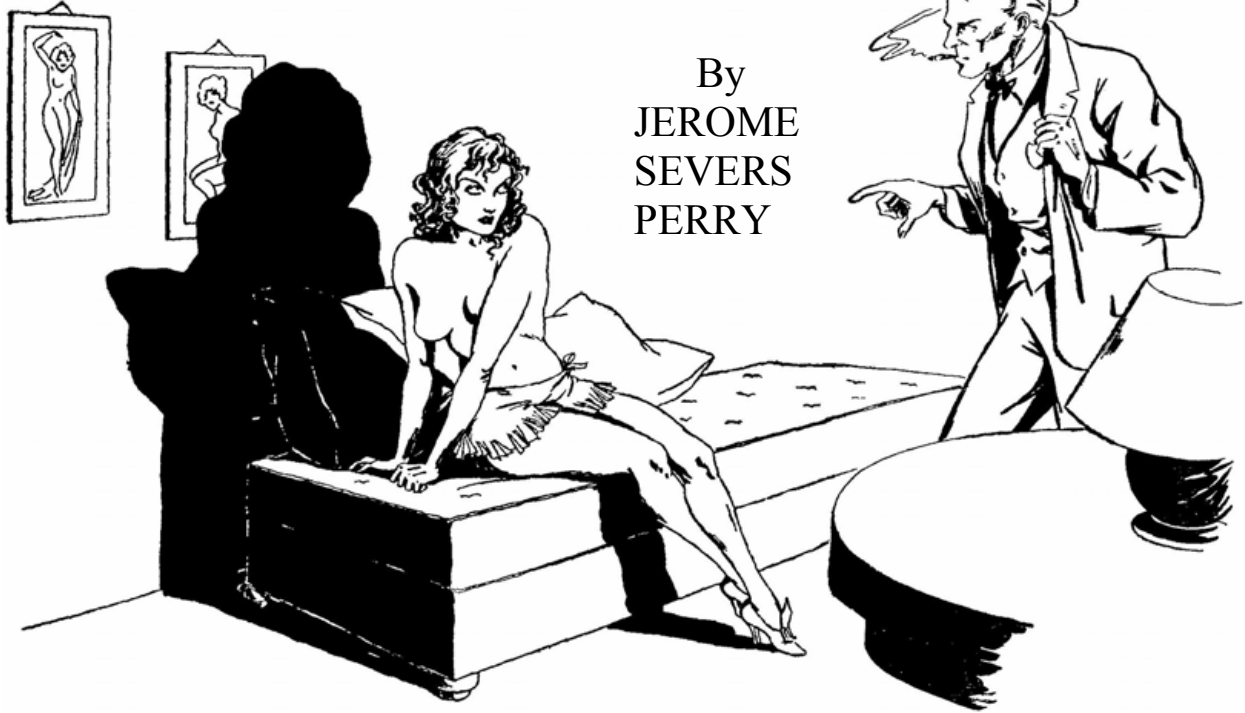


# NIGHT SCENE

*It was a trap . . . and the girl knew she was falling for it! Here's a story of drama at midnight—with a dozen surprise twists*



By  
JEROME  
SEVERS  
PERRY

**D**ONOVAN was looking at a window display of men's overcoats. Donovan didn't look like a Headquarters man. He looked more like a successful lawyer, or doctor perhaps. But he was a detective just the same.

Rain fell in a persistent drizzle. There wasn't much traffic on the street. It was about nine o'clock at night.

A girl sidled up alongside Donovan. She pretended to be looking at the overcoat display in the window, the same as Donovan was. But actually she was giving Donovan a furtive double-o.

Then she said, "Pretty wet tonight, isn't it?"

Donovan turned and looked at her. Took in the bedraggled finery of her tawdry hat, the rain-sodden thinness of her topcoat. Read the invitation in her hard, tired eyes. Saw the professional, come-hither smile on her rouged lips. Donovan said, "Yeah. Plenty wet. Wish I was indoors. But it's too lonesome indoors."

The girl said "I've got a room around the

corner."

Donovan said, "That suits me. Let's go."

They went around the corner. Entered a weather-beaten two-story frame house. Went upstairs.

The girl opened a bedroom door.

She snapped on a soft light.

Donovan took off his hat and raincoat. He sat down. He watched the girl. She removed her soaked topcoat, threw her hat on the bureau. She had hair the color of brass. Bleached—many times.

She smiled at Donovan. "Like me, big boy?"

He nodded. "Sure I like you. But I'd like you better undressed."

The girl said, "God but you're impatient." Then she unfastened her dress and kicked out of it.

Her only underwear was a pair of baby-blue panties. Her breasts looked soft and warm. Her body was slender. It didn't look as old as her face looked.

Donovan said, "Take off your stockings too. I

don't like a girl to keep her stockings on."

She leaned down to unfasten the pink-rosetted garters around her legs, just below the knees. Her breasts swayed, became downward-pointed cones. Then she looked at Donovan. "How about some money?" she said.

Donovan reached into his pocket and drew out some crumpled bills. He said, "How much?"

"Two dollars. Standard price."

"Here's five. I'll stay all evening." He handed her the money.

**S**HE took off her stockings. Then she slipped her bare feet into her shoes and stuffed the five-dollar bill into the left shoe. She came over and sat on Donovan's lap.

Donovan cupped her breast. He said, "These looked even nicer three years ago when you were a strip-teaser at the Hi-de-ho Burlesque."

She jumped up from his lap. She said, "How in hell did you know?"

Donovan grinned and said, "I remember you. You're Marie Norris. You quit the show when you took up with Silk Whitman. Silk made a bum out of you."

"You've got a lot of nerve calling me a bum. If you think I'm such a bum, what the hell are you doing here?" the girl said bitterly.

Donovan said, "I wanted to ask you about Silk Whitman."

"I don't know anything about Silk Whitman."

"You ought to," Donovan said. "He's been your boyfriend for three years."

"That's my business!" the girl snapped.

Donovan said, "Yeah. And it's my business to ask you why you bumped him off this afternoon."

The girl went pale under her rouge. She said, "Silk—bumped off?" in a strangled whisper.

Donovan said, "That's right. We found his body in an alley. He had a hole in his skull. Bullet hole."

The girl sank on the edge of the bed. Her lips were trembling. She said, "Silk—dead!"

"Sure he's dead. You killed him. He made a bum out of you. Lived off your earnings. You stood it as long as you could. But when he brought three Filipinos up here last night you decided you'd reached the end of your string. From a hundred-dollar-a-night baby on Park Avenue to a two-dollar Filipino moll was too much of a drop. So you bumped Silk Whitman."

The girl said, "You lie."

Donovan shook his head. "No, I'm telling the truth. You know it."

The girl said, "Who in hell are you anyhow?"

"I'm Donovan from Headquarters."

She opened her eyes. Her hand went to her bare breast, over her heart. She said, "You haven't got anything on me, copper."

Donovan said, "I've got plenty. I gave you a marked five-buck note. You've been pinched a couple of times for soliciting. This time you'll face a habitual-prostitute rap. That means a stiff sentence."

She said, "Even that's better than going to the chair on a murder frame-up."

Donovan said, "Confess killing Silk Whitman and you won't go to the chair. You'll go free. Whitman was a rat. The world's better off without him. When the jury hears your story they'll agree you were justified in knocking Whitman off."

The girl said, "I won't confess something I didn't do."

Donovan shrugged. "Then it's five years for street-walking." He smiled. "There it is, baby. Confess killing Whitman and you go free. Balk, and you go to the jug on this other charge. Take your choice."

"How do I know you're on the level, copper? Suppose I do confess to this killing—which I didn't do? Suppose I'm freed? You could turn around and pin the street-walking rap on me anyhow."

Donovan said, "I wouldn't do that."

She studied him. Then she said, "Cops are nasty vermin."

**D**ONOVAN grinned. Then he got up and sat down alongside her on the bed. He put his arm around her. He touched her naked breasts.

The girl said, "Keep your filthy doublecrossing paws off me!"

"I'm no worse than a Filipino, am I?" Donovan said.

She flushed. "I suppose you think a—a girl like me hasn't got any feelings?"

Donovan said "Sure you have." He played with his fingers on the bare flesh of her thigh. He said, "I feel sorry for you. It's a tough racket, yours is."

"You're damned right!" she answered harshly.

"Too bad you didn't marry that bank clerk—what was his name?"

"You mean . . . Ben Gordon? You seem to know a hell of a lot about me, copper."

Donovan shrugged. "Gordon would have made you a good husband, baby."

"I suppose he would have," she answered. "But—well, Silk Whitman had a lot more on the ball. I fell for him."

"Ever hear from this Gordon fellow?"

She shook her head.

Donovan got up. He said, "Well, honey, you'd better make up your mind. What's it going to be—a confession on the Whitman bump-off, or five years for hustling on the streets?"

The girl said, "You're sure I'll go free?"

"Reasonably sure."

"Then—I confess. I killed Silk Whitman."

"How?"

"I—shot him."

"You didn't shoot him. You stabbed him."

"All right. I stabbed him."

Donovan grinned. "Okay, you lousy tramp. That's all I needed. I've a dictaphone in this room—and there are two witnesses waiting outside the door, listening. You'll sit in the hot squat for killing Silk Whitman!" He grabbed at the girl.

She cried out. She tried to break loose from him.

AND then a closet door burst open. An unshaven, hollow-eyed man stepped out of concealment. He had a revolver. He aimed it at Donovan. He said, "God damn you, you lousy dick—take your hands off her!"

The girl said, "Ben—Ben Gordon!"

The unshaven man said, "Yes. Ben Gordon. I heard the whole thing. I heard this bull putting the frame on you, Marie. And he ain't gonna get away with it. Because you didn't kill Whitman. I did."

"You—you did—?"

"Yeah. After you turned me down three years ago, the bank found out I'd been stealing funds. I went to jail. Last week I bumped off a keeper and got out. I came back here to find you. I found out what had happened to you. So I bumped off Silk Whitman for what he'd done to you—what he'd made of you."

"But—but—what are you doing here—?"

"I sneaked up here to your room tonight. I wanted to see you. I heard you bring this mug in. I heard what he said. And I know these damned doublecrossing bulls. He talked you into confessing you killed Whitman, when you were innocent. He'd have railroaded you to the chair."

Donovan said, "So you confess you killed

Whitman, do you, Ben Gordon?"

Gordon said, "Yeah. But you ain't gonna grab me for it. Marie and I are leavin'—right now." He turned to the girl. "Put on your things."

The girl got dressed. The unshaven Gordon kept Donovan covered with the revolver.

When the girl was dressed, Gordon backed toward the door of the room. It smashed open. Two uniformed officers came in. They pinioned Ben Gordon. They slipped handcuffs on him.

They took him away.

DONOVAN looked at the girl. He said, "I knew he was in there all the time. Our men trailed him here to your room."

The girl said, "Why didn't they pick him up right away?"

Donovan answered, "Because we wanted a confession out of him. That's why we framed this whole scene."

"You mean—you tricked him into confessing he'd killed Silk Whitman?"

Donovan shook his head. "No, we tricked him into confessing he'd killed that guard up at the state pen. You see, there were several convicts who made a break. One of them killed the guard but we didn't know which one. This was our way of finding out."

"But—he also confessed killing Whitman—"

Donovan grinned. He said, "Gordon did that to protect you. He didn't kill Silk Whitman any more than you did. Because Silk Whitman wasn't killed. We've got him down at Headquarters on a dope-running charge."

The girl sank down on the bed. She said, "You—you mean Silk's still alive?"

Donovan nodded. "But he won't bring any more Filipinos to you, baby. He'll do a nice long stretch for running dope."

"Then—then what will become of me?" the girl whispered.

Donovan pulled some crumpled bills out of his pocket. He counted off two hundred. He tossed them into the girl's lap. "Your share of the reward offered by the state for the capture of that guard's murderer," he said.

The girl said, "Oh—!" Then she said, "I'll go somewhere—start life all over again—"

Donovan said, "Good luck, kiddo." Then he went out.