

# NOT ACCORDING TO DOYLE

By CARTER CRITZ

*When a bodyguard's wished on him and a blonde lovely asks him to tackle a mystery, this snooper has his hands full!*

Norma was kneeling beside me, some keys in her hand



**D**OYLE is the name, Joe Doyle. I'm a private detective so I spend my time minding other people's business. Not that I'm too nosy—I only get curious when I'm hired to do some snooping. Remember the case of the Singing Parrot, and the one about the Headless Taxi Driver? Well, I didn't solve either of those. I only read about them in the newspapers—but I get along all right.

I'm just an average looking young

man, who has been around here and there and a couple of other places I'd rather forget about. There was a time when I thought I was an actor and worked in summer stock, and I've been around Carnies enough to know a midway from a runway, and I still agree with the song that there is no business like show-business.

I live in a hotel on a side street in the Forties and, as hotels go, a tramp steamer couldn't take this one far enough away to

suit me. But be it ever my grumble, it's still my home.

It was just at dusk one day when I wandered into the hotel and up to desk to get the key to my room. I'd had a hard day playing poker with three bright businessmen who had offices on the same floor as mine, and Joe Doyle and his wallet were weary.

"Good evening, Mr. Doyle," said the desk clerk, reaching into the pigeonhole for my key. "Your cousin has been waiting for you."

"That's nice," I said, taking the key. "Not Aunt Martha's boy, Hiram?"

It had always been my personal opinion that Small, the clerk was studying to be a mouse, and was afraid he couldn't pass the examination. He was little and gray-haired and I'd bet he stamped his foot when he went into a towering rage. But right now he was all dignity.

"I wouldn't know about that," he said. "But the gentleman said he was Austin Hempstead."

I had heard of the old homestead, but a gentleman named Austin Hempstead who claimed he was my cousin was a page out of another script. Besides, so far as I knew I only had one cousin on my father's side and none on my mother's side, since she'd been an only child. Quaintly enough Father's brother's son was named Doyle—Bill Doyle.

"And where is dear Cousin Austin?" I asked.

"There." Small nodded toward a chair in the lobby. "He said it had been so long since you had met that you probably wouldn't even recognize each other. So I was to point him out to you when you came in."

"How true," I said. "Just after the Civil War it was, how well I remember! We were crossing the plains when my covered wagon ran into his tractor."

I TOOK a good look at the man in the chair, and I no longer felt so merry and bright. Austin Hempstead was tall and thin, bald-headed and he looked like a corpse someone had left carelessly sitting around.

"Evidently Cousin Austin comes from the more repulsive branch of my family," I said. "But I would converse with yon cadaver."

I walked over to the man in the chair, and then stopped. He just sat motionless staring at me. Karloff couldn't have played a better zombie.

"I'm Joe Doyle," I said.

He nodded in slow motion. "I was afraid of that," he said in a voice that seemed to come out of the bottom of a well. "I need a man of strength, of resource and courage, and what do I find but a gangling youth."

"I outgrew both the gangling and the youth, years ago," I said sharply, for there was everything I didn't like about Austin Hempstead. "What's the idea of the cousin routine?"

"'Twas but a jest fit only for yon varlet's ears," said Hempstead nodding toward the desk clerk. "But to get down to business, Mr. Doyle, I expect you to hire me."

"For what?" I asked.

"To protect you from being killed," said Hempstead in a matter-of-fact tone. "Shall we say for one hundred dollars a week?"

I sat down in a chair near him. I'd often heard of someone hiring a private detective to protect them from being murdered, but when it was suggested that the detective hire someone to keep from being killed that was a horse from another merry-go-round.

"And who is going to kill me?" I asked.

"If I told you that then you wouldn't

need me to protect you.” Hempstead’s coat slid back as he moved around in his chair. The gun he wore in a shoulder holster looked very sinister. “Perhaps we had better make it two hundred a week—the high cost of your living, you know.”

“Blackmail?” I asked.

“Perish the thought.” He looked horrified. “Merely business.”

“Suppose I turned you over to the police?” I demanded.

“On what charge? Offering to protect your life?”

He had something there, and to the police his word was as good as mine. I sat there staring at the slender blonde who had just entered the lobby. She walked like a dancer, and she was lovely. She went to the desk and spoke to Small. Hempstead caught the direction of my gaze.

“Her name is Norma Tilson, and she’s looking for you, Mr. Doyle,” he said. “Too bad. Such a pretty girl, and I’m afraid she may cause your death.” He rose from his chair and started to walk away. “Sorry, you don’t feel your life is worth two hundred a week to you now. Tomorrow the price goes up.”

“All right, Hempstead,” I said. “You’re hired for a week anyway. Starting tomorrow morning. Be at my office at nine.”

“Splendid!” The cadaver actually smiled. “I’ll be there.”

I watched him shamble out of the lobby. I had a feeling it might be worth two hundred dollars to have him around where I could watch him. I was quite curious about dear Cousin Austin.

The girl was talking to the desk clerk. Small caught my eye and motioned to me to come over. The girl looked in my direction and smiled, which didn’t slacken my speed any in getting to the desk.

“This is Miss Norma Tilson,” Small said. “Miss Tilson—Mr. Doyle.”

“I need a private detective, Mr. Doyle,” Norma Tilson said. “Perhaps you may be interested?”

“That’s quite likely,” I said. “Let’s talk it over, Miss Tilson.”

We went over to a corner of the lobby and sat down, much to the disappointment of Small, who had been all ears.

“Here’s the situation,” said Norma. “I live out in Pelham Manor. My brother and I have a house there. We are orphans. Robert has a job in a bank here in town. He seemed worried about something at the bank when I saw him, two nights ago.”

“He’s missing then?” I asked when she paused.

“Apparently,” she said. “He didn’t come home last night and he hasn’t been at the bank today or yesterday. I don’t want to report his disappearance to the police yet. It might be that he is in some sort of trouble, and has to hide.”

“I see. And you want me to try and find your brother, is that it?”

“Yes.” She looked at me anxiously. “I have the strangest feeling that Robert is in some sort of terrible danger. Will you try and find him, Mr. Doyle? I’ll pay you whatever your fee may be.”

**T**HIS was agreeable to me. I needed to make some money.

“I’ll try,” I said. “The charge will be twenty-five dollars a day and expenses. By the way do you happen to know a man named Austin Hempstead?”

“Of course,” she said. “Though I don’t know him very well. He lives in the same block we do out in Pelham. Has a nice place and I’ve heard he is quite rich.”

“Did you happen to notice the man I was talking to when you came in the lobby tonight?” I asked.

“No, I’m sorry, I didn’t.” She frowned. “Why?”

“That was Austin Hempstead.”

“Oh!” Norma said. “What was he doing here?”

“He had a little business with me,” I said dryly. “Now about your brother. When he went into town the last time did he take a bag with him, or any clothes, as though he planned to take a trip somewhere?”

“I don’t think so,” she said slowly. “To be truthful I don’t really know.” She looked at me appealingly, and she had the face for it. “My car is outside. Could you drive out to Pelham with me now, Mr. Doyle?”

“Sure,” I said. “I’m anxious to see your place and learn a little more about where Mr. Hempstead lives. That man interests me.”

We went out through the lobby to the street. Her car, a smart looking sedan, was parked in front of the hotel. I thought she might find a parking ticket tied on it, but I guess she was lucky. She unlocked the door on the right hand side and climbed in and seated herself at the wheel. As I took the seat beside her I noticed there was a car robe tossed carelessly on the floor, and it might or might not be covering something. But I never did believe in looking a free ride in the upholstery, so I asked no questions.

Norma drove west across town until we came to the Westside Highway and headed uptown. It was nice along the river and the George Washington Bridge seemed to be hanging in mid-air up at 180th Street. I should have felt swell. Riding along with a pretty girl on a nice night and all that, but I was worried.

“A car has been following us ever since we left the hotel,” I said finally. “A gray coupe.”

“I know,” Norma said. “I noticed it. Do you think that means trouble, Mr. Doyle?”

“Let’s not be formal,” I said. “Make it Joe.”

“All right, Joe. My name is Norma, you know.”

We found that the coupe was still following when we got up around Dykeman Street. Norma decided to try and lose the car behind us so she drove through Inwood Park. That was a mistake. The gray coupe speeded up beside us and then the driver forced us over to the curb. Norma had to stop or get the sedan smashed up.

The coupe rolled on ahead, stopped and two men got out. They wore ordinary clothes but they were both husky and hard looking.

“What’s the idea?” I demanded. “Is this a holdup?”

“Don’t give us that,” growled one of the men. “We’re police.” Opening his coat, he flashed something bright, which might have been a badge or a brass suspender buckle. “What have you got in that car you don’t want us to see?”

“Nothing at all, officer,” I said, suddenly feeling happy about the whole thing. “I’m a private detective myself.”

“Goody, goody!” said the second man, and I didn’t like his tone. “Not a real private detective. Isn’t that wonderful, Blake?”

“Yeah.” Blake was not amused. He glared at us. “Get out of the car, you two.”

Norma stepped out on the left side of the car and I got out in the right. Blake drew a small but powerful flashlight out of his pocket. I watched as he climbed into the sedan and pulled back the robe. The face of the dead man lying on the floor was ghastly looking in the light from the flash. He had been shot through the head.

I heard Norma gasp and I thought she was going to scream, but she didn’t. I didn’t feel so good myself. So far as I was

concerned the corpse was a stranger, but hardly perfect.

I MIGHT say that thoughts flashed through my brain, but they didn't, they rumbled through like a slow freight. Had the girl known the body was in her car when she came to the hotel to see me? Had Norma killed the man and left him in the sedan? Had someone placed the body in the car while she had been in the hotel talking to me? Yeah, who was going to win the World Series next year!

"Nothing at all in the car, he says!" said Blake looking at me as he climbed out. "Nothing, but a dead man with a bullet in his head!"

Norma came around the car and was standing close to me.

"He—he must have been in the car ever since I took it out of the garage and drove into town," she said. "I didn't know the—the body was there, Joe. I didn't!" Her voice rose and she sounded a bit hysterical.

"Of course you didn't, Norma," I said soothingly.

"Put the cuffs on them, Lansing," Blake said. "We'll take them in."

Lansing produced a pair of handcuffs. He snapped one cuff on Norma's right wrist and one on my left. Blake frisked me and took my gun out of the shoulder holster. They didn't search Norma.

"So you and the girl killed John Stanton to keep him from talking about the bank job," Blake said. "What with Robert Tilson and fifty grand of the bank dough missing, Stanton might have been able to put the finger on your brother—but good, Miss Tilson."

"Sure," said Lansing. "With Stanton working right along beside Tilson at the bank, he had a good chance to know who got away with the dough."

It struck me that Blake and Lansing

were smart detectives to know so much about everything. A couple of real bright boys, all right. Maybe just a little too bright.

"And just where does Austin Hempstead fit in the picture?" I asked.

"Who?" demanded Blake.

"You're slipping," I said. "Austin Hempstead got the fifty grand that was lifted from the bank."

"So that's what—" began Lansing, and then stifled a yelp as Blake stepped on his toe.

"Don't talk so much, Lansing," Blake said. "Come on, let's get going."

He forced us to get into Norma's sedan and sit on the back seat. With the corpse lying on the floor at our feet we didn't like it much. Lansing crowded in, too. He sat on one side of Norma and I was on the other. Blake took the wheel of the car.

We started off. It didn't surprise me much to find that instead of going back downtown Blake drove out toward Westchester. We still appeared to be headed for Pelham.

"I just remembered," Norma said to me in a low tone. "I heard a noise in our cellar last night. I was alone in the house and thought it might be rats so I was afraid to look down there."

"Probably was rats," I said. "Don't worry about it."

Blake was a wild driver and he loved speed. We must have been going nearly seventy when a tire blew out. The sedan sailed off the road, hit a rock and turned over. My head hit something and that was all I knew about it until I regained consciousness about twenty minutes later.

When I finally revived I found I was lying beside the car. Norma was kneeling beside me, some keys in her hand. She was unlocking the handcuffs that still held her wrist and mine.

"What happened to Blake and

Lansing?" I asked weakly after she had unlocked the handcuffs and freed us. "Where did you get those keys, Norma?"

"Lifted them out of Lansing's pocket just before the crash," she said. "Are you hurt badly, Joe?"

"Don't know yet." I managed to get to my feet. I was bruised and cut but didn't seem to have any serious injuries. "How about you?"

"I'm all right," Norma said. "Though I was knocked unconscious for a time. Blake and Lansing are gone. I guess they thought we were both dead and didn't want to be found at the scene of the accident."

"Probably not," I said. "Besides they had some other business to take care of right away. A little matter of money—fifty grand in fact."

SINCE I didn't see any point in our staying there with the body of Stanton, which was still in the wrecked car, we went away from there. Finally we managed to get a taxi that took us out to Norma's house in Pelham Manor.

When we got to the house, I insisted upon going down in the cellar. In an old wine closet we found her brother bound and gagged. He breathed a sigh of relief when we released him.

"I thought no one would ever find me," Robert Tilson said. He looked at me. "Who is this man, Sis?"

"Joe Doyle, a private detective I hired to help me find you, Robert," Norma said. "He's nice and has brains."

Bob grinned when he shook hands with me. I liked him.

"Careful, Joe," he said. "Sis has stars in her eyes—that might be fatal."

"I'll be brave about it," I said. "So Stanton was stealing money from the bank. He got away with fifty thousand, fixed the books so it looked like you had

been doing the stealing and then had you kidnaped the night before last. Right?"

"Right," said Bob. "The men who kidnaped me brought me here last night. Thought it was the last place anyone would look for me and they were correct."

"Who were they?" Norma asked.

"A couple of boys named Blake and Lansing," I said. "Our pals, the fake detectives. But they were too greedy. They wanted the fifty thousand for themselves so they killed Stanton and left the body in your car, Norma. After Stanton was dead, they found they had failed to learn where he had hidden the money."

"I know where the money is now," said Bob. "Stanton was with Blake and Lansing when they brought me here. He hid the money in the coal pile in our cellar. Blake and Lansing didn't see him do it."

"Come on," I said. "We better get to Austin Hempstead's house right away. Let's go."

We went out and hurried down the street to Hempstead's house. Just as we reached it I heard two shots and then three more that sounded like they came from another gun.

We rushed inside. Hempstead was standing in the living room. His gun was in his right hand, his left arm was bleeding at the place where a bullet had creased it. He was staring down at the still forms of Blake and Lansing sprawled on the floor.

"Mr. Doyle," he said, looking at me. "Perhaps you can tell me the meaning of this. I was here alone when these two men rushed in. They accused me of having fifty thousand dollars that had been stolen from some bank. When I told them I knew nothing about any such money, they started to get tough, so I had to shoot them."

"I know, Hempstead," I said. "I suggested to them that you might have the bank money, hoping they would come

here looking for it.” I grinned at him. “You see, at your request I hired you to protect my life and in shooting these two men, you were doing just that!”

“I was merely bluffing,” protested Hempstead. “I didn’t think you would really fall for that gag about hiring me to protect you from being killed. I was in town, visiting some friends at your hotel a day or so ago. They told me about you staying there. I wondered what a detective would do if someone offered to save him from being murdered.

“But you carry a gun and can use it,” I said. “How come?”

“I have a permit,” said Hempstead. “Got it when my house was robbed some time back.” He glanced at the two dead men. “But think of a retired actor killing a couple of murderers. They were that, of course?”

“They were.” I said. “And we’ll all swear you did it in self-defense, Cousin Austin.”

“Thank you, Cousin Doyle.” He frowned. “But think of the publicity, my name is in the papers!” His face lighted up. “Yes, think of it—it will be simply wonderful!”

I grinned and looked at Bob, and then turned to Norma. There must have been something in my expression that made her lower her eyes. I moved closer to her.

“I’m going to kiss you, Norma,” I said. “That’s the way this case should end—according to Doyle!”

She lifted her head as I took her in my arms.

“Clinch—curtain!” said Austin Hempstead.