

Romance in Crimson

By Octavus Roy Cohen

ILLUSTRATED BY ELMORE BROWN

The Story Thus Far:

HELD up and robbed on Long Island by a bandit and his "moll," Wally Andrews and his wife, Madge, return to Karnak, their Southern home city. A few hours after the holdup, Gregg Stuart, an architect who had grown up in Karnak, saves the life of a stranger—Lynn Harrison—when a man (to whom she refers later as "Rick") tries to shoot her on a New York street. Then, to protect her from her assailant, he takes her and one of her friends, Toby Fuller, to Karnak.

There, Lynn Harrison confesses to Gregg that Rick had held up the Andrewses, and that she had been with him at the time. She insists however, that she has been guilty of no wrongdoing; and Gregg, who has fallen in love with her, believes her. Three more shocks follow: Gregg sees Rick on a street in Karnak; Madge Andrews is murdered; and Lynn is arrested and charged with the crime.

The trial begins. Lee Winthrop, the district attorney, brings out these damning facts: That one, Rick Norton, had been convicted of robbery, in Ohio, and that a girl—Lynn Harrison!—had been with him at the time the crime was committed; that Norton had escaped from prison and rejoined Lynn Harrison in New York City; that one Norman Bailey, whose son had been kidnaped, had given some ransom money to a go-between—Lynn Harrison; that Norton had held up the Andrewses, and that his companion had been—Lynn Harrison.

Under the skillful guidance of Jason Marsh, brilliant criminal lawyer who is directing the defense, Lynn gives plausible explanations for every episode. Her silence she attributes to Norton's threat to kill the Bailey boy if she exposed him. Unfortunately, Toby Fuller, who might corroborate some of her testimony, has disappeared mysteriously. . . .

Toby returns! She announces that she is prepared to testify and prove that Lynn is innocent. She says that, knowing nothing of the murder, she had eloped with Rick Norton and married him. Still loving him, in spite of what has happened, she refuses to divulge his whereabouts. . . . Lynn and Gregg have a long talk, in the course of which they plan their marriage, after the trial is over. "Keep on being happy, sweetheart," Gregg says. Then he adds: "As for Rick—I've a strong hunch we've seen the last of him."

Conclusion

THE plane was flying high and fast. It had taken off from the New York airport, and it was speeding south.

Up in the nose of the ship were the pilot and copilot—keen, alert young men. A trim, smiling stewardess inquired solicitously about the comfort of the passengers, and brought tomato juice to those who wanted it. It was an old, old story to her: the flight was the same as always; the passengers were typed.

Eleven of them today—blasé air travelers, and some who were not so blasé. . . . The sound of the motors was regular and pleasantly subdued. The stewardess relaxed. There was nothing more she could do, though she thought she'd rather like to talk to the tall young man in the rear seat.

He was a nice-looking fellow, about thirty years old, she judged; eyes a trifle too close-set, but handsome for all that. The sort of man that women are instinctively attracted to—even air-line stewardesses. But he didn't seem to be in a conversational mood. His response to her professional overtures had been curtly polite. "He's thinking of something important," the girl told herself. "Business, I guess."

But Rick Norton wasn't thinking of business. That morning he had read the Sunday papers—all of them—and had learned of his wife's return to Karnak

Gregg was more than holding his own. He heard Frenzy yell, and then came the welcome sound of Ed Crawford's slow drawl: "Up, feller . . . and keep 'em there"

and of her statement to the reporters: "When I go on the stand Monday, I'm going to tell everything I know—and I know everything." The same thought couched in different reportorial styles. The one message slamming into his brain. Yes, he understood well enough what Toby had told him through the medium of the press.

There wasn't an available line that he hadn't read, and one fact stood out clearly: Thus far Toby hadn't committed herself. She had not said, "Rick Norton killed Madge Andrews." And obviously, she had no intention of saying that until Monday morning. Tomorrow morning.

"And until she does," reflected Rick, "I'm not actually facing a murder rap."

So Rick Norton flew south, his face masklike, his purpose definite. His plan had been born of desperation, but no doubt remained in his mind now.

The plane landed for a few minutes somewhere in North Carolina and the passengers stretched their legs and then climbed back in. Night had fallen and the stars were out. Some of them slept after the take-off; tiny, comfortable little pillows behind their heads, weary bodies stretched out; their senses soothed by the rhythmic sound of the giant motors and the gentle rocking motion.

BUT Rick did not sleep, nor did he relax. He sat there thinking—thinking always the same thing. There was no doubt in his mind; no uncertainty.

The motors slowed slightly and the plane commenced to lose altitude. The lights of a city twinkled beneath them, the city itself looking like a cluster of jewels on black velvet. They pancaked down and made a perfect landing. The

stewardess came to Rick and smiled warmly. "Palmetto City," she said. "Aren't you getting off here?"

"Yes. Thank you."

He didn't hurry. He left the plane quietly and walked to the waiting bus and was driven into the town. He had no baggage, not even a suitcase.

From the bus station he went to a garage that rented cars to patrons who wished to do their own driving. It was a national institution and Rick Norton had his credential card, though the name on it was not Rick Norton. He selected a car, watched them check the oil and gas, paid his deposit, joked with the garage manager and drove out. The manager looked after him and thought: "Nice feller. Salesman, I reckon."

Rick drove north through Palmetto City, scrupulously observing all traffic (Continued on page 70)



Night Watch

By Robert Carson

ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN HOLMGREN

This is your night-owler, folks. Tune in for an exciting story of love and drama at midnight in a radio studio

IT WAS raining. It had rained for three days and nights. There was no indication that it would ever stop. A streaky, weak-kneed, blurred night fell upon the city. Men drove gloomily home, cockeyed from staring through windshield wipers. Life went damply on.

At six o'clock Henry's alarm went off. He reached out with one sure hand, throttled it, and cautiously opened his eyes. Rain was beating on the windows and gurgling down the spouts. He saw happily that it was night and stepped out of the folding bed into his one-room apartment.

Henry turned on a floor lamp and slid his feet into slippers. His eyes were bright; his face was cheery. His pulse beat faster in the darkness. All his life he had liked the night better than the day. His soul, like a supper club, bloomed only after eleven P. M. In the glare of artificial light he browned and grew healthy as other people did in the daytime.

He went into the bathroom, turned on the water in the tub and got out his razor. Across the light well somebody was playing a radio. He sang the lyrics of the song being broadcast with effortless precision. Henry knew the lyrics of every popular song ever written.

Drifting out into the apartment while the tub filled, he came upon Marsha Morgan's picture on his bureau and abruptly stopped singing. A very pretty girl, with a number of cast-iron opinions of her own. The last item tended to make their engagement a little precarious. They loved each other very much and disagreed like a couple of strange congressmen.

Henry was having dinner with her tonight. He had a feeling that a crisis was impending and it made him uneasy. By resolutely ignoring trouble, he had managed to repulse it for twenty-four years; but now the system wouldn't work. Ignore a girl like Marsha, and somebody else wouldn't . . . and Henry knew there were no other Marshas.

He fled unhappily back to the hot water, submerged and considered the happy state of submarines, who simply sank every time anyone wanted to fight with them.

At seven Henry appeared in the Morgan flat, dripping and nervously beaming, carrying a soaked newspaper that he had to peel like an artichoke to read. Mrs. Morgan let him in. Marsha sat grimly in a chair with a book in her lap, her speech obviously prepared. There was a smell of sauerkraut wafting gently through the place.

Ready for a broadside, Henry rapidly kissed Mrs. Morgan first, and then Marsha.

"Like a statue," he commented. "Is this going to be another grudge fight tonight?"

Marsha nodded. Mrs. Morgan hung up Henry's hat and coat in the hall and returned to the living room.

"Gee, I smelled that sauerkraut a

block away," Henry said to her. "Thanks."

Mrs. Morgan smiled enigmatically and left for the kitchen. Marsha was regarding Henry more in sorrow than in anger. He was acutely conscious that things were closing in on him.

"The paper says more rain," he said hastily.

"Sit down," Marsha said.

Henry sat down. "It says there are floods in the west end."

"They say drowning is a pleasant death," Marsha replied darkly.

"Why don't you have a drink?" Henry asked.

"No," Marsha said, "it might cheer me up." She inspected her right hand. "I broke another fingernail typing today."

"It'll grow out, dear."

"They ought to breed a race of secretaries," Marsha said. "Girls with steel fingernails."

"Did you have any trouble getting home this evening?"

"No, I just used the Australian crawl."

"You're in a swell mood tonight."

"I'm bored with my job, tired of working, sick of sitting nights alone—and it'd better stop raining pretty soon!"

"LOOK," Henry said, "we're engaged—not married. You can't act this way to me until we've seen a preacher."

"Henry," Marsha began, drawing a long breath, "I want to discuss our future with you—such as it was."

"Was?"

"Was—and I'm not kidding."

Carefully Henry folded up his damp newspaper and put it on the radiator.

"Okay," he said.

"When are you going to get that raise you were going to get six months ago?"

"I don't know, Marsha."

"You were making more money when you were a salesman in Marshall's shoe store than you are now, running that silly all-night radio program."

"Only five dollars more a week," Henry said.

"Isn't that more money?" Marsha demanded.

"Yes—but I was an extra-good salesman."

"Are you a good radio announcer?"

"I don't know. There's no way of telling."

"I think you're lousy," Marsha said.

"I thought you were going to get a job with a big chain in a little while."

"Maybe I will," Henry said.

"Not unless they start broadcasting all night, sweetheart. At Marshall's you had every night and Sundays off. Those nights and Sundays were devoted to the

Then a lantern bobbed into the room and cast its wavering glow on their strained faces. It was the studio engineer

