

Swing & Slay



By Lawrence Treat

Author of "Harlequin's Death Mask," etc.

Young Detective Bullitt was a fellow passenger of Death. For a corpse rode on that elevated train with him. Bullitt had to change his plans to fit terror's timetable—and the temper of a dark-eyed exotic girl.

IT WAS two a.m. and the elevated train rumbled and jerked uptown. There were few passengers. At the stations, the guard opened and shut the doors that nobody used; then the train squeaked and rattled on.

In the front car, young Bullitt was asleep. He didn't look like a dick. The line of his mouth was soft and relaxed, his small even features seemed almost

childish in slumber. His head nodded rhythmically with the swaying of the train. Across the aisle the dead man stared fixedly.

Young Bullitt didn't care. He'd been working hard for the last week, and this evening he'd been playing just as hard. Somewhere, the blonde with the crinkly hair and the powder-blue eyes was in a deep sleep, but young Bullitt wasn't

dreaming about her. He wasn't even dreaming that she looked like Garbo.

Bullitt. He paid plenty for that name. His father was captain of the detective bureau and nobody dared kid him, so they took it all out on young Bullitt. His life's ambition was to live through a day without somebody making a crack about his name. He heard the same old saws over and over and he smiled them through with a tolerant, good-natured weariness.

He was always tired. When he woke up in the morning and when he went to lunch and when he started out in the evening his brown eyes had the same sleepy look. Maybe it was a good thing. Maybe he was just meant to be tired. Most people are.

He dozed on peacefully. He'd wake up at the right station because he always did. The dead man opposite didn't bother him. The two tough guys holding up the dead man didn't bother him. Nobody did. Young Bullitt was just a man asleep on a train.

He woke up with a shriek echoing in his ears. He saw a slim girl dashing hysterically for the door, and a heavysset man lurching after her. Young Bullitt didn't know what it was all about, but he was a cop and he charged forward instinctively.

The second man was wide awake and went into action. His fist curled up in a beautiful smashing uppercut that caught young Bullitt on the side of the jaw. Bullitt recoiled as if he'd sailed into a baseball bat. He toppled against the seat, clawed at the straw cushions and went wriggling to his knees.

He stayed that way for a few seconds, shaking his head stupidly and wondering whether it was all a bad dream or whether he'd really been socked for the count of nine.

THE sight of the dead man slumped on the opposite seat, staring with glassy fish-eyes, shocked young Bullitt into consciousness. He climbed dizzily to his feet. The guard had slammed the door and was stepping into the car to see what the trouble was.

Young Bullitt yelled, "Stop the train!" and leapt for the emergency cord. The train rumbled forward a few feet and thumped to a violent halt.

The guard stumbled against young Bullitt and young Bullitt palmed his badge and snapped: "Headquarters—hold everything!" He drew a deep breath and shoved at the guard because it was quicker than explaining.

He opened the door and dashed to the platform. Down on the street, he saw two men running. He whipped out his revolver and snapped a couple of shots, but the angle was bad and he'd never been much of a marksman anyhow.

One of the figures on the street lifted his arm and a jet of flame lanced out. The report from down below rang out at the same instant that glass crashed from the car window behind him.

Young Bullitt ducked behind a toothpaste ad. He didn't mind wading into a guy twice his size but he hated gun play. Too dangerous.

He kept behind the protection of the billboards and crawled forward. There was only a strip of cardboard and maybe a sheet of pressed tin between him and the flying slugs, but at least he couldn't be seen. When he came into the open, nothing happened and he didn't see any targets. He presumed the pair had beat it and he went sprinting to the station exit, through the turnstiles and down the stairs.

He sighted his pair running and almost a full block away. Bullitt figured he had a better chance of winging a stray pedestrian than of getting them at a range like that.

He kept racing down the stairs anyhow and almost threw himself into the arms of a cop.

The cop hugged him with one arm and brandished his nightstick with the other. Young Bullitt breathed, "Sweetheart, look at this," and showed his badge.

The cop calmed down and said: "What's it all about? I heard them shots and I come running—"

Young Bullitt interrupted. "Hurry upstairs and collect a corpse in the front car and hold the train and notify headquarters. I'm Detective Bullitt. You see a girl?"

"A girl? Naah. I tell you, I come running from five blocks away, after it's all over."

Young Bullitt snorted and sprinted down the street. His two ghouls were out of sight, but he found somebody at an all-night cafeteria who'd seen the pair turn south on the next avenue.

He went off in hot pursuit. He felt like a Marathon runner who'd gotten mixed up and shown up on the wrong day but had decided to run the race anyhow, all alone. But after a few blocks he saw it was no use and he quit.

He may have lost out on the chase, but he had a perfectly good stiff waiting patiently in an El train. He turned back and reached the station a couple of minutes ahead of the first bunch from headquarters.

On the platform, the cop was having an argument with the train crew. The motorman was saying: "Listen, I got to run on schedule, see? Take the guy off if you want, but it's my car and you can't hold me up like this."

The cop said: "Maybe I can't, but I done it anyhow."

Then young Bullitt hooked the motorman's arm and said: "Sweetheart, just shunt that first car off the main line

and you can run the rest of the train all night long. Non-stop too, for all I care."

"The hell you say! I got to show up with my whole train. What'll I look like if I come into the yard with half the thing missing?"

"You got two cars, sweetheart. One for you and one for me. So just be a nice guy or you'll get your head knocked off." Then the sirens wailed from the street level and the homicide experts arrived, and young Bullitt had his way.

He put the fingerprint men to work immediately. The guard said the only occupants of the car had been young Bullitt, a girl, the stiff and two friends. The guard had thought the dead man was a drunk.

"How was I to know?" he demanded. "We get a lot of drunks on these late trains and they got a right to go home, but we don't get no dead bodies. It ain't my job to ask the passengers if they're dead, is it?"

YOUNG BULLITT got a vague description of the girl and the two men who had escaped. Then the rest of the train went uptown and left the homicide detail on the siding. Every passenger who'd ridden since the evening rush hour had left his signature, or a smudged segment of it, and the fingerprint man looked mad.

Young Bullitt stared dolefully and remarked: "Little man, you'll have a busy day."

Then he examined the corpse. It was that of a fleshy, prosperous looking man in his late thirties. There was no wound, and the strangulation marks on his neck were faint but unmistakable. His mouth was relaxed, as if he had co-operated fully in dying. The complete contents of the pockets amounted to one safety pin and some tobacco shreds.

Young Bullitt jotted down a detailed description and then went to the phone. He got headquarters and organized the police hunt. Check all El stations to find out where the men got on, then check every restaurant, bar, pool parlor and amusement place in the district. Check all cabs to see if anyone had picked up either the girl or the two fugitives. Get the papers to print a picture of the dead man in all the morning editions, under the caption "Unidentified."

Young Bullitt returned to the El car. The fingerprint men were still hard at it. The photographer had set up his camera and was exploding flash bulbs. A doctor was poking the body as if he was in the market for buying him at so much a pound. He placed the time of death at around midnight, and then went technical. Young Bullitt felt tired. His brown eyes were almost closed.

He fell asleep on his way back to headquarters and half of him stayed that way while he made out his preliminary report and checked over all the things he was supposed to. He drank black coffee and averaged two puffs to a cigarette. Every few minutes he rested his mind by thinking of the blonde with powder-blue eyes. He had a headache. He felt irritable but he didn't show it.

At seven a.m. Hanes stepped in and said: "Hear you got a nice one, Lothario."

Young Bullitt looked up wearily.

"Yeah. I met her at a friend's house last night. She does commercial art."

"Who?"

"This girl with the blue eyes. Who do you think?"

Hanes said: "You got a mind like a casting director for a burlesque show. Fast worker, huh? Like a Bullitt. Only I was asking about this case of yours."

Young Bullitt said: "Oh. Yeah." He grinned tolerantly. "What you want to get some day is a sense of humor. About this

case. Here a guy goes home in the El with a couple of friends after he's dead. I always pick cases like that. Some day I want a nice simple one with blood and a sex angle so the papers'll play it up and the police department'll get praised and I'll get a vacation. Know what I'll do? I'll sleep. I'll sleep two weeks and only wake up to eat steak."

"You're asleep now. Or anyhow, you're dreaming."

"Yeah," said young Bullitt. "I guess I'll go home."

It was noon when he woke up and he felt tired. He called headquarters and learned that some of the prints near the body had been identified as Benny Pilson's and Rube Callet's. The criminal files said they were odd-job gunmen and reason said they'd been escorting the stiff. Orders had been issued to pick them up.

Young Bullitt got dressed, went downtown and had a conference with the commissioner, a deputy chief inspector, the chief of Homicide and a couple of other men working on the case.

Young Bullitt said: "What I don't get is why this Rube Callet and Benny Lager—"

"Pilson," corrected the commissioner sharply.

"Well, Pilson. Why they'd want to risk taking a body in the El. If they'd killed him they'd want to get rid of him as soon as possible, and if they wanted to deliver him somewhere they'd take a cab. That's what cabs are for."

THE commissioner looked significantly at the deputy chief inspector, and his mouth tightened. "Bullitt!" he snapped. "Did it ever occur to you that he was killed three feet away from you? That you slept through a murder and the men responsible didn't even get scared till a girl screamed? There's an editorial in one of the morning

papers about cops who fall asleep while murders are committed in their presence. Maybe you'd like to read it. It was quite a humorous little article."

Young Bullitt gulped and turned crimson. The blue-eyed baby of last night wouldn't have been so impressed if she'd seen him now. He wished he had a uniform and was five years younger and had no worries except seeing that kids didn't play ball on his beat. He had a good chance of getting the uniform back, but not the five years.

The chief of Homicide said: "When we find the girl that screamed, we may learn something. I just got word of a cab driver who took her uptown!"

Young Bullitt stood up. "If you want me to work on her—"

"Sit down!" thundered the commissioner. "The way I see it, we have three things to do immediately. Identify the body, pick up Pilson and Callet and find that girl. Until then, we can't get anywhere by discussion. And Bullitt, for your own good I suggest you do something brilliant. And do it soon."

Young Bullitt returned to his desk and went over the evidence, hoping to crack the case by sheer brain power. But he had the wrong kind of brain.

The commercial artist with the blue eyes was a jinx, he decided. Then he remembered he had a date with her for this afternoon. He picked up the phone and called Gaston's.

"Hello, Gaston?" he said. "This is Bullitt. A girl that looks a little like Garbo, only her hair's crinkly and her eyes are blue and make you think of elves. I got a date with her at your place and I can't make it. Tell her I love her and the drinks are on the house. Tell her I wish I could lie down quietly and die, but I can't."

He hung up. A few minutes later his phone rang and the Twelfth Precinct told

him the girl who had been on the train last night had come in and what should they do. Young Bullitt said he'd be right up.

She was dark. She had a squirrelish little face with small even features and a nervous trick of tossing her head. She was excited and she explained that her name was Catherine Ruder and she was a hat-check girl in a restaurant, but she was studying singing. That was why she'd left South Clancy Falls and come to New York.

"I got on at Eighth Street," she said. "You were sitting there asleep and there were three men opposite. The one in the center kept staring at me and I got scared. I thought he was drunk and I decided to go back to the next car. As I got up, the train lurched and I fell against this man who'd been staring. He felt pudgy and cold, and suddenly I realized he was dead. Oh, it was horrible!"

Young Bullitt patted her hand. She wasn't helpful on the case, but somehow she reminded him of Garbo.

"I screamed and then one of the men got up and I ran. He caught up to me on the platform and knocked me over. He didn't do anything, though. He just called me a name. I ran down the stairs and saw a taxi. I signaled it and went home. That's all."

"Sweetheart, let's go out and get a drink. You look all worn out."

"Straight alcohol is what I need," she smiled. "About a thimbleful. Any more than that goes to my head."

Young Bullitt saw that she had several thimblefuls, but what he learned was not relevant to the case. Nor did he incorporate any of it in his report. Nevertheless, his time was not wasted.

IT WAS late afternoon when he returned to headquarters. He told the chief of Homicide about the girl and then he

dropped into his father's office. Bullitt senior growled:

"There's some woman at Gaston's trying to get you. She keeps calling here and asking for Bullitt and they put me on. I tell her she wants you and she says Gaston gave her so much liquor she doesn't give a damn whom she gets. She'll take you or she'll take me or she'll take anybody else, only she won't take Gaston because he gives her too much to drink. Better go over there, son."

Young Bullitt smiled wanly. "Women," he said. "They get me all mixed up."

"In trouble again?" grumbled the old man. "Listen, you get that one at Gaston's to stop annoying me and then I'll see if I can help you out."

Young Bullitt grinned. "Next time she calls I'll talk to her. Now look. A guy gets strangled and goes El-riding with a couple of friends. He goes to sleep and then he ogles a dame and she resents it, and then she screams and wakes me up and all this trouble starts. She's a good-looking dame, too."

"Here the papers and the commissioner and everybody else agree that if we can find her and learn why she screamed, we can break the case. So she walks into a police office and says the only reason she screamed is that she objects to flirting with guys after they're dead. She comes from South Clancy Falls and she wants to sing, and just looking at her does things to you."

"Not to me, son. Your trouble is you tackle every case for the woman that's in it. Just don't let South Clancy get you. Start on the theory that she's lying and then let her prove you're wrong—if she can."

The phone rang and Bullitt senior picked it up. He listened a moment and then handed it to young Bullitt. "It's the

morgue, son. They got a wild woman down there and they want you."

Young Bullitt shook his head. "Oh no—not me. It's that blonde from Gaston's."

"Don't act up. When a woman looks for you in the morgue, she sounds sensible. Take your call and find out what it's all about."

Young Bullitt held the phone gingerly and listened. When he put it down, his head was ringing. "It's another one," he said. "She just identified this strangle case. Stanley Ericson, radio singer. She's a Spanish gal and she's a singer, too. They all sing and they're all crazy. Bunch of mad canaries."

He lit a cigarette and looked thoughtful. "I never had a case with a Spanish gal. If the blonde from Gaston's calls again, tell her to go over to the morgue and ask for twenty-four thirty-seven. That ought to sober her up." He puffed quietly. "That's the torso case."

Bullitt senior looked displeased. "You'll get yourself in a jam, son, and your mother will think I'm responsible, as usual. What's this blonde's name?"

Young Bullitt frowned. "Damned if I didn't forget to ask her! If she calls up again, find out, won't you? You're a detective."

They had the Spanish girl in a small reception room on the ground floor at the morgue. The temperature was up about ten degrees just from her presence. Young Bullitt felt his blood pressure leap as he entered the room.

She was dark and lush and inviting and she had a figure like the one you usually see hanging over the bar between the pictures of Jack Dempsey and John L. Sullivan, and wearing about the same amount of clothes. Only right now Rosita de la Fulga had about a thousand dollars worth of clothes on, excluding the jewels.

She'd been crying, and her dark eyes were moist and shiny. She said:

"Oh, Meester Detective—I have wait all night and all day long, and finally I come here and it is him. My Stanley. I see him lying there so calm and peaceful, and I faint away. But now—" she clutched his arm—"now I find out he is dead and I will kill the man that did it."

"So it was a man, was it?" said young Bullitt.

"Man? He was a devil, a Satan! I scratch out his eyes and I tear his heart and I stamp and beat him—like this—this!" She started pummeling young Bullitt's chest. He grabbed her hands and she threw herself at him and began sobbing.

He said: "Sweetheart, you're all worked up. Suppose you sit down and let me get it straight. Who's Stanley? What's he to you and where were you meeting him and why?"

"For love!" she cried out. "I wait for him and wait, and all the time he is dead!"

She buried her head against the chair and wept some more. Young Bullitt sighed wearily. He made a mental note that if Spanish dames were like her, he'd stick to South Clancy Falls.

"Where was he last night and who had anything against him?" he asked.

"He's an angel, and if I know where he is I am there to protect him, you fool! I tell you who he is and you keep me here and it is stupid. Let me out—in here I cannot breathe—I choke with this air. *Let me out!*"

She got up and streaked for the door. Young Bullitt stepped aside, and as she passed he slapped her on the cheek.

SHE stopped short and took a deep breath. Then she held out her arms and pitched in young Bullitt's direction. It wasn't even a good imitation of a faint, but she was falling flat and he figured she'd

hurt herself if she hit. Which would be a good idea tomorrow, but not today.

He caught her expertly and swung her over to a chair. "Listen, darling," he said. "I can put on as good a fit of hysterics as you can, if I set my mind to it, and when I get hysterical I half murder people. So forget the act or I'll beat the hell out of you."

She opened her eyes and gazed at him ecstatically. "Would you, Meester Detective?" she asked hopefully.

Young Bullitt marched to the window and got into a one-man huddle with himself. He was turning rapidly in circles. He toyed with the idea of taking Rosita home, calling a doctor and giving her morphine, but then he thought of a better possibility. Risky, perhaps, but Rosita demanded unconventional methods and he had a deep faith in the impulsive nature of her temperament.

He tried more questions but he had the success of a man talking to a deaf mute over the telephone. He apparently gave her up as hopeless. But when she left the morgue, she was in a cab whose driver had strict instructions not to lose the trailing taxi. And in the trailing taxi was young Bullitt.

She went straight to the Club Maumont, an expensive downtown night club. It was about four blocks from the station where the body of Stanley Ericson had boarded the El last night.

Young Bullitt called the local precinct and got a thumbnail sketch of the place and its proprietor. Felix (Fleece) Luchetti ran it. Old-time bootlegger. Gang connections, but on good terms with most of the big shots. Political drag, due to large contributions. Roulette wheel and card games, for big stakes, upstairs. Difficult to get in.

Raided twice, but both cases dismissed for lack of evidence. Night club

downstairs, high-priced but otherwise okay. Fleece probably knew Benny Pilson, but who didn't? Use Lou Branch's name to get in, if necessary.

Young Bullitt marched through the door. There was music in the cocktail room. He glanced through the entrance and saw that Rosita wasn't there. He turned away and headed for the stairs. An athlete—boxing—in a tuxedo stopped him. "Want anything?"

"I want to see Luchetti."

"What about?"

"Just tell him I'm a friend of Lou Branch."

"He's busy right now."

"I know it. And I know who he's with. Just tell him that's why I'm here, and that he'd better see me before she leaves."

"So that's it!" said the athlete—boxing—and went upstairs.

Quietly, young Bullitt followed.

He saw the tuxedo turn to the right at the landing, put his ear close to the second door and start to knock. Then he grabbed the knob and jerked it. The door was locked.

Young Bullitt charged like a bull. As he approached the door, he could hear the shrieks and the smashing of furniture inside. He put on speed, left his feet and hit the door with a human hammer blow. One of the panels splintered, but the lock held. The tuxedo started to object and then changed his mind.

Young Bullitt grabbed his gun and smashed the butt at the cracked panel. When the wood splintered further but didn't rip, he turned around, got a running start and hammered again. This time his shoulder went through. He pulled back, ripped the hole wider and battered through.

Fleece was backed up in a corner and was protecting himself with a chair. Rosita had a knife in one hand. With the other she

was picking up whatever was loose and heaving it. She'd started with a couple of lamps, an inkwell and a paperweight, exhausted the supply of candlesticks and decanters and glassware, and was starting in on the books.

Whenever Fleece shifted the chair to parry her attack, she screamed and slashed with the knife. Fleece had a cut on his cheek and his coat was ripped.

Young Bullitt fired one shot at the ceiling. Rosita wheeled, saw him and made a last desperate surge. She swung the knife and flung herself forward. The chair thrust up and caught her on the forehead. The sound was dull and flat. She dropped forward, and this time she wasn't faking.

Young Bullitt pocketed his gun. "Sweetheart," he said, "you shouldn't play around with wild women."

FLEECE LUCHETTI wiped his forehead and saw the blood. He swore softly, then stooped and picked up the knife. He stared at Rosita with hard angry eyes, then kicked her experimentally in the side. She didn't even groan. Fleece grinned. He had thick dark curly hair and a sharp face with mottled skin.

"Well," he said. "Who the hell are you?"

"I'm a knight errant," said young Bullitt. "I go around rescuing tough guys from Rosita."

Fleece glanced past him and spoke to the man in the tuxedo. "Take her downstairs, Ed, and get her fixed up. I'll tell you when we want her." Then he sat down and faced the detective.

"As I remarked before, who the hell are you?"

Young Bullitt took out his badge and placed it on the desk. "My calling card. You've seen 'em before."

"So what?"

"The little girl must have had a reason. Even Rosita doesn't play with knives for the fun of it. So what was it?"

"Search me," said Fleece. "Maybe she's crazy. She's a Spaniard, isn't she?"

"I guess I'll go home," said young Bullitt. "Anybody who wants to can walk into your private office. You lock the door and read the Bible to 'em. I'll tell the commissioner. Great guy, the commissioner. Sense of humor. Sends out the detective force to collect jokes, but they're not usually up to your standard. He'll roar over this one."

Fleece Luchetti dabbed his handkerchief at the cut on his forehead. "What is this?" he demanded. "Some dame comes in and tries to kill me. You're a cop; you saw it. So you take it out on me. First a woman tries to knife me and now a cop tries to get tough."

"Me tough?" asked young Bullitt.

He was thinking that Fleece was strangely casual for a man who'd been attacked with a knife and that he showed surprisingly little rancor. Didn't even suggest Rosita's arrest. Possibly he didn't want her to talk. And certainly the reason for her attack was that she believed she was facing Ericson's killer. Young Bullitt had released her and tailed her on that theory, and it looked as if she'd obliged.

He decided on a colossal bluff.

"Sweetheart," he said. "I'll open my heart to you. I'm trying to get to the bottom of the Ericson case. Ericson was here, and Benny and Rube Callet carted him away. I just got brains enough to know that a place like yours loses its customers when the papers say a guy was killed there and that some gangsters took him away."

"Who told you that crazy story?"

"Benny."

"Oh!" Fleece dabbed at the blood again. "So it's blackmail," he said. "You'll

smear me in the papers if I don't do something. If I don't do what?"

"This is no proposition, sweetheart, and I'm not making bargains. I have all the aces and you only have kings and queens."

"And what if I tell you you're all wet and you can go to hell?"

"Then you get locked up."

"And I get right out again!"

"Not when you're booked as accessory to a murder," said young Bullitt. "I just love to book murder cases. That's what I draw pay for."

"Think I'm going to say the hell with my business just so you can draw a paycheck? What I want is to keep the club out of this."

"If I didn't have Benny, maybe I'd bargain."

Luchetti dabbed more blood. "Look," he said. "I never knew this Ericson guy. Rosita used to sing here but I canned her. She had what you call tantrums. In a big way."

"If Rosita worked here, then Ericson was around too."

"Yeah, but I never knew him. Never knew who he was till Ed found him strangled in the washroom. Then I had him moved. That's all."

"Who was he with?"

"I'll bargain on that one," said Luchetti.

Young Bullitt took out his handcuffs and spread them on the table. "You've got the wrong guy, sweetheart. You might be as innocent as a kid from South Clancy Falls, but when you moved the body, that was murder according to the laws of this state."

Luchetti licked his lips and stared at the handcuffs. He knew he was licked. "Why should I get in a jam for some broad that isn't even a friend of mine? Rosita came up here because she thought I had something to do with this Ericson getting

bumped. She went off the handle, but she was wrong. I'm clean on this. Benny was supposed to take the body away, but how the hell it ever landed up in the El train is one on me. This whole business is screwy."

"Who was Ericson with?"

"Rita Henry."

"Now let's get Rosita in here."

"Sure," said Fleece. He smiled and pushed a button on his desk. When the athlete—boxing—came, Fleece said: "Bring up the dame, Ed."

"She beat it, boss. I went to get her second drink and she beat it."

THERE was nothing young Bullitt could do about it, Ed had let the Spanish girl go on purpose, but there was no law that said he couldn't. And Young Bullitt wasn't proud of that one.

He spent precious time getting the lowdown on the Henrys. Jules, suspected of jewel smuggling but as yet never arrested. And Rita, his wife, who had been with Ericson—according to Fleece.

It was ten o'clock when young Bullitt reached the Henrys' apartment and rang the bell. There was no answer. He listened at the door and thought he heard movement, but he wasn't sure. It might be the wind or the people next door or his own imagination. If he'd been an antelope he could have sniffed, but the only unusual thing about him was his name.

His badge and an impressionable elevator boy won him a pass key without too much trouble. Young Bullitt merely opened the door and slammed it behind him as he walked in.

The corridor was about twelve feet long and led to the living room. Just before he stepped into the living room he noticed the overturned lamp and the green high-heeled slipper that reminded him of Rosita. He didn't have time to stop and

didn't have time to think back to what she'd been wearing, but he did have time to realize something was wrong.

Instead of marching boldly into the room, he dropped into a crouch and sidled close to the wall. The gun exploded at a six-foot range and the slug roared over his head. If he'd been standing up he'd have caught it in the neck or the upper chest.

He had a split-second view of a tall bony man with his hair mussed and a flaming gun in his hands. Then young Bullitt's charge catapulted him forward. A second shot burnt past the side of his head and then his hands were on the weapon and his momentum had knocked the guy over.

He brought up his knee and pinned the gun wrist to the floor. He was still gripping the revolver with both hands. The bony man had a free fist and it jabbed desperately. Then the punishing pressure of young Bullitt's knee loosened the gun grip and he shoved the weapon aside.

He was straddling the bony man. Young Bullitt straightened his back and then smashed downward with two curving blows. They landed a fraction of a second apart, on either side of the jaw. The bony man's face jerked sideways and jerked back, and the dull flat smack of the two blows lengthened into a single sound.

Almost lazily, young Bullitt picked up the revolver. Then the woman in the doorway began screaming.

Young Bullitt didn't pay any attention to her. He took out his handcuffs and slipped them on the bony man's wrists. Then he looked around carefully and sucked in his breath. He strode over to the corner and looked. Rosita was lying behind the couch and she was dead. Her head dangled back loosely. On the white skin of her neck, the strangulation marks showed in little crimson patches.

He turned to the woman. She had flung

herself on the couch and was sobbing. "Go away!" she cried. "Let me go—I just want to leave—and forget. . . I never thought—oh, please!"

Young Bullitt sat down and stroked her hair. It was soft and silken. She wasn't particularly good-looking to begin with, and no woman improves herself by crying, but there was something soft and sweet about her. Scrawny but sweet, young Bullitt told himself.

He said: "Sweetheart, cry yourself out."

She jerked up and faced him. "Who are you?"

"I'm the guy that cleans up the mess. You're Rita Henry, aren't you?"

She nodded. "What am I going to do?"

Young Bullitt smiled. "You're going to get it off your chest, darling, by telling me all about it."

A half hour later he called headquarters and asked for the chief of Homicide. The chief said: "Bullitt, you better get down here fast. The commissioner's sore as hell. Here you had this dame that was on the El and you let her go, and then you had the dame that identified Ericson and you let her go. He's going to have your hide, Bullitt."

"Maybe. Anything happen at your end?"

"Plenty. That's why the commissioner's sore. We picked up Pilson and Callet and he's been grilling 'em the last couple hours, and their story is they were called down to the Club Maumont to take this Ericson off the premises. They put him in a taxi and pretended he was drunk, but some tough cabby caught on and put a gun on 'em and told 'em to fork over all they had or he'd take them and the body straight to the nearest precinct station. So they gave. The cabby dumped them and the body near an El station."

He paused for breath, then went on:

"Well, they were going to leave him there on the sidewalk, but they saw a cop coming down the block so they pulled the drunk act again and brought Ericson up to the platform. It worked so well that they kept on with it, until this girl across the aisle screamed. You know the rest. I got some men on their way to the Maumont now, to bring in Luchetti. What happened to that Spanish dame?"

"She went around accusing everybody she saw. She got killed. Strangled."

"What's that?" demanded the chief.

"She was a spitfire," explained young Bullitt. "I'd only have gotten in trouble with her."

"Listen, Bullitt—if you pulled anything fast, you'll be up on departmental charges. Maybe you better tell me your story right now, before you see the commissioner."

"Sure. It seems that a guy named Jules Henry built up a jewel smuggling ring. Nothing big, but he made nice money out of it. This Ericson was a member of the gang. One day he claimed he lost a rather valuable lot of jewelry that he'd brought in. He was polite and sorry and said he wasn't cut out for that sort of work anyhow, and that he'd like to quit. Jules said sure. But Ericson knew too much and Jules strangled him that same night in the washroom of the Maumont.

"It so happened that Jules' wife was with Ericson that night. They were playing around together. Jules was jealous and so was Rosita, and that's the setup for act two.

"As soon as Rosita left the morgue, she went down to Luchetti and accused him of murder and tried to knife him. Luchetti must have told her Jules Henry was the guy she wanted—that Jules had killed Ericson out of jealousy. Luchetti didn't know about the smuggling business, of course, and he was just trying to get rid

of the dame. But she believed whatever you told her and so she came up to the Henrys and wanted to knife them both. Jules strangled her, and in a way I'm not sorry."

"How do you know all this?" snapped the chief.

"Jules told me," said young Bullitt. "He's with me now. His wife gave me the story first—nice kid, too—and then Jules admitted it. What else could he do? So better send up the usual squad, chief. I got a body and a murderer up here at the Henrys'. Better write down the address and phone number."

Young Bullitt's eyes looked drowsy. He'd had a big evening and it was almost over.

Almost. A few minutes later the phone rang and the operator at headquarters said:

"Hello, Bullitt? There's a call here for you. I'm switching it up to where you are."

"Where's it from?" asked young Bullitt.

"Gaston's."

Young Bullitt said: "Jeez! Don't put her on! It's that blonde again, Harry."

"Sure, but if you think I got nothing to do but tell raving women you're not around, you're crazy. You must have hit her like a Bullitt, the way she's acting."

"Please, Harry. I'm a little tired."

"Well, what'll I do next time she calls? Honest—you can't hold her off much longer."

Young Bullitt had a dreamy, faraway look in his eyes. "Tell her I went out of town, Harry. South Clancy Falls."

"Yeah?" said Harry. "Who's she?"

And he never knew how right he was.