

MILLION BUCK SNATCH

Guns roared in Chinatown. The police took it calmly. "Another tong war," they said. But Hollywood's super-sleuth was always a doubter. Wouldn't it seem more reasonable that somebody had deliberately shot at the girl to keep her from tipping any one off about the kidnaping?



I WALKED into the dimly-lighted Chink restaurant; took a swift squint around the joint. I was looking for somebody I'd never seen before. A dame in a red dress. A dame wearing a corsage of yellow tea-roses to identify her.

Over at a corner table I tabbed a wren

who answered that description. I walked up to her; flopped myself down at her table. I said: "Are you Ellen Morrow?"

She looked at me and nodded. "And you—?" she whispered.

I said: "I'm Dan Turner, private dick. This afternoon, you phoned me, asked me

to meet you here at eight o'clock tonight. Well, it's eight o'clock and here I am. Now, what's all this mysterious hocus-pocus about?"

She took a deep breath. It swelled out her breasts beneath that tight red dress she was wearing; made nice, taut mounds of them. I set fire to a gasper, put the focus on her through a cloud of blue smoke. The rest of her measured up to par, I decided. She had chestnut-brown hair, blue eyes, a full mouth ripe for kissing. Her hips were neither too narrow nor too wide. Her legs were shapely. She was thirty, maybe, I figured.

Not a raving beauty, but easy enough on the eyes. And wise enough to know the score.

She said: "Mr. Turner, I'm—I'm worried. That's why I asked you to meet me here tonight. You—you're sure nobody followed you to this place?"

I said: "I don't think I was tailed. What are you worried about?"

She lowered her voice. "You know Sherry Church, the child actress and movie-star, don't you?"

"Yeah," I grunted. It was a dumb question. Everybody knew Sherry Church. That six-year-old, curly-topped kid was one of the biggest box-office draws in films.

As a matter of fact, I also knew Sherry Church's old man—Joe Church. He was a former bank clerk. A nice, sociable guy. Only the day before, I'd shot a round of golf with him. Licked him, too. Collected a fifty-buck bet from him. He was always gambling on something or other; and he usually lost. But what the hell? His kid was making plenty of geetus. He didn't have to worry.

I looked into Ellen Morrow's blue eyes and repeated: "Yeah. I know Sherry Church. So what?"

The dame said: "I—I'm Sherry Church's governess. And this afternoon, I overheard something. That's why I called you, Mr. Turner. I overheard Sherry's nursemaid, Patsy Patton, talking on the telephone. And—"

THAT was as far as Ellen Morrow got. All of a sudden, hell let loose. I heard a window-pane being smashed at the rear of the cafe. An automatic spat flame and said: "*Ka-chow-chow-chow!*"

I felt a hot slug go zipping past my right ear. Ellen Morrow let out a shrill beef; turned white. Again that automatic said: "*Ka-chow-chow-chow!*"

A glass shattered to hell-and-gone on the marble top of the table in front of me. Water splashed up in my kisser. All around me, people were screaming, cursing. Some of the lights went out.

I jumped up. I slapped Ellen Morrow across the jaw—hard. The slap knocked her backward out of her chair. Before her shoulders hit the floor, I upset our table. It overturned, crashed on its side. I ducked behind it; pulled Ellen Morrow with me.

The table-top acted as a shield for us. I could hear bullets spanking into it, skittering off the polished marble. Somebody shrieked out a high-pitched, wailing gibber.

I gandered around. I saw a slant-eyed Chinese waiter go down, punch the floor with his flat face. He lay sprawled, kicking. There was a round blue hole in his noggin. His brains were all over the place.

I yanked out the .32 automatic I always carry in a shoulder-holster. I took a peep at the cafe's smashed rear window. A masked bozo was outside that window, squeezing lead out of a smoking roscoe as fast as he could throw it.

I pulled down on him, fast.

But just as I tripped my trigger, the louse moved sidewise. Even so, I thought I winged him. I heard him yelp. Then his black-masked mug vanished in the night.

For a minute, everything got quiet as hell on Sunday.

Ellen Morrow whimpered against me. I could feel the trembling of her body. She said: "N-now do you see why I wanted to m-meet you secretly, Mr. T-Turner? I had a hunch they'd try to m-murder me . . .!"

I slipped my left arm around her waist. My hand brushed against the swelling base of her breast. It felt nice. I said: "You think that guy was gunning for you, sweetheart?"

She started to answer me. Then a police whistle shrilled outside. A harness copper came bouncing into the joint. I stood up. The shamus spotted me; spotted the roscoe in my mitt. He raised his service .38, leaped at me.

Before I could blink, he swatted me a belt on the dome. His gun-muzzle took me on the temple, batted a lump on my head the size of a duck-egg. I went down—and stayed down. When I opened my eyes again, that screwy harness bull had the nippers on my wrists.

I said: "You damn fool! What the hell—!"

He yanked me to my feet. He was plenty tough. He said: "You rubbed out this Chink waiter!" and pointed to the dead guy on the floor. "Now, come clean. Why didja do it?"

"You dumb, lousy flatfoot!" I said.

His eyes narrowed. He started to pop me again. And then somebody came roaring in through the restaurant's front door.

IT WAS my friend Dave Donaldson, of the homicide squad. Dave yelled: "Hey, you ape!" and threw himself at the cop, pulled him off me. Then he said: "Haven't

you got any better sense than to slug a guy like Dan Turner?"

That flatty blushed like a sunset. He said: "Cripes—is this Dan Turner? I didn't know—"

Dave Donaldson said: "You don't know anything—that's why you're in harness! Take those cuffs off Turner's wrists."

"Yeah," I said, sticking out my mitts.

Donaldson turned to me. He said: "What the hell is this all about, Turner?"

I said: "Damned if I know. I was sitting here being peaceful when all of a sudden some sharp apple opened that rear window and started tossing chunks of lead. That Chinese waiter stopped a slug with his skull. Then I took a pot-shot at the masked hombre, and he got away. But I think I winged him. I still had my roscoe in my fist when this bright shamus dashed in and slapped me for a row of brick out-houses."

Donaldson went over, took a gander at the dead Chink. He grunted with satisfaction. "I catch!" he said. "Tong-war stuff. I recognize this dead Chink. He's Willie Fong—used to be a Hip Sing hatchetman up in Seattle. Probably an On Leong boy that drilled him. It's as plain as the nose on your face."

I rubbed my wrists where the nippers had been. Then I massaged that Easter-egg on my skull where that dumb flatty had conked me. My brains felt like scrambled eggs. I went over to the cashier's counter, stepped back of the cash-register. I picked a bottle of Vat 69 out of the case, knocked its neck off with the heel of my gat. Then I treated myself to a good, stiff swig.

It made me feel better. I started thinking clearly. When that happened, I noticed something. I said: "What the hell—!"

Dave Donaldson looked at me. "Anything wrong?"

"Plenty!" I answered. "There was a dame with me when the fireworks started. Now she's gone!"

"Dame?" Donaldson looked puzzled.

I said: "Yeah. Dame. Girl named Ellen Morrow. Claimed to be governess to Sherry Church, the kid actress. This Morrow skirt phoned me very mysteriously this afternoon. Asked me to meet her here tonight—said she had something important to tell me. Before she could get started, things happened. Now she's taken it on the lam!"

Dave Donaldson shrugged. "Probably took a powder on account of because she had the tripe scared out of her. I don't blame her much." Then he looked at the egg on my temple and said: "You'd better go on home. If your skull wasn't so thick you'd probably have had a fracture."

I nodded. And since there didn't seem any point in hanging around any longer, I scrambled.

I WENT out to where I'd parked my coupe on the side street. I climbed into the jalopy—and my leg encountered something. Something crouched on the floor-boards. Something soft, trembling. I flicked on the dash-light and said: "For God's sake!"

It was the dame, Ellen Morrow. At first I thought somebody had bashed her. But she'd only fainted. And I couldn't bring her to.

She needed a drink, I figured. So I propped her on the seat alongside me; stepped on the starter. I headed for my own apartment.

I parked outside my joint, carried Ellen Morrow in through the back entrance. I took her upstairs in the automatic elevator, hefted her into my flat, laid her on my divan. Her dress was tight as hell; seemed to make her breathing difficult. I

unfastened it, pulled it off her. Then I caught my breath.

She wasn't wearing anything but an excuse for a brassiere under the red dress. And there was nothing else except lacy panties which were about as concealing as cellophane.

I was still admiring her when pretty soon Ellen Morrow opened her blue eyes wide. She said: "Oh-h-h!" in a strangled whisper.

"Take it easy a minute, kiddo," I said. "Everything's jake. You're in my apartment." I left her, got two glasses and a decanter of Scotch. I poured her a drink and had a couple myself. Then I sat down on the divan alongside her and said: "How come you were in my hack, sweetheart?"

"I—I ran out of that restaurant and saw your car. I hid in it. Then I—I must have fainted. . ." Unexpectedly she put her bare arms around my neck, clung to me. I could feel soft mounds wabbling around on my chest. I liked it. I began to get ideas.

Her lips were red, moist . . . and very close to mine. I kissed her. Her chestnut hair was fragrant.

Well, what the hell! I'm as human as the next guy. What happened after that wasn't in any way my fault.

LATER, Ellen Morrow rested in my arms. She said: "I feel so safe . . . here with you! And to think that man almost murdered me, there in that cafe. . . !"

I grinned down at her. "You're wrong, baby. That mug wasn't shooting at you at all. The cops cleared up the whole thing. It was a tong-war bump-off. That Chink waiter had the finger on him; he was put on the spot."

"N-no! That masked man w-wanted to k-kill me . . . !" Ellen Morrow whispered. She trembled.

I stared at her and said: "See here, baby. Just why the hell would anybody

want to put a slug through you? What's it all about?"

She said: "I—I started to tell you back there in that restaurant. I'm governess to Sherry Church, the child star. This afternoon I heard Sherry's nurse-maid, Patsy Patton, telephoning to somebody. *And she was discussing a plan for the kidnaping of Sherry Church!*"

"What?" I gasped.

"Y-yes! That's why I think that man was shooting at me! I think Patsy Patton realized I'd overheard her conversation. So she put her accomplice on my trail to stop me from talking!"

I leaped to my feet. I said: "Good God! Of all the dumb tricks! You should have gone to the police right away with your story! You should have notified Sherry Church's parents, instead of waiting to see a private dick!"

Before Ellen Morrow could say anything back to me, I pelted to my telephone. I dialed police headquarters. "Let me talk to Dave Donaldson!" I grated into the transmitter.

The desk-sergeant said: "He's not here. He's been called to the residence of Sherry Church, the kid movie-actress."

I felt as if I'd been kicked in the guts. I said: "Why was he called there?"

"*The kid's been kidnaped; her nurse-maid was bumped off!*" the sergeant's voice clipped out over the wire.

I said: "For the love of God!" and slammed up the receiver. I whirled to Ellen Morrow. "Damn it!" I said. "It's true! The kid has been snatched!"

She went pale. "You—you mean—?"

I said: "Listen, sister. You stay here—and don't open the door for anybody, see?" Then I dived into my coat; made sure my .32 was loaded and easy in its holster. I lammed out of the apartment, raced downstairs to my jalopy.

I drove like all the fiends in hell. I thumbed my nose at eleven stop-signals, goosed my coupe until she registered seventy-five. It took me just thirteen minutes to reach the Church residence in Westwood. I saw a bunch of police-cars parked in front of the big, massive house; and I tore ten dollars' worth of tread off my tires, braking to a stop.

I raced up to the front porch, leaned on the doorbell. Pretty soon a sour-faced butler opened up for me. He had his left arm in a sling. He said: "Sorry, sir. No newspaper men are being admitted—"

"The hell!" I barked. I shoved past him. My hand touched his bandaged shoulder; he winced, cursed under his breath. I didn't pay any attention.

In the big reception-hall I spotted Dave Donaldson, looking glum. I said: "Hey—Dave!"

Donaldson came up to me. He said: "How in hell did you smell your way into this mess, Turner?"

"Never mind that!" I told him. "Give me the lay. Maybe I've got a clue for you."

He turned, took me to the ornate staircase. "Come along," he said. He led me upstairs, guided me to a room all decorated in pink and blue with Mother Goose animals frescoed on the walls. In one corner there was a small, child's-size bed—empty. In the other corner I saw a larger bed. The larger bed wasn't empty. Not by a damned sight.

It had a corpse on it.

IT WAS the corpse of a cute, pert little red-haired dame. Or rather, she must have been cute when she was alive. She wasn't so pretty now. Somebody had twisted a wire around her white neck, garroted her. Her face was all purplish and engorged. Her eyes were staring, bugging out of their sockets. She must have put up

a bit of silent struggle before she died. Silent, because she couldn't have uttered a sound with that loop of wire around her neck and her tongue sticking out like a blackened hunk of sausage. But you could see the signs of the fight she'd put up. Her night-gown was ripped into tatters, disclosing her boyish little breasts; revealing her flat stomach, her lithe hips, her smooth thighs and all the feminine intimacies of her pitiful, lifeless body.

I heard a choked sob behind me. I whirled. Two people had entered the nursery; a man and a woman. I recognized the woman from newspaper pictures I'd seen of her. She was Sherry Church's mother—a well-kept, svelte dame with plenty of curves in the right places. She looked wild-eyed, almost insane. With her was her husband, Joe Church, the kidnaped kid's dad—the chap I'd played golf with, only the day before.

Joe Church saw me. He said: "Turner—God! I'm glad you've come! I'll pay you anything—*anything*—if you'll find our little girl for us!"

I said: "It doesn't look as if there'd be much I could do. This is a police-case. Just how did this thing happen?"

"God—I don't know! My wife and I were getting ready for bed. We came into Sherry's room to see that she was safely asleep for the night. And when we came in, we found the window open . . . and . . . Sherry was . . . gone! She was gone, and Patsy Patton, her nursemaid, was . . . dead . . . just as you see her there on the bed!"

I went to the open window, leaned out. I sprayed the ground below with my flash. There was a patch of loamy soil below the window; but I couldn't see any traces of foot-prints or ladder-marks. And there was no trellis up the side of the house that anybody could have climbed.

I turned back, looked at Dave Donaldson. "Any ideas?"

He grunted, shook his head. Meanwhile, the kidnaped kid's mother had left the room.

To Joe Church I said: "Mind if I have a look around the house?"

"Help yourself, Turner," he told me lifelessly. His hand was trembling, awkward, nervous, as he lighted a gasper. The kidnaping of his little girl had taken all the gimp out of him.

I walked out into the hallway, wondering what the hell I could do to help. As I passed a door, a voice said: "M-Mr. Turner. . ."

IT WAS Sherry Church's mother. She was beckoning me into her boudoir. I entered; and I saw that she'd removed her dress. She was clad in a revealing negligee. I could see plenty of her well-preserved, svelte figure. Her breasts, her hips, showed the benefits of the bevy of massage-experts she patronized.

She looked at me desperately. "Mr. Turner!" she whispered. "A minute ago you said there wasn't much you could do. You acted as if you didn't want to . . . take the case . . ."

"Not that," I told her. "It's just—"

"I'll pay you any amount of money you want, if only you'll help us find Sherry!" she sobbed.

I shook my head. "It isn't the dough."

"Then—what else do you want? Is it . . . this . . .?" And she loosened her negligee; stood before me, practically naked.

I caught my breath. She had what it takes, no fooling! And she was offering me the greatest sacrifice she could think of.

I took hold of her negligee, pulled it closed. I said: "I'm not that much of a rat, Mrs. Church. Maybe I've got the rep of being a dame-chaser; but I'm not quite that bad."

"Then . . . you won't . . . help us?"

I smiled, patted her shoulder. "Sure I'll help you," I said. "Matter of fact, I think I've got a lead. Your kid's governess, Ellen Morrow, came to me tonight. She overheard something—a tip on the kidnaping. I've got her in my apartment now. I think I'll take Lieutenant Donaldson with me to my joint right away. We'll question her." And with that, I walked out of the room.

I almost bumped into that sourfaced butler in the hallway—the bird with the bandaged left arm. He was walking along as if he had work to do. But I wondered whether he'd been listening outside Mrs. Church's door . . .

I went back into the nursery; spoke to Dave Donaldson. I said: "Dave, when I came here I told you I had a clue. This is it: Tonight, I met a dame in that Chinese restaurant. The dame was Ellen Morrow—Sherry Church's governess."

It was Joe Church who said: "W-what did she want, Turner?"

I said: "She had a tip on this kidnaping. She said she'd overheard Patsy Patton, the nursemaid, talking over a plan on the telephone this afternoon."

Donaldson said: "But hell—Patsy Patton's this wren on the bed! The one who got bumped off!"

"Yeah," I said. "That's why I think maybe you and I had better run over to my joint and question Ellen Morrow some more. Maybe she can give us a little more dope."

"Okay!" Donaldson clipped out. "Let's get going. On our way, I want to stop at headquarters. Some of my dicks might have turned in some reports."

I went with Donaldson out of the house. We got into his official hack; and he drove like hell. We stopped in front of the Hollywood station, and Donaldson went inside a minute. When he came out, his eyes were glinting.

He said: "I've got news, by God! One of my men found out something about Patsy Patton, the nurse-maid who was rubbed out!"

"What about her?" I asked.

"She was secretly married to that butler in the Church home!" he rasped. "The guy with the bandaged arm! Turner, this thing is beginning to make sense now! The kidnaping was very evidently an inside job. It's my guess that the butler and Patsy Patton framed the whole thing. Then the butler bumped the Patton frill to keep her quiet! Come on—we're going back to the Church house and put the irons on that butler!"

I said: "Wait a minute. On our way, we might as well stop past my place and pick up the governess, Ellen Morrow."

"Oke," he grunted; and stepped on the starter.

TEN MINUTES later we stopped in front of my apartment. We went upstairs. I stuck a key in the lock of my door, turned it. Dave and I walked inside. And then I said: "What the hell—!"

The chestnut-haired Ellen Morrow was stretched out on my divan, just where I'd left her. There was a bullet-hole through her breast.

She was dead!

Dave Donaldson looked green around the gills. He said: "Good God! What does this mean?"

My brain was racing on all twelve. And all of a sudden, I thought I had the answer. I said: "Dave! That butler—did you happen to ask him why he was wearing a bandage on his arm?"

"Yeah. He said he fell down the basement steps this evening, sprained his shoulder."

I said: "Well, think this over. Suppose this Ellen Morrow dame—Sherry Church's governess—was really on the

inside of the kid's kidnaping. Suppose Ellen Morrow came to me for a blind . . . *to establish an alibi for herself tonight.* And suppose her accomplice, knowing she was to meet me at the Chink cafe, followed her; tried to kill her, so that he could grab off all the ransom money for himself!"

Donaldson's jaw jutted. "You mean—it wasn't a tong-war killing in that Chink joint? The gun was really trying to plug Ellen Morrow? And the Chinese waiter got hit by mistake?"

I said: "That's the general idea. And remember—I think I winged that gun-toter as he stood at the back window of the restaurant!"

"Which would account for the butler's bandaged shoulder!" Donaldson rasped. "And when he heard you say that Ellen Morrow was in your apartment, he came here ahead of us and fed her a lead pill!"

I said: "Maybe. Anyhow, I've got a scheme to trap him." I went over, picked up the dead Ellen Morrow's handbag, riffled through it. I found the address of the apartment where she lived. It wasn't very far away.

Donaldson said: "What's your plan, Turner?"

"You'll see," I told him. "Right now, help me get Ellen Morrow's corpse dressed. Then we're going to carry her body to her own apartment!"

"I don't get any part of this!" Donaldson growled. But nevertheless he helped me. It was a gruesome job, putting that red dress on Ellen Morrow's naked cadaver. Her body was still warm, limp; rigor mortis hadn't yet set in. But we made the grade. Then came the uncomfortable task of lugging the dressed corpse downstairs to Donaldson's parked car.

We propped her between us; made it appear that she was drunk and needed us to steady her. By good luck, there was

nobody in the hall; nobody in the elevator; nobody in my downstairs lobby.

DONALDSON helped me lift the Morrow dame's corpse into his machine. We put the dead woman on the front seat between us to hold it upright. Then Dave slammed into gear, tore hell-for-leather to an apartment building five blocks away. When we got there, I scouted around; made sure nobody was watching. Then Dave and I carried the murdered Ellen Morrow up to her own flat.

I said: "You undress her and put her to bed, Dave. I'll look around a minute."

He didn't like the idea very much; but he did as I told him. And while he was at it, I did a little snooping. By sheer luck I found a couple of rent-receipts; and they told me plenty!

I snatched up the telephone on the dead Ellen Morrow's desk. I dialed the Church home in Westwood. A surly voice said: "Hello?"

"Who's this?" I asked.

"This is the butler speaking."

I said: "Okay, Jeeves—or whatever your name is. Take a message up to Mr. and Mrs. Church, please."

"Yes, sir. What is the message, sir?"

I said: "This is Dan Turner, calling from police headquarters. The message is this: Ellen Morrow, Sherry Church's governess, has been shot in my apartment. Yes; that's what I said. Shot. But she isn't mortally wounded. She'll live. She is conscious, and has been removed to her own apartment. She has something very important to communicate to Mr. and Mrs. Church. She wants them to come to her apartment at once."

"Yes, Mr. Turner."

I said: "Tell Mr. and Mrs. Church that Lieutenant Donaldson and I will meet them at Ellen Morrow's apartment in an hour. We have some investigating to do;

but we'll be on hand as soon as possible. Get it?"

"Yes, sir," the butler answered in a queer, strained voice. He rang off.

I turned; saw Dave Donaldson standing behind me. He said: "What the devil are you cooking up?"

"Wait and see!" I grinned at him without any humor. I brushed by him, went into the apartment's bedroom.

He followed me. "Is it a scheme to get that damned butler to come here and . . . ?"

"Time will tell!" I said. I leaned over the bed where Dave had placed Ellen Morrow's corpse. He had done a fair job of peeling her out of her dress, putting a nightgown on her. But I added some finished touches. I arranged her on the pillows; made it look as if she were just resting. I found some rouge, dabbed it on her white cheeks. I put lipstick on her mouth. Then I turned off all the lights except a night-lamp alongside the bed.

I looked at my wrist-ticker. I said: "We'll wait ten minutes. Then we'll hide in that closet over there."

Donaldson grunted. "When I lay my mitts on that butler . . . !" he snarled.

WE WAITED. At the end of ten minutes, I lit a gasper, puffed it to a glow. Then I went over, put the cigarette between Ellen Morrow's stiffening fingers; dropped her arm down over the bed. From the doorway, my stage was all set. The dead dame looked alive. She looked as if she were just lying there, smoking and resting.

Dave Donaldson and I went to the closet, jammed ourselves into the cramped space. We crouched among a lot of perfumed underwear and things. Stuff that had belonged to Ellen Morrow; stuff that once had garbed her lovely form. . . .

Abruptly, Donaldson grabbed my arm. "Listen!" he whispered.

I heard a sound. The stealthy intromission of a key in the lock of the apartment's front door. Then—

Footfalls. Soft, cautious, almost soundless. Abruptly, from the partly-open closet, I saw a form entering the bedroom. . . .

Donaldson whispered: "God! A woman!"

That approaching figure walked on high-heeled shoes; I caught a vague flash of chiffon-encased legs. A cloche hat was jammed down over the head; a veil obscured the features. The intruder wore an expensive ermine coat—

Anybody would have recognized that coat. It was the envy of all Hollywood. There wasn't another one like it. It had been made especially for Mrs. Joe Church—mother of Sherry Church, the kidnaped child movie star!

And even as I stared, I saw a hand raise; saw the dull glitter of an automatic roscoe. Abruptly, the gat coughed fire. It said: "*Ka-chow-chow-chow!*"

The corpse of Ellen Morrow danced a macabre rigadon on the bed as hot lead slugs poured into it. Then I yelled: "Okay, Dave! Let's go!"

Donaldson and I burst out of that closet. Plunged at the ermine-coated figure. Drew our rods as we hurled ourselves forward—

Dave barked: "Look out, Turner!" and handed me a crack on the side of the neck. I went sprawling. But he'd saved my life. That muffled form had swung around. Had taken swift aim at my gizzard. But the shot went wild as I staggered sidewise. And then Dave Donaldson started pumping lead!

His service .38 roared three times. And he didn't waste a shot. The figure in the ermine coat suddenly sagged; groaned. I

leaped in, snatched the automatic from our prisoner's limp hand. "Lights!" I grated. "Turn on the lights, Donaldson!"

He snapped on the wall-switch. At the same instant I grabbed off the hat and veil from the person in my arms. I said: "Just as I thought! We've got you, *Mr. Joe Church!*"

Donaldson said: "God in heaven! Sherry Church's *father!*"

"Yeah!" I grunted. "Joe Church was losing plenty of dough, gambling. I even won fifty bucks from him myself, yesterday, shooting golf!"

"He was in a tight fix for money; but he couldn't lay his mitts on his kid's geetus, because that's paid into a trust fund. So he schemed to kidnap his own daughter—and collect a whopping big ransom. His accomplice was Ellen Morrow, the kid's governess. The Morrow dame came to me to establish an alibi for herself. But Joe Church figured to bump her off there in that Chink restaurant, and get rid of her. She was costing him too much money. He was paying her rent here—I saw his name on some receipts."

"And—and it was Church himself who killed the nurse-maid, Patsy Patton?" Dave Donaldson whispered.

I said: "Sure. He had to, in order to put the snatch on his daughter. I first suspected him when he lit a cigarette at his home tonight. He did it with his left hand. Never used his right arm at any time. But I knew he was right-handed, because I'd played golf with him. So I guessed that his right arm was crippled—where I shot him, back at that Chink cafe!" As I spoke, I ripped away the ermine coat; exposed Joe Church's shoulder. Sure enough, there was a bandaged wound where my slug had nicked him, earlier that night!

"Then—the butler must have told the truth when he said he'd sprained his shoulder in a fall!" Donaldson said.

I nodded. "Yep. And I figured, when the butler gave my message to Church, that it would all end just about this way. Church probably told his wife to stay home; then he came here, disguised as a woman, to kill Ellen Morrow. He didn't know she was already dead—from the bullet he pumped into her in my apartment a while ago!"

As I spoke, Church opened his eyes. "I . . . heard . . . everything you've . . . said," he gasped. "And . . . as long as . . . my number's up . . . I may as well . . . confess . . . it's all . . . true. . ."

I said: "Okay. Now tell us one more thing. Where's your daughter? Where's Sherry Church? When you kidnaped her tonight, where did you hide her?"

"I'll . . . tell if you . . . promise one . . . thing . . ."

"Name it!" I said.

"Promise you'll . . . tell the newspapers . . . I was killed while . . . trying to rescue . . . Sherry! Don't let . . . the public know . . . that I was the real kidnaper! I don't want . . . her to grow up . . . thinking her father . . . was a murderer . . ."

I said: "All right. It's a promise. Now—where is the kid?"

"In this . . . apartment! The . . . bathroom . . ." His eyes closed. He slumped. He died.

Donaldson had already leaped into the bathroom, smashing open the locked door. Within that room, we found the kid—Sherry Church, the tiny child-star. She was all tied up and gagged. She was unconscious; fainted from fright at the sound of all that shooting in the bedroom.

Which was just as well. Because she's still on the screen; and she'll never know what a rat her old man was.