

SPORTSMAN FLIES HIGH

by Lawrence A. Keating

FOURTH INSTALLMENT
SYNOPSIS: Detective Dan Colwell of the Graber-Vael private detective agency is assigned the job of shadowing lawyer Arthur McDonald whose wife fears gangster enemies are plotting to murder him. McDonald is murdered in spite of Colwell's watchfulness. Dan is hot on their trail and suspects a sinister plot . . .

Dan hung up and stepped out of the booth. He fished a cigarette from his pack and lighted it. The thing grew more complicated. But thinking back he could detect no error on his part. He had that package, and that was okay! Colwell thought it was working all right. This case ought to be profitable.

His taxi cab drew up to the somewhat tattered canvas canopy whose begrimmed white letters spelled Kennebec Hotel. Dan paid off the driver and paused on the sidewalk to gaze about him. The Kennebec was a ten-story affair of tan brick in a neighborhood that once had been fashionable as attested by the few sprawling mansions which still evaded the wreckers. Mostly there were other lower middle class apartments about, and delicatessens with smoked windows. A balloon man waited glumly on the far corner, a few automobiles rolled past, and there were several young women pushing baby carriages that contained the small sons and daughters of two-hundred-a-month clerks watching clocks downtown.

Colwell did not relish the visit he was going to pay. He drew a deep breath of reluctance and forced his steps toward the revolving door. But it seemed absolutely necessary to put his head into the lion's mouth this once. He had to learn the exact application of those numbers on the slip of paper found on the running board of McDonald's taxi. They were of great value, he suspected with a thrill warming his breast. Enough to put a man on Easy Street for life!

Because a quarter of a million dollars more in snow soon was due, Arthur McDonald, brains of the ring, had received that thirty thousand dollar package merely as a trout of the smuggling scheme. Quillen wanted that, but more, he wanted the big shipment. That was why he had killed the lawyer to get it all for himself. Probably McDonald had tried to hold out on that small package, arousing Quillen's hate and greed and the decision to get McDonald out of the way. That two hundred and fifty thousand in narcotics would put this small capture Dan had lucked into, in the shade!

When, exactly was the big stuff due and how was it coming? If he was clever enough he might learn that in the apartment of Miss Helen Fane. But he would have to run the gantlet up there and it wasn't going to be fun!

The small hotel lobby panelled in dark wood was indirectly lighted to give a sort of garishly modern version of an old English inn. Dan kept thinking the next few minutes would be risky. He stopped at the desk.

"Miss Fane's apartment 707? By the way, has a Mr. Quillen, a

man in a dark suit, rather wide mouth, big shoulders, come in to see her?"

"No, sir, not today, sir, that I noticed."

Lefty was known here, then. Been giving the girl a play, Dan happened to know. The clerk looked in surprise at the five-spot Colwell passed him. "Say, did you ever visit people and wish you had some excuse to leave? Do a favor for me. You ring me up in 707 just thirty minutes from now. I'll do the talking; the point is, you are a friend who knew I'd be there and you insist on seeing me. It's urgent."

He strove for a Don Juan grin. "You know how it is when a man can't break away from a woman?" Chuckling, he poked a square fist into the clerk's chest.

His chuckle was infectious. The young fellow's black pompadour switched forward as he grinned. He folded the five-spot and tucked it safely away. "I'll do that, mister. Who should I ask for?"

Colwell. He spelled it out. "Thirty minutes from now—and not twenty-five minutes or thirty five minutes. Thirty!"

With a wink he turned to the elevator. But his humor vanished as it carried him upward. The trouble was, he scarcely knew what to expect.

When the door on seven rolled back he went down the carpeted hall, noting the padding exposed in places. It was a cheap, bashy hotel where no one cared much what went on provided it did not bring the police.

Mrs. McDonald admitted him. She wore a slinky black satin gown which showed off her slender, supple figure to best advantage. Her eyes had the look of recent weeping, although not enough to impress him. Colwell stepped in and heard the door close with an ominous click.

"Sit down, Mr. Colwell. As I told you, I've been living under my maiden name of Fane." The girl swept past him to a chair and sank into it. "Take off your coat, won't you?"

He did take off his topcoat and draped it over the chair that held his soft hat. Dan heard heard hinges squeak behind him. He turned to find a shiny bluish forty-four automatic pointing his way with the hard killer eyes of Lefty Quillen behind the straight barrel.

It gave the detective a series of chills down his spinal column. He got to his feet, watching the man come out of a bedroom. "What is this anyhow?"

"So you know who killed McDonald, eh? Two of them! Well, Colwell, you're done for. Done for, get it? You and that snake of a detective agency boss of yours. I mean Graber!"

The words rumbled from deep in his barrel-like chest. Quillen's face was contorted in hate and his eyes were like the eyes of a little sucking pig Dan remembered from his kid days on an Indiana farm, when the pig was wedged in a fence and the old boar came at it. They were the eyes of a man who could hate and who was afraid. "Stick up your hands!" Lefty snarled.

Dan raised his palms level with his ears. "What's this for? I don't get you. How do you know I—"

He fastened accusing eyes on the Fane girl. "You cat!" Colwell cried. "You're not Mrs. McDonald! If you were you wouldn't have this guy here with you! Why, he stammered as if it struck a terrific surprise to him, "you're not Mrs. McDonald! You're a fake!"

Quillen's reaction to this was a puzzled look. The puzzlement lifted as he seemed to make a guess, and he sneered. "Catches on fast for a dumb operative!" He stepped behind Dan and after brief fumbling had the gun from his pocket. "Helen, I guess you put it over on Otto, eh? If it took him

in like it took this chump. Hold still!"

"What do you mean about Graber?" Colwell adopted the stupidly pose. "Graber's all right. He always handed me my check every Friday. Why should she pretend—?" He left off, shaking his head as if thoroughly mystified.

Quillen flung a curse that explained nothing but his hate. "I'll hold this guy. You search him, and don't miss anything!"

She had dropped all pretense that she was the shyster lawyer's widow and her contempt for Dan was plain in the little lift of her shoulder. (The girl wore a hard look now and her nails as she poked her hands into his pockets managed to scratch and tear. She was a cat. She glared at Dan as if she would like to rend him limb from limb. Fane was in this mess, plenty.)

All she found on him was a few keys, a notebook containing nothing much of interest, forty dollars in bills and some small change, and a slip of paper in his vest with his fountain pen.

"That's it! Gimme it!" Quillen snatched it. He backed away and smoothed the paper. His hard eyes lighted. "This is it—the numbers. This is what we want!" he breathed exultantly. "This dumb dick hadn't even an idea he was carryin' dynamite around! Why," he cackled, "he might've give it to Graber!"

"You're crazy. Otto's out of town. He's in Ewing, Pennsylvania or anyhow, on the way. He's off hunting!"

Lefty shot him a pitying look. He sucked air noisily as he thought. "I guess we got to kill him, all right, eh? That's the only way. Helen, then he can't squawk that you faked Mrs. Mac. Who killed McDonald?" he thrust suddenly at Dan.

Colwell, watching alertly the blue automatic, set his jaw. "Why not ask me who used Soup Caterby's own knife on him in that alley? I can put two and two together as to who did the second job, knowing who did the first!"

Quillen's jagged, tobacco-yellowed teeth gleamed wet. "Yeah," he muttered, nodding. "We got to kill you, Colwell. Yeah, we'll do it too." He glanced at the paper in his hands. "Eight five, three, dash, six, six, one."

The expression on the man's face slowly changed. Perplexity, he tried to shake off but failed, gave way to suspicion. It grew keener and more bitter. His pig-like eyes raised to Colwell. Lefty wet his lips with a quick sweep of his tongue, trying to convince himself that it was all right; that these were the numbers.

"Listen," he said at last, thickly. "When we jerked all the stuff outa Mac's pockets, identification and all that we got the numbers too. Hell, that's what we were after! I takes a squint at them, see? You don't think—" He left off.

"What, Lefty?" Helen Fane asked. "Think what?"

For answer Quillen stepped nearer Colwell and struck him a glancing blow on the head with the muzzle of his gun. You rat!" he shrieked. "You got them numbers hid away somewhere! This ain't the paper I dropped on that taxi running board! I kind of remember . . . Yup, the first was seven. The next was—let's see—I guess it was eight. That's it!"

"Listen!" he yelled at Dan, and waved his gun as if about to strike again. "You ain't so damned dumb as you act! You switched them numbers, you goat! These ain't the ones that were on that slip you must've picked off the running board. Come on, come on, out with 'em! Give me the numbers!"

he howled, and made a pass at Colwell's vest as if to jam his hands into the pockets for another search.

Rubbing the side of his head which still stung from the blow, Colwell managed only with the greatest effort to keep control, to maintain his mystified hurt look. "What do you mean? I threw that slip away. It didn't mean anything to me. Who you hittin'?" he whined.

"Helen! Go through him again! The dirty— He's tryin' to slip us these phoney numbers! Listen," he barked before she could speak. "I got a memory, ain't I? I swear the first was 7. The next was 0." Quillen put a hand to his forehead, half bent at the waist, and concentrated with all his might. Still there was no opportunity for Colwell to grab for his gun even had he been so minded. Quillen straightened. "I know I'm right!"

"What you waiting for?" he roared at the girl. "Search him! Yank every stitch off! 'We got to find 'em, don't we?"

"Wait, Lefty. Don't foam at the mouth as if you've gone nuts! Think a minute," she snapped, not in the least cowed by his thundering. "Think a second, will you, and get the rest of those numbers?" Meanwhile she was engaged in turning Colwell's pockets inside out. She found nothing.

He relapsed into a spasm of cursing and slumped into a chair. "Gees! But I know these ain't the ones. You think he turned them over to Otto Graber?"

Helen Fane, alias McDonald, stared at Colwell.

He said nothing for a moment. "Listen, what I can't figure out is, what of it? I mean the numbers? What are they for?"

(Continued next week)

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 a Merry Christmas



May it be a Merry Christmas for you and yours, and may the New Year to come bring you Happiness and Prosperity!

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