

The Case of the Hollywood Homicide

by James Perley Hughes



Doris Spaulding, the golden-haired songbird of the films, was loved by the world. Yet the weird voice of an unknown terrorist whispered he would kill her. Then Ted Bosworth, movie sleuth, set out on a murderer's manhunt. But the killer struck with concealed weapons, and Ted's name was on the suicide schedule.

MORRIS HART, president and principle stockholder of Cosmos Studios, Inc., paced back and forth over the five thousand dollar Persian rug that covered the floor of his office, dropping cigar ashes as he paced. His round face was flushed, and his black eyes snapped as his words cracked out.

"I tell you that *Venetian Nights* super-super has gone screwy! It'll blow up like a balloon, with us having a million dollars

invested in a can of film that ain't worth a nickel."

"What's the matter?" Ted Bosworth inquired.

Ostensibly a member of the publicity department, the young man was the chief of the studios' intelligence staff. Since the kidnaping of Edythe Shirley, the child star, and her rescue by Bosworth, Ted had loomed large in studio affairs and the calls for his services were varied. Morris Hart had

summoned him that morning, calling breathlessly over the telephone as if a murder had been committed in his office. Bosworth had responded on the run and now was listening to his lord and master.

"I asked, what's the matter?" he said, when Hart lighted a fresh cigar and dropped the flaming match upon the rich rug.

"You tell me—that's your job. You're supposed to find out—and stop it. All I know it that Mr. Feldman in charge of production tells me the company is shot to hell and gone. They're scared of something—they don't know what. Miss Spaulding is drawing twenty-five thousand a week and isn't worth a thin dime. She's the greatest attraction in the box-office today, and yet—"

"I guess I'd better get over there." Bosworth was out of his chair.

"Yes—and get that straightened out before I go nuts," the film magnate growled. "After that Edythe Shirley thing, I had to take a month at Palm Springs. If this—"

Morris Hart did not finish. Ted Bosworth had closed the door behind him and was winging for the Number Ten stage. There the *Venetian Nights* was being filmed by one of the most expensive companies ever assembled by the prodigal Cosmos organization. If Doris Spaulding had lost her voice, no greater tragedy could come to the Hart studios. The woman's golden tones and appealing personality had made her one of the most popular stars Hollywood had ever developed. She was one of those almost unique combinations of operatic voice and ability to act with power and conviction. Added to this was a personal charm that endeared her to every one she met.

"I could fall for her in a big way," Bosworth mumbled, as he coursed down the alleys between stages, "and I'm cutie proof."

HE reached the stage to find the company assembled. Because of the strange, obsessing fear that had descended upon the

cast, visitors were barred from Number Ten stage. Sidney Feldman, the production manager, was the only person beyond the glass partition through which spectators usually stared. He was striding back and forth, a miniature Morris Hart, biting his nails as he paced.

"What's it all about?" Bosworth whispered, as he joined the production manager.

"Listen," Feldman gestured to the loud speaker that reproduced the stage sounds beyond the glass partition.

Doris Spaulding was singing an aria, destined to be famous, which had been written by a noted composer especially for *Venetian Nights*. Her golden voice sounded brassily metallic as she mounted toward the high-A which was the song's climax. Bosworth looked toward Feldman's lined face, a question on his own.

"Hell—what's happened to her?" he asked.

"Look at her." The production manager jerked his head toward the set.

The young man looked through the glass partition. Doris Spaulding was standing upon a balcony built high in the wall of a palace in ancient Venice. Its foundation was lapped by the rippling waters of a canal. A gondola was moored beneath, a silken clad cavalier staring up at her. The man began climbing the hanging vines leading to the balcony as the song mounted.

A strange tensy gripped the actors on the stage. A group, representing Venetians strolling along the quai, kept staring with strained expectancy at the singer.

Henri Delange, the director, snapped from his chair, and began to pantomime wild orders to the figures on the quai. Sidney Feldman once more paced up and down, gnawing his nails. The song rose higher, but with uncertain steps. Reginald Kelso, the tenor, playing opposite Doris Spaulding, climbed the trailing vines, not with the eagerness of a lover, but

the grim fatalism of a man going to his own death.

Ted Bosworth stared at the singer's face. Beautiful at any time, its symmetry was marred by terror. The script called for a song to the mounting moon, an aria filled with the soul of a woman caressed by love, but the voice coming from the loud speaker was that of a spirit wailing as it marches to its doom.

A groove deepened between Ted Bosworth's brows. His muscles tensed. No wonder Morris Hart had paced his floor. *Venetian Nights* was becoming a horror film, not a song of love and high adventure. Golden-voiced Doris Spaulding, the most beloved of the Cosmos stars, was singing a macabre melody while the grim, remorseless reaper hovered over her, unseen.

"The devil!" the young man whispered to Feldman. "Why don't Delange cut—why don't he stop before—"

The loud speaker reverberated with the high-A, marking the climax of the aria. Reginald Kelso, as the Venetian lover, had reached the balcony's edge. He extended his arms to Doris Spaulding, whose lips parted as the swelling note poured from her mouth.

"Look!"

The words came from Sidney Feldman in a ghastly whisper. His arm pointed to the balcony. Doris Spaulding was swaying, her hands raised to her mouth. She toppled, falling forward. Reginald Kelso tried to save her. His arms grasped her as she fell.

The trailing vines broke the speed of their descent.

Ted Bosworth stared with distended eyes. His mind could not comprehend what he beheld. The orchestra, playing off stage, stopped suddenly. Deathly stillness held. Then from the loud speaker came a hoarse whisper.

"I guess that pays her back," it said.

Bosworth started and looked at the speaker.

Then came another voice, different from the first. It was sharply bitter and filled with

hate.

"There goes the nightingale. I got her at last."

Transfixed, Bosworth stood in half a daze. Then his eyes shifted to the stage again. Reginald Kelso was struggling to keep Doris Spaulding from falling into the water.

The gondola was quickly shifted and the limp body of the woman was lowered to its deck. Kelso bent over the stricken star. The blood had drained from his face when he looked up.

"She's dead," his words creaked from the loud speaker.

TED BOSWORTH swarmed through the door at the end of the glass partition. As he galloped past Henri Delange, the director leaped to his feet. He, too, had been transfixed by the swiftly moving tragedy.

"Cut—but don't save lights," the man barked hoarsely.

Racing across a high-arched bridge. Bosworth reached the quai and stepped onto the gondola's deck. He dropped to his knees beside Doris Spaulding. Her face was contorted; her eyes staring; her mouth twisted into a strange smile.

The young man bent over the lifeless beauty. The faint scent of peach blossoms came to his nostrils. Cyanide! The most deadly of all poisons. Most deadly, but—

Bosworth leaped to his feet, his face flushed with excitement.

"Props," he yelled frantically.

A white overalled stage hand raced forward.

"Go to the development lab. Get all the methylene blue they'll give you. Run—like hell."

He looked wildly around.

"Anybody called a doctor?" he shouted.

"Yeah—he's on his way now," a voice answered.

"Good—we've got a chance if—"

He stopped as a spotless surgeon dashed

across the quai and boarded the gondola. Studio police had appeared out of nowhere and were holding back the extras and regular members of the company.

"Hurry, doc, in heaven's name," Bosworth whispered. "It's cyanide. I've got props on his way for some methylene blue."

"Who told you about that?" the surgeon shot a glance at Ted's agitated face.

"Read it one of your magazines, but—here it is, doc, for the love of Mike—get busy."

The stage hand dashed across the quai and handed a small bottle to Bosworth. Doctor Gilmer, studio emergency surgeon, hurriedly fitted a hypodermic needle together and sterilized its point with his cigar lighter. Then he plunged it into the vial Ted Bosworth held.

The doctor's skillful hands sought out the sub-clavian artery and the needle sunk through the white, unblemished skin. Then the piston forced the blue dye directly into the circulatory system.

"Come on—give me a hand." Dr. Gilmer gestured to Bosworth to begin artificial respiration.

Then he applied his stethoscope to the woman's chest.

Bosworth's face was bloodless as his eyes fixed on the doctor's calm features. He waited, breathless, for the first expression that would tell him if glorious Doris Spaulding would fight her way back from the shades of death.

Age-long moments dragged their weary way. At last the stricken girl gave a deep and weary sigh. The pallor faded from her cheeks as a faint pink appeared, a harbinger of returning life. The publicity man stared at the transition from death to life with fascinated eyes. He had read of this latest mystery of medicine with skeptical eye, but had remembered it in a moment of crisis. Now he was seeing a modern resurrection. A girl was being called back to life after being killed by the most deadly of all poisons. But for the fact that the film laboratories carried methylene blue in quantity to stain films depicting night

scene, it might have been impossible to have worked this wonder.

"Just in time," Doctor Gilmer spoke in measured tone. "If you hadn't ordered that blue, it would have been too late."

"But you saved her, doc," Ted protested.

"I couldn't have—if it hadn't been for you. But how in heaven did she get the cyanide dose—right in the middle of her song?"

And the murmur that arose from the doctor's question showed that others were perturbed by this mysterious angle.

Life was again pulsing through Doris Spaulding's beautiful body. Her lids had lowered for a time. Now she was looking up again. The clear blue of her eyes, the golden texture of her hair, the perfect symmetry of her features made Bosworth feel that he was looking at a painting, rather than at a living personality.

She stirred and glanced around, surprise widening her lids. She half raised herself, but the doctor pressed her back.

"Just a minute, Miss Spaulding," he murmured. "You've had rather a close call."

"But what happened? Did I faint or—"

"We'll talk about that—after awhile," the surgeon soothed. "First we must get you to your dressing room."

STRETCHER bearers were summoned and the studio police made a lane through the crowd that had been attracted from every part of the lot. The word had flown to all corners of the Cosmos Studios. Morris Hart appeared, his round face pale, his black eyes wide and staring.

"What happened?" he demanded, "Did she faint or—"

"Something worse than that, boss," Bosworth answered. "It was murder."

"Murder—then she's dead?"

Utter unbelief sounded in the magnate's voice. "The voice that charmed two hemispheres stilled forever? Poor girl, she had

so much to live for, and now—”

“But she ain’t dead, boss,” Ted Bosworth grasped the film magnate by the arm. “She’s—”

“What the devil are you trying to do? First you tell me it’s murder. Then you say she ain’t dead. Somebody’s got to be dead, if there’s a murder.”

“I know, boss. She was dead—really dead—and then—”

“Such foolishness and I thought you had brains,” Hart exploded. “I give you—”

“Just a minute, chief.” Henri Delange, the director, had joined the producer. “Bosworth is right. Miss Spaulding was dead, poisoned by cyanide. Ted thought of a new remedy, something that actually brings them back. He sent for it before Doctor Gilmer came—and it saved her.”

Morris Hart stared long and hard at the head of his intelligence department. He shook his head, as though to clear it. Then he rumbled:

“Well—this is one week you’ll earn your salary. Come to the office—I want to talk to you.”

Ted Bosworth nodded. Men were summoned into the presence in this fashion for two reasons only. Either they were fired or they received a substantial raise in pay.

“I tell you, boss,” he began, as they entered the ornate room in which the president of Cosmos held court, “if I hadn’t happened to have read about that methylene blue, we wouldn’t have been—”

“Nix—nix,” Hart broke in. “What do you mean by letting a swell girl like Doris Spaulding get murdered? Saving her was a good job, but letting her get killed was lousy. I’ve a good notion to—”

“Hold on there, boss. If you’re going to fire me, make it snappy. I want to warn Miss Spaulding that she must be careful, or the next time—”

A roar from Morris Hart.

“So there’s going to be a next time?”

“I’m sure of it.” Bosworth answered.

“Then you stop it and step it before she’s dead. You step it or—else.”

“You don’t have to tell me ‘or else.’ Miss Spaulding is the swellest girl on this lot and—”

“You said it—now get busy. Doris Spaulding is sweetheart to the world. Find out how she was poisoned the first time. Protect her from another attempt.”

“And maybe I won’t,” the young man growled, as he hurried for the door.

He had just remembered the word that had come from the loudspeaker on the outside of the glass partition dividing the sound stage from the spectator’s gallery. Two voices had spoken. One had said:

“I guess that pays her back.”

The words were filled with future menace. Doris Spaulding lived again. Her slayer would be certain to strike again. Then came the memory of the second voice. Its words had been:

“There goes the nightingale. I get her at last.”

Two foes. Both sought the life of the screen’s most beautiful song-bird. They would not be satisfied with this one trial. Doris Spaulding was doomed unless he saved her.

THOUGHT of the fate that hung over the girl sped Ted Bosworth’s steps. His was a triple mission. He must hunt out the assassin, find out how he worked, and at the same time prevent another attempt on Doris Spaulding’s life. Guards could not circle her when she was on the set and the attempt to murder her had been made when she was singing. Against such an enemy, no citadel was possible, unless she locked herself in a room and saw no one.

To call in the local police would be a futile gesture. This crime was a studio affair. It was the work of some one not only familiar with life on a motion picture lot, but one who knew Doris Spaulding’s movements to the last detail. It was up to him, Ted Bosworth, who

knew virtually everyone on the pay roll, to find the would-be murderer.

"I'm going to do this on my own," the young man mumbled.

He hurried to the set which had been the scene of the tragedy. There he found Sidney Feldman still pacing back and forth. The production manager was deep in gloom. He saw only a darkened future and failure for the most stupendous production in the history of the studios.

"Forget the gloom, Sid," Bosworth broke in. "Remember those voices that came through—just as she was falling."

Feldman nodded, but showed small interest.

"Recognized either of them?"

"Were there two?" the man asked in surprise.

Bosworth glowered at him and then hunted up the camera men who were on duty at the time of the tragedy. They had photographed the action. It would be useless for production purposes, but of tremendous value to Ted Bosworth.

"See that the action and sound tracks fit perfectly," he told them.

"This isn't a dub in job—they're synchronized now," the men replied.

Ted nodded his understanding. He had one thing no detective in ordinary life could possibly possess, a motion picture of a murder with sound effects, ending in the throaty comments of two voices, one or both of whom might be the assassin.

So far, swell, but he hadn't gone very far. Then there was the menace that would continue to hover over beautiful Doris Spaulding, a veiled assassin, clever and ruthless, who would keep on trying until he was successful. The thought of the doom hanging over her sent him speeding to her dressing room.

As principal star of Cosmos Studios and sweetheart to the world, Doris Spaulding had no simple apartment filled with wardrobe

trunks and costumes wherein she changed from everyday clothes to the brilliant Venetian robes she wore on the set. Instead, she had a bungalow of futuristic design, which in addition to the dressing room was equipped with a studio living room, dining salon, bed and dressing rooms and a kitchen large enough to prepare meals for numerous guests.

Doris Spaulding was lying on a Louis XV chaise longue before the fireplace. Dr. Gilmer was seated beside her, while Morris Hart had buried himself in a huge overstuffed chair. The girl half arose as Bosworth entered and her lips parted in one of those captivating smiles that had endeared her to the world.

"Oh, Ted," she cried, "I don't know how I'm ever going to thank you."

SHE held out her hand. Bosworth flushed as he took it. She drew him down and kissed him. The publicity man had been in Hollywood long enough to know the worth of stage and screen stars' kisses, but Doris Spaulding was different. She had never been free with her lips, although the Don Juans of filmdom had laid unending siege. Bosworth felt the blood flood his cheeks as Doris continued:

"Ted, dear, you're a darling. Just think, I would be dead but for you. I'll never be able to—"

"He did it, not I," the publicity man jerked his head toward Dr. Gilmer.

"He couldn't have, if you hadn't remembered—that funny dye. He told me so himself."

The surgeon nodded and smiled at Bosworth's discomfiture. Morris Hart lumbered out of his chair and looked down at the man and the girl. Doris had made Ted sit on a huge cushion beside the chaise longue. She still held his hand.

"'Nother screen romance?" the producer rumbled.

"What do you think?" Doris laughed.

"I think it would make swell publicity,"

the magnate replied. "That is—after he gets this thing cleared up. We can't have another—"

The flush faded from Ted Bosworth's cheeks as Hart hesitated and then stopped. The girl's warm kiss and the pressure of her hand had sent a cyclone of thoughts storming through his mind. His employer's words brought back the realization of Doris' danger. This wonderful girl with her golden voice would live in a dark cloud unless he freed her.

"There isn't going to be any—any other," he told Hart.

"That's up to you," the man shot back.

"Well, if it's going to be up to me—she's got to keep off the set until—"

"Off the set," Hart boomed, "with the highest price company Cosmos ever got together? I'm not wanting to endanger Miss Spaulding's life, but to stop production—"

"I wouldn't think of it," Doris broke in. "I'm as safe on set as anywhere and besides—I'm a trooper. I still believe the show must go on."

"I knew it." Morris Hart patted the girl on the shoulder. "A real trooper."

She smiled up into his eyes. For a moment Ted Bosworth had a jealous pang. Then he grinned at himself. It was Doris Spaulding's personality. She loved the world. Her kiss had been a gesture of gratitude. The pressure of her hand was friendship. She was a swell fellow, the best ever. About the maddest thing he could possibly do would be to fall in love with her. His job was to protect her, and he was on the job.

"Listen, Doris," he began, "what had the company all up in the air—I mean before that thing happened—this afternoon?"

"Why the voices, of course," she answered.

"Voices?"

"Yes—we all got to hearing them. They said terrible things, but we couldn't trace them. Even Homer Carlson could not track them with all his trick mikes and sound traps."

HOMER CARLSON was the Cosmos sound wizard. An inventor and technician who drew a star's salary, he had established a reputation in the talking picture world. He and Doris Spaulding were exceptionally good friends and were constantly playing tricks upon each other. Carlson, however, had always insisted on having charge of the sound controls when Doris was singing. His wizardry with the intangible waves had done much to add to the singer's reputation. In ways few technicians understood, he was able to transmute the golden qualities of her voice to the sound track and reproduce them throughout the world.

"If Homer couldn't find them, it can't be done," Morris Hart rumbled. "But Ted's not hunting voices. He's after men."

Bosworth nodded, but made no reply. An uneasy sensation was stealing over him, a nervousness not unlike that which had plagued him the night before Edythe Shirley was kidnaped. A hunch was forming deep in his mind. He sensed a brooding presence, a menace that might strike at any moment.

He strolled to one of the large French windows to see a crowd of actors, mechanics and studio attaches staring back at him. In the front rank was Tito Roscanni, a member of the *Venetian Nights* company. The man signalled Bosworth to come out, but Ted shook his head. Roscanni was a tenor, who sang a minor role and understudied Reginald Kelso in the part of leading man. Since Bosworth had taken charge of the studio intelligence department, Roscanni had come to his office frequently. The man had a leaning toward crime detection and was always discussing it.

The publicity man turned back to where Doris Spaulding was half reclining. He smiled to himself as he thought of the wave of emotion that had passed through him when she kissed him. He had thought himself girl proof.

A maid had appeared with a tray of

cocktails. Bosworth took up a glass and held it, waiting for the others.

"Now these voices," he said to Doris. "What were they like? I mean, were they actual persons speaking, or reproductions—trick stuff, you know."

The smile, which had come to the girl's face, faded as he spoke. Her eyes widened just a trifle and her slender, white fingers closed tightly over her handkerchief.

"Why I—I couldn't—"

She paused and an expression of horror came into her clear blue eyes. Ted Bosworth took an involuntary step forward. His jaw tightened and his fists clenched. Morris Hart's moonlike face turned livid and his small black eyes darted around the room. Dr. Gilmer leaped to his feet, standing tautly on the balls of his feet. The maid screamed, dropped her tray and ran shrieking from the room.

A ghostly whisper had come from out of nowhere. It was as sibilant as a serpent's hiss and as filled with menace. Slowly, in dreadful monotone, the words swam through the room.

"I shall not fail again. Today—tonight—perhaps tomorrow, I shall try again. Next time I shall not fail."

MMORRIS HART collapsed into a chair, his face devoid of color. Dr. Gilmer leaped to his black bag, took out a bottle of smelling-salts and held them to Doris Spaulding's nose. She pushed his hand away and sat up stiffly. Pallor bleached her cheeks, but she retained her self control.

"That's what the voices were like," she told Ted Bosworth.

The young man nodded mechanically. His eyes were darting around the room. They were looking for wires, a concealed speaker, a radio set. He could see none. He started to scout among the curtains, the larger tables and vases. He looked behind pictures and into cigarette boxes and humidors. Even an idle cocktail shaker claimed his attention. The search was fruitless.

"Always like that?" Ted asked, continuing.

"Yes—always."

"No wonder the company went haywire," Morris Hart croaked. "Why didn't you tell me about it? Why didn't—"

"We thought somebody was playing a practical joke on us—at least that's what we believed at first."

Doris had regained her composure. In spite of what she had gone through, she was the most collected person in the room. She arose from the chaise longue and walked to where Bosworth was looking into a tall jar filled with long-stemmed American beauty roses.

"What are you hunting, Ted?" she asked.

"A speaker, radio, phonograph—anything that talks, including a man or a parrot." He tried to smile.

"It might have been a magpie. I understand they talk." the girl took her cue from his attempt at humor.

"Nix—nix—," Morris Hart boomed, "this isn't custard comedy. It's real. Too damned real to suit me. You've got to get that guy, Bosworth, and get him good before—"

"Yes, I understand," Ted broke in, "but—first we've got to get Miss Spaulding home and then—go through this room with a comb that'll catch the hair the cat's shed on that cushion by the fire."

"I wish I could stay and—" Doris began.

Ted shook his head and she bowed her acquiescence. The Hart limousine was summoned and again the studio police made a lane for her through the crowd of Cosmos employees. Production had ceased for that day upon the great lot. Neither executives, actors nor extras were able to work and the air seethed with the buzz of speculation. A crowd of newspaper reporters had come out from Los Angeles and were held off with the promise that Ted Bosworth, head of the personal publicity department, would make an announcement as soon as possible.

With Doris Spaulding gone, Bosworth summoned a trio of the best stage carpenters

on the lot. There was not a trick of false partitions, secret drawers and hidden spaces that these experts did not know. Under his direction, they all but took the Spaulding bungalow apart, but could find no trace of hidden instruments. The young man's frown deepened as test after test brought negative results.

But more baffling than their inability to find the source of the mysterious voice was the sensation of hovering doom that haunted Ted Bosworth like an obsessing spirit. For a time, he thought it was merely hallucination, a mental state brought on by the tragedy that came so near ending the career of Doris Spaulding. Then he discovered it was actuality.

"Somebody's watching us, boss," Charley Parley, one of the stage carpenters told Bosworth. "If you could find out who it is, it might give you some idea—"

"Have you seen anybody?"

"Yes—and no. Of course that crowd is hanging around outside yet, but—there's some one out there who has more than idle curiosity."

Bosworth nodded. He stepped to the window and looked out, but saw no familiar face. For a while he watched the crowd. Many still wore their make-ups, and their stage costumes looking garish in the white light of out-of-doors.

"You're right, Charley," he muttered, "but who'd do such a hellish thing?"

"Hell knows—and Miss Spaulding the swellest girl on this—or any other lot. Well, there's nothing here for us to find—unless we tear the place down."

"We may have to do that—but not now."

TED BOSWORTH left Doris Spaulding's bungalow to return to his own office. He had so many things in his mind that he wanted to make an orderly record of them and work along systematic lines. He must get in touch with every person on the Cosmos lot who had

more than a casual interest in the great soprano. Her closest friends and bitterest enemies were of equal importance. Rival queens of beauty, spurned suitors, jealous songbirds. Each offered possibilities. Her private life must be invaded. Even the interest of rival film companies. A case of many facts, each of which might give the true picture.

The young man hurried down the lane leading to his office.

"Of all the mixed up messes," he muttered. "That Edythe Shirley thing was duck soup to this."

As he turned down Publicity Row, he saw Tito Roscanni coming in his direction. The man stopped and waited in front of Bosworth's door.

"Got a minute?" he asked.

"More than that if you have a line on the Spaulding case," Ted answered.

"Okay—let's go in where we won't be overheard."

Bosworth led the way inside and gestured Roscanni to a chair. Then he offered him his cigarette case.

"Camera," Ted said.

Roscanni grinned and nodded.

"You know I'm a bug on this crime detection thing," he began in sober tone, "and this Spaulding case presents what I'd call a very pretty problem."

"If that's your idea of beauty," Bosworth growled.

"You know what I mean." The visitor smiled and puffed his cigarette. "It comes as near the perfect crime as anything I ever encountered or read about. In fact, it exceeds them, for your cleverness in calling the lady back to life makes it perfect."

"Can the compliments," rumbled the publicity man. "If you have any—"

"That's what I was getting around to," Roscanni broke in. "This has been the crime of an extremely clever man, a man who is not only a thorough master criminal but a technician of outstanding ability."

"So what?" snapped Bosworth.

"Find the man who fits that description and you have the assassin." Roscanni finished.

Ted nodded, but said nothing. His eyes were misty with thought. There was much in what Tito Roscanni had said, but he had not said the half of it.

"If you don't mind," the tenor continued, "I'd like awfully well to volunteer my help. I know the company pretty well and—I think I really have a flare for this sort of thing. I was telling Homer Carlson that, only a few minutes ago. There's a man you ought to get something out of. He's very close to Doris—just how close nobody knows—and besides what he doesn't know about sound technique has yet to be discovered. He ought to trap this devil, if anybody can."

Bosworth listened, only partially drinking in his thought. So Homer Carlson was close to Doris, just how close none knew. He was an expert technician, a wizard with sound. He trapped voices, prisoned them for all time by his uncanny skill. He could free them when he wanted. Roscanni had said a lot and yet—he had not fully voiced his suspicions.

BOSWORTH eyed the man through narrowed lids. He was no longer bored. He sensed he was on the verge of making an important discovery, a disclosure that might save Doris Spaulding's life and keep her golden voice singing its exquisite melodies.

"My idea is," Tito Roscanni went on, "if you get Carlson to rig up some of those new registering microphones of his where—"

The man stopped suddenly, his eyes widening with fright. Ted Bosworth brought his feet down off his desk with a crash. Through the air of his office swam a hissing sound, not unlike that which had permeated Doris Spaulding's bungalow living room less than an hour ago. Once more a sibilant voice spoke in measured accents.

"You, Bosworth, and the man who is aiding you, listen. I'll get you both like I did

Spaulding, unless you quit. Take care. You are next, if you keep on."

A final hissing sound and silence.

Tito Roscanni started to his feet, his eyes glassy. He turned to the door in panic.

"Hell!" he began in parched voice. "What have I done that he'd be after me?"

"He—who do you mean—he?" Ted barked.

"I'd think that after that, you'd quit guessing," the tenor retorted. "I'm getting out of here—and off this case. I'm satisfied to be alive—and kicking."

He dashed out the door and Bosworth heard the slap-slap of his running feet as he raced down Publicity Row. Ted, however, stood still, his eyes taking in every familiar feature of an office he had occupied daily for the past two years. There was not a crack or a cranny that he did not know. That voice had come from somewhere. The publicity man did not believe in ghosts. The voice was human, yet not from the lips of man. It was a reproduction, either phonographic or radio.

He had failed to find what he sought in Doris Spaulding's bungalow, but here in his own office, he could not fail. He started to go over the room, inch by inch. Night had come and he switched on the electric lights. He went over the floor, walls and ceiling, methodically and with deepening frown. He was scarcely conscious that his own life was menaced.

A knock sounded. He climbed down from the table upon which he had been standing while sounding the ceiling.

"Come in," he called.

Mike McGlynn, a member of the light loft crew on the *Venetian Nights* set, opened the door and stepped in. His wide, good-humored face was red with excitement.

"I've found something, Mr. Bosworth," he all but shouted. "I think I've found out how Miss Spaulding was poisoned."

"What is it?"

"You'll have to come up topside with me," the man replied. "But unless I'm mistaken—"

“Let’s go,” Ted yelled. He pulled the big man after him.

INSTEAD of the flare of high-powered lamps, the light loft was dark and filled with shadows as Ted Bosworth and Mike McGlynn raced up the spiral iron staircase leading to its low railed gallery. During scenes on the stage, more than a hundred feet below, the crew operating these huge lamps acted on the gestures of the director or his assistant, following a light plot that has been worked out as carefully as the spoken lines or orchestrations.

Now all was gloom, but Ted Bosworth was afire.

At last they reached the bridgelike gallery. Bosworth waited until McGlynn had caught his breath.

“What is it—and where?” Ted demanded.

“Right over here,” the electrician began. “You know how Miss Spaulding clutched at her mouth just before she fell? Well—like all these shots, every angle is figured out in advance—the slant of the cameras, the pitch of the lights. We all know to an inch where Miss Spaulding will be at a certain time. Our lights are trained so they will strike her just so—to get the best possible photograph. The cameras are pointed in the same manner.”

Mike McGlynn moved slowly, explaining as they edged along the narrow catwalk leading to one of the powerful spot lights.

“Go on—both ways,” Bosworth urged. He was beginning to see a clue that fitted with his partially conceived ideas of how Doris Spaulding came so close to death.

“Well, as I was saying—” McGlynn drawled on. He was proud of his technical knowledge. “Whoever did that murdering stunt knew exactly where she would be. He knew her mouth would be open when she hit that high note and he rigged up—”

The roar of a heavy caliber revolver shattered the low spoken words of the lamp operator. Ted Bosworth saw a saffron flame

stab the deep shadows of the loft, not ten feet ahead. He threw himself face downward on the narrow catwalk.

Another explosion reverberated through the empty stage building. A bullet whistled overhead and crashed into one of the wooden pillars.

Bosworth peered through the shadows to see a slender figure wrap one leg around a long steel stanchion and slide toward the floor of the stage. He started in pursuit. Then he saw Mike McGlynn writhing feebly on the rail. The man had fallen across the guard that had been built on either side of the catwalk. He might pitch over the edge at any moment. It was more than a hundred feet to the floor below.

Ted braced himself and lifted the wounded man free. The cold beads of the death sweat were on McGlynn’s brow. His lips twitched. He tried to speak, but no sound came.

“Where—where’s that thing you were going to show me?” Bosworth asked.

THE man tried to speak, but could not. He gestured weakly down the narrow walk. Then his hand fell like a piece of lifeless wood. Ted bent lower. Mike McGlynn was dead. Nothing could be done for him. But a devil was still at large.

Instead of racing down the spiral staircase, Ted Bosworth adopted the means the killer had used. He wrapped his legs around a stanchion, and slid like a fireman for the floor. He pried through every cranny on the set, yet could discover nothing. Then he rang the office of the studio police, told them about McGlynn.

“Who killed him?” the guard shouted into the phone.

“The man who tried to kill Miss Spaulding.”

“Yeah? Well, he can’t escape our net, now. We’ll cover all exits.”

Bosworth wasn’t so confident. He returned to the light loft and explored it again

thoroughly, hoping to find something he missed.

Then he made a discovery that tightened his nerves and brought a fresh groove between his brows. Beyond the end of the catwalk, some little distance from the last of spotlight, he found scars in a timbered upright that told of a heavy instrument having been screwed into place. Below it were twin punctures in the wood that marked where tacks had held wires in place. He borrowed an electric torch from one of the studio police and traced the route the line had taken.

He used a drop rope and heavy sand counter-balance, and descended to the floor. His heartbeat quickened as he picked up the scent again. He worked along the lower level of the stage. He paused, as the studio police bore away the body of Mike McGlynn. Now he was alone in the vast building. Alone? His senses quickened and he thought he heard a light footfall, far away in the darkness. Next came the sensation of watchful eyes, following his movements.

He had struck a hot trail. The knowledge quickened his movements and deadened fear. He was on the verge of an outstanding discovery. Bosworth picked up the trail McGlynn had pointed out. The tell-tale tack marks showed where the wire had crossed the stage and turned sharply to the right.

Ted Bosworth paused to listen once more. He caught a glimpse of a shadow darting across an open space to dodge behind one of the prop palms that formed part of the background.

"Who's there?" he shouted, then threw the beam of his torch in that direction.

No answer. His voice echoed through the vast empty stage. It came back mockingly.

"Come out of there," Bosworth commanded.

There was a slight movement behind the palm. He switched off the electric torch, and dodged down at the same time. Once more the huge stage building echoed with the roar of a

heavy caliber pistol. The stab of flame that licked out through the darkness guided Ted as he plunged forward. A leap to the right and he closed in, snatching the legs of his adversary from beneath him before the pistol's muzzle could be lowered.

A crash and the man came down. The pistol fell from his hands and clattered to the floor. Next the two men were fighting in the stygian shadows. Both sensed that life and liberty depended on the outcome of the struggle. Bosworth struck with savage ferocity. If this were not the assassin, who had merely missed killing Doris Spaulding, he was at least the man who had slain Mike McGlynn and had made two attempts on his own life.

Ted slugged with fists tightly doubled. He heard his foe grunt and felt him weaken slightly. Then the man twisted to the right, wriggling almost free. He had reached out, groping for the pistol. Bosworth struck, striving to knock him out before he could reach it, but he failed to find a vulnerable spot.

Another twist and roll. The assassin was determined to regain possession of the revolver. Ted increased the tempo of his attack, fighting with a furious madness. He could feel his enemy weakening. He tried to find the jaw, but in the semi-darkness he missed and his fist crashed into the floor.

The agony of that blow made Bosworth flinch. For a moment he thought his right hand had been shattered. The pain shot up his arm almost to the shoulder. He tried to double his fist, but it was numb and useless. His enemy took advantage of that crippled right. With only his left fit to use, Ted was forced to the defensive. He struggled desperately. If he could only glimpse the man's face, but the deep shadows made it impossible.

Another roll in the direction which the gun had fallen. Bosworth tried to stay his opponent, but his right arm was useless. He sensed rather than saw the man grab up the gun. He kicked desperately, trying to knock it from his hand. Then came a deadening blow

that glanced off his head. Lights seemed to flash on, then off. His grip on his adversary relaxed.

Instead of striking again, the man leaped to his feet. For a moment he hesitated, as if aiming. Ted tried to squirm out of the bullet's path.

"Hey, what's the matter?" a voice called from deep in the stage building. "Who's shooting?"

The dim shadow that had stood over Bosworth turned and melted into the darkness.

"Switch on the lights!" Ted shouted.

"Orders against it, sir, but—"

"T'ell with orders. Switch them on."

Off in the darkness sounded a rush of feet. Then a flood of light inundated the huge stage. Several studio police rushed forward, their guns drawn.

"You again, sir?" one asked, recognizing the publicity agent.

Some one answered: "Sure it is, and that murderer took another crack at him."

"If he's in here, Mr. Bosworth, we'll find him."

"Hop to it! I've got something else to find."

THE police scattered to the various parts of the building. He could hear them calling to each other.

Ted Bosworth picked up his trail of tack holes that led from the spotlight loft to the stage. It had turned sharply to the right and he followed the plainly marked scars. Once more his heartbeat quickened. Death might be hovering in the deep shadows that even the flood lights could not dissipate, but he was on the trail of an assassin.

At last he reached the end—the glassed-in control room of Homer Carlson, sound wizard of the Cosmos studios.

A blinding light burst in Bosworth's mind. He remembered with burning clarity Tito Roscanni's words only a few hours before.

"Find a technician of outstanding ability

with the guile of a chess player."

Each word painted Homer Carlson. He was close to Doris Spaulding. Just how close, no one knew. Bosworth's lips tightened and he hurried to his office. He reached the telephone and called the Ambassador Hotel.

"Is Mr. Carlson—Homer Carlson of the Cosmos Studios in?" he inquired.

"Mr. Carlson checked out this afternoon," a measured voice answered. "He left no forwarding address."

"Damn," swore the publicity man, leaping to his feet with a speed that upset his chair. "Damn me—asleep at the switch when—"

He stared down at the overturned chair. Screwed to the bottom was a tiny radio box, its speaker scarcely two inches across. From it had come the sibilant warning of the afternoon—a warning that had driven Tito Roscanni from the room, pale with terror.

MORNING was near when Ted Bosworth finally retired to his bungalow in a picturesque court in the heart of Hollywood. He had tried to report to Morris Hart, but the film magnate's butler refused to call him. The same response was given at Doris Spaulding's home, although the frightened voice of her mother told the publicity man that a squad of guards were scattered around the grounds. Ted had no guards, but he kept his doors and windows locked in spite of the warm night. He had no desire to be murdered in his sleep.

He slept in snatches, but the sun was flooding his bed room when he finally awoke. He strode to the front porch to take in his milk and morning paper. Thrust under the door was a note, typewritten on plain paper. He tore it open to read:

Keep away from the studio if you want to live through the day.

The voice.

Bosworth stared at the warning. It seemed bizarre in the bright light of morning. He

glanced through the Times and Examiner. Both papers carried stories of Doris Spaulding, the famous dramatic soprano, fainting during the filming of the balcony scene of *Venetian Nights*, a super-production being shot on the Cosmos lot. The publicity department had succeeded in keeping the real facts from the press. Then Ted scanned the warning again.

"The voice will have to speak a little louder to keep me away," he mumbled to himself.

An hour later his little runabout was driving through the gates leading to the great Cosmos lot. Stage crews were already on hand and many of the actors had appeared. He saw several of the cast of *Venetian Nights* going to their dressing rooms.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

"Working," one of the men replied. "Miss Spaulding sent out telegrams to every member of the cast saying she would be on the set today."

The muscles in Bosworth's cheeks tightened. He understood her reason. She was a trooper, born and bred to the dictum that the show must go on. Morris Hart was paying her a fabulous salary. He had given her the most expensive production in the history of Cosmos. She was a gamester, who would see the show through.

Her return to the set increased the menace to everyone concerned. He had advised against it, but he realized the tradition of the stage would drive her on. As he turned toward his office, he saw Tito Roscanni come out of his dressing room. He wore the silks and satins of a Venetian courtier and made a gallant figure in the warm morning sunshine.

"Find out anything?" he asked, almost breathlessly, when Bosworth approached.

"I'll say I did. You had a hunch that it was the work of a man of high technical skill."

Roscanni's eyes flashed with interest.

"Was I right?"

"I'll say."

"Tell me about it."

"Can't now, but come to my office later. I'd spill you a story that will make the hair in your wig stand on end."

The tenor grinned and nodded. Then his handsome face sobered. Reginald Kelso, who sang the leading-role opposite Doris Spaulding, had emerged from his quarters at the head of the lane. Tall, dashing, a picture of masculine beauty, he sang to himself as he strode toward the stage.

"There's the one who ought to—"

Ted Bosworth paid no attention to Tito Roscanni's mouthings. His widened eyes were fixed on Homer Carlson, whose slender figure was swinging down the street between the stage buildings on his way to his laboratory. The man may have quit his hotel, but he had returned to the Cosmos lot. Sight of him jarred Bosworth's faith in his own deductions.

"I said—" Roscanni repeated, seeing the publicity man had not heard a word.

"Meet me in my office after lunch. I may have more," Ted broke in. He hurried after Carlson.

The sound technician had already taken off his coat and was bending over a number of strange looking devices when Bosworth entered. He looked up, nodded, and then bent over his experiments again.

"What have you got there?" Ted asked.

"I've been working on that voice thing the *Venetian Nights* company has been talking about," he said. "I think I have something that—"

"Anything like that thing you rigged up in the light loft?" Ted shot at him.

Carlson paled and his lips twitched. His pale blue eyes dropped as the publicity man met them.

"So you found out about that?"

"That—and a lot more."

"I was afraid you would. I got the idea yesterday that you might find it and be looking for me. That's why I left the Ambassador. This morning I realized that I

had been foolish and there were a lot more important things than—er—explaining that thing.”

ASTONISHMENT spread over Ted Bosworth’s frank features. Homer Carlson showed a little confusion, but he was utterly calm compared to his inquisitor.

“Important! I don’t suppose murder is important—compared to a gadget that will—”

“Murder? You don’t mean Doris—”

“No, she’s all right, but Mike McGlynn didn’t live to tell anything. I wouldn’t be alive to tell anything, either, if I hadn’t—”

“Are you nuts?” Carlson stared at Ted incredulously.

“No, but I think you are—trying to kill Doris Spaulding and then shooting McGlynn. At least I’d rather credit you with insanity. That trick of shooting cyanide into Miss Spaulding’s mouth by a gun that was trained to the fraction of an inch. Yeah, I figured it out from the marks on the railing in the spotlight loft. It was a perfect job—technically—one of the best things you ever did, but—”

“But it wasn’t poison. It was a dry pea,” Carlson broke in. “At the Davidson masquerade last week, she got a pea shooter—she waited until I was laughing—then she shot a pea into my mouth. She and I are always trying to outdo each other. It was a good stunt and—I tried to work out a better.”

Ted Bosworth stared, his eyes widening as the man proceeded. There was a ring of sincerity to his words. It was a strange, bizarre tale, but it had the tone of truth. Nothing was too mad for Hollywood.

“Go on,” the young man managed to mumble.

“You see I lined up on the same angle as the spots. Then I connected up with the sound track circuit. I fixed it so that when she struck that high-A, it would trip the air gun and send that pea into her mouth. Of course I didn’t expect it to go off when they were actually

shooting. I intended it for rehearsal, so when she fainted, I just naturally cleared out—it gave me a bit of a start. I used an old dried-up pea that couldn’t possibly hurt her—so I couldn’t figure what had happened.”

“Yeah?” Bosworth was over his surprise. “And what did the words— ‘I guess that pays her back’ —what did they mean? Your voice said them—over the loudspeaker circuit.”

“Did I?” Carlson’s brow was puzzled. “Perhaps I did—I guess I was thinking about that trick she played on me.”

Ted Bosworth was silent for a moment. He took out a cigarette and lighted it. Finally he turned to the sound technician again.

“Did you know that Doris was poisoned— at the same time you shot that pea?” he demanded.

“No—man, you can’t possibly mean she’s—”

“Skip that—she’s all right. Now, listen. You are either the most star spangled liar I ever met, or you’re in jam that needs a lot of clearing up.”

“Poison—by heaven—I— What can I do?”

“Answer some questions, and answer right. Did you tell anyone about this pea shooter thing of yours?”

“No—I don’t think so. Several persons saw me working on it. Stevenson, my assistant, Mr. Hart, he was in here—Jack Kerry, Tito Roscanni and—”

SOMETHING clicked inside Bosworth’s mind. None of the others had departed from their normal routine except Morris Hart and Tito Roscanni. Hart had fumed and blustered. Roscanni had showed keen interest in the crime.

“Did you explain this gadget to any of them?” he asked.

“No. Hart and Roscanni are always interested in these things. They thought my stunt of tripping it by a musical note a good gag, but that’s all.”

"It is a good gag—for Hollywood. But now these sound traps. What will they do?"

"Catch and record any sound. Then you can turn it into a picture. A film sound track is a picture, you know. You can identify any voice by it. It's as infallible as finger prints and—"

Homer Carlson had started on another of his long scientific expositions of the mysteries of sound, but Ted Bosworth cut him short.

"Yeah, I know. You've told me about that before, but—say let me have a couple of these sound traps. I have a hunch."

"Okay, they're small. You can put one in a desk drawer and—"

"Just the ticket. Gimme. In fact, gimme two."

"All right, but—"

"No buts, buddy. You're still on a spot. Better stay here and—I'm not through with you, but this hunch—"

He snatched the two sound traps from Carlson's hands and barged out, almost on the run. The inventor looked after him, shook his head, and then once more bent over the apparatus upon his work bench.

Ted Bosworth was moving at high speed. The menace was increasing—with every minute, but with a break of luck he would end it within a few hours.

He hurried to his office to find Herbert Smith. Morris Hart's confidential secretary, pounding on his door.

"What's up?" Bosworth demanded.

"Come quick. The boss—"

"Murdered?"

"No, but—"

"Wait until I put one of these in my desk."

"But he said—"

"Right with you."

A moment later, the two were racing for the private office of the Cosmos Studios' magnate. They found Morris Hart stretched upon a leather-upholstered couch. Uniformed studio police guarded each door and window. Panic had gripped the colossus of the films.

"What's the matter, boss?" Bosworth asked, placing the sound trap on Hart's desk.

"Matter—he's after me. The voice—that voice—it comes in here. It tells me—"

Hart's words ended in a squeal of fear. Once more Ted Bosworth heard what was now a familiar hissing sound and then a sibilant voice speaking. He switched on Carlson's latest invention at the first note.

"Call off the chase or you shall die, too," the voice spoke with tantalizing deliberation.

"See—see—they're going to kill me too," Hart wailed. "Listen, Bosworth, if you don't get that assassin, I'll—"

"What if I do?"

"I'll make you a big shot—a real big shot and—"

"Okay, boss. Make it assistant general manager in charge of personnel."

"But, first—"

"Sure, and that's right now."

BUT Ted Bosworth had a few preliminary steps before the denouement to the drama he was planning. He hurried to the *Venetian Nights* stage, where Doris Spaulding was gamely striving to instill enthusiasm into her still frightened company. The girl was game and ready for everything, but the most of the company had not the traditions of the legitimate stage to give them courage.

Henri Delange was heroically striving to get action from a score of frightened actors, but they only worked with freedom when Doris was off-stage. Ted saw this after a casual glance and he whispered a suggestion into the director's ears.

"And, besides, I want to talk to Doris," he concluded.

"Okay," the man murmured wearily. "If this thing doesn't end soon, I'll be shot and so will the show."

"It's ending—right after lunch," was the confident reply.

He signalled Doris off-set and she smilingly nodded her assent. A few minutes

later, they were in his office.

"Of course, I'll tell you everything—everything from the cradle, if you wish," her face was sober, but a soft light had come into the clear blue eyes.

Ted Bosworth's heart skipped a beat. Then he sternly forced himself to ask questions that made his own soul writhe. Homer Carlson's weird tale of the pea shooter was quickly confirmed. Then he turned to other members of the cast and other figures on the Cosmos lot.

"Morris Hart is a friend—a very good friend," Doris admitted. "I think a lot of him. So is Homer Carlson."

The young man winced.

"How about Tito Roscanni?" he suddenly shot at her.

"Tito Roscanni?" A flush crossed the girl's cheek. "Whatever made you think—"

Her voice died suddenly as a strange, hissing sound permeated the room. The blood drained from Doris Spaulding's face and she gripped the arms of her chair. Ted Bosworth opened a drawer and switched on one of Homer Carlson's sound recording instruments.

"Don't be afraid." The young man got up from his chair and turned it over. "It comes from there."

He pointed to the small instrument screwed to the bottom of the seat. "That's where the one in your bungalow was hidden. One of my gang found it this morning. In the springs of the chaise-longue."

"Oh." The fright had left her voice and wonder showed in her eyes. "Oh, Ted, you're—"

"I shall wait no longer. You die today," hissed the voice.

"Can it!" rapped the man.

"But, Ted, he says today!" The soft blue eyes were filled with fear.

"Don't worry, Doris." Somehow, Ted's hand stole across the corner of the desk to rest on hers. "I'm going to fix this up—right after lunch."

They looked into each other's eyes, but neither spoke. Ted Bosworth felt a lump grow in his throat. Then came the memory of the ways of the stage and the cinema. He must continue to be love-proof. He had a job to do.

"Well, I guess I'd better be stepping on it," he said suddenly. "See you on the set—right after lunch."

HE forced his voice into a brusque, businesslike tone. Doris Spaulding nodded. Her pretty, provocative mouth was just a little sad. She arose and started back toward Number Ten stage. Bosworth watched her until she turned the corner. Then he took the recording cylinder from the Carlson machine and carried it to the laboratories.

"Make a sound track picture of that cylinder," he told the man in charge, "I want it right after lunch. Send over to Mr. Hart's office and pick up another. Make it snappy. It's the boss's job."

"Okay."

Noon came but Ted Bosworth had no appetite. Besides, he lacked the time to eat. He hustled from one part of the lot to the other. Questions burst from his lips. He spent half an hour on the telephone. When he had finished, he went to the office of the chief of the studio police and borrowed an automatic pistol. Then he made arrangements for a cordon to surround Number Ten stage with men in the light and fly lofts.

"But, remember. Don't start until the company is on set," he warned. "I'll talk long enough to give you time to post your men."

"But, Mr. Bosworth, this—"

"Mr. Hart's orders." He silenced further protest.

The hour for a return to the stage arrived and he saw the actors trooping from the lunch rooms and cafeterias. They were buzzing with excitement. A call had been received for everyone to be on set at exactly two o'clock.

Ted Bosworth felt the blood speeding through his veins. The time for the great test

had come. He knew he faced death in carrying out his program.

He saw Morris Hart leave his office, accompanied by two special guards. He nodded to Ted and ordered one of the men to move over so Bosworth could walk with him.

"Are you certain of this show of yours?" he asked anxiously.

"Absolutely."

"Okay, but if I'm killed—"

"I'll never forgive myself," Ted answered.

"A hell of a lot of good that'll do me," the producer growled.

They arrived on the set to find the company tingling with excitement. Doris Spaulding was glowing. It was better than any drama or opera in which she had taken part. It was real. Morris Hart took a chair beside Henri Delange, his bodyguards within reach. Then Ted Bosworth made a signal to the head of the studio police to scatter through the room.

"My friends," Ted began, "during the past few days terror and murder have walked among us. The attempt to assassinate Miss Spaulding is known to all of you. Michael McGlynn, one of the spotlight electricians, was not so fortunate. There is no antidote for a bullet.

"In addition to these crimes, voices have spoken among you—voices filled with menace. They are but part of the same program, a desire to destroy and terrorize through dramatic methods. The murderer is a great egotist.

"Every man and woman who was upon this stage at the time of the attempt on Miss Spaulding's life, is here today. Among you is the murderer. The time has come to pick him out."

ABUZZ went through the assembled actors, stage hands and technicians. Doris Spaulding looked into Ted's sober face and smiled. Morris Hart shifted uneasily in his chair. Homer Carlson came out of the sound

control booth to listen.

"Although the assassin believed he had planned a perfect crime," the young man continued, "he left so many clues that he damned himself at every turn. He was just too smart, too clever, too technical. He was careful about his fingerprints. But he left something just as infallible, just as damning—his voice. A sound track is a picture of the spoken word. No matter how you try to disguise your voice, you can not materially change the picture printed on the film. We have not one record of the murderer's voice, but several. His theatrical warnings wove a web around him. He used a short wave radio hidden beneath chairs and tables, sending phonograph records of his own voice."

"So what?" a man bawled.

"A good question," Bosworth snapped. "The answer is—every man and woman on this stage will speak into the mike. They will say: 'There goes the nightingale. I got her at last.' Sound tracks will be made of each voice. The one that matches our recordings of the voice of the murderer is our man."

Bosworth called an order and a microphone was lowered until it was head high. Then at his direction, the members of the company stepped forward, one by one.

"Camera!" Director Delange called.

The silenced mechanism began grinding out the film, taking pictures of each person as he submitted to the voice test. The developed film would be complete evidence. The sound track would link the assassin to his crime and the tiny frames of photography would picture him.

Doris Spaulding was the first to murmur the test words into the microphone. Reginald Kelso followed. Montague Sponoli, the baritone, was next. Some hesitated and spoke in strained, almost unnatural voices.

Ted still stood on a hard-bottomed chair and looked down the line of actors approaching the microphone. Then he flashed a signal to Homer Carlson and the man

nodded his understanding.

"All right, Roscanni. You're next," Bosworth called.

Tito Roscanni stepped forward. His eyes darted to right and left as he stooped slightly to bring his mouth close to the microphone.

"There goes the nightingale. I got her at last," Roscanni rumbled into the mike.

"Try again, please," Bosworth spoke in clipped tone. "For a tenor, you've developed a remarkable bass."

He glanced at Homer Carlson, but the sound control expert only nodded and grinned. He had been prepared for a blast that would make only discords in the finely tuned mike and he had thrown on a resistance coil that made the registry perfect.

"I gave you what you wanted. That goes," Roscanni shot back.

"Please, just once more, in a normal voice," Bosworth said.

"Okay, but this is all hooley."

Once more Roscanni said the required words into the microphone.

"Check and double check," Homer Carlson called, a moment later.

AT the same moment a pistol flashed in Tito Roscanni's hand. Ted knocked his arm down as the weapon flamed. Screams came from the women. Roscanni fought desperately, trying to get his weapon around to shoot his captor. Men rushed forward, but dodged away when Roscanni's pistol, knocked upward by Bosworth, exploded into the air.

"I'll kill you before you get me," Roscanni growled in Ted's ear.

Ted found his opponent surprisingly muscular. In an effort to keep Roscanni's gun in the air he had no chance to go for his own. Momentarily, he expected a blast from the tenor's gun to rip his head apart.

With a final surge of strength he brought up a left hook that struck his adversary square on the jaw. Roscanni's struggles weakened.

"I wish I'd landed one like that last night,

when you tried to pot me," Ted panted.

Tito Roscanni sank back, limp. Bosworth picked up the man's pistol and leaped to his feet.

"There is your man, chief," he told the head of the studio police. "Carry him off—but watch him."

Ted Bosworth was more in Morris Hart's office.

"Swell work, Bosworth. Swell work. Only one thing missing. Why did he do it?" asked Hart.

"Fair enough. He was nuts about Doris. He tried to make love to her and she laughed at him. He kept after her and she refused to see him. He tried to get into her home out in Beverly and she had him arrested."

"I never heard—" Hart began.

"She relented and they let him go on the way to the police station," the young man broke in. "But he never forgave her. Tito's Latin blood demanded revenge. He tried to make it as theatrical as possible.

"He was on the balcony, standing behind the screen, ready to double if Kelso had any voice trouble. He waited until Doris struck her high-A and then shot the poison pellet into her mouth, almost at the same instant that Carlson's pea struck her. No wonder her hands went to her mouth."

Morris Hart nodded and poured a fresh glass of champagne.

"How did Carlson get such quick action on the test?" he asked.

"He had two known tracks of Tito's voice. He had his own miniature camera there, and a black box of developer. The development was almost instantaneous."

The film magnate lifted his glass of bubbling champagne, but lowered it as a knock came on the door. A messenger entered.

"Package for Mr. Bosworth," he announced. Ted signed the boy's slip and the messenger hurried away. He tore open the package wonderingly, held up a handsome wrist watch. On its back was engraved: "To T.

B.—from D. S.”

“Doris,” he breathed.

Hart's eyes twinkled. Again he raised his glass.

“Well, Mr. Assistant General Manager, in charge of personnel,” he toasted. “Here's to the new job—and the adventures of Hollywood.”