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"A CLEVER JOB"

*The Thrilling Story
of a Baffling Crime*

By

Victor Maxwell

**Richard B. Sale
Ray Cummings**



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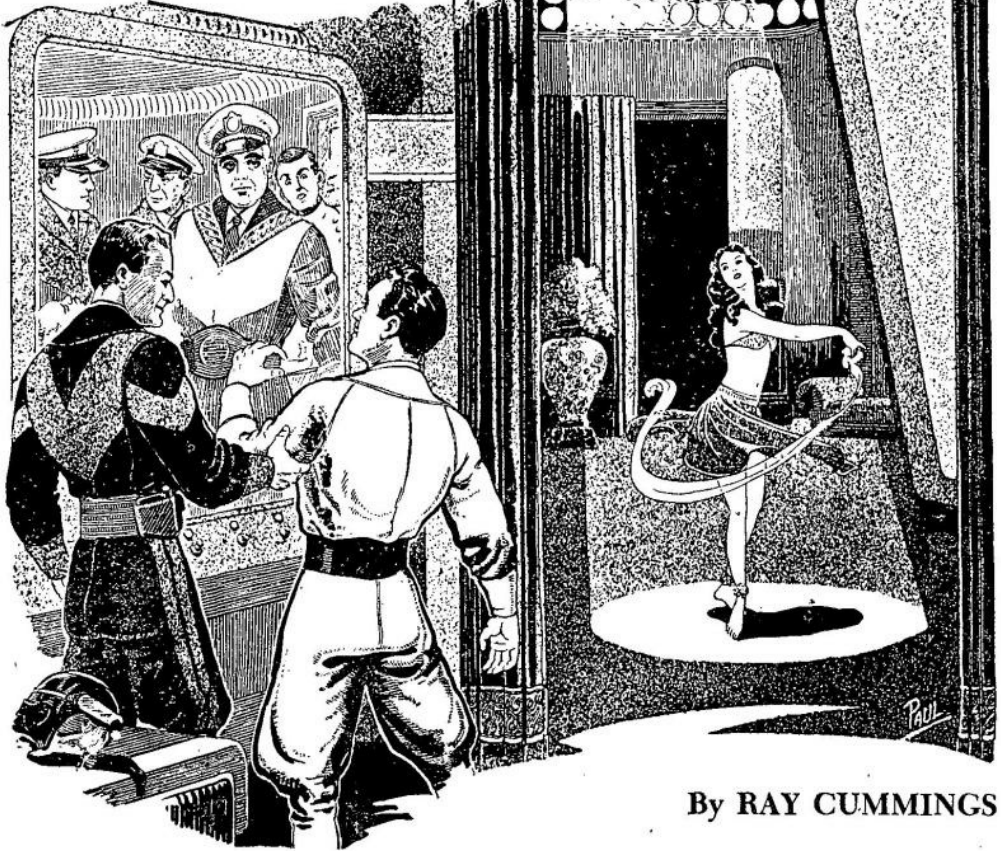
Crimes of the Year 2000, No. 2: The Television Alibi

Ray Cummings

Illustrated by Frank R. Paul

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I jumped and drew the wounded man
before the television window



By RAY CUMMINGS

I jumped and drew the wounded man before the television window

As a member of New York's Shadow Squad—tough, hard and generally ill-natured, or at least so my fellows tell me—I don't suppose it's very fitting for me to sermonize. I have no such intention. But I am thinking that the case which I call "The Television Alibi" illustrates the point that fundamental rightness of action has a providential tendency to be rewarded. The case may be of interest here. I was

involved in it last summer—in June of 1999, to be exact.

My partner, George Trant, assigned with me under Macfarlan of City Night Desk 4, was on his vacation. According to routine, therefore, I had a partial-vacation; “rest-work,” they term it. This television case was a routine job on which supposedly I could work alone, without stress or danger. There were a few moments in it, however, when I could have been killed very easily.

It was an unusual case for me, from many angles. Chiefly, it introduced me to the most beautiful and appealing girl I have ever seen. And it tempted me to let a criminal escape. I very nearly did that—and for Jac Lombard, tough, hard, ill-natured S. S. man, that certainly was a new experience! Trant, the only person so far to whom I have told the full details, has ever since regarded me with ironic admiration—amazed, he says, that I am human enough to be tempted.

The affair occurred on June 25th, 1999. I was supposed to have a rest-day, but Macfarlan summoned me.

“Assignment from the Crime Prevention Bureau,” he announced. “A perfectly decent young fellow seems liable to commit murder.”

He tossed me the memorandum. It involved three people, two of them very well known: Elena Denizon, famous television dancer; Willard Jared, President of the American Television Company; and one George King, a young law student.

The old triangle—two men in love with one girl. The men had had several quarrels, and made threats, perhaps under the heat of too much alcoholite. At any rate, the thing got enough publicity so that the Crime Prevention Desk took it up, and turned it over to Mac.

“Easy job,” Mac told me. “A nice relaxing trip to Arizona—Elena Denizon’s studio-home. You’ll find the boy there with her, probably.”

“I think I’ll see this Jared first,” I said.

“Suit yourself,” Mac agreed. “Connect me when you like—I won’t worry over you.”

I had no trouble getting an interview with Jared. It’s Contempt of Law to stall off the investigation of a suspected impending crime. I called Jared on his private wave, and he admitted me at once, though naturally he wasn’t very cordial.

I found him just what I had anticipated—a man of forty-five or fifty, flabby and toad-like. He was immaculately dressed, heavily jeweled. His fat face, with small fish-like eyes, was dominated by a big old-fashioned rolling mustache, obviously dyed black. His office and residence was an exotically-furnished tower apartment above the New York City broadcasting studio of his company. It was a somewhat notorious tower—unsavory for the gay parties which Jared held with young women,

many of whom he attracted there, no doubt, with promises of a great television career.

He sat now, eyeing me coldly across his desk. He said distastefully:

“Jac Lombard? Shadow Squad?”

I told him the purpose of my visit. I said, “The Crime Prevention Bureau wants a report. It is quite confidential, of course. If you are legally engaged to marry this Elena Denizon, we will protect you from any interference.”

“She filed public refusal of my claim,” he said.

I knew that, of course. “And this George King has claimed her?”

His cold stare clung to me. He said, “If I don’t get her, that boy won’t get her either.”

Now I have had considerable experience with lawbreakers. I’m telepathic enough to know when there is menace radiating from a man. But this was something different—in his eyes I saw a wild, smoldering look, as though on this subject of Elena Denizon he might be demented. Sex psychologists may argue the psychosis of it any way they like. I saw it here.

He repeated slowly, “She can’t marry that boy. I won’t let that happen.”

I drew back slightly. It may seem idiotic to admit it, but I dropped my hand to the Banning gun in my pocket. I said:

“Then my report must show that you are the aggressor.”

Thick, dark color suffused his fat cheeks. He said, “Your report be hanged. Aggressor? You—you—I don’t want to talk any more about this. I don’t want to see the accursed boy again.”

“But you do see him. You quarrel with him—”

“He comes to see me.”

I stood up to terminate the interview. I said, “I’ll talk to him about it. I think the bureau will take legal action to bar him. He must realize that if anything happened to you he will be blamed.”

His eyes gleamed at that. I added, “You have exchanged threats. You have threatened him, just now, to me.”

He stood up with me. He interrupted, “There is no law to make me talk any more about this, is there?”

“Plenty,” I said. “But I have no authority, yet, to force you.”

I left him then and took the Sunset, a low-altitude flyer. It was about a three-hour trip to Arizona. I had late supper on board; hired a local plane in Phoenix and flew to the rambling one-story home of Elena Denizon, set isolated in all that was left of the once great Arizona desert, two thousand miles from the image-casting

laboratory in New York.

Queer whimsy of this girl! But though she was only eighteen, already she was famous enough to get away with it. She hated the city; claimed that her art needed this isolation. And like a hermit, for the summer months she lived here, absolutely alone save for the Indian woman who came by day to do her work.

The television company of necessity had yielded to her whim. Her home here was equipped with a dance floor and the necessary television mechanisms hooked with the laboratory in New York.

I found a landing field and hangar out on the open cactus-strewn desert; and a twenty-foot high metal barrier wall—with an electrified barrage, so the huge warning-sign told me.

At the gate I buzzed for admittance. The lens-eye glowed, carrying my image to her. And presently her voice said:

“Who are you?”

I told her; and I displayed my identifying signature, tattooed on my forearm.

Her voice said pleasantly, “The art of wax-disguise is not difficult. And anyway, you know it won’t be Contempt of Law if I refuse to see you now, because I am alone here.”

Her saying it didn’t prove that George King wasn’t here with her. I smiled. I said, “That’s true. I made bad connections. I’ve been four or five hours getting here. I didn’t mean to be so late.”

Her light laugh rippled at me. “You don’t look formidable. I have no old-fashioned conventionality. You may come in.”

I dismissed the taxi. The barrage gate slid aside, and closed with a click after me as I passed through. The desert outside was a blank stretch of sand, with undulated waves like a frozen sea, pale in the glittering starlight. But inside I found a fairy garden. Rose-colored tube-lights from hidden sources illumined its winding paths—a glowing garden, a little bower of ferns and vivid flowers which surrounded the bungalow.

The front door slid aside. Elena Denizon, most famous dancer of the air, was before me.

II

She sat under a spot of light before her cosmetic table mirror. At my entrance, she turned and surveyed me.

“From the Crime Prevention Bureau?” she said, smilingly. “Sit down, please. You won’t mind—I’m busy just now. I go on the air presently.”

I sat on a stiff little chair near her. She powdered her legs with blue-white talc-dust; adjusted the vivid red costume scarf around her breast and hips, and uncoiled the black waves of her hair. She added lightly:

“I do assure your bureau that I am not planning any crime.”

She was enough of an actress, of course, so that whatever her emotions, I knew she would not display them. Was George King here? I had no way of guessing. My gaze swept the small dressing room. To one side a big archway opened to the dance floor. It was dim in there now; I could just distinguish the television senders; the waxen and canvas props and scenery, and the banks of lights.

The girl was quietly finishing the coloring of her face, and for a moment I sat silent, regarding her. Glamorous little figure, indeed! Trant insists that right from the beginning I was hypnotized by her, so that no longer was I an S.S. man, but more like a country lout spellbound by meeting an actress.

Maybe so. She sat, save for that red costume scarf, like Lady Godiva enveloped by the long, thick mass of her black hair. Her face was of course familiar to me—I had seen the dancing image of her many times. It was an exceedingly beautiful face, with the stamp of intellectuality upon it. But in the dance, with the surge of music and the hum of the transmitter flinging the image of her around the world, her eyes dark as a moonless night, her mouth red like a scarlet flower—her face then would carry a pagan look, as though this were no girl of the year 1999, but a princess of Barbary, voluptuous as Venus.

Yet chaste as Diana. The public seemed to know that. It was part of the charm which Elena Denizon carried with her dancing to all the far-flung corners of the amusement-seeking world.

I said at last, “It wasn’t you I came to see, Miss Denizon. I hoped George King would be here.”

That startled her, though of course she had anticipated it. She was adjusting heavy jeweled bands on her ankles and tipping the burnished nails of her toes with carmine. She sat up abruptly and faced me . . . I think it was perhaps the involuntary gesture of her hand to the cosmetic table—at all events, I saw for the first time the muzzle of a little golden Banning gun, partly hidden by the cosmetic jars.

But her hand did not touch the gun; she seemed only bracing herself against the table. She said sharply:

“George King?”

I nodded. “The bureau is worried over him.”

I gazed vaguely around the apartment. She said:

“But he is not here. I have not seen him—for some time.”

“Do you know where he is?”

She shook her head. Hostility was stamped on her now. For all the apparent frankness of her smile, I was aware of it.

“He’s in New York, I suppose,” she said.

Her hand back on the table came forward as she leaned toward me. She added earnestly: “You represent the law, Mr. Lombard. I want you to be assured of just one thing—George King has nothing to hide. There is no crime—no impending crime. He and I always will deal quite frankly with you.”

I stared at her, judging her. The house was very silent, with the silence of the outer spread of desert crowding it. Then there came a sharp buzz, which in the silence startled me as though it had been the hiss of a Banning heat-stab. On a bracket beside the cosmetic table one of the commercial message-mirrors began glowing. Franks, her technician manager, was calling from the broadcasting studio in New York. His voice sounded:

“Elena?”

She said, “You’ll excuse me, Mr. Lombard?” She drew down the bracket and gave audible connection.

“You, Franks?”

“Twenty-five minutes only. Are you ready?”

“I will be, of course.”

I could see in the mirror-grid over her shoulder the image of Franks’ thin face, with the semi-circle of orchestra players partly assembled behind him. He looked strangely worried. He said:

“Elena, you don’t let me see you. If you—”

“Oh, I don’t mind.” She gestured for me to move away from the visual angle of the instrument; then she gave visual connection.

“Lovely as always, Elena,” he said.

She smiled. “Did you call me to tell me that?”

“Elena, you—nothing has bothered you tonight?”

That struck me into alertness. A side-angle duplicate of the mirror showed me Franks’ image, though he could not see me. His anxious gaze was roving Elena and

the angle of the room behind her . . . The sudden premonition came to me that this already might be more than an affair for the Crime Prevention Desk . . .

Franks was saying, "If I live to the age of a pensioned tower-timekeeper, I'll never get used to having you off there alone on that desert."

"You would not like my dancing if I shut myself up in your metal city," she said sweetly.

He smiled back at her, but his eyes still were worried. "Have your own way, Elena. You will, anyhow."

"Because I am a woman?"

"And an artist, which is worse. Be ready on the second, Elena."

"Of course."

They disconnected. She turned and smiled at me. But she was disturbed by the call, that was obvious. I could almost imagine her thinking. Why was he so worried?

Certainly I was thinking it. She began weaving a garland of glittering bangles into her hair.

"I do not mind your staying here to see me dance, if you wish," she said. "But George King must be in New York."

As though in answer, there came the sharp buzz of the signal from the entrance gate of the garden. Someone demanding admittance. Whatever startled premonition came to her, I could see the color draining from her face and throat. The questioning gaze she flung at me seemed to hold an agony of vague terror.

We stood at the mirror-grid, which now showed the garden gate and the starlit desert behind it. A little private airplane was resting there.

Elena gasped, "George—"

It was George King. A tall, slim figure with the starlight glistening on his shiny white flying suit and black helmet, he stood clinging to the gate, drooping. His voice gasped:

"Elena! Elena, dear, let me in! Quick!"

I saw his face, white and strained. Blood smears were on it, and the shoulder of his flying suit was wet with blood.

III

I stood aside in the shadows of the room while she ran to meet him in the doorway, with outstretched arms.

“George! You’re hurt—why—why—”

He gasped, “It’s—nothing. Just bleeding—”

He stumbled as they crossed the threshold—a handsome boy, just twenty, my information from the bureau had told me. His blood-smearred face was chalk white; his lips pallid.

“I didn’t—want a doctor,” he gasped. “I just wanted to get to you, Elena. It’s nothing—just a stab in the shoulder.”

He sank from her arms into a chair. He looked as though he were on the verge of fainting from loss of blood. I said:

“We’d better get that jacket off him.”

I saw that all the blood seemed to be from a wound in his shoulder. He had smeared it on his hands, and then to his face.

He sat up weakly at the sound of my voice. “Who’s that?”

I said: “I’m from the Crime Prevention Bureau. Don’t you bother about me. Get that jacket off.”

He flung the girl a confused glance. Then he seemed dazed. He sank back, letting us strip off his blood-soaked garments. It was a nasty cut from a knife. His shirts underneath the flying jacket were slashed. But it was only a superficial flesh wound. The bleeding had stopped now. There was no danger save from a possible infection.

I helped the girl bathe the wound in an antiseptic. At my weapon belt I had a little first-aid projector of the healing, germ-killing violet-ray, so I said:

“You’ll need surgical treatment for this pretty soon, but this is helpful for now.”

He lay relaxed, watching us as we worked on him. He said suddenly:

“S.S. man from the Crime Prevention Bureau? Well, I have nothing to hide. I—you go on the air soon, don’t you, Elena?”

“Yes,” she said. Again it seemed that they exchanged glances.

“I guess I’m all right now. Just weak and dizzy—losing blood, and the pain. You—just let me rest here while you dance. I’ll tell this S.S. man—”

“You don’t have to,” I said. “Not now.”

“But he wants to,” Elena said quickly. “Don’t you understand? We have nothing to hide.”

Brave speech indeed. She was no actress now. She regarded me defiantly. She

said, "Go on—ask him anything you like. You're the Law—that's your privilege."

I shook my head. "Later—"

"No, now," she insisted. "I'm going to ask you to leave in a minute. You'd better take your chance while you've got it. We don't want you here—"

I smiled. "All right," I said. "King, if you want to explain this, now seems to be your chance. Were you in New York tonight?"

His eyes avoided both the girl and me. He said, "Yes, I was."

"And you saw Willard Jared, didn't you?"

It seemed that all the silence of the desert was crowding us. There was only the boy's labored, panting breath.

I added, "I saw him myself in the late afternoon. You went to see him soon after that, didn't you?"

"Yes," he said at last.

"In his tower studio?"

"Yes."

It shocked Elena I realized now that she knew no more of this than I. And her fears must have swept her, so that for the moment she forgot what impression her words might make up me. She burst out:

"George! You did go to New York! You did see Jared, and I asked you not to!"

"Well, what if I did?" he flared. "I didn't go looking for trouble. I told him so. I told him—"

She bent forward over him.

"George, look at me. You went and saw Jared. Did he—did he do this to you?"

"Yes," he said abruptly. And suddenly he drew her down to him. "Elena, I love you. I want—"

"Wait, George! Tell me—you didn't do anything to harm Jared? He's—all right, isn't he? Tell me that. Tell me he's—not hurt in any way?"

"No, he's not. Of—of course he's not. Elena, I do love you. Not for all the world would I get your name publicly into this. You had nothing to do with it. I shouldn't have gone. I know that now. I'm sorry. But no one saw me there. No one saw me leave, or enter. And I wasn't with him very long. He struck at me—I tell you no one knew I was there. I called him on his private wave, and he said come on up and I went, in the outside lift. Oh, it wasn't anything. I didn't do anything to him."

Relief swept her—relief at what he said, whether she believed it or not.

"I suppose he quarreled with you?" she prompted.

"Yes. I told him he'd have to stop annoying you. I'll tell you what happened exactly. You and this S.S. man. You can put this in your report to the Crime

Prevention Bureau,” he added to me. “But you leave Elena’s name out of it. . . . Elena, listen: I told him that you were going to marry me—that you’d already filed public refusal of his claim. I told him that I filed claim for you yesterday—which you know I did—and when the hundred days are up, I told him that then you’d accept me. And he said—he said—”

There was a pause.

“He said—” she prompted.

“He said that if—if he didn’t get you I wouldn’t either. He went—all white. I never saw a man so white. I reminded him he was fifty and you were eighteen. Ridiculous! I told him so, and then he went white and he struck at me with a knife.”

“What knife?”

“It was lying on his desk between us. A thing like an ornament. I jumped and took it away from him. But it cut me—slashed my shirt and into my shoulder. I knocked him back in his chair and for a minute I held him. I never saw a man so white with rage. He couldn’t speak. He—he looked at me as though he were witless. I guess he is—issuing air-casts the way he has about how he loves you.”

“Then what, George? You held him in his chair?”

“Yes. Then I let go of him. I told him again that he’d better keep away from you. I didn’t do anything to him. I didn’t even hurt him. When I let go of him he jumped for the knife again. I—I just got out. Ran. That’s all, Elena. That’s all I did.” He saw her looking at me. He rose up a little in his chair and said: “You can report it to the Crime Prevention Bureau and the devil take you. But you keep Elena’s name—”

“What time was it?” I said.

“When I left him? About four and a half hours ago. Just about that. I took my airplane and flew straight here. There’s a fair wind from the northeast at the twenty-thousand foot level.”

The girl swung on me. “Are you satisfied? You can go now and file your report. We don’t want you here.”

She stood before me, grimly imperious. There was only the terror in her eyes. . .

I’ve no possible idea what I would have done. Young King was lying back in his chair. His eyes were closed; he seemed to have used all his strength. The buzzer sounded again. King did not open his eyes. He had fainted, though we did not know it then.

I said, “What’s that? Someone at your gate?”

“No, it’s an incoming call. I’ll take it.”

We received the image and a voice; but she gave only her voice. “I am Elena Denizon. . . .”

The little image-grid again showed the face of Franks, with the New York studio room behind him. His voice gave the routine call—seven minutes before her appearance; and then he began talking. It wasn't important. Urging her to give him visual connection. Talking banalities, almost as though he were flirting with her. I stood, unnoticed beside her. Franks couldn't see us. He had only audible connection. . . I stared at that small image of the New York broadcasting studio. Behind Franks, two uniformed men of the New York City police were standing over against the wall. We could see them plainly. And then I saw and recognized the figure of Rankin, Midtown Police Chief.

Franks was saying, "Elena, don't be silly. Let me see you."

"In the dance," she parried. "Can't you wait five minutes, Franks?"

Then suddenly my heart was pounding. The image showed the door to the stairs of Jared's tower apartment over the studio. The door was opening. I heard Elena catch her breath with a little agonized gasp. And Franks heard it.

"What's the matter, Elena?"

"Nothing," she murmured. "What—what is that behind you?"

They were carrying in a stretcher with a white form on it. A white face showed over the covering of white sheet. . . I understood now. Rankin was letting the girl see this, to surprise her, to find out if she had any guilty knowledge.

Somebody said, "Won't need a more complete autopsy. We've got all the evidence now. That fellow King did it."

It was Willard Jared lying there under that sheet. Jared—dead. Murdered.

IV

Now my partner Trant tells me the Shadow Squad is forever disgraced because I was caught standing witless and let a girl disarm me. However that may be, it certainly did happen. I was vaguely aware that Elena reached and snapped off the audiphone. The image faded. And all in that second the shocked and agonized girl wavered backward. I thought she was going to fall. She backed into her cosmetic table and as I reached to steady her, suddenly she stiffened.

“Stand back! Don’t touch me. Put up your arms or I’ll drill through you!”

The muzzle of her little golden Banning gun came at me, leveled at my chest. Above it I saw her face, with dark eyes blazing.

You never can tell what a girl is liable to do. Her crooked finger was on the sensitive button of the trigger; the safety lever was up; my life hung on the merest grain of pressure of her twitching finger. I own that it gave me a shock. I took a step backward, with upraised arms. And I murmured:

“Careful, there—that trigger is delicate.”

She eyed me as though there were nothing else in the world but my face. She said tensely: “Drop your weapon-belt.”

Docilely I unloosed it; dropped it to the floor.

“Kick it away.”

I kicked it; and abruptly she reached with her left hand under my upraised arms. No skilled criminal ever denuded me of weapons more quickly. She tossed my Banning gun across the room; in the silence it fell with a clatter.

And again she had backed out of reach, still eyeing me with that blazing gaze.

I said quietly, “Don’t get excited. I’ll do whatever you say.”

It seemed that a shudder swept over her. She gasped:

“Oh, George—we’ve got to kill this man. You’ve got to escape, George—”

She did not look from my face. Out of the tail of my eye I could see the slumped figure of King in the chair. No answer came from him. I said suddenly:

“Good Lord, he’s dead!”

That got her. The little golden muzzle wavered aside as she turned toward the chair with an involuntary, agonized gasp. And in that second I sprang and seized her wrist. The gun-bolt fired. The hissing stab of heat shot over my shoulder and seared the ceiling. There was no strength in her hand. A twisting jerk gave me the weapon as I jumped sidewise.

“George—George, dear—” She went past me. Flung herself to the floor by the chair. “George—don’t die, George!”

He was recovering consciousness. He murmured, “Elena, what happened? Why, I guess I fainted—”

Sobbing wildly she drew him to her, caressing him. The audiphone was buzzing. Weapon in hand, I reached for it. Never have I heard so despairing a sob as that which came from the girl. On the arm of the big chair she sat now with King’s face pressed against her breast—his face so pallid against that crimson scarf.

I shut off the buzzer and gave audible connection. It was Police Chief Rankin. He gave me both audible and visible. The mirror glowed with the image of his square, grim face.

He said, “Denizon studio? Where is Miss Denizon?”

“She’s here,” I said. “This is Jac Lombard—S.S., City Night Desk 4. What’s in the air, Chief?”

I shot a glance at the chair. Elena was staring at me, breathless. She and young King were beyond the audiphone’s visual range. I gave Rankin my image. He said, “Well! Jac Lombard!”

“Hello, Chief. Mac sent me here. Miss Denizon was startled just now. Is Willard Jared really dead?”

I was trying to figure the thing out. Something told me to go easy on what I said or did.

“Murdered,” Rankin said. “Obvious who did it. We’re after George King. Simple enough case. Jared died with his audiphone transmitter in hand. He called for help and just as he died, he gasped out to the local wave-sorter the name of the man who stabbed him. Young George King.”

There was a faint gasp from the chair in the shadows. I made a gesture to silence it. Rankin did not hear the gasp. He went on grimly:

“And we’ve got chemical proof. Blood on the body and on the desk and the chair. Blood which isn’t Jared’s blood. This fellow King is native of New York and so the Bartel record of his blood is on file here. We’ve identified it as George King’s blood. A chair was overturned—the desk ornaments scattered. They evidently had a fight. Both of them wounded, and Jared was stabbed to death.”

Mingled with Rankin’s grim words, across the background of my mind a stream of conjectures was flowing. A queer phrase of Willard Jared’s came back to me, “If I don’t get her, the boy never will!” What did he mean by that? And I recalled his wild, irrational look as he had said it. . . The answer to this thing began dawning on me. . .

Rankin was saying, “You’d better call Mac for orders. We’ll use you and Trant

to track down this fellow King—”

I said abruptly, “George King is here.”

The image of the police chief showed his jaw drop with startled surprise as he stared at me. And from the chair, Elena Denizon leaped and stood trembling, gazing wildly. Young King had staggered to his feet. He looked as though he were about to run, but my menacing weapon stopped him.

Rankin said, “George King is there now?”

“Yes. He came a little while ago. Flew his airplane from New York.”

Behind Rankin in the New York studio a distant voice called:

“Lights! Lights for Miss Denizon! Two minutes!”

Through the open arcade near me, the great bank of tube-lights over the dance floor was illumined. The room in there was a dazzling blue-white glare. The reflection of it showed me the chair where young King now was sitting weakly upright, staring around him in confusion. And Elena standing nearby. Amazing, the instinct of the artist—the power it had over her. From the radio-speaker above the dance floor she heard now the thrum of the tuning instruments of the studio orchestra. The lights were bathing her. It was almost time for her appearance before the world—that vast unseen audience waiting now to see her dance.

And imperatively that obligation thrust aside her personal anguish. She stood trembling, smoothing her costume scarf. And she was mustering a stage-smile through the blank despair on her face.

Rankin was saying, “George King is there?” His grinness was gone. He added, “Well, I’m certainly relieved, Lombard. Show him to me, will you?”

And I was certainly relieved. I had figured it correctly. I jumped and drew King before the mirror, holding him there in spite of himself. And Rankin said:

“Why, hello, King! I sure am glad you’re there! Why, it’s a perfect alibi! Jared has only been dead thirty minutes. By his own dying words to the wave-sorter he was stabbed less than forty minutes ago. No physical way you could get from New York to Arizona in forty minutes! He must have committed suicide. He tried it once before.”

Thirty minutes ago! That was about when Franks had called and looked worried. I had had the hunch then of something like this. Jared had committed suicide, to blame it on King! I had seen that suicidal mania in Jared’s eyes!

Rankin added, “Jove, it’s lucky you showed yourself, young fellow. A little later tonight and the Southwest High Altitude Liner would have killed your chances of an alibi.”

Elena had given a half hysterical sob of joy. I don’t know whether, even now,

she realizes that I gave the boy up to Rankin in order to save him. But I sort of hope she does. . . .

King stood sagging against me, murmuring, “Didn’t kill him? Of course I didn’t kill him—”

“Ready, Miss Denizon?” The New York director’s voice blared from the dance floor speaker. “Take your place. Thirty seconds to go.”

The orchestra leader was tapping warningly with his baton. Elena sprang at young King, pulled him from me. Her face was radiant—the impending dance, and the knowledge that King was innocent. She led him back to his chair, stooped and kissed him fervently.

The orchestra began playing. The New York director’s voice said:

“Miss Denizon! Entrance!”

“George! George, dear, let me go! Don’t hold me now! Sit there and watch me. I’ll kiss you all you want when I get through!”

She swayed out under the banks of tube-lights to the rhythm of the dance.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *Crimes of the Year 2000, No. 2: The Television Alibi* by Ray Cummings]