'm making good dough beating the skins, so she is home waiting for me now.