



Her finger was twitching on the trigger when a gun outside the window was fired three times in rapid succession

# DEATH ON THE METER

By EDWARD RONNS

*Detective Dolliver of Homicide Runs a Chase With Doom on the Trail of a Killer—and Learns That the Female of the Gun Racket Species Can Be More Deadly Than the Male!*

## CHAPTER I

### BIG MAN IN THE SHADOWS

DOLLIVER began at ten o'clock that morning. It was a nice morning, with a faint golden haze in the distant hills. It was not a suicide's morning. So Dolliver chose to believe the telephone message from Sally Burgess, who insisted hysterically over the wire that Lubelle Satterlee would never have committed suicide, that she must have been murdered. It was not Dolliver's case, but since the telephone message had been for him, he went looking for Sally Burgess.

The superintendent said Miss Burgess wasn't in. His name was Horace Purvis, and he had a faint lisp.

"I hardly ever see her anyway," he announced. "She drives a taxi, you know. Women do everything nowadays." Mr. Purvis snickered. "Almost everything."

"What does she look like?"

"Sally's all right. About twenty-five, dark hair, slender, medium height. Nice blue eyes. A quiet and industrious person." Mr. Purvis paused. "I thought you knew her."

"Maybe I do," Dolliver said. "I guess I've used her taxi a couple of times. Anyway, she remembers me. She wanted to see me. I'm surprised she's not in. What about her friends? Does she have many?"

"Hardly none at all. Never seen a man come for her, but maybe she discourages them. She lives alone, anyway."

Dolliver was annoyed that he couldn't remember Sally Burgess' appearance. He asked for the superintendent's pass-key and

discouraged Mr. Purvis' efforts to follow him into the cottage.

A yellow, varnished sign announced the bungalow court as Terrace Gardens. Little stone gargoyles squatted like frogs along the barren concrete walk. Dolliver walked slowly between them until he came to Number 8, which was Sally Burgess' address. The blinds were drawn against the high morning sun. There was a semi-circle of red brick steps, a sunken doorway, and a yellow mailbox. There was nothing in the mail-box except a throw-away circular from the neighborhood food market.

It was cool and shadowed inside. The scent in the air was not unpleasant. Dolliver shrugged a little, heeled the door shut, and listened. He was a solid man in his middle thirties, with thick, sleek hair, a square dark face, and a tendency toward fat unless he exercised. He was known at Homicide headquarters to be meticulous, plodding and sober. He was a bachelor. His first name happened to be Enoch.

THE rooms were neat, yet not so neat that a man couldn't be comfortable in them. He was tempted to take an apple from a bowl that stood in the kitchen, but his sense of law and property was too deeply ingrained to permit it. The Hollywood bed in the bedroom was smooth and unruffled, obviously unslept in last night. He felt a little nagging ache of worry as he searched the place. The vacant atmosphere depressed him.

There were no pictures of Sally Burgess—none of any kind. The bungalow looked like a dead end until he found the scratch pad beside

the telephone. There were just two names in neat, typographical script, and two telephone numbers. One of them was the name of the woman who had been reported as a suicide at two o'clock that morning—Lubelle Satterlee. The other was that of a woman named Vera Poole. Dolliver carefully copied both names in his dog-eared black note-book and turned to go.

He was startled to find Mr. Purvis at the doorway, watching him through newly donned thick spectacles. For an instant he caught an intent, worried expression on the super's small, pinched face. Then light shattered and splintered on the glasses as Mr. Purvis raised his head and smiled. His eyes looked goggly, like those of goldfish in a bowl.

"For heaven's sake," Mr. Purvis demanded, "what has she done?"

"Nothing," Dolliver said. "I'm just looking for her. She said she had some information for me."

"Well, I thought, after that other man asked for her—"

"What other man?" Dolliver snapped.

"The man early this morning. He broke in here. I thought he was a sneak-thief." Mr. Purvis was distressed. "'He ran away when I started in through the front door. That was about three o'clock this morning.'"

"What did he want?"

Mr. Purvis snickered. "He didn't wait to say."

"What did he look like?"

"Big," Mr. Purvis said promptly. "He was enormous. A regular gorilla type. But it was too dark to identify him properly."

"Had you ever seen him around before?"

"Oh, no. As I said, Miss Burgess never had any men callers."

Dolliver frowned. Shrugging off Mr. Purvis' morbid curiosity, he left the Terrace Gardens in drowsy sunshine and climbed into his car.

At the nearest pay phone he called Headquarters and got Willie O'Brien.

Willie was sarcastic. "You run down that secret passion of yours, Pop? She have some good news for you?"

"She didn't come home last night," Dolliver said. "And don't call me Pop. Look up her background, if you can. I don't guess she has a record, but Red Streak Cabs always checks their drivers' histories through us. See where she came from and what-all."

"Sure thing. Haven't you viewed the original corpse yet?"

"I'm going there now, in case you want me."

He hung up, irritated and worried, and drove on into town. . . .

A neighbor had found Lubelle Satterlee's body. At two o'clock in the morning Mrs. Brennan had smelled the gas that crept insidiously through the corridors, and had sounded an alarm. The police broke down the door ten minutes later. The gas had come from a little heater set in the ornamental fireplace, and was hissing from all jets. The girl was sprawled on the floor, quite dead. The respirator men worked on her for three hours, giving up just before dawn. It was obviously suicide, motive unknown.

Dolliver listened to Kipps, the harness cop left on guard at the place, tell all this with unchanged expression.

"She was a blonde," Kipps finished. "Pretty nifty, too. The M.E. said she was loaded with rye when she passed out."

Dolliver surveyed the disheveled little flat with bleak eyes. The rooms lacked the neat, prim cleanliness of Sally Burgess' cottage. There were tasseled satin pillows in overabundance on the mohair furniture. Here, too, the bed hadn't been slept in.

"Was she a taxi driver, too?" Dolliver asked.

"Yep. Red Streak Cabs. She worked at night, came home about midnight, and didn't make a sound after that until the lady next door sniffed the gas. She was too far gone by then for anything at all to be done for her."

"Then nobody knows whether she had any visitors or not?"

Kipps grinned.

"You trying to make something out of this, Enoch?"

"I don't know," Dolliver said, brushing his thick black hair in place. "This Sally Burgess was evidently Lubelle's pal. She seems to know me, but I can't place her. Maybe I used her cab a couple times. Anyway, she called Headquarters an hour ago and asked for me. Said she could prove this blonde here was murdered."

"Well, where is this Sally Burgess now?"

"That's what I'd like to know." Dolliver studied the chalk outline of a body on the floor, left when the medical examiner ordered Lubelle's body removed. He had no desire to see the dead girl. "Where is Ankers now?" Ankers was the lieutenant who had been given the case. "Has he dropped it?"

KIPPS spread his meaty hands and shrugged.

He looked bored.

"Ankers called it a suicide and went back home to sleep."

Dolliver twirled his neat felt hat on a long, slender forefinger.

"Was the place this messy when you first came in?"

"Oh, sure. This Lubelle was kinda flashy—the silk tassel type."

"Yeah," Dolliver nodded. "But the bed is nicely made." He eyed the open bureau drawers, the limp stocking trailing to the floor, the twisted rugs. "Some cops have no sense of neatness. Maybe the place was searched."

Kipps stared out the window and still looked bored. Dolliver eyed the pathetic rooms and looked in the kitchen. There was the same disorder here. A can of sugar was overturned on the table and the white crystals glistened in the stray sunlight. A small saucepan filled with dark brown liquid stood cold on the stove, and he dipped a finger into

it for a tentative taste. It was coffee. He could make out the dark grounds on the bottom of the pan. There was also an empty rye bottle and one glass tumbler beside a dirtied coffee cup.

Dolliver returned to Kipps, in the living room.

"Who were her friends?"

"They were mostly men—but plenty of them. That was Lubelle."

"But no callers last night?"

"I only know what I heard Ankers saying," Kipps said. "Some big guy is supposed to have asked the super if Lubelle Satterlee lived here. He showed about three, so it musta been after the suicide."

"A big guy?" Dolliver asked. His eyes were suddenly shiny. "What did he look like?"

"You got me there. The guy kept in the shadows out in the hall. Just big, that's all we got. Nothing there."

"All he wanted to know was if Lubelle lived here?"

"That's all, Lieutenant."

DOLLIVER nodded his thanks and went out. He heard Kipps striking a match for a cigarette as he closed the door. . . .

Taxi Number 83, assigned to Sally Burgess, was missing from the Red Streak Cab garage. Cummings, the manager, was indignant:

"She's had it out all night now," he told Dolliver. "She was due in at midnight, like the other women drivers, but she never showed up. I'm giving her until noon, and then you fellows got to search for it. After all, a cab costs dough."

"Ever have any trouble with the women drivers before?"

"No, can't say I did. They're a pretty good bunch, mostly. Their men go in the service and they take their place."

"Got a picture of this Sally Burgess?"

"Sure, we keep file cards on all our hackies. Come on."

Dolliver followed Cummings' coveralls into the office. The picture was not very informative. He still couldn't remember Sally Burgess. Her face was pleasant, her hair dark and cut boyishly close. Her eyes were pale, her lips thin and strong. She could have been attractive, but the passport-type photo was too harsh for him to tell. He returned the card.

"How long has she been working for you?"

"Three months. Always been strictly business so far." Cummings filed the card. "She buddied with that Satterlee girl—the one that did a Dutch this morning. That was a funny one, too."

"How come?"

"This Satterlee girl was a good-time babe. Always happy, always having dates. Seems funny to think she's dead now. And did it herself, too." Cummings looked shrewd. "Come to think of it, Lubelle was Sally Burgess' best friend. You aren't looking for Sally on account of the suicide, are you?"

"Let's see Lubelle's taxi log, will you?" Dolliver said thinly.

"Sure thing."

## CHAPTER II

### LETTERS AND PEARLS

THE scribbled pad Cummings showed Dolliver carried the activities of Lubelle Satterlee's cab up to 11: 00 P.M. and ended there. The last fare was to a good address, 18 Park Towers, Woodham Park. Dolliver meticulously jotted down the addresses in his worn little note-book.

"Did Lubelle bring the taxi back herself?" he asked.

"I didn't see her myself," Cummings told him. "In fact, nobody saw her bring it in, as it happened. But it was parked okay, and her cash and log were on my desk, where they leave it when I'm not around."

"But you've no idea where Sally Burgess would be?" Dolliver said.

"Nope. If I get hold of her, I'll fire her. That's what I told her boy friend just before you came in."

Dolliver felt a queer thrill chase up his back. He paused half-way through the doorway and slowly returned.

"What boy friend?"

"This big fellow came around about an hour ago," Cummings said.

"He asked for Sally, said he wanted to use her cab. I told him she was out and he said he'd wait a while, but I guess he's gone now."

"What did he look like?"

"About middle twenties, I'd say—a husky blond brute. Sorta Scandinavian or Russian. He had a queer accent. His clothes didn't fit so well—plain black serge and plain black tie. He seemed nervous, kept cracking his knuckles. His hands were the biggest hands I've ever seen."

"You didn't get his name?"

"No, I wasn't that interested."

Dolliver thanked him and left.

Headquarters was only three blocks down and across the square, and he walked through the warm spring sunshine with measured, thoughtful strides. O'Brien, in Records, had some information for him when he came in. The little sergeant had covered a lot of ground. Dolliver listened attentively, smoothing the crease in his felt hat as O'Brien talked.

"This Sally Burgess is clean. No P.D. records anywhere yet. She came here a year ago from Arkansas City, Kansas, worked in a defense plant, and quit to drive a hack for Red Streak in February. No accident record, no customer complaints."

"Any family?"

"Well, that's a funny one. The address she gave in Kansas was a boarding house, and she lived there a couple of years, working as a waitress and taking some correspondence courses in domestic science. But that's all. It's

a dead-end there. Nobody knows what-all before that.”

“No boy friends?”

“Nothing at all on that.”

Dolliver sent down for sandwiches and coffee and sat in his own dingy little office using the telephone. It was a tedious task, checking Lubelle Satterlee’s taxi log. There seemed to be nothing in it. The last address, 18 Park Towers, Woodham Park, was occupied by a Mr. W. F. K. Lemming. Dolliver vaguely associated the name with a bond investment company, and checked to make sure. A call to the *Tribune* verified the respectability of the Lemmings. He scratched the name off the list and was sipping his coffee when the telephone rang.

It was Cummings again, from the Red Streak garage.

“This might interest you, Lieutenant,” the man said “if you’re still wondering about Satterlee. The night attendant just tells me that a lady called last night about midnight and asked if any lost packages had been turned in. She couldn’t remember which cab she took, but I figure it was Lubelle’s. The address checks—a Mrs. W. F. K. Lemming. She seemed pretty anxious to find the package, but we haven’t got it. That make up anything for you, Lieutenant?”

“That sounds fine,” Dolliver said.

He felt considerably better. He finished his sandwich, gulped his coffee, and went out. He used his own car to drive to Woodham Park.

The maid who opened the Lemming’s door for him wore a tight black dress, a wisp of white lace apron, and had a small, intelligent face. She was not too alarmed when Dolliver palmed his badge and requested an interview with Mrs. W. F. K. Lemming. Her eyes ranged his solid, muscular figure with approval.

“I’ll see if she is in, Lieutenant.”

“She’s in,” Dolliver said.

Her smile was brief and wise. The arched Gothic doorway gave way to a foyer the size

of a moderate chapel, carpeted with a thick chenille rug. The Lemmings apparently went for tradition, complete with suits and medieval armor and heraldic plaques over the vast stone fireplace. There was a long living room, a circular flight of carpeted stairs, a narrow corridor with casement windows. The early afternoon sun shone golden through thick evergreen trees. There was a trace of incense in the cool air.

EVERLYN LEMMING turned quickly from her window when the maid ushered Dolliver into her sitting room. She was tall, blond, and immaculately groomed in a tailored gray suit. Her lips were red and sulky, her face was pale, and her hazel eyes showed lack of sleep. She twisted a handkerchief nervously between long and sensitive fingers, and waited until the maid was gone. Her voice was harsh, striking a jarring note with her statuesque beauty.

“It’s not every day that a police detective pays me a call,” she said. “In what way can I help you?”

“Perhaps we can be of mutual assistance,” Dolliver said gravely. He smoothed his sleek dark hair. “I understand you lost a parcel last night.”

Quick, eager interest lit her eyes. Her hand reached out.

“Have you got it?” she breathed.

“Unfortunately, no. Something happened to the taxi driver who, presumably, had your package last.”

Her eyes slowly widened. “Something happened—to her?”

“What was in the package?” Dolliver asked.

She didn’t seem to hear. “What happened to the taxi driver? Please! You must tell me!”

“She seems to have committed suicide,” Dolliver said.

“That’s not true!” the blond woman snapped instantly. “She—”

“Yes?” Dolliver asked gently.

"I mean, it doesn't seem possible," she ended lamely.

All the color drained from her face. She turned suddenly toward a low tabouret and poured rye from a cut-glass decanter. The glass clicked irregularly. She drank in a hurry, then looked at Dolliver, who shook his head negatively.

"I'm so frightened," the woman said.

"What was in the package?" Dolliver repeated. "You can trust me. If you have nothing to fear, nothing to hide."

"But I have," she said. "I'm terrified."

"Of what?"

"My husband. His jealousy." She sat down suddenly, staring at Dolliver's neat blue tie for a long moment. Her hands were limp in her lap. "If the taxi driver is really dead, then I suppose it will all come out, anyway. I have been indiscreet. I wrote letters. I loaned some of my husband's famous jewelry—the pearls, the 'Tears of the Gods.' It was blackmail, and I had to pay to get my letters back. I succeeded last night.

"It seems incredible, doesn't it, that I should have forgotten the package in the cab? Yet I did. I telephoned the cab company, but the girl hadn't returned to the garage then. I waited, and called several times. The last time they said the cab had returned, but the driver had vanished." Evelyn Lemming turned her wide eyes toward Dolliver's patient figure. "Did she really kill herself?"

"I don't think so," said Dolliver.

"Then?"

"I think it was murder. Who was the man with whom you were—er—indiscreet?"

She looked frightened again. "Must my husband know?"

"Not necessarily. I shall try to help you." He waited, her eyes searching his grave, brown face. "Who was the man?"

"Marco Pino," she said in a whisper. "You've heard of him. The famous dress designer. The famous devil!" she spat viciously.

"How much did you pay him for the letters and the pearls?"

"Fifty thousand," she said.

"Do you think he sent after you to recover them and continue the blackmail?"

"I don't think so. He isn't the type."

"Did you ever head of a girl named Sally Burgess?" Dolliver said.

Mrs. Lemming's eyes were blank. She shook her head, took another drink, this time sipping it slowly.

"You'll try to keep your promise to me, Lieutenant? I don't know what would happen if William—if it were even suspected that Marco and I . . . It was all really innocent, you know. He trapped me, made it look bad."

"Of course," said Dolliver.

He turned to leave, his smooth dark eyes settling on a colored photograph of a man and a woman. The woman was Evelyn Lemming. The man with her was much taller than she—well over six feet and proportioned accordingly. He nodded toward the photo.

"Your husband?" he asked mildly.

"Yes."

Dolliver went out thinking that Mr. W. F. K. Lemming was certainly big enough. . . .

**D**OLLIVER was being followed. He first noticed the small drab coupe when he waited for a light at Spring Street. It pulled up alongside him, its sides liberally spattered with creamy mud. The prim little girl seated behind the wheel gave him a quick, wide-eyed glanced, then looked away.

At Fifth and Pine he was still being followed by the girl in the coupe. He turned right, then left, and the other car did the same. He doubled back once more, just to be sure, and the coupe followed him brazenly. At a small lunch-cart he pulled up, got out leisurely and went in, straddling a stool and ordering coffee. The girl came through the sliding door as the counterman put the cup down before him.

She was small, neat and dainty, with a

trim, attractive figure that was not hidden by the severe lines of her orange boxcoat. Her face was piquant under a wide-brimmed sailor hat. She looked at him once, sharply, and then crossed directly toward him on high heels, taking the adjacent stool. Her voice was soft and shy.

"Aren't you Lieutenant Enoch Dolliver?"

"That's why you've been following me, isn't it?" he said.

Her eyes watched the counterman.

"Sally sent me," she said in a whisper. "I'm Vera Poole."

Dolliver remembered that this girl's name had been on Sally Burgess' telephone pad.

"I've spent all day looking for your friend Sally," he said.

"I know," the small girl said. "But she's afraid. This man is following her, and she's afraid of him. She thinks he killed Lubelle."

"What man?"

"She doesn't know. She's only glimpsed him once or twice."

"Why doesn't she come to me at Headquarters, then?"

"She is terrified, Lieutenant, honestly. She's at my place now, but I doubt if she'll remain there alone. She wants you to meet her this evening. She thinks she can help you."

Dolliver studied the girl for a moment. She seemed sincere, her blue eyes wide with natural excitement.

"What makes Sally think that Lubelle was murdered?" he said gently.

"She says Lubelle never drank coffee. She wouldn't tell me much, but I gathered that she really found Lubelle before anybody. She said she went in there and found the place full of gas and had to run away because the murderer came back."

"The big man," Dolliver suggested. His eyes became opaque with sudden skepticism. "It sounds a little queer."

"You must believe me," Vera Poole said earnestly. "She is terrified. She thinks the big man knows she saw him and wants to kill

her."

"What was that about the coffee?"

"Lubelle never drinks coffee," the girl said again. "And Sally insists she saw some on the kitchen range when she ran through. She thinks that means the big man was there for a while before he killed poor Lubelle."

Dolliver's face was dark and smooth. "Does Sally have the package that was left in Lubelle's cab?" he said suddenly.

"I—I think she has something. It's in her purse. She won't let go of it, though. Honestly, I've tried to reason with her all morning, but she insists she'll only give it to you. She wants to meet you at the corner of G and Merrivale Streets. She wants you to come about six."

"Why not now?"

"I don't know. She said at six."

Dolliver nodded. It was close to four then. He paid the check and returned to his own car, watched the girl drive off, and decided against following her. He turned into town again, looking for the dress designing establishment of Marco Pino, blackmailer.

### CHAPTER III

#### FATAL RENDEZVOUS

MARCO PINO'S was not an ordinary dress shop. It was a super establishment, with entertainment on the side for super customers at just a few minutes before closing when Dolliver went in through softly swinging doors and up a short ramp. A string quartet played muted waltzes. There was a spray of fresh orchids in a cloisonné vase at the far end of the room, flanking a door and two Sheraton chairs. Light came from behind blue-tinted mirrors.

A woman approached him with soundless steps over a long carpet, her smile and appearance gracious. Her hair was tinted a blue white, though her face was young and smooth and composed. Her dress was



something you noticed as an afterthought to her figure.

She spoke meticulously. "Can I help you?" Her upturned hand was an invitation for him to follow.

"I'm looking for Marco Pino," he said. "It's a personal matter."

The white-haired woman looked at him with deep purple eyes and smiled a little.

"Of course," she said. "This way, please."

An open door revealed a little amphitheatre in which several women and an interested, though embarrassed man, watched a model exhibit something pink and lacy. Then they were in a small, neat office and a tall, muscular, gray-haired man stood up from behind a desk. His tanned face was blank, his eyebrows arched a trifle. He had a mustache and white teeth.

"This is our Mr. Lathrop," the white-haired woman said. "Your business, you said, was a personal matter with Mr. Pino?"

Mr. Lathrop's teeth and smile were both false.

"Mr. Pino is a very busy man," he said. "Let me help you, Mr.—"

Dolliver was patient. "Lieutenant Enoch Dolliver. From the Homicide Department, Police Headquarters."

The woman paused in the doorway and said something softly, which Dolliver did not catch. The big gray man still looked blank.

"Homicide?" he said. He turned his head carefully to look at the woman in the doorway. "You can go, Jackie." He waited, then swiveled his blank eyes to Dolliver. "Come this way, please."

He led the way through two more offices, both empty, then pressed a button and stepped through a sliding door.

"A man from the police to see you, Marco. Mr. Dolliver."

"Beat it, Lathrop," the man inside said. He stood up as Dolliver came in. "Sit down, sir."

He was small and exquisite, in a red satin dressing gown and a white Ascot scarf. His

face was like old ivory, his hair a crinkled raven. He smoked a cigarette that gave off a queer, pungent odor, and his eyes were pin-pointed through their formal smile. There was a long drawing board under a wide window, and a scatter of sketches of women in various states of attire done on thin tissue paper. There were ink stains on his quick, thin fingers. His voice was a harsh whisper, as if he suffered from a throat ailment.

"It would be useless to deny that I am ignorant of the purpose of your visit, Lieutenant. I have just received an hysterical message over the telephone from Mrs. Lemming. May I begin by placing the entire matter in its proper perspective? I deny any blackmail attempts on the lady."

Dolliver's eyes were flat and dark. "I don't like blackmailers," he said. "I'm glad you're not one."

Marco Pino smiled his ivory smile. "It is true she wrote me silly letters. It is also true that I returned them to her last night."

"For which she paid you fifty thousand dollars," said Dolliver.

"No. She paid me nothing. I returned them to her as a gift."

"She says it cost her fifty thousand dollars," Dolliver repeated.

Marco Pino's smile was a little strained. "Then she lies. I do not know what her game is. But she lies."

"What about the pearls—the 'Tears of the Gods'?"

The dainty man pursed his little mouth, studied his little finger nails, and gave Dolliver a quick little smile.

"I returned those, too. She had given them to me as security for certain monies she borrowed from me. She was an inveterate gambler. On occasion when we went out together—which I do not deny—I financed her losses. What money she gave me last night was merely to redeem the security she had left with me—the pearls."

"Then she did pay you fifty thousand last

night?"

"Only to retrieve Mr. Lemming's pearls. Not as blackmail."

"It's a delicate point," Dolliver said evenly. "Where are the pearls now?"

"With Mrs. Lemming, I presume."

"She doesn't have them."

"No?"

"No."

Marco Pino waved a fluttery ivory hand. "I fail to see where that concerns me. I returned the pearls to her. If she lost them subsequently, I have no further interest in the matter."

Dolliver's eyes were steady. "You may have hijacked them. Your big boy outside may have done a little work last night."

Marco Pino looked pained. "You talk as if I were a criminal. If you are charging me with anything, please be specific."

"I'm a Homicide detective. The blackmail angle is incidental. I'm looking for information on a murder."

THE small man's mouth opened and shut, and his eyes had a sudden haunted look. He turned quickly away to the drawing table, snuffed out his cigarette with a trembling hand. His whispering voice was unreal.

"Who has been murdered?"

"Don't you know?" Dolliver said.

"Of course not. Please—who is it?"

"The taxi driver. The girl who took Mrs. Lemming home. A girl named Lubelle Satterlee."

A queer light danced in Pino's jet eyes. Abruptly he laughed.

"I don't know anything about that, Lieutenant."

"Did you think it was Evelyn Lemming?"

"I didn't know what to think. I know nothing about female taxi drivers, how they live or how they die." He paused. "It's curious that it should have been Evelyn's driver, though."

"It's even curiouser, as Alice says," Dolliver remarked. "Mrs. Lemming, in her excitement, forgot the letter and the pearls and left them in the cab. Before the driver could return them, somebody killed her and got away with the package."

Marco Pino's laugh was soft and sibilant. "That's beyond me." He pressed a small button on his oval desk. "I really can't help you at all, Lieutenant. It is closing time for this establishment. I must leave, so unless you wish me to accompany you for further questioning—"

"No," said Dolliver. He put on his hat carefully. "No, nothing more now. I may be seeing you again, though." At the door he paused. "Do you happen to know a girl named Sally Burgess?"

"Should I, Lieutenant?"

"It was just a question."

"I know a great many women. In my profession, women are always approaching me for special styles and creations. I can't remember them all. If she was a client, perhaps you can refresh my memory."

Dolliver shook his head. "No, I don't think she bought any dresses from you."

He went out, walking alone through the two empty offices. The big blank-faced man was seated at his desk and didn't get up when Dolliver went by. His hard, flat eyes ranged Dolliver's figure dispassionately.

The show room where Dolliver had glimpsed the model was empty. The white-haired woman wasn't in sight. An attendant unlocked the front door, and Dolliver walked down the ramp and into the warm street again. . . .

The corner of G and Merrivale Streets at six o'clock in the evening was dim and shadowed, hidden in the pocket of a ravine. Yellow lights shone in the windows of nearby houses. Dolliver drove slowly up the winding street and parked under the trees. There were vacant lots on three of the corners; the house

on the last corner was dark. He left his car and walked up the path toward the front door.

He was almost there when a queer little alarm jangled in the back of his head. The windows were gaunt and empty, without blinds. The entire house had a vacant and disreputable look. A "For Sale" sign was posted inconspicuously against one wall, yet a car was parked in the driveway—Vera Poole's familiar, mud-spattered coupe.

Dolliver crossed the lawn with quickened strides, his eyes narrowed against the thick evening gloom. At ten paces he could make out the girl's face behind the wheel as she waited for him.

He was about to open the door when he saw, quite suddenly and horribly, that she was dead.

Dolliver's eyes were stark with surprise. His lips went white and thin at the corners. He made a low whistling sound between his teeth.

"You poor, poor kid," he said, softly and gently.

Vera Poole had been strangled to death. Her face was no longer bright, alert, and cocky. Her large eyes stared ahead sightlessly, seeming to glitter in the gathering darkness. Her body was rigid, her legs pressed against the floor and her shoulders tipped to one side as if she had died that way, straining against the strangler's grip.

The killer had not bothered to remove the murder weapon. It was a woman's nylon stocking, tight and brown like a snake around the girl's small throat. Her hands were already cold when Dolliver touched them.

He stood in the darkness a moment, his breathing heavy with quick and violent anger, his eyes touched with pity. A street lamp suddenly glowed with light and spread pointing yellow fingers across the interior of the car. He saw now the envelopes he had almost missed.

There were a dozen all told, when he picked them up. The letters were still inside. In the dull light he made out Marco Pino's

name in fine spidery writing. The address was not the same as his place of business.

DOLLIVER stood beside the dead girl in the car for another long moment, not moving, and his eyes were puzzled. Then he blew open one slit envelope and scanned the letter inside, his face cold and impersonal.

"Indiscreet is the word for Evelyn," he murmured aloud.

He didn't bother to read much. He handled the envelopes gingerly, stacked them neatly and put them in his inside coat pocket. He turned his flashlight on the interior of the car, but there was nothing else of interest. There was nothing in the girl's purse except the usual feminine accessories.

Stepping back, he closed the car door soundlessly, crossed the lawn to his own coupe. His flashlight darted along the soft turf bordering the driveway, paused, steadied on a neat footprint. It was of a woman's shoe. He stared, puzzled, for a long time before getting in his car and driving away.

At the nearest pay telephone he called Headquarters and reported the death of Vera Poole. He hung up quickly, having put his facts across in brief and succinct sentences. He glanced once more at the address on the lavender-tinted envelopes, then headed his car due west on the wide, winding boulevard that reached into the hills. . . .

The Lemming's maid who answered the door still looked smart and brisk. The light in the foyer was apparently the only light in the house. The maid's lip-stick was a little smeared. Somewhere beyond the Gothic door, from amid the collection of antique armor, a clock solemnly bonged seven times. The girl eyed Dolliver for a speculative moment, then said:

"I'm sorry, Lieutenant. Mrs. Lemming is not in."

"When did she go out?"

"I can't say. I didn't notice."

"When is she expected back?"

"I don't know, sir." Her lip-stick glistened wetly. "I'm sorry I can't help you. No one is at home—not even Mr. Lemming."

Dolliver wondered about her smeared lipstick, but he let it go with a shrug. The heavy door closed with a smooth click behind him. His heels made no sound at all as he walked down the path to the street. Just as he reached the arched gateway he stepped sideward onto the lawn and stood facing the big English-type house from the deep shadow of a box hedge.

From the hedge he moved to the shelter of a neighboring chestnut tree, carefully crossed a flower bed, and smelled the scent of sweet spring lilacs blooming somewhere in the night air.

There was a separate garage in the rear, with servant's quarters built into the high sloping roof. There was a light in a rear window of the big house.

#### CHAPTER IV

#### TWO SHOTS

DOLLIVER looked in the garage first, the glow from the lighted house window showing the way. There was a big town car in the back, but the tires were off and the wheels were supported by wooden jacks. There was room for another car here, but it was gone. He turned back to the lighted basement window in the main house.

A big man with a square, harsh face and tight lips was striding back and forth on the smooth bare floor of the basement room, his cigar dead and cold and forgotten in his mouth. The room was outfitted as a home gymnasium, with electric vibrator, rings, trapeze and parallel bars. The big man was dressed in a camel's-hair topcoat and a wide-brimmed hat, and the topcoat flapped impatiently as he walked up and down the waxed hardwood floor. He was quite alone.

The sound of an approaching car made

Dolliver step quickly into the dark shadows flanking the house. Headlights cut like a silent blade over the lawn and through the trees. The car was a long sedan, with a blobbed figure of a chauffeur in the front seat and a white, staring face in the rear. The car stopped effortlessly in front of the garage doors and Evelyn Lemming stepped out, shrugging her furs around her shapely shoulders.

She walked with quick strides toward the rear of the house. Light from the basement window showed her white, strained face, her flat, staring eyes. At the sound of the back door opening the big man in the gymnasium abruptly halted his nervous pacing and stood stock-still. Then, deliberately, he took the dead cigar from his taut mouth, placed it on a leather horse, and thrust his big hands slowly into his topcoat pockets just as Evelyn Lemming stepped into the basement room.

Dolliver could not hear the conversation through the window, but he could gather its progress from what he observed. The woman stopped suddenly at sight of the big man, and her face looked aged and drawn. The big man said something, smiled an utterly false smile, and moved toward her. Evelyn Lemming shook her head. The big man repeated his statement, advancing toward her. His right hand came from his pocket and abruptly slapped her stingingly across her white face.

Her hat fell off and lay unnoticed on the waxed floor. She put her hand to her cheek and shook her head again. The big man slapped her a second time, and she cowered back, then turned and fled across the gymnasium to vanish through another door.

Lemming, for the big man must be Evelyn's husband, stared at his hand for a moment, his hard face working, his mouth twisted in curious dismay. Abruptly he picked up his cigar, jammed it between his teeth, chewed for a moment while staring blankly at the floor. Then he shrugged his coat into shape and strode away. There was something savage about the way he walked.

Dolliver could have tossed a pebble on him as the big man stood in the rear doorway, not ten paces from where he watched in the shadows. The big man's voice was harsh and penetrating.

"Walter!"

"Yes, sir, Mr. Lemming," a man's voice answered from the garage.

A car motor started, a big sedan swung around a loop, and paused. The chauffeur's face was still indistinct behind the windshield. Lemming waited a moment, took something from his hip pocket and checked it with a small metallic clicking sound. It was a heavy Luger. The weapon shone blue and ugly for an instant before he slid it into his topcoat pocket.

Then he snapped an address to the chauffeur in a harsh, scratchy voice and climbed in. Dolliver stood frozen until the car was past him. Then he turned and ran swiftly back toward the street and his own car. The big sedan was out of sight before he started after it.

Dolliver parked at the foot of a winding brick drive and got out, adjusting his shoulder holster securely under his armpit. The night was silent, dark and moonless. A vagrant breeze whispered sibilantly in the tree-tops.

There was a long flight of winding flagstone steps leading up to the square, modern house on the hill. Marco Pino's talents for dress design had not inhibited his architectural vanities. The house was a prophecy for tomorrow—all white stone and glass brick and terraced porch.

Lemming's car was parked half-way up the looping drive, and Dolliver approached it cautiously. The chauffeur's seat was empty. He moved up the flagstone steps again, under a modern porte-cochere, and tried the door. It was ajar. Dim light filtered out to where he stood. Shrugging, Dolliver stepped inside.

A mutter of voices came from a room above. He was in a small hallway, and a brass bannister shimmered in the light that drifted down from the second floor. Dolliver moved

ahead on silent feet. The voices grew louder as he ascended—and then, explosive with deadly meaning, came the sudden crash of a gun.

The roar merged with the higher crack of a second gun that went off instantly after it. Dolliver reached the second floor before the echoes died away. Light blasted from a room directly ahead.

THERE were just two men inside. William Lemming whirled as Dolliver entered. His mouth was twisted and gray with pain. Marco Pino didn't move except for a quick, darting glance of his limpid eyes. His ivory skin looked mottled. He had a small-caliber Belgian automatic in his hand, and his fingers were shaking. William Lemming's Luger lay on the red carpet, and his right hand was a smear of thick, oozing blood.

The smell of cordite was acrid in the air.

"That will be enough," Dolliver said. "Drop your gun, Marco."

"The policeman," Marco Pino said. "It is a pleasure." He pushed his gun aside onto a small kidney-shaped desk of bleached mahogany. His smile was tight and tired. "I am glad to see you again, Lieutenant. This man came here to kill me, and I shot his gun from his hand, as you can see."

Lemming's eyes were bitter. He was concerned for the moment with binding a handkerchief around his shattered hand. His mouth was white, pained.

"I had a right to kill the sneaking little—" he growled.

"I hardly think so," Dolliver said.

"No court in the world would convict me." The big man looked at Marco Pino's elegant little figure with naked hatred. His hat lay tilted on the red carpet at his feet. His sandy hair looked wet under the shine of the light. "A man has some rights," he said heavily.

Pino said something vicious in a foreign language.

"You are a fool, Mr. Lemming, and your wife is a silly, vain woman," he said then, in

English. "You gave me no chance to explain. I am not a man of violence, therefore I am glad the policeman arrived to prevent further unpleasantness. There was nothing between Evelyn and me. It is true I loaned her much money, and eventually she gave me the pearls as security. Last night she paid what she owed me and our relationship ended. I wish to be quit of this affair. It is sordid and foolish, and I do not care to be bothered by stupid men like you."

Lemming listened with a tight face. "Where are the pearls now?"

"I do not know. I know nothing about them now. I do not care."

"What about the letters my wife wrote you? Where are they?"

Dolliver said nothing about the envelopes in his coat pocket. He made no effort to interfere with the two men.

Marco Pino studied his fingernails. "Many women fancy themselves interested in me. I do not encourage them. I returned Evelyn's letters last night, together with the pearls."

"Then you *were* playing around!" Lemming said thickly.

"She is a foolish woman," said Marco Pino. "That is all."

It was a damaging statement to make. Almost simultaneously there was an interruption. A door opened at one side of the room, a door hidden by a heavy tweed curtain. The white-haired hostess of Pino's dress establishment glided in. Her lovely face was distorted with violent hate. Her deep purple eyes were insane. She held a small nickel-plated revolver in her hand, and it was pointed at Marco. She ignored Dolliver and Lemming.

"I've warned you, Marco!" she said in a high, querulous voice. "I've warned you again and again!"

The small man whirled, his lips trembling. He started to snatch for his gun on the desk, then stood still. His eyes slid to Dolliver, then back to the woman. He licked his lips.

"Jackie, honey, I'll explain later. It's all so

involved, I—"

"Yes, it is involved," she said tightly. "Too involved for me. This will simplify everything."

Her finger twitched on the trigger. Dolliver swung his gun, but had no chance to fire. Nor did the woman. A gun fired three times in rapid, coughing succession. The glass in the wide window behind Marco Pino shattered with a loud crash, then fell apart altogether. Marco Pino seemed to stretch his short frame upward, as if to stand on tiptoe. His hands fumbled at his chest, then slowly and carefully he went down on his knees, facing the woman. His shirt was suddenly a welter of dark, bubbling blood. He coughed once, then collapsed on his face. His blood slowly merged with the scarlet carpet.

There was that sudden second of silence when death appears in a violent and ugly form.

The woman's eyes were wide and sightless.

"The shots came from outside!" Lemming said in an awed whisper.

But Dolliver was already pounding down the stairs. For a moment he was blinded by the darkness outside. There were no more shots. Then he heard the dull thud of feet, and he whirled that way. He got a glimpse of a big man, flitting through the shadowed shrubbery. He fired once, his gun spitting flame at the vague, hulking figure, then the man was gone.

He gave chase, hurtling a low picket fence, landed in rough ground that sloped sharply down to a chuckling creek. The darkness was deep and dangerous within the ravine. Ahead there was a crackling of underbrush as the killer threshed his way free. Dolliver snapped another shot in his direction. Flame suddenly spat back at him. He ran forward, stumbling through the uneven growth, splashing across the little stream.

There was no further sound. Dolliver, halted, breathing hard, in the dark shadow of a wild eucalyptus tree. Below was an abrupt

drop to a little street fifty feet below. There was no movement there. He cursed softly, waited another moment, then turned and strode back to the squat white house on the hilltop.

The front door was wide open and the house was empty as he searched swiftly through the rooms. The white-haired woman was gone. There was no trace of Lemming. He went quickly down the flagstone steps to the street. The Lemming sedan was gone. He stood alone and pocketed his gun with exasperation. He felt angry, baffled and defeated.

It seemed a long way back to town.

## CHAPTER V

### GUN WOMAN

IT WAS midnight when Dolliver tried Sally Burgess' bungalow address again. This time there was a light in Number 8 at Terrace Gardens. He parked at the entrance and went quickly up the concrete walk with the little stone gargoyles leaping along beside him. He took a deep breath to quell his excitement as he stood on the red brick steps.

"Sally Burgess," he said aloud, waved his hand downward in a queer little gesture, then briefly thumbed the bell.

It had been a long day since his search for Sally had begun right here, at her own place.

There was no immediate answer to his ring. He tried again. He was dropping his hand away when the door inched open and a girl peered out at him. He glimpsed the shine of a gun in one hand, quickly covered as she stepped back with a little exclamation of relief.

"It's you," she said. "Come in. Hurry!"

He stepped in and she leaped back against the door with a long sigh and a brief, tired smile. Her gun had disappeared somewhere in her powder-blue topcoat. She was wearing a saucerlike hat like a miniature Mexican

sombrero with a jaunty feather of red in the beaded band. But her face was not jaunty. It was white and strained, and her eyes were deep pools of fear. Her face was thin, like a boy's, and her black hair, cut close to the shape of her head, gave an impression of severity. But she looked better than the passport photo Dolliver had seen. He took a deep breath.

"So you're Sally Burgess."

Her smile trembled. "I've given you a merry chase today."

"Not so merry."

"No." She shivered, left the door, and walked past him to the bedroom. There was a half-filled suitcase on the Hollywood bed. The bureau looked ransacked. She ignored the suitcase, pulled down the blinds, and turned, reaching for a cigarette in a shell box. Her fingernails scratched noisily as Dolliver waited.

"I don't know how to apologize to you, Lieutenant, for all the trouble I've caused," she said. "But somebody had to know that Lubelle was murdered. All I could think of was you. I wasn't sure you would remember me, but I took that chance."

"Why didn't you come directly to me?" Dolliver said.

"I was too frightened. Korpi was after me all day."

"Who is Korpi?"

"Walter Korpi. He's Mr. Lemming's chauffeur. He's been trying to kill me all day."

Dolliver watched her light the cigarette.

"Did Walter Korpi kill Lubelle Satterlee?" he asked.

"Yes. I'm sure of it. I saw him and could identify him. That's why he's been after me all night and all day." Her large eyes were suddenly moist and filled, and she no longer looked boyish. She looked helpless and frightened and feminine. "I've been panic-stricken. I didn't know what I was doing today. Even now—" she gestured toward the suitcase on the bed— "I was going to run

away. I'm glad you've come at this time."

Dolliver's eyes were dark and distant.

"What makes you so sure Walter Korpi is our man?" he said after a moment.

"You received the letters, didn't you?"

"Yes." He nodded briefly. "I got them."

"Well, first of all," Sally Burgess said, "Walter Korpi knew of Mrs. Lemming's affair with this Marco Pino. He drove her back and forth, and knew what was going on. And Mrs. Lemming probably babbled to him of her troubles. In a way, it was coincidence. I had just come off duty and stopped at Lubelle's for some tea—she never drank coffee. I passed this big man on the stairs and went inside. The gas was on and poor Lubelle was there on the floor dead."

She paused and shuddered. She looked small, white, and tired.

"I had no time to think or cry out. I heard the man's footsteps come back upstairs, running. He must have been watching me, because he came back, knowing I'd seen him come out of there. He—he looked insane. I ran out through the kitchen and saw the coffee pot there, and I knew it was murder, because Lubelle never drank coffee, so it must have been for this big man."

"I escaped him, and I must have been half hysterical. I stopped to call the police and thought of you, because you had taken my cab several times. While I was telephoning, I saw the man coming in and I had to run away again. I managed to get in touch with Vera Poole and she helped me hide, though I didn't dare go out again until it was dark. I haven't seen Vera since I sent her to meet you with the letters."

"Vera is gone," Dolliver said quietly.

She was puzzled. "Gone where?"

"She's dead," Dolliver said. "I found her dead in her car. She was strangled."

**T**HE girl's blue eyes grew enormous with horror. She clenched her tight hands and swayed, staring at Dolliver.

"He couldn't!" she whispered. "Why? She had nothing to do with it! She didn't know anything at all."

Dolliver shrugged. "Maybe he approached her, thinking she was you. When he got close enough to realize his mistake, it was too late. She was another one who could identify him. So he killed her." He paused deliberately. "He left the letters, though. Presumably, he wasn't interested in them—just the pearls."

"What pearls?" the girl asked.

"There were two pearls in the package Lubelle found in her cab. You haven't explained how you got the letters yet, by the way."

"I didn't get any pearls. All I saw were the letters on the kitchen table. I picked them up."

"With Walter Korpi coming in after you?"

"There was a moment before I heard his footsteps." The girl's face was distressed.

"When I first went in there, the place was stifling with gas. I saw Lubelle and ran to open the windows, but they were stuck. I went into the kitchen, holding my breath, and saw the letters there. Then the man came back through the hall door. I was coughing and choking by then, and I couldn't think of anything except the idea that the letters might be a clue. I knew Lubelle must have found them in her cab, that they didn't belong to her. So I snatched them up and ran outside, with Korpi after me."

Dolliver's eyes were pools of darkness. The girl watched him anxiously. Then she whispered, quietly:

"Please, you must believe me."

"Well, there's another murder to be straightened out," Dolliver said. "Somebody shot Marco Pino through his window an hour or so ago. I was right there when it happened, but I couldn't catch the man. I imagine he killed Pino to prevent him from talking. Maybe Korpi and Pino planned to keep the pearls. They weren't interested in blackmail. I understand the pearls are worth a fortune, and Korpi, figuring he was already up to his neck



in murder, might just as well get all the profit by getting rid of his partner, Marco Pino."

"Yes," the girl whispered. "It must be that way."

"Well, that finishes it," Dolliver said. "We'll send out an alarm and haul him in in the net. He won't get away."

He reached for the telephone and spun out Headquarters' number. The only sound in the little bedroom was the thin mechanical clicking of the dial and the girl's smothered sobs. He had only dialed the exchange letters when a man's voice said:

"Drop it, copper. I'll save you the trouble. I'm right here."

The man's voice was deep and resonant, and Dolliver needed no glimpse of his gun to know what backed it up. He looked at the girl, saw her staring with wide and terrified eyes at the doorway behind him. Slowly he replaced the receiver.

"Drop the gun, too!" the man's voice rapped again. "Barrel first."

Dolliver's gun hit the floor with a thump.

"You, too, baby. Take off the coat."

The girl sat frozen.

"Shed it!"

The girl slowly shrugged out of her powder-blue topcoat and moved away from it. Dolliver turned to face the man in the doorway.

He was big enough. He was ruggedly good-looking, with a broad brown Scandinavian face and white teeth. His eyes had laughter wrinkles at the corners, but he was not laughing now. The big Colt in his hand was dwarfed by the thickness of his fingers. He wore a faded trench-coat, but no hat. His thick blond hair was unruly. His eyes were pale, hard, alert.

"You're Walter Korpi, Lemming's chauffeur," Dolliver said.

"That's right, copper." The big man stared at the girl. "I'm surprised you don't recognize me, baby. You don't say hello at all. Seems to me we were sorta married, a long time ago,

back in Kansas. Wasn't your name Korpi once, like Mrs. Korpi, baby?"

The girl stared back at him evenly. Her face was cold.

"I never heard of you before."

"Sister, sister, you break my heart," the big man said. "Don't you remember the bank-bustin' days, when we knocked 'em over like piggy jars? You always were the hardest wench in the world, Sally. A killin' dame."

"Shut up," the girl said tonelessly.

"Now I know," the big man continued, "why you looked me up here. You wanted a handy peg to hang a rap on when you pulled your next play. It made no difference to you that I was tryin' to go straight now, did it? But this time I'm not playing it the noble way. This time I don't take the rap for you. This time, baby," the big man said softly, "I'm not in love with you any more."

"Shut up," the girl said again.

"Let him tell it," Dolliver said quietly. "It sounds fine."

KORPI grinned a flat, hard grin.

"Sure. You heard the cop, Sally. I listened to your fancy tale to him, too. It kinda makes me mad, the way you twist truth and fancy around to suit your ends. You didn't tell it quite right. You were in Lubelle's before she got home, you were there before she came in with the package, and you were there when she found the pearls.

"Just like that, you decided to keep 'em. Lubelle had been having a few shots and she was a cinch to put out of the way. You turned on the gas. The reason I came into the picture was because Mrs. Lemming sent me over to get the package back. You saw me coming and ran. I had to follow you."

The big man paused, then went on:

"You tried to frame me then by calling copper. You tried to make out to be running away from me by sending back the letters. That made you look good and innocent. But you had to kill Vera, too, because she got

suspicious of you. She knew you were in no danger, that there was no reason for you to be afraid to go to the cops. It's easy to strangle a girl, isn't it, with a woman's stocking? And then you killed Marco Pino from the lawn outside and I saw and chased you, and the copper chased me. And we all played ring-around-a-rosy until right now. You've still got the pearls, honey. Haven't you?"

The girl's eyes appealed to Dolliver. "He's making it all up, Lieutenant. You mustn't believe him. Why should I kill Pino? I never knew him. I never saw him in my life."

Dolliver looked at the blond man.

"Well, Korpi?" he said judicially, "It's her word against yours."

The big man shrugged. "I can make her sing, if you want."

The girl looked at him with sudden stark hatred in her blue eyes. Dolliver took a deep breath and smoothed his thick hair.

"I'll tell it myself, then," he said, and looked at the girl levelly. "Your whole story sounded queer to me from the beginning. But it seems to me that maybe Lubelle never drove her cab last night. She was too far gone with drink. Maybe you took her place. You killed Pino because Pino could identify you as the cab driver last night! You drove Mrs. Lemming home from Pino's in Lubelle's cab. You found the package and carried it up to Lubelle's flat to plant the letters. You thought Lubelle would be passed out and you could look them over and make your plans.

"You didn't dream Lubelle might still be a little sober. She wasn't very. The medical examiner reported she was filled with liquor when she died. It helped her die fast. That's why you were pinch-hitting, driving her cab in the first place.

"But she was awake when you came back. She saw the pearls, and you had to kill her. That's why you returned her cab without letting anyone see that you were the driver. And you killed Marco Pino because only he could identify you as being the driver who

found the package Mrs. Lemming lost."

It was suddenly quiet in the little room. The girl stared at Dolliver, and the big man was watching the girl with catlike eyes. He was grinning now. Dolliver had been guessing up to now, but they were guesses that made sense.

"Another thing," he said. "We can prove you killed Vera Poole. There were footprints in the mud outside her car, and there was no mud on Vera's shoes. She never got out of her car. But you did, to get away after you strangled her. Those footprints will match with yours and convict you, Miss Burgess."

The girl's face had changed a little with each word of Dolliver's deliberate speech. A breeze came through the open window and stirred her smooth dark hair. Her lips were thin and hard and white. Her pale eyes were like arctic ice.

When she moved, it was with the speed of a striking snake. The gun came from her thigh with a swift, smooth movement that was all one—the draw, the snap of the safety, the squeeze of the trigger. Her face was distorted with white hatred.

The sharp report of her tiny gun was drowned in the bellow of Walter Korpi's huge Colt. Her bullet whip-cracked over Dolliver as he dived for his own weapon, his eyes on the girl. She was slammed backward as if by a giant hand, half twisted and then fell, sliding to the floor. Her thin, muscular figure lay in a contorted position at the foot of the bed. She didn't move after that.

Dolliver's glance snapped to Walter Korpi. The man was mechanically blowing smoke from the muzzle of his Colt. His pale eyes were no longer hard. They looked wet and shiny, and his chin quivered for a moment.

"She was always quick as lightnin'," he whispered. "Quick and deadly." He took a deep breath and gave Dolliver a tortured grin. "There goes the best years of my life," he said, and he didn't mean to be funny.

“The pearls?” Dolliver said.

“They’ll be in her shoes. Her heels are hollow. It was a habit with her.”

Dolliver didn’t touch her. He nodded briefly and picked up the telephone again. He could hear people babbling excitedly in the

adjacent cottages, but he paid no attention. Big Walter Korpi sat in a chair with his blond head buried in shaking hands. Dolliver poked a finger that was none too steady through the telephone dial and in a quiet voice called through Central for Police Headquarters.