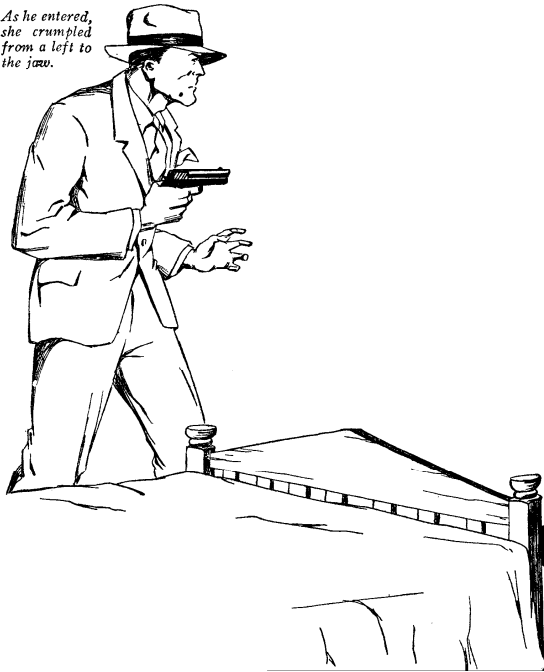


# A Hundred Grand

By MORT LANSING

*She confessed to Johnny that she'd killed a man. "Maybe," Johnny said, "but it stinks to me!" Thereafter Johnny stuck to the money trail*

*As he entered, she crumpled from a left to the jaw.*



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“THERE’S a picture of him here somewhere!” He fumbled through the drawer of the heavy table. “Here it is!” The woman beside him leaned over the photo, straightened abruptly.

“That is not the man! That is not my brother!”

The man shrugged, tossed the picture back into the drawer. She followed its fall with worried eyes. There in the littered drawer, half covered, was a black revolver.

“Let’s quit playing!” the man laughed suddenly. “You know why I got you up here! How’s it for a little kiss?”

She slapped him, eyes angry slits. Again he laughed, paying no attention to the

sharp blow, reached out suddenly to hook his fingers in the low vee of her gown. The silk ripped, torn to her waist. Her breasts, unfettered by brassiere, sprang forth boldly, proud and upthrust, quivering in her anger.

Before she could scream he groped her roughly, purposefully. Back, back across the table he bent her, eyes hot, holding her helpless with the weight of his body, free hand caressing, fondling, burning mouth seeking redolent flesh.

Her hand slid into the drawer, fingers found the cold butt of the pistol. Suddenly he released her, blood trickling from his lip, struck at her viciously.

She sprawled over a heavy stool in a

sudden flurry of silken legs, lay there stunned for a moment while his face flamed and contorted with anger. He kicked her cruelly.

“Bite me, will you! I’ll teach you!” He drew back the foot again.

Her arm came slowly up, hate and fear in her eyes. The gun seemed to speak before it was half directed at the target.

Three shots—like slaps. Crack! Crack! Crack!

**F**OR a moment the man looked down at her, an odd expression sweeping over his face—staggered a half dozen steps—crumpled, clutching at his breast.

Slowly, painfully she arose, white-faced, wide-eyed, the gun thudding on the thick carpet. Hands covering her breasts she leaned over the fallen man. The white shirt front was slowly turning red.

“God help you, lady—you’ve killed him!” The valet stood in the doorway.

Sobs shook her half-naked body, hysteria threatened. The little valet knelt over the body of his master for a few seconds, then hurried to the woman.

“He was no good, lady! I saw what happened! He deserved to die!”

“But they’ll hang me! They’ll hang me!” Over and over she sobbed the words, the little man comforting her as best he could furtive eyes darting about the apartment.

“He deserved it, I tell you! I saw it all! Trying to assault you! Listen, I’ll help you! I’ll do it! We’ll get the body out of here by the back way. We’ll take it somewhere else and no one will ever know you killed him! We can get him out between us; if we meet anyone they’ll think he’s drunk again! Will you help me?”

She regained control with an obvious effort. “You—you—” her hesitant voice held just the trace of a foreign accent, “you would do this for me? Why would you do this?”

The little valet drew himself erect,

looked righteous. “Because he was a beast—and I hated him!” He spurned the body of Thorndike, the dead man, with his foot.

**L**ATE on the afternoon of the following day, Johnny Harding, tattler columnist of the *Daily Recorder*, got off the elevator on the fourth floor of the St. Helena, face grim and serious, as he rang the bell at the apartment of Niva Sorenson, newest importation of Gold Star Pictures, latest box office bet of Papa Manheim, whom Johnny Harding respected and loved for the shrewd but big-hearted movie magnate he was. A trim maid answered his ring, but stopped his abrupt advance sternly in the hall.

“No,” she said, smiling faintly—they all smiled at Johnny Harding!—“Miss Sorenson isn’t in right now!” She glanced at the card in her hand, smiled again. “She isn’t granting any interviews at present; I’m afraid you’ll have to see her press department!”

“Gee,” sighed Johnny, eyeing the shapely maid, “and the boss promised to fire me if I didn’t find her favorite recipe for okra!” The maid shrugged, flushing beneath his bold stare. “Say,” he continued hopefully, “if she isn’t here maybe you can give me a recipe?”

She was gently but firmly shoving him toward the door. Harding’s hand emerged from his pocket, stubby fingers concealing the thin nail file. At the door he braced himself momentarily. “You’re sure you don’t know any?” he persisted, and she laughed as she shook her head. “You look like you know your okra!” cajoled Johnny as she began closing the door.

Still talking, still holding her with his eyes, he slid the slender nail file across the steel door jamb, and still laughing at his blarney she closed the door in his face. The lock clicked, against the nail file, which prevented the tongue from slipping into its groove.

He stood there whistling thoughtfully beneath his breath until the sound of her spike heels on the polished floor faded away. He turned the knob and stepped in.

No one was in sight. Softly he tiptoed down the shining hallway, made the thick rug with a little sigh of relief, knowing its very thickness and luxury would muffle the pad of his stealthy feet. Through three huge rooms he tiptoed, constantly alert but meeting no one, taking in every detail of the magnificent apartment and mentally cataloguing the owner as a person of taste and discrimination. At a far door he paused, ear pressed close to the panel.

"I'm sure I don't know, ma'am," the maid was speaking, voice worried, "something about vegetables he said."

"Vegetables!" The answering voice was almost a shriek. "Vegetables! What did he look like? You tell him no I am not here?"

Johnny opened the door, smiling grimly. "How de do?" he said.

THE room was mussed, disordered, floor literally covered with flung newspapers, as if some one had been searching them impatiently. However, for the time being, Johnny wasn't interested in newspapers.

Against the long French doors leading to the balcony on the street side stood Niva Sorenson, romantic star of a score of European film hits, recently imported by Papa Manheim for the edification of the American public.

Johnny Harding proceeded to get edified first, for, clad as she was in a gossamer, spider web negligee, every enticing curve and contour of a perfect figure was outlined and accented against the light. Generous breasts faded to a thin, flat waist, flared again to svelte, rounded hips, tapered to columnar thighs. Johnny was well down onto a million dollars worth of Slavic legs when the maid came to.

"You," she gasped, starting toward him, "I told you—"

"Take it easy, sister!" There was no laughter in his voice now, nor yet in his eyes, which were fixed on the movie star. Her own eyes flared with hate—or was it fear? Long fingers almost hid the mound of a breast while red lips drew back from gleaming teeth.

"I'm Johnny Harding of the *Daily Recorder*, and I've just been up to see Papa Manheim. Does that mean anything to you?"

"What you want? I do not know what you mean!"

"Okay, babe; forget the accent. You may be a Russian princess to some guys but to me you're just an umbay! I got a couple of questions for you about Papa Manheim and I'd just as soon spring them in front of the baby here. They've got something to do with a *hundred grand!* Does that burn you?"

The woman's face grew even whiter; her great eyes took on the startled look of the snared animal as she gestured the maid from the room with never a word until the door closed.

"What you want?" Her words were low, tense. "What you want to know about Meestair Manheim? What he tell you?"

"Forget the accent, babe!" Johnny's voice was disgusted. "And get the hell out of that light. I don't care if you've got a million dollar shape—I'm not interested. I want to know how come you put the bee on my friend Manheim for a *hundred thousand bucks!* Now talk fast!"

SHE lit a cigarette with trembling fingers, walking across the room to sink down on the deep divan before the little columnist. Ivory knees emerged in turn from the negligee as she walked. The ripe beauty of her body was more than hinted at.

"Why—why—why—" her voice was tragic, "deed he tell you! He promise me no! no! he don't say nothing—and now—"

She began to sob, head in hands. The dark valley between her breasts, the rising, pulsing mounds themselves worried Johnny. He shifted uneasily, spoke with sarcasm.

“Is this an act? Listen, sister, you’re wasting time. I don’t know you and I don’t want to, but Papa Manheim is a friend of mine—a damned good friend! I’m sick of seeing every cheap hustler and panhandler on Broadway finger him for jack, and I’m not going to stand by and see you or anyone else rook him for a hundred thousand potatoes. That’s money, important money! Now you listen to me!”

He pounded his fist on the table. “You’re going to dig up the hundred grand he sent you this morning and you’re going to lay it right in my hand, or I’ll have you clapped so deep in jail you can’t blast your way out! Maybe Papa made a little mistake—maybe he lost his head and played around you a little bit. But he’s got a nice family and a hundred grand is too much jack! Believe me, hustler, I got influence enough in this town to keep that quiet—and I’ll do it! You can’t rook a friend of mine! You or any other cheap hustler from Brooklyn!”

“Hustler!” Her eyes blazed with anger. “You call *me* that, in whose veins flows the purest—”

“Nerts,” said Johnny wearily. “I know, I know! Sit down. I like the way you shimmy when you get sore but it won’t buy you anything!” He glanced at his watch. “Now, small change, you may be a princess to a lot of mugs, but to me you’re just a chiseler that put the finger on a friend of mine for a hundred grand. You’ve got until five o’clock to dig it up—or else!”

Back and forth she paced before him, worried, frantic, her cigarette making a blue cloud behind her. The negligee, clinging and seductive, was her only garment—and it was fastened only at the waist!

“No! No! I can’t get it for you! I

haven’t got it!”

“What the hell could you do with a hundred grand?”

“I don’t know! I don’t know!” she moaned.

“A hundred grand! Great Godfrey! Spent a hundred grand and don’t know where! With a hundred thousand dollars you could buy your way out of the electric chair!”

She faced him desperately, breasts rising and falling.

“Electric chair! That is what I spend the money for! To keep me from the electric chair! *I keel a man!*”

Johnny Harding laughed up into her face. He looked at the clock on the mantle. Four forty-five. “Why don’t you save these scenes for the movies, hustler? I’m getting a little tired of them! No kidding! You’ve got fifteen minutes to dig up that jack!”

But at five o’clock the only occupants of the apartment were a frightened maid who tried vainly to assuage the grief and calm the fears of a hysterical movie star.

**J**OHNNY HARDING, excited, skeptical and worried, was dropping nickels into a telephone in the corner drugstore. Getting his bosom friend. Bill Nobles, of the homicide squad, on the phone he took his bawling out without a single word of derision.

“What for you bother me about that guy is more than I can see!” The detective’s voice was plaintive. “I’m up all night and you get me out of bed to ask about a cheap chiseler like Thorndike! No, I don’t know where he is, and if you find him tip off some of the boys, will you? He’s been up to his old tricks—passing rubber paper. There’s a pick-up order out for him, but it’s none of my business. I deal in murders.

“Now if you happen to know anything about a cab driver named Cohen, a dead cab driver that might abandon his cab in the Bronx and then run out to Long Island to get himself

knocked off—Cohen was the name. C like in chump, O like—”

“Nerts!” spat Johnny and hung up.

To his next call a suave voice answered, “No, Mr. Thorndike isn’t at home. No, I don’t know when he will be—”

Likewise, “Nerts!” said Johnny Harding.

Call number three. “For God’s sake, Johnny,” came the agonized voice of Papa Manheim, “don’t go to the police. What do I care if she chiseled me for a little gelt? I’ve spent a million and a half in publicity building her up and if you call in the police now I’ll lose it all! Listen, Johnny, please, on my knees I’m begging you! It wasn’t a hundred, I tell you—only eighty thousand, Johnny, eighty thousand! What if my wife, Sara, should find—” but he was talking to a dead phone.

By eight o’ clock Johnny had visited three pawnbrokers checking up on the picture star’s wild story. Likewise he had visited Cecil Thorndike’s apartment only to be turned away by a hard faced valet with the same information garnered from his phone call—that Thorndike had not been home for several days.

**S**HORTLY afterward, lounging in a cab with Niva Sorenson by his side, he assured himself that so far her wild story had checked in every detail. She actually had raised \$20,000 on her jewelry that morning.

“Flushing,” he told the driver and turned to the woman again. “Baby, so far your story is checking. I don’t mind telling you that much but I still think it’s a frame-up. You bump off a guy and then his own valet helps you dispose of the body! Why in hell would he do that!”

“He say,” her voice was just as low, “he hated him. He say I am too beautiful to die! So we breeng him out here.”

“And then,” Johnny mused, “he calls you up this morning and says somebody saw

you! Somebody calls him on the phone and demands a hundred thousand dollars—blackmail! Babe, you and Smollett aren’t running a fast one, are you? Smollett mean anything to you? Boy friend?”

He felt her slim body stiffen beside him, her voice held anger. “Smollett is a servant! A menial! In my veins—”

“Yeah,” grimly, “I know. Royal blood and all that. But it stinks just the same. You claim you kill a guy in a fight for your honor. Say, let me see the scar you were talking about. Pull up here, driver, and turn on your light.”

The driver got a break. The muffled figure in the back lifted her cloak, her skirt, to disclose chiffon clad perfection—a million dollars worth of tapering leg. She unhooked the left stocking, slid it down to her ankle, disclosing a long skinned place stretching across her shin. Harding leaned over and examined it closely; she winced beneath his fingers.

“Okay,” sharply, “it’s fresh. Let’s see the other.”

The cloak parted beneath her fingers. The low vee of her neck half disclosed a pulsing breast and unhesitatingly she drew back the gown. There on the soft whiteness of her throat gleamed a black blotch—a bruise, in the form of an oval pointed at both ends—the mark of teeth.

“Okay, baby. Start your bus, Mac, we’re on our way to Flushing.”

“So far you’re still clicking,” he admitted. “But I still can’t see why this guy Smollett would help you hide the body of his boss I Still” —remembering the fragrance and musky odor of that svelte skin, “some guys will do a lot for a dame. If you’re on the level, he got his foot in it, though!” The woman remained wrapped in silence.

Through Flushing and toward the fishing piers they rolled, back into a clump of trees that darkened the moonlight. She

directed the driver herself and presently the headlights revealed a fishing shack, dirty, grey and dilapidated. Johnny stopped the car and with an insinuating wink at the driver led the woman down the pathway toward the black cottage.

"The driver," she said, "he will suspect something?"

"Sure, babe! He'll suspect plenty, but not what you think. Come on."



THE door was unlocked; with an eerie feeling Johnny opened it, cast the rays of the tiny flashlight about the single room. A crude table and two broken chairs stood against the window. A cot with a crooked leg was along the wall. Bottles were on the table, on the chairs, cast about the floor—but the shack was empty.

For a long while they stood there in utter silence, the light flickering and dancing on the dirty walls.

"Chiseler!" snapped Johnny. "If you and that punk put a stiff in here last night, where in hell is he?"

The woman moaned and fainted. He stood there, looking down at her, wondering, trying to piece the thing together. Deliberately

he walked away to examine the cot minutely, carefully, long and well by the bright little light. There was no single spot of blood stain. Still puzzled, and more than a little suspicious he came back to her, cast the light on her.

Her face was ghastly white and even beneath her thin lipstick her lips appeared blue, bloodless. The long cloak she wore had fallen apart, her dress had worked up about her hips in the fall. On the upper part of her rounded thigh was a black bruise, as large as the palm of a hand.

"J's" Johnny spoke to Johnny, "somebody's been kicking her around, all right! Teeth prints, a bruise like that and a barked shin! But where in hell's the body? If she and this mug Smollett *did* put one out here and some one else found it! Whew! What a mess!"

Even Johnny Harding failed to relish the idea of helping conceal a murder! If this woman had killed Cecil Thorndike, as she claimed, how could he afford to put his foot in it? Even for an old and trusted friend like Papa Manheim? And as he carried her to the cab looking at her finely chiseled features he realized she was exactly the type who might kill a man trying to use force where guile might be successful.

"'Smatter, boss?" from the cab driver, "couldn't she take it?"

"She didn't like the salt breeze," grinned Johnny, lifting her in.

Something gleamed and glittered in the sand at his feet. Thinking she had dropped her vanity he picked it up, examined it with surprise. "Drop your badge, buddie?"

"Naw," said the cab driver, "mine's on my cap!"

Johnny dropped the shiny badge in his pocket, got in.

At the first drug store he bought ammonia, borrowed a glass of water and revived her. The rest of the way into Manhattan she was inarticulate other than

mumbling and groaning, moaning like a frightened child about the electric chair, the noose and death! Johnny comforted her as best he could, arm about her trembling shoulders, fragrant hair in his face, but his doleful countenance belied his words.

"We'll straighten it up some way," he promised her. But inwardly he was cursing for by now he was more than half determined that events had transpired exactly as she had claimed. He swore deeply at the panic that had made her conceal the corpse with the aid of the misled valet, Smollett.

**F**OR now, to all appearances, the body had been found, and the finders were blackmailing the woman—hence \$80,000 from Papa Manheim. If it wasn't reported to the police the blackmailers would bleed Niva Sorenson from that time on—and if it was reported the ensuing scandal would break down all the publicity for the star Papa Manheim had so painstakingly built up. It *was* a jam, and how!

At the St. Helena he insisted on her taking a drink for a bracer. In fact, he needed a little bracing himself, and got it, not once, but three times. It was good Scotch.

"Well," he said dismally, "it still stinks to me! I'll admit I came up here this afternoon thinking you were just another cheap tart, hooking Papa Manheim, but now I don't know what to think! You've cut loose with a hundred grand to keep this thing still, but that's only a starter! Where you going to get the jack when they tap you again!"

He paced back and forth, bracing himself at every turn with the bottle of Scotch he carried in his hand. For a long while she sat there silent, thinking, thinking. When she arose her voice was steady in answer to his question—as steady as the hands which held the telephone.

"No, no," he protested, "lay off the police until morning! I'll tell you—you call

this mug Smollett and get him over here, out of his own apartment. I'll have a little look-see while you're entertaining him; there may be something rotten yet. Don't give up, baby!"

It required a little argument before she agreed, but ten minutes later the call had been made, the soft-voiced Smollett had promised to appear by midnight and Johnny was on his way to Greenwich Village, where lay Thorndike's apartment.

The sidewalk in front of the apartment hotel was deserted; Johnny waited in the shadow across the street. Presently a little figure of a man darted from the entrance, hailed the very cab Johnny had vacated and rode away. Johnny ran across the street, dashed into the foyer and up to the desk.

"Smollett," he said hurriedly, "Smollett, Mr. Thorndike's man. Was that him that just left?" And as the clerk nodded affirmation, he snapped his fingers in disgust. "Missed him again!"

Walking out he caught the eye of a fresh-faced bellhop, motioned him to follow. Wise in the ways of apartment hotels the bellhop was soon beside him on the sidewalk.

Johnnie shoved a card in one of his hands, began leafing through a sheaf of green bills with the other.

"Gee, Mr. Harding," the bellhop grinned, "I'd have known you, anyway. I read your stuff every morning. What—"

Johnny grinned back at him. "Swell, kid. I like to see young fellows reading pure literature. Want to make a few bucks? I'm buying good advice. If you was me and wanted to go to that heel Thorndike's apartment without anyone knowing it, how'd you work it?"

The kid spat into the gutter. "Heel is right! Thorndike wouldn't give a dime to see an earthquake. But if I was you and wanted in his apartment while he was gone I'd tell a wise bellhop—like me—then meet him in the elevator in about ten minutes. Maybe the

bellhop can finagle a pass key.”

Johnny peeled off the top bill and handed it to the boy. They grinned at each other and parted. Ten minutes later Johnny Harding opened the door of the empty apartment and switched on the lights. He closed it softly behind him and gazed around. It was furnished exactly as Niva Sorenson had explained—the table here, the divan there, the heavy chair here. He padded through the living room, entered one of the bedrooms at the rear. Evidently it was the man Smollett’s room, for the closet held a single black suit and the bureau drawers revealed nothing but the clothes of a valet. There were a few pictures, a few nicknacks, and a bottle of Scotch half full on the dresser.

Johnny wiped his mouth and walked into another bedroom. The bureau drawers held half a dozen pairs of ragged socks, a few tattered undershirts; the closet revealed a soiled dressing gown. “Where,” Johnny asked Johnny, “is the guy’s clothes? Thorndike was always a snappy dresser. Where’s his rags now?”

Perhaps the valet had concealed them—no doubt he had. His plan was simply to make it seem that the murdered man had disappeared. He wandered back into the living room, set the bottle carelessly on the table. Here was the stool she had fallen over when Thorndike hit her. Here was where the struggle had occurred. He pulled open the heavy drawer.

The gun itself! The murder gun! The valet had missed it!

He picked it up carefully, touched the trigger. Crack! Crack! He dropped it hastily, waited for the echo to die away, sweat popping out on his brow. Whew, what a trigger! Speaking of hair-triggers! No wonder the damned thing went off! Good thing he wasn’t looking in the barrel! Carefully he revolved the cylinder in his hand, gazed at the remaining shells long and well.

Presently he laid the gun back on the table and began to laugh. Perhaps he laughed from sheer relief but sometimes the little columnist laughed most heartily when mad. He killed the Scotch, took up the phone and called Niva Sorenson.

For a second the operator rang fruitlessly. Then the connection was made and a woman’s sobbing voice said, “Oh! oh! oh!” and the connection was severed.

**I**T TOOK a precious three minutes to get to the ground floor and hail a cab, and a precious ten minutes to get to Central Park West. But he wasted no time at the front door—rather, he made the fire escape in nothing flat.

The French doors were locked but he burst a pane of glass with the gun he had thrust into his pocket. There was no sound in the bedroom; he tiptoed to the closed door, placed his ear against it. Cautiously he opened it a tiny crack and peered in.

The woman leaned, half-crouched against the table, a heavy book end raised above her wildly streaming hair in a gesture of defense. Just out of arm’s length was Smollett, valet to Cecil Thorndike, smirking and smiling.

“Now, sweetheart, there ain’t no use fighting me like this. After all, I’m your friend. Look what I did for you!” Step by step he advanced, little pig eyes glaring and burning.

She stood quivering like an excited thoroughbred. The bedraggled appearance of the room proved the struggle that had already taken place and the figure of the woman emphasized it. She stood there poised for flight, clad only in a pair of thin silken step-ins, a torn brassiere dangling unheeded from her shoulder. A tattered negligee lay on the floor beneath her heels. Her generous breasts rose and fell in the stress of her fear and emotion.

Before Johnny could say a word the man sprang. He didn't seize her, didn't snatch at her. Instead he swung at her savagely with a clenched fist and the book end clattered harmlessly to the floor as she crumpled from a hard left to the jaw. For a moment longer Johnny stood there as the man bent over her white form.

"Stick 'em up, you rat!"

The man turned and glared, eyes wild, then slowly his hands went up.

**I**N FIVE minutes he lay on the floor, trussed like a pig for slaughter, a red spot on his jaw showing where Johnny had smacked him unmercifully. The woman, Niva Sorenson, lay on the davenport, still unconscious. Johnny hung up the phone and looked around for the Scotch bottle.

"Punk," he said softly to Smollett, "you act like a rat and if I was you I'd run true to form. In five minutes Bill Nobles will be here, Nobles of the homicide squad. When he gets through with you they'll clap you in the bastille, and finally they'll sit you in the hot seat and fry your no-good carcass to a crisp." He took a drink and looked solemnly at the bound man.

"What do you mean, hot seat?" The man's eyes were frightened. "Why, just this. I know the whole lay, chump, the whole lay. I got the gun right here that killed Cecil Thorndike, and it's got your fingerprints all over it!"

"I didn't kill him! The dame did it! She—"

"Nuts! When you go on the stand who's the jury going to believe! A swell-looking dame like that, a dame all broke out with sex appeal, or a rat like you? Why, you've got 'heel' written all over your face. You shouldn't have put the gun back in the drawer. Well, you'll make a fine looking stiff, anyway."

Silence. When the man Smollett spoke

again his voice was shaken. "Mister, I didn't kill Thorndike. You got me wrong."

"Yeah, how would I know? How would a jury know?"

"Thorndike ain't dead, mister, honest to God. Listen, let me out of this and I'll take you to him. I know where he's at, I know where he's holed up!"

The door barged open. Bill Nobles.

"Hello, drizzlepuss," smiled Johnny, "have a drink?"

The big detective's eyes swept around the room and back to the little newspaper man. "What you into now, dimwit? And who's the scenery?"

"It's a long story," said Johnny, "but I've got a pinch for you. Thorndike, the hot check man." Nobles looked disgusted. "Only this time I'll bet my hat you'll stick him for murder—not hot paper! Sit down, demon detectatiff, sit down!"

**T**EN minutes later. "And so as soon as I find the blanks in the revolver, I knew it was a frame-up sure enough. Besides, it looked funny for Thorndike to plaster the town with bad paper just before he got bumped off. I'll bet even you would smell a little stink there. They frame this poor little innocent gal here into believing she killed Thorndike, and little Rollo helps her do away with the body. That stunk like fish, too. He's a great little helper, though. He's going to help you up to the Bronx to pinch Mr. Cecil Thorndike!"

Nobles thought for a moment. "Okay, I'll knock him off if he's there, but whatta you mean murder? I can't pinch him for killing hisself, 'specially if he's alive now!"

"Teh! Teh!" said Johnny softly. "How about that cab driver, Cohen? You know you found his body in Flushing and his cab in the Bronx? Well, lookee! I found his badge outside that cabin on the bay. Smollett here probably rode back to town with the great

Sorenson, picked up another cab and went back for Thorndike. Of course they smacked the poor cabby on the sconce—just in case. Ask Thorndike when you pinch him—or this lug here.”

Smollett turned his head away and groaned—his face drained of color.

At the door on the way out Nobles turned at Johnny’s voice. The little columnist was bathing Niva Sorenson’s face with a towel.

“Would you mind calling me in the

morning about eleven? I have to be in the office around noon.”

“Why don’t you leave a call, simple mind?”

“Here? Leave a call in a swell joint like this? My! my!”

The white shapeliness of the screen star stirred beneath his ministrations. Nobles grinned enviously, closed the door.

“And don’t forget that hundred grand,” Harding’s voice came to him, “I won’t have time to worry about it. I’m a busy man.”