

WOMAN AT BAY

BY GEORGE HARMON COXE

ILLUSTRATED BY MARIO COOPER

The Story:

Sent to Havana to ferret out the SEVIGNY manuscript which the American government wanted for its written evidence of pro-Nazism, PAUL MACKINNON found himself in a tight spot: The manuscript had vanished, and VICTOR MOLINA, who was to have turned it over to SEVIGNY'S widow, had been murdered. Evidence pointed to BRUCE AITCHISON, an industrialist with previous Vichy interests, and his friends, MARIE GERAND and DENNIS CLARKE, but there was no proof. SEVIGNY'S widow, none other than NORMA TRAVERS, PAUL'S beautiful ex-wife, proved herself innocent, but refused to help PAUL when she learned through RODRIGUEZ, a member of the Cuban police, that AITCHISON had offered PAUL \$25,000 for the manuscript. Sworn to secrecy, PAUL could not explain that he had claimed knowledge of the manuscript's whereabouts in order to learn more of AITCHISON'S plans, so, befriended only by attractive ADRIENNE BRISSARD, he had to work alone. Then murder struck again. Learning from LEON VIDAL, a reporter, that MANUEL ZAYAS, another of AITCHISON'S men, was on NORMA'S trail, PAUL went to warn NORMA, found MANUEL slumped on the floor with NORMA'S paper cutter in his heart. . .

Conclusion

SITTING there on the bed that Norma had not slept in, Paul MacKinnon stared bleakly at the crumpled body on the floor and took time out to sort his thoughts and adjust his composure. He lighted a cigarette, noting that his fingers trembled a little, and rubbed the dampness from his hands on the sides of his coat. Finally he stood up and flexed his shoulders, twisting his neck a little to get the cramps out, then went to the bureau and found the sheath for the dagger.

Coming back to Manuel Zayas' body, he knelt and took one of the hands. It was definitely cool, though there was body warmth up under the sleeve on the inside of the arm. He had a moment of nausea taking hold of the dagger, but it came out easily and he carried it into the bathroom, washing it thoroughly before drying it. When he had replaced it in the sheath he put both in his pocket and then began to think in earnest.

He had no feeling at all that Norma had done this. He believed this not only because he wanted to believe it, but because he knew that if she had she would not have gone out and left her knife and sheath behind, nor would she have left the door unlocked.

Furthermore, he was convinced that she did not even know murder had been done. The lock was of the spring type, and unless the safety catch had been pressed to leave it unlocked without her knowing it, she would never have gone out with a body on the floor and the room accessible to anyone who turned the knob.

This meant that she had left the room some time before eleven, and she was still out. Where, MacKinnon did not know, and he did not take time to think about this now, or let himself speculate on the possibility that Aitchison had carried out his threat.

No, the important thing now was that, with this coming on top of her when she was already under some suspicion in the death of Victor Molina, Norma was due to be arrested as soon as Zayas' body was discovered.

MacKinnon rose and made a quick inspection of the room and closets, finding nothing

missing that he could remember, and nothing new except some crumpled wrapping paper and a small carton which had held a bottle of liquid stocking preparation.

Remembering the packages she had carried into the lobby at seven that evening, he was left with the impression that one of these had been a sizable paper bag. When he could not find it now, he wondered about it, but not for long. For underlying all his thoughts in the past few minutes, there had been one nebulous plan that had persistently clamored for attention, and he knew he must deal with it.

It did not take him long, once he examined the problem. It was actually very simple.

With the body here, Norma was as good as in jail. With the body in his room, there would be a certain amount of time gained, and that was about all he could hope for now. Later the body would be found, and Rodriguez would toss him into jail anyway, but at least the charge would not stand up long, for he possessed one thing which Norma lacked.

Zayas had arrived downstairs at three minutes after eleven. Given two minutes to get up here the back way, he had been killed not earlier than five minutes after eleven. And he, MacKinnon, had an alibi from eleven to twelve that even Rodriguez could not shake.

With a sigh and a deliberate concentration on the physical aspects of the job rather than the moral perils, he put the hat on Zayas' head, lifted him, carried him to the door and held him there with one hand, thankful that the man was small. He glanced into the hall long enough to find it clear and reached for the light switch, glancing over his shoulder as he did so. In the instant before darkness claimed the room, he saw the stain on the rug. He turned his back and went out.

MACKINNON'S luck ran out just as he reached his own door. In order to get at his room key, he got his left hand and arm under Zayas' armpit and shoulder, and propped him against one hip while his right hand explored his pocket. He found a key, but as he tried to fit it, he heard the muted thud of an elevator stopping. Hurrying now, desperate, he punched at the lock and cursed silently and then, exasperated beyond caring, he looked at the key and found the reason.

The key, so similar to his own, was the key to room 319 at the Palm Hotel.

He clung hard to the dead man and dropped the key into his trousers pocket as he found the right one. Steps were behind him as he fitted it and turned the bolt.

"Need any help?"

The voice struck clear through him, and he flinched and stiffened, nearly losing his grip on Zayas. Then he made himself glance over his shoulder. A man and a woman had passed, and the man had stopped.

"No," MacKinnon wheezed. "No, I can manage." He had the door open; he was starting through. "Thanks just the same."

He felt Zayas' feet dragging and took a quick hitch so he could keep moving. "Had a little too much to drink," he said, with a forced laugh. "But I've got him now."

The woman had gone on, but the man was still standing there, his frown puzzled before he shrugged and turned away.

MacKinnon kicked the door shut. He stretched Zayas on the floor. Then he flopped into a chair.

"Everything," he gasped morosely, "happens to MacKinnon."

When he could, he examined his clothes and found no stains except a tiny one on the cuff of his shirt. One hand was discolored and he washed this carefully. Then, since

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Adrienne stood, wide-eyed and immobile, her jaw slack as she stared at her hand. The gun spun crazily as it fell and then she screamed

Swamis Beside the Potomac

By Mona Gardner



If the cabby's prophecy doesn't please you, he'll take you where you can get one with another angle

ILLUSTRATED BY GEORGE LICHTY

WASHINGTON is doing a boom business in soothsaying these days. The nation's capital is awash with people ready to tell—at the drop of a dollar—the answers to such fundamental questions as: "Why did Bob drift away from me? . . . Shall I buy U.S. Steel or RCA shares this week? . . . When will I marry?" Raise that one dollar to five or ten, and the omen-mongers are prepared to disclose when the war will end, the day your soldier boy will ring the front doorbell, whether that spot on your left lung is tuberculosis or just a transitory shadow.

Taxis, dentists and hotel rooms are difficult Washington items to find, but fortunes are not. You can have them told in department stores, taxicabs, pharmacies, night clubs and office buildings. Five-and-dime stores employ swamis in gaudy robes to tend their

zodiac counters; a dozen downtown lofts have been remodeled into temples where a variety of mystic cults hold nightly séances; while classified ads in daily newspapers and the telephone directory list columns of virtuosos who tell all via stars, cards, spirit embers, Egyptian sand or ectoplasm for anywhere from fifty cents per star to fifty dollars per ectoplasm.

If a person is not aura-conscious before, he becomes so in Washington. Furniture-store windows display rooms planned for the Taurus personality, for the Capricorn, the Aries, and the other nine zodiacal types. A jewelry store window is filled with astrological tidbits in gold and silver; another window bulges with astrological neckwear; and the one beyond offers candy keyed to your planetary vibrations. A photograph shop, no more than a camera's throw from

the Department of Justice, has a window full of spirit photographs.

The thing that gives special luster to the capital's present troupe of performers is the audience they attract. Along with the usual habitués—life's cowards and immoderate sentimentalists—there are congressmen, realtors, presidents of national organizations, visitors at the White House, OPA and WPB executives, government clerks, women newspaper columnists, and senators, all standing in line at Washington's plush séance chambers or booking appointments with the busy prophets weeks in advance.

Take the case of the elderly New Deal congressman who is meticulously careful to consult his spirit control before casting an important House vote. For the prevailing séance, his favorite spiritualist comes to his office in the Capitol Building. They pull the shades

down, and while the hubbub of lawmaking goes on in the corridors and offices about them, they summon spirits for communion.

And there is the senator from a Southern state who is a weekly customer on the books of one eminent seeress. Regularly every seven days she casts his horoscope for the ensuing week, telling him his lucky days for handling money contracts, and the ones on which he should avoid making important decisions. Last winter, before her yearly sojourn in Miami, she drew up forecasts three weeks in advance.

Another substantial citizen prominent in national affairs, hearing about this super-insurance, asked to have the same weekly service. The seeress was sorry, she said, but her time was solidly booked with government employees, and until one of her regular customers died or the Administration changed and they moved away from Washington, she couldn't take on another weekly patron.

Seers Are in Fashion

Seer décor in the capital has had a face-lifting job. Gone is the grubby cubbyhole and the outside gypsy dressed in a bandanna and an old portiere. Instead, there's a spacious suite done in Louis Quatorze or Early Metal-Tube, a neon sign, a uniformed maid opening the door, and a brisk secretary answering the telephone and making all Madame's appointments. The frankly ungriddled gypsy has become sveltely Mainbocher, or, just as sveltely, the lace-fichued-mother type. Gentleman seers are combed and brushed, the glass of fashion in Hollywood tweeds or a frock coat, with here and there a jeweled turban.

So ably have certain of these plugged into the infinite that they roll divinations off the tongue at half-hour intervals from midmorning until nine or ten o'clock at night, interrupting the flow only for small material mouthfuls at noon and again at dinnertime. One prominent seeress got so jammed with ten-dollar appointments for eight and nine weeks in advance that she revised her system last summer. Now each month on the 15th, she opens her bookings for the ensuing month, makes an average of 168 or 170 bookings on that day, fills her calendar by the 20th, and closes her books inexorably.

Another refuses to make any appointments at all. She is at her office from one o'clock in the afternoon until five. You appear at one, pay five dollars, and wait your turn if there aren't too many ahead of you. Even then, it is not unusual for Madame's secretary to come out around three o'clock and say the

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Most of the capital's seers do a land-office business; customers stand in line, eager to pay their money and find out what the future holds for them



One gifted prophet casts a weekly horoscope for a prominent senator; he considers it an infallible guide to the conduct of government business