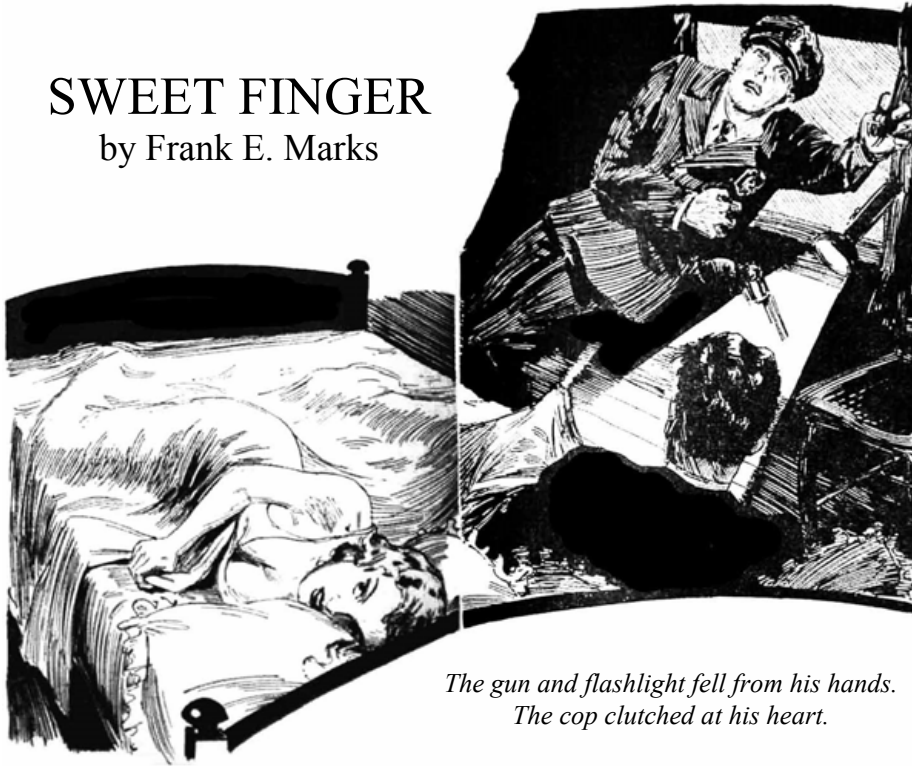


SWEET FINGER

by Frank E. Marks



*The gun and flashlight fell from his hands.
The cop clutched at his heart.*

“Burglar on the lam, eh?” That’s what the girl thought when he ducked into her boudoir. And that’s what the cops thought. . . . But a strange twist of fate guided this midnight marauder. What was his mission?

WITH the throttle mashed to the floor boards, the driver glanced through the rear window of his coupe. The pursuing radio car was gradually lessening his three blocks’ gain. He yanked down the brim of his hat to shade his eyes from the blinding glare on his windshield.

At the end of the block, pinched tires howled as the small machine careened on two wheels into an intersection. At the next street-crossing the occupant of the coupe again turned his head. The radio car was not yet in sight. He right-angled into another dark street, swerved into the driveway of the Ardshire Apartment house, stopped and switched off his lights.

He looked back toward the street from which he had just turned. The patrol car flashed by, its siren moaning. The man smiled. Then, out of the corners of his eyes, he saw a uniformed patrolman emerge from the shadows of the trees.

The officer flashed his electric torch, shot its ray on the coupe, started toward it. The driver accelerated his faintly-purring motor, started the car to the back of the grounds where a row of

garages come into view. One of them was vacant, the doors open.

He drove the coupe into the stall, jumped to the concrete floor and walked toward the rear of the apartment building. When the angle of the structure cut off the sight of the policeman coming in the driveway, he broke into a run until he reached the wall of the house. He glanced upward; then sprang into the air. His fingers caught the lower section of the fire escape.

With the agility of an acrobat his legs shot upward. He landed on the first platform, mounted the iron stairs. At the seventh floor he hesitated at an open window behind whose shade a soft light glowed. He withdrew a black mask from his pocket and tied it over his eyes. A blue automatic glistened in his hand as he leaped over the sill, into the room.

FROM the living room where he found himself, the masked man looked through a doorway into a boudoir. A dim night lamp cast its glow on a golden-haired girl whose head dented the pillow. Noiseless footsteps took him to the open door. He

went into the room, close to the bed, gazed at the slumbering blonde.

The coverlet was down, exposing the girl's inviting creamy shoulders. Rising and falling rhythmically, her firm lush breasts peeped over the lace of her lingerie. Then, as though her subconscious mind warned her of something, her eyelids raised slowly, sleepily, her body remaining motionless.

As her glance fell on the man beside the bed, she stirred suddenly, spoke, "God, Spangler! What are you doing here? I thought you had that diamond snatch lined up for tonight."

The masked man lowered his gun, stared through the holes of his black domino. The golden-haired girl sat up, her hands behind her, under the pillow. Her eyes roved searchingly over the man. He wore a tuxedo under his light top coat. She gazed at his prominent cheekbones, the chin with a cleft in it, his bluish, close-shaven cheeks.

The color gradually drained from the blonde's face as she studied him. Her eyes seemed to grow twice their size. Her scarlet lips trembled. With cat-like swiftness her hand came from under the pillow. Her fingers clutched a revolver. She pointed it directly at the masked man's heart. "Drop the gun, mug! Reach!" she ordered.

The man let his weapon fall to the floor. He raised his arms.

"Who the hell are you?" the girl demanded.

He grinned. "You just called me Spangler."

"I was half asleep when I said that! My mistake!" Covering him unwaveringly, the blonde threw the covers to the footboard. Her nightdress was rumpled up around her waist. Her enticingly-curved hips and exquisite thighs gleamed as she slid her legs over the edge of the bed to the floor.

She advanced to the intruder, reached up with a bare rounded arm and snatched the mask from his face. She drew a quick breath, stared. "I've never seen you before, mug! But you sure resemble him."

"Who—beautiful—Spangler?"

The girl's face went hard. "Skip it, sap! I'm calling the cops!" She glanced toward the phone by the night lamp.

In that fraction of a second her gun had wavered. The stranger's arm shot upward, struck violently under the blonde's wrist. Her revolver left her hand, fell to the floor and slithered under a dresser. The man reached down, recovered his own gun and pushed the girl back onto the bed. "I'll

handle the arsenal, sister, if there's any shooting to be done!"

The intruder suddenly jerked his head toward the window of the adjoining room, the one through which he'd entered. There was a tread outside on the fire escape. The man's hand went into his pocket. He withdrew a rope of pearls that glistened in the lamp glow. He crumpled them in his hand. "Quick! Where can I hide these?"

The blonde's eyes popped "Burglar on the lam, eh? You ducked in here to ditch the cops. Don't plant any hot stuff here!"

The stranger paid no attention to her protest. He jerked the lid from a large jar of face powder on the table, buried the pearls in the depths of the container. He switched off the night lamp, jumped into the bed, crowded the girl over and pulled up the cover.

There was a rustle as the window shade in the next room bulged forward. He spoke in an undertone, "Get this, sister! I'm your husband, We're asleep!"

The girl winced as the cold muzzle of his automatic jammed into her side. "What's the lay?" she asked nervously.

"A radio car trailed me. I slipped into the driveway of this place. The patrol car went by. But a flatfoot spotted me. I guess he saw me come up the fire escape!"

"Damn you!" the blonde cursed. "You're going to get me in a jam!"

The intruder slapped his hand over her mouth. "Keep quiet!" He put an arm over her, felt the warmth of her quivering thigh that made tingles ghost through his fingers. He caressed the smooth velvety surface of her flat stomach, explored upward until his palm contacted the firm pliant flesh of her breasts and imprisoned one. His lips stole around the redolent little hollow of her throat. "Pretend you're asleep!" he whispered. There were soft footfalls in the other room.

The girl trembled, buried her face in the pillow and pressed her warm body close to the man.

THROUGH half-closed eyes the intruder saw the policeman coming from the living room. The officer switched on his flashlight, directed it toward the bed as he advanced. The man in the bed lay still, his fingers clenching the automatic under the coverlet.

The policeman stopped within six feet of the

bed. He focused his flash directly into the pretended-sleeper's eyes, leveled his service gun, rasped, "Not smart enough, Dapper! Our boys had you spotted the minute you hit town this morning!"

The man addressed as Dapper blinked open his eyes, looked into the barrel of the weapon held in the patrolman's hand.

"Come on, out of that bed!" the officer demanded. "And don't start anything funny!"



"Don't plant any hot stuff here," she whispered—"I don't want the cops."

There was a muffled report from under the covers. The policeman slapped his hand to his chest and reeled backward. Dapper had fired through the bed clothing.

The blonde turned her head upward from the pillow, gasped as she saw the distorted features of the officer in the beam of his fallen flashlight. She stared with horror-stricken eyes as the patrolman slumped, fell to the floor.

"My god!" she murmured. "You killed Haggerty, the policeman on this beat!" Her eyes were fixed on the prostrate figure in the eerie beam of the flashlight.

Dapper sprang from the bed, went to the fallen officer, grasped his shoulder and slightly turned him. He thrust his hand under the policeman's chest, withdrew it and held it up. His fingers were crimson.

"You've killed him!" the blonde screamed breathlessly. She jumped from the bed. "You damn crook!" she flared venomously. "You've, put me on a spot! We'll both burn for this!"

"I won't," Dapper replied. He went to the small table, directed his flash on the powder jar and thrust his hand in it. He dragged out the pearl necklace and dropped it in his pocket. He turned, took a step toward the next room.

"Wait!" the blonde's voice was almost a wail.

Dapper wheeled, threw the beam of light on the figure of the quivering girl. Her filmy garment revealed every enticing curve of her desirable body. His blood surged as he gazed on her shimmering white thighs that melted gracefully into her slender waist.

His eyes drank in her dimpled stomach, the swelling breasts that had made his fingers twitch under the covers. Now the firm, luscious mounds thrust forward boldly, heaved rapidly under her stressed emotions.

The girl's eyes were plaintive, supplicating as she came close to Dapper in spite of the gun in his hand. Her quivering sensual red lips opened. Gone was the hard line of her mouth when she spoke. "You—you wouldn't leave me here now, with this dead cop?"

Dapper shrugged his Tuxedo-coated shoulders. "Sorry, beautiful; got to make my getaway. You can tell your story to the cops."

She reached up with bare arms, put her hands on his shoulders. "But—but the cops won't believe anything I say!" The touch of her body against him made his pulse race.

"Why wouldn't they believe you?" he asked.

"Because they know me—know the man I go with!"

"Spangler?"

She nodded.

"You mean Spangler Carson?"

The blonde nodded again. "And you look so much like him, wearing that Tux and black mask. Spangler always works that way. None of the bulls have ever had a glimpse of his face."

LIKE every citizen of the country, Dapper knew of Spangler Carson. His description and lawlessness had blazoned every newspaper of the land. Sketches of him in fashionable dress and mask had been drawn and published from fleeting glimpses that his victims had furnished. Countless

murders, hold-ups, and bank robberies were credited to him.

The police had yet their first time to get their hands on him. And yet, somewhere, hidden in his hideout of the metropolis, he lived unapprehended.

Dapper grinned. "Seems I've crashed some big time connections, getting into your place."

"You have, Dapper. And you got guts, bumping off that flatfoot. But I can't stay here, now! Don't you see?"

Dapper nodded. "But I haven't any hangout to take you to. Besides, if the bulls saw me with you, they might take me for Spangler Carson; open up with a stream of hot lead—get us both."

The blonde spoke hurriedly. "Listen, Dapper. I know a place. We'll be as safe as if we were in a maternity ward. Will you go—take me?"

Dapper's fingers sank into the resilient flesh of her breasts as he put his arm around her, squeezed. "Okay, beautiful. Get into your duds."

The golden-haired girl swished her silken garment over her head. For a brief moment she was gloriously unadorned—looked like a prize statue in marble. She ran to the closet, took some clothing from the hooks.

Dapper watched as she raised one tiny foot after the other into a pair of lacy step-ins and pulled them to her waist. She sat on the edge of the bed, leaned over and worked chiffon hose up her faultless legs. Her breasts, unbrassiered and pendulous in her bent position, swayed provocatively. She stood up, thrust her feet into slippers and wriggled into a street gown. Dapper helped her on with her coat.

"All set," she whispered. They left the bedroom, went into the adjoining room to the window through which Dapper and the policeman had entered. Dapper looked below. Everything was dark, silent. He got out onto the platform of the fire escape. The girl came after him.

Dapper hurried down the iron steps. The blonde was at his heels. He reached the bottom landing, grasped the framework and vaulted to the yard. He reached up, caught the girl's dangling legs and eased her to the ground.

They went to the garage where Dapper had parked his coupe when the policeman had followed him in the driveway. He helped the girl into the seat. Then he got behind the steering wheel and pushed down the starter. The motor purred to life. Noiselessly the car passed along the drive, into the

street.

Following the girl's directions, Dapper finally entered a gloomy section of the city. It was a deserted neighborhood business district consisting of small shops, now closed.

In the center of the block, the blonde spoke. "Turn in—driveway."

Dapper swung the car between a brick bank building and a store that appeared to have living quarters on the second floor. As his headlights described an arc, he noticed an assortment of musical instruments in the window of the shop. The girl whispered "The folks who run the store live upstairs. Drive in the backyard."

Dapper ran his car to the rear of the shop, under a shed to which she pointed. He stopped the engine. They got out. She took him to a back door that faced a second door when they entered a vestibule. She punched an electric button, pressed her ear to a speaking tube. Then she spoke into the mouthpiece, "It's me, Spangler—Jessie!" She waited, listened, said excitedly. "But Spangler! You've got to see me!"

THERE was a pause during which interval Dapper felt the blonde's eyes boring at him in the semi-darkness. Then the lock clicked. The girl who had announced herself as Jessie pushed the door inward, reached for Dapper's hand and led him up the stairway.

At the landing above, an open door led into a reception room. A man of Dapper's build scowled from the threshold. He wore silk pajamas under a robe tied at the waist. His eyes were dark. He had a cleft in his chin and his bluish cheeks and prominent facial muscles twitched when he spoke, "What the hell are you doing here at this time of night? Do you want the cops tracking me?"

He stood aside as Dapper and the blonde entered the room. He closed the door, gazed at Dapper speculatively. "Who's this?" he snapped.

"He's a burglar," Jessie answered. "Got guts, too; just bumped off a flatfoot—Haggerty. We can use a guy like him, can't we, Spangler?"

Spangler Carson looked intently at Jessie who stood behind Dapper. The hunted killer's eyes contracted slightly as he caught a signal on the blonde's features. He shoved out his left hand to Dapper. "Sure, we can use a guy like that." Spangler smiled cordially.

Dapper felt the vise-like grip of the killer's

handshake. And then, with lightning swiftness, Spangler's arm shot out from his shoulder like a piston. His knuckles cracked on Dapper's jaw with a force that jerked the unsuspecting man's head backward.

Dapper staggered, tried desperately to maintain his balance. The back of his legs struck a low stool. He tripped, fell with a thud on the rug. It seemed as if there were a barrage of varicolored Roman candles poking before his eyes. Vainly he tried to keep them open. His muscles were like jelly. He was unable to stir even when the girl reached down, relieved him of his automatic, and took the string of pearls from his pocket.

Spangler Carson took the cord of his dressing gown from his waist, tied Dapper's hands securely behind his back.

As though from a long distance Dapper heard Spangler's voice. "Spill it, Jessie. What's it all about?"

The girl held up the jewels, spoke hurriedly, "Hot stuff! Cops chasing him!"

"So what?"

"The fool came up the fire escape at my place—got into my room! Haggerty was on his tail, came in the window after him. Then this monkey bumped off Haggerty. We'd better scam!"

"What did you bring the sap here for?"

The blonde Jessie smiled cunningly. "Take another good look at him, Spangler. Can't you see? He looks enough like you to be your twin brother!"

"Yeah. I noticed that."

"Then don't be stupid. Suppose the bulls find this bird somewhere—with a hole in his carcass?"

Spangler's face lighted up. "They'd think it was me! Some idea, kid!"

"You get it. We could take it on the lam. You could have your face lifted." She went close to the killer, put her outstretched hands on his shoulders, added, "We could be together all the time, then."

FOR a fraction of a second, Spangler Carson's face clouded. He glanced furtively toward the closed door on the other side of the room—the door leading into his bedroom.

On the floor, Dapper struggled to move his inert body. It was leaden. Spangler's voice seemed to be drifting a thousand miles farther away as he listened, helplessly, to the killer's scheme.

"I got it, Jessie," the gunman was saying. "I'll pump a few holes in this bird. I'll drill some more

through my car. Then we'll take him out and ditch my bus with him in it. I'll put the Indian sign on him—the mark of Marchetti's gang." He grinned evilly and went to a mahogany cabinet where there were decanter and glasses.

With his back to the blonde, he poured out two drinks. He deftly sprinkled a powder that quickly dissolved in one of the glasses. He handed it to the golden-tressed girl. "Have a drink for good luck, Jessie." He downed his own, watched over the brim of his glass as she drank.

"I'll hurry into my clothes," he told her. "You stay here; keep this monkey covered. If he stirs, let him have it!" The killer left by the hall door, went along the corridor to the front of his building instead of into his bedroom as Jessie had expected.

She sat down, gun ready and flared a match to a cigarette between her red lips. She yawned, patted her mouth as smoke sifted through her fingers. Glancing toward the bedroom door, she got up, walked to it.

She turned the knob, opened the door a crack and looked into the room. She straightened as she stared at the bed. There was a bulge in the bed clothes. Somebody was there covered up.

Jessie's senses reeled as she crossed the room. She shook her blonde head to clear it from a drowsy cobwebby feeling that was overpowering her. Grasping the top of the coverlet, she jerked it back. She caught her breath. Her face went hard.

On the bed lay an unclothed girl with dark hair. Her bare knees were bunched up to her youthful breasts. Her frightened eyes widened at the gun in the blonde's wavering hand. "Please—don't shoot me!" the dark-haired girl whimpered.

"You black-haired bum!" the blonde gritted through clenched teeth. "What are you doing here?"

"Spangler brought me!"

The yellow-haired girl's face went livid. She reeled, caught the bed for support. "So—so he's double-crossing me, eh? The rat! I got it. He doped my drink, too!" She grasped the girl in the bed by the hair, flourished her weapon. Listen, you! One peep and I'll be back here and blow your head off! Stay here and keep quiet! See!"

The black-haired girl shook with fright, nodded. "I—I will!"

The blonde stumbled back drunkenly to the other room where Dapper lay on the floor. She kneeled down, shook him. "Snap out of it, Dapper.

I'm with you now!"

He felt her tear at the cords that bound his wrists. She got them loose. He extended his cramped arms, worked the blood back into his muscles. "How come you changed your mind?" he blinked.

"Forget it," she answered. She went to the cellarette, poured out a glass of liquor, returned and gave it to him.

He gulped it down, smacked his lips. "Now I feel myself again," he said. He started to get up.

Jessie held him down. "Don't—don't get up yet. Listen," she said thickly, "Spangler's going to take you for a ride! You look so much like him the cops will think that's who you are when they find your body!"

"I heard it," Dapper replied.

She pushed the automatic in his hand. "Keep this out of sight when he comes back. Pretend you're still tied up. Watch your chance and get him! I—I'm—I'm pretty near out. The rat slipped me a powder."

THERE were footfalls out in the hall. Jessie crawled to the chair, slumped in it. The room was whirling crazily in front of her. Her eyelids drooped. Darkness blotted out her memory as Spangler, now dressed, came into the room with another man. Both held revolvers in their hands.

On the floor, Dapper feigned unconsciousness, kept his weapon hidden under his body. To start anything now would be suicide with Spangler Carson and his armed torpedo in front of him.

The killer grinned, spoke to his henchman. "Jessie's passed out. And I hit this bird so hard he'll stay cold long enough to handle him."

"What do you want me to do, boss?" the torpedo asked.

Spangler motioned to the bedroom. "Get Charlotte. Gather her up in the spread. No time for her to dress now. Take her down to this bird's car. Drive to Adams and Figuero. I'll finish this monkey here and drag him to my car downstairs. We'll put Jessie in it with him. I'll ditch it where you're waiting for me. Savvy?"

"I get you, boss." The accomplice disappeared into the bedroom. In a few moments he returned with a huddled figure enveloped in the bedspread, walked across the room and opened the door to the hall. He hesitated when the killer spoke, "Mike."

"Yes, boss."

"Come back here after you put Charlotte in the car."

The henchman nodded and went down the stairway with the bundled girl.

Spangler Carson flared his lighter to a cigarette, exhaled a fog from his nostrils and appraised the inert-appearing form of Dapper on the floor. He glanced at Jessie slumped in the chair.

The man called Mike came back into the room. "Now what, boss?"

"Take Jessie down," Spangler jerked his thumb to the blonde. "Put her in the back of my car. Then get on your way with Charlotte in the other bus."

The torpedo wrapped his gorilla arms around the yellow-haired girl, lifted her bodily and went out of the room with his burden. A minute later Dapper heard the purr of his coupe. Mike was leaving with the dark-haired girl as his chief had told him.

IT flashed through Dapper's mind why the girl, Jessie, had returned his gun and untied his hands before she had passed out. She had discovered the brunette in Spangler's bedroom. Jessie had realized that the killer had slipped a knock-out powder in her drink. Spangler had ordered his henchman to dump the unconscious blonde in his car that was parked below.

All that was now left for Spangler Carson to do was to bump off Dapper, set his dead body behind the steering wheel at the appointed spot and then wipe out the blonde. The police would find their bodies and believe it was Carson, rubbed out with his moll by a rival gang. Spangler would make his getaway with the brunette, Charlotte, who waited with Mike in Dapper's coupe.

The killer's face creased wickedly as he looked down at the supposedly trussed man. Through partly closed eyelids, Dapper watched tensely. He saw the sardonic, self-satisfied smile on the gangster's lips as he advanced with lowered right hand gripping his gun. Within striking distance Spangler posed, flipped his revolver and caught it by the barrel. The killer raised his arm. The heavy stock of the weapon described a deadly arc toward Dapper's skull.

The intended victim jerked his head sidewise as the bludgeon grazed his neck and banged the floor. Dapper whirled his body from its cramped position, dragged his hand from under his leg and pulled the trigger of his automatic. A report made the room

tremble. Fire licked over the shoulder of the killer. Where the slug ploughed into the wall, plaster sifted to the rug.

Spangler's eyes went demoniac. He tossed his gun, tried to catch it by the stock as it flipped in the air. Dapper shot out with his fist, struck the weapon and sent it clattering across the floor. He lurched out with his other arm, clamped the gangster in a crushing grip and shoved him flat on his back. The fall imprisoned Dapper's gun hand under his assailant.

Spangler Carson cursed, worked his right arm free from Dapper's grip, rained swinging blows on top of Dapper's spine. Dapper's face strained with the jarring pain that racked through his brain. He gritted as the killer's fingernails raked over his ear, bringing trickles of blood. The hard metal of the automatic was cutting into Dapper's clenched fingers under Spangler's back.

Dapper abandoned his weapon, pulled his arm free from his antagonist's weight, smashed his fist into his mouth. Spangler spat red-tinted saliva as he twisted to his side, got his hand on the automatic that had been under his back. Dapper plunged, crashed his assailant's arm down. The killer's knuckles cracked against a chair leg as his arm spread out. The weapon left his hand.

Spangler Carson reached up with both arms, encircled Dapper's neck, squirmed. The two men rolled across the floor. They struck the cellarette, overturned it. The decanter rolled out. Its contents gurgled onto the rag. Dapper's hand shot for the container, readied it. His fingers curled around its neck. He swung it in the air, brought it down with splitting force on his opponent's head. Spangler went limp. His eyelids fluttered and closed.

DAPPER got to his feet, looked toward the closed door to the stairway. There was the sound of people running; up the steps. He glanced at the unconscious killer. He reached to the floor, picked up the blonde's handbag. Then he went into the dark bedroom, peered out through a crack in the doorway.

Police Lieutenant O'Neill, with a squad of men from headquarters at his heels, barged into the outer room. For a moment, the officer stood still, eyes alert, ready for action. He lowered his service gun as he looked at the blood under the head of the sprawled gangster.

O'Neill spoke, "Looks like the end of the trail

for Spangler Carson this time. He's had some fight here, too." The police lieutenant turned a puzzled face around the interior.

In the dark bedroom, Dapper moved on his toes to the open window, calculated the short drop to the ground. Nobody was in sight down in the yard. He clutched the sill, swung over, hesitated, and then let go. He struck the soft soil, stood up and looked around. A big sedan was under a shed.

Covering him unwaveringly, the blonde threw the covers off the footboard and slid to the floor.



Dapper ran to the car and looked into the rear compartment. The blonde girl, Jessie, lay on the floor. Dapper smiled. This was Spangler's car, the machine in which he and the golden-haired girl were to have been taken for a ride.

Dapper yanked open the front door, vaulted behind the wheel and started the engine. It hummed quietly. He drove out of the yard into the street.

Twenty minutes later he headed the big machine into the driveway of the Ardshire Apartments to the garage where he had put his own car earlier in the night. He sprang out, opened the rear door and gathered the blonde in his arms. He looked up along the wall of the building, figured the location of the girl's room which he had entered previously by the fire escape.

He proceeded to the apartments and went in the rear door. Pressing the unconscious girl against him, he got in the freight elevator and started the cage upward. At the seventh floor he got out, carried the blonde along the deserted hall and stopped at a door. In her handbag he found the key to the apartment and opened the door. He took her into the suite.

SUNBEAMS streamed across the bed in Jessie's apartment the following morning. Her hair was like spun gold as the rays streaked her pillow. Her face was pale and wan. Dapper had just set down the phone.

He strode across the room and stood close to the girl in the bed. She had not opened her eyes since he had placed her there. He sat down, lighted a cigarette and unfolded a newspaper that had been pushed under the door of the room.

Banner headlines screeched across the top of the sheet. Heavy type told of the capture of the country's foremost enemy, Spangler Carson. Dapper smiled when he read a paragraph about the killer's yellow-haired girlfriend who was supposed to have been in his place with him. She had disappeared. He turned to the girl beside him. Her eyes were twitching.

There was a rap on the panel of the door. Dapper turned, answered, "Come in—"

Two men came into the room, walked to Dapper who kept the newspaper in front of his face.

"Well?" a voice in front of Dapper said.

Dapper lowered his paper, blew out a cloud of smoke and grinned into the face of Police Lieutenant O'Niell and the patrolman—Haggerty!

"Good morning," Dapper greeted.

O'Neill scowled. "Of all the undercover men, Jim Clinton, you drive me the screwiest!"

James Clinton, secret investigator, who had tracked down some of the most desperate criminals of the nation laughed. "I ducked out last night when I saw you had Spangler Carson safe. You see," he turned to the blonde. "I wanted to be sure she got home okay. We owe something. She helped me out of a jam before you got there."

There was a scream from the bed. The blonde girl, Jessie, was sitting up. Her terror-stricken eyes were fastened on Haggerty—the policeman. "That—that cop!" she gasped hysterically.

Clinton put his hand on her shoulder. "Take it easy, sister."

"But you shot him! I saw you! The blood!"

The secret agent smiled. "You saw me fire a blank cartridge. Then you saw this." He took a capsule from his pocket, crushed it in his palm. Crimson streamed over his hand.

The girl's mouth dropped open. She stared, shook, fell back on the pillow.

James Clinton handed some papers to O'Neill. "Official report; see you later at headquarters."

The police lieutenant looked steadily at Clinton; then cast a furtive glance at Jessie. "Okay, chief," he replied. He and the officer left.

CLINTON sat on the edge of the bed, took the girl's hand. Her eyes stared. "I heard," she murmured. "You're a detective, aren't you?"

He nodded. "The whole thing was a scheme to run down Carson. The police chasing me, my coming up the fire escape, pretending to be a burglar. I knew you'd want to get out of here when you believed Haggerty was shot; figured you'd lead me to Carson if you thought that I was a crook. Spangler's in jail now."

"I'm glad you got him!" her eyes flared. Then her face sobered. She sat up. The coverlet fell away exposing her heaving breasts. "But they'll take me to jail!"

Clinton shook his head. "We'll need you to testify. You'll be safe now. Carson was the last of the gang."

"And it's the last of that kind of a life for me," Jessie declared. She stared thoughtfully at the detective. "But imagine me putting the finger on a gangster."

Clinton pulled her from the bed to her feet. She landed in his arms, melted to him. He felt her warm quivering form against him. He said softly, "Sweet finger."