

“Oh  
Fanny!”  
by Raymond Lester



**N**O, don't, Ruth! Leave it alone. We have been spotted again." Scarcely had the last word of her warning left Fanny Eden's lips when the small, daintily gloved hand of Ruth Nevein returned to its owner's side—empty. Her wide-set, innocent blue eyes flashed an upward, inquiring look of alarm. Without a question she followed her companion.

Fanny, tall, distinguished, and predatory, led the way to the elevator.

"There's a jinx on us to-day," murmured Fanny when they reached the ground floor. "I am not superstitious, but when the same sleuth-like fellow trails two nice-appearing girls through three stores it is time to think of going home. We'll do our shopping another day."

"Such a beautiful little neckpiece it was, too," said Ruth regretfully. "Real sable. Don't you think you must have made a mistake? Store detectives don't work for different firms, do they? Perhaps, after all, it is only some masher."

"It is my job to watch and yours to pinch," retorted Fanny as they approached the exit. "I'm the eyes and you are the hands, but take a look over your shoulder as we go out. Why, that fellow couldn't smile at a girl if she were ever so— He's a dick. It is

tempting fate to be within three blocks of his ugly face. Take my word for it, Ruthie, the stores are working out some follow-up system. The foxy brute! He gave me cold shivers directly I set eyes on him. See him? Gray overcoat, green tie, flatfooted, and has a face like a stale—hamburger."

Ruth's blue eyes took a rearward glance. "Oh, Fanny!" she gasped. "He's right behind us!"

"Sure, I knew it, and that's where he'll stay until the stores close or we quit. May as well beat it right now. In another ten minutes business will shut down. Let's intake this trolley."

At the corner of Thirty-Fourth Street, the girls boarded an uptown car and Fanny's dark eyes burned with resentment when their shadow followed and seated himself facing them.

"Does the big boob think we're a couple of dips?" she asked herself. "Or is he playing for time?"

In no wise perturbed by the looks of scorn bestowed upon him by the stylishly dressed pair, the gentlemen with the hamburger countenance stolidly kept his seat until—closing time.

"So that was his dodge," said Fanny when they reached their apartment.

"Followed us all the afternoon. Spoiled some of the best chances we ever had, and quit when he knew there was not a department store open."

"Better luck to-morrow, maybe," said Ruth.

"Maybe!" echoed Fanny with morose sarcasm. "I'm off the hopeful stuff. This is where we pack up and go. That fellow is after us for keeps. He'll most likely be waiting for us at the corner of the block to-morrow morning. I'll bet he's got our height, weight, and style of beauty all card-indexed by now. He had time enough in the stores, and while we were in that trolley he checked up on us in forty different ways. To-morrow morning every house dick from Fourteenth to Forty-Second will be snooping round looking for a dainty little dame with a mole on the side of her nose. That's you. As for me, even these homely, low-heeled shoes won't let me pass in a crowd without my head projecting a good two inches above the average. You might work alone, but the two of us! The combination, actually the long and the short of it, is enough to give us away now we've been spotted. It's too bad to think we'll have to split partnership—or move."

"I can't do anything by myself," protested Ruth. "You know that. Besides, I don't want to. We get along fine together. Why I'd—I'd rather take a job than give up you, or this place. It is the only home either of us have had for a good long time. Buck up, hon, I guess you'll think differently to-morrow. Anyway that beast didn't trail us home."

"No need for him to. He doesn't care where we live. All he wants to do is to get us on the job and with the goods on us. We might of course get away with it for a day or even a week, but sooner or later he would land us. He's big and ugly and slow on his feet, but those pig eyes of his are gimlets that

bore holes right through my pluck and give me the creeps. I got the smell of the police court and a nasty three by seven cell directly I saw him, I tell you—"

"Oh, Fanny, do stop," cried blue-eyed, light-fingered Ruth suddenly. "I'll make a cup of tea. That'll cheer us up."

Without waiting for reply from her downcast and pessimistic partner, the girl bustled into the kitchenette.

Fanny Eden leaned back on the couch and sighed. Facing her in the corner stood an expensive gramophone flanked by a cabinet full of records. Comfortable easy-chairs stood here and there on the thick, velvety carpet. There were pictures on the walls, silk curtains at the windows, and heavy satin portieres draped the doors. Altogether it was a nicely furnished living room, and the bedroom shared by the two of them was similarly well equipped.

"Three rooms and—a bath," murmured Fanny. "Seventy-five dollars a month. Select neighborhood, and over a hundred paid off on the furniture. A closet full of clothes and—Gee! To-morrow's rent day and we're—What's the matter, Ruth?"

"The kettle is boiling and there's not a speck of tea!"

"Let's have coffee then."

"There isn't any," wailed Ruth. "There's nothing in the place but condensed milk and sugar."

"Nothing to eat?"

"There's a bag of beans!"

"Beans? You forgot to order?"

"I didn't. They wouldn't send any more goods without the money. I didn't say anything to you about it this morning. I thought surely we'd have some cash to-night. That wretched detective drove everything out of my head. Oh, Fanny, what shall we do?"

"That's done it," remarked Fanny, slumping back on the couch. "No money to

speak of. All the hock-shops closed, no credit, and nothing but sugar, condensed milk and dried beans in the house. It is time I got busy. I'm not going without anything to eat to-night, so shut up and let me think. We've been up against it before, and when the old game has petered out I've generally managed to pull off something or other."

Twenty minutes passed. Then after a careful survey of the telephone directory, Fanny Eden went into the bedroom. She returned to the living room wearing a plain black dress, and with her wavy, dark hair decorously smoothed and parted in the center. A lace handkerchief was perched on the top of her head. She carried a long black cape and a small soberly trimmed hat. What was still more important than this remarkable change in her appearance, all the moodiness had gone from her face and she smiled mischievously at the round-eyed Ruth.

"Don't gawp," admonished Fanny. "Get one of those lace doily things and fix me up with a dinky little apron like a maid wears. Run a thread round the edge and make it frilly. You know the kind of thing I mean. I'm the new maid at Mrs. Trevor's. Hustle! It's only three blocks west, but I want to phone before the grocery store closes. I know where she deals. I've seen the delivery wagon outside her place."

Pinning the hastily improvised apron round her waist, Fanny put on the cape, concealed her maid's cap under her arm and hurried briskly to the door.

"Back with the eats in half an hour, unless I'm pinched. No, there's nothing to explain. No real danger of getting copped and thank goodness this is a walk-up apartment. No nosy hall boys piking around. Get out the best service, Ruthie. Fanny's coming home with the bacon."

FOLLOWING a brief and entirely satisfactory conversation in the telephone booth of a nearby drug store, Fanny Eden walked to the street where resided Mrs. Trevor. Twice did the cloaked figure pass the sombre brown-stone mansion, then about two minutes before a delivery wagon turned the corner of the street Fanny hurried through the gate and disappeared beneath the stoop. The shades of the barred basement windows of the old-fashioned house were drawn but a light burned within, and now and again a shadow moved on the blind. The top half of the window nearest the basement door was down about three inches and the sound of voices and the occasional clatter of kitchen utensils clearly reached the girl's ears.

The conversation that she overheard was peculiar, opportune and, it might be said, interesting; but for the moment Fanny did not grasp its full value. She was all on the alert for the arrival of the grocery boy. She had nothing very difficult to do, but it required nice judgment in timing.

When the delivery wagon stopped outside the Trevor house a tall, smiling, dark-haired maid met the boy at the gate.

"All right," she said as she took the parcel from his arms. "I'll take it. What? Yes, I'm the new maid. Sorry to order so late, but cook ran short. Thank you. Good-night."

"Night, Cutie," chirruped the boy and hopped back to his seat.

As quickly, but with less noise, Fanny ran back to the arch beneath the stoop, resumed her cape and hat and tripped away as she had come, unobserved. The parcel was weighty, but her spirits were light enough to compensate for any burden.

"It wasn't anything very big that I pulled off," she said when she stood in the

kitchenette facing the astonished Ruth, "but if I say it, as I shouldn't, it was rather neat. I only wish I could have ordered more, but I couldn't for fear the parcel would be too heavy for me to carry."

"But what would you have done if they hadn't tied the things up? Supposing the boy had brought all this stuff loose in a basket?"

Fanny Eden shrugged her shoulders. "I'd have told him to leave the basket and collect to-morrow. I was all primed for any little thing like that. Sometimes, Ruthie dear, I'm nearly as good with my head as you are at lifting things from shop counters. Now, I guess we'll make a start on that canned lobster and mayonnaise. There's crackers, and coffee, dates, chocolate, shrimps, pickles, sardines, two cans of peas and—oh, well, there's everything we need to see us through for to-night, at any rate."

Half way through the feast, so easily but so illicitly obtained, Fanny drifted from talkativeness to absent-minded inattention.

"Say!" she demanded with sudden return to animation. "Among all that junk we've got stowed away, there's a couple of fluffy opera cloaks, isn't there?"

Ruth nodded.

"Think we can fake up a pair of classy evening dresses?" asked Fanny with strange eagerness.

"Why, yes. There's the pink silk you wore when we did the society act at Atlantic City, and I've got that crepe—"

"Of course. That's all right. Get 'em out while I talk. When I've finished you can tell me if you'll take a chance. I heard something to-night while I was waiting for that grocery boy. Now listen:

"Mrs. Trevor was due to go to some swell affair to-night, but her sister's been sick and she had to put it off. I heard the maid tell the cook she was scared stiff, and that made me listen all the more."

"Who was scared stiff? Mrs. Trevor?"

"No, no. The maid. Don't butt in, Ruth. There's five or ten thousand dollars worth of jewels in that house and nobody there but those two servants. Thinking she was going to wear the family heirlooms, Mrs. Trevor got 'em out of the safe deposit this afternoon. Now they're in her boudoir. I know, because I heard the maid tell the cook all about it. Are you on, Ruthie? A little bluff and we'll be on easy street."

"But how are you going to get in?"

"Dress and a line of talk, plus a little on-the-purpose accident. Get an iron, and while we're getting the creases out of our glad rags I'll give you the cues."

### III.

SOON after ten o'clock the maid at the Trevor mansion cautiously opened the front door. The prolonged ringing at the bell had given her no cause for suspicion, but the knowledge that her mistress's valuable jewels were in the house made her nervous. She peered through a crack of the door and gazed into the reassuring, innocent blue eyes of a young lady clad in shimmering crepe de Chine. Behind this dainty vision stood a tall dark beauty in pink.

Blue eyes laughed merrily.

"What's the matter?" she asked. "Afraid of burglars? We've called to see Mrs. Trevor. Hasn't she reached home yet?"

The maid opened the door wide. Evidently there was nothing to be feared from these young ladies.

Ruth and Fanny stepped into the hall.

"I don't think Mrs. Trevor will return until about eleven," said the maid.

"Oh, but we can't wait until then!" exclaimed Fanny. "We thought she would surely be home from her sister's by now. What an awful nuisance! Our car has gone

on to pick up a friend. So we'll have to stay a few minutes."

"Won't you step in here?" invited the maid, now thoroughly convinced that these were intimate friends of her mistress.

Ruth moved toward the door of the drawing room, and as she passed an elaborately carved stand the on-the-purpose-accident took place. There was a rip of tearing silk and she stooped over her torn skirt with a faint cry of dismay.

"I'll get a needle and thread and sew it up for you," offered the maid and hastened away.

"Now!"

Fanny's eyes flashed as she gave the word, and the two girls flew up the stairs.

The first door they opened proved to be the bathroom. It faced the stairs. Further along they came to a bedroom and then—the boudoir. The light was on and it was evident from a magazine that lay on the floor near a chair that the maid had been sitting on guard, waiting the return of Mrs. Trevor.

"You take the bureau," ordered Fanny "I'll go through the dressing table! Ah! I've got them!"

"Oh, Fanny! We'll do it in time. We're on velvet."

Ruth's exclamations of joy were nipped in the bud.

From the hall below came the sound of hurrying feet. Pale faced and with popping eyes the two girls leaned over the banisters and watched the maid running to the front door.

A stout, elderly lady entered. "The young ladies," commenced the maid. "They were here. One of them tore her dress—"

"What young ladies? What are you talking about?" snapped Mrs. Trevor, and in a few seconds of quick questioning scented unpleasant possibilities to the situation.

"My jewels!" she shrieked, and followed

by the maid she rushed up the stairs and plunged headlong for her boudoir. It was not a moment for dignity.

"The door is locked. They're in here. Run down and phone the police. Quick! Run! I'll stay here and keep guard."

Sobbing hysterically, the maid scuttled down the stairs, and ran to the telephone at the rear of the long hall.

Ten minutes later a sergeant, two policemen and a plain-clothes man pounded up the stairs. They hammered at the door.

"Break it down!" cried Mrs. Trevor. "There are only two girls in there. There's nothing at all to be afraid of."

There wasn't! At the first shove of the sergeant's shoulder the door burst inward. Four men and two women stared silently at an empty room. The birds had flown, and it was quite some considerable time before the detective discovered there was no key in the lock. By that time it was too late to capture the young ladies.

In a cozy little walk-up apartment two girls stood admiringly over a pile of glittering jewels that lay on the kitchen table.

"Some haul," whispered Ruth. "But what a narrow squeak we had. How ever did you think of doing what you did? I was scared out of my wits."

"That's because your fingers are quicker than your brain, hon," said Fanny easily. "That bathroom was certainly handy, and the position of that telephone was another thing in our favor. Just fancy the old girl wearing her knuckles out on that door, and never thought to look behind her when we were slipping down the stairs. She never even heard the front door latch click as we went out. I wonder, too, what she'll make of the bill for our eats when she gets it."

"Oh, Fanny!" breathed Ruth, "You're—" "The limit," finished a deep voice,

“and—she has reached it.”

The two startled girls looked round, and after a long moment of petrified silence they located the owner of the voice. It was the gentleman of the features described by Fanny as genus hamburgian. He stood on the ledge of the kitchen window. He was smiling. No. It was not a smile, but a grin. Horrid, grossly triumphant.

“You two slick dames can get into your go-to-meeting duds and come along with me,” he observed, as he pushed down the window and landed on the floor with flat-footed, ponderous agility. “While you’re getting ready I’ll gather up this stuff.”

Game to the last, Fanny turned without a word and led the way to the bedroom.

To the accompaniment of quivering sighs and choking sobs, Ruth changed into her

street clothes, but not a word or sound came from Fanny’s tight pressed lips.

One glance around the empty kitchen, the table bare of glittering jewels, was enough for Fanny.

“The mean, sneaking piker!” she shrieked, glaring at Ruth’s pop-eyed face of wonder. “Don’t you see what happened! He’s beat it. What ails you?”

Ruth wilted and sank into a chair.

“But—but you said he was a dick,” she gasped.

“What I *said*,” sniffed Fanny. “That don’t make any difference now. Some dicks are crooks and some crooks are gentlemen. If there’s any word that fits us, say it.”

“Oh, Fanny!” sighed Ruth.

“Darn your ‘Oh, Fanny!’ ” snapped the other. “Call me boob and be done with it.”