

SHAKEDOWN SHAM

By ROBERT LESLIE BELLEM

"I think my wife is being blackmailed," the guy opened up. And Dan agreed to protect the dame while she kept her secret tryst. It wasn't until after she'd kept her clandestine appointment that he had a real idea of how big a job he'd taken upon himself



THE GUY helped himself to a gasper from the pack on my desk and said: "I think my wife is being blackmailed, Mr. Turner. I want you to look into it."

I leaned forward with a lighted match; put the focus on him as I furnished fire for the coffin-nail in his handsome mouth. His name was Toby Vaughan, he been an All American football fullback a few years ago, and he still had the appearance of a gridiron hero. His frame was big, muscular; his skin had a tan outdoors freshness to match the competent slant of his jaw and the steady blueness of his eyes. He was wearing a sporty set of threads that had cost plenty of scratch.

He hadn't bought those clothes out of his movie salary, however. I knew enough about him to savvy that much. Ever since his college days he'd been hanging around the various lots, playing bit roles and extra parts in mob scenes, waiting for the break that never came. He just happened to be one of those good looking but unfortunate lugs with an amiable disposition, an ambitious nature and not an ounce of acting ability. Characters of his kidney are a dime a dozen in Hollywood, and you can't help feeling sorry for them as a class.

IN Toby Vaughan's case, though, your sympathy would be wasted. His wife was the former Kay Holliston, an

Oklahoma oil heiress with more dough than a pickle has warts. They'd been married maybe a year, give or take a month; and from a financial standpoint Vaughan was even better off than if he'd had a starring contract with the biggest studio in town.

Moreover, the gossip-mongers said the marriage was a genuine love match; and I was inclined to believe this when I piped the worried expression on Toby's face. He figured his frau was in a jackpot of some sort, and he wanted to get her out of it. Otherwise he wouldn't be seeking the services of a private ferret.

I said: "What makes you suspect a shakedown?"

"Lots of things. None of them conclusive, perhaps; but when they're all added together they look ugly.

"List them for me," I suggested.

He dragged on his butt. "Well, to start with, Kay's income has been hit pretty hard by the gasoline rationing program. Her money's in oil property, you understand; independent producing and refining companies, service stations, and so forth. You know what the war has done to the petroleum industry."

"Yeah," I said. "Motorists with 'A' cards aren't buying much ethyl."

"Exactly. As a result, Kay's liquid cash isn't what it might be. And in the past couple of months there's been a mysterious drain on it. She's withdrawn close to a hundred and fifty thousand dollars I can't account for--unless it's because she's being bled white."

"Is that your only reason for suspecting blackmail?"

He reached in his pocket. "No. I found the torn pieces of a note in her waste basket this morning. Perhaps it wasn't ethical, but I put them together and read them. Here, see for yourself." And he handed me a sheet of paper to which he'd

pasted a series of scraps, like a jigsaw puzzle.

I copped a swivel at the typewritten message:

"Mrs. Vaughan—

Meet me at five P. M. Tuesday, room 607, Constantine Hotel. Bring ten thousand cash, no new bills. This time I guarantee to give you what you want.

He Who Knows"

"Looks as if you're right about the shakedown angle," I said. I gave him back the letter and added: "Do you think she'll keep the appointment? Today's Tuesday."

Vaughan made a bitter mouth. "I'm sure she'll go. I followed her to the bank this morning; saw her draw out ten thousand dollars in old currency. And then I shadowed her to a Main Street pawn shop. She bought a gun, a second-hand automatic."

I said: "Oh-oh! That's not so good."

"You're right it's not," he growled. "That's why I've come to you. I don't want to appear in the thing personally; I'd prefer not to have her learn that I've found out about the affair. You see, I—I care for her too much to have anything come between us. No matter what she's done to fall into the hands of a blackmailer, she mustn't know I'm aware of it."

"And what would you like me to do?" I asked him.

"Go to the Constantine. Take Room 609, next to 607. If—if anything happens, I want Kay protected at all costs." He stripped a century out of his wallet, passed it to me. "Is this enough for an advance retainer?"

"Yeah, if it's all you can spare," I said. "It may cost you more, though, before we're finished. We can discuss that later." I stood up, ushered him out of the office.

AT FOUR o'clock that afternoon I parked my jalopy around the corner from the Constantine Hotel, barged into the joint's shabby lobby and ankled over to a desk clerk who needed a haircut and shave. He stopped studying a Racing Form long enough to ask me if I wanted something.

"Yeah. A room," I said. He looked for luggage; saw I didn't have any. "Our rates—" he started to say.

I tossed him a ten spot. "Sure, I know. In advance. Take out a day's rent and keep the change for yourself. Put it on Kayak's nose in the fifth at Tanforan; win yourself a yacht. That is, if I can have 609."

"Certainly sir. Thank you very much, sir. 609, you wanted? Let's see. Yes, it's vacant. Register right here. Boy! Now where is that bellhop? Never mind, I'll take you up myself. Follow me, sir."

Instead of my real monicker I signed the book John Jones; then I tailed the guy to the elevator and presently found myself in the room I'd requested. As soon as the clerk was gone, I locked the portal, then gumshoed over to the connecting door between my quarters and the adjoining 607. I put my ear to the panel; listened, but didn't hear anything. Evidently there was nobody home in there.

This was just dandy. I pulled my penknife, opened a special blade designed for boring holes in woodwork; reamed an imperceptible peep-hole in the portal eye level. When I applied my glimmer to the result, I could lamp a fairly large area of that adjacent chamber.

I waited.

At a quarter to five somebody came into 607; a sallow, furtive little jerk with a receding chin and buck teeth that gave him the appearance of a hungry squirrel. He sat down on a chair, twitching like a hophead.

I kept on waiting.

AT FIVE sharp there was a faint knock on the door of the room occupied by Squirrel-Puss. He got up, answered it, and I copped a hinge at Toby Vaughan's wife. The instant I piped her, my temperature soared for the higher brackets.

She was a lot prettier than her newspaper pictures indicated. Her hair was the color of sunlight; not golden, not copper, but bright as a morning on the desert. Her map was clear, chiseled, and she wore a pale blue dress that adhered to her like sprayed paint.

She faced the sallow jerk. "You have the letters?"

"Let's see the dough first, babe," he said.

She opened her big blue leather handbag; rummaged out a wad of geetus. "Here."

"You don't mind if I count it, do you?" Squirrel-Puss snatched the cabbage, leafed through it. Presently he stowed it away in a worn wallet, returned the wallet to his inside coat pocket and gave vent to a soapy chuckle. "Ten G's. Thanks, hon."

"The letters, please," the Vaughan quail's voice trembled on the thin edge of hysteria.

Squirrel-Puss said: "Now, ain't that just too bad, sweetness? You know I hate to disappoint you, but, when I went to get them letters from my safety deposit box, I was just five minutes late. The bank had closed."

"You lie!"

"Is that a way to talk? I wouldn't kid you, sis. Can a guy get into a bank when it's closed? Sure not. So I guess you'll have to wait until next time. I'll drop you a line when I need another payoff; then we'll do business."

Kay Vaughan sucked in a quavery breath. At the same instant she delved into her handbag again; produced a pearl-handled .28 roscoe.

“There isn’t going to be another payoff,” she whispered tautly. “This is the last one. *This is it.*”

Squirrel-Puss let out a bleating yelp. “Hey, nix! Don’t aim that thing at me! Please, don’t!”

Watching through the hole in the door, I tabbed the tension on her beautiful mush; saw her finger tighten on the gat’s trigger. I gasped: “What the—!” as I realized I couldn’t prevent what was about to happen. The blonde doll was lined up dead fernist me with the little jerk frozen before her . . .

The .28 sneezed *Ka-Chowp!* in a sharp staccato, its report so hemmed in by the room’s walls that it seemed to have a heavier echo. Squirrel-Puss staggered, clawed at his skinny bellows; folded like a wet paper bag.

I GATHERED my hundred and ninety pounds of heft, smashed at the thin portal so hard I rammed it off its hinges in a shower of toothpicks. My left shoulder throbbed like an ulcerated tooth as I catapulted over the threshold.

“Now, then,” I said, hoping against hope there would be no more fireworks and realizing I had to use strategy to keep any further murders from taking place.

The Vaughan chick stared at me. “Who—how—?”

I snapped: “Belay the questions,” and wrenched the rod out of her slender fingers; stowed it in my pocket while I risked hunkering down by the fallen jerk to inspect the tunnel in his ticker.

“Is—is he—?”

“Yeah,” I said. “Deader than democracy in Berlin.” I delved for the guy’s wallet; got it. I also got a smear of ketchup on my mitt, which I wiped on the defunct bozo’s shirt. He didn’t mind; laundry bills weren’t worrying him from now on.

There wasn’t anything in the wallet except the lettuce which Kay Vaughan had just paid out; nothing to identify the blackmailer. I took a squint at the greenbacks, put them back, replaced the bill-fold where I’d found it. Then I straightened up, slipped an arm around the yellow-haired doll’s pliant waist. For her protection I had to get her out of there instead of making the investigation I really wanted to make. “Let’s go.”

“N-no! Turn me loose! I—I must call the po-police and tell them I’ve k-killed a man!”

I hauled her toward the next room. “Stew the cops. I’ll notify them when the time comes. Right now we’re powdering before anything else happens.” I steered her through 609 to the corridor; peered out. The hall looked deserted, which was a nice break for our side. I nudged the shivering filly to a rear staircase and we slipped downward.

At the main floor I slowed to a casual walk; made her do the same. We sauntered through the shoddy lobby, gained the street; whereupon she turned her pallid puss toward me and halted in her tracks:

“I tell you I’ve g-got to give myself up! Don’t you understand I’m a—a m-murderess?”

“I understand plenty, hon.”

“If you don’t let me go, I’ll scream!”

I said quietly: “Okay. If you’re so set on going down to the gow I’ll accommodate you. Here’s my coupe; I’ll run you to headquarters. Climb aboard.”

She obeyed, and I turned my attention to the job of driving.

I used my right hand for steering purposes because my left arm ached to beat hell. Smashing into the door between the two hotel rooms hadn’t done my shoulder any good, although at the moment I couldn’t estimate the amount of damage; sometimes a surface injury hurts

worse than the deep kind.

The cupcake with the sunshine coiffure said: "Wh-where are you going? This isn't the w-way to police headquarters!"

"Cork the chatter, hon. I'm running this show," I told her. And a little later I drew up before my own apartment stash, parked and got out. "Come along."

She hung the puzzled glimpse on me. "Wh-what's the meaning of th-this? Where are we?" Her voice was thin, frightened.

"You'll find out. Quit wasting time." I pulled her to the sidewalk and she took a harried gander up and down the street in the gathering dusk. There was nobody in sight as she tried to get free of my grasp.

"I—I don't understand—" she whimpered.

I said: "Who cares?" and prodded her inside the building. We entered the automatic elevator and I poked the "3" button. Pretty soon we were in my igloo. I locked the door, put the key in my pants and switched on the lights.

She stared at me again. "This is almost like—like a kidnapping!"

"Something of the sort, sweet stuff."

"But—but can't you realize I've killed a man? I've got to g-give myself up!"

"Not yet a while, you don't," I growled. "I have other plans for you. They don't include your going to the jug."

"You can't stop me!" she made a dig toward the door.

I SAID: "That's what you think," and pinioned her. "You're staying right here until I give you the office to scam. And you can have your choice of being quiet about it or taking a poke on the button."

She tried to pull away. "No—you mustn't—I won't let you t-touch me—"

I indicated my bedroom. "Go in there and strip off your duds."



"No!"

"Hurry up. You can pass your clothes to me. I promise not to peep."

"You—you mean—?"

I mean you've got me all wrong if you think this is about to become a necking party. That's not the idea at all."

"Then wh-what is the idea of asking me t-to . . . undress?"

I said: "So you won't take a notion to lam. When you're peeled down to your underthings, you'll stay put."

"But wh-why should I? Is it m-money you're after?"

"No. I could have taken that ten grand you paid to Squirrel-Puss," I reminded her. "Being deceased, he wouldn't have minded. But I didn't glom it, which ought to prove I'm neither a thief nor a blackmailer."

"What are you, then?"

"Just a dopey private ferret, is all. Now get out of your garb or I'll do the job myself."

"You wouldn't dare!"

“Wouldn’t I, though?” I reached toward her. It was a bluff—but it worked. She whimpered, ducked me, scuttled into the bedroom. A minute later her raiment began fluttering over the threshold to make a fragrant silken pile: the pale blue dress, sheer nylon hose and finally her spike-heeled patent pumps.

While she was still hidden from view, I gathered up her duds and toted them into the bathroom; locked them in a cabinet. At the same time I shucked my coat, took a squint at my throbbing shoulder and the patch of red on my shirt sleeve. It wasn’t bad. I used some iodine, put my coat back on, ankled back to the living room.

The Vaughan cutie was standing there, wrapped in a bathrobe of mine and looking like a woeful blonde goddess. “Now wh-what?” she asked me dully.”

“Just make yourself at home and keep your chin up, hon. Pretty soon everything’s going to be jake.” I powdered from the apartment.

DOWN at my office I dialed Toby Vaughan at his sumptuous wikiup in Westwood. Presently his clear voice came over the wire, worried, jittery. “Hello?”

“Dan Turner talking.”

“Thank God, I’ve been waiting to hear from you! Where’s my wife? What happened to her? Did you know a man was found d-dead in that hotel room at the Constantine?”

I said: “Yeah. Kay acted faster than I expected. She pulled a rod and blasted before I could smash in to stop her.”

“But where is she? Do the police suspect—?”

“I don’t know what they suspect,” I grunted. “As far as your wife is concerned, though, she’s safe enough. Temporarily, anyhow. I may be able to get her out from under the rap—but it’s going to cost you plenty.”

“How much?”

“Say five grand for a starter.”

“I—I’ll send it right over to you. I can’t come myself; I have a business engagement. But if you’ll be in your office within the next half hour, I’ll—”

I said: “I’ll be here,” and rang off.

To kill time, I got a fresh fifth of Vat 69 from my desk and started working on it. Twenty minutes and four jorums later a messenger arrived, handed me an envelope, took a receipt, and beat it. I opened the envelope, extracted a wad of cabbage, counted it to make sure. Then I shuffled down to my jalopy, aimed for police headquarters.

My friend Dave Donaldson of the homicide squad was on deck when I got there. “Hi, chum,” I said. “Why the apoplectic countenance?”

He gave me a glare that would have curdled vinegar. “You’d be apoplectic too if you had my troubles! I don’t know why I don’t retire and take up chicken farming or something. I got indigestion, dandruff, stomach ulcers, and a sinus infection; and then on top of that I run into a hotel kill that makes no more sense than a maniac counting pink hop-toads—”

“You’re talking about that bump-off in Room 607 of the Constantine?” I asked him innocently.

He leaped six feet straight up in the air like a guy who’d been tickled by a length of barbed wire. “What do *you* know about that mess?” he caterwauled.

I said: “Plenty. Wait until I put through a phone call; then maybe I’ll help you make the pinch.”

His glims narrowed. “Say, chum! The desk clerk at the Constantine said he rented a room to some big bozo in tweeds just before the murder happened. He told me this big bozo asked for the room next door to where the corpse was found. He—”

“Did the big bozo register as John

Jones?"

"Yeah, and the description fits you!"

I broke out a gasper, torched it. "Wouldn't it be funny if I turned out to be John Jones?" I grinned. Then I eluded his enraged grasp; ducked out to the corridor and wedged myself in a public phone booth. I dropped a jitney in the slot, dialed a columnist acquaintance of mine on the *Morning Post*; a newspaper skulk who knew everything about everybody.

PRESENTLY I made connections, asked a question, got the right answer. When I ankled out of the booth, I bounced full into Dave Donaldson's waiting embrace. He mauled me against the wall with his weight, shoved his mush close to mine.

"Now, then, Sherlock!" he snarled. "Suppose you tell me what goes on!"

"Sure, bub. Keep your blood pressure under control and let's take a little spin in your official chariot."

"Where to!"

I said: "The apartment igloo of a frail named Lucette Landon."

"And who is Lucette Landon?"

"Just a dame. Central Casting lists her as an extra on call whenever any of the studios need chorus wrens or dress-up fillies for society scenes," I told him casually.

He backed off; glued the suspicious glance on me. "You mean she's hooked in with that hotel croaking?"

"Sort of." I headed for the exit and Dave lumbered along at my heels, snorting to himself like a volcano craving to erupt all over the precinct.

We piled into his police sedan and he gunned the ball bearings out of it; headed for the address I gave him. Bye and bye we dragged anchor in front of a gaudy structure on Sunset, the kind where the monthly rental on a single room would

cost you a young fortune.

Dave said: "Pretty expensive joint for an extra doll."

I nodded, made for the lobby, accosted the desk clerk. "Miss Lucette Landon in her stash, cousin?"

"Yes, sir. She went up about thirty minutes ago. I'll ring her for you. Name, please?"

I tossed him a five-spot. "Never mind. We'll go up without an announcement and surprise her. She alone?"

"At the moment, sir."

I made a gesture to Donaldson and he tailed me to the elevator. We got off at the fourth floor, came to the Landon quail's wigwam. Dave raised his knuckles to knock.

"Ix-nay," I whispered as I reached for my ring of master keys. "Let's do some snooping first."

He piped me trying various keys on the lock. "Hey, this isn't legal! You want me to lose my badge for participating in a burglary?"

"Look the other way and you won't see me doing it," I advised him. Then, when I got the door open: "Come on—and no noise."

He mumbled in his gums, hesitated; followed me inside. I made a swift frisk of the layout without spotting anybody, although you could hear a shower splashing in the bathroom. Satisfied, I found a closet and opened it.

Donaldson whispered: "What's that for?"

"It's where you're to hide. Get in and stay in until I signal for you. And pray my scheme works."

He told me he didn't know any prayers but he had a rabbit's foot he could rub. "I don't think it'll help, though," he added sourly. "Every time I try it in a dice game I throw craps."

"Then just keep your fingers crossed,"

I closed the closet door on him. Then I made for the bathroom; reached it just as something exceptionally gorgeous in a gossamer negligee was coming out. This delicious dish was a diminutive brunette with sparkling black peepers and more curves than the Burma Road.

I said: "Hi, Toots. Are you Lucette Landon?"

She gasped, whirled so fast that her kimono almost slipped its moorings. "Wh—who—what on earth—Say, what's the idea of sneaking in here this way? I'll give you just two seconds to get out of here before I scream for the cops!"

"Why bother, babe? I'm a cop myself, sort of," I flashed the tin pinned on my vest.

THE color leaked out of her piquant pan. "Is—is this—you mean it's a pinch?"

"That depends on what you're guilty of," I said. "Innocent people rarely get sent to the bastille."

"Then scram. I'm innocent," she tried to pull a bluster on me but it was strictly from corn; didn't register. "You haven't got a thing on me."

I gave her the fishy eye. "Are you sure?" I worked on her conscience.

"Certainly I'm sure."

"You haven't been taking blackmail dough?" I prodded her some more.

She drew a quavery breath. "So that's it."

"Yeah, hon. I'm afraid it is."

A speculative look came into her narrowed optics. "How much do you want for giving me a break, letting me get out of town before the blowoff? My bags are packed."

"I noticed them," I said. "Sorry, though. I'm not interested in bribery coin. What I'd rather catch is the rat you're planning to elope with."

"Me? Elope? What a laugh!"

"You're not expecting anybody?"

"Of course not."

"In that case. . ." I hauled her into my arms, swooped my kisser toward hers.

She began squirming, struggling. "Nix! Not here . . . not just now!" she panted. "Wait until. . ."

From the doorway behind me a snarling voice said: "Wait until when, you two-timing tramp?" And then a heavy hand fell on my shoulder, yanked me backward off-balance. Somebody aimed a Sunday punch at my profile.

I staggered, ducked the newcomer's knuckles, righted myself and dug out my roscoe. "*Okay, Toby Vaughan. Freeze.*" Then, as loud as I could bellow: "*Hey, Dave, come in and put the nippers on this rodent! He's the murderer!*"

THE GOOD looking, sun-tanned former football hero pivoted in his tracks. He was just in time to receipt for a bash on the button from Dave Donaldson. There was a metallic glitter, a click of steel, and Vaughan was wearing official police bracelets.

Then the brunette Landon chick yeeped again.

"Quiet, babe," I snapped at her. "So far, you're out of this except maybe as an accessory; the recipient of the blackmail lettuce. So stow your screeches unless you yearn to accompany your sweetie to the gas chamber."

Toby Vaughan's chiseled puss turned six shades of pale. "Wh-what do you mean, gas chamber?"

I said: "You're the louse that committed killery on Squirrel-Face in Room 607 of the Constantine. You were hiding in a closet. You fired at the same instant your wife did; and it was your slug that bumped the little guy."

"Prove it!" he dared me.

I frisked him, lifted a heater from his hip pocket. "I'll make book the bullet in the sallow mug's ticker matches the rifling of this gat. That should be proof enough."

He went green around the fringes. "God—I forgot to toss the gun away—!" It was the same as a confession, and he seemed to realize it the minute the words spilled out of his yap. "How did you guess—?"

I said: "I didn't guess. I was sure of it. I cinched my suspicions when I phoned you, asked for five grand. The money you sent me came from the defunct jerk's wallet."

"Wh-what?"

"Yeah. I'd examined those greenbacks when I inspected his remainders. I saw where some of his gravy had stained the bills. Those same stains were on the geetus you sent me; which meant you'd taken it out of his pocket after I hauled your wife from the hotel."

Vaughan seemed to shrink in his tailored threads. "Smart, aren't you?"

"Sometimes," I admitted modestly. "The way I add it up, you were the one who'd been blackmailing Kay. You used Squirrel-Puss as a stooge. You'd finally glommed practically all of your frau's ready assets; then you decided to croak your go-between so he'd never spill. Moreover, you framed the kill so Kay would take the fall; which would keep your own skirts clear. That's why you hired me to watch from Room 609, so I'd be a witness when she apparently murdered the mug."

"Ridiculous!" he snarled. "You can't prove I was anywhere near the death room at the time of the shooting. If you'd thought so, why didn't you smoke me out instead of forcing Kay to leave with you?"

I said: "I had a good reason, bub. To begin with, I wasn't certain you were the killer at that point. All I knew was that

somebody with a second cannon was hidden nearby; and if I made a wrong move there might be some more blasting. Kay herself might get slugged. I wanted to protect her because I realized she was innocent. Then, later, I could start tracking the concealed gungel."

"Oh," he summoned a sneer. "You realized Kay was innocent, eh? What did you have, a crystal ball or a cup of tea leaves?"

I peeled back my coat. "Something better than that," I grunted. "I'd heard two shots, so close together that the second one sounded almost like an echo of the first. Your wife's pill couldn't have creamed Squirrel-Puss because her aim was lousy."

"Really?"

"Yeah. She missed him clean, hit the communicating door *and nicked me on the shoulder*." Then I gave him a hinge at the wound in the fleshy part of my flipper; the shallow gouge that had been aching like an ulcerated tooth for quite a while.

"My God . . . !" he whispered.

I SAID: "That's how I knew Kay wasn't guilty of murder. Somebody else had bumped the little guy; someone who savvied all about the setup in Room 607 of the Constantine, and who knew Kay was packing a rod. You matched those specifications. Most likely you had worked her up to the point of buying a roscoe to cool her supposed blackmailer; and you figured to back the play with your own bullet in case she missed."

He shuddered; seemed unable to say anything.

"The rest was routine," I finished.

"I checked up on you by calling a gossip columnist; learned you were paying the apartment rent of a wren named Lucette Landon. That supplied the motive. You'd never been in love with Kay; you'd married her for her fortune. Now that you

had it, a hunch hit me you might be planning to blow town with your sweetie. So I came here; put on an act to make you jealous when you arrived. It worked; threw you off your guard. Now you're washed up."

The brunette Landon frill butted in with a yowl of frustrated rage. "What about me? I never got anything out of the deal except my rent and a lot of promises! I didn't know the chiseling heel was going to k-kill anybody!"

"For which you can be thankful," I told her grimly. "A jane in your spot shouldn't complain."

She gave me the coquettish glimpse. "I'm not complaining . . . if you'll stick around, handsome."

"Not by a long shot," I backed off. "I've got other plans." And I washed my hands of the whole mess, left the details for Donaldson to clean up while I made knots to my own apartment stash.

Kay Vaughan was still there. I broke the news to her bluntly; told her the whole

score. "So now you're in the clear, sweet stuff," I wound up the ugly story. "Your hubby did the dirty work and tried to pin it on you."

Two droplets of brine as big as mock oranges spilled out of her peepers, skidded down her wan cheeks. "To th-think Toby was the real blackmailer. . ." she whispered. "Wh-why, the money I was paying out was to buy back letters which he himself had written to some g-girl!"

"What?"

"Y-yes! It was his name I was trying to keep from scandal, not my own. . . ." All of a sudden she piped the gore on my shoulder. A tender expression came into her glims. "You—you're bleeding! I did th-that to you—!"

"Just a scratch," I shrugged.

"Scratch or no scratch, you've g-got to let me fix you up!"

So I let her fix me up. . . . She made a good nurse.