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INHERITANCE OF MURDER
A COMPLETE BLACKBAT NOVEL

BLACK BOOK
DETECTIVE

APR. 1948



Inheritance OF MURDER

*A Tony Quinn
Mystery Novel*
By G. WAYMAN
JONES

DON'T BURY ME YET

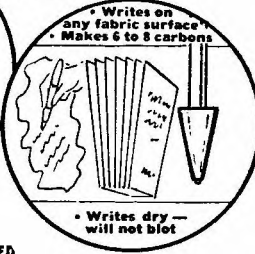
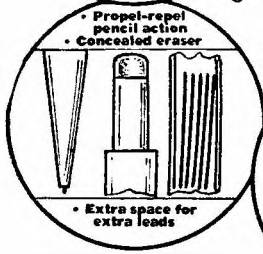
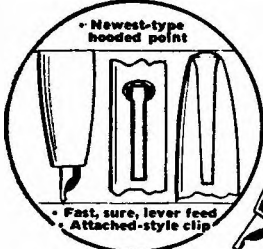
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By W. T. BALLARD

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BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE

Vol. XXIV, No. 2

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

April, 1948

A COMPLETE BLACK BAT NOVEL



Inheritance of Murder

By G. Wayman Jones

The Black Bat takes the trail of young Richard Norton, a scion of wealth whose strange record of crime has no logical explanation! Tony Quinn and his aides face desperate perils as they try to find the answer to a psychological mystery!

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OFF THE RECORD

A DEPARTMENT WHERE READERS AND THE EDITOR MEET

ALL through the ages, in folklore and fiction, courageous men have undertaken the battle against crime and injustice. In our own day and country, it is the Black Bat who has taken up the cause of many noble forerunners—continuing the unceasing war against crime and the despicable tyranny, greed and viciousness of criminals!

And now the Black Bat meets another man who has dedicated his life and fortune to the war against crime!

It all happens in the thrilling new Black Bat novel, **THE MURDER MAKER**, by G. Wayman Jones—the most gripping adventure that has ever come the way of Tony Quinn, the famous “blind” Special District Attorney. Soon the web of peril traps Tony’s loyal helpers, too—beautiful, devoted Carol Baldwin, powerful Butch O’Leary and clever, cunning Silk.

The story begins when a wealthy old man calls on Tony Quinn at his office and introduces himself as William Gallaway.

A Million in Rewards

Gallaway said, “It’s really amazing, Mr. Quinn, to realize that a man without sight can do as much as you have in the fight against crime. Astonishing is a better word, I think.”

Quinn laughed softly. “What I have done, Mr. Gallaway, is little enough compared to your efforts. You not only fight crime, but your name is closely associated with every cause that is good and decent.”

Tony Quinn had immediately recognized William Gallaway as a man who, for the preceding six or eight months, had been doing a very unusual thing. Gallaway, during that time, had been offering large rewards to anyone who captured an infamous criminal. He’d spurred every private detective and criminologist to exert his utmost efforts. He’d made every plain cop on a beat wish that he had four eyes and ears. He had, briefly, given the art of crime de-

tection a shot in the arm, the like of which it had never before received.

He had donated the incredible sum of a million dollars in reward money to help stamp out crime!

“I suppose you wonder why I came to see you and insisted upon absolute privacy,” Gallaway said now. “The fact is, Mr. Quinn, I think I am going to be murdered.”

Quinn’s eyebrows shot upward. “Murdered? Do you mean the underworld has put a price on your head for this action you’ve taken against them?”

“No,” Gallaway answered sadly. “I wish it were as simple as that. If it were, I’d know how to protect myself. In this case, however, the menace comes from a much closer source.”

The Name of the Killer

He took a large envelope out of his pocket and placed it before Tony Quinn. Three large seals closed the envelope securely.

“In this envelope,” Gallaway said, “is the name of the man who wants to murder me. I want you to keep the envelope, and promise to open it only if I am found slain.”

Naturally, Tony Quinn wanted to know the name of the would-be killer immediately, but old William Gallaway wouldn’t talk, however hard Tony Quinn pressed him. Finally, with reluctance, Quinn accepted the envelope and agreed to the wealthy man’s terms.

But he was still far from satisfied.

“He won’t talk to me,” Tony Quinn told his faithful helper, Silk, after the man had left, “because I am a district attorney, and he’s afraid if I knew who was threatening him I’d go ahead anyway and arrest that person.”

Tony Quinn worried about the problem more and more. By late afternoon he had come to a decision. Gallaway might never talk to him as Tony Quinn. But he might talk to him as the Black Bat. Therefore.

(Continued on page 8)

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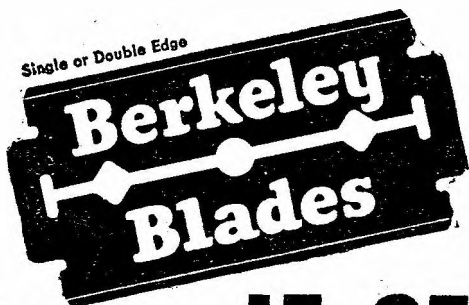
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OFF THE RECORD

(Continued from page 6)

with a word to Silk to contact Butch and Carol and have them stand by, Quinn prepared to visit the elderly millionaire in the full regalia of—the Black Bat!

With his kit of the finest burglar tools, the Black Bat quickly gained entrance to Gallaway's home through the kitchen door. When he heard a groan, he stepped into the library, his gun level and ready for action.

William Gallaway sat behind a desk. His shirt front was a mess of fresh blood. He wasn't dead yet, but he'd been shot twice in the chest.

The Black Bat hurried to his side, and Gallaway recognized him as the famous masked crusader against crime, but still he would not name the man who had shot him.

"No . . . no," he gasped. "I won't talk. Not to a man who hides . . . behind . . . a . . . hood."

The Man in Brown

The Black Bat had no alternative. Gallaway might be dead in a matter of seconds. Stripping off his hood, he revealed himself as Tony Quinn, and asked whether the man Gallaway had named in his envelope was, in truth, the killer.

The dying Gallaway nodded. "Yes. He killed me. He didn't fire the shots, but he was . . . here. It's my nephew, Peter Cheney. He seems so . . . so good and decent, but he's a murderer. He wants my . . . money—before I give it all away. Man who shot me . . . was a stranger. Dressed in brown. All in brown. Find him. . ."

A moment later, William Gallaway was dead.

Thus begins the most dramatic hunt in all Tony Quinn's experience. To find the Man in Brown. . . But who was the Man in Brown?

When you know against whom you're battling it's not too bad. But when you don't know who your enemy is, when you don't know whom you can trust, the menace to your life and limb is increased a hundred-fold. Tony Quinn was to know, in the days to come, the true meaning of this terror that had no name, of this ruthless killer known only as—the Man in Brown.

(Continued on page 10)

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OFF THE RECORD

(Continued from page 8)

It was a menace that increased with each passing hour until it seemed certain that not only Tony Quinn, but Silk and Butch and lovely Carol Baldwin could not escape its bloody hand!

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A lot of people felt like dancing and cheering when old Maria Truesdale died, for her ten million dollars was going to be divided up among a crew of greedy heirs who'd been waiting a long time for her to breathe her last. Old Maria had been poisoned—that was plain. But the question was—what ever had made her swallow the deadly potion? For the poison used against her was raw aconite, and if you know your lethal drugs you know that aconite is twice as hot as a blue gas-flame and about as smooth as sawdust. It's not something you can slip in someone's coffee, or sneak by in a dish of vanilla ice cream.

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(Continued on page 112)



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... AND THEN DAN SAVED THE DAY



WOW! A DEAD STICK LANDING AND HE'S SHAPPED A SKI!

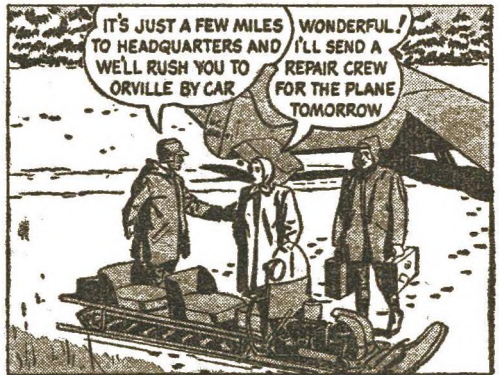
LET'S GET OVER THERE. HE MAY BE HURT!

RIDING THEIR MOTORIZED-SLED, TWO STATE GAME WARDENS ARE RETURNING FROM A LONG WOODS PATROL WHEN ...



ARE YOU HURT, MISS?

NO, BUT I'M DARNED MAD. MY ENGINE CONKED OUT AND NOW I'LL MISS THE ICE CARNIVAL.



IT'S JUST A FEW MILES TO HEADQUARTERS AND WE'LL RUSH YOU TO ORVILLE BY CAR.

WONDERFUL! I'LL SEND A REPAIR CREW FOR THE PLANE TOMORROW.



I DO HOPE WE'LL MAKE IT. MY APPEARANCE IS SET FOR EIGHT O'CLOCK.

SAY! YOU MUST BE SANDY OLTNER, THE FLYING FIGURE SKATER! AND I LOOK LIKE A TRAMP.

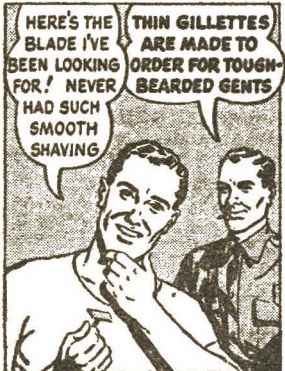


REID'LL GET YOU THERE WITH TIME TO SPARE, MISS OLTNER. HOW ABOUT IT, DAN?

YES, SIR... I'LL EVEN HAVE TIME TO CLEAN UP HERE FIRST.



BLADES? TRY THESE



HERE'S THE BLADE I'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR! NEVER HAD SUCH SMOOTH SHAVING.

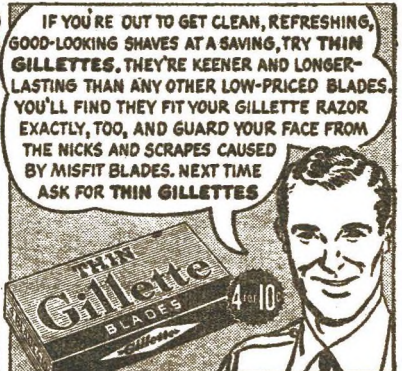
THIN GILLETTES ARE MADE TO ORDER FOR TOUGH-BEARDED GENTS.



OUR COMMITTEE IS GIVING A LITTLE PARTY FOR SANDY LATER. WILL YOU JOIN US?

THIS IS MY FIRST GOOD LOOK AT YOU, MISTER... YOU'RE WE-L-L... HANDSOME!

PLEASE DO!



IF YOU'RE OUT TO GET CLEAN, REFRESHING, GOOD-LOOKING SHAVES AT A SAVING, TRY THIN GILLETTES. THEY'RE KEENER AND LONGER-LASTING THAN ANY OTHER LOW-PRICED BLADES. YOU'LL FIND THEY FIT YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR EXACTLY, TOO, AND GUARD YOUR FACE FROM THE NICKS AND SCRAPES CAUSED BY MISFIT BLADES. NEXT TIME ASK FOR THIN GILLETTES.



Inheritance of Murder

A Tony Quinn Novel by G. WAYMAN JONES



The Black Bat takes the trail of young Dick Norton, a scion of wealth whose strange record of lethal crimes has no logical explanation!

CHAPTER I *Double Life*

THERE weren't many of them left, these huge mansions on estates measured in acres. Not as close to a great city as this, at any rate. The entrance was imposing, with a great wrought-iron gate, a winding path, the

drive and then the massive porch with four white pillars.

Within was the same sort of vastness, but unlike most places of this kind, there was no coldness. The house had a warm, lived-in look. A life-size oil painting of Paul Norton, whose home this once had been, but dead now for six years, occupied a prominent spot in the

Quinn and His Aides Face Desperate Peril as They

reception hall. The dining room was provided with a table which could easily accommodate twenty. Now four people sat there, being served dinner by a maid in a crisp black uniform and white apron.

Only one end of the table was in use and Lila Norton sat at the head of it. She was a slender, gray-haired woman in an expensive gown. Her features were regular, pleasant to look upon, and there was no faded glamour about her. She was still a beautiful woman at fifty-five.

At her right was Richard, her son. A handsome young man with a tantalizing half smile, shoulders like those of a discus thrower, tall and athletic-looking. He had wavy black hair and dark, rather brooding eyes,

The guests were Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Blane of the social columns. It was a quiet dinner party and a pleasant one. Which fact Mr. Blane observed with a smile toward Dick Norton.

"Richard," Blane said, "you're out of college now, and with a very good record, I must say. Isn't it time you began looking for something? I'd be willing to get you set in the financial world. With your father's reputation to back you, I predict you'd go far."

Dick Norton nodded. "That's nice of you, Mr. Blane. I may take you up on it, too, but not right away. I'm trying to find myself. I need a little more time. Mother understands. Don't you, Mother?"

MRS. Norton smiled and laid a hand on her son's arm. "I have never urged you to do anything you didn't feel ready for, Richard. I'm proud of you. It isn't every boy who graduates from college with honors."

"Nor happens to be as popular as Dick," Mrs. Blane added. "Why, Lila, you should see how silly the girls become over him, and he attaches himself to none of them. He shows no favoritism and they scramble madly for his attentions. Your Richard is a most unusual boy."

Dick grinned. "I need time to make up my mind about women too, Mrs. Blane. Slow and easy is my routine. I want to know where I'm going so that when I start, I'll get there fast"

"He's exactly like his father," Mrs. Norton said affectionately. "Now, Richard, you don't have to stay. I know there are things a young man likes to do. So off with you. Come home early."

Dick pushed back his chair and arose. "Thank you, Mother." He bowed to the guests. "Awfully nice having you here, Mr. and Mrs. Blane. Remember, I may take up your offer, sir."

"Any time," Blane said cordially. "Any time at all. I could use a young man like you." After Dick had gone upstairs, Blane addressed Mrs. Norton. "Most unusual lad. He'll be marvelous in business. You like him on sight. Everything about him is just right. Education, appearance, manliness and looks. He's got a way with him, Lila. You should be very proud of the lad."

Lila Norton beamed. "I am, Ralph. I hardly know how I would have gone on without him after Paul died. Richard never gives me the slightest trouble. He returns home early, chooses his friends carefully, doesn't gamble, and I've never smelled liquor on him. As a matter of fact I had to urge him to smoke." She laughed. "I thought my son should have at least one bad habit."

Upstairs, Dick Norton adjusted his quiet tie, pulled at the tips of the handkerchief showing in his breast pocket and touched his hair with a pair of military brushes. He put on a topcoat, surveyed himself again and smiled broadly. There was a remarkable thing about that smile. It came only from the lips. None of it was in his eyes; none came from within him. The eyes were still dark, and mirrored a brooding soul.

Dick went downstairs, kissed his mother affectionately, and said good-night to the others. He left the house, went around to the back and got out a small, low-priced coupe. He drove it sedately to the street, turned in the direction of the city and let her roll.

After two miles he had an eerie feeling that he was being followed, yet there were no headlights burning steadily in his rear-view mirror. Still the feeling persisted to such an extent that he suddenly pulled over and jammed on his brakes. No car went scooting past. He muttered something and continued the drive to the city.

Strive to Solve a Psychological Murder Mystery!

He drove to the entrance of a large and smart hotel and turned the car over to the doorman, who knew him. Dick walked inside, checked his hat and coat, and within two minutes after he entered a dining room he had a pretty girl in his arms, dancing her around the crowded floor. People greeted him on all sides, and he responded in a natural and friendly manner.

He had the second dance with an at-

do some serious dancing."

She was flattered and pleased and showed it. Dick left her shortly and glanced at his wrist watch. It was eight-forty. The girl's father, Kenneth Porter, was due to speak at nine-thirty and he would be at it until ten.

Dick maneuvered his way to the lobby, lit a cigarette, and wandered out a side door as if for a stroll in the fresh air. Once around the corner he moved much



THE BLACK BAT

tractive blonde of eighteen or so. They made a nice-looking couple and their bantering conversation was typical.

"Your dad is going to make a speech, isn't he?" Dick Norton asked her.

"Uh-huh," she responded. "It'll be stuffy, but Dad never turns down a chance to speak and Mother just sits there and gloats over his fame and eloquence. Dick—we could go off for a little while. Somewhere else, where the band is hot."

He shook his head. "That wouldn't be fair. Your father is a marvelous speaker. I wouldn't miss him. Afterwards I'll look you up and then—maybe—we can

faster. He pulled up the collar of his jacket to hide the whiteness of his shirt and his expensive tie. He ruffled his hair a bit and assumed a more slouching walk, though it was a fast pace.

He headed downtown rapidly, and again he had that weird feeling that eyes were watching him. His jaw set grimly and he began maneuvers to expose any shadow on his tail.

He turned a corner abruptly and came to an immediate stop. A small, rather dapper man came around the same corner, but he didn't stop, paid not the slightest attention to Dick Norton and certainly didn't look like either a cop or

a private eye. He was just an average individual who looked rather like a servant in some well-to-do family.

Dick Norton sighed with relief and resumed his fast gait. He ducked into a subway, ran down the steps and reached the platform. He could hear the distant rumble of an approaching train and then—fast clicking heels on the steps. Dick watched without appearing to do so, and an extremely pretty blonde came through the turnstile.

Under other conditions, Dick might have been tempted to find some excuse for talking to her. She had just the right amount of color, and clear blue eyes. Hers was the face of a girl who could pose for beauty ads, and the figure of one who would make good in any bathing beauty contest.

But Dick wasn't interested this particular night. He was only relieved that she couldn't possibly have been trailing him. Yet, to take no chances, he continued to watch her, but she got off two stops further on. Dick berated himself for being such a suspicious idiot.

Far downtown, he left the subway, reached the street and turned west. This was a poor section, one of flop houses, cheap hotels and cheaper gin mills. He kept to the shadows and glanced at his watch occasionally. Each time he moved a little faster.

He had dismissed the feeling of being followed. It was just nerves, he told himself. Nothing else. How in the world could anyone be onto his little game? Yet, as he always did, he stopped abruptly again and under cover of lighting a cigarette, looked around carefully.

The street was almost deserted. Some derelict off the Bowery stumbled past, muttering to himself. Dick waited a couple of minutes, spiraled the cigarette into the street and walked rapidly up the steps of a rather ramshackle apartment building.

He let himself in with a key and looked out onto the street again before he closed the door. No one had observed him, that he could see. That was Dick's trouble. He hadn't seen well enough. For in a deep and dark doorway close by, was a giant of a man who knew how to turn himself into a shadow.

Dick Norton climbed three flights of stairs, fitted another key into a door lock and entered a four-room apartment. It was cheaply furnished and smelled of

stale beer and cigarette smoke. He bolted the door, threw his coat onto a chair and went directly to a sideboard where there were two bottles and some glasses.

He poured himself a good-sized drink—not too big—and downed it in two gulps. He smacked his lips, lit a cigarette, and let it dangle from the corner of his mouth while he quickly removed his clothes and replaced them with a cheap, dark brown suit that looked like a sack. His shirt was also brown and he jammed a battered hat on his head, pulled it far down. Next he put on a pair of tinted glasses, then surveyed himself in the mirror.

He removed a .45 automatic from a dresser drawer, slammed a bullet into the firing chamber and grinned somewhat malevolently. He also took along a deadly-looking blackjack fashioned of a round lump of lead encased in leather. Last of all he strapped a kit of burglar tools around his middle. They were small, expertly fashioned, and made no bulge at all.

A flashlight, a bunch of keys, and he was ready. He hadn't spent more than ten minutes in the apartment. On the street again, he hurried east to a public garage where he was greeted as Pete, and was apparently quite well known. He took out a moderate priced sedan, neutral in color, and fast enough for his purposes.

He drove this uptown to Queensboro Bridge, crossed it, and was soon rolling over the smooth highways of Long Island. He stayed within the speed limits and watched the rear view mirror. There was one pair of lights that stayed persistently there. He slowed up. The car behind him passed and kept going. The driver was that quiet-looking man Dick had seen afoot when he left the hotel.

SOON another pair of headlights tantalized him. He cursed himself as a coward with unwarranted suspicions. This second car went by fast and disappeared. The driver was that remarkably pretty blonde he had seen in the subway.

There were no more lights. Dick Norton couldn't see the car which took the place of the other two for it traveled without lights and stayed well behind him. Its driver was the giant of the doorway across from Dick's cheap apartment.

Dick fired once at the figure
in black, with glittering eyes
peering from beneath the hood
(CHAPTER I)



Dick headed into the fashionable sections of one Long Island town, parked in a dark spot and began walking. Once he saw a patrolman and promptly vaulted a hedge, crouched down and remained there until the patrolman went on by.

Then he resumed his hurried pace until he reached an imposing-looking house. There were lights in the front hallway, but Dick knew no one was at home. In fact, he was positive that at this moment the owner of the house was making a boring speech at that social affair Dick had just left. The owner's wife would be there, and his daughter would be searching for Dick Norton who had promised to take her to some hot spot later on.

Dick grinned comfortably as he took a last look around, climbed the steps to the porch and went to work on the door. He had a special key for it, shiny and brand new. It opened the door easily. It should, he reflected, for he had made the key for this lock alone after taking an impression of the owner's key.

Dick knew where the wall safe was located and he also knew it contained thirty thousand dollars worth of jewels which had been taken from a bank vault because the family intended leaving on a vacation in the morning, before the bank would open.

Dick didn't use a flashlight. He knew every inch of the way for he had studied the set-up often enough. He did blunder against some sort of a hassock and nearly fell, rattling a small table to keep his balance. He cursed bitterly, then relaxed. The house was empty. What did he have to fear?

He located the safe easily, even knew how to make the panel slide back and reveal the glistening surface. He had burglar tools along, but he didn't need them. Twice he had stood close by the owner of this safe while it was being opened, and the combination was impressed upon his memory.

He spun the dial, opened the door and reached for the jewelry boxes inside. Then he quickly stepped away, yanked out his gun and crouched. There had been a click from somewhere in the house. It sounded like a lock being forced. He snapped the safety to the off position and drew a bead on the door.

Nothing happened, and he knew he couldn't waste time. He would have to be back at the hotel within a reasonable

time after Mr. Porter had completed his speech. He fished out the cases with gloved hands, opened them and disposed of their contents in various pockets. There was a sheaf of cash, too, which he appropriated.

He closed the safe door, slid the panel back and his work was done. He was turning away when the lights flashed on. An elderly man in a lounging robe stood by the door. He squinted sleepily through his glasses, and then his eyes got big and round when he spotted the gun.

"Why—why I know you," he said. "Dick Norton! What in the world are you doing here?"

"I might ask the same question of you, sir," Dick said.

"Why—I arrived just before the folks left. Dick, what are you doing with a gun in your hand?"

"What does a man usually do with a gun?" Dick asked coldly, and leveled the weapon.

"You're crazy!" the man with the glasses shouted. "Dick, what's wrong with you?"

"Only the fact that you have seen me and know me," Dick said. "Good-by, sir."

He fired once. The bullet hit the man between the eyes. He was hurled backward by the force of the heavy slug, struck the side of the doorway and crumpled. Dick stepped over the body, entered the hallway and came to a sudden stop. The gun in his hand wavered a trifle. He had seen a shadow flit across the wall of the room opposite. A weird shadow of a man whose head seemed to be as smooth as a billiard ball. An ominous shadow.

Then the shadow became reality. The man was dressed in black from head to foot. A somber hood covered his head and face. Two glittering eyes peered from behind the hood, and there was a gun in his hand.

DICK fired once at the figure which moved agilely aside. He fired again at the light switch and shorted all the lights in the house. Dick knew it was impossible to reach the front door. His only hope of exit lay in running up the stairs to the second floor and making his escape from some window there, even if it entailed the risk of a broken limb

He dashed up the stairs and kept going when a harsh voice commanded him to stop. Whoever it was must be guessing. In this intense darkness no man could see a thing.

A gun cracked. The bullet whistled past Dick's ear. He stopped at the head of the stairs. This was even more serious than he had anticipated. He couldn't see a thing, but the man who came almost noiselessly up the stairs must be able to see. That shot hadn't been a near miss by sheer accident.

"Norton," the man in the darkness said, "drop that gun and raise your hands. I can see you quite plainly."

"You're a liar." Dick snarled. "But you're on the steps and you can't get away."

"Not if you shoot first—which I do not intend shall happen, Norton, I'm the Black Bat!"

Norton's breath came from his throat in a gasp of horror. He raised the gun and fired. He intended to rake the stairway with bullets. He had to. There was no other way out now. With the bullet he sent a resounding curse that died on his lips.

A single flash of flame came from halfway down the steps. Dick screamed. He felt the searing agony of a heavy bullet plowing through his body. He tried to pull the trigger again, but his finger was possessed of an inexplicable weakness and the dark seemed to grow more intense.

Then Dick Norton pitched forward and rolled down the steps. One flailing arm hit the Black Bat, but Dick didn't know it.

CHAPTER II

Killer Extraordinary



THE Black Bat ran down the steps, bent over Dick Norton and made a quick examination. Dick was badly hurt, but in no particular danger of dying. Distantly, and quite beyond the ability of the average man to hear, were the sounds of sirens. The Black Bat

heard them for his hearing was far above average. The shots had attracted some-

one who had phoned the police.

The Black Bat hurried to where Dick Norton's victim lay. The man was dead. The Black Bat's lips compressed tightly behind his hood.

Two cars stopped outside presently and four radio patrolmen hurried to the house. They found the front door ajar. One of them opened it, saw Dick Norton, then spotted the dead man. The officer barged in, followed by the other three patrolmen.

The Black Bat stepped from behind the door.

"Gentlemen," he said.

All four cops turned quickly, hands streaking for their guns. They didn't draw them.

"Holy smokes, it's the Black Bat!" one said.

"Do I require this gun?" the Black Bat asked pleasantly. "I can save you boys a lot of trouble if you let me explain."

"Go ahead," one patrolman said. "We know there's a warrant out for your arrest, but don't worry about us trying to pull you in. First place, you're on our side even if you do wear a hood. Man alive, wait'll I tell my wife!"

The Black Bat chuckled. "There isn't much time. My estimable friend, Captain McGrath of the Manhattan Detective Bureau, could happen to come here and he isn't quite as tolerant as you gentlemen. Now listen carefully. The man at the foot of the stairs is named Richard Norton. He comes of a respected and wealthy family, and he is a thief and murderer."

"He killed this other guy?"

"Yes. You can prove that by the gun Norton dropped at the head of the stairs after I was compelled to shoot him. The dead man is Walter Porter a member of the family which occupies this house. Its owner, Mr. Porter, is attending a social function at the Hotel Windemere. You can reach him there. The dead man, who was Kenneth Porter's cousin, just happened to be in the house when young Norton came to rob it."

"Black Bat," one cop said, "could this Norton kid be the phantom burglar who has robbed about fifty homes and killed a couple of other people?"

"He is that man," the Black Bat said positively. "Watch him. He's deadly and desperate. Put cuffs on him before he wakes up. And, gentlemen, please

inform Captain McGrath that he owes me a fifty-cent cigar for making this capture. McGrath has been going crazy trying to find this burglar. Good night—and thanks for your cooperation.”

The Black Bat stepped onto the porch, closed the door. When a patrolman opened it, some ten seconds later, there was no sign of the prowler in black.

The Black Bat had moved silently to the end of the porch, vaulted the railing and cut through the back of the property. He reached another street where a deceptively battered coupe was waiting. Behind the wheel was the quiet-looking man whom Dick Norton had observed and regarded as harmless.

The Black Bat got into the car, stripped off the hood and replaced it with a broad-brimmed black hat which could be pulled well down over the eyes.

“I was half a minute too late, Silk,” the Black Bat said. “That crazy kid murdered some man who was in the house. Shot him down without a chance, because the man recognized him. I dueled it out with Norton, plugged him, and turned him over to the police who answered someone’s alarm.”

“Silk” Kirby wagged his head from side to side. “I don’t get it. Richard Norton looked like a pleasant, nice kid. He comes of one of the best families and his mother is wealthy. He had everything a boy could hope to want and yet—he became a killer and a burglar. It just doesn’t make sense, sir.”

“No.” the Black Bat mused. “It doesn’t. I’ve been thinking of that too. I condone nothing that Norton has done. He’s a vicious person without morals or scruples. He led us a merry chase for days after we decided to try and find this mysterious burglar who stole a fortune in gems and cash and who made his third kill tonight.”

SILK KIRBY watched the road and stayed within the speed limits.

“How did you finally identify him, sir?”

“With your help, and that of Carol and Butch,” the Black Bat answered. “The crimes followed a pattern—once you recognized that pattern. Each victim was robbed at an auspicious moment when there were jewels and money in the house. Which meant someone knew that. They happened when the victims would be away from home, usually at a

social affair.”

“So that’s why you had us all checking those affairs and the names of the people who attended them.” Silk Kirby said.

“That’s right, Silk. Between us we discovered that Dick Norton had attended every party, and some time during the evening had gone out for a stroll. By some darned hard work we found he maintained a cheap apartment in a cheap section and became another personality when he turned into a burglar. We discovered that he would presumably go away to see some old college chum, but in reality he visited this cheap apartment and gambled and drank and acted like any common crook.”

Silk reached the bridge and remained silent as he maneuvered the car across it. He turned uptown, took a cross street finally, and then uptown again until he reached a section of the great city where the neighborhoods were like those of a smaller town.

The houses, with medium-sized yards, were those belonging to wealthy people. The street was bordered with tall, heavily foliated trees. It was a dead end street too with a large house on the corner. Running down beside this house was a narrow street, also dead end, which was used more as a driveway to the garage behind the house than as a thoroughfare.

There was a neat fence around the property and a sign on the gate read:

ANTHONY QUINN

Silk brought the car to a smooth halt at the curb. The Black Bat stepped out, seemed to blend with the darkness and there was only a wisp of a shadow passing through the side gate into the garden behind Tony Quinn’s home.

Silk followed in a somewhat more sedate fashion, though he was careful not to be observed. Silk crossed the garden, entered the garden house and found a well-concealed trap-door wide open. He dropped into a tunnel, closed the door by means of an electrical contact and proceeded along the tunnel until he encountered a short ladder.

This took him through the floor of a large and splendidly equipped scientific laboratory. The Black Bat was there, already seated beside a girl named Carol Baldwin, who was the attractive blonde Dick Norton had seen in the subway.

Also present was "Butch" O'Leary, the enormous man who had watched Norton from the doorway across from Norton's apartment. Butch was an ape of a man with long arms, hands that resembled light boxing gloves, a pair of feet which made shoe salesmen groan. His neck was thick and short, set upon a pair of massive shoulders.

He was almost ugly except for the grin that habitually spread his features and softened the harshness of them. Quinn had once done him a favor which he had never forgotten, and had repaid by devotion and loyalty. Silk Kirby, in this better light, proved to be about fifty, slim, bald and narrow-featured. He had smooth manners which had brought upon him this nickname everyone used. He was as smooth as silk and, at one time, he'd been a confidence man who ranked among the best that doubtful profession had ever developed. He had once come to rob Tony Quinn who had prevailed on him to reform, and he was now Quinn's close friend, servant and companion.

Minus his hood and wide-brimmed hat, the Black Bat was an unusual-looking man. There were deep scars around his eyes. Otherwise he was handsome, with regular features, extremely alert eyes of brown and the build of a professional athlete.

"This should be the end of another little job," the Black Bat said. "Not the most important we have handled, but necessary. That young idiot was a clever operator and he might have turned into something as highly dangerous as any criminal we have ever known."

Carol Baldwin accepted a cigarette and a light from the Black Bat.

"It's really amazing," she said. "Since you put me to work studying Richard Norton I have sworn a dozen times he simply could not be our man. He's just a young chap, out of college a year or so, and trying to find himself. From what I have heard he had every opportunity to do just about anything he liked. All sorts of jobs, and even security without work. His mother is worth about two million dollars and it would all have been Richard's when she died."

"Yes, I know," the Black Bat reflected. "His mother denied him nothing. His reputation was tops—and yet—he deliberately turned himself into the worst possible sort of a crook and killer."



McGRATH

"He's one of them Jekylls and Hydes," Butch opined somewhat lugubriously.

THE Black Bat chuckled.

"Except," he said, "that in the case you refer to, Dr. Jekyll didn't know what Mr. Hyde was doing. He was two distinct personalities. Richard Norton is not. He has known what he was doing every moment. He used his social position to aid him as a thief."

"It would be interesting," Silk observed, "to know what made him do such a thing."

"Educational, as well," the Black Bat agreed. "It's out of our line though, and yet we might be able to do something about it. Suppose we meet here tomorrow night around eight. I may have some news."

Butch arose and revealed the fact that he really had been sitting on a small chair and not suspended in space as he appeared to be. His enormous form had completely hidden the chair.

"Coming, Carol?" he asked, from near the trap-door entrance to the tunnel.

She smiled at him. "You run along, Butch. Tony and I have—well, a few things to talk about."

Silk laughed. "In other words, I'm to get out too. Very well, Carol. I'll make some coffee and there is cold chicken for sandwiches. If Butch was going to stay I wouldn't be making this offer, because

there is only enough for nine people and Butch eats more than that all by himself."

Shortly, the Black Bat and Carol were alone. He reached over and grasped her hand.

"It's been a long time, darling," he said. "We've done a lot of good work, the four of us. Whenever we complete a job, as with this lad Norton, my mind always goes back. I think about the days before the Black Bat came into existence and I was good old reliable Tony Quinn, District Attorney for this great city."

"I didn't know you then," Carol snuggled a little closer and he put an arm around her. "But I heard about you—from my father and others. You'd have been governor of this state if—if that awful thing hadn't happened."

The Black Bat smiled thoughtfully. "It was pretty bad, Carol. In fact, I thought I was finished. I remember that day in court. You've heard all this before, but remember it does me good to talk about it. I had one of our more notorious crooks facing a nice long prison term and I based my case on documentary evidence. Only this crook was worried and frantic. Enough so that he sent a couple of his hoodlums to destroy the evidence with acid. They threw the acid and hit me. Carol, I've never talked about this much, but I went blind in less than a minute."

"Yes," Carol said softly, "I know."

"There I was," the Black Bat said, "Tony Quinn at the peak of my aspirations one minute, and a blind man the next. I guess I never gave up hope. Nobody does, not even without eyes. I had to live, so I adjusted myself and learned how to use my other faculties. It was amazing how they improved. My sense of touch, my hearing, my sense of smell. I got so that I'd actually know when there was something in front of me, though I couldn't see it and the object was out of reach."

"You were miserable the night I first met you," Carol whispered. "I never saw a man so full of despair and I was glad then, that I could help. That is—my father could help. I was nothing more than a messenger."

The Black Bat smiled. "I guess I fell in love with you that night, though I didn't realize it. All I knew was that your father offered me the vital parts of his eyes. Because he wanted me to get

back into harness and work against all those crooked forces that killed and robbed and cheated. He was a great man, Carol."

"Not great," she disagreed. "Just a police sergeant who turned his back once too often. The idea came to him after he was told he could not live. He thought that, with his eyes, you might be able to carry on the crusade. That's what he always called it. A crusade against crime. He knew, before he died—I think—that the operation would be a success and that you would see again."

The Black Bat reached for a pipe, tamped it slowly and Carol applied a match. He leaned back.

"If he only knew how successful the operation was," he reflected. "I got my sight back and more. It was from then on that I found I could see in the dark. You know, Carol, how it is possible for me to read fine print in extreme darkness; see faint colors. You've no idea how much it helps me as the Black Bat. And now, as Tony Quinn, I'm fighting to get to the top again. Being a Special District Attorney is a break for both of me. Like Dick Norton, I'm two people. Blind Tony Quinn of the D. A.'s office—and the Black Bat. I'm blind by day, and I see better than anyone I know by night."

SIDE by side they sat there in silence for a few moments while they thought back. Thought how Tony Quinn had decided to pretend blindness after his sight was restored. So that he might fight the underworld anonymously and with methods the law would hardly condone. Quinn especially recalled those times when it had been necessary for him to kill, to rob, in the interests of justice, and to pull other tricks far outside the law.

As the Black Bat he could get away with it, for only four people knew of his dual identity, and he himself was one of the four. The others were Carol, whose father had provided the eyes which permitted him to see again; Silk Kirby, ex-confidence man who had become Tony Quinn's eyes after Quinn had been blinded; and Butch O'Leary, the gigantic, slow-moving and deadly menace to all who stood in his way. Butch didn't possess the mental agility of Silk Kirby, but Butch's strength and power were efficient tools. His faith in Quinn was

CHAPTER III

The Background of a Criminal

colossal and his reward for his work was the right to bash in the skulls of killers and criminals.

Two other people strongly suspected that Tony Quinn, blind Special D. A., was also the mysterious, hooded Black Bat. The Police Commissioner was one, but he remained content to let things ride as they were. The Black Bat was a thousand times more of an asset than a menace to the police and the general public.

Captain McGrath, of the Detective Bureau was the other, and McGrath had sworn a dozen times that he would unmask the Black Bat and reveal him as Tony Quinn. McGrath was shrewd, honest, and possessed of a bulldog tenacity. And yet, with all his dire promises to arrest the Black Bat, he had deliberately let the hooded figure go more than once. Even McGrath wondered what he would do if he ever really got the Black Bat at bay.

McGrath lent considerable spice to the life of Tony Quinn and the existence of the Black Bat.

In preparation for his life work and purpose, Quinn had studied criminology intently, had set up this secret laboratory in his home and equipped it with every known device and apparatus for scientifically studying clues. In scope, this lab rivaled that of the F. B. I. For Tony Quinn was independently wealthy and had more than sufficient means to carry on his crusade.

His arm around Carol tightened. He was thinking that some day he would have to give it all up. Then, and only then, could he and Carol be married. While he operated as the Black Bat, Tony Quinn believed it unfair to make her share all his risks.

"You know," he said thoughtfully, "in some ways this case of Richard Norton is as interesting as any I've ever come across. I think of him as a laboratory specimen ready for dissection and analysis. I'd like to find out why, with all his advantages, he went off on such a strange tangent. There must be a reason for it."

"Do you intend to try and find out?" Carol asked sleepily.

"Yes, if it can be arranged somehow. Not working as the Black Bat, but as Tony Quinn. It should prove interesting, if not exciting." His expression was grave and thoughtful.



BLIND Tony Quinn, with his white cane extended to search for any obstruction in his path, walked down the steps of his home the following morning and to the street where Silk Kirby waited behind the wheel of a heavy sedan. Quinn got in and Silk drove him

to his office downtown in a city building where he held forth as a special district attorney and handled difficult cases.

Everyone knew him and he called back greetings with amazing accuracy. In his rôle of a blind man, Quinn's eyes were stark and staring. Dead, unblinking, and hardly moving in their sockets.

On Silk's arm he walked to the elevators, kidded the elevator man about becoming a grandfather for the first time and slipped him a five dollar bill when no one was looking.

There was a visitor to Quinn's this morning—Captain McGrath, chunky and broad-faced, with a thick mustache and an aggressive manner. McGrath's clothes seemed to have been fashioned by an expert in sheet metal. His shoes were square-toed, large and roomy. He looked exactly as a detective would be expected to look, and swore this was not so. McGrath claimed his appearance was the same as that of any small business man.

He arose as Quinn entered and stood there, silently. As always he waited to see if Quinn would forget himself and offer a word of recognition, proving that he was not blind.

"Good morning, Captain," Silk said, "or aren't you speaking this morning?"

"I'm speaking all right," McGrath grumbled. "I've got plenty to talk about. The Richard Norton case, Mr. Quinn. I've been put in charge."

"Fine," Quinn approved. "Silk read the details to me from this morning's newspapers. It's amazing, isn't it?"

"That doesn't apply. It's ridiculous." McGrath held the door open, then walked over to sit down beside Quinn's desk. Quinn hung up his cane, having just a slight amount of trouble in finding

the hook. He handed his hat to Silk, walked over and felt of the back of his chair before he sat down. Then he relaxed and looked somewhat to McGrath's left.

"I got more news," McGrath said. "I'm working for you. The D. A. is assigning the prosecution to you, Tony, and I call it a dirty trick. The D. A. is afraid of it. He'd be up against the most high-priced legal talent ever brought into court. He'd have to fight psychiatrists who will claim the lad is off the beam. Maybe he is."

"Um." Quinn tapped his fingernails together. "So I get it, eh? The tough ones. I might have expected this. Well, we'll make a good team, Mac. Give me the facts."

"Give you the facts," McGrath decided. "Listen, the Black Bat bagged that kid. So you know all about it."

Quinn held up his hand. "Mac, stop it. I'm not the Black Bat. I'm a blind man dependent upon others and trying to do a job as well as a man gifted with sight. Just give me the facts."

"Okay," McGrath grumbled, and went into all the features of the case—the main robberies for which young Norton had been accountable, the three killings.

"The kid tried to shoot it out with the Black Bat last night," he added. "That, in itself, makes me think he's crazy. The Black Bat threw a slug into him, but the kid will live—until the electrician at Sing-Sing makes the current hum through his body."

"You're right," Quinn agreed. "I'm going to send him to the chair if I can. It won't be easy. How is his mother taking it?"

"She collapsed. I went to see her about two this morning, but her doctor said nobody could talk to her. He sounded like he meant it, but he let me have a brief look. I thought she was dead."

"Those foolish boys," Quinn said angrily. "They never think of the consequences or the hurt they'll do to those who love them. Mac, I'm glad we're on the case. We're going to handle it in a somewhat different fashion than you might expect."

"Look, it's open and shut," McGrath grumbled. "The kid was caught cold. He won't talk. He just sneers. But that gun killed three people and we can prove it. You know, I wonder what happened to all that loot he collected. It must

have been worth a couple of hundred grand."

"You didn't find any trace of it?" Quinn said musingly. "That is another reason why we shall not only prosecute Richard Norton and make him pay with his life for those crimes, but—we shall also find out what caused him to take up such a strange life."

"But why?" McGrath argued. "What does it gain us? The kid will either get his breeches burned in the chair or they'll haul him off to some asylum."

"That's it, Mac. He belongs in one place or the other, and we've got to determine which. If he is sane, he rates the chair. If he is mad, we can't kill him. The interests of justice demand that we learn the truth."

"Okay, okay," McGrath grumbled again. "You're the boss anyhow. How do we start?"

"By going to young Norton's home. I want to meet his people, size them up, study the environment there. Silk, will you bring the car around? Mac will lend me his arm and eyes for my trip downstairs."

QUINN cancelled his morning appointments and McGrath led him into the hall. McGrath had a crafty look on his face. He watched the elevator teller arrows and when one car indicated it would stop at this floor, McGrath moved Quinn in front of another door.

The car stopped, the door opened and McGrath let go of Quinn's arm. "Okay," he said. "Let's go!"

Quinn took two confident steps forward and ran full tilt into the closed door of the next shaft. He backed away, startled, and then a slow smile spread over his face.

"Mac," he said chidingly, "aren't you ashamed? That was a trick to find out whether or not I am blind."

McGrath was beet red as he took Quinn's arm again and piloted him into the open car.

"Yeah," he said morosely. "Yeah, I'm ashamed, and sorry too. I'm going to stop all this. Heck, I'm nothing but a fool with a one-track mind."

"Forget it." Quinn laughed. "No harm done—and you're not a fool, Mac. As to the one-track mind, I refuse to comment. When do they expect the boy will be ready to go to trial?"

"In a short time. He's strong and

healthy and the wound wasn't too bad. Look, if we run into any trouble, you back me up, eh? With those big shots who'll be pulling for the kid?"

"I'll accept all the blame," Quinn said cheerfully, "and give you half the credit, if there is any credit to bestow when we finish."

When Silk pulled up before the imposing entrance of the Norton home, Quinn's apparently blind eyes took full stock of the place though McGrath didn't realize it.

The man who greeted them when they entered was middle-aged. He had iron-gray hair and a close-clipped mustache. The glasses he wore attached to a black silk ribbon made him look pompous. Quinn knew him well—Edward Hammond, one of the most successful attorneys in the state.

"Well, Tony Quinn," Hammond said. He stuck out a slim, pinkish hand and then dropped it with an embarrassed laugh. "So they've attached you to this mess, have they? I'm glad of that because, at least, you'll be looking for the right answers and not trying to make political taffy out of it."

"The voice," Quinn said, "is vaguely familiar."

Hammond laughed again, a booming, affected kind of laugh.

"Forgive me, Tony. It's hard to remember that you are blind. Come in, with your friends. Oh, yes—there I go again. I'm Ed Hammond."

Quinn stretched out a hand and Hammond took it.

"I might have expected one of our more eminent attorneys would be on the job," Quinn said. "Meet Mr. Kirby, who works with me, and becomes my eyes upon occasion. And Captain McGrath of the Police."

Hammond shook hands with each of them and led them into the living room. McGrath suppressed a whistle of surprise at the room. It looked like a movie set.

There were two men seated there.

One turned out to be Fletcher Townsend, Dick's cousin. About twenty-four, he was a rather frail, nervous-looking sort and wore gray suede gloves despite the fact that he was indoors and it was warm. He had small, sad eyes, thin blondish hair and he was dressed with the exaggerated correctness of a fop. He was the son of Paul Norton's sister.



As the killer smashed at Carol's hand, she was left dangling by one hand only (CHAPTER XI)

The second man was Dick Norton's uncle. His name was Max Imlay, and Quinn sized him up as about fifty-two or three, a hard-bitten person, careless about his clothes, though they were expensive. He was tall, lean, and slow-moving. His handclasp was without the slightest enthusiasm.

Attorney Hammond moved Quinn over to a comfortable chair and helped him into it. Silk stood beside that chair, alert and ready for anything. McGrath sank into the depths of a davenport.

"Quinn is on the District Attorney's staff," Hammond said to young Morton's relatives. "I'm certain you will find him fair and disposed to see that Dick is properly handled."

"He ought to be shot—right now," Max Imlay declared sourly. "I'd shoot him myself if I didn't think he was stark mad."

"That's a rotten thing to say." Fletcher Townsend's voice was angry. "Dick needs our help, not our censure. He happens to be your nephew. Or had you forgotten that?"

"I wish I could," Imlay declared. He glared at Quinn. "Well, just what do you want here? The way I understand it, Dick was caught red-handed. It's only a question of his being sane or insane. This isn't like any ordinary criminal case."

HAMMOND decided to earn the enormous fee he was already planning to charge.

"Gentlemen," he said, "this can be handled in a quiet fashion. Of course, Quinn, we intend to claim insanity.

"He never exhibited any signs of it before," Quinn said quietly. "In fact, he seemed like an unusually good sort. Kind to his mother, bright in school, honest and fair in all things. If he is mad, I want to know what made him go mad, and why his madness should attain the proportions of a cold-blooded killer."

"In other words," Max Imlay said acidly, "you intend to delve into our family history. I think I can stop you, Quinn. We've got the money to stop you in your tracks."

"That's an odd attitude to assume," Quinn observed, without rancor. "I should think you'd welcome such an investigation. I could, you know, simply indict Dick, take him into court and fight any evidence that he is insane. I

don't want to do that. Not until I am certain he is sane."

"Now, now." Hammond raised both hands piously. "Let's not become angry. And keep our voices down, eh? Don't forget, the boy's mother is upstairs and desperately ill. Under the care of Doctor Fisk, one of our most eminent physicians."

"Ah," a new voice broke in, "I owe you something for that compliment, Hammond."

The man who entered was ruddy-faced, jovial-looking, with a tonsure of brown hair that gave him the appearance of a monk. He was tall, big-boned, and had a crushing grip.

"Meet Doctor Roger Fisk, Tony," said Hammond. "Doctor, this is Quinn, on the D.A.'s staff. A good man, even if we will be enemies in the courtroom."

Dr. Fisk sat down. "I couldn't help but overhear some of your talk on my way down," he remarked. "Quinn, I fully agree with you. We should find out what made the boy go berserk. As a medical man, I'm intrigued. As a close friend of this family and an old friend of the boy's mother, I consider it my duty to find out. I have only one word of warning. None of this must reach Mrs. Norton."

"She is taking it badly, then?" Quinn asked.

"Your expression is mild," Dr. Fisk said. "It could kill her. Now, how can we help you? How far do you intend to go?"

"I want to know everything about Richard Norton. The smallest details. Where he was born, his antecedents, his record as a boy—education, social activities. His friends and enemies. I shall try to conduct an exhaustive study of him and I do not intend to stop until I have everything."

An hour later, Silk had taken down several pages of notes. Under Quinn's adroit questioning, he obtained a mass of information. Quinn arose.

"I intend to check all of this material," he announced. "And from the beginning. That seems to be at the Reeves Memorial Hospital where Richard was born."

Max Imlay rose. "This is a pack of nonsense. I intend to block it if I can. We're not an ordinary family. We've money, background, and influence. Good day. I'm going to my office."

Dr. Fisk started for the door also.

"Mrs. Norton will be recovering from the effects of the sedative I gave her," he said. "I'd better be there when she awakens. Call on me for any help you require, Mr. Quinn."

Hammond paced the floor.

"Mr. Hammond," Quinn said, "I take it that Mrs. Norton's health is none too good. Assuming this shock is too much for her and assuming that Richard is either executed, or declared mentally incompetent—then where does all her money go?"

"I couldn't say. I'm not at liberty to do so. Professional ethics, you know."

Fletcher Townsend started to laugh. "I'm not troubled by ethics, Mr. Quinn. I also can guess what you are driving at—that one of us urged Dick into this mess so his mother would die soon and Dick would be out of the way and the estate then turned over to the heirs. I know about Mrs. Norton's will. It leaves everything to Dick. Upon his death, without marriage or issue, it is divided between Max Imlay and myself. Does that answer your question?"

"Thank you," Quinn said. "It does very nicely. Silk—Mac—I think we've finished here. Until Mrs. Norton can be interviewed. Thanks, Hammond, for your help, too. I shall indict Richard Norton tomorrow."

"Do you call that a nice way to thank me?" Hammond groaned.

CHAPTER IV

Accidents Can Happen



UNDER Quinn's direction, Silk sent the car rolling back to the city and the uptown address of the Reeves Memorial Hospital. McGrath went along "strictly for the ride" as he repeated half a dozen times.

"All kidding aside," he told Quinn, "have you any other motive

than mere curiosity to make you dig into Richard Norton's life this way?"

"I told you," Quinn said patiently. "I wish to determine whether or not the inevitable plea of not guilty due to insanity, has any foundation. Experts—the best of them—are in constant con-

flict over these things. Hardly ever do they agree in a case like Norton's. Hammond will retain the best psychiatrists he can get, will pay them plenty, and they'll be prejudiced. They'll look at Richard's home life, his family, his upbringing and quickly decide anyone enjoying all those benefits must be crazy to go in for crime."

"Anyone would be, to give it up," McGrath grumbled, still dissatisfied.

"On the other hand," Quinn went on, "the State will hire its own experts who may decide the merits of the case solely upon symptoms. I want to know which side to believe before I tear into Dick Norton and send him to the chair."

Silk pulled up before the hospital while Quinn and McGrath were still arguing. It was an old brick building with a newer addition built in the form of two wings. Ivy crept up over the red brick front to make it look more like a campus building than a hospital.

McGrath helped Quinn out of the car, took his arm and signaled to Silk that he could stay in the car. Quinn's cane tapped as they moved along and McGrath warned him about the steps. They were almost to the top when Quinn's highly sensitive ears heard a scraping sound. It came from above—high above, but he didn't dare follow his instinct to look up.

McGrath heard it also, but almost too late. At the top of the four-story entrance were ornamental brick peaks and one of them had given way. It was coming down, a huge chunk of brick and mortar, capable of crushing ten men to death.

McGrath's trip-hammer mind worked well this time. He thrust a hand against the small of Quinn's back, gave him a terrific shove and Quinn went hurtling away from the entrance. McGrath leaped too, almost as far as he had pushed Quinn.

The supposedly blind man lost his balance and rolled down the cement stairs. McGrath hastily ducked. As the heavy load of bricks hit the stairs they seemed literally to explode and fly in several directions. Both McGrath and Quinn were hit more than once but only by fragments. Silk was already out of the car and speeding toward the scene as soon as the façade ornamentation toppled.

Between them they got Quinn to his

feet and Silk recovered the white cane. Quinn was trembling slightly.

"What kind of a hospital is this?" McGrath said. "If people don't come in by way of the ambulance entrance they toss the building at them. Boy, what a method of making business."

Nurses, doctors and hospital officials were descending through the rubble. A nervous and embarrassed house physician explained that all those brick peaks had been condemned and that right now bids were being sought for their removal.

"It's nobody's fault," the blind attorney said, as Silk dusted off his clothing. "Thanks to Captain McGrath neither of us is injured. I am Quinn, of the District Attorney's office. I want to talk to a record clerk. Silk, take me inside, please."

The hospital officials were more than eager to help him after what had happened. The twenty-six-year-old record of the birth of Richard Norton was promptly produced. Silk read it.

The record contained nothing out of the ordinary. Richard Norton had been born on March 29th, 1921, at 3:05 in the morning. The attending physician, a man named Rolf, had been dead for two years.

There were some charts, however, signed by a nurse named Bessie Jackson. Quinn made a mental note of the name. He told Silk to hand back the files.

McGrath was disgusted and didn't mind showing it.

"Well" he said, "we risked our necks under an avalanche and what did we find? That Richard Norton was born. Imagine how surprised he'll be when we tell that in court."

"There was nothing else in the record?" Quinn asked.

"No, sir," Silk replied. "Temperature charts, delivery room data, blood counts. Just the usual thing."

"All right, Silk. Now go to a phone and call the nurse's registry. Find out where this Bessie Jackson lives—if she is still alive. We'll pay her a visit."

"For what?" McGrath wanted to know.

"I'm not sure," Quinn replied. "There might have been some injury to the infant which could account for the way he acted. It won't hurt to make certain, and we can't ask Mrs. Norton—not in her present state of collapse."

"I'm going for a phone, too," McGrath

said, "and call Headquarters to send me a car. I can't fool around all day on this. It's nonsense, Tony."

"Perhaps it is. Run along, Mac. I couldn't resent anything you might do from now on. Not after the way you saved my skull out there. And if we do run across something, you're in on it."

WHEN Silk returned, McGrath had gone to the street where he was waiting for his car. Silk sat down close to Quinn and spoke in a low voice.

"The nurse, Bessie Jackson, isn't known at the registry, but they did have an old file on her. She quit nursing about a year after Dick Norton was born. Why she did, doesn't appear on the record, sir."

Quinn arose. "Then there is only one way to find out. If you've got her present address—or last known one—we'll look her up and ask her why she quit. Maybe she got married. You know, Silk, McGrath could be right, and this is all a lot of nonsense."

"All but that chunk of bricks," Silk shuddered. "I didn't notice anything until I saw Mac give you that shove. It was close. I hate to think how close."

At the address in the registry files they found no Bessie Jackson, but by some patient inquiry Silk located a woman who had known the nurse, and she was able to give another address. Silk returned to the car and headed across town.

"Bessie boarded with my informant, sir," he explained. "Got behind on the rent several times and I think she was pretty gay. At any rate she came into some money and quit. She is supposed to have bought a house and settled down there all by herself."

"We'll see," Quinn replied, and began thinking deeply.

There was not a thing to go on. Just the fact that a well-brought-up and apparently well-cultured boy had turned into a desperado, and that there had to be a reason for it. He was following a vague trail but as the Black Bat he needed an answer to one question. How had Dick Norton, who associated with no criminals in his lifetime, become so proficient a burglar?

A sneak thief or pickpocket might learn their professions quickly, but a crook who knows how to make duplicate keys, use high-speed tools, study lay-

outs, fashion alibis, and leave no trace of his activities, must have either experience or an excellent teacher.

"Silk," Quinn said suddenly, "I've changed my mind. First we'll visit that hideout apartment of young Norton's. The police checked it without finding a trace of the loot. Maybe we'll be more fortunate."

Half an hour later Quinn dropped his mask of blindness and used those uncanny eyes of his to help him search the apartment. It was frowsier than he could have believed. He found several bottles of cheap whisky, spare clips of bullets well-hidden, a cache of keys and more tools concealed under the floor but not a trace of the more than two hundred thousand in loot which he knew Norton had stolen.

They gave up after an hour and Silk drove to a smart club where they had lunch. Over coffee Quinn told Silk what he had learned from the apartment search.

"Everything about it was cheap. Neighborhood, furniture, rent; even the whisky was rotgut. Yet Dick Norton who was born to wealth, seemed to enjoy that. Why? From the best of everything, he descended to a point where there was nothing. Yet he deliberately did that. Why, Silk? If we could answer that, we'd have an excellent line on him."

"Does a mentally affected criminal have to account for his actions?" Silk countered.

Quinn whistled softly and smiled. "So you're on Mac's side. It looks as if I'm riding this route alone. Silk, there is more to this than anyone has so far observed. In my opinion Dick Norton is not insane or even weak-minded. He

chose to become a thief and a murderer because that was what he wanted. If I can't find out why, perhaps the Black Bat can. But the answer is going to be found. . . ."

They reached Bessie Jackson's home at about two o'clock. It was a one-story brick house, cozy-looking but none too well kept up. The grass which had once made a neat front lawn had died long ago. The mail-box on the little porch was rusted and half fallen off. It was also empty. Silk rang the bell.

There was a long wait, then the door opened to reveal a huge woman with a florid face who was wearing a soiled housecoat. Her breath was redolent of whisky.

"I'm a lawyer," Quinn said, "and I want to talk to you about something. I'm quite willing to pay for whatever information you can give me."

"Come on in."

She turned and waddled down the short hallway to the living room. Once the furnishings had been good but lack of care had turned them into junk.

A PARENTLY the enormous overstuffed chair was for her use alone. It seemed to fold around her vast hulk as she eased herself into it. Silk helped Quinn onto a straight-backed chair.

"It's about a young man who was arrested last night," Quinn said. "Richard Norton. The records show that you were the nurse when Richard was born. Is that right?"

"If the records show it, why should I deny it?" she said. Her voice was low and moody. "What's the matter with you? The way you look— Oh, I get it. You're blind as a bat."

[Turn page]

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"That's right—blind as a bat," Quinn replied. "You were the nurse then. Was there anything unusual about the birth?"

She stretched out one hand, as if Quinn could see her actions, and rubbed the fingertips together.

"There was something about being paid, mister."

"Give her ten dollars," Quinn told Silk. "Now will you answer the question?"

She took the ten, folded it and jammed it into the depths of the chair. Then she laughed uproariously. It was easy to see that she'd had too much to drink.

"Sure I'll answer the question. The kid was born, he squalled right on schedule. I tagged him, took care of him and his mother, and I was slipped an extra hundred bucks. Now I get ten more just for telling about it. If I thought nursing would pay off like that on every case, I'd go back to it."

"You have nothing else to tell me?"

"About what? The kid? There's nothing else to tell, even though I'd like to hold you up for another ten bucks. That's all there is, mister. What did you say your name was?"

"I didn't, but it happens to be Quinn, and I'm on the District Attorney's staff."

Bessie Jackson shrank back into the chair as far as her bulk would permit.

"A copper. I thought you were one. A rotten copper trying to pump an old lady like me. Get out of here. Beat it, you understand? I wouldn't give you the time of day for ten thousand dollars."

Quinn got up. "On the contrary," he said slowly, "I believe you'd sell out for five dollars. Let's go, Silk."

Outside they both breathed fresh air as if they needed it. Quinn settled himself in the back seat of the car.

"Our good friend Bessie is holding something back," he said. "First of all, I'll bet she hasn't worked since she bought this house. Now, you discovered her credit was bad in those days, so where did she get the cash to buy? From a relative? That's an old stall. Bessie could drink up a fortune in the years which have elapsed."

"Maybe she worked," Silk suggested.

"That hulk of a creature? No, Silk. Her hands were flabby and soft. She hasn't done a lick of work in years, and I'm betting she lived on money supplied by someone who feared her. I'm also betting that she has a visitor tonight who

won't be quite as gentle as Tony Quinn. Bessie knows something. . . ."

Quinn would have been surer if he could have watched Bessie Jackson's activities after he and Silk departed. She didn't move until she heard the car pull away. Then she hoisted herself out of the chair and waddled to a back room to telephone. She dialed a number, held on for a little while and got her party.

"Something's gone wrong," she wheezed. "A blind character from the D.A.'s office was just here. Listen, you ain't sold me out? Okay, okay, it was just an idea. Listen, I've got to get away, and it'll take a lot of dough. An awful lot, get me? I'll want it tonight at the latest. Small bills and a big pile of them. Bessie needs lots of nourishment. And say, bring me a bottle of good stuff. I'm low and I don't dare budge. There might be cops watching me."

She hung up, laughed in that wheezy voice of hers, then suddenly became sober. She tucked a stray strand of gray hair into place—or where she thought it ought to go—and then went to various windows and looked out. She was relieved at not seeing some stranger loitering close by.

CHAPTER V

One Accident Too Many



FROM a bed in the prison ward at Bellevue, Richard Norton looked up and sneered. He hadn't gone back to being the polished, pleasant and wealthy youth.

"So you're the guy who thinks he's going to put me in the chair, are you? A blind man, Quinn, and start asking me questions. Sure—all you like. And I won't answer one. How do you like that?"

"Naturally," Quinn replied, "I don't, though your reluctance to talk isn't unexpected. You're quite tough, aren't you, Norton? But it's a veneer. You're only tough on the outside or it would have shown long ago. My job is to prosecute you. I'm beginning to think it will be a pleasure."

Dick Norton half rose, then sank back

as Silk moved up aggressively. Quinn called over a doctor, took him aside, and asked how Norton had been acting.

"Normally, I'd say, Mr. Quinn. If he intends to put on a maniac act, he hasn't started it yet. That boy is smart. He'll never overdo it, but from what I know of the case he's probably as crazy as a loon anyway."

"You, too," Quinn chuckled. "No, I don't mean you're insane, Doctor. I only mean that everyone is firmly convinced that Dick Norton cannot be in his right mind. Has he had any visitors?"

"No, sir. Not a soul, though there have been several phone calls from his friends. Is he to be restricted from visitors?"

"On the contrary, let him see anyone he likes, but make certain all visitors are known, and keep a record of them. Thank you, Doctor. Oh—would you mind sending in his possessions? All of them."

Dick Norton turned on his side to watch Quinn examine his clothing and the kit of burglar tools which especially interested the blind man. Silk described each object and Quinn touched it gently. One item was a slender bit of steel with a strange hook at the end of it. The tip was stained with what seemed to be soot.

Quinn clumsily dropped this instrument and Silk bent to pick it up.

"We'll keep that, Silk," Quinn said. "I think it's some sort of a key and it might reveal the hiding place of Norton's loot."

Norton laughed uproariously, but there was a worried look in his eyes.

Silk led Quinn out of the barred room. A guard closed the door.

"We'll pay Norton's apartment another visit," Quinn said. "That hook tool gives me an idea. Once I saw something like that in the possession of a crook. He had an especial use for it, and if I could only think back. . . ."

It was late afternoon by the time they reached the office and matters required Quinn's attention. He thrust the odd case of Dick Norton out of his mind and went to work.

At seven he signed his last letter, closed his last file and leaned back. In the privacy of his office there was no need to pretend blindness. He asked Silk for that strange hook and placed it on the desk.

"This thing," he said, "slides into a

narrow crevice where it can hook around something. Whatever it is, the object has soot on it. Soot from an oil burner, Silk, and there was a large one in Norton's apartment. Do you recognize the significance? The stove looked as if it had been in constant use, but quite likely was not. Jewelry about the only thing he stole, hidden in a stove. That would be the last place a policeman would look. When Norton saw me handle this thing, he broke out in a cold sweat. I think we'll go back to his apartment now. . . ."

By night, the apartment building was more dismal than ever. There was a weak light in the front hall, but the owner had neglected to install lights at each landing. The stairs were dark. Quinn and Silk reached the second floor and started up to the third. The stairs wound around a well and it was a long distance to the bottom.

Quinn, with one hand on the bannister, felt a tiny slit beneath his hand, but kept on going. In the darkness, he looked down, and his eerie sight penetrated the gloom. He saw the loose piece of the stair close to the bannister. But he was supposed to be blind, if he evaded this obvious trap, he would give away the fact that he could see. Two steps from the trap, Quinn tossed his cane upward and seized it by the base.

He stepped firmly on the loosened board. It tipped, just as he had expected it would, and threw him against the bannister which gave way. Quinn started falling and Silk let out a yell of astonishment and fear. The crook of the white cane darted out however and was inserted between two bannister supports above the broken stair and its curved end fastened around one of the supports.

QUINN hung there, over the edge, hung by clinging to the end of his cane. Silk couldn't see much. He heard the section of bannister crash far below, but it was not followed by the louder crash of a body.

"Silk!" Quinn said tensely. "Silk, I'm over the edge of the stairs, but my cane got caught. I'm hanging on. Help me—quickly!"

Silk lit a match, took in the situation and dropped to one knee. He reached over the edge of the stairway, secured a grip on one of Quinn's wrists, then seized the other one. He braced himself and tugged.

In a moment Quinn was sitting on the steps, wiping perspiration from his forehead. Silk was berating owners of apartments like this, and he didn't care who heard him.

"Let it go," Quinn said finally. "There's been no great amount of harm done and accidents will happen. We've work to do. Help me up the stairs."

He was a trifle shaken when he closed the door of Dick Norton's apartment, but he took that odd hook from his pocket and went to the oil stove. He opened the door, knelt and examined the interior carefully. Finally he saw the slot into which the hook would fit. He inserted it, found that it caught, and he tugged hard.

Nothing happened. He tried twisting it and this time he got results. One flat section of the back of the stove came free. He gingerly lifted it out. It was nothing more than a flat metal box, cleverly fashioned into the side of the stove's interior. There was a lid, closed by a hoop and hasp. Quinn opened it. There was nothing inside.

"I might have known," he whispered to Silk. He added loudly, "All right—we'll go home now. And wipe that soot off your arm and sleeve, Silk. You look like a chimney sweep, I'll bet."

"But I—" Silk started to say and Quinn's hand pressed hard over his mouth, silencing him.

Silk got the idea. He, not blind Tony Quinn, was supposed to have located the hiding place.

"But I haven't anything to clean it off with," Silk went on. "The heck with it. I'll be careful not to rub against you, sir."

"You already have," Quinn laughed. "That's how I knew about the soot. I felt it. And hold my arm when we go down those stairs. I don't want another tumble. . . ."

In the car, and speeding toward Quinn's home, Silk turned his head for a moment.

"What was the stage play for, sir?"

"There might have been ears," Quinn replied. "Microphones. You can't tell what will happen in this case. And, Silk, do you believe now that there is nothing to all this?"

"You mean those—accidents? I admit it seems funny. Two of them in one day."

"Accidents, my hat. Someone doesn't

want me to investigate the life of Richard Norton. Whoever this is, will go to any extremes to stop me. Remember, I told four people I intended to go into young Norton's life. Those who heard me say that were Doctor Fisk, Attorney Hammond, Fletcher Townsend, Dick's cousin, and Max Imlay, the lad's uncle. No one else, Silk, so among those four men is one who would rather kill me than have me delve into the history of Dick Norton."

"But the hospital cornice, or whatever it was—that certainly seemed like an accident."

"Of course it did. It was meant to, and even fooled me, until this happened. However, I was ready for it though I did not know what method our mysterious enemy would use. I permitted young Norton to hear me remark about the hook and that I wanted to go back to his apartment. He passed the word to someone, and whoever it was, can't have seen or talked to Norton without the police knowing it. We've got some sort of a line, at any rate."

"If the broken stairway was not an accident," Silk persisted.

"It was not, Silk, but I'll wager that if we investigated the broken pieces we'd find little or no trace. That it was meant for me is obvious. A blind man, going up strange stairs, would keep toward the side of the bannister and use the railing as his guide. I felt the crevice where the wood was parted and I saw where the step had been operated upon. All I hope is that the man who wanted to murder me is convinced I believe that was an accident. I can cope with such accidents, Silk, but a desperate man coming at me with a gun is another thing."

"I'm wearing my shoulder sling from here on—with the safety off the gun." Silk vowed.

HE SWUNG the car around the corner where Quinn lived, rolled up to the curb and spoke in a low voice.

"Sir, there's someone sitting on the front steps and for once, it doesn't look like McGrath. Too big a man for Mac."

"I saw him, too," Quinn whispered. "He's a stranger to me. Stay in the car. Take a gun out of the glove compartment and cover me. I'm going on in. If I tap my cane against the step, it's a signal everything is all right and you can put the car away."



SILK

Quinn got out, thrust his cane ahead of him with the tip an inch above the ground and fumbled for the gate. He opened it, passed through, and kept going up the walk.

The man on the porch was six feet tall, gray-haired, and powerful-looking. He wore a medium priced blue suit and had a jovial, friendly appearance.

"Mr. Quinn?" he asked.

Quinn came to a dead stop. "Who is it?" he asked nervously. "Who are you?"

"Oh, I'm sorry. Terribly sorry, Mr. Quinn. I honestly forgot that you're blind. I must have frightened you."

"You did." Quinn still held the cane tightly, ready to swing it at the first sign of treachery.

"I repeat, I'm sorry," the man said. "My name is George Cheney. I'm with the Department of Social Welfare, and I came to you about this young Richard Norton. I happen to know something about him."

"Help me up the stairs," Quinn begged.

His cane tapped and Silk pulled away. Quinn fumbled with the door key, murmured his thanks when Cheney took his arm, and they went inside.

In the living room, Cheney sat down.

"It's a most amazing affair," he said. "I saw Norton's pictures in the papers

and thought I recognized him, so I went to the prison ward at Bellevue. It's the same young man. I knew him as Peter Collins."

"Very interesting," Quinn said. Though the fact that Cheney had visited Norton was the most interesting detail of all, Quinn didn't say so.

"Yes," Cheney went on. "I encountered this young man about eight months ago. I had a certain family on my list for investigation and I discovered that one member—a lad about Norton's age—was running wild. I checked a bit and learned he was a friend of this Norton, or Peter Collins, as he was known in my neck of the woods. I managed to get my subject away from Norton, but I took an awful tongue-lashing doing it. Norton's speech intrigued me. I was once a teacher, and I sensed that while he looked and acted tough, he was really well-educated."

"How far did you go in your investigation of him?" Quinn asked.

"Nowhere at all, sir. When I went to look for him, he had vanished, and nobody knew where he was. It seems he appeared infrequently and vanished completely whenever he wished to."

"I see. Well, we know where he vanished to, at any rate. There is nothing else, Mr. Cheney?"

"N-no, I think not. My offering isn't much, but I thought it might be of some help. You can reach me at the Welfare Board at any time. I'm ready to cooperate whenever I can."

Silk came in in time to escort Cheney to the door. When he returned, Tony Quinn was using the telephone.

"Murphy," Quinn said, "this is Quinn. You were guarding Richard Norton all day. Did he have any visitors? Cheney? Yes, I know about him. Who? A cousin? Named Fletcher Townsend? Yes—thanks, Murphy. I wanted you for the job because I knew I could trust you. Send for a relief now, but get back on it tomorrow."

Quinn hung up.

"So Norton had two visitors after we left, eh?" Silk said. "Townsend and this Cheney. Either one could have set the trap at Norton's apartment."

"True," Quinn said musingly, "but Cheney couldn't have had anything to do with the falling bricks at the hospital. Unless someone told him I was going there. I'm not discarding Mr. Cheney as a suspect, Silk. Go see if Butch and Carol have appeared."

Both were in the secret lab, Silk reported a moment later. Quinn, using his cane and moving like a blind man, entered his library. The shades were all drawn and Silk closed the door after they passed through. Quinn always worked on the principle that someone might be watching. He never relaxed his pose as a blind man unless he was certain he could not be observed.

He thrust the cane under his arm and moved directly to one section of the book-lined wall. He found a hidden control, a narrow door moved out and he entered the lab.

THERE he plunged into the details of the case, omitting nothing.

"I'm certain we are on the track of something big," he added. "With four or five nice suspects lined up. We can deal with only two of them at the moment. Carol, you are to watch Fletcher Townsend. Silk will give you all the facts about him. Butch, you take over Max Imlay, the uncle. Neither must have any inkling they are being watched or investigated. We'll pass up Dr. Fisk for the moment. He seems to be okay. Attorney Hammond is prominent, well-liked, but I happen to know he is tricky and some-

what greedy too. But Hammond would have to operate through someone else. He's too well-known to take an active part. Fletcher Townsend and Imlay are the best bets."

"We'll get right on it, Tony," Carol said. "Silk told us two attempts were made on your life. Be careful, Tony."

Quinn chuckled. "So Silk finally admits they were murder attempts and not accidents. We're progressing. Off with you now. Report in by phone every two hours. If we don't hear from you, we'll start looking."

"And you, Tony?" Carol asked.

"I'm going to visit a woman tonight, but there is no need for you to look alarmed. She weighs in the vicinity of three hundred, looks like something out of Faust and she smells of whisky. But she attracts me, Carol, because I think she knows something. She wouldn't tell Tony Quinn. Perhaps she will talk to the Black Bat."

CHAPTER VI

Murder—the Great Silencer



SILK was at the wheel as the coupe slid to the curb on the street behind Bessie Jackson's home. Silk stopped only a second. Anyone watching may have thought someone left that car and disappeared into the night, but that observer would never have been certain. The Black Bat had developed a speed which made his somberly clad figure a mere blur in the night.

He made his way through back yards easily and without any noise. Those uncanny eyes of his served well now for he stumbled over nothing, because he saw all obstacles even in this complete blackness.

Reaching Bessie Jackson's home he listened at the rear door for a moment or two, then studied the lock. It offered no especial difficulties for him. A simple, slim bit of steel turned it. There was no burglar chain. He stepped into a kitchen that smelled of unwashed dishes and rancid food, with a predominating odor of whisky above everything else.

There wasn't a sound in the small

house. The Black Bat moved through the dining room, came to the living room door, and then he saw her. Bessie Jackson lay on her side. One hand was outstretched and seemed to be clutching something. Her face had the characteristic cyanosis that comes with death from certain violent poisons.

Her body was almost cold. Bessie had been dead for two or three hours at least.

The Black Bat knelt beside her and pried open the fingers of her clenched hand. He removed a two-inch-long vial of a colorless fluid. He unscrewed the stopper and sniffed.

Rising, he studied the scene for a moment. Bessie had apparently been sitting in her usual chair and enjoying a glass of whisky. It was still on the small table, about half full. He dipped a finger into the whisky and gingerly tasted of it. The stuff was liberally dosed with a drug.

The Black Bat began visualizing what had happened. Bessie must have warned someone that Tony Quinn was heading toward the truth, whatever it might be. That person had come to see Bessie, and had come prepared by bringing poison. He had known her habits, her craving for whisky, and had probably supplied a bottle of the stuff, well spiked with poison. Bessie had drunk greedily, as she might have been expected to do. She had died then.

But none of this explained the vial of poison in her hand. That stamped her death as suicide. A not surprising end for such a woman. In fact, if Bessie had not been involved in this Norton matter, even the Black Bat would have assumed she was a suicide.

He did check for a note but found none. He noticed her cheap coat, hat and handbag on a hall chair. They had not been there this afternoon, So Bessie must have gone out.

The Black Bat searched the handbag. In it he found several department store receipts. Three listed purchases that afternoon of four dresses, two hats and some lingerie. Another indicated that she had purchased two expensive traveling bags. All told, Bessie had spent a considerable sum of money on quality merchandise. Yet the clothing she was wearing was cheap.

There were five twenty-dollar bills in the bag, though the department store statements indicated she had ordered all

goods sent C.O.D. That was no help to the suicide theory. A woman, even one like Bessie, would hardly go on a shopping spree with evident plans for some sort of a trip, then commit suicide a couple of hours later.

The Black Bat was certain this was murder, though there was not a single clue to homicide.

He spent ten minutes searching the premises. In one bureau drawer he found a tin cash box. It was unlocked and annoyingly empty. The box seemed to have been hastily thrust back into the drawer and the clothing in the drawer was carelessly disarrayed.

The other drawers were fairly neat. Bessie's training as a nurse must have instilled an instinct for keeping her personal things in order, though she had let the house itself go to pot.

The Black Bat put the vial of poison back into her hand, closed the fingers over it and made one more careful check of the scene. He return to the kitchen, on his way out, but there in the darkness his eyes fell upon a wall calendar. It had a ring around the numeral indicating this present day of the month.

Old calendar pages, pinned back with a paper clip, were similarly marked. The twenty-first day of each month had a penciled ring around it. Something happened on the twenty-first. Something Bessie didn't want to forget.

THERE was a large wastebasket beside the sink and it overflowed with paper, bags and boxes. The Black Bat dumped the contents on the floor. Bessie, it seemed, emptied the basket only when the refuse began to overflow all over the kitchen. Among the papers were two crumpled envelopes bearing post office date stamps. One was for exactly a month ago, the other for exactly two months ago.

So Bessie received plain envelopes, addressed in block letters with no return address, on the twenty-first of each month. The Black Bat recalled the rusty mail-box on the front porch. He went through the house, opened the door and took a quick look at the street. There was no one within sight. He moved over to the mail-box, and instantly his eyes spotted something white inside.

He quietly removed the single envelope he found there, carried it back into the house and shut the door. He worked

there, in total darkness, opening the envelope carefully. Inside were ten twenty-dollar bills. Two hundred dollars. No wonder Bessie had marked her kitchen calendar so she wouldn't forget to look in the mail-box. The Black Bat put money and envelope into his pocket, added the two envelopes from the previous months, and replaced the rest of the refuse in the basket.

Five minutes later Silk drove slowly past the spot where he had dropped the Black Bat. There was a low whistle. Silk hit the brake. The blurred shadow moved fast and Silk opened the car door. The Black Bat was inside and replacing his hood with a wide-brimmed black hat by the time Silk got rolling again.

It was a necessary change. The hood would attract attention, while the black hat was almost as effective a means of concealing those telltale scars around the eyes which would have quickly betrayed the Black Bat as Tony Quinn, acid-scarred blind man.

While Silk drove to the next stop, the Black Bat told him about the death of Bessie Jackson.

"As I see it," the Black Bat said, "Bessie knew something and was being paid monthly blackmail of two hundred dollars to keep her mouth shut. That runs into fairly substantial sums over a period of years. Now Bessie gave up her work as a nurse soon after Dick Norton was born, so we have something of a tie-in."

"You said it was murder," Silk remarked. "How about clues? They might show us someone who could answer all our questions."

"No clues, and all indications pointed to suicide except that Bessie had spent part of the afternoon buying things for a contemplated trip. She was intending to go away quickly, before we became more suspicious. She had little cash on hand so she must have contacted her blackmail victim and got him to promise her a lump sum."

"He paid off all right, sir. With poison."

"It must have been incredibly easy, Silk. Bessie's appetite for whisky would have been well-known to the murderer. He simply brought her a poisoned bottle, poured her a drink and after she was dead removed the bottle. But he left a vial of undiluted poison in her hand. I don't know why. I can only guess."

"So can I," Silk offered. "It was a

plant—to indicate suicide."

"More than that, Silk," the Black Bat said thoughtfully. "A woman like Bessie, with something on a blackmail victim to supply her with fifty dollars a week for life, would make certain everything she knew was written down and hidden. I found a tin cash box in a bureau drawer. I believe it had been rifled after Bessie was dead. That box may have contained her documentary information."

"But I still don't get the idea of the poison vial in her hand."

"Suppose Bessie knew, or was told she'd been poisoned. Suppose her murderer produced that vial and told her it contained an antidote which she could have if she told where the evidence was hidden. Bessie would grab at such a chance and talk. Then she died—because no antidote could have saved her. The murderer got the documents and was safe.

"Bessie still clutched the vial of poison which she believed to be an antidote. Everything was neatly wrapped up. Poison from the vial was in her drink, she held the rest of the poison in her dead hand. Obviously a suicide. Who would guess, unless that person knew all we did, that Bessie was murdered?"

"It sounds logical enough," Silk agreed. "I wonder what she could have known?"

The Black Bat shook his head regretfully.

"Whatever it was," he said, "she could have broken this whole mess and probably given us a hint, if not absolute proof, why Dick Norton went off on his career of crime. And, incidentally, why someone doesn't want Dick Norton's past life investigated to such an extent as to make two attempts to kill the D. A. in charge of the case."

"How about checking alibis for those two attempts?" Silk suggested.

"I intend to, now that we are certain they were not accidents. With the second one, somebody knew I'd go to Norton's cheap apartment. Norton knew this, too, and told this someone or passed the word along somehow. So far, we know that Townsend saw Norton after we left and so did this social worker named Cheney. But as far as checking an alibi is concerned, it's impossible. We don't know exactly when the trap was set."

"The first attempt was different

though," Silk argued. "Somebody pushed that peak of bricks on you. He had to be there, on the roof of the hospital."

"That's true, and it gives us a working point. I'll put Carol and Butch on it. Drop me off just beyond the Norton residence and then keep circling until I signal."

"What if Mrs. Norton isn't alone, sir? They'd hardly be apt to leave her alone, sick as she is supposed to be."

"Someone will be in the house, but I doubt I'll be seen or heard. If I am, I don't mind if they know the Black Bat is interested. After all it was the Black Bat who effected the capture of Dick Norton and started this whole affair rolling."

CHAPTER VII

Murder Makes Heartbreak



ELLA NORTON was propped up against several pillows. The room was dark, but she was not asleep. She saw the door open, saw someone come in, closing the door quickly behind him.

"Who is it?" she asked in sudden fear.

The almost invisible figure moved toward the bed. Mrs. Norton reached for the bed lamp, but a gloved hand gently took her wrist and checked the move.

"Please don't," a voice said softly. "I'm here to help you if I can."

"But who are you, coming here like this? Into a darkened room, unannounced? Why didn't my nephew bring you up?"

"He's reading in the study, Mrs. Norton. He doesn't know I'm here, and I hope you will not create any alarm. I am the Black Bat."

For a moment there was only a tense silence. To Mrs. Norton the Black Bat meant the man who had captured and shot her only son. She didn't know it, but a gloved hand was in position to stifle any scream which might have risen to her lips.

She didn't scream. "Oh, I'm glad you came to see me," she said. "They tell me so little."

"Perhaps it is because they don't believe you can stand all the details, Mrs. Norton. I'm wondering myself."

"Nonsense," she said weakly. "I'm not well. I've never been really well since Richard was born, but I have the stamina to stand up against the truth. You are a rather legendary figure in my particular world, Black Bat, but I do know you are honest. Tell me—about my son."

"He has two distinct personalities—that of the nice, clean-living boy you knew; the other, that of a crook, residing in a squalid atmosphere, associating with thugs and other low people. A gun-carrying burglar who stole thousands of dollars in loot and who didn't hesitate to shoot. That was the boy I came to know."

"And you tracked him down." There was a faint sob from the pillow. "I'm not blaming you for that. Tell me—do you think Richard is mad?"

"That is what I am trying to find out, but cooperation is difficult to get. Also I'm rather handicapped in that I'm unable to move about freely. The police don't especially care for me, you see."

"Yes, I've heard that. How can I help you?"

"By telling me about Richard. Frankly, Mrs. Norton, I intend to reveal the results of my investigation to the District Attorney in charge. It will be your son you tell me about, so I promise not to press you to talk."

"But what harm can I do my son by telling the truth?" she asked plaintively. "Richard was born twenty-six years ago last March the twenty-ninth. He was a healthy baby. Much healthier than his mother, I can assure you. I came close to dying when he was born. Richard grew up, loved by his parents. He seemed to be normal."

"He betrayed no tendencies to lie or steal or cheat?"

She laughed hollowly. "He wasn't a saint, if that's what you mean. No little boy is, but he was no different from other boys. He attended a private school, then transferred to public high because he didn't want to develop any snobbish tendencies. From there he went to college and did very well indeed."

"He never exhibited any traits which might lead you to think he possessed a split personality?"

"None whatsoever. He was, in fact,

quite a devoted son. When his father was fatally hurt in an auto accident, Richard never once left his side. He wanted to give his blood for a direct transfusion and I recall how disappointed he was when the doctors wouldn't permit that. After his father's death, he gave me the strength and the will to go on. Now—now, I don't know. I don't seem to care much."

"You must," the Black Bat whispered. "Richard needs you now."

"Does he?" she asked wearily. "My son—who murdered three people? Two of them close friends of mine. And robbed those people who trusted him and let him into their homes so he might decide which one to rob and how it could be done easiest? The boy who told me he would be away a few days to visit college friends and who went, instead, to this hovel where he associated with thieves and murderers?"

"I know," the Black Bat said. "It's rough, but he still needs you,"

SHE sighed heavily, and her lips trembled.

"Richard hardly seems like my son any more," she said. "I'm his mother, but I sometimes wonder if he is worthy of being saved. If he can be saved."

"You don't, then, believe he is mad?"

"How can I believe that? He showed no such tendencies. He was always a rather determined boy who knew exactly where he was going and why. I'm very tired. I'm grateful that you came to see me. I only wish that—no, I can't say it."

"I know what you meant to say, Mrs. Norton," the Black Bat whispered. "You wish the bullet I'd put into him would have killed him instantly."

"Yes. That way the shock would have been—well, just one single shock. Now I don't know what is going to happen. I doubt I can endure the publicity that will result. I need my husband now. He would have known what to do. Paul was never at a loss in handling any sort of a situation."

"There is just one thing more," the Black Bat said. "It could be important. If you feel up to talking another moment or two."

"Please don't consider me," she said earnestly. "I want justice done, and you are the man who can see that it is done. What do you wish to know?"

"It's in relation to a theory—probably

cockeyed, but worth considering anyway. I have wondered if someone could have purposely led Richard astray. With selfish motives in view. Do you understand?"

"You mean that I'm an old woman and not likely to live long. I'm also quite wealthy and Richard is my heir. If he should die or be declared incompetent, others would come into, or at least manage my estate. I've thought of that, too."

"Did you come to any conclusions?"

"I believe your theory to be practical. My nephew, Fletcher Townsend, and my brother-in-law, Max Imlay, are both selfish men. I cannot see how they could have led Richard astray, though, because he didn't especially like them. So far as I am concerned, you may investigate anyone, no matter how close he is to me. I don't care any more."

"That's not an encouraging attitude," the Black Bat said in a kindly voice.

"So Dr. Fisk tells me. He says I don't care whether I live or die. Frankly, I don't. Dr. Fisk has been wonderful. During the initial state of my shock over the news, he never left my side for a moment."

"Could he help me, do you think?"

"I'm sure he could not. The doctor is comparatively new in town. He comes from some midwestern city. He knows very little about us."

Mrs. Norton closed her eyes and relaxed against the pillow. There wasn't a sound, yet when she opened her eyes a moment later she sensed that she was alone. She closed her eyes again, and sighed deeply. . . .

Half an hour later the Black Bat was in his laboratory, scrutinizing the envelopes and money he had found at Bessie Jackson's home. He gave up after an hour.

"Nothing," he told Silk. "Whoever wrote the address on the last envelope, wore gloves or carefully obliterated all chances of fingerprints. The paper is ordinary dime store stuff, the money untraceable and the block printing doesn't mean a thing. Did you ask Carol and Butch to report in when they called the last time?"

"Yes, sir. They should be here soon. I'll prepare something for them to eat. It's possible they had no time for dinner and Butch looks pathetic when he is hungry."

The Black Bat removed his somber clothing and put the garments away in a steel locker. He was now Tony Quinn, but not compelled to act out his supposed blindness. He tamped a pipe full of tobacco, applied flame, and sat down in a comfortable chair. He smoked slowly and his thoughts were concerned with this bizarre series of events.

Richard Norton could expose the whole thing, Quinn knew, but Norton would never talk. Yet the whole scheme seemed to concern something more than

So far, there were no indications to connect Max Imlay with the events, though it was hard to judge either Imlay or Townsend at present. Quinn didn't know enough about them.

The whole thing stemmed from the date of Richard Norton's birth. Bessie Jackson had been the nurse. She had retired, and probably had lived on black-mail. Now she was dead—murdered, because she knew too much. The killer was moving fast and not apt to hesitate at more murder. That meant he had a



CAROL

merely Norton's rôle as a killer-burglar, even if his loot had been spirited away by someone. There were bigger things concerning this, but as yet, Quinn didn't even know in what direction he was headed.

THE DEATH of Mrs. Norton, a highly possible thing now, would make Dick her heir, and Dick was certain to lose his liberty, if not his life. The estate was a motive, with Fletcher Townsend and Max Imlay as the possible beneficiaries. Fletcher Townsend could have arranged the trap for blind Tony Quinn if Dick Norton had told him about Quinn's intended visit. That brought Townsend to the fore though George Cheney, the social worker, was also suspected.

mighty reason behind his work.

Somewhere in Dick Norton's life lay the secret, and someone didn't want it exposed. Someone was so determined to keep it a secret that two attempts had been made on the life of the one man who had sworn to check back over Norton's life.

It was an odd case. Motives, clues, even suspects were well-hidden. There were no gunmen involved, no professional crooks outside of young Norton himself. Every avenue of approach closed up—or dried up, as with Bessie Jackson's murder.

There were no witnesses to question, few alibis to check. The thing went back too far, and time had obscured all the essential details.

Quinn discovered that he was puffing

on a cold pipe, and he lit it again. He tried to plan some method of procedure and found it impossible. There was nothing to point in any certain direction.

Carol came then, to bring his mind back to earth. Carol had little to report.

"I picked up Fletcher Townsend at Mrs. Norton's home," she said. "He never left it. I did a little checking on him, but there wasn't much to learn. He works for a broker as a clerk, has a little money of his own, but likes to pretend he is a big shot. His friends are okay—the usual sort. He gambles a little, drinks a little, stays out late now and then. He has a modest two-room apartment. That's all there is, Tony."

"I wish there was a way to get you into Mrs. Norton's house," Quinn said. "Without being obvious about it. Posing as a nurse is out. Dr. Fisk wouldn't hire an unknown. Acting as a reporter would get you nowhere. Mrs. Norton would refuse to see you. A maid—well, I doubt it. People like the Nortons get their help from accredited agencies and in her state of mind she wouldn't hire anyone anyway."

Carol pursed her lips. "I can think of a way, Tony. I don't like it any more than you will, but it can be done. Fletcher Townsend is the key to open the lock. I could arrange to meet him, become confidential, and get him to bring me to the house. It would give me a chance to look around at least."

"Try it," Quinn grinned. "Only don't carry it too far. After all I'm the guy you intend to marry some day and personally I don't like Fletcher Townsend much."

"He's a pompous, vain peacock," Carol said. "I'll arrange it tomorrow and get in to see his aunt as quickly as possible."

Butch returned then and the enormous member of the Black Bat's band had something to report. It was the first definite and interesting item to come out of this maze.

"I checked on Max Imlay, the uncle of that kid," Butch said. "He's an architect and fairly good. Has a two-room office, and two clerks. He hasn't got much money, but gets along okay. He went into a classy place to have dinner. You know, one of those joints where you get your soup at seven and your dessert at nine—if you can catch the waiter's eye. I figured he'd be busy there so I

went back to his office and sort of—well—got in, if you know what I mean."

"Good," Quinn approved. "What did you find?"

Butch hunched his big shoulders. "Well, you were telling us how you nearly got knocked off when a chunk of the hospital fell your way. The Reeves Memorial Hospital, you said. So when I saw a file with the name of the hospital on Imlay's desk, I looked at it. Imlay is bidding for designing the repair work and he must have been on the roof and known that big hunk of bricks could be pushed over easy."

"Hmm," Quinn mused. "Highly interesting. If the bricks were pushed over, the man who did it must have known they were loose. Imlay did—we've proof of it now. What did Imlay do after dining, Butch?"

"He went straight home and he's there yet, so far as I know."

"All right," Quinn said. "Go back to him. Keep reporting to Silk and I'll contact both of you tomorrow. Watch it, too. The fellow behind this is playing for keeps. He'd hardly be reluctant about killing other people."

CHAPTER VIII

Five Suspects



DOCTOR ROGER FISK was announced at Quinn's office the following morning and Quinn had him sent in at once. Fisk seemed a trifle put out about something as he sat down.

"Mr. Quinn, I want a pass, or whatever it is you give, to see Dick

Norton. I went to the prison ward at Bellevue about an hour ago and they refused, point-blank, to let me in."

"Why did you wish to see him, Doctor?" Quinn asked blandly.

"Why—why— Oh, hang it man, I'm nothing more than an emissary from his mother. She wanted to go, but that was out of the question, so I agreed to see him, to tell him his mother was standing behind him."

"Of course I'll grant you permission to see him," Quinn said. "Frankly, I never issued an order to prohibit visi-

tors. It must have been the police. Do you mind waiting a moment while I find out about that?"

Dr. Fisk didn't mind at all and made himself more comfortable while Quinn contacted the prison ward at Bellevue. He asked a few questions, listened a lot, and looked grimmer than usual when he hung up.

"I have the answer, Doctor. Last night Richard seemed to be having a bad spell and tumbled out of bed. His police guard came to his side and Richard attacked the man in an attempt to get at his service pistol. Fortunately the officer was suspicious, and Richard only got himself a fist in the face. Shortly after noontime he will be transferred to jail."

"The idiot!" Dr. Fisk sighed in despair. "Quinn, don't let his mother know about this. I'm worried. She doesn't seem to care whether she lives or dies, and that's bad. She has been chronically ill for years."

"You have been attending her all that time?" Quinn asked.

"Oh, no. I've only been in town for six years, Mr. Quinn. Prior to that I practised in Chicago. I became Mrs. Norton's physician four years ago."

"Then you wouldn't know so much about the boy," Quinn said musingly. "Who was the attending physician prior to your coming here?"

"No one man in particular after the death of the attending physician at Richard's birth. As for knowing Richard, you're quite right. He was away at college for two years and hardly ever at home when I called, after that. Naturally I saw and talked to him a number of times, however. Frankly, I never noticed any symptoms of mental aberration. I'm not a psychiatrist though and I wasn't looking for such symptoms anyhow."

"I understand," Quinn said. He raised his voice. "Silk, will you find the pad of official passes. I use it so seldom I'm not familiar with its size."

Silk found the pad and, at Quinn's request, filled in all but the signature. He guided Quinn's pen to the proper line and Quinn scrawled his name. He ripped off the page and handed it across the desk, not in a very straight line with where Dr. Fisk sat.

Fisk got up, accepted the pass and put it into his pocket.

"Really, Mr. Quinn," he said, and smiled, "if a man didn't know you were totally blind, he'd hardly suspect you could not see."

"Thank you." Quinn grinned. "It's nice to have a doctor say that. I do my best, but sometimes it isn't so good. Silk, here, saves me from many a fall or collision. Doctor, if Richard confides in you, or you notice any symptoms, let me know, will you?"

"Naturally," Fisk shook hands. "Unless what I see or hear incriminates Richard too badly. After all, I'm on his side, you know."

Fisk went out and Quinn stared thoughtfully into space. He called Silk over.

"Phone Headquarters and have them get a line on Dr. Roger Fisk. His previous record in Chicago."

"Good gosh, you don't suspect him?" Silk cried.

"No more than anyone else, but he tipped me off that time. He is on Richard's side and it might be well to know why Dr. Fisk gave up a Chicago practise to come here. Why the change?"

"I'll attend to it," Silk promised. . . .

In the early afternoon Quinn appeared before the Grand Jury and succeeded in getting indictments against Richard Norton on three charges of murder and an open number of charges of burglary and armed robbery. Attorney Hammond was there and offered no great amount of opposition.

AFTER it was over, Hammond sat down beside Quinn.

"I'm having alienists go over the boy tomorrow," the lawyer informed. "He's mad as a hatter. Anyone can see that. Even his cousin, Fletcher Townsend, said so last night. He'd been to see Richard."

"Yes, I know that. What did he say about him?"

"That Richard hardly talked rationally. It seems Richard especially hates you. He told Townsend you were going to search his apartment again and he hoped you'd break your neck before you got there. Foolish things like that. Townsend created quite an uproar telling it. He talks too much, anyway, and becomes loud when he is excited. Seems Mrs. Norton overheard some of the more lurid parts of the story and promptly went into a dead faint. Doc Fisk came

down and gave Townsend some plain talk."

"What did Imlay have to say about all this—or wasn't he there?"

"Imlay is a queer bird, Tony. Personally I don't like him. He says little, and thinks a lot. He never uttered a word, but you should have heard Fisk. You know, with his ruddy face and that tussure of hair running like a halo around his skull, he looks like a friar. But he didn't talk like one. Which brings up another point."

"And that is what?" Quinn asked, highly interested.

"Don't think I'm maudlin or trying to defeat the ends of justice by sobbing on your shoulder, Tony. However, from what Fisk says, Mrs. Norton is in bad shape. If Richard is convicted and—executed—I think she'll die. You'll be sentencing two people to death if they fry him, Tony."

"Murderers always have mothers and fathers," Quinn said, softly. "Sisters and brothers. They are almost always badly affected when someone they love is sent to such an inglorious finish. Yet it has to be. I can't permit Mrs. Norton's health to stop me from sending her son to the chair—which he richly deserves if he isn't crazy."

"Um—yes." Hammond arose. "Well, thanks anyway."

"Thank you," Quinn said with emphasis, but Hammond didn't know why his legal opponent seemed so grateful.

Quinn now knew that any of them—Imlay, Fisk, Hammond or Townsend—could have arranged the trap on the stairway leading to Dick Norton's apartment. Townsend had told them all that Quinn was going there and that Dick hoped he'd break his neck on the way. One of those people had taken Dick Norton's hopes a bit too constructively.

Silk took Quinn back to his office. "I looked over a couple of newspapers," Silk said. "They found Bessie Jackson this morning, and she's listed as a suicide. Also I heard from Headquarters on Doc Fisk. They checked on him by teletype and got a quick reply. Doc Fisk graduated from Matthern University in Nineteen-eighteen, interned at a Chicago hospital, and hung out his shingle three years later. He worked up a good neighborhood general practice, never married, and had no close relatives. Six years ago he closed his office, sent his patients a notice that he'd turned his practice over to another doctor, and that's the last they heard of him."

"Which seems to give Dr. Fisk a clean slate," Quinn said. "Oh, well, there's nothing like making certain. How about Carol and Butch? Have they reported?"

"Butch has been regular. Carol phoned the office on the private wire, but none too regularly. Seems she has met young Townsend and he's giving her quite a rush. And how that girl worked it! She knew one of Townsend's bosses and went to him. Said she needed someone to show her around town and she liked Townsend's looks, so he was assigned to do the honors. He'll never suspect her."

"Good. Back to the office now. I've got an accumulation of two days' work ahead of me. And an assignment for you."

"I'm ready for it," Silk said.

"After you deposit me at the office, go out and learn what you can about a Dr. Rolf who died two years ago. This Rolf was the attending physician at Dick Norton's birth. I'm working on the theory that if Bessie Jackson, who was the nurse, discovered something which led to blackmail, perhaps Dr. Rolf knew the same thing, but was ethical enough to forget it."

"It may take a long time," Silk said. "The doctor has been dead two years and I'll have to rely upon his friends and relatives."

"Concentrate on the relatives, Silk. I doubt Dr. Rolf told anyone this secret—if he knew it. But he might have made some sort of an entry on his records. As a rule a physician's papers aren't destroyed for some time after his death. There are bills to be collected and such. If you can find those papers and notebooks, even old appointment books, we may get a lead."



NEXT ISSUE
 •
**TONY
 QUINN**
 IN
**The
 Murder
 Maker**

CHAPTER IX

In the Middle of Murder

QUINN handled routine business for the remainder of the day, though it was difficult to get his mind off the Norton case. Silk didn't appear at six so Quinn sent out for something to eat. At seven-thirty Silk returned and he had news.

"I located a sister-in-law of Dr. Rolf finally," he explained. "I told her it was police business and she cooperated. Dr. Rolf had a roomful of books, journals, records and files. They had been gone over and some of the papers had looked valuable so the whole business was put into storage. At the Acme Warehouse right here in town. It's still there."

"Excellent," Quinn said. "What about Dr. Rolf, personally?"

"A general practitioner of good standing. He was never in any trouble. He was a bachelor, and that sister-in-law was his closest relative. Like most doctors of his kind he left a lot of bills due him and some he owed other people. He died neither rich nor poor. And there is something else, sir."

"Whatever it is, you don't like it," Quinn said. "I can tell from the tone of your voice."

"I don't like it at all. Someone else got the same idea as you, sir. Dr. Rolf's sister-in-law had a visitor about four hours before I showed up, a man who said he was from a clinic where Dr. Rolf used to work and that among his notes

were items concerned with old clinic patients. This visitor wanted to know if Rolf had left any papers, and he was told the same story I was told."

"That is bad," Quinn agreed. "It shows we're on the right track, though. Besides, I doubt any attempt would be made to get at Dr. Rolf's stored papers until after the warehouse closes for the night. Our job is to get there first. And because there must be no publicity about this, perhaps the Black Bat should handle it. Let's head for home, Silk."

It was dark as Silk pulled away from the curb. He followed his usual route home, taking cross streets to an avenue. These cross streets, in the downtown section, were narrow, dismal and deserted at this hour. He stopped for a traffic light and idly wondered why there was so little traffic. Only two cars were parked in the next block, one just beyond the intersection and the other far down, almost at the end of the block.

As they passed the first, it pulled out suddenly and Quinn told Silk to watch it. This car nosed out, put on a burst of speed and Silk reached for the gun under his arm. But the car pulled abreast and kept right on going. There was only one man in it.

After passing Quinn's sedan, it cut in front and continued on. Then the car further down suddenly pulled out to block the street. The driver leaped out and there was a gun in his hand. He yelled something and started shooting. The car ahead of Quinn veered to the right and climbed the curb. Silk tried to stop, but couldn't until the car he drove was between the other cars.

The one on the sidewalk backed up.

[Turn page]

Tired Kidneys Often Bring Sleepless Nights

Doctors say your kidneys contain 15 miles of tiny tubes or filters which help to purify the blood and keep you healthy. When they get tired and don't work right in the daytime, many people have to get up nights. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder. Don't neglect this condition and lose valuable, restful sleep. When disorder of kidney function permits

poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may also cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, a stimulant diuretic, used successfully by millions for over 50 years. Doan's give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills, (Adv.)

also blocking the road and trapping Quinn's sedan neatly. This driver also jumped out, and he also had a gun. Quinn took a quick look at him and recognized him merely as a type. A professional crook who would do anything for money.

The other man, further down the street, had been only a blurred form. He had ducked behind his car and only the top of his hat showed. The two men opened fire. Their bullets streaked past Quinn's sedan. Apparently he was supposed to be one of those innocent bystanders who was most apt to get hurt.

A slug smashed through the rear window. Quinn slid down to the floor, reached for the door and gave Silk terse orders.

"I think this party is meant for us, but they don't want to make it too obvious. We'll roll out, hit the street and then do some more rolling, right under our car. It's the only safe place. As you dive for it, snap on the siren switch."

"And I'll do a little shooting on my own!" Silk shouted.

Quinn pushed the door open and, in one heave, threw himself out. It was a clumsy move, purposely so, because it had to look like the desperate efforts of a blind man to act quickly. Quinn slid off the running board. A bullet nicked the pavement close by him. Then the siren started wailing. Silk dropped beside Quinn and fired two shots at the car ahead.

QUINN flattened himself as much as possible and slithered beneath the car. His clothing caught on something, but he ripped himself free. Another bullet smacked into the side of the sedan. Silk fired two more shots before things became too hot for him and he joined Quinn in the questionable security under the sedan.

The siren was screeching and its high-pitched sound was picked up by the man-made canyons to echo and re-echo until the sound was ear-splitting. The shots, fired so rapidly, might be construed by anyone a few blocks away as the back-firing of a truck, a common sound in this section. But the siren was bound to draw attention.

The two gunmen apparently knew it, too. They pumped four more slugs, this time without any pretense of aiming at one another. Then they piled into their respective cars. The one ahead turned

the corner. The one behind backed up at high speed.

Silk crawled out, his face grimy, his jaw set hard. He pulled Quinn from beneath the car. A patrolman was running up, gun in hand. Silk promptly dropped his weapon until he could be identified.

Radio cars swiftly converged on the scene. Silk gave them descriptions of the two sedans and the radio cars went off on a vain hunt.

Silk dusted off Quinn's clothing and clucked his tongue at the tear in his coat. The patrolman was taking a few notes.

"I don't know exactly what happened," Quinn said, "but it appears we were caught between a couple of gunmen who meant to shoot it out."

"I couldn't see either one any too well," Silk explained. "I didn't even glimpse the marker plate numbers. Things happened too fast."

The patrolman closed his book with a snap.

"I'd say you were pretty lucky, Mr. Quinn. We've had cases like this before, where a couple of gunmen tried shooting it out, and sometimes the people between them were hit. I'll make a full report. Maybe some of the boys in the Detective Bureau will know what crooks would be apt to start a private war."

"Do that," Quinn said. "Silk, see if the car will start. It was hit half a dozen times."

No damage had been done to the motor. Silk helped Quinn into the back seat, got behind the wheel, and placed his reloaded gun beside him. They resumed their trip home. Quinn was grasping his white cane until his knuckles gleamed.

"I wonder if McGrath would think that was just an accident," he said. "We were beautifully trapped, Silk. If we'd been killed, there wouldn't have been a soul who would believe anything except that we were innocent victims."

"I'm still shaking," Silk admitted. "Those birds are getting bolder, sir. And it seems there are more than one."

"The chap who passed us was just a gorilla, Silk. The other man kept under cover so much that I never got a glimpse of him, so I think we can assume he was the man we're after. This makes three attempts. In a way, it's gratifying to know we're on the path to uncovering something, but our man is growing more



BUTCH

dangerous through desperation.”

“And he won’t stop,” Silk opined. “Not now, because he can’t.”

“Yes, I know, and it makes things difficult. We can’t tell where or when he’ll strike next, and the fourth attempt may abandon all pretense of being an accident. Frankly, I’m scared. I must keep acting like a blind man and that leaves me wide open.”

They were both alert and wary during the rest of the ride home. Silk didn’t permit Quinn to enter the house unaccompanied, as he usually did. Once inside Silk made certain windows and doors were securely locked. Quinn went straight to the laboratory.

CAROL and Butch were there. Quinn proceeded to the steel locker and removed the regalia of the Black Bat. Then he stepped behind a screen and changed into the black clothes.

“I’ve got to work fast,” he said. “We’re after certain records left in a warehouse by the administrators of a doctor’s estate. Our enemies also know about these files and will be bound to try to get them. While I doubt they realize we are on the same track, they are still bound to work fast. Carol, what of young Townsend?”

“I’ve little to report,” she said. “He’s

nice enough, except that he spends too much money and is head over heels in debt. The only thing that saves him is the fact that his aunt is worth so much money. He talks freely about Dick Norton, but offers nothing helpful. And he refuses point-blank to take me to the Norton house.”

“And you, Butch, with reference to Max Imlay?”

“A bust,” Butch said disgustedly. “I’ve tailed him around. He just works. He went to the hospital today and made a recheck. I found out he’d been there before, and knew the bricks were loose.”

“Very well,” Quinn said. “Butch, go out to the coupe and wait. Carol, stay here with Silk. There might be need for some fast work by all of us when I get back.”

Quinn came from behind the screen and drew on the wide-brimmed black hat. He thrust a heavy automatic into its holster, scooped up a kit of burglar tools, and headed for the tunnel exit. He emerged from the garden house, flashed across the estate and reached the car which Butch put into motion the instant the door closed.

“The Acme Warehouse,” the Black Bat said. “It’s downtown near the river. Pass it slowly so I can size up the place. Then we’ll both go inside. Be prepared

for trouble, because we may find plenty of it."

Butch's grin spread from ear to ear. "I been waiting for some. This trailing a guy around is tough on the feet. Me, I'd rather use my fists. Let 'em make trouble."

The Acme Warehouse was one of those windowless, ten-story structures sandwiched in between a lot of ancient dwelling houses now converted into garages and stores. As in the downtown business section, there were few people abroad and the neighborhood was dark enough to make operations easy.

Quinn noted the heavy front door, but he also saw that the alley beside the building was well-used, which meant an auxiliary loading platform at the rear. Butch parked the car under his instructions.

"I'll go alone," the Black Bat said. "Give me five minutes, then slip down the alley. By that time I ought to have some entranceway open for us."

CHAPTER X

Man With a Book



WHEN Butch finally joined the Black Bat a small door, set in a large one, was slightly ajar. The Black Bat entered first. There were no lights on inside so Butch placed one big hand on the Black Bat's shoulder and followed in his footsteps.

The Black Bat saw clearly through the darkness, made his way between two huge rows of packing cases, and proceeded to the office. That, too, was unoccupied. If there was a watchman, he wasn't around. The Black Bat looked for time clocks and saw them, indicating there should be a watchman on the premises.

He came to a stop and whispered that Butch was to remain silent. They stood there in the darkness, while the Black Bat's unusual hearing sought to pick up some sound.

He moved over to the big freight elevator. The doors were closed and the indicator showed it was on the seventh floor. Then the Black Bat's eyes spotted a large brass ring with a single key at-

tached to it. He scooped this up. It lay directly below one of the watchman's time boxes. The key fitted the lock smoothly.

"We're a little late," the Black Bat said in a whisper. "I think the watchman was struck, or killed, as he made a check at this station box. He dropped his key. The elevator is at the seventh floor, so someone is probably there. We'll have to hike it, Butch. Keep your hand on my shoulder and move softly."

They found the stairway and went up the flights as fast as they dared. Near the top the Black Bat drew his gun and brought Butch to a stop. He listened again. He heard muted voices—several of them. Then he heard the sound of a sharp blow struck against metal and something clanged onto the cement floor.

A harsh voice gave vent to an annoyed oath.

"Take a look at that. There must be two tons of junk piled inside. We'll need a couple of hours to go through it."

"Get started," a man said in a high-pitched, authoritative tone. "Hank, go back to where we put the watchman and get his key. Then start checking the boxes. Maybe they're connected with an alarm system and if a call doesn't go through on time, this place will swarm with cops. Take the gag off the watchman and make him tell you what boxes to check and when."

"Okay," someone said. "I'll take the elevator, huh?"

"Walk it, you fool. Elevators make too much noise. Hurry it up. You others start cleaning out that storage room."

The man called Hank had a flashlight, and sent its beam peering ahead of him as he hurried toward the stairway. The Black Bat nudged Butch and whispered into his ear. Butch closed fingers into massive fists, ran lightly down the stairway and stopped just beyond the turn. The Black Bat quietly faded into the darkness.

Hank ran down the steps, turned the corner, and a mighty hand ripped the flashlight from his grasp so it wouldn't clatter on the cement steps. Another hand gripped his throat and the yell he started to give became only a faint gurgle.

Hank was not small nor weak, but in the hands of this giant he was powerless. Butch held him at arm's length and hit him just once. A second blow was rarely

necessary from Butch's fists. The man went limp. Butch slung him over one shoulder, went on down to the sixth floor and, using the flash, located a large empty packing case. He dumped his unconscious prisoner inside it and thrust a pile of excelsior over him.

Then Butch returned quietly to the upper floor and rejoined the Black Bat. They spoke in whispers that couldn't be heard a dozen feet away.

"There are five of them," the Black Bat said. "The one in charge of operations has a muffler or something pulled up over the lower half of his face and he keeps his hat brim down. He's the man we want."

Butch rubbed his hands. "Let's get at it," he suggested.

"Not yet. There are five, I said, and they'll be armed. Give me that flashlight. If you need another, ask one of those boys to loan you one."

"I bet I won't be refused." Butch laughed softly.

The Black Bat took the flash, moved into line with the stairway and hurled the flash. It hit a wall, landed on the steps and rattled down several of them.

Instantly all work at the storage room came to a stop. The man with the high-pitched voice issued orders.

"Two of you—go see what that was. You others, keep working. Faster—and don't forget the Black Bat is in on this business and he gets around."

TWO men scampered across the large expanse of floor space, their flashlights bobbing. Butch moved into position behind a stack of packing cases. He let the first man go by and pounced upon the second. It wasn't much of a pounce. Butch merely grabbed the man's shoulder, spun him around and hit him under the jaw.

He didn't fall, for Butch held him firmly and laid him down without a sound. The first man was already at the top of the stairway. He turned and saw someone he thought was his ally. Butch, taking the place of the man he had knocked cold, turned his borrowed flash full into the first crook's face.

"Come on," the half-blinded crook growled. "What's holding you back? Hank's flashlight is on the stairs. Something must have happened to him. We're going down and see."

He started down the steps. An enor-

mous fist descended on the top of his head like the blow of a pile-driver. The crook fell against the side of the stairs, but he was apparently more hard-headed than Butch reckoned on. He managed to get out one eerie yell before Butch hit him a second time.

As the shout rang through the building, the Black Bat moved forward. Two men, engaged in removing the contents of one storage room, spun around with drawn guns. They seemed to know exactly what was expected of them.

The third man, so far unidentifiable, sprinted toward the storage room and flung something inside it. He repeated this operation, then ducked toward the open elevator door. The other two were already inside and waiting. Both opened fire as the Black Bat raced across the open area toward the storage room. He fired while still on the move. The elevator door slammed shut and the mechanism whirred.

Then there was a dull explosion from inside the storage room. It was followed by another, and flames rose instantly. The Black Bat got close enough to see that the fire had been started by a pair of incendiary bombs, throwing off a jellylike inflammable substance that it would be impossible to extinguish.

It covered everything and consumed the contents of the storage room so fast that within a minute the place was a roaring furnace. The Black Bat covered his eyes and made one attempt to get inside. The flames threw him back. To enter that inferno was positive death.

There was a hissing sound and automatic sprinklers began operation, throwing down streams of water which seemed to build up the fire instead of extinguishing it. Those bombs, the Black Bat knew, then, were a type developed by the war. They would consume almost anything.

The cascading water from the sprinkler system meant that an automatic fire alarm had been turned in. The Black Bat raced back toward the stairway, followed by Butch.

"These two guys," Butch indicated the pair of crooks. "What about them?"

"Let them stay there. They're in no particular danger. The fire can't spread. Where is the first one you hit?"

"Downstairs in a box," Butch replied.

"Bring him along. And hurry. We've got to be out of here in three minutes.

"I'll wait to lead you."

Butch reached the floor below, hurried over to the packing box and hauled out his still unconscious prisoner. He draped him around his neck as if he were a fur piece, secured a good grip on his ankles and neck and jogged along behind the Black Bat. . . .

They were safely inside the coupe, with the prisoner between them, when the first of the fire apparatus rolled up. Butch drove rapidly away and under the Black Bat's direction headed uptown. He turned into one of the big public parks and stopped at the darkest point he could find. The Black Bat got out and hauled the prisoner with him.

Butch drove away, but he would circle the area and come back. The Black Bat dragged the unconscious man over to a tree and propped him against the trunk. Then he sat down to wait.

The crook groaned after several minutes and finally opened his eyes. He didn't struggle because there was a circular metal object poked against his throat and he recognized it as the muzzle of a gun.

"Wh-what hit me?" he blinked dazedly.

"A fist," the Black Bat said. "Up to now you've been lucky. How that luck will hold depends upon you."

"What is this?" the crook demanded. "Where am I anyhow? Who are you?"

"The Black Bat. I want information and I intend to get it, or else."

"You can't scare me," the crook protested. "I'm no stool pigeon."

"There are times," the Black Bat said, "when I can't afford to waste a moment wheedling information out of a man." The Black Bat's hand moved out and the thumb pressed hard against the crook's forehead, then came away.

RAISING his hand, the crook touched something adhering to the middle of his forehead.

"It's a sticker, cut in the shape of a bat," the Black Bat said. "My trademark. You've heard about that."

"But—you only put them on guys you have to—have to—kill!"

"Quite right. That should indicate I'm serious. I want information about the man who hired you to help loot the storage room at the warehouse. You have about half a minute to start talking. Unless you do, they'll find you right here,

with the sticker branding you as my victim. Half a minute!"

"It was a guy named Socrates."

"Socrates? Do you mean to say that is his name?"

"Yeah, his monicker. That's all we know him by. He paid us a hundred each to help, but I figured it was just another cinch job."

"And his name is Socrates. Why is he called that? There must be a reason."

"Sure. It's on account of he always carries a big book under his arm and it says Socrates on it. The book ain't for reading. It's got a gun inside it."

"Tell me more about this man named for the book he carries. The book which isn't a book at all, but only a place to conceal a weapon. How long have you known him? Where does he come from?"

"Listen, if I spill it all, do I go free? Oh, what's the use? I'm licked anyhow. I don't want to die, and you know it. This guy has been around for years. He wears colored glasses and always keeps a muffler or coat collar around his chin. He dresses like a bum, but has all kinds of dough on him. Sometimes he won't show for months. Nobody knows where he goes or where he comes from."

"But he is a criminal? He pulls jobs?"

"Big ones. I think he's a big shot on the outside and lines up good things. Then he gets together the men he needs and pulls the job. He knows every big shot crook in the country."

"The man with you tonight—you are positive he is the original Socrates? There was no substitution?"

"No two people could look and talk like that guy. Of course I'm sure."

"And what were you after in the warehouse?"

"Some papers. Blackmail stuff, he said. They'd pay off plenty. That's all I know."

"Where do you ordinarily meet this man Socrates?" the Black Bat demanded, and pressed the gun harder against his prisoner's throat.

"There ain't any regular place. Like I said, he just shows up all of a sudden. And every time he's got a job lined up."

"Good night," the Black Bat said abruptly and brought down the automatic sharply.

He waited there in the darkness until he saw Butch and the coupe roll slowly

toward him. Then he snapped on a flashlight which had belonged to one of the warehouse raiding mob, stood it on end beside the unconscious man and hurried over to the coupe. The beam of light would draw the park police. Butch drove away at a sedate speed while the Black Bat removed his hood and donned the black hat.

"It was fun while it lasted," Butch observed happily.

"Fun, yes, but we didn't win that round. The papers I wanted were completely destroyed. Nothing could have lasted through that fire. We had a glimpse of the man behind this, but it was of no help. We know he is a professional crook with a strange nickname, and he carries a gun inside a book. He appears and disappears at will and always pulls a fancy job. The man is clever, trusts no one, and leaves no trace of his true identity."

"But what's his connection with that Norton boy?" Butch wanted to know.

The Black Bat sighed deeply. "The answer to your question probably lies burned to a crisp back in the warehouse. If we only knew what we were after! If there was just a slight clue. It seems to center on the fact that someone does not wish the life of Richard Norton investigated. That much is clear because they've tried to stop Tony Quinn, three different times."

"Maybe," Butch suggested, "the kid was working for this big shot crook and the guy is afraid you'll come across his trail if you keep tracking down the kid's past."

"There's something in that," the Black Bat admitted, "but I've a feeling we're looking for something far more important than that. It could concern the Nor-

ton estate, though I can't see how. It could concern the loot Dick Norton accumulated. All the proceeds of his criminal acts vanished, you know. And yet, why should either of these suppositions present any danger to this man known as Socrates?"

BUTCH folded his huge fists. "If we could find him, I'd make him talk," Butch promised.

"Well, you can take your pick of four or five men. Those involved in the case so far. There's Dick's cousin, Fletcher Townsend, his uncle, Max Imlay, Attorney Hammond, and a social worker named Cheney who seems to show a strange interest. You might even include Dr. Fisk, for he has usually been present when the c'an met."

Butch turned into the dead end street beside Tony Quinn's home.

"All I know is if Max Imlay is mixed up in it, he's playing a mighty cagey game."

They found Silk in the laboratory, nervously pacing the floor. Silk didn't wait for any resumé of the evening's events. He had news.

"About half an hour ago, sir, there was phone call from this man Cheney, the social worker who visited us. Cheney wanted to talk with you, but agreed to give me the message. It seems that Cheney went to see Mrs. Norton. Why, he didn't say. But while there he saw a man he'd seen before—in the company of Dick Norton at that cheap flat where Norton lived as a crook."

The Black Bat looked around. "I don't see Carol. Did she go to talk with Cheney?"

"Yes. Cheney seemed to be fright-

[Turn page]

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PLEASE

PASS

THE

POISON



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ened. He was afraid to leave his home and Carol thought he might give her all the details if she posed as your secretary or something. I wanted to go, but she insisted I must remain here in case you needed me."

The Black Bat headed for the telephone. Silk stopped him.

"There's no use calling Cheney. I tried half a dozen times and he doesn't answer."

The Black Bat began removing his dark clothing and issued orders at the same time.

"Butch, take the coupe and get down to Cheney's place at once. If there is any trouble, handle it in your own way. Silk, give him Cheney's address. Then get out the sedan. You're going to drive me there, too, but as Tony Quinn and not the Black Bat."

Butch promptly disappeared into the tunnel, clutching a bit of paper upon which Silk had scribbled Cheney's address. Silk hurried to the garage for the sedan while the Black Bat switched to the gray tweeds that Tony Quinn usually wore.

There was a look of intense worry on Quinn's face. Cheney could have been setting a trap, another of those affairs to kill Tony Quinn by some accidental means. Carol might fall into it. Or Cheney could be telling the truth and had reason to be frightened. If he had seen someone from the Norton household with Dick Norton when the boy posed as a crook, Cheney was on the way to solving this mystery. And if Cheney had seen this man and recognized him, it was possible the murderer had observed Cheney and realized he had to dispose of the social worker.

CHAPTER XI

Death at the Window



AFTER Carol left Tony Quinn's home via the tunnel, she hurried toward the street fronting the house, walked rapidly along it to a bus stop not far away. She took a bus to an avenue where there was plenty of traffic and taxicabs. She hailed one and gave an ad-

dress close by Cheney's residence.

Carol knew that she might be walking into a trap, or the possibility of surprising a murderer face-to-face. She opened her handbag, took out an efficient looking blue-black automatic and pumped a bullet into the firing chamber. She replaced the gun, leaned back, and tried to calm her ruffled nerves.

Cheney lived in Greenwich Village, in a none too prepossessing part of it, but the apartment house looked to be respectable. She found his name below the row of bell buttons. She rang a couple of bells at random and when the door latch clicked, she entered, stepped to one side where the shadows were thickest and waited until the people she had aroused returned to their apartments.

Cheney lived on the eleventh floor. There was one self-operated elevator. She brought it down and rode up to the twelfth floor. She left the car there, sought out the stairway and walked down one flight.

This was a large building with a number of small apartments. It took her a few moments to locate the one listed under Cheney's name. His card was tacked beside the door. Carol listened intently outside, heard no sound at all and tapped lightly on the panel. Nobody came.

For a moment she was tempted merely to stand by until Quinn or the Black Bat arrived, but she recalled how excited and frightened Cheney had been. The man might have been attacked and could be dying inside the apartment. She grasped the knob and turned it. The door was not locked.

Carol removed the automatic from her purse, gripped it tightly, and pushed the door wide open. The apartment was dark and the weak hall light did little to break that gloom. There was not a sound, even now with the door open.

She stepped in, gun ready, every nerve and muscle attuned for fast action. She called Cheney's name without drawing a reply and went deeper into the apartment.

Carol reached for the light switch, snapped it, and for one brief instant she was half blinded by the light. Then she was completely blinded by a blanket which descended over her head. Two strong arms wound about her. The gun was wrested from her hand.

She struggled and kicked, but it was

no use. Whoever held her was strong, and no novice at this sort of thing. She was being forced across the apartment. She tried to scream, but the thick folds of the blanket effectively smothered any cry she could make.

Her sharply pointed shoes hammered at a pair of substantial ankles and she thought she heard a yelp of pain once or twice. By sheer momentum and force, she was pushed on and on while her mind tried to figure out what this attacker was up to.

She felt a window sill at her back. Then she knew his intentions. The arms hugged tighter. She was lifted off the floor. Her head and shoulders went out the window. In a moment now, she would be thrown clear, to drop eleven stories and meet certain death.

Carol suddenly doubled up her legs and shot them straight out. She almost broke the man's grip that time. His arms slid away until her hands were free. She managed to get them out from beneath the enveloping blanket, but her resistance didn't alter the danger she was in. She was still half out of the window.

She succeeded in raising the blanket, doubled herself up and secured a firm grasp on the window sill. Then the killer, gripping her kicking legs, forced the lower part of her body through the window.

She dropped until only her grip on the window sill prevented her from falling clear. Carol opened her mouth and screamed loudly and lustily. She tried to pull herself up by first pushing both knees against the brick wall. She inched up about a foot and then the man at the window brought a fist down against her fingers. He beat at them frantically, trying to break her grip.

She set her teeth tightly together, tried to forget the pain from those blows and kept hoisting herself up little by little. Then the man concentrated on one hand. For a short moment there was a cessation of this torture, but only while the killer sought some heavy object that would crush Carol's fingers.

SHE didn't know what it was, but the first blow sent agony coursing through her whole body. The second numbed the fingers of her left hand. It slowly slid off the window sill and she was dangling by one hand only. He

would smash at that next, and then she would drop. Carol screamed again.

But there was no pounding against that one hand. The killer had stopped for some reason. Yet she couldn't hang on with only one hand. The fingers began to slip. If she braced her knees against the building, the added pressure would break her grip. She could do nothing but cling and pray.

Then big fingers encircled her wrist and held it securely. She kept screaming. The killer was going to force her to let go that way now. She was lifted as easily as if she were a doll. Another huge arm descended and secured a grasp on the neckline of her dress. With one mighty heave, she was lifted and pulled through the window.

Carol had a look at Butch's white and drawn face before she fainted. . . .

When she awakened, the overhead lights made her wince. Pain was running through both arms and her knees felt as if they were being pressed by hot irons. She was lying on a davenport with Tony Quinn kneeling beside her, and making no pretense of being blind.

Silk was there too, worried-looking. Butch stood with his back against the door and Butch looked as if he would enjoy murdering someone. Silk found a little brandy and Carol sipped it as the dizziness and remnants of terror went away.

"How do you feel?" Quinn asked. "Well enough so Butch can take you home?"

"I'm—all right—I guess. Tony, did you get him? The man who tried to kill me?"

"No. He's the slipperiest character I've ever encountered. Butch heard you scream and ran down the hallway fast and loudly. The man heard him and then fled while Butch was busy hauling you back through the window. Did you get a glimpse of him, Carol?"

"Not even a peak," she sighed. "He threw a blanket over me and by the time I got that off, I was hanging out of the window and it didn't make much difference to me what he looked like. He had darkened the room anyway. All I know is that he was powerful and enjoys killing people."

"No signs of Cheney when you got here?" Quinn persisted.

"Why—no. No, I didn't see him. I thought the apartment was empty when

I arrived. Tony, could it have been Cheney who tried to kill me?"

"I don't know. We haven't had time to check. Carol, you've got to get out of here. You and Butch. So that I can phone Captain McGrath and have him in on this. I rather think I'll need him by the time we finish inspecting the premises."

"I can walk."

Carol proved it by a wobbly gait across the room. She faced a mirror and gasped. Her stockings were ripped, her dress torn and disheveled. Her hair looked as if she had just come out from under a shower.

"Get me away, Butch," she pleaded. "Hurry! The way I look—"

Silk went into the hallway first and informed the several aroused tenants that everything was under control. When the hall was clear, he and Butch escorted Carol to the elevator. Then Silk returned to find Quinn standing in the middle of the room with a thick book in his hand.

"'The Life and Times of Socrates.'" Quinn was smiling. "A lugubrious tome, but hardly meant to be read. Take a look."

Quinn raised the cover to reveal a medium-sized gun nestled in a cut-out oblong pit slashed from the pages of the book.

"So he finally slipped—if the book and gun will do us any good. What about Cheney, sir?"

Quinn put the book under his arm. "We'll hunt for him. I don't believe we'll have to go far."

They didn't. In the bedroom Quinn spotted the thin streak of blood just below the closet door. He opened the door and Cheney was propped up inside. There was a knife through his heart. A long and wide-bladed kitchen knife.

"Cheney saw too much," Quinn said slowly. "Silk, phone Captain McGrath. Tell him the whole story. Say that Cheney phoned the house and we came right here, but he was dead when we arrived. Murdered! Instruct McGrath to proceed at once to the Norton home and bring anyone there to this apartment. Don't mention this book under any circumstances."

WHILE they waited for McGrath, Silk and Quinn prowled the apartment, looking for clues and finding none.

After twenty minutes of this Quinn sat down, put his white cane between his knees, placed both hands on the crook of it, and his eyes grew blank and staring. The eyes of a blind man.

He acted the part too, when Captain McGrath and Max Imlay walked in.

"Who did you bring with you, Mac?" Quinn said.

"Imlay. Townsend was there, but he insisted someone had to stay with Mrs. Norton."

"Good evening, Mr. Imlay," Quinn said. "I find it necessary for you to perform a most disagreeable task. Silk, lead Mr. Imlay to the next room and show him the body. Imlay, I want to know if you ever saw this dead man before."

They trooped back a moment later. Imlay was as pale as death. He sat down and looked as if he could use a drink.

"I saw that man not more than two hours ago," Imlay said. "He came to the house and wanted to talk to Mrs. Norton. We informed him that her condition was such that she could see no one. He appeared rather disappointed, but went off."

"Who was there when Cheney came to the house?" Quinn asked.

"Why, I talked to him. Fletcher Townsend was present. So was Hammond. That's all."

"Cheney saw all three of you?"

"Yes, all three of us. I'm afraid we weren't too civil to him. You see, Mrs. Norton had a bad spell and we'd sent for Doctor Fisk. We were too worried about her to pay much attention to a visitor we thought was just a screwball."

"Did Fisk find Mrs. Norton in bad shape?" Quinn went on.

"Well—yes. He arrived soon after this Cheney departed. Lila was weak. She doesn't have any will to fight. Who was this man? What did he want with her?"

"I'm not sure," Quinn replied. "He was a social worker and somehow met Dick Norton. The circumstances do not matter, but Cheney took an interest in Dick. Whether it was favorable or unfavorable, I don't know. At any rate he once saw Dick in the company of a man whom he, Cheney, saw again. Tonight—at the Norton home."

Imlay's face reddened. "But what if he did? What's this all about anyway?"

"That, too, is still vague," Quinn said.

"The arrest and prosecution of Richard Norton is no different from that of any other young hoodlum except that Dick comes of such a respected family. I was interested in learning why a boy of his upbringing would turn to crime and wanton murder. I started to investigate, and someone did not wish me to continue. Whoever it was had reasons strong enough to take risks for. On three different occasions he attempted to stop me—by killing me."

"What sort of nonsense is this?" Imlay demanded hotly.

"It isn't nonsense. The first time a section of a brick parapet of the Reeves Memorial Hospital fell on me. As you know, Mr. Imlay, those parapets needed immediate attention. You were bidding on a redesigning job meant to eliminate them."

"How did you find that out?" Imlay cried. He settled back in his chair. "That's a foolish question. Your job is to find out things. All sorts of things. Very well, I did bid for the job. I knew the parapets were loose, and if you were nearly killed when one of them fell you can't tell me that was an attempt at murder. I thought those bricks would fall long before they did."

"It was a murder try," Quinn insisted. "Followed by two more. In one, I went to Dick Norton's cheap flat to search for the loot he'd stolen. Norton knew I was going there. I told him so and he, in turn, told Fletcher Townsend."

"I remember that," Imlay said. "Townsend told me, and the others too. We all wondered if you'd find anything."

"I didn't—except a step which had been cleverly loosened so it would tilt and throw me against a weakened banister which crashed. If I'd fallen, I'd probably have been killed. The third attempt was cruder, because the would-be murderer was running out of those tricks to make my death resemble an accident. In this case he had a couple of gorillas shoot it out, with me in between. If I'd been killed, it could have been easily assumed I was just an innocent victim."

MCGRATH was glowering now. "I'm agreeing with you, Tony," he broke in. "I thought that first attempt really was an accident. I thought the second might have been, but one man doesn't go through three dangerous af-

fairs in a period of two days without it becoming obvious someone wants him good and dead."

"I had nothing to do with it."

Imlay fumbled for a cigarette and held the pack uncertainly toward Quinn who paid no attention to it whatsoever. Imlay shrugged, put a cigarette between his own lips and lit it with a match that was held in a not too steady hand.

"Mr. Imlay," Quinn said, "Dick Norton was born on March twenty-ninth, nineteen-twenty-one. At that time were you married to Mrs. Norton's sister?"

"No. I was living in St. Louis. I'd never heard of the Nortons. When I married, Dick was four years old."

"I see. And Fletcher Townsend—how old is he?"

"A year younger than Dick. Twenty-five years old."

"Going back to Cheney's visit again. Did he drive up?"

"No. I saw no signs of a car or a taxi. He must have walked."

"Thank you, Mr. Imlay," Quinn said. "I'm grateful. Silk, will you escort Mr. Imlay to one of the police cars downstairs and have him sent home?"

CHAPTER XII

Alias Socrates



CAPTAIN McGRATH closed the door after Silk and Imlay departed. He lit the stub of a cigar he had been chewing, walked over and sat down close to Quinn.

"Now let's have it," he said.

Quinn drew a long breath.

"About the murder of Cheney? I know little about it and I've told you everything that I do know. My theory that there is a man who doesn't want me to investigate Dick Norton's life is true. Cheney saw that man and placed him as a visitor to Norton's flat where he lived as a crook. Which is proof enough that this mysterious person knew all about Dick's double life."

"Okay, I'll grant that. I'll grant that if Cheney spotted him at the Norton house, he probably saw Cheney too, and killed him. But what's behind it? What

does this man want?"

"I doubt that he wants anything material," Quinn replied. "In my opinion he is trying to hide something. It's something important enough to commit murder over. Mac, did you ever hear of a crook named Socrates? So named because he always carried a book about Socrates. Not to read, but to conceal a gun in. To make the weapon readily disposable, I imagine, though there may be some other reason."

"Socrates?" McGrath grunted. "Doesn't sound familiar. I'll buzz the Identification Division and have them check through the nickname files. Sometimes we get surprising results that way. Say, is he the guy we're after?"

"It begins to look that way, Mac."

"Then I'll get busy right away."

McGrath lifted the phone, dialed and made his request. He hung on while the check was being made. Then he listened intently for a few minutes. He hung up and looked dolefully at Quinn.

"No soap. There is such a name on the records, but that's all there is—just a name. It has popped up several times, but we've never been able to track this man down or get any sort of a line on him."

"No fingerprint files, Mac?"

McGrath shook his head. "Nothing. We only know this guy has been around for a long time. We haven't even assigned any specific crime to him, but he is a crook all right."

"He's always been elusive, I guess," Quinn said. "He won't be easy to find, Mac, but if he isn't the man we want, he's implicated and could lead us in the right direction. Send out an alarm for him, will you?"

"It's like telling the boys to look for a ghost," McGrath grumbled, "but I'll do it. Now I'd better see about checking this place for prints and clues."

Silk came into the room then and stood respectfully by, waiting for Quinn's orders.

"Mac," Quinn said, "go look at Cheney's body again. Especially the soles of his shoes. See if there is any indication he walked on fresh earth, grass or dead leaves."

McGrath hurried to obey. Quinn arose and picked up the heavy volume on Socrates which had been behind his back. He handed this to Silk who promptly walked out of the apartment with it.

McGrath returned. "Nothing, Tony, that I could see. Are you trying to prove Cheney might have been traipsing around the Norton estate?"

"That's right, Mac. You catch on fast. Well, Silk has gone to ring for the elevator. If you will lead me into the corridor, please, and turn me in the right direction—"

McGrath watched Quinn tap his way down the hall to where Silk waited beside the open elevator door. The officer wagged his head somberly. For the ten thousandth time he told himself that Quinn must really be blind. No faker could act the part so well. And yet McGrath knew well enough that before long something would happen to make him doubt again.

Silk drove Quinn home, but this time he left the car in front of the house and accompanied Quinn inside. Silk kept one hand poised to go for his gun. Inside he proceeded to double lock every door before he pulled down the shades in the library. Quinn dropped his pose as a blind man and hurried into the secret lab.

He placed the thick book on the lab bench, held an iodine vapor apparatus over a flame and allowed the vapor to seep out over the outside of the volume. A number of fingerprints appeared as the vapor settled into the minute grooves caused by the imprint of the ridges.

The prints, under a large and powerful magnifying glass, were useless. The rough binding rendered none of them open to classification. Next Quinn examined the interior of the book with similarly bad results.

HE WENT to work on the gun. Its numbers were intact, and he knew it must have been stolen somewhere. He set aside the investigation of this angle until all other lines were blocked.

Then he set up an infra-red apparatus, focused a camera, and turned the invisible rays on all sides of the book. He took a number of photographs before he opened the book and went to work with the infra-red on the inside cover.

He speedily developed the film and printed it. The wet prints were a revelation. There had been a number on the book, painstakingly removed and invisible until the infra-red rays revealed traces of it. The number was 59A23. That meant nothing as yet.

Then he studied the photos made of the inside cover. There, too, something had been written in ink and removed with an eradicator. Quinn made out the name of Oliver Talbot, Joliet, Illinois, and a date had been scrawled near the top of the cover. This date was December 25, 1915.

Without hesitation, Quinn moved over to where the phone was located and dialed long distance.

"This is Quinn of the District Attorney's office," he said when he got his number. "I need some help. In nineteen-fifteen, and I suspect some years after that, there was an Oliver Talbot living in Joliet, Illinois. He may be dead now, so you might find it necessary to consult old phone books. If he is alive, I want to talk to him. If dead, to his relatives. This is an urgent matter and I may have to ask the Joliet police to do some checking. See what you can do, please, and call me back."

While he waited, Quinn examined every page of the book. There was nothing on them. The back cover revealed no clues in the infra-red. Then the phone rang. Long distance had something to report.

"We have located the surviving family of Oliver Talbot who lived in Joliet in nineteen-fifteen, Mr. Quinn. There is a daughter waiting for your call. Shall I put it through?"

"By all means," Quinn said, and tried not to let any of his excitement get into his voice.

A woman came on the wire.

"This is an important police matter," Quinn said. "I am a District Attorney in New York. A certain book called 'The Life And Times Of Socrates' has become a clue in a vital case. On the inside

cover of that book we discovered the name of Oliver Talbot, the name of Joliet, and the date of December twenty-five, nineteen-fifteen. This book must be traced. Can you tell me anything at all about it?"

"I'm sorry," the woman answered hesitantly. "It was so long ago. But just a moment. My mother might know. I'll let you talk to her."

The voice of an old lady reached Quinn. He repeated his request and heard her laugh.

"Why of course I remember that book. I thought Oliver might enjoy it, but he regarded the whole thing as a joke. I gave it to him for Christmas and he wanted to know why I thought he was interested in Socrates. It was the only mistake I ever made in connection with Oliver's Christmas presents."

"Excellent," Quinn said. "Now, do you know what finally happened to that book? How it has appeared in New York so many years later?"

"I can't answer how it got to New York," she said. "But I do know what Oliver did with it. At the time—it must have been nineteen-twenty-two or nineteen-twenty-three—there was a drive on for used books which were to be presented to the State Prison here in Joliet. Oliver selected a number of books and I recall how he laughed when he included Socrates among them."

Quinn exhaled slowly. "You will never realize how grateful I am, Mrs. Talbot. I as well as several people who may not be killed because of what you have told me. Thank you again."

He hung up for a moment, became connected with long distance again and asked for the warden at Joliet Prison.

[Turn page]

HER KISS WAS THE KISS OF DEATH!



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This call went through fast. Silk entered the lab, meanwhile, with a tray of sandwiches, cake and coffee. He set the tray down and stood listening with intent interest.

"This is Tony Quinn, Warden, of the New York District Attorney's office."

"How are you, Mr. Quinn?" the warden's pleasant voice came over. "I'm delighted to hear from you."

"I need a favor, Warden," Quinn went on. "We are searching for a murderer here who is known only by the name of Socrates. Does that ring a bell with you?"

THERE was only a slight hesitation on the line.

"I'm sorry, Quinn. It doesn't seem to mean a thing. Perhaps the F.B.I. files will help."

"No—only the name Socrates is listed. Here is why I thought you might know. This man is known by that nickname because he always carried around a thick book titled 'The Life And Times Of Socrates.' The book was hollowed out and contained a gun. The volume was traced to an Oliver Talbot of Joliet whose widow says it was given to your prison in nineteen-twenty-two or nineteen-twenty-three. Also on that book was a number. Painted on with a fine brush and white paint, I think. The number was five-nine-A-two-three. Offhand I'd suggest it was a library number and that the book was presented to your prison library."

"Macklin!" the warden roared. "Henry Macklin! Yes, that's it. In nineteen-twenty-six Henry Macklin was serving a life term for murder committed during an armed robbery. An evil man in all ways, who liked crime more than his medical profession and got kicked out for dealing with gangsters. In nineteen-twenty-six—I can give you the exact date, if you like—he was carrying this book on Socrates back to the library. It was hollowed out then, too, with a gun concealed in it. With this gun, he effected an escape. Look here, if you've found Macklin—"

"You want him back," Quinn chuckled. "I'm sorry. If, and when we find him, he'll need more luck than a hollowed-out book and a gun because we intend to electrocute him."

"You'll be doing the world a favor," the warden said. "Shall I send on his record, fingerprints and photo?"

"By all means, and use air mail. Get them right off, Warden. Thanks very much."

Quinn hung up, reached for a sandwich and leaned back smiling broadly.

"Silk," he said, "we've got a target to shoot at. Our friend Socrates has a name. He is Henry Macklin, an escaped convict with a bad record."

"But who is Henry Macklin?" Silk asked.

"Yes, you have a right to ask that," Quinn said in a more sober voice. "I believe he is someone attached to the Norton household. A man whom Dick Norton emulated in every detail. For Macklin also has two identities. One which gives him respect and trust. The other which makes of him a vicious criminal."

"And what is he after?" Silk asked.

Quinn chuckled between sips of coffee.

"Now you're demanding too much. Though I have a hunch. We aren't finished yet, Silk. We've merely taken away one spadeful of earth, but when we're done we'll have dug a grave. For a man named Socrates, Henry Macklin—and another name we probably know better than his other two."

CHAPTER XIII

Old Records



T WAS midnight when Quinn finished his third cup of coffee. He had gone to the library where he could sit before the fireplace, smoke a pipe and think. The weird matter of Dick Norton's double life was beginning to take definite shape.

He finally called

Silk.

"Contact Butch," he said, "and have him take newspaper photos of Dick Norton over to the neighborhood of Bessie Jackson's home. Have him query the neighbors as to whether or not they ever saw young Norton in or near the home of the murdered nurse."

Silk went to the phone and transmitted the message. He walked back to where Quinn was seated.

"He'll get right on it, sir. And Butch says Carol is fine. He knew you'd prob-

ably worry about her."

"She has rare courage," Quinn remarked. "But then, so have you and Butch. If things go well, we shall all have reasons to celebrate tomorrow."

"You know who led young Norton astray then—who tried to kill you and Carol?"

"I think I know, and I'm also fairly certain where the proof lies. There won't be anything else, Silk. You need rest."

"I'll put the car away first," Silk said. "It's still out in front of the house."

Quinn closed his eyes, leaned back and began tracing the whole affair from the moment of Dick Norton's arrest. There was a link missing. The motive of this Henry Macklin, alias Socrates.

Then Quinn sat bolt upright. Someone was approaching the library and the steps were not those of Silk. Quinn relaxed. He had to keep up his pose of a blind man no matter what happened, but he took a firmer grip on his cane.

"Is that you Silk?" he called out. "What's the matter? Wouldn't the car start?"

Someone came into the room and moved up close behind the chair. A heavy voice spoke.

"Yeah, the car started okay, but that butler of yours won't be back until you're a dead man, Quinn. Too bad you can't see me. I'm Stockton. Bennie Stockton. Remember me?"

Quinn jumped up to his feet and swung the heavy cane. He aimed it straight at the burly man who was closing in. Because Bennie Stockton had once boasted he would kill Tony Quinn, the man who had broken his million-dollar racket and sent him to prison. Bennie Stockton whose brains were in his muscles and in the guns he usually carried. Bennie Stockton who was—Death.

Bennie ducked the blow, took the second one on the shoulder and leaped. His weight sent Quinn crashing to the floor. Bennie fastened one hand around Quinn's throat and the fingers began to squeeze. Quinn used his fists, but it was no use. The only man who could have routed Bennie was Butch. They were almost of identical size and strength.

Bennie held Quinn down by the simple expedient of placing a knee against his chest. The big fingers squeezed harder. Bennie was panting and talking. Quinn's lungs were already clamoring

for air, but he understood what Bennie said.

"I wish there was time to do this slow," the brutal killer was boasting. "Yeah—good and slow. I been thinking of it all those years in stir. But now I get to knock you off and I'm paid for it besides. How do you like that, you blind copper's stooge? How do you like it, huh?"

Quinn raised his left hand and Bennie seized it instantly. Then Quinn moved his right fast. He fastened a grip on Bennie's thick shock of hair and twisted as hard as he could. Bennie yowled and squeezed harder. Quinn's hand was growing weaker. He let it drop until he found Bennie's eyes. He gouged at them. Bennie yowled again.

Quinn's idea was to make him cry out as loudly and often as possible. Silk was bound to hear and Silk packed a gun which would equalize the difference between his size and Bennie's. But if Silk was a minute longer, it would be too late.

Suddenly Bennie's grip loosened. He jumped up, dabbing at his inflamed eyes. Then he raced for the nearest window, raised it, and climbed out as Silk came running into the room with drawn gun.

SILK bent over Quinn, saw that he was half-conscious but not badly injured. Then he ran to the window, but it was too late. Bennie had faded into the night. Silk returned to Quinn's side and raised him up.

"I'm all right," Quinn said. "It was a man I sent to prison. He must have been waiting for you to go out and put the car away. Probably had a window jimmied and ready."

"Let me help you up," Silk said. "Of all the times for some crook to carry out his revenge!"

"Bennie," Quinn said weakly, "is a fool. He thought I'd be dead in a moment or so and he talked a little too much. Bennie was paid to come here and kill me. And he was paid by one man, Silk."

"We've got to get Macklin," Silk growled. "And quick, before one of his plans works."

"Oddly enough," Quinn said, "Macklin just showed me the way through Bennie. Silk, lift my head up, and then bash it against the fireplace bricks. Hard enough to open the scalp and maybe raise a nice bump."

"What?" Silk was aghast. "You don't mean that?"

"I do mean it. And you must make this look real. Say Bennie did it. If I pass out—or seem to—phone the Reeves Memorial Hospital and have them send an ambulance. That's the important thing. I must go to that hospital. Meanwhile pack my regalia and a couple of guns in a bag. Take them along. Stay with me, because I may be in considerable danger. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir. All but bashing your head."

"Go on and do it," Quinn urged. "Or I'll do it myself."

Silk grasped Quinn's shoulders, raised him a bit.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said, then rapped Quinn's skull smartly against the bricks.

Quinn moaned once and went limp.

When Silk phoned for an ambulance, he didn't have to pretend his anxiety. He fetched the things from the secret lab, prepared the suitcase and was trying to waken Quinn when the ambulance finally rolled up.

Silk explained to an interne what had happened. There was a quick examination.

"Pulse is good, but you never can tell about these things," the interne said. "There might be a concussion. I'd better take him to the hospital."

"I'm going along," Silk insisted. "I knew you'd do that so I got a few things ready." He kicked the suitcase.

A stretcher was brought and Quinn was carried to the waiting ambulance. Silk walked directly behind the stretcher, one hand resting lightly against the lapels of his coat, two inches from the butt of a gun ready for instant action.

On the way to the hospital Quinn recovered consciousness, or pretended to. Silk never was certain which. Quinn remonstrated mildly, but the interne was adamant.

At the hospital his head was examined and then X-rayed. Finally he was tucked in bed. Silk sat down heavily in a chair beside the bed, as if he dared anyone to try and make him move. He flatly refused to allow any nurses in the room.

"I've taken care of Mr. Quinn for years," he said belligerently. "I know how to handle him, and I intend to do so. In fact, I'm going to lock the door. No telling but that hoodlum who tried to kill him might not come here to finish the job."

After ten minutes of this, Silk and Quinn were left alone. Quinn grinned at him.

"Anyone wants a recommendation for a man to knock him cold, let me know. You did an elegant job. My head aches like a dozen hangovers. See if you can slip out, reach a phone and find out what Butch learned. It's important. And, Silk, leave me your gun. That little idea you had about Bennie or Macklin trying to get me again isn't bad. If another attempt is made, I'm going to shoot to kill and explain afterwards—if I can—how a blind man can shoot straight."

Silk didn't like it, but he followed orders. He was back in five minutes.

"Butch wakened several neighbors," he reported. "One woman—the prying kind who keeps her nose stuck out of the window—took a look at Dick Norton's picture and said she had seen him visiting Bessie at least twice. Not recently though. About a year ago."

"That jibes," Quinn said. "That's about the time Dick Norton started off on his tangent of crime. Now one thing more. Go back to the phone, call Bellevue, and find out what Dick Norton's blood type is."

Silk was gone longer this time. He found Quinn dozing when he returned.

"Norton's blood is classed in group 'O'," Silk said. "Now you'd better rest. . . ."

WHEN Silk awakened Quinn, the hospital was quiet, lights were dimmed, and the few floor nurses were dozing. Quinn got out of bed and donned the regalia of the Black Bat. He had Silk inspect the corridor, locate the stairway and find the quickest route to the hospital office.

"Good," Quinn said. He was strapping burglar tools around his middle as he spoke. "Now remain here. Nobody gets in. Say I'm sleeping and you won't permit a visitor. Not even a doctor. I'll be gone about half an hour. No longer, I hope. Thank heaven you didn't notify McGrath of this attack on me or he'd be here to gum up the whole affair. We'll pray the hospital didn't make a report. Wish me luck, Silk. A great deal depends upon what I find."

The Black Bat left the room, heard Silk lock the door behind him, and made his way to the stairs. He went down them on rubber-soled shoes without a

sound. It was a ticklish business, for no hospital ever really sleeps and there was danger of meeting a nurse or a doctor at any moment.

When the Black Bat reached the hospital office only the front part was lit, and the room where records were kept was darkened. The Black Bat examined the lock briefly, opened it with a well-selected master key, and stepped in. He locked the door behind him and went to work.

Here his uncanny vision stood him well, for it would have been impossible to use any lights without fear of detection. He studied filing cabinets, but they dated back only a dozen years. He went to the superintendent's office and sat behind his desk for a moment. Finally he picked up the phone. It was answered instantly.

"This is Dr. Scott," he said, and grinned at the nameplate on the desk. "Do you know where the old files, case histories, are kept?"

"Why yes, sir. In the basement."

"Good. Go down there and see if I locked the door this afternoon. I'm afraid I left it wide open. Please don't bother to call me back. If it's locked, well and good. If it isn't just lock it. Thank you. I couldn't sleep for worrying about it."

He hung up quickly, sped to the door and opened it a crack. He could see the exit from the main office and a clerk hurried out. The Black Bat slipped into the corridor and followed. He had often risked creating an alarm in his startling hood, but never quite so openly as this. It had to be done. He was in a hurry, and usual methods were too slow.

The clerk went down a flight of steps, glanced in an awed and frightened manner at a door labeled "MORGUE" and walked a little faster. She reached a door, rattled it, and said something under her breath. When she returned, she passed within two paces of where the Black Bat was hidden, but he wasn't worried. The door to the morgue was between him and the clerk.

Five minutes later the Black Bat was studying the files of nineteen-twenty-one. He found the record of Mrs. Norton's stay at the hospital and the birth of Richard Norton, but he was already familiar with these. What interested him most was the file of a Mrs. Henry Macklin who had given birth to a son

on the same day that Dick Norton had been born.

But the results listed on Mrs. Macklin's file were rather different. The son had been born dead and the mother had died four hours later. There was a harsh notation to the effect that both had been buried in Potter's Field because the husband and father could not be contacted.

The most interesting and vital part of the files consisted of two signatures. Dr. Rolf, who had attended Mrs. Norton, had also taken care of Mrs. Macklin. The nurse in both cases had been Bessie Jackson.

The Black Bat located another file on Paul Norton who had died here. This was also interesting.

The Black Bat's gloved fingers replaced the files. He made his stealthy way back to his room and tapped a signal. Silk admitted him instantly. The Black Bat made no effort to remove his regalia.

"I'm going out again," he said. "This time I may be gone a while. I know how risky it is but, believe me, the whole thing is necessary. Hold the fort as best you can. If anyone gets in, say I was pettish about staying here, that you fell asleep and I must have slipped out. Blind or not blind, that's what I must have done."

CHAPTER XIV

Blood Types



PROPPED up in bed, Mrs. Lila Norton looked drawn and pale. Her movements were listless, her voice filled with despair. The night table lamp glowed feebly.

Dr. Roger Fisk sat beside the bed, calmly stirring the contents of a glass.

"You've got to fight, Mrs. Norton," Dr. Fisk said. "I admit that you've been through a lot, but even so you owe it to everyone who loves you to find the will to go on. Dick's misfortune won't last forever."

"They are going to execute him," she said in a low voice. "And I wouldn't stop them if I could, Doctor. Richard is

evil. He has murdered three people. That is my fault. Mine, because his father cared nothing about him as the boy grew up. I know Richard realized and resented this. I tried to make it up, but I couldn't. Now he has taken three lives and they are going to take his—deservedly so. But I am his mother. I brought him into the world. He is my responsibility and I cannot go on. I don't want to go on."

"Please, Mrs. Norton," Dr. Fisk begged. "Think of Fletcher, and Max."

"Think of them?" she scoffed. "Why should I, when they'll rejoice if I die. Doctor, do you recall what I said about changing my will? My money cannot be of any use to Richard. The others do not deserve it. Tomorrow I shall call in Attorney Hammond and have him make a new will leaving my entire estate to agencies which work to prevent such things as this from happening. People who will take boys like Richard and put them on the right path."

"I'll tell Hammond in the morning," Dr. Fisk said soothingly. "It's a good and generous idea. I gave you a sleeping tablet a few moments ago. A light one. If it does not work, please drink the contents of this glass. In the morning you will be fresh for your conference with Hammond. I'll be going now. Good night, Mrs. Norton."

Fisk arose, put the glass on the table within reach of his patient, and beside it he placed a bottle of white tablets. He picked up his bag, snapped off the night light and walked softly from the room.

Mrs. Norton lay there in the darkness for a long time. At least it seemed a long time to her. Sleep refused to come. She raised herself finally and reached for the glass of sleeping potion. A black gloved hand came out of nowhere and encircled her wrist gently. A soothing and familiar voice reached her.

"Do not drink that, Mrs. Norton," the Black Bat said. "Dr. Fisk made it much too strong. In fact, if you drink it you will die, and everyone will say you committed suicide."

"Suicide?" she gasped.

"Yes. Not a pleasant word, is it? But that's what Dr. Fisk intended everyone to believe. You see, he put twenty of those white tablets from that bottle into the water. It would have looked as though you had done that and then taken them. After all, you have been

going through a great deal and if you were found dead, by your own hand, nobody would be particularly surprised."

"But Dr. Fisk! I can't understand—"

"I'm here to make you understand, Mrs. Norton. You know you can trust me. I've been here for a little while. I was here before Dr. Fisk arrived. In fact, when I learned he was on his way over, I moved fast. I heard you tell him that your husband showed little interest in Richard when he was a boy. Is that true?"

"Yes," she said. "It's almost as if—as if he knew how Richard would turn out."

The Black Bat laughed softly. "Mrs. Norton, no child is born anything at all. Babies are alike. It's how they develop later on in life that counts. Some are weak and easily impressed. More easily led. Richard became one of these. Possibly because your husband took so little interest in him. Tell me—you were very ill when Richard was born, were you not?"

"I almost died, as I told you," she answered dispiritedly. "I wish I had, and Richard along with me."

"I think you'll change your mind about that," the Black Bat said in a kindly voice. "Your husband loved you very much. That I know. He would have done anything to save you. Mrs. Norton, he went to extremes, but you lived and he was satisfied."

"What on earth do you mean by that?" she asked.

"Your son, the one born to you in nineteen-twenty-one at Reeves Memorial Hospital, didn't live, Mrs. Norton. He died minutes after birth. You were unconscious and knew nothing about this, but your husband did and so did Dr. Rolf. You were in considerable danger of dying. Dr. Rolf had, only a few moments before, delivered a son to a Mrs. Macklin who did not survive.

"So Dr. Rolf had a live, motherless baby on his hands, a baby whose father was in prison for life. Who wouldn't have a chance. And he had a mother whose son had just died, and when she learned the truth she might die too."

MRS. NORTON sat bolt upright. "Go on," she ordered quickly.

"So Dr. Rolf did the thing he believed to be best. With your husband's permission, of course. He substituted the Macklin baby for yours and your son

was buried as the Macklin child. Richard is not your son. He knows that now. He has known it for some time."

"But are you certain?"

"I have what amounts to proof, Mrs. Norton. The hospital records for one thing. The murder of the nurse who cared for you as another. Blood tests as well. I found records of them. Your type is 'A'. Your husband's was 'B'. Richard is an 'O' type. An 'O' type child cannot be born to parents who are 'A' and 'B'. The fact that Richard's father is known is likewise proof. He happens to be Dr. Fisk, though that isn't his name at all."

"Dr. Fisk is Richard's father?"

"Exactly. And that is why he tried to kill you. At first by breaking your heart over Richard, but when Richard seemed destined for a quick trip to the electric chair while you still lived, he had to do something about that. Also you told him you intended removing Richard as your heir and that also led Fisk to more speed."

"It seems—I don't know what to say. How did this Macklin become Dr. Fisk? Is he really a doctor?"

"Oh yes, indeed. He practised medicine for some time, then became what was known as a gangster's physician. That got him removed from the medical profession although he managed to escape jail and keep from getting fingerprinted. Later, as Henry Macklin, he became an out-and-out crook and was sent to Joliet from which he escaped years ago."

"And he took the name of Fisk and went back to practising?"

Mrs. Norton was highly interested now and there was nothing weak about her voice.

"Macklin constantly sought an opportunity to get back into practise, but he needed someone else's name, diploma and license. He took those of a real Dr. Fisk. Perhaps Macklin murdered him; maybe he died a natural death. We'll probably never know. At any rate Macklin took Fisk's name, closed up the practise Fisk had developed in Chicago and came East. He had all he needed now, the name and reputation of a good physician. He was admitted to practise here."

"And then he—met Richard?"

"Macklin came here soon after your husband's death. Up to then the nurse, Bessie Jackson, had received blackmail

and I believe your husband paid it. To keep secret the truth about Richard's birth. However, when your husband died, Bessie's blackmail stopped but she'd grown lazy and alcoholic and looked for another angle. Somehow, probably through underworld friends, she traced the father of the child you reared as yours. She tracked him down and approached him. That was what he had been looking for and he willingly paid.

"His next step was to study the situation. This he did with a skill he had developed as a crook. Oh, he had a good practise, but he was essentially a crook and no crook likes to work for an honest living. Especially when there was a fortune such your estate represents, waiting and ready for his harvest.

"He looked up Richard, and told him the truth, that he had been stolen to gratify a rich woman whose child had died. Macklin would know how to do that. Then he introduced Richard to the life and excitement of a crook. He led him on and on until Richard was pulling important jobs. Fisk—or Macklin—got the loot. Macklin didn't care if Richard was caught so long as you were alive. That was important, because Richard's troubles might break your health. If Richard inherited, Macklin could have wheedled him into handing over the entire fortune."

"I see," Mrs. Norton said. "And if Richard didn't hand over the estate I might have left him, this man—Dr. Fisk or Macklin—would have proved Richard was his son and taken the money anyway."

"No, anything but that. Therein lay Dr. Fisk's weakness. If Richard was ever proved not to be your son, then Richard was not your heir and would get nothing. Fisk had to avoid such an exposure, and he did so with considerable zeal. In fact he attempted to murder a good friend of mine who thought it his duty to investigate Richard's past thoroughly."

"You must mean that blind District Attorney."

"Yes—Tony Quinn. He knows all about this now, but it happens he is in a hospital after being attacked by a man Dr. Fisk sent to kill him."

"Dr. Fisk told me about that. He spoke of it in such a tragic manner."

Mrs. Norton kept talking until she suddenly realized she was alone. The

Black Bat had vanished into the darkness.

CHAPTER XV

Final Crisis



NOW the Black Bat drove Tony Quinn's car as fast as he dared, back to the hospital, parked it, and slipped into the building. He reached his room and was gratified to see that no excitement prevailed. He tapped on the door and Silk let him in. Silk was sweating, copi-

ously.

"Get on the phone in one of the public booths," the Black Bat said, "and have Butch come here as fast as he can travel. He is to come to this room without being seen and he is to bring with him the regalia of the Black Bat which we had made to fit him. Speed is absolutely essential on your part and his."

Quinn removed his black clothing while Silk went to phone. By the time Silk returned, Quinn was in bed, his bandaged head against the pillow, his sightless eyes staring at the ceiling.

"Butch is on the way," Silk said. "What gives, anyhow?"

"I'm about to be murdered." Quinn grinned. "By the eminent Dr. Roger Fisk, alias Henry Macklin, alias Socrates, alias something else. When he enters, you can stand by for trouble, but Butch is to handle it if he gets here in time."

"Dr. Fisk?" Silk gaped. "But how—why—"

"I'll tell you later. Right now we've got to prepare for him. He won't fail to come, gushing all over the place because his good friend Tony Quinn was attacked by a bad man. Oh, yes—he'll decide I need a little treatment. Possibly strychnine or cyanide, though I suspect it will be something which leaves little or no trace. And Fisk can say I died of a brain hemorrhage brought on by the attack."

Silk drew his gun, snapped off the safety and picked up a magazine. He folded the gun between the pages.

"If Socrates can carry a gun this way, so can I and I'll start the shooting the moment I see a hypo."

"Unless Butch gets here first. Now relax. The way you look Fisk would be wise in a moment."

It was half an hour later when a nurse entered the room and made a routine temperature reading. She entered it on the chart, smiled at Silk, and started for the door. She stepped aside quickly as Dr. Fisk appeared.

"Well, well," Fisk said, "I thought you were too tough for this sort of thing, Mr. Quinn. It's Fisk—Mrs. Norton's physician. I heard you were here, and I thought I'd drop in."

"Nice of you," Quinn said. "I have no physician of my own. Perhaps you'd like to take over the case?"

"Delighted."

Fisk moved briskly up to the bed. He used his stethoscope without knowing a gun was trained on his back. He examined the temperature chart and nodded.

"Everything seems to be progressing fine, though in these concussion cases you never can tell. Rest is the best thing, Mr. Quinn. I'll give you a mild shot. Or a pill if you'd rather have that."

"A hypo is all right," Quinn said, and smiled. "I could use a little sleep. My head aches terribly."

"Of course, of course. A definite symptom."

Fisk opened his kit and removed a hypodermic needle. He plunged the needle into an unlabeled vial and drew up a quantity of colorless fluid. Then he doused a bit of cotton with alcohol, exposed Quinn's arm and poised the needle.

"I wouldn't do that, Doctor," a voice said. "Because if the needle gets to within an inch of Mr. Quinn's arm, he won't die. You will!"

Fisk turned quickly. The Black Bat stood with his back against the door and there was a large gun trained on Fisk.

"Drop the hypo, Doctor," the Black Bat said. "Or shall I call you Henry Macklin or perhaps Socrates?"

The hypo fell out of Fisk's hand. He looked at Silk, who also held an exposed gun. He glanced at Quinn and then unexpectedly made a dash for the door. The man in the Black Bat's regalia didn't move. Fisk launched a punch at his jaw, connected, and saw it shaken off as if it were nothing more than a flea bite. Then an enormous gloved fist cracked against Fisk's jaw. It lifted him completely off the floor, hurled him across Quinn's bed and put him to sleep.

Quinn nodded at Butch behind the black hood and signaled that his work was well done. Butch promptly vanished.

Quinn sat up.

"Silk," he called, "will you get this mess off my bed? Then start yelling, as if this had just happened. I'll put up a fuss, too. And remember, the Black Bat was here long enough to tell us the whole story of Dr. Fisk. . . ."

PROBABLY the most surprised person to listen to Quinn's story was Captain McGrath.

Fisk, in handcuffs, was slumped in one of the chairs. McGrath tilted Fisk's head back.

"Now tell the truth. Quinn was in bed. Silk was right here in this room. And the Black Bat was here too?"

"Of course he was here," Fisk groaned. "But the Black Bat can't testify against me. He can't appear in court without removing that hood. What have I to be afraid of?"

"Me," Quinn said simply. . . .

Later, over coffee and cake in the Black Bat's secret laboratory, Quinn told the whole story to Carol, Silk and Butch. He repeated what he had said to Mrs. Norton.

"The old lady perked up. She seemed more relieved about Richard not being her son than grieved over the news that her real son had died at birth. Fisk, of course, directed the whole thing. Partly out of revenge. He hated Mrs. Norton because she had taken his son, though I imagine visions of her fortune softened his anger somewhat.

"He set out to get her money by using Richard. He sought Richard out and soon convinced him he was the son of an infamous crook and a mother who wasn't above stealing, that he had been stolen and that he was entitled to the Norton estate no matter what happened. Richard, being impressionable and resentful of the inattention Paul Norton had showed him before he died, was an easy conquest for Macklin. Paul Norton, of course, knew of Richard's antecedents; knew he was not his own son and couldn't warm up to the boy.

"Fisk took Richard around to see Bessie who must have had some proof of his birth, and convinced him. Whatever that proof was, it vanished with Bessie's murder, and so did whatever papers she

had prepared denouncing Fisk if he ever succeeded in killing her. I began to suspect Fisk right after Bessie died."

"Why?" Silk asked. "There wasn't a clue that I could see."

"Bessie died from drinking a poisoned glass of whisky, died with a vial half full of poison clutched in her hand. It was improbable that she would have held the vial while drinking the poisoned highball. I wondered about that, and I still believe that Fisk poisoned her, told her so, and held out this vial as the antidote. For Bessie certainly told where she had hidden all her blackmail evidence. She would have trusted a doctor who told her the vial contained an antidote. Nurses obey a doctor's orders without the slightest question.

"Fisk, of course, arranged to send part of Reeves Memorial Hospital down my neck and McGrath's. He simply went upstairs to Mrs. Norton's room, stayed there a few seconds and made certain she was sleeping under the influence of a narcotic. Then he slipped out the back way, rushed to the hospital and arrived before we did. Max Imlay looked good as the killer there. Possibly Fisk knew he would be suspected, and chose such a way to kill me.

"The affair at the stairway of Dick Norton's apartment was also arranged by Fisk, whom Fletcher Townsend innocently warned about my going to the apartment again. The street shooting may have included Dr. Fisk. I think it did because one man took good care to stay out of sight. Fisk then grew desperate and hired a killer. That didn't work, so he tried to kill me himself. That hypo was loaded with poison."

"Fisk almost got himself loaded with bullets." Butch laughed. "I never saw Silk with such a nervous trigger finger. And then the dope of a Doc rushed me. Boy, was that a fool stunt!"

"I doubt Fisk knew what he was doing," Quinn said. "That was a healthy sock you gave him. At first we thought he was dead."

"Yes, I know." Butch sobered. "When I thought about the way he tried to push Carol out of the window at Cheney's place, I added a little more power."

"He had it coming," Quinn said. "Cheney, of course, took a bus to the Norton house, failed to see Mrs. Norton, and started walking back to the bus stop. On the way he saw Dr. Fisk turn into

the estate and Fisk also saw him. They recognized one another and Fisk realized he would have to kill Cheney before he could talk. Cheney had seen Fisk and Richard Norton together. Captain McGrath will find the stolen goods among Fisk's possessions. The whole affair is concluded."

"What about Richard, now that Fisk seems to be the ringleader?" Carol asked.

"Be in court day after tomorrow," Quinn said. "I've asked for a quick trial."

Carol was in one of the back rows when court opened.

She saw Quinn arise, hand Silk his

white cane, and move unseeingly to face the jury box.

"Your Honor, Gentlemen of the Jury," Quinn said. "The man known as Richard Norton is charged with first degree murder. I intend to prove that he is a wanton, cold-blooded killer who selected his violent way of life because that is what he wanted. I intend to show that he killed for the thrill of killing and robbed for the thrill of being a thief. I intend, Gentlemen of the Jury, to demand that he be sent to the electric chair and I am certain you will agree that he deserves no other fate. Call the first witness, please. . . ."



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THE MURDER MAKER

Another Exciting Tony Quinn Mystery Novel

By G. WAYMAN JONES

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Johnny expected them to come and take him for a ride—at any moment!

THE FRIGHTENED COMEDIAN

By JACK KOFOED

It was no laughing matter for funny man Johnny September when he was on the receiving end of a grim death threat!

JOHNNY SEPTEMBER wandered restlessly about the apartment. He'd light a cigarette, puff half a dozen times, and crush the almost full sized butt in an ash tray. Then, he'd go to the red-leather-covered bar, and pour another bourbon.

Jake O'Connor stood that for half an hour, then spoke up.

"Johnny," he said, "you're headin' for a straightjacket. What are you knocking yourself out for? The Club Montmartre is paying you three thousand dollars a week. Dorothy Seaton, who has as much dough as the Readers' Digest has circulation, wants to marry you. You're holding the world by the tail, and what hap-

pens? You act like a shell-shocked dough-foot right out of a foxhole."

"You know why I'm frightened," Johnny said. "Ear Mentone and his boys are due to get out of Sing Sing pretty soon. Christy Ryan, the cigarette girl at the old Moon Club, said I put the finger on them. They're killers. No wonder I'm scared."

Jake wasn't worried about that, because he thought most gang stuff was kind of phony. Actually, he was more bothered about the Seaton girl marrying Johnny, and taking him out of show business. Losing ten percent of his star's three grand a week would be a terrible blow, particularly with the O'Connor kids going to college. Jake didn't mention that.

He just said: "If you feel that way, why don't you ask for police protection?"

"Police! Police! They couldn't assign somebody to watch me twenty-four hours a day for the rest of my life, could they? You just sit there, and think this doesn't amount to anything. Well, it does. I know those guys. They won't stop at anything. I can't hide out, because I'm in the papers every day."

"And, if you're not, Dorothy Seaton is," said Jake. "If you ever marry her, what a three-ringed circus that's going to be."

Johnny paid no attention. "I dream of them picking me up some night, and taking me for a ride out in the country, and cutting me up. No wonder I'm shaky."

O'Connor chewed on his cigar.

"There's nobody wants you taken care of more than I do, Johnny," he said. "Ten percent of your three grand a week is something I need every seven days. Something's got to be done. Even if the boys, or Christy Ryan, don't get you, that bourbon will, and I'll be out of luck either way. More guys are ruined by bottles than guns."

STILL nervously pacing the room, Johnny September didn't answer. He walked around O'Connor's apartment restlessly. He'd go to the window, and look down into the street, then back to the bar, fumbling with his glass. Fear was kicking his stomach around. Jake might laugh, but he couldn't. He knew how tough "Ear" Mentone and "Whacky" Sillgard and Joe Carlo were. Johnny had not hurt them, but they thought he had, and that was enough. As for Christy—maybe he hadn't acted as fairly to her as he should have, but nothing he had done called for a killing.

"I'm a sap," he thought. "Look at the guys at Okinawa and Iwo Jima and in the Bulge. They were just as scared as I am, but they went ahead, and did what they had to do. Dorothy thinks I'm game just because I'm big." He took another drink.

"Don't worry about me, Jake," he said aloud. "I'll be all right."

O'Connor yawned. "As your agent," he said, "I could be your bodyguard, too. When I was with the Marines in the First War, I was a sharpshooter with anything that went bang. But, the bottle!" He shook his head.

Johnny September still felt the quiver of fear in his stomach, but he grinned. "I'll be all right," he repeated. "Come on.

It's time for me to go to work. . . ."

There were zebra stripes on the walls of the Club Montmartre, and on the upholstery of the chairs and the divans along the walls. The waiters wore white mess jackets, heavy with gold braid, and the prices on the menu were as high as a Constellation crossing the Rockies. Despite this, the velvet ropes were always up, and a man had to be a celebrity, or nimble with a ten-dollar bill to get a table. This was because Johnny September was giving out with songs, dances and witty sayings on the Montmartre's floor.

"What a party!" Johnny said into the microphone. "I've drunk so many peoples' health I've ruined my own!"

The club's well dressed habitués guffawed. Johnny executed a few dance steps. These comprised his entire routine, though the crowd didn't know it. He sang a few bars in a two-note range, but his voice sounded good.

Walter Jones, the columnist of the *Daily Express*, dropped into the zebra striped chair next to Jake O'Connor, the booking agent. "That big, good looking ginny of yours is the funniest act in show business," he said, "but won't he ever find out that distilleries can make whisky faster than he can drink it?"

Jake, who was thickening around the middle, and getting cottony about the ears, took a sip of his bourbon, and said nothing.

Johnny flashed a smile, acknowledging the applause of his devotees. It was a real smile, unless one noticed the dark dents of his eyes, and the hollows under the cheekbones. He cleared his throat, and assumed a serious expression. Doubletalk was his forte.

"My girl said to the bus driver that anyone could see the spastum is definitely consequential, if there is not an overflow of the under. Well, the bus driver was a liddle dazzis when his wagon went fan-num carlo, depending on the condition of the reflexes when the prehensile is spemo, and the fellow is making a good salary."

The comedian waited until the last insistent handclappers ceased smacking moist palms together, then looked at his watch. "It's after eleven folks," he said. "We'll be back at one with an entirely new show, new gags, new numbers. If you think you've enjoyed yourself, wait until you get the check. 'Night, everybody."

The band went into a medley, glasses

clinked, people at the ringside began discussing Johnny September. Johnny went backstage to change his clothes.

"Somebody ought to put a quarter in the air conditioning machine," he said to a chorus girl. Then looked at her a second time, because he did not recognize her. "You new here?"

"It's my first night," the girl answered.

"I love you," he told her, as he loosened his tie. Johnny said that to every woman he met. "Good grief, it's hot. This is too much like work for a stingy three thousand dollars a week."

He went into his dressing-room and uncorked a new bottle of Scotch. He knew that outside they were all talking about him.

OUTSIDE, Marty Harris, front man for Steve Zultosky, who owned the Montmartre, was rubbing his hands.

"Jammed," he said to Paul, the maitre d'hotel. "And, do you know why?"

Paul accepted the cue overlings always throw to underlings. Paul knew why the place was jammed, but he also knew the proper thing to say. "The food is good, the place is run right," he said, ignoring the right answer, about which Marty Harris was preparing to orate.

"Food—run right!" Harris mimicked. "It's Johnny September. He'll outdraw anybody in the business. The men love him. The women love him. Eight guys flew in from Buffalo tonight, a champagne party, just to catch Johnny. And, the babes—you're answering the 'phone for him all night."

Paul nodded solemnly as if Marty's statement was some sort of divine revelation. "I guess you're right, Mr. Harris." He darted away.

"Good evening, Miss Seaton." He pretended to look accusingly at the lovely newcomer. "You missed Johnny's show tonight, the first time since he opened."

Dorothy Seaton surveyed the room from under heavy lids. "I know. I haven't laughed since last night, and that's bad when you're used to a Johnny diet. Get me a table. If I stand here another minute I'll drop."

Paul took her to the table where Jake O'Connor and Walter Jones were sitting. They made a pretense of rising, and then slid back against the cushions. Jake O'Connor had lost his voice twenty years ago through a bungled tonsillectomy. When he knew he'd never sing again, he turned

booking agent. Jake sweated through that business for years, collecting five dollar commissions on fifty dollar acts that tried to do a Houdini on him pay nights. Then, along came Johnny September, and success.

"Jake," said Dorothy suddenly, "I'm going to marry Johnny."

O'Connor looked up. "I was wondering when you were going to say that." He was wondering much more acutely how he and his family would get along without his manager's and booker's share of that \$3,000 a week. Now, this character with the millions and the body was going to take him out of circulation.

"Well, well, well," said Johnny September, bulking suddenly at their elbows. "My two favorite people." He pretended to salaam. "Jake, you don't look any sharper than a wet towel. What's wrong?" He kissed his fingers. "Angel pie, I kiss my fingers right up to the elbow."

"What'll it be?" Jake asked.

"Bourbon. You forget? What a question?"

"Darling," Dorothy said, "I—"

"Pardon me, baby," Johnny broke in. "There's Barney Chadwick. I want to say hello. He owns the Diamond Cat in Chicago, and I can't pass up a contact like that."

"Table-hopper!" sulked Dorothy.

Marty Harris came over. "They're havin' a big party for the wounded guys at St. Paul, and they're yellin' for you. The Army Special Services major just called."

"Johnny!" Dorothy pouted. "You're not going to leave me, are you?"

"I won't be gone more than an hour," the comic said. "You stay here with Jake. You can catch me in the second show, and we'll spend the rest of the evening together. Okay?"

"Do I have anything to say about it?"

"No," said Johnny, gulping down another bourbon, "but you do about pretty nearly everything else. Good-by, honey chile. See you in an hour. . . ."

The funny part of it was that, when Johnny September reached the hospital, there wasn't any party, and the Special Services major hadn't called. That was bad. It couldn't be leading to a stickup, because everybody knew he never wore expensive jewelry, or carried more than twenty bucks. The Broadway columnists had a lot of fun kidding about that.

Suddenly Johnny's heart almost stopped. Since he had talked with Jake,

and lapped up so many bourbons, he had shaken loose from fear for a moment. Now, it came back. He was afraid again—horribly afraid. His hands shook, and sweat beaded his forehead.

Johnny almost asked the major to send an armed guard with him, but that would have seemed silly. Frightened as he was, he couldn't have the major, who wore Distinguished Service Cross and Purple Heart ribbons, think anything like that. He left the hospital. It was dark in that block—dark enough for anything to happen. No taxi, of course. There never was when you wanted one.

There was a bar around the corner. Johnny decided to go there, and telephone the Club Montmartre to send the boss's car for him. Come to think of it, even a taxi might be a plant. He looked around carefully, then started down the street.

Someone stepped from a shadowy doorway, and said: "Johnny!"

HIS heart slammed into his throat, and he went cold all over.

"This is Christy Ryan, Johnny," the voice continued. "I guess you remember me, don't you?"

"Sure, sure, I do, Christy."

"You know you didn't do right by me, Johnny. You made me think you loved me, and then walked out. That was a very mean trick, just because you hit the big time, and didn't think I was good enough for you."

Johnny was thinking: It's too dark to see. Maybe she's got a gun. Maybe she'll blast me. Good night! Why did I come here, anyway? Sweat dripped from his armpits.

"Don't be afraid, Johnny," the girl said. "I wouldn't ask for a seat in the chair by killin' you, even if you deserve it. As a matter of fact, I'm going to do you a favor. I'm gonna tip you off that they let Joe Carlo and Whacky Sillgard come out of Sing Sing yesterday. They didn't have to bother with Ear Mentone. He's buried up there."

Johnny September sucked in a long, whistling breath.

"Sure, I know you're scared, Johnny," she went on, "and nobody ever had a better right to be."

"But, I never did anything to them," the comic wailed. "I didn't turn them in."

"Sure, you didn't, but they think you did, and that's the same difference. I told them you were the squealer, Johnny.

You'll get killed, and nobody can point the finger at me. That's pretty smart, don't you think, my sweet?"

"Yes," he said dully. "Smart. Sure. I guess I've got it coming to me, Christy, but even knowing that doesn't make me any less scared. There's no use running any more. I know when I'm licked."

Johnny September walked away. The lights of the bar flickered. He opened the door, and went in. He didn't know whether or not he wanted a drink. He just wanted to be by himself for a little while, and wonder if he had much more time to live.

The barroom was empty except for a shabby, and slightly drunk man. "Double bourbon, please," Johnny said. The drunk looked up. He had a thin face, except for flabs of flesh that hung down under his chin.

"Hey, you bartender," he mumbled. "Gimme some service, will you?"

"Just a minute, sir," the bartender answered, then under his breath: "What a lush!"

Johnny leaned against the bar. He was six feet tall, and had a sort of Gregory Peck—Perry Como look, if you can get a picture like that. Black hair, and blue eyes, which don't make sense except in Irish girls, and shoulders Max Baer wouldn't have been ashamed of. He picked up his glass, and swished the contents until the ice tinkled.

The bartender moved down toward the drunk. The door opened, and another man came in. He wore a trench coat, stippled with raindrops. He had a mustache that looked like a line of eyebrow pencil across his upper lip.

Johnny thought the newcomer looked familiar, but he couldn't be sure. A night club comedian meets a lot of people, and sometimes after a dozen bourbons, faces and names get mixed up. Anyway, this guy looked like the fumbled portrait of a gigolo and killer. His eyes had a flat look, and his lower lip was thick and red.

The drunk had just reached for his rye when this character came in. He turned around very slowly, and somehow or other he didn't look as bleary as he had a moment before. Johnny thought: He knows this fellow, and doesn't like him. But, New York is full of people who don't like each other, and there's no jail sentence for hate if you don't translate it into action with fists or guns. It wasn't any of Johnny September's business, anyway.

The drunk reached under his coat, as though he was going to scratch an itching rib, but his hand came out with a gun in it. The whole thing might have been a slow motion picture, but Johnny's mind was acting in slow motion, too. Maybe it was the bourbon. The drunk squeezed the trigger. Somehow the gun didn't make as much noise as might have been expected, but the bullet hit the newcomer just above the left eyebrow. It was messy, but not in the least dramatic. The man was dead before he hit the floor. There was blood all over him, and all over the floor, too.

The drunk—he must have been pretending, because he couldn't have shot that way unless he was sober—slipped off the stool.

"You don't know me, do you, Johnny?" he asked.

"No," answered the comic. "I never saw you before."

The killer slid the gun back into his shoulder holster. "If you ever see me again, don't remember. This guy don't look pretty, does he? You'll look worse."

He walked across the room, and through the door without looking back. Johnny September now looked at the man on the floor. His forehead seemed to have caved in under the impact of the bullet. The comic shivered, and turned toward the door.

"Hey," said the bartender, "you better wait for the cops. They won't like it if you walk off like this."

"I'll like it less if I stay here," Johnny answered. He closed the door very softly behind him as the bartender went to the telephone to call the Homicide squad.

THE murder set the fear complex stirring again. It brought back memories of the gangsters he had known when he started in show business. They were ruthless, and didn't think any more of killing a man than of betting ten bucks on a horse. Of course, this murder didn't have anything to do with him, but if the gunman was caught, and Johnny had to be a witness, somebody beside Joe and Whacky might want to rub him out.

Back in 1939 Johnny was twenty years old, and driving a hack. He was making enough money to live on, but there was only one thing he could always get starry eyed over. Show business. He could sing a little and dance a little, and tell a story pretty well. Maybe show business wasn't in his blood, but he was sure making his

own transfusions. When Johnny knocked off at six o'clock, it didn't take much effort to talk him into an impromptu show for the drivers who were coming on duty.

Then it happened. Whacky Sillgard and Joe Carlo, who fronted the Moon Club, Ear Mentone's joint, heard Johnny telling a story. They heard it only because they ran into the Purple Cab garage to beat the heat fanned up when they shot Lefty Carter to death. A coincidence, as they say, but a coincidence that changed Johnny's life.

Carlo told Johnny he was a very funny guy, and asked if he would like to quit hacking, and do some night club work. Johnny started to laugh that off until one of the boys told him who Carlo was. Then he nodded, not knowing it was like signing his life away. But, signing his life away was only part of what Johnny September would have done to get into show business.

At first they had Johnny as a sort of host at the Moon Club, because, naturally, he had no routine, or act. Carlo paid Jack Silver, a gagman, to write out a script for Johnny, and soon Johnny was up in front of the mike, clowning with all the poise of an old-timer. His bosses paid him fifty dollars a week, and in the first hour he was there he saw the Moon Club was a hangout for the mob. So, what? The spotlight was hitting him, wasn't it?

The mob loved Johnny. The broken-nosed characters, the beady-eyed rod-carriers and the slick sharpies all went for his stuff. They were so pro-Johnny that if a customer took the kid's jokes deadpan, Sillgard or Carlo or Liver Frank would make a personal issue of it. Many a time a gentleman was boffed, because he did not get hysterical over Johnny September.

After the comedian had been there for three months, Danny Edwards, an agent, told Johnny he could get him a hundred a week at the Cabin Terrace. After the agent had gone, the cigarette girl drifted over.

"You wanta be a dead pigeon?" she asked.

"Meaning what?"

"Why, Johnny," mocked the girl, mocking his all embracing stare. "You been here three months, and this is the first time you've even taken a look at me."

"I guess I've had my eye on my career," he said. "Tell me two things. What's your name, beautiful, and what do you mean, do I want to be a dead pigeon?"

The girl gave Johnny a pack of cigarettes from her tray.

"I shouldn't be talking to you," she said, "but this may make it look legitimate. Take the cigarettes, and reach slow for the change. I'm Christy Ryan, Carlo's girl. You can call me at the number written inside the match box. So long now."

Johnny shrugged, and watched the girl's departing figure. It was very nice. Everything was nice. Johnny walked over to where Carlo was sitting with a party.

"Can I see you for a minute, Mr. Carlo?" he asked.

"Sure, sure. But, first, say somepin funny for these friends of mine. Say somepin funny."

"I'll be on in a few minutes, and then I will," said Johnny. "I'd like to get out of my contract here, Mr. Carlo. I can get twice as much at the Cabin Terrace. I know you gave me my start, but you can always get somebody else. Okay, Mr. Carlo?"

Joe Carlo smiled. "No, Johnny. It ain't okay. We like you. You stay. Fifty bucks is enough dough for a funny man to earn."

"It's a good break, and I want to take it," insisted Johnny.

Carlo was still smiling. "You stay. Give me your mother's address, and I'll send her a case of whisky. Tomorrow you can have a car all day, and Fat Garcia as chauffeur. You stay, Johnny."

Johnny shook his head. "This is my two weeks notice. Two weeks from Tuesday I blow."

Carlo polished the fingernails of one hand against the lapels of his coat. Then, he motioned slightly. Three waiters and three hangers-on came over.

"Take Johnny downstairs," Joe Carlo said. "I gotta speak to him."

The little room under the dance floor had only four walls and a chair. "Sit down," Carlo said. Johnny hesitated. A hand-shot out, and five angry red marks splayed out on Johnny's face. He pulled back his fist, but a hand grabbed it. He was spun around, and another hand clipped him on the side of the mouth. Furious, Johnny jerked back. Two of the waiters came in close when Carlo spoke.

"Hold it," he said. "Johnny, we like you. Don't quit. Don't run away, either. We got boys in Spokane and Fort Worth and Miami. You ain't got a chance. Wherever you go, we find you."

Johnny straightened his tie, and rubbed the sore spot on his cheek. "What makes

you think I'll go on being funny?" he asked.

Joe Carlo lit a cigar, then dashed the glowing end against his palm. "I don't want to do this to your eye, Johnny. You'll keep on being funny!"

WHEN a puzzled, angry Johnny left the Moon Club after the last show, a voice from the shadows called to him.

"Don't turn around. Get into the cab on the corner, drive around the block, and pick me up. This is Christy."

Christy sat close to Johnny in the cab. "You're knocking your head against a stone wall, kid. You'll have to keep on working for them." She looked up into his face, and yielding to the impulse, he kissed her.

"What shall I do?" he asked. "This is all new to me."

"You can't fight 'em. Stick around for a while. Take it easy. Maybe they'll get tired of you or something. But, keep on being funny, Johnny. If you don't get laughs, they'll think you're doublecrossin' them—and Joe Carlo is awful tough on people he thinks are doublecrossin' him!"

"Like you're doing right now?" asked Johnny.

"Like I'm doing right now," the girl said, kissing him on the mouth.

He knew it was dangerous and he knew what Carlo would do if he found out, but Johnny always was a sucker for a good looking girl. . . .

Nearly nine years had passed since then. For a couple months after that, he thought he was chained to the Moon Club for life. There were plenty of other offers, but he turned them down. He remembered what a gang in Chicago had done to Joe E. Louis, and he didn't want anything like that to happen to him.

Then, one night, he went to work as usual, and the Moon Club was as dark as the inside of a coal miner's pocket. Christy was waiting for him at the corner.

"What's happened?" he asked.

"The police moved in," the girl said, "or anyway they were going to move in when Ear and Joe and Whack heard about it. They lammed. No more Moon Club, Johnny. Caput, that's what it is, and I'm glad. Now you can go anywheres you want and nobody'll bother you. Ain't that swell? You're gonna be a star."

"I know I am," said Johnny. "I'll be hitting the big spots in no time at all."

Christy cuddled up against him. Johnny

knew what that meant. She was going to hang around his neck. She could do him some good in a place like the Moon Club, but not in the big time where he was headed. Somehow he'd have to sluff her off, but easily and diplomatically, because she could get awful tough.

"Sure, baby," he said. "Sure. We'll go places all right. Don't you worry about that."

But, they didn't go places together. With the Moon Club mob in jail, he could take what jobs were offered. Johnny tied up with Jake O'Connor, and Jake booked him into the Beachcomber at a thousand a week, with a lot more in the offing. It was then he decided that tough, hard talking Christy Ryan would only be a drawback to his career. When he told her, there was a frightful scene.

"Okay, Johnny," she said, "but you'll be awful sorry. I'm going to tell Joe Carlo you stool-pidgeoned him and the boys into jail. You may live until they get out, but not much longer than that, Johnny, not much longer than that!"

After the killing at the bar, Johnny September hurried around the corner, walking close to the building line, and frequently looking behind him. His mouth was as dry as though it were filled with crumbled soda crackers. His heart thumped so that breathing was difficult. He thought of how the dead man's forehead had looked, where the bullet caved it in. Knowing how Joe Carlo and Sillgard operated, he thought he might be lucky if he got it that way.

A cab wheeled by, and he hailed it. Within a few minutes, he was back in the Club Montmartre. Dorothy Seaton and Jake O'Connor were still at the table. Walter Jones had departed.

"Well, darling," Dorothy said, "that was certainly the shortest show you ever played." Then she saw his face. "What in the world is wrong with you? You're the sickest looking guy I've ever seen."

Johnny gulped. "Angel," he said, "let's go up to Greenwich after the second show. I'll ditch this crummy business, and we'll go to Europe or South America or someplace on a honeymoon—a couple of years' honeymoon."

The girl stared at him. So did Jake, but Jake wasn't surprised.

"What's wrong?" Dorothy asked. "Come clean, and no doubletalk."

He told them, and his fright showed so clearly through his words that it was a

little pitiful. His big, well shaped hands trembled on the table cloth. His face, as virile, if a lot younger than Humphrey Bogart's, was seamed with the fear that shook him.

"Pull yourself together, kid," Jake said. "It ain't good for a guy's gal to see him this way." But, Johnny didn't hear. He was staring past O'Connor to the club's entrance, staring with such a horrified look that Jake stretched his fat neck to see what it was.

Joe Carlo and Whacky Sillgard, both a little shabby, and with the prison pallor still on their faces in spite of an effort to sunlamp it away, were talking with Paul, the maitre d'hotel!

BOLDLY they walked up to the table. The comic thought of the night Carlo had taken him into the basement room under the Moon Club. He thought it was good he was sitting down, because his shaking knees would not have held him. Maybe it would have been better if he had married Christy Ryan. Then, this would not have happened.

"Hello, Johnny," Joe Carlo said. "It's nice to see you after so long. We got a lot of things to talk over. As the guy said, it ain't good to put off till tomorrow what you can do today. C'm on, let's take a little ride, hey?" His voice was soft, and held a faint accent.

Johnny tried to answer, but though his lips moved, no sound came out. He thought how the dead man looked on the floor of the cocktail lounge.

Jake looked up at the two men. He had no appearance of belligerency. His gray hair, ample paunch and friendly eyes made him look almost like a grandfather. But, when he spoke, there was a new note in his voice, like a file scratching across slate.

"Listen to me, you crum bum," he said. "You've been scarin' Johnny, and I won't have it. Things have changed since they tossed you into the clink. You're not big shots any more. You're just a couple of tramps."

Both Johnny and Dorothy were looking at him in fascinated silence.

"Now, wait a minute, Mr. O'Connor," Joe Carlo began.

Jake got heavily to his feet, and slapped the man across the face. "You rough-housed a lot of people in your day," he said. "If you don't stay away from Johnny September, you'll get what you dished

out, only ten times as much. And, that goes for your crazy sidekick, Sillgard, too. Now, get out of here, but quick!"

Carlo and Sillgard looked at each other, hesitated, then turned their backs, and walked meekly toward the door!

Jake sat down with a grim smile, and signaled for the waiter. "Let's have another round," he said.

"Never mind," said Dorothy. She drew the ermine wrap from the back of the chair, and put it around her slim, white shoulders. "I've been used to a Johnny diet, and thought it wonderful, but I didn't know it included anything like this, my great big he-man. You curled up like a wet postage stamp in front of the goons. I can't stand that. My people were soldiers, you know. Jake, who's twice your age, and half your size, practically threw them out. Maybe I'm just a silly sentimentalist, but a coward turns my stomach."

She rose with the slightly regal air that was part of her charm. "When you go on a honeymoon, Johnny," she said, "get a girl who is big enough to be a bodyguard as well as a sweetheart."

Johnny September, scarlet of face, did not look up as she left the club in a whirl of anger and Chanel Number Five. Marty Harris came over. "You're due on in five minutes, Johnny," he said. "Don't you think you'd better get ready?"

"Sure," said the comic heavily. "Sure, the show must go on, or something."

Just about the time Johnny was saying, "What a party! I've drunk so many peoples' health I've ruined my own," Jake O'Connor and Marty Harris left the ring-side, and went into the club's office. A big Irish smile dimpled Jake's face.

"Well," he said, "for the first time since Dorothy Seaton came into Johnny's life, I haven't a thing to worry about. I wanted to break up that darned romance from the start. It couldn't have worked out for either of them."

"Nobody can do anything but try," said Marty.

Jake lit a fresh cigar. "I racked my brains for a long time, trying to figure out what to do about it, but it wasn't until Johnny began to show how scared he was of Joe Carlo that the idea came. Dorothy comes of a family in which generals and Congressional Medals are like cornflakes to average people. She makes a fetish of courage. I figured that if she ever saw Johnny in a blue funk, she'd drop him like a hot cake."

"You interest me," said Marty Harris. "Go on."

"I made it my business to find out about Joe Carlo and Whacky and Christy Ryan. Christy married a truck driver in Secaucus, New Jersey, and was out of the picture. I looked her up, and found that she never had told Carlo that Johnny had fingered him. Maybe down in her heart she still loved Johnny a little bit.

"Women are that way, you know. Christy was so nice that I asked her if there wasn't something I could do for her. As a matter of fact there was. She had a kid sister who wanted to get into show business. That's the new gal I sold you for the chorus line."

"Not bad, either," said Marty.

"Then," Jake went on, "I took a trip to Sing Sing, and had a talk with Carlo and Sillgard. They weren't tough any more. Their spirit was gone. They didn't have anything against Johnny September, either. Why should they?"

"I haven't the faintest idea," said Marty.

"Well, the rest comes quick and easy. I gave Joe Carlo and Whack a C note to come here, and pretend to get tough, after Christy's sister stopped him on a dark street, and pretending to be Christy, put more fear into his heart. Johnny September is a great comic, but he hasn't much moxie. That's what I was counting on to chase Dorothy Seaton away. If he had gotten up, and taken a belt at Carlo, Johnny and Dolly probably would have been married after the second show."

Marty Harris stashed the evening's take in the safe. "Up to this point," he said, "everything is hunky dory, but what about that murder Johnny ran into?"

"That," said Jake O'Connor, "was the sort of coincidence which always happens in life, but is ruled out in fiction. The cop on the beat blew the killer's brains out when he ran from the saloon. I checked with Captain Devery about that. Even if they find out Johnny was a witness, they won't call on him."

Jake sighed, and relaxed.

"Personally," he concluded, "I don't care if Johnny gets married, so long as he doesn't get a dame with a bankroll like the United States treasury. As a matter of fact, when he went back to get ready, I saw him smooching up to Christy Ryan's sister, though he doesn't know she is Christy's sister. A girl like her won't care if he's a hero, or is scared stiff by his own shadow!"

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A Complete Novelet by W. T. BALLARD

Wacky detective Hank Ross can't clean up on his own slot-machine—but hits the jackpot in a haywire game of kidnaping and homicide!

CHAPTER I

Phony Confession

I PULLED the lever of the slot machine. Two lemons and a plum came up. I reached down into the little cup, got my nickel back and played it again. This time I got a cherry, a lemon and a plum.

The voice behind me said, "If you aren't too busy I'll come in."

I turned around. There was a red-headed girl standing in the open office doorway. She was very beautiful in her fox furs, beautiful enough to have made my heart turn over even if I hadn't recognized her from her newspaper pictures.

She was Beth Moore and she was supposed to have a million dollars.

I said, "You can come in if you don't bother me, but I'm busy. I want to hit the jackpot." I turned back and pulled

Ross grappled with him,
trying to twist the gun
out of his hand



the slot machine lever.

She came over to stand at my side. Her perfume was very nice. It filled the office. She watched me while I put in my nickel, pulled the lever, took my nickel from the box and put it in again.

Finally she said, "Whose slot machine is it?"

"Mine," I told her.

"And there's nothing in the jack pot." She stooped and peered through the little glass window.

"No."

"And you keep using the same nickel, over and over."

"That's right, it's the only one I have."

"You're crazy," she said. "Even if you hit the jack pot, you don't win anything."

"That's right."

"Then why play?"

I turned to look at her. She could certainly ask a lot of questions. "I just want to hit the jack pot," I explained. "Didn't you ever want to do anything?"

"Yes, but—"

"So, I want to hit the jack pot."

"You are crazy!"

"Of course. I'm Hank Ross, the wacky detective. You must have heard of me, or you wouldn't be here."

"I hadn't heard you are crazy."

"Then you haven't been talking to the right people. Any cop could tell you. They've even threatened me with a padded cell."

I TURNED away, rescued the nickel, noticed that it was getting a little smooth from passing through the machine so often, put it back in the slot and pulled the lever. Two bars showed and I thought I had it, but a bell dropped into the third slot.

She put a hand on my shoulder. "Please, this is serious, I have to talk to you."

"Some other time. I'm busy."

She made a little sound under her breath as if she were thoroughly out of patience, then she fumbled in her purse and brought forth a folded piece of paper which she held up before my eyes.

Letters had been cut from headlines and pasted onto the paper so that they read:

YOU WILL PAY FIFTY THOUSAND DOLLARS TONIGHT OR YOU WILL BE DEAD. DO NOT GO TO THE COPS.

I read it twice. "When did you get that?"

"In the mail, yesterday."

"Forget it," I told her. "A crank letter. Every rich girl in the world gets them. Nothing ever happens."

"Doesn't it?" she said. "Someone broke into my house last night and murdered Meadows, my butler."

I turned to look at her. "Murdered your butler. What do the cops say?"

"They don't say anything. You see, I haven't told them. I came to you instead."

I turned around and took a real look at her. She was well worth looking at. Then I went over to my desk.

"We'll just tell them now. I may be screwy but not screwy enough to conceal a murder."

She moved quickly. She was around the desk and had hold of my wrist. "Wait. You don't understand. I know who sent the note, who killed the butler, but I can't prove it."

"Who?"

"That's why I came to you."

I stared at her. I made a business of being a screwball, but it seemed she could give me lessons. "And just what made you come to me?"

"Some friends recommended you."

"You're a liar," I said. "I don't know any of your friends."

She bit her lip, white teeth marring the careful rouge. "I, well, I read about you in the paper, about you breaking up that crowd of warehouse thieves. The paper said you were rough and tough."

"I'll show you my scars."

She waved this aside. "Please, this isn't funny. My brother is trying to get me into trouble. I have to prove it—prove it before next month."

Nothing she said made much sense. I asked, "Where does your brother come into the picture?"

"He sent me the note," she said. "He's the one who killed the butler."

Later we both went back to her home and we called in the cops. Detective Lieutenant Hammer of the Homicide Squad was a tall thin man. He was also annoyed. He was always annoyed when I was around, but at the moment he was angrier at the girl as we stood in the hallway of Beth Moore's residence in West Los Angeles.

"You should have called us at once," he said. He was staring at the butler's

body. The man had apparently been struck from behind. He'd been sitting on a high stool, just inside the kitchen door, with a shotgun across his knees.

Whoever killed him had jimmed open a cellar window, crept up the stairs and struck. Maybe the butler had gone to sleep, maybe he merely hadn't heard the intruder. He had fallen from the stool, dropping the shotgun with a clatter. The clatter had awakened both the maid and Beth Moore. They had run downstairs and found the body. At least that's the way they told it.

Hammer wasn't satisfied. Neither was I, but I didn't matter.

The girl said, "I didn't call you because I didn't want publicity. I went to see Mr. Ross instead. I trusted him. I thought maybe he could help me."

"How?" Hammer was watching both of us, his small eyes alight with suspicion.

SHE moved her shoulders wearily. "I don't know; move the body or something. I've seen it done in pictures."

Hammer was watching me. "It's a wonder he didn't, it's just crazy enough for him to think of. What's the matter, Hank? Losing your grip?"

I shrugged. "I'm not in this. This is too screwy for me. I'm getting out." I put on my hat. "I'll see you in the morgue."

Hammer laughed harshly. "Not if I see you first." The girl looked reproachful.

"And I depended on you."

I touched her chin with one finger. "Not me, darling. The cops have landed. They have everything in a mess. Let them straighten it out." I turned and went back to my office. When I got there a young fellow with red hair was standing in front of my slot machine, actually putting nickels into it. I hated to disturb him, but I was curious.

"Having fun?" I said.

He turned then and I saw something I hadn't observed before. He had a gun in his hand, a very large gun, black and shiny and ugly. I looked at him again, and suddenly I knew that this was Beth Moore's brother. The family resemblance was striking.

"Hey," I said. "Put that thing down. If you want to play games there's a water pistol in the desk. That one you're holding is real."

"Shut up."

I shut up. Gags were all right, but I'd learned that you didn't argue with a gun.

"Sit down."

I sat down at my desk. He laid a type-written slip in front of me. I picked it up and read it slowly. It was a confession, saying that I, Henry Ross, had been hired by Beth Moore to break into her house and that in so doing I had murdered the butler.

I looked up. "Listen, Bud. I'm the one who is supposed to be crazy."

"Sign that."

"I'm not that crazy."

"I said sign it."

I signed it. I didn't like the way his eyes seemed to grow small. This lad was really on the edge of being bughouse.

He picked it up with his free hand and backed toward the door. "I'm going to the police with this. We'll see if my smart sister is so wise after they arrest her. If you're smart, you'll get away before they catch up with you." The door slammed.

I didn't go after him. There was a gun in my desk that wasn't a water pistol, but I still didn't go after him. I reached for the phone and called the police. When I got Hammer. I said:

"There's a young cluck named Moore on the way to your office. He forced me to sign a phony confession at the point of a gun. Yeah, he's the brother of Beth Moore. No, this is not one of my gags. It's strictly on the level. Hold him there. I'm coming right down." I hung up and headed for the door.

CHAPTER II

Left to Die



MY CAR was parked on the far side of the street. I paused on the curb, looking up and down to see if young Moore was still in sight but I didn't pay any attention to the two men who had been interested in the store window behind me until one of them said:

"Take it easy, Mac."

I turned to look at him. He had a narrow horse face under the pulled down brim of a weathered hat. He didn't look

pleasant, or friendly, or very intelligent.

"I'm in a hurry. Scram."

"We're in a hurry too, Mac. Get in the car over there."

The car was a small sedan. I looked at him again and started to laugh. "Look, pal, I love gags. I'm the boy that invented the hot-foot, but right now, I have no time for games."

"This," he said, "is not a game." He emphasized the words by poking me in the side with a small gun.

I looked quickly up and down the street. There were a number of people in sight, but for all the good they did me at the moment they might as well have been on the moon.

I started to sweat. The other man had closed in until I was fenced between them. I'd never seen either of the men before but I knew the type. You can buy murder for fifty bucks if you know where to find the right characters. These two looked the part, and acted it.

"What's the beef?" I asked. "Can't we settle it? There must be some mistake."

"No mistake." The one on the right had gold teeth. He showed them when he spoke, but he wasn't smiling. "Get into the car, Mac."

I didn't argue. There are times when it's smartest to save your breath. I walked over to the car. Gold Teeth opened the door. His partner shoved the middle of my back. I went in, on the floor, half on my knees, half on my chin. I tried to get up and they shoved me down. One of the men climbed to the seat, the other went around and slid under the wheel. The motor came to life and we moved into traffic.

We traveled a long time. It must have been two hours, it seemed like ten years. Finally we turned off the pavement and jolted back a rutted road, then the car stopped and they shoved me out.

We were in the middle of a vineyard. All I could see was grapes and the old shack that leaned drunkenly to the right.

They herded me into the shack. At least they weren't going to kill me and I began to hope. The hope die. They laid me on the hard packed earth floor and bound my wrists and ankles. Then they gagged me. The shack looked as if no one had visited it in months. There are much more pleasant ways to die than to starve. I almost wished they'd put a bullet through my head.

It was five or six hours before I heard the noise. At first I thought it was a rat, then I felt his old fingers pulling at my tape bounds and smelled the garlic.

He was old, a Mexican. His English was poor and my Spanish a little rusty, but I made out that he was the watchman, that he'd seen the fresh car tracks in the dust and come back to investigate. I could have kissed him. I loved him like a brother.

As I walked to the highway and waited for the bus I got over feeling relieved and started to get mad. The circulation in my cramped arms and legs was still not good. I thought about the girl, and her brother, and the two hoods.

I didn't know what it was all about but I was going to find out. And when I did, I'd teach them not to play games. The bus came finally and I got aboard. It was after dark when I got back to Los Angeles.

The headlines on the evening papers jarred me. I bought a sheet and read it while I caught a quick sandwich in a one-armed lunch. They told about Beth Moore, the heiress, being held by the police in connection with the murder of her butler, and mentioned that I was being sought.

I read further. Hammer was being cagey. He said that I was known for my crazy antics, that I was a psycho, a man who would do anything for a gag, but that if I thought this confession was funny, I'd think differently when the police laid their hands on me.

I DIDN'T think it was funny. I was ready to swear off gags for the rest of my life if I ever got out of this jam. I kept remembering the little hut, and how thirsty and hungry I'd become lying there. Supposing the old Mexican hadn't seen those tire tracks? Supposing I'd lain there for a week?

The rest of the story was about Beth Moore and her brother. The father had made a lot of money as a contractor in the Middlewest. Beth had turned into a glamour gal. The brother was a no good heel who had been in one small jam after another. I wondered how I could reach the girl without running headlong into the cops. I decided that the smartest thing to do was to get in touch with her lawyer.

His name was Carlton Whinery. His house looked like money, and he didn't

keep me waiting more than ten minutes. He was a small man, rather good looking with a tiny patch of gray at each temple. But he looked smart, smart enough to keep Beth out of jail, and I hoped, to keep me out too.

His voice was surprisingly deep. "Why the devil did you sign that confession?"

I told him about Ralph Moore coming to my office, about the two hoods who had parked me to die in the old winery shed. I got mad all over again as I talked. He didn't seem impressed by my anger.

"The police don't take you very seriously," he told me. "They said you were a screwball. Do you have an alibi for last night?"

"I was home, in bed."

"Alone?"

"Alone." We stared at each other and I found that I didn't care much for the small attorney. He was much too self-satisfied to suit me. I toyed with the idea of giving him a hot-foot.

"That isn't much help," he said.

"I could fake one," I offered.

"That still wouldn't help my client."

I got mad again. "You and your client. She comes into my office and disturbs my researches. I never saw her before, and yet I land right in the middle of things. I'd give a worn five-cent piece to know what this is all about."

He shrugged. "You're dealing with another screwball. Her brother Ralph is almost childish in many things that he does. This is a belated effort on his part to secure the trust fund."

I stared. "Come again. You're on the wrong line. I don't know what you're talking about."

He thought it over. "I don't see any reason why I shouldn't tell you, although I don't see why you should know."

"Stop double-talking."

"Has anyone ever told you you are very rude?"

We glared at each other like two villains in a cheap play. Suddenly I laughed. "Look, Butch, there's no need us snarling at each other."

"No." He seemed to gain control of himself. "I'm sorry, Ross. Miss Moore should never have come to you in the first place. She should have called the police. That's what I'd have advised her to do, if she had asked me."

I looked at him. There was a note of discontent in his voice, almost as if he were sorry the girl had ever met me, as if he was jealous of me.

I could have been wrong of course, but I'm given to first impressions and my impression was that this little lawyer was in love with the dame and resented her turning to anyone else for help.

"You've been put to a lot of trouble," he went on, "and the police will certainly cause you a lot more. You have a right to know what it's all about. The answer is so simple that it won't sound logical. When the father died, he left Beth and Ralph each a half million dollars. The rest of the estate, some three to four millions, was placed in trust for five years.

"The will reads that the residue shall be divided between them, providing in the opinion of the trustees, both have shown themselves qualified to handle the money, also, that neither is in trouble at the time when the division is to take place."

WITHOUT appearing to, I watched him as he talked. "And when is the trust due to expire?"

"Next month."

"And your theory is that the brother framed this murder and tried to involve his sister, and incidentally me, in an effort to prove that she wasn't a fit person to receive the money?"

He nodded. "That's what Beth thinks."

"What do you think?"

He spread his hands. "I don't know. As I said before, Ralph in some respects is hardly more than an overgrown child. It's just the sort of crazy thing he might try. Besides he's under the influence of that gambler and—"

"What gambler?"

"A man named Parcell. Ralph has run through most of the half million his father left him. He has tried to raise money from his sister. He has been in trouble on bad check charges, and I understand he has borrowed heavily from Eddie Parcell."

That, I didn't like. Bringing Eddie Parcell into the picture changed things. If Ralph Moore actually owed money to Eddie I could imagine him doing almost anything to raise the necessary funds to pay off the loan.

And Parcell being in the picture

might explain the two hoods. Eddie might not care to have me playing around, if he were part of the caper.

I rose. "Thanks, my friend. I'll have a little talk with Parcell."

His eyes flicked. "Talk to Parcell, what for? You don't come into this, Ross."

I said, "You don't want Miss Moore to stay in jail, do you?"

"She's not in jail."

I stared at him. "But the paper said—"

He shrugged. "The cops didn't take your confession too seriously. They held her as a material witness. I bailed her out."

Soon after that, I left Whinery's office.

Gamblers came and gambler's went, but Eddie Parcell was always around. Sometimes he was operating, sometimes he wasn't. At the moment he had a night club on La Brea, just a supper joint with no wheels, but it was rumored that if you were looking for a floating crap game, Eddie was the boy to see.

The club wasn't large and it was very full. I edged my way through the mass before the bar and went down a short hall.

Eddie was alone in the room, at work at the desk. I stuck my fist in my coat and hoped it looked like a gun.

"Hello," I said.

He looked up and surprise brought him half out of the chair.

"Sit down."

He settled back slowly. "What kind of a screwball stunt are you pulling this time?"

"This," I told him, "is on the level."

He was black haired and although he was clean shaven his skin had a bluish tinge from the heavy beard.

"The cops are looking for you, sonny. If they weren't afraid you'd burn down their jail, they'd have you locked up by now. Get out of here. I'm busy."

I didn't answer. I kept the first in my coat pocket and edged around the desk. He watched me, his eyes glittering like an annoyed snake but he made no move as I used my free hand to pull out the top desk drawer and lift his automatic.

I felt better then. A gun in your pocket is better than a fist, any time. I said, "I want to talk to you, Eddie. A mug named Moore owes you dough. How much?"

"Never heard of him."

I made an arc with the heavy gun and

cracked it along the side of his head. The skin broke, blood oozed from the cut, just under the hairline.

He swore sharply with anger and pain. "You clown, I'll kill you for that!"

I hit him again. Not enough, to put him out but plenty to hurt. I don't think he'd been pushed around this way in all the years he'd been in town. Certainly he didn't expect it from me.

CHAPTER III

Forced Visit



SOMETHING came into his eyes that hadn't been there before. It was fear. He was used to handling hard guys, but when a practical joker turned tough it just didn't make sense to him and what he failed to understand, he feared.

"You are crazy. I've always thought so."

"Enough to kill you," I said. "Enough to pull out your fingernails and press in your eyeballs and file off your teeth. I'm all worked up tonight, chum. This is my night to cut loose. How would you like my initials carved in your stomach?"

He wet his lips with the top of his tongue. "What do you want?"

"How much does young Moore owe you?"

"Twenty-five grand."

"And how do you expect to collect?"

"He's got some money coming next month."

"So you decided to help him get his sister behind the eight ball. You hired a couple of hoods to tie me up among the vines."

"Look," he said. "I don't know what kind of hop you've been eating, but why don't you go home and sleep it off? I'll forget this. We'll pretend it didn't happen."

I shook my head. "Wrong guess, Eddie. I'm going to get to the bottom of this. Where's young Moore?"

"At his apartment, I guess. I talked to him on the phone, half an hour ago."

"All right, we'll go over and see him."

"Wait," Parcell made one last attempt. "I'm not in this."

"You're in," I said. "I can't afford to

leave any loose ends hanging around. Come on and no funny moves. I'm right behind you."

His eyes smoldered as he rose, wiping the blood from his forehead.

"Put on your hat."

He put on his hat. It covered the broken skin where the gun had socked him. "Tell your boys as we go out that you'll be back in a little while. We don't want them along."

He nodded. Some of the fear had faded from his eyes, but they remained wary and I was pretty certain he wouldn't try any tricks.

He didn't. We left the club and walked across the parking lot to his convertible. He started the motor and wordlessly turned it toward Beverly.

Young Moore lived a half block south of Wilshire. The building had no desk clerk and we rode up in the automatic elevator, still not saying anything.

Evidently Parcell had been there before. Without hesitation he turned right on leaving the car and led the way down the carpeted hall to the end where he paused and knocked on the white door. There was a minute of silence, long enough for me to wonder if Moore was not at home, and what I would do next.

But he was at the apartment. He opened the door and looked at Parcell with fear. "Eddie." Then he saw me and his fear changed to astonishment.

I had the automatic in my hand. I shoved Parcell in, followed, kicking the door shut. Then I waved them both toward the front room.

Young Moore hadn't opened his mouth. He acted like someone who had been dazed by a pile driver. When we reached the front room I waved Parcell to a chair, put the boy facing the wall and went over him. I was taking no chances, but he was clean.

I stepped back and told him to sit down. He moved over to a chair at Parcell's side, his eyes never leaving my face.

"I haven't quite decided what I'll do with you," I said. "First, you can call the cops and tell them that confession you forced me to sign is a phony."

"I won't."

"Take a look at Eddie's head," I advised him. "That's just a sample of what will happen if you play stubborn. I'm all through with gags. I'm right in the mood to get tough. I had nothing

against Eddie. I just wanted him to talk."

THE boy did not answer.

"But I have got a lot against you, wise guy. You've caused me all kinds of trouble. I should tie your neck in a bow knot just to show you that your screwy tricks don't pay. Who were those two gunsels you hired to dump me among the grapes?"

He looked blank. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"The devil you don't." I took a step forward, swinging the gun suggestively. "You had it neatly timed. You forced me to sign that confession, then your men grabbed me before I could go to the cops. You played it with more brains than I thought you had."

He was still staring. "I tell you I haven't the faintest idea what you're talking about. I admit I forced you to sign that confession. I'm not certain now that you were guilty, but—"

I cut him short. "Oh, so now you aren't certain I killed that butler. Nice of you, pal." I reached out, got a fist full of his coat and jerked him toward me.

"Look, sonny. I'm the one who plays games. I'm a guy who passes out jokes but doesn't care to have them handed back, especially by juvenile heels who sponge off their sisters. You've got one minute to tell me who those gunsels were."

He shook his head. "I can't tell you something I don't know."

For some reason I believed him. He didn't know. He hadn't sicked those men on me. If he hadn't, who had, and why? I tried to think of some reason why those boys should have given me a free ride, some reason not related to this case. I couldn't.

Parcell sensed my indecision and started to get out of his chair. "So now that you're all fouled up, I might as well be getting back to the club."

I pushed young Moore away from me and told the gambler, "You'll go back to the club when I tell you to. Sit down!"

His eyes were unblinking. "You're digging that grave deeper."

"I'll share it with you," I said. "If sonny boy didn't hire those torpedoes probably you did."

"What interest have I got in all this?"

"I'll tell you," said Beth Moore appearing suddenly in the kitchen doorway.

I almost dropped the gun. I hadn't known she was around. The possibility hadn't even occurred to me.

She came forward into the room, her green eyes flicking across Parcell to her brother. She brought an awareness into the room which hadn't been there before. The place had seemed flat, almost lifeless. It wasn't now, and I had the fleeting thought that this girl could be dangerous if aroused, as dangerous as a tiger.

Parcell sensed it too. He was nervous. He shifted his feet. He started to get up, met my eyes and settled back in his place.

"You've got it all wrong, Miss Moore," he said. "I'm just a pal of your brother's trying to give him a lift over the hump."

"I'm certain you are." The words cut like a knife. They brought color to his dull cheeks. "If you hadn't taken him for every cent he had, he wouldn't have got into half this trouble."

She turned to look at me. "I thought you'd run out on me. What's this talk about being dumped among the grapes?"

I told her what had happened. I saw the film of caution form across her eyes. I thought, she doesn't believe me, and suddenly, for no apparent reason, it was very important that Beth Moore should believe me.

"There's no need to be sore at me," I said. "It was your brother who forced me to sign that confession."

Her voice was cold. "I wasn't thinking about the confession, I was remembering that you called the police after I trusted you this morning."

"It was the only thing to do," I argued. "You'd have been in a lot worse jam if you hadn't called them. Concealing bodies isn't the easiest thing in the world, or the most healthy."

She nodded slowly, unwillingly. "I suppose so. But at least you didn't have to walk out and leave me to answer Hammer's questions alone. I don't like him."

I DIDN'T care much for the detective lieutenant myself. "We'll just take your brother down there now and straighten the whole thing out."

"But it won't be straightened out," she said. "Ralph swears he didn't send

me the note, or break into the house."

"Naturally." My voice was cold. "The butler got killed. Even if his death was an accident, the cops are going to pin the killing on someone. They just can't let it hang fire."

She passed a hand tiredly across her eyes. "None of this makes any sense. The only person who might want to discredit me is Ralph. He swears he didn't have anything to do with it, and I believe him."

Eddie Parcell said, sharply, "Don't look at me. This business is too screwball for me. I had no part of it and I want none. All I want is to wash it off. I'll even forget the dough the kid owes me."

The girl looked at him. "You mean that?"

He nodded. He pulled out a handkerchief and wiped the palms of his hands as if they were sweaty.

"Maybe you're all right after all," she said in a softer tone. "Maybe I misjudged you."

I started to whistle "Hearts And Flowers." Parcell said, "Shut up, you screwball. You don't even know when someone is leveling."

"I want you to get your money," Beth told him. "If Ralph owes it to you, I'll see it's paid out of his share of the estate, if we get it."

I cut in. "Look, Eddie, as long as we are all pals and we love each other dearly, why don't you join the chorus and help."

He stared, suspiciously. "Meaning what?"

"Meaning that Miss Moore is trying to do the right thing, so why don't you forget you're a heel and help her?"

"How?"

"Someone sent her a note, threatening her life. Someone tried to break into her house and knocked over the butler. Two mugs held me up outside my office and tried to lose me in the country. I've a hunch all three things are tied together."

"Well?"

"Well, with your connections it shouldn't be too hard to find those mugs." I described them as well as I could. "Sound like anyone you ever heard of?"

He didn't meet my eyes. "Maybe."

"How about turning them up?"

"I'm no stool-pigeon."

"Forget the cops, just let me know who they are. I'll handle them from there."

"Okay." I could tell by his tone that he'd made his decision. "You've bought a deal. Can I go now?"

"You're already gone," I said and watched him move quickly toward the door. After it had closed, I had a momentary qualm. He could be crossing me. He could be going after a couple of bruisers. After all, I had beat him across the head with a gun, and his kind seldom forget things easily. They seldom forget at all.

CHAPTER IV

Three Shots



BUT I put down my doubts and turned to the girl. "You'd better phone your lawyer and have him meet you at Police Headquarters."

She looked uncertain. "I hate to disturb him at this hour."

"Don't worry, he'll bill you plenty."

"Not Carlton," she said. "He's an old family friend."

I shrugged but she moved to the phone. Twenty minutes later we all walked into Hammer's office together. He wasn't glad to see us. A phone call had brought him down from home.

He turned the fullness of his displeasure directly onto me. "So, you decided the water was too hot and you'd come in. Why didn't you show up after you phoned?"

"I was kidnaped."

He puffed out his thin cheeks. "A likely story. The only way you could be kidnaped would be to hire it done yourself. No one else would want a screwball like you." He swung and leveled a pencil at the girl as if it were a gun.

"As for you, and your brother, you're going to have to learn that the police department has other things to do besides worry about your family quarrels."

"But—"

He chopped her off. "You have a servant murdered. You fail to report the death. You say now you had received a threatening note, but that the note came

from your brother."

"I didn't send it," said young Moore, staring at his sister. "I don't know anything about it."

"I should lock you all up." Hammer was really mad. "Someone killed that butler and I think you all will be safer in jail. I'm not at all certain one of you didn't do it, just for fun. You all seem to have a macabre sense of humor."

Carlton Whinery had been standing around not doing much of anything. He said now, pompously, "I don't know about Ross. He seems to be slightly unstable mentally, but my client and her brother had nothing to do with this, nothing at all."

Hammer looked at him. He said, "I'd rather believe a liar than a lawyer, any time. As for your client and this brother of hers, they're spoiled. They think because they have money, that will solve all their troubles. I don't give a hoot if they have all the dough in the world, I'm going to get to the bottom of this, and when I do, someone is going to take a long ride."

I was watching Beth Moore as he spoke. I saw her shiver as if the words striking her had the same effect as a strong, chill wind. Soon afterward we left Hammer's office.

When we were outside, standing before the entrance, her brother laughed shortly, harshly:

"I never saw a cop who didn't like to throw his weight around. What can Hammer do?"

"Plenty," I said, "and he's no one to throw his weight around as you put it. He's a very tough monkey."

"There's another thing," Beth said. "That note—if you didn't send it, who did?" She was talking to her brother.

Carlton Whinery cut in. "I don't think you have to worry about the note. I'm glad to see you two children have decided to make up and be friendly. It will be ever so much easier to straighten things out when it comes to turning over that trust fund."

"The note means something," I told him. "Meadows, that butler got killed, remember."

He looked at me and even in the uncertain light of the street I could see the dislike in his eyes behind the glasses.

"That was probably just a coincidence. A prowler probably broke into the house, found the butler watching and killed

him, merely intending to knock him out."

"Sure," I said. "And those two thugs who kidnaped me could have just picked me up by accident and hauled me out of town."

LIGHT reflected from his glasses as he turned and his tone became annoyed. "Couldn't those men have been angry about some thing you did, something which had no relationship to Miss Moore?"

"Yes, but—"

"We'll know as soon as Parcell locates the men," Beth Moore said.

Whinery looked at her. "What's this?"

She explained. "Mr. Parcell is a gambler. He has underworld connections. He's trying to locate those two men who kidnaped Mr. Ross."

"I see."

"In the meantime," she said, "I'll feel much safer if Mr. Ross stays with me."

"That won't be necessary," Whinery said. "You can go out and stay at my house." He laughed a little. "I guess I can protect you as well as Mr. Ross can, and you've known me a lot longer."

I watched them and the thought came as it had when I first met the man. He's in love with her, I thought, and looked at the girl. She gave no sign of returning his feeling, or even being conscious of it.

She said, "I wouldn't think of putting you to that trouble. Mr. Ross will drive me home. I'll be all right."

He shrugged. "As you wish." He turned and moved away toward his own car. We crossed the street to where Beth Moore's coupe was parked.

I said to Ralph Moore, "You'd better come out to the house and stay there until this is cleared up."

He nodded and we all got in. The girl started the motor and turned west along the empty street. . . .

The house was quiet and deserted.

"I let my maid go," Beth explained as we left the garage and walked up the drive. "She was so nervous it was worse having her around than being alone." She found the key and handed it to her brother. He opened the door and we stepped in. The phone was ringing as we entered and Beth Moore hurried along the hall.

I heard her say "Hello," then heard her call my name. "It's Parcell," she

told me. "He wants to talk to you."

The gambler's voice was as near excitement as I had ever heard it. "I've found your men," he said. "One of them got tight in a Third Street joint tonight and bragged that he and his partner had been paid plenty for losing a certain party. He also bragged that he'd be in clover for some time. Seems the guys he worked for are good for some more shake-downs."

"Who are they?"

"Their names wouldn't mean a thing, just a couple of heisters, but I know them and they know me. If you want, I'll meet you over at their place. We'll crack in and see if they'll do some talking."

I said I'd be there in fifteen minutes. I hung up and turned to the Moores. "You two wait here. I'm going over and talk to the gentlemen who gave me the free ride. I'll have to borrow one of your cars."

"I'd rather go with you," the girl said.

I hesitated, then shrugged. "Why not? Mind staying here alone?" I looked at young Moore.

He shook his head. "Why should I? No one's going to beat my head in with a poker."

I said I hoped not and the girl and I went back to the car. On the way over I said, "Are you going to marry your attorney?"

SHE turned her head and I could almost feel her eyes in the darkness. "You are a screwball to ask a question like that. Tell me, Hank, are you actually as crazy as you act?"

"What do you think?"

"I think it's pose. I think you're kidding everyone."

"Smart girl."

"But why?"

I shrugged. "I like to watch people's faces when something unexpected happens. I pulled a couple of stunts years ago and the cops decided I was wacky. It paid off too, because they let me get away with a lot that the average private eye would have been jailed for. That's the only reason Hammer hasn't cracked down harder on both of us. He can't help feeling at the back of his mind that this isn't as simple as it seems. He thinks I've got an angle somewhere. He's afraid I'd make a fool of him, and if there's one thing a cop hates, it's to be made a

fool of. But you haven't answered my question about Whinery."

"Don't be silly."

"He's in love with you."

"A lot of people have been in love with me."

"You're a spoiled brat," I told her. "When this is all over, if it ever it, I'm going to turn you across my knee and whale the daylights out of you."

She grinned. "You wouldn't dare."

"The devil I wouldn't. After all the trouble you've put me to I could beat you with a clear conscience."

"I wonder. You interest me, Ross."

"You don't interest me," I said, and knew I lied. She did interest me, plenty.

She sounded different when she spoke again. "I guess it's because I feel dependent on you. In my whole life I never felt dependent on anyone. Strange, I've always had a phobia about threatening letters. I used to read about people getting them and wonder what I'd do if I ever got any."

I had a sudden idea. "Did you ever mention this—this phobia to anyone? Your brother for instance?"

"Why, yes, of course. I've talked about it for years, to almost everyone."

"And this independence. Did you ever mention that you'd never felt dependent on anyone?"

"Of course. I used to be very proud that I was independent. I've argued with Ralph, and Carlton Whinery, and everyone. I told them I'd probably never marry because I'd never met a man I felt dependent upon."

"Meaning you'd marry me?" It was a gag, but she considered in silence.

"I might," she said, "if you could prove you were stronger than I am."

"You should see my muscles."

"I don't mean that. I mean, well, stronger mentally—"

"Cinch. I'm a mental giant."

"I don't believe it. Anyone who will stand for hours, pulling the lever of an empty slot machine isn't very smart."

"That's how I develop my muscles," I told her. "Some saps go in for weight lifting. I build the body beautiful by pulling a slot machine lever."

She started to answer but I had seen Parcell's car parked at the curb and pulled in behind it. He came out of the shadows to join us and was surprised to see the girl.

"Our two pals are holed up in that

apartment over there. They've got a basement apartment at the back."

"How we going to get in?"

"They'll let me in." His voice was grim.

I nodded. "Okay, sweetheart. You stay in the car, and if you hear moans and groans, don't get excited. I'm a very positive character when I ask questions."

Parcell grunted. "Stop playing, and let's get to business. I'll go in the front. You go around to the back, just in case our friends decide to leave when I knock on their door. After I get in, you can come in and do your question and answer game."

I nodded. There was a brick wall along the side of the building. I followed it back. The apartment was built so that the first story was half under, half above ground. It put the windows within a couple of feet of the brick walk.

I PAUSED at the rear corner and waited. The sky to the east was showing a streak of gray. I hadn't realized how late it was. Suddenly I was very tired. I thought that I'd really had a busy day, or night, or both. It seemed a lot longer than twenty hours since the red-headed girl had first walked into my office.

It always gets cooler, just before dawn, and I shivered, standing there, waiting for something to happen. Then suddenly the lights in the corner apartment went on. The windows were partly covered by Venetian blinds. I stepped closer, peering through the cracks. There were two men in the bedroom, both in pajamas and I had no difficulty in recognizing the boys who had left me to die in the vineyard.

They were arguing. I couldn't hear clearly what they said.

I saw the one with the gold teeth get a gun from the table and move toward the door.

I saw it open and Parcell step in. The guy with the gun looked uncertain, then he lowered it slowly. Parcell was talking to them both and I figured it was time for me to move. I went around to the rear apartment door. It was locked. I cursed myself for not thinking of this, then I started back along the side of the building at a dog trot.

I'd reached the front entrance and was running along the concrete hall when

shots rang out. There were three shots sharp and loud.

CHAPTER V

Killer's Wind-up



SPRINTED ahead, trying to loosen my gun as I ran, cursing as I did so. My first thought was that they'd cut loose and knocked Eddie down, but as I burst into the apartment I saw I was wrong.

Parcell was still on his feet. He had rushed to

the window and torn the Venetian blind aside. He swung around as I barged in, his gun loosely in his hand.

The two gunsels were on the floor. One had fallen on top of the other, their bodies twisted so that they seemed almost interlocked. I stared from them to Parcell.

"Why did you shoot them?"

"I didn't. Someone from outside shot through the window. He got them with two shots, then put one through my arm." He turned and I could see the blood leaking out of his coat sleeve.

"He?"

Parcell stared at me. "Well," his voice was low, studied. "I supposed it was a man. I didn't see him. The blind was in the way."

I knelt beside the men on the floor. Both were dead. The man with the gold teeth had gotten the bullet in the mouth, the other one in the center of his back.

Suddenly I felt very tired. I'd been so certain that the whole screwy business would iron out as soon as I made these two talk. But they weren't going to talk now. They would never talk again.

Another idea came. How did I know that the shot had come from outside the room? How did I know that Parcell hadn't hired these men in the first place and taken this method of getting rid of them before they could talk to me?

But that was silly. I'd never have found them if Parcell hadn't led me here. And why should he bother to bring me to the apartment merely to kill the mugs? It would have been far less trouble and much safer to get them out of town.

Who then?

I turned as Parcell touched my shoulder. He still held his gun although he wasn't pointing it at me. It wasn't pointed at anything.

"We'd better get out of here," he said, hoarsely. "Those shots. Someone will call the cops."

I nodded, climbing to my feet and together we hurried back down the hall. As we dashed from the front door we almost ran over Beth Moore.

She caught my arm as if she feared I'd vanish. Her face was white and there was a catch in her voice. "Hank! You're all right? Those shots!"

"They weren't at me," I told her. "What are you doing out of your car? I told you to stay put."

"I was scared. I thought maybe you were hurt—perhaps killed."

Parcell growled, "We'd better get out of here; otherwise we'll all be in jail."

As if in answer to his words I heard the siren of a police car somewhere in the distance.

We turned and ran to the cars. Somewhere behind us a woman screamed. I don't know what it was. I never found out, but I guess the manager had just found that two of her customers had paid their last rent.

"Meet us at Miss Moore's," I told Parcell as we raced past his car and gained the girl's coupe. "Meet us in half an hour."

The lights were on all over the house as we turned into the driveway. I said, "Looks like your brother is still here."

She had hardly spoken since we'd left the murder apartment. "Where did you think he'd be?"

I shook my head. "Someone shot through that apartment window."

She caught her breath. "You think it was Ralph?"

"Or you, or someone."

Her voice was low and almost toneless. "You're pretty much of a heel, aren't you, Hank?"

"I practise being," I told her.

"And I almost worried myself sick after those shots. You aren't worth worrying about."

I didn't argue. I was driving. I wheeled the car back around the drive toward the garage. There was another coupe parked before the open doors.

The girl said in surprise, "Why, that's Carlton Whinery's car. What's he doing here?"

"Probably didn't trust you alone with me," I said and parked behind it.

SHE didn't answer as we went into the house through the rear door.

Whinery and Ralph Moore were in the kitchen. Evidently they had heard us drive in. "Did you find them?" young Moore said eagerly.

I nodded.

"Did they talk?"

I looked at him. "Were you here all the time we were gone?"

He fumbled. "Well, no. I went back to my apartment to get a razor and stuff."

"Certain you went to your apartment?"

He stared at me, his attention 'caught by my tone. "What are you trying to get at, Ross?"

I didn't answer as Parcell's car pulled into the driveway. Whinery said, "He was here when I came in, if that means anything."

"It does." I turned to look at the lawyer, noting again how the light reflected from his glasses. "If he was here when you arrived, he probably couldn't have shot those two men."

"What two men?" Ralph Moore stared me. "You mean the gunmen you went to find? Were they shot?"

I nodded. "They were shot before they had a chance to talk. Only one of them lived longer than the killer expected. When you shoot a man in the back, Whinery, make certain that it's on the left side, just under the shoulder blade. That way, you'll hit the heart and he doesn't finish the conversation."

For a full half minute no one in the kitchen understood what I'd meant. Then the girl gave a little half strangled cry.

"Hank—no!"

"Yes!" I said. I was watching the lawyer very closely. "That's what the man said. He said it before he died. Whinery hired him to take me out and lose me in the country because he didn't like the idea of you hiring a private detective."

"Are you trying to be humorous?" It was Carlton Whinery. I couldn't actually see his eyes, the curved lenses of his glasses still reflected too much light.

"Even a clown has his moments, and this is mine," I said. "I'm not gagging this time, friend. I'm leveling. Murder is always bad, and you made it worse by

killing those two gunsels."

"What's this?" Parcell had stepped into the kitchen doorway.

I spoke without turning. I didn't dare take my eyes off Whinery. "I'm just repeating what that gold toothed hood told us after he got shot. Mr. Whinery thinks I'm joking when I accuse him of murder."

Eddie Parcell was quick. He didn't know what the game was, but he had gambled for years and in that split second he decided to back my game.

He said, "Whinery will find out." His words meant nothing, but they apparently backed my play.

They cracked the lawyer. He might have bluffed me out, but with two men facing him, two apparent witnesses, he cracked.

"All right," he said. "All right." He jumped sideward, trying to get behind Ralph Moore.

I jumped too. I didn't jump toward him, but away, so that I had a clear shot at him. My bullet caught his shoulder, but it was the wrong shoulder. He had his gun out and was squeezing the trigger. My bullet must have spoiled his aim for he was a good shot. He missed me completely, but he didn't miss Eddie Parcell. The gambler went down without a sound. He had a bullet in the throat. I think he was dead before he ever hit the floor.

Ralph Moore let out a yell and tried to run. Not so Beth. The gal had all the nerve in the world. She made a dive for Whinery. She caused more trouble than she saved because I had to knock her out of the way. I got shot in the leg, doing it. It might have been the head, or neck except that Whinery was rattled by that time and just kept yanking the trigger.

I had no time to shoot. I grappled with him, and I was heavier than he was. We went down together, with him trying to twist the gun against my side. I caught his wrist and tried to lever the automatic out of his fingers. It went off and suddenly he was quiet in my arms.

AS SOON as the excitement had subsided a bit, I phoned the police, and they came. Then the questioning began and all the routine of a murder investigation. It was daylight before Hammer got there.

Detective Lieutenant Hammer was in

a growling mood.

He said, "I haven't been in bed more than two hours and they call me again."

"I haven't been in bed at all," I told him.

Outside it was nice and bright with the morning sun shining on Beth Moore's flowers. They'd carted Whinery away to the hospital. The bullet had hit him in the side and gone directly through his stomach. They didn't expect him to last until noon. He didn't. He died at ten-five.

"Darnedest thing I ever heard," said Hammer. He looked first at me, then back at the girl. "I wouldn't have believed it if Whinery hadn't told me himself. I'd have sworn it was another of Hank's screwball tricks. That lawyer was nuttier than you ever were, Ross."

I shrugged. "No, just in love."

Beth Moore got color in her cheeks. "I feel sorry for Carlton."

"A homicidal maniac," I told her. "The guy had a complex a yard wide. He was in love with you, but you never paid any attention to him. You were perfectly able to take care of yourself. The only fear you had was of threatening letters. You'd talked about them for years, so he figured to send you one. He thought that you'd blame it on your brother who was trying to get the trust fund. He thought that you'd turn to him for protection since he was your lawyer."

"But to break into the house, to kill Meadows, the butler?"

I shrugged. "Killing the butler was an accident. I believe him when he says that. He broke in, merely meaning to scare you, found the butler on guard and struck out of sheer panic. He struck too hard, that's all, and he killed the man. But he still thought you'd turn to him for help."

She shook her head. "Poor Carlton. He wasn't the type I'd look to for help. It never occurred to me."

I grinned wryly. "And to make matters worse, you called him yesterday morning and told him you were going to see a private detective. Imagine how he felt. He'd framed the whole thing, even killed the butler, and instead of appealing to him, you turned to me. He had to get me out of the way, so he hired those two gunsels to get me out of town.

It only happened that they picked me up right after your brother had made me sign that phony confession, and naturally I associated the whole thing with your brother."

"I understand all that," Hammer cut in. "I have Whinery's confession. The only thing I don't understand is why you suspected him?"

I shrugged. "Well, it's hard to put into words. First, right from the moment I met Whinery, I guessed from the way he talked that he was in love with Beth. But he didn't seem concerned about her safety although she'd been threatened in that note and the butler had been killed. That made me feel he might know more about the deal than he let on.

"Second, he obviously didn't want me around. Third, Beth told him that Parcell was out locating the two gunsels and they got knocked off very shortly afterwards. Fourth, he showed up at her house, for what reason? None that I could think of unless he felt he had to know how much I'd found out. So, I put the pressure on him and he cracked."

"And if he hadn't?"

"Then I'd have pressured Ralph Moore and after him Eddie Parcell. If neither had cracked, I'd have tried it on sweetheart. I was convinced that someone pretty closely related to the case was guilty. If that hadn't worked, I'd have begun to suspect myself or you."

Hammer almost tore his hair. "And to think," he moaned, "that a lot of bright guys work day in and day out on police cases while a screwball like you pulls rabbits from hats."

I grinned.

"What your department needs is a hot-foot to stir it up."

"Or a slot machine with an empty jack pot," Beth said.

Hammer didn't know what she was talking about. He thought she'd gone wacky too. She probably had. She married me. It's nice to have a red-headed wife, but she ruined one thing for me. She filled up my slot machine with nickels. I'm still trying but I haven't beaten the darn thing yet. I guess I'm not a very good detective. Any guy should be able to beat a slot machine, that is, if he owns it.

THE BRASS RING

By DONALD BAYNE HOBART

Even an innocent pastime like riding the merry-go-round puts Private Detective Mugs Kelly right next to murder!

IF I hadn't decided to go strictly juvenile and take a ride on the merry-go-round it might not have happened, at least my part of it. I probably never would have heard of Cuthering T. Upton, and that would have made me just too happy for words.

Mugs Kelly is the name, and I'm big and tough with a face that had the gargoyles of Notre Dame looking down at me in horror the last time I was in Paris. There's nothing gruesome about the Kelly countenance, you understand; it's just plain ugly. Personally I thought it was a touch of professional jealousy upon the part of those waterspouts.

Since I'm a private detective the face and build come in handy. Some of the characters I'm forced to pal around with play rough, in which case I'm right in there slugging.

But let's get back to the merry-go-round, since we seem to be traveling in circles anyway. I've just finished up a job that took me out to Pittsburgh and I'm heading back to New York in my coupe. As I'm driving through Maryland, I spot a carnival going full blast.

"That's for me," I told the coupe, being a simple soul who would talk to my horse, if I had a horse. "Let's join the festivities."

So I found the parking space, locked the car and left it there, and went strolling along the midway with the local yokels. I found the Carney had the usual set-up. Games, sideshows, and all the rest of it.

The first thing I spotted was a stout man moving around through the crowd and looking like a hick constable in an old Mack Sennett comedy. I decided that if he was representative, then the local Law was straight from any loud scented cheese you wanted to name.

But after watching Fat Stuff for a few minutes, seeing him bump into peo-

ple and pretend to fall down I decided he was just part of the show. One of those characters you file and forget.

I was just standing there when something dug into my back. It felt like a gun



MUGS KELLY

barrel. Not wanting to be remembered as "Dead and Hasty" Kelly, I turned slowly out of my respect for firearms.

I breathed a sigh of relief when I found a tall, thin and elderly gentleman had poked me in the back with his cane. He wore a linen suit, a panama hat, white mustache and goatee. The makeup was that of a colonel such as had never been seen in Kentucky.

"I hope you will pardon the intrusion," he said. "But I am Cuthering T. Upton—the Cuthering T. Upton."

"How nice," I said. "And I hope the three of you will be very happy."

"I beg your pardon?" Upton stared at me.

"'Twas but an idle jest," I said. "There

is something I can do for you, Mr. Upton?"

"I'm sure we have met before," he said. "Your face is familiar."

"Once you get used to it," I said. "Mugs Kelly is the name."

"Mugs Kelly—of course!" exclaimed Cuthering T. Upton with a beaming smile. "The celebrated private investigator. We met in New York last year. Don't you remember me, Mugs?"

I didn't remember ever having seen him before, but if he wanted to make it old home week, that was all right with me.

"Pappy," I said tenderly. "Pappy, you done come home."

"Never mind the horse-play," said Upton in a low voice, looking around quickly at the crowd milling about us. "My life is in danger." He reached out and shook my hand and I found a small flat package in my palm. I closed my hand over it quickly. "Nice meeting you, Kelly," he said. "See you later. Look out for the constable."

Before I could start asking any questions, he swung around and hurried away. I dropped the little package in the side pocket of my coat, since I had the idea it might be better if I didn't try to examine it in public. I was just going to walk away when somebody grabbed my arm hard.

"So you and the old guy are working together," said a hard voice, and I found a big, tough looking man was holding me. "He goes through the crowd picking pockets and passes the stuff to you. All right, hand it over!"

"Hand over what?" I asked, not caring in the least for tough and nasty. "And let go of my arm, or you'll get a fist in your face."

"The pokes you guys have been lifting," he said, releasing my arm. "I'm Joe Clark, special officer. Let's have the stuff."

"Down, Towser, you're barking up the wrong tree," I said. "Show me your badge."

Just as I suspected, that one stopped him cold. If Joe Clark was a special officer then I was Napoleon, and I'm too tall for the part. He started fumbling through his pockets, and I let him have a quick flash of my badge.

"I—I must have made a mistake," he stammered. "Sorry."

He went away from there fast, and I

didn't make any attempt to chase him. I usually can find trouble without going running after it. I watched him though, and I saw him stop and say something to the clown constable who was still fooling around. Then they both disappeared in the crowd.

I wandered along the Midway, and saw one of the girl shows which wasn't so hot. After I came out, I heard music coming from the merry-go-round and decided to take a ride for two reasons. The first was that I like to ride on merry-go-rounds and the second was that I wanted a chance to think. It struck me that I was right in the middle of something that had the strong scent of ancient tuna, and I wanted to figure why-for and how-come.

I bought a ticket, gave it to another attendant and found the merry-go-round had stopped. I climbed onto a red and white horse. There were a lot of kids and a few older people taking this ride. I was surprised to see Cuthering T. Upton sitting in a gondola about six rows of horses ahead of me. Then some more people got on and blocked him off from my view.

The merry-go-round started and I was having a swell time. I tried for the brass ring. As we went around the ring arm was lowered so everybody riding the outside horses could make a grab for it. With the horses going up and down on the poles it wasn't easy to get a ring. I even missed on the second time around.

FINALLY the ride was over and the merry-go-round stopped. Everybody got off except Upton. He just sat there. I got curious and walked along the circular platform until I reached the gondola where the old guy was sitting.

One good look at the neat black hole in the center of Upton's forehead told me that he was dead. Someone had killed him with what must have been a bullet from a .22 caliber gun. He was holding a brass ring in his right hand and he had slumped back on the seat of the gondola, with his heavy cane lying beside him.

"What's the matter with him?" asked the ticket taker, who also ran the merry-go-round machinery. "Blazes! The guy has been shot!"

"He has," I said. "And you better close up for a time. The police will want to investigate this. It's murder."

"Yeah, they will." The attendant

turned away. "We got to close up all right."

In a few minutes the merry-go-round was closed down. Fortunately it was in a tent so the entrance could be fastened tight. The attendant told the crowd waiting to get on that there was something wrong with the machinery. I hung around, since I had found Upton, and besides I wanted to know who had killed him.

The police arrived, and a sergeant of the state troopers took charge. Sergeant Grant was his name. He was wiry, red-headed, and looked and acted like he knew what it was all about. Of course I had to tell him my name, what I did and where I came from right away. I also mentioned that Cuthering T. Upton had talked to me and said his life was in danger. I didn't say anything about the package Upton had given me though. I decided I would tell Grant about that later.

"There are angles about this case that puzzle me," the sergeant said, after the local coroner had examined the body. "Shooting a man on a moving merry-go-round like that takes expert marksmanship."

"It sure does," I said looking closely at the blue marks around the bullet wound in the corpse's head. "Especially with a twenty-two caliber gun."

I caught a gleam of something under the seat of the gondola and reached down and picked it up. I held it so the sergeant could see it too. It was a metal badge, with "Chicken Inspector" printed on it.

"Some kid must have dropped it," Grant said. "There's been too much trouble around here today. First Mrs. Hartly Smith comes to the carnival. She is very rich, and hasn't much sense if you ask me. She brings along a fifty-thousand-dollar diamond necklace that she was going to have repaired—something wrong with the clasp. Either she drops the package or someone lifts the necklace out of her purse, and she starts howling for the police."

"And then you get a murder," I said, sticking my badge in my pocket. "Just who was the late Cuthering T. Upton, anyway?"

"A retired banker and a friend of Mrs. Hartly Smith," said the sergeant. "She admits she did a lot of talking about having the necklace with her while strolling through the crowd."

"Which was just asking for somebody to lift it." I looked at Grant as a thought struck me. "Do you happen to know a big dark-haired man named Joe Clark?"

"Joe Clark, hum." Sergeant Grant thought a moment. "Seems to me there is a man named Clark who has the shooting gallery concession here. Yes, I'm sure of it, and he's big and dark."

"And might be very handy with a twenty-two rifle," I said, picking up Upton's cane.

I told Grant about Clark pretending to be a special officer and accusing me and Upton of being pickpockets. The sergeant was interested.

"I think we had better go talk to Clark," Grant said. "Come on." He looked at the cane I was holding, and grinned. "You can take that along for protection if you wish."

We headed for the shooting gallery and found Joe Clark there. He wasn't alone. Fat Stuff, the clown constable, was with him. Clark looked at me with a blank expression, and he had the face for it. I gathered he was going to pull the "I've never seen you before" routine regarding me.

Since only Clark and the constable were there the shooting gallery wasn't doing much business. It was the usual set-up. A bunch of .22 rifles chained to the counter, moving and stationary targets in the back and the whole thing in a tent.

I stepped back and let the sergeant do the talking while I examined Upton's cane. It proved to be very interesting.

"Want to ask you some questions, Clark," Grant said. "About a murder." He looked at the fat constable. "What's your name?"

"Ed Hogan," said the constable.

There was a magazine used for loading the guns lying on the counter and it was filled with bullets. I did some swift finger work with that when no one was watching me. Then I reached into my pocket and drew out the chicken inspector badge.

"You lost this badge when you murdered Upton on the merry-go-round, Hogan," I told the fat man.

He cursed, grabbed up one of the chained rifles and was raising it to aim at me. I lifted the cane in my right hand. There was a crack of a .22 and Hogan reeled back, dropping the rifle and holding his shoulder.

"Why, that cane is a gun," said Grant in surprise.

"That's right," I said. "The weapon that killed Upton. I figured it had to be some sort of trick weapon for Upton to let anyone get so close. There were powder burns around the wound in his forehead."

"And Hogan is the murderer," said the sergeant, covering the fat man with his revolver.

"Correct," I nodded. "Here's the way I figure it, Sergeant. Mrs. Hartly Smith brings the necklace to the carnival. She does a lot of talking and while Hogan is doing his rube constable act, he overhears her. He decides to lift the necklace, but before he gets the chance, she drops the package. Upton picks it up and decides to teach Mrs. Hartly Smith a good lesson."

"Sounds possible," said Grant.

"Then Upton realizes that Hogan and Clark here are after him. Maybe they roughed him up in the crowd before he can slip away. He gets frightened and hands the package to me. Hogan and Clark aren't sure which one of us really has the necklace, so Clark tries to pull the special officer gag on me, which didn't work."

"I'm talking," said Clark suddenly. "I didn't kill anybody and I ain't taking no

murder rap. This guy Hogan offers me twenty bucks to pull that special officer gag and try and get a package away from this big guy." He nods at me. "When I find the big guy is a cop, I'm not having any, and I tell Hogan that. He says if the big guy is an officer, then Upton probably didn't pass him the package."

"So Hogan trails Upton, and they both get on the merry-go-round," I took it up from there. "Maybe they struggled, and Upton tries to defend himself with his cane. Hogan grabs the other end of it and it goes off killing Upton—as it is a gun cane that only shoots one shot at a time."

"Wait a minute," said Grant. "If there is only one shot in that thing how did you manage to shoot Hogan in the arm with it, Kelly?"

"I reloaded it," I said. "From a bullet I got out of that magazine on the counter." I grinned, looking at the fat man who was glaring at me. "You never can tell when a clown constable might get too funny."

We opened the package and found it contained the diamond necklace all right. Hogan finally broke down and admitted the whole thing. That's the trouble with me going to carnivals—I'm always looking for the gimmick and this time I sure found it at the right time.



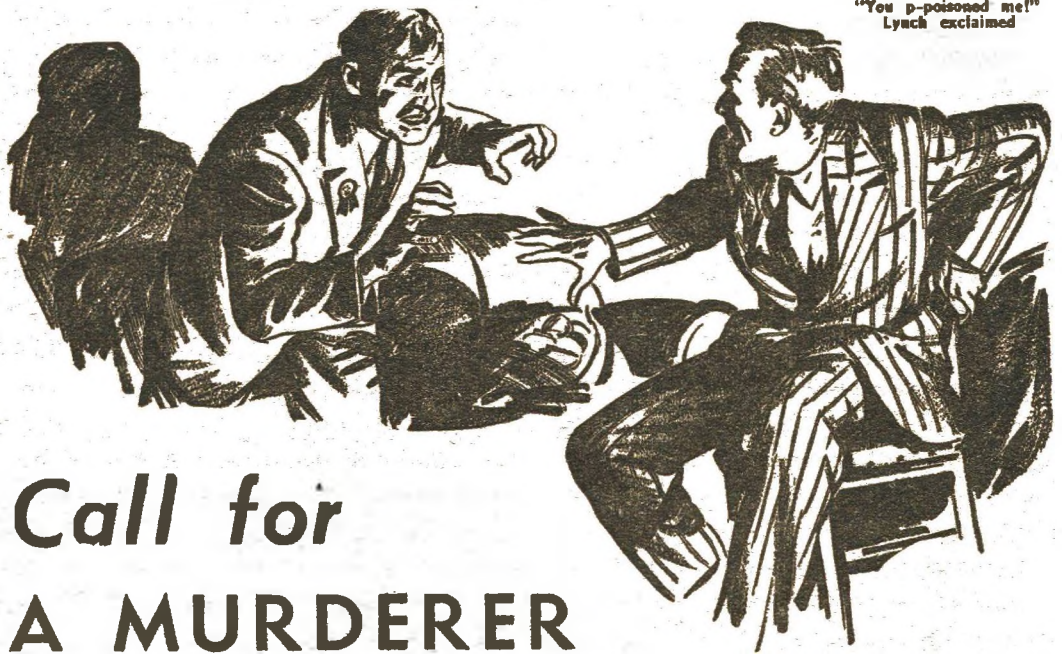
***"The Name of a Killer Is in That Sealed Envelope—
and I'm Honor Bound Not to Open It!"***

Tony Quinn was faced with one of the most ticklish problems in his entire career. William Gallaway, a public-spirited man who had spent a fortune to combat crime, now faced death and knew who his killer was going to be. He had entrusted the name of the killer to Tony Quinn—in a sealed envelope which was not to be opened until after the murder!

"How about opening it, sir?" Silk asked Tony Quinn. "I could do the job without leaving a trace. . . ."

"No, that's not the way," Quinn brushed aside the situation. "But—I think the Black Bat is going to visit Mr. Gallaway. . . ."

And that's how the Black Bat embarks on one of his strangest cases in **THE MURDER MAKER**, next issue's thrill-packed novel by G. Wayman Jones. It's a suspenseful mystery of many surprises and shocks that will hold you breathlessly interested from start to finish—look forward to it!



"You p-poisoned me!"
Lynch exclaimed

Call for A MURDERER

By JOHN L. BENTON

TEN years is a long time to wait for revenge. But James Brownlee would have waited forever, if he had to, and counted the cost none too great.

Staring across the crowded lobby now at the face which had haunted him all these years, Brownlee knew a sudden savage joy that made him momentarily dizzy. Abel Lynch seemed prosperous and well, in comparison to his own seedy, lined, haggardness. So much the better; if Abel Lynch was enjoying life, it would be that much harder for him to leave it.

Brownlee's eyes roved the hotel lobby, crowded with noisy men all sporting badges complete with blue and red ribbons. It was a convention of florists and he had inadvertently blundered into it looking for the bar. Each man wore a metal badge with his name and home town inscribed above the two color ribbon.

With his head slightly bent, Brownlee edged up alongside Abel Lynch and caught a glimpse of his badge. Harry Crown, it read, Ithaca, New York.

So Lynch was now Crown, the florist! A little sardonic laugh bubbled in Brownlee's throat as he moved on through the crowd. Typical of Abel to go from burglary to flowers.

A discreet question at the room clerk's desk brought the information that Mr. Crown was in room 903. Brownlee fingered the little glass vial of aconite that he had carried for ten years in his vest pocket. There were no preparations to be made. The perfect murder, he mused, is the unplanned one, the impromptu murder that leaves fewer clues than the over-planned type.

He waited at the bar, keeping an eye on the convention room until the meeting broke up and the delegates began to stream out. Some headed for the bar, but Abel Lynch disappeared in the direction of the elevators.

Brownlee waited ten minutes and then went upstairs. He knocked on the door of 903. Lynch opened it an inch inquiringly, Brownlee shoved his foot in, forced it open and stepped inside.

He waited, seeing the shock, the startled recognition grow and burst into

BROWNLEE KNEW THEY COULDN'T PIN THE KILLING ON HIM, BUT—

paralyzed fear.

"Jim Brownlee!" Lynch croaked.

"Yes, Jim Brownlee. Did you think I'd stay in jail until I rotted, Abel? Or should I say Harry Crown?"

"Jim!" gasped the other man. "You're not—you're not blaming me for that, are you? When I heard the cop's whistle I ran—same as you'd have done. I thought you heard it, would run too—"

"With my head in that safe I couldn't hear anything," Brownlee said viciously. "You didn't even stop to warn me, to see if I was coming with you. You ran to save your own yellow skin—you never gave me a thought! So I spent five years in jail while you had a good time outside. Did you think I'd forgot that?"

"Jim, listen!" Lynch babbled. "Let's talk this over. You've got to see my side of it. Let's have a drink!"

A drink. Brownlee controlled his mounting rage. The sight of his hated enemy, so well fed, so prosperous, afflicted him with an insane desire to sink his fingers into that fat throat. But this was better. A drink was a good vehicle for the aconite.

"Okay," he muttered and slumped into a chair.

"That's the boy," Lynch chattered. He got up and bustled nervously with a bottle and glasses. His fear was pathetic—but not to Brownlee, who was enjoying it.

He poured liquor into a glass, splashed seltzer on it, shoved the glass at Brownlee. When he turned to make his own, Brownlee dumped the aconite into his drink, stirred it carefully.

LYNCH turned back with his own drink made and Brownlee reached for it.

"You take mine," he said with a wolfish grin. "I don't trust you."

Sardonic humor, he thought, watching Lynch gulp the poisoned drink with nervous haste, his Adam's apple bobbing convulsively.

"Well, that's that," he said, as the florist set down the glass.

"What? What did you say?"

"Nothing." Brownlee took out his watch. He had administered a stiff dose and knew that he could expect results in just over five minutes, if Lynch proved susceptible.

The reaction was gratifying. Lynch's face began to pale, droplets of cold sweat

appeared on his skin. His eyes became fixed and glassy.

"M'tongue feels funny," he muttered. "Tingles." He groped for his throat. "Burns—burns all the way down."

The eyes shifted slowly to Brownlee and in their depths struggled understanding of what had happened.

"You p-poisoned me!"

With a tremendous heave, Lynch was out of his chair, clawed fingers reaching for Brownlee's face. The lean man grinned like a wolf, but he had no intention of being clawed; he got up out of his chair and turned to avoid the dying man.

But Lynch moved a little faster than expected. He hurled himself onto Brownlee's back and clung like a cat. Brownlee cursed in a savage undertone. He shook himself like a dog, but it was several seconds before he could dislodge the frantic clutch that Lynch had fastened upon him.

In the end it was more the poison than Brownlee's struggles. Lynch's muscles relaxed, he slipped away and collapsed to the carpet. As he tumbled, he carried over the end table, and with it the lamp and the telephone.

Panting, Brownlee stared down at him as he died. Then a tiny sound brought his attention back to his own position. From the earpiece of the spilled telephone, the operator's voice sounded.

"Your call please. Hello. Hello."

Brownlee started to replace the instrument, but a new thought stayed his hand. Why not leave it this way? Lynch would be found a little faster, but the overturned table was not a bad prop and a natural thing if a man dying either by suicide or by accident, were to grope for the phone to call help. All he had to do was get rid of his own glass—swiftly!

He took it to the bathroom, rinsed it out and set it on the shelf. Then on quick feet he went past the dead man, past the now silent telephone, and out into the hall.

The elevator door opened just as he got there, and out stepped an assistant manager, a pair of bellhops and the house detective. They didn't give Brownlee a second glance as they charged past.

He could have taken the elevator down, left the hotel and have been out of their range forever. But he didn't want it that way. What good was re-

venge if one didn't stay to see the fruits of that revenge come to ripeness?

So Brownlee turned and followed them back down the hall, catching up to one of the bellhops.

"Something wrong?" he asked.

"Nothing, sir," the bellhop answered, but Brownlee stayed with them, grinning to himself.

WHEN they entered the room, Brownlee was right behind them, despite the efforts of the bellhop to discourage him. And his face was appropriately grave and blank as they discovered the body and the overturned table.

"Mr. Harry Crown," the house detective muttered. "He's dead. We better get the cops right away."

Brownlee was satisfied with this. He decided to go now, wanting to get no closer to the police who might just take it into their heads to check up on him and find that he had a record and that he knew the dead man. That is, if they could pierce Lynch's disguise.

But when he turned to the door he found two husky bellhops in his way.

"What's the matter?"

"Sorry, sir, you can't go now," one of the bellhops said. Over Brownlee's shoulder his eyes met those of the house detective, and that hard-shelled charac-

ter stepped forward and laid a heavy hand on Brownlee's arm.

"You'll hafta stay now, bud," he said. "The cops'll want to talk to you."

"Me? Why me?" Brownlee demanded.

"Because from the setup here, this might just be murder, see? And in murder the cops want to talk to everybody concerned."

"But I'm not concerned! I just happened to see you and—"

"No? Then how come you got this pinned on the back of your coat?" And from the cloth, the detective pulled a metal badge with blue and red ribbons and thrust it under Brownlee's nose.

Harry Crown, Ithaca, New York, it read.

Brownlee's jaw dropped as he stared at it. Comprehension struck him a stunning blow. He remembered now. When Lynch had clung so tenaciously to his back he had pinned the badge on him—marking him for the whole world to see! He was branded, and all the cops had to do was take his prints and they'd find out the whole thing.

Desperate, he whirled to the door again, but the two bellhops and the detective were square in the way. And faintly now, far down in the street, he heard the sirens of the approaching police cars.



"You Are Not Allan Andrews. Get Out — or Die!"

PRI NTED in clumsy block letters on one of the mirrors in the Andrews home, the message stared at private eye Barney Forbes. Ever since Barney had consented to take part in a scheme which called for his impersonation of Allan Andrews, trouble had dogged his footsteps. True enough, he was not Allan Andrews—but how did anyone know that?

Follow Barney Forbes as he risks life and limb to uncover a sinister mystery in **MURDER OUT OF HAND**, a suspenseful novel by **EDWARD RONNS**. It's a hard-hitting narrative of a gory game played for high stakes and it packs a thrill in every paragraph! Featured in the April issue of our companion magazine, **THRILLING DETECTIVE**—now on sale, only 15c at all stands!



"That's the name of one of his friends," Iven gasped

THE LYING CORPSE

By WAYLAND RICE

When Detective Sergeant Dyne investigated the toughest murder case of his career, even the corpus delicti made trouble!

DETEKTIVE SERGEANT MATT DYNE cut the siren before he came in sight of the house. He was really rolling, traveling with all the speed that phone call from John Ridgely demanded.

When a man like Ridgely said he was in danger of being killed, he meant exactly that. Ridgely wasn't head of a large mining combine because he liked to play jokes or saw petty trouble building up into homicide.

The house was large, square and white, an old-fashioned place for this neighborhood, but as large as any of the others nearby. The street was shaded by tall, stately maples and oaks. The yard, behind the white picket fence, had rather tall grass, and trees grew close to the house, making it somewhat dark and remote. The whole place was as carefully sleek as a movie actress' hairdo.

Sergeant Dyne neither saw nor heard signs of any trouble. Lights were on all over the house, even in what seemed to be the windows of an attic. He opened the gate, walked up the path and rang the bell. He waited a full two minutes and rang again. Then he went to each end of the porch in turn and peered down the gloomy sides of the house. He saw nothing.

About the time he decided to kick in a window, someone clattered down the steps inside the house and the door was flung open. A young man—about twenty-eight—stood there. His face and arms, clear up to the elbows, were covered with dust and dirt. His hair was disheveled. But he wasn't a bad looking chap for all the dirt.

"I'm sorry I kept you waiting," he said. "I was in the attic cleaning up some things." Then he looked at the badge in Dyne's hand. "Police!" he gasped.

"There is probably nothing to it," Dyne said. "If any trouble existed here, you'd know about it, being in the house. Mr. Ridgely phoned Headquarters a few minutes ago. He said he was in danger."

"Danger?" The young man seemed startled. "Why, it must be some kind of a joke, Sergeant. I'm Gene Ivers. I live here as sort of an adopted son to Mr. Ridgely. I saw him about half an hour ago in his study. He was all right then and didn't seem alarmed. Come along. I'll take you to him."

MATT DYNE stepped into the hallway and began to look around. That was when the single shot roared out. It seemed to fill the house with a million reverberations and stopped both men in their tracks.

Dyne had never seen anyone as pale as Gene Ivers. For a moment he thought the young man was going to faint. But Ivers managed to totter after him to the study door. It was locked from inside. Dyne remembered seeing a fireplace equipped with heavy brass tongs and poker. He rushed back, got the poker and with it attacked the thinnest part of the door panels.

He broke through in less than two minutes and reached into the hole to fumble for the

bolt. He slipped it and threw the door wide open.

Seated behind a large desk was a gray-haired man. There was still a faint sign of life in him. Dyne heard Gene Ivers let out an unearthly scream. The man at the desk held a pencil in his hand and was drawing something on a piece of paper. He couldn't see what he was doing. His cheek lay flat against the blotter pad.

Before Dyne reached him, the pencil fell out of his hand and the man's body gave a violent twitch. That was all. There was no heart-beat when Dyne felt for a pulse.

Dyne looked at the corpse for one long moment. This was John Ridgely, soaked in his own blood that was still oozing from a large wound almost directly over the heart. On the floor, beneath a wide open window at the rear of the room, lay a huge pearl-handled revolver that looked as if it belonged to Buffalo Bill.

Dyne came to life then. He raced toward the window and peered out. Then he shoved himself through the window, jumped and landed lightly on the grassy lawn outside. His own gun tight in his fist, he began searching.

It was no use. Whoever had shot Ridgely, had worked fast after pulling the trigger. It was easy for a killer to start running and keep on running. With a two or three minutes' head start, he'd put space and darkness between himself and this house.

Dyne went back into the house, but by the more orthodox route of the front door. He was halfway down the hall when a car pulled up with a squeal of hastily applied brakes. A man got out, left the car door open and pounded up the walk to the porch. He skidded to a stop at sight of Dyne standing in the doorway with a gun in his hand.

"Who—who are you?" the newcomer demanded.

Dyne studied him, and saw a man about the age of John Ridgely. Which meant close on the heels of sixty. He was tall, angular and looked powerful for all his gray hair. He had light blue eyes that were snapping with a mixture of anger and fear.

"I'm the police," Dyne said. "What's your hurry, mister?"

"Police! Oh—then something happened. John phoned me at the club. He said I must come out at once, that he was in danger."

"That's what he told me," Dyne said. "The danger is over now. For John Ridgely."

Gene Ivers came out of the study, walking slowly, head down. He glanced up at the

sound of voices and moved a trifle faster.

"He's dead, Carl," he said. "He's dead!" The man addressed as Carl gave a convulsive shudder. Then he seemed to regain possession of that icy cold nature that was his. He looked at Dyne.

"My name is Carl Hoffman. I am—was—a good friend of John Ridgely. We'd known one another for more than forty years. And now he is dead. I came too late."

Dyne didn't reply. He walked back to the study. Nothing had been changed there. He saw a newspaper, neatly folded, on a small table near the door. But Dyne was interested in a different sort of paper. He walked around the desk and looked down over the dead man's shoulder at the words he'd scrawled as life ebbed out of him.

There were two words, legible enough, for Ridgely had printed each letter. The first word was fairly steady. It read 'ALFALFA.' The other, none too plain, Dyne made out as 'BRADY.'

HE CALLED Gene Ivers into the room and had him look. Carl Hoffman entered too, but stood near the door.

"Alfalfa Brady," Ivers gasped. "That's a man's name. One of John's friends. Or enemies. They'd been on the outs a long time. That—that revolver looks like one Brady might have carried."

Dyne told the two men to touch nothing. He hurried into the hallway where he'd noticed a phone. He called Headquarters and sent out an alarm for someone called Alfalfa Brady. It was a meagre description, so he yelled for Ivers and got a better one.

Alfalfa Brady, it seemed, was a character right out of the Old West. A has-been gun-fighter and cowboy and gambler and miner. Sixty-five years old or so, five feet eight, scrawny, no more than a hundred and twenty pounds. Almost bald except for a halo of gray hair, and he invariably wore a ten gallon hat.

"That," Dyne grunted into the receiver, "ought to get him picked up fast. Two guys of that description couldn't exist in this town. And send a couple of cars to his home address. Then get me the men who follow murder around."

He hung up and faced Ivers and Hoffman, who stood side by side now. Hoffman was nervously fingering a newspaper folded into his pocket.

"I don't suppose you need me any longer," Hoffman said. "I—there isn't anything I can do to help, Sergeant, And—and I'm terribly

affected by John's death."

"Mr. Hoffman—" Dyne's voice was quiet, but packed with authority—"I'm afraid you'll have to stick around. You see, the man who shot Mr. Ridgely did so within three minutes of the time I reached the body. You arrived so soon after the crime that it is quite possible you could have had your car parked nearby, raced to it after killing Ridgely, and then drove up here to brazen the whole thing out. You'll have to stay awhile."

"I killed John?" Hoffman yelled. "Sergeant, that is outrageous—"

"Carl, be yourself," Gene Ivers said. "The Sergeant meant no direct accusation. He said you might have done that. And it's true. You could have. That doesn't mean you did."

"I—I'll stay," Hoffman agreed. "It's necessary, I suppose."

Dyne walked back to the study and closed the door behind him. First of all, he searched it, being careful not to smudge any possible fingerprints. He found nothing much. The newspaper on the table was a sorry affair, wrinkled and damp with what smelled like ripe garbage. Furthermore, it was two days old. Dyne wondered why it had been left there, when the rest of the house was in such an exceptionally neat condition.

He didn't think too much about the case. The answer was too obvious. A dying man had written down the name of his killer. Find this man Brady, with the unusual first name of Alfalfa, and the answer to the whole thing would be provided. For Dyne's money, it was an open and shut affair.

He examined several enlarged photos depicting the dead man in cowboy regalia. He saw oil portraits of mine owners and photos of mines in the west. Some of them showed Carl Hoffman standing in front, with Ridgely by his side. Dyne called in Ivers.

"Are there any photos here of Brady?" he asked.

Ivers didn't even look around. "No, sir. Mr. Ridgely wouldn't permit even the mention of Alfalfa's name. They'd been bitter enemies for years. I guess Mr. Ridgely had a big battle with him over something when they were young. Maybe over women, maybe over a mine. Anyway, they became enemies. Frankly, I'm not surprised that Brady killed him."

Dyne sat down far across the room from the desk. He talked in a low voice. "You thought a great deal of Ridgely, didn't you?"

Ivers' head came up and his gaze was cool and steady. "Yes, sir. My dad died a long time ago. My mom died when I was born.

Mr. Ridgely was Dad's pal. I had nobody, so he took me in and treated me as if I were his own son."

Dyne nodded. "Ridgely was a bachelor, and that made bringing you up all the harder. Well, once Brady is found, the whole thing will be over. That is, so far as we're concerned. It won't be over for Brady until the jury gets through with him."

THE following two hours were extremely busy. Fingerprint men found a multitude of prints in the murder room, but none of them helped any. There were no footprints on the lawn outside to indicate which direction the killer had taken. In fact, there was nothing save that tremendous six-shooter, the name which the dying man had written, and a bullet lodged in the wall behind the desk.

Two things bothered Dyne. If Ridgely knew his life was in danger, why hadn't he taken some precaution to protect himself until help arrived? There were guns in the house. Ivers could have stayed close to his foster father and battled anyone who tried to kill him. Yet Ridgely had never even told Ivers.

Then there was the matter of the bullet dug out of the wall behind the desk. The medical examiner stated that a slug of high calibre had struck Ridgely close to the heart, causing death by hemorrhage. The bullet had continued on and passed through the body to lodge in the wall.

Back at Headquarters, Dyne tested the big six-shooter in the basement target range. The gun made a lot of noise and had a terrific kick, but there wasn't too much force to the bullet. He took one bullet apart and discovered why. The powder was so old it had lost much of its energy.

The men who had been sent for Alfalfa Brady reported that he'd partially stripped his apartment and vanished, taking his car with him. Road patrols and blocks produced no signs of the fugitive, whom the newspapers had already accused as the killer.

Dyne studied thick files on John Ridgely, some containing information from newspaper morgues, others composed of information he'd found at the dead man's home. It appeared that death by gunshot was foreordained for Ridgely. He'd been shot twice before, and on each occasion it had been in the chest and he'd been listed as dying. But his tremendous strength and vitality had pulled him through to the amazement of the doctors.

In each case, the wound had been the re-

sult of a gun duel which had taken place years before in the semi-lawless West. Ridgely had killed men—at least three—but he'd never shot anyone in the back or showed a streak of yellow. He'd been a colorful figure in the waning years of the nineteenth century, and when he had made a strike, he gave up the hard life and came East to live in comfort and security.

Ridgely had been a generous and unselfish man with everyone except Alfalfa Brady, whose career had rivaled his own. From ancient accounts it seemed that they'd been partners. Then Ridgely had discovered an extremely valuable piece of mining property and bought it on his own. Brady protested that purchase, claiming that since they were partners, he owned half. There'd been the inevitable gun battle so common to those days, but it had ended in a draw. Brady had sworn he'd get even some day.

What Sergeant Dyne wanted to know at this moment was if Brady could have nursed his desire for vengeance for so many years before taking any action. It seemed almost incredible and yet, on the surface of things, it seemed that was exactly what had happened.

Dyne had never liked the promptness with which Carl Hoffman had appeared at the scene and he was taking no chances. When Hoffman had been finally dismissed, Dyne put a tail on him. There were no reports as yet. Dyne decided to do something else about Hoffman too, just in case things turned out that Brady wasn't guilty.

Dyne knew Hoffman's club and went there. His badge worked wonders so far as co-operation went. He talked to bus boys, waiters, stewards and hat-check people. But it was the phone operator who gave him something of a lead.

"About nine-thirty this call came for Mr. Hoffman," she said. "I can't say who made it, but he spoke as if talking hurt him, or as if he was whispering so somebody close by his phone couldn't overhear. I had to make him repeat several times. I had Mr. Hoffman paged, and transferred his call to booth seven. He went in there. It's close by my switchboard. I don't usually pay much attention, but that whispering voice got me. I guess I wondered if Hoffman would be able to hear him. But I didn't cut in on the line or anything like that. This job is too good."

"How did Hoffman react?" Dyne asked quickly.

"Well, just like me, he couldn't hear either. You know how people are. Somebody talks

to them over the phone and they can't hear, so they begin yelling. When it's the other party who should be doing the yelling. Anyway, Mr. Hoffman must have understood him finally because he didn't just walk out of the booth. He bolted out and was yelling for his hat. That's all I know."

Dyne nodded. "Maybe you've helped us. Any time I can do you a favor, let me know."

HE WENT out and looked for the doorman. He found him down the street a bit watching some kids throwing pennies against a brick wall. Dyne showed his badge.

"Aw, let the kids have fun. It's only for pennies," the doorman argued.

Dyne grinned. "I've more important things to do than arrest a bunch of kids. I work on Homicide. Perhaps you know something that will help me. On the John Ridgely case."

The doorman looked startled. "Look, buddy, I knew Ridgely. He was a swell tipper and a nice guy. But I don't know a darn thing about his killing. Or anyway I don't think I do, but I'd almost lie to help find the guy who knocked him off."

"All I want is the truth. About nine-thirty another club member came out in a great rush."

"That would be Mr. Hoffman, Sergeant. Yeah, I remember all right. He nearly bowled me over, and instead of letting me whistle up a cab, he started running like sixty down the street. His car was parked there. He never leaves it in front of the club because then I have to keep an eye on it and that means four bits. Hoffman don't throw no dough around."

"I see." Dyne thought that Hoffman's actions were perfectly normal. Ridgely had phoned, said he was in danger and to come right out. Naturally Hoffman would be in a rush.

"He sure was in a hurry," the doorman rambled on. "But I saw him do something he never did before. He started to cross the street right over there. Then he slowed up, came back and started rummaging through the rubbish basket. No kidding, I saw him take out an old newspaper. Then he started running again."

Dyne didn't show any signs of how much this interested him. He was thinking of that two-day-old newspaper in Ridgely's study, a newspaper soaked with moisture from garbage.

Dyne went to the same trash can. There was a paper bag of garbage in it. The bag was soaking wet and so were all the papers

close to it. That newspaper in Ridgely's study had come from this basket. It had been put there by Hoffman in place of a cleaner, more recent newspaper which he took away. Dyne saw much and forgot nothing. He remembered the way Hoffman had nervously fingered the folded, fresh newspaper he had taken.

Dyne went back to Headquarters and was just in time to get a flash. Alfalfa Brady had been found. Dyne got the location and went there fast. It was three miles out of the city, along one of the old highways which wasn't used a great deal now.

Alfalfa had driven off the road. Tire marks were still visible where he'd apparently applied brakes before heading onto the soft shoulders, and the mark crossed a brief expanse of cleared land to some thick brush which had stopped the sedan.

Alfalfa was still behind the wheel, stone dead and cold, and in the grip of rigor. There wasn't a mark on him. In the rear seat were two traveling bags, which had been hastily packed. Dyne sat down on the running board to wait for the medical examiner.

An hour later Dyne talked with that official.

"Now understand me, Sergeant," the medical examiner said. "I never did go with the theory that the time of a man's death can be established very close. There are always too many complicating factors. The temperature, the age of the deceased, his physical condition. I should say this man died early this evening, of a heart condition that was probably chronic. I can tell better after the P. M."

"I'll look you up then," Dyne said. "At the morgue, eh? In about an hour?"

"Two hours. These things take time. Yes, in two hours I'll be much more certain."

Dyne drove to John Ridgely's home, more than four miles away. The only person there was Gene Ivers, who sat on the front porch smoking cigarettes furiously. Dyne told him what had happened.

"So he's dead," Ivers said bitterly. "He even cheated the vengeance of the law. Oh well, so long as he's dead."

DYNE sat down on the porch steps beside Ivers. "Tell me, were Ridgely and Hoffman really very good friends?"

"Certainly," Ivers replied. "The very best. They trusted one another in everything."

"Hoffman didn't owe Ridgely any money? Anything like that?"

(Turn to page 102)



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"Why, Mr. Hoffman is quite wealthy, Sergeant. What in the world are you getting at?"

"I wish I knew." Dyne grinned slightly. "Cops have to look down all alleys, Mr. Ivers. Most of 'em are blind alleys, but you never can tell."

But Ivers wasn't to be put off. "Do you mean to insinuate that Brady didn't murder Mr. Ridgely? That Ridgely, with his last living act, was mistaken, or lied?"

"Not at all." Dyne arose. He was getting into dangerous water and wanted to swim clear. "We merely question all angles. Frankly, I didn't like the way Hoffman appeared so promptly after Ridgely was shot. Did Brady, by the way, have a heart condition?"

"I hardly knew the man," Ivers said. "I wouldn't really know. But you're wrong about Hoffman, Sergeant. I know you are, for the simple reason that he was Ridgely's best friend."

Dyne tried another angle before he pulled out altogether. "About Ridgely's fortune. Who gets it? And does Hoffman share in any part of it?"

Ivers spoke patiently, as if Dyne were a backward pupil who learned only through constant repetition.

"Mr. Hoffman, Sergeant," Ivers said, "is wealthy. I told you that. He has more than enough money, and keeps adding to it. Why should Mr. Ridgely provide anything for him, beyond some token of their friendship? This he did do. I know the terms of the will. I get everything. Hoffman obtains possession of all the old portraits and photos of the West that are in the house. He collects those things and Ridgely's will makes Hoffman's collection as good as any."

"Okay," Dyne said. "Thanks, anyway. And I wouldn't mention this to Hoffman. It would only alarm him unnecessarily. We know Brady is the murderer. We'll more than likely discover that he arranged this long ago, carried it out and then fled. He was excited and nervous. His heart couldn't take it, and he felt himself going out. He braked his car, pulled off the road and died as the car was stopped by some heavy brush. That's all there is to it and—say, wait a moment."

Dyne arose quickly and squinted down the street. Ivers jumped to his feet.

"What is it?" he asked. "What do you see?"

"Just a cop," Dyne said. "The patrolman on this beat. Maybe he saw something. Let's go see."

They stopped the patrolman, who recognized Dyne and acknowledged his rank with a sloppy salute. The patrolman did have news.

"Now why didn't somebody tell me about this guy Brady?" he asked. "I know him by sight. I had no idea you were after him, or I'd have told you this before. I was heading for Grand and Grove. Call Box 217 is down there, and I had to make any eight-thirty duty call. Well, I passed this house and I saw a car in front. That ain't unusual, but I take a good look anyhow. I see Brady behind the wheel. He was scrouged down a little, as if he didn't want me to see him, and he was pale. The street light lit up the inside of the car kind of dim, but I could see it was Brady all right. When I came back half an hour later he was gone."

"What kind of a car was it?" Dyne asked quickly.

The patrolman gave an accurate description of the car which Dyne had last seen half enclosed by heavy brush, the car in which Brady had been found dead.

[Turn page]

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"Well," Dyne said, "I guess that does it. We've placed Brady at the scene of the crime. I'll make a report. Not much more to do now that he's dead. Good night, Mr. Ivers. If anything else turns up, I'll drop around."

IVERS didn't comment. He sat down on the porch and started smoking cigarettes again.

Dyne phoned Headquarters half a mile away and learned that the tail he'd put on Hoffman was still with him and had reported in only once, to the effect that Hoffman had gone straight home and was still there.

Dyne's next stop was at the morgue, where he met the medical examiner. That official had a full report of the autopsy.

"Brady suffered from a chronic heart condition. Must have had it for years. Lately, it grew worse and worse. As a matter of fact, I found out who his doctor was and contacted him. He showed no surprise at Brady's death. He'd warned him a year ago that he'd check out fast—and soon. In my opinion, Brady felt himself going, drove off the road and into the bushes so he wouldn't hurt anyone else. There wasn't time to cry out for help, even if he could cry out. He just slumped over the wheel and died."

"Thanks, Doc." Dyne was frowning slightly.

He returned to where his car was parked and went to the fashionable apartment house where Brady had lived alone. He discovered a service elevator and a side exit and scrutinized both carefully but without result.

Next, he drove to the club which Hoffman had left, consulted the doorman once again and drove to the spot where Hoffman's car had been parked. He checked his watch carefully and drove at a fast clip straight to Ridgely's residence. There he checked the time. He knew exactly when Hoffman had left the club and he knew almost to the moment when he'd reached this house. He also knew for a fact that Hoffman hadn't tarried on the way. Not one second.

Most certainly he had not parked away from the house, approached it on foot, entered to shoot Ridgely and departed by the window then rushed back to his car and pretended he had made a fast and direct ride from the club. Hoffman's ride to Ridgely's home had undoubtedly been direct.

But there was still that newspaper business. Dyne liked nothing he couldn't explain

by facts, and he saw no earthly reason for Hoffman substituting an old, garbage-saturated newspaper for the fresh one which had been on the table in the murder room.

Hoffman lived in a section equally as pleasant and fashionable as Ridgely. His house was, if anything, even more ornate and expensive. Dyne parked some distance away and strolled past the entrance, whistling softly. He knew the tail on Hoffman would spot him and he did. They met at the next corner.

"Nothing doing at all, Sarge," the detective said. "Hoffman drove here straight from Ridgely's place, put the car in the garage and ran like mad to the house. He let himself in. The place has been lit up ever since. Once or twice I saw him roaming around, but right now he's in that front room on the second floor. The one with the dormer."

"Stick around," Dyne said. "I'm going in. Come running if there's any noise. And watch the back door as I ring the front door-bell. If he runs out that way, you grab him. Even if you have to do it with a slug through the leg."

The detective scampered away to take up a suitable position. Dyne walked onto the porch and rang the bell in several long, sustained rings. He peered through a small window beside the door and had a full view of Hoffman coming down the steps from the second floor. Hoffman was in shirt sleeves and wiping his hands energetically on a piece of white cloth which he tucked into a hip pocket before opening the door. He seemed startled to find Dyne standing there.

"Why—why, this is unexpected," he gasped. "Come in, Sergeant. Has anything

[Turn page]

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new happened? I heard over the radio that Brady had been found—dead.”

“That’s right,” Dyne said. “I smell oil. Or is it my imagination?”

Hoffman gulped. “No, I’ve been oiling up some fishing reels. Thought I’d get away from all this. My hands are oily and I’ve got a cloth in my pocket which I wiped my hands on. Just fishing reel oil, that’s all.”

“You weren’t, by any chance dismantling the gun you took from Ridgely’s house in that newspaper, Mr. Hoffman? Suppose we have a look, eh?”

“Gun? Newspaper?” Hoffman cried, alarmed.

MATT DYNE started for the stairway. Hoffman grabbed his arm, whirled him about and let pop with a right fist. It missed by a mile and packed no power anyway.

Dyne took his arm firmly and dragged him upstairs. In the room with the dormer window he found a heavy automatic in the process of being torn down. There was also a spent slug amidst the pieces of the gun.

“We’ll get your clothes, Mr. Hoffman,” Dyne said. “This is a pinch. You were seen taking an old newspaper out of a trash can before you started for Ridgely’s home. You substituted that old paper for one on Ridgely’s table. The new paper was wrapped around this gun and this slug. Brady didn’t kill Ridgely.”

“Who—who did?” Hoffman quavered.

“You guess,” Dyne said quietly. “And you’re under arrest, so the guessing shouldn’t need more than a couple of chances.”

Dyne gathered up the dismantled gun and the slug. He went with Hoffman and when the man had his hat and coat on, Dyne clamped handcuffs around his wrists. Hoffman’s shoulders sagged. He looked as miserable as any man could.

Dyne whistled up the detective, who was hidden in the shadows, and let him drive. They went straight to Ridgely’s home. On the way, Hoffman managed to find his voice.

“But you’re wrong, Sergeant. Why should I have killed Ridgely? He was my friend. There is no motive.”

“Sure there is,” Dyne said pleasantly. “Ridgely’s picture collection. Guys go crazy over things like that. You’re a collector. You wanted Ridgely’s pictures and his will gives them to you. Ivers told me all that. It’s motive enough.”

Hoffman began to moan softly, and Dyne

let him stew. In front of Ridgely's house, he spotted the patrolman and called him over. He gave him and the detective some whispered orders, then hauled Hoffman out of the car and half dragged him to the door.

Ivers opened it, and was staggered by what he saw.

"Hoffman—in cuffs?" he cried. "Sergeant, have you gone crazy?"

Dyne kicked the door shut and led the way into the living room. "No, just coming to my senses. Brady didn't kill Ridgely. Hoffman did. The gun we found didn't do the job, The killing was done by another which I located in Hoffman's possession. He was taking it apart as the first act of getting rid of the thing, along with the bullet which really killed Ridgely. I found out the gun we discovered on the floor had very old ammunition in its chambers. The powder didn't pack enough wallop to penetrate Ridgely's body and lodge in the wall."

"But why?" Ivers shouted. "They were such excellent friends."

"Those pictures you told me about," Dyne explained. "You're a pretty good guy, Ivers. You didn't want to actually come out and accuse Hoffman, though I suspected him."

"But there is still Brady to account for," Ivers declared.

"Sure, and he's all accounted for. The man who murdered Ridgely found Brady either dead or dying, in his own apartment, of that heart condition. He loaded the body into Brady's car, parked it in front of the house so the patrolman would see him and

[Turn page]

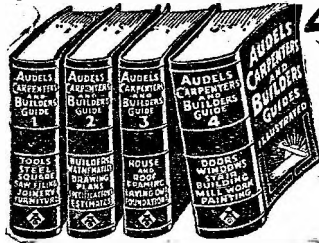
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establish his presence at the scene of the crime. Next, he drove the car to the spot where we found it, simulating the driving of a dying man. He put Brady's body behind the wheel, hiked over to the highway and got a lift back. Then he walked in on Ridgely, shot him and there you have it."

Ivers bit his lip and glanced at Hoffman. "You really have the evidence then, Sergeant?"

"Oh, perfectly. It's the chair for Hoffman. If I ever saw premeditated and planned murder, this is it. We've got everything. Opportunity, motive—well, come on Hoffman. We'll start on your last ride."

"No, wait," Hoffman cried. "You're making a mistake. I didn't kill him. Ridgely phoned me at the club. He was dying then. He told me to get over fast and no matter what I found, to pick up the folded newspaper he was leaving on that table. I was to substitute another. I did fish the substitute out of a trash can, but I was in a hurry. I came directly here. I did as Ridgely asked. He was my friend. He knew he could depend upon me."

"Do you know who killed Ridgely?" Dyne asked.

"Yes." Hoffman faced Ivers. "He did!"

IVERS laughed harshly and paced across the floor. There was a wide open window at the rear of the room.

"He's trying to save himself, naturally," Ivers said. "But throwing the blame on me won't work. Look what I owed Ridgely. My very existence. He took me in when I was nothing but a baby. Would I kill a man like that?"

"Yes!" Hoffman shouted. "You would because Ridgely killed your father. That's why Ridgely took you in. Ridgely was a fighter and a killer. Sure, he was all that, but he had a heart too. He killed your father in a fair fight. But you're like your father."



NEXT ISSUE'S NOVEL

THE MURDER MAKER

By G. WAYMAN JONES

You shoot without thinking. The fight was your father's fault and he got what he deserved. Brady knew about it. He told you. He was dying, and he called you over. He hated Ridgely and this was the way he sought vengeance. Brady told you that by killing your father, Ridgely came into a fortune. Well, it's true, he did. That's why Ridgely made you his sole heir. That's why he brought you up. He felt he owed you something."

Ivers, at the far end of the room stood looking intently at Hoffman and Dyne. The detective was placidly chewing on a cold cigar. Ivers suddenly turned and streaked for the open window. He started a lunge five feet from it and executed a perfect dive through the window.

Still Dyne didn't move. A moment later Ivers came back, through the same window. Pushed back by the husky patrolman, and Ivers' face didn't look quite the same.

Dyne took the cuffs off Hoffman and put them around Ivers' wrists. "I had to make Hoffman admit his part," he said. "I was pretty sure you'd killed Ridgely."

"But I was with you when the shot was fired," Ivers yelled. "How could I have killed him?"

Dyne grinned. "Ridgely was a funny sort. He was a straight shooter, and he could take it as well as hand it out. You shot him and you thought he was dead. You had to establish some sort of an alibi, so you began

[Turn page]

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cleaning the attic. You wouldn't have heard any shooting up there. Nobody would suspect you. There was no motive.

"But Ridgely was tough. He'd been shot in the chest twice before. Getting shot wasn't new to him, and I'm betting he thought he could pull out of this also. Though he may have had some doubts because he phoned Hoffman to pick up the gun and the bullet. I say Ridgely's actions were based on hatred of Brady because Brady had told you the secret. Ridgely hoped you'd never know—how he killed your father. This hatred of Brady was so intense, it gave Ridgely the strength to hang on.

"Ridgely knew Brady had told you the secret because before you shot Ridgely, you let him know. So Ridgely phoned Hoffman. Then he concealed the gun in that newspaper which Hoffman was to pick up unobtrusively. Ridgely also included the slug which had passed through his body. All this he did while he was slowly dying. Men don't die as quickly as the movies or stories indicate. Some have lived for days with slugs through their hearts. Some even recovered."

"I was wrong," Hoffman broke in. "I didn't know what Ridgely was up to."

"Make a clean breast of it, Hoffman," Dyne advised, "and you'll be shown a full degree of mercy. Let me go on. Ridgely's next move was to phone the police. Ridgely knew Ivers was in the house and although Ivers

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had shot him, Ridgely wanted Brady to pay, because in his opinion Brady was the greater villain and had committed the more serious crime in telling Ivers the whole story of that affair many years ago.

"So Ridgely held on to his life. How he did it, I don't know, but he was a man of great determination. He heard me arrive. He had one of his old six-shooters and fired a bullet into the wall, dropped the gun and put the handkerchief he'd used on it into his pocket. Then he felt himself going. Once more he found that all consuming hatred for Brady buoying him up. For the final act, he wrote Brady's name. A sure conviction. He thought Brady was alive. Ivers neglected to tell him Brady had related this story as he lay dying."

"It's horrible," Hoffman groaned. "Horrible. But it was like Ridgely to do a thing of this sort. Just like him, and he did hate Brady as intensely as you indicate."

"I know," Dyne sighed. "It served to give me something of a lead. The way Ridgely had bled was another clue. I reached him two minutes after he was presumably shot, but no man bleeds that much in two minutes. He took care that no blood got on the floor. He was careful. And then, when Ivers opened the door, he knew the moment was at hand.

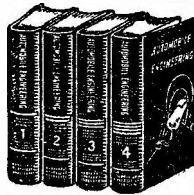
"Ivers believed Ridgely stone dead for many minutes. He greeted me with his alibi. Without waiting for any questions, he established that he'd been in the attic for half an hour. Why? I was a stranger. Why should he tell me that? Then I found that the gun on the floor had not been used for murder. It was you or Ivers, Mr. Hoffman. I knew you were mixed up in it somehow. If I could get Ivers to let you take the full blame, I knew you'd talk."

Hoffman nodded. "Yes. Yes, I talked. I'm not made of the stuff that Ridgely was. Let's get it over with."

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OFF THE RECORD

(Continued from page 10)

There'll be plenty of swell reading in the next big issue, with thrills and excitement on every page. Plenty more stories and features, too, in addition to those already mentioned. For the tops in detective and mystery stories—look forward to our next issue!

LETTERS FROM READERS

QUITE a number of readers have written in lately, requesting that in a forthcoming issue we reproduce, on the cover, a portrait of the Black Bat in full regalia, so that you loyal fans will have a fine reproduction of the Black Bat's picture in full color, suitable for framing. What do you other readers think of it? Would you rather have a cover of this kind than one with an action situation? Please write and let us know.

We'd like to have letters from you, too, telling us your opinion of the various stories in this issue. Though we can only print excerpts from a small portion of the letters received, all communications are carefully read and studied. If there is anything you'd like to see changed in the magazine, your ideas on the subject will be warmly appreciated. The welcome mat is out—for praise and criticism alike!

Now let's look at the mail:

I have read every bit of the latest issue of **BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE**, and so—my compliments! **CITY OF HIDDEN DEATH** and **G. Wayman Jones** were great. In a previous issue I read **DEAD MAN'S PLUNDER** and I agree with all who gave it praise. I do not agree to the Black Bat's being married, for no man in his right mind allows his wife any dangerous tasks such as Carol Baldwin performs. So marriage would eliminate Carol, which is bad.

Please follow the suggestion of Robert N. Federowicz and put a portrait of the Black Bat on the cover.

I don't agree with Alvin Whiteheart who says it's impossible to break down a door by charging into it the way someone was doing in one of your pictures. While staying in Florida once, at a hotel, I was asked to break open a door, the reason was the hotel was being thoroughly searched for the cause of a strong smell of smoke. I am 6'4" and 190 pounds, and I was able to splinter the panels by a charge of some 8 feet. As for the tie and hat of the man in the picture not being mussed, the hat could have been a tight fit (or snug) and there could have been a clip on the tie.—*Roy N. Glerum, Delmar, Del.*

Am writing to tell you how much I enjoy the Black Bat's stories. If I had my way, his story would be the only one in the book. I really get excited when I read his stories.

As Robert Federowicz says about the Black Bat's portrait on the cover, I would like that very much too, and I believe everyone who reads the Black Bat would enjoy it also.—*Edith Taylor, Columbus, O.*

I do not agree with the idea of giving the Black Bat a Seeing Eye dog. The Black Bat can get along very well by himself, and besides there are a lot of people who do not care for dogs and consider them dangerous. Let's keep the Black Bat as he is.—*Jim Purkines, Escondido, Calif.*

I agree with Robert Federowicz. A good half view with the Black Bat's costume patterned after the way Parkhurst used to draw him would be perfect on the cover.—*Jerry Stier, Avon, N. J.*

There are a lot of rackets making victims of veterans. Veterans are getting cheated out of their bonus money and the few dollars they managed to hold on to while in service. I think it would be a good idea if Tony Quinn and the Black Bat got after some of these chiselers, confidence men and racketeers and exposed them and gave them what was coming to them for their dishonesty. What do you think? Tell G. Wayman Jones I believe it would make a thrilling story.—*Thomas Price Malone, Jr., Phoenix, Ariz.*

Thanks for your suggestion, Tom. We'll tell Mr. Jones about it. And now for just one more selection from our bulging mail-bag:

I am a steady reader of BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE and the Black Bat is the one story I really like to read best of all. He is tops with me. It would please me very much if you would have a nice picture of the Black Bat on the cover, and please put more pictures of Tony Quinn in the book.—*Ann K. Hamtramck, Detroit, Mich.*

Thanks, everyone, for all the fine letters. Write us today. We'll be looking for YOUR letter or postcard. Please address it to The Editor, BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. So long. See you again next issue!

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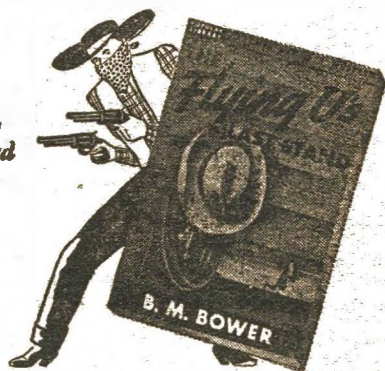


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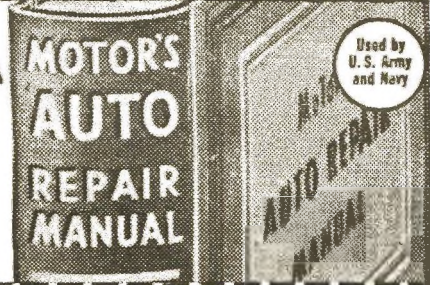


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