

Beyond Justice



By Robert
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"What in hell are you doing in my bed?" I demanded.

*Dan Turner judges a beauty contest—and things happen! Was the girl's murder
an act of vengeance—or a dead man's legacy to love?*

IT WAS A hot afternoon, and I was sweating. The crowd was beginning to get restless, and I didn't blame them. They'd come to see a beauty contest, and they wanted action. So did I. The judging had already been delayed almost an hour.

We were waiting for Ben Berkin. He was late. Ben Berkin was production mogul for Cosmos Features, and this beauty contest was his idea of a publicity gag. It was being held right on the Cosmos lot, with the public invited.

I was one of the three beauty-contest judges. Imagine me, Dan Turner, Hollywood private dick, in a spot like that! But Ben Berkin had asked me to do it as a personal favor. "With your reputation as a lady-killer, Dan, you'll make a swell judge!" he had said to me.

So I had accepted, just for the hell of it. And now, here I was on a platform with two other judges, waiting for the parade of cuties to start.

Entrants in the contest were restricted to movie extra girls. The winner was to be awarded a year's contract to play in Cosmos pictures, and a huge silver loving cup donated by Ben Berkin himself. Not only donated by Ben Berkin, but actually made by him. Ben had been a silversmith before he got into the movie racket.

I WAS sitting there wishing I could duck out long enough to snag a swig of Scotch from my flask, when a studio messenger came up to me and whispered in my ear.

He said, "You're wanted in the main office, Mr. Turner."

I followed him, wondering what it was all about. I reached the executive office building. A guy was waiting for me. He was Ben Berkin's assistant, and he looked pale.

He said, "Mr. Turner, something terrible has happened. Ben Berkin has been killed in an automobile accident on his way to the studio!"

I said, "For God's sake—!"

The guy nodded solemnly. "Mr. Berkin was taken to the Emergency Hospital, where he died. He didn't know he was dying. His last words were that the beauty contest should take place as scheduled. The news of his accident was to be withheld until the prize has been awarded."

That was just like Ben Berkin, I thought. His studio came first, no matter what happened. I pulled out my flask and took a deep nip of Vat 69, toasting Ben Berkin's memory.

Then I went back to the judging platform on Sound Stage B and gave the signal for things to commence.

Right away, a long file of hot numbers started mincing across the huge stage. I've seen a lot of

bathing costumes in my time, but the ones worn by these gorgeous dames were just about the most daring I'd ever laid eyes on. Abbreviated silken trunks, crotch-high and skintight; and thin wisps of silken bandeaux for brassieres.

There wasn't much left to the imagination; and if I hadn't just been informed of poor Ben Berkin's death, I'd have got a hell of a hoot out of it.

As it was, I felt low and depressed. I was anxious to get the whole damned thing over with. So I took a swift gander at the parading dames, and my eye caught a flashy brunette who stood out over all the others. She was a wow.

She had hair as black as midnight, and her dark eyes flashed like two shining black stars. Her body was not too thin and not too lush. It was just right. She had hips, and she had breasts—feminine without being ostentatious. And her skin was as smooth as creamy ivory. She held a little card with the number "7" on it.

I consulted my list and saw that Number 7's name was Estrellita Souzan. She was Spanish, probably.

Right alongside the Souzan cutie there was a blonde. She wore too much make-up, but she was damned pretty—that is, if you happen to like generous breasts and somewhat overdeveloped hips, which I don't. Her number was 13—unlucky as hell—and the list gave her name as Wanda Wynne.

Seeing her, I remembered a bit of gossip I'd heard. In my business, it pays to listen to gossip. This blonde Wanda Wynne wench was rumored to be Ben Berkin's flame of the moment! If that were true, I wondered how she'd act when she learned that Ben Berkin was dead.

I took a good look at her; and then studied the brunette Estrellita Souzan once more. Then I turned to the other two judges and said, "My vote goes to Number 7—the Spanish wren."

These two mugs looked at each other, exchanging significant glances. Then one of them said, "We're voting for Number 13, Wanda Wynne."

I shrugged. I was outvoted, and I didn't give a damn. So the announcement was made that Wanda Wynne would get the prize.

I OPENED a big box and withdrew the huge silver loving cup which Ben Berkin had contributed. It was a massive piece of junk, all

ornately engraved and heavy as hell. On the front of it there was a bas-relief figure, a naked woman in solid silver, beautifully executed.

I stepped across the stage and walked up to Wanda Wynne. I handed her the cup.

She took it, grinning. For my especial benefit she wiggled a little. Her lush breasts swayed beneath the thinness of her silken brassiere-strip. "Thanks, handsome," she said to me.

"Don't thank me," I said. "I didn't vote for you."



Before I could reach her, the girl had dropped the trophy, and there was a dagger in her breast.

And then the flashing little brunette, Estrellita Souzan—Number 7—cut loose with a nasty sneer. "Frame-up!" she said, just loud enough for Wanda Wynne to hear. "It was in the bag. Ben Berkin bribed the judges so you could win!"

Wanda Wynne looked sore. She flushed. "Go to hell, you jealous Mexican cat!" she snapped nastily at the dark-eyed Spanish cutie.

For a minute I thought they were going to start pulling hair. They were spitting nasty cracks at each other as they walked off the stage side by side. Nobody was near them. And then, suddenly, Wanda Wynne let out a shriek.

I jumped. That shriek wasn't a yell of rage. It had pain in it, and abrupt, deadly terror. I smelled trouble, and leaped toward those two girls.

But I was too late to stop what happened. Before I could get halfway across the sound stage, Wanda Wynne dropped her silver trophy. It clattered and bounced on the floor. Then Wanda Wynne collapsed, slowly.

There was a thin, jeweled dagger sticking out of her left breast!

I said, "What the hell—!" and dived toward her. Blood was trickling through her thin brassiere and

making a slim crimson river on the whiteness of her bare torso. As the blonde girl went down, the brunette Estrellita Souzan emitted a horrified, choked cry—and then grabbed for the handle of the jeweled stiletto. She pulled it out of Wanda Wynne's heart.

Blood gushed. Estrellita Souzan went corpse-white. Her knees buckled under her. She fainted. The dagger dropped from her fingers and made a silvery clangor as it hit the floor. The Spanish dame slumped over Wanda Wynne's body.

AT THE same instant, the studio was filled with a hell of an uproar. People were milling around and shouting. I saw the chief of the studio guards and yelled, "Clear this damn' place out!" And then I reached the two fallen beauty contestants.

I hauled the Souzan brunette to one side and let her drop. Then I threw myself at Wanda Wynne. The dagger had sliced a clean, sharp hole through her bandeau and through her flesh. Her eyes were wide open, staring horribly into emptiness. She was limp, lifeless. I felt for her pulse, and couldn't find a single flicker.

I ripped away her brassiere, baring her left breast. I shoved my hand against that bloodstained, swelling white mound of still-warm flesh. Her heart was stilled forever. She was dead.

After that, I got pretty busy for a few minutes. Wanda Wynne's corpse had to be guarded, I had to phone Dave Donaldson of the homicide squad. The beauty-contest audience and the losing contestants had to be cleared out. Everybody else seemed to have lost his head. I was the only guy who had sense enough to do what was necessary.

But even I made a hell of a blunder. What with all the rushing around, I forgot the brunette Estrellita Souzan. Then, when I remembered about her, she was gone!

She was gone, and so was the silver loving cup!

PRETTY soon, Dave Donaldson arrived. He took one squint at the dead Wanda Wynne and said, "Jeeze! What a mess!" Then he looked at me and said, "Who did it?"

I said, "I'm not sure. But I think it was a Spanish dame named Estrellita Souzan. The Souzan wren was sore because Wanda Wynne had licked her in the beauty contest. They walked off the stage together. And then Wanda Wynne was

stabbed. This Estrellita Souzan looks like the hot-blooded Latin type who'd use a shiv."

"Where is she? Where is this Souzan skirt?"

I felt my pan getting brick-red. "She got away," I admitted. "She probably picked up the loving cup which she figured she should have won, and scrambled."

Dave Donaldson said, "A hell of a lot of help you are!" and legged it to the nearest phone to put out a dragnet for Estrellita. But by the time night fell, she hadn't been found. She wasn't at her own apartment; wasn't in any of her usual haunts.

Meanwhile, of course, the homicide men had found her fingerprints on the stiletto which had killed Wanda Wynne. As far as the cops were concerned, it was an open-and-shut case.

ON MY way home that evening, I stopped in at the undertaking establishment where Ben Berkin's body had been taken. In his coffin, Ben looked very lifelike, very natural. The auto accident had crashed in his skull, but the mortician had fixed it up all pretty. Ben's red-haired widow, Irene Berkin, was standing by the casket. She'd been pretty, once. Had been a minor film star, in fact, back in the days of silent pictures. But the years had added too much fat to her figure; and there were lines about her eyes and her mouth.

I spoke a couple of words of condolence to her, and went out. It seemed ironic that Ben Berkin and his mistress, Wanda Wynne, had both died on the same day, within an hour of each other. I wondered whether Ben's widow, Irene, had known about the blonde Wanda Wynne. But of course I didn't ask her.

I went home to my apartment. The minute I opened my door, I caught a faint whiff of something. Perfume. I stiffened.

Somebody was inside the flat—or had been there recently!

I grabbed for the .32 I always carry in a shoulder holster, and shoved myself into the apartment. I clicked on my living room lights. I didn't see anybody. But I heard a faint movement in my bedroom.

I leaped at the bedroom door; punched it open. Then I said, "Well, for God's sake—!"

There was a girl in my bed. She was undressed—stripped down to her step-ins.

She was Estrellita Souzan, the Spanish dame! The one Dave Donaldson and his homicide coppers

were looking for all over Hollywood!

She looked gorgeous as the devil, lying there on my mussed bed. Earlier in the afternoon, clad in her abbreviated bathing-suit, she'd been a knock-out. She'd been pretty enough to get my vote in the beauty contest. But now—

Well, if I hadn't suspected her of being a murderess, she could have had my spare shirt just for the asking. Her coal-black hair hung down around her white shoulders; and her naked breasts were glorious. She had a figure that filled me full of itching desires—all slim curves and alluring contours. I never saw skin so white and satin-smooth.

Her dark eyes were enigmatic as she looked at me. And her features were pale, drawn, strained.

I said, "What in hell are you doing here!"

In a low, husky voice she answered, "I wanted to see you. And I didn't think the police would suspect me of being here. It's the last place on earth they'd search for me."

"So you know they're on your trail for bumping off Wanda Wynne, do you?" I fired at her.

She nodded, nervously, and licked her kissable red lips. "Yes, I know they're after me. I saw it in the papers."

I said, "Well, so what! Do you expect me to hide you from the law, baby? Because I won't."

She sat up in the bed. "Listen, Dan Turner!" she whispered desperately. "I need you! I'm in a jam—a bad jam. And you're the only one who can pull me out of it."

I said, "Nix. You don't need a private dick. You need a good criminal lawyer."

"No," she said. "I need you, Dan Turner. Look—how would you like to see them hang me? How would you like to see this white body of mine turned into cold, lifeless flesh—with the worms eating at it!" She ran her fingers over her breasts, her hips.

I SHUDDERED a little. It wasn't a nice picture she was suggesting. And then I thought of the blonde Wanda Wynne. I thought of the knife-wound in Wanda's breast. . . . I said, "You should have thought of all that before you killed the Wynne doll."

"But—but I didn't kill her!" Estrellita wailed.

I said, "Nuts. You were the only one near her. And you were sore at her—sore as hell."

"But I didn't murder her!" Estrellita Souzan

choked, desperately. "You've got to believe me, Dan Turner. You *must*!"

"If you didn't do it, then who did!" I barked.

"Wanda was murdered by . . . her own husband!" the brunette cutie whispered.

I fished out a gasper and set fire to it to cover my bewilderment. What in hell was Estrellita getting at, I wondered.

"Listen!" she pleaded with me. "Wanda Wynne was secretly married. Her husband was a man named Tony Bogard. He used to be a circus performer—a *knife-thrower*!"

I said, "What—!" and strangled on a throatful of cigarette smoke.

"Yes! And Tony Bogard was in the audience today, watching that beauty contest! I saw him, down in front of the stage!"

Estrellita's tone was damned convincing. She seemed desperately sure of herself; and I found myself starting to believe her. Or at least I was willing to listen to what she had to say.

I stepped over to my bureau and hauled out a fifth of Vat 69 and a couple of glasses. I poured two stiff hookers, and sat down on the bed. Estrellita and I downed our snifters. Then I said, "Now start from the beginning, baby, and give me the works."

She drew a deep breath that pouted out her breasts. Then she started talking. "Wanda Wynne was married to this Tony Bogard, a former knife-thrower in a circus. But she'd been separated from Tony for a long time. Wanda came to Hollywood, and Ben Berkin met her. He fell for her—hard."

I said, "Yeah. Go on."

"Well, Ben Berkin's wife, Irene, was very jealous. She suspected Berkin of being intimate with Wanda Wynne. So Berkin couldn't very well give Wanda much of a break in pictures, for fear it would start gossip and get his wife sore."

I nodded. It all added up and made sense, so far.

"The way I figure it," Estrellita went on, "Ben Berkin conceived the idea of this beauty contest so that he could give Wanda Wynne a break in pictures without it appearing to be a personal favor. If she won the contest, he could give her a movie contract and it would look all right. So Ben Berkin made arrangements for Wanda to win the contest. He bribed the judges."

"He didn't bribe me," I objected.

"He didn't need to. He'd already bought the other two judges. They could outvote you."

I REMEMBERED the significant look which had passed between those two other judges, when they overruled me in the contest. I began to think maybe Estrellita Souzan was right. "Keep going," I told her.

"Meanwhile," she said swiftly, "Wanda's husband, the knife-throwing Tony Bogard, came to Hollywood. He learned of Wanda's intimacy with Ben Berkin, and he got crazy jealous. He was in the audience today, and saw his wife winning the contest. He must have realized that she'd now be deeper than ever in debt to Ben Berkin—would have to come across to Berkin, plenty. And so, in a jealous rage, he threw a dagger into Wanda's heart."

"How come you know so much?" I asked.

"I don't. I'm just guessing. But I know I'm right. I feel it—in here." She pressed her naked left breast.

I said, "Why did you take it on the lam after Wanda Wynne was murdered?"

She flushed. "I—I saw that silver trophy lying on the floor of the stage. I knew it should have been mine; knew I'd have won it, if the contest had been square. I had a crazy impulse—and I obeyed it. I stole the silver cup and got away during the excitement. It wasn't until later that I realized my actions would leave me open to suspicion—that I might be accused of m-murdering Wanda. . . ."

In spite of myself, I believed her. I saw something glittering alongside the bed. It was that big silver loving cup.

Estrellita had brought it with her when she'd taken refuge in my apartment. I looked at the Spanish cutie and said, "Granting there's some truth in your theories, why did you come here? And why are you undressed?"

She met my gaze frankly. "I need you. You're the only one who can save me. I haven't any money to pay your fee. But . . ."

I caught her meaning. She didn't have any geetus, but she had sex-appeal. Lots of it.

I shook my head and said, "No soap, baby. I'm not in business for my health."

"P-please—!" she whispered, and caught my hand. She carried it to her breast.

A tingle jiggled up my arm. The trouble with me, I'm a sucker for dames. They're always cracking my good resolutions. And Estrellita's breasts were warm and soft. . . .

After all, I'm human. What the hell?

The first thing I knew, I had the brunette baby in my arms. And she was clinging to me with all the hot passion of her Latin blood. When I kissed her, I felt the tip of her hot tongue between her fragrant parted lips. I could feel her thighs close to me, and when I squeezed her breasts, she moaned and put her arms around my neck. . . .

I didn't bother to turn off the light . . .

A LONG while later, I went to my telephone. I intended to check up on some of Estrellita Souzan's story; and if she'd told me the truth, I'd help her as much as I could.

I called up one of the two guys who had been judges in that beauty contest on the Cosmos lot. When I got him, I said, "This is Dan Turner. I'm going to ask you something, and I want a straight answer, because it has to do with Wanda Wynne's murder. What I want to know is this: did Ben Berkin bribe you and that other judge to throw the beauty contest to Wanda Wynne?"

He floundered around for a minute. And then he said, "Yes. You're right, Turner. Ben Berkin had the whole thing framed."

I said, "Thanks," and rang off. Then I turned to Estrellita Souzan. "About this Tony Bogard, the knife-thrower who was Wanda Wynne's husband," I said. "Do you know where he hangs out?"

She nodded and told me an address on Fairfax.

I looked at her and said, "Listen, Estrellita. I'm going out, and I'm going to leave you here. Will you promise me you won't run away?"

"Why should I run away?" she came back at me. "If I go outside, the police will catch me."

She was a damned sensible jane. I blew her a kiss and went out.

Downstairs, I phoned Dave Donaldson of the homicide squad. I said, "Listen, Dave. I'm going to a certain address on Fairfax." I told him the number. "I want you to follow me out there in about ten minutes, I might have something interesting for you—in the Wanda Wynne killing."

"All I want," he growled back at me over the wire, "is to lay my mitts on that Estrellita Souzan wench!"

I said, "Forget her for a while. I don't think she did it." Then I hung up before he could give me an argument.

I got into my new coupe* and started for

* Turner's old coupe was burned and wrecked in "Death's Bright Halo," *Spicy Detective* for October 1935.

Fairfax. Pretty soon I drew up before the apartment house where Tony Bogard was supposed to be living. I took a squint at the mail-boxes in the lobby, and saw his name on one of them. It made me feel good, because it was another point in Estrellita Souzan's story. Another bit of truth. I went upstairs to Tony Bogard's flat. I knocked.

THE door opened. I saw a sleek, rat-like guy staring at me. He said, "What do you want?"

I said, "Is your name Bogard?"

"Yeah. So what?" he answered me nastily.

I shoved myself into his flat and said, "You were Wanda Wynne's husband, weren't you? And you were on the Cosmos lot today when she was murdered?"

His rodent's eyes narrowed, glittered. "Who told you?" he rasped.

I said, "You used to be a circus knife-thrower, didn't you?"

His face got red. He said, "That lousy little Estrellita Souzan's been spilling her guts! I should have known better than to tell her so much!"

When he said that, I got the play. I knew why Estrellita had been wise to so much. Estrellita had been playing around with this Tony Bogard mug! He looked at me and said, "So Estrellita's hiding out in your apartment, is she, Turner?"

He was smart, to figure that out. And I'd been dumber than hell to tip my hand to him. But there was no use yowling over spilled milk. I reached for my roscoe to hold him until Dave Donaldson arrived on the scene.

But Tony Bogard was too quick for me. He did something I should have expected, but didn't. He caught me with my trousers at half-mast. He flicked a stiletto out of his coat-sleeve and zinged it at me.

I ducked, and the blade caught me in the fleshy part of my left arm. It felt like a red-hot poker against my flesh. It hurt like hell. I saw red. I charged at him.

He met me head-on, and we locked horns like a couple of moose. I had a death-grip on his coat, and I felt it tearing. And then Bogard brought up his knee and planted it on me in a place I don't like to talk about.

I doubled over, sicker than seven hells. Tony Bogard picked up a bottle from the table in the middle of the room and christened me with it, as though I'd been a ship being launched. I went down

and out.

WHEN I woke up, Dave Donaldson was shaking hell out of me, and I had a lump on my stall the size of the Graf Zeppelin. I opened my eyes and staggered to my pins I was woozy.

Donaldson pulled out a half-pint of bourbon and handed it to me, I took a long swig, much at I dislike bourbon. Then I felt better. Donaldson said, "What in hell happened to you?"

I said, "You got here too late, or it wouldn't have happened." And then I saw something on the floor.

It was a leather billfold.

I picked it up. It had Tony Bogard's name stamped on it, in gold. I remembered his coat tearing while we were battling. The billfold must have fallen from his pocket; and he'd overlooked it when he lammed out, after slugging me unconscious.

I opened the wallet. There was a folded sheet of paper in it. I extracted the paper and read it.

It was written in green ink, and I recognized the handwriting. It said, "Darling Wanda: it's all fixed for you to win the beauty contest. When the loving cup is presented to you, look inside. You'll find a five-carat diamond—with my love. Ben."

I whirled on Dave Donaldson and said, "This note was written by Ben Berkin to Wanda Wynne. And in some way, Wanda's husband, Tony Bogard, got hold of it!"

"Tony Bogard?" Donaldson stared at me. "Who's he?"

"He's the guy who lives in this apartment. The one who slugged me silly. The one I wanted you to arrest—which was why I phoned you and told you to meet me here!"

"But he's gone now," Donaldson said.

I grabbed at him. I said, "Yeah—and I think I know where he went!" I dragged Dave out of the apartment and downstairs. I was feeling sick—and scared. I had a hunch. . . .

WE LEFT Donaldson's official car parked at the curb, and used my jalopy because it was faster. In spite of the knife-wound in my arm, I drove; and I went like hell. That new hack of mine was a speedy sled. I held it around ninety, and to hell with traffic!

Ten minutes later I skidded a fortune in rubber off my tires, stopping the coupe before my

apartment. "Come on!" I yelled at Dave Donaldson.

He tumbled after me, into the house and up the stairs. I reached the door of my own flat. It was open—

I said, "God in heaven!" and dived inside.

I froze in the doorway of my bedroom. I saw just what I'd been afraid I'd see.

Estrellita Souzan's lovely, naked body was sprawled on my bed. Only she wasn't lovely any more. She was all bloody. There was a knife-wound in her breast. She was as dead as a mackerel.

Dave Donaldson took one gander at her. Then he whirled on me. "Damn you, Dan Turner!" he roared. "You were hiding her here!"

I said, "Yes. Because I knew she didn't kill Wanda Wynne."

"Then who did?" Donaldson rasped. "And who killed this Souzan dame just now!"

"Tony Bogard killed Estrellita Souzan," I answered. And then I noticed something. I noticed that the big silver loving cup, which Estrellita had stolen and brought to my apartment, was no longer there! It was gone!

The murderer had stolen it. But why? To get the diamond from inside it? That was ridiculous. Why take the whole big, heavy cup when he could have picked out the diamond?

And then, suddenly, I knew the answer.

I SNATCHED Dave Donaldson's wrist and yelled, "Come on with me! I'm going to give you the murderer of Wanda Wynne!" And I hauled him out of the apartment.

We piled into my hack. I gunned the motor—shoved the throttle all the way through the floorboards. I headed for Beverly Hills.

"Where are we going?" Dave Donaldson rasped.

"To Ben Berkin's house!" I snapped back. "To see his widow, Irene Berkin!"

Dave cursed as I skidded around a corner. If ever a motor took punishment, mine did then. We were going places in a hurry.

And then I drew to a halt, a half-block away from Ben Berkin's lovely residence. There was a light in the living room. Donaldson and I walked up on the porch. I flagged him into silence, and got out my skeleton keys. I got the front door open. We crept inside the house.

Just off the main corridor, I heard voices in the

living-room. I heard the red-haired Irene Berkin, Ben Berkin's widow, saying, "Here's your ten thousand dollars. Give me the loving cup and the letter."

Then Tony Bogard's voice said, "Right. Take the damn' cup. And here's the letter— For God's sake! I haven't got it! I must have lost it!"

I yanked out my automatic and stepped into the room. I said, "Yeah. You lost the letter, Tony Bogard. And I found it."



*She was dead as a mackerel
and all bloody.*

He whirled at me. His rat-teeth were bared in an animal snarl. I saw his hand come up to throw a knife—

Dave Donaldson fired over my shoulder. He damn' near deafened me. His slug took Bogard squarely between the eyes, and Bogard went down.

Irene Berkin gasped out, "Wh— What—"

I said, "Take it easy, Mrs. Berkin. Everything's going to be all right now."

Then Dave Donaldson looked at me. He gestured toward the dead body of Tony Bogard and said, "Is he the guy who rubbed out Wanda Wynne?"

I shook my head. "No. But he murdered Estrellita Souzan in my apartment a while ago."

"Then—then who *did* kill Wanda Wynne during that beauty contest?" Donaldson demanded heavily.

"A dead man," I answered him.

Donaldson stared at me as though I'd lost some of my mental cogwheels. "What in hell are you talking about?" he rasped.

I turned to Irene Berkin and said, "Mrs. Berkin, let me ask you a question. You knew that your husband had been running around with Wanda Wynne, didn't you?"

"Y-yes," she said.

"You accused him of it, maybe? Threatened to divorce him unless he gave her up?"

"Y-yes," she repeated.

I grunted. "Well, he probably tried to ditch her—and she wouldn't stay ditched. She had too much on him. So your husband, Ben Berkin, took the only other way out. He killed her."

DAVE DONALDSON said, "You're screwy, Turner! Ben Berkin had been dead almost an hour when Wanda Wynne was stabbed! He'd been killed in an automobile accident!"

I said, "Yes, I know. That's what muddled up the whole thing. But I've got it straight now. Ben Berkin really loved his wife; didn't want her to divorce him. He wanted to get rid of Wanda Wynne; and when he couldn't buy her off, he decided to kill her. He arranged a beauty contest which she was to win. Being a former silversmith, he made a huge loving cup that would be her prize. He bribed the judges, to be sure Wanda Wynne got the cup. And he wrote Wanda a letter, telling her he'd secreted a diamond inside the cup."

"So what!" Donaldson demanded.

"So when Wanda Wynne got the loving cup, she walked off the stage with it. Estrellita Souzan was alongside her. Wanda reached inside the cup to get the diamond— But here. I'll show you just what happened." I picked up the huge, gaudy trophy from the floor. I held it away from me. I put my hand down inside it; fumbled around. I found something hard and many-faceted; a diamond. It seemed to be stuck to the false insides of the cup. I picked at it.

The heavy silver figurine—the naked woman in bas-relief on the outside of the trophy—suddenly snapped open. There was a flick of spring-steel. Then the figurine closed again.

I said, "Ben Berkin fixed a stiletto inside the cup, between the outer shell and the false inner portion. Picking at the diamond inside the trophy releases the spring. The silver figure snaps open—and the stiletto is hurled out, point-first. That's how

Wanda Wynne was killed by a dead man. That's how Ben Berkin murdered her, even after he'd been killed in an auto accident."

Donaldson said, "Good God!" Then he looked at the dead man, Tony Bogard. "Where does *he* fit into this mess?" Dave asked me.

I said, "Bogard must have found that letter which Ben Berkin wrote to Wanda Wynne—the letter telling her about the diamond inside the cup. When Bogard saw Wanda die, he probably realized the truth. So he determined to get the silver loving cup and use it to blackmail Mrs. Berkin, here. Tony Bogard had to kill Estrellita Souzan in my apartment to get the silver cup. Then he came here to Mrs. Berkin and demanded ten grand; otherwise he would tell the police that the dead Ben Berkin had been a murderer." I looked at Irene Berkin. "Is that right?" I asked her.

She nodded brokenly. "Yes. And I—I paid him the money, to keep Ben's memory clear of the taint of murder!"

I felt damned sorry for her. She had loved Ben Berkin—and Ben had loved her, too. Had loved her well enough to kill a dame in order to keep her from divorcing him. . . .

I turned to Dave Donaldson and said, "Listen, Dave. Ben Berkin is dead. And so is Tony Bogard. Tony Bogard was a murderer—he killed Estrellita Souzan in my apartment a while ago."

"So what!" Donaldson asked, slowly.

"So this. As long as Bogard is dead anyhow, let's say that he was the one who murdered Wanda Wynne—who was his wife. Bogard was a former circus knife-thrower, so the story will be accepted without question. How about it? Will you play ball?"

Donaldson said, "Yeah, I'll play ball. Ben Berkin wasn't a bad egg. And he's beyond justice now."