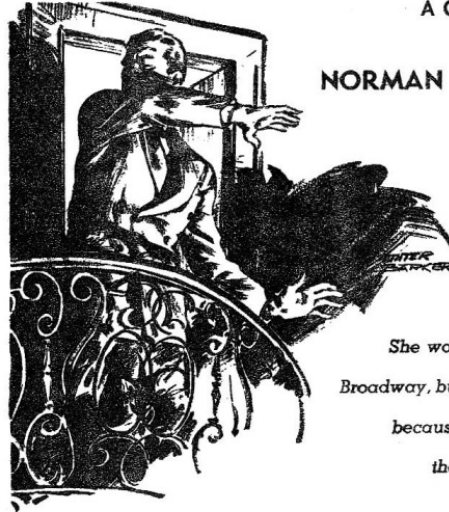


A Complete Novelet

By

NORMAN A. DANIELS

With a piercing scream, she went hurtling down toward the cement floor



She was a nightingale of Broadway, but she was doomed because a killer thought that she might sing!

DEATH ON A HIGH NOTE

CHAPTER I

Wanted for Murder

STEVE MADDEN of the Broadway Squad saw the figure slip into an alley off Seventh Avenue. The furtive manner by which the man tried to vanish was indication enough that he was cop-shy.

Steve Madden peered down the alley. He said, "Come out of there, punk, or I'll come in and drag you out."

Someone whimpered a little and there were hesitant footsteps. Finally a figure appeared in the gloom and Steve Madden didn't wait any longer. In half a dozen long jumps he reached the man, grabbed him by the throat and by one wrist and pinned him hard against the brick wall.

"The Big House leaves a smell," he said softly. "and you got it. No guns or knucks, eh? That's in your favor. Now stay right where

you are or I'll part your hair with a gun muzzle."

Madden didn't carry a regulation size flashlight. It was too bulky, but he did have a small, flat affair which threw a good enough beam. He snapped it on and sprayed his captive's face with light. Madden snicked the flash off and put it back in his pocket.

"Wally Bishop!" he said. "Quick! Where's the leather?"

His prisoner cringed. "Honest, Steve, I didn't cop no leather. I ain't in business no more. They only let me out day before yesterday. You ought to know that. It was you who got me a three-year rap this time."

Madden put a hand under Wally Bishop's arm and piloted him to the pleasanter surroundings of the street. In a doorway they stood talking quietly. Passersby paid no attention.

Madden said. "If you got out of stir day before yesterday, you've probably put the

pinch on a dozen wallets. Wally, when will you learn?"

Bishop rubbed his nose. It was a large nose and needed plenty of rubbing. "They taught me how to reform up there, Steve. This time they showed me how."

Madden laughed. "What a line! Wally, nobody short of an undertaker could reform you."

Bishop shook his head and extended his right hand. Only the thumb and little finger were left. The three center fingers had been removed.

"They got a big press up there. My eyes ain't so good and my hand got under it. I can't work with my left mitt, Steve. That puts me out of business."

MADDEN heaved a long sigh. Though he and Wally Bishop were entirely unlike and worked on opposite sides of the fence known as the law, he still liked the bedraggled, whining little guy.

"I'm sorry, Wally. I didn't know. What are you doing around Broadway if you can't work the street?"

Bishop smirked. "You been on vacations, Steve. You know how it is to come home. Ain't nothing in the world like these lights—and the people. The noise and the dirt. It gets in your blood and it got into mine. I was raised here. I want to croak here. That's how it is with me, Steve."

"Got a job?" Madden asked, not unkindly.

"Me? Who'd give me a job? A five-time loser. I'm on the bum, that's it plain and simple."

Madden stared at the throngs passing by and saw no one. His eyes were on a huge, brand new neon sign three stories high fastened to a building across the street. It advertised the fact that somebody had money and nerve enough to buck the bad luck which was closing even some of the old-time clubs.

Madden said, "Wally, you'd be happy, so long as you're on the main stem. Dressed right

you wouldn't look so bad and I know you can talk better than you pretend to. Suppose I get you a job tending door at that new club? You'd be outside most of the time, you'd have all the people milling around you and the lights blinding your eyes. A pair of gloves, with fake fingers to replace the ones you lost would take care of your hand. The pay isn't so hot but there's always tips."

Wally Bishop's sagging shoulders straightened and his head came up.

"Steve, if you could do that for a guy, a bum like me. . . . But that's the way you are, ain't—I meant. isn't it? The bad boys around here are scared stiff of you, but there ain't—isn't—a one of 'em who won't say you're square."

Madden smiled. "I'll try to get you the job. Morrison, who owns that club, owes me a favor or two, and he opened so fast I don't think he's hired a door man yet. But Wally, let me catch you lifting a leather from the customers and you'll go back in stir faster than you got out. Understand that?"

Wally managed a grin. "It'll be tough—seeing them well heeled guys getting in and out of cabs with their coats open and their back pockets just aching to be picked. But I couldn't do it, Steve. Not if I wanted to, and I don't want to any more."

Steve said, "Stay here. I'll go over and see Morrison. You eaten?"

"Yeah. I still got a fin from what they gave me when I got out. I'm okay."

Madden went across the street, opened the door of the night spot and climbed a short flight of stairs to the main room. The hangings were the usual fakery to hide an ancient building and its dirty interior. The lights were dim so the faked drapes couldn't be detected from the real thing.

Madden passed up the hat-check girl who gave him her best leer. She was new and didn't know him. The headwaiter came forward eagerly. He rubbed his hands and it was easy to see that the joint was full, not only

from the headwaiter's attitude, but from the smoke that curled out of the main room and drifted down the steps, and from the noise and clatter of glasses and silverware. About a million people seemed to be speaking all at once. The mélange of voices was nerve wracking to anyone but a man like Madden who liked things this way.

"I am very sorry, m'sieu." The headwaiter didn't see too well in the dim light. "There is not a table left—"

"Hello, Barney," Madden said. "You've changed accents. Last time it was British."

Barney stopped rubbing his hands and let go with a loud laugh. Suddenly he didn't seem to go with his white tuxedo coat but looked more like the old-fashioned bootlegger that he'd once been.

"That was the London Club," he explained. "This joint's got more class and we feature a French chef. Steve, we're really full up, but there's a little table I was saving for some palooka."

"Yeah, near the men's room," Madden chuckled. "It'll do. I want to see Morrison."

BARNEY cocked one eye professionally. "Business, Steve?"

"Yes. Not cop business. Something personal."

"Okay, I'll try to find him. What'll you have to drink? The usual?"

"No, I'm on duty," Steve answered.

He sat down at a table just barely large enough for one person and at which four were usually served. He could look down over the rail to the sunken dance floor where there were larger tables. Most of those tables had champagne at them. Around where Madden sat the popular drink was a highball.

The band was good. Madden hadn't heard of it before. Lights dimmed and a blue spot swept across the bandstand toward a slim young man who was raising a trumpet to his lips. The spot centered and the trumpet player went to town.

He was smooth. He played no difficult variations of the song's theme, stayed in the same key and did things to that number so powerful that the dancing throng slowed and finally stopped. He was stealing the show with that magic trumpet and he knew it. He was blowing his soul into that horn and it came out sweet and good.

Someone slipped into a chair beside Madden, but the detective paid no attention. He was too busy appreciating that music. When it was over, he joined in the applause—something he didn't often do.

The man at the table said, "He's pretty good, eh, Steve?"

Madden looked at his companion. Morrison owned this club, and two other ones. He was Broadway at its best, New York personified. He had a long, lean face, and gray hair that was parted in neat waves. His clothes were perfect. Even the boutonniere seemed to have been especially grown for him. He was smooth and polished and rich. He'd have made good at anything he tackled in the night world of Broadway, where he chose to run high class saloons.

"Hello, Mr. Morrison," Madden said. "That boy's tops. Who is he?"

"I don't know. He just came with the band. It's a new orchestra but at the try-out they topped all the others, so I hired them. Wait'll you hear the new thrush. What's up, Steve? Barney said you wanted to see me."

"It'll keep. What about this new singer? By the glint in your eyes you're a lot more worried about her than you are satisfied."

Morrison laughed. "You don't miss much, Steve. It's what makes you such a good cop. Here's the angle. Hazel Thorne was supposed to be featured, attended the final rehearsal and then blew. Nobody knows where. This new girl comes along—at the opportune moment. I listened, caught fire and hired her. She was mighty good. The real thing is something else again. She hasn't even rehearsed with the band. Talk about cold openings."

Madden said, "I'll stick around and see if your judgment is still good. Got a doorman yet?"

"No. Haven't had time to think about a doorman. The customers are so eager to come to a new spot I rig out that they don't mind opening their own cab doors. Why, Steve?"

"You just hired yourself a man," Madden said. "Name of Wally Bishop. Got out of Sing Sing day before yesterday. Fifth rap for picking pockets. Now hold it. He's out of business. Lost most of his good right hand up there under a press. Wally never was really bad. Just couldn't help using those supple fingers of his. He needs a job and he's Broadway, Mr. Morrison."

Morrison looked at his well manicured nails. "Steve, if you say he's okay, I'll take him on. Send him around—tonight if you can. Now I've got to start circulating. At the prices I've charged for the premiere the customers expect me to shake hands with them. See you around."

CHAPTER II

Just One Shove

HURRIEDLY Morrison went away and Madden settled down to wait. It was not for long. At the end of the next number the house lights dimmed again and a girl came from behind the purple velvet curtains.

She was tall, with raven black hair done up in a tight knot at the back of a long, graceful head. Her eyebrows were surprisingly thick, her lashes certainly not faked and as black as her hair. She wore an over abundance of makeup, but it was skillfully applied. She had class and she could sing.

Something rang a warning note in Madden's brain. He hated those mental gongs which served to stir up his memory. He studied the girl carefully and was sure he'd never seen her before. Yet he kept looking harder and harder.

Finally he picked up the menu card, got a pencil out of his pocket and with a few expert strokes transferred the singer's appearance to the white back of the card. It was a good drawing, an unusual likeness.

Then Madden reversed the pencil, rubbed out all of the hair and when he put it back he did it lightly, to resemble blonde hair. He narrowed the eyebrows to the simple hair line affected so much by entertainers. He cut the lips down from their full sensuousness to a more brittle line. The eyes were cleverly made larger by the application of eye shadow and he eliminated this in his drawing.

Then the gong rang louder. This singer was made up to hide her true features. Without that heavy makeup she was much lovelier than she was now and no girl hides her true loveliness. The drawing he had seemed more and more familiar.

He felt warm breath on the back of his neck and looked up. A waiter, bald headed, short and about fifty-five, straightened quickly and almost upset the single glass on his tray. He put the glass on the table.

"It's on the house, Mr. Madden," he said.

"Thanks, Snyder," Madden replied. "Did you have a good look at the drawing?"

"Drawing, sir? I didn't—oh, you mean you were sketching something on the back of the card? That's okay. We got lots of them cards. You do anything you like, Mr. Madden."

Madden said, "Bring, me a check, Snyder. You know I never take even a coke and bitters on the house. Go fetch it."

The waiter promptly vanished and Madden was glad of that because the girl was finishing her song. Her voice, low pitched, smooth as velvet and full of personality, began rising. It reached the final note, something a Metropolitan diva would have been proud of. It reached that note, held it rooted, and then something else was added.

That trumpet player was on his feet, horn poised and from it came a brass note which

was twin to the one the singer held. It was beautiful. Not a sound could be heard except those two notes which married one another and became one.

Then it was over and the trumpet player and the singer took bows. Snyder appeared out of somewhere and handed Madden a check for a dollar and a quarter. He winced. These checks come mighty high for his income, but this time he felt it was worth every nickel. The music, the singing and that last note had made his heart warm.

He put two dollars on the table, got up and walked out. He met Wally Bishop across the street, told him the news and then hopped a cab down to Headquarters. In the identification rooms he thrust his drawing of that singer under the nose of a sergeant who had a rare camera eye.

“Yeah,” the sergeant said. “Yeah, Steve. You got something. I seen that face before and if I saw it the puss was on a reader. Wait’ll I see what I got.”

He spent twenty minutes but it was a profitable investment. He placed a wanted circular before Madden and alongside it he laid that drawing. There wasn’t much question about it. Roseann Taylor was the singer at the club.

“You remember the case, Steve,” the identification man said. “Two years ago she was warbling with a band run by a guy named Nick Darlan. They started a road tour and their first stop was Boston. That night she went along with Nick Darlan, and no clergyman said she could either. The next morning Nick was found stabbed through the back of his pink pajamas and the doll had powdered.”

Madden nodded. “I remember. Well, you can throwaway the reader. I know where she is and I’ll have her here in an hour. Thanks, Mac.”

He borrowed a ride in a radio car back to the night club. He didn’t talk much. His heart was too heavy. It seemed a shame to arrest anybody who could sing like that.

THIS time Steve Madden entered the club by its stage entrance. There was the usual old man at a desk near the door. He removed an ancient pipe from between his lips and showed toothless gums. “Hello, Steve,” he said. “Can I fix you up with one of the chorus girls?”

Madden grinned, waved his hand and kept going. He knew his way around here. The dressing rooms were in what had formerly been the basement but which was now fitted out with paneling and a general attempt to conceal the fact that this was below ground level. He descended a narrow, winding steel stairway that made three distinct turns on its almost vertical descent.

Then he was at the mouth of a corridor lined with doors. Most of them were open. The floor show was going full blast apparently. A few strains of music could be heard and then, once more, that final sweet burst of melody from the brass of the trumpet player and the throat of a singer who was wanted for murder.

“Sometimes it’s tough being a cop,” Madden growled, and kept heading for a door with a gold star on it. The door was open about half an inch. He gave it a push and walked in.

On a coral covered divan, a girl was sprawled out. She’d been reading a book and eating an apple and the apple hadn’t done her lipstick any good at all. Her dress was pulled up with the nonchalance a girl can assume when nobody is supposed to be around. She had nice legs.

She was plainly dressed, in a tailored skirt and a white blouse with a Sinatra-type bow tie and pearl buttons down the front. She wore shell-rimmed glasses over gray eyes—or maybe they were hazel. Anyway they were warm, intimate eyes.

Those slim legs swung off the divan and she stood up quickly. She let the book drop and held the apple as if she was going to take a vicious bite of it.

“You might have knocked,” she said. “If you had any right to come here at all, which you haven’t. Are you leaving on your own two legs or do I have to call the bouncers?”

Madden sat down. “This is a swank spot. They don’t have bouncers. I want to see that new singer. What’s her name?”

“Lucille Bowers?” the girl asked quickly and some of the antagonism left her face. “Is it about a contract?”

Madden said, “I can guarantee her the longest booking she’ll ever have. Mind if I wait?”

“No. No, not at all. I’m Lucille’s arranger. I—just met her a few days ago, but she’s a natural. There’s a quality to her voice—”

“She’s got a nice voice,” Madden admitted. “If I make a deal, do you go along with it?”

“Why, I hope so. I sincerely hope so.” She batted her eyes at him, sat down on the arm of the divan and didn’t care if plenty of leg showed. “My name is Sandra Vail. I’ve been arranging music for a long time.”

“You’re not that old, baby,” Madden said. “Let’s just say you arrange music. Where’d you meet Lucille?”

“Oh—oh. it was at a rehearsal hall where she was trying to get a spot in a musical. We clicked. somehow, and I knew I could push her further than any legit show could do. She went with the kind of music I arranged.

“I see. Is she married? This Roseann?”

“What did you say?” Sandra asked quickly, her head suddenly cocked to one side.

Madden had purposely let his voice taper off at the end of that sentence. Now he raised it again. “I asked if Lucille was married.”

“Good heavens, no. Look, Mr—ah—”

“Steve Madden—without the mister.”

“Madden—Steve.” She frowned and Madden liked the way she did it. “Sounds familiar somehow and yet I’d know you if you were looking for talent.”

Upstairs a door opened and the sounds of the club filtered down. The noise was cut off

as the door closed, but came back on again like a stuttering radio. It was cut off once more and there was a moment of silence. Then a long, piercing scream brought Madden to his feet. It rose higher and louder, filled with fear and despair. Madden was out of the room in time to see a body hurtle past and hit the cement floor with a nerve rending crunch.

HE needed only a glance to know that it was Lucille Bowers, alias Roseann Taylor. She wasn’t going to worry about being pinched now. Lucille was far beyond anything the law could do to her.

There was no one on the circular steel stairway. Madden looked down at the body again. She’d worn a gown cut very low in the back. Just above where the garment began, were two bright red scratches.

Behind Madden someone shrieked. One of those cries that rises in vigor and capacity and tends to render every one near it, mad. He turned and roughly slapped a hand against Sandra’s mouth. Then he twisted her around and propelled her back to the dressing room. He slammed the door, put his back against it.

Sandra sat down on the divan again, her face pale, her eyes enormous behind the glasses. She moved her lips but nothing came out. Her hands fluttered as if they didn’t know what direction to take. She showed small, even, predatory white teeth.

“Who did that?” Madden demanded. “Do you know? Have you any idea?”

His voice broke the spell and she managed to talk. “Did it? Did what? What are you asking me?”

“Come off it, baby,” Madden said sharply. “She was pushed. One gentle little shove. You and Lucille were close as thumb and forefinger. If she was bumped, you’ve an idea who did it.”

“But—but I don’t. I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“You can stop stalling as of now,” Madden snapped. “A little while ago I called

Lucille by her right name, Roseann. You thought you were hearing things because nobody was supposed to know that she was Roseann Taylor. A dame wanted for murder.”

“Who—who are you?” Sandra demanded weakly.

“I told you my name. It’s Steve Madden. I’m a cop. How about it? Does that loosen your lovely little tongue?”

“I—don’t know anything. I—never knew her name was Roseann. . . .”

“You’re a beautiful liar,” Madden said tartly. “But we don’t differentiate between ugly liars and beautiful ones. Put on your hat and coat.”

“I—I’m arrested?” She suddenly seemed to realize what it was all about.

“Baby, I don’t make a habit of taking strange women around. Not without a reason.”

“But—but hadn’t you ought to tell somebody about—about. . . that?” Her hand pointed uncertainly at the door and what lay beyond it.

Madden said, “Where’s the phone?”

“At the desk near the main door. I’ll be ready when you come back.”

CHAPTER III

Death Strikes Again

FOR a moment Madden hesitated. Then he stepped out of the room, closed the door and walked noisily down the corridor. Then he came back, very quietly. After two minutes, the dressing room door opened and Sandra Vail spilled out of it in a flurry of arms, legs and sport coat.

She was stopped by actual physical contact with Madden and his right hand took a firm grip on her arm. He smiled gently down at her.

“Sorry, baby, but I wanted to see if you’d try to take a run-out.”

If she made any reply, Madden didn’t hear it. He was watching the chorus who had

descended the steel staircase and seen what lay at the bottom of it. They were staring at it in silence, exhibiting that morbid curiosity which seems to affect so many human beings in the presence of death.

Madden stopped at the desk and used the phone. Then he took Sandra back, still holding her arm. She made no resistance but his grip never relaxed.

Morrison was one of the first club officials to come down. Madden told him briefly what had happened. He didn’t elaborate. The orchestra leader looked as if he was going to lose his dinner. He turned green and sped off somewhere. The trumpet player stared, winced and turned aside. He didn’t appear to be feeling well either.

Later Madden gave it all to Homicide, but retained possession of his prisoner. There was a definite understanding between Madden and precinct Homicide commanders. If there was a kill on his beat, he could handle any part of it he chose. They’d learned, by hard experience, that he could get ten times further with Broadway characters and settle a case in half the usual time.

Outside Madden walked west a couple of blocks to a garage where he persuaded a friend to let him borrow a machine for a while. He put the girl in it, got behind the wheel and drove uptown to Columbus Circle. There he pulled over, lighted a cigarette and banded it to Sandra.

He pointed a jutting chin at the deserted area before the entrance to Central Park.

“With the soapbox guys gone home, this is a nice quiet spot. Just right for a pretty girl to open up her heart to a hard boiled cop. I’m waiting, Sandra.”

“And if I don’t.” She sucked noisily on the cigarette.

He shrugged. “It won’t be pleasant. We’ll find out who you really are. You’ve got to have people. Everybody has people, and they’ll hear all about this under the worst possible light. I can help you. If you are

willing to help me.”

She studied the glowing tip of the cigarette. “I’d be a fool not to talk. Yes, I knew Roseann was wanted for murder. I knew the whole story. Far more than the Boston police did. Roseann didn’t kill that heel.”

“Meaning Nick Darlan?”

“Meaning Nick Darlan,” She pouted a little. “I knew him too. He was rotten all through, Steve.”

“She was intimate with the guy,” Madden said.

“Y-yes. If you worked for Nick and you wanted to get along—well, a girl had to be friendly.”

“I know what you mean,” Madden said a trifle sadly. “Where was Roseann hiding out these two years and how does it happen she risked everything to take a job in the spotlight of Broadway?”

Sandra tossed the cigarette away and held out a hand for another. “I told her she was a fool. I tried to warn her, but she dyed her hair, let her eyebrows grow, changed her makeup, the shape of her painted mouth, and the outlines of her eyes. She did look different. She even changed her style of singing.”

Madden asked, “How much did she—or you—pay the singer who was billed to open that club tonight and who disappeared so conveniently for Roseann?”

“Pay? I don’t know what you mean?”

“Look,” Madden said earnestly, “you’ve got to keep leveling with me. One bum steer and our deal is off and you get slapped in the jug. I can’t afford to fool around. I want the truth when I ask you a question.”

“I’m telling you the truth—as I know it. I don’t know everything. Roseann made the arrangements. I just took care of her music.”

“Oh, sure! Just the music! And you knowing she was wanted for a murder rap. Okay, I’ll buy—temporarily—the story about Roseann being innocent. What did happen two years ago in Boston?”

“Roseann couldn’t take it. She couldn’t

stand Nick. He’d been after her for weeks but when the show-down came, she left him cold. She came to my room and got into some street clothes. Then she went out the hotel through the service exit and took a walk. She was gone about an hour and when she came back, she stayed in my room.”

A SMILE of disbelief curled the detective’s lips. He shook his head slowly.

“And Nick lay dead somewhere else in the hotel all that time,” Madden commented dryly.

“Listen—and you don’t have to make a habit of being stupid—I said I’d tell the truth. I am. You keep interrupting. Ten minutes after Roseann returned to my room, and while she was right there beside me, Nick phoned and wanted to know if I’d seen her. So how could she have killed him?”

Madden allowed himself a slow smile. “Now wouldn’t that be a beautiful story if there were, say, two more witnesses? The Boston cops are sure she knifed him.”

“They knew she’d gone with Nick. They thought she’d stayed there all night. Nick wasn’t killed until the late morning hours. He was asleep when the murderer struck. Whoever it was used a pair of scissors—big, sharp scissors that Nick kept for clipping newspaper items. I can’t get the picture out of my mind.”

“Tell it.” Madden urged, his mouth settling into a grim line.

“He was—lying on his stomach. He had a pair of pink satin pajamas. His initials were on the coat pocket, Big initials. He always personalized everything he wore, even his underwear. Roseann’s handbag was on the floor. Her nightie was ripped to shreds and hanging off the back of a chair. Her mules were beside the bed.”

“What a beautiful picture,” Madden said slowly. “No wonder the cops blamed her. You didn’t say anything about her prints being on

those scissors. Nice, plain fingerprints, baby.”

She raised her head. “Of course they were on the scissors. Why not, when she used to do most of Nick’s clipping and kept his scrap book?”

“Is that all?”

“Isn’t it enough? What more do you want? And what are you going to do with me?”

“What can I do but lock you up as a material witness? Baby, you’re holding back. You know it and I know it. You made a play to get clear. I can’t take chances with you.”

She let her chin rest against her chest and removed the shell-rimmed glasses with one sweep of her hand. She spoke without looking up.

“There’s going to be an awful mess. I gave you my real name. It is Sandra Vail, but I forgot to add that my father is Talbot Vail.”

“Maybe he is,” Madden said. “Talbot Vail could buy me and maybe the whole department. I admit he is wealthy and influential. But he cuts no ice with me. Don’t you understand, Sandra? I can’t let you go.”

She gave it to him cold. “You might try to find the man who murdered Nick Darlan. That is what Roseann and I were trying to do. All it got her was a crushed body. Maybe the same thing will happen to me but I’m going ahead with it. Why do you think she risked her life appearing in public? It was because we knew the whole thing stemmed from her — Broadway. We knew whoever knifed Nick would either turn Roseann in and perhaps betray himself doing it, or—do just what he did. Murder Roseann.”

Madden stepped on the starter of the radio car. “Dump the contents of your purse on the seat,” he ordered. “Show me something to prove you are Talbot Vail’s daughter. And do all that while I’m driving. There’s a little job that won’t wait.”

She proved, by an operator’s license, a bankbook and several letters that she told the truth. Madden was convinced. He drove the car back to the club.

Wally Bishop was already working. He wore an enormous overcoat built for a taller man and kept the sidewalk clean with the hem. There was a high peaked military cap over his ears and he wore a pair of dark gloves.

He gave Madden a sloppy salute. “Hi, Steve. You sure started things rolling up there. The boss is having convulsions and all the customers are leaving like the joint’s got smallpox. They forget I’m here to be tipped to.”

Steve said, “I’m looking for a waiter named Snyder. If he breezed out of here, he did it fast. Bald, about your height, skinny face and a big underlip.”

THE little doorman grinned impudently at the detective, and then winked.

“He came out coat tails flying, about twenty minutes ago,” Wally reported. “He didn’t look like no customer what with a waiter’s coat under his topcoat. That’s how I remember.”

“See if you can remember what directions he gave the cabby.”

“He said, ‘Head uptown.’ That’s all, Steve. If I’d known you wanted him I’d have busted him one and sat on him.”

“Stick around,” Madden said. “I may need you later. Keep your eyes and ears open.”

Madden knew his way around. In ten minutes, with Sandra at his side, he was running up the stairs to the offices of a waiters’ union. There was a clerk on duty, very amenable to Madden’s badge. From the records he procured Snyder’s home address. It was uptown all right. Very far uptown.

Sandra held on tightly while Madden raced the car up Broadway. The address was a two-story house, not new, not old. There were lights in the second-floor windows.

Madden had to take chances. He left Sandra in the car, found the front door locked and rang the bell. He allowed two minutes to go by and then smashed at the door window with his gun butt. He reached through, opened

the door and raced up the stairs.

He found Snyder in the living room. He stared glassily at the ceiling. There were big black lumps on his throat and blood oozed out of the corner of his mouth. He was warm. He hadn't been dead long.

Madden said something under his breath and looked for the telephone.

CHAPTER IV

Brief Escape

WHEN he emerged from the house his car was still there, but Sandra Vail wasn't. He found her glasses on the seat, held them up to a street light and grunted. They had plain glass lenses. Those glasses served her as bumpers serve a car. They kept things away.

He had to wait until another detail from Homicide arrived and he dumped the whole thing in their laps. Then he drove about to the home of Talbot Vail, which was one of those narrow-front places that look as if the tenants have to be skinny as posts to live there, but which are deceiving. For once behind the slim facade they suddenly push out in either direction, and back, to become the city equivalent of a country mansion.

A natty maid with a come-on smile took him upstairs to a study where Talbot Vail was seated. Madden was rather surprised. Talbot Vail was about sixty-five, rather old to have a daughter as young as Sandra must be.

Vail looked up with watery eyes and reached for a glass beside his chair. "You sent word you are a detective," he said in a flat voice. "Private or official."

"Broadway Squad," Madden said. "Is Sandra home?"

Vail snickered. "If you knew Sandra, you wouldn't ask such a question. She hasn't been home in three years. What's she done now?"

Madden gave it to him. "There's been a murder. Now wait—Sandra didn't do it. But she knows things, and she ran out on me."

Vail nodded. "I understand. So she's taken up with policemen now, has she? At any rate it provided her with an alibi this time."

Madden grimaced. "You seem to think a lot of your only child, Mr. Vail. The fact is, we were having a quiet conversation backstage at a night club when a friend of hers was pushed down a flight of stairs. But while you're feeling this way about Sandra, tell me what makes her tick in this strange manner?"

"How should I know? Since she was eighteen she's been on a straight road to perdition. She didn't have sufficient looks to make the stage, nor a voice good enough to sing even in dim lights. But she did know music—if you call that stuff nowadays music. She didn't want my help and didn't get it. She went out on her own."

"She got around," Madden said by way of urging for more.

"She's aged me ten years beyond my time. A couple of years ago I really had a scare. Hired private detectives. They didn't do much except tell me things I didn't want to know. Sandra had been going with some orchestra leader. Oh, it was all nice and proper. He was going to marry her when they got around to it. Between bookings, you know. Only he forgot to tell her he already had a wife who wasn't letting him go."

"He wouldn't have been named Nick Darlan?" Madden asked.

"He would—as if you didn't know! I understand he got himself killed. After that happened, Sandra came home. She said she wanted to settle down, really study music and asked me for the use of a mountain lodge in the Catskills. I gave her the key and that's the last I heard of her."

Madden knew then, where Roseann Taylor had hidden herself while the Boston police searched for her. Sandra was in this deeper than ever.

"You have no way of finding out where she is now?" he asked.

"Less ways than you, sir. In fact, I don't

want to find out. Any news I get of her just becomes worse and worse. Are you going to arrest her?"

"Yes," Madden said.

"Tell her to call me and I'll send down an attorney. The least he can do is change her name so she won't be electrocuted under the name of Vail. Tell me—what have I done to deserve all this?"

Madden arose, played with his hat brim. "I'm not sure, Mr. Vail. But I think if you had a recording made of this visit and you played it back to yourself, you might grasp some hint. Good night."

He went out to the carbon monoxide reeking street and thought the air smelled sweet and clean. That interview had told him more about Sandra Vail than an autobiography could have done. But she was still missing and he had to find her. It was now a matter of prestige.

STEVE MADDEN drove back to the night club. Wally Bishop was still on duty.

Wally said, "Back again, Steve. Listen, what hours do I have here? Nobody seems to know. The boss went off in a big rush. Am I supposed to stay here until he says go home?"

"Better stick around," Madden said. "This is an unusual night, Wally. The place cleaned out?"

"Of customers, yeah. Some of the waiters and orchestra boys are still in there."

Madden went inside. The place was badly upset. Customers had merely shoved chairs back and gone off in a rush. The drinks were stale and the atmosphere was like that of an old-time saloon, the kind with sawdust on the floor. At one of the ringside tables, beside a bottle of champagne which someone else had probably paid for, sat the trumpet player. He looked up as Madden approached.

"Hello," he said. "Did you make a pinch yet?"

Madden sat down. "Can't say. I'm Broadway Squad, not Homicide. You got any

angles?"

"Me?" His sweating glass made a liquid ring on the tablecloth. "What would I know? This is my first time here. What a flop it turned out to be. I go with these fiascos. Me, Lennie Carter, the big bust."

"Tomorrow will bring another night," Madden said. "The joint will bulge. People like coming to a spot where murder has been done, especially if it's got swank. How long did you know Lucille?"

"The torch? Never saw her before she stepped on the bandstand. She was good though. We'd have wowed 'em, given more of a chance. I like singers who can hold a high one like she did. Brother, that was music."

"It was," Madden agreed. "Seen the boss?"

"Morrison? He got a phone call an hour ago and breezed right out. Me, I'm breezing too."

Madden left him sitting there, staring at the champagne. He went to Morrison's office and closed the door. He telephoned Headquarters and got a member of his squad on the wire.

"Check a trumpet player named Lennie Carter," he instructed. "Five feet-eleven, hundred and fifty or sixty. About thirty years old. Black hair, brown eyes. Big hands that don't fit the rest of him. I'll call back in an hour or so. Work fast."

Madden left the club, spoke to Wally again and clambered back into the borrowed car. He drove to one of the better hotels, took an express elevator to the very top and climbed a flight of stairs to the penthouse there, occupied by Morrison who owned the night club.

Morrison let him in, though Madden knew he maintained a cook, Filipino valet and a maid. When all of them were dismissed, it was because Morrison had the makings of a big night. The other half of the evening turned out to be Sandra.

She was somewhat different now. The

tailored skirt and the plain blouse were gone. She wore a sequinned, tight fitting gown, with gold slippers, long gold fingerless gloves and a lot more make-up, well applied. She was stretched out on a chaise-lounge and plenty of leg, dressed in sheerest nylon, was on view.

"Hello, Steve," she said. "It took you quite a while to catch up with me."

Morrison tried bluster. "Now see here, Steve, a man's home is his castle—"

"Yeah." Madden didn't look at him. "It's also a place to hide somebody who ran away from the cops. Sit down, Morrison, and stop talking yourself into a mess. Sandra, find something to put on over that outfit so we won't have wolves drooling in our wake."

"You're really going to take me in?" She had long, artificial eyelashes and batted them at him.

"Make it a warm coat, One of Morrison's if you didn't bring one. Our cell rooms are noted for their ventilation."

She slid both legs off the lounge and sat there, cupping her chin in one hand.

"I could make you, Stevie," she said seriously. "I can make any man and you're no exception. Want to bet on it?"

Madden chortled. "No, I wouldn't make any bets. You're a funny kid, Sandra. With all the dough your old man has, you'd rather live in a precarious fashion. Take it from me, using cash to push yourself along is better."

"But not as much fun, Stevie."

QUICKLY Madden glanced at Morrison from the corner of his eye and said, "I can't understand why the daughter of Talbot Vail—"

"Talbot Vail's daughter?" Morrison was on his feet horrified. "Sandra, why didn't you tell me? Good heavens, his money backs a lot of my places."

"I thought you might like to know that," Madden said. "Okay, Sandra, we're going and I don't think Morrison is going to offer any more objections."

She had brought along a fortune in ankle length fur coat and Madden helped her get it on.

He took her to the street and put her in the car.

Sandra said, "Steve, you're a fool. In another few hours, Morrison would have talked. I could have made him talk. I was only trying to help you find the man who murdered Roseann."

Madden started the motor. "You amateurs," he snapped. "And your methods. Morrison didn't kill her. He'd have been one of the first men Homicide checked and if he didn't have an air tight alibi, he'd have been downtown long ago. You were playing up the wrong street, Sandra. And I got news for you."

"It won't be good," she grumbled. "Not coming from you."

"The truth is—Roseann wasn't with Nick Darlan the night of the murder. You were. Matter of fact, you and Darlan were to be married, or so he said. But it turned out he had a wife he didn't like to talk about. That gave you a perfect motive for slicing him through the back. So Roseann helped you. She pretended she was the one who'd been with Nick and the heat was taken off you. In return you hid her and then the two of you concocted this silly idea of making the killer come into the open by returning to the haunts of Nick Darlan here on Broadway. How about that?"

She blushed. Madden hadn't believed she remembered how to blush.

"That's a lie!" she said.

"No," he argued. "You gave it away by saying that Nick lay on his stomach when he was found. He wore pink pajamas decorated with his monogram. How did you know there was a monogram unless you saw him in the pajamas when he was alive? How did you know he initialed everything else he wore? Nick didn't tell anybody. He liked to be known as a big he-man. Baby, I told you before that leveling with me gets a lot more dividends."

She laughed at him. “You’re smart, Steve. Smarter than the Boston cops. They swallowed the story. But the rest of it still goes. I didn’t kill Nick—though I should have. And now that you do know the truth, I can tell you something else.”

“For instance—and it better be good.”

“Nick liked Roseann, but she wasn’t for him. When he realized this, he became a good pal of hers. Once he told her he was afraid of someone. Some man.”

“It is good,” Madden confessed. “Go ahead.”

“I can’t,” she sighed deeply. “For two years Roseann tried to figure out who it could be. That was the main reason why we came into the open. That man was the murderer and he’d want Roseann tried for the kill. He’d take steps and perhaps go far enough to be identified.”

Madden started the car. She clutched at his arm. “Steve, don’t lock me up. I can’t help you if I’m behind bars. I do want to help you. After that I don’t care. It’s my own future that hangs in the balance. If Boston finds out Roseann and I switched stories and that Nick had a wife, they’ll charge me with murder. They’re bound to.”

“We’re going back to the club,” Madden said. “Stop worrying.”

CHAPTER V

Manhattan Dawn

TWO blocks from the club, he stopped and went into an all night drug store to use the phone. He called Headquarters and got his office on the wire. They had completed a tentative check on Lennie Carter, the trumpet player.

“It’s not much,” Madden was told. “He hasn’t been around for a couple of years. Last time he worked with the Number Two band at the Club Midas. Nick Darlan played there too, in the Number One spot. Carter’s married, but

apparently not living with his wife. Rooms at one of the moderate priced hotels. No record of any kind. Minds his own business.”

“Thanks,” Madden said. He hung up, put in his nickel again and dialed the number of the Waiters’ Union.

“This is Steve Madden,” he told the same night clerk who’d waited on him before. “About that man Snyder again. Can you give me a list of the places where he worked during the last four or five years?”

The clerk could and did. Madden made no notes. Before hanging up, he said, “If you have Snyder’s card out of the files, keep it there. You won’t have any further use for it. Somebody strangled him to death tonight.”

Sandra was in the car, waiting this time. Madden said nothing but continued the rest of the short drive to the club. Wally was on duty, sitting on the steps dozing, but he jumped to his feet, all service and smiles.

“Oh, it’s you, Steve,” he said. “Listen, when can I go home?”

“Presently. Who’s inside?”

“Nobody that I know of. Man alive, it’s half past three in the morning. I ain’t used to keeping these kind of hours. Up at Ossining they make you—”

“Yeah, I’ve been told. Come on, Sandra.” He marched her up the stairs, but halfway along them took her elbow firmly and brought her to a halt. He dropped his voice to whisper.

“Follow my lead right through this. Do whatever I say or suggest. And make it look real.”

“Steve,” she gasped, “you’ve actually believed me all this time. You have an idea whom Roseann and I were searching for. Steve, if you help me I’ll be so eternally grateful. I can go home again and face Dad. I couldn’t before. If the Boston police ever dragged me out of his house, he’d really disown me.”

Madden didn’t answer. He just piloted her through the still smoke laden atmosphere of the club. Somebody had switched off the air

conditioning and the smell was worse than ever. They went backstage, down that death trap of a circular staircase and Sandra shuddered violently as they passed the spot where Roseann's body had crashed.

They reached the dressing room. Madden left the door open about an inch. He said, "Okay, Sandra, start looking. If you've been telling me the truth and Roseann did keep a diary, everything we want to know must be in it."

"Yes, Steve." She took the ball from there. "I'm sure she kept a diary. And she put everything in it. Names and dates and places. It must be here."

They made a great to-do about opening drawers, trunks and suitcases. Then Sandra gave a little cry of elation. She was a good actress. There wasn't even a smile on her face as she handed Madden an old book of clippings she'd found in a trunk.

"This is it, Steve. You can see it says Five-Year-Diary right on the cover."

"Let's have it," Madden grunted. "Now we'll see. Go back two years. . . . March that will be. And here it starts. An entry for Boston. . . ."

Madden turned his back on her for a moment and put the fake diary down on the dressing table. He heard a gasp.

Sandra said, "Don't look now, Steve, but I think somebody has a great big gun pushed against the small of my back and the muzzle is as cold as the heart of the man who holds the gun."

It was Lennie Carter's voice—the boy with the golden trumpet. "Stay bent over that table, Madden," he said. "Raise your right hand very slowly and take your gun out of its holster. If you make one play, this kid gets it right through the back."

Madden lifted the gun out by two fingers. "I was afraid of this," he said.

"Now back up until you hit the wall, raise your hands palms outward and the backs of your hands flat against the wall. Move,

Madden, because I don't care any more how many I have to kill."

UNDER the circumstances Madden obeyed the orders explicitly. Sandra stood, apparently frozen by fear. Her face had gone slack. She'd never been a raving beauty and now she verged on the ugly side. The makeup was as violent as the paint on a roadside billboard at close range.

"Don't be a fool, Lennie," Madden said gently. "As it stands now you've got a fairly good defense but if you kill anyone else, there won't be any defense at all."

"They'd lock me up," Carter said. "I couldn't take that. They'd fix it so I'd never play again and I couldn't take that either. My trumpet is my life."

"It double-crossed you, Lennie," Madden told him.

Carter showed some interest. "My trumpet? Just how?"

"You told me you'd never seen Roseann before in your life. I know she hadn't rehearsed with the band. But when she sang and hit that high note, you matched it with your horn, and brother you had to know how she'd sing to do that."

Carter nodded over Sandra's shoulder. "I couldn't resist temptation. I didn't think she knew me. I'm sure she didn't so I took a chance. That's one you're up on me, Madden, but it's the last trick that counts."

"So I've been told," Madden said. "You had an easy time of it with Nick Darlan. Sandra here was with him that night. You and everyone else knew Nick was married and any proposal he made to Sandra was so much hot air. But it gave her a motive to kill him and when she went out, you moved in and used the pair of scissors. Only the girls double-crossed you and Roseann took the rap. She let on that it was she who'd been with Nick so there was no longer any motive."

"Step sideways out the door," Carter ordered. "Sandra, don't pull a faint. I might

not believe it and let you have one through the back. Get started.”

They were in the corridor. Sandra and Madden walked side by side with Carter bringing up close at the rear, his gun steady as a rock.

“How did you know he’d be here?” Sandra whispered.

“He wouldn’t have dared leave,” Madden said. “He was afraid we’d spot some clue and he wanted to be around. I found out he worked at the same club as Nick two years ago but not with Nick’s band. I found out he was married but not living with his wife. Nick was the cause of that. An expert in the line. It tied up pretty well, especially after he’d lied to me about never having seen Roseann before.”

“Shut up,” Carter warned. “Do you think I enjoy this? Remember, Madden, I can kill you and slam one through Sandra before either of you can so much as turn around.”

“Don’t remind me of it,” Madden grumbled.

They crossed the club, went down the steps and Wally Bishop was at the door. He held it open.

Wally said, “Hey, Steve, how much longer before I can go home to bed? I’m not used to these hours. I tell you I’m out on my feet.”

As Madden passed very close to Wally he gave him a slight nudge.

Madden said, “Why don’t you go back to your old line, Wally? Just don’t let your crippled right hand know what your left hand is doing.”

“Let’s go,” Lennie Carter said impatiently. There was no gun in his hand now. Both arms swung clear and he looked nervously up and down the half deserted street.

“Shall we use my car?” Madden asked.

“Use it,” Carter snapped. “And hurry it up.”

Madden got in first to man the wheel. Sandra squeezed herself up against him and he could feel her trembling. Carter got in last. Madden started the car, drove a block and a

half and suddenly pulled up to the curb.

Carter said, “What’s the idea, Madden? I’ll kill you if there are any tricks.”

“How,” Madden asked sweetly, “will you kill me?”

“I’ve got a gun and you’re unarmed.”

“You haven’t had a gun for the last two minutes. It was lifted out of your pocket by one of the smartest pickpockets on the stem. Look down the street, Lennie. There’s a cop coming this way. Look in the other direction, behind you. Two more are coming this way. If you jump out and run, all I have to do is give a yell and they’ll cut you to pieces. It’s much better for you to surrender.”

CARTER frantically reached for his gun and swore bitterly. As if by prearrangement, Sandra suddenly stood up as far as the roof would permit and let Madden slide across her to reach Carter. There wasn’t even a fight.

The patrolmen, answering Madden’s hail, quickly put handcuffs on Carter. Another radio car showed and the prisoner was whisked away.

Sandra tried to light a cigarette but her hands shook too badly. Madden gave her a light. She said, “I’ll have crow’s feet under my eyes from now on. I’m thirty years older. You had him all the time. You knew you did, Steve.”

“I wish I’d had your confidence,” Madden said. “I gave him too much of a break. I knew he’d try to get that mythical diary but he worked too fast. It doesn’t make much difference now. Too bad! He could certainly play that trumpet.”

“But Steve, he has a good defense. You told him so. Nick took his wife away from him.”

“Sure, that’s correct. But like Lennie, you forgot something. There was a second kill. Lennie strangled Snyder, the waiter who saw me drawing a picture of Roseann as she was without any makeup. Snyder knew the whole

story. He'd worked at the same club with Lennie and they must have been friends. So he told Lennie I was ready to put a pinch on Roseann and Lennie was afraid she might know just a mite too much. So he followed her to the staircase and gave her a shove. Then he went to Snyder's house and paid him off. The marks on Snyder's throat were those inflicted by a man with big hands. Lennie had big hands."

"They'll—burn him then?"

"If they don't, juries have lost all their value, baby. And the way he played that trumpet. Hey, where are you going?"

She was out of the car. "Home, Steve. Home where I belong. If you ever see me in one of those hot spots again, put me in the deepest dungeon you can find. I wanted to go far. I didn't have the looks so I figured being a woman would help me move up the ladder faster. I'm a washout and it's good for me to know that. I won't be seeing you, Steve."

Madden got out of the car, half tempted to dissuade her. Someone came running in his direction. It was Wally Bishop, partly tangled

in the too long uniform coat and partly blinded by a too big hat that slid down over his eyes.

He tipped the hat up and said, "I did it with me left mitt, Steve. He never even knew I lifted the gat. Did he, Steve? Did he know?"

"He didn't," Madden said. "It was smooth, Wally."

"Yeah? Thanks, pal. Thanks very much." Wally threw the hat in the gutter and clambered out of the overwhelming coat. He let this drop to the sidewalk. "Swell," he went on gleefully. "Here's the gat. Imagine, I never thought me left mitt could do them tricks. Steve, I'm back in business."

"Beat it," Madden snarled.

Wally didn't take offense. He was too delighted with his new found prowess.

He literally danced down the street. Madden watched him, swung around and saw Sandra turning the corner.

"Such," Madden said, "is life."

He crossed the street to a cellar restaurant where the steaks came thick and rare even just before dawn.