

you heard the latest?"

"Didn't know it was out yet."

"It sure is! Remember that egg that hit town a few months back with the fat roll and the shiny roadster?"

"Bud Taylor?"

"In person, boy—and how!"

"What's happened?" Perry was shaking with excitement.

"The kitty's out and runnin' wild! That guy got his roll from a bank—shot up the teller for objecting to his methods."

"No?"

"Nothing different. They offered a big reward for him—no holds barred. Some smart dick trailed him here and tried to take him single handed—fool about money, see? Huh, that smart dick's in the hospital, and the squads are combing the city for gentleman Bud—a tough baby, no foolin'."

It was all plain to Perry now. Jean had been playing around with Bud. And now her name would be dragged into the papers. He could see the headlines.

"Pretty South Side Manicureist Held for Questioning. Scour City for Desperate Bank Bandit."

Perry groaned. He wondered why Bud had phoned her.

"Good God!" he gasped. "Could he have been asking her to leave town with him?"

He remembered Bud's amused smile as he talked to her—that smile was it variance with Bud's disreputable appearance. There was guile in it. It had no place on a man's face, when he had just shot a detective, a man who was even then being hunted by very policemen in town.

Perry's brain worked rapidly. There was only one solution. Bud knew that Jean would have nothing to do with him if she suspected him of being a criminal. He must have fallen hard for her. No man, Perry reasoned, could resist her. Bud had probably invited her out for dinner at a road-house, and once in his car—

Perry did not finish the thought. He left the store in charge of his assistant, jumped into his car and sped to Jean's apartment. "It's all my fault," he kept muttering to himself. But even while he was admitting his weakness, his keen brain was working out a solution.

He wouldn't mention Bud's name. He would just tell her how much he loved her and beg her to slip away for a quiet ceremony at Rockville. Once his wife he could tell her about Bud. They would start out on a rumpy honeymoon in the car, and by the time they returned the unpleasant affair would be forgotten.

She was alone when he arrived, a golden girl in a foamy creation of chiffon that melted entrancingly into the creamy texture of her shoulders and contrasted perfectly with her glossy black hair, glistening eyes and seductive lips.

He wanted to crush her to him in a frenzy of passion, but he knew that she had dressed to go out with Bud. Besides, she greeted him with a distinct coolness.

"B-r-r-r, it's rather chilly for that gown you're wearing," he forced a smile. "Light up a fire."

"There's too many ashes on the hearth. Besides, I'm too surprised to do anything but wonder why and wherefore." Her brown eyes smoldered vindictively.

"Nice greeting for a weary prodigal."

"Did you think this was a rest sanatorium where weary men could recuperate?"

Her coolness dampened the ardent proposal he had planned. He sought aid from the radio. It was his Christmas gift to her. Done in oriental style, the set was inclosed in a high cabinet that resembled a bookcase. It stood beside the doors to the dining room.

"The queen needs music," he suggested. "Duke Ellington's gang opened the KYW program tonight. Maybe they'll jazz away your grouch."

"Seems to me you'd get tired of radios sometime. Don't you ever think of anything else?"

"Only you, sweetheart." He glanced at his watch. "The radio fills the air with music—you fill my soul with dreams. Duke'll give us jazz in five minutes, and in the meantime—the glorious meantime—"

"I'll get my batteries charged with the latest in neotronics and crystal sets," she cut in.

Perry crossed the room and sat down beside her on the divan. He reached for her hand, but she raised it to smooth her hair.

"Jean, dear, don't you care any more?"

"You didn't expect me to spend every night here alone, listening to the radio, did you?"

"No. But you knew that I was—"

"Sunk in radios. Nothing else enters your mind."

"Well, thanks to that, I am the owner of the best little shop in town."

"Am I supposed to get excited?"

"You might—you might even throw yourself into these weary arms. They've worked a long time for you."

"Yes? For me, and who else?"

"You know there's no one else, never has been. Sweetheart, you've always been the center of my world. Radios offered a short cut to make my dreams come true. Smile at me, sweetheart."

"That's what you say!" she retorted, and opening her vanity case she frowned at it provokingly.

Even frowning, she was lovely, more lovely than he had thought. When he remembered that she might have come to care for Bud Taylor, he was filled with a kind of terror.

He stared at her. Her cool, insouciant beauty aroused his sleeping passions. Her pale golden skin was faintly flushed with pink. Her mouth, tightened by the fierce frown, challenged him, threatened him with the thought that even now Bud Taylor was planning to ravish it with passionate kisses.

His gaze shifted to the delicate lines of her body, lounging gracefully beside him; the silken legs carelessly crossed, the slim hips, the gentle curve of her breasts, fluttering like imprisoned doves beneath their chiffon covering. The thought of that dainty loveliness in Bud Taylor's arms maddened him. He caught her in his arms and drew her to him fiercely.

"He can't have you. You're mine—mine!"

"Have you gone crazy?" Her brown eyes stared into his. Amusement and delight mingled in their depths.

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"Yes, I know you were going out with Bud Taylor. But you shant! I won't let you! I love you, love you!"

"You've had an original way of showing it!"

"I don't care! It was all for you. You've got to marry me—now—tonight!"

"Why the hurry?" But beneath the calm, her heart was pounding. He felt it and crushed her to him.

"I can't wait any longer. I love you! You're mine!"

His lips brushed her flushed cheeks, found her lips and sought to compel a response by the ardency of his desire.

"It's just like that, eh?" Perry's passionate embrace was rudely interrupted by the ominous voice of Bud Taylor.

Perry released Jean and started up. Bud was standing in the center of the room, immaculate, his

handsome face distorted with jealous rage. Perry knew that the hand in his coat pocket gripped a gun.

"So?" his eyes flamed with suppressed fury as he leered at Jean. "You've got a new sweetie already, eh?"

"He's always been my sweetie," Jean retorted, and Perry's heart leaped exultantly.

"Yeah? Then you were just playing me for a sucker?"

"I never said or did anything to mislead you. Just because a girl is civil it doesn't mean that she belongs to you."

"No? Well, listen, sister, the strumpet ain't born that can chump me—and live."

Perry longed to choke him, to crush in his foul mouth, but he knew that any attempt to close with him would precipitate tragedy. He tried

to placate the man.

"I'm sure Miss Tarleton had no intention of deceiving you. If she has put you to any expense I'll gladly reimburse you."

"Listen, fella, money ain't got a damn thing to do with this. If I can't have her, you won't."

"You beast!" Jean cried. "I thought you were a gentleman or I'd never have noticed you. I'd prefer death to you!"

Continued on Page 3.

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