

He Got What He Asked For

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The Theft and Getaway Were Perfect—All Detective Sarah Watson Had to Do Was to Find the Missing Diamond Necklace and Turn It Into Paste!

I

THE HEAVY FRONT DOORS of the Citizens' Saving Bank swung in. A woman in rusty black entered the cloistered silence of the main banking room, strode purposefully across the tiled floor and halted at one of the depositors' windows. The woman had a savings bank book in her black-gloved fingers, with some soiled

bills folded inside it. The outside of the savings book said, "Sarah Watson."

She shoved the book and the money under the elaborate wicket, put an elbow on the marble shelf of the window and swung the thick, rigidly corseted column of her body around, waiting and staring from under bristling iron gray eyebrows.

The clerk behind the wicket made haste to enter her deposit, murmuring polite nothings. She paid no attention to the nothings. She was watching the door. The armed guard stalking from marble column to marble column bowed respectfully to her. Her gray eyes glinted on him a moment, and returned to the door.

The door swung in. A long, lank young man with red hair and gingersnap freckles entered. The woman's craggy chin grew a trifle

more prominent. She reached around, took her savings book from the clerk, thrust it into her shabby, capacious black handbag, and bore down upon the young man.

"Ben Todd!" she said in a voice which echoed hoarsely back from the vaulted ceiling. "Thought you'd be along, feller. Which are you going to do—put or take?"

The young man grinned sheepishly. He said: "Whadya think?"

"How much you got left, squirt?"

"Nine dollars and two cents. Not that it's any of your damn business. Just because I'm a ground down underling in your measly detective agency is no reason..."

Sarah Watson adjusted her ancient black headgear more firmly upon her hard knob of gray hair. She said: "You put your bank book back in your pants, young man.

"We're going to see the president of the bank."

"Good Lord! You don't think the president of this mausoleum is going to take pity on my plight?"

"From what I know of him, he never took pity on anything," said Sarah, grasping the young man's arm firmly, "but we're going to see him, because he telephoned and asked us to see him. After we've seen him, maybe you won't need your piddling nine dollars. Come on."

Two minutes later, Sarah Watson and Ben Todd were behind the door which said, in gold letters, "Adolph A. Hecker, President," and Sarah was being bowed into a chair by Mr. Adolph A. Hecker himself.

"Mr. Hecker," said Sarah, leaning forward stiffly from the waist, "meet Mr. Todd,

my assistant. We came as soon as possible. Of course we have a great press of work at the office..."

"Quite," said Mr. Hecker, nodding grudgingly at Ben Todd and settling himself behind his large mahogany desk. Mr. Hecker had some difficulty settling himself, because the distance between the edge of the desk and the edge of Mr. Hecker's pot belly had to be nicely judged.

Mr. Hecker made a steeple of his thin white hands and turned his bleak eyes upon Mrs. Watson. He said: "Quite! Mrs. Watson, I will state the case frankly and concisely. I find myself in need of an agent upon whose discretion I may rely. I make it a practice, as you know, to be informed regarding each and every depositor in my bank..."

"The case, please," said Sarah.

"And so," said Mr. Hecker, "knowing you, Mrs. Watson, and your excellent reputation, I—ah—that is to say—Mrs. Watson, what would your fee be for recovering a stolen diamond necklace belonging to my wife?"

"Ten per cent of the value of the necklace," said Sarah promptly.

"Ten per cent? I had no idea! Does that not seem excessive, my dear lady?"

"Ten per cent," said Sarah, firmly.

"Ten per cent. Well—ah—perhaps in that case, you would not care to undertake my—ah—job. The necklace I wish recovered is, you see, only paste. A very clever imitation, but paste. The value is relatively small—not more than two thousand dollars."

"Ten per cent," said Sarah, "and expenses, of course."

"Ah? The expense would be slight in this case. I happen to know the—ah—young person who stole the necklace. I happen to know where—ah—she will be at a certain time this evening."

Sarah Watson got to her feet, stood looking down at the square toes of her black shoes. She said: "A case for the police, Mr. Hecker. Too simple for us."

"Sit down, Mrs. Watson, pray. It is not simple at all. I—ah—wish it were. Let me explain. I will be frank. This is confidential, of course. Quite! The necklace—the paste necklace, Mrs. Watson—was taken under peculiar circumstances. The young lady who took it was calling on me at the time at my apartment.

"My wife—ah—happened to be travelling abroad."

"Quite," said Sarah.

"What? Oh! Yes, yes. Well, Mrs. Watson, I was showing the young lady my wife's collection of jewels, among them the imitation diamond necklace which my wife keeps for most functions. The real one, which is the famous Gautier necklace, remains in our safe deposit box practically all the time. Now, the—ah—young lady managed to abstract the necklace—the imitation necklace, Mrs. Watson, and shortly afterward, she departed with it, believing that I would be in no position to accuse her of theft..."

"Was she right?" said Sarah.

Mr. Hecker's pale eyes wandered away from Sarah's. After a moment, he said: "She was."

"Quite," said Sarah. "Well now, Mr. Hecker, while I never object to picking up a bit of small change even so small a bit as I would pick up on this job, it doesn't seem to me that

it's worth it to you to hire us. If the necklace the young lady removed was simply an imitation, it would be simpler and easier for you to have another imitation made, and—"

"Ah, Mrs. Watson, there you have me. I cannot have an imitation made, for this reason. It was yesterday morning that I discovered the theft of the paste necklace and it was yesterday morning that my wife returned from abroad. I had just time to go to our safe deposit box, remove the real necklace and place it in my wife's safe at home, where the imitation had been. It is there now, and there isn't a chance in the world of my extracting it again in order to have an imitation made without my wife's knowing, so..."

"I see," said Sarah, staring intently at Mr. Hecker, "and of course, there's the fact, too, Mr. Hecker, that if we steal back this necklace for you—k"

"Mrs. Watson! I beg you—not steal—*recover!*"

"Steal," said Sarah, firmly. "If we steal back this necklace for you, Mr. Hecker, it will cost you only two hundred dollars, plus expenses, whereas, if you were to have an imitation made, it would cost you two thousand dollars. Eh, Mr. Hecker?"

"Quite," said Mr. Hecker. "I have considered that angle, naturally. A banker always considers..."

"Let's get down to brass tacks," said Sarah. "What's the young lady's name? What's she look like? Where is this place that you know she'll be this evening? How have you any guarantee that she'll have the necklace with her?"

"She will be on the eight o'clock train to Chicago tonight. She has lower berth number 3, car

Number 654,” said Mr. Hecker. “I am sure she will have the necklace with her, because I have information that she has quit the theatrical production with which she was connected and has—ah—closed her books definitely in this city.”

“Mr. Hecker,” said Sarah, “did you get all that data yourself?”

“I did.”

“You’d make a good detective,” said Sarah. “What’s the young female’s name?”

Mr. Hecker’s thin lips writhed a trifle as though he were about to swallow a dose of astringent. He said: “Her name is Dolores Flores.”

“That describes her,” said Sarah. “Now, if you’ll advance some expense money, Mr. Hecker, about two hundred dollars to start with, we’ll get ready to steal your necklace.”

Sarah Watson and Ben Todd stepped out of the bank and into the sunshine. Sarah said: “You’ve got two hundred dollars in your pants, Bennie, and all afternoon. You might get the tickets. Be sure to get in Car 654, and be sure you get me a lower, young feller. You might drop my ticket at the office. Then you might check up on this Dolores Flores female and make sure she is taking that train. You might get a look at her, if you can, but not too long a look, Bennie. I know men! Then you might interview somebody that knows jewels and find out what the Gautier necklace looks like and how much the real one is worth, and then you might...”

“Listen, slave driver,” said Ben Todd, “after I do all that, there won’t be any *then*. What are you doing in the way of work yourself this afternoon, old girl?”

“Bennie,” said Sarah solemnly, “I’m going to a tea—a Republican tea.”

“Republican? I thought you were a Democrat?”

“What if I am? It ain’t branded on my forehead, is it? I’m going to a Republican tea, Bennie, because Mrs. Adolph A. Hecker is giving the tea, in her own apartment.

“Listen, you old wench! You’re not beginning your double-crossing tricks already?”

“Fiddlesticks! I’m merely interested to see the woman who could bear Adolph as a husband. Bennie, do ladies wear diamond necklaces at tea parties?”

“Not ladies,” said Ben Todd. “Sarah, you’re up to something. Now listen, you stalking tigress, Adolph may only be going to pay us a coupla hundred—”

“And expenses...”

“But a coupla hundred would pay my salary for four weeks, Sarah, so for hell’s sake, stick to Adolph.”

“Bennie, you know me. I have yet to betray the confidence of a client. Good-by. I’ll see you on the train.”

II

Sarah Watson stalked down the ramp beside which the Chicago train waited. She was dressed as she had been dressed that morning. She held firmly a large yellow suitcase of the cardboard variety and ignored, as she stalked, the three pestiferous red caps who pursued her.

Halfway down the long train, her steps slackened. There was a young man lounging there, with one foot on the lowest step of a car. He was a red-headed young man and he was

deep in converse with a slinky young person who was aggressively female from the black velvet hat perched on her platinum curls to the black velvet bows on her spike heeled slippers.

Sarah took longer strides. She stopped abruptly beside the conversing couple. She said:

"Young man, is this car 654?"

The young man stared blankly at her a moment, then his wide mouth grew wider. He said: "Well, if it ain't Aunt Sarah! Auntie, you're early. I want you to meet my friend, Miss Dolores Flores."

Miss Flores extended a drooping hand which dripped ruby red at the fingernails. She said: "Charmed!"

Sarah Watson grunted. She gave a nod which set her ancient headgear to quivering. She turned her back and mounted the steps. At the top of the steps, she paused. Ben Todd's red head was close to the platinum blonde curls. Ben Todd was whispering and the young lady was giggling. Sarah peered down at them and made a horrible face.

The conductor was bawling his last warning when Miss Dolores Flores made her entrance into car 654, followed by Ben Todd. The young lady's progress down the aisle was marked by a small flurry among the seated passengers, particularly the males. Only the woman in Section 4 remained oblivious, and she kept her rugged countenance bent over a printed circular until the pair passed. The circular said: "Twenty Reasons why American Ladies Should Vote Republican." One sheet of the circular was devoted to the photograph of a lady whose nose and bosom were both prominent. The photograph was inscribed in flowing ink, "With regards to Mrs. Sarah Watson, from Mrs. Adolph A. Hecker."

Ben Todd slid into seat 4, beside Sarah. Sarah lifted her eyes from the circular and fixed them on the elaborate curls which covered the back of Miss Flores' head. Sarah said: "If you've got the necklace, Bennie, we've still time to get off?"

"Got the-! Whatya think I am, woman, a professional dip?"

"I think you're a damn fool," said Sarah. "If you ain't got the necklace, what was the idea of all the billing and cooing?"

"Listen, horse-face," whispered Ben Todd, leaning closer, "I—er—happened to scrape an acquaintance with the charmer in the course of my investigations this afternoon and..."

"I'll bet you didn't have to scrape very hard!"

"No. She likes auburn hair. Now listen, and no more cracks, old lady. This is biz. The charmer's afraid. She's asked me to protect her. There's a naughty, bad man with dark hair and slimey eyes and a wart on his chin..."

"And two hairs growing out of the wart," said Sarah. "I know. I saw him on the observation platform as I came by. And I've seen him somewhere before, but I can't think where. He looks like a bad 'un. Now, I wonder who sicked him on Dolores?"

"Hell knows. You say he was on the observation...?"

"He was, but he ain't now. Look!"

Ben Todd followed the lift of Sarah's gray eyes. A dark individual was sliding into the seat directly opposite theirs.

"Bennie," said Sarah, "I've got a premonition we have competition. We've got to

look spry. It might not be a bad idea for you to go and bill and coo some more with Dolores. Buy her new magazines and things and charge 'em to Mr. Hecker. Stick with her—No! Wait—”

Sarah had risen abruptly. The young lady with the platinum tresses was making her way forward toward the door marked “Ladies.” Sarah stepped over Ben Todd’s long legs and into the aisle. The train began to move. Sarah lurched forward toward the door marked “Ladies.”

Five minutes later, Miss Flores was back in her seat and Sarah was back in hers.

“Ben,” whispered Sarah, “when that girl bleached her hair, she bleached out all her brains. She’s got that necklace in her handbag, crammed in with all the face paint and lip paint and the cigarettes and the rest of it. I saw it—the Gautier necklace!”

“The imitation of the Gautier necklace.”

“I was forgetting,” said Sarah. “Well, the imitation’s worth two thousand, ain’t it? The girl’s an imbecile. Go on up, now, Bennie, and sparkle for her. Keep your eye on her purse but don’t put your hand in it. When the time comes for snitching, I’ll snitch.”

“Well, when is the time coming for snitching? That’s a little detail we ain’t worked out, yet, old girl.”

“We ain’t but I have. It won’t be until after dinner anyway, Bennie. I never steal except on a full stomach.”

The train sped on. Sarah sat with her head back against the green plush, her hands folded over her prominent abdomen. Two hours passed. A black man with a white smile and a white coat came down the aisle, beating a musical gong. Sarah stirred. Ben Todd came down the aisle,

behind him, Miss Dolores Flores. They stopped at Sarah’s seat.

“If you don’t object, Auntie,” said Ben Todd, “Miss Flores and I are going to dine together—”

“Delighted,” said Sarah, rising. “Love to eat on trains. Lead the way, nephew.”

After dinner was over, Ben Todd squirmed Dolores into the club car at the end of the train for a cigarette. Sarah returned to car 654, and was occupying the seat opposite her own, while the porter made up her lower and the upper above it—reserved for Ben Todd. Sarah wore the complacent and reminiscent look of one who has relished good food.

A long-legged young man charged suddenly into the almost empty car and gripped Sarah by the shoulder. He said: “Listen. There’s a stop in five minutes. I saw you fingering the girl’s purse. If you’ve got the goods, let’s hop off and...”

Sarah shook his fingers off. She half rose from the seat and pushed her face close to his. She said: “You go back and stick with the fool girl, Ben Todd. She’s in danger as long as she’s got that thing in her bag. I’ve just remembered where I saw the gent with the wart last—Go!”

Ben Todd waited a moment, staring. Then he wheeled and charged back down the aisle. In the doorway he collided with a gentleman who also seemed in haste. The gentleman had a wart on his chin.

Sarah settled back in her seat and closed her eyes. A few moments passed. Someone again laid a hand on her shoulder. She started, looked up into a pair of slimey, dark eyes. She said: “Mercy! I’m afraid I’m sitting in your place, mister. The porter’s making up my bed. If you don’t mind, I’ll just—” She slid over to make room for the owner of the seat.

The gentleman with the wart sat down.

Sarah said: "You know, I've seen you some place before, mister."

The gentleman with the wart looked her over. He said:

"Old stuff! You ain't."

"Maybe it was a picture of you I saw," said Sarah thoughtfully. "I see a lot of pictures of people—"

The porter said: "All ready, Madam."

Sarah rose. She glanced down at the face with the wart. She crossed the aisle and disappeared between the green curtains of her berth.

For five minutes thereafter, Sarah's hoarse voice grunted and groaned behind her curtains. Then, she emerged, swathed in a purple crepe robe, and lurched up the aisle toward the Ladies' Room. When she returned, the gentleman with the wart had vanished. There was no one in the car to notice that Sarah was still thoroughly corseted and shod under her kimono.

An hour passed—two hours—three hours. The berths were all made up and the car dark, except for the dim lights at either end. Someone fell against the curtains of Sarah's berth. She opened them with a gun in her hand. She saw a ladder and a pair of long legs ascending the ladder, and she lay back. She kept the curtains slightly parted with one hand, and her eye fixed to the opening.

More hours passed, hours filled with the hooting of the train's whistle and the rattling of the train's wheels. Sarah opened her curtains wide and surveyed the empty aisle. She drew

back into her cubicle and tapped smartly on the ceiling above her.

"Huh?" said a sleepy voice. Sarah tapped again. She put her feet into the aisle and stood up. She was still wrapped in her purple kimono.

The curtains of the upper berth parted. A rumped red-head appeared in the opening. Sarah said, very softly:

"Time! Ring for the porter. Keep him busy this end."

The red-head nodded. Its eyes blinked. Sarah strode up the aisle. At the other end of the car, the porter's bell began to ring, insistently. It was then three a.m.

Two minutes later, Sarah thrust her head out of the Ladies' Room door and peered down the car. Deserted. Not a sound but the faint wailing of the train.

Sarah began to walk down the aisle toward her own section. She paused before she got there, her hand gripping the curtains of the lower occupied by Miss Dolores Flores.

III

In the men's washroom, Ben Todd took his head out of his hands and looked up into the anxious face of the porter. Ben Todd said:

"I feel better now, George. What time is it?"

"Three fifteen, suh."

"Um. So we been in here ten minutes, huh? Well, George, that was sure nifty liquor you gave me. It did the trick. Here!"

Ben Todd thrust a bill into the porter's ready fingers and stood up.

He said: "Don't bother any more about me, now, George. Just stay and finish up that bottle."

Ben Todd swayed down the aisle toward section 4. The car was dark, silent. The ladder was still in place in front of his berth.

Ben Todd climbed up. Someone had switched the light on over his bed. Someone had left a slip of paper stuck into his pillow with a large safety pin. The determined script on the paper was Sarah Watson's. It said: "Next stop 3:25. Get ready. The girl is dead."

There was no signature. There was a smudge of red near the ragged lower edge of the note.

Ben Todd sat hunched up, staring. His freckles began to take on a darker hue against the whitening of his face. Presently, the paper began to shake a little in his hand.

It was sixty seconds before he began frenziedly adjusting the few garments he had removed that night. He was badly handicapped by the jerkiness of his breathing and the fumbling of his fingers.

At 3:24, he was sitting cross legged on his berth, gripping his valise. There was no sound from the berth beneath him.

At 3:25, the train stopped. Still no sound from below.

At 3:25 ½, there was a stir in the aisle. Ben Todd peered down, saw a man dashing into the vestibule of the car.

At 3:26, the conductor's whistle blew from the platform outside the train, and the train gave a preliminary lurch.

Sarah Watson erupted from her berth, charged down the aisle. Ben Todd swung his long legs over at the same instant, ignored the ladder, leaped, followed her, caught up with her in the vestibule. The conductor was just mounting the steps. Sarah put a hand on his chest and shoved. She went by him like a blast.

The conductor leaped back on the moving train, cursing. Ben Todd slid into the next vestibule and jumped. He landed sitting down on the dark platform, the few scattered lights of the town beyond the station pinwheeling in his head.

A firm hand hauled him up. "A hoarse voice said: "Stop resting, feller. I've got a car waiting."

Together, they dashed around the dark bulk of the station, dived into the lone car waiting in the dreary street beyond. The taxi began to move. There was only one other car in sight, its tail light rapidly diminishing. Ben Todd said: "Sarah! That poor girl! How-?"

Sarah lifted her black gloved hands. She crooked the fingers suggestively. She said: "This is the way it happened, Bennie."

"God!" breathed Ben Todd. "Strangled! Sarah, what in the name of hell are we going to do now?"

"We're going to keep quiet if you know what's good for you," said Sarah, with a glance at the driver's back. "This is no place to discuss-"

Sarah broke off and leaned toward the driver. She said:

"This flying field, young man. It is the only one hereabouts? You're sure? Good! Now, listen, young feller, a lot depends on this. You

sure there ain't a single solitary private plane to rent at that field, for love nor money?"

The taxi driver kept his head over the wheel and nodded. They were making speed. The tail light of the single car ahead was growing larger.

Sarah said: "Then you're damn sure, young man, that there ain't a plane of any kind or description flying out of this place until the regular passenger plane comes through at four a.m. and takes off again?"

The driver nodded. He said, "You can stake your life on it."

"Maybe I am," said Sarah, quietly, and leaned back against the cushions.

Ben Todd spent the next ten flying minutes hunched in his corner, staring at Sarah Watson's rugged profile, which looked white in the flash of occasional street lamps, dark and brooding in the intervals between.

The taxi swerved on to a dirt road, bumped to a stop in front of a fenced field. There was a gate in the fence, and beyond the fence, a square, boxlike structure.

Ben Todd reached for the door handle on his side of the car. Sarah gripped his arm. She said: "Wait!"

The man standing just inside the gate of the flying field moved on, passed into shadows, emerged again and walked through the door of the square building beyond the gate.

Sarah said: "All right, now," thrust a crumpled bill into their driver's hand and got out. They passed through the gate and halted, Sarah's fingers digging into Ben Todd's arm, in their ears, the diminishing sound of the car they had come in. Sarah Watson said: "We've got

about fifteen minutes to wait, if the plane's on time. Don't spend any of 'em in the light, Ben Todd, and don't go near that waiting room, until the last minute, and then get our tickets. If you can change your appearance any while you're hanging around in the dark, do it. And give me your valise. I need the duds in it."

"Sarah!" Ben Todd's voice sounded as though rust had attacked his vocal chords. "Sarah, you're not going to try to get into my clothes? They won't fit you and you couldn't get away with it anyway, old girl. Listen! I'd do anything to get you clear of this terrible thing, Sarah, but..."

"Idiot! Give me that bag. Remember, keep out of sight 'til the last minute. I'll meet you just before the plane leaves the ground."

Sarah Watson grabbed Ben Todd's valise from his nerveless hand and strode away and was lost in the shadows at the far side of the field.

Ben Todd located the spot where the plane would settle down to discharge and admit passengers. Thereafter, he skulked in shadows, his forehead beaded with perspiration in spite of the cool wind of approaching dawn. Once or twice, he thought he saw the dark bulk of Sarah's figure melt into the darker bulk of the shadowed side of the waiting room structure. Several times, he was sure he saw a flashlight darting there, close to the ground. Then, the distant drone of a big plane came to his ears and he lifted anxious eyes. The stars were fading out and gray was washing into the ceiling above him.

Like a monstrous, murmuring white bird, the plane rested in the white path of the runway. The trim stewardess stood at one side of the rear door, the collar-ad co-pilot at the other side, watch in hand. Faces peered out of the windows of the plane, waiting.

The co-pilot snapped his watch shut, grinned at the stewardess, put his foot on the first of the two little steps up to the plane's door.

A woman ran out from behind the waiting room, carrying a man's valise in one hand, a yellow cardboard suitcase in the other. An enveloping, bright yellow rain coat flapped as she ran. The bags smacked against her thighs as she came on.

She slowed. She lifted the hand with the valise in it and straightened the exotic creation of black velvet and nodding violets which had slid forward off her grey hair and was threatening to blind her. She came to a full stop, set the valise down, and adjusted the polka-dotted veil which hung from the hat, drawing it well down and over her prominent chin.

A long legged young man shot out from the waiting room door and joined her. She thrust the bags into his hands.

"Here," she said. "You handle it. Tell 'em we know the suitcase weighs too much, but your valise don't weigh anything, because it's empty now. Tell 'em to divide the weight of the suitcase between us, because we're travelling together. Don't bollix it, feller. It's important—"

Sarah Watson charged on, thrust a ticket under the co-pilot's handsome nose and entered the plane. She went in with no more sound than the rattling of her stiff yellow raincoat, and she took a seat at the rear.

The seats were brown leather, four seats on each side of the aisle. A man and woman sat on one side, rather white and tense. In front of them, an elderly gentleman, evidently a person of means, read a book.

On the other side, Ben Todd sat in the last seat, with his back against a walled-off

cubicle labelled "Stewardess." In front of him, sat Sarah Watson. In the front seat on that side of the aisle, just behind the glass partition which separated the passengers from the pilots, a man sat. All that was visible of the man from the rear was a section of dark hair and a soft felt hat.

The plane soared. The squares of dark and light on the earth beneath grew smaller, then began to take form in the growing light. Here and there, sunlight glinted on a steeple.

Sarah Watson turned in her seat. Ben Todd leaned forward. Sarah said, through her veil: "Well, we made it. But I can't say I think much of your ideas of disguise. Any fool can turn up his coat collar and pull down his hat. Couldn't you have rustled a false mustache or something, Bennie? Not that it matters now. We're on and nobody can get off this thing until—"

"Sarah, listen! You can't get away with it, old girl! The cops will be waiting for you at the next stop."

"Waiting for me?" Sarah thrust her proboscis close to Ben's. "Waiting for *me*? Ben Todd, do you mean to say you've been thinking that I—do you mean to say that you've been thinking that poor girl is dead because I—?"

Ben Todd stared into the eyes behind Sarah's dotted veil. For a long time, neither of them moved, except to sway slightly with the swaying of the plane. Ben Todd said, slowly: "I've been a damn fool, old girl. But you've got to admit you acted like you had something damn unpleasant to run away from."

"Not from," said Sarah, hoarsely. "After! Look ahead, Bennie. Ain't there something familiar about the back of that head?"

Ben Todd stared at the dark hair resting on the leather cushions of the seat up the aisle.

He stared at the soft felt hat on top of the hair. Presently, Ben Todd said, very quietly:

"Wart face!"

"Exactly," said Sarah.

"But listen—if you mean you think he killed—"

"I know he killed her."

"Well, then, why the hell all the dramatics? Why the hell didn't we get him at the landing field?"

"You're forgetting we also want to get the necklace."

"What of it? If he killed her, he's got the necklace. We'd have got it. You could simply have claimed it for old Hecker."

"And had the cops hold it as evidence for months? Listen, Bennie. I set out to steal that necklace, and I'm going to steal it, for reasons of my own. Bennie, in which of a man's pockets do you think he'd be likely to hide a diamond—a necklace he thought was diamonds?"

"Listen, you damn fool woman. If that guy has the necklace, let him keep it. He's dangerous!"

"Bennie," said Sarah, "don't worry about me. Now, think! Where'd he be likely to put that necklace?"

"God knows. The Gautier necklace is pretty bulky, so the imitation must be, too. He might hide it in his luggage, far as that goes."

"He has no luggage. He must have hopped that train in a hurry, must have learned at the last minute that the necklace was on board. Think, now, Bennie! Which pocket?"

"Wait a mo," said Ben Todd, slowly. "I'm remembering something—in the dining car, while you were shovelling in grub, I was watching. I saw that guy take his wallet out to pay. He took it out of an inside coat pocket, left hand side. The pocket seemed to have some special kind of zipper arrangement on it."

"Bennie, you're worth your wages, sometimes! Let's see, now. The next landing is in three quarters of an hour. In about half an hour, Bennie, I'm going to be sick."

"Sick? Whad'ya mean, sick?"

"Sick. Lots of people get sick on planes. I never rode on a plane before, and I'm a sensitive nature, Bennie. I'm not only going to be sick, but I'm going to get hysterical. I'm going to do some staggering and some screeching. I'm going to stagger up front and then I'm going to stagger back."

"Listen, Sarah, for hell's sake! That fellow's a killer. He's dangerous."

"After I stagger back, Bennie, I'm going to stagger into that little cubbyhole right behind you. Your job is to see that that little snip of a stewardess don't follow me in there. After I'm in, Bennie, just let things take their course... just let things take their course."

Sarah turned squarely around. She became absorbed in peering out of her window. Ben Todd regarded the grey, rocky knob of hair on the back of her head for a long time. His lips moved silently. A lip reader reading those lips would have blushed.

Presently, Ben Todd relaxed and stared down from his window. Below, the earth revolved, slowly. Above, the thin, pink tinted clouds raced.

Sarah Watson stirred. She glanced at the small, plump watch pinned on her bosom. She rose.

Sarah gulped dangerously as she stood up. She gulped again and lurched into the aisle. She made some loud, unintelligible noises. She began to sway up the aisle.

The alert stewardess started down the aisle to meet her. Sarah stumbled, knocked the stewardess sidewise, went on with a rush. Sarah was screeching now, loud, thin screeches from which words were beginning to emerge.

“Stop the plane! I’m scared! I’m scared stiff! Something’s going to happen—”

Ben Todd was in the aisle, racing after the stewardess. The stewardess was racing after Sarah. Sarah was now at the glass partition which separated the pilots from the passengers. Sarah was banging on the glass with clenched fists. She was yelling her terror.

The stewardess reached Sarah, clawed at the yellow rubber which covered Sarah’s broad back. Sarah went on yelling, went on pounding.

Ben Todd reached the stewardess. He put firm hands on the stewardess. He said: “The old lady’s scared into a fit. You can’t handle her. Let me.”

Sarah Watson wheeled suddenly. She staggered. One of her thick arms went out in a wild, wide sweep. The fist at the end of the arm struck Ben Todd on the point of the chin. Ben Todd staggered. His long arms sawed the air. One of the arms struck the stewardess.

With a last weird yell, Sarah Watson collapsed. She collapsed over the dark gentleman sitting directly behind the glass partition. The dark gentleman and Sarah

became a conglomerate, moving mass of waving arms and legs, a mass slipping and sliding over the leather seat, a mass vocal with grunts and gasps.

The stewardess recovered. She leaped into the fray. She clawed indiscriminately at portions of Sarah’s anatomy and portions of the dark gentleman.

Ben Todd gripped the edge of the dark gentleman’s seat. Ben Todd swung out a long arm and curved it about the slender waist of the stewardess. Ben Todd lifted the stewardess up and out into the aisle. He said:

“I told you I could handle her. Lay off!”

Suddenly, Sarah Watson was on her feet. She was sagging against Ben Todd. She was pulling down her veil as she sagged. She was moving rapidly toward the rear of the plane, moaning as she moved, and taking Ben Todd with her.

The dark-haired gentleman was straightening himself. He was gulping in deep breaths. He was putting his hand to his left side. He was rising from his seat.

Sarah reached the door of the little cubicle marked “Stewardess.” She opened the door. She said, loudly:

“No! Leave me alone! I want to be alone! Oh, I’m so ashamed!” and she slammed the door of the little cubicle shut in Ben Todd’s face.

The stewardess was at Ben Todd’s shoulder. The stewardess was reaching past Ben Todd, trying to open the door of the little cubicle.

Ben Todd closed his fingers about the wrist of the stewardess. He said: “Leave the

poor old thing alone. She just got scared, and now she's ashamed."

A new voice rose over the tumult, the voice of the dark haired gentleman:

"I've been robbed!" he screamed. "Robbed!" The dark haired gentleman was in the aisle now, facing the rear, his arms raised, his wart revealed to all who cared to look. "Robbed!" he screamed again.

The door of the little cubicle burst open. Sarah Watson came out of the cubicle with a rush, covering her veiled face with her hands.

"A man in there!" she howled. "A man! He hit me. Oh, my! He hit me and he jumped out of the window in there. He jumped and he's going down with one of those parasol things!"

The passengers were all on their feet now, swaying and jerking, momentarily in danger of entangling with each other in the center of the aisle. As Sarah's screech reached them each followed with his eyes the direction of Sarah's stubby, pointing finger, and each scrambled into a seat, peered out a window.

"Look! A man—she's right—his parachute's stuck—no, it's unfolding—he hit her—he must have been hid in there all the time!"

The dark haired man got back into the aisle again. He raised an arm and pointed it at Sarah. He yelled:

"I've been robbed! That woman robbed me!"

"What?" Sarah's answering yell was hoarse. "You've been robbed? You're accusing me—me? Look down there, man. Look! There goes your thief!"

"I've been robbed!" yelled the dark haired man. "She took them. She took the diamonds—my diamonds! She... that woman..."

"Diamonds?" said Sarah hoarsely. "My dear man! Just look out of the windows, as everybody else is looking!"

The passengers ceased staring with popping eyes at Sarah and the man with the wart. The passengers pressed their faces again against the windows:

"Look! He said diamonds—wait—the wind is carrying the parachute this way. What's that shining down there in the man's hand? Diamonds—he said diamonds—there's something shining in that man's hand. He's got away with the diamonds—he must have been hiding in there all the time. It's a blessing we're not all dead!"

The man with the wart got out into the aisle again. He raised his arms and shook his fists. He cried:

"That man's got my diamonds! That man! Stop the plane! That thief has my diamonds. He's going to land any minute! Stop the—"

And suddenly the man with the wart ceased yelling and crowded to a window and fixed his eyes avidly on the figure slowly drifting down, drifting now very close to earth, near the wide spread of a red factory's roofs!

The plane tilted, began to point its nose toward the earth. The man with the wart lost his balance on the slippery seat upon which he had been kneeling. He slid, he clawed at the seat, he banged his head against the back of the seat in front, and he fell.

The stewardess ran to him and said, "The plane's stopping very soon now, anyway,

sir—the regular stop. And you must have seen where that thief landed with your diamonds—”

Sarah Watson settled in her seat and folded her hands complacently. She turned her head and Ben Todd leaned toward her.

“Bennie,” she said, close to Ben Todd’s ear, “Bennie, I’ve always said that all men were alike, but the one that just landed under that parachute is different, Bennie, because I made him myself. I had a hell of a time finding enough scrap iron about that airport to weigh him down, and a hell of a time stealing a parachute there, too, and, of course, there’s a good suit of yours gone to pot to clothe him, but we can charge the suit to Mr. Hecker.”

A hand touched Sarah on the shoulder. She turned, looked up through her veil at the face of the gentleman with the wart.

“Madam,” said the gentleman, “I wish to apologize for accusing you of stealing my diamonds. I was wrong!”

“That,” said Sarah, “is perfectly all right, perfectly all right.”

The man with the wart leaned closer. He stared down into the face behind the polka dots of Sarah’s veil. He said: “Madam, I—” and suddenly wrenched the veil away, brushing aside the clutch of Ben Todd’s fingers.

The man with the wart stared down into the eyes under Sarah Watson’s bristling brows. He said, very slowly, and lingeringly:

“Ah!”

Sarah said nothing. The thin lips under her incipient mustache curved slightly.

The gentleman with the wart began to talk with a rush of words. He said:

“I see! I remember you! I know you now! You took them and you passed them over to him back here and he jumped with them. What a dummy I’ve been!—A *dummy*! I see it all now! A *dummy*! Not a man, but a—”

The plane bumped. Dust fanned past its windows from the whirring propeller. There was another bump.

The man with the wart took one more moment to glare balefully into Sarah’s eyes. He said: “You think you’re damn smart, yes, but I’ll outsmart you yet, you old harridan.”

And then he rushed to the door at the rear of the plane, wrenched it open, and leaped while the plane was still gliding down the runway. In the silence which followed the cessation of movement and sound, Sarah Watson’s voice said hoarsely: “The gent who lost his diamonds seems to be in a hurry to get some place.”

The car carrying Sarah Watson and Ben Todd away from the airport sped along the wide, white boulevard. Ahead of it, another car sped—far ahead.

Ben Todd took his clenched hands off his knees for a moment and turned to Sarah. He said:

“He may make it yet. If he’s as smart as I am, he knows just about where that dummy landed.”

Sarah Watson unfolded her hands, opened her capacious handbag, stared at herself in the bag’s mirror. She said: “Becoming hat, this. It’s my Sunday hat.”

“Sarah, for the love of—listen, that guy with the wart is gaining. He’s going to get there long before we do. He’s going to get there and he’s going to find that dummy, and he’s going to

get that necklace. Sarah, you've got to think of something!"

"I am thinking of something," said Sarah, snapping her bag shut. "I'm thinking we'd better tell the driver to slow up a bit."

"Listen, you! You gone batty? Can't you see that guy is eating up the road?"

"Bennie," said Sarah calmly, "some day you're going to have a nervous breakdown. Now listen. You may think you know just where that dummy landed and probably the gent with the wart thinks he knows, too, but things look different from the air, Bennie, and I'm betting the gent with the wart is going to spend a long time searching for that necklace..." Sarah broke off and leaned forward to the driver.

"Driver," she said. "Take the next turning, please. And don't go so fast. My partner's a bit nervous."

"Who wouldn't be nervous!" yelled Ben Todd, "with an idiot woman like you! Slow up and let me out of here, driver. I'm going to get another car and go after that guy..."

"You're going to stay right in this car," said Sarah firmly. "Take the next crossing, driver—the one that leads to the police station."

IV

Sarah Watson strode into police headquarters, her fingers on Ben Todd's arm. Ben Todd's pallor was excessive and his forehead was dewed with sweat.

"Captain," said Sarah to the man behind the desk, "I'm Sarah Watson. Here's my card. This is my assistant. We're here to put you on the trail of the murderer of Dolores Flores."

"Already?" said the man behind the desk. "We just got it over the wire that they'd found that dame dead on the train to Chi."

"Let me talk, Captain. I'm in a hurry. I was on that train. I had the berth opposite the murderer's. I meant to keep my eyes on him all night because I knew who he was. I'd seen his photo in the police files at home. Wait, let me talk, Captain."

"I meant to watch him, but my eyes got stuck together for a few minutes and when I opened them, I saw the murderer sneaking back into his berth from somewhere. He was in his shirt sleeves. He had something red on his cuff, his right cuff. It'll be there yet, when you get him."

"Blood, eh? Where is this guy?"

"Not blood, captain. There was no blood. The girl was strangled to death. When I found her, dead, in her berth, her handbag was lying open beside her. There was a lipstick in it, blood red, and uncapped. The metal case of the lipstick had printing on it that said the lipstick was made special for Dolores Flores. Your chemists will be able to match that lipstick up with the red smudge on the murderer's cuff, Captain, when you get him."

"Say listen, where is this guy? Where do we get him?"

"Let me talk, Captain. The murderer got that smudge on his cuff, of course, when he put his thieving hand in the girl's purse to steal her valuables. I would have got the same smudge on my own—er—hand, if I had put it in. But of course, I didn't. Fingerprints, you know, Captain. Now, Captain, if you'll just send a squad car out with a half dozen men with guns. There's a big red brick factory about ten miles southwest of the airport here."

"The Furness factory," said the Captain.

"The name don't matter," said Sarah. "The point is, you'll probably have to beat the woods that lie south of the factory. The murderer will be in those woods, doing some beating himself, for something he lost. You'll catch him easy, Captain. Those woods are big and they're thick, and the murderer don't know just where to look. He's a dark man, the murderer, with black eyes, and a wart on his chin with two hairs sprouting out of it and—"

"Warty Capruccio! He's been up for murder before, and slipped clear."

"The same, Captain. Well, Captain, you've got my card and you can reach me if you want to, though you won't have a smidgin of trouble convicting Warty without me, I'm sure. I'm in a hurry now, Captain, because I'm on a job, and it ain't finished yet."

Sarah Watson and Ben Todd emerged from the building which housed the local police. Ben Todd was not only perspiring, he was gnawing his nails.

"Sarah, here comes a cab. I don't know what in hell's name you were up to in there, wasting time, setting the cops on that guy's trail."

"Time," said Sarah, sententiously, "is never wasted when it's used to bring a criminal to justice."

"You should talk about criminals! Listen, you imbecilic old battle-axe, we may have time yet to repair the damage you've done. If we hire a plane, we can get there before the cops get there... Sarah, stir your stumps! We've got to get that necklace..."

"Bennie," said Sarah, "you can go hire a plane if you want to. But it ain't worth it,

especially as we couldn't charge it to Mr. Hecker's expense. The necklace that dummy took down to earth came from the five and ten, Bennie, and it cost me a dollar. It ain't worth retrieving, because it's already charged to Mr. Hecker, anyway. I had it ready to drop in that poor girl's purse, in case I managed to steal the string she had."

"Sarah! Do you mean to say you fumbled getting the imitation string from the murderer?"

"I never fumble anything, young man," said Sarah, and opened her purse.

Ben Todd stared down at the coiled, glittering thing in the bottom of Sarah's purse. He had put his hand out toward the purse. Sarah snapped the purse shut. She advanced to the curb and signalled a taxi. She said: "The thing to do now, Bennie, is to get the first train out of here for home. I've got a date with Mrs. Adolph A. Hecker."

"Mrs. Hecker! Why you damn, double-crossing old..."

"Mrs. Hecker," said Sarah, "is a very fine woman, even if she is married to Mr. Hecker. Mrs. Hecker has promised me ten thousand dollars for this necklace, Ben Todd."

Sarah Watson stepped into the cab. Ben Todd stepped after her and flopped on the seat. Ben Todd took his head in his hands. He said:

"My head, my poor, poor head! I knew before this thing was over you'd have us tied up in a mess of double-crossing, triple-crossing knots!"

"Bennie," said Sarah, firmly. "You wrong me. I engaged to do a job for Mr. Hecker and I intend to do it. Of course, Mr. Hecker shouldn't have lied to me. If you had eyes in your head, Bennie, you'd have seen him lying. Ten per cent seemed excessive to him, Bennie, until he

happened to remember that the necklace he wanted to recover was paste, nothing but paste. Oh, well, all men are alike! Let's see now... Ten thousand from Mrs. Hecker, and two hundred from Mr. Hecker, and expenses from both of them."

"Sarah Watson! How in hell are you going to collect two hundred from Mr. Hecker when you haven't got a necklace to turn over to him—when you're turning the necklace over to his wife?"

"Simple," said Sarah. "Mrs. Hecker is turning the imitation over to me, Bennie, when she pays me the ten thousand. The imitation has been in Mrs. Hecker's wall safe ever since Mr. Hecker put it there, after Dolores Flores—poor girl—stole the real necklace under Mr. Hecker's eyes. Let's see now... ten thousand and two hundred and..."

The doors of the Citizens' Savings Bank swung open, letting in morning sunshine. A woman in rusty black strode across the tiled floor and halted at a depositors' window. A long legged young man entered behind her and strode to another depositors' window. With perfect timing the two shoved bank books and sizeable wads of bills under the wickets of their respective windows.

A door at the side of the banking room slammed. The slam echoed against the vaulted

ceiling. Sarah Watson turned, leaning her elbow on the sill of the window. Her bristling brows lowered over her eyes as she watched the pompous figure of the bank's president come toward her across the tile floor.

The president came very close. His pale eyes lifted and regarded Sarah bleakly. He said:

"Mrs. Watson, that necklace you returned to me an hour ago—that necklace for which I've already paid you two hundred dollars and an exorbitant expense account—that necklace, Madam, is nothing but—"

"Nothing but paste," said Sarah. "A clever imitation, but paste. Well, Mr. Hecker, that's what you asked for, and that's what you got."

The clerk shoved Sarah's bank book through the wicket.

He peered around Sarah's bulky figure and addressed himself, in a loud and cheery voice, to the president of the bank.

"Mr. Hecker," he said, "I thought you'd like to know. Mrs. Watson has just made a very nice deposit, very nice indeed. Mrs. Watson must have put over a very shrewd piece of business this time, I think."