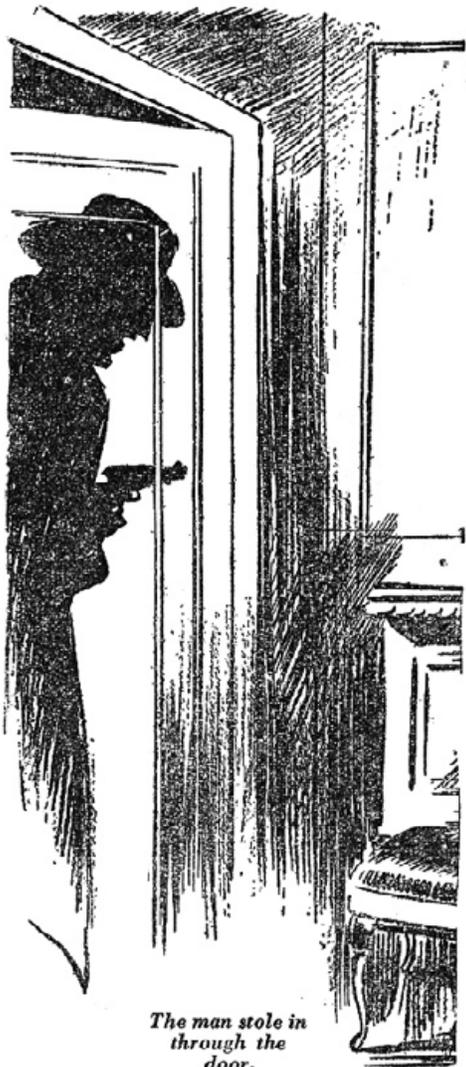


Sleuth of the Air Waves

By Emile C. Tepperman



The man stole in through the door.

★ ★ ★

Rod Mallory, the Air Wave Detective, pulled his most sensational radio scoop. For, in full sound of millions of listeners, he was announcing the report of the gun that would end his own life.

★ ★ ★

MALLORY'S headlights picked up the slim figure of the girl thumbing a ride at the side of the road. He began to slow down, and even as he did so, his radio was saying:

“All motorists in the vicinity of Newtown are warned to be on the lookout for Linda Blake, wanted for murder. She is armed and dangerous. Five feet three, bobbed blonde hair, blue eyes, weight one hundred and nine. Extremely pretty, soft-spoken, pleasant manners, but do not be fooled. She is dangerous. Anyone sighting this girl is directed to call from the nearest phone, to the Newtown City Police Headquarters, or to stop one of the city police now laying a dragnet around the city—”

Mallory shut the radio off and coasted down alongside the girl, grinning twistedly in the dark. He was going too fast to stop beside her, but he pulled up about twenty feet beyond, and she came running up. He had the door open for her.

“Pile in,” he said. “How far are you going?”

She didn't answer at once. He saw that she was slim and lithe, with clear blue eyes that were not at all hunted or frightened. She was dressed in a gray tweed suit. She was about twenty-three. She carried a large, flat handbag made of gray material.

She climbed into the car, swung the door shut, and then put her hand into the purse.

Mallory pretended not to notice that action. He had the car in first, with his foot on the accelerator, cradling it gently back and forth.

"I'm heading for Newtown City," he said casually. "It's about ten miles, isn't it?"

The girl took a small twenty-two calibre automatic pistol out of her handbag, and pointed it at him.

"I'm sorry Mister," she said in a low, husky voice. "I'm sorry, but you aren't going to Newtown City. In case you don't know it, I'm wanted for murder, and I'm trying to get away. I'd just as soon shoot you as not. I want you to turn around and drive like the devil—*away* from Newtown City. Do you understand?"

Mallory smiled. "Sure. Sure I understand."

HE LET his foot up abruptly from the clutch, and pushed down savagely on the accelerator. The car leaped forward with a terrific bound. The girl was thrown backward in her seat, uttering a gasp of dismay.

Mallory took his right hand from the wheel, seized her gun wrist and thrust it upward. At the same time he stepped down on brake and clutch, and brought the car to a stop.

It had swerved to the right, almost into the ditch, but he caught it just in time.

The girl struggled in silent, bitter fury, trying to break his grip on her wrist. She beat at his face with her left hand. She did not utter a word; she just kept on fighting with the desperate fury of a hunted animal in a trap.

Mallory made no attempt to overpower her. He contented himself with holding her gun wrist in such a position that she couldn't shoot him, and with warding off her attempts to bite, scratch and kick.

At last, when she found that all her efforts were unavailing, her shoulders sagged and she let the pistol fall out of her hand.

"I—I could *kill* you!" she said.

Mallory grinned. He deftly caught the

pistol with his left hand, reaching over for it as it fell.

"You little fool!" he said. "Did you think you could escape by driving hell-bent-for-leather down this road from Newtown City, in a commandeered car? Don't you know the roads'll be crawling with troopers?"

She stared blankly at him. "Aren't—aren't you going to turn me in?"

"Not me, baby. You're too valuable to me—outside of jail. For a while, anyway."

"I—I don't understand. Who are you?"

"The name is Mallory," he told her. "Rod Mallory."

"The Air Wave Detective!" He nodded. "WFZ. Five nights a week, at nine o'clock. Theme song." He hummed, *A policeman's lot is not a happy one!*

"What are you going to do with me?" she demanded.

"I'm going to take you back to Newtown City. That's the only way you can fool them. They'll never expect to catch you, heading *back*."

"And then?"

"I'm going to put you on the air tonight. I have an hour and thirty-five minutes to go before broadcast time. I think I can manage it. In return for your guest appearance, I'll guarantee, on behalf of my sponsor, to hire the best lawyer in the state to defend you. If you're innocent, we'll get you acquitted. If you're guilty, we'll try to squeeze you past the electric chair. That ought to be fairly easy with your looks."

She studied him as if he were some strange animal. "Don't—don't you *care* whether I'm innocent or guilty?"

"I don't give a damn," he told her frankly. "All I want is to get sensational stuff on the air. As for you, you might as well agree. You can't get anywhere by running away. They'll catch you before morning. You'll be better off playing ball with me. It's lucky for you I happened to be

driving along here.”

“And if I don’t agree?”

“I’ll turn you in to the cops,” he told her cheerfully.

She sat silent for perhaps two minutes. Then she raised her head. “All right, you ghoul,” she said. “I’ll do it. I suppose you’re right about giving myself up. I’d be caught sooner or later. But how are you going to put me on the air—with all the police in the world looking for me? They’ll be up at the studio before I can say two words.”

“Leave it to me,” Mallory told her. “Climb in the back. You’ll find my suitcase there—I was up-state for the week-end. There’s underwear, socks, shorts, ties, and two suits. Even a hunting cap. Take your pick. Now snap it up. There may be police along here any minute.”

SHE left her purse in front and climbed over in the back. She got the valise open and pulled out the clothing. Mallory switched on the radio, then while it was warming up, he asked without turning his head:

“By the way—whom did you murder?”

“I didn’t murder anybody!” she told him savagely.

“Is that why they’re hunting you?”

“That’s why I’m running away. I don’t see how I can prove my innocence.”

“According to the law of this country you don’t have to prove your innocence. The district attorney has to prove you’re guilty.”

Before she could reply, the radio came alive. It was another announcer this time, but the topic was still the same:

“ . . . The most sensational murder of the decade. Linda Blake, the young woman who was being held as a material witness in the Obermeier shooting, had been closeted alone with District Attorney Cunningham, who was showing her a number of pictures for the purpose of identification. She had

not, up to that moment, been suspected of complicity in the Obermeier case, but it seems that the police overlooked a bet.

“No one knows exactly how it occurred, but a shot was heard from the district attorney’s office, and by the time the officers on duty were able to break the door down, they found only the dead body of District Attorney Cunningham, shot through the back of the head. The window was open, and Linda Blake was gone. . . .”

Mallory turned the radio off. “So Cunningham is the man you didn’t kill, eh?”

She didn’t answer. She just kept on dressing, in silence. At last she said, “All right. What’ll I do with my old clothes?”

“Pack them in the valise.”

She did so, and then climbed back beside him. She had put on his tan hunting jacket and his corduroy trousers. She had turned the cuffs up. The jacket was too large in the shoulders, and it bung down almost to her knees. The hunting cap sat low on her head hiding the blonde bobbed hair.

Mallory grunted. “Hell, you look just like a dame disguised as a man!”

He got out of the car, went around in front and opened the hood. He put his hand in around the carburetor and jiggled the needle-valve regulator until a generous amount of gasoline dripped out. He caught it in his cupped hand came back with it, and smeared it over her face.

“That helps a little.” he said.

They had hardly gone a quarter of a mile farther before a powerful pair of headlights, with a bright red spotlight between them, appeared on the road, speeding toward them.

“That’s a police car,” he said. “Sit tight.”

The police car slowed down as it approached, and straddled the road so Mallory couldn’t pass. He brought his car to a stop.

A plainclothes detective jumped out and

came running over. "Say, Mister, have you seen a woman—"

The detective stopped, and grunted. He said nothing to Mallory, but turned around and addressed someone in the police car.

"It's Brain-Wave Mallory, captain," he said disgustedly. "With another guy."

A string of profanity issued from the police car, followed by a tall, powerfully built man with a pair of wide-spaced, shrewd eyes.

"Why, good evening, Captain Carrigan," Mallory said pleasantly.

"Ar-rgh!" said Captain Carrigan. "That does it. It wasn't bad enough, but this has to happen to me. So many people have fatal accidents driving at night, Mallory. Why can't you have one?"

Carrigan came up close to the car and looked suspiciously at Mallory, then at Linda Blake.

"Oh—er—permit me," said Mallory. "Let me introduce my new assistant, Johnny Smith"—motioning toward Linda. Then: "Johnny, I want you to meet Captain Carrigan, head of the Newtown City Homicide Squad. You'll be seeing a lot of Captain Carrigan in the future. He comes up every night after the broadcast to bawl hell out of me for stealing a march on the police department!"

CARRIGAN Swore feelingly under his breath. He brushed the introduction aside, with only a cursory glance at the dirty-faced young man seated beside Mallory.

"We had some motor trouble a way back," Mallory explained, "and Johnny got himself good and dirty fixing it up. Johnny's a wonder with motors and things. I've hired him as general all-around utility man. One of his jobs will be to shoo cops out of the studio during the broadcasts."

"Never mind that now!" Carrigan snapped impatiently. "We're looking for

Linda Blake. I suppose there's no use asking if *you* saw her?"

Mallory grinned. "What do you think, captain?"

"I know damned well what I think. I think that if you did meet her, you've figured out a way to smuggle her into town for your broadcast. And while every man on the force is out looking for her, you'll put her on the air and make us look like fools."

"Why do you think she did it?" Mallory asked. "Why do you think she killed the D. A.?"

"Why!" Carrigan grunted. "Because Cunningham must have got the goods on her. He must have tricked her into an admission of some kind. We were pretty sure that Buster Vallon was behind the Obermeier kill. Cunningham had a picture of Vallon that he was going to show her for identification. But he must have found out something else in there, and she saw the jig was up, so she killed Cunningham and lammed."

"Vallon, eh?" Mallory said reflectively. "So Buster Vallon is mixed up in this!"

"I'll say he's mixed up! We're morally certain he killed Obermeier. But there's nothing to arrest him on. We thought the Blake girl would identify him from the picture—since she saw the actual shooting. But instead, what does she do? She kills the D. A. It was cold-blooded murder, I tell you, and she'll fry for it!"

Mallory could sense the sudden tautening beside him of Linda Blake's slender body. He said hastily, "I better be moving on, captain. I'll be late for the broadcast—"

Carrigan was leaning in at the window, smiling sweetly. "Don't leave us yet, my dear Mr. Mallory. We would just like to check on you a little bit, to make sure you didn't meet her on the road, and are kind of smuggling her in." He extended his hand. "The key," he said. "The key to the trunk

compartment!”

Mallory shrugged and handed over the key. The other detective took it and went around to the back. They could hear him fiddling with the lock.

“She’s not in there, captain.”

Carrigan nodded. He had already glanced into the rear window, to make sure no one was hiding there.

“All right, Mallory,” he said. “Go ahead. But remember—if you’re pulling a fast one on me, I’ll jug you for aiding and abetting, and for accessory after the fact. I’ll give it to you with both barrels.”

“I know you’d enjoy that, captain,” Mallory said. He pulled away.

Linda Blake sat straight and stiff and silent as he drove on toward Newtown City. Several times he glanced sideways at her, but neither of them spoke.

At last, just as they reached the outskirts of Newtown City, she said, “I didn’t kill Cunningham, you know.”

“I’m listening,” he said.

SHE took a deep breath, then went on slowly. “Cunningham had a sheaf of pictures in his hand. He was sitting with the window at his right. His office is on the ground floor, in the rear of the courthouse—”

“I know, I know,” Mallory said impatiently. “Go on.”

“Cunningham spread the pictures on the desk. He told me that the picture of the man they suspected was among them. He said they couldn’t arrest that man on suspicion, because he was very influential in the city, and had powerful friends. But if I identified the picture, they’d go ahead with the arrest.”

“He didn’t tell you the man’s name?”

“No. He got up from the desk, and I started to look through the pictures. Most of them were not police photographs, but were clipped from newspapers. I found the right one immediately. It was a thin, tall man,

with very narrow eyes. I remembered it distinctly. I could never forget it, because I had seen that man shoot down poor Mr. Obermeier this morning, in cold blood. I started to put my finger on that picture when the door opened.

“It wasn’t the door to the corridor, but a private door at the back of Mr. Cunningham’s office. A man came in, with a gun in his hand. It was the same one whose picture I had found. Cunningham hadn’t heard the door open, but I had just looked up as that man came in. He didn’t say anything. He just pointed the pistol at the back of Mr. Cunningham’s neck and fired it. Then he looked at me, and said, ‘*Sorry, sister, I have one for you, too!*’

“He pointed the gun at me. I screamed and jumped for the window. He must have fired again. I don’t know. I fell head-first out of the window. Luckily it was only a few feet above the ground. I started to run. I looked back, but I didn’t see the man at the window. I heard a commotion, and the sound of some one trying to break down the door of Mr. Cunningham’s office.

“I ran around to the front of the courthouse and went inside, intending to get hold of one of the officers and tell him what had happened. But just as I got inside, I heard the door cave in under their attack, and one of the policemen shouted. ‘*The D. A. is dead. The dame killed him. She made a getaway out the window. Look out for her. She must still have the gun!*’ ”

Linda Blake paused. She kept looking straight ahead, her hands clasped tight in her lap. “I was scared. I knew they’d never give me a chance to explain. So I turned and went out. No one stopped me. They weren’t looking for me out in front. I realized I was a fugitive. I went to a pawn shop on the east side, and bought that automatic. I wasn’t going to give myself up. I—I really didn’t know what to do, but I remembered that a hunted person must always keep cool, so I

tried not to lose my head. . . .”

Her voice trailed off. She was sobbing at last, silently, trying to repress it as best she could.

“Lay off,” Mallory said, gruffly. “I can’t stand crying women.”

“I’m not crying!” she flared. “Do you believe me? Do you believe my story?”

“Yes,” he said. “I believe it. That was Buster Vallon who came in the back way and shot Cunningham. You were right to run away. You wouldn’t have stood a chance. Vallon must have fixed himself a good alibi. Your story would fall flat as a pancake. As it is now, you wouldn’t be any good as a witness against him in the Obermeier case, either. Not when you’re wanted for murder.”

“What will I do then?”

“Just as I tell you. I’ll get you out of this—”

“Thank you.”

“Or else I’ll come and kiss you goodbye on the night you fry!”

She flounced around in the seat. The oversized hunting cap slipped down over her forehead. “You’re a ghoul!” she said.

He chuckled, and swung the car off the main street and into a side street. A block or two farther on, he stopped in front of a small, run-down hotel. The place was deserted, except for a clerk behind the desk.

“Hello, Rod,” said the clerk, looking interestedly at the dirty face of Linda Blake. “What you got this time?”

“Gimme Rooms 20 and 21, the same as I had last time,” Mallory said quickly. “Here’s a hundred. Another hundred after the broadcast.”

The clerk nodded, took two keys off the rack, and slid them along the counter. “You got a broadcast in an hour and five minutes,” he said.

“Don’t I know it!” Mallory said.

HE LED Linda up the stairs to the second floor, inserted the key in the door of Room 21, and pushed her in. It was a small, comfortable room, with a neat bed, a desk and a chair. There was a telephone on the desk, with a hush-a-phone attached to it.

“This is where you’re going to broadcast from,” he told her. He strode across to the telephone, and dialed the number of WFZ.

“Freddy?” he asked. “Listen, I’m putting on a hot one tonight. Linda Blake. She’ll broadcast from this phone. Hook everything up, have it ready to click on the minute. Keep this line open from now on.”

He glanced at his watch. “Fifty-five minutes before I go on the air,” he told Linda. “And I’ve got plenty to do! You sit tight in here, and don’t open the door for anyone. I’ll be back by nine at the latest. If I don’t get back in time, you pick up that phone and tell Freddy you’re ready to go on—”

“But—but what’ll I say?”

“Tell them just what you told me—in your own words.”

“I—I don’t know how to start.”

“Never let it worry you. Anyway, I have a hunch you won’t have to worry about it. So long now, and remember, don’t open that door for anyone but me. If anything comes up that you can’t handle, tell it to Freddy. His ear will be glued to that phone till broadcast time!”

He squeezed her hand, patted her on the head, and went out. He waited a moment to be sure she locked the door behind him, then he went down the stairs fast.

He waved to the clerk at the desk, dashed out into the street, and got under the wheel of his car. He drove like a whirlwind for ten blocks, keeping his eye constantly on the dashboard clock. It was eight-twenty when he pulled up in front of a small, quiet night club with a very modest electric sign which said:

buster vallon's place

Buster Vallon had his finger in a good many unsavory pies, but he was a modest man. He kept his name out of most of those pies, and where it appeared, he never used capital letters. This little night club was quite a gold mine. It never advertised, never sought publicity; yet its sexy shows and its gambling tables kept it filled night after night.

Obermeier, an investigator for the District Attorney's office, had been shot right in this street that morning, a hundred feet from the club. Linda Blake had been passing when she had seen Obermeier and Vallon come out of the club, arguing forcefully. She had seen Vallon take out a gun and shoot Obermeier, and duck into a side alley.

There had been half a dozen other witnesses of the shooting, but they had all strangely disappeared. Linda Blake had stayed to talk to the police, and her reward had been to be held as a material witness, without bail. But Vallon had a perfect alibi, putting him at the other end of the city when Obermeier had been shot.

Rod Mallory parked his car directly in front of the club's entrance, waved aside the protestations of the uniformed doorman, and plunged into the club. He knew his way around in here. He ducked a headwaiter, turned left past the cloakroom, and bounded up the stairs to the first floor.

The gambling rooms were located up here, and it took him five precious minutes to get past the suave gunman who was on guard there.

"Look, Mike," he said at last, "if you don't tell Vallon I'm here, you may be out on your ear tomorrow. Just go in and tell Vallon I want to see him—about Linda Blake!"

Mike yielded on that, and went down the hall. He turned almost at once and said,

"Come on."

Buster Vallon wasn't very cordial. He waved Mike out, and waited till the door was closed. Then he turned his narrow eyes to his visitor. He opened the top drawer of his desk and took out an automatic. Very deliberately he clicked off the safety. He rested his hand, holding the gun, on the glass top of the desk.

"All right, Mallory," he said softly. "I know you, and you know me. I know how you work, and you know how I work. You said you wanted to see me about Linda Blake. Go ahead and say your piece."

MALLORY wasn't fazed by the sight of the gun. He dropped nonchalantly into the easy chair opposite the desk, acting as if he had all the time in the world—whereas the electric clock on the wall behind Vallon said eight thirty-two.

"The police are looking for Linda Blake, Buster," he said. "They won't find her—till I turn her in."

Vallon's face did not change expression. But his eyes became a little narrower. "You have her?"

"Yes, Buster, I have her."

"Where?"

Mallory only smiled. He didn't answer.

Vallon sighed. He took his narrow eyes from Mallory, and looked down at the automatic. He turned it around, as if admiring the blued-steel sheen of the barrel.

"How do I know you have her?" he asked in a low soft voice. "You should have some proof. Something to convince me that you have her."

Mallory nodded. He raised his glance to the ceiling, and quoted: " 'Sorry, sister, I have one for you, too.' "

He waited a moment, still looking at the ceiling. Then he slowly brought his gaze down to meet Vallon's.

"Well?" he asked.

Vallon sighed again. He leveled the

automatic so that it was pointing at Mallory's heart.

"Where is she?" he asked.

Mallory smiled. "You can put that gun away. It won't do you any good to shoot me."

"What do you want?"

"Ah," said Mallory. "I knew you'd be reasonable. I was pretty sure you'd have all the torpedoes in town out looking for Linda Blake. You don't want her to fall into the hands of the police. You want her dead, so she can't tell that little story about the thin man with the narrow eyes who walked into Cunningham's office through the back door, and shot him dead. Do you?"

Vallon was silent for a minute. Then he said; "No. No, I don't want her to talk. How much do you want?"

"Is it worth fifty grand?" Mallory asked.

Vallon smiled crookedly. "So you're no better than the rest of them! I always thought you were a boy scout—couldn't be bribed. I figured you were making enough out of your sponsor. But you're just like all the others. Money talks with you, too."

"Got any objections?" Mallory demanded.

"On the contrary. I'm glad to find this out. Yes, fifty grand is okay."

"I'll take it now."

Vallon shook his head. "I'll give you ten now. You take me to her—and make damned sure that no one sees me—and after I finish with her, you get the rest."

"Are you going to do it yourself?"

"Yes. I'm going to do it myself. This will be between you and me."

"You'll play square with me, Vallon?"

"Why, sure I'll play square. You can trust me!"

He opened the bottom drawer of his desk, withdrew a tin box and counted out ten thousand dollars in fifties and hundreds.

Mallory took the money, put it in his pocket, and looked at the clock. Eight forty-

five. Fifteen minutes before broadcast time.

"Let's go," he said.

Vallon got up from behind the desk, put on his hat, and motioned toward the door. Mallory reached it first. Mike was standing just outside, in the corridor.

Vallon said, "Just a minute, Mallory." Then he turned to the gunman. "Fan him, Mike."

Mallory looked pained, but he offered no objection when Mike went over him thoroughly.

"He's clean, Buster," said Mike.

"I never carry a gun," Mallory said.

"So I've heard," Vallon smiled. "But it's always best to be on the safe side."

"You want *me* to trust *you*—but *you* don't trust *me*."

"Not entirely—yet. It doesn't seem natural that a guy like you should be so easy to buy. Still, you never can tell. I'm willing to be convinced. But—while you're convincing me, I'm taking no chances."

Mallory shrugged. "You're paying off. You're entitled to have it your way."

HE FOLLOWED Vallon downstairs and out of the club. He climbed in under the wheel, and Vallon got in beside him. With his eye on the dashboard clock, Mallory drove back to the little hotel. He didn't pull up at the front this time, but swung into an alley about fifty feet down, turned off the lights and left the car there. Then he led Vallon through two back yards, and into the basement entrance of the hotel.

"We'll take the back stairs," he said. "There's not a chance of your being spotted. And we can get out the same way."

Vallon nodded. His eyes were glittering now. He said nothing.

As they made their way up the stairs, Mallory glanced at his wrist watch. It was eight fifty-five.

"Haven't you got a program, at nine?" Vallon asked.

"To hell with the program," Mallory told him, with an affectation of carelessness. "This is a real chance to knock off some *real* dough."

"Yeah," Vallon said drily. "You're surely going to knock off some real dough this time!"

Mallory looked at him swiftly. "How do you mean that?"

"Don't get nervous now," Vallon told him. "It only meant, you're getting fifty grand out of this."

Mallory reached the door of Room 21, and knocked twice. He glanced at his watch again: It was eight fifty-nine.

He heard Linda's voice at the door. "Who is it?"

"Mallory," he said. "Open up."

"Just a minute," she said. "My trousers are slipping."

A moment later she opened the door and let them in. She had taken a sash cord from one of the curtains and tied it around her waist, under the jacket, to keep the trousers up. Mallory's clothes, now that she was standing up, were far too large for her.

She started to say something to Mallory, and then she saw Vallon. Her face became White. A haunted, frantic look came into her eyes. She said to Mallory, "Is this what you saved me for? All that talk of getting me off—"

Vallon gave her no time to finish. He kicked the door shut, felt behind him and turned the lock, and at the same time he took the automatic out of his pocket.

Mallory looked at his wrist watch. It was nine-one. They were on the air.

He said in a loud voice, "Miss Linda Blake, I want you to meet Buster Vallon. Now that we're all together here in Room 21 of Lytle's Hotel, we can get down to business. I think you've met Mr. Vallon before, haven't you, Linda? He's the man who shot Obermeier to death this morning, isn't he?"

"Yes," said Linda Blake.

"And he's the man who came into Cunningham's office today, through the back door, and shot him in the back of the head?"

"Yes."

"He tried to shoot you, too?"

"Yes." She looked directly at Vallon. "He tried to shoot me, too, but he missed. I escaped through the window."

"All right," said Mallory. He turned to Vallon. "There you are, Buster."

Buster Vallon said softly, "Yes. Here we are." He raised the automatic.

Mallory turned to the girl. "Vallon is going to kill you, Linda. You're too dangerous to him while you're alive. Your testimony might not be able to convict him, and then again it might. He doesn't want to take a chance on a trial. He'll feel safer when you're dead."

"Oh, you—you ghoul!" she exclaimed. "I put my life in your hands—and this is what you do with it!"

"Too bad, sister," said Vallon. "You shouldn't have talked to the D. A. You should have done what any other smart dame would do in the circumstances—keep your mouth shut. Now you've got to go out. But if it's any consolation to you, I'll tell you that Mallory is going, too!"

He looked at Mallory, and smiled thinly. He kept the automatic pointed at him. "Sucker, did you think I'd pay you fifty grand?"

"No," said Mallory. "I didn't think so. I thought you'd want to knock me off, too. Remember—you told me that you know how I work, and I know how you work? Well, you were wrong. I know how you work, all right; but you don't know how I work!"

VALLON didn't move from his position at the door. His finger was curled around the trigger of the automatic. He had

power in that weapon, and he knew it—the power to kill. But there was something he didn't understand; something that made him feel suspicious, tricked.

“Just what do you mean?” he asked.

Mallory nodded toward the radio on the night table near the bed.

“Turn it on,” he said. “It's all tuned in to WFZ.” Warily Vallon did so.

A buzz of static came over the radio, growing in volume, then disappeared. There was silence.

“Now I'll show you what I mean, Buster Vallon,” said Mallory. “You've been on the air for exactly seven minutes!”

Vallon jumped as if he had been shot—because although Mallory was standing on the other side of the room from him, Mallory's voice was blasting from the radio speaker!

It didn't take Vallon more than a moment to realize how he had been tricked. His eyes swung to the telephone with its hush-a-phone attachment on the desk, and for the first time he noticed that the receiver was off the hook. Usually, a telephone is the commonest sight in a room, and no one pays it any attention. Vallon had been preoccupied with keeping Mallory and Linda covered, and with preparing himself for the double murder. Now, however, he knew that he had only trapped himself.

Mallory said loudly, “Ladies and gentlemen of the radio audience! This is Rod Mallory, the Air-Wave Detective, broadcasting the solution of your latest mystery. Hold on to your seats, the end is not yet. Buster Vallon is now going to pull the trigger which will send Linda Blake and your reporter into eternity. Listen for the shots!”

Vallon's face was contorted into a terrible grimace of hate and rage. He saw that he was trapped inextricably.

“All right,” he rasped. “This is for your radio audience. I'm finished, and so are you! Damn you all!” he shrieked. “Damn you and damn your radios! Here's hating you all!”

But Vallon never fired the shot. The connecting doorway to Room 20 was thrust violently open. Captain Carrigan and Detective Infield appeared, both with guns in their hands, and both guns bellowing. Their slugs blasted into the body of Buster Vallon, and sent him crashing backward into the wall, dead before he slid down to the floor.

And out of the radio speaker came the reverberating echoes of those shots, going out to all the wide-spread homes which were tuned in to the coast-to-coast hook-up of WFZ's affiliates.

Mallory grinned, and turned around and caught Linda Blake around the waist, just as she was about to crumple up in a faint.

“Now listen,” he begged, “don't go soft on me now!”

“Who's going soft!” she said. And then she really did faint.

Mallory held on to her and carried her to a chair.

Captain Carrigan said to him, “Infield and I figured you might produce Linda Blake at the broadcast, so we drove back to town and hung around the studio. We were only two minutes from here when your broadcast started, and you told the world where you were. The clerk downstairs told us about the next room. It was a close shave, Mallory. Damn it, you put it over—”

“Naughty, naughty,” Mallory said, grinning. “Such language to use—when you're on the air!”