



# The Corpse was in the Countinghouse

By ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

**The Story:** NEIL ANSON was in a tough spot. He'd been standing on the sidewalk when the Pleasantville Bank was robbed and its president, FRANK CRENSHAW, was shot. Because Neil had seen Crenshaw a few minutes earlier, had an argument with him, and accidentally left his brief case in Crenshaw's office, he knew he'd be a logical suspect. The only person who could testify that he'd already left the bank at the time of the crimes was a blonde he'd noticed going into a beauty shop after he left Crenshaw. Neil found out from the beauty shop owner that the blonde's name was KATHERINE GLOSTER and went to call on her. She remembered having seen him, but she was strangely unco-operative. As he left her apartment, he saw GEORGE DURANT, the bank teller who had been held up, going in.

Neil went back to the beauty shop to see if the owner, GLADYS LELAND, could tell him any more about the blonde. Gladys agreed to have dinner with him, but she couldn't tell him much. After dinner, she invited Neil to her apartment for a nightcap. On the way, they stopped to get an early edition of the paper. Neil's picture was in it. The murder weapon had been found in the railway station—in Neil's brief case. Neil convinced Gladys that he was being framed and she agreed to help him and offered to put him up for the night. She also told Neil that ELLEN JASPER, Crenshaw's secretary, who had been engaged to Neil's brother, was in love with him. Neil was dumfounded. After Gladys had gone to bed, Neil decided to go and see Ellen right away.

Ellen told Neil that the police were convinced that either he was the murderer or she was, because the time element seemed to rule out any other explanation. However, she added that CARL HARMAN, the bank's lawyer, had seen him leave the bank—without his brief case. It seemed to Neil that this established his alibi and he asked Ellen to tell the police about it. But when she called them, they pointed out that she could have smuggled the brief case out of the bank for Neil. More convinced than ever that both he and Ellen were being framed, Neil determined not to give himself up until he could find the real murderer. He said good night to Ellen and went back to Gladys Leland's apartment.

Suddenly Neil felt desperately afraid. He tried to struggle to his feet, but the hypnotic power of Dr. Lancaster's eyes held him

**B**ACK in the empty apartment across the hall from Gladys, Neil Anson spread out the blanket on the couch again and adjusted the pillow. Then he took off his shoes, coat and trousers.

Tomorrow was going to be a hard day. Now that the police were trying to involve Ellen in the crime, Neil was determined to stay free until he could find the real murderer.

The apartment had been closed long enough to be stuffy, and Neil padded to the window, opened it, and stood for a moment breathing the crisp night air.

Suddenly he saw a police car swinging around the corner. As he watched it, it pulled up to the curb in front of the apartment-house entrance and stopped. The car doors opened, and two policemen jumped out.

Neil grabbed his clothes and the blanket and pillow and clapped his hat on his head. He opened the door, jerked it shut behind him and ran across the hall to Gladys Leland's apartment.

He felt as though he'd been ringing her bell for hours before he heard her sleepy voice. "Who is it?" she asked.

"Me," Neil said.

She opened the door a crack and saw him standing there in his underwear, his shoes in his hand, his suit draped over his arm.

"Police," he whispered. "Let me in."

She stared at him for a moment in sleepy surprise, then she let him in and pushed the door shut.

"I used the telephone in there," Neil said. "They must have traced the call."

"You do the damndest things," she said. "Why did you have to do that?"

"I had an idea."

"Don't get any more."

"I won't."

She pointed to the bathroom. Neil hurried in there and began to dress.

Gladys' doorbell rang again.

"Who is it?" she called.

"The police."

"What do you want?"

"We'd like to ask you some questions."

Neil heard her open the door.

A man's voice said, "We want some information about the apartment across the hall."

"The people who live there have been away. They're due back in a couple of days. What's wrong?"

"We think someone broke in there."

"Well, for Heaven's sake, get the landlord, then. I'm catching cold here and—"

"Someone was in there just a little while ago. He used the telephone. We traced the call. You hear anything?"

"I was asleep."

"The window's open."

"I'll close it if you think there's any danger he might climb in—"

"No. I mean in the apartment across the hall."

"Well, I'm sorry, but I can't help you. I'll keep my door locked. Thanks for telling me."

"We think the man has left; but he may be coming back, and we want to watch the place."

"Well, go ahead and watch."

The officer said, "You don't understand. We want to watch it from this apartment."

"Absolutely nothing doing," Gladys Leland said firmly.

"Why not?"

"Because," she said, "I'm a working girl and I need my sleep. I'm tired and I want to get a good night's rest. I've had a hard day and I'm going to have a hard day tomorrow."

"You can go right to bed. My partner wouldn't disturb you at all. He'd sit right in here next to the door. He'd leave the door open just a crack so he could—"

"I told you I need my sleep. Your man would watch that door for about an hour and then he'd start making passes. I can't spend the night fighting him off."

There was silence for a moment, then the policeman laughed. "But this officer could stay here and protect you and—"

"Sure," she interrupted, "and when the shooting started the guy would miss the cop, send a couple of bullets through the door and probably hit me. Why don't you hide in the broom closet down at the end of the hallway? That will give you a view of the whole corridor. You can see the man the minute he comes up."

"Where is it?"

"The door to the left of the fire escape."

"Okay, we'll look it over."

**A** MOMENT later she opened the bathroom door, and whispered, "You've got to get out of here. They're going to watch that apartment all night, and as soon as I leave to go to work in the morning, they're sure to use a passkey and come in and watch the place from here."

He nodded, trying hopelessly to think of some place to go.

She took a key off her key ring. "Here's a key to the shop. When things calm down, maybe you can—"

The doorbell rang again. She motioned Neil back to the bathroom, and went to the door.

"What is it now?" she asked.

"Open up a minute. We want to tell you something."

Neil heard her unlock the door and a moment later he heard the policeman's voice only a few feet away.

"We're going to make a stake-out," the policeman said.

"What's that?"

"I'm going to stay in that apartment with the lights off and my gun ready. If he comes back, I'll shine a flashlight in his eyes and put the handcuffs on him."

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# TOP TV TOWN

In Chicago they don't lavish money on costly trappings. They turn out quiet, casual lit



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JACK HASKELL			RANSOM SHERMAN		
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