

# Heir Today and Gunned Tomorrow



When the second explosion rang out, I was moving fast.

By Frederick C. Davis

Curt Hafford, chief of detectives, sat at his desk and the corpses came to him. He went home and the murder clues knocked at his door. But every time Curt tried to bank that case in his city's jail, all he could grab was the smoke of the vanished killer's cigarette.

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Great  
Detective  
Novelet

## CHAPTER I

IT WAS long past midnight, and even longer past an honest dick's bedtime, when a jingling noise penetrated the fog of fatigue that filled my head. In all the musty ramifications of headquarters it was the only sound. Without lifting my aching eyes from the notebook I'd been studying fruitlessly for hours, I groped for the telephone and started talking without asking who was calling. I knew who it had to be.

"No, Terry, honey, no," I said wearily. "I haven't finished yet."

"But, Curt," my wife asked, sounding chipper as a lark, as she always did, even at such an unholy hour of the morning as this, "what on earth are you *doing*, darling?"

"Thinking."

Another man's wife wouldn't have taken

an answer like that. Another woman would have launched off then and there, bawling hell out of her husband and nagging him to head for home right now, or else. But not Terry. Her next question sounded like that of an eager kid who'd been asked to guess which hand held the lollipop.

"Thinking about what?"

"Murder," I mumbled.

"Darling! Something new?" Terry squealed delightedly. "Tell me about it!"

I'd often thought that if any young guy in the Detective Bureau should ever ask me for a few words of wisdom on the subject of getting married, which was highly improbable, I'd have plenty to suggest.

"Chum," I'd say, "first ask yourself seriously, do you love her? Well, if you do love her as much as I love the girl I married last year, that brings up a second important

question. How does she feel about murder cases? Can she take 'em or leave 'em alone? If so, you've comparatively little to worry about.

"But do murder cases get her all excited? Does she pepper you with questions? Would she rather talk homicide than sleep or eat? If the answer is yes, you've got a tough problem, chum.

"After all, catching murderers is a serious business. When you've cooked up a plan for nailing a killer, you don't want it banded about over a bridge table. You've got to learn to stay clammed up at home about your official business. And when you're balmy about your wife, and as susceptible to her teasing as I am, this takes considerable will-power—often, I may add, more will-power than I possess."

Terry was urging me again, "Tell me all about it, Curt!"

"Look," I said firmly, "this case is a headache that aspirin can't cure. I can't talk about it to anybody. There's nothing new on it anyway. I'll be home soon, I hope. Please, honey! Good-by!"

I went back to poring over that notebook, hopelessly. Thirty seconds later the phone tinkled again. With a moan of long suffering, I dragged it back to my face.

"Terry, sweetheart," I began to plead, "this is positively one time when I absolutely can't talk about—"

The voice that broke in was a man's. It asked in a hushed tone, "Is that Curtis Hafford, chief of the Detective Bureau?"

Tired as I was, I said I couldn't be positive, but I thought so.

"Remember the Barlow murder?"

Remember it! Since yesterday, when it happened, I hadn't been able to get away from it for a minute. When a man gets shot through the heart in front of headquarters by somebody who dissolves into thin air an instant later, you're not likely to let it slip your mind.

"I know why Barlow was killed," said the tense voice on the wire, "and maybe I know

who did it."

Suddenly sitting up straight, I asked, "Who's calling?"

There was a long silence on the line. Then, "I might get a slug in my own heart for this, see? But it's a dirty deal. I'm not letting anybody get away with it if I can help it. I'm acting in good faith. I'll tell you who I am when I see you. But first I gotta know whether you'll play ball with me."

"My word of honor, I'll give you every possible break," I promised. "The best and safest place to talk is right here, as fast as you can make it."

Another prolonged silence. Finally the voice said tersely, "I'll be right up," and the connection broke.

I felt feverish. This guy hadn't sounded like a crank. He really knew something, probably something from the inside. Once he'd spilled it, I might be able to crack the killing that had had me running in dizzy circles, for the past thirty-six hours—one that so far had looked unbeatable.

**T**HE homicide had been sensational, yet simple. Its very simplicity was what had made it so tough. It had been pulled off right under the noses of hundreds, but nobody had seen it done.

At the time, five-thirty yesterday afternoon, the sidewalks were jammed with office workers hustling for home in the rain. Somebody had been moving along in the umbrella-carrying crowd with this chap named Rex Barlow. A gun had blasted a bullet into Barlow's heart from a distance of two or three inches. With girls screaming and the crowd milling, the killer had simply squeezed away unseen, leaving Barlow lying dead at the front door of headquarters.

Police Commissioner Hammer didn't like that. Raw District Attorney Welling had also made a few trenchant remarks in print. I didn't cotton to it either, particularly because the *Star* seemed to be changing its opinion of me.

Upon my appointment six months ago it had editorially hailed me with enthusiasm, proclaiming that I was just what the force needed. As the youngest chief of the Detective Bureau in the city's history, it had expected great things of me. But one thing the *Star* hadn't expected was somebody's getting murdered in broad daylight on my own doorstep, with the killer getting away clean. Editorially again it was demanding immediate results, which were easier to demand than to get.

The victim, Rex Barlow, aged forty, who'd lived in a one-room apartment on Birch Street, had turned out to be something of a mystery man. He'd been so close-mouthed to the few friends he had that none of them knew much about him. Particularly nobody seemed to know where he'd worked, if anywhere. I was still trying to get a line on that angle.

As for the killer's motive, the evidence found on Barlow's body gave only a vague hint. It consisted of a wallet stuffed thick with small bills totaling a shade more than four hundred dollars, and that little black notebook. It suggested blackmail or extortion, but I'd puzzled myself blind over the cryptic notations scribbled on its pages, without getting anywhere.

While I frowned over them again, waiting for a follow-up on that mysterious telephone call, footfalls approached in the corridor.

I bounced up expectantly as the door opened. The man who came in wasn't my unknown informant. He was District Attorney Welling. Not having seen lights across the street in the courthouse, I know that Lewis Welling hadn't been working late, like me. Probably he was strolling homeward from a convivial evening at a night club. At sight of me his expression turned sour.

"Well, Hafford," he drawled.

There was no love lost between my bureau and the D.A.'s office. Welling insisted on attempting to run everything, including me; and I didn't want anybody running me,

including Welling. He was elected only recently—and quite unexpectedly by everyone. The original candidate, our tried and trusted old-timer, had died just after nomination. And his party had made some sort of political deal for the job, slipping this personality hot-shot in. He seemed to think that he was expected to do great things to justify his black horse election.

Instead of waiting until I placed a case before him, all wrapped up and ready for prosecution, he kept trying to lift it out of my hands. When the case didn't come off, he publicly blamed the failure on my bureau. When it did, he took credit for a success. I made a point of having as little as possible to do with him. Resenting that, he'd been needling me too much in the Barlow killing.

"Well, can't you give me any action?"

I'd often been tempted to give him some action in the form of a sock on his beautiful cleft chin. Much as I disliked his ambitious tactics, I had to admire his appearance, which was a perfect picture of what the well-dressed district attorney should wear in order to impress the public—Homburg, Chesterfield, hand-made bluchers, custom suits molded onto a physique that caused his tailors to weep for joy, and all the correct accessories.

He was handsome enough to be a movie star, except for the cold sparks that glinted in his eyes when he looked at me in that peculiar, searching, disappointed way of his.

"When I get this case sewed up, Welling," I said, wanting him to get out of here before my nameless caller arrived, "I'll be sure to let you know."

"I thought so," Lewis Welling said wryly. "You're still baffled. I can't prosecute a homicide case until you've at least arrested some sort of suspect, you know."

"I know," I said pungently. "Good night."

HE SHRUGGED and strolled out while I mulled over that notebook. His footfalls echoed on the marble stairs, going down.

There were two flights in this antiquated building, one at each end of the halls. My office was on the third floor. If my informant happened to be coming in just now, I hoped fervently that he would be using the opposite stairs, so Welling wouldn't tumble and horn in. However, I heard only the D.A.'s footfalls fading. And the notes in that little black book still defied me.

On the first page there was a heading, *Standard*. Under it was a long column of initials, apparently those of people's names. Opposite each set of initials a figure was jotted down. The lowest figure in this second column was 4 and the highest 12. Following this list was a second headed *Eureka*. There were eighteen lists in all, each under its own designation—*Union, City, Service, Midwest*, and so on. Still trying to smell out their meaning, I suddenly felt the twinge of a hunch and reached for the telephone directory.

Just then more footfalls echoed. These were faint and quick. They paused, as if the person on the stairs were taking a wary look around, then hurried on, coming closer. My nerves tightened. When the steps were almost at the third floor I rose tensely from my chair, intending to welcome my unknown informant at the door. While I was still behind my desk the first gunshot blasted.

When the second explosion rang out, I was moving fast. Snapping the door open, I slipped into the corridor. At first there was nothing to see. Then a head appeared beyond the landing of the stairway on the left.

A young man was climbing, slowly, woodenly. On the top step he paused as if exhausted and stood stock still. He wore the uniform of an Army private and an expression of blank astonishment. Blood made dark streaks down the front of his tunic.

More footfalls began echoing on one of the floors below. Somebody was running up the opposite flight. Then the soldier toppled, fell flatly forward, lifted his stunned head to

stare at me again and mumbled something incoherent.

I was bending over him when the running feet on the other stairway reached the landing. District Attorney Welling stopped there, his Grecian jaw dropped. I howled at him.

"Go back down! Somebody shot this soldier! Try to spot him!"

Whatever else might be said of Welling, he was no dope. What had happened was plain enough. He spun about, dashed downward, and disappeared.

The soldier was trying to lift himself with one arm, making groping motions at himself with the other, and babbling unintelligibly with lips dribbling blood. Dragging something out of his pocket and pushing it at me, he sagged down. His inertness was final.

I stared at the thing he'd left in my hands. It was a square of heavy paper with a scrolled border, a seal, and blank spaces filled in with ink. In the topmost blank the name Stanley Latson had been written. Then the nature of this document hit me with a cold shock.

At the very moment of his death Stanley Latson had wanted me to have his birth certificate.

## CHAPTER II

**T**HIS was worse, far worse. At least Rex Barlow had been drilled outside the building, but Stanley Latson had been blasted down within a few yards of my third floor office door. Moreover, the D.A. had hustled back to report, scathingly, that the killer had lammed.

Reporting to Commissioner Hammer, I'd had my ears blistered. I'd done the only thing that I could do about that birth certificate at the moment. It hadn't been issued by this state. Instead, it bore the name of the Bureau of Vital Statistics of Pennsylvania. Accordingly I'd sent a telegram to Harrisburg, asking them to verify it by wire, collect.

Having phoned Terry long ago to say I'd be delayed still further, and having answered as few of her busybody questions as possible, I drove homeward through a foggy dawn.

The kitchen lights were burning. Mrs. Pink was busy at the stove. She was our maid. We'd had her for months now, and all our friends envied us, even though Amanda Pink was probably the most taciturn woman on earth. Neat, wry-faced, gray top-knotted and efficient, she greeted me with just one word:

"Breakfast?"

"Please, Amanda," I moaned. "But no coffee. I want to get some sleep."

Terry came hustling downstairs, shiny-eyed as a schoolkid. She kissed me and sat facing me across the table, squirming with gleeful eagerness.

"It's simply terrible, Curt! A fine, nice young soldier getting murdered in his home town, just when he'd finished his basic training. On his first leave, too. And practically inside your office. Isn't it terrible? Was there lots of blood?"

I looked at my wife. She was lovely. Her natural blond hair was the color of sunlight. She had a delicately upturned nose and a fine, sensitive mouth. You'd think she'd faint at the mere mention of blood. But not Terry. She was simply gaga about homicide in all its forms.

She read murder stories by the bale. When a real case broke she just loved it. The gorier, the better. Her life wouldn't have been worth living without killings to brighten her days. She looked as ethereal as an angel and as fragile as an orchid, but murder was her meat.

"This one's tied up with the other one, isn't it?" she said, bunching her lips thoughtfully in that provocative way which she knew made me melt inside. "Somebody's awfully desperate to protect himself. Golly, maybe there'll be another one soon!"

"Look, honey, I've already got two murders too many," I said, wincing. "I don't need any more, but I do need some sleep." I

pushed my plate away. "In fact, I'm going to bed this minute."

Terry hustled after me upstairs. Once there, I felt too bushed even to take my shoes off. Right away the doorbell rang, and Amanda Pink called.

"Somebody to see you, Captain Hafford! Important!"

To Terry I muttered, "You keep your pretty nose out of this, sweet," and went staggering down to the front door. Dawn was just breaking. In the misty glow I made out a girl standing across the porch.

"Come in."

"Oh, no-o, no-o," the girl said in a strained whisper. "I—I wouldn't dare!"

As I neared her she retreated. She was scared—afraid of me, afraid of everything around her, afraid even of the sound of her own voice. Her dark eyes were widened, her lips trembling. Evidently she'd found my name in the *Star* and my address in the phone book; she'd forced herself to come to my home. Now that she was here, she was so gripped by fear that she had to force herself to speak.

"I heard it on the radio!" she blurted. "I liked poor Stan so much!"

She meant Stanley Latson. As soon as she'd said this little, she became even more terrified. She peered all around, as if in dread that she'd been followed. Both of us stared up and down the street. No one was in sight. I felt certain nobody'd trailed this girl, but suddenly she shook her head, quailing, backing away from me again.

"I shouldn't have come here! He'll kill me too!"

"I promise to keep you perfectly safe from—"

"I shouldn't have come!"

She screeched it out, turned and fled. She ran on teetering high heels, as if devils were chasing her.

I PUSHED into the garage and was backing the car out when a flutter of red appeared on the seat beside me.

“Terry!” I said sharply. “This is police business! You go back to bed!”

“Hurry up, Curt, darling,” Terry said excitedly, “or you’ll lose her!”

It certainly was true that I’d lose her if I wasted any time arguing with Terry. And Terry looked delightedly immovable. Of course she’d eavesdropped from our bedroom window. She knew how vitally important this lead was.

So she urged, “Step on it, step on it!” and the only choice I had was to do exactly that.

I spurted the car to the corner with the headlamps out. The frightened girl had turned here. She was almost a block farther now and still running.

I veered after her quietly, matching her speed. Terry perched on the edge of the seat; so lovely with her yellow hair splashing on the shoulders of her red housecoat and her tiny bare feet in white mules that I could hardly keep my eyes on the other girl. Then, two more blocks away, we saw her rush into a white house that had been remodeled into small apartments.

After rolling past I stopped. Terry hustled out ahead of me. Easing quietly along a walk, we saw a gleam in a rear window upstairs. That was probably the girl’s room. It wouldn’t do to corner her now, I decided; she’d better have time to buck up her courage.

I signaled Terry to come along back to the car. Halfway there, I discovered Terry wasn’t with me. She wasn’t anywhere in sight.

There were noises at the back of the house. They led me to the entrance of the basement. Terry was inside, talking to a man who’d been wrestling a couple of ash-cans—the janitor. I arrived just in time to hear her saying in her spritely way:

“Thank you so much!” Then she bounced out to take my arm, her eyes glowing.

“She’s lived here for months,” Terry informed me, steering me toward the car faster than I could stumble along. “Her name’s Julie Finley; she works at an office called Genealogical Associates.”

“Please remember, Terry,” I protested, “that I’m supposed to be the detective in the family. But okay, many thanks. Please drive back home and phone Bill Rocum,” Bill was a detective lieutenant. “Ask him to come here.”

Terry dashed off happily. I was supporting myself against a tree across the street when Bill Rocum arrived, looking none too wakeful himself. I instructed him to case the white house and to tail the girl if she went anywhere. Then I trudged homeward in a daze of fatigue.

A truck had stopped in front of the house. The legend on it read *Carr’s Dairy*. The white-coated milkman was standing on the porch, reading a note he’d plucked out of one of the milk bottles.

“Half pint of coffee cream,” he mumbled, looking up disgustedly. “It’s always somethin’!”

“You’re telling me,” I said, pushing in.

Terry was in the bedroom, never more wide awake. Helping me to peel off most of my clothes, she chattered. Tucking me into bed, she kept it up. I was past answering. Just as I was dozing off she piped up again.

“I found out something about Rex Barlow, darling.”

That got me up on one elbow, blinking. “You what?”

“This morning I bundled up a bale of old *Stars* for the waste paper collection. I saw a little item about him. He was arrested on a charge of hit-and-run driving five months ago.”

“A man is considered innocent until proven guilty,” I mumbled, subsiding again. “Also, it’s quite possible to die from lack of sleep. My darling, my sweet, my own, if you don’t shut up now I’ll wring your beautiful neck.”

Next, just as I was dropping off again, Amanda Pink screeched, "Telephone! Important!"

It was headquarters calling. I couldn't beef, because I'd left instructions about that. It was an answer to my wire to Harrisburg. Somebody in the vital statistics office there had been on the job horribly early. But the message was one that opened my drooping eyes:

"No birth record of Stanley Latson."

Terry, hovering at my shoulder and seeing my befuddled expression, asked eagerly, "Darling, what on earth is it?"

"A glimmer of light," I said. "There's a little light, but no silence. I'm going back on the job where *I* can ask the questions."

**T**HE FUNK BUILDING, the city's biggest, housed hundreds of offices. A phone call from Bill Rocum had brought me to its lobby. The time was nine o'clock, with stenographers, clerks, and executives mobbing into the elevators.

"She's up there," Rocum yawned.

"I'll take over," I yawned back at him. "You're lucky. You can go home now and catch up on your forty winks."

Genealogical Associates was on the thirteenth floor. The office door bore this name plus the line, *A. B. Jordan, Director*. I stepped into an empty reception room. After five minutes nobody'd noticed my arrival. I knocked on the inner door, then opened it and found another empty room.

Framed coats-of-arms hung on the wall. There was a bookcase containing works on people's pedigrees, a file cabinet, a desk and chairs. All the drawers of the desk were open, their contents messed around. The file cabinets were also open and contained nothing.

Everything indicated that somebody had cleared out of here fast, with certain records. The frightened Miss Finley? Probably not; her hat and coat were thrown on a chair. There

was no other sign of her, so maybe she'd gone to the washroom.

Two keys lay on the desk blotter. Both had numbers stamped on them; one was 1306, the other 1307. The first, then, was the key to this office, which was 1306, and the other must be that of the adjacent office. Seeing no connecting door, I turned along the hall to the door numbered 1307 and unlocked it.

This room also showed signs of having been emptied of everything that could be gotten out in a hurry. But there were other things too big and heavy for that. One was a hand-operated printing press, size six by ten. There were racks containing cases full of type of various faces. On the composing stone lay a form of type tied up with string, waiting to be used again.

It was an agreement couched in hole-proof legal language, like those installment buyers must sign, stipulating that a blank amount was to be paid to Genealogical Associates weekly. For how long? Oddly, no time limit was set.

Back in the first office, I searched farther. Peeping from behind the file cabinet, where it had evidently fallen unnoticed, was a yellow sheet, the carbon copy of a letter:

*Dear Mrs. Mallory:*

For three weeks now you have failed to make the payments called for by our written agreement. Unless the arrears are immediately paid up in full, we shall place your account in the hands of our attorney for collection.

The name typed underneath sent a shock through me, *R. Barlow, Manager*.

It spurred me to a deeper search. I opened a closet door and froze.

Julie Finley stared out at me with horribly bulging eyes. Both her feet dangled above the floor. There was a shoe on only one of them. One of her stockings had also been stripped off. It was now coiled hard around her engorged neck. She'd been overpowered and mercilessly strangled. Her body hung limp

against the inner wall, the garrote caught on a coat-hook.

### CHAPTER III

PART of it was plain enough. Some person had gotten wind somehow that Julie Finley might sing. He'd been there in the office waiting for her. In a building as busy as that one, naturally nobody had noticed a man leaving with perhaps a fat briefcase and a couple of bundles. That man had now chalked up three murders in three days; he remained a gun-toting ghost.

After a morning of doggedly angry work I'd come up with no inkling of who A. B. Jordan, of Genealogical Associates, might be. So far as I'd been able to figure, he wasn't anybody who'd ever existed.

Shortly before noon I waded into the District Attorney's shiny office. Lewis Welling, brisk and debonair, gazed sardonically at me across the polished mahogany of his desk.

"Haven't you had any complaints about that office?" I demanded.

Surprisingly, he nodded. "Several."

Even more astonished, I growled at him, "And you didn't do anything about it?"

"My dear Hafford," said Lewis Welling, "there was nothing to be done. I went there and talked to a man named Jordan and—"

"Jordan!" Was I finally getting a lead on Jordan from my particular chum, the D.A.? "What about him? What's he look like?"

"A rather ordinary sort," Welling said calmly, with a supercilious smile. "I don't remember him clearly, because our interview was quite brief, and that was months ago."

"My dear Hafford, don't look so burned up. People went there to have their genealogies traced. Too many people have too much money to spend these days. Outfits like Genealogical Associates stand ready to relieve them of it."

"They charged plenty—too much, some of

their clients thought, which is why those complaints came to me. But these people had signed a perfectly legal agreement with their eyes wide open. There was nothing criminal about it. Their only recourse was to stop paying and take their chances in a civil suit."

"Did any of them do that?"

"They did. Several suits were pressed by Barlow for Genealogical Associates. In each case the result was a garnishee slapped on the defendant's salary—ten per cent. This really amuses me, Hafford. As soon as I heard the news this morning, I checked on this. You're at such loose ends that you're actually coming to me for enlightenment. Well, come again whenever you don't know where else to turn."

At loose ends, he'd said. The galling truth was that he was right. After working painstakingly all the rest of that day and late into the evening, the three-time killer was still a good long jump ahead of me. At least twice now someone had been at the point of fingering him—first Stan Latson, then Julie Finley—both times he'd beaten me to them.

By midnight, I was teetering on my heels from exhaustion and fuming about that baffling angle—that is, how the hell the phantom A. B. Jordan had been able to get there first with murder in his heart.

HOPING to heaven I could get a little rest before keeling over, I tiptoed into the house. The bedroom was dark and silent. Terry lay quietly with her lovely hair splashed on the pillow.

Holding my breath and not turning on any lights, I shed my clothes, got into my pajamas and crawled in to my bed as gently as possible. Blissfully I relaxed.

"Curt, darling," Terry said brightly.

I groaned. She hadn't been asleep at all. She'd just been lying there, thinking happily about murder.

"A couple of years ago," she went on, "when I tried to get a copy of my birth certificate, I found out there wasn't any on

file. You tried once, too, and yours isn't either. In those days nobody bothered much about such records. There must be thousands and thousands of people in the city who've run up against the very same thing."

"Um-hmm," I droned.

"Genealogical Associates were selling counterfeit birth certificates, weren't they?"

"Um-hmm."

"Defense jobs pay the biggest money, too," Terry said. "You can't get certain ones without proof that you're a citizen. If you've got proof, okay; if not, you're out of luck or else you've got to go through no end of maddening red tape.

"Word got around that Genealogical Associates could get your birth certificate right away, for a fee. I bet most of the people who got 'em didn't know those certificates were fakes."

Hard as I was trying to get some sleep, I had to admit that Terry was a smart girl. That was exactly the way they'd worked the racket. Having first, in some way, obtained a true copy of each state's birth certificate form, they'd printed the false copies right there in the next room.

Their fee, under their ironclad agreement, was a certain amount per week, ranging from four dollars to twelve. It didn't sound like much, but multiply it by hundreds or thousands of clients and in the course of a year you've got considerably more than peanuts.

This, of course, verified my hunch as to the little black book found on Rex Barlow's corpse. Each heading was the abbreviated name of a defense plant—*Standard* for Standard Machinery, *Midwest* for Midwest Appliances, and so on. Each set of initials was those of a victim. Each figure was the amount of that plant worker's weekly payment. The notebook proved the magnitude of the racket.

"Dirty!" Terry said after a moment of silence, during which I'd almost dozed off. "Why, once those poor people were hooked, they *stayed* hooked, but good!"

That was true, too. Genealogical Associates had actually used the courts to make their racket stick. Hailed before a judge, the client hadn't dared to defend himself with the truth. For the use of a counterfeit birth certificate was in itself a felony, which he couldn't prove was not intentional; it would cost him not only his high-paying job, but also a stretch in the clink. Instead, he'd got hit with a garnishee, a bigger weekly payment than the victim had had to make before. And these suits had scared thousands of others into paying up regularly on the dot.

"Curt, darling—"

"Please, Terry, I'm practically dead!"

"Barlow was front man for the office, of course. Wanting a bigger cut, he tried blackmail on Jordan. What he got instead was a bullet in his heart. Now there was murder in it. That scared the secretary, Julie Finley, so badly that her boy friend, Stan Latson—probably an ex-victim himself, before he was drafted—decided to get her out of it by wrecking the racket. So he got killed too, which scared Julie even worse. Then—Darling, how could Jordan have known that first one and then the other was about to talk?"

"Oh, gosh, I dunno! Let me sleep," I moaned.

"It's uncanny!" Terry said, quavering a little, ignoring my plaint. "He knows what move you're going to make before you make it. The next time you turn up another witness, you'll find another corpse."

"No, Terry! No! Lemme forget it for a few hours."

"There's something else I discovered today. I've simply got to tell you—"

"That's enough, Terry! I positively refuse to listen to another word!"

Pushing my head under the pillow, I crammed it hard over both my ears. I heard her saying something unintelligible, then she caught on.

NOTHING happened for a whole week. Every faint lead I followed came to a dead end. A. B. Jordan remained as elusive as a spook. Day by day Commissioner Hammer grew more grim. District Attorney Welling's statements in the *Star* left this mess of a case entirely in my lap. Editorially the paper voiced its belief that after all the Detective Bureau should be headed by an older and more experienced man. The finish wasn't far off. Not the three-time murderer's finish. Mine.

But hope glimmered again in my heart as I headed for home after the toughest night's work yet. Again it was almost dawn. In the kitchen Mrs. Pink was stirring up breakfast.

"Lots of coffee this time, Amanda," I sighed. "I'm going places."

I hadn't yet tasted my first cup when Terry came tripping downstairs in her cute little mules and her glamorous housecoat. Eyeing her across the table, I tried to be stern.

"You won't get a word out of me, my pet," I warned her. "It's too important. Just one more step and I'll have him."

"Golly!" Terry exclaimed. "A new lead straight to Jordan? How on earth—"

I shook my head, gulping coffee, watching the clock, and trying not to look at Terry. She'd put on a dazzling, teasing smile. She was bursting with curiosity. She looked so eager, so elated, so proud of me.

"I bet Jordan didn't quit his racket," she piped up. "I bet he's collecting again, murders or no murders. He can't sue any clients now, but he can still get 'em into plenty of hot water—fired from their big-paying jobs and prosecuted. Fact is, the murders have made 'em even more afraid of him. I know, Curt! He's opened up a new office under another name!"

"What!" I stared at her, my jaw sagging. "Terry, how the devil did you find that out?"

She beamed. "Why, I just know how your mind works, that's all. Let's see. Jordan would have to let his clients know where to send their payments from now on, so he'd send 'em

a notice by mail. I know what you've been doing tonight, Curt! You've been at a defense plant, questioning the swing shift workers. You managed to make somebody open up about the notice he'd received from Jordan. Did you actually see it?"

I simply goggled at her. It seemed so impossible that everything around me felt unreal. This was my wife, this was our breakfast nook, our maid was bustling as usual, but there was nothing normal left in the world. Terry had suddenly become clairvoyant. I felt I hadn't a single secret left.

"Jordan would have to be pretty careful about those notices," she hurried on, dancing lights in her eyes. "It would say, 'In future send your payments to the X. Y. Z. Collection Company, Box 999, Sub Post Office B' or something like that."

I was so stunned that before I realized it I'd blurted out, "It's the Acme Service, Box 387, Sub Post Office D!"

"See!" Terry cried. "And you're waiting for Sub Post Office D to open up this morning so you can find out the street address of Acme Service! Then you'll case the place. When Jordan goes in, you'll grab him. My goodness, you're smart, Curt, darling! It'll be such a wonderful feather in your cap!"

I got up, dizzy with confusion, staring at her. She looked so bright and fresh! I'd wanted desperately to keep all this under my wig, yet she'd figured it exactly. Suddenly, in a strange way, I was afraid of her. And besides, the clock was warning me that I'd better shake a leg.

"I'm getting out of here!" I mumbled, and went.

WHEN I got back to the house that evening I was a changed man—changed for the worse, dragging my spirits like a whipped hound's tail. I'd taken the worst tongue-lashing of my life from Commissioner Hammer and snorts of derision from the D.A. The *Star* was now demanding

my removal from office. It looked as if they'd get their wish in a burry.

I trudged into the house feeling utterly licked, but also I was mad to the marrow of my weary bones. Terry came romping to greet me, eager for the exciting news. But the expression set on my face was so fierce, that she stopped short and turned pale.

"Curt! What's wrong?" And then she wailed, "Oh, Curt, did he slip you again?"

"He slipped me again," I said, almost snarling. "When I got to that new office of his, he'd skipped clean. It was such a narrow squeak that there was still cigarette smoke in the air there, but he made it. By now he's holed in somewhere else, laughing his head off at me. He'll probably abandon his racket, but he's still a three-time killer. Now I'll never get him, never."

"I'm so sorry, Curt, darling." "Sorry!" I snapped. "You should be! Do you know *why* he's been able to lick me to a fare-thee-well? Because he was tipped off. And can you guess *who* tipped him? You, Terry. You!"

Terry sank into a chair, her lips parted on a gasp, her eyes widened with dismay. "Curt Hafford, you've gone completely out of your senses!"

I faced her in a cold fury. "Listen to me! I've worked this case strictly solo. I've talked to nobody in the bureau about it. There couldn't possibly be a leak there. The leak's right here."

"Curt!" she cried, really alarmed.

"Terry, I'm crazy about you. When you coax me to open up, I can't resist you. I've told you things I shouldn't have told anybody. And you're a chatterbox. Don't deny it. You've blabbed about this murder all over town."

Tears began to glimmer in Terry's eyes. "Honest, Curt, I haven't."

"I wish I could believe that. But how can I? You're at the phone twenty times a day, shooting the breeze with your gossiping friends. Every day you go to lunch with three

or four girls. You have cocktails with others. At least twice a week you wag your pretty chin all afternoon over a bridge table. As a result it got to Jordan somehow and he's been able to show me his dust. I'm done for and a killer's getting away with it."

**T**ERRY looked so hurt. This was almost more than I could take—the first serious quarrel we'd ever had. But it was important. My whole career was at stake, and to think it was being wrecked by idle, unthinking gossip—

"And that's not all, Terry. What I'm about to say now is terrible. But it's true that if a warning hadn't leaked to Jordan, Julie Finley wouldn't have died."

Terry sat very still. Suddenly she was tearless and her soft, oval face was very white. And she shuddered a little.

"Curt, darling," she said quietly, "if it were true, I wouldn't blame you for hating me. I'd hate myself. But I realize how responsible your job is. I haven't told a single person a single word about the inside of this case."

Then she added, like a very earnest little kid, "Cross my heart and hope to die."

I sat studying her, feeling more and more like a heel. She looked so innocent. With all my heart I wanted to believe her. But there was the stark fact of the leak standing between us—that deadly leak. I tried grimly to get around it.

"If it wasn't you, then it had to be Amanda Pink."

"Amanda? But Curt, it couldn't be her, either! She rarely leaves the house. She hasn't even taken her Thursday afternoons and Sundays off. She's not well so she spends all her spare time resting in her room. I know for a fact that she hasn't been out of this place since the case broke. Nobody ever comes to see her, either. And she never touches the telephone except to answer it.

"Don't you see, Curt, both times when you

headed for Jordan's office, and both times when a warning got to him ahead of you, I was right here in the house. Amanda simply couldn't have made a phone call without my knowing it."

"You're positive of that?"

"Absolutely! Don't you dare mention this to Amanda, either. Maids are so terribly hard to get these days! Amanda's a perfect jewel. I wouldn't lose her for the world."

"So there couldn't be a leak anywhere," I said bitterly. "But still there's a leak."

Terry let out a little wail. "That look in your eyes, Curt, darling! It's so awful! You still suspect me, you still do!"

"If I'm wrong about this, Terry, I'll never stop begging your forgiveness; but heaven help us, what is there left for me to think?"

Terry shuddered again and gave a little groan. "I can't stand it! I don't blame you, Curt, but I can't let you think I'm responsible for Julie Finley's death. I've got to do something, do something!"

She stared into space, frightened and biting her lips. Because it was already too late now, all I could do was let the whole world come crashing down on my head.

#### CHAPTER IV

**I** COULDN'T SLEEP. Terry lay in her bed, also stark awake, thinking. And sometimes sobbing quietly to herself. It was more than I could bear. I groped for some other answer. The theory I soon snagged onto seemed pretty far-fetched, but it was the only possibility.

Not wasting any time about looking into it, I swung out of bed and snapped on the lights. I prowled into a corner, took a picture off its nail, then got down on my knees and crawled. Terry sat up in bed to stare, wondering if I'd suddenly gone whacky. She became sure of it when I began dragging my bed away from the wall.

"Curt, what on earth are you doing?"

"Shh!" Whispering close to her ear, I said,

"Don't speak!"

She watched me prowling about until finally, in the hallway downstairs, I found it, hardly believing my eyes.

"My gosh, there it is!"

Terry pointed toward the little disk-shaped thing hanging to the wainscoting behind the clothes rack—the thing with threadlike wires trailing into a small hole bored in the floor.

"That?"

"Shh!" I whispered elatedly, "Darling, I most humbly beg you to forgive me. That's a microphone!"

Terry looked dubious, but the discovery made me jubilant. It seemed incredible that someone had actually sneaked into my home and installed a microphone, but there it was, centrally located in the house and probably of a super-sensitive type capable of picking up conversations in any of the rooms around it or above it.

Dust lay on it, thick dust. Apparently it had been rigged up long ago—no doubt at about the time when the birth certificate racket began operating. A devilishly neat trick, tapping in on the private conversations of the chief of the detective bureau! No wonder the murderous kingpin of the racket had been able to outguess me.

Drawing Terry away from it, I whispered again, "Amanda."

Terry shook her head, strangely unexcited. "I remember when it was done. At least I'm pretty sure it was then. A man came to the door and said he was from the phone company. Something was wrong with our phone, probably dampness, he said. He spent a lot of time crawling around, trailing wires. I didn't pay any attention to what he was doing, of course. That was before we hired Amanda, thank heaven."

I nodded, satisfied. That was when it had been done. So Amanda was counted out again and we still had our perfect jewel of a maid. Cautioning Terry to be silent, I went down into the cellar. The thin wires came through

the hole in the hallway floor, trailed along a joist, neatly hidden, then out through the crack of the basement window.

“Curt, darling, I think—”

“Shh! You stay here while I trace these wires.”

In bathrobe and slippers, I hustled outside with a flashlight. Terry, of course, trailed me. The wires were threaded under a row of bushes, then they turned to follow the hedge. At a corner of the lawn they ended, half of a small connection plug being affixed to them.

“See?” I said. “Somebody’s been sneaking in here at night and hiding in this corner of the hedge with some sort of amplifier and earphones which he simply hooked onto the mike by means of this plug.”

Still strangely unimpressed by all this, Terry asked quietly, “So now you don’t suspect me any more?”

“No, darling, not at all! I’m terribly sorry, Terry! This certainly is the answer. And you see what it means. I’ll keep an eye out. The next time anybody sneaks in here to eavesdrop, I’ll nail him! Or else I’ll sound off with something tricky that will lead him into a ready-made trap. I’m not licked yet, not by a long shot! Terry, honey, come back into the house and let’s have a drink!”

**A**LREADY it was past three o’clock. My eyes had gone bleary and my joints ached. For several hours I’d been sitting at the bedroom window in the dark, watching that corner of the hedge.

Nobody had sneaked in to tap the mike. At this hour it was extremely unlikely that anybody would come. Abandoning my vigil with the determination to take it up again before dawn, I crawled back into bed. Terry was fast asleep, her lovely face as placidly innocent as a child’s.

Then I began to have cold misgivings. It was just possible I realized, that the mike would never be used again. As the case stood, A. B. Jordan was safely beyond reach. Other

than the mike, I had no lead to him at all. Being devilishly smart, he must know how well he’d covered himself. Also he must realize that to use the mike again would be an entirely unnecessary risk.

He could continue to lie low in perfect safety, while I got booted out of the Detective Bureau and the case gathered dust in the Unsolved file.

Although chilled by the thought, I finally drifted off into restive slumber. How long I dozed I couldn’t know. Suddenly my eyelids had snapped open: I found myself lying there rigid, sensing something was wrong. Reaching over for Terry, I groped into emptiness. I sat bolt upright in bed.

“Terry!”

There wasn’t any answer. The door stood open and the hallway beyond was black. From somewhere came furtive rattling sounds. From somewhere else a peculiar grunting and squealing noise. It was human and terrified.

Swinging quickly out of bed, I snapped on the hallway light. At that the squeaking sounds became louder. They seemed to be calling inarticulately, calling for help. Another door stood open—that of Amanda Pink’s room. Groping in for the wall switch, I was shocked to a standstill.

Amanda Pink, clad in her flannel nightgown, lay spread-eagled on the bed. Her wrists and her ankles were tied to its four corner posts with strips torn from one of her sheets. Adhesive tape was plastered thickly over her mouth. She stopped squealing through her sealed lips and stared at me in desperation.

“Be quiet, Amanda!” I blurted, keeping my voice down. “You’re all right. I’ll get you loose soon. But somebody’s in this house—something’s happened to Terry, too!”

At that, Amanda Pink began squeaking again. My frantic gestures didn’t silence her. Trying to listen to those sneaky sounds downstairs, I hurried back to my room for the police positive I kept there. Then I went down

the stairs, one step at a time, soundlessly, my finger on the trigger.

The noises were coming from the kitchen. I poised at the door, ready to fire fast, then abruptly stepped through.

“Put ‘em—”

It was Terry, her eyes bright with excitement. She’d never looked lovelier.

“Are you all right?” I asked her crazily.

“Of course I’m all right, Curt, darling!” she cried. “But I wish you’d stop pointing that gun at me!”

“Did somebody break in here? Amanda’s tied in her bed. I’ll let her loose.”

As I turned back, bewildered and anxious, Terry caught my arm. Her small, delicate hand squeezed so hard that I froze.

“Don’t you dare, Curt! What do you think I tied her up for, if I didn’t want her that way?”

My jaw dropped. “You tied up Amanda? For heaven’s sake, why?”

“Look!”

Terry had been poking among the kitchen gadgets in a drawer. Triumphantly she plucked something out of it. It was an ordinary five-cent pen-holder, complete with a pen point which was perfectly clean—it had never been dipped in ink.

“Watch this!”

Terry pulled our orange-juicer off a shelf. Next she darted to the refrigerator and back with a lemon. Quickly halving it, she closed the squeezer on it and let the thin yellow fluid dribble into a cocktail glass.

“Terry,” I said, completely mystified. “Who’s gone crazy now?”

Next, her every movement quick, she had a small scratch pad. On the top sheet she scribbled something with a pencil. Then she caught up the pen, dipped it in the lemon juice, and scribbled again. Just as she was tearing off the scratch sheet she lifted her head tensely to listen.

THERE was a rattling sound on the front porch—a thoroughly familiar sound, not in the least alarming, but it threw Terry into an even more breathless state of excitement.

“Come on, Curt!” she whispered.

In her white mules she went clippety-clopping through the rear door connecting with the garage. Still with my gun, I drifted after her, numbed with bafflement. The broad doors stood open and Terry was scrambling into the car.

“Come on!” she urged again frantically. When I ducked in she already had the engine humming.

“What the devil are you up to?” I gulped at her.

Not answering, she whizzed out backward, then veered forward along the driveway. Everything was black with thick pre-dawn darkness. Nearing the sidewalk, she braked violently, leaning forward to peer along the street. Then she swung the car out, not turning on the headlamps, and began following a red tail light which was in gleaming motion near the other end of the block.

“Who’s that?”

“Watch him!” Terry said tensely.

The other car rounded the first corner. Terry spurted, then braked at that same point. The taillight was now glimmering near the curb almost a block away. The other car had stopped. While it stayed there Terry swung to the curb and let the motor idle.

“Curt,” she said quickly, “that microphone’s no good.”

“No good?”

“They probably used it at first, right after it was installed,” Terry rushed on, “but then they must have decided it wasn’t such a hot idea. The only time they could sneak into the yard to listen over it was after dark, and that didn’t really give them time enough. Besides, it was too risky—somebody might see them. I don’t believe anybody’s been near that connection plug in months.”

“Anyway, I’m dead certain nobody could have heard a word over it during the past week.”

Not during that all-important past week? Trying to keep up with her, all I could ask was, “Why not?”

“Because I found the mike a week ago and cut the wire in the cellar.”

“What! You cut— You found—”

“It was the same day Julie Finley was killed,” Terry hurried on. “I reasoned it out. Julie couldn’t have *told* anyone she’d come to see you—she was too afraid she’d get killed because of it. I’d watched her from our bedroom window, and I knew nobody had *seen* her, either. Then how had Jordan found out so as to be able to get at her so fast?”

“Well, that information had to come from our house somehow. So I turned the place upside down, hunting for a microphone—and I found it.”

I screeched at her, “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I started to, but you were so tired that night you wouldn’t listen, smarty-pants. You stuck your head under the pillow, so I just kept it to myself. Besides, I wanted to make sure that that mike really was the way Jordan was tipped off. It might have been left there just to mislead you in case you found it—to cover up the real leak.

“What you told me last night made it perfectly clear that there *was* some other way, a better one. So I thought it out and the only possible answer—”

Abruptly Terry said, gesturing toward the other car, “He’s going to begin going places any second now!” She fished into the pockets of her housecoat. She brought up that sheet of scratch paper and a folder, of matches. Striking one of the matches, she held the flame under the paper, but not close enough to scorch it.

“What *is* this?” I demanded of her. “Some trick you picked up from reading so much about crimes? Never mind—tell me the rest!”

“See?” Terry squealed delightedly.

I saw a few words written with pencil it. They read: *Half pint coffee cream*. Then more words appeared as if by magic—brown-tinted strokes that developed under my eyes as I stared. And these read, *Now is the time for all good men—*

“Surely,” Terry said with a superior air, “you have read somewhere, just as I have, that lemon juice makes a perfectly good invisible ink. So unsuspecting in a kitchen too! Well, the other note I wrote this morning doesn’t read the same as this one. The driver of that other car I stopped to develop the invisible writing with heat, just as I’ve shown you.”

“Other note?”

“The first one I wrote and left in the milk bottle on the front porch, of course!” Terry said. “Look! There he goes!”

The other car had swung sharply from the curb and now it was darting around the corner on crying tires.

## CHAPTER V

AS FAST as I could scramble, I ducked out and around to the other side of the car. Terry slid over to give me the steering wheel. By that time our quarry was out of sight. We jack-rabbed off in high, headlights still out, and skidded around the next corner. Two blocks ahead the tail beacon was gleaming red again and moving fast.

I went after it at a wild speed. Having to concentrate on driving, I had hardly any chance to think things out. It was still dark, so I could keep the other car clearly in sight and at the same time feel reasonably sure the driver hadn’t spotted us tailing him. We both traveled at such a crazy clip that I became no longer certain where we were. Then, abruptly, the other car veered to the curb again and bucked to a stop.

Also stopped myself, almost a block away, I saw a white-coated man spring out of it. Lugging a wire basket half full of milk bottles,

he ran down a driveway and vanished.

“Don’t worry, Curt,” Terry said, her breath short. “He’ll be back.”

“Sure! Gosh, it was one of those commonplace, everyday things so easy to overlook. Routine notes put out with the milk bottles—written in invisible ink, too. Terry, honey, I hand it to you for figuring that one!”

“Pooh,” Terry said. “I’d eliminated every other way or getting information out of our house, so it had to be that. You’d have thought of it, too, if you hadn’t been so upset about me, Curt.”

Rolling the car forward in the gutter, I let it drift to a standstill again only a hundred feet behind the milk delivery truck. Its engine was idling. Now there was a rapid tinkling noise in the drive, way. Carr, the milkman, hustled back into sight with the bottles rattling in his carrier. He hopped into the truck. Almost instantly it sputtered off again.

“He’s gone far enough!” I said.

My car, being lighter than his truck, accelerated faster. He was tooling past the intersection when I pulled alongside him. For a second we sped along nose to nose, staring across at each other. Recognizing us, his face turned as white as the milk in his bottles.

“Stop!” Terry screeched at him.

Instead of stopping he tried desperately to squeeze more speed out of his truck. He had very little left, but I had plenty. Although I pulled slightly ahead of him, he kept hurtling along, trying recklessly to get away.

Suddenly I’d had enough of this race. We were getting too far from that house the milkman had visited. At any rate I knew he’d have to be pulled up short. At a sharp angle I cut directly in front of him.

We heard him howl out his consternation. He also swung sharply to the right in a wild effort to avoid a collision. Still pressing in, I gave him his choice between ramming me or crashing into the curb. He took both.

He jounced across the gutter and sideswiped a maple which deflected him back

in my direction. Suddenly Terry was thrown against me. The truck’s hood was pushing in through our right-side door, folding our car like a stiff, rusty hinge.

THE grinding and crashing seemed to last an eternity, then everything was appallingly quiet. Terry sobbed with her lips against my face, stunned but unhurt. I scrambled out the left side, ran around and found that it was our car that had really taken it. The sedan would never go any place else except behind a tow-truck.

The milk wagon was damaged much less. The windshield radiated cracks from the spot where Carr’s head had hit it. He’d spilled through a burst door and lay on the pavement. There wasn’t any blood on him, but his forehead was welted; he was out cold.

Peering dizzily down the street, I mumbled, “Where are we? Whose house was that?”

“I dunno!” Terry wailed. “But look!”

A massive, gleaming car was turning out of the house which the milkman had visited. And it was turning in our direction! It came rapidly. In another moment the driver would see the wreckage here and he’d know at once what had happened. Having plenty of power under the hood, he’d either whiz off at the corner or fly past us and, in half a moment, be out of sight.

Having only one choice, I jumped into the milk truck, kicked the motor into action and backed away from my smashed sedan. Before I could choke out a warning to Terry, which would have been useless anyway, she’d clambered into the seat beside me. Behind us, the racks of milk bottles clattered crazily as we bumped out of the gutter.

The rear-view mirror showed me that the big car was still coming. It was still behind us, when I shot the milk truck into the middle of the street.

The big car was past the corner now. Its driver had no choice but to plunge through. He

saw me veering to cut him off. He was riding a gleaming projectile that surged forward seemingly without effort but with smooth and apparently overwhelming force. He had only a narrow lane left.

I crowded in, making it still narrower, until his left wheels were spinning along the gutter. Then, with a crazy wrench of the wheel, I crushed the truck hard against him.

The impact seemed to knock the earth out of its orbit. Foggily, I found myself still gripping the wheel with both hands, and Terry clinging to me with both arms. We came out of it as if rising to the surface of a vat of molasses. On my left I saw a mass of naked machinery—the underbelly of the other car. It had lurched over on its side. Its topmost wheels were still spinning.

Somehow I got out of the truck and around to the other side. From that angle I got an X-ray bird's-eye view of the big car. Its whole top had been ripped off against a tree. Its driver was lying huddled under the wheel, his face a horrible mask of red.

Remembering my first-aid training, I left him there rather than run the risk of aggravating his injuries by moving him. I wanted Lewis Welling to live long enough to get as far as the electric chair.

The only thing I did was to fish into his pockets and bring up the little slip which the milkman had passed to him. The one reading *Half pint coffee cream* in pencil, and, in developed lemon-juice ink, *He just found out who Jordan is*.

It hadn't been true when Terry wrote it, but now it certainly was.

**A**T A reasonable hour, for a change, I headed for home that evening, although I'd had a strenuous day putting the case on ice. Lewis Welling, hospitalized, had clammed up, but that wasn't going to do him much good in the light of the signed statements I'd obtained from both Carr and Amanda Pink.

These two had verified my picture of how Welling had worked it. Carr, because running a dairy meant hard work and low pay, and because farm help was so scarce, had gone to Genealogical Associates for a birth certificate so he could land a defense job. Questions asked him there had brought out the fact that he was my milkman.

Instead of a defense job, he'd been given a special assignment as an undercover courier to take the place of the too-risky microphone that had been previously planted in my hallway.

In the same way, Genealogical Associates had put Amanda Pink into my home as a maid, that being a very simple thing to arrange, because, like practically everyone else, Terry had been advertising for a new maid practically every week.

Welling, keeping himself in the background and using Rex Barlow as a front, must have thought he had a big-paying, foolproof setup. Not only could he neglect to act on any complaints that might come to him as the district attorney, an election which he'd wrangled through political confusion, but also he'd laid a secret pipeline that would tip him off to any move I might plan to make against him. And I could testify how nearly foolproof that scheme had actually been!

It was clear enough now that Amanda Pink, spying from a window, just as Terry had, had seen Julie Finley talking with me. Within half an hour Carr had picked up the note she'd left in the milk bottle and had phoned a warning to Welling.

In the same way, "Jordan" had been able clear out of his new Acme office before I could get to him. Getting to him after that would have been a hopeless job except for that tricky note Terry had planted this morning, which had forced him to betray himself.

Everything was lovely. Commissioner Hammer was all smiles. The *Star* was editorializing in my praise. After this there'd be real cooperation between my bureau and the new D.A. All of which was very pleasant,

except that it was Terry, not I, who should receive all this credit.

I was coming home with happy plans for celebrating. I had roses and perfume for Terry, I wanted to buy her the best dinner that could be bought and dance her around all night—yes, until dawn. But when I stepped into the house I found her sitting in the living room sobbing her heart out.

“Oh, Curt, darling,” she blubbered, “it’s so terrible, so awful! I could kick myself!”

“Good gosh!” I gasped. “Why?”

“This whole thing wasn’t worth it! I’ll never, never fool around with murder again!” Her eyes still streaming, Terry had to struggle for breath before she could go on. “Because I—I’ve g-gone and lost—the b-best maid I ever had!”