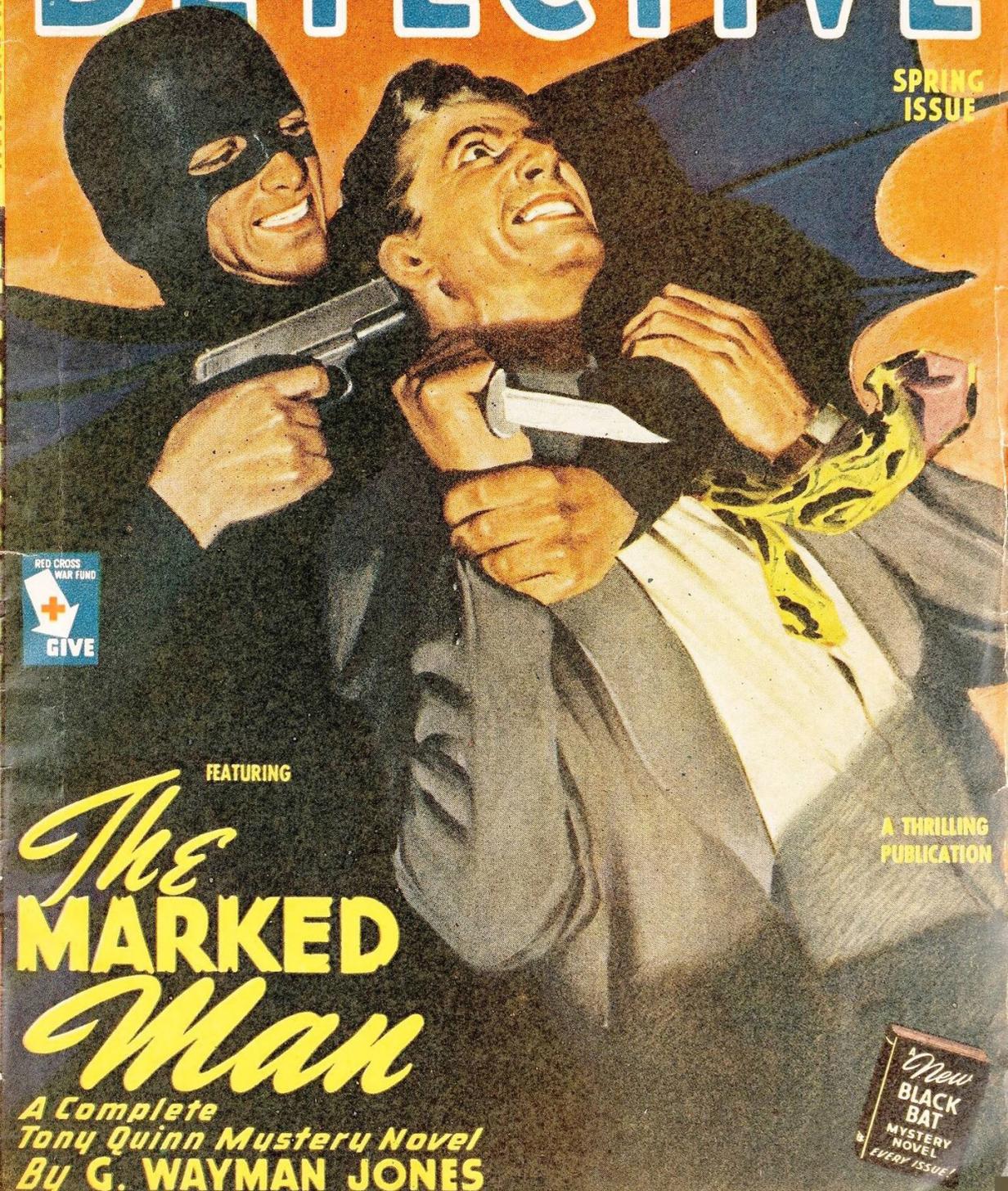


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Nemesis of Crime

By G. WAYMAN JONES



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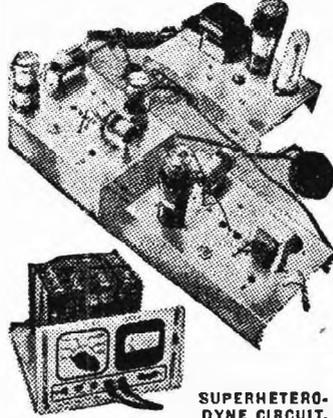
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OFF THE RECORD

A DEPARTMENT WHERE READERS
AND THE EDITOR MEET

IF YOU were a very clever jewel thief and wanted to keep track of New York's most valuable gems, how would you go about it?

That's what the Black Bat wanted to find out in **MURDER ON THE LOOSE**, next issue's thrilling novel by G. Wayman Jones. For a wave of audacious jewel robberies in Manhattan was giving the police nervous jitters and there was plenty of indications that the crooks were so ruthless and bold that murders were going to result.

As Tony Quinn, special District Attorney, the man who was the Black Bat, could make no open moves. But as his blood counterpart, a creature of the night, he could and did move over the city like an invisible wraith. And his loyal aides, Butch, Silk Kirby and Carol Baldwin pursued their own investigations.

Carol Gets a Lead

It was Carol who got the first lead. Posing as a lady's maid, she was sent out on a job by an employment agency specializing in high class domestic help. The same agency recommended a boarding house which catered entirely to chauffeurs, maids and similar workers.

The room was so nice and the meals so remarkably good that Carol was surprised. And then things began to register. For one thing, she noticed that at dinner, the girls frequently bragged about their employers' jewels.

Mrs. Carter, the proprietress, and her manager, Jacques, an enormously fat man, plus Mrs. Carter's son Compton, made no comment on these conversations. But behind dazzling, thick glasses, Jacques seemed to be drinking it all in.

And next day, frequently, there would be a jewel robbery—the victim being the woman whose jewels had been so freely discussed. Some times it was another woman who was robbed.

But when Carol learned that there was a chain of these boarding houses strung over the city, she felt that she had stumbled on the method by which the crooks got their information.

Murder Stalks!

This particular night the usual conversation was going strong with one of the girls describing a diamond necklace her mistress was going to wear at a party that night.

At two in the morning, Carol left her room and sneaked downstairs. There was a light in the butler's pantry and she heard the excited voices of Mrs. Carter and her son Compton.

"We'd better get Jacques over here," she said. "He told me to call him if everything wasn't exactly right. You're sure the man was dead?"

"I stuck a knife into his chest right up to the hilt," the boy said.

Carol shivered. So the Black Bat's hunch had been right. The killings had been done!

Find the Master Mind!

The next day when she had a chance to get away, she hurried to Tony Quinn's house, entered by the summer house tunnel and made her report. She added also the rest she had seen, how Jacques had come, taken the boy's bloody shirt to destroy and the diamond necklace which he said would have to be turned over to a certain party for appraisal before Compton got his cut.

"So there is someone behind this," Quinn said thoughtfully. "There would have to be a clever master mind. Any idea who it is?"

"No, though Jacques probably does."

But Jacques was not the kind of man who could be scared, as Butch found out. Though fat, the man was almost as strong as the massive Butch and his knowledge of judo made him a fearsome adversary.

It was up to the Black Bat and his little organization to run down and unmask the leader of this vast criminal conspiracy. So once more, Tony Quinn, the crusader against crime, donned his hood and mask and the Black Bat went forth by night to hunt down the men who lived by murder.

An Exciting Crime Chase

It was a chase filled with excitement and danger. Carol herself was the first casualty. Boldly searching Jacques' house, she discovered a complete jeweler's workshop, with all the tools necessary for cutting up stones, bracelets, rings and similar gew-gaws. She had no chance to report to Tony Quinn. The blow came out of the darkness and she never saw who hit her.

From there on it was a double quest for the Black Bat. To find the master criminal and find the girl he loved—before they decided

(Concluded on page 80)



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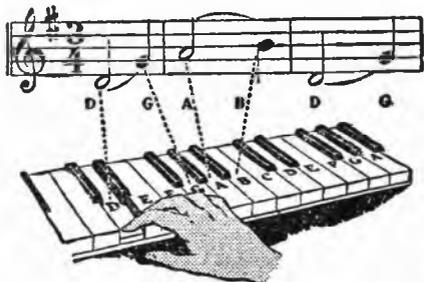
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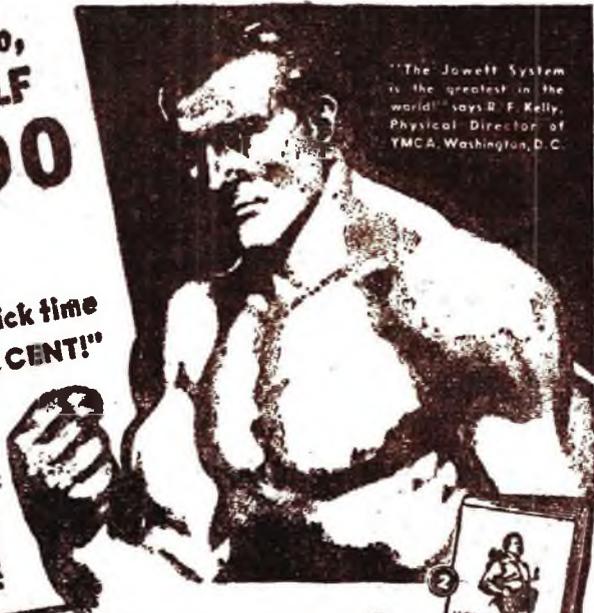
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When the extinguisher was turned on the flames, they leaped higher and higher (Chapter X)

THE MARKED MAN

By G. WAYMAN JONES

To Talk to Sidney Trexel Meant Death – Until Tony Quinn, Wrecker of Criminals, Stepped into the Case and Began Tracing a Sinister Pattern of Death and Plunder that Defied Solution!

CHAPTER I

Murder in a Crowd

SIDNEY TREXEL was forty-five. He was still slim, and his dark brown hair showed no streaks of silver. He had a pugnacious jaw, keen, observing eyes and, being a wealthy dealer in bonds, dressed to fit the part.

As a rule, Sidney Trexel was quite calm, taking matters in their course and rarely showing any alarm. But as he emerged from

his private dwelling in midtown Manhattan, he seemed to be almost on the verge of panic.

He stood in the doorway for several minutes, carefully scrutinizing the people who walked up and down the street. Satisfied that they presented no danger, Trexel began walking rapidly North. He reached the corner, slowed up and tried to be casual about entering the avenue. There he stopped again and looked around.

A newsdealer called his name, and Trexel gave a start of alarm, which he quickly conquered. Digging into his pocket for change,

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The Black Bat Goes on the Elusive and

he bought a late edition and began opening the pages, scanning the headlines quickly.

"Nice night, Mr. Trexel," the newsdealer said affably.

Trexel didn't reply. Instead, he placed the newspaper on the small counter and avidly read a short article which had to do with the release of three men from prison.

"Something worrying you, Mr. Trexel?" the newsdealer persisted. "Maybe I can help."

Trexel smiled thinly.

"I wish you could, Joe. I wish anyone could, but it's something I must handle myself. By the way, you can see my house from here. Have you noticed anyone watching it?"

"Well, I ain't looked steady at it, sir. When I did glance that way though, I didn't see anything worth noticing."

"Thanks." Trexel dropped a coin on the counter. "If you do see anyone acting suspiciously, it's worth twenty dollars if you get the information to me."

"My eyes are glued on your house, Mr. Trexel," the newsdealer said. "I'll watch it until two in the morning, when I close up. Thanks for a chance to make twenty bucks."

Trexel nodded, walked away and apparently forgot all about his newspaper. The newsdealer watched him merge with the crowd, shrugged and started to fold the paper for resale. Out of curiosity though, he turned it around and looked at the article which Trexel had found so interesting. It wasn't much.

FUTURIST LEADERS RELEASED FROM PRISON

The days of the Black Legion and the K.K.K. and that society known as The Futurists, were brought back to mind today with the release from prison of George Wayne, Edmund Glover and Ted Slater. They served a full seven year term, with some months off for exemplary behavior.

The Futurists was an organization on a nationwide basis given to great mumbo-jumbo, the wearing of fantastic regalia, militaristic meetings and a general fraud instituted upon its members. The dues—which were large—were absorbed by organization officials for their personal use.

The three ex-convicts stated that they had no plans to resume their once potent order.

The newsdealer shrugged. It was none of his business anyway, except that Mr. Trexel was a steady and good customer. He didn't want anything to happen to him. He looked down the street at Trexel's house and resolved to get that twenty-dollar reward if he could.

Sidney Trexel, meanwhile, stopped in at a tobacco store where he was also well known. He nervously fumbled with a roll of bills,

passed one of them to the clerk and was handed a box of cigars. He opened and inspected them, nodded in satisfaction, and the box was wrapped in brown paper for him.

"Well, Mr. Trexel," the clerk said, "what do you think of the war these days? The Japs are getting what they deserve. Boy, am I glad to see them blasted!"

"We all are." Trexel tried to smile. "Personally, I haven't read the war news these past few days. I've been—ah—terribly busy. Yes, very busy. Keep several boxes of my cigars in stock, will you? I'm smoking more than usual of late."

Trexel went out on the street again, hesitating at the doorway, turning his head first in one direction and then another. Finally, he stepped into the crowd like a swimmer darning the water on a northern December day.

The tobacco store clerk rang up the sale and went back to talking with another customer who wasn't in quite so much of a hurry.

"If I ever saw a man who expected to meet trouble, Trexel is the guy," this clerk mused.

THE customer looked up in time to see Trexel disappear at the end of the window.

"That's Sidney Trexel, the Wall Street man, isn't it? Maybe he's had a little trouble on the market."

"That man," the clerk said, "never showed any worry before, even when he got trimmed. There's a lot more than business that's worrying him."

Trexel glanced at his watch and then walked rapidly east to a public garage where he kept his sedan. Some minutes later, he drove out and proceeded downtown. It was almost eight o'clock, quite dark, and the streets were well crowded with pre-theatre and after-dinner throngs.

Trexel stopped at a corner and sat behind the wheel waiting and once more scanning the pedestrians. Now, however, he seemed less nervous. Then he blew his horn one short blast, opened the door and stepped to the sidewalk.

A man of about his age was approaching with outstretched hand. Trexel tucked his box of cigars under one arm as he welcomed the man. The newcomer was darker than Trexel, stouter by forty pounds, but just as carefully and tastefully dressed.

"Glad to see you, Cliff," Trexel said heartily. "Meeting like this on a street corner isn't exactly the way I like to do business, but I'm tremendously worried. Our business matter couldn't wait, of course, and that's why I arranged to pick you up here. Get into my car, and I'll tell you the entire story."

Baffling Trail of Three Mysterious Ex-Convicts!

Trexel turned toward the car door, stepped upon the running board and then spun around quickly. Cliff Farraday had uttered a sharp scream. Now he was clutching with both hands at his chest, and blood welled between the fingers.

He swayed from side to side, like a puppet with its strings removed whose jointed knees hadn't quite started to buckle yet. Farraday's knees finally did buckle. He crashed forward, hit the rear fender of Trexel's car, rolled off it and sprawled on the sidewalk.

Cliff Farraday had screamed from pain, but Trexel's scream was louder, for it was induced by sheer terror. As he screamed, he ducked and all but slid beneath his car.

directly above his heart. He straightened and gave crisp orders to the policemen who gathered around.

"He's been shot," McGrath said. "Looks to me as if the bullet came from high up. Probably from one of the windows in the buildings across the street. Seal off the block. One of you put in a call for the emergency squad. Snap into it. This is murder."

The word brought a dismal groan from Trexel. McGrath was looking at the buildings across the street, studying those windows he could see. On the fourth floor of the edifice directly across the way, one window was open.

"Flanagan!" McGrath called one of the



THE BLACK BAT

Pedestrians came to an abrupt stop. Nobody seemed quite capable of figuring out just what happened. Then an authoritative voice called orders for the gathering crowd to break up. A rather short, compactly-built man wearing a derby hat, was busy pinning a gold badge on the lapel of his coat as he hurried toward the scene.

He was Captain McGrath of the Detective Bureau. From a point halfway down the block, he'd been attracted by Farraday's yell, watched him buckle and knew instantly what had happened. Patrolmen and two traffic cops were hurrying up too, and a radio car came to a quick stop.

McGrath bent over Farraday's form, raised the man and took a quick look at the wound

radio patrolmen back. "Take two men and see what's behind that open window. Pay particular attention to that building."

Trexel extracted himself from his odd position, half under the car. He arose slowly and warily. His face was ashen, his hands shook badly. He picked up the paper-wrapped box of cigars which had fallen to the sidewalk.

"What's it all about, mister?" McGrath asked. "Or are you just an innocent bystander?"

"I—I'm the man for whom that—that bullet was intended," Trexel gasped. "Get me out of here. They may be watching. They may try again, and next time they'll succeed."

"What is this?" McGrath demanded.

TREXEL seized the detective captain's arm in a shaky grip. "I tell you it should have been me lying there dead or dying. Not Cliff Farraday. I've got to find cover of some sort."

"Get into the car," McGrath ordered and drew his gun. He climbed into the car too. "Now give me the low-down on this. What did you mean by saying the bullet was meant for you—not the man who was killed?"

"Exactly that"—Trexel glanced at the badge.—"Captain. They've been after me ever since they got out of prison. Sooner or later they had to catch up. I've even been afraid to visit my office. I had some urgent business with Farraday, so I asked him to meet me here. I thought it might be safer. . . ."

"Who's after you? And why?"

"I—I don't think I shall elaborate right now, Captain. In the first place, I'm so frightened I can hardly concentrate. I heard the bullet whiz past my ear and strike poor Farraday. I—saw him die, and I knew it should have been me."

"And in the second place?" McGrath growled.

"What I have to say is—well—confidential. I really should tell it only to someone of importance. Like the District Attorney. You see, the information I have also involves me. Oh, I'll talk all right. I'll even give you the names of the men who tried to murder me and killed Farraday instead."

"Have it your own way," McGrath grumbled. "Only I'm a Detective Captain, and I carry some weight. Here comes Flanagan. He looks as if he found something."

"Pray that he found the men who fired that shot," Trexel said fervently. "If he didn't, I'm doomed!"

McGrath rolled down the car window, and Flanagan made his report.

"You were right, Captain. That room with the open window—it's unoccupied. But there were cigarette butts on the floor, and the door had been forced."

McGrath climbed out of the car.

"Get in, Flanagan, and guard this man. Keep your gun handy. Somebody is after him, and they mean business. I'm going across the street and see what happened."

McGrath proceeded straight to the room with the open window. It hadn't been occupied for some time, and there was considerable dust about the premises. There was no furniture.

Cigarette butts—two brands—were strewn around the floor, along with matches and empty match containers. A pair of cheap binoculars lay on the floor just beneath the window, and further prowling brought forth a single .38-calibre cartridge shell. McGrath rolled this between his fingers.

"Here is where the killers were." McGrath reviewed the case mentally. "They must

have known that Trexel and the dead man were going to meet across the street and waited here. They lined up the target with those glasses and then fired one shot. It missed Trexel and got the other fellow. This is a job for a man with brains. I can handle it, but Trexel insists I take him to the D.A. before he'll talk."

"We can handle things here, Captain," a radio car sergeant said. "Go ahead and take this suspect to the D.A."

"I didn't call him a suspect," McGrath snapped. "He was standing right in front of Farraday when it happened. The bullet was intended for him, but he must have moved just as the murderer pulled the trigger, and Farraday got it by mistake."

"I'll send finger-print men over here. Don't move around the room too much, and keep everybody else out."

McGrath went back to the car. Flanagan exchanged places with him. Trexel sat behind the wheel, still badly effected by his close shave with death.

"Start the car," McGrath ordered. "I'm taking you to see the Special District Attorney who handles things like this. His name is Tony Quinn. Is he high enough, and has he brains enough so you'll talk?"

"I'll tell any District Attorney what I know, and I want you to be there too, Captain. You handled things very efficiently indeed—so far. I desperately need your help. Yours as well as Quinn's. I say—isn't Mr. Quinn a blind man?"

"So they tell me," McGrath grunted. "So they tell me."

"But a blind man—" Trexel objected mildly.

"Mister," McGrath sighed, "if you convince Quinn you need his help, things will happen fast. He can't see with his eyes, but he certainly hears, smells and knows things. Turn left at the next corner."

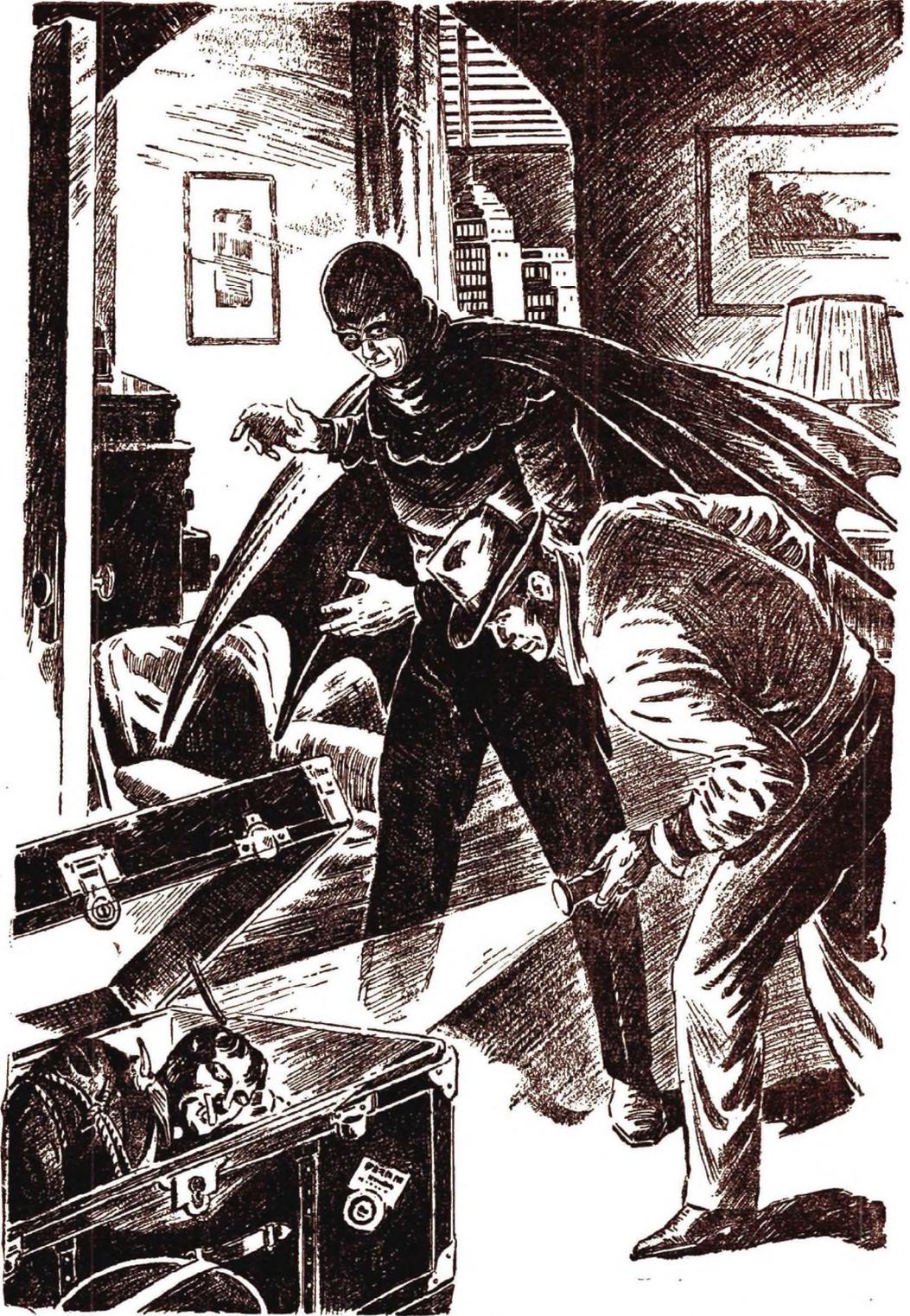
CHAPTER II

Special D.A.



CAPTAIN McGRATH and Trexel stopped in front of a large, comfortable looking house at the end of the street. The yard was nicely landscaped, there was a neat fence around the premises and a garden at the back of the house. Affixed to the fence, beside the gate, was a name plate reading TONY QUINN.

McGrath rang the bell, and the door was opened by a man of medium build and height. He was almost entirely bald, was quietly dressed, had keen eyes and a thin



Crammed tightly within the limits of the trunk, lay the body of the missing man, his throat slashed (Chapter X)

face. He instantly gave the impression of being smooth as an oil slick.

"Good evening, Captain," he said.

"Hello, Silk," McGrath growled. He didn't like this servant of Tony Quinn's, and the feeling was quite mutual. "Is Quinn home?"

"Mr. Quinn," Silk accented the first word, "is home, naturally. Being blind he doesn't gad about, sir. Will you step in, please?"

McGrath and Trexel followed Silk down the corridor to an open door from which only the flickering light of a fireplace emanated. Trexel saw Quinn a moment later.

He sat in a rather old, overstuffed chair in front of the fireplace. There was a cane between his knees and he was leaning forward, his head cocked just a trifle, in the position a blind man assumes when he depends upon his hearing to tell him things.

Quinn was a firmly built man with a rugged chin, dark brown hair and firm, even lips. His eyes were blank and staring—the eyes of a man totally blind. About them were deep scars, etched into his flesh by a powerful acid. He wore a smile of genuine welcome, and it seemed almost to light up the sightless eyes.

"Hello, Captain," Quinn said heartily and his hand reached out vaguely. "I'm glad you came. I was just beginning to grow a bit bored with this private little world of mine. How are you, and who is with you?"

"Glad to see you," McGrath took Quinn's hand and spoke somewhat grudgingly, like a man who really meant what he said, but resented the words and the sentiment behind them. "I've brought a man named Sidney Trexel. He's a broker."

Trexel took the proffered hand offered in his general direction.

"I guess I'm lucky," he said, "to have someone like you interested in my problem, and believe me it is a problem. I remember the days when you were a crusading district attorney, Mr. Quinn. I guess I idolized you about as much as anyone."

Quinn's smile turned rueful.

"Now look at me! However, I have no real complaint to make, and I'm on the District Attorney's staff again. Doing the work I like. Under a handicap, but we manage, eh, Captain?"

"Yes. Yes, indeed," McGrath grumbled. "A short while ago somebody shot at Mr. Trexel—right at the corner of West and Carmody Streets. Trexel moved as the shot was fired, and the bullet killed a man named Cliff Farraday—a friend of Mr. Trexel's. They'd been standing there talking."

"Only for a second or two," Trexel said. "I had just warned Farraday I was in great danger, and I started to get into my car. I heard no shot, but I did hear the whiz of the bullet. Then Farraday screamed, and I dived under the car. That bullet was meant for me."

Tony Quinn made a steeple of his fingers. "Tell me, Mr. Trexel—why you are so certain that Farraday died in your place?"

Trexel sat down, leaned forward and dropped his voice.

"Almost six years ago," he said, "I was an official of The Futurists. Do you remember them?"

"Yes," Quinn said. "They were a nationwide organization, fashioned something on the lines of the old Black Legion or the Klu Klux Klan. As I recall it, the Futurists abandoned their ideas when it was discovered that the officers were using the membership dues solely to line their own pockets."

"Quite right," Trexel said. "I was one of the officials. Don't laugh. In those pre-war days, organizations with hoods and uniforms flourished. I believed in the outlined principles of The Futurists. I honestly thought the order would help to create a new and better world."

"Then I discovered that the men who started this movement were interested only in what they could get out of it. Fancy regalia was one of the essentials—a uniform cost fifty dollars. The organization made a straight twenty-five dollar profit on the deal."

"Doesn't sound like much, but multiply it by the thousands who joined up. Add the dues—nominal, I'll grant, but never spent on furthering the organization."

"Three or four of the higher-up officers went to prison, didn't they?" Quinn asked.

"George Wayne, Edmund Glover and Ted Slater. They got seven year terms and were released from prison three or four days ago. They are the men who want to kill me."

"Why?"

TREXEL hesitated.

"I saw through their schemes some years ago. I knew their aims were just talk, and that they intended to take as much cash from the members as possible and then abscond. I couldn't stand that, sir. I went to the authorities and told them the entire story. Later I threw myself upon the mercy of the court which passed sentence upon all those involved."

"You did not go to prison?" Quinn was highly interested.

"I was given a suspended term of two years because I proved my part was quite innocent, and I risked my good name by coming forward to expose the whole crooked deal. I think you will find, in the court records, oral threats against me uttered by those three men."

Quinn brought both hands down against the arms of his chair and hunched himself around so that he was facing in Captain McGrath's general direction.

"What did you learn, Captain?"

"I saw Farraday go down," McGrath said. "Nobody seemed to hear any shooting. I lo-

cated a room in a building across the street from which the shot was fired. Evidence—cigarette butts and matches—showed more than one person waited there until Mr. Trexel got into position as a target.

"May I use your phone? The finger-print boys and the Medical Examiner ought to have something to report by this time."

As McGrath spoke, Silk quietly carried a portable telephone into the room and plugged it in. He placed the phone on a table, pushed a chair beneath McGrath, bowed and withdrew.

No movie butler could have been more polished, but McGrath had a dreadful fear that the chair would be pulled from beneath him at the crucial moment.

Quinn was talking to Trexel again.

"Who knew that you had an appointment to meet Farraday at that corner, Mr. Trexel?"

"I've been afraid to go to my office ever since those three men were released. I knew they'd try to kill me. They took an oath on that. Farraday and I had some business.

"I phoned him and asked him to meet me at the corner. Or, no—he called my office, and I relayed the message through my secretary Larry Vaughan."

"Would anyone besides Vaughan be likely to know about the appointment?" Quinn asked.

"I maintain an office staff of three. Two girls work in the outer office. Then there is my private office. Vaughan also has a private office, which he shares with a man named Howard Hunt who leases space from me. Hunt is a promoter. He may have known about it."

"Do you trust them?"

"Of course I do. Both of them. Are you inferring, Mr. Quinn, that they might have tipped off those three men?"

"Obviously," Quinn said, "someone did. Ah, Captain McGrath, you look as if you had some news."

McGrath sat down.

"The Medical Examiner says Farraday never knew what hit him. A .38-calibre slug smashed straight through his heart. The wound had a downward angle to it, just as I suspected. There were no powder marks.

"In the room where the murderers lay in wait, my men found nothing. No trace of



McGRATH

prints, indicating the men wore gloves. A pair of cheap field glasses were on the floor. So cheap they have no manufacturer's number or anything else by which to trace them."

"Then I suggest," Quinn said, "that you keep an eye on Mr. Trexel. He seems to be a marked man. Marked for murder. If you trap these three ex-convicts, I'll see that they are punished. Your part, Mr. Trexel, will be co-operation. Place yourself in Captain McGrath's hands. We shall do our best to protect you."

"Thanks," Trexel arose. "I feel better. Do you think I should risk traveling about as usual?"

"Why not? If those three men are out to get you, seclusion on your part won't stop them. Unless you can get away secretly."

"I could, but I won't," Trexel said. "Someone has to draw them into the open and the only man is me. Thank you again. I'll do all I can to help."

He and McGrath departed, escorted to the door by Silk, who handed them their hats. McGrath went out first, looking around carefully and keeping one hand on the butt of his gun. Trexel got into the car and started the motor.

He picked up the box of cigars, removed the wrapping paper and opened the box. McGrath accepted one. They lit up, and Trexel drove away.

"I have great confidence in Mr. Quinn," he said. "Great confidence. Why, the way he goes at things you'd scarcely know he was a blind man."

"Yeah," McGrath's teeth clamped hard on his cigar. "Sometimes I almost doubt it myself."

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CHAPTER III

A Matter for the Black Bat

SILK KIRBY watched the car pull away from the curb and then walked back to the library, where Tony Quinn sat, staring with sightless eyes into the embers of the fireplace.

"Not much to that one," Silk said, and his manner was more that of a friend than a servant.

Quinn chuckled.

"You mean as far as the Black Bat is concerned. A man was murdered, Silk, don't forget that. But the matter seems to be practically settled already. We know the motive, and we even know the identity of the killers. All that's left to do is find them, and the police should be quite capable of doing that."

"I suppose so," Silk grumbled. "I was hoping we'd have a little action, sir. I saw Carol and Butch this afternoon, and they were hoping for the same thing. I wonder why McGrath brought Trexel here?"

Quinn laughed.

"McGrath has only one motive. He wants to trap me into revealing the fact that I'm not blind and that I am the Black Bat. He uses practically any excuse. Incidentally, you might bring me the files on that Futurist organization. I think there is a folder on them."

"Then you are interested?" Silk asked quickly.

"Somewhat. But don't start riding high because so far this isn't anything for the Black Bat."

Tony Quinn picked up his pipe, stuffed it with tobacco and applied flame. He leaned back to think of the days when he headed the District Attorney's office.

He recalled with a shudder that afternoon in court when he was introducing certain evidence against crooks on trial—of how hirelings of these crooks attempted to destroy the evidence by hurling acid upon it—of how he'd turned just in time to take the acid full in the face.

Blindness had resulted in less than two minutes—a blindness soon pronounced permanent by all the prominent eye surgeons Quinn could find. He had even traveled to Europe before the war, seeking some remedy and found none. Returning, he had settled down to the monotonous existence of a blind man, with no hope of getting his sight back.

Other senses improved to recompense him for the loss of his eyes. His hearing became abnormally acute, his sense of touch

super-delicate. He learned how to move about and sense the presence of impediments in his path, how to recognize voices and even footsteps. But all of this didn't make up for the eternal darkness.

One night a very pretty girl named Carol Baldwin came to see him. She had a weird proposition to offer. Her father was a policeman, then dying from a bullet wound suffered in a gun battle with crooks. He had followed Tony Quinn's career as a racket buster, and now he wanted to help him.

Death being certain from the wound, Carol's father offered to give his eyes to Tony Quinn. On a slim chance that such an operation might succeed, Quinn had gone to a small Midwestern town and submitted to the operation at the hands of a little known but highly talented surgeon.

Carol's father died soon after, and Tony Quinn returned home to wait. Finally he removed the bandages. The operation was a success. He could see—and with an added bonus for all those months of blindness. By some freak his vision was as good in darkness as in broad daylight.

He kept his recovery a secret. As District Attorney, he knew what a law officer had to contend with in the form of red tape. A private investigator, working independently, could get much more done, take more chances and use methods to counteract those adopted by crooks and killers.

So Tony Quinn became the Black Bat. He was forced to wear a hood that covered his head because the acid-etched scars around his eyes were a dead giveaway of his identity. The hood was black and tight fitting. His clothing was jet black too. Very soon the underworld breathed the name of the Black Bat in fear.

Silk Kirby worked with him and was a valuable ally. Silk had once been a highly talented confidence man who had caused the police of many cities violent headaches. Silk's smoothness enabled him to work for the Black Bat, and his skill was only out-matched by his enthusiasm.

Carl Baldwin came to see Quinn after her father's death and stayed on to become another of the Black Bat's small band of trusted workers. She had courage and brains and soon proved herself highly valuable.

Between Quinn and Carol, friendship was replaced by an unspoken love. While engaged in this dangerous work, Quinn realized he had no right to marry, and Carol agreed with him.

THE fourth member of the group was Butch O'Leary, a massive man with huge hands and arms, a bull neck, a big, almost ugly face and the devotion of a St. Bernard. Butch wasn't the most clever man alive, but he made up for that in brute strength and dogged determination.

Aided by these three, Tony Quinn prowled

the night as the Black Bat. He broke laws when it became necessary to break them. He killed when there was no other alternative and—he made an enemy of Captain McGrath.

McGrath suspected that Quinn was the Black Bat. He had tried to prove it many times, had come dangerously close more than once. Yet he was always beset by a tiny element of doubt which he couldn't shake off, although he never relaxed his oath to put the Black Bat behind bars.

Police Commissioner Warner may have suspected that Quinn was the Black Bat, but Warner never delved deeply into this matter. He was well satisfied that the Black Bat worked with the police and helped to clear the city of criminal elements. Commissioner Warner looked no gift horse in the mouth.

Silk Kirby returned with a folder on that organization known as the Futurists. He handed it to Quinn and then moved about the room, drawing window shades, until Quinn was secure and could abandon his pretense of being totally blind.

The blank eyes became alive and bright. They scanned the papers and old newspaper clippings. There were pictures of the three men convicted of fraud, full details about them and about the order they had started and used as a means of amassing a fortune.

For some time he sat there with his eyes closed, puffing slowly on his pipe and thinking. Some of his thoughts he spoke aloud, for Silk's benefit.

"The three men who started that organization were very clever, Silk. If Trexel hadn't exposed them, they'd have cleaned up millions. As it is, they did rather well. Now three men of that type, spending years in prison, might come out even more confirmed criminals."

"And even more dangerous," Silk offered.

"Exactly. The fact that they almost successfully staged an attempt on Trexel's life is proof they made plans while in prison. I'm wondering if the Black Bat shouldn't take a hand and try to round up this trio."

"One of the Black Bat's aides is more than willing," Silk said with a slow grin.

"I think they are all willing. Your part doesn't come just yet. Send for Carol and Butch right away. They'll take the initiative in this."

Twenty minutes later, Silk quietly informed Quinn that the rest of the Black Bat's little band was at hand. Quinn arose, thrust his cane under one arm and walked purposefully toward what seemed to be just another section of the bookcases which lined the walls.

A hidden control opened a narrow door, and he stepped into a laboratory which would have made police scientists envious. From this lab, a tunnel led to a garden



As the killer raised his knife, his hand was seized and twisted (Chapter XI)

house behind the mansion.

Exists and entrances were cleverly concealed. Quinn's residence was more or less isolated on a dead-end street, and beside his garden was a cross street, hardly more than an alleyway. He and his aides could quietly slip through the garden gate which led off this side street, reach the garden house and make their way to the lab.

Carol came forward to greet him. She was a stunning blond with blue eyes, a nice chin and a trim appearance. Quinn took both her hands. Lumbering behind her and towering above them both came Butch O'Leary, an expansive smile on his massive face.

Quinn apprised them of the situation as rapidly as he could.

"Carol, your immediate job is to shadow Trexel. McGrath will have a man doing the same thing, so watch out. I want to know where Trexel goes and whom he meets. Whether or not he is being followed and by whom. It's a difficult job, but you're capable of it."

"I'm on my way," Carol said. "It's still early. I may be able to pick him up at his home."

"Good." Quinn smiled at her. "Phone in now and then, so we'll know you're all right. Butch, you have the work of a real detective cut out for you.

"There are two suspects—Trexel's secretary, Larry Vaughan, and a promoter named Howard Hunt. I know nothing about them, and it's your task to get complete facts about each man. Keep in the background and don't crack any heads—yet."

"But later?" Butch asked hopefully.

"Perhaps. Get going, Butch, and watch out. You may run across the trail of three desperate men filled with a desire for revenge."

IT WAS Carol who ran across the trail of the killers first, however. She reached Trexel's house ten minutes after departing from Tony Quinn's laboratory. She drove a small car and parked it up the street a bit.

Not two minutes after her arrival upon the scene, she picked out Captain McGrath's man. He was parked in a doorway across from Trexel's home, but he stepped out now and then to look around.

That meant Trexel was in the house, and Carol settled down to wait for developments. At ten o'clock a car rolled into the quiet street, pulled up to the curb and the driver tooted the horn once. The door of Trexel's house opened, and he came out in a great hurry. With hasty glances up and down the street, he rushed for the car and got in beside the driver.

As it pulled away, Carol's car was already in motion and she saw the detective hail a taxi frantically. Carol clung to the trail, keeping her distance and doing an excellent

job of it.

Trexel and the driver of the car stopped in front of an expensive restaurant. The driver got out first, and he seemed as nervous as Trexel. Looking around covertly, he finally signaled Trexel who popped out of the car and all but raced across the sidewalk and through the revolving doors.

McGrath's detective went in too, and Carol adjusted her sleek brown fur coat, tilted her hat a little more to the left and hoped she had enough cash with her to pay for a meal—if she had to order one.

Carol soon saw Trexel and his friend. They were being seated at a centrally located table where a third man was awaiting them. All three shook hands. One thing that impressed Carol was the nervousness exhibited by the entire trio.

Each kept looking around, eyeing newcomers suspiciously and talking in whispers so low that it necessitated their leaning far across the table to make themselves heard.

Finally, they appeared to agree upon something. They arose, pushing back their chairs. Carol was close enough to hear Trexel instruct the waiter to call them from the bar as soon as the meal was ready to be served.

As they started toward the bar at the rear of the restaurant, a rather good-looking young man—about twenty-eight and tastefully dressed—hurried up. Carol held her breath, but no trouble developed. Trexel nodded familiarly to the young man and addressed him.

"I nearly forgot about you, Larry. Thanks for being prompt. Here is the envelope with instructions for that deal I told you about over the phone. You know Jim Banton."

"Hello, Vaughan," Banton said. He was the man who had picked up Trexel at his home. The young man, apparently, was Larry Vaughan, whom Tony Quinn had described as Trexel's secretary and a possible suspect.

Carol glanced toward the big windows of the restaurant. If Butch had started on Vaughan's trail, he might be outside. Sure enough, outlined against the glass was the huge bulk of Butch O'Leary. There was no mistaking his size.

Larry Vaughan was shaking hands with the third member of Trexel's group, who was addressed as Ben Dawson. Dawson was fifty, partly bald, might have been jovial looking had so much fear not been crammed into his eyes.

Several restaurant patrons filed past the four men, and for a minute or two Carol couldn't see them. Then she spotted Larry Vaughan walking rapidly toward the exit. Trexel and his companions were heading for the bar. She also saw Butch's hulking form vanish from the window. Butch was still trailing Vaughan.

Of Captain McGrath's detective, there

was no sign, but the man might have taken a table at some position obscured by the decorations in the large room.

Carol ordered a meal, and was finishing the first course when she saw Trexel's waiter bustle over to the bar. The three men returned to their table where an appetizer had already been served. They sat down. Banton began eating. He sipped from his water glass, leaned back and lit a cigar.

A few minutes went by while Trexel and Dawson carried on more of their whispered conversation. Then Trexel addressed Banton about something, but the man didn't reply. Carol looked at Banton. Her fork dropped from her hands with a great clatter. At the same moment Trexel half arose and shook Banton.

Banton did appear to be asleep except that his eyes were open. As Trexel moved him, Banton slowly slid under the table to the accompaniment of screams from diners at nearby tables.

Carol arose and hurried toward the telephones.

CHAPTER IV

Frightened Men



RETURNING to her table, Carol saw that the detective had taken charge. Trexel sat at an adjoining table, head bowed and held between both his hands.

"It was meant for me," he said, over and over again. "I should be lying there dead, not Banton."

Captain McGrath arrived in a remarkably

short time. He had never, knowingly, seen Carol, so she felt safe in remaining there. Working efficiently, McGrath closed all exits to the place, waited while a doctor examined Banton's corpse and listened to his report.

"This man," the doctor said, "swallowed a particularly virulent poison. It was contained in his water glass. The stuff is tasteless, has little odor and works very fast."

"All right," McGrath said. "Now who could have slipped poison into that water glass? Trexel, you ought to know."

"But I don't!" Trexel groaned. "When we first sat down at the table, that was my chair—my glass of water. Then my secretary came. I had some work for him. After he left, Banton, Dawson and I went to the bar for a drink.

"When we returned, Banton took my place at the table. It made little difference, because we'd all ordered oysters on the half shell, and the servings were exactly alike."

"Hm," McGrath said thoughtfully. "Some-

one saw how you were seated at the table, poisoned your glass, Mr. Trexel and then probably left the premises. If you three men had reseated yourselves as before, Trexel would be dead now.

"Johnson!" A detective came up fast. "Mr. Trexel will tell you where his secretary can be found. Pick him up—on suspicion of murder if he raises a fuss. Now where is the restaurant manager? I want to talk to the waiter who served this table."

Carol quietly waited until McGrath was satisfied that the murderer had set his trap and departed long before the poison took effect. Then she left the restaurant with all the other patrons. As she reached the curb, a shabby looking coupé pulled up, the door opened, and Carol promptly got in.

The man behind the wheel was dressed in black and wore a large black-brimmed hat pulled well down over his face to hide the tell-tale scars around the eyes. Tony Quinn, as the Black Bat, was in action.

He drove to a quiet sidestreet and stopped the car. Carol told him everything that happened in careful detail.

"Then Larry Vaughan could have poisoned that water," the Black Bat said. "But so could anyone who passed the table. It looks as though another attempt at Trexel's life went wrong, and another innocent man died."

"It's a lucky thing," Carol said softly, "that the murderers don't try to get Trexel with a machine-gun. There's no telling how many innocent people would be killed. And I know very well that Trexel's two friends were almost as frightened as he. From now on, people will avoid Trexel as if he had leprosy."

The Black Bat nodded.

"I checked on Trexel. In my role as Special District Attorney, I contacted the trial lawyers and talked to them about the Futurist organization. Everything Trexel said was the truth.

"He got tired of watching people buncoed by those three officials. He reported the whole thing and even stood trial himself. Wayne, Glover and Slater really did curse him after they were sentenced to prison—and promised Trexel he'd eventually pay."

"It looks as if Trexel's friends are doing the paying," Carol sighed. "And where do we begin? That is, unless you have a line on the whereabouts of those three Futurist men."

"I haven't," the Black Bat admitted ruefully. "They left prison, bought tickets for New York and have dropped completely out of sight. In accordance with Parole Board regulations, they all had jobs, but never showed up to claim them."

"How can we hope to locate them?" Carol queried. "They must have a good hiding place."

"Of course, but—they must also have a

contact man. Someone who can watch Trexel and set the stage. Wayne, Glover and Slater couldn't move around very much. Every policeman in town has had a look at their rogue's gallery photographs. That contact man may be Larry Vaughan or Howard Hunt, who rents office space from Trexel."

"Butch followed Vaughan," Carol said quickly. "That leaves Hunt. Suppose I watch him?"

"I was about to suggest that," the Black Bat said. "Butch found an opportunity to phone me while Vaughan was telephoning someone else. Butch thinks something may be up. Vaughan acted rather suspicious."

"He did do a little work on Hunt, but learned practically nothing except that the man is single and has been in town only a few months. He lives at the Vickery Hotel."

"I'll look him up," Carol said, "if you'll drop me somewhere near his hotel. With Butch watching Vaughan, and Trexel taken care of by Captain McGrath, we have the ground quite well covered."

"Except for Ben Dawson," the Black Bat said. "He may have noticed something—perhaps he may have seen someone approach the table close enough to drop that poison into the glass."

CAROL shook her head.

"I think that was done while the three men were at the bar. People passed the table every few minutes. Sometimes there was a whole column of them."

"I'll see Dawson anyway," the Black Bat reiterated, "after I visit Larry Vaughan. Silk is home, fuming a bit and waiting for reports. Keep him advised, and good luck, Carol."

She started to get out of the car on a deserted side street.

"Tony—it puzzles me a little. Our objective is to find three known ex-convict killers, but we're only watching the victims of those killers. Do you hope to pick up a trail leading to their hideout that way?"

"How else?" the Black Bat parried. "They're holed up snugly somewhere, but they must have a contact man. Locate him, and we have the lead we require so badly. You may safely consider Howard Hunt as the possible contact man, so be careful."

Carol watched the coupe turn the corner and vanish. Then her high-heeled shoes clicked briskly as she hurried toward the Hotel Vickery. It was a hotel with considerable class. She boldly walked in, entered a phone booth and called the desk.

Yes, she was informed, Mr. Hunt had just come in, and would she have her name sent up. Carol said she'd call in person. Then she went to the lobby, selected a chair which commanded an excellent view of elevators and doors and settled herself for a long wait.

She was there hardly more than five min-

utes before Hunt emerged from one of the elevators, paused to light a cigarette as, over his cupped hands, he surveyed the lobby. It was vividly clear that he was worried, nervous and suspicious.

Evidently satisfied, Hunt walked briskly to the revolving doors and turned left on the street. Carol was right behind him, but she dropped back somewhat. With Hunt in his present mood, he'd be apt to notice her and if she kept following him, he might take precautions to throw her completely off the trail.

He looked over his shoulder several times, but Carol was always prepared, and she pretended to be looking in the store windows that lined the street. Hunt suddenly wheeled, ran directly into the road and help up his hand for a taxi that was traveling at a rather good clip. The driver stopped, and Hunt was inside quickly. The cab pulled away, and Carol winced.

Maybe she wasn't quite as good a shadow as she had believed, for Hunt had certainly performed that stunt to throw anyone off his trail. She did manage to stop another taxi and she thrust a five dollar bill—one of several Quinn had just given her—at the driver.

"My husband is in that cab," she said. "He forgot some important papers, and I want to catch him and give them to him when he gets out of his cab."

"A cinch," the driver grinned. "I'll keep after him like he's got the family jewels."

But the driver was too sure of himself. Hunt must have given some very definite orders to his cab driver, for the vehicle would swing into a side street so fast that it all but tilted on two wheels. Then it would speed up. Carol's driver did his best, but he never caught up with Hunt.

Keeping him in sight suited Carol's purposes however, and now she was certain that Howard Hunt was up to some mischief. He'd been doing his best to avoid being followed ever since he got into that taxi.

Abruptly, his cab came to a stop without heading into the curb. Hunt leaped out, dodged through traffic and jumped aboard another taxi going in the opposite direction.

Carol's driver came to a stop.

"It's no use, lady. That guy doesn't want you to catch him. Smart guy too. He knows darn well I can't make a U-turn here. Not with two cops standing right on the corner. You can have the change out of your five bucks."

"Keep it," Carol said softly. She was watching Hunt's taxi disappear. He'd outwitted her beautifully, and she wondered how he'd known she was after him. The man evidently had some definite and very secret destination in mind to go to all this trouble. That fact, at least, was something to report. Howard Hunt now stood well to the forefront of Carol's list of suspects.

CHAPTER V

A Grave for Butch

BUTCH, meanwhile, was busy following Vaughan, but in his case the trail was fairly easy. Vaughan left the restaurant, hurried two blocks east and entered a garage. In a few moments, he drove out in a sedan.

Butch, behind the wheel of his coupé, took up the trail. Vaughan apparently had little thought that

he'd be followed, for he drove directly to an express highway, headed uptown and kept rolling until he was at the city limits.

Here the houses were more like those of a smaller town—with two-story duplexes, small stores at the street corners and an occasional cop moving slowly along.

Vaughan left the highway for a dark, tree-lined street, went to the end of it and turned once more. Finally he stopped the car, got out and walked fast up the dark street. Butch went after him and was in time to see Vaughan stop in front of a white gate leading to some fenced-in property, too shrouded in the gloom to make out.

Vaughan didn't spend much time looking, and he saw no signs of Butch, for the giant aide to the Black Bat had learned how to merge even his great bulk into the darkness.

Trexel's secretary opened the gate. It squealed loudly, and he left it open. Butch watched him approach a large, rambling dwelling. Not a light shone in any of the windows, the front yard was a veritable estate and Vaughan soon vanished.

Butch listened intently, but he didn't hear Vaughan's footsteps on the porch, nor did the front door open. In fact, the house appeared to be not only deserted, but completely run down. It was a ghostly, uninviting sort of place, all of which bothered Butch not at all. He swept through the gate, left the cement walk as soon as he

could and stayed on the grass where he made less noise.

Certain that Vaughan hadn't used the front entrance, Butch moved to circle the house and see what the back of it looked like. Twice he hit decayed branches, hanging dejectedly from tree limbs, waiting until the wind blew them down. This created minor noise, and Butch began moving more slowly to avoid them.

He was within a hundred feet of the house when someone came lunging out of the darkness. Butch whirled to meet the attack, but he was too late. A club of some kind swept down at him. Butch jerked himself to the right. The club missed his head, but it didn't miss his shoulder, and there was force enough behind it to send Butch down on one knee.

The attacker raised the club and came in for another blow. Butch reached out with those incredibly long arms of his. Fingers touched the attacker's trouser legs, but the distance was about an inch too far, and the man waltzed back.

Butch rose with a roar of wrath. The man dropped the club, wheeled and began running—not toward the house, but in the direction of the street, and he was fleet of foot. By the time Butch reached the sidewalk, the man was taking a corner which led him to the little neighborhood center.

Butch piled on all the steam he could muster, sailed around the same corner, but the man was out of sight. He kept on going to the wider avenue. There he stopped and looked in all directions. There were no signs whatsoever of his attacker.

Light glowed rather feebly from a drug store window. Butch headed toward it. He hoped that the druggist might have seen the man run past his place. But even if he didn't and the trail ended here, Butch wanted to phone Silk and appraise him of developments.

He opened the door and walked into the drug store. A man in a white coat came out of the back room, walked behind the counter and politely waited for Butch to

[Turn page]



**TOPS
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state his wishes.

"I guess maybe you didn't see a guy running past your store a minute or two ago?" Butch said.

"No, I didn't. Sorry. Is there anything wrong?"

"Not much," Butch grinned expansively. "The guy was after my roll, I guess. He tried to brain me with a club. Thanks anyway. I'll use your phone if you don't mind."

"It's right over there in the corner," the man in the white coat said pleasantly. "I'll go with you. Sometimes the door sticks a little, and I know just how to work it."

Butch found the booth door closed. He grasped the door handle and started to pull it. A dismal groan came from inside the booth, and at the same time two legs flopped out of the partially open door.

Butch realized what had happened. This was the druggist. The man he was after had knocked him out, stuffed him in the booth and taken his white coat to pose as the druggist.

HE STARTED to turn around. He hadn't noticed that the man behind him had quietly lifted a heavily weighted cigar cutting machine off the counter. Now this sturdy weapon crashed against the back of Butch's skull.

He fell against the telephone booth door, did his utmost to retain his spinning senses, and then the cigar cutter struck him again. The last thing Butch remembered were more groans from the real druggist.

When he opened his eyes again, he was in a very dark place, lying on a cement floor. The air smelled both musty and laden with the odors of stale food. He didn't move because he knew more than one person was crouched near him. He could hear their breathing.

Butch's intentions were to lie there until his strength flowed back into his arms and legs, then give a jump and tackle whatever trouble developed.

But something seemed to be the matter with his arms and legs. They were aching. He tried to flex muscles and discovered that he was tightly bound with strong rope. He barely restrained the groan that rose involuntarily to his lips.

Someone slapped him smartly across the face, and a voice spoke. It was a calm, even and unexcited voice.

"I think this man is bluffing. Almost an hour has passed since we carried him in here. Ted, pass me your knife and I'll soon find out whether or not he's awake."

Someone else spoke, and his voice was heavy with worry.

"I wonder who he is. Certainly not the one who was described to us. Maybe he is an agent of that man. Maybe there's a whole gang of them."

The knife touched Butch's throat and

started to slowly slice the flesh. Butch opened his eyes wide.

"Okay," he said. "I'm awake, and I'm not a cop. If you guys want my money, take it and welcome. Just stop slicing me with that knife."

"Ah—so you were bluffing," the first man mused. "Who are you? Why did you follow a certain person here?"

"Me follow anybody?" Butch growled. "Mister, I was taking a short cut when a guy jumps out from behind a tree and starts swinging a club. He got away from me. I was sore so I started to chase him."

"Stop lying! Who were you going to phone from that drug store?"

"My mother," Butch sighed. "She worries when I stay out after nine o'clock."

The knife bit a little deeper and then was withdrawn. The spokesman addressed the others. There were three in all, Butch knew, and he tried to penetrate the gloom to see whether or not Vaughan was one of them. He couldn't see beyond his nose.

"This man is stubborn. I doubt very much that we can make him talk. Let's take a vote. Shall I slit his throat and have it done with? Then, if he does know anything, we can be sure it won't go any further."

"Too risky," one of the men adjudged. "What if he's telling the truth? Murder is going too far."

"Unless," the third man snapped, "he is an agent of our enemies. We can't take chances now. We'll probably burn anyhow."

"But there's no great hurry," the spokesman said. "There may be ways to loosen his tongue. Some of these big men are soft, and it would be well if we were very certain."

Ten minutes later, after some hard work, the man was convinced Butch didn't fall into the classification of being soft. If slaps, punches and kicks didn't make him open up, nor the threat of having his throat cut make him yell for mercy, it was useless to keep on.

Butch, half conscious again and aching in every bone, had his teeth gritted, his jaws locked. Nothing could have made him admit he was an agent of the Black Bat.

The spokesman tried different tactics.

"Ted, you'll find a couple of old shovels in the northwest corner of the cellar. Get them. You two start digging a grave. We've got to have a place to get rid of the corpse. In the cellar of this old house, he won't be found for months."

A FEW minutes later, Butch heard the men testing the cellar floor with the shovel ends until they found the border of the cement. Then the shovels bit into dirt.

Butch felt all hope ebbing very fast. The

Black Bat couldn't possibly locate him. He had found no opportunity to phone Silk and appraise him of his whereabouts or of the existence of the old house, in the cellar of which his own grave was now being prepared.

That they'd kill him was hardly worth questioning. If these were the three ex-convicts who had tried so assiduously to murder Sidney Trexel, they'd hardly hesitate with him. As one of them had said, 'We'll probably burn anyhow.'

They had nothing to lose by another killing, and all Butch had accomplished was to drive them out of this refuge to another.

"Wouldn't you like to talk?" The spokesman prodded him with his foot.

"I've got nothing to talk about," Butch replied through swollen lips. "You guys are crazy."

"Dig it good and deep," the spokesman directed the other two. "When you have it finished, I'll cut his throat. Then we'll tumble him in and cover him up—the obstinate rat."

Again the shovels went to work. In fifteen or twenty minutes, the grave would be large enough. Butch tried pressure on the ropes that bound him. It was no use. The knots were cleverly tied, the ropes thick and strong.

Butch didn't mind dying. He'd long ago reasoned that, so long as he worked for the Black Bat, death would be his constant companion. But dying like this—trussed up, helpless, unable to put up any kind of a fight—That galled.

On his feet, without these ropes about him, he could put up a scrap, take his toll and, if he died, it would be part of the game. Butch gave vent to a roar of rage, half lifted himself off the floor and tugged and pulled on the ropes.

"Getting desperate, are you?" the spokesman inquired mildly. "You can save your neck only by talking. A frank and complete story of who you are, why you came here and who sent you."

Butch didn't deign to reply. He just kept on trying to break loose until exhaustion put an end even to that. He sank back wearily and knew he was a defeated man, without one ray of hope.

He knew things that the Black Bat should be informed of. That Vaughan, for instance, must be the contact man, that the three killers were holed up in the cellar of this old house. If the Black Bat knew all that, he could take action.

"The grave is deep enough," one of the men called softly. "Just so long as he is covered is okay. We can't stick around here any longer, so what's the difference? And remember, if he wasn't against us, he wouldn't be here."

"Very true." The spokesman knelt beside Butch. "Listen to me, my massive fool, in

less than a minute I'll slit your throat. The only thing that prevents me from doing it right now is curiosity. Use your head. What's the sense in dying when you have only to speak a few words?"

But Butch knew very well that even if he did talk, they'd kill him. If he believed there was the slightest chance of the Black Bat locating this house, he would have tried to stall.

A difficult thing with these men, for they were definitely not ordinary hoodlums—which made them all the more deadly. Yet he would have taken the chance, told as passable a series of lies as he could think up.

Battered, bruised and aching, Butch realized the uselessness of stalling. He was a dead man no matter if he told the entire truth. These men simply couldn't afford to let him live.

"I've got nothing to say." He spoke deep in his throat. "I haven't any idea what it is all about, but if you're cowards enough to slit the throat of a man tied up and helpless, go ahead and do it. I'm not afraid to die."

"No—I'll grant you that and in a way I hate to do it, but you see—oh, what's the use in talking."

"Get it over with," the blood-thirsty member of the trio advised. "We might have to leave here in a rush, and we want time to hide the body."

Fingers passed over Butch's throat, pulling the flesh taut. Butch closed his eyes and wondered if it would hurt much. He could hear the killer breathing hard, and then the cold steel of the blade rested against his jugular.

The killer took one last long breath, and the knife began to cut. There was a faint tinkling sound from somewhere in the house. The knife was quickly withdrawn, and Butch's spinning wits steadied a trifle.

"It's the telephone," one of the men said. "Must be important. He wasn't to call unless things got out of hand."

"Answer it," the spokesman said sharply. "Hurry!"

The knife didn't return to rest against Butch's throat. Everything seemed to be held in abeyance until the meaning of that phone call was cleared up. One of the men ran up wooden stairs, a door opened, and Butch thought he saw the momentary glimpse of a flashlight.

Then he heard a voice—mumbling at first and then shrill. The bang of the phone being dropped back on its cradle indicated how excited the man was. He clattered down the steps, talking as he descended.

"It was—the man we expected to call if there was any trouble. The one we must fear is on his way here. He may be here already."

The spokesman arose swiftly.

"Take the guns. We'll line up, thirty feet apart and cover the house. Shoot at anything

that moves."

Butch held his breath, still dazed at this unexpected break. If they left him alone in that cellar, he'd do his best to get loose and, failing that, shout at the top of his lungs, a warning that the premises were guarded, and the killers' attacker in deadly danger.

The spokesman must have reasoned along the same lines. He walked over, fumbled in the darkness and picked up one of the shovels. He came back, prodded Butch with his foot until he located the position of his head. Then the shovel clubbed down.

Butch yelled but his cry was cut off abruptly. He sank back into unconsciousness.

CHAPTER VI

Hand of the Law



LARRY VAUGHAN, highly agitated, entered the lobby of the apartment where he lived. It was late, and the place was deserted. Vaughan had grown to hate silence and a lack of people about him. He rode the automatic elevator to the seventh floor, opened the door cautiously and peered out.

He worried tremendously over that man mountain whom he had detected following him through the estate which surrounded the old house. He'd spotted him barely in time, but there was no telling what had happened up there.

The man had been very huge, probably extremely strong too, and able to put up a terrific fight. Vaughan hadn't lingered long after Butch started chasing one of the occupants of that house.

Nobody lurked in the corridor, so Vaughan hurried down it toward his suite of rooms at the far end. He extracted a key from his pocket, unlocked the door and reached for the light switch. Something fiery red glowed briefly, deep within his apartment.

"Step in, close the door and don't turn on the light," a calm voice said. "Don't try to get out either, Mr. Vaughan, because I can see you quite clearly, and there is a gun in my hand."

Vaughan gave a half-hearted groan of terror and raised his hands high.

"You—you are making a mistake. I—I—"

"Put your hands down and close the door," the voice said, adding crisply, "Now!"

Vaughan obeyed. He stood there in the inky darkness of his apartment with his back hard against the inside of the door. He wondered, wildly, why this man wouldn't turn on any lights. In such intense darkness,

Vaughan might be able to turn the tables. He knew, from the brief glow of a cigarette, that the intruder occupied the deep chair in the northwest corner of the room.

Vaughan, on tiptoe, started slinking toward a table upon which he knew there was a tall and very heavy vase. With such a weapon, he might have a chance. He reached the table and cautiously extended one hand, moving it very gently so, when he touched the vase, it would be with such a gentle impact that the vase wouldn't wobble noisily.

"Mr. Vaughan," the man in the darkness said. "Stop playing cops and robbers. I can see you very clearly. If it's the vase you want you're about a yard away from it, and your hand is much too high."

"How—how do you know that? It's so dark—"

"Isn't it? Just come over here and sit down. I want to talk with you. On a friendly basis if you are sensible. If you aren't, I really don't mind much. Your hand is almost touching the vase now. What do you want it for? I can smash it with a single bullet."

Vaughan lowered his arm.

"I—I don't know how you can see," he began.

"But I can. I see you as clearly as if there were a spotlight on you. That green-and-white-striped necktie, for instance. I don't like it. Look here, Vaughan, you're nervous and frightened, so turn on a light if you wish. A soft light."

Vaughan moved carefully toward a phonograph record cabinet on which rested a small lamp. He snapped the switch. His eyes soon became accustomed to the change from blackness to the soft yellow light now filling part of the room.

He saw a man, dressed entirely in black, sitting quite nonchalantly in an easy chair. The intruder's head was covered with a tight fitting black hood. A cigarette dangled from black gloved fingers and there was no gun in his hand.

"The Black Bat!" Vaughan exhaled.

"Right the first time. You've no reason to be afraid of me, Mr. Vaughan. Or have you?"

"Why—no. No, not at all. It's just that so much has happened. There have been two murders. People who are friendly with Trexel are being killed. Naturally, it has made me very nervous . . ."

"Naturally," the Black Bat sympathized. "Sit down. What kept you so long? I've been waiting here for quite some time."

"I—was at a movie," Vaughan attempted.

"Oh come now, you were seen taking an envelope from your employer just before one of his friends was poisoned in that restaurant. Undoubtedly, you delivered the envelope, for it wasn't stamped nor even addressed."

Vaughan gulped.

"Mr. Trexel didn't want me to talk about where I delivered that letter. Ask him. If he wants to tell you, that's his business."

THE Black Bat crushed his cigarette in an ash tray. Beneath that black hood he was frowning deeply. It had occurred to him that Butch must have been trailing Vaughan all the time. Yet Butch had not made any report whatsoever to Silk.

The Black Bat had used Vaughan's telephone to check on that only three or four minutes before the young man appeared. Something must have happened to Butch and Vaughan either knew about it, or he could tell about where any attack had happened.

"Vaughan," the Black Bat said slowly, "when you left the restaurant, you were trailed by one of my men. There is no use lying to me. I'll know every move you made and, in the event my man doesn't show up, I'll also know you had something to do with his disappearance."

"I saw no one," Vaughan insisted. "I've nothing to hide either. I'll answer any question you want me to. I'll co-operate in every way."

"Good. Glad to hear that. To whom did you deliver Trexel's message?"

Vaughan gulped and began dry-washing his hands.

"I don't know. That's the truth. You've got to believe me. I—I left the note under the door of a certain house."

"And that house is where?" the Black Bat queried, his worries about Butch mounting higher and higher. Vaughan could be telling the truth. If he were, then Butch might have decided to investigate this particular house and run into a nest of trouble.

"It hasn't any number," Vaughan declared. "Trexel drew a rough map which I memorized. It showed the location of the place. I left it in the coat pocket of my other suit. If you will let me get it—"

"Sit tight," the Black Bat ordered brusquely. "You came here directly from that house, wherever it is, and you must have had the map with you. If there is such a thing as a map."

Vaughan had arisen and moved a step or two toward the door of his bedroom, which was wide open. The Black Bat had already studied the layout of this apartment. He knew that Vaughan hoped to enter the bedroom alone, slam the door and exit through a second door leading from the bedroom to a rear hallway where a service elevator could take him to the basement.

Vaughan's look of disappointment was ample proof that his plans had gone awry. He moved slowly back toward the chair he had occupied and, in doing so, passed directly in front of a window.

There was a single shot. Glass splintered. Vaughan gave a yelp of terror as a bullet

whizzed past his head and buried itself in the wall. The Black Bat didn't straighten up as he left his chair. He merely hurled himself, in a doubled-up position, toward Vaughan and sent the young man reeling away from the window.

With the same motion, the Black Bat reached the phonograph record cabinet upon which the only illuminated light in the room stood. He snapped the switch.

There was some frantic scurrying. Before he could turn around, Vaughan had slipped into the bedroom, slammed and locked it. A second or two later another door slammed shut. He'd taken advantage of the Black Bat's momentary lull in vigilance induced by that bullet.

The Black Bat raced for the living room door, opened it and hurried down the corridor. He could hear the hum of the service elevator mechanism and groaned. He himself had left the service elevator at this floor level. Vaughan's escape had been comparatively easy.

To cut him off now was practically impossible. The Black Bat returned to the apartment to search for clues which might lead him to the place where Butch was undoubtedly held.

He entered cautiously, worried about the mysterious gunman who must have fired that shot from a window across the court. Nobody seemed to have been aroused by the shot and, from the small hole in the wall, it appeared that the killer had used a gun of small calibre.

The Black Bat was puzzled about this shot. It had been clearly directed at Vaughan alone, for the Black Bat had occupied a chair well to one side of the window. Were those three killers after Vaughan? If they were, it upset the Black Bat's theories badly.

HE SAW a small desk in one corner of the room, which he hadn't investigated as yet. Seating himself behind it, he studied the objects on the desk. There was a telephone bill tucked under the blotter.

The Black Bat picked it up and whistled softly. This bill had been made out to another number—not to the phone in Vaughan's apartment—but it was in Vaughan's name. Furthermore, the bill included an installation charge.

The Black Bat lifted the phone and called the night business office.

"This is Captain McGrath of Police Headquarters," he said blandly. "It's necessary that I learn the location of a certain telephone." He gave the number. "It's a new installation. Your bill shows the charges were made only three days ago."

He waited, rather impatiently, for about five minutes before he got the information he wanted. Vaughan had ordered a telephone connected at 607 Whiting Avenue.

"Our information," the clerk told him, "indicates that there had been a phone in the house, but service had been disconnected for almost three years. If that phone hadn't been forgotten and left in the house, no installation could have been made because of the shortage of instruments."

"Thank you," the Black Bat said. "The Police Department appreciates your courtesy."

He hung up, elated at his luck. This phone undoubtedly meant something. An old house, untenanted for three years—what better hideout could there be for three ex-convict killers?

He had to move fast. Butch was an obstinate man at best. He'd try to clean up any number of enemies even if he died doing it. No time could be wasted.

The Black Bat headed for the door, opened it and stepped back a pace under the menace of a police positive. Behind it was Captain McGrath, and he was smiling broadly.

"So the tip was right," he gloated. "Someone phoned me and said the Black Bat was here. I came over, heard a voice talking on the phone and bided my time. Put out your hands, Black Bat. I've been saving a nice pair of handcuffs for you many years now."

"McGrath," the Black Bat said tensely. "We've had truces before. We've worked together and accomplished things. Right now, I need your help as much as you need mine. Vaughan is the contact man for the convict killers. He escaped from here a matter of minutes ago."

"So what?" McGrath grumbled. "He won't get far. I've had two men posted at the front and the rear for several minutes. Vaughan can't get away."

"But he already has," the Black Bat argued. "McGrath—he's the most important—the only clue we have. If you throw out a dragnet for him—"

"No soap." McGrath kicked the door shut. "I'm not being stalled. I'm not becoming an ally of yours. I'm doing just one thing—taking you in."

The Black Bat was sweating under his hood. Not alone because he was afraid of McGrath, but because every passing instant doubled and redoubled the danger into which Butch had fallen.

"Is it more important to lock me up or to nab three killers who have murdered two men already and may kill more. Men who definitely menace Mr. Trexel. Vaughan is the only person who can lead us to those murderers, and you stand here, sticking a gun in my face while he makes good his escape."

"Yeah—so I am." McGrath was enjoying himself tremendously. "I'd like to see that face too. Or would you prefer to do the unveiling in public? Look, Quinn, I know you're the Black Bat. I've known it all along.

"You've played games with me, laughed at me and made others laugh too. And you say those three ex-cons are worse crooks than you. Why, if I tally up all the laws you have broken, there'll be a two-hundred-year sentence against you."

"All right, I concede that." The Black Bat was growing desperate. "Whatever I did was necessary, vital, in fact. I've killed men when I had to. So have you. I work with the law, not against it, and yet you sacrifice a chance to land three of the worst killers we've ever encountered so that I may be locked up."

McGrath's smile faded slightly.

"Just the same," he argued, "I don't think Vaughan even got away from this building. I was here three minutes after I got the call. We'll smoke him out. . . ."

"It was probably Vaughan himself who tipped you off," the Black Bat said. "Captain—look at this."

The Black Bat picked up a leather pass case on the desk. Quite apparently, Vaughan had forgotten it.

MCGRATH laughed harshly.

"No you don't. I'm not falling for any tricks."

"This is no trick," the Black Bat snapped. "It's an old snapshot of Larry Vaughan, standing beside another man, and that man happens to be George Wayne, one of the ex-convicts we're after. Now do you believe that capturing Vaughan is important?"

McGrath reached for the leather case, took it cautiously and let his eyes sweep across the snapshot and then back to the Black Bat. But the hooded man in black hadn't moved, hadn't tried to take advantage of McGrath's momentary lapse of attention.

"They even look alike," McGrath marveled. "Say—I think Vaughan is George Wayne's son. He's been working for Trexel all these years, planning for the time when his father and the other two convicts could get out of prison and take their revenge. Let me at that telephone."

McGrath picked up the instrument and called Headquarters. He issued orders that a still alarm was to go out for Larry Vaughan. Then he hung up, but the gun he held was still levelled at the Black Bat.

"Walk over and open that narrow door," McGrath said. "I think it leads to a clothes closet. Go on. Get started. I never inferred I'd given up the idea of taking you in."

The Black Bat groaned, but obeyed. McGrath had waited too long for a chance like this not to do something drastic if the Black Bat went on the offensive. The door did open into a fairly large closet. McGrath's gun exerted some pressure against the Black Bat's spinal column. He stepped into the closet, and McGrath closed the door and locked it.

"If you shoot off the lock, I'll hear it," he



SILK

warned. "When I come back, I'll have Vaughan. That will make two sweet prisoners and even Commissioner Warner himself couldn't make me do this differently."

The Black Bat heard McGrath hurry away. Then he put his shoulder against the door and shoved hard. The door was sturdy and didn't budge. He drew his gun. McGrath had not risked coming close enough to remove the weapon, for so far as McGrath was concerned, he knew the Black Bat would never shoot him even if he had a golden opportunity.

The Black Bat pressed the muzzle of the gun against the lock and then hesitated before his finger tightened on the trigger. McGrath would surely hear the shot and return. He wouldn't have gone far from the apartment anyway—probably just to the elevator from which point he could give orders to his men.

The Black Bat had to get out of this temporary prison quickly and without making too much noise. Drawing McGrath back would avail him nothing and only serve to delay any attempt to rescue Butch.

He removed a flexible bit of steel from his pocket and soon worked the key out of the lock. Then, using this same strip of steel, he started picking the lock. Not a very difficult task, but it required four or five minutes at the very least.

He felt the steel seize upon the lock, worked carefully and smoothly, was almost ready to turn it when he heard footsteps approach the door. Average ears wouldn't have

detected the sound or, if they had, would have been unable to distinguish the fact that this was not McGrath approaching. The Black Bat's hearing was uncannily acute.

He moved back from the door a step or two, all the shallow closet permitted, but the tiny room did extend a little on either side of the door so he sidestepped.

He was none too soon either, for a gun roared, and steel ripped through the door and smashed into the plaster behind the spot where he had been standing before.

There were five more shots, fired in quick succession, and then the sound of running footsteps. The Black Bat crashed against the door. It still held, but the shots had attracted McGrath and he came in a great hurry. He unlocked the door, gun ready.

"Well, well," he said, "I never thought the Black Bat would lose his head and start shooting like a crazy man. . . ."

"I didn't fire those shots," the Black Bat said swiftly. "It was done by someone else. A man who knew you'd locked me in here. My gun hasn't been fired and anyway—look inside the closet. You'll see where the slugs hit the wall."

McGrath stuck his head into the closet door. Suddenly he was gripped by the seat of the pants and shoved in. The door closed and locked. McGrath let go with a mighty curse and then started to plead.

"Listen, Bat, I'm convinced someone tried to kill you and that it was my fault. Let me out of here. I wouldn't take you in now. Any rat who'd try to murder you that way—

Bat! Hey—Black Bat!”

But there was only silence on the other side of the door. The Black Bat was gone. McGrath sighed and started hammering on the door.

CHAPTER VII

Something Beyond Revenge



THERE were police in the building, but the Black Bat avoided them easily enough. He reached the basement, removed the hood and took the wide-brimmed black hat from under his coat. It was a type which could be rolled up and reshaped easily and quickly.

He donned this to mask the scars around his eyes.

Three minutes later he was in his car, which he'd fortunately left parked close by.

He drove uptown via the express highway and twenty minutes later he was on the street where that deserted house was located. In these early morning hours the neighborhood was quiet as a tomb. Unlike Butch, he could see the ramshackle old dwelling, for darkness disappeared under the Black Bat's abnormal vision.

He put the hood back on, reached the open gate and stepped through it. His eyes swept away the darkness again. His uncanny hearing was alert for the slightest sound, and he heard one—a faint rustle like that made by a man who was lying flat and had raised himself slightly.

The Black Bat instantly darted off the walk and behind a thick shrub. They knew he was coming, and this was an ambush. Moving cautiously now, he drew closer to the house.

Then, to determine where this ambush was located, and its strength, he grasped the supple branch of a tall bush, pulled it as far as it could go, released it and threw himself flat.

The snapping branch created noise enough to draw the fire of one gun, and the voice of another man, further to the left.

"Stop shooting at sounds, you idiot. Wait until you see something."

But they were not seeing the Black Bat because he was almost invisible, and darkness meant nothing to him. He moved carefully and noiselessly, headed straight for the man who had fired at him and given away his position by doing so. As far as he knew, there were only a pair of them, but if these were the wanted men, there was probably also a third.

Beyond question, they had deployed to cover approaches to the house. If he could get rid of them, he might be able to reach

the dwelling without further interference.

Crouched, inspecting the ground before he took another step, the Black Bat grimly drew closer and closer to one of the trio. His gun was ready to deliver a knockout blow or a killing bullet, and he no longer cared which the situation called for.

But there was a sudden disruption of his plans. From the house came a roar of rage, repeated over and over again. It was Butch yelling a warning. Someone to the left arose and ran noisily in the direction of the house. The Black Bat saw the figure but dimly because of the many shrubs and bushes.

His gun blasted once. The running man threw himself flat, but he was unhurt for he began crawling rapidly. The others were on the move too. The Black Bat started travelling fast himself and headed straight for the house. Everything else, save rescuing Butch, became a side issue now. He had to reach him before any of these men did.

The front door of the house was closed and locked, but very old, and offered little resistance. The Black Bat smashed it open, raced down a hall and then called Butch's name. The answer came from below his feet, and he soon located the cellar door.

A sharp knife slashed through the ropes that bound Butch, and the big man came to his feet with a bound. He sat down again—fast and very hard. Muscles and nerves were not yet ready to support his great weight.

The Black Bat left the cellar and prowled the yard for a few moments. There were no signs of the men. They had hurried away, and by the speed with which they'd escaped, it looked as if things had been prepared for just such an eventuality.

Butch lumbered out of the cellar. The Black Bat took his arm and piloted him along a roundabout way to where he'd left the car. Police would be on the scene shortly. In fact, the Black Bat could hear the approaching whine of a car engine turning over fast. Butch's coupé was still where he'd left it too.

"Meet me at the lab," the Black Bat instructed. "And be careful. Captain McGrath is on the warpath."

CAROL and Silk were waiting when the Black Bat emerged through the tunnel and trap door. While he was removing his black clothes, Butch arrived.

Again attired in smoking jacket, with his cane under one arm, Tony Quinn emerged from the small lab dressing room and sat down on a leather divan. Carol was already ministering the slight wounds on Butch's throat.

"Well, Butch," Quinn asked, "what happened?"

Butch went into detail.

"They kept it dark in the cellar so I never saw anybody there, but I had a good look at

the guy who passed as the druggist," he concluded.

Quinn opened a drawer and took out an old newspaper clipping. It was the story of the conviction of those three organizers of the Futurists. Butch laid a thick finger on the picture of George Wayne.

"That's the guy who slugged me," he said. "Boy, when I meet him again . . ."

Quinn slowly folded the clipping.

"We accomplished this much," he said. "Wayne, Glover and Slater are positively behind this. Vaughan is not only their contact man, but apparently also a spy and—very probably—the son of George Wayne."

"His son!" Carol gasped. "Then they've been making their plans all along—ever since they were sent to prison almost seven years ago."

"Plans that have failed so far," Quinn said and there was a slight puzzled note in his voice. "Failed for the killers, but created havoc with law and order."

"Remember, while Vaughan is a very suspicious subject, we still do not have proof that he poisoned Jim Banton or fingered Trexel when he met Farraday at that corner."

"But of course it must have been him," Silk put in. "Who else would have done that?"

"I don't know," Quinn replied slowly. "The only motive for murder that we have is pure revenge and it doesn't fit in too well. Those killers seem almost too eager. There must be something in it for someone."

"And I did forget to mention that an attempt was made on my life too. I don't know who started shooting through the closet door. McGrath had me under arrest and locked in one of the closets in Vaughan's apartment."

"While McGrath went out to try and find Vaughan, a killer came into the apartment. He knew I was locked in the closet, and he did his best to kill me. I'm quite certain it wasn't Vaughan, because he would have known anyone in the closet had room to step away from the door."

"Also, when Vaughan fled, he was completely frightened. I think he got away as fast as he could travel. If George Wayne is his father, then Vaughan undoubtedly was concerned mostly with warning him to get away."

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"There was a telephone call," Butch broke in. "The man who answered it was plenty excited, and they hurried out to lay a trap for you."

"Then would Vaughan have made such a call and risked coming back to his apartment, knowing very well the building might have been full of police? It doesn't fit. Not snugly enough to satisfy me."

"Do you mean there is someone other than those three men and Vaughan who is interested?" Carol asked.

"I'm beginning to think so," Quinn admitted. "The case has passed from a cut-and-dried affair in which three men are out for revenge, into something far more reaching."

"Ben Dawson may have the answer to it. I didn't have time to visit him yet, but it won't be dawn for a couple of hours. Silk, you've been clamoring for something to do."

"Name it," Silk said promptly.

The Black Bat laughed. "Put on one of my Black Bat costumes and pay Ben Dawson a visit. Find out all you can about what happened at the restaurant, and why Trexel, Banton and he met there. Butch, you've been identified by those three men, so you can't take part. Carol, it will be your job to protect Silk."

"Dawson may be watched. If so, Captain McGrath might get another anonymous phone call to come and snag the Black Bat. Rig up some kind of a signal and keep in touch with one another. Butch, you can catch a little rest here in the lab. I'm going to stand by in case McGrath decides to come over."

Butch, whose wide forehead had been a mass of wrinkles, suddenly began speaking. It was apparent that he had been too engrossed in his own thoughts to have followed the conversation of the others.

"Hey, boss, maybe this doesn't mean much, but if Vaughan telephoned that house I was at, he must have known by then that you were on the trail."

"Yes," Quinn acceded. "He did know. Why?"

"Because the guy who called didn't say it was the Black Bat who was coming. Not according to the way those three ex-cons talked. They just said it was somebody they had to fear—an enemy of theirs."

Quinn frowned. "Odd—because Vaughan was bound to know the Black Bat would try to reach that house. There was no reason to hold back my identity from the killers. Perhaps Vaughan didn't phone—never got the chance."

"Perhaps the man who fired that shot from across the court, did the phoning and said he was Vaughan, told the three killers that an enemy was on the way."

"All I know," Butch wagged a puzzled head, "is that they had no idea I worked for the Black Bat, or that he was on the move."

CHAPTER VIII

Captain McGrath's Puzzle

IT WAS almost dawn when Tony Quinn heard a car stop with a squeal of brakes. Heavy feet pounded up the walk to his front door. He knew those footsteps. It was Captain McGrath.

Silk had evaded him successfully, and McGrath was trying one of his usual attempts to find blind Tony Quinn unaccountably missing at the same time the Black Bat was known to be abroad.

But Silk hadn't reached the house yet, and Quinn had to play for time. He let McGrath ring the bell and pound on the door for a few minutes before he approached a window, raised it and called out.

"Who is there?" Quinn's voice carried the querulous tones of a blind man.

"Quinn!" McGrath answered in vast surprise. "Open up. I've got to see you right away."

"I'll be down as soon as I can. Please be patient, Captain."

But Tony Quinn moved with a lightning speed which would have done McGrath's heart a world of good to see at this present moment. He streaked for the hidden lab door, opened it and hissed a warning to Butch.

"McGrath is here. When Silk comes, send him to his room fast. I'll stall McGrath."

Then Quinn went back up the stairs, donned slippers and padded noisily down the stairs again. He fumbled for the door lock, found it and McGrath came in.

"I'm sorry I was so long," Quinn said, "but I was sound asleep when you awakened me and I couldn't find either my robe or slippers. Come in, Captain. What's so terribly important?"

McGrath eyed him sharply.

"Turn on a light, will you?" he asked.

"Oh—I'm terribly sorry. The switch is to the left of the door. I never bother with lights, Captain. Naturally, they are of no value to me."

McGrath snapped the switch and turned a further critical eye upon Tony Quinn, noted the tousled hair, the rumpled pajamas and the blank, staring eyes that looked just to the left of him.

"I swear," McGrath grumbled. "You're something of a magician, Quinn."

Quinn laughed.

"Now I'm beginning to understand. You encountered the Black Bat a few minutes ago and came here as fast as possible to see if I weren't at home. When are you going to learn, Captain? I'm a blind man. Even

doctors you sent to examine me have verified it."

Somewhat crestfallen and completely sheepish, McGrath took Quinn's arm and piloted him into the living room at the front of the house. He even helped him into a chair and then sat down himself.

"I admit I may be a fool," he said. "But, doggone it, Quinn, I'd swear you are the Black Bat, and you're no more blind than I am. Yes, I did meet the Black Bat. For the second time tonight. I don't suppose I'd get far by asking you where you were at one o'clock—on the dot."

"In bed, I think. I usually retire about midnight. There isn't much for a blind man to do."

"Yes, I know. I know," McGrath broke in testily. "I met the Black Bat at one o'clock too and I was sap enough to let him trick me after I had him cold. Well, maybe I didn't mind then."

"But this time I was positive I had him cornered at Ben Dawson's place. Dawson admitted he'd been there and left only a matter of seconds before I arrived."

"Elusive chap, isn't he?" Quinn smiled sleepily.

"By the way," McGrath had a happy thought. "Where is Silk? Isn't he usually on deck when you're awake?"

"Yes—when he is also awake. Silk sleeps heavily. Do you want him for anything?"

McGrath arose.

"I just want to see with my own eyes that he is here. It could be, Quinn, that I've been tricked by a double for the Black Bat. Silk is about your size—a little thinner perhaps—but the Black Bat's regalia would cover that up."

"Look, by all means," Quinn said. "And if that's all you want, just let yourself out when you are convinced neither Silk nor I could be guilty of tricking you. You don't happen to have any additional information about those murders?"

MCGRATH hesitated in the doorway. "If you aren't the Black Bat, then you don't know that Larry Vaughan has just about been proven the contact man for the three killers. Or that his name isn't Vaughan at all, but Wayne, and that his father happens to be George Wayne, one of the wanted men."

"Very interesting," Quinn said. "And, Captain, one other thing I've been meaning to ask you. Wasn't there a very large sum of money involved when those men were arrested those years ago? It ran into many thousands. Was it ever accounted for?"

"Well, not completely. Wayne and the others lived like sultans. Spent money left and right and they hired the best lawyers available for the trial. The most expensive legal talent too. I figured they used it all up that way."

"But you have no proof," Quinn said. "Did you go deep into the business of the Futurists, Captain?"

"No. I didn't see any need to. It wasn't in my jurisdiction and, besides, the facts were clear. Wayne, Slater and Glover were sent up for helping themselves to the society funds. It was all a big gyp.

"Trexel squealed on them, and they swore to get him. They began trying the day they got out of prison. They missed Trexel and killed two other people. Trexel may be a marked man, but he is certainly a lucky one too."

"Until another attempt is made," Quinn added. "His luck can't hold out forever. Is he well guarded?"

"I was beginning to think you were stalling me."

McGrath opened the door, looked in and saw Silk in bed. He lay on his back, mouth open, eyes closed, and he was snoring gently and peacefully. McGrath closed the door and led Quinn back to the hallway.

"Okay," he said. "You win this time, but I'm not giving up. I don't know how you travel so fast, because I left Dawson's and came here as quickly as my car could move."

"If I am the Black Bat," Quinn chuckled, "I must have wings. Perhaps I fly."

"I wouldn't put it past you," McGrath said and closed the door with a slam. Quinn didn't turn out any lights. As a blind man, he wasn't expected to remember they were



CAROL

"You bet he is, and by some of my very best men. I drop around occasionally to check up. Trexel will be safe. Naturally, we stay our distance in case there is an attempt. Then we can move in fast and nail the killers."

"I hope you do."

Quinn's sensitive ears heard what he'd been waiting for. The gentle pad of unshod feet along the hallway. It was Silk approaching, and he had to pass directly behind McGrath.

Quinn arose, veered a bit to the left and got tangled up with a coffee table. He and the table went over with a crash. McGrath rushed up to help him.

"I'm quite all right," Quinn said. "Thanks, Captain. I was merely going with you to Silk's room."

"And about time too," McGrath grumbled.

lit. He went back to his own room and really went to sleep.

In the morning, Silk was serving breakfast when Quinn came down and the ex-confidence man was in an excellent mood.

"I didn't learn much, but we certainly spiked McGrath's guns, sir."

"And nearly spiked mine," Quinn answered with a laugh. "He's beginning to suspect you may be the Black Bat now. Or at least the Black Bat's double. Exactly what did you learn from Dawson?"

"One thing in particular." Silk poured coffee from a silver service. "Dawson is so scared he can hardly talk. I've rarely seen a man so close to a breakdown from fear. You'd almost think those three killers were after him instead of Trexel."

"He is Trexel's friend. They are together a lot and those near Trexel come to sudden

and violent ends. Did he have anything to say?"

"Just that he saw no one poison the water glass at the restaurant. He is sure Vaughan didn't do it because he was watching Vaughan most of the time. Personally, if Vaughan didn't do it, I think we might look to Howard Hunt for an answer. He certainly went to extremes to avoid being followed last night when Carol was on his trail."

"Hunt comes high on my list of suspects," Quinn said. "I can't figure just exactly how he fits in, but he undoubtedly does. Perhaps we'll look into his case today. I'll arrange to have Trexel brought to my office also. How did you get away from McGrath last night?"

"Carol was in the lobby of Dawson's apartment house. She saw McGrath drive up, and she touched the apartment bell. I left in a big hurry and was going down the back way as McGrath came up in the front elevator."

"Carol was waiting, but we had to do a lot of fancy ducking. McGrath sent for all radio cars in the vicinity, and some of those cops know me. That is why I was delayed."

"And did Dawson relate any reason for his meeting with Trexel and Banton?"

"No, they're just friends and often meet for lunch or a late dinner. They aren't related in any business sense, but have known one another a long time."

"All right," Quinn said. "After breakfast, we'll go to the office. Is Carol still around?"

"No, sir, she went directly home last night."

"Contact her by phone," Quinn instructed. "Tell her to get the background of Trexel, Banton, Farraday and Dawson. Have Butch keep an eye on Howard Hunt if he can locate him."

CHAPTER IX

Request for the Unusual



DAWSON was the first to arrive at Tony Quinn's office, and Carol had not overestimated Dawson's terror. The man was almost beside himself with fear.

Quinn, supposed to be blind, took no cognizance of this. He merely invited Dawson to sit down and answer a few questions.

"But there is nothing I can tell you," Dawson said, half irritably. "I've been questioned and questioned. Why? I haven't done anything except be present when Jim Banton was poisoned and I didn't kill him."

"No one has ever suspected you did," Quinn said soothingly.

"Then why all this? Why was I asked to come here? Do police work at cross purposes all the time? All you have to do is find three ex-convicts, and you have the entire answer."

Quinn leaned forward a trifle, his blank eyes well to Dawson's left.

"Mr. Dawson, has it ever occurred to you that there might be more to this affair than just the revenge of three men fresh out of prison?"

Dawson gaped for a moment and then registered new alarm. He began fidgeting in his chair and scowled blackly.

"Of course not," he finally managed. "What else could there be?"

"That's what I'm trying to find out," Quinn said. "However, I feel certain you have been entirely truthful about all things. You may go, Mr. Dawson."

"Do I still rate protection?" Dawson asked. Then he added nervously, "I must have it. For sixty more days at any rate. Will you promise me that I will be watched?"

"I guarantee it." Quinn picked up his phone, called Police Headquarters and gave the necessary orders. "You may feel quite safe," he told Dawson after he hung up. "An officer followed you here and is waiting to follow you wherever you go."

"Thank you," Dawson gulped. "I know that Sid Trexel is coming. May I wait here for him?"

"Of course," Quinn consented.

Trexel, accompanied by Captain McGrath, appeared about five minutes later. Trexel nodded to Dawson and talked with him for a few moments. Then Trexel addressed Quinn.

"I don't know how to say this, Mr. Quinn, but I feel that so long as those three men are after me, I'm a menace to my friends. I'm afraid to stop and talk to anyone for fear another attempt will be made upon my life—that I'll live and an innocent person will die. They may get me next time, but honestly that doesn't worry me half as much as being responsible for the death of another friend."

"I quite understand," Quinn nodded. "You, Dawson, Farraday and Banton all came from the same Middle Western state, didn't you? They were—Dawson is—your friend and you feel deeply."

"I called you in this morning to ask whether or not you noticed any new movements on the part of those three killers. Suspicious looking men about, for instance. Remember, those men may have hired others to help."

"I have noticed nothing," Trexel declared. "And bank on it, I've been alert. I'm also very grateful for the protection you and Captain McGrath have provided."

"Where is Larry Vaughan?" Quinn asked

blandly.

Trexel bit his lower lip.

"I don't know. I haven't seen him since I gave him a letter to be delivered. That was just before Banton was poisoned. Vaughan was supposed to bring me a reply, but I learned he never even delivered the letter."

"It has come to my attention, through Captain McGrath's excellent work, that Larry Vaughan may really be the son of George Wayne," Quinn said. "What do you think of that?"

Trexel paled.

"Good heavens! If that's the case, Vaughan has laid all the groundwork for these attacks and may have arranged other traps. Yes, yes—he could be Larry Wayne. George did have a son.

"Of course he was in his teens when the Futurists were in their glory. I never saw him, to my knowledge, but come to think of it, Vaughan does resemble George Wayne somewhat."

"Then if Vaughan should return, say or do nothing to arouse his suspicions," Quinn ordered. "Quietly notify me or Captain McGrath, and we'll take care of the rest. That is all, Mr. Trexel. Captain, will you remain, please?"

"But I've got to cover Trexel," McGrath said.

Dawson spoke up.

"There is a detective watching me. I'm going with Trexel to his office so we'll be guarded. You may arrange to have a man sent to his office later."

"Okay," McGrath said. "Travel by taxi and don't get into any cab cruising around that just happens to stop before you signal. I'll be at your office shortly, Mr. Trexel. Don't worry, you'll be quite safe."

SHORTLY after Trexel and Dawson departed—and before Quinn started talking to Captain McGrath—Howard Hunt was ushered into the office. He sat down close to Quinn's desk and carried an aggressive air about him.

"What's the idea?" he demanded. "Don't tell me you think I killed those two men or that I'm working with the three ex-cons?"

"We don't—not yet," Quinn said significantly. "Compose yourself, Mr. Hunt. We merely called you here for some routine questioning which, I hope, will automatically clear you of the least amount of suspicion. Here—have a cigarette."

Quinn pushed a silver cigarette case across the desk in Hunt's general direction. Hunt picked up the case, opened it and took out a cigarette. Silk was at his side to apply flame. Silk also picked up the cigarette case and laid it on the desk at Quinn's elbow.

"What do you wish to know?" Hunt asked, more at ease now.

"Did you ever live in that Midwestern

state where the Futurists had their headquarters, Mr. Hunt?"

"No, sir, I never did. My recollections of that gyp organization are very faint. I'd never fall for the type of propaganda they handed out."

"I can certainly believe that," Quinn nodded. "You are a promoter, I understand. What do you promote?"

"Anything I can lay my hands on. Right now, it's a new type of insecticide the Army has developed and which should do very well after the war. I'm laying the groundwork for its distribution when the Army releases it."

"Oh yes, I've heard of the stuff," Quinn said. "How did it happen you rented desk space in Mr. Trexel's office?"

"Purely by accident. I was looking for a place exactly like that. Where I could use a small office staff and have a place to meet people I do business with. I happened to wander into Trexel's office and made him a proposition. He accepted, and there I was."

"Have you seen anything of Larry Vaughan today?"

"No, sir, I have not. And, come to think of it, Vaughan was an odd guy. He'd prowled around plenty. I caught him going through my desk one day, and I called him on it. Believe me, he knew everything that went on in that office."

"Undoubtedly," Quinn agreed. "Thanks very much for coming, Mr. Hunt. I can say this much—I doubt strongly that you have anything to do with this business. Just be on guard, because people close to Trexel have a habit of dying suddenly."

"Do you know what?" Hunt arose. "I'm pulling out of that office as soon as I can find another. One of these days those three cons will toss a bomb at Trexel, and I don't want to be in the neighborhood when that happens."

Hunt left, and McGrath settled himself in the chair Hunt had just vacated.

"We're getting nowhere," he declared flatly. "Those three monkeys have holed up somewhere, and I don't think they'll ever come out again."

"On the contrary," Quinn told him with a smile, "we're doing very well indeed. Captain, will you give me all the details as to what happened when Farraday was shot and killed? Right from the moment it happened until all the excitement died away."

"I told you that already," McGrath complained. "I was coming out of a hock shop where I'd gone to make a check for some stolen stuff. I heard Farraday yell and saw him fall. I saw Trexel do a nose-dive under the car. Then he told his story."

"I sent men to the buildings across the street where the shot came from. We located an empty apartment, found evidence they'd been there—the three ex-cons, I

mean—and that the murder bullet had been fired from there. We even found the used cartridge shell.”

“Then you drove Trexel somewhere?”

“I rode with him,” McGrath corrected. “We clicked right away. I liked the guy and felt sorry for him. He was scared stiff.”

“And his movements before the attack took place—did you go into them?”

“Certainly. I tried to find out if he was tailed by some finger man. Trexel came out of his house, talked to a newsdealer for a couple of minutes and was very nervous. Then he stopped at his usual tobacco store and bought a box of his favorite cigars. Good ones too.

“He opened the box as we drove away from the spot where Farraday was killed. He gave me one. From the cigar store Trexel went to his garage, a public place and took out his car. He told me he was afraid to walk or even take a taxi.”

“I don’t blame him,” Quinn said softly. “Now, when you left the scene of the first crime, exactly what route did you follow?”

CAPTAIN McGrath looked puzzled.

“Why—the shortest one, I suppose. Trexel was driving, and I kept busy watching for any more signs of a fresh attack. I didn’t pay much attention to where we went.

“We drove north from the scene, turned into a cross street and then into Drury Avenue. We crossed White Bridge over the river and headed for our destination. What’s all this got to do with it?”

“Probably nothing, Captain. I’m merely asking a few questions. That will be all, I think, except for one thing. Please pick up my cigarette case very carefully by the edges. You will find Howard Hunt’s finger-prints on it. Have them checked—through the F.B.I. if necessary—and let me know if you find anything.”

Somewhat startled at the order, McGrath obeyed. Quinn settled down to some routine office work for about an hour, and then he called Silk over.

“A little job, Silk. Find me a calendar for seven years ago. Then locate a diver. Yes, one of those men who prowl around the bottom of the ocean. Have him at the office right after lunch and, by the way, we’re having lunch at home today. Carol and Butch will be there too.”

“A seven-year-old calendar and a deep sea diver?” Silk gasped.

“That’s right. Get busy now.”

Silk obtained both items. At noon he drove Quinn home. In the dining room, with drawn window shades and closed doors, Carol and Butch joined them.

Butch had little to report.

“I got on Howard Hunt’s trail, but he didn’t go anywhere except to the office, and he never tried to throw me off. Then he

went to your office, and I trailed him to his hotel apartment. That’s all.”

“And you, Carol?” Quinn asked.

“I went into the histories of the men involved,” she told him. “On Hunt I could learn nothing at all. He’s new in town and never talked about where he came from. Farraday was just an average man, a hard worker and as honest as he could be.

“For that matter, so was Banton and so are Dawson and Trexel. They’ve known one another for a long time and frequently meet for lunches and dinners. There is one other member of the group, a lawyer named Peter Lorash. He comes from the same state too.”

“How about their habits?” Quinn asked.

“Good, I suppose. Paid their bills, lived decent lives and belonged to fraternal orders. Great ones for that. Take care of themselves too. Dawson’s heart isn’t so good. Farraday had stomach trouble and Trexel is nursing a nice set of ulcers at the moment. He has to be very careful of what he eats.”

Quinn closed his eyes, deep in thought for a second and then he sighed and smiled.

“You covered things very well, Carol. Very well indeed.”

She grinned back at him.

“It’s surprising what you can learn by talking to a man’s neighbors. Where do we go from here, Tony? Are there any leads at all as to where those three men are hiding?”

“None. Intelligent men, provided with a little money, can stay out of sight easily enough—and for a long time. Frankly, I don’t look for any more activity on their part.”

The telephone was ringing and Silk sped to answer it. When Silk returned, he was excited.

“McGrath called,” he said. “Dawson was just killed, and Trexel is in pretty bad shape.”

CHAPTER X

Flames of Murder



AS THEY left Tony Quinn’s office, Trexel, Dawson and a detective boarded a taxi and were driven directly to Trexel’s office building. They rode to the twelfth floor, where the offices were located. The detective took up a post near the elevators, where he could not be seen, but could observe people who got

off at this floor.

Trexel and Dawson entered the office. The staff was out to lunch, and the rooms empty.

They sat down, but before they could begin talking, Dawson's nostrils twitched.

"I smell smoke, Sid. Did you throw a lighted cigar butt in the waste basket? Wait—there's smoke coming from underneath the door to the office which Hunt shared with Vaughan."

Both men jumped up and ran to the door. Dawson opened it. Inside, a fire burned briskly. One of the two desks was covered with flames. The rug was burning and papers on the desk were adding fuel to the

pounding behind him. He turned. The door was closed. Trexel shouted for help. The detective's voice answered him.

"The door is locked, and there's no key. Stand aside. I'll blow the lock off."

The detective's gun blazed once, and the lock was smashed. He forced the door open. Trexel was on one knee, reaching up frantically and clawing at his throat. The detective grabbed him and yanked him clear of the blaze.

Someone brought a fire hose, and in a few



"I Know That Your Wife Was Just Murdered—an Hour Ago!"

WHEN THE BLACK BAT suddenly appeared in Paul Hampton's room with this startling announcement, Hampton cringed with fright.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"I am the Black Bat," said Tony Quinn, "and I am here to help you."

"But how—how do you know my wife was killed? It isn't known to anyone—only to me—"

"Tell me all about it," commanded the Black Bat. "And remember I have my own ways of getting information and of checking it—so give me the true facts."

Hampton talked. The story he told is only one of the amazing factors in the astonishing mystery of murder and jewel thievery which the Black Bat must unravel in *MURDER ON THE LOOSE*, a gripping complete book-length novel by G. Wayman Jones that is packed with suspense, surprises and action!

COMING NEXT ISSUE

blaze. In another two or three minutes, it would have been out of control.

Dawson seized the cushion of a chair and started beating at the flames, yelled for Trexel to get a fire hose. Trexel sped out of the office into the hallway and yanked down a brass fire extinguisher hanging on the wall. He rushed back into the office.

"Stand aside," he yelled to Dawson. "I'll play this extinguisher on the blaze."

He stepped well into the office, opened the extinguisher and a stream of fluid shot out. The fire leaped higher and higher.

"It's gasoline!"

Trexel dropped the extinguisher and turned toward the door. Dawson screamed for help. Trexel tried to reach him, but Dawson had fallen to the floor, where spilled gasoline soaked him. His screams grew weaker and weaker.

Trexel's clothing was aflame too, and he tried to beat it out. There was a great

moments the blaze was under control. McGrath arrived soon after and approached the blackened, twisted body of Ben Dawson.

Looking up, McGrath spoke.

"Call Mr. Quinn and get him up here right away. Send for a doctor too. Trexel is singed pretty well, but in no danger. Grogan—you were supposed to watch them. Why didn't you?"

"It wasn't—his fault."

Trexel was lying on a couch. He tried to sit up as he spoke, but fell back with a groan.

"This whole thing was arranged beforehand. A fire started in the office. I ran for the nearest fire extinguisher, and somebody had filled it with gasoline. Then the office door was closed and locked on us. The fire was meant to kill me, but it got Dawson instead."

"Okay," McGrath said. "Take it easy, Trexel. You'll be all right."

"Dawson? Is he . . . ?"

"Dead. He never had a chance. It was

just luck that Grogan got here fast enough to save you."

"I saw Mr. Trexel come out and grab the fire extinguisher," Grogan explained. "So I ran right to the office, of course. But I didn't see anybody leave. I'll swear to that."

McGrath grumbled something and went into the gutted office. It was Howard Hunt's desk in which the fire had started. McGrath managed to get one large lower drawer open. Inside, he found the remains of a neat incendiary time bomb. It was set to go off shortly after noon. McGrath went back to Trexel.

"Did you have any appointment in the office this noon?" he asked.

"No, I didn't. I make it a point to stay here though, while the staff goes to lunch. Hunt asked me to do that. Just in case his phone rings, or someone comes to see him. I don't mind because I never eat lunch early."

"Then Hunt knew you'd be here when that bomb went off," McGrath mused. "Quinn is going to be plenty surprised when I hand him the solution to this."

TONY QUINN arrived as fast as he could. On Silk's arm, he entered the office, and McGrath told him in detail just what had happened. Dropping his voice to a whisper, McGrath added some significant news.

"The bomb was in Hunt's desk. He knew Trexel would be here when the thing went off and—your hunch about him was right too. Finger-print records show he is really a clever crook known as Walter Perot. Comes from the West Coast and isn't known here at all, but you can bet your life he's in this up to his neck."

"Send out an alarm for him," Quinn ordered. "He'll try to leave town as soon as he can. Now I want to talk to Trexel alone."

McGrath cleared the office. Quinn found his way to a chair beside the couch on which Trexel lay.

"This does it," Quinn said tersely. "Through no fault of your own, Mr. Trexel, you have become a menace to others. Three attempts were made on your life. Three innocent people died. This can't go on."

"You suggest a solution to it," Trexel said, "and I'll be indebted to you forever."

"It's very simple. You will disappear. Vanish! Not a soul will know where you are except me. And I'll even stay out of it if you wish. Go somewhere under another name and stay hidden until we have the three killers."

Trexel sat up successfully this time, and there was a glow of hope in his eyes.

"I thought of that before. I didn't think I should do it. But now that you insist, I'll be glad to go. It won't take me more than four or five hours to make arrangements. I will visit my bank, get some cash, plan a short trip and a hiding place where I can stay under cover."

"Don't leave until after ten o'clock tonight," Quinn said. "I'll try to see you then. We'll discuss the wisdom of giving me your address or of letting the whole thing go until you read of the capture of the three men in the newspapers."

Trexel tried to extend one rather badly seared hand and then realized that Quinn was blind and unable to respond to this gesture of friendship.

"It's a crime, Mr. Quinn, that you lost the sight of your eyes. You were an excellent D. A. You are very good now, even if you can't see—but what a criminal investigator you would have made with normal sight."

Quinn smiled.

"Sometimes I think about that too, but I'm doing all right. At ten tonight then, and until that time be very very careful. McGrath will stay on your heels. Tell no one, not even your most intimate friend, that you are going away. You will simply vanish from the face of the earth."

Back at his office, Quinn was very busy until the dinner hour. A rough looking individual called on him late in the afternoon and turned over a package. Silk provided the seven-year-old calendar, which gave Tony Quinn evident satisfaction.

Shortly after darkness set in, the Black Bat and Silk slipped out of his house via the tunnel, reached the garden house and made certain they were unobserved before they raced for the coupé, parked on the street just outside the gate.

Silk didn't look very much like Tony Quinn's manservant. He wore a disguise which made him a much younger man, fresh from some very rural spot. It was one of two disguises Silk had become proficient in using during his days as a confidence man.

He stopped the car on a quiet street directly behind the hotel in which Howard Hunt lived. Changing to the black, close fitting hood, the Black Bat slipped quietly to a rear entrance, signalled Silk and they both went in.

Avoiding building employees astutely, they used a service elevator to reach Hunt's floor, located his apartment. Silk rang the bell. No one answered, so the Black Bat used his thin strip of tempered steel on the lock. It was no easy task but finally the lock turned, and they stepped inside.

"Don't turn on any lights," the Black Bat told Silk. "McGrath may have these rooms watched, and some of his men will come flying if they see a light go on. Use that small flash you carry, but keep the ray away from the windows."

THEY proceeded to search the rooms thoroughly, without finding much. One evident fact was that Howard Hunt had hastily packed his most important possessions and fled. One large clothes closet held

a big trunk, addressed in block letters to a city more than a thousand miles away with printed orders to the express company to hold the trunk until called for.

"He cleared out, which is an admission of guilt as far as I'm concerned," Silk said.

"But he didn't arrange to have the trunk shipped on ahead of him," the Black Bat said in a puzzled voice. "That intrigues me, because he could have shipped it out easily enough. Let's see what is in the trunk."

The Black Bat found it locked, but the lock was cheap and gave way quickly to his ministrations. He raised the lid and gave a gasp of horror. Silk echoed it.

Inside the trunk was the corpse. It was doubled up and crammed tightly within the narrow limits of the trunk. The body was that of Larry Vaughan. His throat had been slashed, but the flow of blood had been partly checked by thick layers of cloth.

"And now," the Black Bat asked softly, "do you think, Silk, that Larry Vaughan was murdered by the three ex-convicts, one of whom was his father?"

"Hunt did it?" Silk made that a question.

"Well, the body is in Hunt's residence, in one of his trunks, prepared for shipment to a distant spot. Hunt is gone. The facts all add up to his name. We know he is a crook—but suppose someone else knew he was a crook too and tipped him that he was going to be arrested?"

"A man of Hunt's type would cut and run for it—which is what he did. A man with a criminal record is a perfect fall guy for another crook, Silk."

"I learned that long ago, in my particular line of work, but I'll be frank, sir. I can't seem to figure the tie-up here."

"You will. And in a very short time now. What's more, we'll make those three ex-convicts surrender themselves very shortly."

"But you don't know where they are. How will you reach them?" Silk wanted to know.

"We'll advertise for them. By radio and newspaper. We'd better close this trunk, keep Vaughan's murder a secret for a little while. Certainly it can't harm him now."

Before closing the trunk, Silk felt of the dead man's wrist.

"He's been dead a long time, sir. I doubt he lived very long after he got away from you at his own apartment."

The Black Bat nodded.

"I don't believe Vaughan lived an hour after he phoned that old house and warned his father I was coming out. Let's get away from here before someone catches us."

Safely in the coupé again, the Black Bat gave orders for Silk to drive to a section directly across town. There he pointed to a private dwelling.

"A man named Peter Lorash lives there," he said. "Very shortly it will be necessary that you drive here as rapidly as possible

from the vicinity of Sidney Trexel's place. Therefore, select the easiest and quickest route and remember it."

Silk started back, judging traffic lights and traffic conditions. Finally he stopped on a side street beside Trexel's apartment house. The Black Bat donned his wide-brimmed hat and began to open the car door.

"Stay right here, Silk," he ordered. "And be ready to move fast."

An instant later, the Black Bat disappeared among the shadows of an alleyway.

CHAPTER XI

Murder Is Never an Accident



MOVING about so early in the evening was dangerous, but the Black Bat had to take his chances and he remained alert to duck for cover if anyone came along. He reached the door of Trexel's house without being noticed and boldly rang the bell.

Trexel opened the door, gasped and stepped back. The Black Bat moved in, closed and locked the door behind him and took Trexel's arm.

"You know who I am," he said. "Thanks for letting me in. I know how I must have startled you. Have there been any further attempts on your life?"

"Not since—since this noon—when Dawson was killed. Darn it, that outfit you wear scared the dickens out of me. I just can't make myself believe that a man all in black and hooded can possibly be a friend of mine."

"But I am," the Black Bat said smoothly. "I have your interests alone in mind. I notice you are packed for a trip. Running out, Trexel?"

"No, I'm not running out and I resent such an insinuation," Trexel bristled. "In fact, the man in charge of this case practically ordered me to go away and conceal myself. I'm a menace to society, it seems. Three men want to kill me, but always murder someone else by mistake."

The Black Bat sat down.

"Dawson's death was especially ghastly. Ingenious method, starting a fire and replacing the contents of a fire extinguisher his victim was bound to use with gasoline."

"I've said all along that those three men aren't plain crooks or thugs," Trexel said. "They have brains and resources. I had hoped you might round them up by now, but I suppose if the police can't do it why—I've no right to expect you can."

"Mr. Trexel," the Black Bat said, "I can promise to produce those three men tomor-

row. Furthermore, I'll wager they'll march voluntarily into the police precinct nearest the place where they are hiding."

Trexel's eyes opened very wide.

"But how—why?"

"You see," the Black Bat said slowly, "those men didn't try to murder you, nor did they kill Farraday, Banton or Dawson."

"You must be mad," Trexel gasped. "It's clear as daylight that they are responsible. Who else has a motive for killing me?"

"No one, I expect," the Black Bat said. "However, you're a little mixed up. Farraday, Banton and Dawson were not killed by accident. The murder attempts were aimed at them, not you."

"Oh, come now." Trexel waved a hand in a gesture as if to dismiss the whole silly idea. "That just isn't possible. Who in the world would want to kill them?"

"You," the Black Bat said calmly.

Trexel stiffened and took a couple of steps backwards. One hand moved fast toward a hip pocket, froze an inch away. There was an automatic in the Black Bat's fist, and through the slits in the hood, two fiery eyes served a warning of quick death. Trexel half raised his hands.

"That's better." The Black Bat arose. "Keep your hands up and turn around while I deprive you of your gun, Trexel. Then you may be seated, and I'll tell you a story with which you are very familiar, but which you never thought anyone else would guess."

He took a .38 revolver out of Trexel's pocket, frisked him and sat down again. His automatic remained steady. Trexel wiped perspiration from his forehead, glared at the hooded man in black, but finally sat down too.

"We'll go back to the time when the Futurists started their little game of get-what-you-can-from-as-many-suckers-as-possible," the Black Bat said. "They created an organization with appeal. They sold uniforms, badges, pass-cards, collected dues and, all-in-all, took in a vast sum of cash."

"And I informed the authorities about what was going on," Trexel said bitterly. "Now you accuse me of being the murderer of three of my best friends."

"And fellow officers of the Futurists," the Black Bat added. "They were involved, but were just as honest as you pretended to be. They threatened to upset the apple cart about that racket, and you told them you'd take the rap."

"If you hadn't, they'd have talked. Then you'd have made the number four man of those just released from prison."

TREXEL looked increasingly angry.

"What if they did agree with me that it was time to expose the organization?" he demanded.

"There was a lot of money. A great deal of it, Trexel, and Wayne, Glover and Slater

never got it all either. Thousands were tucked away. You told the three high officials who were prison bound that you would keep it for them.

"You told Farraday, Banton and Dawson that you'd also keep the money. The men who went to prison believed you, believed that they'd get their share when they were released.

"You met them, aided in arranging a hiding place for them. They trusted you. By telling them that Howard Hunt was after the loot, you kept them frightened and in the background.

"To the three men who were murdered, you explained, seven years ago, that if you turned the surplus cash in to the courts at that time, you and they would be arrested. They were honest, but afraid and unwilling to go to prison. Therefore, a scheme was concocted.

"The money was to be kept intact, under your jurisdiction and their supervision, until seven years went by. The statute of limitations in criminal cases of that kind would then release you. The money could be turned back without any risk of your going to prison."

"I'm afraid it will take a great deal of proof to make anyone believe that," Trexel smirked.

"Of course it will—and I have it. The money, for instance, is right in this apartment. You wanted a chance to go away—to vanish—and when Tony Quinn offered you such an opportunity, you seized upon it.

"You got the cash from the various safe deposit boxes and you would have gone away tonight, and nobody would ever have found you again. You'd be safe too—with the law behind your disappearance until you were established under another identity."

Trexel glanced at two heavy suitcases near the door. He licked his lips, but said nothing.

"You murdered Farraday," the Black Bat went on. "You had planted, in your car, a box resembling the wrapped box of cigars which you took care to purchase.

"The duplicate box contained a gun, well padded to absorb sound and to prevent any flame or powder from emerging to mark the corpse and give away the fact that he had been shot at close range. You managed to create a downward wound by stepping up onto the running board of your car as you fired.

"The empty apartment across the street was properly rigged by you to indicate that the three ex-convicts had laid in wait there to kill you and murdered Farraday by accident. Now shall I tell you how you killed Banton?"

Trexel didn't answer, but he was growing pale, and his tightly clasped hands were shaking.

"You poisoned the glass of water before you left the table for the bar. You took

pains to see that all three of you ordered the same appetizer—oysters on the half shell. Then, returning, you could sit anywhere without arousing suspicion, because all servings were identical.

"You didn't care who got the poison, Banton or Dawson. Just one thing betrayed you. A case of ulcers. A serious case. You can't eat raw oysters. Therefore, why did you order them except to make sure the servings were the same? You got Vaughan over there to throw suspicion on him. You allowed Hunt to share your offices so he'd be another stooge.

"But Hunt was after that money too. I'm sure of it now. He is a fairly well-known

"You knew it was the Black Bat on his way, and you hoped those three men would kill me. So long as they were afraid of Hunt and believed he was the murderer, you were quite safe. It wouldn't surprise me if Hunt's confession indicated you had apprised him of the fact that there was some easy money to be made and started him on his career of getting the fortune."

THE Black Bat paused briefly.

"Now we come to Dawson. You rigged that too—the fire bomb in Hunt's desk and the extinguisher loaded with gasoline. You knew you'd get burned, but it was worth the pain for any suspicion against you would then



BUTCH

crook who might have stumbled on the truth and decided to profit by it, only he didn't suspect you. In fact, he was scared to death of even being with you, because he thought those three ex-cons were doing the killing."

Trexel found his voice.

"Do you think Hunt will testify to that? Or Larry Vaughan?"

"Hunt will—when the police find him. He'll have to, because you threw too much blame on him. Vaughan won't talk because he's dead. You killed him. You made a previous attempt at it by shooting from a window across the court from his apartment.

"Vaughan never got very far when he fled. You were waiting for him. You phoned those three ex-convicts, pretending you were Vaughan, and told them Howard Hunt was on his way and that if they didn't kill him, he'd probably kill them.

be wiped away. You closed and locked the door yourself, so that the detective had to shoot the lock away."

"What do you think a jury will say if a masked man addresses them with those accusations?" Trexel demanded.

"I'd probably go into the cell adjoining yours," the Black Bat admitted wryly. "Quinn has proof enough. The fake box of cigars, for instance. You dumped it over White Bridge while Captain McGrath rode right beside you. A diver brought it up.

"Dawson made a strange statement to Quinn also—that he needed protection for sixty more days—when the statute of limitations would operate to protect him. I think Dawson was rapidly getting onto your scheme. So did you, and therefore you murdered him."

"Suppose," Trexel said, "we make a deal."

"Nothing doing. You did your best to land me in jail, for one thing. You were watching Vaughan's place. After trying to shoot him, you saw me and sent McGrath there. Then you knew I'd visit Dawson, and you did the same thing. You tried to kill me when I was locked in Vaughan's closet.

"Anyway I don't make deals. Quinn knows all about this too. I saw him tonight and explained the whole thing. Shortly he will arrive with the police. They'll take you in for murder. Four murders, in fact, and one of the crimes will stick.

"The three ex-convicts will come forward as soon as they hear the whole story. They couldn't do it before, because you had convinced everyone that they were the killers—and convinced them that Howard Hunt was gunning for them too.

"You also caused them to violate their paroles, and they'll go back to prison—gladly, now that the stigma of murder has been removed from their names. They kept silent because of all those circumstances, added to the fact they still wanted the money you were holding."

Trexel scowled.

"Just how do you propose to turn me over to the police? They'll take you too, and if you don't testify, there is only a very weak case."

"Justice," the Black Bat said, "will be done. Somewhere there is another man you intended to kill. I haven't identified him yet, but I will. His story will convict you. However, there is no need to wait for that."

"What do you mean?" Trexel asked nervously.

The Black Bat opened the cylinder of Trexel's gun and removed all but one cartridge. He ordered Trexel to arise and back into the bedroom. It had two doors, one of them leading into the hall. This door he locked and pocketed the key. Then he threw the gun, with one bullet in its cylinder, on the bed.

"The way out for you," he said. "I'll wait five minutes. If I don't hear a shot, I'm coming back and kill you myself. Five minutes, Trexel. The shot will be the signal that you have killed yourself. I'll step out of the picture then."

As the Black Bat moved out of the room, Trexel sat down on the bed with bowed head. The Black Bat closed and locked the door. Less than a minute later, there was a single shot. The Black Bat waited another full minute before he looked in the bedroom.

Trexel was gone. The killer had blown the lock off the other door—a trick he'd learned from the detective assigned to guard him and a trick the Black Bat knew Trexel would try.

Outside, Silk had the coupé ready to travel. It was rolling as the Black Bat clambered onto the seat. Silk asked no questions, just

concentrated on driving. At Peter Lorash's home, he stopped. The Black Bat leaped out of the car, raced to the small, dark doorway and rang the bell. Lorash let him in.

SHORTLY after, Trexel walked up to the door. It opened. Lorash was standing well inside the hallway. Trexel greeted him pleasantly. He walked a step closer. His right hand, held behind his back, suddenly brought a knife into view.

He raised it, and Lorash shrank away. Then Trexel's knife hand was seized and twisted. The blade fell to the floor. A fist collided with Trexel's jaw, and he went down. The Black Bat faced Lorash.

"Now you have concrete evidence that Trexel meant to murder you, as he murdered the others. You were the only one left who might guess the truth after Trexel vanished."

"I'm convinced," Lorash said tensely. "He was double-crossing Farraday, Dawson, Banton and myself. We trusted him. We were essentially honest and wanted to return the money when it was safe to do so.

"Trexel double-crossed Wayne, Slater and Glover too. He probably told them he'd keep the money intact. And all the while he was scheming how he could get it all, get rid of us and make those three ex-convicts take the blame."

"Tell that to the police and the District Attorney in charge," the Black Bat advised. "Meanwhile, watch Trexel. If he moves—which I doubt—slug him hard. Remember, he is a killer."

Lorash watched the Black Bat close the door and vanish. Captain McGrath arrived a few minutes later.

Tony Quinn's big car pulled up too after several minutes, and Silk, now minus any disguise, helped Quinn out. The pseudo-blind man's cane tapped across the sidewalk. McGrath met him. Lorash explained the entire case. Trexel, alternately groaning and cursing, was well-guarded and handcuffed.

Quinn's lips were tightly compressed. He took McGrath aside.

"I hope now that you will no longer accuse me of being the Black Bat. I intended to break this case alone, and he beat me to it. Yes, I have the fake cigar box.

"We'd better not go into that deeply either, because Trexel disposed of it while he was seated beside you. Take him in. We have all the proof we need and if you ever get the Black Bat boxed up, let me know. I want to see him myself. Taking this case right out of my hands—and yours."

"Tough," McGrath grumbled, but he brightened somewhat. "But the Black Bat can't come into court, can't say a word in public. The case is ours, Quinn. Lorash's testimony is enough to convict—along with Hunt's evidence.

"We landed him, but he's been afraid to

talk so far. He'll open up now. Then there is the money contained in those suitcases. One of my men found it in his home."
 "Enough," Quinn declared grandly, "We'll

beat the Black Bat at his own game."
 "Yeah," McGrath's eyes narrowed. "Only his game is blind man's buff, and I'm always 'it'."



FURTHER EXCITING EXPLOITS OF THE BLACK BAT

IN

MURDER ON THE LOOSE

By G. WAYMAN JONES

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Gillen was lying beside the bed with the back of his head crushed

CRIME IN CONCRETE

By CLARK FROST

Clem Johnson Must Find the Answer to a Grim Mystery When Concrete Beams on His War Construction Job Collapse!

CLEM JOHNSON took the message with an outward show of calm. But inwardly his heart leaped with exultation. For the last week or so he had been greatly worried over this scandal concerning his construction work, a scandal which threatened to ruin his engineering reputation which he had built up by years of hard, conscientious toil.

"Fine, Nick," he said into the telephone. "I'll be around in fifteen minutes."

He dropped the receiver back into its cradle and swung his swivel chair around to face Bill Shotwell, his chief engineer.

"That was Nick Lukens, Bill," said Johnson crisply. "He's just come across some evidence regarding those concrete beams. He thinks it puts the company in the clear. Anyhow, he wants to see me right away."

Clem Johnson was a large, muscular, good-looking man of about forty, with iron-gray hair and clear hazel eyes. Despite the fact he was approaching middle-age, there was an activity in the way he moved, which showed he had lost nothing of the athletic vigor for which he had once been famous.

Bill Shotwell, on the other hand, was a lean man with thinning blond hair. He had

a closely clipped moustache and a darkly tanned face. Years of construction work on responsible jobs in odd corners of the earth had given him a cautious cynical expression.

Shotwell dropped the pencil he was holding as he met the glance of his employer. Johnson was the owner of the Alleghany Engineering Corporation.

"Did Lukens tell you who's responsible?" he asked. "Did he give you any names?"

Johnson shook his shaggy head.

"No. He refused to talk over the telephone, but he says the evidence is conclusive. He advised me to keep my mouth shut and to get to his house as soon as possible." Johnson glanced about the office and frowned as his gaze fell upon a vacant desk. "I wonder what happened to Vera," he said. "It isn't like her to stay away from the office all day without notice. Are you sure she didn't phone?"

Shotwell shook his head. "Haven't heard a word."

"I'm worried about Vera," said Johnson. "She hasn't been herself lately. I wonder if she's ill."

Vera Collins was Johnson's secretary, an attractive efficient girl. Johnson had found her indispensable, for she had been with him for several years. He had grown to trust and value her.

"Maybe she's planning to quit her job now because there's a threat of a scandal," suggested Shotwell. "Why don't you drop by her apartment and find out on your way to Nick's? You go right by there and it won't take a minute."

"Good idea, Bill," said Johnson. "I'll do it." He got up, grabbed his hat and headed for the door. He swung it open and stopped abruptly.

A thin bony man, about thirty years old stepped through and stopped at the threshold. He was a new employee, a time-keeper. His name was Bert Gillen.

"Hello, Gillen," said Johnson. "Something you want?"

IT WAS late, after six o'clock in the evening, and Johnson was wondering why Gillen had remained so long after his working hours. Gillen sidled into the room.

"Yep, Mr. Johnson," answered Gillen. "There's something I want. I want my time. I'm quitting."

Johnson stared at the man, for he did not like his tone. It was insolent. He made one of his quick decisions.

"Quitting, eh? All right." He turned to Shotwell. "Fix this fellow up, will you, Bill? I'm in a hurry to see Nick."

But Gillen had his eyes on Johnson. He was sneering. Reaching out he put forth a hand to detain the owner of the Alleghany Engineering Corporation.

"No, you don't," said Gillen. "Beter stick

around and hear what I've got to say. You're building an addition for the Ludlow Propeller Company, and you can't do it without my cooperation."

Johnson was angered by the man's manner.

"Can't we?" he said. "Well, we'll see about that. Pay him off, Bill." Then he paused, struck by the odd gleam which he detected in Gillen's eyes. "What's on your mind, Gillen? Quick! Out with it."

"Yep, you've been busy all right," answered the timekeeper with a sly smirk at Johnson. "You've been so busy you didn't reinforce those concrete beams on the Ludlow job."

Shotwell's voice cut into the conversation. "You run along, Clem, and let me handle this fellow," he said. "Hurry up, before you're late for that appointment with Nick."

"Nobody's going to handle me," shrilled Gillen. "I know what's going on in that Ludlow job and I want five grand as a bonus!"

Clem Johnson's jaw bulged with anger. He clenched his big fist—and then changed his mind.

"So you've been hearing stories about the Bessemer job and it's mixed you up, Gillen," he said coldly. "You heard about us pouring concrete beams on the Bessemer job and you thought it was the Ludlow contract. Somebody told you Nick Lukens, head of the city's Building Bureau, was up checking the job this afternoon. Well, Lukens just telephoned me. Lukens says the Alleghany Engineering Corporation is not to blame. Got that? I'm on my way to see Lukens now."

Gillen's entire frame shook with spite.

"Bah, you can't bluff me!" he yelled. "I saw those beams poured myself. On the Ludlow job, too. The specifications were faked. And it wasn't at the Bessemer job, either. It was at Ludlow's. I was there."

"You don't know anything about anything," snapped Shotwell. "Naturally the specs on the Ludlow beams were changed. Originally an eighteen-inch steel I-beam was specified. But we couldn't get the steel. Concrete had to be used."

"Why didn't you reinforce it, then?" shouted Gillen.

"We did reinforce it, you fool!" retorted Shotwell. "No concrete beam could stand the stress without reinforcement. Since then it has been checked by the architect, the city inspectors, and this corporation."

Clem Johnson didn't wait to hear more. He shoved past Gillen.

"Pay this rat off, Bill, and throw him out. I'm on my way to see Vera and Lukens now."

He slammed the door and hurried to the street.

Outside, in the raw wintry sting of a late fall evening, some of his anger evaporated.

He had been on edge since noon, since the Bessemer accident. Or was it an accident? That particular question was under investigation now.

Earlier in the week, heavy equipment had been moved into the still uncompleted Bessemer structure. Under its weight and vibration, two concrete beams had crumbled away. One workman was dead, three others injured. The war effort had been impeded.

A preliminary check indicated that only a fraction of the proper amount of steel reinforcing was in the concrete beams. In some mysterious manner, it had been overlooked. Johnson had been astounded. He could not imagine how such a thing had happened. But if additional beams proved faulty, the picture would be black indeed. Now that fool, Gillen, was asserting similar construction flaws existed on the Ludlow job. Johnson couldn't believe it. Nevertheless, he made up his mind to find out.

Frowning with worry, he drove his car through the scanty evening traffic, stopping first at Vera Collins' address.

The girl's apartment was dark, and his ring went unanswered. At length he returned to the street and climbed back into his car.

Cutting across town, he stopped in front of a small frame house, got out again and mounted a stoop. It was the place where Lukens had bachelor quarters. Johnson pressed the bell. When there was no answer, he rang again, this time long and resoundingly. Still he got no response although there were lights within. So he began to pound on the panels with his big, hard fist, making a loud hollow sound.

AT THIS moment the door was jerked open from the inside and a girl appeared, clad for the street. She was wearing a small hat and a tweed coat. In her hands she was clutching a large handbag, decorated with a large glistening silver B. She was a tall, good-looking girl, with full lips and blue-black hair, and Johnson noticed at once that she looked pale and frightened, almost hysterical.

"Is Nick Lukens in?" Johnson asked her.

But the girl did not answer. Instead she shoved past him, as if frantic with haste, darted across the stoop and down the steps, and made off up the street, running as hard as she could go. Johnson gazed after her in astonishment. Despite her hurry, she lurched back and forth across the sidewalk, as if almost distraught with fear. She reached the corner, turned it and disappeared.

All this struck Johnson as very strange indeed. She had left the door wide open behind her, so, after a moment of hesitation, Johnson entered the house. The hall was dark, but light was streaming from a nearby room. He walked forward to the lighted doorway and stopped. His hazel eyes wid-

ened at what he saw and his square face grew grim. He was not too much surprised. The suspicious actions of the girl had prepared him for something like this.

Stretched out across a large lounge chair was the body of a thickset, middle-aged man. There was a bullet hole in his chest and he was dead. It was Nick Lukens.

Then Clem Johnson caught sight of something else which did cause him to catch his breath. Nick Lukens was not the only person dead in that room.

Further back, slumped on the floor by a walnut desk, lay Johnson's secretary, Vera Collins, with blood matted the shining folds of her sleek blond hair.

For several moments Johnson stood as if frozen in the doorway. His heart was pounding and sweat was trickling down his face. There was no need for him to examine the bodies. He could see they were both dead. There was a gun between the girl and the man.

After the first shock of discovery had passed, Johnson's mind began to race. Questions filled his brain. What was Vera Collins doing in Lukens' home? From all appearances it looked as if the girl had shot Lukens. Johnson remembered, now, that Vera had confessed to him, not long before, that she was worried about some man. Had this been a love tragedy? Had she shot Lukens and then killed herself? All the evidence pointed that way. But considering Lukens' age and unromantic nature and what Johnson knew about the character of his secretary, Johnson could hardly credit it.

At last the big engineer drew a deep shuddering breath, tore his fascinated eyes from the bodies, and swung about to leave the room. Standing directly in back of him was the huge frame of Sergeant John Trell, head of the Homicide Bureau, whom Johnson knew by sight. Standing further down the hallway, near the entrance of the house, was a knot of uniformed policemen. Through the open doorway Johnson caught a glimpse of several police radio cars. The police must have entered the place quietly while Johnson had been looking at the bodies. Certainly they had not blown any sirens.

Sergeant Trell smiled grimly at Johnson.

"Some feller phoned us that he heard shots in this house, a little while ago," said Trell. "So we came to investigate and got here just in time. Caught you red-handed, eh? What did you do with the gun? Ah, I see it. And I notice you're wearing gloves. Pretty shrewd. Afraid of leaving fingerprints?"

Johnson was thunderstruck by the accusation. "You're mistaken," he said. "I didn't do it."

"Who did?" asked Trell.

"I don't know."

One of Trell's men had moved closer. Now he whispered something and the ser-

geant looked at Johnson sharply.

"Say," he said, "aren't you the Johnson who's got a war contract for the Bessemer plant's big building on the North Side?"

"Yes," agreed Johnson wearily.

"And this fellow here"—Trell nodded toward the sprawled figure of Lukens—"was the one who's been checking on that accident which happened there today. That right?"

"Yes."

Trell's eyes glinted. He jerked a thumb toward Vera Collins.

"Who is she?"

"My secretary," replied Johnson.

"And when she started to spill the works to Lukens, you had to knock 'em both off, huh? That how it happened?"

"No!"

"You killed them before she got a chance to talk—right?"

JOHNSON grew exasperated. "Quit saying I did it," he snapped. "I don't know a thing about it. I just found them here." Then he told Trell how he happened to discover the bodies but it was plain Trell didn't believe him.

In the meantime other policemen were crowding into the room past them. They began to look for clues, to examine the gun, and prepared to take pictures. Trell remained in the doorway, talking to Johnson.

"How'd you get inside the house if both these people were dead?" Trell asked.

"Lukens had phoned me to come over. When he didn't answer the bell, I walked in. The door was open."

"So you didn't see anybody but these two?"

"There was a girl."

"A girl?"

Johnson told of the tall dark-haired girl who had run away from the house before he entered.

As Trell was digesting this, a detective in the room had been examining Vera Collins' body. He bent over and removed something from her hand, looked at it, straightened up and stared searchingly at Johnson. Finally he stood up, walked over and whispered in Trell's ear. The sergeant turned quickly and also stared at Johnson.

"What became of the lower button on your coat, Johnson?" inquired Trell.

Johnson glanced downward. He could not suppress a start of surprise. The Sergeant was right. The button was missing. Only a few loose threads hung from the place it should have been.

"Why—er—that's odd," he gasped. "It's gone. I must have lost it. I don't know what became of it."

Trell took the object which the detective had handed over and held it up so the engineer could see it.

"Here it is," said the Sergeant. "It

matches. Now give me one good reason why we should find it clutched in Vera Collins' hand!"

A ghastly chill of dismay ran down Johnson's spine. He realized at once that he was in a trap, that some enemy had framed him. He also realized it would take all of his wit and energy to free himself from the trap into which he had fallen. His only chance of finding this enemy and clearing his name lay in remaining free. If the police locked him up his plight would be hopeless.

"That ties you up like a string," said Trell grimly.

Johnson stared at the loose threads on his coat, and then at the dead girl's hand. He made a gesture of despair and resignation.

"Smart boy," approved Trell. "No use fighting a sure thing. We'll go down to headquarters and you can—"

Trell never finished his sentence. Quick as a flash Johnson had given him a violent shove and leaped toward the rear of the house. After staggering a few steps, Trell regained his balance, turned and yanked out his gun.

But Johnson had already vanished through the door in the rear of the hall. Uttering a loud shout, the Sergeant rushed after him.

But the head-start, brief as it was, proved to be all the advantage the active, athletic Johnson needed. Like a greyhound he bounded through the kitchen, wrenched open the rear door, and leaped across the concert court in back, and scaled a high board fence, off to one side. By the time the Sergeant emerged from the house, Johnson was out of view.

The engineer had visited Lukens often and was familiar with the neighborhood. He darted up an alley, crossed a side street and went through more alleys and backyards. He ran in silence, using all the craft of an intelligent and desperate man.

Twenty minutes later he eased his bulk into a public telephone booth ten blocks away.

He put through a call for the office of Morgan & Trout, architects on both the Ludlow and Bessemer jobs. But it was late and the office didn't answer. Next he tried Morgan's residence. Morgan was not at home. He tried Trout. This time he was in luck for Trout himself answered.

Johnson gave his name. "Trout," he said. "How much has been uncovered about those faulty beams on the Bessemer job? Do you know?"

Trout sounded worried. "Yes. It's bad, Mr. Johnson, mighty bad. Every beam drilled so far is lacking the specified reinforcing steel. I can't understand how it happened."

Johnson's fingers whitened on the telephone receiver. He tried to keep his voice calm.

"Have you any way of finding out?"

"No. Not until the investigation is completed. Lukens has entire control. He'll have to finish up before we can do anything."

"Lukens is dead," said Johnson. He waited, listening.

Over the wire he could hear Trout's startled exclamation.

"Dead? How?"

JOHNSON ignored the question. "Ever hear of Lukens having a girl friend?" he asked Trout. "A tall, dark-haired, slender girl, with an oval face and olive complexion? English looking, rather full lips?" He paused, then added: "She may even have been a business associate."

"No. Why do you ask?"

Instead of answering, Johnson hung up. Again he thumbed through the worn and tattered telephone directory until he found Bert Gillen's name and address. But he didn't dial Gillen's number. He copied down the address upon the back of an envelope and left the drug store.

Gillen lived in a poor section of the city, on the second floor of a large, old-fashioned frame residence which had been made over into flats.

There was no response to Johnson's knock, so he used a long, thin piece of iron he had bought a few minutes before in a small hardware store. The door gave and he stepped quietly into a small, box-like living room. A single lamp was burning on a cheap veneered table. Johnson crossed to the table and looked about, his huge bulky form throwing a black shadow against one wall.

The furniture, what there was of it, was cheap and unmatched. Cast-off pieces, in all probability, placed there by the landlady to create a "furnished apartment." The effect was anything but cheerful.

Johnson moved toward a door and then halted as his glance fell on some paper slips piled up on a small telephone stand. He walked over, picked up the slips and glanced through them hastily. But he didn't find what he wanted so he put them back with a feeling of disappointment. Old bridge scores!

As he was laying the slips down he noticed a small drawer in the telephone stand and pulled it open. Inside he found a long envelope addressed to Herbert Gillen. The envelope was empty but it was the return address, on the upper left hand corner, which focused Johnson's attention. Printed there was the firm name of Morgan & Trout, Registered Architects.

Johnson frowned. What possible connection could a respectable firm of architects have with the crafty timekeeper. Gillen was a potential blackmailer. He might even have been the one who had stolen the button and placed it in the hand of a dead girl for the

purpose of framing an innocent man in a double murder.

Johnson glanced at the envelope before shoving it into his pocket for safe keeping. There he found another address which had been hastily scrawled down in pencil. It was quite legible and he idly read it. Then he thrust away the envelope and again turned toward the door. Once more his attention was diverted when his eyes chanced to fall upon a large framed cabinet photograph standing on a nearby bookcase.

One quick glance was enough. In two long, hasty steps he had crossed the room and had snatched up the picture. He scrutinized the photograph eagerly. It was autographed. Across the bottom were written the words, "To Bert, from his true and sincere friend, Norma Brown."

For a moment or two Clem Johnson stood rigid, staring at the picture of the girl he had seen, earlier that evening, leaving the home of Nick Lukens, the murdered City Building Inspector! It was the same girl! No doubt about that. Here was luck!

Then he remembered something else. He snatched the envelope out of his pocket and hastily compared the scribbled pencil address with the autograph on the bottom of the picture. The writing was the same. Clem Johnson chuckled aloud. Of late things had been going pretty badly with him, but at last it looked as if he were going to get a break. Now he had just what he wanted, the girl's name and address. She was Norma Brown, of 511 Green Street.

But Johnson was not through with this apartment yet. He still needed evidence concerning the plot which had been formed to link him up with crooked construction work. He believed he would find it here.

For a third time he started for the door. Yanking it open, he stepped through into the dark hall beyond. As he moved forward, a black, vague figure loomed out of the shadows and made a menacing gesture. Johnson threw up his arm for protection but he was just a trifle too late. A crushing weight thudded down on the top of his head. Before his eyes flashed a blinding light and then—darkness settled over him. His senses departed. . . .

When Clem Johnson again opened his eyes he was lying on the spot where he had fallen. For some moments he was too dizzy to move, but after a while the sensation departed. He climbed weakly to his feet. The light was still burning in the living room. Seemingly nothing had been disturbed since he had left it to enter the hallway. There was no way of telling how long he had been unconscious.

Johnson remembered seeing a small bathroom when he had entered the apartment and to this he made his way, staggering slightly as he walked. He lighted the bath-

room by means of a button, found some towels and for the next ten or fifteen minutes busied himself bathing his aching brows and reducing the size of the large bump which the blow had left on the top of his head. When he left the bathroom his vigor and activity had been completely restored.

HOLDING the strip of iron which he had purchased in the hardware store as a weapon, Johnson cautiously continued his investigations. Soon he came to the doorway of a small room. It was dark but Johnson lighted a match. By its light he found a wall switch. He pressed the button and lighted the center bulb of the room.

A single glance told him this was a bedroom, fitted out with a cheap metal bedstead, a battered bureau and two chairs. But Johnson also found something else—something which caused him to catch his breath. For the second time on this fatal night he had chanced upon murder!

Bert Gillen, former timekeeper of the Alleghany Engineering Corporation and the tenant of the apartment in which Johnson now stood, was sprawled beside the bed in a large pool of coagulating blood. The back of Gillen's head had been crushed to a gory pulp by a series of savage blows. He was lying on his back, eyes glazed, features contorted, but there was no mistaking that face. Johnson recognized it at once.

The engineer slumped back against the frame of the door, sick and shaken. He was appalled by this latest crime of a murderous assassin.

Then a strident sound straightened him up, alert and trembling. That sound was the loud buzzer of this apartment. Johnson recognized the noise because he had pressed it several times before venturing to force an entrance. The whirr of the buzzer meant that someone was outside in the front hall and anxious to enter. Also Johnson remembered that the front door was not fastened, for he had broken the lock to get into this place. Only a slight push would be needed to swing open the door. Then whoever was outside could enter and find him here. Once more he would be discovered on the scene of a murder.

Wildly Johnson glanced about him, searching for a means of escape. His eyes fell upon the nearby window.

Leaping across the room, he unfastened the catch and raised the sash. As he did so he heard heavy footsteps crossing the nearby living room. Johnson thrust his head out through the window and looked around. Below, about five feet, was an extension with a tin roof. He crawled through the window, lifting his feet, and let himself drop lightly to the roof of the extension.

Behind him he heard a rough voice calling. "Hey, there! Anybody here?" The voice

sounded like that of Sergeant Trell, of the Homicide Squad.

Johnson crept to the edge of the extension and glanced downward, but all was darkness below and he could not tell how great the drop would be or what he might hit when he landed. Then, from the room he had just left, he heard a startled bellow.

"What's this—another murder?" So it was Sergeant Trell! Under his breath Johnson was cursing himself for not stopping long enough to turn off the light of the bedroom. That would have delayed the police just a little—just long enough to have allowed him to get away.

He slid his body over the edge of the roof. As he made ready to drop, the head of Sergeant Trell appeared at the window, silhouetted against the light. The Sergeant was holding a large revolver.

"Halt!" shouted Trell. "Halt, or I'll fire!"

Johnson paid no attention. He was preparing to let go his hold. Trell whipped up the revolver. There was a jet of flame, a crashing report and a lead slug ripped into the tin near the engineer. Then Johnson dropped.

The engineer landed in the darkness a dozen feet below, scrambled to his feet, and darted away, keeping close to the building. Above him a whistle shrilled. But Johnson didn't quit running until he was a safe distance away from Gillen's home. Then he paused to catch his breath and to make plans.

He felt in his pocket for the envelope and found it was gone. The envelope! That was why he had been struck down in the hall. Luckily he had a good memory and the theft of it didn't bother him now. Who was his assailant? That man was the murderer! Johnson thought back. Both Morgan and Trout had been in the engineering office that morning and either one could have cut the button off his coat. Also both of them could have seen Gillen without Johnson's knowledge and, even if they hadn't, it did not eliminate them as suspects.

Johnson hunted up a telephone booth and dialed his own office. Bill Shotwell was still there.

Johnson could detect the anxiety in his voice when he spoke.

"Clem, what have you been doing?" he cried. "The police are looking for you."

"I know it. They think I killed Vera Collins and Nick Lukens."

There was a pause. Then Shotwell spoke again. "Maybe Vera murdered Lukens and committed suicide?" he suggested.

"Perhaps. But there was a tall, dark-haired girl who ran away from Lukens' home just as I got there. Her name is Norma something. It's possible she did the shooting, so I'm on my way to her house now, to question her. Bill, did you ever hear of such a girl running around with Lukens?"

SHOTWELL'S voice grew excited. "No, I never heard of her before. But you're going to see her now, Clem? You know where she lives?"

"Yes." For some reason Johnson was grinning as he spoke into the telephone. "Say, Bill, do me a favor. Call up both Morgan and Trout and find out if one of them knows a girl by the name of Norma. Tell them her name was scribbled on the back of one of their firm's envelopes. You might also mention I'm on my way to see her. Just tell them that. If they don't seem to know anything, hang up. I'll call you back."

Twenty minutes later Clem Johnson stepped from a taxicab which had halted in a dark side street. After walking a short block to Green Street, he stopped before a three-story apartment building, glanced up and down the street in both directions to make sure he was unobserved, and then ducked into the vestibule of Number 511.

On the second floor, in the rear, he found an apartment bearing the name of "Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Brown," on a name-plate. He pressed the button of the buzzer.

The summons was answered by a tall, oval-faced girl with blue-black hair and full lips. She uttered a startled gasp when she caught sight of Johnson and tried to shut the door again. Johnson was too quick for her. He thrust his foot in the crack, pushed her backward and stepped into the apartment, closing the door behind him.

"Oh!" gasped the girl. "Get out of here or I'll scream."

"No you won't," answered Johnson. "It would bring the cops and you don't want that."

He moved past her down the hall and into a nicely furnished living room. Johnson inspected it with an all-encompassing glance. On the wall was the picture of a good-looking soldier of about thirty. Beneath it was a small service flag.

"Your husband?" asked Johnson.

"Yes," said the girl. "He's in France now—with the Invasion."

Johnson smiled at her warmly. "Then you're Mrs. Arthur Brown and your first name's Norma?"

"Yes." Her voice was barely audible.

Johnson nodded. "I'm expecting things to happen and we haven't much time, so I'll have to talk fast, Mrs. Brown. I'm in a spot and so are you. Why did you kill Vera Collins and Nick Lukens?"

Fear sprang into the girl's eyes and she gave a convulsive start. "I didn't kill them," she cried. "Honestly I didn't. You'll have to believe me."

"Do you know who did?"

"No."

Johnson stared at her. "But you were there at the house. I saw you."

Norma Brown began to shiver. "I must

have gotten there just a few minutes before you did," she said in a trembling voice. "The door was standing open and I heard someone groan. I thought Mr. Lukens was ill." She ran her slim hands through her black hair. "I went inside and found them. The woman was still alive. She groaned once more and died. All that blood—it was horrible!"

Norma Brown was overcome by the memory. She staggered to a nearby chair, sank down and buried her face in her hands. Johnson watched her.

"Take it easy," he said. "My name is Clem Johnson. I run an engineering firm and the police suspect me of the murder. Why did you go to see Nick Lukens?"

"I had met him," she answered in muffled tones, without looking up. "I wanted to ask him to get me a job. I used to be employed by Morgan and Trout but they discharged me last week, after a man named Gillen, who had been annoying me recently, went there and made charges against me. My husband's in the Army and I need employment."

"What kind of work did you do for Morgan and Trout?" asked Johnson.

"I was Mr. Morgan's secretary."

"So Gillen was annoying you, eh? Why?"

The girl looked up at Morgan then. Her face was filled with despair.

"I had met Mr. Gillen in a business way and, after a while, he began to act—just horrible." She shuddered.

"Why did you go to Lukens' home for work instead of his office?" Johnson persisted. He hated to do this but it was necessary.

"I did go to Luken's office several times, but he was never there because he was busy with some building trouble over on the North Side. So finally, in desperation, I tried his home tonight." Again she ran her hands through her hair in a distracted fashion. "I'm familiar with construction work and was educated to be an architect. I'm efficient, even if I do say it myself. I had to act quick because I was afraid Mr. Morgan would prejudice Mr. Lukens against me. He was terribly angry when he discharged me. Bert Gillen had made plenty of trouble and Morgan and Trout blamed it all on me. Gillen had worked for them at one time. He was trying to blackmail them and Morgan thought I was the one who had furnished Gillen with the information."

JOHNSON thought he was beginning to see a light. "Ah, ha!" he murmured softly. "So Gillen had worked for that firm and he was trying to blackmail them."

At this moment he noticed an expression of astonishment and fear on the girl's face. Her eyes were fixed on something behind him. When Johnson had entered the room he had noticed a half open window, opening on a fire escape, off to one side. Now he

realized that someone else had entered the apartment. He was not surprised. He had been expecting something of the kind. He turned around.

Then he got a surprise. The man who had come in from the fire escape was Bill Shotwell. In one hand he carried an automatic.

"Hello, Clem," said Shotwell from behind the leveled gun. "Surprised to see me?"

Johnson stared at his chief engineer.

"Not very," he answered steadily. "That's why I announced I was on my way to see Norma Brown. I was ready for a blood-thirsty visitor. But I didn't think it would be you, Bill."

Shotwell smiled coldly. "So you baited a hook but caught the wrong fish?"

"That's right, Bill," said Johnson. "I used you as a sort of a grape-vine. I thought either Morgan or Trout would follow me here. I never once suspected you, Bill."

Shotwell scowled. "You ought to have told me more," he said at last. "If I had known you didn't suspect me I would have kept under cover. But it's too late now." There was another pause before Shotwell continued. "What made you suspicious of either Morgan or Trout?"

"Because they were the only ones who would have had an opportunity to cut the button off my coat in the office today," answered Johnson. "Gillen couldn't have done it because he was murdered. As for you, Bill, I trusted you too much to include you in the list. I should have known better. You always were a schemer, Bill." Johnson shook his head regretfully. "It had to be one of four men—Gillen, Trout, Morgan—or you! I'm sorry you are the one. I hate to find out you killed Vera and Lukens and then battered in Bert Gillen's skull."

"How do you know all this?" sneered Shotwell.

"Because—now that I think back—I remember you were always making a play for Vera Collins and she kept you at arms length until about a year ago." Again Johnson sadly shook his head. "After that her manner toward you changed but I thought you were too square to deceive a trusting woman. Recently she was worried about some man and she didn't dare tell me his name. You were that man, Bill. And I never guessed it. How was I to know you were a dirty, sneaking, deceiving rat!"

"Bah, don't waste your sympathy on Vera," cried Shotwell, with a flush of anger in his cheeks. "She was a squealer. She went to Lukens tonight and told him everything. I had to shut her mouth." His eyes glittered murderously.

"About the concrete mess?" said Johnson. "Yes, I surmise that now. You couldn't have worked things in the office the way you did without her help. But she went to

the wrong man when she squealed to Lukens. She should have told me. I would have handled you plenty, Bill."

Again Shotwell sneered. "I know you would, but it's too late now."

"But why did you do it, Bill?" asked Johnson. "Why did you want to ruin me? Why hurt this girl whose husband is fighting with the American Army?"

"Bah, I don't care about you or the girl," answered Shotwell. "I want to impede the war effort. There's big money in it. Years ago, before I met you, my name used to be Fritz Schuler."

Clem Johnson gave a start. Beside him he could hear the girl draw in her breath sharply.

"Ah, ha!" cried Johnson. "You're a German—a Nazi!"

"Right," said Shotwell with a nod. "Also, the steel we didn't use for reenforcing the beams was sold to the black market. Vera helped me to reroute the trucks to another city and to conceal things in the books. I made plenty of profit, in addition to what I got from my own Nazi government. I tell you this, Clem, because I'm never going to let you get out of this room alive, either you or the girl."

"Another double murder, eh?" said Johnson softly. "You'll never get away with it, Bill. You must have left records back at the office. The Alleghany books will show they have been altered."

"Pooh, I have all the books down in my car below," said Shotwell. "That's what I was doing in the office when you called me, getting the books. And I'll leave a forged note here after I've killed you and this girl, explaining the whole business. It'll be a complete confession, supposedly signed by you. Folks will figure Clem Johnson was caught in a crooked job by Lukens and Vera Collins, and had to shoot his way out. Then after murdering his timekeeper to keep him from talking, he became half crazed when his secret sweetheart refused to divorce her soldier husband. They'll think he killed her and himself. Makes a nice solution."

"One more question," said Johnson. "Why did you batter in Bert Gillen's skull?"

"Because after you left the office, tonight, I let something slip which revealed I was the crooked one in the firm and not you," said Shotwell. "I gave Gillen a temporary bribe, but I knew I'd have to seal his lips, and I did."

SHOTWELL'S face hardened. He motioned with the automatic.

"Move away from the girl," he commanded. "This is it."

Johnson obeyed slowly, watching the armed man like a hawk. As he circled away from Norma Brown, Johnson saw the girl's hand stealing out toward a stand on which

rested a large ornate aquarium containing several goldfish. Johnson gathered his muscles for some quick action.

Suddenly the girl gave the stand a quick push which overturned it. The glass aquarium fell to the floor with a tremendous crash and a large spurt of cold water gushed forward, drenching Bill Shotwell's legs. Shotwell was tense, excited and nervous. The interruption was unexpected. For one brief instant his gaze left Johnson and flickered in the direction of the girl who was leaping toward him. That instant was enough for Johnson.

He bounded forward like a great cat as the muzzle of Shotwell's weapon flickered toward the girl, and then came back. The automatic thundered. Smoke gushed out. The bullet missed Johnson by half an inch. Johnson's muscular body went through the smoke and crashed into Shotwell. There was the heavy smack of a big fist and then another. Shotwell whirled through the air, landed on the floor with a thud, slid along waxed boards at the edge of the rug and then banged into the wall. He gave one groan and lay still, unconscious. The automatic had skittered under a chair.

Johnson blew on his smarting knuckles and then turned to speak to the girl, but she was still moving. She rushed by him into a kitchen and returned a moment later with a bowl full of water. Then she knelt down and rescued the flopping goldfish, putting them into the bowl.

Johnson recovered the automatic and then stood watching her until she finally stood up and placed the bowl full of goldfish upon the top of the radio, across the room. He was grinning.

"When you get through playing with the fish, Norma, would you mind phoning the police?" he said. "Ask for Detective Sergeant Trell. Tell him what happened. When he gets here, we'll inform him about the books in Bill Shotwell's black Buick sedan,

down in front. That, and other things, will put us both in the clear."

"Certainly," answered the girl. She was smiling also. She was a different looking creature now that her fear and anxiety had departed, wonderfully attractive. She glanced at Shotwell's limp body. "Is—is he dead?"

"No, merely out," said Johnson. "If he wakes up before the police arrive I'll take care of him again. But I don't think he'll wake up. I think he's good for about an hour. I hit him hard enough. I was remembering what he did to my secretary, Vera Collins."

Norma Brown went to the telephone, got Trell and delivered the message Johnson had given her. Then she turned to Johnson.

"How did you learn my name and address?" she asked.

"I dropped by Bert Gillen's apartment, found his body and an autographed photograph of you. Your address was written on the back of an old envelope."

She grew thoughtful, then shuddered daintily. "So that poor woman I saw in Mr. Lukens' home was your former secretary," she said. "How awful!"

Clem Johnson looked her over again, this time speculatively. "Say," he said, "I'll be needing a new secretary to take Vera Collins' place. You say you're good. Also you're looking for a job. How'd you like to go to work for me?"

Norma Brown's eyes brightened. "I'd love it. You're doing war work?"

"Sure," said Johnson. "We ought to make a good team. I've got four brothers in the Army. Probably they're fighting beside your husband right now. You and me together—we ought to make a good team."

"That's right," said the girl enthusiastically. "And the harder we work, the sooner we can bring the boys home."

"Check," said Clem Johnson. "Check and double check."

Tony Quinn at His Best in MURDER ON THE LOOSE Next Issue!

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If backache and leg pains are making you miserable, don't just complain and do nothing about them. Nature may be warning you that your kidneys need attention.

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(Adv.)

WINDOW TARGET

By KERRY McROBERTS

Watching the Bank Was Jack Trask's Favorite Hobby!

AS "SPEC" ADAMS waited in the booth for the call to come through from Bridgeport, he wondered who could be telephoning him from clear over on the other side of the State.

"Hello?" a woman's voice finally spoke over the wire. "Is this Mr. Adams, the owner of the Hilldale Pharmacy?"

"That's right, lady," Spec answered. "What can I do for you?"

"Have you a young man by the name of Jack Trask working for you?"

"That's right, lady. Want to speak to Jack?"

Spec glanced out the glass door of the booth at a pale-faced young man who was standing behind a counter, gazing solemnly out the window at the bank building on the opposite side of the sleepy main street.

"No, I don't want to speak to him," the woman's voice was saying. "I only wanted to warn you, Mr. Adams, that Jack Trask is stealing drugs."

"What's that! Hello, hello! What did you say, lady?"

There was a sharp click in Spec's ear, indicating that the mysterious caller had hung up.

Spec jiggled his own phone hook until the local operator cut in.

"Mr. Adams, your party has rung off. Shall I call back?"

Spec swallowed against a dry throat. Through the glass door of the booth, he could see that Jack Trask had turned toward him, as if the nervous young man had overheard mention of his name. Spec brushed his perspiring brow with the back of a wrist.

"No, don't call back, operator. Let it go. Yes, let it go."

For a moment, Spec didn't have sufficient nerve to leave the phone booth. The druggist had hired Jack Trask the month before, after the young man said he had been discharged from the Army as the result of internal injuries received from the concussion of big testing guns. The boy was nervous, too thin. His dark eyes constantly avoided a speaker.

But there was no denying that Jack was an excellent chemist. He did not object to sweeping out the store and running errands. He had said his home was in Albany, but he didn't care to return to find his buddies away at war, and to answer the ceaseless questions of grown-ups. War work was too hard for him. He appeared perfectly content in Hill-

dale, where there was plenty of fresh air, milk and eggs, and he could spend his off-hours swimming and fishing.

"I can't believe he's taking drugs," Spec said under his breath. "And how in the world could a woman in Bridgeport know what he is doing?"

Stepping out of the booth, Spec avoided Jack's questioning glance. The druggist was a bald-headed little man with a button chin, a pudgy red nose, and pale green eyes shielded by pince nez. He waddled like a



JACK TRASK

bear cub as he walked to a rear partition, went through a door, and stepped into his prescription department.

KNEELING to the floor, his nervous fingers twisted a safe dial. He was perspiring as he swung open the crude steel door, slid a drawer out, and stared at four small bottles containing morphine pills. Spec wiped his brow with relief, then closed the safe. His small supply of drugs was intact.

"Is something wrong, Spec?" Jack Trask's voice asked from the partition door, where the young man had appeared silently.

Spec's heart jumped.

"No, Jack, nothing is wrong," the druggist

managed to reply. "Nothing is wrong at all." He wiped his brow again with his handkerchief. "Jack, you take the afternoon off. Go fishing, or do something. I won't need you this afternoon. I'd like you to take the afternoon off."

A dark frown creased Jack's brow.

"If there is anything wrong, I wish you'd tell me," the boy said.

"Nothing is wrong, Jack. You work hard, and I can't pay you much. Take a little vacation this afternoon."

"Okay," Jack Trask said, and turned away.

When Spec heard the front door close, an odd idea struck him. He pulled out a secret drawer in his prescription desk, where he kept his old World War .45. The gun was gone.

"Well, I'll be darned!" Spec exclaimed. "How did I even think about my old forty-five? Am I afraid of the kid? Or was there some question in my mind about his Army discharge? He could have stolen some pills and put back some paste tablets. But what does he want a gun for? What am I going to do? I can't go to the police. I don't want to go to the police. How would a woman in Bridgeport know what he's doing? This whole thing is getting tangled up. I'm in one bad mess. I mustn't let it run away with me. I've got to think this out carefully."

Walking into the main part of the drugstore, Spec stood at the front window and looked out at the main street. Across the pavement stood the Hilldale Bank, an old red-brick structure with a brass alarm over the front door.

Spec shifted his gaze up the main street, and he was surprised to see Jack Trask sitting on the steps of the library, coolly smoking a cigarette. Spec stepped back from the drugstore window.

"He's watching the bank," the druggist told himself, "just like he watches it most of the time from the window here when he's in the store. What in heaven's name is he up to?"

Spec Adams couldn't make up his mind what to do about Jack Trask that afternoon. The boy was not on the library steps when the druggist locked his shop to go home for dinner. When Spec returned to work until eleven o'clock that night, he brought with him a .38 caliber revolver that he had borrowed from his next-door neighbor, Allen Burke. It was a long-barreled weapon which Spec couldn't keep concealed about his clothing. So the druggist hid the gun on a shelf behind a stack of gauze packages.

The next morning Jack Trask didn't turn up for work at the Hilldale Pharmacy.

Spec felt more relieved about the boy's absence as the morning wore on, and when Jack didn't come in that afternoon, the druggist began to figure that Jack had overheard his name mentioned on the telephone.

"He's flown the coop," Spec chuckled. "He caught me closing the safe. That's one way of getting rid of him without an argument. I better send the morphine back and have it checked."

Then Spec got to thinking about his old World War .45. His relief gave way to anger. The gun was a trophy. He had killed six Germans with it. The weapon had saved his life. It had been his protection for more than twenty years in the drugstore. Spec said that he would be double-blasted if he'd let Jack Trask get away with that gun.

Closing the drugstore for his dinner, Spec got into his sedan and drove down the main road until he reached Mrs. Holt's home. He rang the bell and gray-haired Mrs. Holt came to the door.

"Hello, Mrs. Holt, is Jack still living here?"

"Good evening, Spec," the landlady replied. "He's still with me, but I don't think he came home last night. About dinner time he went out with two men. Hasn't Jack been to work?"

"No, he didn't come to work today, so I thought I would see if he was sick," Spec said. "Do you mind if I go up to his room and leave him a note?"

"Not at all, Spec. It's the room next to the bath on the side by the garage."

Spec went upstairs and found all of Jack Trask's shirts, fishing paraphernalia, extra suit and toilet articles.

THE druggist searched high and low, under the bed mattress and under chairs, but he didn't find his World War .45. He left a note telling Jack Trask to visit him before leaving town, and then Spec descended to talk with the landlady again.

"Mrs. Holt, what did the men look like who went off with Jack?"

"City people, Spec. Is there anything wrong?"

"Would you say they were respectable city people, Mrs. Holt?"

"They didn't look too respectable, Spec, but I don't like to comment on Jack's friends. I only saw them when Jack came out of the house. They drove up and talked to him from their car. He got in."

"What kind of a car was it?" Spec asked.

"It was big high-powered car, but I don't recognize all the makes, Spec. You look worried. Has anything happened to Jack?"

"Yes, I think something has, Mrs. Holt, but just you keep it to yourself for a while."

Spec moped perspiration from his brow when he climbed into his sedan. As he drove down to the State Troopers quarters, he told himself that he was a darned old fool. He hadn't learned a single thing in his fifty years of life. He hadn't learned anything about human beings at all. He was a thick-headed rube, suspicious of the wrong people, and as gullible as a babe in the woods with crooks.

Stopping at the lock-up, Spec walked inside and right up to the desk from which the uniformed sergeant called out a greeting.

"Sam, I want to borrow a tommy-gun," Spec said seriously. "Don't tell me you can't lend me one. I want a tommy-gun and I'm not going to leave here without it. Maybe I couldn't get into this war, but I'm going to find myself a red-hot battle in the next few days, and you'll see some real action. Now first you hand me over a tommy-gun before I tell you what I want it for."

Sergeant Sam Peabody scowled.

"You sound like you've been down to the tavern, Spec. I'm not going to lend you any kind of a gun. Now, take a chair and cool off. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. I've got a good notion to arrest you for driving in your condition."

Spec let Sergeant Peabody talk himself out, and then Spec began to do some talking. When he left the State Troopers' quarters a half hour later, the druggist was carrying a tommy-gun carefully concealed in a corrugated cardboard box marked "Moth-Proof Garment Bag." . . .

It was at ten o'clock the next morning that what Spec Adams had figured would happen, did happen!

Spec had been standing in the phone booth, with the door open, perspiring freely as his eyes focused across the drugstore and to the big front window. He could see the bank across the street. Exactly on the minute of ten, a large limousine pulled up at the curb before the bank building, and two men got out to go into the bank, leaving a third man at the wheel of the car.

Spec leaped from the phone booth, grabbing the tommy-gun from its case on the floor behind a counter. Jerking open the front door of his drugstore, he did not go out to the sidewalk, but ducked back. He saw the driver of the limousine across the street glance toward him. Then the driver slapped at the horn button on his steering wheel with one hand as he whipped up an automatic pistol with his other hand.

Spec had the tommy-gun at his hip, just as Sergeant Sam had instructed him. The druggist never heard the three sharp horn blasts. He saw the limousine driver's 45 pointing. Spec pulled the trigger of the tommy-gun.

With a staccato roar, the tommy-gun exploded, bouncing like a struggling pig at Spec's hip. He began to shout at the top of his lungs.

"Get 'em, outfit! Over the top, and give 'em the works! Smash 'em hard! At 'em, men!"

He saw the glass windshield of the limousine smash in a thousand pieces. He saw the driver slump in the front seat. Then he could hear the clanging of the bank alarm. He saw two men come racing out of the

bank and leap toward the limousine. They halted, guns in their hands sweeping to point at the door of the Hilldale Pharmacy.

Spec Adams charged out of drugstore, the tommy-gun once more crashing and bouncing against his hip. He saw the two bank robbers wilt behind their stalled limousine. Now, as Spec stopped his fire, he heard men shouting on the main street. A State Trooper's car careened up to the bank on screeching tires and Sergeant Sam threw himself out the squad car door.

"Don't shoot again, Spec!" Sergeant Sam yelled. "You'll slaughter the whole town. Put up the tommy-gun. You got all three of them."

SPEC ran wheezing across the street, the hot weapon in his hands.

"Drag the truth out of them before they die, Sam!" Spec shouted. "Find out where they've got Jack Trask. Ask 'em quick, before it's too late. Ask them where he is."

"I can hear you, Spec," Sergeant Sam protested as he kneeled beside one of the groaning bandits. "Will you please shut up? This isn't the World War all over again. I'm going to ask them where they took young Trask."

Two hours later, the troopers found Jack Trask tied hand and foot in an abandoned barn ten miles from Hilldale. He had been badly beaten up, and one eye was closed. When Sergeant Sam told the boy what Spec had done, Jack Trask forced a feeble grin.

"Thanks, Spec," Jack said. "I thought I'd starve to death here. Those thugs picked me up outside my rooming house. They asked me if I had been fired, and when I said I hadn't, they pulled a gun on me. Then they took me off. They wanted to know why I always stood at your front window, looking at the bank."

"What did you tell them, Jack?" Spec asked, chuckling.

"I told them the truth," Jack Trask answered. "The brass on that bank alarm always kept reminding me of the Army. I don't know why it did, but it did. And I was always thinking of my outfit in France, with me back here mixing pills for a living."

"Don't worry about that, kid," Sergeant Sam said, helping the young man to his feet. "You did your bit. And don't let anyone say you didn't. And Spec did his, too. I forgot to tell him that on the way out, but we were in a hurry. You should have heard the old fool going over the top again with a tommy-gun at his hip."

Spec chuckled to himself, and then he sobered up.

"I soon figured out you didn't know any girls in Bridgeport, Jack," the druggist said. "Yet a girl called up to tell me you were stealing drugs. Besides, you couldn't have made more than fifty bucks out of stealing

the batch. By and by I got to wondering about you watching the bank. Mrs. Holt told me about the city slickers. So it all added up all of a sudden. I figured that somebody who was interested in the bank wanted to get you away from that front window."

"But that doesn't explain who stole your forty-five, Spec?" Sergeant Sam interrupted.

Jack Trask glanced nervously away from Spec's gaze.

"I didn't steal it," Jack said miserably. "I happened to find it in the secret drawer in the prescription desk, and saw that Spec hadn't cleaned the gun in twenty years, so I took it home with me to clean it. I have it hidden in a hunting boot back in my room. I've sent away for a new firing pin, Spec, as a present for your birthday next week. You never could have shot that forty-five in a

hundred years."

"Well, I'll be switched!" Spec exclaimed. "I had it figured out that you were carrying the gun just in case the bank was held up. That just goes to show you, how far a feller can be side-tracked."

"I better get back our tommy-gun before it rusts up," Sergeant Sam snapped. "What were you in the World War, Spec. A quartermaster?"

"Nope," Spec replied with dignity. "I was the best all-around machine-gunner in the best all-around fighting outfit that ever tickled a French girl under the chin. When you troopers need some more help, just let Jack Trask and me know. Thanks for arriving late at the holdup, Sergeant. We won't need your protection on the way back to town. Now, I reckon that will hold you. Yes, I reckon it will hold you."



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Although she fought like a wildcat, Drukker got the gun away from her

MISS MOUSE, MEET MR. CAT

By S. J. BAILEY

DRUKKER was staring gloomily at the two amber inches remaining of his fourth double Scotch.

"Mike," he said. "Do you know what it feels like to kill someone?" Mike finished mopping the bar and hung the rag on his shoulder. He picked up a bottle, jammed the cork in firmly and stared at the ceiling. It was an off-hour for business in Poletti's Chop House.

"Me first wife," he said thoughtfully. "One night I got liquored up and she rode me about it until I put my hands around her neck and almost—almost mind you—finished her."

"Yeah, sure," said Drukker, making a row of wet rings on the bar with the bottom of his glass. "I feel that way now, and I don't mean almost."

"You, Mr. Drukker? It's a rib. And who would you be killing?"

"It's already done." Drukker bit each syllable off hard, as if he were afraid it might get stuck in his teeth. "Young Joey Mulane—indirectly. He was a nice boy, too."

"It's tough about Joey," said Mike, putting down the bottle and resting both elbows on the bar top. "A good, clean lad. But what would you be having to do with it? Young Joey was killed in a cab crash when his hacker got jammed between a trolley and an El pillar. You didn't have nothing to do with it."

"Hit me again," said Drukker. He had finished his drink, now pushed the glass toward the barman for a refill. "It's no rib, Mike. I gave Joey Mulane some evidence to deliver to the D.A. He had papers on

him that proved Henry Wiggam, the public-spirited publisher of the 'Sentinel,' is a crook. I might as well have put a bullet through his heart."

"It's tough, Mr. Drukker," said Mike with a sigh. "A fine lad, Joey. He'd have been a good newspaperman had he lived."

"Mike," said Drukker. He paused, pressed his fingertips against his throbbing temples. "Mike, I've got to make up my mind about the murderer of Joey."

"Yes, Mr. Drukker," said the barman patiently. He was fond of Drukker.

"Maybe I'll toss a coin on it. Heads he gets away with it. Tails I put him out of business myself—for keeps."

"That's your fifth double Scotch, Mr. Drukker," said Mike reprovingly. His hand trembled a little as he put the bottle back on the shelf.

"Maybe you haven't heard, Mike. Maybe you don't know I was booted off the 'Sentinel' today, right after they found Joey with his body smashed and his pockets empty. Maybe you don't know I was booted out of the D.A.'s office this afternoon, when I tried to tell him about the evidence Joey was bringing him."

"I heard talk, Mr. Drukker," said Mike, embarrassed. "There ain't a man on the 'Sentinel' that ain't boiling about it. You're aces with them, Mr. Drukker."

"That crazy bunch of buzzards," Drukker said huskily. He laughed a little to cover the thickness in his throat. "Not one of them wouldn't have sliced my throat to beat me to a yarn. Now they're throwing me garlands of daisies."

"That is life," said Mike. "Dog eat dog. Dog lick dog's wounds."

"If I had a gun right now, Mike, a gun here in my hand, I'd hunt that rat up and shoot him to shreds."

MIKE grew more uneasy. He reached out and touched the reporter on the sleeve.

"Take it easy, Mr. Drukker. More killing won't help anybody."

"So help me," Drukker went on slowly, intensely, "I'd go upstairs and give him every load."

"Is he upstairs?" Mike's jaw dropped. "And you're hanging around here waiting for him to come down from the private dining room. Now, Mr. Drukker, cool off!"

He leaned forward and put forward an expostulatory palm. Drukker, already slipping from his bar stool, laid a five dollar bill on it.

"Don't do anything rash, Mr. Drukker," pleaded Mike. "For your own sake."

"Aw, quit having the jitters," said Drukker with an acid smile. "I haven't got a gun."

"Even if you had, it's not the ones that talk about doing it that you have to worry about," said Mike, looking relieved. "It's the

quiet fellers you gotta watch. Oh, Mr. Drukker!"

The ex-reporter, who was already halfway to the street door, again rubbing fingertips against his throbbing temples, turned slowly and came back to the bar.

"Mr. Drukker," said Mike, his voice dropping to a confidential whisper. "There's a neat quail doing a solo at the table by the back hall door. You can see her from here—the one with a bit of adhesive tape on her cheek."

"Cut herself shaving, no doubt," said Drukker. "Thanks for the tip, Mike, but—well, Joey and I had been planning to do the town tonight, and—" He broke off and fumbled a cigarette free from its package.

"I get it," said Mike. "But she's right out of your book. A blonde with plenty of class."

"That's okay, Mike," said Drukker, lighting his cigarette. "I appreciate your interest in my extracurricular activities. But not tonight. So long, Mike."

"Mr. Drukker!" Mike made a successful grab at his elbow. "I don't usually stick my nose into my customers' business. But this quail is on the griddle. She's all nerves. And"—again the whisper—"she's packing a heater in her bag."

Drukker paused in the act of shaking his match out, dropped it when the flame seared his fingers.

"Are you sure?" he asked sharply. Mike nodded, turning pale.

"Now, Mr. Drukker, I didn't mean to be putting that kind of ideas in your head. I was only thinking of you as a reporter. She might be a story. Come to think of it, it wasn't a real heater—just one of those lighter things. . . ."

But Drukker was already en route to the table by the back hall door, covering ground fast with his long-legged stride. He didn't have a plan. The throbbing in his temple had obliterated straight thinking for hours now.

He spotted the girl with the neat patch of white tape on her cheek. She was streamlined and would have been pert if it weren't for the strained, set expression she was wearing—she was also vaguely familiar.

But before he could reach the table, a big man wearing a chauffeur's rig came through the hall door. Drukker didn't notice much about his face, because the long red scar on his forehead was what had his attention. Drukker's skin crawled at sight of him, but he kept right on going until he could hear what the man said.

"The name," rasped the chauffeur in what was meant to be a whisper, "is Henry Wiggam. That's it—Henry Wiggam. Have you seen him in the joint, lady?"

The chauffeur drew a blank. The girl just stared at him.

"You don't know Wiggam?" said the chauffeur with a note of relief in his rasping voice. But Drukker felt no relief. The name Wiggam made his head ache worse.

"No," said the girl, and the clear, controlled tones of her voice went with the rest of her, "I don't know him. What's more, I don't know you. And you can take that as a cue to sound retreat."

She delivered the brush-off with a crisp finality that might have made Drukker grin under other circumstances. But there was an undercurrent of tautness that her voice and manner could not quite hide. He spotted the thick bulge of her bag, a black affair with silver clasps on the table by her gloved hand. Then he saw that the scarred chauffeur had noticed his presence.

"Oh," said the big driver, not troubling to hide his contempt. "It's you."

The fuse that had been burning for hours inside Drukker, that had been fostered by whisky and frustration now reached some hidden detonator inside him. He let go with a straight right that landed with a jarring thud on the side of the chauffeur's jaw and sent him crashing over a chair.

But it didn't relieve the throbbing in the ex-reporter's skull—not even when the chauffeur, his face black with rage, rubbed his jaw tenderly and stuck two fingers in his mouth to check his bridgework.

"You'll pay for it, Drukker," he threatened. "My boss can be real tough. You'll pay with interest. Don't ever forget it."

"Take the air, hood," said Drukker, making a move toward him. The scarred-faced chauffeur scrambled to his feet and left the room, muttering angrily under his breath. As the back door slammed, the ex-reporter saw that the girl was eyeing him with speculation in her blue eyes. He pulled out a chair to sit down.

"Not that one," she said, motioning toward another at the table. "I've got to keep an eye on the hall stairs. I'm waiting for someone to come down."

"So I must sit with my back to the door," said Drukker.

"What's the matter? Are you expecting somebody?"

SLOWLY Drukker grinned at her. "You don't know that brave lad I just smacked. He has a lot of courage—with a gun in his mitt—providing you're not facing him. He's Pool, Wiggam's chauffeur. Used to be a dirt track auto racer. He got his scar in a crack-up. You know friend Wiggam, I take it."

"I do not," said the girl. She certainly was wasting no words. Drukker studied her. She made a pleasant subject. Her skin was smooth and golden, without too much benefit of Max Factor, Arden or Rubenstein. Her lips were full, almost

sulky, but on her they looked good. She needed an attractive face to compete with her figure, and she had both. As far as Drukker could tell, she was a real blonde.

"Just for the record," Drukker told her, "Wiggam is a newspaper publisher and a crook. Under pressure, he's good for a spot of murder. Of course, I can't prove a thing."

"Of course," she said dryly. "But he's still just a name to me."

"Maybe," said Drukker, trying to decide just how much of her rigid self-control was natural. "But brother Pool had a reason for asking you. Maybe you convinced him you don't know his boss, but seeing you here with me won't exactly bolster his conviction."

"I'm afraid I don't see what Wiggam has to do with all this?"

"Wiggam is upstairs right now with a cute pigeon," said Drukker quietly.

"Oh!" she said and turned white.

"Then he's the man I saw!"

"Where—upstairs?"

"Yes. You see, I followed her."

"Who was it, kid?" Drukker spoke gently. The girl was showing signs of distress.

"It's my kid sister, Janet," she said, her voice low. Her gloved fingertips touched the tape on her cheek. "I know she's afraid of him, but she wouldn't leave. She scratched me when I tried to take her away with me."

"With that tape covered by your fingers, I know you," said the ex-reporter. "Your name is up in lights across town. You're Patsy Holworth."

She nodded, but her mind wasn't on Patsy Holworth, actress. She was thinking about her sister. As she sat there, she seemed to come to a decision. Drukker saw that her eyes were regarding him steadily, saw her fingers grip the clasp of her bag tightly, sensed the growing purpose in her.

"Tell me more—about Wiggam," she said. "He's a crook—a killer?"

"In spades—but I can't prove it. I had him sewed up for the D. A., but everything went flooey. He's too big for the law, I guess, even in New York."

"You mean he's above prosecution?" Her voice was tight.

"That's right. Too much pull."

"Look at this," said the girl. She drew a paper from her bag, handed it to Drukker. It was a heavy sheet of notepaper which had been torn up, then pasted together with Scotch tape. There was feminine handwriting on it.

It read:

Patsy darling,

Remember how we played cat and mouse when we were kids—how I'd be the mouse and hide under a chair, and you'd be the cat

and pounce on me when I'd try to sneak out? Well, Patsy, I've been an idiot, and now I'm playing the game for real. I'm in a spot where a certain Mr. Cat is going to pounce any day now. And when he does—

Drukker reread the unfinished note, then handed it back to the girl. As she put it away in her bag, he caught a glimpse of something else. Mike hadn't been kidding. She was carrying a small automatic—perhaps a .32.

He put his finger to his temple again to ease the throbbing. So far, so good. Wiggam had maybe cornered the wrong house. This sister was hot on the trail, red hot. Perhaps his upstairs romance would blow up in his face.

"Well?"

The girl's question pulled Drukker out of the reverie. She was waiting for him to say something about the letter. He wanted to tell her about Joey, but decided against it. She was a friendly kid underneath the strain that had stretched her taut. It wouldn't take much to make him cry on her shoulder. If that ever happened, he'd be a lot more bothered than he already was. She wasn't the type you could leave alone, once you got started.

"So you crashed the upstairs dining room, and there she was," he said, forcing himself to consider the problem at hand. "She got sore and told you to mind your own business. Right?"

"Just about." Her lips barely moved as she spoke.

"You and she have always been close?"

"Yes. Very close."

"What—what were they doing when you came through the hardwood door?"

"I don't know—oh, yes, they were sitting on a couch."

"And you went over and grabbed her by the arm?"

"Not quite," the girl said. "I caught hold of her hand and pulled. I asked her to come with me. She told me to run along and not to worry, that she was all right. But she wasn't all right. I could tell by her eyes. She was terrified."

"Go on," said Drukker sympathetically when she paused.

"I—then I put my arms around her in case she wanted to whisper something in my ear. She must have thought I was trying to drag her out bodily. Anyway, she struck at me and scratched my cheek."

Headlines ran through Drukker's aching head as if it were the big electric-light news band that ran around the old Times Building.

They read:

—BROADWAY STAR SLAYS PROMINENT PUBLISHER—HENRY WIGGAM DIES OF WOUNDS INFLICTED BY PATSY HOLWORTH—

IT WOULD make quite a story at that. He shook his head to clear it. It was hard to remember he was no longer a reporter—not since five minutes past three that afternoon, when the "Sentinel" had dispensed with his services. The D.A. had had him thrown out an hour later. It was now eight forty-five.

He didn't even have the dubious authority of a press card anymore. He knew that Wiggam was a killer, but he couldn't prove it. He could reach across the table and grab that gun and walk upstairs and settle things in a hurry. The only trouble was, it wouldn't settle anything—really.

It wouldn't bring Joey back. He thought about the kid, about how careful he had been to deal from the top of the deck, even in two-paragraph stories for the paper. He wondered if it really paid to play the game straight when the guy pulling the strings was a ruthless newspaper Napoleon like Wiggam.

"Hey! Come back from Dubuque. You haven't heard a word I've said."

"Huh?" He shook himself back to reality.

"I'm sorry." He even managed a half grin. "Patsy, I'm carrying quite a load."

"How many?" she asked with a shadow of what seemed to be a natural pertness.

"I don't mean whisky," he told her. "I was a reporter until three o'clock this afternoon—and a blasted good one, if I do say so. Now I'm a nothing. I went after Wiggam, and he broke me."

"That's rotten," said the girl quietly. "Tell me about it."

"No thanks," he told her. "I don't like to cry. And you have your own griefs."

Her gaze flicked past him as he spoke. She was staring at the doorway beyond. Her hands tightened on the bag, and she pulled it onto her lap. Looking over his shoulder, Drukker saw a slim blond girl, a girl a lot like Patsy, go past. Wiggam was following her. Wiggam saw them watching him. He gave no sign of recognition, but his wide jaw was set tightly, his black eyes alight with deadly purpose.

"Come on!" Patsy whispered as the back door slammed shut.

As they moved in pursuit, Mike blocked their passage, tried to stop them.

"Please, Mr. Drukker," he said. "I don't like this. Maybe you'd better check it with me for awhile."

"It?" said the ex-reporter, shaking himself free.

"You know. The rod." Mike was trotting alongside of him, tugging vainly at his sleeve. "I don't like the look in your eye, Mr. Drukker."

"Not now, Mike," said Drukker, following the girl. "See you later."

He caught up with her halfway down the dark alley that led from the rear door to the street. They reached the sidewalk in time to hear a powerful motor purr into life, saw a

low-hung limousine move swiftly away from the curb. A street lamp outlined the couple on the back seat through the rear window, gave them a glimpse of Janet and Wiggam.

Patsy's fingers squeezed hard on his biceps. "She's going with him!" the girl exclaimed incredulously. "She consented!" Patsy almost wilted there beside Drukker.

The muscles along Drukker's jaw tightened. Headlines whirled through his throbbing head again, but they were blurred. He wasn't quite so much the detached reporter now. He was in the story, but not writing about it.

"Steady," he heard himself saying. "Steady, Patsy. Here comes a cab."

"What a break!" said the girl. "I've got to see where he takes her."

They piled in, and Drukker told the jehu to tail the big car ahead.

"I hope he don't take to the parkway," the driver said as he got under way. "That there's a fast crate, and this heap of mine is strictly from junk."

Drukker settled back in the rear seat beside the girl. Neither of them spoke for a few minutes, and when Patsy broke the silence at last, he hardly recognized her voice. The last shreds of her control had gone.

"He's got some hold over her, and I'm going to break it!" She was almost screaming as she finished.

"Take it easy," said Drukker. "Meeting her in a private room and then riding off with her doesn't make sense—unless he's dropping her at a subway."

"He's headed for the parkway," said the girl, shivering.

"He lives in Westchester," said Drukker flatly.

"You mean he's taking her home with him?"

"Not necessarily." His voice was low. "There are lots of places in Westchester—lonely spots, woods, old quarries, dumps . . ."

"Stop it!" she snapped. "Do you want to drive me crazy?"

"Sorry—I was thinking out loud." He studied her face as he spoke. "I'm trying to figure out what he's up to. By that note she tore up that you pasted together, she's afraid, all right."

"What do you think she meant in her letter?"

"'Mr. Cat is going pounce,'" he quoted. "It could mean she was afraid Wiggam was going to kill her. If he was just tired of her, he'd be more apt to bounce her and let it go at that—unless she was making too much noise about it."

"Janet's a sweet kid," said her sister. "She has a responsible job. She just isn't the type to date a man like Wiggam." Without realizing it, she'd switched her viewpoint.

"You know how it is," said Drukker cynically. "You're in show business. A girl has

a job, but she doesn't feel like working all her life."

"Janet wasn't like that." Patsy's full mouth was a thin line of disapproval.

"They never are," he said sadly.

"You're wrong," said the girl angrily. "It's this Wiggam—something he did to her. He's making her do this. If he were out of the way, it would be different. I know it. I can feel it!"

MIKE was right, Drukker told himself. The ones who talk about killing never do it. Take this girl beside him—she hadn't said she was going to kill Wiggam. But she had the gun with her. She meant business. His head ached harder.

The cab droned along the speedway as Drukker massaged his temple. A lot had happened in a very few hours, was still happening. He knew he couldn't think straight—not with his head aching and the rage that burned within him. Beside him, the girl leaned forward, watching the car ahead. A street light made the lovely profile glow before him. She was in a dangerous mood—no pretense, no false hysteria.

The cabby had to keep his foot on the floor, but he hung onto the taillight of the limousine past Cross County Boulevard. Then the car ahead put on a quick burst of speed going around a bend, and the hacker lost it.

"The guy must have wings," the jehu muttered.

"Maybe he turned off," said Drukker.

"There ain't no side roads but that dirt track just past the bend."

"That's where he went," said Drukker. "He lives close by. Keep going and take the next right. I'll tell you when to pull up."

"Okay, buddy," said the driver. "But I'm kicking myself just the same."

Wiggam lived on a tree-lined avenue. Low hanging branches brushed the top of the cab as they drove along it. In the middle of a long suburban block, a high privet hedge surrounded a large fieldstone house whose lower windows were dark. A driveway curled past the house, and Drukker caught a glimpse of a yellow cab pulled to one side, half hidden by overhanging shrubbery.

They paid off the cab at the next corner. As they walked along the dimly lighted sidewalk, Drukker could feel Patsy press close against his arm. She was breathing hard, a bit unevenly. She was depending on him to get her to Wiggam. He felt guilty about it, as if he were leading a lamb to slaughter.

But this whole crazy venture had been her idea. Which didn't make the thought of her going through the muck of a murder trial any the pleasanter. He wondered how he'd be able to testify without hurting her. From the first, each of them had accepted the other at face value. He felt very close to her and, at the moment, didn't like it. He'd kick away

the yarn of a lifetime if he didn't snap out of it pronto. Just saying this did him no good whatever.

They came to a wrought-iron door set in the hedge. Drukker worked the latch softly, but his ears caught the scrape of a foot from the small stone porch of the house. He saw a shadow move, realized Wiggam knew they had followed him.

"You stay here, Patsy," he told her softly. "Keep that gate open—as if you were waiting for someone."

Drukker walked onto the porch alone, moved swiftly to the bell. He ignored the shadow behind the stone pillar, watched it out of a corner of his eye. He pretended to press the button which would ring the bell.

The ruse worked. The lookout's attention was divided between the girl and himself. He had counted on that. It gave him just the opening he needed. With a quick pivot, he rushed the shadow, threw a hard fist at the man's jaw.

The lookout made a clicking sound with his teeth, then sighed like a lovelorn swain and folded up in sections. His shoes gave forth scuffing noises on the rough masonry. Drukker felt pretty certain there hadn't been enough noise to raise an alarm inside the house. He could see the yellow cab better from the porch. There was no driver at the wheel. His lips tightened grimly.

A flick of his handkerchief brought the girl to his side with swift, noiseless steps. She had the grace of a trained dancer—which she was. Drukker tiptoed to the front door of the house and tried the latch. The door was not locked.

The carpeting on the stairway was luxurious, deep-pile stuff—and silent under foot. It covered the upper hall as well. Wordlessly, Drukker and Patsy Holworth moved toward the door whose edges showed a light behind it.

Drukker was careful about turning the knob. Silently, he opened the door, just wide enough to reveal Wiggam, now wearing a crimson-faced black dressing gown. The publisher lounged in a chair, smoking a cigarette. His brilliantined black hair reflected blue highlights as he turned it to glance at the electric clock on a radio cabinet beside his chair. Beyond, Drukker saw a bedroom and part of a bed with pale green sheets. The sheets were turned down, ready for the night.

"Is she there?" the girl whispered, trembling against him. He put a finger to his lips for silence and shook his head. He studied the room in detail, seeking an element he had missed at first survey, something that had to be there.

Finally he spotted it. It was a tiny, shiny bit of black metal on the floor, barely visible beyond a front leg of the chair in which Wiggam sat. It was the ugly snout of an automatic pistol.

He threw the door wide with a rapid gesture, hurled himself straight at Wiggam. The publisher tried to get up and grab his weapon from the floor in one motion. But Drukker kicked the gun away toward the bedroom door, and Wiggam turned like a frightened insect, scrambling after it.

"Freeze, Mr. Wiggam!" said the girl quietly. "Reach for the ceiling."

THE publisher stopped, then obeyed. He gasped as he saw the gun in the girl's hand. Drukker felt a wave of admiration at the rocklike steadiness with which she kept its muzzle pointed at the publisher's mid-section. She meant business all right, and it didn't occur to either man to doubt it.

"What have you done with Janet?" she asked. "Quickly, Mr. Wiggam."

"Hey! Don't shoot," said the publisher through white lips. "She's not here. You can see that."

"You've killed her, Mr. Wiggam," said the girl as if she were stating a fact rather than making an accusation. "I know it. That's what her letter meant."

"What letter?" asked the publisher, growing paler still. Beads of sweat stood out on his forehead like apple tapioca. Drukker saw the girl's knuckles grow white around the gun she held. It never entered his head to intervene.

"Drukker!" cried the publisher, his voice drying up to a squeak. "She's crazy! She's going to shoot. You brought her here. For Heaven's sake, do something!"

Drukker grinned and kicked at the carpet with his toe. Somehow he didn't think he'd mind going to prison for this. It was worth it to see Wiggam crawl.

"You'd better tell her what you did with her sister, Wiggam," he said. "That trigger won't take much more squeezing without—" he made a popping sound with his lips.

"Mr. Wiggam," said Patsy, and the calmness of her voice was more deadly than if she had raised it, "I'll give you five seconds to tell me what you've done with my sister, Janet Parker."

"Did you say Parker?" Drukker demanded.

"I did. My real name is Parker."

"Good grief!" said Drukker. He was beginning to make sense of the whole mad pattern. "Then she's secretary to the City Finance Commissioner! Don't shoot, Patsy—give me that gun!"

"Stand back," she warned as he moved in on her. Wiggam made a bolt for the other weapon by the bedroom door. He was stopped in his tracks as the girl's gun spat flame and put a slug through his right shoulder. Drukker got it away from her, felt a long nail scrape skin from his cheek as she fought him like a wildcat.

"It's all right, Patsy," he told her, keeping the moaning publisher covered. The pounding

in his temple that had been driving him crazy since Joey was killed had vanished. He was sure of himself now. "I almost let you kill him for the sake of a cheap news story and for Joey. Am I a heel!"

"You're crazy," said the girl. Tears were streaming down her cheeks now, though her voice was still steady. "He killed Janet. I can see it in his eyes."

"It's my party now," said Drukker quietly. He went over to the publisher, who was cowering against the wall in a spreading pool of his own claret. "Okay, Wiggam, where is she. Did you dump her somewhere along the way? Speak up!"

"It's too late!" said Wiggam. He licked his lips. "You'll never get to her in time. She's done for—"

He broke off as a shriek from somewhere below quavered through the big stone house—a scream frightful enough to congeal the blood.

"Janet!" gasped Patsy, bolting for the door. "Janet!"

Wiggam tried to use the diversion to make another grab for the gun on the carpet. Drukker saw the motion from a corner of his eye, put a slug through the publisher's thigh. Then he picked up the other gun.

"I'll be right back," he told the moaning man on the carpet as he raced after the girl. The scream came again as they reached the ground floor. It was still from underneath their feet. Drukker passed his girl companion in the lower hall, slammed into the kitchen and found the cellar door. He leaped down the steps, a gun ready in either hand.

From the ceiling in front of the old-fashioned boiler, a single unshaded bulb dangled. Its glare threw bold shadows on the white-washed walls. In the light a slim, dishevelled blond girl was struggling with Pool, the scarred chauffeur. He was taller than the girl, about to overwhelm her.

Drukker shot once. The bullet went between the steam-gauge and the riser, over the top of the dusty boiler. It was a snap shot, but it was good. The slug ploughed a crimson furrow across Pool's scalp and sent him reeling into the wall.

"Janet, honey!" cried Patsy, leaping forward. She seized her collapsing sister and supported her, holding her close. "Are you all right, Janet?"

Pool recovered then and went for the gun in his shoulder holster. He ducked behind the girls, using them as a shield. Drukker yelled and leaped around them. He smashed with both fists, still clutching the weapons, in a terrific one-two before the scarred chauffeur could bring his weapon to bear. He heard the jawbone snap under the weight of the automatics he carried in either hand. He watched Pool fall. Then he put a pistol in his pocket and picked up the chauffeur's gun.

"Come on," he said, prodding the fallen

chauffeur, who was screaming with agony. "Get moving. Your legs are okay, and we've got business upstairs."

THEY found Wiggam on his hands and knees, still trailing blood as he shouted into a telephone.

"I want a policeman! Help! Murder!"

"Thanks, pal," said Drukker. "I want cops. I'm accusing you and Pool of the murder of Joey Mullane and the kidnapping and attempted murder of Janet Parker."

"You're crazy," said the publisher. He looked at Pool, who had flopped into a chair and was holding his broken jaw, moaning. He winced, then recovered some of his waning bravado.

"You shot me!" he cried. "You're the ones who are going to jail."

"I don't think so," said Drukker. He turned to Janet. "You're the Finance Commissioner's secretary?"

Janet nodded. She was still pale and shaken.

"I recognized your name as soon as I heard it," said the ex-reporter. "Wiggam made love to you and got advance information on the printing bids. Right?"

"I guess so," said the girl dully. Her pride as well as her body had taken a terrible beating.

"Then you'll testify in court that Wiggam slipped in spiked bids to get contracts for the job-printing department of the 'Sentinel?'"

"I'll testify," said Janet. "I'll be glad to." The look of hatred she threw at the groveling publisher should have shriveled him where he crouched.

"Somebody stop the blood before I bleed to death," moaned the publisher.

"Fix him up, Patsy," said Drukker callously. He couldn't feel sorry for this killer on the floor nor for his henchman in the chair.

"Pool is an ex-racing driver," he went on. "He knows all about trick driving. He drove a yellow cab and picked up Joey and maneuvered it between a speeding trolley and an El pillar. He jumped in time. He was going to do the same thing to Janet tonight. That's why the cab is outside without a driver."

"Try and prove it!" mouthed Pool defiantly through broken teeth.

"You're going to admit it and implicate Wiggam," said Drukker quietly.

"In a pig's eye!" said the chauffeur. His scar was a vivid purple against the pallor of his forehead.

"What about the prints on the wheel of the wrecked cab, Pool? You didn't have time to wipe them off, did you?"

Pool moaned. His whole body sagged with admission of defeat.

"That's why you'll implicate Wiggam," the ex-reporter went on. "Why should he beat the rap while you fry, brother?"

"Shut up!" screamed Wiggam. Pool glared at him.

"And you told me it was safe. You promised to cover me. How I'll sing!"

"I'm sorry, kid," said Drukker, turning to Patsy, who was putting a tourniquet with a towel and a mirror handle on the publisher's thigh. "I was going to let you kill him and take the rap. I guess I was crazy at that. I'd had an awful wallop. I've only been able to think straight the last few minutes."

"I know how you felt," said the girl quietly. She took time out from her first aid on the wounded publisher to daub at his cheek, where she'd scratched it, with a handkerchief.

"No," he said. "You don't know how I feel. But you will. When the police let us out of here, I'll ride you and Janet home in a

cab and tell you about a certain young pal and fellow newspaperman, a kid named Joey Mullane."

It was just before closing time when Mike served Patsy and Drukker a pair of planter's punches complete with fruit salad effects and frosted glasses. Then the bartender leaned confidentially across the bar and beamed at them.

He was as happy for them as if he'd licked the world himself.

"If you two would put your cheeks together," he whispered huskily, "them two strips of sticking tape would make a swell V for Victory."

Patsy grinned. It was the first time Drukker had seen her smile, and it was swell.

"V for Very Nice Idea," she said.



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"I'll take that letter, my boy," he said

A LITTLE MORE DOPE

By J. LANE LINKLATER

*Don Graham, Teller of the First National Bank of Tamtown,
Meets the Only Girl—Just as She Is Arrested for Murder!*

THERE are only seven policemen on the Tamtown police force but we have a very comfortable police station. Whenever I get a chance I like to go there and visit my pal Bill Turner. When you walk in, you find yourself in a sort of reception room, with a big high desk in the middle, then a small squad room, and beyond that the chief's office.

Off to one side is the jail.

One evening I wandered in about eight. Bill Turner was alone, working at some pa-

pers on the tall desk. He had a job in the department as technical expert. What he really wanted, though, was to be running around with the boys, mopping up the rough ones.

Anyway, the chief claimed that Bill was too old to be fooling around outside. Bill was past sixty. He was tall and lanky. His hair used to be red. What was left of it wasn't any color in particular.

Bill glanced up at me. "Hiya, kid," he murmured absently.

He went back to his papers.

I watched Bill quietly for awhile. He and I had troubles which were similar. Like Bill, I was tall and lanky. I had been raised by two maiden aunts. When I was a kid they had insisted that I was by nature frail and had to be brought up with great care. By the time I was twenty I had suffered every disease known to childhood, which just about wrecked me for good. I was twenty-five and, after a few years on my own, I was only just beginning to look human.

Like Bill, I wanted to venture forth and exchange blows with my fellow-men, but no one would let me. I was working as a teller in the First National Bank of Tamtown, and bank tellers aren't supposed to go around hitting people.

Presently I got tired of looking at Bill Turner.

"What's keeping you so all-fired busy tonight?" I asked.

"Murder," said Bill, looking up. "Man named Harry Stanton got shot two-three hours ago. Know him?"

"Stanton? Sure."

I knew Stanton because he had an account at the bank—a good one. He came in occasionally to cash a check. I remembered him as a short stocky man with a heavy face and surly dark eyes.

"Know who killed him?" I asked.

"The boys are working on it," Bill said indifferently. "There's no report on it yet."

The outside door opened and Chief Wedger came in with a couple of other policemen. They had a girl with them. She was about twenty, rather small, but with a very trim figure. She had large dark eyes and a clear olive skin. I knew her because she had often come into the bank to cash Stanton's checks. She was his secretary.

I had often felt like saying to her:

"Look, Miss Burns, I'm Don Graham. I work here in the bank but really I'm a human guy. How about you and me going where we can dance?"

BUT I couldn't do that. Training by two maiden aunts can be mighty potent.

She may have been in trouble, but she still looked good to me.

She never gave me a tumble. In fact, nobody noticed me. They all walked back to the chief's office, including Bill Turner, and left me alone. I could hear a jumble of voices, and in about fifteen minutes they all came out again.

The chief and the policemen and the girl went outside, leaving me once more alone with Bill.

"What did the chief bring the girl in for?" I asked.

"He thinks she did it."

"Her!" I choked. "Lila Burns! He's raving. Why, only a glance at her ought to

convince him she couldn't do a thing like that."

Bill gave me a pitying glance.

"Kid," he said, "you'd be surprised how classy some murderers look."

"I still don't believe it. You think you have enough evidence to charge her with murder?"

"Not quite," said Bill. "The chief took her over to Mrs. Hudson's for now. That means he's after a little more dope before he books her."

Mrs. Hudson was a policewoman. The chief often took women prisoners over to her house to be held temporarily.

"Where was Stanton killed?" I asked.

"In a building out at his place. Stanton had a huge garden where he specialized in raising fancy plants. There's a greenhouse and potting-shed in the southeast corner of the grounds. His body was found in the potting-shed. He'd been shot through the head."

"What evidence—"

The phone bell rang. Bill listened, said "yeah," hung up, turned to me.

"I got to go out for awhile, Don," he said.

"I think I'll drift along, too," I said.

At one corner of Bill Turner's tall desk I had noticed a small bunch of keys on a ring. The police chief had dropped them there when he came in, apparently intending that Bill should put them away. But Bill seemed to have forgotten about them and I thought perhaps they might be keys to the Stanton place.

Bill didn't see me scoop them up.

We went out. Bill sped away in the department car, and I climbed into my coupe.

Not long afterwards I stopped at the Stanton place which lay about a half mile beyond the city limits. There was a large house, surrounded by three or four acres of garden. I'd often been past there, but never inside.

Getting into the garden was easy. Although no moon was shining I was cautious as I made my way along those winding garden walks toward the southeast corner. I was nervous, too, as if I was committing my first big crime. For that matter, maybe it was a crime to trespass on the Stanton premises, while the police had it in charge.

This so-called shed was a small brick building which abutted the greenhouse. It had a heavy door, padlocked. I fiddled around with my keys and finally found one that fitted.

Inside, I quietly closed the door, and snapped on my flash.

I saw benches and work-tables. There were piles of dirt, stacks of earthen pots, rows of plants. In one corner was a heap of tools. The odor was strong—a mixed one of plants and new dirt and fertilizer.

Standing in the middle of things and pok-

ing my flash aimlessly in every direction, I felt rather foolish. I wasn't looking for anything special—didn't even know what to look for. All I knew was that Stanton had been killed here.

A small bench had been over-turned. A few broken pots littered the floor nearby. That was all I could see, which appeared to have anything to do with the murder. Possibly Stanton had been sitting on that bench and had toppled off of it when shot.

I was about to turn around when someone spoke gruffly to me out of the darkness beyond.

"Don't move!" he said. "I've got you covered!"

I held still.

"Poke that flash into your face so I can get a look at you," the voice said.

I blinked into my own flashlight.

"Shucks!" said the voice. "You're that punk who works in the bank."

"I am," I said. "And who are you?"

"I'm Gregg, the gardener." He reached up and snapped on a switch, flooding the place with light. He was standing against an inner door which led into the greenhouse.

GREGG was a spare muscular man. The bones of his face were prominent, and his eyes were black and bright. He was still holding a gun.

"I live in a cottage on the edge of this place," he explained. "When I seen someone sneaking through the garden, I came in through the greenhouse. What are you after?"

"Just looking around."

Gregg nodded. "Where did you get the key?"

"At the police station."

Gregg frowned.

"The police station! Well, if the cops want you looking around, I guess it's all right." He peered at me dubiously. "What were you huntin' for?"

I had a hunch.

"Did Stanton keep any papers here in the potting-shed?"

"Some. Most records are in the house, but there's some papers over in that corner."

I went to that corner. Here were a series of small pigeonholes in a wooden case. Papers were stuck in the pigeonholes. I examined them, taking each compartment in turn. Some seemed to be planting records. Others were bills for garden supplies.

One set of small cards puzzled me. I couldn't see what they meant.

On one of these cards was written:

"September 3, Autumn Leaf, \$100."

"Sept. 7, Purple Rose, \$300," said another.

"September 12, Cornstalk, \$200," was written on a third.

The last card was equally cryptic.

"September 18, Beautiful Bloom, \$2000."

"What are these things?" I asked Gregg. He came over and squinted at them.

"Danged if I know."

"Could they be names of different varieties of plants?"

"Maybe. But I never heard of 'em."

I put the cards back. I was puzzled. They didn't mean a thing to me.

"Have you a phone in your cottage?" I asked Gregg.

"Sure, I've got a phone," he said. "Why?"

I shrugged. "Nothing. I was just asking." I grinned at him. "Well, I'll have to get back to the station."

"Okay," he said, shoving the gun back into his pocket. "But I don't like this. I'd like to get my hands on the murderer."

I didn't answer that. I just turned on my heel and walked away.

When I got back to the police station, Bill Turner was seated at his tall desk.

"Bill, what evidence have you got against Lila Burns?" I asked.

Bill yawned and leaned his head wearily on his hands.

"Don, I'm sorry to blast your tender feelings, but listen to the hard facts. This gal, Lila Burns, came out of a girls' college about six months ago dead broke. Her father and mother were dead, so she had to get a job. Mrs. Stanton, the dead man's late wife, employed her as a secretary and companion. As you probably remember, Don, Mrs. Stanton died about three months ago. After the funeral, Stanton asked Lila to stay on as his secretary, and she accepted. She claims it was all right because there were two or three women servants living in the house."

Bill Turner leered at me and I got peeved. "What's wrong with that?" I cried hotly. "Maybe she needed the job. I'll bet the old buzzard got fresh with her."

Bill smiled. "That's what the Chief thinks," he said. "It would furnish a motive. She's a good-looking little wench. Probably the old boy lost his head and started to make passes. Then Lila got sore and slammed a thirty-two bullet through the head."

"With what—her hand?" I snapped. My voice must have sounded sarcastic because I saw good-natured Bill Turner smother a grin. "Or did she use a slingshot?"

"Oh, there was a gun, all right," said Bill. "An old Smith and Wesson belonging to Stanton. When Stanton was found, the gun was lying on a bench nearby. This Lila Burns claims he always kept the gun in the drawer of the library table. And Stanton had been in the potting-shed all afternoon. He was always there, fussing around all day with his plants. She could easily have slipped out to the shed, without anyone seeing her, and shot him."

I shook my head. "That's not evidence." I said. "It means nothing. Who found the body?"

"The girl. About five o'clock in the afternoon. A man named Dingman called at the house to see Stanton. Lila Burns went out to get him. Pretty soon she came back and told Dingman Stanton was dead."

I GRINNED at Bill. "So that makes her a murderess," I said. "What about the three servants. Couldn't one of them have shot Stanton?"

"Perhaps, but not likely. There were only two there—a cook and a housemaid. The other one was having a day off. But neither one had a motive, while Lila Burns admits she had taken a dislike to Stanton and was thinking of getting another job. Of course she could have walked off without killing him, but the real trouble is the fingerprints she left."

"What fingerprints?"

"On the murder gun. Only two persons seemed to have handled it, old Stanton, himself, and the girl. That's what sewed the case up so far as the Chief was concerned. At first she denied ever handling the gun. But later, when the Chief confronted her with the evidence, she admitted she may have picked up the gun once, to examine it."

This put a damper on my spirits. Of course, Lila Burns may have been telling the truth but it didn't sound right to me. Yet the fact that she had once handled the gun wasn't proof she had shot Stanton. The whole thing was circumstantial, all the routine stuff the police usually dig up before they get ready to make a pinch.

I pretended to be disgusted.

"Is there anything else?" I asked.

Bill put on a smile of exaggerated patience.

"Yeah. There's something that shows motive."

"Motive? I thought you claimed she killed him because he got fresh, because she didn't like him and was going to quit her job?"

"Partly. But that ain't enough. If he just got fresh, she might have walked out on him. But suppose there was a reason why she couldn't walk out?"

"What reason could there be?"

"The girl had been handling plenty money. Suppose she had been snitching some. She'd have to cover it up, wouldn't she?" Bill Turner paused to make what was coming next more impressive. "Well, we've got proof she was trying to cover up at least one theft. Maybe more!"

I was commencing to feel very low. "What's the dope?" I demanded.

"Stanton often ordered high-priced plants from this man Dingman in St. Louis. He'd send along cash, sealed and registered. The girl was supposed to attend to that. Well, it looks like she didn't always send it. Anyway, we found a telegram to Stanton from

St. Louis complaining that the last order had been received but the cash was not at hand. The amount should have been two thousand dollars. This had happened several times of late, apparently. Dingman says, when he couldn't get a satisfactory explanation for these lapses either by wire or mail, he paid Stanton a surprise visit to find out about it. From all appearances she was keeping Stanton in ignorance, and when Dingman suddenly showed at Stanton's, she realized the jig was up. So she sneaked out to the potting-shed and shot Stanton."

"Your idea is the girl sent the orders but kept the money?"

"That's right, Don."

"Phooey!" I was disgusted. "It's childish. She'd be sure to get caught. I don't believe it."

At this moment the door opened and Chief of Police Wedger came in. He was a big fat man with a triangular face and a big red nose. He had a good reputation for honesty, but was as stubborn as a mule.

He looked at me, grinned.

"Hello, Don," he said. "You look blowed up about something."

"Don thinks we're treating the Burns gal too rough, chief," Bill said.

The chief snorted. "Say, that dame is guilty, all right. We've got her dead to rights. All we need is a little more dope."

"Have you looked for other suspects, chief?" I asked.

"What other suspects?"

"Well, Stanton had a gardener named Gregg working for him. Maybe Gregg had a run-in with his boss."

The chief chuckled.

"Not much chance there. Gregg was on the job this afternoon, but he was working in front of the house, some distance from the potting-shed. He didn't know a thing about it. No reason for him to bump off Stanton."

"You talked it over with this visitor from St. Louis, Dingman?"

"Sure. He's all right. We checked with St. Louis. Dingman has been in business there for years. He's staying down at the Tamtown Hotel."

That gave me an idea.

"See you later," I said.

I found Dingman taking his ease in the lobby of the Tamtown. He was a man of about fifty, large and fat. He waved a plump hand at me when I introduced myself.

"Sit down, my boy."

"Thanks," I said. "Well, I'm just a local fellow. I—I'm kind of interested in that murder."

He looked at me quizzically.

"You knew Stanton?"

"Not very well. But the girl the police arrested—she interests me."

"Ah! You know the girl, eh? Sweet-hearts, perhaps?"

"Well, not exactly. But I can't believe she did it."

"You may be right, my boy." He wagged his head and his jowls quaked. "I don't know her. Never saw her before today. I hope you're right. People are so disappointing. Human nature is frail." He twisted his neck and peered at me thoughtfully. "You wanted something of me?"

TO tell the truth I hardly knew how to begin. But I nodded and made a start.

"I don't know, sir. I thought perhaps you might have noticed something when you were out at the Stanton place—something the police over-looked."

"I noticed very little," Dingman said lugubriously. "You see, I wasn't there long. I'd driven all the way from St. Louis, a two-day trip. When I reached Tamtown, I drove out to Stanton's place. One of the woman servants called the secretary. The secretary went to get Stanton. Later she returned and told me he was dead."

"Must have been a shock," I suggested.

"It certainly was. There's money due me which I may never get now. Besides the loss of future business."

"The police say the girl took money which should have gone to you, sir."

"I wouldn't want to accuse her of that. I only know I didn't get it."

"Mr. Stanton was a stranger to you?"

Dingman opened his mouth and gaped. It seemed like a small mouth for such a wide face.

"Good grief, no! This town is new to me—but Stanton was no stranger."

"You—you mean you knew Stanton before?"

"Indeed, yes. He used to live in St. Louis. He had a small plant nursery there. He specialized in shrubs—fancy stuff. He bought his stock through me, mostly. Then he married Mrs. Stanton. She was a wealthy widow. She wasn't in good health, so they moved out East. That was eighteen months ago. They purchased their place here, and Stanton used it for growing rare shrubs and flowers. No doubt he expected to cash in on it later. He had sunk a lot of money in it."

"Mrs. Stanton's money?"

Dingman raised one eyebrow.

"No doubt. But she wasn't quite a fool. She never forgot that when she married him, he was poor and she was rich. She didn't trust him completely." Dingman cocked his head. "I understand she made her brother a partner in the business with Stanton."

"Her brother? I hadn't heard anything about Stanton having a brother-in-law."

"He's a Chicago man. Name is Roger

Verne. A lawyer."

"Stanton's brother-in-law couldn't be a suspect in this case, could he?"

Dingman leaned back and closed his eyes. Then he opened one of them and regarded me solemnly.

"I see you're looking for suspects. Quite natural, my boy. Clear your girl friend by convicting someone else, eh? Good." He poked a plump forefinger into my arm. "As to Roger Verne, I don't know. He lives in Chicago but I have no idea where he is at this moment. You might look into it."

"You couldn't think of any other suspect, sir?"

"Other suspects?" Dingman smiled. "I couldn't commit myself, my boy. It wouldn't be right. Ah, you might, however, consider the gardener!"

"Stanton's gardener?"

"To be sure. He may be quite innocent, of course, but it struck me the police were too easy on him. I can see no evidence of his guilt, but on the other hand there's no evidence of innocence."

"You have some reason for suggesting the gardener?"

"He was the man on the ground, my boy. Nothing final about that, it's true, but there's an obvious possibility. The gardener could have had a dispute with his employer. As I see it, no one was in a better position to go to that potting-shed unobserved."

"That's right," I agreed.

"Then there's the revolver. I'm told the girl had it, in a desk. Assuming she didn't use it, who could more easily have slipped in to get it than the gardener?"

"Right again," I said.

Dingman smiled paternally.

"Now, I'm not accusing anyone. I really have no definite idea as to whom is guilty. You wanted suspects. I give you those two—Roger Verne, the brother-in-law, and Gregg the gardener."

"Thanks," I said. I was still quite foggy about the whole thing, but felt that Dingman had helped me. "You expect to stay awhile, sir?"

"Until morning anyway," said Dingman. "Longer if the police wish it. Call on me if you think I can help."

Now I wanted to see Lila Burns. I drove up to Mrs. Hudson's house. Mrs. Hudson answered my ring at the door. She was a large woman, big-jawed, tough and cheerful. I was scared of her, too. Had been, ever since I was a small kid.

"I'd like to see Miss Burns," I told her.

SHE glared at me, and then laughed.

"You got a permit from Chief Wedger?"

"If Miss Burns is willing to see me," I said firmly, "why should you stop me?"

Mrs. Hudson looked startled, but finally

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laughed more heartily than ever.

"You're doing pretty good," she said. "But the girl is in bed."

"I still want to see her."

"If that's the way you feel about it, trot right in, laddie."

She showed me into her living room, trudged away, and presently came back with Lila. Lila was wrapped in some sort of a blue negligee. She sure appeared soft and nice, but smaller that way. Her hair had a nice shiny glow, but she seemed smaller than I remembered. I looked her over, took a deep breath, and found I couldn't say a word.

She had to speak first. Her voice sounded tired.

"You wished to see me?"

"Yes. I—I'm sorry about getting you up."

"Oh, that's all right. I wasn't sleeping anyway."

"Well, anyway, I'm looking into the Stanton business on my own hook. I'm sorry to say it, but the police have quite a case against you. I don't believe them. I came here to tell you so."

"Thank you so much," she said. "But I don't see why you should have this interest in me."

If she could have seen herself from where I sat, she might have known the answer.

"Would you mind answering a few questions?" I asked.

"Not at all."

"Well, about the revolver," I said. "That's an important point. They tell me you knew about it."

"That's quite true."

"Where did he keep it?"

"In a desk drawer."

"Where was the desk?"

"It was in a small office room, just off the library."

"How could a person get into that office room?"

"Through the library or the window, a large French window opening into the garden. There's no way of getting into the room from inside the house except by way of the library."

"You were working in the library all afternoon?"

"Yes."

"Did anyone come in?"

"Only Mr. Stanton himself. About four o'clock there was a phone call for him. I sent Gregg to tell him."

"A phone call, eh? Who called?"

"A Mr. Parley."

"Parley? Isn't that a queer name?"

"I thought so. But the man repeated it—Mr. Parley. I went to the window and called Gregg, the gardener, who happened to be working nearby. He went and called Mr. Stanton. Mr. Stanton came in grumbling,

[Turn to page 72]



I Have Lived Before--

Says Aged Lama.

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answered the phone, and then went out again."

"Did you hear the conversation, Miss Burns?"

"No. There's a phone extension in the office. He talked over the extension, then went out by way of the French window."

I was silent a little while.

"Well, of course the main point is about the gun," I said. "You say it was in the desk drawer in the office. But you also say that no one except yourself was in the office or library all afternoon."

"No one except Mr. Stanton himself, while he was phoning." She gazed at me wistfully. "You really think you're getting onto it?"

"Well, I was pretty doubtful. But I pretended to be cheerful.

"Aw, don't worry, Miss Burns," I said.

She smiled.

"It's nice to have you on my side," she said.

That didn't put me in any state of mind for clear thinking. I went out and sat in my car for at least half an hour before the head really got to functioning again. By that time I had managed to fasten on one idea—and I didn't know just how good that one was.

I drove down to Pete's Pool Parlor. Pete had some sporting papers and I looked through them. Then I used his phone to call the gardener, Gregg. After that I phoned Mr. Dingman at the hotel.

"Mr. Dingman," I said, "I was just talking on the phone with that gardener. He claims he's found something out in that potting-shed that I should see."

"Go and take a look at what he has, by all means, my boy," said Dingman, "Evidence, is it?"

"Might be. It's a kind of letter, I guess. It was in with some papers there. Stanton received it a day or two ago, and the fellow who wrote it told Stanton, in the letter, to destroy it as soon as he read it. But Stanton didn't do that."

"Say, that might be important." Dingman's voice sounded excited. "Yes, you should go."

"But I'd rather not go alone," I cut in.

DINGMAN chuckled.

"Afraid of that gardener, eh?" He nodded understandingly. "Well, yes. It might be a trick."

"Would you go with me, sir?"

"It's getting late." Dingman's tone was doubtful. "My bed-time." He hesitated. "Still, I did promise I'd help if you asked me. I'll wait here for you."

He didn't have to wait long. I was down at the hotel in five minutes. One side of

[Turn to page 74]

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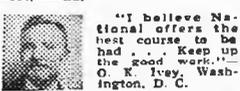
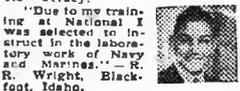
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the coupe sagged down as Dingman put his weight in beside me.

On the way, he acted cheerful.

"You're pretty sure you've got something, aren't you?"

"No," I said. "All I have is an idea."

"An idea, eh? That makes me curious."

"So far as you know, did Stanton have some interest in life, involving money, outside of his plants?" I asked.

Dingman pursed his lips.

"You must remember, my boy," he said, "that while I knew him well, I wasn't an intimate of his. He may have had interests of which I knew nothing."

I stopped the car outside the gates of the Stanton garden.

We got out.

"You'd better lead the way, since you're more familiar with the grounds," Dingman said.

So I went on ahead, through the meandering walks to the door of the potting-shed. I took out my keys.

Then I turned to Dingman.

"If you don't mind, I think I'd better go in alone, sir," I said.

"Eh?" he said, as if astonished. "Oh, if you wish."

I unlocked the door and entered the shed, poking my flash ahead of me. The wooden case with the pigeon holes was in the corner adjacent to the door to the greenhouse. I tried the greenhouse door and found it locked. I reached up and turned on the light switch. Then I peered into some of the pigeonholes. I took out a number of papers, selected one, and put the others back.

My back was turned to the outer door. I was scrutinizing the paper closely as a voice behind me spoke quietly.

"I really think I should be in on this."

I turned my head. Mr. Dingman's substantial bulk was filling the doorway. His face was screwed into a fatherly smile. In his right hand he was holding a large revolver, the muzzle directed at me.

"Nice of you to bring me along, my boy," he said. "I'll take that letter."

I knew he couldn't see the letter well from where he stood. I folded the paper, so that the crease was sharp. Then I bent swiftly and poked it under the door to the greenhouse. Coming up straight again, I flung the keys out through a half-open window along the top of the wall.

Dingman's smile died away. His eyebrows came together.

Then he smiled again, suddenly.

"Oh, well. I may be able to retrieve the letter."

I didn't tell him it was no letter—just one of Stanton's bills.

"You wrote it, didn't you, Mr. Dingman?" I asked him.

"Indeed, yes." He sighed gently. "Was there any evidence beside the letter, my boy?"

I really wasn't sure, but I bluffed it.

"Sure. I began to think it was you when Lila told me about the phone call from Mr. Parley. She says you used to phone by long distance from St. Louis and she recognized your voice. That was you, wasn't it?"

"Yes. I told Stanton in the letter I'd use that name." Dingman laughed. "But she got it wrong. It was Parlay—accent on the last syllable."

"A betting term, I believe."

"Of course. That was the other interest Stanton had—horse racing. He used some of the funds intended for plants, for betting. Naturally, he had to keep his betting secret. When his wife was alive, she would not have permitted it. And since she died, his brother-in-law, Roger Verne, would have closed down on him, since he had a half interest in the place."

"And it was you who robbed him!"

"Robbed him!" Dingman blinked, as if offended. "Well, I got the money, yes. I was placing bets for him. Occasionally, when one of his horses paid well, I merely claimed that I never got the money."

"There are cards in one of these pigeon-holes," I said. "They have queer names on them, such as Autumn Leaf, Purple Rose and Cornstalk. Then there's one called Beautiful Bloom. That one is dated Sep-

[Turn page]

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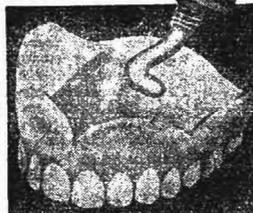
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tember eighteenth—just a week ago. The notation against it says two thousand dollars."

"Yes. Stanton had only one system—he picked horses whose names suggested plants or flowers. He had a special hunch on Beautiful Bloom. He bet two thousand dollars and the darned horse won and paid better than twelve to one. That made his winnings about twenty-five thousand dollars. I couldn't see turning that much back to Stanton. I hadn't farmed out the bet because I thought the filly had no chance."

"It made him sore, eh?"

MR. DINGMAN grunted. His expression became regretful.

"Indeed, yes. I wired him that his money had never arrived. But he was still suspicious, so I wrote him confidentially that I would come and see him and check things over. He still had to keep quiet about his betting, so I thought I could depend on him to destroy my letter." Dingman shook his head. "You can't depend upon people any more," he lamented. "He wasn't to be trusted."

Stanton had destroyed the letter, all right, but I could see no point in telling Dingman that I had never seen it. My hunch that there had been such a letter had certainly turned out to be correct!

"Then you reached the edge of town and phoned him?"

"Yes. So that I could be sure of seeing him alone, of course. I intended to put him out of the way." Dingman waggled the gun in his hand. "With this. But when I came in here I noticed that he had a gun on the bench there, so I used his."

"Stanton got the gun when he went to the

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house to answer your phone call," I said. "Evidently he was afraid of trouble with you." I stared at him. "What are you going to do now?"

"What can I do, my boy?" he said sadly. "You've tripped me up. You've left me only one way out! I'll have to get rid of you. Then, I'll have to concoct some evidence which will direct suspicion upon Gregg, the gardener—conclusive evidence the police will accept. The police are mighty stupid, my boy."

And I could see the old rascal wasn't going to delay killing me much longer. He wouldn't warn me, either. He'd just do it. He was holding that revolver like a rock. He hadn't moved an inch.

The only change I could see in him was a sharpening light in the depths of his eyes.

"There's something else in this pigeonhole you might be interested in," I told him hastily.

I could see his finger hesitate on the trigger.

"Yes?" he said, with a touch of impatience.

"Yes."

I reached in and got the revolver I had asked Gregg, the gardener, to leave there for me. I knew I couldn't fool with Dingman any longer. The minute he saw that gun in my hand he would shoot.

So I fired.

[Turn page]

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It didn't give him much of a chance. There was an accusing look in his eyes. I, too, had disappointed him! If he could have talked, I was sure he would have said something sad about human nature.

But he couldn't talk. The slug took him somewhere in the chest, and he came to rest in an undignified heap across the threshold.

In the morning I was still a teller in the First National Bank of Tamtown. More people came in to talk to me about my career as a police detective than to cash checks. I couldn't help wishing my two departed aunts could have heard what they said.

Dingman was in the hospital. He had been badly wounded but the doctor said he would pull through all right. Of course, Dingman realized it wasn't going to do him much good to recover. He still wasn't able to talk much, but I heard that he'd mumbled he hadn't expected me to turn out to be unreliable like all the rest.

Along toward noon old Bill Turner came into the bank. He looked depressed. There was a hostile glint in his eyes. When he reached my cage, he forgot to congratulate me.

"Gimme them keys," he grunted.

"Keys?"

"You know—the keys you snatched off my desk, last night."

"Oh, yes—the Stanton keys!" I'd forgotten about them. I forked them out of my pocket and handed them to him. "Say, Bill," I said, "I'm sorry about that. I hope I didn't get you in bad."

"Tush for you!" said Bill.

He turned away. I felt dashed. Then he stopped halfway across the bank and came back.

He grinned.

"Okay, kid! Nice work! It—well, it just made me kinda sore you didn't let me in on it. Rats! I never do get a chance to get out and slam anybody in the puss or nothing!"

"Thanks a lot, Bill. And I'm sorry about things. It just slipped my mind about you."

"Okay. Well, next time, lemme in on it, huh?"

"Sure," I promised. "Now run along, Bill! Scat!"

Bill looked surprised. Then he glanced over his shoulder, saw who was coming, and hurried away.

Lila Burns, looking better to me than a

NEXT ISSUE'S NOVEL
MURDER ON THE LOOSE
By G. WAYMAN JONES

whole garden of roses, walked quickly toward my cage. I had it in my mind to greet her breezily and rivet her attention with bright and bold chatter. But when she halted about two feet off, my tongue hinges tightened and I couldn't say a word.

"Good morning," she said. "I'd like to cash a check. It's my last paycheck. I don't know if it's any good."

"I'll take care of it," I squeaked.

I grabbed the check, jabbed at it with the paid-stamp, counted out her money.

Lila Burns put the cash in her purse. She looked up at me again and said:

"I—I don't know just what to say, Mr. Graham. I mean, I'm overcome with what you did last night. I'm really very grateful. It was quite wonderful of you. I wish I knew how to say it, but talking scares me so."

"You!" I said incredulously. "You're scared—of me!"

"Indeed, I am," she said warmly.

Suddenly I felt easy, sure of myself.

"Don't let it worry you," I said kindly.

"I'll be off for lunch in five minutes. Just wait for me over there by the door."

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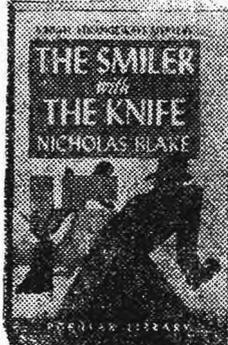
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OFF THE RECORD

(Concluded from page 6)

to dispose of her as a dangerous witness. Keep an eye peeled for **MURDER ON THE LOOSE** in next issue. You'll say it's one of the best Black Bat stories ever to come from the typewriter of your friend, G. Wayman Jones.

LETTERS FROM READERS

WE SURE stirred up a hornet's nest with those letters in the last issue. For instance, there was Harold M. Smith, of Waco, Texas, who wrote in some indignation to say that nobody, not even a cop, could be as dumb as Captain McGrath. This has stirred a spirited reply from a lad up North.

Oh, no? I guess Mr. Smith doesn't know any cops. They've got to be dumb to get in—it's one of the rules. Any time one of them shows signs of developing intelligence he is tossed right out on his caboose. Take it from one who knows!—George Candles, Superior, Wis.

This is what we call adding heat without light to the argument. Mr. Candles' letter has aroused our curiosity. What happened between him and the police department which makes him so violent? How about it Mr. Candles? We scent a good story.

And on the other side, there's this:

Harold Smith is right. A man as dumb as McGrath couldn't lace his own shoes and would be out without a guardian. How long could such a cluck hold down a job as Captain of Detectives? He's got to show some results sometimes. Besides, if he were smarter, the Black Bat would look smarter in fooling him. My personal opinion is that the Black Bat gets away with murder.—Eugene Scheinberg, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Well, maybe. But don't forget, pal, that McGrath only looks bad when stacked up against the peerless Black Bat. By any ordinary standards he's smart enough, it's just that the Black Bat outsmarts him.

Here's a letter from a gal who isn't mad at anybody, but who likes us and the stories:

I read every issue of Black Book Detective. Tony Quinn is my ideal. Please don't change a hair of his head. I like lots of short stories too. Best Regards. —Mary R. Brown, Joplin, Mo.

Which makes us feel very noble because Tony Quinn is sort of an ideal character at that. He's honest and idealistic and a crusader for the little guy and he's smart and resourceful and never quits. If we only had some more like him!

So keep the letters coming friends. Whether they're bouquets or brickbats, we love 'em. Just address The Editor, **BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE**, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. Thank you!

—THE EDITOR.

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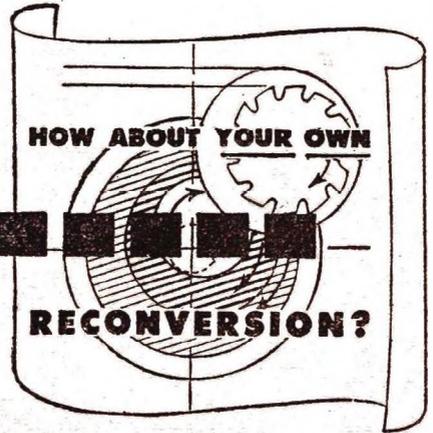
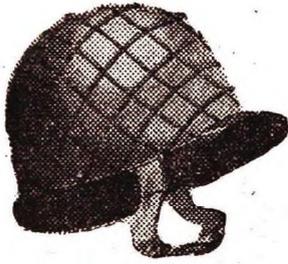
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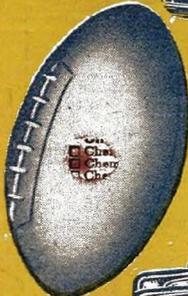
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