

The Corpse in the Crystal & He Got What He Asked For **D. B. McCandless**

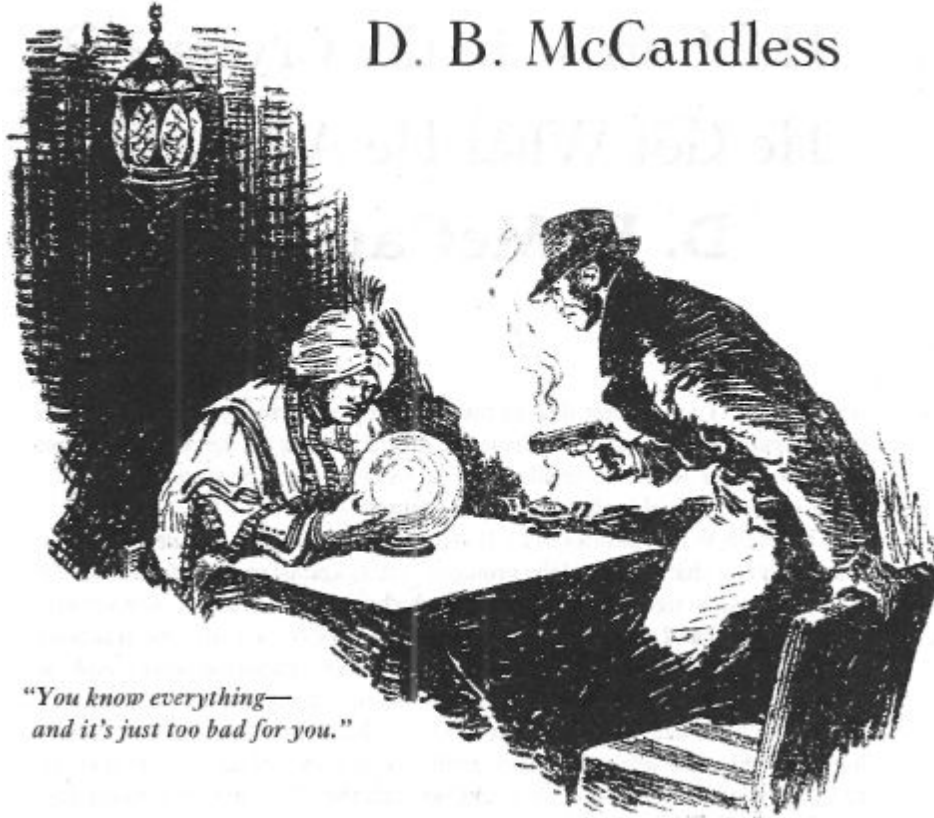
AN ELEMENT OF a great deal of pulp fiction that correctly prevents it from being regarded as serious literature is the absurd reliance on the reader to accept virtually any far-fetched coincidence or series of events. The suspension of disbelief is often pushed to the very brink of fantasy.

The Sarah Watson stories of D. B. McCandless are a case in point. They are humorous and charming, and the protagonist runs against stereotypes. She is not a sexy redhead in tight, low-cut sweaters who has every man she encounters eating out of her hand. She is, instead, middle-aged, heavy, dowdy, and relatively charmless. This element of originality, as well as a fast-paced narrative, combine to make the stories among the most readable of their kind-so much so that two tales of "The Female She-Devil" have been included in this collection. Do not, however, judge the stories based on credibility, as they will fall somewhat short. Even allowing for the difference of era between the 1930s and the present day, railroad and airplane travel had little in common with the events related in the second of these adventures.

"The Corpse in the Crystal" and "He Got What He Asked For" (January 1937) were originally published in *Detective Fiction Weekly*.

The Corpse in the Crystal

D. B. McCandless



A MASSIVE individual in blue and brass marched resoundingly down a tiled corridor and halted before a door. Scabby gilt letters on the door said: "Watson Detective Agency." The massive individual pounced upon the door knob, wrenched it and swung himself into the office beyond.

A long, languid young man with red hair let his feet thump from his desk to the floor, sat upright, said: "Cheese it, the cops!" and relaxed again, grinning.

The massive individual, standing spread-legged and stroking a black eyebrow thick enough to have served as a mustache for a daintier man, greeted the young man.

" 'Lo, Ben Todd. Where's your boss?"

" 'Lo, Sergeant. Sarah Watson has gone out."

"I can see that, even if I am a cop. Where's she gone?"

"Crazy, I guess. She said she was going to consult a crystal gazer."

Sergeant O'Reilly cried out and shook his fists at the ceiling.

"Damn Sarah Watson!" he exclaimed. "A crystal gazer, eh! I might have known she'd get ahead of me!"

O'Reilly sat down heavily in the chair beside Sarah Watson's roll-top desk. He reached a thick arm and laid heavy fingers upon a newspaper lying there. He lifted the paper and stared at a square hole cut neatly therein. He took a square clipping from his pocket and fitted it into the hole in the newspaper.

"Read this, Ben Todd."

Ben Todd shambled across, lounged over the Sergeant's shoulder and read. The clipping fitted into the empty space in Sarah's newspaper, under "Letters from Readers." It read:

Dear Editor: People say all fortune tellers, mediums and crystal gazers are fakes. Two weeks ago, I sat before a crystal ball and the most wonderful seer in the world looked into the crystal and saw the body of a certain well known wealthy young man laying dead in a marsh, with cat-tails drooping over him and a bone-handled knife in his heart. That was two weeks ago, and the next day, the body of that same well known, wealthy young man was found dead, laying in a marsh, just exactly as the wonderful seer had seen it in the crystal. Now that young man lays in his grave and the police can't find his murderer. And then people say crystal gazers are fakes!

Yours respectfully,
Lily Tarrant

"A certain well-known, wealthy young man," Ben Todd whistled, went on. "Found in a swamp... with a bone-handled knife in his heart... *Alexander Courtwell!*"

"The same!" O'Reilly agreed. "I wonder if this wonderful seer saw the ring when he saw the corpse in the crystal?"

"Ring?"

"The ring we found under the corpse. The big onyx ring with the two big diamonds in it. The ring we knew belonged to Honest Jim Carson."

"Well, for Pete's sake, O'Reilly, if you knew, why isn't Honest Jim Carson in jail for the Courtwell killing?"

"Honest Jim Carson," said O'Reilly, "is in his grave. He was there, of unnatural causes, three days before Courtwell was killed."

"Oh!" said Ben Todd.

O'Reilly got to his feet, cast the crumpled newspaper from him, and shook his fist again at Sarah's roll-top desk. Ben Todd said, thoughtfully:

"So... a crystal gazer saw Alexander Courtwell dead before he was found dead... and Sarah's gone to consult a crystal gazer!"

"Damn her brains! There's ten thousand dollars reward for the apprehension of Courtwell's murderer, Ben Todd, and that Watson woman had to set her eagle eye on that clipping before I... Wait!"

O'Reilly grabbed the 'phone on top of the roll-top desk. He shouted a number, glared at Ben Todd.

"*Evening Star?* O'Reilly. Yeah, the cop. Gimme Watkins. You, Watkins? Listen, you made one bad boner, letting that Tarrant woman's letter get into print. You made another bad boner not calling the papers off the street quick enough after I ordered you to. Let's see, now if you've made another boner? Anybody get the Tarrant woman's address out of you since that paper went on the streets? What? They did? *She* did? I might have known! I might have... Oh, God!"

O'Reilly slammed up the 'phone and whirled on Ben Todd.

"That Watson woman is a liar and a thief," he roared. "She called up the *Star* and

told 'em she was assisting me on the Courtwell case. She asked for that Tarrant woman's address and she got it."

"She would."

"She got it. Which means she's probably with the crystal gazer now, picking his brains dry, and she'll have that ten thousand dollars reward in her damn, thieving fists before I..."

"Listen," said Ben Todd. "I don't allow anybody to damn Sarah Watson. She may be an old battle-axe and an old liar but she's not a damn old thief."

"She is a damn old thief!" shouted O'Reilly, thrusting his blue jaw close to Ben Todd's: "I came here with every intention of sharing that reward with her if she'd help me by going to that crystal gazer and picking his brains dry before we closed in on him. Now she's got the jump on me, and she'll cop the whole reward!"

Ben Todd yawned and said:

"Well, you're giving her a good start, anyway, O'Reilly, while you stand here, sizzling in your own grease. Listen, O'Reilly! I just thought of something! If the crystal gazer knew about the murder before the murder was done, then he's involved, and if he's involved..."

"If he's involved! Of course he's involved! What else do you think I've been thinking? What I should have done was to close in on him first and sweat him after, instead of thinking of conniving with Sarah to pick his brains first..."

Ben Todd reached for his hat and took a long stride toward the door.

"The old girl may be with him now!" he cried. "If he gets wise to what she's after, then Sarah's in..."

O'Reilly reached over Ben Todd's shoulder and opened the door.

"Of course she's in danger!" he admitted. "What else do you think I've been thinking? If you don't move quicker, Ben Todd, I'll grind down your heels."

At just about the moment that Sergeant O'Reilly first made his entrance into the office of the Watson Detective Agency, Sarah Watson herself was leaning upon the rickety stoop railing of a certain flathouse, conversing with a janitress perfumed with gin.

The thick shaft of Sarah's sturdily corseted body was wrapped in nondescript, rusty black garments. Her antique headgear was set at a hurried angle on her straggling gray hair. There was a slight, unaccustomed tinge of hectic red on the high cheek bones under her grey, bristling-browed eyes. There was, however, no hint of excitement in the hoarse, downright voice with which she fired questions at the vague and wavery target of the janitress.

"She left in a hurry, eh? In a big, black car with red wheels? Walking between two men, eh? Did you get a look at those two men?"

"Well, now." The janitress ran a soiled hand over her mouth. "Well, I tried to get a look, because it seemed kind of queer, Mrs. Tarrant going off with two strange men like that and her a new widow woman that's always trying to communicate with her dead husband through the spirits and such, but the men walked awful fast. Seems to me they was both dark and one of 'em had his lip puckered down at the side by a scar, sort of, and the car was the swellest thing on four wheels I ever seen, four red wheels..."

"What time? Think, woman! Remember I'm paying you to think."

"Am thinking. Fifty cents will buy... Well, don't glare at me that way, missus. They left right before twelve, because I remember, I was wiping up the halls right after and I smelled something in Mrs. Tarrant's kitchen and her door was open and I edged in and the smell was beans—burnt to a crisp."

"Burnt to a crisp, eh? Mrs. Tarrant must have left in a hurry! Well, here's your fifty cents and take my advice and put it in the bank and not down your gullet."

Sarah Watson started briskly down the stoop, wheeled abruptly and transfixed the janitress with a glinting eye.

"By the way, what's the name of the crystal gazer Mrs. Tarrant goes to?" she asked. "I might find her there..."

"You might. She's been running there enough, trying to see her dead husband in heaven, but it's my opinion she's been looking in the wrong place for him... Don't growl, missus. It's Chariot she goes to. Chariot, his name is, and his place is on Green Street, Number..."

Sarah took a little black notebook from her capacious handbag and noted down the address.

A ramshackle vehicle which faintly resembled an automobile chugged to a stop at a corner on Green Street. Sarah Watson stepped out and strode down the street.

Halfway down the block, she passed a dirty first-floor window with a sign in it which said: "Chariot." She strode by the window, about-faced suddenly, and disappeared down an odorous alley which led to a backyard.

Five minutes later, she mounted the first flight of an iron fire escape ladder and was sitting, bolt upright, on the top step of the ladder, gazing calmly through a rift in the dirty curtains on the open back window of Chariot's flat.

There was no one in the kitchen beyond the curtains but something was sizzling on the stove. The nostrils of Sarah's beak quivered appreciatively as a little breeze blew the fragrance out.

Presently, a door in the kitchen opened. For a moment, the aroma of cooking was diluted by the heavy odor of incense and the room beyond the kitchen showed dimly. Then, a swarthy man in a white robe and white turban closed himself into the kitchen, ripped off his white wrappings, flung them on the floor, yanked off his dark, pointed beard, slung it at a chair, kicked at the discarded robe and turban and bent over the sink. Outside on the fire escape, Sarah Watson nodded grimly.

The man turned from the sink suddenly, facing the window. Sarah edged closer to the wall of the building. The man was clothed in dark trousers and undershirt. He was towelling vigorously. His face was no longer swarthy. It was white, very white—and young.

A fuzzy grey kitten rolled out from under the kitchen table and dabbed at the fringes of black beard protruding from the edge of the chair. The man threw down his towel, picked the kitten up by its scruff, grinned at it, and thrust its soft body under his chin. With the kitten cuddled between his collar bone and his jaw, the man bent over a pan on the stove and expertly flipped over a sizzling steak. He bent over another pan, stirring...

A square door in the wall between the man at the stove and the window where Sarah Watson watched began to open, very slowly, very silently. Sarah edged closer to the curtain.

The stubby fingers of her right hand began to slide into her handbag...

Suddenly the opening door flew wide, revealing the black hole of a dumbwaiter shaft. A man leaped noiselessly through the door and into the kitchen. He was dark and his profile showed a mouth drawn down by a puckered scar. Before his feet hit the oilcloth, he had placed a gun between the shoulder blades of the man bending over the stove.

The man at the stove stiffened but did not move. The kitten clawed at his shoulder and dropped to the floor, squealing.

"Take it now, snitcher—!" the man with the gun snarled.

A gun blasted. The man with the scar dropped his gun, clawed at his back, slid slowly to the floor. The man at the stove bent over the prostrate man, straightened and looked up at the billowing curtains at the back window. There was smoke still wreathing out of the rift in those curtains, but nothing else.

A few minutes later, a brilliant female in rusty black strode along Green Street and climbed into the ancient automobile parked at the corner. For a moment or so, she sat behind the wheel, her hard bosom rising and falling hurriedly, her stubby fingers wiping away the moisture that beaded the incipient mustache upon her upper lip.

Then the old car coughed and chugged down Green Street. Halfway down the block, it slowed. There was a car parked opposite the window in which Chariot's sign appeared. It was a fine car, black, with red wheels.

Sarah Watson's car snorted on a few more yards and stopped. Sarah got out.

The man sitting behind the wheel of the black car sat up suddenly, taking his eyes off the dingy entrance to Chariot's flathouse and transferring them to the woman standing with her elbow resting on the edge of the open window at his left.

"No use waiting," she said. "He's not coming out." She jabbed her elbow viciously into his neck just below the chin. Something in her right hand cracked down upon the back of his head. His slid, his lids fluttering down over amazed eyes.

Sarah Watson drew a hairpin from the knob of grey hair under her hat. She thrust the pin into the button in the center of the steering wheel. The horn began to blow.

Sarah leaned over the man slumped under the wheel and peered into the back of the car.

"It's all right, Mrs. Tarrant," she soothed the frightened woman. "The cop will come running when he hears the horn and the cop will take the ropes and bandages off you. I haven't time."

Sarah withdrew her head, gazed sternly for a moment at the unconscious man behind the wheel, then strode away.

As she mounted the steps of the tenement which housed Chariot, a horn was still blowing behind her, and a ruddy cop was tearing around the corner and down Green Street toward the black car with red wheels. Sarah stepped into the vestibule of the tenement, opened a door into the hall, pressed a firm finger on the bell under Chariot's name and kept the finger there.

The horn of the black car ceased blowing suddenly. Sarah took her finger off Chariot's bell. A smell of burned steak permeated the hall.

The door opened two inches. A man's voice said: "Chariot is not receiving."

Sarah leaned on the door and said, hoarsely:

"Chariot's receiving me, if he knows what's good for him," and she wedged her common-sense shoe into the two-inch opening.

"Madam, if you wish a reading, you must return later. The crystal is clouded. Chariot cannot—"

"Listen," Sarah interrupted fiercely, wedging her foot farther in, "the crystal may be clouded, but it ain't too clouded for me to see that there's a corpse in Chariot's kitchen..."

The voice behind the door gasped. Sarah pushed through, stepped into the dimly lit room beyond, slammed the door shut behind her, locked it, and faced a white-robed man whose white turban was over one ear and whose dark, pointed beard was slightly askew.

"Chariot," Sarah declared, "I got a premonition we ain't got much time. Now talk. I want to know how you were able to tell that fool Tarrant woman just where and how the body of Alexander Courtwell would be found, and I want to know quick."

The man in the tipsy turban looked down at the gun in Sarah's stubby fingers.

"Who... ? What...?" he stuttered.

"And what have you done with the man shot down in your kitchen?" Sarah asked.

"My God! You know about that... You think I killed him?"

"Young feller, you're in a mess and if you want to get out of it, you'd better talk. Sit down

here by your glass ball. I'll sit here on the other side, where your fool clients sit. I'll look into the crystal myself, young feller, and see what I see. I see you, Chariot, without that brown stain on your skin and without that beard. You're peaked and white... prison white..."

"Prison! How did you know... ?"

"I saw it in the crystal, young man. Yes, you've been in jail. Maybe you didn't belong there..."

"I didn't. I was..."

"Half of 'em don't belong there—so they say. You've been in jail, Chariot, and somehow, either there or after you got outside, you found out just how and why Alexander Courtwell was going to be killed, and you blabbed it to one of your gullible woman customers. Why?"

"I had to. I had to tell her something. She kept tormenting me, kept coming here every day, begging me to see something in the crystal. I kept seeing things, of course, things I thought she wanted me to see. But I kept thinking of that poor fellow, Courtwell. I kept thinking of how I'd heard those two planning in the next cell, planning to stick him in the heart with the bone-handled knife one of 'em owned, and planning to throw his body in the swamp.

"I kept thinking how I'd heard them whispering about what Courtwell had done to 'em, how he'd cheated 'em out of some big gambling debt. I kept thinking about it, I tell you, and when the Tarrant woman kept nagging me to see something, I kept seeing Courtwell's body in a swamp with a bone-handled knife sticking out of the heart, and one night, before I knew I'd done it, I blabbed. I didn't mean to. I didn't think she'd ever tell anybody, 'til I saw that letter in the paper today, and then I knew something was going to happen—something

like that dead man in the kitchen—something like you...”

“Young man,” said Sarah, “worse things could happen to you than me. Now, I’m looking in the crystal I see two men, planning and plotting in a cell. What do they look like?”

“I don’t know.”

“What?”

“I was released the morning after they came in. I never saw them. I only heard their voices.”

“Damn,” said Sarah and leaned over the crystal. “Wait! I’m beginning to see... One of them had a scar on his chin...”

“No,” Chariot shivered, twisted in his chair. “That one spoke to me before he fell down with a bullet in his back. I’d have known the voice, if he’d been one of them.”

“Drat it, man,” Sarah explained. “You can’t hang a murderer on a voice. Think, now! You must have heard those two say something definite, something that would identify them?”

“I heard their names.”

Sarah Watson stood up. She waved her gun under Chariot’s nose.

“At last we’re getting some place,” she said, hoarsely. “Their names, young feller! What were their names?”

A bell shrilled suddenly, went on ringing, filling the dim room with clamor. Chariot sat erect, staring into Sarah’s glinting eyes. Someone began to bang lustily upon the flimsy door to the hall.

“The cops!” Sarah cried. “You’ve got one chance, Chariot. Scuttle down the fire escape.

Take my car outside—License 4738. In the side pocket, you’ll find the keys to my flat and the address. Get there quick—and stay there ‘til I come. It’s your one chance, Chariot. There’s a dead man in your kitchen and your fingerprints are all over the place and you’ve been to jail...”

Chariot got up, still staring at Sarah.

“Leave that white nightgown in the kitchen,” she said, “and take the kitten with you. It might starve before you get back here again.”

Chariot looked into her grim eyes a moment longer, then turned and fled. Sarah got up and opened the door. O’Reilly and Ben Todd stood outside.

“Too late, boys,” she lied. “The swami’s evaporated... climbed up a rope and disappeared... magicked himself into thin air or something. There’s a man in the kitchen and you might ask him, but I don’t think he’ll answer. He’s dead.”

The police car sped through the night, O’Reilly at the wheel, Sarah Watson bolt upright beside him, Ben Todd lounging in the rear.

“A little speed, please, Sergeant,” Sarah urged. “I’m used to speed.”

“You’ll have to get unused to it, then,” O’Reilly chuckled. “Your racing car is gone and Chariot, alias Eddie Danville, has gone with it.”

“You know, Sergeant,” said Sarah, dreamily, “Chariot—Eddie Danville, I mean—didn’t look like a boy that would steal a poor old woman’s car.”

“Whadya know about how he looked?”

"I saw his prison picture, didn't I? A nice looking feller. Didn't look like he belonged in jail."

"He don't," admitted O'Reilly. "He belongs in a nice comfortable chair, wired for electricity."

"All men are alike," said Sarah. "They jump to conclusions. Just because Eddie left a dead man in his kitchen and just because Eddie's fingerprints showed he'd been in jail... Listen, O'Reilly. Anybody could have shot that man. I could have shot him."

"You!" O'Reilly laughed. "You couldn't hit a clay pigeon in a shooting gallery, woman."

"No, but men make better targets than clay pigeons—bigger targets, I mean. Now, O'Reilly, you can let me off at this next corner. I've got to..."

"I'm taking you right to your door, Sarah Watson. You're tired, woman, hanging around with a bunch of cops all afternoon. It must have been a shock to you, too, woman, when you came on that dead body in Chariot's kitchen."

"It would have been a greater shock if the body hadn't been dead. You slow up, O'Reilly. Stop at the next corner. Stop, I say! Let me off here. I've got to..."

The car swept past the corner with Sarah grabbing the door handle beside her. It swung into Sarah's street, slid halfway down the block. O'Reilly shouted:

"Glory be! Look what's out in front of your door, Sarah Watson. Look! Your car!"

"Stop!" Sarah shouted. "Don't run into it. My car! What a coincidence! O'Reilly, I told you that Eddie Danville wasn't all bad. Maybe he stole my car to make a getaway in, but he found my name and address in it, and left it

here for me, before he went wherever he was going..."

O'Reilly put on the brakes. He turned slowly in his seat and stared hard at Sarah.

"Woman, I'm beginning to understand why you were so anxious to stop at that corner..."

Ben Todd poked his head out of the open rear window and twisted his neck to look up.

"Sarah," he yelled, "somebody's in your flat. There's a light..."

"Of course there's a light," Sarah agreed. "There's always a light. You know that, Ben Todd, you crazy squirt. You know I always turn a light on in the morning, so I won't have to come home to a dark place. You know... O'Reilly, turn this car around!"

O'Reilly did not stir. His black brows were gathered, his eyes glaring at Sarah's craggy countenance.

"Woman," he began, but choked suddenly, as Sarah reached across him, put one foot on the starter, and kicked his shins viciously in an effort to put her other foot on the clutch.

"Woman," O'Reilly repeated, giving her a dig with his elbow which sent her bouncing back to her own side. "I'm taking you to that corner, but if you was a man, I'd..."

The car whirled into a U-turn and sped back toward the corner.

"Thank you, Sergeant. I have to stop at the corner to buy milk. I've got a new cat in my flat."

Sarah Watson sat on the edge of her bed. The bed was in a cubbyhole between the front room and the rear room of her railroad flat. The window of the cubbyhole looked out on a dark, narrow air-shaft. Both doors of the cubbyhole were closed.

On a straight chair, facing the bed, sat Chariot, whose real name was Eddie Danville. He was still in trousers and undershirt and his face was whiter, if possible, than it had been when Sarah first saw it.

"Now, Eddie, we're safe here for a few minutes," Sarah began. "I've got a premonition there will be a big mick cop stamping through the premises soon. Let's have them now, Eddie, the names I've been waiting all afternoon to hear."

Eddie Danville looked around the room. He wet his lips and whispered:

"One of 'em was named Jake."

"Jake what?"

"Jake. That's all I know."

"Jake! There are ten thousand Jakes. What was the other one's name. Come now, Eddie. Hurry!"

"Tony. That's all I know. Tony."

"You're a big help. Tony! Ten thousand Tonys! Wait a minute... that man with the scar who died in your kitchen... you ever see him before this time?"

"No."

"His name was Chinny Downs. A killer, according to the cops. Now, Eddie. We know that Chinny Downs was mixed up with Jake and Tony somehow, because he came to your place to do their dirty work for them, and get you

before the cops got you. If we could find out who else Chinny Downs was mixed up with... Drat it! There's the bell! Remember what I told you, Eddie, about the fire escape..."

The bell in Sarah's kitchen went on ringing. It rang furiously, first in frenzied spurts, then long, loud, and insistently. Presently, Sarah swished into the kitchen, silencing the bell by the simple method of jabbing a button in the kitchen wall. As she jabbed, her eyes roved over the kitchen. Suddenly, she ceased jabbing, dashed to the table, grabbed one of the two used coffee cups there, rinsed it and set it back in the cupboard. A moment later, she was at the door which opened from her parlor to the main hall.

"Sergeant," she greeted the man puffing up the last flight, "why, I never expected to see you..."

Sergeant O'Reilly did not answer. He came on up the stairs, rounded the banister, pushed past Sarah, strode into the little parlor, strode into the cubbyhole bedroom, peered under the bed, jerked open a closet door, yanked at a yellow rubber raincoat and some dangling black garments, then strode back into the kitchen.

"What is this? A raid?" Sarah asked.

"You know what it is. Where is he?"

"Where's who?"

"Chariot. Eddie Danville."

"Heavens, O'Reilly! You don't mean you think that jail bird... that... er... murderer... is here?"

"You know I think he's here and you know why. Ten thousand dollars is why, Sarah Watson. You'd do anything for ten thousand." His eyes shifted to the window. "What's that

outside that window? Glory be! She's got him on the fire escape!"

O'Reilly dashed to the kitchen window, his gun ready. The shade flew up revealing a dark form on the fire escape.

"Don't shoot, Sergeant," the fellow pleaded. "It's Ben Todd. I'm here for the same reason you are. I came back because I got a hunch the old gal was up to something..."

Ben Todd jumped down into the kitchen. Sarah Watson stepped between him and O'Reilly, her hands on her broad hips, her bristling brows tied in a knot.

"O'Reilly," she said, hoarsely, "I might have expected this from you, but you, Ben Todd..." She whirled on the long-legged, red headed young man standing just inside the open window. "You, you young addlepate. Who do you think you're working for, anyway? Me, or O'Reilly?"

"I'm working for you, Sarah."

"Not any more, you ain't."

"I'm working for you, Sarah, and when I got a hunch that jail bird might be here with you... Well, I just had to come back to protect you, old girl."

"Any time I need protection from any man, I'll ask for it! Now, git! No, you stay, Ben Todd. You and me are going to have a talk. O'Reilly, you git! And next time you come here to go through my personal belongings and look under my bed, you bring a search warrant."

The door banged on O'Reilly's broad back. Before the echoes died away, Sarah was at her front window, peering down. A few moments later, she returned to the kitchen.

"Now," she said to the young man sitting on the window sill, "we can talk, Ben Todd. We can talk about what's going to become of you, poor soul, now that you're out of a job."

Ben Todd grinned. He twisted about on the window sill, reached out a long arm, and dragged into the kitchen a white-faced young man in undershirt and dark pants.

"Sarah," Ben chuckled, "what do you think would have become of you, poor soul, if I hadn't been out on that fire escape to create a little diversion for Sergeant O'Reilly?"

Sarah Watson looked at Eddie Danville, then grinned at Ben Todd.

"Bennie, I wouldn't have given you credit for that much brains!" she said. "Bennie, meet Eddie—a nice feller, even if he has been in jail, and he's kind to animals and knows how to cook. Drat it! I let the Sergeant get away without asking him..." Sarah wheeled and charged out of the kitchen door.

Sarah barked a number into the 'phone on her parlor table.

"O'Reilly back yet?" she asked. "Good. O'Reilly? Listen. That dead feller in Chariot's kitchen. You said you recognized him—that he was called Chinny Downs. Now listen, O'Reilly. Chinny Downs was a gangster. What gang was he mixed up in?"

"I thought of that, too, you old war horse," boomed O'Reilly's voice. "But it's no soap. Chinny was a punk in Big Smiley's gang, just joined up recent. There are a hundred punks just like him lined up with Smiley..."

"What's a hundred punks to a bull like you? Get the whole hundred rounded up. Take 'em under the light... Listen, O'Reilly. What about the man you found unconscious in the car

with that fool Tarrant woman? Maybe he'd spill something?"

"Maybe he would, if he knew something. He says he don't, and I believe him. He says Chinny Downs knew something, but Chinny Downs is dead."

"Somebody made a mistake," said Sarah. "If Chinny had been allowed to live, he might have talked. Oh, well, sometimes it ain't good to be too impulsive."

"What's that?"

"Nothing, Sergeant. I was just thinking you've made some headway, anyway, toward collecting that ten thousand reward. You know the Courtwell murderer is connected somehow with the Smiley mob. Now, you'd really have that ten thousand reward cinched, Sergeant, if you just knew the name of the murderer, even the first name..."

The 'phone clanked in Sarah's ear. She hung up, smiling grimly.

Sarah Watson stalked back into her kitchen. She found Ben Todd with a gun pointed at Eddie Danville, who stood with his back to the wall.

"Bennie, you're being childish," Sarah said.

"I ain't. This guy is trying to tell me that you put that bullet in Chinny Downs."

"He's trying to tell you the truth."

"Sarah! What the devil? Why—"

"If I hadn't, Chinny would have put a bullet in Eddie. I didn't want to see murder done, Bennie, especially when the murderer was liable to be worth ten thousand to you and me."

Ben Todd sank into his chair, his gun and his mouth both slack. Sarah shoved Eddie Danville into a chair.

"Now, Eddie, tell us," she asked. "Do you know the Smiley outfit?"

"Do I know it? Smiley's the guy who framed me into the pen, because I—"

"Never mind what you did to him, Eddie. Whatever it was, he deserved it. Now, when you knew the Smiley mob, Eddie, was there maybe a Jake connected with it—a Tony?"

Eddie Danville jumped to his feet and held on to the edge of the table.

"Jake Benner and Tony Corelli!" he cried. "Why didn't I think of them before? What a blasted fool I am!"

"Of course," agreed Sarah. "Sit down, Eddie. You need food. We all need food. We've got work to do before morning, bloody work, maybe. We need red meat."

Sarah Watson stepped out on her front stoop and peered up and down the dark, sleeping block. She made a dash down the steps, across the sidewalk, and into the battered wreck waiting at the curb.

Two young men ran after her, one of them hatless and enveloped in a voluminous yellow raincoat. The car door slammed. The machine snorted away from the curb.

"Sarah, for Pete's sake, tell us what we're up against," Ben Todd pleaded. "If you're planning to break into Smiley's roadhouse hangout, we wouldn't have a chance, the three of us..."

"If we break into Smiley's roadhouse," said Sarah, swerving the car around a corner, "we'll break in because I know we have a chance."

"Sarah, for Pete's sake, stop being cryptic..."

Sarah Watson slowed the car, stopped it in front of an all-night drug store.

"Cryptic? What's that mean?" she asked, then got out of the car and stalked into the drug store.

Sarah Watson stood wedged into a telephone booth, the receiver clamped to her car.

"Hello? This Smiley's roadhouse? Want to speak to Jake. Jake or Tony."

Sarah waited. She waited a long time. She heard some one step into the booth next to hers. She put out a tentative hand to pull open her door and peer out. Just then, a voice spoke into her ear.

"Yeah? This is Jake."

"Tony there, too?"

"Who wants to know?"

"Listen, Jake. Smiley don't know it yet but Chinny Downs got his today. He got it in Green Street. Yes, Green Street. And the cops found Jim Corker knocked—out in a car with the Tarrant skirt tied up in the back. They found Jim Corker on Green Street, too. Jim's down at Headquarters now, sweating. Yes, I said sweating. Now listen, Jake. The feller Chinny Downs was after is sneaking back to-night to Green Street. Never mind who I am, Jake. I'm no fool, and neither are you."

Sarah hung up, tore open the door and peered into the adjoining booth. A red headed young man peered back at her, through smudged glass, then opened the door and stepped out.

"Dumb-ox!" she cried. "Suppose Eddie's got nervous and skeedaddled while you've been in here, spying on me?"

"Double-crosser," muttered Ben Todd. "You never had a job yet that you didn't double-cross somebody. You've double-crossed O'Reilly and now you're going to double-cross Eddie. You old female snake! If Eddie has made a getaway, so much the better for Eddie..."

Sarah did not answer, but stalked out of the drug store. Ben Todd followed. At the curb, Sarah peered into the rear of her car and gave a satisfied grunt. She slid in under the wheel, reached out and yanked Ben Todd in by his long arm.

"Bennie," she said, "you had one bright flash of intelligence to-night when you stalled off O'Reilly. I suppose I oughtn't to expect anything more of you. Shut up, now. I'm going to talk to Eddie. Eddie, we're going back to your crystal gazing den right now..."

"No," shouted Ben Todd. "We can't. There'll be at least one cop on duty there. Maybe two."

"If there's three," said Sarah, "there's three of us."

"Eddie," Ben Todd warned, "you take my advice and get out of this car now, while you can."

"Be quiet," commanded Sarah. "Eddie, we're going back to Green Street because if Jake and Tony are as dumb as I think they are, we're going to have callers there."

"Sarah," apologized Ben Todd, "forgive me. But I still don't..."

"You ought to apologize," said Sarah, complacently. "You ought to grovel."

"I will," Ben Todd agreed, "if I'm able to, after the cops at Eddie's place get through with us."

"Don't worry about a few paltry policemen," Sarah insisted. "The thing to worry about now is whether we can beat Jake and Tony to Green Street."

The old car plunged around a corner and rattled into amazing speed.

"But, Sarah," Ben Todd asked, "even if you get this Jake and this Tony, how are you going to hang the Courtwell murder on 'em so it sticks? You've only got Eddie's word, and Eddie's word..."

"Ain't worth a hoot," Sarah finished for him. "I know. But there's no use worrying about more than one thing at one time. You leave things to me, Ben Todd."

Three figures stole down an odorous alley at the side of a tenement in Green Street and stopped in deep shadows. One figure whispered:

"Look's like our company ain't here yet, but we can't be sure. Eddie, you go back into this alley and wait 'til I call you. Cops are too dangerous for you."

"Listen, old girl," whispered another one of the figures, "if you're going to mess up with cops..."

"Who said I was going to mess up with cops? Come along, Ben Todd. Keep your hand off that gun and don't get any bright ideas of your own."

Sarah Watson moved down to the mouth of the alley. She surveyed the street, then charged swiftly out of the alley and up the front stoop of the tenement, with Ben Todd behind her. A long, sleek car was just turning the corner.

Sarah and Ben went through the vestibule door and into the hall. A cop sitting on the bottom step of the stairs roused suddenly, stood up.

"Quick, officer!" Sarah yelled. "Get inside and turn the lights off in that flat. Eddie Danville's on his way here. Sergeant O'Reilly sent us..."

"The hell he did!" roared the cop, reaching for his holster. "Sergeant O'Reilly is inside that flat..."

Sarah Watson lurched suddenly. The cop staggered under the onslaught and sat down again on the bottom step with Sarah on his lap. Sarah's stubby fingers gripped the cop's right wrist.

"Move, Bennie. Take his gun," she ordered.

Ben Todd snatched at the gun, backed with it in his hand. The cop heaved suddenly, throwing Sarah back, sprawling. The cop charged at Ben Todd. Sarah got to her knees, straightening her hat.

"Officer," she warned, "if you don't behave, I'll tell Sergeant O'Reilly a woman disarmed you."

The door to Eddie Danville's flat swung out. Sergeant O'Reilly stood framed in the dim light from the swinging lanterns beyond.

"What's this?" he asked.

"Misunderstanding," Sarah answered. "Get those lights off in there, O'Reilly, and get this competent cop stowed away somewhere where he won't be seen. Eddie's coming home."

Sarah pushed by O'Reilly and into the room beyond, reaching up and switching off the hanging lanterns as she went. O'Reilly remained rigid a moment, then crooked a hairy finger at Ben Todd and the cop and followed Sarah.

Sarah was at the window, the heavy curtains parted in her stubby fingers.

"Two," she whispered. "One of 'em coming up the stoop. One of 'em going around the back way. Lord! Eddie's out back, I've got to..."

She wheeled, saw the dim forms of the three men.

"All of you hide," she commanded. "Somewhere... anywhere, and don't move, whatever happens... Get in back of those curtains hanging on the wall, the three of you..."

"Say!" O'Reilly's voice was husky. "Who's giving the orders around here, anyway?"

"I am," said Sarah. "And if you know what's good for you, O'Reilly, you're taking 'em."

Sarah strode out of the room and through the kitchen, which was dark. She poked her head out of the window and called softly:

"Eddie!"

No answer. A faint scuffling, a deep groan. Sarah got on the fire escape, peered down.

"Eddie!"

Two forms in the shadows below, struggling. Sarah went down swiftly. The two wrestling figures fell, rolled on the asphalt at her feet.

"Eddie! Which is you?"

A groan answered her. She bent, caught hold of a slippery garment which gleamed faintly yellow in the darkness.

"I'd like to watch a good battle, but there ain't time," she said, smashing the butt-end of her gun down on the skull of the man straddling Eddie.

Sarah and Eddie dragged a recumbent figure through the kitchen window, laid it on the floor in the darkness. Sarah whispered:

"Which one, Eddie?"

"Jake, I think."

"Leave Jake lay. I've got to see what Tony is up to..."

Sarah stole to the door which led into the front room, and inched the door open. The room on the other side was dark and still. Dimly, Sarah could discern bulges in the dark stuff which curtained the walls, three bulges. In the silence there came a faint clicking of metal against metal. It seemed to come from the door to the hall.

Sarah turned back into the kitchen.

She whispered a warning. "Eddie, you stay here."

"No. That's Jake at that door, Sarah. He's a killer."

"You stay. No nonsense. Wait a minute! Where's that white nightgown of yours...?"

Sarah stepped into the front room and closed the kitchen door firmly behind her. She moved silently in the darkness, reached up and switched on a lantern which hung directly over the crystal ball. The dim rays of the lantern revealed her swathed in a white robe and wearing a white turban well down over her bushy brows. A snort came from one of the bulges in the curtains. Sarah looked at the bulge.

"O'Reilly," she whispered, "I've got one of the Courtwell killers in the kitchen and the other one is coming through that door. You stay put and don't snort..."

Sarah walked to the hall door and threw it open. The man outside straightened suddenly, reached for his hip.

"Why didn't you ring the bell?" Sarah asked. "I don't often look into the crystal this late, but if you want a consultation..."

Sarah backed into the room. The man followed, shutting the door with his foot. He kept his hand on his hip.

"Where's this guy Chariot?" he rasped.

"Chariot? I don't know. At least, my conscious mind don't know, mister. Maybe if I looked in the crystal I might see him. Of course, it's late, and my fee would be double..."

The man shoved his face close to Sarah's, stared at her under the eerie rays of the lantern.

"So that's it? How much?" he asked.

"Twenty," Sarah replied. She stalked to the table which held the crystal globe and sat down.

The man hesitated, then lowered himself into the seat opposite.

"Come on now," he ordered. "No use stallin' with the fortune tellin' stuff. You know where Chariot is and you're willin' to spill for twenty. Spill, or..."

He drew his hand from his hip and showed the gun in it to Sarah. Sarah glanced at it, then bent her head over the crystal globe.

"Chariot!" she muttered. "I can almost see him. I can see him! He's near, very near. Wait! There's something else swimming into the crystal..."

"Can that stuff! Where's Chariot?"

"In a minute. It's coming clear. I see a man's figure... lying down... very still... there are cat-tails swaying over him... there's a dark stain on his breast... there's something in his breast..."

The man with the gun jumped out of his chair, then sat down again. He ran his left hand over his forehead. "You can't pull that. That's a lot of—"

"Ah!" Sarah went on. "I see it now. It's sticking out of his heart. It's still quivering in his heart. It's a knife, a bone-handled knife..."

"Hey!" cried the man on the other side of the table.

"Wait! It's going. Chariot! I see Chariot. Something is between his face and mine. Something black with two sparkling circles in it. Ah! A ring, an onyx ring with two diamonds..."

The man with the gun leaped up again. His gun arm came up. He said:

"O.K. You know everything. I don't know whether you see it in that ball, or whether you don't. You know it. You know about the ring I took off Honest Jim Carson's stiff and lost the night I croaked Courtwell. You know it, and it's just too bad for you! Look into your damned crystal and see if you see yourself with wings, lady, because you're going—"

Two guns spurted fire—one from the curtained wall, one from the gun in front of Sarah Watson. At the same moment, Sarah pitched the crystal ball through the air. It struck, splintered, crashed. The man who had shot at Sarah crashed with it.

Lights flashed on. Three men—O'Reilly, Ben Todd, and the cop, dashed to the writhing figure on the floor. He was surrounded by jagged, bloody glass.

Sarah Watson clasped stubby fingers over an arm which was beginning to seep red into the white of her robe.

"Meet Tony, boys," she said. "Too bad I had to break Eddie's crystal."

O'Reilly straightened, turned and faced Sarah.

"Eddie! Eddie Danville!" he bellowed. "You said he was coming...?"

"He's come," said Sarah. "He's in the kitchen, guarding Jake—Tony's helper in the Courtwell killing. When Jake and Tony are able to talk some more, O'Reilly, you might get 'em to talk a little about how Eddie was railroaded to jail. I'd like to see Eddie cleared, because I want him to buy a new crystal. I want to look into a crystal, O'Reilly, and see future events. I want to see myself handing part of the ten thousand dollars reward for Courtwell's murderers to Ben Todd and part to Eddie Danville..."

"Part!" shouted O'Reilly. "It will be a small part indeed you'll hand out to anybody, Sarah Watson."

"And part," said Sarah, "to Sergeant O'Reilly. It will have to be a small part, of course, because I'll have to divide the ten thousand dollars four ways."