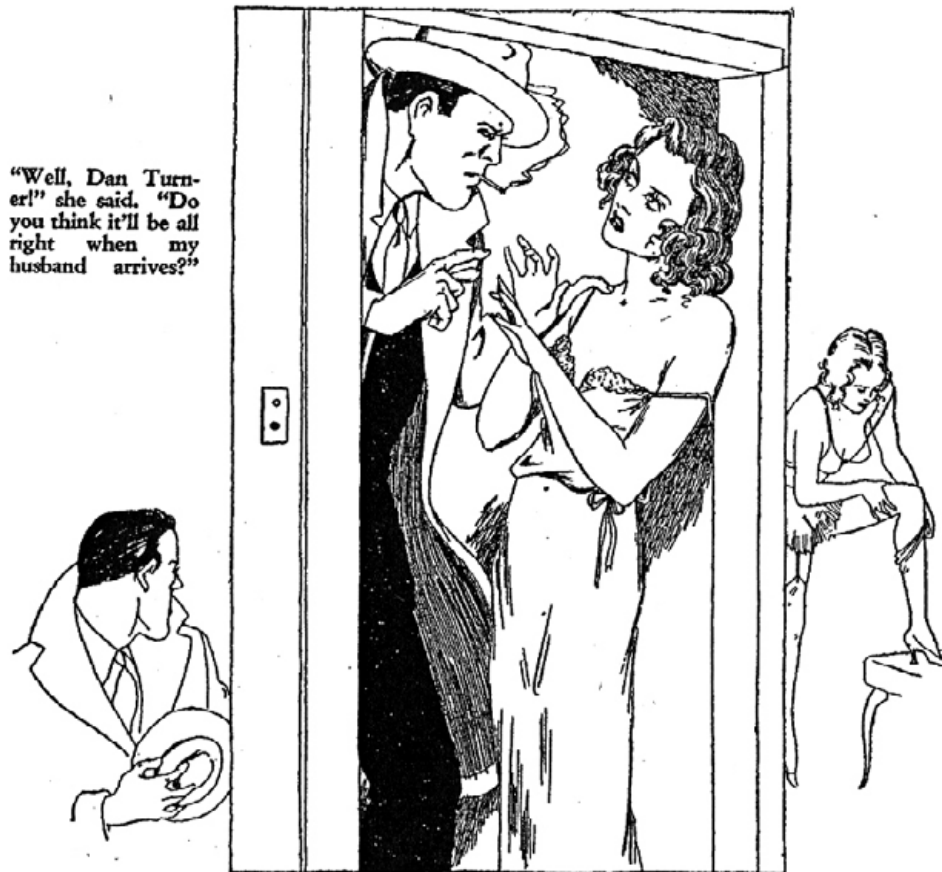


COOKED!

By Robert Leslie Bellem

An ounce of murder-prevention is worth a pound of chasing a killer. So Dan tries to help the girl—only to find that a very fast one is being pulled on him.



I TIPPED the bell-hop four bits and said: "Scram, kid." He winked at me and beat it. Then I locked the door of that hotel bedroom and turned around.

Lola Lambert was already peeling off her duds. In the glow of the room's single, shaded lamp I watched her. She unfastened her dress, whipped it off over her brunette curls. Then she stood there in snug-fitting silken panties bandeaux, and sheer chiffon hose.

She smiled and said: "Well, Dan

Turner—do you think I'm seductive enough to interest my own husband when he arrives?"

I blinked and set fire to a gasper. "Damn tootin'!" I agreed. And I meant it. I exhaled a lungful of smoke and put the focus on her.

She was a sock in the eye, no fooling. Just to look at her made me itch all over. Her raven black hair made her skin seem even whiter than it really was. Her dark eyes were twin challenges, and she pursed her crimson lips as if inviting a kiss.

But I kept myself under control. After all, a private dick hasn't got any right to play around with his clients; and Lola Lambert was a client of mine. Besides, I didn't have time for any monkeyshines. Lola's estranged hubby, Dr. Timothy Lambert, was due to arrive any minute. And the stage had to be set for him.

I watched while Lola opened her overnight bag. She extracted a diaphanous negligee, slipped herself into it. The garment clung to her like a wet spiderweb, concealing very little of her feminine charms. Lord, but that dame was built! It was no wonder she dragged down ten grand a week as a star in F-K-V Pictures. She had what it takes.

As soon as she had adjusted the negligee to her own satisfaction, she gave me a worried look. "It's time for Timothy to be showing up, isn't it?" she whispered nervously.

I looked at my wrist-ticker. It was nine in the evening. "Yeah," I said.

"Then—hadn't you better hide?"

I nodded and went to the closet on the other side of the room. It wasn't a very deep closet, and I had a hell of a time squeezing my bulk into it. But I made the grade, pulled the door almost shut after me.

SQUATTING there in the semidarkness, I began to wonder. It suddenly struck me that I was being more of a damned fool than usual. Kidnaping is ugly stuff to fool with in California. If anything went haywire, I might find my elbow in a sling. On the other hand, Lola Lambert was paying me five G's to put the snatch on her estranged hubby for just one night. And five G's is important geetus in my language.

So I kept my fingers crossed and hoped for the best.

A couple of minutes dragged by. Then I heard a knock on the door of the bedroom, and I peeped out of my closet.

I saw Lola Lambert open the bedroom

door and step back. A guy walked into the room. He was Dr. Timothy Lambert, Lola's hubby. He was a dark, short guy with a perpetual sneer. When he saw his wife, he stiffened.

"Lola!" he growled. "What the hell does this mean? I received an urgent call to come to this hotel room. Someone said it was an emergency case. Now I find you here. What's the idea?"

Lola said: "Tim . . . darling . . .!" and held her arms out to him. At the same time, she allowed the front of her negligee to come open. From where he was standing, her husband certainly got one swell eye-full of breasts and things.

But the damned sap didn't seem a bit interested. He must have been made of ice. He said: "Layoff the coquetry, Lola. You know how matters stand between us. That stuff is out—absolutely out." His voice was rasping, frigid.

"Oh, I know, Tim!" Lola whispered forlornly. Her shoulders slumped. "You've been so infatuated with that blonde Honey Holland girl that you've lost all your love for me. But now that Honey's leaving Hollywood, I thought . . . maybe . . ."

I crouched in my closet, watching and listening to what went on. Mentally I reviewed what I knew about Lola Lambert and her doctor-husband. This Timothy Lambert person was a drugless physician; he called himself an electropath. He did all his healing with ultra-violet rays, sun-lamps and the like. As the husband of a prominent screen star like Lola, he'd built himself a swell practice among the Hollywood picture people.

Recently, however, Dr. Lambert had fallen neck-over-appetite in love with a cute little bleached-blond extra dame named Honey Holland. The affair had reached the stage where Lambert had left Lola altogether; and gossip had it that he spent most of his time in Honey Holland's

apartment.

Looking at him from my closet, I wondered how in hell any frill could ever fall for him. He was lean, little, ugly. And right now he had a sneer on his map that made me want to soak him square in the teeth. He was pushing Lola away from him and saying: "Never mind bringing Miss Holland's name into this, Lola. And as far as you and I are concerned—we're through! Get me?" He started backing toward the door.

It beats hell how a woman's love for a guy can make her lose all her self-respect and backbone. That's what was happening to Lola Lambert. I saw her go to her knees before her hubby, like a slave. "Tim—you can't leave me—!" she pleaded. She clutched at his legs.

"Lay off me!" he rasped. "I've got work to do tonight. Important work. Let me go."

I could see that she was fighting a lost cause. He didn't go for what she had. Not one damned bit. I realized that Lola had lost her play. It had been her intention to keep him occupied all night, if she could. But now that she'd failed, it was up to me to step into the picture and put the grab on him; earn my five grand fee.

I waited until Lola had maneuvered him around so that his back was toward me. Then I stepped softly out of the closet. I dragged out my .32 roscoe from its shoulder-holster. I reversed it. Then I tapped Dr. Timothy Lambert on the noggin. I wasn't too gentle about it, either.

He went out like a light.

BEFORE HE hit the floor, I grabbed out the length of cord I had ready in my pocket. Then I tied the doctor's wrists behind him; tied his ankles, too. I slapped a handkerchief into his kisser, wadded it tight.

Lola looked at me. "You—you haven't—hurt him badly, have you?" she whispered.

I said: "Not as bad as he deserves!"

"You know where to—to take him?" she asked me.

I grunted, nodded. Then I said: "Will you still be here when I get back?"

"Y-yes. I'll w-wait for you. Then we'll make sure Honey Holland gets away on the eleven o'clock plane for New York. After that, it will be safe to release Timothy . . ."

"Okay," I told her. "Leave everything to me." I started for the window. We'd engaged this particular room because the fire-escape ran directly past it. Now I raised the sash, took a swift gander into the darkness outside. Below me, the alley was dark, deserted. The coast was clear.

I hefted Dr. Timothy Lambert's unconscious form to my shoulder, crawled out the window with him. I started down. Behind me, Lola shut the sash and pulled down the shade.

It was no trick at all to carry Lambert down to the alley, hoist him into my parked coupe. Then I crawled in alongside his slumped figure and stepped on the starter. I headed my jalopy hell-for-leather toward Culver City.

Twenty minutes later I parked behind the F-K-B studio lot where Lola Lambert worked. The big, gloomy sound-stage buildings loomed out of the darkness like ghosts; a fog was beginning to blow in from Santa Monica. I didn't mind that. I was glad for it. The gathering mists would keep any stray passer-by from seeing what I was up to.

I dragged Dr. Timothy Lambert out of my hack, lugged him toward the old open-air studio behind the present F-K-B buildings. This old-time open-air lot was where movies had been made in the old days of silent films, before the advent of the talkies; before it was necessary to have vast, sound-proof, enclosed stages.

The place was a junk-yard of discarded sets; a mystic maze of littered back-drops, false-fronted buildings and the like. It hadn't

been used in years; there wasn't even a watchman on guard at the entrance. Earlier that day, Lola Lambert had taken me through the joint; had shown me a swell spot to park her erring hubby for the night.

Through a screwy puzzle of western towns, dippy-looking European villages and miscellaneous disused outdoor sets I carried the unconscious Dr. Timothy Lambert. At last I came to the place I was looking for. It was a dilapidated, old-time set representing a medieval castle courtyard.

The main door of the castle's false front was a practical prop—it really worked on hinges. I opened it and stepped inside. I dumped Dr. Lambert on a pile of littered trash and cobwebs. Then I pulled out a gasper and flared a match to it.

In the light of the match, I saw Lambert's eyes flutter open. He stared up at me—and if a glance could have killed me, I'd have been one dead rooster. He choked around his gag; tried to curse at me.



I LEANED over him, blew smoke in his mug. I said: "Take it easy, Doc. I'm really doing you a favor, putting you out of circulation for the night. I'm keeping you from being a murderer. And I'll turn you loose by daybreak."

"Mm-f-ff! Gl-ig-gg!" he chewed at his gag.

I said: "Listen, boy-friend. If you only knew it, this is the sweetest break you ever got. Lola, your wife, has told me all about your quarrel with your sweetie, Honey Holland. I'm hep to the whole damned set-

up. You and the blonde Holland chicken had one hell of a row. That's why the Holland baby is leaving Hollywood tonight. She is taking the eleven o'clock plane for New York—and from there, she's going to London to work in British films."

Lambert choked some more.

I went on: "When you fought with Honey Holland, you made certain threats. You told her that if she left you, you'd bump her off. You're so dippy about that blonde tramp that you'd rather have her dead than away from you. And from what your wife has told me about you, you're just vindictive enough to go through with some murder scheme against Honey Holland."

Lambert glared up at me.

I said: "Well, Doc, you're getting a break. It so happens that Lola, your wife, loves you to beat hell—in spite of the way you've treated her. She loved you so damned much that she doesn't want you getting into any jams with old John Law. In other words, Lola was afraid that you would carry out your threat—that you'd kill Honey Holland tonight, before Honey could get on the plane for the east. Therefore, Lola hired me to put the snatcheroo on you; to keep you here until morning. By that time, Honey Holland will be well on her way—and you won't be able to do anything rash about it. See?"

He squirmed and twisted as if he'd gone completely utsnay. He kept shaking his head from side to side and glaring at me, as if to deny what I'd said. But what the hell! I didn't pay any attention to his head-shaking. I just blew him a kiss and left him there.

I puzzled my way through the maze of battered, weather-beaten open-air sets and finally got to my jalopy. Just as I crawled into the hack, I saw somebody in a parked roadster across the street. It worried me a little; and I swung my own machine around in a U-turn, so that I'd pass close to that parked roadster.

Just as I drove by the other gas-buggy,

the guy leaned forward to flick on his ignition-switch and his dash-light. In the glow, I saw his pan. I recognized him. He was Freddie Lerch, the F-K-V director. He'd been with F-K-V Studios for years; but what the hell was he doing here now, at this late hour of the night? And how long had he been here? Had he seen me lugging Dr. Timothy Lambert into that old back lot?

AS I DROVE on past him, something bothered me, puzzled me. It was a stray bit of gossip I'd heard somewhere. What was it? Then I remembered. About a year ago, the scandal-mongers had linked Freddie Lerch's name with the blonde extra girl, Honey Holland! Lerch was supposed, at that time, to have been in love with the Holland floozie. Then he lost her to Dr. Lambert. Or anyhow, that's what the gossips said.

It was a damned peculiar coincidence that Lerch should be there on that spot tonight, of all nights. It had been rumored, some while back, that Lerch was sore as hell at Dr. Timothy Lambert because Lambert had taken Honey Holland away from him. Of course, Lerch had never done anything about it. Just the same, I didn't like the idea of seeing Freddie Lerch at this particular time and place.

However, there wasn't anything I could do about it. So I headed my jalopy back toward Hollywood; and about a half-hour later I walked into that hotel bedroom where I'd left Lola Lambert.

She was still there, waiting for me. And she was still wearing that filmy, revealing negligee. The minute I walked into the room, she came toward me.

She said: "D-did you leave Timothy in that castle courtyard set?"

I said: "Yeah. Left him all tied I up like a bundle of meat. He'll be safe until morning."

"Oh—how can I thank you, Dan Turner?" she whispered. "You've saved him from . . . being a murderer. . . ."

I grinned and said: "You needn't thank me. After all, you paid me five thousand clams for the job."

"Yes, b-but—you d-don't know how much this all means to me!" she whimpered. And she crept close to me, as if she wanted me to cuddle her in my arms and comfort her.

Well, that wasn't hard to do. After all, I'm human—and Lola Lambert was certainly one of the prettiest pieces of female I'd ever run into. I slipped an arm around her waist and pulled her against me.

She felt warm and seductive to my touch. I could feel the satin smoothness of her body, through that thin negligee—and I could see plenty, too. First thing I knew, I was tilting her chin upward.

I planted my lips against her a mouth and kissed her.

She certainly knew how to kiss. Her fragrance drifted to my smeller, started my pulses to pounding in my temples. She strained me toward her. "Dan—!" she whispered. "I—I wasn't able to attract my own husband. Was it because I'm so . . . ugly . . .?"

I said: "Ugly? Hell, no, darling! You've got everything!"

She cuddled closer . . .

LATER, WHEN I saw that it was getting close to eleven o'clock, I said: "We'd better be on our way, Lola. We've got to get to the Glendale airport in time to see that Honey Holland boards that eleven o'clock plane for New York."

"All right, D-Dan," Lola whispered. She slipped off her negligee, put on her dress. I watched the operation. No question about it, Lola Lambert was built. . . .!

She stuffed her negligee into her overnight bag, and together we left the room; left the hotel. We got into my jalopy and drove toward Glendale. We reached the airport just five minutes before the New

York plane pulled out.

I took a squint at the passengers aboard the plane. But I didn't see the blonde Honey Holland. She should have been there by that time. I went into the station, found the ticket-agent. I said: "Didn't you have a reservation for a Miss Holland on this plane?"

He said: "Yes."

"Was it canceled at the last minute?" I asked him.

"No. But she hasn't arrived yet," he told me.

I went back outside, kept my peepers peeled for the last-minute arrival of the Holland babe. But she didn't show up. The plane took off without her.

I went back to my parked coupe, where Lola Lambert was waiting for me. Lola looked pale: "She—she didn't make the plane!" she whispered.

"No. She didn't make it," I said.

Lola said: "Do—do you suppose . . . something has happened to her? Is it possible that Timothy got loose and . . . killed her before she left her apartment . . .?"

"Not a chance!" I said. "I left him tied plenty tight."

"Then I don't understand why Honey Holland didn't get here in time to catch that plane!" Lola cried. Her lips were trembling. As I crawled into my coupe, alongside her, she grabbed my arm. "Dan!" she whispered. "Take me out to that R-K-V lot. I w-want to make sure Timothy is still there—"

I nodded. Matter of fact, I wanted to check up on the doctor myself. So I nosed the jalopy toward Culver City and stepped on the gas.

Lola Lambert sat close to me, and I could feel her thigh trembling as I drove. She was still trembling when we got out in front of that disused outdoor lot behind the R-K-V sound stages.

THE FOG was thicker than soup by that time. I'd have lost my way in the maze

of obsolete outdoor sets if it hadn't been for Lola. She seemed to know exactly where she was going. I followed her; and pretty soon we came to the medieval courtyard set where I'd left her husband all tied up.

I dragged out my pencil flashlight, found the castle door. I shoved on it; and it stuck. That seemed queer, because it had worked perfectly when I'd last opened it. I put my shoulder against the portal and shoved. The door finally creaked open.

I swept the beam of my flash in a short circle; and then I said: "What—!"

Dr. Timothy Lambert was gone!

There wasn't a trace of him anywhere. Not even a sign of the cord with which I'd tied him up. I felt a cold premonition sliding down my spine. Lambert had escaped. And Honey Holland, the girl he'd threatened to murder, hadn't shown up to catch her New York plane . . . !

Lola Lambert pressed herself against me. "My God!" she whispered in a frightened voice. "He's gone! He's killed Honey Holland! They'll hang him . . . !"

I said: "Take it slow, baby. Maybe we're all wrong about that. Maybe the Holland floozie was detained for some other reason. We had better check up on her."

"No! We must checkup on Timothy," Lola moaned. She was dragging me back through the maze of sets. In the fog, we found the exit from that back lot; scrambled into my hack. Then I started gunning my motor, aiming for Hollywood.

"We'll go to Timothy's house first!" Lola said tensely. "He might still be there—"

I nodded, shoved my throttle to the floorboards. We cut through the fog like a knife through pea soup; and pretty soon we screeched to a halt before the house on Sunset where Timothy Lambert had been living since he'd split with his wife.

There were lights downstairs in the place; and when we raced up to the porch, I saw that the front door was open just a little

way. I smacked into that door, shoved it all the way open. Then, with Lola at my heels, I went bursting into Dr. Lambert's front room—his reception room.

I didn't see anybody. But I heard something that stiffened me. It was a low, feminine moan from the adjoining room. I hurled myself into that next chamber; and all of a sudden I felt as if somebody had kicked me in the guts. I was in Dr. Lambert's therapy-room. The place was lined with all sorts of electrical gadgets. But I didn't look at them. I was staring at something just in front of me—

IT WAS A sort of operating table. Over it, banking it on either side, I saw a double battery of sunlamps and ultra-violet ray lights with crackling, blue quartz tubes. The sun-lights and quartz violet-ray tubes were all turned on full blast. Under them, strapped to the operating table, was a writhing nearly naked feminine figure—

A blonde dame!

She was tied, hand and foot; and wide straps held her to the table. Her body must have been damned pretty not so very long ago. But it wasn't pretty now. It was a beet-red color all over, from neck to ankles; big, watery blisters were already forming.

She was Honey Holland, the girl whom Dr. Lambert had threatened to murder! And she was being slowly cooked to death by those damned quartz lamps!

Like a flash, I leaped at the lights, smashed them away. I found the connecting wires, ripped them out. I heard Lola Lambert scream horribly, behind me. I whirled on her. "Shut up, for the love of God!" I growled. Then I leaned over the blonde Honey Holland, lifted her head.

She opened her eyes, stared at me through her hellish agony. I said: "Who did this to you, Miss Holland?"

"Tim . . . Lambert . . . sent for me to come here . . ." she gasped. "He grabbed me

. . . as I came in the front door. Strapped me to the table. Turned the lights on me . . . all dressed in white . . . all dressed in white . . . oh, God . . . God . . ." Her eyes closed. She lost consciousness.

I stared down at her for a single instant. I knew she was done for. Those damned lamps had burned her horribly. She might live a few hours—even a day or so—but she would never recover. She must have lain exposed to those hellish artificial sun-rays for a long time. And those rays are murderous. An hour under them is equivalent to several days direct exposure to strong sunlight. If ever there was a fiendish way to commit murder, this was it! Honey Holland must have suffered the tortures of the damned, lying under those lamps. And she'd suffer one hell of a lot more before she kicked the bucket.

She heeded medical attention, and she needed it quick. I pivoted, brushed past Lola Lambert, hurled myself into the front room. I found a phone, snatched at it, dialed the nearest emergency hospital. "Quick!" I rasped. "An ambulance—and first-aid dressings for third-degree burns!" Then I gave the address and started to hang up.

I never completed the job of putting that receiver back in its prongs. From behind me, something smashed down on my cranium. I saw stars. Then I didn't see anything at all. Everything went black. I was out.

WHEN I opened my glims, an ambulance interne was forcing a slug of rye down my gullet. I looked up and saw several other guys standing around. One of them was my pal Dave Donaldson, of the homicide squad.

I said: "Dave—what the hell—"

"The hospital people phoned me," Dave said. "This is a murder case. That Honey Holland wren is a goner. Won't live till morning. She was literally cooked alive. And what the hell happened to you, Turner?"

"I don't know," I told him. Then I spotted Lola Lambert over in a chair. She had a bandage around her head. I said: "Maybe you can tell me, Lola."

She got to her feet, weakly. "J-just as you were phoning, I heard a sound," she said. "I looked—and saw T-Timothy, m-my husband, coming into the room. I tried to call out—and he hit me over the head with something that looked like a blackjack. I—I don't know any more. I woke up to find the ambulance man binding my head."

I managed to gain my pins. I was feeling plenty woozy. I reached out and took that bottle of rye from the ambulance guy; and I sucked it dry. The good old alcohol starting seeping through me, and I commenced to feel a little better. Also, I began to have an idea.

I said: "So it was your husband, eh, Lola?"

She nodded.

Dave Donaldson said: "Sure. It must have been Lambert. He's the one who threatened to kill Honey Holland. And the Holland wren has made an ante-mortem statement, accusing him. Just wait till I lay my mitts on that bird!"

I said: "Well, Dave, I think I can help you put your hands on the murderer. Come on—let's get going." I started for the outdoors, grabbed Lola Lambert and pulled her with me.

Donaldson said: "Where are we headed?"

"To the residence of Freddie Lerch, the F-K-V director!" I answered him. "And we've got no time to lose!"

We piled into Donaldson's official hack. Donaldson drove—and he didn't spare the horsepower, either. He kept his finger on the siren-button and his brogan on the gas; and we went places in one hell of a hurry.

Donaldson scraped a lot of tread off his tires, braking to a stop in front of Freddie Lerch's house in Beverly. We all piled out of

the police car, started for the Lerch front door. On the way, Donaldson said: "Surely you aren't going to tell me it was Lerch who—"

Lola Lambert interrupted him. "Oh, God!" she moaned. "If it's only true! If it's only Lerch, instead of my Tim! If Tim is only innocent . . . !"

I shushed both of them. I said: "Keep quiet and let me do the gabbing." Then I pressed Freddie Lerch's door-bell.

A Filipino house-boy finally opened up for us. I said: "We want to see Mr. Lerch. Tell him it's the cops."

THE GUGU widened his eyes, turned and started pelting up the stairs. Pretty soon Freddie Lerch himself came flapping down, dressed in pajamas, dressing-gown and house slippers. He looked sleepy, startled. He said: "What's this all about?"

I said: "Mr. Lerch, what were you doing behind the F-K-V main lot tonight around ten o'clock?"

He scowled: "I'd been in my office, going over some papers. I was just leaving to come home, around ten o'clock. Why?"

I said: "Is it true that you were once in love with a girl named Honey Holland?"

"Yes—not that it's any of your damned business!" he snapped.

"Dr. Timothy Lambert took the Holland wren away from you, didn't he?" I persisted.

Lerch flushed angrily; He turned to Lola Lambert. He said: "Lola, what the hell's the idea of this guy asking me so many questions?"

"P-please answer them, Freddie," Lola whispered through dry lips.

Lerch turned back to me. "Okay. Since you want to know the truth—Yes, Lambert took Honey Holland away from me. So what?"

"You hated Lambert for that?" I said. "And you hated the Holland dame for giving you the go-by?"

His jaw jutted. "You can't pry into my business that way!" he growled. "To hell with you."

I tried another tack. I said: "All right, Mr. Lerch. We'll let that drop for a while. Now, maybe you'll answer some different questions. How long have you been with F-K-V Pictures?"

"Ten years," he said surlily.

"Do you happen to know," I asked him, "anything about a certain set on the old outdoor lot behind the present F-K-V studio layout? I refer to a set representing a medieval courtyard."

He said: "Yes. I remember that set. It was constructed several years ago for a silent picture which was never completed. The talkies came in about that time, so the production was shelved."

"Could you lead us directly to that castle courtyard set?" I asked him.

I held my breath until his answer came. He said: "Sure." Then I heaved a sigh of relief. I knew I was coming to the end of my puzzle.

WE WAITED until Lerch got some duds on. Then we all went out and piled into Dave Donaldson's official hack; started for Culver City lickety-split through the fog. At last Dave drew up before that old back lot. Freddie Lerch led us through the maze of old outdoor silent sets. Finally we gained that castle courtyard.

Donaldson snapped on his flashlight. I turned to Freddie Lerch. "You know your way around here pretty thoroughly, don't you?" I asked him.

"Why not? I was to direct the picture that was to have been made on this set!" he said.

I said: "Okay. Would you mind opening that castle door?"

"Not at all," he grunted. He went to the door, shoved against it. It swung inward easily, without a sign of sticking.

I said: "Wait!" and leaped toward Lerch.

I grabbed him. "Listen. Tell me. Is this the only set that looks like a castle courtyard?"

He shook his head. "No. There were two sets built for the picture—both identical in every way. One was to be destroyed in a big mob scene. We had the second one made for possible re-takes."

I said: "That's all I wanted to know!" and bashed past Lerch, through that property door. I whipped out my flash, snicked it on. I almost stumbled over the prone, trussed form of Dr. Timothy Lambert—exactly where I'd left him, several hours before.

I whirled, slammed myself back into the courtyard. I saw somebody running—

"Grab her, Dave!" I yelled, "*Grab Lola Lambert! She's your murderer!*"

Donaldson made a flying tackle, brought Lola Lambert down in a sprawled heap. He pinned her with his weight, and she shouted curses at him.

I said: "Shut up, you she-devil! You're the one who killed Honey Holland. You did it because you were jealous of her. . She'd taken your husband; and you knew he'd follow her to London. So you murdered her. And you tried to plant the crime on your hubby, so you'd have revenge on him for ditching you!"

She glared at me.

I said: "You tried to use me for a cat's-paw. You tried to fix things so that I'd give evidence against your husband. You got me to kidnap him and bring him to this set, leave him here. While I was doing that, you sneaked out of that hotel bedroom, lured Honey Holland to your husband's office. You wore a surgeon's white gown, cap and mask. That's why Honey Holland thought you were Timothy Lambert. You struck her, tied her on that operating-table, turned the sun-lamps on her and left her. You were back in the hotel room by the time I got there."

She choked out a sobbing curse.

I went on: "You had everything timed to

a hair. When we didn't find Honey Holland at the airport, you got me to drive you here to Culver City; and you led me into this old lot. *But you guided me to the duplicate castle-courtyard set.* That's why I didn't find your husband behind the door. I should have been suspicious when that other castle door stuck, instead of opening easily. But I was fooled for the time being. I really thought your husband had escaped."

I paused, lighted a gasper, took a deep drag. Then, I finished up: "It was you, Lola Lambert, who bashed me on the head when I was phoning from your husband's office for an ambulance. Later, you lied; said it had been your husband who'd socked me. If your plan had worked, you'd have gone

unsuspected. Later, you'd have come here and released your husband. The cops would have arrested him; and all his protests wouldn't have done him any good. Because his alibi wouldn't hold water. My own testimony would show that he had escaped from here hours before. Fortunately," I concluded, "that sticking castle door gave me the clue I needed. I realized I'd looked for Timothy Lambert behind the wrong door—on a duplicate set. So all I had to do was check up on the duplicate set with Mr. Lerch, here. And now you're all washed up. If Honey Holland dies, you'll hang."

I was right. Honey Holland died. And they hanged Lola Lambert.