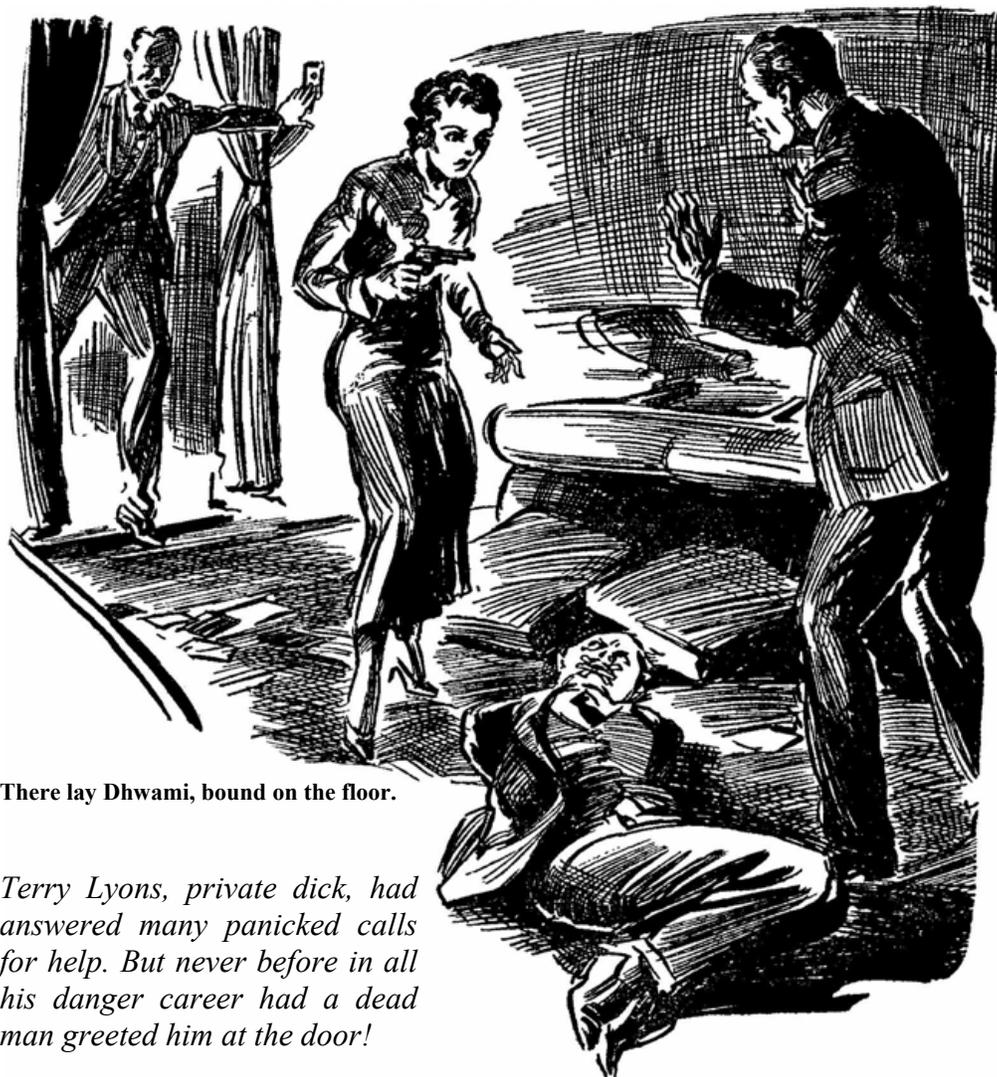


# The Corpse in the Doorway

by James H. S. Moynahan



There lay Dhwami, bound on the floor.

*Terry Lyons, private dick, had answered many panicked calls for help. But never before in all his danger career had a dead man greeted him at the door!*

TERRY LYONS, rolling over in bed, reached for the ringing phone. He swore; his first sleep in forty-eight hours and they couldn't leave him alone! The hell of a detective's life—

The voice in the receiver, curiously foreign, held an alarmed note. "Mr. Lyons!"

"Yeah. Who's this?"

Words in a hurried torrent burst from the voice on the other end. "Mr. Lyons, this is Dhwami—I called at your agency about a man who was acting suspiciously. Remember?"

Terry looked at the phone as if he'd like to smash it. "Yes, and the story's still the same, Dhwami—nothing doing! This operation we're on has been keeping me and my partner without sleep

for—"

"Yes, but he's here now—right outside my window—the same fellow! For God's sake, Mr. Lyons, come now! I'll pay anything—I'll—I'll—" The voice ceased abruptly.

Terry grunted, under the impression he had been cut off, scowled, was about to replace the receiver when, with a shrill harshness that nearly destroyed his eardrums, the man at the other end screamed. Terry jumped to his bare feet. A choked-off oath came over the wire, the sound of a crash, and the line clicked dead.

Terry, galvanized suddenly into life, rattled the hook. "Hello! Dhwami! Hello, Dhwami!"

The operator's bland voice came. "What

number did you call, please?"

"I don't know!" Terry groaned. "I was cut off!"

"There is no one on your line now; will you—"

Terry slammed up the receiver on the unfinished apology, jumped for his clothes. A fine mess! Here he'd told this queer little dark guy the agency couldn't possibly take on his case, and now—well, he supposed some dicks, older in the trade, would go back to bed. But hell—

He climbed into a blue suit, pushed his feet into his shoes. If what the little brown man had told him was true, Dhwami had a safe full of uncut gems in the office of his importing establishment—rich bait for a thief! He grabbed up a flat, blue-steel automatic and a few rounds of ammunition from a drawer, snatched up a brown snap-brim felt and hurried out.

Lights of a cab gleamed at the corner. He whistled, told the driver, "Seventy-four Ascalon Avenue. Hurry!" and jumped inside.

The cab left the curbing with a jerk, rasping into high while Terry, on the edge of the seat, finished lacing his shoes, fumbled with vest buttons and jerked straight his shoulder dip with its sagging pistol.

**T**ERRY was young, reckless-looking, well-muscled, his curly black hair clipped close to his head. But the year's experience in sleuthing he and Dunc Talbot had put behind them—since the day Terry had left his father's Wall Street office in favor of a manhunter's career—had toned down most of his wildness and given him judgment and balance. These—coupled with a conscientiousness that was sending him now to the aid of a stranger simply because that stranger might have called aid elsewhere and gotten it in time—were the qualities that had attracted the powerful Jewelers' Association.

The Jewelers', harassed by the operations of a gigantic ring comprising, it was believed, stick-up men, a penny-weighting mob, a group of fences and even a band of smugglers operating out of Amsterdam and plying the Atlantic liners, had asked for action. They were getting it. No more than a week ago, sheer seconds had separated Terry from the killers of Simmie (the Shark) Aronson when the ring had marked the little fence for a stool-pigeon's death. Terry's own escape had been close—the scant half-inch between his scalp and the bullet hole that now decorated the brown felt he

wore cocked over one ear—and would wear till he brought in the bird that drilled it—attested to the fact.

It was this case, occupying the entire time of both the partners, that Terry had pleaded as excuse for turning down Dhwami when the little brown man had come that afternoon with the tale of a hook-nosed stranger whose suspicious actions seemed to menace the uncut gems in Dhwami's safe. Terry had tried to pin down his feeling of something not quite right about the client's restless, evasive manner, but had gotten only as far as the surface of Dhwami's enamel-bright black eyes. He and Dunc couldn't afford to be wrong; accordingly he had declined the business. And now, despite his own distrust of the little brown man, Terry was on his way. He grinned crookedly.

When the cab pulled up he was snapping the magazine of his pistol closed on a fresh clip of cartridges. He leaped to the curbing, tossed a bill to the driver.

It was a wicked neighborhood of Sicilians and studios. Number 74 was one of a block of red-brick Dutch-colonial houses with cast-iron fences, twelve-paned windows, white-pillared doorways and polished brass knockers. Terry swung up the steps, jerked open the outer door and found himself in a dark entryway. No light burned in the hall beyond. He fumbled for matches, struck one. Its fluttering flame showed him three old-fashioned speaking tubes—above their bells the cards of the tenants. Dhwami, his client, was on the second floor.

Terry, with an exclamation, dropped the gutting match that had scorched his fingertip. The entry went black as a tank of ink.

He swore, found his matchbox, pushed it open.

A dim yellow light glowed suddenly behind the frosted glass of the double door and feet thumped the stairs inside unsteadily. Terry paused, frowning. Something was wrong—the steps, coming closer, were stumbling, uneven, queerly heavy. Terry, stood for an instant listening with growing concern, then plunged for the doorknob, tugged at it.

The door was locked.

The thumping steps came closer; a shadow darkened the diamond design in the frosted glass of the doors. The steps were leaden. A hand within fumbled with the latch; Terry, gathering himself, let go the knob and the door banged open.

A TALL man in a dark suit stood there, his face livid, his glassy eyes staring out at nothing. Dim light from the hall, touching his swaying figure, showed the blood streaming from wounds in throat and side. He opened his lips, strove to speak, achieved only a ghastly “Ugh” that choked and bubbled in his hacked-open throat, then, without warning, he pitched over suddenly into Terry’s arms.

Terry, with a gasp, lowered the body, dropped beside it. The pale light showed the dead man’s face, the nose long and bony between wide-open, brownish eyes. A cold breeze from the street stirred the corpse’s stringy black hair, slammed shut the entry door to the street.

Terry started, bent closer. The man’s body, from throat to thigh, was covered with leaking stab wounds! Terry, horror-struck, peered into the dead stranger’s swarthy, hook-nosed face.

A hook-nosed man! Dhwami’s evil star! Terry dropped to his knee, felt for papers in the pockets—and froze . . .

From above had come a woman’s scream; thin, high-pitched, terror-stricken.

Terry’s glance jerked to the stair; it ended above in gloom. A woman! He ran a harassed, bewildered hand through his hair. The scream came again. He hesitated no longer, was on his feet, running for the flight of steps, gun in his sweating hand. He pounded up, the ancient wood creaking with his weight, reached the hallway above. Something had happened to the lights; the place was pitch dark. He fumbled quickly for matches, struck one and went down the hall with his flickering glimmer, peering at white-painted doors. The first two were locked, blank. The third, at the end of the hall, bore in a brass frame the white card of his client, *Baradhi Dhwami*, and underneath, *Imports*.

Terry’s knuckles hammered the panels. “Dhwami! Open up! It’s Lyons!”

Silence.

Terry did not hesitate. He slammed his gun through the panel, splintering the thin wood, poked his hand through, felt for the catch, swung the door wide and burst in, gun fanning the room.

It was an elaborately furnished studio done in black and vivid red. The furnishings were oriental, exotic. No one was in sight.

Terry saw a door ahead, pushed through it to a sort of hall, glanced into a kitchen, empty, an open bathroom, likewise empty, jerked open the door

ahead and found himself in an empty bedroom. A door was in the wall opposite. He flung it open. It was a closet containing a neat row of suits and shoes in trees. He dropped to his knees, looked under the high, canopied bed—

“Drop that gun!” a girl’s voice said behind him.

Terry Lyons, on hands and knees, knew that in his awkward position there was only one thing to do. He did it. His fingers released the square pistol and he got to his feet, facing a slender, green-eyed girl of perhaps eighteen, her bosom heaving, her eyes blazing, her red lips curled back from clenched white teeth. The white fingers of her left hand were pressed, as if to steady them, against the skirt of her brown, figured-silk dress. The pistol in her right hand seemed overly large for a girl’s use, accounting perhaps, for its unsteadiness. Her hat—a cocoa-brown soft felt with a green-stone pin set with rhinestones—was not quite straight, and the red-gold hair beneath it was obviously tousled. She pushed the pistol unskillfully at him.

“Look out!” Terry gasped. “You’ll discharge that thing!”

The white-faced girl, ignoring his outburst, pointed with the pistol at the door and commanded angrily, “Go ahead!”

TERRY, with an uncertain glance at the girl, backed out to the hall and stopped, his head in a whirl, his eyes searching her pretty, wrathful face. The girl, moving around behind him, jerked the pistol at the stair and spoke only the single word, “Up!” between lips drawn tight. The tone of that one word put an end definitely to any hopes he had of reasoning with her.

He shrugged. “You seem to be giving the party.” With a glance behind him, he started up the stairs. The girl followed a little in the rear, keeping the pistol out of reach of a possible kick.

At the head of the flight he paused. “Where to now?”

“You know where to!” she said angrily.

“Now wait a minute!” Terry objected. “Look here. I don’t know what this is all—”

The girl’s teeth clicked. She swung the pistol up. “Go ahead!” she commanded harshly.

Terry shrugged, moved ahead of the pistol, down the hall. Would she shoot? He looked back. She was coming along behind him; this must be the right way. He glanced at doors along the corridor. The girl kept on walking behind him. She must

mean the end door, then. Terry came to it. It was shut. He put a hand on the knob, swung it open.

The place was a shambles. In the middle of the room a divan was overturned, and beyond, on the wall, a shattered cheval mirror hung awry, rayed with cracks. Drawers gaped open, their contents scattered about on the floor. Curtains were ripped from windows.

Bound with bell-wire and gagged with strips of white surgeons' tape across his mouth, a swarthy-skinned little man lay on the floor in a jigsaw puzzle of shattered pottery and glass. His eyes, bulging white in a liver-colored, wide-nostriled face, slid yellowly around in their sockets from the pistol in the slender, shaking hand of the girl to focus finally in mute pleading on Terry Lyons' face.

"Dhwami!" Terry burst out. "What—"

The girl swung the pistol up. "Quiet! I'll do the talking here!"

Terry looked at her. For the first time his confidence wavered. Was she working herself up to shooting him? He sought the answer in her pretty, twisted features, found only a white scorn and a lashing contempt.

"Would you mind telling me what you've got against me?" he asked finally.

Her words rushed out in a torrent, overwhelming him. "You can stand there and ask me that!" She stood there, panting, measuring him from head to foot.

The pistol in her hand was a scant yard out of reach. If he could get closer—Terry spread his hands appealingly, took a tentative step forward. "But I tell you I—"

The girl's silken shoulders seemed to rise, curving her slender body like a striking cobra. There was no mistaking the fear or earnestness in her voice. "I'll shoot—" She raised the pistol, her shining nail already white on the tip. Terry shrugged, dropped his hands.

"All right," he said disgustedly. "You tell it. But if you're planning on taking a shot at me with that pistol you're waving around, let me tell you that even if I don't take you along with me, there'll be plenty others to take up the job where I left off. I don't know what your act is, but if you use your head you'll let somebody else handle the gun end and hear what I have to say."

THE girl, scowling under lowered brows, did not lower the pistol. "I don't know what you're talking about," she flung at him, "but if you make a move for this pistol I'll shoot." Her eyes, watching Terry's, narrowed sharply. "What—" she began.

But Terry, instead of answering, was staring over her shoulder at the tall, indistinct figure slipping through the hall doorway, a hand reaching for the light switch.

Pure instinct flung him flat just as the room was plunged into darkness. The girl's pistol crashed, lancing flame and gassy smoke; echoes rang from the narrow walls. Terry, choking back the cough that would have betrayed his whereabouts to the girl, waited, not breathing, in the utter blackness.

No sound came from the hallway where the strange man had suddenly appeared. Somewhere in the room a clock ticked away seconds, and from outside came faintly the sound of a passing car. The tickling in Terry's lungs was torture; he fought it, straining to hold back the cough, almost uncontrollable now, that would bring him relief—and, almost certainly, a slug from the girl's pistol, if not the man's—

Something scraped faintly to the left a few feet away—a sole on the floor, perhaps.

Terry flung out a hand, felt his fingers touch a silken ankle. He clutched it, jerked it out and away. The girl gave a startled cry, tried frantically to tug loose and fell with a thump. Before she could get the pistol into play again, Terry was on top of her in the dark, his hands pawing for it.

The world seemed to explode in his face; flame blinded his eyes; ringing deadened all sound in his paralyzed ears; he felt his scorched cheek burn where the gun flame had seared it. His right hand darted out, struck something blunt, angular—her pistol—jerked it aside as it roared again.

With a cry of pain from the girl, he twisted it from her clutching fingers.

A crimson flame winked thunder from the hall door where the strange man had suddenly appeared the instant before he snapped off the lights. Terry felt the slug whip past his ear, heard it *plock* into the wooden bedstead. He flung himself flat, the girl's terrified whimpering in his ear. The gun in his hand exploded, lancing fire at the hall doorway where the strange man's weapon had flashed. No shot answered. In the stillness a faint creaking came from the hallway beyond. Terry scrambled to his feet, charged for the hall. In the dark he almost

stumbled over the bound figure of Dhwami. No time to stop to loose him now! Terry swung around the hall door-frame, heard feet pounding the stairs ahead, going up. He raced after them.

A gun slammed slugs in drumming thunder at the foot of the flight.

Terry braked just in the nick of time; heard lead thud into wood and plaster. The shooting from above stopped. Terry dived for the stair, went up it in threes.

Ahead, at the end of the hall, a door banged.

Suspicious of a trap, he moved forward warily. The whole thing just didn't make sense! Who was this girl, and what had inflamed her so against a man who had never, to his knowledge, seen her before?

And this shooting stranger, bottled up now, Terry hoped, in the apartment ahead, where did he fit in? If they were together why should he bother to turn off the lights? Who had tied up Dhwami? Why?

Because of the bad light it had been impossible to make any identification. There were hundreds of dark men in the city, of average height, wearing the same sort of conservative blue serge.

Terry listened. A faint creaking seemed to come from somewhere in the bowels of the house. With sudden decision he covered the distance to the door at the end of the hall, put a hand on the knob and tried it. It gave. He pushed in the door, fumbled for a switch, gun up, finger tense on the trigger.

His groping hand found the switch; snapped it on.

THE room was without furniture, empty. The door ahead, leading to bathroom, kitchen and bedroom, was closed. He started toward it when from somewhere below sounded a muffled shot.

Terry glanced undecidedly at the closed door ahead. As he wavered, the sound of a cry from below was choked off suddenly with grim significance.

He spun, dashed for the hall, ran down it, swung down the stairs and into the apartment where he had left the girl. The lights were on. Dhwami still lay bound on the floor, but his position had changed. Wary of a trap, Terry approached cautiously.

A glance at the crooked trickle of blood welling from the small, round hole between the bound man's eyes was enough. Dhwami's lips, that might

have held the key to this riddle, were stilled forever.

Terry, nearing distraction now, sprang for the back bedroom. Had the girl killed Dhwami? She had been the only one in the apartment when Terry had chased the strange man upstairs. But if so, why had she screamed? Was she, instead, perhaps, at death grips with Dhwami's murderer?

The door to the bedroom was closed. Terry, reckless of danger, slammed it open, charged through into the bedroom and stopped.

The girl, her eyes closed, her black hair, its hairpins loosed, streaming out on the floor, lay beside the bed, suspiciously still.

Terry, with an exclamation, dropped beside her, feeling for her heart. It was still beating. He ran to the bathroom, got water, and poured it between her pale lips. She shuddered, her eyes blinked a little and she sat up dazedly. Then her eyes encountered his, and terror came into them. Suddenly she bent forward, staring into his face, the terror in her eyes fading slowly to bewilderment. She put a hand to her throat. "But—you're not—"

The creaking sound came again from the bowels of the house.

Terry started. The creaking died. He turned to the girl. "Roll it out, sister. And it had better be good!"

Instead of answering, the girl looked past him at the corpse of Dhwami. Utter bewilderment peaked her brows. Her eyes returned to his face, she stammered.

"Who—are you?"

"I'm a private dick. Talk fast, sister. We're sitting on dynamite. There's at least one killer with a pistol in this house. Who are you and who's doing all this killing?"

The girl put a shaking hand to her brow. "I'm Nora Lane," she said with an effort. "I live here. And that's the man downstairs." She indicated the bound corpse in the living room. "His name's Dhwami. A man who was just in here shot him—and the poor man bound that way!" Her voice started to rise hysterically; she covered her face with her hands.

Terry glanced sharply at her, put a hand on her arm. "Quick! Where'd he go—this killer?"

She shook her head dully. "I—don't know. I fainted."

Terry looked at her disheveled person. "What'd you do, try to grab him after he shot Dhwami?"

She shook her head. "No. I heard a sound and I turned and a man was standing in the little entryway between the living room, there, and this room. He had his back to me, and I watched him lift his pistol and fire a bullet into Dhwami. I was petrified. He ran in here, made a grab for me and almost tore my hair out. I don't remember anything after that. Is Mr. Dhwami dead?"

Terry nodded. "What was the idea of herding me up here with the pistol a little while ago?"

THE girl looked wildly about the room. "I—I— thought you were somebody else—the man who was just there. I saw you prowling around Mr. Dhwami's room. I'd just seen him kill another man—" She was trembling violently.

"How'd Dhwami get in here tied up like that?"

The girl wrung her hands. "You don't understand at all! Mr. Dhwami lived below us. He came up and asked me if I'd mind keeping something for him in our refrigerator as his own was out of order. I took the package, put it away, and just as he was going a man stepped out of the hall and knocked Mr. Dhwami unconscious with a blackjack."

"That's the man that shot Dhwami just now?"

"No, no! This was another man altogether."

"What'd this first man look like?"

She shook her head. "I was so scared I couldn't say for sure."

"Did he have kind of a long, bony nose?"

The girl nodded her head violently up and down.

"I begin to get some of it," Terry said. "That must have been the fellow with all the stab wounds that fell over me in the doorway downstairs. Well, he sapped Dhwami, then what?"

"He closed the door, stepped over Mr. Dhwami's body and shook the pistol in my face and said, 'Where is it?' I didn't know what he was talking about. I thought he must be mistaking me for somebody else because I've only had the apartment for a few weeks since I got back from Europe with the family."

"And then?"

"And then I started to back away from him and stumbled against a big club chair and he made a grab for me. I guess I fainted. I have a hazy remembrance of coming to with sounds of quarreling and seeing a man—the one in blue who just shot Mr. Dhwami—attack the hook-nosed man

with a knife. I must have fainted again, because I came to in the chair and nobody was in the room. Mr. Dhwami was lying bound and gagged on the living-room floor. I screamed. Then I heard a noise downstairs. There was a pistol lying on the rug. I took it and went down—" She hesitated, coloring.

"Yes," Terry said hastily, "I understand. This man in blue, the one that stabbed the first man, he's the one you thought I was, eh?"

She nodded. "You're about the same build, and your suits are alike. On account of my fright I didn't notice the difference at first. I see now your hair's a little different, shorter."

"What about the fellow I saw in the hallway just as you fired at me—the one that turned off the lights?"

"I didn't see him," she said. "Perhaps he's the same one."

"How could he be? I chased him upstairs but I had to drop the hunt when I heard you scream down here. If he'd come down he'd have to pass me in the hallway, wouldn't he?"

"I suppose so," she said bewilderedly.

"Well," Terry said, "there was no one in either your kitchen or the bathroom when I came through just now. Where'd this fellow you say killed Dhwami and attacked you go to? He didn't go through the hall or I'd have run into *him*, too. And he's not in this apartment." He glanced sharply at this pretty, olive-skinned girl who had almost taken his life once that night. Her story did not check with Dhwami's scream that had broken off the phone call, the last living words Terry had heard him speak. Could Dhwami have been shamming? The little brown man must have known, after Terry's refusal to take his case, that it would take a strong plea to change his mind. Did that explain the urgency of Dhwami's message? Terry felt the girl's eyes on him and turned to look into them. Frankness seemed to be in them—

He picked up the phone. After a moment he looked up. "Dead. Wires cut, probably. Where's this package Dhwami asked you to put in the icebox for him?"

THE girl led the way to the kitchen, opened the refrigerator. "That square package over there," she said, indicating a bundle on the lowest shelf. "It's pretty large; perhaps it's a roast."

Terry drew out the bundle, set it on the kitchen table, took a knife from the drawer and slit the cord

which bound it. He drew off a paper wrapping, another.

“Why,” the girl exclaimed, “it seems to be almost all paper!”

“Hold on!” Terry snapped. “Here’s something—”

A creaking sound behind him spun him around. The girl turned too. There was no one in the kitchen. A ghostly, hollow thumping came, it almost seemed, from the very bowels of the house itself. Terry froze. The sound came again, fainter, deeper down.

“Look out!” Terry shouted suddenly and plunged for the door, pushing the girl out of his path. Running through the living room he dragged his gun, dived for the hallway, and swung down the stairs.

On the street floor the corpse of the hook-nosed man was still lying in the doorway where it had fallen. Terry leaped it, charged for the rear of the hall.

The cellar door banged open and the strange man in blue fired. Terry’s hand was suddenly numb; he heard the pistol drop from his fingers. He kept going, flung himself on the smoking pistol in the other’s hand, turned it as it roared almost in his face. His charge drove the strange killer off balance; they went down together, grunting, panting, cursing. Terry’s dangling wrist was useless. He twisted with his left hand at the other’s pistol, felt it slipping from him, felt the straining body with a sudden lurch, roll over on top of him. Terry’s senses reeled; he strained, panting, desperate, fought to hang on to the hand that was steadily forcing the pistol into line with his heart. Sweat broke out on Terry’s brow as the pistol moved closer, inch by inch. He could see the grinning teeth in the swarthy face beginning a triumphant smile. The open cellar door loomed black beside him.

Summoning all his strength in a last desperate effort Terry heaved sidewise. The other man, taken by surprise, put out a hand to save himself. His hand encountered, not solid wall, but the empty air of the cellar doorway. Clawing, fighting for balance, he fell over. Terry’s muscles, arching with a powerful heave that sent sweat out on his brow, pushed him down the cellar steps; the man cried out, tumbled thrashing. Terry was on his feet and down the steps, the captured pistol swinging in his left hand. He crashed the heavy butt down on the

head below him—and again; saw the murderer’s muscles relax and his body lie still. Terry looked up as a shadow darkened the doorway. It was the girl, Nora.

“Are you all right?” she gasped through the darkness.

He grunted something, got to his feet, poked the pistol into a hip pocket, found his own and holstered it, and dragged the unconscious form of his erstwhile enemy into the hallway.

The girl backed away a little, said bewilderedly, “How did he—”

Terry, tight-lipped, brought out manacles. “I think we’ve got the answer to our riddle here,” he said. He shackled his live captive securely to a three-inch steam pipe in the hallway.

“Now,” he said, “let’s have a look at the other one. But first let’s get a cop.” He went to the doorway, whistled. A cab came to the curbing. Terry sent the driver after the patrolman on the beat. Then he returned to the hall.

Nora Lane watched him while he hunkered beside the corpse in the hallway. “Why!” she exclaimed, as light from the doorway fell on his wrist, “you’re wounded!”

Instead of answering, Terry drew from the breast pocket of the hook-nosed man’s suit a dog-eared calf pocketbook. He thumbed the contents. After a moment he looked up, his eyes sober.

“Say,” he said, “this is something! This guy is Morey Halpern. The police of two continents would have paid a nice sum for him alive. Let’s have a good look at the other one.”

Nora Lane, her eyes flashing, stood in his path. “Young man,” she said sternly. “You’re not looking at another thing until that wrist is attended to!”

**T**ERRY glanced at the handkerchief she was taking from a pocket, shrugged. He stood submissive while the girl made a rough bandage, a quizzical look on his wind-burned face as she bent over her task. After a moment she straightened. “There,” she said, “that’ll help until we can get a doctor.”

Terry cleared his throat, said, “Thanks.” He went over to the shackled man, jerked up his head and struck a match, holding the flame close to the man’s closed eyes. Behind him the girl gave a little gasp.

“Why!” she cried. “It’s Mr. Montgomery!”

Terry turned.

"He may be Mr. Montgomery to you, but to me he's Barney Rochemont."

The girl looked puzzled. "He told me on the boat he was a salesman."

"A salesman?" Terry repeated surprised. "That's a new one for Barney. A salesman for what?"

"Novelties."

Terry scratched his head. "Novelties, huh? Well, it'll be some time before he'll be awake enough to explain what he meant by that. In the meantime let's go upstairs and finish seeing what was in that package Dhwami left with you."

Climbing the stairs ahead of him she asked over her shoulder, "But how on earth did he get downstairs without our seeing him?"

"Dumbwaiter," Terry explained. "That's what we heard thumping and creaking that time. When I chased him upstairs he ran into the kitchen of the apartment just above yours, climbed into the dumbwaiter, lowered himself down to your apartment, shot Dhwami and went for you. Hearing me on those creaking stairs must have made him figure he was trapped. The dumbwaiter had worked for him once. He tried it again. That's why I didn't pass him on my way down."

In the kitchen, Terry picked up the bundle, peeled off the last wrapping. An oblong wooden box a foot long stood there. He lifted the cover. Little serrated packages of white folded papers, piled tight, lay in it. Terry said, "Oh-oh!"

"What's that?" the girl asked.

Terry turned to her. "Morphine, at a guess. There's enough dope in those bindles to bring a small fortune at retail."

Terry grunted something unintelligible.

After a minute the girl said uncertainly: "But if that's what they wanted why did they have to shoot Mr. Dhwami? And why take my hat?"

Terry was scowling thoughtfully. "I'm not so sure that's what they were after at all," he said. "Take a walk upstairs and perhaps we'll find the key to this business without waiting for Barney Rochemont to come to."

In the fourth-floor apartment Terry led the way to the kitchen. There, lying on the floor near the dumbwaiter, was a black piece of cloth. The girl snatched it up. "My hat!" She turned it over in her hands. "But," she exclaimed, "the pin's gone!"

"What kind of pin was it?"

"Oh, just a rhinestone pin with a big piece of green beer-bottle glass stuck in the center," she laughed. "But really, I rather liked it, even if it was a cheap little setting. And why should Mr. Montgomery, or whatever you say his name is, give it to me on the boat and then steal it from me this way? Why, if he'd wanted it back all he'd have had to do was ask."

TERRY breathing excitedly, grabbed her arm. "Come on!" he gasped, starting for the doorway. "If this is what I think it is, we've walked into something big!"

She hurried down the stairs behind him to the street floor again. Terry searched the pockets of "Mr. Montgomery," the man he called Barney Rochemont. His hand came out holding the pin.

"This it?"

The girl nodded.

Terry struck a match, held it close to the pin. "Cheap setting, yes," he said in a tone of suppressed excitement. "But I'm wondering about that piece of 'green beer-bottle glass,' as you call it. Have you had this stone appraised?"

Nora Lane shook her head, wondering.

Terry blew out breath. "Something tells me this washes up more than one job," he said, half to himself. He turned to the girl. "If you ask me, this is probably a perfectly good emerald Barney didn't like to bother quibbling over with unsympathetic customs officers. We've been trying for months to find out who was back of the ring that was smuggling in valuable stones right under the G-men's noses. A nice, honest-looking young girl"—he looked over at her and she blushed—"could wear in what looked like a cheap brooch without question. Later the ring could send a man around to pick it up—somebody like Halpern, there," he nodded to the corpse in the doorway.

"That—that big green stone's a real emerald?" the girl asked, incredulous.

"Unless my hunch is a lot more wrong than usual," Terry said. "What probably happened was this. Halpern came here, saw Dhwami coming out of your apartment, and not knowing anybody by sight, struck him down, preparatory to searching your apartment for the pin. Dhwami, who had seen them watching the house, probably thought they were gangsters about to hijack his store of dope, and tried to hire me as bodyguard. When he failed, and the men reappeared, he sent me a desperate

phone call, to make sure I'd come, and brought his stash of dope up to your room, getting you to hide it without your knowledge."

"I can see that," she said. "But why should—Barney Rochemont, did you call him?—kill his own partner, this Halpern?"

Terry looked down at the unconscious man's face. "We can only make a guess, but mine would be that either Barney didn't trust his partner or when he saw a chance to get the whole thing for himself, he took it. Dhwami he killed later because the little dope peddler had been a witness and would tell the cops. If he hadn't heard me on the stair, you might have suffered the same fate."

The girl shuddered. After a moment she said slowly, "I think I see the rest of it now. When Mr. Dhwami came in I'd just taken off my hat and tossed it in a corner of that club chair. When I fainted I fell into that chair, hiding the hat, the very thing they were searching for—"

A beefy, panting cop pounded up the stairs. Terry showed him credentials.

Terry turned to Nora Lane. "That's about all of it," he finished, looking straight at the crook. "When Halpern told him the hat with the pin couldn't be found, he thought he was being doublecrossed and in his rage stabbed his partner to death."

"It's a lie," Barney Rochemont raged.

"Let's see," Terry said, "how big a lie it is." He reached inside the murderer's pocket, drew out a bone-handled spring-knife, pressed a button in the handle. The knife clicked open, disclosing a narrow blade, ground thin, sharp as a razor. A dark, reddish stain was not quite wiped off near the handle.

Terry nodded to the patrolman. "Well, Mr. Montgomery," he said, turning back to the murderer, "it's too bad people haven't more trust in human nature. You know, even if I never know for sure which of you mugs spoiled six dollars worth of hat for me, I wouldn't be surprised if that district attorney sends you to the chair just the same."

"I wouldn't be a bit surprised myself," the cop said significantly.