



**Blondes and murder are  
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# FATAL FACIAL

by Cary Moran

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knows how to blend the two to get the most out each!*

**H**ER hair was red, her face heart-shaped, her lips full and attractive, a perfect frame for white teeth. Only her eyes didn't fit. They were black, with long, shadowed lashes, black and cold. Cold, like agate. Even in the white uniform, she managed to exude sex appeal. Pinned low to reveal plenty of white, curved flesh in front, the uniform covered her flaring hips like a sheath. Beneath the desk her knees were

crossed to reveal slender tapering legs is sheer hosiery.

Across the office, little Sanderson chewed on a nickel cigar and regarded the legs with great approval. Miss Murray looked up.

"The doctor will be out soon, Mr. Sanderson!" Her lips smiled but the eyes remained agate-like.

Sanderson grinned. "No hurry, no hurry at all. The longer I stay, the better I like it here!"

He leered at the slim legs.

Miss Murray made a moué, pulled the hem of her stiffly starched skirt down in such a way as to reveal even more than before. A slender circle of white flesh gleamed above the shadow of the chiffon.

"I think the doctor is considering your proposition," she said gravely.

Sanderson started to speak but the door opened. Dr. Max Harrin entered, nodded briefly and went to the outer door. He glanced at the waiting room, then closed the door and locked it. Sanderson stood beside the desk.

"I brought 'em, doc. Here you are." He laid two photographs on the desk. Both showed the head and shoulders of a man approximately forty-five years of age. There was a vague resemblance between the two, nothing definite, only a shadow of similarity in the general contour of the two faces.

Dr. Herrin picked them up, adjusted his glasses, and held them toward the light. He said, "Hm-mm."

Sanderson spoke eagerly, thrusting a dirty thumb at the picture on the right

"Now that one there's the boss, and this other gee is Hudson, the butler. Do you think you could do it!"

Herrin put the pictures back on the desk and smiled wolfishly at the little man.

"What's to prevent me from calling the police instead of falling in with your plans?"

Sanderson said, "You *could* do it. But ten grand is not to be sneezed at. Beside you probably like living."

Herrin said moodily, "I don't think I want anything to do with it."

**R**UTH MURRAY arose and laid her hand on his shoulder. "Mr. Sanderson, you pardon us for a few minutes and we'll go in and talk it over." She led the doctor in to the adjoining room.

"Are you a fool, Max!"

Sullenly Herrin said, "I don't like to fool with the law, you know that."

"It wouldn't be the first time!" Her voice was cold. "I thought you loved me! Where can you pick up that much money so easily? *Besides, there might be more later on!*"

He shook his head stubbornly. She walked to him, put her arms about his neck. "Max, do this for me. If you love me, you'll do it."

Her lips were very close to his. Soft curves were warm against his chest, hips pressed close. Slowly he put his arms about her, pulled her closer, his long thin fingers sliding down across the small of her back. For a long moment he kissed her, then sat down on the leather couch with the cold-eyed woman in his arms.

"Say you'll do it," she whispered. He nodded dumbly and drew her against him once more.

**L**ATER they went together into the waiting room.

"For Pete's sake!" said Sanderson. "You must have had a debate!"

Ruth Murray said levelly, "Dr. Herrin will do the job, and you may depend on it that it will be well done. When will your friend be in?"

Sanderson was fumbling at his pocket, his face wreathed in smiles. "There's no time like now. To-night? I'll get him up here and in the back way before midnight." He placed a bunch of bills on the desk, leafed through them rapidly. "Five grand. Five more when he walks out of here. Right?"

Miss Murray swept them into a drawer.

Sanderson grinned as he closed the door. Herrin stood moodily at the window. The nurse looked up from the photographs she was examining and spoke to the doctor.

"Did you notice that your own general facial characteristics are in the same classification as both these men? If you

weighed a few pounds less, yon might pass for either one of them.”

The doctor didn't turn his head.

AT twelve-thirty the operating room of the little Herrin Sanitarium blazed with light.

But from the outside the place appeared dark. Heavy blankets were tacked over the windows. Even the cracks beneath the doors were stuffed.

On the operating table lay a man, his body sheet-covered, his eyes blazing up into the bright light. Sanderson was talking to him quietly, grinning as he spoke. At the head of the table Nurse Murray laid out sponges, material, sterilized instruments for an operation. Dr. Herrin entered drawing on a pair of rubber gloves.

“Fix his fingerprints, too, eh doc?” grinned Sanderson. Herrin nodded. The man on the table whispered something. Sanderson went on, “And just to be sure nothing goes wrong, I want your John Henry on this before you start.” He put a slip of paper on the table, drew an ugly gun from his pocket and waved it menacingly.

Herrin read the paper coldly and laughed, “This amounts to a confession that I performed an illegal operation on the features of this man.”

Sanderson laughed easily, thrust a pen toward the doctor. “Just in case yon decide later on that ten thousand isn't enough!”

The nurse said something *sotto voce*. Herrin signed the paper. Sanderson stuck it in his pocket and laughed.

“You going to stay here and watch?” from the nurse.

“Absolutely,” from the little man.

“Suit yourself,” snapped Dr. Herrin. “It isn't a very pretty sight. If I were you, I'd sit over there in the corner and keep still. There's a bottle of Scotch in the cabinet.”

“Thanks.” Sanderson went over to sit

down.

THE smell of ether. Almost utter silence. The surgeon and his nurse moved like automatons. Sanderson tried to look away but the scene held his eyes. He saw the tiny sharp chisel, the small rubber mallet, heard the grating of bone being split out and removed. He retched a little, swung the cabinet open, and tilted the bottle of Scotch for a long drink.

He sat there looking at the ceiling, the bottle in his hand. Presently he drank again. The room was stuffy. Ether still swirled through the stifling atmosphere. Sanderson's eyes grew cloudy. His chin dropped. He caught himself with a jerk, put the bottle down on the floor, and shook his head. Presently his eyelids grew heavy, his chin dropped to his breast, and Sanderson sighed and slept.

The nurse touched Herrin's arm, nodded toward the sleeping man. Herrin tore the mask from his face, his lips twisted in a snarl. He picked up a handful of gauze and the long thin lancet from the table, a lancet as long and as slender as an ice pick blade. Quietly he stole toward the sleeping man.

He touched him on the forehead, said, “Sanderson!” Sanderson slept on. Swiftly Herrin pulled the coat from the little man's left shoulder, tore the shirt and undershirt aside. He placed the point of the lancet at a spot between the ribs.

The cold eyes of the nurse gleamed a little as she saw him push mightily on the steel. Sanderson's figure jerked convulsively, straightened momentarily, and then relaxed. Herrin withdrew the lancet quickly, held the gauze against the tiny wound. There was barely any blood.

He turned. “There, damn you! I told you I'd do it and I did! Now I'll finish the job!”

The nurse said, “Don't bother. It's done.”

The man on the operating table lay still and white. There was no breathing apparent.

IN Haleyville a mob of shouting, rioting people were kept back from the doors of the Haleyville Trust Company by three policemen with riot guns. The air was filled with curses as men and women battled toward the guards. The door of the bank opened and Sheriff Jud Tolliver stepped out, wheezing and blowing, mopping his fat face with a dirty handkerchief. He held up his hand for silence.

"Now, boys," he began, "there ain't no use starting a riot. The examiners are checking the books and maybe they'll save something out of it yet. Starting trouble in the street won't get you any place. Go on home now and take it easy. We'll let you know when you can get your money."

A voice roared from the crowd, "Have you found Lawrence yet! Have you cornered the dirty crook?"

The sheriff continued his face mopping. "I'm working on it now, boys, and I'll have him before the end of this week, I got our dodgers all over the country and I'll get him, don't you worry!"

"Yah," taunted the voice. "You fat old fool! *You'll* get him! And him with three weeks start. You couldn't catch a cold!"

The sheriff shouldered his way through the crowd, his face more flushed than ever. He started toward the battered Ford, moved into the traffic, then suddenly swung toward the curb a half block further along the street.

"Hey, Jarnegan," he bellowed.

A slim little man with a turned-down black hat stood on the curb eating an apple. He waved his hand toward the sheriff and continued eating.

"Come here, Jarnegan, damn it! Come here!"

Jarnegan grinned, tossed the apple core into the gutter and went to the car.

"H'ya, Jud. Hear anything from Lawrence?"

The sheriff swore mightily. "Hell no and what's more I don't expect to! Him with three weeks start! He's a smart man, Jarnegan. Any guy clever enough to empty a bank as clean as he emptied that one ain't gonna leave no trail!"

Jarnegan grinned. "How much did he get?"

Tolliver spoke gloomily. "I stuck around all morning. When they got up to three hundred thousand I left. Of course that's just bonds. He—"

"All negotiable?"

Tolliver nodded sadly. "Say, Jarnegan, ride out to Lawrence's with me, will you? I got to ask Mrs. Lawrence a couple of questions."

"Sorry. When the county hired me, they said nothing but homicide. Rake me up a murder and I'll go with you. You know, on second thought, I believe I'll go along for that ride. That Lawrence dame is a honey. I always like them plump blondes."

He crawled in beside the wheezing sheriff.

BANKER Lawrence's colonial mansion sat well back among the pines that topped the hill at the end of Haleyville's main street. The Ford rattled and roared as it skidded up the gravel drive. Sheriff Tolliver sighed as he rang the bell. Jarnegan stood behind him, hands in his pockets.

The door opened. Hudson, the butler, said, "Yes, what is it—oh, I beg pardon, Mr. Tolliver. Will you step in, please, I'll see if Mrs. Lawrence can see you. This way, please."

The rug on the hallway was inches. Jarnegan said, "What's your name, pal?"

The butler looked startled, drew back and said, "Hudson, sir. James Hudson. I'm the butler."

Jarnegan peered at him closely, said, "Butler? Hell, I thought you were advertising something!"

Hudson frowned, turned, and went swiftly

up the stairs.

The sheriff spoke plaintively, "Don't be that way, Jarnegan. Don't ride these people. I got to depend on them!"

Jarnegan walked through the curtained doorway and disappeared. Presently Tolliver stuck his head into the room, frowned with disapproval as he saw Jarnegan before the window, a glass decanter in one hand, a blonde maid in the other. The blonde giggled and trotted away.

Tolliver said, "The lady is still in bed but she'll see us."

Jarnegan nodded pleasantly, tipped the decanter, coughed, and put it down, wiping his mouth on his sleeve.

Tolliver said, "Why in hell can't you leave the dames alone? This is serious."

"Her name is Minnie," said Jarnegan, "and she feels good all over. They got a cook, too, but she's colored. And why should I leave the dames alone? I like 'em."

The sheriff grunted as the butler tapped on the door of a bedroom.

A soft voice called to them. They went in. Jarnegan entered last, leaned against the door, and lit a cigarette, his sharp eyes sweeping the room.

"Won't you sit down, Mr. Tolliver." The sheriff eased into a spindle-legged chair that stood by the bed. "And you, too, Mr.—"

"Jarnegan," said the sheriff. "That's Jarnegan."

"H'ya," said Jarnegan, and sprinkled ashes on the thick rug. He didn't sit down.

**M**ILDRED LAWRENCE was thirty-four and looked ten years younger. She was blonde, with a rose-petal mouth, tiny white teeth and wide, baby blue eyes. The satin coverlet was moulded over her figure, revealing flaring hips and a small waist. Through the thin material of her gown, her breasts were apparent, smooth upper slopes

revealed by the low neck.

The sheriff spoke at length, hesitating, his little pop eyes unable to keep away from the satiny skin revealed. "So if you've got any pictures at all that I haven't seen, ma'am, I'd be much obliged to have them."

She smiled, murmured, "Certainly!" and rang the bell at the head of the bed. In a few minutes the maid entered.

Jarnegan grinned and said, "H'ya!" The maid flushed; Mrs. Lawrence looked annoyed.

"Get my mules and my negligee," she said coldly to the maid and sat up in bed.

Slim white feet in golden mules. A gauzy negligee about plump shoulders, two legs that gleamed seductively through sheer material as the woman came to her feet. No wonder Sheriff Tolliver mopped at his face and tried to avert his eyes. She walked sinuously toward a dressing table, hips liquid and provocative. Directly in front of the French doors she paused, turned dramatically. Every line of her rounded body was limned by the light... the inward curve of a waist that flared to hips, continued to tapering thigh, and smoothly turned calves.

She said, "Mr. Tolliver, you know exactly how I feel about this. I've told you before that James and I haven't been getting along for months. Since he's absconded with all that money, I'm willing to do everything I can to bring him to justice!"

She continued toward the drawing table.

Jarnegan said beneath his breath to the maid, "A chassis like a truck! I used to like 'em with plenty meat, but no more, no more! I like 'em slim and round, like you, kid."

Mrs. Lawrence started. "You may go," she said. The girl made for the door.

"See you downstairs, sheriff," grinned Jarnegan and followed her out.

**A** FEW minutes later Tolliver peered into the living room. No Jarnegan. The butler

appeared. "You seen Jarnegan!" The butler shook his head. The sheriff waited a few minutes longer, walked back to his car cursing.

As he stepped on the starter, Jarnegan ran around the house yelling, "Hey, wait for me."

"Where you been?" asked the sheriff in disapproval. "You look like you been digging in an ashpit."

"I was down in the furnace room playing around the ashpile," grinned Jarnegan. "If I was you I'd get me a search warrant and tackle that house with a fine-toothed comb!"

"You're crazy! I suppose I'd turn up the jack in the guy's own house! Mrs. Lawrence is all right. She hopes we catch him. What you got against her?"

"I don't like the way she swings her hips. You better do like I say. The cook says the ashes ain't been hauled out of there for a month, and I got an idea you'll find something interesting. Lemme out here."

"Why'n't you give me a lift on this, Jarnegan! You ain't doing nothing."

"Bull. I'm a homicide man. That's what the county says. Find me a juicy murder and I'll take it off your hands. Well, I'll be seeing you. I got a date with a blonde."

Jarnegan got his murder that very night.

**A** LITTLE past noon the next day he stood with arms akimbo in a dingy room at the Palace Hotel down by the railroad tracks. He stared down at the man who lay sprawled on the dirty bed. The fat lady who ran the hotel was at his elbow chattering and jabbering. Jarnegan glared at the murdered man.

"He come in just before ten last night and rang the bell at the desk. He registered just like anyone else and I showed him to his room. About eleven I went to bed myself and slept like a log, didn't hear a thing. But when the maid opened the door this morning, this is

what she found. Oh, my God, what would me poor dead husband—?"

Shut up," snapped Jarnegan. "Let your dead husband lay. He probably deserves a little rest. Who's in the rooms on each side of this one?" He glared at the pale faces of the curious that swarmed in the doorway. "Well, speak up! This is Room 12. Who's in 10 and who's in 14?"



"I'm in 10," simpered a flat-faced blonde with stringy hair, who, looked like the wrath of God without her war paint.

"Fourteen is empty. This is Miss Billy Golden," ventured the landlady. The stringy blonde, smirked, drew her dirty wrapper close about her hips.

Jarnegan said, "No use to ask where *you* was all evening. You was in your room. Did you hear anything?"

The blonde said, "Well, I can't say that I did. You see I—"

"Yeah, I know." Jarnegan's voice was

dreary. "You was so damned sleepy, you wouldn't have heard a locomotive in the hallway—oh, forget it. Beat it, all of you. Scram!"

He herded them out, slammed the door without touching the knob.

THE man on the bed had died hard. His face was beaten to a pulp, his features so badly battered as to be a bloody, sticky mass. On the bed beside the corpse was a blood-stained brick and a sash-weight. On the floor at the head of the bed was a bloody pillowcase which had been stripped from denim-covered pillow.

With cautious fingers Jarnegan turned the body. It was rigid, stiff, stone-like. The nose was mashed to a pulp, the forehead caved in the jaw-bone broken in half a dozen places. The right side of the skull had collapsed like a shattered eggshell but the left side, though covered with dried blood, was intact. Jarnegan wet his handkerchief at the water pitcher, sponged the clotted blood from the battered face.

Stubby grey whiskers came into view on the left cheek, whiskers that ended abruptly two full inches below the cheek bone, leaving a rectangular space smooth and free from whiskers.

Jarnegan stepped back, lit a cigarette, and dropped it to the floor. His eyes grew wide as he gazed horror-stricken at the corpse's hands. The fingertips were mashed. The killer had laid them one at a time on the brick and mashed item into shapeless nothingness with the sashweight. The pillow case had been used to muffle the blows.

An hour later Jarnegan went downstairs to the dingy lobby. "All right," he told the waiting deputies, "go on up and dust for prints. I'll be back later. You can call the meat wagon after you get through." He tore a leaf from the register and stalked out.

JUD TOLLIVER sat in his office perspiring greatly and groaning at his hard luck.

"I've got one hundred and one crank letters about that damned Lawrence," he groaned, "and not a one of them worth a whoop. I searched the Lawrence house like you said and all it got me was a good cussing from the lady! She knows words and how to say 'em! What did you find out about the stiff?"

"Nothing," said Jarnegan. "A guy named E. T. Paul registered and went upstairs to his room. He's dead the next morning with his face caved in, his fingers all mashed to hell, and a suitcase full of newspapers standing in the closet. Looks like the killer didn't want him identified. Let me have all your dodgers on missing men for the last couple of months."

"In the pigeon hole. If his face was kicked in, how's that gonna help you?"

"It probably won't. I measured the stiff. He's exactly five foot ten and a half. Maybe I can get something from that and the color of his hair. Probably not."

At three-thirty the sheriff waddled out, leaving Jarnegan sitting at his desk leafing through the files of missing men from all over the state and surrounding territory. Jarnegan folded three of them up, put them into his coat pocket. For a long while he sat staring at a gaudy calendar on the far wall. When he left, he headed his car toward the Lawrence house.

He rang the bell. The door opened and a voice said, "What is it, please?"

Jarnegan's eyes flickered. He said, "H'ya, pal, I'm looking for Minnie. You know Minnie?"

The butler spoke uncertainly, his voice low.

"What's wrong with your voice!" snapped Jarnegan.

"I have a slight cold, sir. Who was it you wanted?"

"Minnie, Minnie the maid! The blonde one. I got a date with her."

"Who is it, Hudson?" Mrs. Lawrence appeared in the lighted hallway. "Oh, it's you! What do you want now?"

"Minnie," said Jarnegan patiently. "Your maid. I got a date with her and she said to call for her here."

"Minnie is discharged. I let her go at noon. She was very impertinent and—"

"Yeah," said Jarnegan, "I know. Where'll I find her?"

Mrs. Lawrence wasn't sure. Much against her wishes she had the butler consult the little black book in the pantry.

"How long's he been with you?"

"I don't see—" her voice was frigid.

"All right, all right," grinned Jarnegan and crossed his legs. The butler returned.

**T**WENTY minutes later Jarnegan rang another bell. Minnie stood at the door, a kimono wrapped about her.

"H'ya," grinned Jarnegan. "I gotta quart of Scotch."

She said, "You better scram. My husband's got a bad temper." But she smiled.

Jarnegan said, "I know it. He's got it with him. He won't be back until the first of the week. Hope he sells a lot of groceries."

She opened the door and giggled. "You know everything, don't you?"

The Scotch was good. The bottle was half empty before Jarnegan got down to brass tacks. "What'd they fire you for, baby!"

"I snitched a drink out of the decanter in the living room. Hudson saw me and told!"

"He looked like a heel to me anyway!"

"It's a damned funny thing," she said slowly. "Me and Hudson was always like this." She held up her hand, two fingers locked tightly together. "Then he sees me and tells. The old lady fired me and I popped off and ratted on Hudson. He's done the same thing

many a time. But she stuck up for him, and they had a new maid there before I got packed and out of the house!"

Jarnegan took another drink. "Aw, he's just ringing in a new sweetie to take your place."

She giggled. The kimono was brief. Jarnegan looked with approval at her legs.

"The butler runs the house. A maid usually has to do whatever he says. Hudson wasn't such a bad old skate."

Jarnegan stood up. She said: "Hey, where you going? My husband won't be back until Monday."

"Yeah, I know. But I will. You sit there and do tricks with the rest of the Scotch and I'll be seeing you later. Get it!"

He was gone before she could protest.

He went back to his office and went to work on the missing men dodgers again. Cigarette after cigarette turned to ash as he worked. The clock ticked on. At eleven he called the sheriff.

The sheriff said, "Damn it, what you wanta run off for? They'll fire you for this. You got a murder on your hands now and I want you to help me with that Lawrence deal."

Jarnegan said, "Just sit tight and handle that murder yourself. You won't find out anything anyway. I'm playing a hunch. There's three missing men in this state that are almost exactly as high and as heavy as this corpse I found. I had the coroner weigh the body. Anyone of these those guys could be it. I'm going to run them all down."

**T**HREE days later he got off the train in Junction City. A hack driver took him to Herrin's Sanitarium. Mrs. Herrin admitted him. No, the doctor was out of the city. She didn't know when he'd be back.

Jarnegan knocked ashes on the rug and showed his badge. Her face grew indignant.

"Why didn't you say so! Yes, he's run



away from me and I'm going to have him jailed for desertion. The old fool! Running around with that scut of a red-haired nurse! Now it was like this, Mr. Hooligan."

"Jarnegan, lady. J like in jack."

"Oh. You see I was at my mother's visiting. I knew there was something going on between him and that hussy so I told mamma—"

"What kind of surgery did your husband do?"

"Don't you read the papers? He was Max Herrin, the great plastic surgeon. Why, women came from all over just to get him to—"

"Did he leave you a note or a letter?" She got it. It said:

"Martha: I can't stand your nagging any longer. I'm running away with Ruth, and there's no good in your looking for us.

Max."

Jarnegan said, "I'll keep this. I think I can find your old man for you, Missus Herrin. Did he take his car?"

"No, thank goodness! Like I told mamma—"

"Can I see it?"

The car was an expensive coupe. Jarnegan searched it thoroughly, found nothing in the cushions but a few hairpins, and a silver dime which he quickly dropped in his pocket. He turned disgustedly, glanced down.

"New cement floor?"

"Yes. He had it laid while I was at mamma's. I told her—"

"Okay, missus, you'll hear from me."

Junction City is eighty miles from Haleyville. It was Jarnegan's last stop. Mid afternoon found him back in the sheriff's office using the phone.

"I don't see," said Tolliver plaintively plucking at his sleeve. Jarnegan waved him aside.

"Hello, is this Minnie? I been away. Is

there any of that Scotch left? Okay. I know a joint that's got another bottle. I'll be out tonight but it may be kind of late. You don't need to dress. Bye bye."

He turned to the sheriff. "You don't see what?"

The phone rang again.

"Junction City calling Mr. Jarnegan. Hold the wire, please."

Jarnegan listened in silence. He and, "Yeah," a few times and finally, "I guess so. Okay. Thanks a million. I'll let you know Sure. Sure. Before morning."

"Now," he said to the sheriff. "I'm going to sleep until eleven o'clock. You come back down and wake me up about that time. Maybe I'll have some errands you can run."

AT eleven-fifteen Jarnegan was stealing through the wooded grounds of the Lawrence estate. From the privet hedge he regarded the house with great interest. A portico on the east side bore a lattice work trellis.

In a few seconds Jarnegan was up the lattice, tugging at a pair of French doors. They stuck. He broke out a pane of glass with the butt of his gun, crouched in the shadows waiting and listening for long moments before reaching inside and opening the door.

He slunk in, scuttled rapidly for the protecting shadow of a low divan. For a long while he listened. From below came the strains of a radio, soft and vibrant. He stole to the top of the stairway, leaned over and listened again. Only the music. Nothing more.

A narrower stair led to a gabled third story. At the top Jarnegan paused. Down the hallway a crack of light gleamed beneath the last door. A small porch-like balcony opened off the end of the hall. Jarnegan moved to the balcony, peered to his left and into the open screened window of a lighted room.

A woman paced the floor. She had red hair

and white skin and hard eyes. She wore a black bandeau and a pair of scanty step-ins of the same color. As she walked, her bare heels came down viciously on the floor, her breasts quivered and trembled with every step.

"I think you're just playing around," she grated and Jarnegan started at the fury in her voice. "You've found out where the stuff is, but you've fallen for this dame and want to stick as long as possible. I won't have it, I won't have it!"

A man hove into view. His voice was anxious. "You know that isn't true. You know I love you! My God, haven't I proved it? According to Sanderson's story, she knows where the stuff is, but she thinks I know, too. Can I come right out and ask her? She'd suspect something right away. I don't like it any better than you do but we'll have to wait, that's all!"

The woman sneered. "You don't seem to mind the time you spend with her! She thinks you're her husband! Bosh! And here I am up here all by myself—"

She began to sob, her white shoulders shaking. Hudson, the butler, took her in his arms, pressed her close and kissed her hair. "Don't cry, darling. We'll find out, tonight. I'll make her tell me tonight; then we'll run away. We'll be all alone dear, just you and I. You know how I love you!" His arms tightened about her, strained her to him.

"I can't help it," she cried, "I am jealous of her!"

His lips pressed the words back into her mouth. They stood there molded as one and the man picked her up, carried her out of Jarnegan's sight. Jarnegan stole back into the hallway, his lips grimly compressed.

**T**HE music still came from below. He went down the narrow steps. On the second floor he opened doors. Into each room he stepped noiselessly and sniffed. In the third

trial, the third room, he closed the door softly behind him. The pencil beam of his flash verified the theory. It was Mrs. Lawrence's bedroom.

The vanity table, laden with crystal bottles, the deep bed, the ruffled coverlet. It was familiar to Jarnegan. He'd been there before. Long black velvet curtains obscured the French doors. Noiselessly, Jarnegan slipped behind them and settled down to wait.

When the luminous dial of his wrist watch read twelve-forty-five, the door opened and soft lights flashed on. Humming to herself Mildred Lawrence stepped into the room. Through the crack in the curtains Jarnegan watched while she began to disrobe, and stood in sheer lingerie before the mirror admiring her body. She pirouetted almost gayly, smiling at herself.

She sat down to repair her makeup, touched a crystal dropper of perfume to the lobes of both ears, to the downy valley between her breasts. Presently she donned a sheer net nightgown of orchid, slipped back the covers of the bed, but changed her mind and sat down on a large chair, book in hand.

She read for some five minutes. A soft scratching at the door.

"Come in," she said softly.

The door opened. It was Hudson, clad in a red robe. He walked toward her, a thin smile on his face. Round white arms were outstretched, flung about his neck. Passionate red lips closed on his. Jarnegan watched until a white hand reached out to flip out the floor lamp.

Jarnegan crouched in the darkness and waited patiently. After a time he half dozed, kept himself awake with an effort, and was rewarded minutes later by the return of the light. He peered through the crack.

Hudson was sitting on the arm of the chair. Mrs. Lawrence stood by the table, her eyes curious.

"Do you think it's safe?" she asked.

"Certainly," said the man. "I tell you I want to check some numbers. I have to have them."

Without a word she reached behind the mantel clock, fumbled for a minute, and emerged with something that looked like a long spike. Straight to the French doors she walked. Jarnegan quit breathing. He could have reached out and touched her. She squatted quickly, picked with the point of the nail for a moment at a length of floorboard. The nail sunk into a hole, almost half its length in depth. She pushed against the nail, finally turned and said, "Help me."

Eyes burning the man sank down beside her, brushed her hands aside, and pushed hard. The entire floorboard slid, moved slowly, its far end passing under the baseboard against the wall. An inch at a time, a black hollow was revealed. With a little cry, the man thrust his hands into the black gap, pulled them out loaded with papers. Eagerly he spread the bonds at his feet, his breath coming hard.

The woman moved slowly toward the bed, reached beneath the pillow.

She said, "Look!"

The man turned, big face paling as he saw the shiny little gun.

"Put your hands up," said Mrs. Lawrence, "and step away from the window."

**S**ECONDS later: "Did you think you were fooling me! My husband, James Lawrence, has ignored me for years. True enough we planned this thing out in exactly the way you've worked it! But you aren't my husband! I don't know who you are—don't know where he is—and I don't care!"

"What are you going to do? For God's sake, don't call the police!"

She laughed. "You know," her voice was low, "it's been nice with you around! If I was sure my husband wouldn't turn up, you and I might make a deal ourselves!"

His eyes gleamed "He won't turn up. He's dead, Mildred, dead! I swear it. Let's take this money and go away together. We'll be happy! We'll—"

She moved toward him, the gun hanging at her side. As his arms went about her and his lips met hers, it thudded to the floor.

The door opened softly.

"You damned rats! Both of you!" The lovers sprang apart. The red-headed maid stood there in the doorway covering them both with an automatic. "I heard what you said! I heard it all! How long do you think I'll stand for this?"

Jarnegan started to get into action but her gun beat him to it.

The man in the red robe sighed softly, crumpled at the knees, and laid his check on the carpet. Then was a round blue hole between his eyes.

Step by step the maid advanced into the room, the blonde cowering back in terror.

"And now you, you cheap hustler!"

"Hold it," said Jarnegan.

The maid whirled, the gun exploded, the bullet broke glass from the French doors.

Jarnegan crouched and fired. The maid screamed, dropped the gun and grasped her bleeding wrist. The blonde Mrs. Lawrence fainted. Jarnegan reached for the phone.

**T**WENTY minutes later Sheriff Tolliver looked up from the bonds he had been thumbing and said, "You have the luck of the devil!"

Jarnegan bristled. "Luck! I got brains, that's what, and I play my hunches! When I saw that stiff down at the Palace Hotel, I knew something was stinking. Why would anyone shave the sideburns off a corpse? I'd just been out here and the only guy I ever heard of in town that had monkey side-burns like that was the Lawrence butler! Hell, I use my head!"

The sheriff looking bewildered, started to speak, but Jarnegan hurried on.

“Remember when I came out here the first day with you and kidded the butler? I got eyes, I have. The thing about him that tickled me most was that Adam’s apple of his! You could have hung your hat on it! The stiff at the hotel had the marks of shaved sideburns and an Adams apple just like that! But when I hurried out here the butler was alive! Made me feel mighty bad until I noticed the front of his throat was as smooth as mine! So I asked myself a question. If the real butler was dead, who was this on the job out here?”

“Checking through those missing men dodgers was a break, I’ll admit that, but I had weights and measurements to go by and I used my head. I looked up three guys in this state that had checked out, and the last one fit. That guy was a plastic surgeon from over at Junction City with a shady reputation and a screwy wife. I don’t blame him for leaving her! I checked the note he left her with the signature on the Palace Hotel register. Are you beginning to see now?”

The sheriff shook his head dumbly. “Was the stiff at the Palace this missing doctor from Junction City?”

Jarnegan spat in disgust.

“Sap! How could a man beat in his own face and smash his own fingers! This stiff here on the floor is the missing doctor! He registered at the Palace, then came and got Hudson, the butler, and took him down to the

hotel to knock him off. He had to get him out of the way. The red-head here is his sweetie, his nurse from back in Junction City!”

“But wouldn’t Mrs. Lawrence know he wasn’t Hudson, the butler?”

Jarnegan sighed. “Screwy, she was in on it. Lawrence looted the bank and was going to come back and play the part of the butler for the rest of his life after Doc Herrin fixed up his face. His wife knew that. And she knew from the first that the guy taking Hudson’s place wasn’t her husband. But she fell for him, see? She didn’t care. She liked him! Pretty clever scheme all the way through, except it didn’t work.”

“For Pete’s sake, don’t go,” said Tolliver. “I’m all mixed up. If this guy here is Dr. Herrin and this dame is his nurse and the stiff in the morgue is the real Hudson —the butler—where in hell is James Lawrence!”

Jarnegan lit a cigarette. “That was Junction City phoned me just before you left the office this afternoon. They followed my tip and dug up the new floor in Doc Herrin’s garage. There was a couple of decomposed bodies beneath the floor. I expect by now, they’re identified one of them as Lawrence. I’ll be seeing you-”

“Where are you going?” wailed the sheriff. “Wait, I need you! Listen—”

“Forget it,” said Jarnegan. “I’m a busy man. I got a date with a blonde.”