

Robert Young's new story is a brisk and entertaining tale about D. D. Rinehart, alias Nancy Drew, a futuristic private eye who takes on an offbeat case involving doppelgangers and call girls.

Hologirl

by **ROBERT F. YOUNG**

We are looking for girls with Zing, Zest and Zowie to help promote our clients' products on
3V

Talent Associates

Sespol Bldg., Suite 1400

Idealia

I handed the clipping back to my caller. Before tossing it onto my transparent desktop, he'd informed me that he had good reason to believe that Amos Kurilman, who, in conjunction with his wife, ran the agency, was a pimp.

"You think it's a front for a call-girl operation?"

Sespol nodded his peruked head without removing his gaze from where it had been ever since he'd sat down opposite me — on my legs. "An egregious front, Ms. Rinehardt. The girls even have the gall to live right on the premises. And there must be hundreds of them! The lobby's equipped with an electronic surveillance system that comes on after dark, and the same faces never show up on the tapes more than twice. The Sespol Sky-Rise is a respectable office building, restricted to respectable businesses. During the day, girls go up to Suite 1400 where, presumably, they are interviewed; they then come back down again and depart. Fine and dandy. But if my other renters ever get wind of the *other* girls who come and go after hours, they may not renew their leases. Worse, they may even cancel them."

"So you want proof of what the *other* girls are doing so you can cancel Kurilman's lease."

"'Flagrante delicto proof,' if I may be so bold as to coin a term. Something tangible I can show him that will cause him to slink off into the night, dragging his tails behind him, so to speak (ha-ha!), without the incident making the media. In a word, a hard-core porno-photo."

"My fee is \$300 a day, plus expenses," I said in the brusque Philip Marlow tone of voice I reserve for such occasions. "\$700 in advance."

"That's pretty steep for snapping a dirty picture."

"It's not that simple. Before I snap it I have to find out what the score is, and that means legwork. Incidentally, that V-shaped cicatrix on my left kneecap you seem so fascinated by is a mememto of an overnight hike I went on when I was a brownie and fell on a beer can."

He raised his pale-blue eyes to my face. He gave a little giggle. Then, abruptly all business, he stood up, counted out fourteen fifties from his shoulder purse and arranged them on my desktop. "I hope you're as good as they say you are."

"I'm better."

D. D. Rinehardt, Private Investigator, it says on my office door. *If I can't find out what you want to know, nobody can.*

The Sespol Sky-Rise rises like a glass phallus from between two inflated electricar-domes that suggest a pair of gonads. I found a parking slot for my Blue Jay in one of the latter, entered the building proper and took the main elevator to the fourteenth floor. Psychedelic walls, knee-deep pile carpeting, gilt doors with bas-relief lettering, a genuine antique fireman's ax hanging in a recessed glass display case.... The door I sought proved to be a double one. *Talent*, the lettering on the left one said; *Associates*, on the other. They opened to my touch, and I stepped into a commodious reception room.

More knee-deep pile carpeting. Comfy-chairs arranged artfully along luminous walls. A long, low center-table imbricated with popular periodicals. A mahoganoid desk with a big brown female sitting

behind it. A nameplate reading *Cecily Sturmi Kurilman*. An inner door just to the desk's left.

The hour was early (9:30, or thereabouts), but already most of the chairs were occupied by applicants filling out application forms, or just sitting. I got a form from a pile on the desk and headed for one of the empty chairs, Cecily Sturmi Kurilman's gaze cold upon my back.

While filling in the blanks, I filled myself in on the other applicants with periodic *coups d'oeils*. Soi-disant Zing, Zest and Zowiers came in diverse packages. One of the applicants had legs like a rhino; another, a face like a pizza. A third was pot-bellied and brought to mind a retired hooker. There were three or four dishes, however, that my client Sespol would have gone down on at first sight. Law of averages.

Some of the questions on the application form mystified me: *How do you spend your evenings? Do you go out often? If so, where? Are you in any way associated with the following? — The Amour Arms, The Halcyon Hotel, The Tryst Inn*. I answered them with *Watching 3V, No, Nowhere* and *No* respectively. Farther up the page I'd already entered my professional alias — Nancy Drew — and supplied the address of my apartment, which I rent under that name. There was no request for a phone number — odd indeed in these days of monthly mail-delivery. When I finished I gave the completed form to Ms. Kurilman, who rolled it up, placed it in a cylinder and dropped the cylinder into the mouth of a pneumo-tube. "Please be reseated, Ms. Drew. Mr. Kurilman will see you as soon as it's your turn."

I killed time trying mentally to divvy up Sespol's \$700 advance among my creditors in such a way as to leave enough to buy a new set of tires for my Blue Jay. Meanwhile, the applicants who were ahead of me were successively processed by Mr. Kurilman. I noticed after a while that the one who entered the inner door was never the next to leave by it, but the one after, and from this I deduced that a sort of intermediate waiting-room existed between the room in which I sat and the room where Kurilman was conducting the interviews (Sespol had told me that the suite comprised six rooms altogether). It turned out to be a cozy little vestibule containing a single comfy-chair and a winged mirror similar to those found in boutiques. When, instinctively, I stepped between the wings, a subdued but penetrating light with no apparent source obligingly came on and bathed me from all angles. In its flattering radiance I pirouetted, gave my bangs a pat and ascertained that my nipples, which I'd painted orange for the occasion, protruded from their pap holes at precise 90-degree angles.

At length the inner inner-door opened, and the applicant who'd preceded me came out. A pink-periwigged little man somewhere in his 40s beckoned me to enter. ("Nancy Drew, is it? I'm delighted to meet you, Nancy." "Thank you, sir. I'm delighted to meet you, too." Etc.) After looking me over and swallowing (the ones from 16 to 60 swallow; those over 60 salivate), he opened a tattered transcript of *The Duchess of Malfi* seemingly at random, handed it to me and told me to read the duchess' lines.

(Duch.) "I would have you lead your fortune by the hand unto your marriage-bed...."

Between lines, I saw him stealthily snake my handkerchief out of my handbag and stuff it into his coat pocket.

When I finished, he said, "You read that very well, Ms. Rinehardt." He took back the transcript. "I like your carriage too." A second swallow, a final once-over. "We'll be in touch."

How? I wondered. By carrier pigeon?

Officially there's no such thing as a master data bank containing up-to-date histories of all private citizens over age 21 and connected like a monstrous macrocosmic spiderweb to every precinct comp in the country. But any private eye worth his or her salt knows better and has at his/her fingertips a precinct employee who can, and will for the right dollar, come up with all he/she needs to know about anyone he/she wants to know it about.

My contact is a male Caucasian, code-name "Gloria," employed at Precinct 2. He got me the following data on Amos Kurilman (material irrelevant to the Kurilman case omitted):

B. Wichita, Kan., Jun. 2, 1978.

Educ. Majored Bus. Rel., Gray's University.

Marital hist. Married Cecily Sturmi, Feb. 6, 2008; no offspring.

Mar. 30, 2009. Went into partnership with Wentworth, Thom; Cert. Bus. "Holography Equip.) Mfg. Co." Partnership dissolved Feb. 10, 2017; fry, equip. sold auct. Feb. 14, 2017.

Sep. 16, 2011 Established talent agency, Cert. Bus. "Talent Associates."

May 20, 2018: Transferred "Talent Associates" from Wichita, Kan. to Cincinnati, O.

Jan. 6, 2019. Transferred "Talent Associates" from Cincinnati, O. to Idealia.

Police record: No police record.

Parapsychodiagnosis: Fetishism; cyclothymia.

I had Gloria do two more data taps (again, material irrelevant to the Kurilman Case omitted):

Sturmi, Cecily

B. Wichita, Kan., Jul. 11, 1980.

Educ. Grad. 12th Grade, Jun. 19, 1998. Took crash-course Speedteaching Mar.-Aug., 2017.

Marital hist. Married Amos Kurilman, Feb. 6, 2008; no offspring.

Mar. 30, 2009 — Feb. 10, 2017. Sec.-treasr. "Holography Equip. Mfg. Co."

Sep. 16, 2017 — Jun. 2, 2019. Sec.-treasr. "Talent Associates."

Police record: Arrested morals charge, Wichita, Kan., Dec. 4, 2001; fined & released. Arrested soliciting, Wichita, Kan., Aug. 17, 2005; fined & released. Arrested oper. bawdy house, Wichita, Kan., Nov. 20, 2007; fined & released.

Parapsychodiagnosis: Probable psychopathic personality.

Wentworth, Thom.

B. Wichita, Kan., Jul 11, 1977. *Educ.* Majored Mech. Eng., Halger's Institute Tech. Sideline: Art collecting.

Marital hist. No known marriages.

Mar. 30, 2009. Went into partnership with Kurilman, Amos; Cert. Bus. "Holography Equip. Mfg. Co. Partnership dissolved Feb. 10, 2017.

Jun. 19, 2018. Moved from Wichita, Kan. to Cincinnati, O.

Feb. 21, 2019. Moved from Cincinnati, O. to Idealia. Last known address 616 Sycamore St. Present whereabouts unknown.

Police record: No police record.

Parapsychodiagnosis: Schizoid type; probable progressive alcoholism.

In the precinct parking lot I climbed into my Blue Jay and closed the door. As I did so, someone climbed in the other side and closed the other door. Golden peruke with shoulder-length curls; Mediterranean-blue eyes; faintly hooked nose; wide cheekbones; cheeks only just beginning to sag. Pastel shirt, codpiece skin-slax, copper-studded shoes. A disarming smile. "Permit me to introduce myself, Ms. Rinehardt. I am Gino. Odrussi."

In my rearview mirror glimpsed three bearish muscleme leaning on the hood of a Hawk. "You don't need to introduce yourself," I told Gino. "I've seen your picture in the society pages of the *Idealia Update* at least a thousand times. I just love the way you sit your polo pony — the one your girls bought you for your birthday."

The disarming smile didn't deteriorate in the least. "You know, I'm glad you brought my girls up, Ms. Rinehardt. Because they are why I am here. I protect them like a father, and when I am doing so I do not like to have other parties getting into the act."

I began to see a faint light. "Go on."

"It has come to my attention via certain arcane channels that you have been retained to take steps that will be detrimental to the continued financial well-being of a certain Amos Kurilman. This would be all to the good, Ms. Rinehardt, were not Amos Kurilman my animal cookie, and mine alone."

"What makes him so exclusively yours?"

"His girls are operating in my girls' territory. That's bad. Very very bad. But what is worse is their wholesale pricetags. My girls charge \$600 per night, of which I take only a modest 33 and 1/3 percent. But his girls charge only \$400 per night, which means either that he is operating at a loss or taking 50 percent of their earnings. I do not think they would stand for this, which leaves only one conclusion to be drawn: he is operating at a loss with the intent to drive me out of business."

"It's a well-known fact," I said, "that all the call girls of Idealia swear fealty to you. That being so, where does he get his from?"

An eloquent elevation of the hands. A sad shake of the periwigged head. I knew instantly that he was lying when he said, "I have no idea." A grim grin supplanted the disarming smile. "But wherever he is getting them," he went on, "I am going to crumble him. Personally. Which is why I do not want a pretty private eye like you getting in my way, because then I will have to crumble her too." He swallowed surreptitiously, the grim grin dissolved and the disarming smile came back. A hand crept over like a puppy dog and nuzzled my right thigh. "Please do not force poor Gino to disfigure so flawless a work of art. Is it not bad enough that one Venus lost both arms?"

I shooed the puppy dog away. "Get out of my car, you fucking Calabrian bastard!" I said.

The smile sort of froze in place as its owner did my bidding. In my rearview mirror I saw him rejoin the Three Bears. The smile was still there when I pulled out of my parking slot, so wide it filled the whole mirror. Late-morning sunlight pouring down upon the Goldilocks peruke caused a halo to form above it. The illusion was as ephemeral as it was ridiculous. I put it out of my mind, joined the traffic flow and headed for the Orchard.

They have sanctuaries for birds, don't they? And for koalas, seals and hippopotamuses. Why not, then, a sanctuary for wineheads?

Thus, apparently, went the ratiocination of the designers of Idealia when they decided to reserve a tract of land in the center of their model city for those of its dwellers who might someday find themselves at odds with reality and in need of a place to withdraw. The tract happened to be an apple orchard, which was how it got its pop name and which was why, when I stepped through the force-field gate after parking my Blue Jay, I smelled apples.

Rotten ones.

A footpath wound willy-nilly among the trees; I set forth along it. The trees had so many suckers you could hardly see the limbs they grew out of. The rotten apples still clinging to the branches and those littering the ground were the size of acorns.

I passed occasional cottages constructed of thrown-away tar paper and scrap lumber, with wine bottles planted in their front yards. The first native I came upon lay sound asleep across the path. I stepped over him and went on. The next one I came upon was sitting under one of the trees. This one was alive. "Good afternoon," I said politely. "I'm looking for a resident named Thomas Wentworth. Can you direct me to his place of abode?"

The native blinked. He was sober, but his vacant eyes left little doubt that the last of his brains had boiled away quite some time ago. "Grwk," he said.

I went on. Another native. Walking. Wearing a slouch hat, a trenchcoat and a pair of toe rubbers. The trenchcoat had moss growing on it. "Kind sir," said I, "are you by any chance acquainted with a fortyish gentlemen of mechanical bent named Thomas Wentworth?"

He was staring at my lead-veined handbag as though he could smell the two pints of Muscatel I'd picked up after leaving the Precinct 2 parking lot. "Thomas Ooh?"

"Never mind," I said and proceeded deeper into the Orchard.

I had better luck with the fourth native I met. "His house is in the holler," he told me.

I had no idea where the "holler" was, but I figured if I kept following the path I'd eventually come to it, and eventually I did. A creek purred over pebbles and broken glass, habitations of various shapes and sizes squatting at sporadic intervals along its bottle-littered banks. Following the creek, I came upon a native washing his socks, but he wasn't the one I was looking for. He was a newcomer (who but a newcomer would bother to wash his socks?) and, relatively speaking, young for a winehead. Young

enough and not yet far gone enough to swallow when he saw me. When he made a grab for me as I passed I whacked his hand with my handbag. When he lunged for me I gave him another whack, this time on the side of the head. I left him sitting in the middle of the creek, sobbing.

I don't much care for wineheads.

Wentworth didn't have a mailbox out front with his name on it, but I was sure when I came to the one-room prefab with the window boxes that it was his. There was nothing in the window boxes except wine bottles, but they still provided a distinction of sorts, and Wentworth, I was certain, was not a typical winehead.

I ascended a trio of warped steps to a wobbly stoop and looked through a screenless screendoor. "Thomas Wentworth?"

The figure slumped in the room's only chair stirred. "Thomas Wentworth is dead. *Requiescat in pace*."

I stepped inside, opened my handbag and tossed one of the two pints of Muscatel (miraculously, neither was broken) into his lap. I set the other on a nearby window sill. Wentworth opened the one I'd tossed him and chug-a-lugged a third of its contents. After he wiped his mouth on his shirtsleeve, I said, "In five minutes, I'm leaving. Whether or not I take the other pint with me depends on how promptly and straightforwardly you provide answers to a few questions I'm going to ask. Ready? Here comes the first: Did you and Kurilman part friends?"

I couldn't see his face very well in the dim, foliage-filtered light coming in the windows and the door. Wineheads don't have faces anyway — only molding clay that keeps sagging no matter how many times they press it back into shape. At length Wentworth said, "Kurilman paid me what I asked. He knew what I'd do with the money. And he knew that after a year or so I'd be too far gone to build another machine and that in the interim I wouldn't try. No, I guess you could hardly say we parted friends. But we didn't part enemies either."

"You blackmail him, of course."

"Regularly. But only for a little at a time."

"This machine you alluded to — what did you call it?"

"A holoplicator."

"And what does it do?" Wentworth chug-a-lugged the rest of the pint and tossed the bottle into a corner. "It doesn't matter what it does, because it only does it temporarily, and with respect to what I invented it for, it doesn't do it at all. I failed."

"Kurilman didn't seem to think so. He bought you out. Why?"

"I don't know why."

"You know perfectly well why."

"All right. I know why now. But I didn't then."

"Is that the why of the wine?"

"Young lady, there is no why of the wine. Only the wine."

"I know," I said. "But you're only the second winehead I've ever known who admitted it."

"Who wash the first?"

"My father," I said and went out and closed the door.

"D. D. Rinehardt, as I live and breathe," said the taller of the two executive types when I came out of the breakfastmat next morning.

"Or is it Nancy Drew?" said the shorter, taking my arm and guiding me to the Sparrow parked behind my Blue Jay.

I can smell IRS agents a mile away. Maybe it's the periwig powder they use. "Are we going for a ride?"

"In the park."

Pinched between them on the narrow front seat, I watched the streets and avenues unwind beneath the greenery of maples, sycamores, lindens and box elders. Ideal city smothered with green boughs. The

park closed around us: songbirds sang; robins hopped on dappled swards; lovers held hands on benches growing out of trees. *Morning is when I am awake and there is a dawn in me.*

When he was winiest, my father used to look out into the back yard and say that, even when it was night.

The taller of my two escorts parked the Sparrow opposite an oak-tree bench, and the three of us got out and sat down, me in the middle. "Ms. Rinehardt," said the shorter, "we've got your number."

"You've been watching too many antique movies on 3V," I told him.

"Button your lip, sister," said the taller.

Another antique-movie buff. "What's the rap?" I asked.

"No rap, sweetstuff. Just a warning. The IRS is already onto Kurilman and we don't want outsiders poking around. One of Idealia's concerned citizens — a very prominent one — put us wise to the white-slavery racket Talent Associates's a front for, and we're almost ready to close in on our man."

"Unreported income, huh?"

"You bet, unreported income! Oh, are we going to get him! Aren't we, Bernie?"

"You bet, Sam!"

I didn't have to go on sitting there. I knew it and they knew it. I stood up. "Sure you're going to get him," I said. "You're going to get him the way your IRS forefathers got Al Capone. You're going to get him for not leaving a tip for the waitress and let him get away without paying for his pasta. And afterward you're going to go around bragging about it."

With that, I walked over to the curb and flagged down a passing electricab. "We'll audit you!" Sam screamed as I climbed in.

I slammed the door. "Go ahead and audit!" I hollered out the window.

HOUSEWIFE SEES DOPPELGANGER; *Claims she saw set exiting from local hotel.* Mri. Ralph Comminger this morning told the Roving Update Reporter that while she was driving by the Halcyon Hotel — "an establishment of low repute I wouldn't dream of patronizing" — she saw herself coming out of it. Etc.

CALL GIRL ARRESTED FOR OPERATING WITHOUT A LICENSE VANISHES FROM JAIL CELL; Leaves dress, undies and shoes behind; believed to be walking the streets naked. Police, acting on a phone call from a concerned citizen, early this morning arrested an unlicensed call girl, who carried no identification, as she was leaving the room of a client at the Tryst Inn. Upon confiscating an envelope concealed on her person, they discovered it contained three \$100- and two \$50-bills. Etc.

ALLEGED CALL GIRL TURNS OVER NEW LEAF: REFUSES FURTHER RELATIONS WITH CASH CUSTOMER; Claims to be respectable housewife. James P. Rowe, arrested last night for assaulting Marianna Mori, insists she is the call girl to whom he paid \$400 three nights ago for services rendered at the Amour Arms. Etc.

I didn't bother scanning the rest of the Idealia Update back-issues the morgue selectacron had deposited in the carrel. Except for a missing paragraph, I already had the whole story. The time had come for me to earn my \$700.

Since I couldn't do so till night, I decided to knock off for the afternoon.

It came as no great surprise to me when I entered my apartment to find Goldilocks and the Three Bears awaiting me in my living room (printlocks, for all their vaunted infallibility, pose no problem for pros). Goldilocks was sitting on one of my love seats; opposite him on the other, squeezed tightly together, sat the Three Bears.

"Anybody for a can of beer?" I asked.

The Three Bears' eyes lit up, but Gino shook his head. "We are here on the Kurilman matter, Ms. Rinehardt, as you cannot have failed to grasp. For some foolish reason you have ignored my advice to leave the cookie-crumbling to us. Very well: you now have two choices. You can take your rightful place

beside the Venus de Milo, minus both your arms, or you can tell me from where Kurilman obtains his girls, a matter of considerable concern to me as a respectable tax-paying citizen, and a mystery which I am sure a talented private investigator like yourself cannot by this time have failed to resolve."

I sat down on a nearby ottowoman. "From Mars, maybe?"

"He gets them, as you very well know," Gino said, a disarming smile and a grim grin vying for supremacy on his face and with the latter holding a slight edge, "by luring housewives, factory-line females, pasta-parlor waitresses and other such simpletons into his office by means of a clever come-on ad in the classified section of the *Idealia Update*. There, a magic metamorphosis is put into motion that enables the housewives, factory-line females, pasta-parlor waitresses and other such simpletons to leave by the same door they came in by and yet which somehow allows those of them who are qualified for call-girl work to simultaneously remain and to go out later on in a professional capacity and drive away the cares of Kurilman's clients for the cut-rate sum of \$400. What I want to know is how does he accomplish this legerdemain?"

My apartment is on the topmost floor, which means it's equipped with skylights and gets a lion's share of sunshine. It was filled with sunshine now, and already that damned halo was taking form above Gino's periwigged head. Jove, Jupiter. *Capo de tutti capi*. Inheritor of the spoils of the Castellammarese War, of the successive empires of Masseria, Maranzano, Luciano, Genovese, Gambino, Lucci, and Bombasino. God in a codpiece and a wig arrogantly striding over the power-cathected masochists fawning at his feet —

No, Gino, no. Not over me. "Kurilman," I said, "has a machine like a big sausage-grinder. His wife puts the girls in, adds equal parts sugar, spice and everything nice, and he turns the handle. And for every girl put in, two come out, one to do his bidding and one to go back to her 3V set, her factory-line job or waiting on tables."

In a secret compartment of the ottowoman, within easy reach of my right hand, was a fully charged raze pistol. But I had no need of it. Grim grin and disarming smile fought for a while on Gino's face, with neither winning out. Nothing remain. Nothing. He got up without a word and walked out the door. The Three Bears followed, staring sideways at me as they passed. Not with disbelief, but with relief. For Gino had given the order, they could not have carried it out. It was theirs as well as his Achilles' heel.

After an afternoon of work and relaxation (I did my laundry and re-read Camus' *The Plague*), I prepared a light dinner and ate by yellow candlelight at my little dinner table with its damask cloth.

I hadn't touched Sespol's \$700 advance (it's my policy never to spend a client's money till I've fully earned it); when I did, I'd buy the steak I'd been ravenous for for weeks and maybe even have french fries and a tossed salad to go with it.

Eleven o'clock found me parked across the street from the main entrance of the Sespol Sky-Rise, my Laseroid camera sharing the seat beside me with my handbag. *Idealia* is not ideally illuminated; as with ordinary cities, only lights of low wattage are allowed in residences and business places, and streetlights are confined to corners. The pitch goes something like this: "National switchover to solar power is just around the corner, folks, but until we round that corner we've got to go right on conserving." The argument would make sense (1) if "conserving" applied to 3V and (2) if realistic restrictions were imposed on indiscriminate use of energy during daytime hours. As matters stand, it's nothing but a psychological gimmick to ease peoples' minds while Rome burns.

Most of the windows of the Sespol Sky-Rise were dark, but a few glowed wanly in the night, one of them on the fourteenth floor. Whether or not it belonged to Suite 1400, I had no way of knowing.

Electricar traffic was sparse, pedestrian even sparser. As I sat there waiting I killed time by trying to find the Kurilman story's missing paragraph. I knew all right what he was doing and I knew he was doing it somewhere in Suite 1400. It was true that, not being of mechanical bent, I didn't know precisely how he was doing it, but he was doing it, and, that being so, why hadn't he done it to me? I'd seen him swallow, hadn't I? And where did Cecily Sturm Kurilman fit in? Surely she must have a bigger piece of the action than her role as sec.-treasr.-receptionist would suggest.

An electricab pulled up in front of the main entrance, and a girl in a gown came out and got in. A

hobo-girl? The corner streetlight was too faraway to shed much light on the scene. I doubt whether I'd have been able to tell anyway.

Just to make sure, I decided to wait for a repeat performance, and let the cab take off without tailing it.

A short while later another cab pulled up, and another girl in a gown came out and got in. This time, when the cab took off, I followed.

I know Idealia like a book, and before the cab had gone three blocks, I knew it was headed for the Tryst Inn. So I got ahead of it and was parked across the street when it pulled up opposite the entrance. The girl in the gown got out, paid the driver with money she took from her shoe (she had no handbag), and ran up a shrub-bordered walk to the door. I got a halfway decent look at her in the wan radiance of the entrance light as she let herself in, and something about her — exactly what it was, I couldn't fathom — gave me a bad turn. It was a feeling sort of like *deja vu*, at least in the sense that it came and went so fast I couldn't pin it down.

By the time I gained the little lobby, she was already on her way up in the elevator. The indicator stopped at 5. The lobby was empty, as one would expect at that time of night. Next to the elevator was a buzzer with which to summon the night clerk. Next to that hung the Tryst Inn directory.

An Idealia ordinance requires that all such directories be updated daily. So I knew when I peered at the names that they weren't those of persons who had checked out umpteen years ago.

Only three rooms on the fifth floor were occupied: 502 by a John Olms, 507 by a Clinton Adams and 510 by a Charles Proveno. It's not hard to spot an alias, and an alias was what I was looking for. Why? Because pseudo-prestigious hostelries like the Tryst Inn are made to order for middle-income out-of-towners who like to shack up with call girls, and middle-income out-of-towners generally cherish their good names.

I settled for "Clinton Adams." It had just the right pseudo-prestigious flavor.

I waited for a while before going up. It's *de rigueur* for call girls to make small talk before jumping into bed with a client, and it was unlikely a Kurilman hologirl would go against the grain. Clients have to be taken into consideration too. Sometimes they're up-tight and need to be put at ease.

How do I know? I've been around, that's how.

While I waited, I checked my Laseroid to see whether it was loaded properly. It was. After ten minutes had gone by, I stepped into the elevator, which had dutifully returned to lobby level, and told it to take me up to the fifth floor. A narrow hallway, garishly carpeted. Forty-watt lamps burning at either end. Walls with sleazy roses seeming to grow out of them. Opposite 507, I set my Laseroid on the floor, got a small vial out of my handbag and squeezed a few drops of lock acid into the keyhole (for obvious reasons, hotels have never gone in for printlocks). Then I replaced the vial and armed myself with the Laseroid.

The floor plan of a pseudo-prestigious hotel-room is simplicity itself: bed on one wall, 3V set facing it on the opposite; two chairs, one next to the archway leading to the commode-shower, the other beside the bed; one table. Illumination is supplied by a single overhead light, one switch located over the headboard of the bed, the other to the left of the door jamb.

I waited the sixty seconds necessary for the lock acid to do its work, then I turned the knob, stepped inside and switched on the light. My Laseroid was already pointed in the right direction. When the bed appeared on the viewer, I turned the knob, and the brief brightness of the laser beams revealed to my right eye what the holo-film recorded: Kurilman's client banging away like sixty—

Banging *me*!

The little whore didn't dematerialize till quarter after eight the next morning. I stood guard at the door the whole night through to make sure she didn't sneak out and bring even more shame to bear on my good name.

I kicked the sleazy clothes she'd been wearing (I'd made her put them back on) under the bed. "Clinton Adams" had long since absconded. I don't know which demoralized him more — glancing over his shoulder and seeing me or the look in my eyes. Whichever, he'd dressed and departed posthaste.

I was still a little shaky when I slipped behind the wheel of my Blue Jay, and to calm myself I went for a ride in the park. It was well after nine when I took the elevator up to the fourteenth floor of the

Sespol Sky-Rise. The first thing I did was swing my handbag against the recessed case that held the antique fireman's ax. When the glass window shattered, I seized the ax and entered the Talent Associates reception room. Goldilocks and the Three Bears were there, and so were Bernie and Sam. Ms. Cecily Sturm Kurilman sat behind her mahoganoid desk like a becalmed brown battleship, gazing raptly at a point in space just above Goldilocks' head. Her husband was wading back and forth through the pile carpeting, wringing his hands and saying over and over, "What other girls? What other girls?"

All of them gaped when I came in with my ax.

I walked past them, kicked open the inner door, went into the intermediate waiting-room and smashed that damned mirror to smithereens. Behind it stood a Christmas-treelike complex of crystals, tubes, wires and widgets. I smashed that too. Behind where it had been, separated from me by a soundproof paraglass partition, the cream of yesterday's crop of hologirls, wearing hand-me-down pajamas, were lolling on studio couches, eyes focused on the screen of an inculcator. The culls were nowhere to be seen.

No one tried to stop me on my way out. After I replaced the fireman's ax in its recessed case, I went down and got in my Blue Jay and headed for my apartment.

On the way, I stopped off at the Idealia Public Library and did some belated research.

"In laser holography," I told Sespol the next morning, "a laser beam is divided by means of a mirror. One of the two resultant beams is used to illuminate the subject, and the reflection from the subject is cast upon a photographic plate. The other beam is reflected from the mirror directly upon the plate. This is the reference beam. Merging on the plate with the light coming from the subject, it creates an interference pattern. When the reference beam only is directed upon the plate, the rays passing through the plate translate the interference pattern into an exact 3-D duplicate, called a 'virtual image,' of the subject. This was Thomas Wentworth's starting point when he set out to invent his 'holoplicator.' "

For a change, Sespol's gaze wasn't directed at my legs. It was directed straight across my desktop at my face. "And you smashed this — this machine?"

"You know perfectly well I did. You covered up for me, didn't you?"

"Yes. But not for your sake. For the sake of the Sespol Sky-Rise.... But *why* did you smash it? Surely not just to keep Odrussi from getting his hands on it. He couldn't have — not with the IRS on the scene."

"With Cecily Kurilman also on the scene, he just might have. Wentworth's machine," I went on, "employed only the basic principles of laser holography. It went as far beyond them as four-dimensional geometry goes beyond plane geometry. It could create life-size 3-D images in space, and it could create them so forcibly that they acquired separate realities. With inanimate objects, the duration of these realities was so evanescent as to be nil. For reasons we'll never know, only image-realities comprised of living cells retained reality for any appreciable length of time — in the case of humans, for as long sometimes as forty-six hours. But Wentworth's purpose wasn't to holoplicate people — he doesn't *like* people. What he wanted was to accumulate permanent holoplications of *objets d'art*. When the holoplications refused to retain reality for more than a split second, he wrote the machine off as a failure, and when Kurilman offered to buy him out — the machine, having been built on company time, belonged to the company — he jumped at the chance. In her own sweet way Kurilman's wife had seen its possibilities instantly. After the deal went through, she took a crash-course in speedteaching. Six months later, Talent Associates was born.

"Why speedteaching?" Sespol asked.

"Obviously, the holoplicator couldn't holoplicate intangibles, such as personality, character, educational background and the like. Probably all that came through was the subject's organic self, plus one or two acquired physical faculties. Cecily Sturm Kurilman didn't have time, even with an inculcator to help her, to teach her hologirls much, but she didn't need to. How much education does a walking, talking fornicatory doll need? ... Everything clear in your mind now, Mr. Sespol?"

"As a bell." He grinned at me. Evilly.

He knew. He knew!

"And now, Ms. Rinehardt," he said, holding out his hand "since I didn't pay you to investigate Kuril-man's activities, if you'll fork over the porno-photo I did pay you for, I'll forget about the black eye you almost gave the Sespol Sky-Rise and go my merry way."

I removed the fourteen fifties he'd given me from my handbag and laid them on the desktop. "There is no porno-photo. I forgot to load my Laseroid."

Still grinning, he opened his shoulder purse, counted out fourteen fifties of his own and laid them beside mine. "I think there is."

"Pick up your sleazy money and get out!"

He snickered. Then, slowly, he got to his feet, picked up the twenty-eight fifties and stuffed them into his shoulder purse. When he snickered again, I turned my back on him. I heard him walk out the door. Snicker, snicker, snicker, all down the hall—

Nancy Drew, Girl Detective

D.D. Rinehardt, Private Eye.

Sometimes at night I climb the stairs to the apartment-building roof and sit on one of the sunchairs and look up at the stars. At my star. It's Arcturus, in case you care to know. Orange-red, cold, faraway. And yet not my star at all. The Grape has a thousand faces, wine comes in a thousand forms. My body is a garden in spring round which I have built a wall. When I write I imitate Chandler, Hammett and Spillane when all the while I yearn to set down sentences with the sensitivity of poor Scott.

I sit in my sunchair and I cry beneath the stars.

D. D. Rinehardt, Private Eye —

Hard-boiled Nancy Drew.