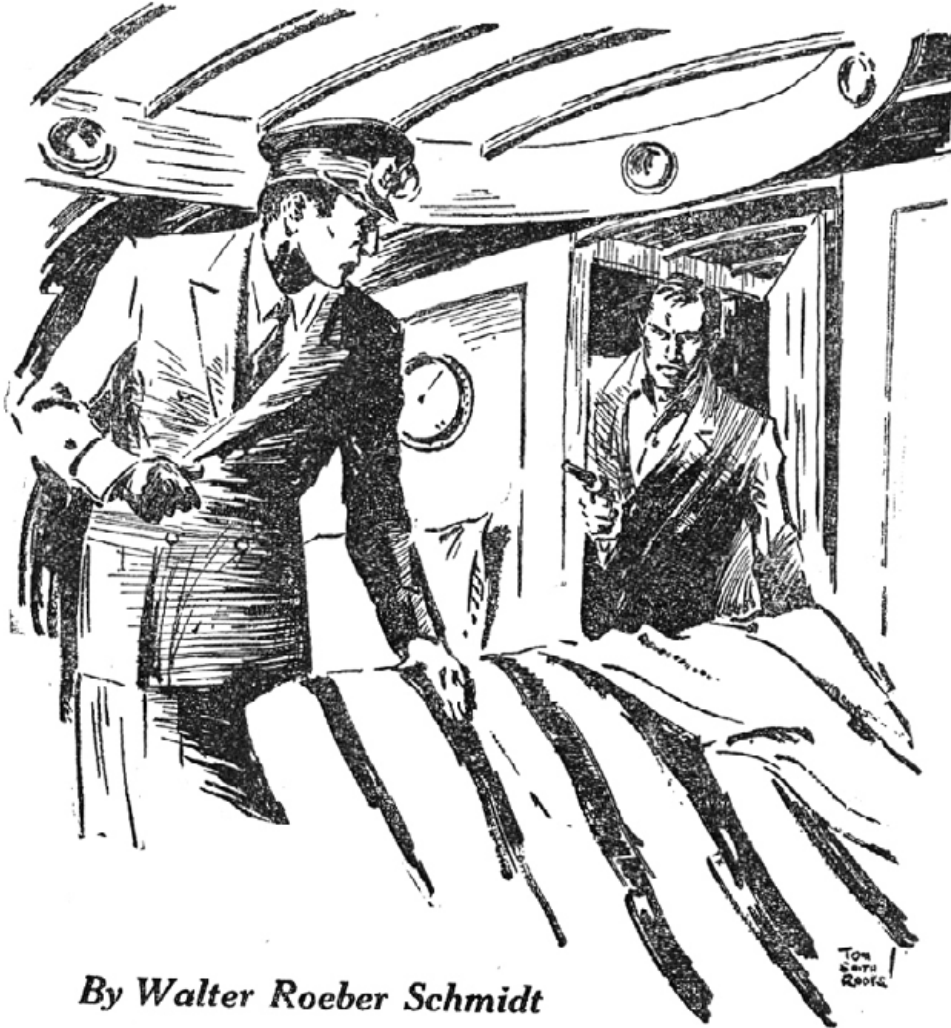


Detective Hugh Carey's vacation turned into a corpse cruise. And his white jacket became a

Crimson Shroud



By Walter Roeber Schmidt

THEY sure were a mixed group. Looking at them, near the end of our first day on board, I thought that only on a ship could you find such a variety of humans gathered at one table.

The Vorhees had been married the day before and the papers were pretty full of it. He was the son of a wealthy toy manufacturer and his bride was a pretty Westchester girl. They were young and nice

looking and sort of snooty.

There was Paul Dean and Laura Kingsley. The top of Park Avenue, and Broadway. Well, that's happened plenty of times. Dean was telling a story and the Kingsley girl was staring up at him, listening. She had very red lips, a honey of a figure and platinum blonde hair. She had once been a dancer. There was a bracelet on her left wrist and it glittered like something

alive. I could tell it was the real thing.

Joan Vinson and I filled out the table. She'd been sitting there alone when I arrived for breakfast that morning. I'd liked her right away. She had a way of looking at you squarely out of nice wide-set grey eyes when she spoke.

"I'm Joan Vinson," she'd said, giving me her hand. "I was beginning to feel like a Fifth Columnist or something. Where's everybody?"

"We ought to be able to hold the fort," I'd said, and sat down. "My name's Hugh Carey."

"Sounds familiar, but I can't place it."

"All Irish names sound familiar."

She was easy to laugh with and we spent most of the day together. Had cocktails. And here we were at dinner listening to Dean tell a slightly off-color story.

He finished and everyone laughed to prove they weren't drips. The Vorhees excused themselves then. I noticed how the Kingsley girl looked after them as they went off.

When we broke up, Joan Vinson and I walked around the deck for a while. We got roped into some bridge. Finally we got away from that and found a couple of deck chairs that weren't too close to all the merry-making. I felt as if I'd know Joan much longer than only one day.

IT HAD become cooler, as it always does at night on the sea. The sky was clear and full of stars. The moon threw a silver path on the water. From the ballroom came the muted strains of the orchestra.

We talked. She told me she was a nurse. There was no reason for my not telling her who I was.

"Of course!" she said. "I knew I knew that name. The Foster murder case up in the Bronx. Tell me, how did you ever—"

"Hey, this is a vacation—remember? No shop talk."

"Okay, copper," she agreed, smiling.

I fished out my pipe and was about to light it when a voice spoke out of the darkness behind us. I recognized it as Vorhees':

"You could have gone on some other boat. Why bring her on this one, under the circumstances?"

A second voice that was Paul Dean's replied: "Nuts. How'd I know you were going to take this scow for a honeymoon cruise."

"You know how she is when she gets tight."

"I won't let her get tight."

"You'll be tight yourself. How will you watch her?"

"Forget it. There's nothing to worry about."

There was a short pause. Then Vorhees said: "All right. But keep her away from us. Now that I'm married—well, see that she understands. If she tries any monkey business with Gale or me, I'll break her neck."

Footsteps died away into the darkness.

Joan said: "Just one big happy family! Copper, let's go get something to take the bad tastes out of our mouths."

We went to the ballroom bar. We were half through our Scotch and sodas when the lights dimmed and the orchestra began playing some fast rhumba music. A slinky little guy with his hair plastered down came out on the dance floor with a girl. They began circling around and stamping their feet. Joan seemed interested. I turned and asked the barkeep what he thought about the weather.

When the lights went up and the slinky guy and his partner took bows, Joan said: "That's Angelo Semperi, know that, copper?"

"Fine." I drained my glass.

"Remember, he used to dance in vaudeville with Laura Kingsley. She threw

him overboard when she began climbing. And here they are on the same boat. Interesting, don't you think?"

I nodded. "And he brought suit against her when she chucked him overboard and it was settled out of court. She bought up his share of the dance-team partnership contract or something. Now we're right up to date. How about another drink?"

She made a face at me. "All right. One more."

The Vorhees came in to the bar. They stood off alone and didn't try to mix with anybody. When their drinks were set before them they clinked glasses and held each other's eyes, then drank. They set their glasses down and watched Semperi and his partner do an encore. The dancers left the floor with a rush and a flourish. The lights went on bright.

Vorhees caught me watching him. He smiled a little. His wife turned to see who he was smiling at. It seemed okay with her that it was me. A minute later we were all drinking together, laughing and talking. I liked them. They didn't seem snooty at all any more.

Then it banged home why Vorhees had told Dean off only a few minutes ago out there on deck: Laura Kingsley once had sued Vorhees for breach of promise. He proved she was just trying to collect some easy money, but for a while the tabloids had a Roman holiday.

The orchestra came back and the four of us went out on the floor. I danced once with Gale Vorhees and a couple of times with Joan. As we left, Paul Dean and Laura Kingsley entered the place. . .

I COULDN'T sleep. I read for awhile but that did no good. I decided on a couple of rounds of the deck and a smoke. My watch said it was a little after two.

The boat was dark and quiet. The air was salty. I stopped to light my pipe. A woman

was sitting in a deck chair. I wondered at her being out at this hour, alone. I couldn't see who it was. She had on a white dress.

I stood in the stern smoking and looking out over the water and the low-hanging stars. I thought some about Laura Kingsley and Paul Dean and the Vorhees and Angelo Semperi and how-come they all seemed to know each other, one way or another, and be on this same boat. I thought some about Joan Vinson and how much I liked her.

Finally, I started back. As I came into full sight of the deck I saw Paul Dean swaying along toward me. He was drunk to the teeth. He placed his hands on my shoulders and hung there, swaying. He asked me if I'd seen Laura Kingsley. I said I hadn't—not since I'd seen him and her entering the ballroom. He said:

"Tha's funny. Very funny. I'll go fin' her." He staggered off.

I had forgotten about the woman in white, but now as I approached the chair I slowed down. If she stayed out in this cool breeze much longer she'd catch pneumonia sure. I remembered as I went toward her that Laura Kingsley had been wearing a white evening gown.

Her face was turned from me, but I could tell it was the Kingsley girl right away. I shook her by the arm, gently. She didn't wake up.

I started to shake her again. Something jammed inside me and I went rigid. I stopped shaking her. There was no sense shaking her any more. She wouldn't wake up. She was dead. I could see that now. Her face rolled toward me. It was chalky white, the eyes wide-eyed and staring. I knelt down and put my ear against her heart to make sure, and at that moment Paul Dean came back down deck.

I stood up. He stopped and asked me again, just as if he hadn't asked me only a minute or two before: "Have you seen Laura?" I didn't know what to say. Then he

looked down and saw the white dress.

“Why, there’s Laura! What you doing out here with Laura?” He leaned forward pugnaciously. “What you doing out here with Laura?” he repeated.

I said: “Listen, Dean—”

He began yelling. He wouldn’t stop. I saw it was no use trying to explain anything to him. I cracked him on the jaw and caught him in my arms.

I got him to my cabin and put him on the bed, touched the service button. I said to the man who answered: “Tell the captain I have to see him right away. It’s important.”

Five minutes later Captain Bronson appeared. He had thrown his uniform on hurriedly and he still looked sleepy. “Sorry,” I said. “Come on outside.”

I locked the door so Dean couldn’t get out when he came to and start raising hell. We went over to where Laura Kingsley’s body lay in the deck chair. I said:

“She’s dead.”

“Dead?” He stooped down and looked into her face, felt her pulse. “Let’s get her to my cabin,” he said.

We lifted her and carried her to his quarters. I told him what had happened. He went to get the doctor.

There were stains on her back on the left side from where she’d been stabbed. It was too bad. She sure had been a beautiful girl. But now, with her chalk white face and staring eyes, she didn’t look beautiful. My glance settled on her left arm and I saw that the bracelet wasn’t there.

The ship’s doctor came in with the captain. He told us what we already knew. Laura Kingsley had been murdered—stabbed three times in the back, near the heart.

“What time was she killed?” I asked.

“Not over an hour ago. Sooner perhaps.”

“All right,” Captain Bronson said. “What now?” He was nervous; he looked at me.

I said: “Send a cable ashore. Tell them

I’ll take charge if they, and you, want me to. I’m Carey of the New York Homicide.”

He seemed relieved.

“Have you a key to Miss Kingsley’s cabin? And who occupies the cabins on either side of hers?” He gave me a passkey and looked up the cabin list. A couple named Jenkins had the cabin on one side; there was a companionway on the other side. I took the key and left.

It is difficult sometimes to be sure your eyes aren’t tricking you. A swiftly disappearing figure might be only a shadow; or the shadow actually a figure. I couldn’t be sure, but as I moved toward Laura Kingsley’s cabin I felt that the shadow at the top of the companionway, disappearing, was the form of a human.

I hurried forward, looked down the steps, listened. I saw nothing. It was quiet; only the throb of the turbines came up from far below.

The door was open. I didn’t need the key. I went in.

THE bed was made and the room was tidy. A tweed coat lay over a chair. There was a bottle of bourbon and some glasses and a bowl of half-melted ice on the table.

I stepped over to the dressing table. There was the usual assortment of make-up stuff on it—some bobby pins, perfume, powder and so on. I opened the top left drawer. It had a lot of Kleenex tissues in it and that was all. I opened the drawer on the other side. There was a lot of costume jewelry in it.

I looked in all the drawers and closets for the bracelet, but couldn’t find it. I left the cabin, locking the door behind me. I went next door to the Jenkins. After a while, I woke them up. I told them I was sorry to disturb them, but had they heard or seen anything unusual going on tonight?

They were sore. I guess they thought I

was tight. I suppose my questions, to them, didn't make much sense. They'd heard nothing and seen nothing, they said, and would I please scram and let them go back to sleep.

I couldn't go knocking people out of bed all over the boat. That wouldn't do any good. I'd done all I could until morning. I went back to my cabin.

Paul Dean was sleeping on the bed. It didn't matter. I didn't want to sleep. I wanted to try and think.

I began undressing slowly. I threw my white linen coat over a chair. I noticed the smudges of rouge on the right lapel. A hell of a note! I'd tell that Joan Vinson in the morning when I saw her to keep her mouth out of my coats hereafter when we danced.

I mixed a drink which I didn't touch and sat and tried to think things out. There wasn't anything to think out. Some one of the hundred-odd Havana-bound passengers aboard had knifed Laura Kingsley as she sat there in that deck chair. That's all there was to it. . . .

Sun was streaming in through the window. Paul Dean was gone. I showered and shaved and went to breakfast.

Joan Vinson and Dean were the only ones at the table. "Good morning," she greeted.

"What's good about it?" I said.

Her laugh was funny, forced.

Dean said: "Thanks for taking me in last night, Carey. Guess I was pretty tight."

"Yeah; you wanted to fight."

He laughed, put his hand to his good-looking face. "My jaw feels sore," he said; he seemed to be trying to remember.

Joan asked: "Isn't Miss Kingsley breakfasting?"

"Maybe she's breakfasted already," he said. "It's late."

Dean left first. Joan waited for me. As we went out I saw the Vorhees sitting at another table. I couldn't blame them for that.

Naturally honeymooners don't like a former flame of the groom sitting next to them at every meal.

When we got outside Joan said: "Copper, I want to ask a funny question."

"Go ahead."

She steered me toward the rail and looked down into the water. "Why did you sock Paul Dean on the jaw last night?"

I frowned.

"Were you fighting over that girl in the chair?" She said it as if she were hoping I'd say no, I wasn't fighting over that girl in the chair.

I asked: "What were you doing on deck at that time of the morning, on this side of the boat?"

"Looking for you, copper."

"For me?"

She nodded. "The night was swell. I couldn't sleep. I put on a coat and started for a round of the deck. When I turned the corner up there I saw you and Paul Dean talking. It looked very chummy. Then he went away. You stopped by the girl in the chair. I couldn't help seeing what happened. I watched from behind a lifeboat. You socked him and dragged him off somewhere. Then the captain came."

"The girl was Laura Kingsley. She was murdered while sitting in that chair."

"Murdered! Then she was dead when you—"

"That's right. I socked Dean because he was drunk to the teeth and would have raised a riot and woke up the whole boat. That would have mixed up everything."

"Copper, you're not mixed up in it? You didn't know her before, too?"

"Don't be a sap!"

"Now I feel better."

"That's fine."

A message came from the captain for me to come right down.

Dean was there in the captain's quarters. "Mr. Dean is worried about Miss Kingsley,"

Bronson said. "He wants the boat searched."

I told him.

He looked at me as if maybe I was kidding.

Bronson nodded toward a door. "In there."

He came out soon. "Good Heavens!" was all he said.

Bronson told him I was handling things till we reached port. The captain and doctor left us.

"Dean, you have some explaining to do, this girl being your guest and all. Would you rather do it now or when we reach shore?"

"Now. What would you like to know, Carey?"

"Where were you during the hour before you bumped into me?"

"We were both pretty tight. We danced till the music stopped. On the way out Laura said she was going to the Powder Room. I waited outside but she didn't show up. I went looking for her, inside and then on deck. I'd just come from her cabin when I met up with you."

"That's all?"

"That's all—except the bracelet. You better know about that. That bracelet Laura was wearing, it's my mother's; a family heirloom worth a great deal of money. I gave it to Laura during one of my expansively drunken moments. When I wanted it back she refused, said it was a gift—she'd tell all the newspapers if I tried to force her."

"Go on."

"I hired Semperi—the dancer—to get it back for me. He has something on her. I brought her on this cruise because Semperi is on the boat. I want to get the bracelet back into the house vault before my mother finds out it's gone. Have you got it, Carey? It's not on her hand."

"You're sure you haven't got it, Dean?"

He knew what I meant. "Wouldn't I be a damn fool to bring a girl on a cruise to

murder her and then tell you what I've just told you."

"You sure would," I said. "I'll see Semperi. Maybe he's got it." I went out.

I found Semperi on the dance floor, practicing with his partner. I told him I had to speak to him.

"I am busy," he said. "You can see that, can you not?" He and the girl, a redhead, kept sliding around the floor.

"It's about Laura Kingsley and the bracelet," I said. "I'm a detective."

He stopped right away and chased the girl off. He came over. We stood near the piano, in front of the empty bandstand.

"Paul Dean has asked me to help him," I hedged. "What about it, have you got the bracelet?"

He measured me with his dark eyes. "I do not know you. I do not know who you are or whether Mr. Dean—"

"Cut it." I showed him my shield. "Have you got the bracelet or haven't you?"

His tongue flicked over his lips. "No; I had no chance last evening to talk with Laura about it. Today I shall, most certainly."

"What is it you have on Miss Kingsley, Semperi? Mr. Dean says you can help him because you have something on her."

The eyes and lips tightened. "Mr. Dean, he talks too much."

"It's better to talk when a murder's been committed, Semperi."

He looked up at me. "What—do you mean?"

"Laura Kingsley was murdered last night."

He kept looking at me. "I am not surprised," he said coolly. "You are handling the business of catching the murderer?"

I nodded.

"I will tell you. We are—were—man and wife, Laura and I. Nobody knew we were married. It was better to keep it quiet,

because we were a dance team. She wanted a divorce but I didn't. I'm no fool."

His voice was calm, matter-of-fact. "Why should I? It was more profitable this way. She would do as I wished. I could prove she was—how shall I say?—indiscreet during our marriage. It would have made big trouble for her and her rich friends. Do you know who killed her?"

"No. You maybe."

He shrugged. "There have been many times I felt like killing her. But I did not.. One does not kill the golden goose."

I thought: You're a rat, Semperi, if ever I met one. I asked: "Where'd you go after you finished dancing last night?"

"To my cabin. I was there all the rest of the night."

I REMEMBERED something and gambled. "You're a liar. I saw you leaving Miss Kingsley's cabin about three in the morning. You ducked down the companionway when you heard me."

His tongue flicked out over his lips again. I knew I had him. "I can prove it. I took fingerprints off the stairway rail." That did it.

"Very well," he said. "I'll tell you. The truth. I went to her cabin. She wasn't there. The door was open. I went in. I found the bracelet in one of the dressing-table drawers. On top of a lot of other junky jewelry. I took it and left. I heard you coming and ran."

"You have it, then?"

"Yes." He fished inside his blouse and came out with the bracelet. He handed it over.

I wrapped a handkerchief around it and put it in my pocket.

The Vorhees and Joan were playing shuffleboard. Joan waved her hand as I came up. Tom Vorhees saw me. He stopped playing and came over.

"I've heard what's happened," he said. "We better talk."

"Sure."

We moved a bit away from the others. "I want you on my side, Carey. That's why I'm telling you this."

He told me what I already knew, about him and Laura and the breach of promise business. He was afraid, being on the same boat with her, that she'd make another try for dough or make things unpleasant for his bride just out of revenge. They'd stayed clear of her, even changing their table.

"Did she bother you?" I asked.

"No."

"How about your wife?" I thought, looking down deck to where some chairs were placed: Easy; just get her to sit in one—get up for a moment—go behind—reach one hand around and cover her mouth—stab with the other—fling the knife overboard. . . .

"I don't think so," Vorhees was saying. "I really don't know."

"You better find out and let me know. I can't help you otherwise."

"I will."

"Where'd you and your wife go when you left me and Miss Vinson last night?"

"To our cabin."

"You stayed there—both of you?"

"Yes." He took a cigarette from a gold case. "Speaking of Miss Vinson, Carey—is she anything to you?"

I looked up at him. "I met her for the first time yesterday. Why?"

"I had to get up for a drink of water last night. Through a window I happened to see her coming back to her cabin. She was hurrying—hurrying the way people hurry when they don't want to be seen. It was about the time of the murder. This may or may not mean anything. I pass it on to you for what it's worth. She may have seen something or. . . ." His voice trailed away.

"Thanks, Vorhees."

He went back toward the shuffleboard game.

I stood there filling my pipe, turning over what Vorhees had said. Joan had seen me slug Paul Dean. But what else? Had she seen or been part of something before that? Why had she been on deck at that hour of the morning? The business about looking for me to go for a walk was going to sound awful weak at a coroner's inquest.

I didn't know her, really, or anything about her. All I knew was that I thought she was pretty swell. That's what made it tough.

I walked over and watched them play. Gale Vorhees played silently, deliberately. Joan got a bigger bang out of the game. When they finished, I told Joan I'd like to see her for a few minutes.

"Will you wait till this one is over?" she asked. "Gale and I are playing two out of three and it's one up."

"I'll be in my cabin—twenty-two."

Her nice gray eyes smiled at me. "Will I be safe?" she teased.

I growled and went on. I could hear her, laughing softly, behind me.

I mixed a drink. I walked slowly around the room with the glass in my hand, trying to make some of the pieces fit.

I had the bracelet. Would Laura Kingsley have put it in that drawer? Would she have left an expensive thing like that in a dressing-table drawer and gone out without locking her cabin? Was the bracelet mixed up in the murder, or wasn't it? Had she been killed for some other reason?

There was a knock at the door. It was Joan.

"You got here fast," I said.

"I didn't finish the game. I suddenly remembered it might be about last night you wanted to see me."

"That's right. Want a drink?"

"No-o."

"Sit down."

THE room was still untidy. The bed had been made, but my linen coat and dark

trousers still hung over the chair and the shoes and socks were in sight. I asked her to excuse the looks of the place.

"What you need is a woman in your life, to keep house and stuff." She was trying to keep her tone light and make the eyes smile, like most of the time, but I guess she knew why I'd told her to come here.

I rattled the ice around in my glass a little; then I said: "This isn't easy. We had a lot of fun together yesterday, dancing and all. But I have to have the truth. You're in a spot. You realize that, don't you?"

"Yes." She looked straight up at me. "If I hadn't told you about seeing you pop Paul Dean you'd never have known I was on deck last night, would you? I thought—" She broke off and laughed, a short, tight little laugh. "Funny, isn't it—last night I thought maybe you were mixed up in it and now you think I am."

I let it pass. "Did you see anyone else on deck last night when you were there behind that lifeboat?"

"No; I'd have told you if I did."

"Can you think of something stronger to tell the coroner when we hit port why you happened to be on deck last night in the vicinity of the murder at the time of the murder?"

"What I told you is the truth."

I stood there frowning, rattling the ice in my glass.

"Just like a movie, eh, copper? Girl in spot. Must catch real murderer to save self and save big job for hero."

"This isn't funny. I'm behind the eight ball."

"I think I'll take that drink after all. I need it." She got up and went over and began mixing one for herself. I watched her and one part of me kept drumming that she couldn't possibly have anything to do with it.

She saw me in the mirror, I guess. She turned. "I didn't do it," she said "Honest I

didn't, Hugh."

She came back and stood in front of the chair with the clothes on it. She changed the subject: "What sort of girl were you dancing with last night, copper, to plaster rouge all over your coat that way?"

"This is no time to play games. But now that you started it, the girl who plastered rouge all over my lapel that way is a nurse named Vinson."

"That's not true, copper."

"Hereafter when you dance with a gentleman keep your mouth where it belongs."

"I said it's not true."

"All right, skip it."

"I will not skip it." She was a little sore. "In the first place, I'm taller than that. My head clears your shoulder—see?" She stepped close and showed me. "And I don't use rouge. I use Pommade and Pommade doesn't come off."

"That's fine. Now if you just—"

I guess what I was thinking showed in my face as all the pieces began falling into place. "Hugh," she cried, "what's wrong? You ill?"

My mind kept racing back over all that had happened last night. I said: "I've got it, I think, Joan. You just gave me the key. If I'm right. . . . Now let's see, how's the best way to do this?"

"What?"

I took her by the arm. "Be a good girl. Get Vorhees and his wife to the bar. I'll get Semperi and Paul Dean. We'll all have a drink."

I walked her to the door. "Scram, see you in a half hour. And whatever I say, play it straight."

She went out. I followed her in a little while, after I stowed the coat away in a spot where it wouldn't be easy to find. I locked the door after me and had a man posted till I got back to watch that no one went in. . . .

The six of us sat at one of those round,

glass-topped tables. They knew I hadn't maneuvered them here together, like this, just to buy them free drinks. But they were all fine about it. You'd never think, sitting there chinning and laughing with them, that one of them had slit Laura Kingsley's throat and would try, if I had this thing doped right, to slit mine a little later on tonight.

There wasn't any sense beating around the bush too long. I waited till the drinks were half gone and then I let them have it.

"You know," I said. "Funny thing. I got some lipstick all over the left shoulder of my white coat the night Miss Kingsley was murdered. It bothers me. I wonder could any of you suggest how maybe it got on there?"

The oily grin slipped off Semperi's map. Tom Vorhees looked at me as if maybe I was daft, "inviting" them here to tell them this. Paul Dean frowned, shrugged at Joan. Gale Vorhees' hand stopped with her drink in mid-air.

Joan said, playing it straight: "You danced with me. Maybe that's it, Mr. Carey."

"Stand up."

She did and I stood up, too. "No. No go," I said. "You're too tall."

Gale Vorhees was rising, slowly, a funny expression in her face. "We danced, too, Mr. Carey—remember?"

"Sure," I said. "That's right."

She was a little thing. I didn't realize how little till now. The top of her head only reached to my breast pocket. I shook my head and we sat down. The three men kept staring at me as if I was nuts.

"Okay," I said, "there's some explanation to it; I'll find out all right. I never let things like this lick me. . . . Let's have another round. Steward!"

The white-jack came over and I ordered the same for everybody. I kept watching pretty close, but there was no give-away. Well, I'd put on my act. I only hoped it got across. I hoped I was right and I'd have that

visitor I expected later.

I gazed across the inky blackness of the room to the silhouette of the dummy I had fixed in my bed. I was cramped from sitting in this corner so long. I glanced at my wrist watch which I'd taken off and put in my pocket so the radium face wouldn't show. It was almost three.

A screwy way to try and catch a murderer; waiting for a visitor to come steal your coat. But it was the way I saw it and I had to play it that way.

I sensed rather than heard someone outside. There was a soft knock at the door. I took a fresh grip of the gun. Another soft knock. I could hear the locked door being tried. Then silence. Everything inside me went tight.

Noiselessly the window at the far side of the cabin was raised all the way up. A head was framed for a moment, studying the bed. The head disappeared. Soon it came back, and then more of the body was visible as it came in. Hands clung to the windowsill, balancing; feet gently touched the floor.

The intruder tiptoed swiftly toward the bed, right arm upraised to strike. I barked from the corner of the room where I sat: "If you move another step I'll fill you with lead!"

I got up, keeping the figure covered with the gun, felt for the switch. The cabin was flooded with light. I was looking at the tall, broad-shouldered form of Paul Dean as he stood there staring at the dummy in the bed.

I took the makeshift blackjack out of his hand. "Sit down," I said.

He sat on the bed, trembling.

"Why did you do it, Dean?"

He didn't say anything. He kept looking up at me and I could tell he was trying to decide how much I really knew—whether he could lie himself out of this or not.

"You weren't drunk," I said. "You knew that was Laura in that chair all the while. You just tried to divert me from her, that's

all; you tried to complicate things and make it look like you were really drunk by letting me slug you."

HIS eyes stayed on me. I went on: "It happened after the dancing. You killed her out there in the deck chair. You came up from behind her, clapped your left hand over her mouth so she couldn't yell and knifed her. You took the bracelet. And then you realized the thing you'd killed her for could hang you. So you put it back, in her cabin. You knew it would be returned to you later, if you got away with this."

"I'd have got away with it if I hadn't bumped into you." His eyes moved off me; he knew I knew what was what. "Everything'd been all right if I'd kept my hands off you."

I thought: You'd still be all right, Dean, if it hadn't been for Joan. . . .

"We were in her cabin." His voice was low. "She was tight. I asked her to give the bracelet back and she laughed at me. She laughed when I offered to buy it back. She knew I don't have enough ready cash right now to cover even half what it's worth.

"We were standing near her dressing table and there was a paper knife on it. It had a point and it looked sharp; it was long enough. I thought what I could do with that knife. I really didn't intend to use it. It was just one of those things we think about doing and know we're never going to do. I suggested we have a final nightcap outside. We mixed two drinks and took them out.

"No one was around. We sat in deck chairs. She said it was cool—would I get her a coat? I went in for it. I got the coat and was on the way out when I passed the dressing table. There was the knife. I saw how easy it could be. I picked it up and held it in my pocket.

"She didn't hear me. It was all over in a few minutes. I threw the knife and the highball glasses overboard, picked up the

coat. I took the bracelet off. I had to go back into her cabin to make sure everything was all right.

"I chucked her coat over a chair. I cleaned up the place a bit so there'd be no evidence of company. I don't know why I didn't think of it before, but it was then I realized that that bracelet could condemn me if found in my possession. I put it in a drawer in the dressing table. You have it, haven't you, Carey? You found it there."

"Yes, I have it." There was no point in telling him all about Semperi.

"Bumping into you after I left the cabin, there was nothing to do but snap into that drunk act. I didn't know you were a detective. I pretended to go looking for her, but what I really did was watch you. When you went over to her I had to try and mix you up in it.

"I let you sock me. I figured that was a swell alibi—proof that I was tight. I thought I was in the clear until this evening in the bar when you mentioned about your white jacket and how these rouge smudges got there. I knew it was only a matter of time before you'd have the answer, that the rouge came from my hand. If the jacket was destroyed you wouldn't be able to prove anything. I had to try and get it before you—" He stopped short. "I see. You knew all the time. That's why you were waiting."

"That's right."

He stood up; he was still trembling. "If something should happen to me, Carey, get the bracelet back to my mother. Fake some excuse about it being out of the vault. Will you do that?"

"Sure." I went over and touched the service bell, keeping the gun pointed at his

stomach. I unlocked the door and opened it a bit. When the steward came I said: "Tell Captain Bronson I want him." He went away.

Dean asked: "Carey, suppose I should make a break for it?"

"I'd hate to do it, but I'd have to shoot."

He inhaled deeply. "All right," he said. "Maybe I'll make the rail anyway."

He jumped. I could easily have fired but I didn't. He leapt through the door, took a couple of long strides and disappeared head first over the rail. No human can swim as far as he'd have to swim to reach shore. He didn't want to reach shore, anyway, I knew. I didn't bother having Bronson stop the boat. It was better this way for everyone. . . .

I went around and knocked on Joan's door. The light came on. She came out soon. I said: "It's all over." We went over to the rail. I told what had happened.

After a while she said: "There were only three ways then that rouge could have got on there. That's how you knew."

I nodded. "You or Gale Vorhees whom I danced with—or Paul Dean off his hand when he'd hung on my shoulders, the hand he'd held over Laura Kingsley's mouth when he murdered her."

She shuddered a little.

I put an arm around her and she stopped. "I wanted this to be a nice vacation," she said.

"It will be." I looked out over the dark water toward Havana and Sloppy Joe's and the fun that lay ahead, for both of us. Maybe when we got back to New York I'd take her up on that crack about having a woman in my life, permanently.