



Deadlier than the male (Armed Services edition)

James E Gunn

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a selection from Chapter One: Helen Brent had the best-looking legs at the inquest. She had a white sharkskin suit that had cost \$145. She had an air of impeccable good breeding that had cost a great deal more. From the looks of things, she was no usual divorcee. Obviously, she was a woman of great wealth, of travel, of culture, of charm; she was a gorgeous blonde; she had been around. Perfectly poised, she crossed her legs with stunning and careless showmanship. Her name was Helen Brent, she said, and she was thirty-one; her home was in San Francisco; she was in Reno to get a divorce from her husband, Mr. Charles Brent. She had been in Reno-how long? Six weeks; during that time she had stayed at a boarding house on the edge of town, run by a Mrs. Krantz and her daughter, Miss Rachel Krantz; Miss Rachel Krantz was in the courtroom. On the previous Thursday, she had left the Krantzes' and gone to the Hotel Riverside? Yes. She had gone back to the Krantzes' at eleven that night to pick up a handbag? Yes. And about what time had she left the Krantzes' to go to the hotel? About five. She left at five. By four o'clock she was through packing; since it was a ferociously hot day, she lay down and sweated. This annoyed her. She was not exactly athletic, but she was active, and she had a long and elegant body to which she was much attached; she liked showers, and hated baths because they left her feeling sticky. She had taken two bedrooms at the Krantzes', so she would have a place to put her clothes, but there were no showers, and Helen was faced with a fairly unpleasant alternative: she could take a bath and go over to the Riverside feeling sticky, or she could do nothing and go over to the Riverside feeling smelly. At four o'clock Mrs. Krantz, who owned the place, was downstairs in the back part of the house, where she lived with her daughter, and she was expecting a visit from her great friend and neighbor, Mrs. Pollicker. Mrs. Pollicker, as usual, was God knows where. And Rachel Krantz, who had to manage everything, was walking up and down outside Helen's room, trying to think of a way to persuade Mrs. Brent to stay. For the Krantzes' was certainly not the place for Helen, and certainly not fashionable at all. There were two houses that had been built as boarding houses, in Reno, the city of boarding houses; they had both seen better days, but not for long. The tide of the town had flowed away from them, and left them like driftwood on the plain that surrounds Reno. This was convenient for Mrs. Pollicker, who lived in one of the houses alone, and used only a bedroom and the kitchen. Mrs. Pollicker's flesh was not only weak but eager, and her life was shriekingly immoral. She also had two badly trained poodles, and between the dogs and the Devil she would have had trouble in a respectable district. Her ribald friend Mrs. Krantz was more tolerant. It was not so convenient for the Krantzes, who still took boarders, though they gave no meals, and just managed to be unsuccessful. The neat and meager upstairs rooms usually had one or two permanent residents, and perhaps one or two women who were trying to get a divorce as cheaply as possible. There was never anyone like Helen Brent.!

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