



A Special Holiday Gift
from
Ron Miller
and
Velda



VELDA

GIRL DETECTIVE

**THE
BETTER
LITTLE
BOOK**

**MEETS THE
STRANGLER**



VELDA, Girl Detective Meets the Strangler

BY MAXWELL FURLONG

[The events described are based on the actual case files of detective Velda Bellinghausen, but for obvious reasons, the names and likenesses used in this book are entirely fictitious.]

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VELDA, GIRL DETECTIVE MEETS THE STRANGLER

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
1 The Girl in the Car.....	5
2 A New Client.....	14
3 On the Trail.....	26
4 A Pair of Stags.....	40
5 Closing In.....	48
6 I Get Lucky.....	62
7 I Get Not So Lucky.....	74
8 Crime Does Not Pay.....	88

VELDA, GIRL DETECTIVE MEETS THE STRANGLER

CHAPTER ONE

THE GIRL IN THE CAR

My name is Velda Bellinghausen. I'm a private detective. Until a couple of years ago I was a show girl in Slotnik's Follies. But I got tired of taking everything off except a handful of feathers three times a night, five times on Saturdays with matinees. My dad had been a cop, and a

good one, too, so maybe he inspired my choice for a new career. Or maybe it was the advertisement I saw on the matchbook cover for a correspondence course in detection. Whatever the reason, I sent in my money, took the course and got my license. It seemed like a good idea at the time, but it was harder getting started than I thought. People didn't seem to take the idea of a girl detective very seriously. This probably had a lot to do with the fact that I wasn't getting very much work.

And maybe I was doing too much work



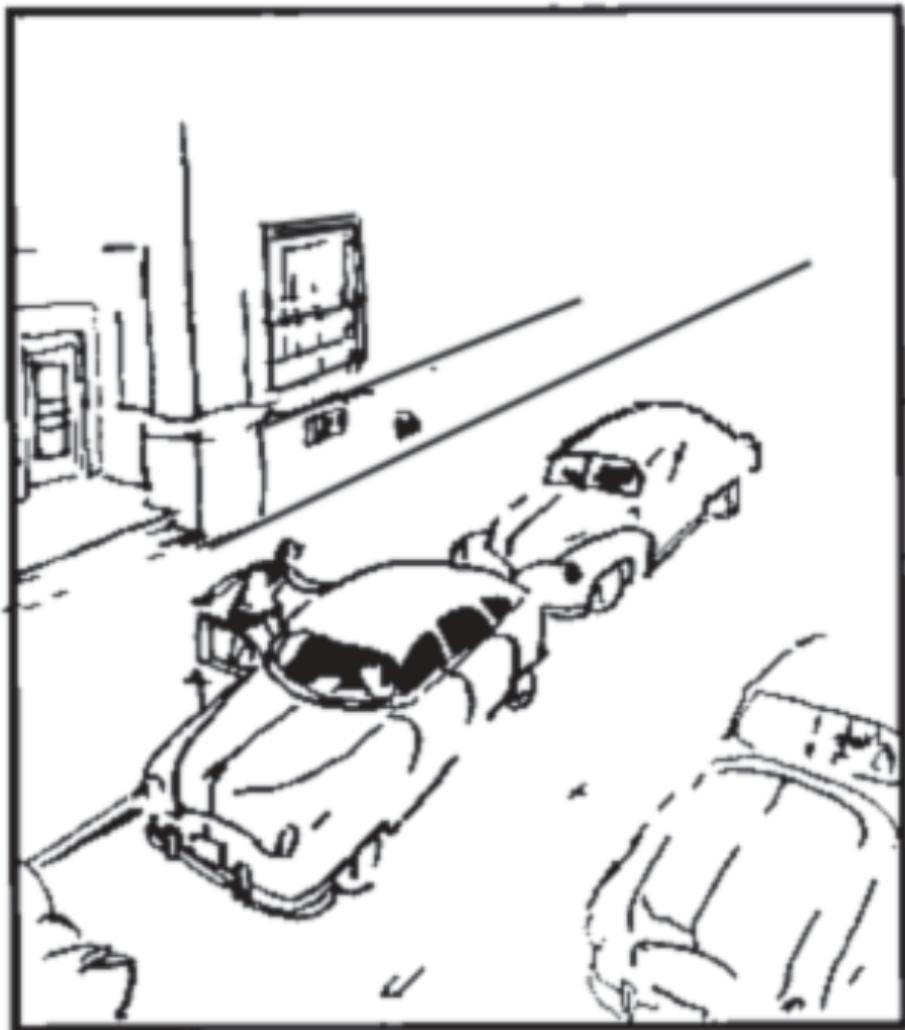
People didn't take me seriously.

out of the goodness of my heart.

Like the Case of the Strangler and the Strawberry Blonde.

I was on my way back from Joe's Diner—Joe lets me put my cheeseburgers on the tab when I'm between jobs—when I heard someone yell. I looked around and saw some kid standing beside a parked car about halfway down the block. He was waving his arms and now I could hear what he was yelling. It was “Help! Someone help!”

I broke into a run and a half dozen long



I heard someone yell.

strides later I was standing beside the kid, panting like a steam engine.

“Jeepers, lady! There’s a sick girl in my car!”

I looked inside and, sure enough, there was a figure slumped on the front seat. It was a young girl that looked like a teenager, about the same age, I guessed, as the kid who had done all the yelling. Her strawberry blonde hair hung loosely over the seat and her wide flowered skirt was pulled well up her thighs. She looked like she was asleep, but I couldn’t see her



A figure slumped on the front seat.

breathing.

I crawled inside and shook her by a shoulder. She just flopped over loosely. I pushed a couple of fingers against her neck. I couldn't feel a pulse under the ice-cold skin.

“Hey, kid,” I called out. “You better call an ambulance. And the cops, too. I think the girl's dead.”

As I climbed back out to the sidewalk, the teenager was leaping into the drugstore to look for a telephone.



The kid phoned the cops.

CHAPTER TWO

A NEW CLIENT

The ambulance arrived about the same time as the police. The police were naturally interested in a girl found dead in a parked car. While we waited for the officials to arrive, I asked the kid if he knew who the girl was and what she was doing in his car.

“I ain’t got no idea, lady,” he said, shaking so hard he could hardly talk. “I ain’t never seen her before in all my life.”

“I know who she is,” said a voice from



“I ain’t got no idea, lady!”

behind me. I turned around. It was the druggist, who had just come out of his store. “That there’s Joyce Whooply. Know her anywhere.”

I wanted to ask him more about the girl, but just then the cops and ambulance came flying around the corner, sirens blaring. I stood back as the men piled out of their vehicles and swarmed over the car. As a good citizen, I knew I should let the police and doctors do their jobs and not get in their way.

One of the cops—a young rookie I

PHARMA



“That there’s Joyce Whooply.”

recognized as Biff Spillminler—came over to where the kid stood next to me.

“What’s your name, kid?” he asked.

“W-wally,” the kid stammered. “Wally Underpoff.”

“That your car there?”

“It sure is, officer!”

“You know who that girl is? You know what she’s doing dead in your car?”

“I sure don’t know, officer!”

Now his nervousness didn’t look so much like he was scared to death. It had a kind of guilty feel about it. The cop must’ve



“W-wally,” the kid stammered.

felt the same way, because he told the kid he'd have to take him back to the precinct with him. Just for some routine questions, he told the kid, but I knew better. When the cops think they got the guilty party, they get this funny kind of look in their eyes.

The cops also asked me what I was doing hanging around. I told them I'd just been walking by and didn't know anything about anything. I batted my eyes at the cop who was talking to me and showed a lot of teeth when I smiled and he let me go my way, of course.



I batted my eyes at the cops.

A couple of days later I got a phone call at my apartment. It kind of surprised me because I'd forgotten I'd paid my phone bill that month. I picked up the handset and said, "Hello?"

"Is this Miss Bellinghausen, the detective?" said a woman's voice I didn't recognize.

"Yes, it is. How may I help you?" I always try to sound as professional as I can when speaking to a prospective client.

"It's my boy, Wally, he's been arrested!"

"Wally? Wally who?"



I got a phone call.

“Wally Underpoff,” said the woman and I suddenly remembered who Wally was.

“They’ve charged my boy with the murder of that poor girl! You have to help him! He didn’t do nothing!”



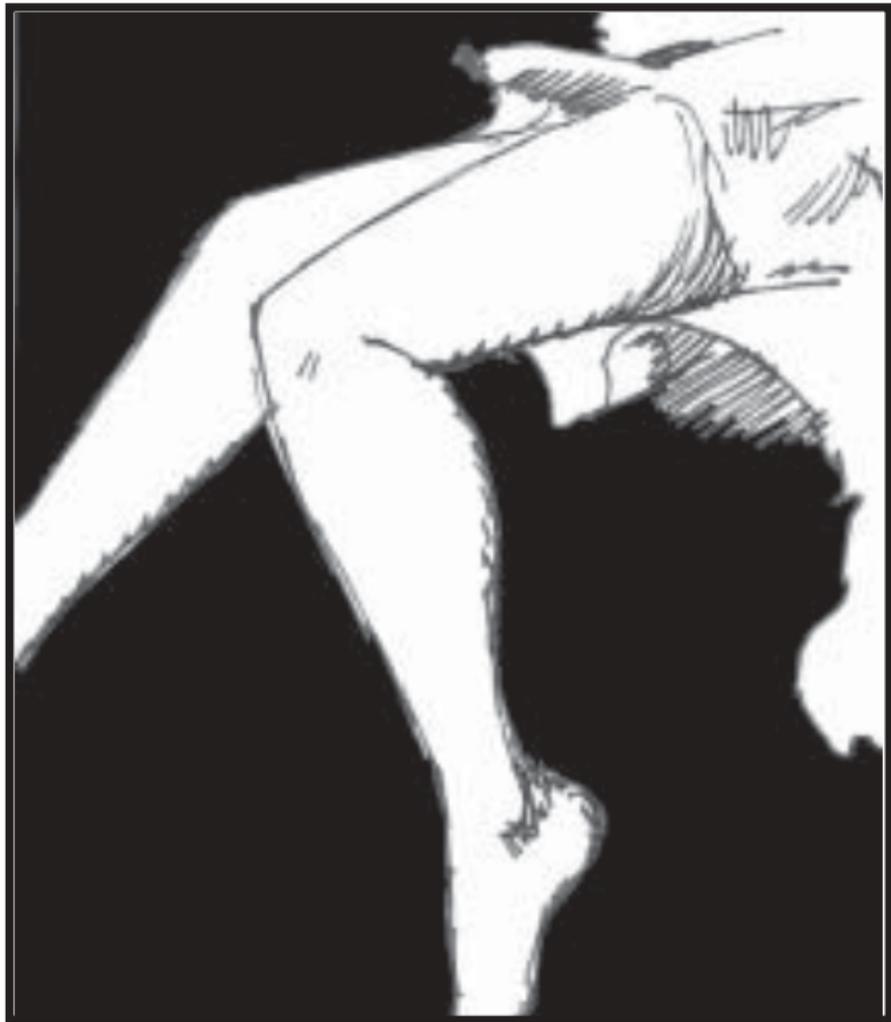
“You have to help him!”

CHAPTER THREE

ON THE TRAIL

I had to assume that the kid was innocent, otherwise what was the point of taking the case? So that gave me a lot of questions that needed answering, the main one being: What was Joyce's body doing in Wally's car?

A friend of mine on the police force told me what had been found out about the girl. The facts that one of her shoes was missing and there was no sign of a struggle in the car suggested that she had been killed



One of her shoes was missing.

somewhere else. Her body must have been placed in the car later, he said.

Why would someone do this? I wondered. Surely it would have been simpler and safer for the killer to have left the girl where she'd been murdered. Was Wally's car singled out for some special reason? I had no idea.

One possible clue was that Wally's car had been parked only two blocks from the apartment building where Joyce had lived with her mother. Maybe the murderer was someone who lived in the neighborhood.



It could be anyone.

I went to talk to Wally.

“I’d left a party some pals of mine were having,” he said. “My friend, Bob Squink, gave me a lift to where I’d parked my car. He’d just dropped me off when I found . . . found the body.”

“Where was this party?” I asked.

“Over on Clarabel Street. A bunch of my friends were having a platter party. It was a swell time, but I got a big exam coming up—I’m apprenticing to a spring maker—and I didn’t want to lose much sleep.”



“We were having a platter party.”

“Where was this party?”

“At Betty Lou Rotifer’s. She lives over on Clarabel, at 261, apartment G.”

Betty Lou didn’t tell me much more than Wally did.

“Sure, the boys were here last night,” she said. “They got here around 8:30 or so. I remember because Alfred Hitchcock was on. The show was called ‘The Perfect Murder’. Ain’t that something?”

I agreed that it was and asked what time they had left.

“Around ten, I guess. Wally said he had



Betty Lou didn't tell me much.

to get some sleep because he had some big exam coming up or something.”

“He left with Bob?”

“Sure. Bob was going to give Wally a lift to his car.”

My next stop was to see Joyce’s mother. It wasn’t easy for her, I knew, but she seemed pretty calm and composed for someone who’d just lost her only daughter. Which was OK by me because I hate being around people when they are crying.

“Joyce was going to go see the new cars at the Autorama show,” Mrs. Whooply said.



It wasn't easy for her.

“She left here about one in the afternoon with her friend, Nancy. She lives right downstairs. Joyce was such a sweet girl. Always so helpful and considerate. Why did this have to happen to her? Everyone liked her so.”

I told her that I didn't know.

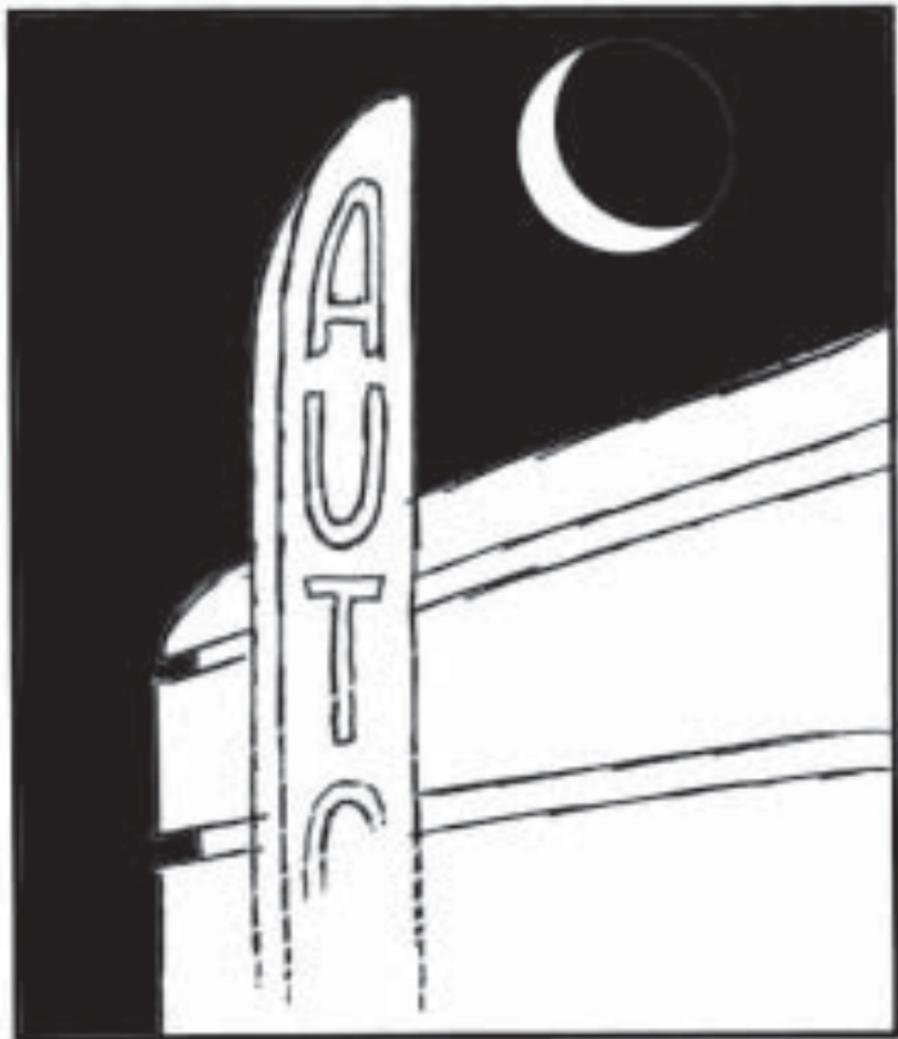
I went downstairs to talk to Joyce's pal, Nancy. She was a pretty brunette with big brown eyes all red from crying. I was beginning to get depressed, talking to these people.

“We didn't go straight to the



“Joyce was a sweet girl.”

Autorama,” she told me. “We stopped first at Pat’s place. She’s a friend of ours who was having a birthday party yesterday afternoon. We just wanted to say hello, but she had such great new records, we decided to stay. By the time we remembered the Autorama, it was too late to go.”



“It was too late to go.”

CHAPTER FOUR

A PAIR OF STAGS

I hiked on over to Wronch Street, where Nancy told me Pat lived. I was lucky: she was home, too. I guess everyone was just too broken up about poor Joyce to go out.

“Yeah, Joyce and Nancy were here yesterday. They came by to say ha-happy b-b-b-birthday.”

I thought she was going to start blubbering, but she pulled herself together and kept on talking, much to my relief. I asked her how many kids were at the party.



Pat

“There were about a dozen I guess. Mostly couples and a couple of stags I never saw before. I don’t know who they came with. Most everyone had dates, except Joyce and Nancy. They were going to the Autorama, but decided to stay at the party instead. Gee, Joyce was the most—pretty and a really good dancer, too!”

She went on to tell me that the party had started to break up in the late afternoon and the kids started to drift off. The two nameless stags left around then, too.

“But Joyce hung around to help me do



A pair of stags.

the dishes and clean up. She was always like that, so helpful and—and c-c-considerate. Well,” she continued, snuffling back tears, “she left right after and that was the last time I ever saw her.”

I wondered about those two strangers. Did anyone recognize them? Pat replied that they seemed older than the others—maybe around 22 or 23—and no one at the party seemed to know who they were. She did notice that one of them had a star tattooed on his left wrist. I asked if Joyce would have accepted a ride from a stranger.



A star was tattooed on his left wrist.

No, Pat said, so far as she knew, Joyce would never have done something like that. I had been hoping that maybe she'd accepted a ride from a frustrated or jilted boyfriend. But Joyce was only 17, Pat told me. She had no suitors, frustrated or otherwise. Everyone liked her, boys and girls alike, but she had no romantic interests. She would never have responded to the advances of a stranger.

“She was as nice as she was pretty,” was Pat's summation of her friend.

I wondered if I had reached a dead end.



“She was as nice as she was pretty.”

CLOSING IN

I only had one theory to work on. After leaving Pat's party at 6 o'clock, Joyce would have been on the streets after dark. Had she been the victim of some lurking assailant? A girl as young and pretty as she was might have caught the eye of an unsavory character who pursued and caught her in the dark shadows of some lightless alley.

But where had this attack taken place? Where had she been between the time she



Had she been pursued?

left the party and the time Wally found her body in his car at 10:30?

A check with my cop friend got me the results of Joyce's autopsy. It was pretty awful. The girl had been strangled so violently that her neck was broken. In fact, the medical examiner believed that she died of the broken neck and not the strangulation, so she may have lingered for many painful minutes. The cop told me that the ME and his secretary demonstrated how it had been done. Dirt and gravel embedded in the girl's bare foot suggested that she'd



The ME showed how it had been done.

run in a futile attempt to escape her assailant.

All I could think of to do was try to trace her steps from Pat's place. Where had she gone?

Pat had told me that she'd only had light sandwiches at her party and all of those had been eaten pretty early. Did Joyce leave her friend's place hungry? If so, maybe she'd stopped someplace to eat.

I started walking in circles from Pat's apartment and after about half an hour found a little all-night coffee shop. I went



I found an all-night coffee shop.

in. There was a man behind the counter frying hamburgers. They didn't look as good as Joe's, but I was hungry and ordered one anyway. While I waited, I asked if he'd been on duty the previous night. He sure was, he grumbled. I asked if he'd seen a pretty teenager with strawberry blonde hair.

“Yeah,” he answered. “I know who you're talkin' about, too. That kid what got murdered last night, right?”

“That's her.”

“Well, all I can say is that she wasn't in very good company.”



“I know who you’re talking about.”

“She wasn’t alone?”

“At first she was. Sat by herself over in that booth, eatin’ a burger. But that was before them two characters come in. She didn’t invite ‘em. They just kinda moved in. I could tell both of ‘em been drinkin’. I caught the one tryin’ to slip ‘er a beer and when I told ‘im the girl was underage and to clear out, he thrown a punch at me. That’s when I tossed the both of ‘em out.”

“Did the girl leave with them?”

“No—but I didn’t notice much when she did leave. Not much later, I guess.”



Tossed 'em out.

“You don’t know who those men were, do you?”

“Sure. They hang around here all the time, causin’ trouble. One of ‘em—the one what swung at me—he’s a hothead name of Riley Nematode. The other gink’s Lippy Slung.”

“Either one got a tattoo on his hand?”

“Yeah. Riley’s got himself a blue star.”

I thanked the man and finished my cheeseburger in thoughtful silence. So Riley and Lippy were the two characters who had crashed Pat’s birthday party. They



“They hang around here all the time.”

must have recognized her when she showed up at the coffee shop. They tried to force themselves on her but when she rebuffed their unwelcome advances, they waited for her outside. They must have kidnaped her—she surely would not have gone with them willingly. What hours of terror she must have experienced—what hours of whiskey-fed violations she must have endured. It made my skin crawl and my blood boil.



She must have been kidnaped.

CHAPTER SIX

I GET LUCKY

The grill man didn't know where either man lived, so I had to canvass the neighborhood. I finally got lucky at a bar that was just opening for the afternoon. Sure, he knew Riley Nematode, the bartender said, more's the pity.

“Just a punk,” he went on. “Always looking for trouble.”

“You know where he lives?”

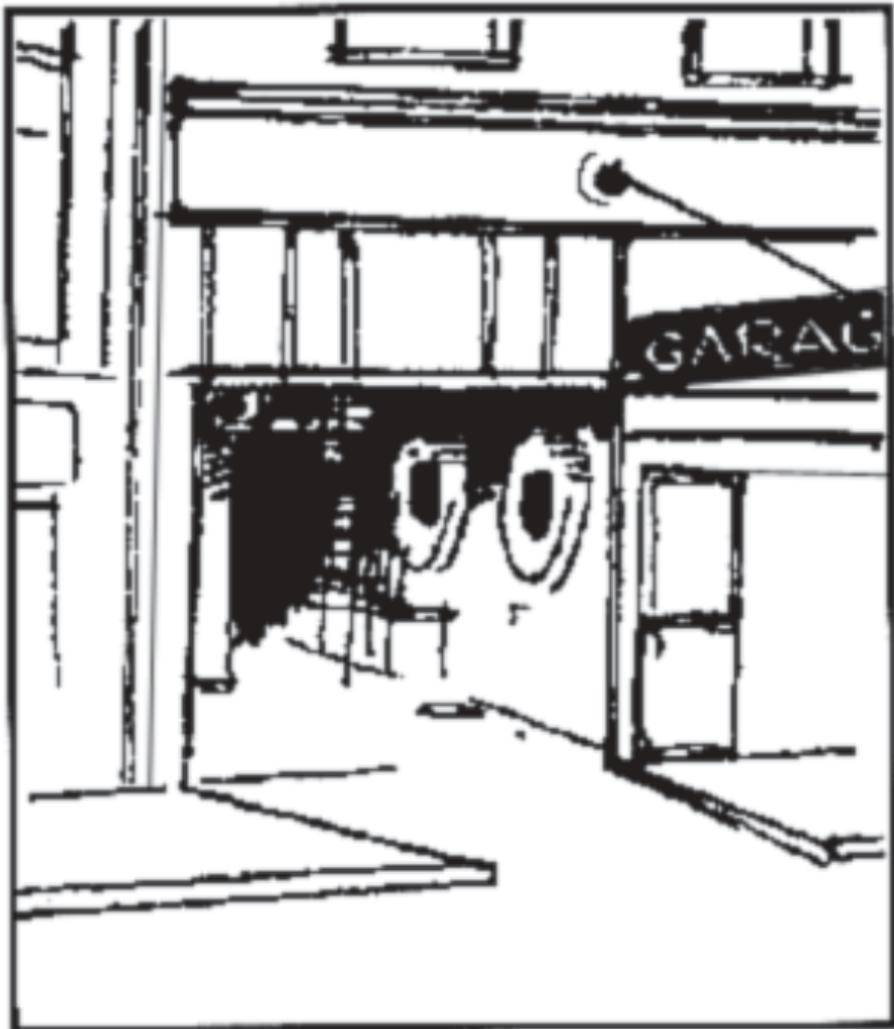
“Sure. He's got a room over the garage on Swinkman Street.”



Just a punk.

I thanked the bartender and left the tavern. Swinkman was only a few blocks away, so I decided to walk. I didn't have cab fare, anyway.

The garage was a greasy pit squeezed between a hardware store and an all-night liquor shop. Inside were just a couple of lifts and one fat guy even greasier than the junk he was working on. He looked at me with a kind of dazed disbelief, as though maybe one of the girls on the pinup calendar hanging on wall next to the fan belts had just climbed down off the paper.



The garage was a greasy pit.

I asked him if Riley Nematode lived upstairs. I had to ask him twice.

“Uh, yeah, sure,” he finally said.

“He up there now?”

“I guess so.”

I’d seen the door to the stairs and headed for them.

“Say, lady!”

I turned and looked back at the fat man. He was sweating grease like a meatball.

“Say . . . I was just wonderin’, what’d Riley do to get so lucky?”

I didn’t say anything, but just turned



“Say, lady!”

back toward the door. We'd see how lucky Riley is, I thought.

Narrow stairs led to a landing with a door. I knocked on it. There was no answer. I knocked again.

“Who is it?” snarled a voice on the other side.

“It's the good fairy of the north,” I said.

The door opened half an inch revealing an eye that looked like a well-oiled ball bearing. It opened so wide at the sight of me that I thought maybe it was going to roll out onto the floor.



I knocked again.

“Holy cow! What—?”

“You eat Crunchy-Ohs?” I asked. “The cereal with the atomic-powered vitamins?”

“What?”

“You’re the grand prize winner in the great Crunchy-Ohs thousand dollar contest. Crunchy-Ohs, the cereal with the atomic-powered vitamins.”

“There must be some mis—” he started to say, and then realized that he might be making a mistake himself if someone was willing to give him a thousand bucks.

“Maybe you’re right,” I said. “This



“There must be some mistake.”

must be the wrong address.”

“No! No,” he said, hastily opening the door wide. “Come on in. I, ah, you just took me by surprise is all. I was, uh, I was takin’ a nap.”

I stepped inside and looked around. What a dump it was. Just the sort of place I’d expect a petty hoodlum like Riley to live. Crumbs like him have no sense of personal hygiene.



It was a dump.

CHAPTER SEVEN

I GET NOT SO LUCKY

“What’s all this about a contest I won?”

“What? Oh, that. Well, all you got to do is answer a couple of simple questions and the prize is all yours.”

“Yeah? You mean like the Sixty-Four Dollar question? I can do that. So shoot.”

I was going to pump him for some information first, but I was impossible to pass up a straight line like that. I pulled my nickel-plated .45 automatic from my



I drew my gun.

purse, pointed it at him and said, “Funny you should suggest that.”

“Say, what’s the big idea?” he said, backing up a couple of paces.

“The big idea is what you were doing with Joyce Whooply last night.”

“Who?”

“The girl you followed out of the coffee shop . . .”

“What about her?”

“Why’d you strangle her?”

“It wasn’t me done that, it was—”

“Shut up!”



“What’s the big idea?”

Those last words were uttered by someone behind me and I didn't even have a chance to say "What the—?" before a heavy hand clamped down on my wrist and a powerful arm wrapped itself around my chest. A strong shake that nearly broke my arm threw the gun from my grasp. The kid I'd been talking to picked it up off the floor and held it on me.

"Who the h— is this?" said the stranger behind me.

"How should I know? I ain't never seen her before in my whole life."



A heavy hand clamped down on my wrist.

“Well, she sure knows more about what happened last night than is good for us.”

“You mean more than is good for her, don’t you?”

“Yeah, I guess so! Ha ha ha ha!”

I didn’t see anything funny.

The arms released me and a shove in the small of my back pushed me onto the floor. These two guys, I decided, needed to learn a lot about how to handle a woman.

“Boy, oh boy!” said the newcomer, who I could now see. He was shorter than Riley, a burly, heavy-set kid in his early twenties.



They need to learn how to handle a woman.

I figured he had to be Lippy. “You sure picked a cuter girl than that one you did last night! This is sure one hot cookie!”

“Yeah? So hot she came in here packing a rod. What was she doin’ that for?”

“Beats me. Keep the roscoe on her, Riley, while I see who she is.”

He picked my purse off the floor and emptied on a table. He opened my wallet and looked at the card under the plastic window.

“Well, well! Looky here! She’s a detective!”



“She’s a dee-tective!”

“You don’t say?”

“What were you doin’ here?” Lippy asked, turning toward me.

“I heard they needed a couple of sand-sifters down at Coney Island and thought you two would be perfect for the job.”

“I don’t need no job—” began Riley, but Lippy told him to shut up.

“She’s just being smart,” he said.

“I am smart,” I replied.

“Yeah? So who’s got the drop on who, huh?”

“So now what? You going to strangle



"I am smart."

me like you did Joyce?”

“It’s an idea.”



“It’s an idea.”

CHAPTER EIGHT

CRIME DOES NOT PAY

If I'm so smart, I asked myself, why am I giving them ideas like that? I didn't have a good answer.

Whatever the two boys wanted to do to me, they didn't want to do it there. So they ordered me to my feet and told me to go toward the door. Lippy opened it and went out onto the landing, while I followed with Riley behind me with the gun. The chubby guy had just taken two steps down the steep stairway when, bracing myself by



I slammed Lippy in the back.

grasping the handrails on either side, I raised both feet and slammed them into the small of his back. He let out a kind of bleat and sailed head first into space, like Dave Browning making a high dive. He hit the stairs about half way down and rolled the rest of the way. I didn't stop to watch, however entertaining the sight might have been. Instead, I threw myself backward into Riley. We fell onto the floor in the room, me on top. I heard the wind go out of him with a whoosh. I rolled on over and bounced to my feet. Before Riley could



We fell on the floor.

remember he still clutched my gun, I stomped on his wrist. He let go of it.

I picked up the gun, squatted on my haunches and pointed the muzzle at the bridge of his nose.

“I told you I’m smarter than you,” I said.

“Oh, yeah?”

“Yeah. I know two things for sure. I know enough to take the safety off a gun if I mean to use it and I know that Crime Does Not Pay.”



I pointed the gun at his nose.

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