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BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE

Vol. XXIII, No. 1

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

August, 1947

A COMPLETE BLACK BAT NOVEL



Dead Man's Plunder

by G. Wayman Jones

The death of a beautiful blonde puts Tony Quinn on a difficult trail of grim mystery that leads through a maelstrom of peril and intrigue to the heart of a devastating crime conspiracy! Follow the Black Bat as he fights to recover vast loot! 11

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OFF THE RECORD

A DEPARTMENT WHERE READERS AND THE EDITOR MEET

YOU'LL agree that it's odd when a killer comes to the Law and asks help in solving a murder. But it's a very peculiar situation indeed when it's a murder—which he himself has committed! Yet, that's exactly what happens to Tony Quinn, the famous blind Special District Attorney, in the smashing new Black Bat novel called **THE LONG AGO MURDER**, by G. Wayman Jones. What a story! It's gripping, it's amazing, it's packed with surprises, suspense, and thrills!

Tony Quinn and his loyal helpers, Silk, Butch, and lovely Carol Baldwin have their hands full when the action starts popping in this one. This is how it begins:

The man came out of the doorway covertly, like a woodchuck peering around to be certain everything is safe. He was a tall, gaunt man with a strange pasty hue to his angular features. Nobody could ever claim that he was handsome, but despite this and his furtive manner, there was something about him that demanded respect.

The Bloody Shirt

He wore clothes that didn't fit too well, as if he'd grown much thinner of late, but insisted upon wearing his old clothes. Near the outer fringes of light from a street lamp he paused and examined his left sleeve. It was soaked with blood. Fresh, very red blood, and he shuddered visibly.

A policeman sauntered around the corner and the man quietly faded into a doorway and stayed there until the cop walked on by. Then the gaunt man emerged and hurried to the nearest lighted corner. He found a drug store there and a clock in the window indicated that it was slightly after one in the morning.

Fumbling in his pockets, the man produced a trifle of silver. Not more than forty cents. He entered the drug store and a clerk bustled toward him.

"I'd like this dime changed so I can make a phone call," the gaunt man said. "And—a pack of cigarettes too, please."

"Right. What brand?"

"Why—why, it doesn't matter. Just—cigarettes. And how much does it cost to use the phone now? It used to be a nickel."

"It still is." The druggist chuckled. "About the only thing that hasn't gone up. Say—you been on a deserted island or something? Not knowing how much the phone costs?"

"An island?" The gaunt man permitted an odd smile to cross his lips. "Yes. Yes, an island. Isolated, quiet, serene. I wish I were back there."

Whiteacre Lane

He reached for the cigarettes with his left hand, remembered the bloody shirt, and dropped the arm stiffly by his side. He used his right hand to pick up the cigarettes and the change. Before he went into the phone booth, however, he stopped to look up the name Anthony Quinn in the directory. Then, apparently deciding against entering the booth, he turned back to the counter.

"Can you tell me if Whiteacre Lane is very far from here, please?"

The druggist shrugged. "This is New York, my friend. No place is very far if you got cab fare."

"But that's just it. I haven't. Not enough, and I want to reach a friend of mine."

"He must be in the bucks," the druggist said. "That's a high hat address."

He began explaining directions about busses, but the gaunt man frowned.

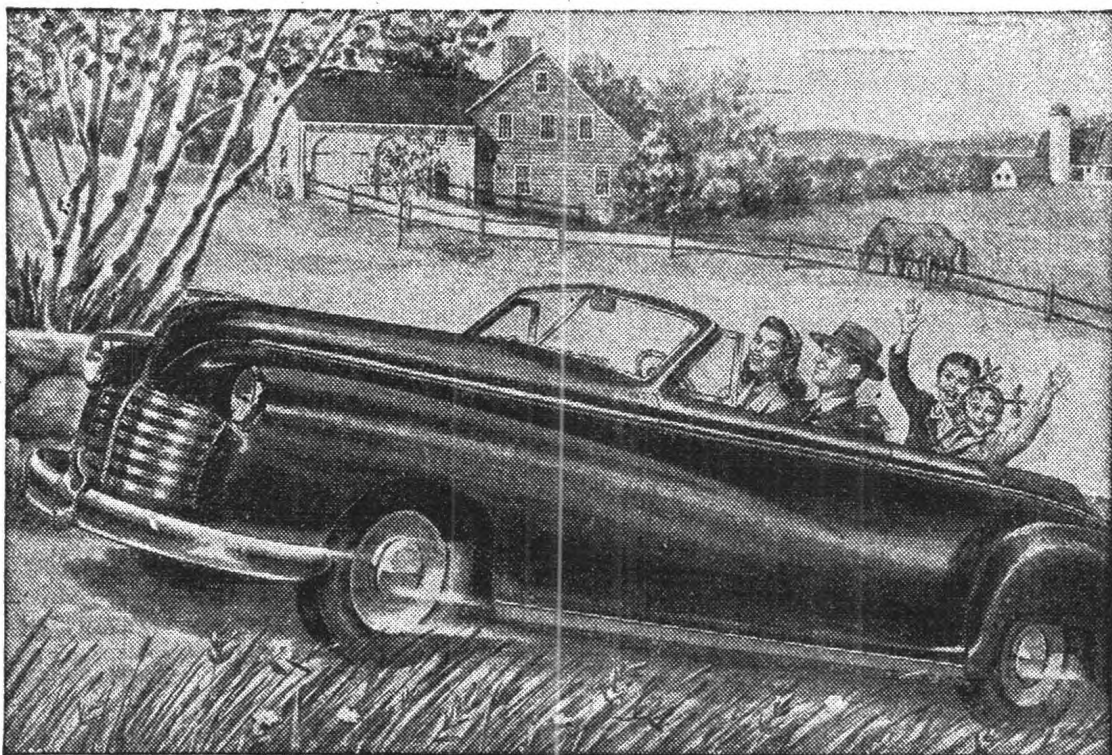
"Isn't— isn't there a cross-town trolley line?" he asked.

The druggist looked surprised. "Say—you really been away. That trolley was taken off eight or nine years ago. You've got to travel by bus."

The gaunt man thanked him and went out into the night, again cautiously investigating every flickering shadow and keeping a sharp eye for blue uniforms. In the bus he took a rear seat and pulled the brim of his faded hat well down over his eyes.

At last he stood before the house that had on its gate a neat sign reading: **ANTHONY QUINN**.

(Continued on page 8)



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OFF THE RECORD

(Continued from page 6)

"If he'll only help me," the gaunt man muttered. "He's got to help me. I haven't a friend in the world—except him, and I'm not even sure of him. Not after—what happened!"

The Knife

The house was all dark, and before he pressed the doorbell button, the man almost gave it all up and succumbed to the urge to run for it. But he reached a hand into his inside pocket and pulled out a long knife. It was stained with blood. He put it back. At least, he thought, I have this if things get too tough.

It was several minutes before there was any response to the bell ringing, and then Silk Kirby, Tony Quinn's valet, answered the door. Silk tried to persuade the man to see Quinn during regular office hours, but when the man wouldn't take no for an answer, Kirby invited him in.

"Just walk ahead of me," Kirby said.

The gaunt man started to do that, but Silk Kirby moved in noiselessly behind him and suddenly threw an arm around his neck and drove a knee into the small of his back. In a moment, Kirby had the knife.

"Nice little toy," he commented caustically. "I figured, when you said you couldn't go to the office, that you were some kind of a mug and armed. You'll see Mr. Quinn all right. Maybe a judge and jury, too. I—say, this knife is bloodstained. Who'd you kill?"

"I—don't know. I'm—not sure. Please, if you have any sense of mercy in you at all, let me talk to Mr. Quinn. He helped me before."

"Oh, he did." Silk eyed the man critically. "I suppose on another murder rap, eh?"

Silk got his reply, and it staggered him a little.

"Yes," the man said. "Another murder. He helped me with that."

Clyde Ainsley's Story

Tony Quinn was soon downstairs, and in the library he confronted the visitor. Around Quinn's eyes were the deep, almost ugly scars of the injury that had blinded him once, and which enabled him still to keep up the pose of being blind. But the gaunt visitor did not know that yet.

"Don't you recognize me, Mr. Quinn?" he

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asked. "Oh—I suppose not. We've both changed. Ten years is a long time. I've lost a lot of weight and aged beyond my years."

"Suppose you tell me," Tony Quinn said, "why you are here—armed with a blood-stained knife?"

"I—think I killed a man. I'm not sure. I didn't want to kill anybody. But he was there—on the floor. The knife was in my hand. He'd been stabbed many times."

"Begin at the beginning," Quinn urged, and his voice was quiet and compelling. "Begin ten years ago."

The man told his story. His name was Clyde Ainsley. Ten years before he had been happily married to a beautiful, young wife. Then, one night, the two of them had been caught in the midst of a gang war. His wife was killed. Ainsley had gone berserk. With his bare hands he strangled one gunman, after bashing in his skull. But the main gangster, a man named Steve McCleod, got away.

Crazed, Ainsley had tried to track McCleod down and kill him, but Ainsley had been apprehended first, and declared insane. Since then, he had been confined in an asylum. But today he had wandered away from the institution and again picked up the trail of Steve McCleod.

"He walked to a cheap section and entered a house," Ainsley continued. "I was right behind him. There was a card below one bell with his name on it. I went upstairs, located the room and knocked. The door opened. It was all dark. I don't know what happened then."

"Was it Steve McCleod whom you found dead?"

"No. Not McCleod. I don't know who the man was, but he'd been stabbed a dozen times. Slashed brutally—like a—madman might attack someone. I was lying across an old bed when I woke up. I saw the dead man. I thought I'd killed McCleod and I didn't care. It didn't matter—until I saw that he wasn't McCleod."

Menacing Guns

Tony Quinn decided that the best thing to do would be to go to the scene of the crime at once and investigate. But Quinn and Silk had hardly arrived at the room where the body lay than the sound of sirens told them that the police were arriving. Someone must have tipped them off!

Silk and Quinn escaped out of the house

(Continued on page 109)



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WHAT A FISH!



WHAT TH....!

BROOK



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SKIP IT. YOU'RE FREEZING. LET'S GET YOU HOME



HERE'S WHERE I TURN. I HOPE UNCLE HAS A FIRE GOING

HERE?..UNCLE? WHY, SHE'S THE BOSS'S NIECE... AND HE'S HERE!



WHAT AN INTRODUCTION! NOW, MARGIE, I'LL MAKE SOME COFFEE WHILE YOU HOP INTO DRY THINGS

GOOD CHANCE FOR ME TO CLEAN UP



OUT OF BLADES? TRY THESE THIN GILLETTES



WHAT A SHAVE! THESE BLADES ARE JUST MY DISH!

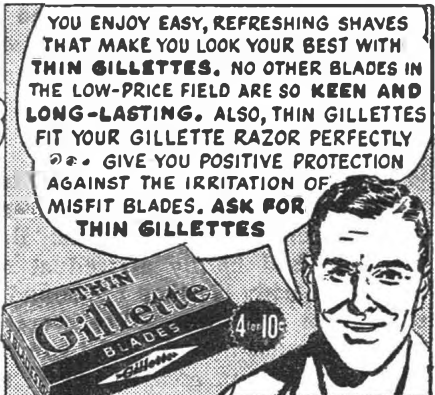
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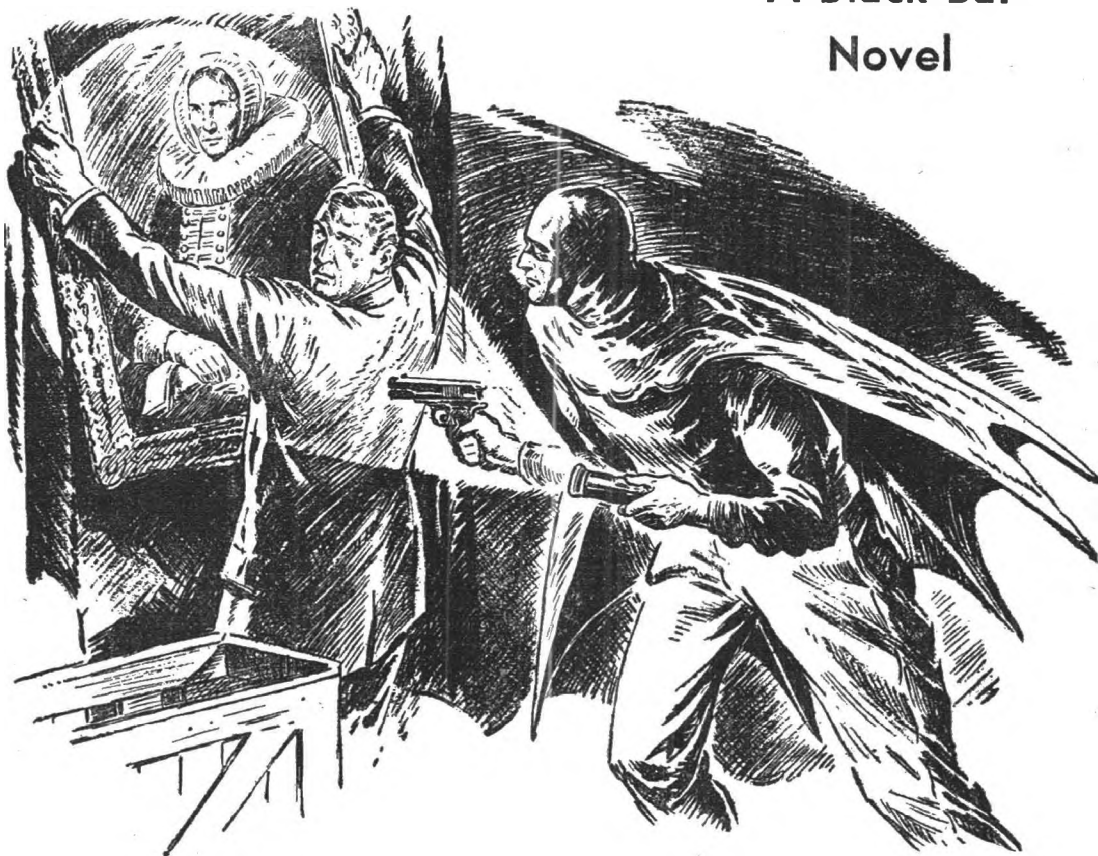
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A Black Bat Novel



The Black Bat snapped on a flashlight as Shane took down the portrait to pack it in the crate
(Chapter V)

DEAD MAN'S PLUNDER

By G. WAYMAN JONES

The murder of a beautiful blonde puts Tony Quinn on a trail of mystery that leads through a maelstrom of grim peril and intrigue to the heart of a devastating conspiracy of crime!

CHAPTER I

Police Procedure

SERGEANT LANNIGAN of the Radio Patrol pressed the apartment door buzzer once more. He could hear the clamor of it inside, but nobody came to answer. He turned to a pop-eyed little man who tenanted the next door apartment.

"You're positive you heard voices in

there and, later on, a scream? I don't want to crash any doors unless I have to, and it happens that the building super isn't around so I can't get hold of a key."

The little man nodded violently. "I did hear voices. Mrs. Titus' and that of a man. I was listening to the Jesters show. It ended and I turned the radio off. Before I had my hand away from the dial, I heard the scream. Just one."

The Black Bat Battles to Recover a Fortune

"Was it cut off all of a sudden?" Lannigan asked.

"Just like I snapped off the radio," the tenant insisted. "I listened a little while. I didn't hear another sound, so I thought I'd better phone the police."

Sergeant Lannigan glanced significantly at his patrolman driver. He stepped back, measured the door and hurled himself at it. Which was some hurling because Lannigan weighed better than two hundred and twenty. The door threw him back like a rubber ball. He signaled his partner and both of them attacked it this time.

One panel finally crashed through. Lannigan ripped the broken pieces of wood away to reach inside and find the snap lock—and at that instant he saw the sprawled-out body of the blond girl on the floor. Lannigan wasted no time. Even as he turned the snap lock, though, he noted that the night bolt and the burglar chain were both off. Then he was bursting into the living room.

It was one of those large, expensive places fitted out by an interior decorator who went in for formal coldness in his decorations. Though they were not as cold as that body on the floor was going to be.

Lannigan merely touched the wrist for a pulse and found none. He noticed the brutally inflicted marks around the throat. It had been a lovely throat too. Mrs. Phyllis Titus had been around thirty, an icy blonde, but even in death as beautiful as anyone Lannigan ever saw.

She was dressed in a light suit of natural gabardine fitting a trim, tall figure. Her makeup had been skillfully applied and was intact. A large diamond guard ring and a diamond-studded wedding band were on the fourth finger of her left hand. There was a jewel-encrusted wrist watch on her wrist and the white blouse beneath the suit coat was held at the throat by another diamond pin. Whoever had killed her, certainly could not have been a thief.

"Mike," Lannigan said, "stand right here and don't touch anything."

Lannigan went over to the telephone and dialed.

"This is Sergeant Lannigan, Nine-

teenth Precinct Radio Patrol," he said. "Give me Homicide. I've found a little job for them."

THEN Lannigan began questioning the tenant, who was more pop-eyed than ever. Yes, he admitted, Mrs. Titus had often had men visitors. Why not? She was a widow, young and undeniably pretty. No, he hadn't the faintest idea of where she got money enough to maintain an apartment like this, and he figured it cost in the neighborhood of three hundred a month. She had lived there for three years. There had never been any trouble; no loud talking or fights until tonight.

Half an hour later Captain McGrath of Homicide walked in. McGrath was not a large man, but he exuded quiet efficiency. He wore a suit with about as much drape to it as a battleship deck.

McGrath's shoes were square-toed. Not because he wanted to emulate a movie version of a detective, but square-toed shoes were easier on his arches and fifteen years on a beat had made him conscious of his feet. He had snappy eyes, a short-cropped mustache, and looked like a fighter.

He didn't touch the body, but studied it for about three minutes. Then he turned to Lannigan.

"Know her?" he asked the Radio Patrol man. "Probably not, because she made sure lately that she got little publicity. But think back and you'll recall pictures of her pretty face in all the newspapers. She was the widow of Joe Titus."

"Well, I'll be—" Lannigan said. "You know, I figured I'd seen her somewhere before."

McGrath pushed his hat to the back of his head. "Don't get things wrong, Sergeant," he said. "Phyllis Titus never had the faintest idea her husband was a racketeer, killer, and all-around crook. Not until I nailed him and sent him to the chair. He died in the death house at Sing Sing a little better than three years ago. Now, it seems, we have an aftermath."

While fingerprint men went to work and the medical examiner bustled im-

in Fabulous Art Treasures Looted by Killers!

portantly into the room, McGrath began his investigation. He had a lot of facts in a surprisingly short time. He sent for help and shepherded half a dozen detective sergeants and lieutenants into the bedroom.

"Here's what we know," he said. "Phyllis Titus was seen by the doorman entering the building. She was accompanied by a man who had brought her home before. The doorman watched them

McGrath tossed the book of matches to Lieutenant Anderson.

"Andy," he said, "take two men and cover that restaurant. You'll find some good pictures of the murdered woman in the living room. Snag one and see if she can be identified by anyone at the restaurant. Mainly though, I want the man who was with her identified."

Anderson sped off on his mission. This was police efficiency working at top



THE BLACK BAT

get out of a taxi. A company-owned cab operating mainly out of Grand Central. She had no baggage and wasn't exactly dressed for travel. So she and the man must have picked up the cab somewhere near Grand Central if not directly there. Sergeant Brady, take five men and cover that angle. I want the cab driver brought in."

Brady gave a snappy salute, hurried out and commandeered five of the waiting plainclothesmen. McGrath picked up a pack of matches he had found. The cover was a violent purple, and advertised the Club Restaurant, which was not far from Grand Central.

speed. Phyllis Titus had not been dead more than an hour and the net was beginning to spread.

McGrath gingerly picked up a half-smoked cigar butt next. It had a band around it bearing the name *Flora y Ca*. It had a light wrapper and was obviously an expensive cigar. The tip of it was still moist.

"I found that pack of unused matches in the murdered woman's handbag," McGrath said. "She was a heavy smoker, judging by the stains on her fingers, so she must have acquired the match book recently. That's why I wanted the restaurant checked. Now we've got a cigar.

I discovered that the ash-trays had been dumped into a wastebasket beside the living room desk. Probably done mechanically. You know the way women keep emptying them. My wife does, anyway, and the devil blast me if I fill one to overflowing."

"Sure, Captain," Lieutenant Wysocki said, "but a cigar is a cigar. There's millions of 'em smoked every day."

McGRATH rolled the butt between his fingers.

"Ah, but not this kind. I smoke cigars—too many of 'em. I know all the brands. This one is unfamiliar. Wysocki, take this cigar band, locate the firm that makes or imports 'em and find out who they sell 'em to. That's a big order, and it may lead to nothing, but it has to be done. Take twelve men and hop to it."

To two detective sergeants, McGrath gave orders that every tenant in this big apartment house must be interviewed.

"I want the best description possible of the men in her life," he insisted. "Especially facts about a five-foot-ten, hundred and forty to hundred and sixty pounder with shoulders like a football player. The doorman knows him, and claims if the guy was set face-to-face with him he could pick him out. Get going."

The fingerprint men came in.

"As usual, Captain, there are all sorts of prints," one of them said. "Mostly the dead woman's and those of a maid who comes in by the day. Any others are a hodge-podge. No use at all. Anything on doorknobs is all smeared."

McGrath sighed. "If only fingerprints were as useful as most people think. Okay, you can report back. Where is the medical examiner?"

That official came in a moment, and reported. "The time of death seems to have been well placed without my help," he said. "It coincides closely with the time the woman screamed, which came at the close of the Jesters radio program. By examination of the body temperature and the degree of rigor, I'd confirm the time. You hardly need an autopsy, Captain. She was strangled by a man with strong hands. He simply got one grip and held it. Some bruises on her chest indicate the killer put his knee there to get better leverage and to hold her down."

"Thanks, Doc." McGrath made some notes. "Do a P.M. anyway."

Photographers were busy over the corpse now. McGrath walked out and had himself driven back to his office. Reports would start coming in soon, and it was his job to correlate them.

They were not slow in arriving. Sergeant Brady had located the taxi by flashing Phyllis Titus' photograph to all the drivers working for the company whose cab had brought Mrs. Titus, and her escort, home.

"Any time you give me an assignment like this," Brady chuckled, "be sure the woman is just as attractive. The hackie must have really sized her up. She was with a man, but the driver didn't pay much attention to him. Maybe a little under six feet, slim and well-dressed. He had a kind of lean face, was clean-shaven, and wore a gray hat with all one side of the brim turned down. You know—fancy."

"Bring that driver in," McGrath said. "We'll need him for identification purposes."

Then Lieutenant Anderson checked in. He had found that Mrs. Titus, and the obviously identical man, had dined at the Club Restaurant and left there about 8:45. Anderson would bring in the waiter who had served them and who was sure he would be able to recognize the man.

McGrath leaned back, lining everything up. Mrs. Titus had dined with the killer, had taxied back to the apartment with him, and she had been strangled at precisely nine o'clock, when the radio program went off the air. Which meant that the murderer certainly had not waited long after they were in the apartment before he acted.

Reports from the detectives who were questioning the apartment house tenants were meager. Mrs. Titus seemed to have lived a quiet life without many friends, though several people gave descriptions which fitted the man who McGrath had just about made up his mind was the murderer.

Not a trace of a motive could be found and that worried him. Motives were important, especially in a case where there were no actual eye-witnesses. But motive could come later.

Once McGrath had his hands on this man, he told himself grimly, he would get the truth out of him!



An arm wound around Hank's neck, throttling his yell, and jerking his head back
(Chapter XIV)

CHAPTER II

Special D.A.

MEANWHILE the taxi driver, the doorman and the waiter were all assembled in a Headquarters room and made comfortable. Lieutenant Wysocki reported in last. It was around midnight when he phoned.

"You either got a crystal ball in your pocket, Captain," he said, "or you're plain lucky. About the cigar—it's an import. Not well-known, as you said. They cost a buck and a quarter each and have a limited sale. This particular cigar was extremely light in shade and the sales manager of the firm says he's pretty sure it was ordered by the tobacco stand in the lobby of the Fidelity Building."

"Ah," McGrath commented, "we're getting some place."

"We're already there," Wysocki said. "I routed out the guy who owns that cigar stand and he says he orders a box a week especially for one customer, and keeps them under the counter. The guy has an office on the nineteenth floor of the building. He answers the description the doorman gave, so all we have to do is wait for the man to show up."

"Throw your men around that building," McGrath ordered. "The murderer may intend to run for it. If so, he'll probably think he has a little time so he may go to his office. For money or papers. Have the tobacco dealer concealed somewhere so he can spot the man. I'll be over directly with three other people who can identify him."

At the scene, McGrath carefully posted his men and the witnesses. He put Wysocki in charge.

"I'm going to the nineteenth floor," he informed. "If this guy should show, have someone telephone me over the phone connecting the one elevator that's in use. I'll make the operator stand by to get the call."

The operator was willing to cooperate. He even suggested that the man they were after must be Theodore Slater, exporter, who maintained a large office on the designated floor. Slater was the only executive in the building who fitted

the description.

McGrath was contemplating a forced entrance into Slater's office when the operator called out hoarsely:

"One of your men just phoned. The guy is coming in. There goes the buzzer."

McGrath raced for the car. "Hide in the fire stairway," he told the operator. "And stay there. You might run into a slug if you don't."

McGrath sent the car down. It didn't make any too good a stop, but he opened the door anyway. He looked squarely at the man he was certain had been the last person to see Mrs. Titus alive. Not a bad-looking chap either, McGrath decided, and let his eyes dust smoothly over the man's hip pockets in search of a bulge.

"Nineteen," the man said. Then he looked at McGrath somewhat suspiciously. "You're new here?"

"Yes, sir," McGrath nodded in agreement. "My cousin is the regular operator, but he got an appendix attack and they had to take him to the hospital. So I'm just filling in. Tough too, on account of I got a job daytimes."

At the nineteenth floor, the man got out and walked rapidly toward the offices of Theodore Slater. He let himself in with a key, lights flicked on and the door slammed shut. McGrath hunted up the operator and got a passkey from him.

McGrath tested his holstered gun for fast drawing, propped his coat tails behind the holster so the gun butt was exposed, but couldn't be seen by anyone facing him. Quietly he inserted the key, turned it, and opened Slater's office door without a sound.

Slater was busy in an office marked "Private" on its opened door. McGrath stepped into that doorway. Slater was jamming papers into a briefcase. A medium-sized safe stood wide open. McGrath coughed just once.

Slater looked up and turned deathly pale. One hand was inside the briefcase. Suddenly it came out clutching an automatic. He fired twice, wild. McGrath fired once. His bullet ripped through Slater's right arm and the man dropped the weapon. He staggered over to a chair and sagged into it limply. His features were haggard.

"All right," he said, "go ahead and kill me!"

McGrath blinked a few times. "This is a pinch, not a kill."

Slater seemed shocked, but some of the color returned to his face.

"Are you a—police officer?"

McGrath kept the gun trained on him. He picked up the automatic, thrust it into his pocket and reached for the telephone. He spoke to Slater as he dialed.

"Sure I'm a cop. Captain of Homicide. Who'd you think I was—Paul Revere?"

THERE was a connection and McGrath spoke into the phone, but never took his eyes off Slater.

"Quinn?" he said. "This is McGrath. I've got a nice little murder case all wrapped up like for Christmas, with fancy ribbons and stickers on it. Suppose I bring the guy to your office. Right now, and we can iron the whole thing out while it's hot. Sure—in twenty minutes."

He was as good as his word, and in exactly that length of time he was facing a man who sat behind the big desk in the Special District Attorney's office, and who was obviously blind. His eyes were dead and staring and, adding nothing to the handsome appearance of his face, were deep and strangely pitted scars around the eyes.

His build was sturdy, with plenty of muscle. He had thick hair, a mobile mouth that was stern at the moment and long, slim fingers.

Standing slightly to the rear of his chair was an older man of perhaps fifty, though in men of his slight stature, age is hard to estimate. He was almost entirely bald, was by no means a handsome man, but gave the feeling of being suave and smooth. In fact, his name was "Silk" Kirby and the "silk" part fitted him perfectly. When he walked into an adjoining office, it could be noted that every step he took was smooth and fluid.

Captain McGrath occupied a chair before the desk and at his side and handcuffed to him was Theodore Slater, no longer dejected looking, but bright, alert and eager. He wanted to talk, but every time he opened his mouth, McGrath dug him with an elbow. McGrath had quickly told his own story, and that satisfied him.

Tony Quinn, whose sightless eyes seemed to be centered on the wall some distance to the left of the man he ad-

dressed, spoke in a calm voice.

"You see how it is, Mr. Slater. Everything is against you. So far, I have given you no opportunity to express yourself because I wanted you to know exactly where you stood. You may or may not talk. That is your privilege. You are an intelligent man, far above the ordinary. You have admitted knowing Phyllis Titus well, of having dined with her this evening, taking her home and being observed, successively by a waiter, a taxi driver and the doorman of her apartment house. Some ten minutes after you were last seen with Mrs. Titus, she was murdered."

Slater hesitated a moment, as if undecided.

"Mr. Quinn," he said finally, "I know about you. I know that once you were the district attorney of this county and a mighty good one. Now they've made you a special D.A. in charge of important stuff. If any other D.A. asked me questions, I would refuse to answer until I was provided with an attorney. However, because you are Tony Quinn, I know you will protect me even if you are convinced of my guilt."

A slow smile spread across Quinn's features. McGrath looked disgusted.

"I've known Mrs. Titus for about two years," Slater went on. "I knew all along that she was the widow of a murdering crook who died in the electric chair. In fact, Phyllis told me so the second night I took her out. It didn't make any difference. I suppose I fell in love with her when I first laid eyes on her. I asked her to marry me a hundred times. Last week she agreed. Then, tonight, she changed her mind. Reluctantly, I could tell, but definitely."

"Motive established," McGrath said mechanically. "A simple crime of passion."

"Let him talk," Quinn ordered. "Go ahead, Mr. Slater."

Slater bowed his head in unspoken thanks, forgetting entirely that such a gesture could mean nothing to a blind man.

"I took her to dinner," he said. "We had one cocktail. She refused to qualify her refusal to marry me. I took her home. In the cab she asked me not to accompany her into the building where she lived. I paid the driver before I got out of the cab. I helped her out then."

"The doorman, who identified me, isn't

lying when he is positive it was I who stepped out of the cab. He was some distance away. If he had been in front of the door where he belonged, he would have helped Phyllis out. Well, I merely said good night to Phyllis and walked away. By that time the doorman had his back turned. I walked to the corner and looked around. Phyllis was going into the building and there was a man with her. I couldn't see his face, and I haven't the faintest idea where he popped up from."

"Then it was this stranger whom the doorman saw going into the building?" Quinn asked.

"Yes, of course. He admits he didn't see the face of the man who actually went into the building."

"What did you do after that?" Quinn asked. "The crime was committed at about half a minute after nine. Perhaps you were able to reach somewhere and provide yourself with an alibi?"

"No. No, the appearance of that man startled me. I wondered who he was. Mainly because Phyllis had acted as if she were frightened. So after I rounded the corner, I waited there. I guess I waited ten minutes or so before I decided I was a fool and went directly home."

McGRATH interrupted sarcastically.

"You talk well, Slater. It's a pretty good little story, but how come an innocent man like you was packing up bonds and cash for a getaway when I found you? Why should an innocent man draw a gun and start shooting? See if you can explain that?"

Slater smiled wryly. "Captain, I won't even resent the sarcasm in your voice. I'm in too tough a spot. My answer is simply this. When I reached home, I heard about the murder over the radio. At once I assumed one of her dead husband's tough friends had killed her, and I supposed the man must have seen me leave Phyllis in front of her building. I reasoned that perhaps he thought I'd seen him too."

Quinn's face showed no expression. "So in fear of being the murderer's next victim, you proceeded to make plans for flight."

"That's right," Slater said. "When I entered my office building, Captain McGrath was on the elevator. He told me

some wild yarn about being on relief duty, and I didn't believe him. I thought he was either the murderer or one of his men. Pardon me, Captain, but you do look tough."

Quinn permitted himself a smile. "Underneath his ruggedness McGrath is really soft-hearted," he said. "Keep talking."

"I had a gun in the office. I thought if this elevator operator was a crook out to get me, I'd better be protected. Then, when he suddenly appeared in my office, I began shooting. There wasn't time to think. Fortunately I've never been any good with a gun."

Quinn shook his head slowly. "Mr. Slater, you have a good story. A logical one thought up by a cool mind. But it gets you nowhere. You haven't a witness to back up your story."

Slater hesitated. "Mr. Quinn," he said then, "what I'm going to say next may sound like a pipe dream. Maybe it is. Remember I stopped after I turned the corner from Phyllis' apartment house? It was dark by then. A car turned the same corner. For just one brief instant it flashed across a doorway directly across the street. Somebody was standing there. I hadn't noticed before because of the darkness."

Quinn leaned forward. "Perhaps if we can locate this man and he places you there at the time when Mrs. Titus screamed, you have an alibi."

Slater gave a curt, derisive laugh. "Here is the pay-off. This man was dressed completely in black. From head to foot. He even had on a—jet-black hood which covered his entire head."

Captain McGrath jumped up, pulling Slater along with him. McGrath's mouth opened, his eyes became brittle. Then he sat down again without saying a word.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Slater," Quinn said.

"You—don't believe me?" Slater asked, in a voice heavy with hopelessness.

"It isn't that I don't believe you, exactly. I have to go by facts and frankly they convict you, Mr. Slater. I'll ask for your indictment on first degree murder charges in the morning. That's all."

McGrath led Slater out of the room, but he returned in two minutes and stowed handcuffs into a hip pocket.

"I turned him over to a couple of the boys, Tony," he said.

Quinn chuckled. "I know why you

came back, but before we go into that, I'd like to talk to the others. Whom have you got out there, Mac?"

"Max Bethall, Phyllis Titus' uncle. He's a high-class bum. Then Hank Titus, her brother-in-law, barged in and he demands to see you. Hank is a crook and has never even been arrested. Along with Hank is Joe Titus' ex-partner in murder. A gorilla named Adam Hewitt. And maybe by now there's an architect named Oliver Owen whom I sent for after hearing Slater's story."

"Architect?" Quinn asked.

"Yes. You see I found out that Phyllis Titus had been planning to remodel a house in the country so that she and Slater could occupy it after they were married. They went to see this Oliver Owen about it. I figured he could testify that their intentions had reached the serious stage and when she finally turned him down, Slater got sore with plenty of reason."

"Oh—I see," Quinn said thoughtfully. "Well, send in that precious duo of Joe Titus' relatives, and his ex-partner."

CHAPTER III

Nemesis of Evil



BETHALL came first. He was the uncle of the murdered woman and a super-dignified, pompous man. He wore nose glasses on a nose so small that the glasses seemed about to drop off every time he breathed. He was gray-haired and had an obvious flare for show-

manship. He was waving one arm theatrically now.

"I demand the facts!" he declaimed. "My dear niece was murdered and I am her only surviving relative. I want to know all about this ghastly crime."

"Captain McGrath will be glad to oblige you, Mr. Bethall," Quinn said. "First however, did you know Mr. Slater? And were you aware of the fact that he and your niece were to be married?"

"Of course I did, and I did not approve," Max Bethall declared. "Slater has small, close-set eyes. I don't trust him. I never did, and it seems my judg-



McGRATH

ment of his character was good."

"Is Hank Titus present?" Quinn asked.

Hank was much like his brother who had died in the electric chair. A barrel-chested man with frosty blue eyes that were heavily lidded. His manner was quietly arrogant.

"It gets me," he said, "how they let a blind man be the D.A."

Quinn showed no animosity. "I get by, Hank," he said. "I sent your brother to the chair and if some of the things I've heard about you are true, I'll probably send you there too. However, at the moment I want to know if you possess any facts which might help us convict Slater."

Hank put a cigarette between his lips and rolled it around a bit.

"Do you think for one minute that I'd talk if I did?" he said. "The law and I are enemies. I wouldn't even help convict a man who murdered my sister-in-law."

"Good night," Quinn told him. "Adam Hewitt—I presume you are here since I heard three sets of footsteps enter. If you intend to act as Titus has done, there is no use in my wasting any time on you."

Adam Hewitt laughed. Only his voice laughed. The expression on his wide face was completely blank, as if no emotion whatever could push through to the surface. He was tall and slender, but his face was fat, and seemed all out of

proportion to the rest of him. A deadly man, Quinn knew. Capable of murder without a twinge of conscience.

"The only funny thing about this," Hewitt said, "is my being asked to a D.A.'s office and not have it be a pinch. Sorry, Quinn, I hardly knew Phyllis. Joe, her husband, made me stay away when he was alive, and I kept away after he was dead. Slater I never heard of. Glad to have been of help to you, eh?"

Quinn allowed himself a soft laugh and dismissed the trio. McGrath didn't move. He waited until he heard the door of the outer office close. Then he edged his chair close to Quinn's desk.

"Okay," he said, "let's have it. Slater told a wild yarn. I don't believe a word of it. Do you?"

"How can I, when he has nothing to back up his story?"

"Nothing except a man dressed all in black who wore a black hood over his head," growled McGrath. "How about that, Tony?"

"You take it for granted that the man Slater saw was the Black Bat," Quinn said. "Furthermore, you have always assumed that I am the Black Bat. Now you want to know what I intend doing about it. If I am the Black Bat, then I can alibi Slater. I must know that he can't be guilty so, as district attorney, how can I send him to the chair? It's an interesting situation, Mac. Let me know how it comes out."

McGrath got up. "You can't horse around about this, Tony. Sure I think you're the Black Bat, but if you are and you did see Slater, you won't prosecute him. You'd rather own up to the fact that your blindness is all pretense and that you're the Black Bat. Otherwise, while you protect your own dual identity, you'll be deliberately sending an innocent man to the chair."

Quinn stretched his arms toward the ceiling and yawned.

"I'm going home, Mac," he said wearily. "You dragged me out of a nice warm and cozy house. We'll go to trial with Slater's case in ten to fourteen days. The charge is still first degree murder."

"I guess you can play around with it up to a certain point," McGrath insisted. "But to convince me, I've got to hear you demand a guilty-without-mercy verdict from the jury."

If McGrath hadn't been so involved with his own swirling thoughts, he might

have noticed Quinn give a mild jerking movement. Quinn's highly sensitive ears had picked up the sound of the outer door latch closing gently.

Someone had been listening in the outer office. Someone who knew that Captain McGrath suspected that Tony Quinn was not blind and, moreover, that Quinn was the elusive figure in black known as the Black Bat. Such information in the hands of the wrong man could be dangerous.

Because Tony Quinn was the Black Bat!

WHEN Quinn had been the duly elected head of the district attorney's office some years before, he had gained considerable fame from his manner of handling cases and his methods in stamping out crime. There had even been a good deal of talk about his turning into material for the governorship.

But two desperate criminals had changed that when they attempted to destroy evidence by hurling acid upon it. Characteristically, Quinn had tried to protect the evidence and had been hit squarely in the eyes with that powerful corrosive.

He had gone blind on the spot. The acid had eaten fast and deeply. It had created those ugly scars around his eyes. There was nothing anyone could do for him. He resigned his position, naturally, and spent months in search of a doctor who could give him some hope. Though he traveled half-way around the world, before it was torn by flames of war, he had received no encouragement.

So he had returned home, convinced that the remainder of his life would be spent in darkness. He developed his sense of touch to help him get around. His hearing became abnormally acute. He could detect odors no ordinary organ of smell could find. All of this helped, but it didn't replace his sight.

Fortunately he was wealthy, though money couldn't buy back his sight at any price. Silk Kirby had come to him then, Silk, a confidence man without a peer. He had left a trail of empty pocketbooks and broken avaricious hopes from Coast to Coast. He was broke himself when he entered Quinn's home to rob it, but instead he had stayed and had become Quinn's eyes, after the blind man had, by a long confidential talk, shown him the error of his ways. And Silk Kirby

had never backslid, had in all ways proved worthy of the trust Tony Quinn reposed in him.

Now Silk was more than a servant. He was Quinn's close friend and confidant, and when Quinn had become the Black Bat, Silk had shown himself to be a willing and competent aid.

Before that, however, a girl had injected herself into Quinn's life. She had come to him from a town in the Midwest, with a proposition which had sounded weird in those days. Her father, she told Quinn, was a police officer who was slowly dying from a bullet wound he had received in a running battle with crooks. Always an admirer of Tony Quinn's work in his crusades against crime, and deeply sympathetic because of the former district attorney's tragic blindness, the girl's father wanted Quinn to have the healthy portions of his own eyes.

The girl, Carol Baldwin, finally persuaded Quinn to undergo an operation. It was performed by a little known surgeon in a city far from New York. Carol's father died soon afterwards, and Quinn, accompanied by the faithful Silk, returned home to wait.

Then one night, when he removed the bandages, according to the surgeon's instructions, he had discovered that he could see once more. In addition, nature had granted him a bonus for his months of suffering—the phenomenon of being able to see as well in total darkness as in full daylight, even to distinguish the faintest pastel colors in a gloom through which ordinary eyes could not see at all.

The surgical miracle had come to be repeated many times during the years that had elapsed since Quinn had undergone it, but probably he alone had found not only sight restored but the ability to see in the dark.

Quinn's experience was one of those inexplicable quirks of nature, and in his case it became a decided asset. For Tony Quinn had made up his mind that if ever he should see again he would dedicate his life to carrying on his fight against crime. Moreover, he was determined to carry it directly to the underworld and forge his battles with the same ruthlessness which killers and crooks employed.

Such work, of course, was dangerous, and could be performed best under the mantle of anonymity. So he had de-

vised a covering personality under which he could work. That character wore a black hood—to cover the telltale scars around Quinn's eyes—and a distinguishing, all-covering black cape which fluttered awesomely as he flitted from danger spot to danger spot.

SOON would-be killers began to think hard before they committed a crime. They had to consider not only the punishment the law would mete out to discovered offenders, but also the unrelenting hunt which the Black Bat would start out on and never stop until his man was run to earth.

As a tribute to her father's memory and his fight against criminals, Carol Baldwin joined Quinn, and the Black Bat's force became a trio. Soon one other joined them to make it a foursome—a huge, ungainly giant of a man named O'Leary for whom Tony Quinn had once done a favor, and which the big man had never forgotten. At some time O'Leary had been given an ordinary first name, but because of his size he had inevitably been dubbed "Butch," and his real name had been forgotten long since.

Butch, unlike Silk, was not smooth, and sometimes it took him a while to think things out. But he made up for all that by his intense loyalty and the use of his brute strength which was invaluable to the Black Bat.

In recognition of Tony Quinn's undoubted talents as a crime fighter, the blind man had been appointed to the office of Special District Attorney during recent years, and given charge of important, and unusually difficult cases. The manner in which he handled them made people forget he was blind—or supposed to be sightless.

Only Captain McGrath doubted the special district attorney, and somehow the doughty captain had got it in his mind that Tony Quinn was not blind, and that he actually was the Black Bat. And McGrath had taken a solemn oath to run down the Black Bat.

Not that McGrath didn't agree that the existence of such a man fighting on the side of the law was a decided asset to the department. But McGrath was a stubborn believer that everyone should abide by the law, and the Black Bat too often forgot legalities.

In his career he had killed men when it became necessary. He had robbed

homes and safes, helped suspects and prisoners until they talked. In fact, his methods of operation were hardly different from those of the crooks he battled—but they got results.

All of which made the Black Bat an enemy and an ally of the law. McGrath didn't bother to distinguish. In his mind there was only the fact that the Black Bat was an enemy of the law, and that there was a warrant out for his arrest. Sometimes McGrath came too painfully close to success for Quinn's comfort. More often he merely blundered about in his attempts to prove that Quinn could see, and that he prowled the night in a black hood.

But through it all, Tony Quinn, Special District Attorney, went his suave way, attending to the business of the law without fear or favor—as now.

Guided by Silk's arm and a white cane held in his other hand, Quinn walked down the outside steps of the City Building in which his office was located. His car was parked at the curb. A patrolman saluted, though he knew the gesture was lost on Quinn. He spoke a pleasant good evening and Quinn answered him, calling the man by name. Which elicited no surprise because Quinn had long ago proved he could identify people by their voices and footsteps.

Silk helped him into the car and drove off quickly. Neither spoke until they had put some distance between themselves and the City Building. Then Silk made a remark.

"Well, sir, it doesn't look so good."

"It's a spot I've always hoped to stay out of, Silk," Quinn said, "In my position I shall have to prosecute Slater, because he hasn't a leg to stand on. Everything is against him—motive, opportunity, and the fact that he tried to run away, even tried to shoot himself clear. No—Slater hasn't a chance. Any jury would convict him."

"And only the Black Bat could prove Slater's innocence," Silk said musingly.

"Yes, I was in that doorway," Quinn said. "You knew I was on the prowling that night. I'll tell you all about it when we're home and have Carol and Butch to listen."

Silk made a sharp turn, straightened out the wheel and headed down a blind street at the end of which Tony Quinn lived.

"You intend to find the real killer, of

course?" Silk said.

"How else can I save Slater? You know as well as I do that if I fail, if Slater is doomed, I shall have to admit my double identity—and that will be the end of the Black Bat. I'm in a jam, Silk."

"We all are," Silk amended gently.

"Yes, of course. All four of us. And the case has tie-ins I don't like. We're going to have no picnic proving Slater's innocence, and it may become highly dangerous."

CHAPTER IV

Millions in Art



SILK stopped the car in front of a gate set in a neat white picket fence. Beyond it lay Quinn's large house. It was surrounded by spacious grounds, unusual for a city home, but it was an old place which had come into being before real estate had become so pre-

cious.

The neighborhood was sedate and quiet. Other homes were similar to Quinn's. Except in two unique respects. In Quinn's home was a secret laboratory in which all the devices used in modern crime hunting were hidden. And there was a tunnel which led from a small garden house, beneath the grounds to the secret lab. By this means the Black Bat could come and go without the danger of being seen. And his aides could slip in quietly and leave without arousing any suspicion.

The north side of Quinn's property fronted on a narrow lane which he alone used. It led to his garages at the rear, shrouding the property well and being almost made to order for the Black Bat's purposes.

Quinn entered the house alone, as always playing his part of a blind man. Tapping his cane before him he moved slowly, and had some trouble getting the key into the front door lock.

Once inside he still carried on the pretense until his acute hearing told him the house was empty and that no spies were lurking anywhere. Then the mask of blindness dropped away and his eyes became alive and sparkingly clear. His

movements became sure and quick. He went to a telephone and called Carol who, by prearrangement, would reach Butch.

Some thirty minutes later Quinn arose from his favorite chair in front of the library fireplace. Silk had drawn all the shades. Quinn tucked his cane under one arm, approached a section of the bookcases which lined all four walls from floor to ceiling, and touched a hidden control. One narrow section of the bookcase opened silently and he stepped into the lab.

Carol came forward. A trim, blond and lovely girl. Quinn took both her hands and held them tightly. Both hoped some day to be married, but they knew that day would not arrive until the Black Bat had ceased his campaign against crime. For while he ventured out in his black clothing, the game was too dangerous. Neither one ever spoke of it these days, but both knew how matters stood, and were content to wait.

Butch was straddling a straight-backed chair and overlapping so much of it he seemed, oddly enough, to be sitting on air. He had a large head that reminded one of the shaggy head of a St. Bernard. His neck was practically nonexistent, and powerful shoulders seemed to be built in line with Butch's protruding chin. He had massive arms, hands that could hold a volley ball in a tight grip, and he was big from head to foot. Yet he could move with the grace of a fencing master. There was a broad grin of welcome on his face now.

Quinn sat down on a davenport and pulled Carol down beside him. Silk came in, and Quinn began to talk to his little band of crime fighters in a calm voice.

"A week ago," he said, "I visited a man named Douglas Shane, a particularly selfish person who has more money than is good for him. I think he has been divorced four times, which is some indication of his kindly nature. My visit was to milk him of some money for charity. I got it, incidentally. But Shane, like everyone else, was convinced of my blindness and was not aware that I saw a large package arrive while I was there, and saw him open it."

Quinn paused, passed around cigarettes and held a lighter for all of them. Then he leaned back comfortably and went on.

"Shane couldn't wait to open the pack-



Butch's mighty fist made such a direct journey to Bethall's chin that the man didn't have time to get the gun into firing position (Chapter IX)

age and, thinking I could see nothing, he proceeded to get on with it. It was an oil portrait. I wish I owned it. So do a million other people, and a certain museum would very much like to have it back hanging among its collection of this artist's work."

"Stolen, huh?" Butch broke in.

Quinn nodded assent. "For four or five years, right up until the time Joe Titus was arrested for murder, a large number of such treasures had been deftly filched, and by a crook so clever that he left not a particle of a trail. I have always believed Joe Titus was the man."

FOR just a moment, everyone was silent.

"But Titus was a brute of a killer," Carol objected then.

"Yes, I know," said Quinn. "And I also know that Mr. Shane had obtained one of those stolen portraits for his own secret collection. He's a type who wouldn't care if it was stolen or if it was drenched in blood. I decided to work on the theory that Joe Titus had originally stolen it, and that the portrait had remained hidden all this time. I had intended to interview Phyllis Titus, who was murdered tonight."

"Just what gives with this Phyllis?" Carol asked. "I've seen her around, and she appeared to be a nice person. Not a girl to marry a heel like Titus."

"I have investigated that," Quinn said. "It seems that Phyllis' uncle, Max Bethall, arranged the introduction and Titus courted her with considerable fury. He had a likable personality, if you recall. A good-looking man, too, with polished manners. I doubt that Phyllis knew what he was until we arrested him. Even then she stuck by him, which is to her credit."

"Do you think she was murdered because she knew about that portrait and the other stuff Joe Titus had maybe swiped?" Silk asked.

"That's a better motive than the one we have pinned on Slater," Quinn observed drily. "But how can we make it public? Here is my belief. Joe Titus worked for, or with, another man who stayed in the background, but selected the articles Titus was to steal. Titus simply wasn't the kind of man to select fine things."

"How much was stolen, altogether?" Carol asked.

"Get a grip on yourselves," Quinn replied. "More than two million dollars worth of stuff vanished."

Silk whistled shrilly. Butch made funny noises deep in his throat, and Carol just gasped in surprise.

"Two million," Quinn repeated with emphasis. "Though you'd be surprised how fast those treasures can add up to such a sum. Until Shane brought that portrait to light, not one of the objects was ever heard of again after the thefts. I have a theory about that. The stuff was stolen just before the war. Exports were cut off abruptly. Now they are gradually being lifted, and it's time to drag out the treasures and get rid of them in South America, perhaps, where there is still plenty of money."

"Maybe this man Shane is actively mixed up in it," said Carol, "and didn't make a purchase at all. He may simply have had the portrait sent to his home, to admire it before it was finally disposed of."

Quinn glanced approvingly at Carol. "Quite possible. So we have two things to work on. Find the loot that was stolen years ago. Far more important than that, find the man who murdered Phyllis Titus, so Ted Slater won't be sent to the chair. By me!"

"The Black Bat was near the scene of the crime tonight," Silk explained, "and had Slater in sight at the time of the killing. He couldn't very well have done it."

"I had already looked over Mrs. Titus' apartment," Quinn said, "but had found nothing of interest. I took up a position outside to wait for her return. I could see the curb in front of the building, but not the door. I saw Slater get out of the cab. Then he came in my direction, walking swiftly. He stopped around the corner and peered back. To study him better I stepped almost out of my hiding place, and car headlights caught me just as Slater looked in my direction."

"Then whoever intercepted her must have been in the building lobby, waiting," Silk reasoned. "All he had to do was step out, take her arm, and lead her inside. It has to be that, because you were in one direction, north of the entrance, remember, and the doorman was south of it."

"You're right," Quinn agreed. "However, the Black Bat could alibi Slater, except that the Black Bat cannot go into

CHAPTER V

Shane's Secret

court, take the witness stand and prove anybody's innocence. Not without being locked up himself. What makes it worse is that I, Tony Quinn, must prosecute the man quickly and thoroughly. We haven't much time to find the killer, either, because there's a light calendar on the criminal docket now."

"You tell us how to get started," Butch said ponderously. "We're all waiting."

QUINN arose and began pacing the lab floor.

"I want Douglas Shane watched," he said, after a time. "Not for long, because he's going to have a visitor in black shortly. Carol, suppose you tackle him. Be especially vigilant after the Black Bat leaves him."

Carol got the address from Silk, walked to the trap-door and went down the ladder. With a wave of her hand she disappeared. Quinn turned to give Butch his instructions.

"You take Max Bethall, the uncle of the dead girl. And remember that he engineered the meeting of Phyllis and Joe Titus. He did it smoothly, and in such a manner as to indicate he might have been bribed to handle the matter. Find out whom he sees, where he goes. All you can about him."

Butch hurried off, and Silk followed Quinn out of the laboratory. When the secret door closed, Quinn's eyes assumed their dead blankness once more. He sat down before the fireplace. Silk raised the shades, then served Quinn a mild highball.

"Do I fit in anywhere, sir?" he asked.

"You always do," Quinn said, and smiled. "However, for tonight I'll work alone. I look forward to nothing exciting."



DOUGLAS SHANE lived in one of those suburban houses that set far back on their grounds and resemble a miniature estate. It was a small house, however, compared to others he had owned, for this one had only eighteen rooms, fifteen of which he never used

and hardly ever saw.

Shane was a middle-aged man who was positive he looked no more than twenty-five. The wrinkles and sagging flesh beneath his eyes spoiled that illusion. But he was a happy man this night, for he had something no other person on earth owned.

It was a great secret and he enjoyed keeping it, though he told himself that sooner or later he would have to let someone else in on it, because owning a portrait like this in secret wasn't half as much fun as when someone else envied him. But he would take his time there, select those among his friends he trusted implicitly.

Shane also fancied himself a rather dangerous individual. He kept guns in every room of the house and sometimes spent hours in target practise at the rear of the house. Right now, to make the scene dramatic, he had a Luger lying on the table beside the highball glass.

Shane himself occupied a chair close by the table. Across the room, framed by purple velvet drapes, was his new

[Turn page]



...ITS QUALITY

HITS THE SPOT! ★

acquisition. Cleverly arranged lighting brought out all of the artist's uncanny skill with colors. Shane really appreciated and understood fine art and he was enjoying himself to the hilt.

And he was safe. Even if a burglar entered the house, he would never locate this particular room. It was well concealed and not even the servants who came and went with annoying frequency, ever learned of it. For the portrait wasn't the only art treasure installed there. Shane had others. Some legally obtained, some—like the new portrait—bought without asking any questions and without dickering as to price.

Shane picked up his highball glass, tilted his head slightly and studied a fresh angle of the portrait.

"Superb," he mused aloud. "Wonderful. I'll have to let Beaumont see it some day. Drive him crazy."

The lights went out then and the highball glass slipped out of Shane's grasp and hit the floor with a crash. Shane was not a coward—not when it came to defending his valuables, so he moved quickly. He scooped up the Luger and flicked off the safety. He would have to be careful, he thought. If he was compelled to shoot a burglar, it would be necessary to hide some of these valuables before calling the police. One thing in his favor lay in the fact that this room was virtually sound-proof.

He faced the only entrance, a narrow door, and the gun was pointed with a steady hand. He felt a mild breeze across his face. It was gone almost as quickly as it came. He knew, then, that whoever the intruder might be, he was in this room.

"Mr. Shane," a gentle voice said out of the darkness, "put down your gun."

Shane fired twice in the direction of the voice. "I'll put you down!" he roared.

"Not that time, Mr. Shane," the same voice spoke from the left, a dozen feet away from the direction in which Shane had fired. "And don't shoot now, because I'm standing right in front of your portrait. If you missed me, you'd put a nice bullet-hole through it."

"I'd rather riddle the thing than let a crook get away with it!" Shane yelled and fired two more shots.

There was intense silence. He wondered if he had shot so well in the darkness that he had killed the man instantly.

Maybe he had just crumpled to the floor without making any sound.

Shane didn't move. He was beginning to tremble. If only the man would speak, give him a direction in which to shoot. But there was just an eerie silence. Shane moved forward a few paces until he knew he was directly beneath the portrait. He lifted one leg and moved it about, experimentally searching the floor and hoping he wouldn't yell if he encountered a corpse.

SOMEONE touched him on the shoulder. He started to whirl around. A gloved hand came down like a rocket and hit his gun wrist. It was a hard blow with the side of the hand and it made Shane's whole arm nerveless. He desperately tried to retain a grip on the Luger. He couldn't. The gun fell to the floor.

"Who—what—are you?" Shane demanded. "To move about in the dark the way you do?"

"I like the darkness, Mr. Shane. All bats like darkness."

Shane tottered in the direction of his chair, found it, and sat down heavily.

"The Black Bat," he said. "I might have guessed. At any rate I know I'm in no danger. I'm—sorry I opened fire. I thought you were a thief."

"I am," the Black Bat chuckled. "I've come to steal your portrait and turn it back to the museum from which it was stolen. No—stay in that chair. Don't try to get out of it. I can see everything you do. I can even tell you the color of your socks—a violent yellow. And your tie—an unbecoming blue. Your shirt is blue also, a lighter shade than the cravat. Your suit is a gray pinstripe, and you have a blue handkerchief in the pocket of the coat."

"You can see in the dark," Shane marveled. "Look here, can't we come to some sort of an understanding? I realize you're not a crook, but then again, no man is averse to a little extra money."

"I have quite enough," the Black Bat told him. "But I am willing to bargain with you."

"Ah!" Shane sat upright in his eagerness. "I knew we'd make a deal!"

"I'm glad you feel that way about it," the Black Bat said blandly. "The portrait will be returned to its rightful owner. Anonymously, if you tell me where you got it. Or if you refuse,

they'll find it hanging around your neck and you'll be uncomfortably seated on the steps of Police Headquarters. You'd find it most embarrassing, Shane."

"I bought it blind," Shane said, much too fast.

"So? You simply wanted the portrait, wished for it, and left a suitable sum of money anywhere and the portrait just materialized in your hands. You can tell that to the police, Mr. Shane."

"No—wait!" Shane cried. "I—I can't stand the publicity. You're right. It should go back. I'll ship it back tomorrow."

"Tonight, Mr. Shane. And I shall watch you do it."

"Tonight, then," Shane groaned. "But don't make me tell you where I got it. Those people are killers."

"They'll stop being killers the instant I know who they are and find them. I'll see that you are amply protected. Talk, Shane."

"Oh, what's the use!" Shane grumbled. "You probably know almost the whole thing anyhow. They attracted my attention by letter. I answered by writing to James Jasper at some address on Fifth Avenue. It was a blind. Then they phoned and I kept an appointment at a hotel room. In the Regal. I forget the room number. The portrait was there."

"They told me to get fifty five-hundred-dollar bills, put them in a plain envelope and mail them from the box just down the street from my house. I wanted that portrait, so I did as they asked. They got the money all right. Postoffice inspectors are still wondering what was stolen out of that burgled mail-box."

"And the portrait was delivered how?"

"By ordinary messenger. I tried to find out who hired the man, but it seems Western Union has no record of the transaction. Maybe it was one of the crooks in a messenger's uniform. I don't know. At any rate I had the portrait, they had the money, and we were all satisfied." He added disgustedly, "Until now."

"How well you tell that story," the Black Bat said. "Was it typed out for memorizing, or did you learn it by repeating what someone else said? Now let's stop playing games. Tell the truth, Shane."

"What kind of a devil are you?" Shane moaned. "All right, you might as well

turn me over to the police. I'll be punished for owning a stolen portrait, but that's much better than being killed. Shall I wrap it up? The original packing is still in this room."

"If that's the way you want it," the Black Bat replied. "The police will ask you the same question. They might not be as gentle when you give evasive answers. But that's your lookout. Wrap the portrait, Mr. Shane."

The Black Bat snapped on a flashlight for Shane's benefit. Shane fetched a wooden crate, took down the portrait, and slid it into the frame. He wrapped the original heavy brown paper around it, tied the whole thing with the cord and propped it against the wall.

"Won't you be content just to take the portrait?" he pleaded. "After all, I'm out twenty-five thousand dollars, and that's punishment enough."

"You pay that much in alimony," the Black Bat laughed. "To be frank, I want to know about how you acquired the portrait, because I think the man or men who sold it to you killed someone."

"They're not playing for marbles." Shane spread his hands in a hopeless gesture. "That's the impression I received—that they'd kill to keep a man quiet. Why expose me to that?"

"Take it easy now," the Black Bat warned. "Walk ahead of me and do exactly as I say. Don't worry about those crooks. The only thing you'll be exposed to will be the Police Department's identification camera. Get going!"

Shane turned toward the door. His eyes were narrowed a trifle. He wondered if the Black Bat recalled that this secret door opened on such powerful springs that it would literally snap shut. He'd had it made that way in case he had to get out of the room in a hurry. He also wondered if the Black Bat knew that the electrical impulses controlling that door would not be affected by crippling the regular house current.

Shane put the flat of his hand against the door, found the control button with the other hand, and gave the door a hard shove, opening it about halfway. He twisted sideward, passed through, and let go of the door. It obediently snapped shut like a rat-trap. But Shane was not through. He reached for the outside control. He could lock the door this way, prevent the Black Bat from escaping.

He gave a gleeful laugh, raced through the house and, despite the cold, didn't bother to take his hat or coat. He passed through the kitchen door, ran across the grounds toward his garage and in two minutes was driving a fast coupe along the driveway at a dizzy clip.

The Black Bat set down the cumbersome portrait. If he hadn't been holding it, he might have seized Shane the moment he started his escape. He tried the door, discovered it couldn't be opened from within by ordinary means and promptly slanted the muzzle of his gun at the control button.

The whole thing operated by electricity, he knew. The gun blazed. He pushed at the door. Nothing happened. He began to feel like a caged animal. Undoubtedly Sahne was going for help, and the only place he could afford to go was to the men from whom he had obtained the portrait. If they got here, the Black Bat's position might become highly perilous.

He fired two more shots. It was quite useless. The door was made to hold, and it held. He looked around for some instrument with which to smash his way through, and found nothing.

A full ten minutes went by. He stiffened and reached for his gun. Someone was methodically pounding the walls. He hastily put his ear against the door. The pounding kept on. Not the hard banging of a man's fist, but lighter, as if a woman were searching for some secret entrance.

It must be Carol, who should have been posted outside to watch Shane. She had tumbled to the fact that the Black Bat must be a prisoner. He banged the butt of his gun on the door. It drew her promptly. She answered him by several thumps. Finally the door opened when she had located the spring.

SHE was white with terror and clung to him for a moment.

"Tony," she whispered, "I was afraid you were d-dead!"

"I guess I might have been in a short time," he said soberly. "What happened out there? Tell me while we leave this place."

"I watched the house from the moment I got here. No one left or entered. I knew Shane was inside, because I saw him through a window. Then all the lights winked out. I knew you frequent-

ly killed them, so I wasn't worried. I waited, and it wasn't long before I heard a car start. I was running toward my own car to follow whoever left when I thought that maybe you were—were still inside."

"You should forget me at times like this," the Black Bat said mildly. "Though I'm rather grateful you didn't this once."

"I tried to forget you might be in danger," she explained. "I began following Shane. He was far ahead of me, but I could have caught him. Then I saw your car hidden off the road, and I knew you were still in the house. So I went back. Tony, it's much more important to me to know you are safe than to follow a dozen murderers."

They were outside now, at the rear of the house. "You're forgiven," the Black Bat said. "That's what I like about you and Silk and Butch. You have intelligence enough to break the rules when necessary. Now listen carefully. Stay here, under cover. Shane may come back. Or someone else may come. No matter who it is, don't interfere and above all, don't let them see you. Just try to identify whoever comes, then slip quietly away and come back to the lab. Remember now—no heroics. I want you safe, too."

"I'll be good," she vowed. "Where are you going?"

"To surprise the curator of the Museum of Arts by delivering this portrait to him. Then I'm going home, too, and try to assemble some facts."

CHAPTER VI

A Corpse Comes Calling



TONY QUINN slipped away so quietly that Carol hardly knew he had left her. She heard the quick whirr of his car starter and that was all. Carol promptly sought a hiding place from which she could cover the front entrance to the house as the sound of the car

died away.

The Black Bat drove swiftly, and made a stop at the museum curator's home, boldly rang the bell and politely

handed the wrapped portrait to the man who got out of bed to answer the ring.

"Please don't be alarmed," the Black Bat said. "I'm merely delivering a stolen portrait which belongs to a Philadelphia Art Museum. Will you look at it and attest to its genuineness?"

"Of course! Of course!"

The curator promptly tore the paper away, emitted a cry of astonishment, and studied the artist's signature intently.

"It's genuine!" he exclaimed. "Thank

and geared for remarkable speed.

The Black Bat no longer wore his hood. It would have attracted too much attention. When he was abroad, in public places, he wore a wide-brimmed hat which shadowed his face enough to hide the acid-etched scars around his eyes.

Leaving the coupe he merged with the darkness, passed through a gate to the rear, and entered the garden house. There he opened the cleverly concealed door into the tunnel and a moment or



SILK

you very much. I hope you also have the man who stole it."

"I will have—with luck," the Black Bat promised. "Good night, sir."

The curator stood in the open door. He saw the Black Bat reach the top porch step, and then he seemed to fade into nothingness. There was not a sound. He wagged his gray head in wonder and locked up the house doubly tight. Then he spent two hours looking at the portrait, after making a phone call to Philadelphia.

The Black Bat drove his car straight home. He parked the rather worn-looking coupe on the narrow side street beside his home. That coupe was peculiar. No law agency could ever trace its registration plates to Tony Quinn and, while the car looked shabby, it was weighted

so later he was in his laboratory.

Through means of an elaborate signal system, Silk knew that the Black Bat had returned. By the time Silk reached the lab, the Black Bat had temporarily passed out of existence and blind Tony Quinn, clad in gray tweeds, was waiting for him.

"My mission was only partially successful," Quinn said. "I recovered a stolen portrait from Shane, but he got away. You didn't hear from Butch?"

"Just a couple of routine reports. Max Bethall seems to realize he might be under surveillance and is acting like a good little boy."

"More and more, Silk, I'm beginning to get the impression that when Joe Titus handled these important thefts, he was working under orders from someone

else. I've studied Titus' record. He was a smart crook, granted, but a man brought up in semi-poverty who never had the opportunity, nor the inclination, to learn what art treasures are valuable, or why. His judgment of what was valuable and what was not, would have been nil."

"My opinion of him exactly," Silk agreed. "But he was a smooth article. Perhaps not such a bad sort in his home life and ordinary movements, but perdition-on-wheels when he went on a job."

"The stolen stuff has been missing for years," Quinn went on. "Shane's portrait was the first portion of that loot to be brought into the open. The stuff couldn't have been shipped to South America or anywhere else, unless recently, and I have my doubts about that. Even wealthy South Americans who buy such things have been too busy with political uprisings and all that to have had much time to think of spending fortunes on luxuries like these art treasures."

"Then the loot must have been well-hidden somewhere and stayed there even after Titus went to the chair," Silk said. "What I don't understand is that if Titus hid the stuff, how did anyone else find it? Or did Titus send word to someone? If he did, why hasn't the stuff been in circulation before? Titus has been dead for three years."

QUINN leaned back and studied the ceiling of the lab.

"Ted Slater mentioned something about Mrs. Titus owning a house which she meant to fix up for them after they were married," he said thoughtfully. "She even went so far as to hire an architect. Then, without giving Slater a single reason, she called the whole thing off. Why?"

"Maybe she discovered this old house contained her husband's loot," Silk said, "and she didn't know what to do about it. If she was genuinely in love with Ted Slater, she wouldn't have wanted to bring him in on it. Maybe that's why she dropped the marriage plans."

"Tomorrow we locate this house," Quinn affirmed. "If it can be arranged, you go there and inspect it. Right now I think it's time we arranged a little sleep for ourselves."

Before they could leave the lab, a colored bulb on a panel studded with

bulbs flashed to indicate that someone was in the tunnel. It was Carol.

"Shane didn't return," she explained, when she came into the lab. "But someone else came to the house and walked in as if he owned the place. The front door was unlocked, I think. At least I heard no key scraping. This man tried the light switches. They didn't work, so he pulled a flashlight from his pocket. He went through the first floor of the house and then left, in something of a hurry."

"Did you recognize him?" Quinn asked.

"I'd know him again if I saw him," Carol told him. "When he went back to his car, he was illuminated for a moment by the headlights. I'd say he was about thirty-five, not a bad-looking man, and dressed quite well. Certainly he couldn't be classified as some tough mobster. I got his license plate numbers."

She reeled them off and Silk made notes. Without waiting for orders, Silk went to the phone and checked with the Motor Vehicle Department. It was handy for the Black Bat that he could use Tony Quinn's official position to get such information.

Silk turned back from the phone. "The name is Christopher Gentry, and he lives at two-two-five-nine Waverly Avenue. The name isn't familiar to me."

"I've heard it or read it before," Carol said musingly. "Though I don't know where. What do you think of Mr. Christopher Gentry, Tony?"

"I don't know. Shane went for help. Perhaps Gentry was sent to find out if Shane had told the truth and the Black Bat really was imprisoned in Shane's hall of art treasures. When he didn't find me, he vamoosed fast, thinking I might be somewhere around. At any rate Gentry seemed to know that the house was unoccupied. Therefore he must have been in direct, or indirect contact with Shane. We'll look up Mr. Gentry in the morning."

"And where do I go from here?" Carol queried.

"You can cover Hank Titus, though the job won't be either an easy or a safe one. Titus is a crook like his brother was, but even more dangerous because he has less brains. He's the push-'em-over type, with no more mercy than he has sense. Still, he should be covered."

Carol hefted her large handbag. "I'm

packing a gun, Tony. It knocks 'em down whether they are tough or soft. I'm not afraid of Hank Titus."

"All right then, but postpone it until morning. Silk will give you a file on Hank. It may help you."

Quinn entered the library and soon afterward Silk followed. Silk began preparing the house for the night.

Quinn was tapping his way up the staircase to the second floor when the phone rang. Silk answered it, said only, "Thanks," and hung up. He opened a table drawer and removed a heavy gun.

"Carol," he told Quinn curtly. "She called from the first phone booth she could reach. She saw someone on the porch."

"Go through the back door," Quinn ordered. "Be careful. This may be a scheme to wipe us both out. I'll carry on as if nothing has happened."

Quinn continued to make his blind way up the stairs. He was in his room when he heard the front door open, then Silk's voice hailed him. Quinn hurried downstairs. Silk just pointed through the open door. Quinn stepped onto the darkened porch and closed the door behind him. Now, if he were being watched, he was only a darker blur in the night.

A MAN was seated in one of the porch chairs. He wasn't there for social reasons. He was dead, and his name was Douglas Shane. Quinn bit his lip. He bent over the body and, without touching it, made a brief inspection.

"Strangled," he said hoarsely. "Just as Mrs. Titus was murdered. Call Captain McGrath, Silk. At once."

"But, sir, McGrath will only see in this some further proof that you are the Black Bat."

"It can't be helped."

"I could dispose of the body somewhere," Silk suggested.

"That won't work," Quinn said grimly. "I'm not half as worried about what McGrath will think as what the man who put Shane's body here knows. He took a terrific chance, lugging a corpse around. I believe he was certain nobody was home."

"I don't get it, sir."

Quinn piloted Silk into the house and both went to the library where Quinn sat down and reached for a pipe. As he tamped it with a fresh load of tobacco,

he explained for Silk's benefit.

"This is McGrath's fault. When I questioned Slater in my office this evening, Slater mentioned that his only alibi was a man dressed and hooded in black. Naturally McGrath realized that Slater had seen the Black Bat.

"After everyone left the office, McGrath had a little talk with me about the Black Bat. He said openly that if his hunch was correct and I was the Black Bat, I was also in a bad predicament, being responsible for the prosecution of Slater, and also being the only person who knew he was innocent."

"McGrath talks too much," Silk offered in a grumbling voice.

"He does indeed, though he was certain only we two were in the office. You had gone to another room. But immediately after McGrath got through offering his opinions, I heard the outer office door close softly. Someone had been listening."

Silk whistled. "But at least you have the suspects narrowed down to the people who were in the office with you—Hank Titus, Max Bethall, and Adam Hewitt."

"Perhaps. But it could have been someone who entered soon after all three of those men had gone. The architect who had worked on Mrs. Titus' home, for instance, was due and never did show up."

"I'm beginning to understand, sir," Silk said thoughtfully. "If you dispose of Shane's corpse so McGrath won't be wise, the murderer who put Shane on the porch will know you must be the Black Bat. I guess we'd better risk McGrath. I'll call him."

CHAPTER VII

Pressure



N HALF an hour, McGrath arrived, sleepy-eyed and in an ugly mood. He studied the corpse, then entered the house. Silk gave him a drink.

"Well, what does it mean?" McGrath said. "There is something behind the idea of leaving a murdered man on

a D.A.'s front porch."

Quinn, his blind eyes dead-looking, puffed slowly on his pipe.

"Mac," he said, "if there is a meaning in it, it's beyond me. I know who the dead man is—a wealthy and important person. I talked to him a few days ago about collecting money for charitable purposes. His name is Douglas Shane. Silk identified him. But why he was killed and dumped on my porch I cannot figure out."

McGrath chewed on a cigar stub impatiently.

"I'm getting warm, Tony," he observed cannily. "On the Black Bat's trail, I mean. I've just heard that a short time ago the Black Bat visited the art curator of one of our big museums. He turned over to him a valuable painting stolen about five years ago from a museum in Philly. It was all neatly wrapped, and on the paper was a name and address. Douglas Shane's name. Now I find him dead on your porch."

"I see what you mean." Quinn pursed his lips. "The Black Bat put him there."

"I mean nothing of the sort. If the Black Bat had killed Shane, there would have been on the forehead of the corpse a sticker of black paper cut out to resemble the silhouette of a bat. That is the Black Bat's trademark. His victims always have such a sticker plastered on 'em so no one else will be blamed for the crime. The Black Bat didn't kill Shane. Someone else did and that someone left the body on your porch because he, too, probably has an idea you're the Black Bat. It's a form of intimidation."

"I forgot about the sticker," Quinn admitted. "The rest of your statement doesn't make sense."

"It does, if the murderer was using the corpse as a warning. It means you'd better behave or he'll expose you."

"I see what you mean." Quinn spoke in an easy, unworried voice.

"Perhaps it's a threat only you understand," McGrath went on. "Perhaps it constitutes grisly pressure that you'd better convict Ted Slater of killing Mrs. Titus. All of which reminds me. What are you going to do about Slater?"

"Try him for murder, as I said," Quinn said positively.

"Even though the Black Bat can prove him innocent?"

"I'm not the Black Bat," Quinn insisted. "Let him come forward if he

wishes. And let me ask a question, Mac. Suppose the Black Bat, in the full interests of justice, does come forward to prove Slater's innocence and land the right man for us. What will you do then? Arrest him?"

"Why not?" McGrath snapped. "He's a criminal, isn't he? I— Oh, what's the use? I don't know what I'd do! I want no part of sending an innocent man to the chair, even with evidence enough to convince any jury."

Quinn yawned. "Good night, Mac. If you want my opinion, I think you'd shake the Black Bat's hand should he appear to alibi Slater. Though what a judge might do to him is something else. I'll see you at the office tomorrow. And you might check on how my front porch visitor is tied up with all this."

McGrath arose, grumbling. "Oh, sure. That's what comes of being just a cop. I lose my night's sleep but you, the D.A., you just go to bed and leave everything to the police. I should have been a lawyer."

"Too true," Quinn laughed. "But you can sleep during court sessions and I have to be on my toes. It evens up. . . ."

In the morning, at nine, Silk was owl-eyed as he served Tony Quinn's breakfast.

"Sleep?" he repeated in answer to Quinn's question. "An unknown quantity. The medical examiner didn't arrive until five, and the body wasn't moved until six. Cops prowling around all the time."

"You can make up for it today, by taking a nap on the office couch," Quinn told him.

"I'm not so sure." Silk snapped open the morning newspaper and sat down beside Quinn at the table. It was Silk's customary job to read the news while Quinn breakfasted, for Quinn acted his part of a totally blind man to the hilt. Silk went on.

"There's a column on the front page that won't make you feel so good. Some feature writer wrote it for the *Globe-Star*. I'll read it:"

NO MORE BREAKS FOR WOMEN KILLERS

Last night a quiet, decent-living woman named Phyllis Titus was cruelly strangled to death in her apartment. The fact that Mrs. Titus was the widow of an electrocuted gangster-killer has nothing to do with the case. A man named Theodore Slater is locked up



CAROL

and charged with the crime. We believe he should be brought to trial at once and shown no mercy.

The evidence against him is conclusive. He was seen to accompany Mrs. Titus into her apartment building ten minutes before she was murdered. He has no alibi at all. That he happens to be a successful and moderately important man makes no difference. Women killers are a nasty breed and should be disposed of like mad dogs.

In the past eleven months there have been five such killings and not one conviction of first degree murder. In fact, our eminent District Attorney lost two of the cases. This time Anthony Quinn, Special District Attorney, is in charge. Quinn's reputation as a prosecutor is unparalleled and the *Globe-Star* is glad to know that he will try this murderer. But Slater must be punished immediately so that other potential killers of women will know they can enjoy short shrift with the authorities.

The women's clubs, the pulpit, and now the press, demand fast and strict enforcement of our laws.

It's up to you, Mr. Quinn!

TONY QUINN shook his head sadly. "That's no breakfast appetizer, Silk. That's an indictment of the whole district attorney's machine. The only answer to it is a fast trial, and I'm not prepared. I wanted to stall the thing. Now it's impossible. Which means we work faster and harder than ever to clear Ted Slater before I can have him sentenced to the chair."

"The man who wrote that article sounds as if he secretly hates you, sir. The name seems familiar too."

"Who has the by-line, Silk?"

"Fellow named Christopher Gentry. I— Hold it! That's the name of the man whose car was driven to Shane's house last night."

"Indeed it is, and now that we have connected the name with the occupation of feature writer, it brings back other memories. Unless my mind is slipping, this Chris Gentry also wrote a long feature article on Joe Titus after interviewing him the night before he was led to the chair. I can't recall the details, but I want you to get me a copy of that article this morning."

Silk folded the newspaper wearily. "I knew the offer of your office couch was too good to be true," he sighed.

Half an hour later, Quinn's car pulled up before his office building. He got out alone, made his way up the stairs, and through the revolving doors. He was greeted a dozen times on his way in, but no one offered to help him, for they had all learned he was self-reliant.

The elevator man always had a special greeting.

"Say," he said this morning, "they been taking your office over the coals, Mr. Quinn. But I notice the papers think

you'll handle this killer okay."

"I'll do my best," Quinn said. "How is everything?"

"Well, not so good. I've got to work a double shift today. Larry Tupham's wife called and said he wouldn't be in on account of he's probably on a bender. He's weak that way. Never came home last night, which is nothing special from the way his wife talked. Some guys can take it, and some can't. Your floor, Mr. Quinn."

Quinn's cane swept lightly across the car floor, located the floor level and, reassured, he stepped into the corridor. There he met a wave of reporters, all clamoring for his reaction to the story by Chris Gentry. Quinn gave them what they wanted.

"Just who is this Mr. Gentry?" he asked. "I thought I knew most of you boys."

"He's not a regular newspaper man, Mr. Quinn," one reporter said. "He does feature writing on high space rates. Does okay for himself, too. Peddles the stuff to the highest bidder and it looks like Floyd Watrous came through with enough to get him on this case."

"Floyd Watrous?" Quinn wrinkled his forehead in thought.

"The publisher of the *Globe-Star*. You know him. Always campaigning for something or other."

"Oh, of course," Quinn said. "Thanks, boys, for your interest. Just quote me as promising a quick trial."

He walked unerringly to his office and pushed open the door. A man, seated in one of the visitors' chairs, arose immediately and offered his hand. Quinn gave no sign that he saw this gesture, and the man dropped his arm fast. He gave an embarrassed laugh.

"My name is Watrous," he said. "Floyd Watrous. I publish the newspaper which took you for a little ride this morning."

"Glad to know you." Quinn's fist went out awkwardly and well to the left of where the publisher stood. Watrous took the hand and shook it warmly. Quinn led him into the private office. "I'm not in the least disturbed by your article, you know."

Watrous heaved a sigh of relief. "That's what I came to find out. Gentry went a trifle heavy, though you can see he respected you far above the others on the D.A.'s staff. Quinn, if you want

to run for the D.A.'s job and properly operate this department, my newspaper will back you up. So will I, personally."

Quinn hung up his hat and coat, walked slowly toward his desk and fumbled for the swivel chair behind it. He sat down slowly.

"A generous offer, Mr. Watrous," he murmured, "and I appreciate it. But no. I'm blind, and the man in charge of the District Attorney's office must be someone who can see. I handle only specialized cases, and I have to depend upon others too much to take complete charge. Thanks again, though."

"I still think you could do it," Watrous maintained stoutly.

HE STOOD before Quinn's desk, a short, obese figure with wavy, slate-gray hair and a heavily jowled face. He weighed well over two hundred, and was not tall.

"Well, that's the only reason I came to see you," he said.

"Drop in again, any time, Mr. Watrous," Quinn said cordially. "As for the trial of Ted Slater, I shall attempt to begin it tomorrow. Unless his attorneys object too violently."

"Let them," Watrous snapped. "With all this publicity any judge will realize the public demands a fast trial. What can Slater's defense be anyway? He has none."

Quinn's lips parted in an enigmatic smile. Watrous fumbled with his hat, finally drew it on carefully and departed. Quinn pressed a buzzer and asked the clerk who responded to send in a detective attached to his office.

Quinn gave the detective specific orders.

"An architect named Oliver Owen was supposed to see me last night," he informed. "He failed to appear. Bring him in and find out why he didn't show up last night."

The detective noted down the name, saluted, and hurried away. Quinn leaned back to give the case some thought. So far, what he knew helped but little. Even the activities of the Black Bat had only served to muddle the case further.

Ted Slater had begun it. He was innocent, but his chances of escaping the chair were slim indeed. But Quinn knew that he was only a mild factor in the developments. Joe Titus had stolen a king's ransom in treasures and con-

sealed them. Mrs. Titus, who had planned to marry Slater and had gone so far as to consult an architect about some house, had been murdered. Obviously it was because she had discovered that her late husband had been the thief responsible for so many daring and outstanding thefts.

Her murderer was a man who had waited for her in the lobby of her apartment building. Someone she trusted enough not to raise any cry for help, and she had gone with him to her apartment where she had promptly been strangled to death.

Douglas Shane had entered the scene when he had acquired one of the stolen portraits. He had gone directly to someone and reported that the Black Bat was on his trail. That had made Shane dangerous, so he had been murdered and left on Quinn's porch as a warning.

Had that been to indicate, perhaps, that Quinn would meet the same fate, or had it been an indication that the murderer knew that the Black Bat who had called on Shane was Tony Quinn? To have developed such a suspicion meant that this man must have overheard Captain McGrath's accusation. He must have been the someone who had quietly slipped out of the office while McGrath had gone on talking.

Hank Titus, brother to the executed crook, could have been the eavesdropper, but so could Max Bethall, Mrs. Titus' uncle. Bethall was a man not averse to making a few dollars if the effort was not too great. Or Adam Hewitt, who had once teamed up with the dead gangster and might know something about the thefts, could have been listening in.

Questioning these three as to how they had left the office might result in nothing. They were all chronic liars and would be apt to protect one another even if they didn't know exactly why they were doing it. To them the law was an enemy; their own kind, a friend.

Or this architect who was supposed to come to the office and hadn't, might have dropped in, heard McGrath and high-tailed away before he was seen. Perhaps one of the elevator operators might be of some help on that angle. Quinn mentally made a note to have Silk question them.

Now two fresh names were added—those of Chris Gentry who had written that flaming article, and of Floyd Watrous who had published it. Gentry was

a free lance space writer who would sell himself to any bidder. But why had Watrous suddenly started on another of his campaigns? Why had he come to see Quinn?

CHAPTER VIII

Opposing Forces



QUINN'S thoughts were interrupted when Silk entered with an old copy of a newspaper in which Gentry's rather lurid story of an interview with Joe Titus had been published after the crook had been executed. The headline for the article read:

INTERVIEW WITH A DEAD MAN

It was not any masterpiece of reporting. Gentry had obtained little information from Titus, and had made the most of it by wordy flourishes. Joe Titus had said:

I'm not ashamed or frightened. I knew what I was getting into. I'm not sore at anyone. I'm just a guy who wanted to make his dough fast and enjoy it while I was young enough. Seems like that won't happen. I wanted to retire soon, and I would have. I wanted to go up to the country. It was my life. I don't care what people say about me or think about me. I lived according to the way I saw fit. I just lost the battle, that's all. I'm a game loser.

There was more, quite a lot more, but Quinn concentrated upon that particular section of the story. He read it over slowly and then again, aloud.

"Listen, Silk," he said. "I'm quoting—'I wanted to retire soon and I would have. I wanted to go up to the country. I don't care what people say—'"

"Just words to me," Silk interrupted.

"That part in which he says he just wanted to go up to the country. It ends too abruptly. The thought isn't finished. It's as if Titus said something else and Gentry decided to cut it out. When he did, he ruined his style, which is never abrupt."

"But he was only quoting Titus," Silk objected.

"Quoting, my eye. What did Gentry care about the words he put into Titus' mouth? When they appeared in print, Titus would be dead. I wonder if Titus

really meant to say anything more. For instance, about a house in the country to which he would retire. And perhaps a description of the house."

"First though," Silk said, "I'd ask him what he was doing in Shane's house last night."

"How can I?" Quinn asked. "I'm not supposed to know he was there. The only person who would have reason to know would be the Black Bat, and I'm tied in too closely with him already. Besides I have another worry. When did Butch report in last?"

Silk seemed startled. "Why, not since last night, sir. He must be in some kind of a jam!"

"And we're in no position to get him out, Silk. In half an hour I'm going before the Grand Jury to ask for Slater's indictment. Then I'm going to bring him to trial this afternoon, if I can. That ought to satisfy Watrous and his clique."

"But suppose you convict Slater before—before the Black Bat proves his innocence?" Silk asked in considerable worry.

"Don't remind me of it," Quinn said. "Things are bad enough without that..."

With his uncanny intuition, Tony Quinn knew that something must have happened to Butch O'Leary, but just how much there actually was to worry about Quinn could not even guess.

Butch had arrived at the hotel where Max Bethall resided soon after leaving the Black Bat's laboratory. It had been a simple matter to find out which suite Bethall occupied. Butch had merely thrust a blank piece of paper into a hotel envelope, addressed it to Bethall, and handed the envelope to the clerk.

"Mr. Bethall asked me to leave this," Butch explained. "It isn't important. Just put it in his box and he'll pick it up in the morning."

The desk clerk inserted the envelope in the mail slot for Suite 1201. Butch noted that, wandered around the lobby for a short while and, when he saw an opportunity, he quietly slipped into the stairway. He climbed the twelve flights, located the suite and watched it from close by the stairs, so he could hide quickly if anyone came.

It was a long night, even though he hadn't arrived until almost three in the morning. Bethall was in. Butch had made certain of that by listening outside

the door, and the man hadn't gone to bed until nearly dawn.

In the morning, with more activity around the hotel, Butch was kept on his toes to avoid detection. It wasn't until ten-thirty that a waiter brought a breakfast table to Bethall's suite and Butch took a long chance to hurry out and get something to eat himself.

WELL after mid-day, Bethall came out. He seemed calm enough, purchased a newspaper in the lobby, and avidly read the story of his niece's murder. Then he walked briskly to the hotel garage, two blocks away. Butch hurried to where his own car was parked, and when Bethall drove out, Butch was ready to follow.

Bethall crossed town, took the tunnel beneath the river and finally parked his car in the center of a small suburban town. He got out and walked. Butch didn't park at once. He had two worries on his mind—that Bethall might give him the slip, and that two people were shadowing Bethall.

For another car had taken up the pursuit soon after Bethall had left the hotel garage. Butch was well trained in the method of handling a situation like this. He stayed behind Bethall for some distance, turned off, and let the other car take up the chase. But Butch would backtrack quickly and follow both for a time.

He saw that the driver of the other car was a weasel-faced man who usually ducked whenever he noticed a policeman. Bethall seemed wholly unaware that he was being followed. He took no precautions and went straight to his destination, a two-story, moderately-priced single family house. There was a mailbox in front of it bearing the name of Adam Hewitt.

Bethall remained inside for about half an hour. When he emerged, he was red-faced, and obviously angry. So was the man he had visited, for the front door slammed shut behind Bethall so quickly that the visitor was almost caught in it.

For a frustrated, angry man Bethall did a strange thing. He went to a small town movie. So did his weasel-faced shadow, and so did Butch. Bethall sat through two shows, dozing most of the time.

At seven o'clock it was dark. Bethall left the theater, didn't bother about eat-

ing, but did stop in a drug store where he entered a phone booth. Butch was having an easy time of it, allowing Weasel-face to do the actual shadowing, and confining himself to following the shadow.

Bethall walked straight back to the house he had visited in the afternoon. Only this time his approach was different. He took refuge in a yard across the street and kept glancing at his watch. Finally all the lights in the white house were extinguished, and a few moments later a car drove out of the garage.

Bethall went to work then. He was clumsy at it for he broke a rear window with enough noise to attract attention if anyone had been around. He slid the window up and awkwardly wormed his way into the house. Weasel-face promptly drew a gun and crouched close by the open window, waiting for Bethall to emerge.

Butch considered all things and decided his best move was to ingratiate himself into Bethall's confidence. The stage was set for him. He went to the front of the house, quietly made his way to the porch and examined one of the windows. It was locked, but Butch had learned a great many things from the Black Bat about opening locked windows. A thin bit of metal, properly applied, moved the latch back. Butch raised the window gently, crawled through, and closed it again.

Judging by the racket Bethall was making, he must be on the second floor. Butch sat down in one of the chairs in the hall. In a few moments Bethall came down. Butch arose, and probably looked like some prehistoric monster to a man with Bethall's unsteady nerves. He gaved a strangled cry and reached for his hip pocket.

Butch wound one arm around him, pinning his hands down, and spoke softly.

"Mister, I got no beef with you. All I want to do is help. Get that? There's a monkey been trailing you all afternoon."

"Trailing me?" Bethall cried. "I—I don't know why. I'm a peaceful citizen."

"Yeah, so peaceful he just calls a guy on the phone, gets him to leave his house and then busts in. Look, pal, I'm a right guy. Maybe the monkey following you is a dick, huh?" Butch added significantly, "Though he didn't look like one."

"How do I know you're not a detective?" Bethall tried to free himself, but failed.

"I'm going to let you go," Butch said. "Turn that flashlight on my kisser and see if I look like a cop."

BUTCH put a tremendous scowl on his face. Bethall only glanced at the big face.

"All right," he whispered. "I don't know who you are, but I've got to trust you. Where is the man who followed me?"

"He's hanging around in back to grab you when you come through the window. Practically no trouble at all to snap his neck—if you want me to. For a price, of course."

"You're a—a crook?"

"The cops have stronger words than that for me," Butch said, with a smirk. "Happens I'm on a little vacation from the big town. But it's safe enough to go back so long as it's night. What's the racket, pal?"

"I'll tell you later," Bethall said hurriedly. "The whole story, and there is a lot of money in it for both of us. I

[Turn page]

Now She Shops "Cash and Carry"

Without Painful Backache

Many sufferers relieve nagging backache quickly, once they discover that the real cause of their trouble may be tired kidneys.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking the excess acids and waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up

nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

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

(Adv.)

could use someone like you. I'll give you a hundred dollars to seize the man outside and make him tell who sent him."

"A cinch," Butch growled. "You just scam through the window like you have no idea he's there. When he shoves the gun under your nose, freeze and stay that way. I'll grab him and he won't even fire a shot."

"It's rather risky—for me—but I realize it is the best way," Bethall agreed. "I'll give you a minute or two to get set."

Butch left via the front door this time. He had learned one thing without Bethall's knowledge—that the man had been after certain papers and that there were a lot of them hastily crammed in his inside pocket. Butch meant to learn what those papers contained, but not until he was fully in Bethall's confidence.

Butch slipped around to the back, making an astonishingly small amount of noise for so big a man. He saw Weasel-face stick up Bethall and begin searching him.

Butch's methods were elementary, but never slipshod. Standing behind the unsuspecting crook, he raised one arm, doubled the fist and brought it down squarely on the man's head. The resulting paralysis never allowed any victim of this type of blow even to pull the trigger of a gun. Butch picked up the weapon, grinned at Bethall, and rolled Weasel-face over to search him. He found nothing of any consequence.

"Make him talk," Bethall said angrily. "Break his arm if necessary. I want to know who sent him. He's a stranger to me, but I know very well he works for someone who is after me."

Butch knelt by the man and patiently waited until he recovered consciousness. Then Butch warned him not to cry out. He took the man's wrist and began turning it. Weasel-face couldn't take any punishment of this kind and his writhings were more in anticipation of pain than in actual experience of it. But he made the act look good.

"Who sent you?" Butch demanded. "Talk, or I'll bust that wrist. Then I'll oust the arm—maybe your neck. Come on—you're all washed up and you know it."

"You'll let me go if I talk?" whimpered Weasel-face.

Bethall answered that one. "Yes, but I'll know if you lie. Who sent you?"

"Hank Titus," the prisoner said promptly. "I was supposed to follow you and if you pulled anything, I was to use my head. I figured you lifted something out of that house."

Bethall stepped back, told Butch to let the man go, and when Weasel-face fell flat, Bethall kicked him viciously on the side of the head. He drew back his foot for another kick, but Butch intervened.

"Want to make this murder, pal? He's had enough. You got what you wanted, didn't you?"

"Yes." Bethall shrugged. "Leave him there. I have a car nearby. I'll pay fifty dollars a day if you act as my body-guard."

"Just so long as you don't go around daytimes too much," Butch said. "Me, I'm kind of hot where the cops are concerned. And listen, I got to know what the score is, too."

"We'll work it together," Bethall promised. "I'll tell you the whole thing when we reach my hotel. And you might tell me something about yourself as we drive into town."

CHAPTER IX

"If He Croaks, Let Him"



JUST to make it dramatic, Butch made up a likely though somewhat blood-thirsty yarn which impressed Bethall greatly as they drove along. Bethall said he felt safer with Butch with him, and looked as if he did.

They lapsed into silence after Bethall started driving through city streets and Butch tried to figure out some scheme whereby he could get a look at those papers and yet stay in Bethall's good graces. Being friendly with the man he was supposed to watch was good business to Butch's way of thinking, though he didn't trust Bethall beyond his sight.

Somewhat to Butch's surprise, Bethall did not return to his hotel, but stopped at a fashionable apartment house. Before he got out of the car, he explained things to Butch.

"I've got to go in here alone. You are to watch the front and if you see anyone

who looks suspicious, make certain he does not interfere with me. Is that clear?"

"Leave it to me," Butch replied. "But, mister, you wouldn't be taking a run-out powder on me now, would you?"

"I'm leaving my car right here, you idiot. Stay with it. I won't be long."

Butch gave him five minutes before he wandered into the lobby of the apartment building himself. He glanced at the mail-boxes. One bore the name of Phyllis Titus, and Butch knew then where Bethall had gone. To the murdered woman's suite.

Butch took the automatic elevator one floor above that on which Phyllis Titus had lived. He walked down, pushed open the stairway door cautiously, and saw no one. He proceeded toward the apartment, heard the knob turn and dashed back to the stairway again. Just in time, too, for Bethall came out of the apartment holding a gun in his fist.

He stuck the weapon back into his pocket, headed for the elevator, but hesitated. He turned and started back toward the stairway where Butch was hiding. Butch, with the door open a crack, saw him coming and stepped over to the wall so he would be concealed when the door swung open. He was thinking fast, trying his best to handle the unexpected turns of this situation as the Black Bat would have handled them.

Bethall shoved the door open hard. It hit Butch slightly, but Bethall didn't notice. Butch caught him before he went down more than two steps. Bethall felt the hand on his shoulder. He drew his gun before he started to turn around.

"Fading on me, huh?" Butch said.

Recognition dawned in Bethall's eyes, along with a large measure of relief that turned to sudden panic as Butch's mighty fist started a short, direct journey to Bethall's chin. Bethall didn't even have time to get the gun into firing position. He hurtled down the steps, unconscious before hitting the first of them, and continued to roll over until he was on the landing.

Butch peered into the hallway, wondering if the racket had aroused anyone, decided it had not and sped down to where Bethall lay. Butch figured the combination of the punch and the fall down the steps should keep Bethall under the wraps of unconsciousness for some time. He knelt beside the man and

pulled out the contents of his inner pocket.

Bethall seemed to have found only a sealed envelope in Phyllis Titus' suite, which he had added to the papers he had stolen from Hewitt's home. Butch looked them over. Hewitt's papers were mostly letters addressed to him, from various town officials in nearby states. All stated that the writer possessed no knowledge of any property such as that which Hewitt had apparently described in letters to these people.

The sealed envelope addressed to Mrs. Titus had been sent her through the regular mails. Butch ripped open the flap and dumped ten fifty-dollar bills into his hand. There was no note, no return address, though the envelope had been postmarked locally.

Butch thought it all over. If these things interested Hewitt and Bethall, they must have some appeal to the Black Bat also, but how could he get them to the Black Bat without allowing Bethall to go free and perhaps vanish? Butch searched the man further and found a single key. He figured that might fit Mrs. Titus' apartment door, inasmuch as the door had showed no signs of having been forced.

BUTCH gathered up all the papers, held them tightly, and hurried upstairs. The key opened the door easily. He saw that the place had been searched crudely. Bethall, it seemed, hadn't cared whether or not he left traces of his visit.

There was an ornamental desk of some light, modernistically carved wood. The drawers were pulled wide and the floor was covered with papers. Butch saw a number of postage stamps that had fallen from a small box. They gave him an idea.

He located a large envelope, stuffed all the papers into it, sealed the flap and stuck on stamps. Enough postage to carry twice the weight of the envelope. He put on a few more for good measure, used the dead woman's fountain pen desk set and printed the name of Tony Quinn on the envelope. He added Quinn's address and beneath the stamps he thought were surplus he printed directions that the envelope was to be carried Special Delivery.

This done, he gathered up more papers at random, hoping that Bethall might not have inspected his loot carefully, and

for a time might be deceived by these phonies which Butch intended to put into his pockets.

Butch opened the door. The hallway was still empty. He walked softly down it to the mail-slot near the elevator. He dropped the envelope. It barely went through the slot and he held his breath for fear the thing might get jammed up. But it dropped smoothly.

The elevator was in use. Butch could hear it whirring. If it stopped at his floor, he might find himself in a jam so he began moving rapidly toward the stairway where Bethall should still be lying.

As he pushed open the door, he heard the elevator car open and someone growled an oath. Butch didn't pay much attention. He reached Bethall and thrust the papers into the man's inner pocket. He was standing erect again when he heard a sharp command.

Butch looked up. There were two men at the top of the steps, and both had guns trained on him. Butch raised his arms shoulder high and stood pat. The pair came down the steps. Another man appeared behind them. Butch didn't recognize him, though he sensed this man was in full command of the other two.

"Okay," Butch said. "You got here faster than I thought any cops could move. I caught this guy coming out of that dead woman's apartment. You know, the one who was knocked off. So I figured he wasn't up to no good. He had a gun—it's under his body, I guess. He pulled it on me and I patted him one."

"Excellent, my friend," the man in charge said. "Okay, boys, pick up that hulk and carry him to Mrs. Titus' apartment. We can have some privacy in there."

"It's okay for me to go, huh?" Butch said. "I'm late on a date."

"No—you'll have to come along. Just to answer a few questions."

Butch shrugged those enormous shoulders. He wasn't at all fooled about who these men were. They were killers. He knew the breed. At least the professional types. It might be best to play along with them, watch his chances, and try to take all three of them. Butch liked that idea.

He picked up Bethall himself, cradled him in his arms and marched up the

steps. The rather smooth looking man who headed this trio picked up Bethall's gun and followed.

In the corridor, all three of them moved fast, as if they didn't want to be seen, and yet did not wish Butch to realize this. The smooth man had a key. Butch wondered how many men had keys to Mrs. Titus' apartment.

The man opened the door with it and stepped aside. Butch went in, carrying Bethall who was beginning to moan and stir a bit. Butch walked into the bedroom and dropped him onto a bed. As Bethall started to slide down, he grasped at Butch's arms. It was an involuntary gesture of self-preservation for Bethall's eyes were tightly closed and all he felt was the sensation of falling.

But from that gesture Butch knew Bethall was faking unconsciousness now. He didn't care. If Bethall jumped up and distracted these men sufficiently, he might get in a few licks. Butch stepped back from the bed.

"What'll we do with him?" one of the gunmen asked, eyeing Butch. "Hank, you think it's safe—"

HANK meant Hank Titus, Butch guessed. So all the forces of evil which stemmed from Joe Titus were beginning to rear up. Now, more than ever, Butch wanted to get his big fists to work.

"Watch him," Hank said. "I'll look Bethall over. Maybe we can work something out."

But it was Bethall who acted at the wrong time. If he had waited a moment or two he might have helped Butch. As it was, both gunmen were ranged beside Butch when Bethall leaped off the bed. Instantly their guns drilled into Butch's ribs.

Bethall ducked under a driving punch sent by Hank Titus, sprinted toward a wide-open window, yanking out the dummy papers Butch had put in his pocket. He flung them out of the window.

Hank moved in then. He held a short, wicked-looking sap and he used it on Bethall with all the power he could muster. Bethall went down heavily.

Hank sped toward the door, paused an instant and spoke quickly to his men.

"Make that big ox face the wall. He's working for Bethall. Nick told us so when he phoned. And watch him. Re-

member what he did to Nick out there in the sticks where Hewitt lives."

"Turn around," one of the gunmen snapped to Butch.

Butch saw nothing else to do but obey. As he faced the wall he heard the swish of the sap. He knew he had been a fool, had played right into their hands. The sap caught him beside the left ear, a hard blow that sent him sagging to his knees. The sap hit him again. So did two gun butts in the hands of their wielders. He was slipping into unconsciousness when he barely heard Hank Titus giving final orders. Final for Butch.

"Bust his skull. If you don't kill him, make sure he'll be in a coma for days, and if he croaks, let him."

The guns began thumping against his head again. Butch didn't even feel them.

CHAPTER X

House in the Country



AN INDICTMENT against Slater was procured by Quinn in short order. Witnesses testified briefly and to the point. The jury took the case as merely routine and Slater was taken back to jail quickly. Quinn had a conference with Slater's attorney who objected strenuously to an immediate trial.

"I'm sorry," Quinn told him. "You know what's happening in this case. The *Globe-Star* started it, and now all the editorial writers are howling for Slater's blood. I've orders from the District Attorney's office to try this case at once. Tomorrow, if I can convince a judge to consent."

In the afternoon Quinn went before a court and argued the matter. The newspapers had done their work well. The court listened to Quinn's plea that in a year's time Slater wouldn't be able to drum up any defense and that the State had all the evidence needed.

By late afternoon it was over. Slater's trial was to start in the morning and thoughts of it made Quinn shudder. Slater, who seemed to have trusted Quinn so much at the start, was now eyeing him with open wonder at the

methodical way in which the blind man had started him on his way to the electric chair.

That afternoon, Lawford, Slater's attorney, made a private call on Quinn and begged him to accept a second degree murder plea of guilty.

"Did Slater agree to such a pleading?" Quinn asked.

"No, but I can talk him into it. Give the man a break, Quinn. I'll admit right now that he has no defense. All I can hope to do is beg the jury for mercy."

"It won't work," Quinn told him.

Lawford sighed deeply. "All I can do is try. How about that plea? It will save the State a lot of money and you a great deal of time."

Quinn shook his head. "No, I'm sorry. In the first place Slater may not agree, and I would have weakened my case by consenting to such a plea. Even more important than that lies the fact that I am not the duly elected district attorney. I'm an appointed special D. A. You should talk to the man higher up, Lawford. If I accepted such a plea, they'd have my scalp."

"If I visited the D. A.'s office," Lawford said, "he wouldn't even let me in. I know how you are being hounded. I know the State has lost some important murder cases similar to this one, but just the same Slater deserves a chance."

"No killer does," Quinn snapped. "Especially a woman killer. I'm going ahead with the trial tomorrow, and I don't care to discuss it any longer."

Lawford went out slowly. He was young, conscientious, and eager to help a client who never had the slightest chance. Quinn waited until the door closed. Then he called Silk over.

"You can see what we're up against, Silk. I'll pick a jury in one hour flat in the morning. They'll start taking evidence at two in the afternoon. I doubt I'll require more than two hours for my testimony. Why, the jury may have the case by the following morning. And we know that Slater is entirely innocent. I'd rather face the machine-guns and grenades flung at me by a dozen lunatic criminals than have to go through with this."

"Yes, sir, I know," Silk said. "And while you talked to Lawford, that reporter who started all this came in and is waiting. So is Oliver Owen, the architect Mrs. Titus and Slater talked to

some days ago."

"Send Owen in," Quinn ordered. "No word from Butch yet?"

"No, sir. It's not like him, either. While you were in court, I ran over to the house and checked. If any calls had come in, they'd have been registered on our signal board. I located Carol and took it upon myself to withdraw her from watching Hank Titus. Seems he gave her a little trouble. She was positive he'd been in all day, but he suddenly appeared in a taxi and acted wrought up about something."

"If Hank Titus met Butch, he had something to be hot about," Quinn mused. "Butch was supposed to be checking on Bethall. Did you send Carol to his neighborhood?"

"Yes, sir. If she finds Butch, she'll get a report from him. Or try to find out what happened if he isn't around. And she will check in every half-hour. Here, at the office, pretending to be a taxpayer with a beef for the D. A."

"Good, and if she doesn't find Butch," Quinn said anxiously, "you'll have to begin looking, too. I'll get along somehow. Send in Owen. That reporter, Gentry, can wait. He's made trouble enough already and all he probably wants is a statement."

OWEN came in. He was a gray man. His hair was iron-gray, his eyes slate-gray, and his clothing gray, even to his suede shoes. Owen, to judge by his appearance, must be a highly successful architect. He was not apologetic about not showing up before, either.

"The police have informed me that if I did not come to see you, they'd haul me in." Owen grimaced as he sat down. "Naturally, I realize it must be about the murder of Phyllis Titus, though how on earth you expect me to help you, I don't know."

"You were politely asked to come last night," Quinn said. "Why didn't you?"

Owen regarded the man he thought was blind and scowled. Sometimes this pretense of blindness made Tony Quinn's visitors show their true nature and Owen was showing his now.

"I was called out of bed in the middle of the night," the architect said. "I'd been working hard all day—upstate—on an old house that needs remodeling. I was dead tired. I figured if you needed

me badly enough, I'd get another summons."

"Let it go," Quinn said. "Now that you are here, tell me what you know about Mrs. Titus and Mr. Slater."

"Look here," Owen said, "Slater didn't kill her. Why a blind—that is, anyone could tell he was crazy about her. They appeared at my office three days ago. She brought some blueprints with her."

"Of what, Mr. Owen?"

"They were the plans of an old house. Pre-revolutionary. I think she said it had been built in Sixteen-fifty. I specialize in such places. Restoration work, you know. It's highly technical."

"Please confine yourself to the details of their visit," Quinn interrupted.

Owen flushed. He was not accustomed to being cut off like that. He scowled again, safe in the belief that he faced only a blind man.

"Mrs. Titus wanted me to look over the plans," he said, "and later on take a run up to the place. Seems she and Slater intended to get married and move there."

"You still have the plans?"

"No. I told her I couldn't offer much of an opinion until I had inspected the house. The plans were interesting, but you never can tell about the condition of joists and beams."

"Did she tell you where this house was located?" asked Quinn.

"No, she did not. Except to infer that the place was not far from New York City. She wanted to clean the place up before I visited it and she promised to phone me as soon as she was ready for the inspection."

Quinn's dead eyes seemed to be centered on the wall to Owen's left.

"You can go," he said. "I doubt that we shall even require you at the trial. If we do, you will be subpoenaed. Good afternoon, Mr. Owen."

Owen ran a finger around the sweat-band of his gray hat, regarded Quinn stonily for a moment or two, then turned abruptly and walked out. Quinn told a clerk to send in Chris Gentry, the freelance writer.

Gentry was no movie version of a newspaperman. He was of medium height, with brown hair, dark eyes, a distinctly cleft chin, and he wore large shell-rimmed glasses. His manner was almost ingratiating. He slid into a chair.

"I—suppose you're plenty hot about

those stories I wrote, Mr. Quinn?" he offered tentatively.

Quinn allowed himself a faint chuckle. "No, I'm not. I do think we're rushing things a bit with Slater, but then he deserves no sympathy. He goes to trial tomorrow."

"Yes, I know. There is nothing personal in this, Mr. Quinn. I respect your abilities as much as any man. Maybe more, because I've followed your work

trouble in getting an indictment or a fast trial."

"There can't be much doubt in your mind about Slater's guilt," Gentry said, "the way you're going at things?"

"Who told you to ask me that?" Quinn said curtly.

GENTRY winced a trifle.

"Watrous—who else?" he said. "I'm to do some follow-up yarns. One



BUTCH

closely. When I wrote that first story demanding a speedy trial, I did so under orders."

"Orders?" Quinn asked. "I thought you were a free lance, selling at space rates and under obligation to no one."

"I am, but Watrous has always paid me the most money and I—well, sort of bend the knee slightly when he commands it. Watrous said Slater should be made an example of, and he told me to put on the pressure."

Quinn wondered why Watrous had done that. True, he was a publisher and a rather sensational one, at that, but Mrs. Titus' murder could have had no personal effect upon him. Or had it?

Quinn leaned back. "Your articles were persuasive, Mr. Gentry. I had no

on you, especially, since you're now a fair-haired boy so far as Watrous is concerned. It will probably boost you into the head D.A.'s office.

"I can't talk about cases or how I feel concerning any defendant, before I have tried the man. You realize that."

"Sure. I'll square it. Nothing to worry about. Leave everything to me, Mr. Quinn."

"I feel that Watrous is taking a most decided interest in this case," Quinn said. "I'm beginning to wonder just why."

Gentry took a cigarette case from his pocket. "I'm going to have a smoke, Mr. Quinn. Would you like one?"

"Thanks." Quinn held out his hand blindly and Gentry placed a cigarette on

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his palm. Quinn transferred it to his lips and made no motion when Gentry brought a lighter flame close.

Quinn next apparently felt the heat of it for he started puffing even before the flame touched the tip of the cigarette. When it was going well, he sank back in his chair.

"Thanks again, Gentry. How do you feel about Watrous' interest in this matter?"

Gentry talked from behind a cloud of smoke.

"Believe me, Mr. Quinn, Watrous is just looking for circulation. Nothing more, I'm sure. It could have been any other man and he'd have shown quite the same interest. May I quote you as saying you are certain of a quick conviction?"

"Yes, of course you may. And aren't you the man who interviewed Joe Titus in Sing-Sing the night before he was executed?"

GENTRY fanned smoke away from the front of his face and looked highly pleased.

"Gosh, do you remember that? I'm flattered. Yes, I talked to Joe Titus. Made a good story out of the interview, too. A bit grisly perhaps. Joe told me about all the things he wanted to do before he died. That is, discounting the fact that he'd been sentenced to death. He had big plans. Especially for his wife. I think the man was pulling some final jobs to get enough cash to retire on. Then he'd have been a quiet, law-abiding citizen."

"You didn't go into it very deeply when you wrote that story, Mr. Gentry," Quinn said. "You see, I had it read to me only a few hours ago. In handling the case I wanted all possible information, and among the things that were dug up was your story."

"Frankly, I don't even remember what I wrote," Gentry remarked. "Often I never read my stories in print. But it seems that if the plans Joe Titus told me about were impressive enough to linger all these years, I should have made them part of my story. Just because I'm curious, I'll find out."

He arose, thanked Quinn profoundly and walked out. Quinn was behind in his detail work and he got busy on it, though worry about Butch became more and more acute.



CAPTAIN McGRATH was announced well after the dinner hour and Quinn had him sent in. The police officer seemed disturbed about something.

"Tony," he said, "I've been mighty busy and only just now found out you are going to trial with the

Slater case tomorrow. Now you know how I feel about such things. The man's a killer. If we take care of him quickly, other potential killers will think twice—we hope. But if you're doing this to impress me because I think you are the Black Bat, and you may know for a fact that Slater is innocent, that's something else."

"If I were the Black Bat with such knowledge," Quinn said slowly, "I would stall the trial and start working to prove his innocence. As the district attorney in charge of the case I feel that Slater is guilty and that what happens is strictly routine. Have you any doubts as to his guilt?"

"We-ell, nobody actually saw him strangle her."

"What a witness you'll make," Quinn snorted. "Last time I talked about this you were convinced of his guilt."

"I know—and I don't blame you for wondering about me. But I've talked to Slater a lot. He just doesn't seem like a man who'd do that. And his grief for Mrs. Titus is sincere."

"Perhaps you think it is sincere because in reality his grief is for himself and has all the elements of sincerity," Quinn said coldly.

"Okay," McGrath said. "Forget it. I'm wrong again. If you are so dead set on his guilt, then he killed the woman. I'm convinced, and you don't need to worry about me as a witness."

Quinn had begun to make a comment when the phone interrupted him. It was a call for McGrath. Quinn vaguely extended the instrument toward him.

"He's still halfway between consciousness and unconsciousness, eh?" McGrath said into the phone. "Have the docs made up their minds yet? Yeah, I don't

blame them. The guy is big enough to take twice the punishment any ordinary individual could stand."

Quinn stifled an involuntary gasp. He could feel the blood beginning to run cold in his veins.

"Well," McGrath went on, "until he checks out, it's not homicide. Anything new around the spot where he was found? Yes? Well, I guess a couple of gorillas tried to stick him up and he battled them. That's why they gave it to him so hard. Keep a man posted at his bedside."

McGrath hung up. "Biggest man I've laid eyes on in months," he said. "Fellow they found behind the building where Mrs. Titus was murdered. He'd been shellacked with a sap and gun butts. I imagine he was left there to die, but he didn't oblige."

"A stickup?" Quinn asked.

"Probably. He'd been searched and everything he owned taken from him. Nobody knows who he is, but he may come out of it pretty soon. They took him to Knickerbocker Hospital. If he dies, there's another murder on our files."

"Let us hope," Quinn said, "that he lives."

And Quinn never meant anything so fervently in his life because he felt certain this man was Butch.

The moment McGrath left, Silk hurried in from the anteroom.

"That must be Butch, sir," he said worriedly. "I'd better see about this right away."

"No," Quinn said. "Stay away from that hospital. There must be nothing to connect us with Butch now or at any time. When Carol calls in again, give her the details. She can take care of things."

"Yes, sir," Silk agreed reluctantly. "You're right, of course. But where do we stand now, sir?"

"On the edge of more danger than we have ever seen," Quinn replied. "Fighting an enemy is one thing; fighting time another. You can't win against time unless you are lucky, or make your luck. I must start Slater's trial tomorrow. Oh, he'll appeal any death sentence automatically. His journey to the chair can be delayed a few months, but if we don't prove his innocence at once, we'll all be finished."

"I can see that," Silk said somberly.

"The real murderer will simply lay

low. Do absolutely nothing. Then will come the moment when we have to decide between letting an innocent man go to his death—or writing a complete finish to the Black Bat. And you know what our decision will be."

IN SILK'S voice was a tinge of desperation.

"I wish I could suggest something!" he said.

"I can," Quinn assured him. "Things are beginning to fit together. Not as accurately as a cut-out puzzle, perhaps, but a few ends meet. The man or men behind this crime are after something. We know what it is, fortunately. The loot Joe Titus stole and concealed. I think at least three men—perhaps a fourth—know of the existence of this loot. Max Bethall, the murdered woman's uncle, Hank Titus, Joe's brother, and Adam Hewitt who was Joe's partner in crime for a long while. All of them were sufficiently close to Joe to hazard a guess about this loot."

"You mentioned a fourth man?" Silk asked.

"Yes—the murderer. Provided he isn't one of the three I have already mentioned. I'm wondering now if that old house somewhere in the country isn't Joe's hiding place for those things he stole. I have nothing to back up such an assumption, but Mrs. Titus was about to open up that house and live there with Slater after they were married. She even went so far as to consult an architect about the matter.

"If Phyllis Titus was as eager about this as I imagine she might have been, then she may have done something about it between the time she saw the architect and the moment she was murdered. Perhaps Slater knows, but I can't ask him. We're not on his side, and there's enough suspicion of me now. Finding Shane's body on my front porch is proof of that."

"We might try to check Mrs. Titus' activities," Silk suggested.

"That's what I intend to do. As soon as Carol reports in and you have given her those instructions, we'll wait only long enough to get a report on Butch. If the man in the hospital is Butch, then we're going to begin. As Tony Quinn investigating a murder, first. If we get nothing that way, the Black Bat is going to spread wings tonight."

Carol called twenty minutes later. Then again, forty minutes after that. It was Butch, she told Silk. Badly beaten, still unconscious, but with a fighting chance to live because he was fighting to the best of his ability. Carol had identified herself as his sister, had lent aid to the belief that Butch must have been the victim of footpads, and intended staying by his side until all danger was past.

Soon after, Silk led blind Tony Quinn from his office to the car parked at the curb. They drove to the apartment house where Mrs. Titus had lived, found the superintendent, and had him unlock her rooms.

Silk looked at the confusion.

"Sir, someone has pulled this place apart," he said seriously.

Quinn looked surprised. "That's odd. I wonder why. Perhaps you'd better let Captain McGrath know about this."

While Silk phoned, Quinn expertly got the super to talk. He learned that Mrs. Titus had owned an expensive coupe which she kept in a garage two blocks west. Quinn and Silk didn't wait for McGrath to show. They left the super in charge of the Titus apartment.

The garage manager was duly impressed by Quinn's official badge. He answered all questions freely.

"Yes, Mrs. Titus garaged her car here ever since she moved into the neighborhood. She was a real nice lady, too. I hope you burn the guy who killed her."

"This car," Quinn said. "Did she use it during the three days prior to her murder?"

"Sure. She took it out one morning early and didn't bring it back until after dark. She was alone when she left and alone when she returned."

"I see," Quinn commented. "How did she act when she came back with it? Was there anything unusual about her?"

"We-ell, now you mention it, she seemed worried about something. I told her good night and she didn't answer. Just walked on out."

"I'd like to inspect the car," Quinn said. "That is, my assistant will do the inspecting. Will you take us to it?"

THE garageman led them to a large platform elevator, took it to the fourth floor where cars were stored, and pointed out a low-slung light blue coupe. Silk searched the car thoroughly, but

found nothing of any importance.

"I noticed the gas tank is almost full," Quinn said to him in a low voice. "That means she may have filled it close by whatever place she drove to. Find a bottle and take a sample of the gasoline. Then get some clean paper and pry the mud from beneath the rear fenders. There's plenty of it, and comparatively fresh too."

They were back at Quinn's home within the hour and at work in the laboratory. Quinn forced himself to think as the Black Bat now. By sheer will power he compelled all thoughts of Butch and of his own troubles not to interfere with fast, efficient work.

"Silk," he said, "telephone State Police Headquarters in Albany, in Trenton and in Hartford. Use my name and office. Find out if any gasoline companies sell a green-colored gas in those states. If so, find out what part of the state."

Silk hurried to the phone. His first call was successful.

"There is a gasoline called Emerald Gas sold in southern Connecticut, sir. There are only about a dozen stations which handle it, all company-owned."

"Get the location of each station," Quinn ordered. "And make sure our car is full of gas. We're going visiting tonight."

Silk made another phone call, jotted down the location of each station and turned the list over to Quinn, who was bending over a microscope and studying samples of the reddish earth found beneath the fenders of Mrs. Titus' coupe.

CHAPTER XII

Clues Pointing North



ONE of the lights on the signal board flashed. Someone had entered the gate and was walking to the front porch. Both men moved rapidly. Quinn's eyes assumed their blank stare, he hurried into the library and sat down in front of the fireplace. Silk busied

himself straightening out bric-a-brac on a table.

The doorbell rang and Silk walked sedately to open the door. He returned

bearing a fat, overstamped envelope.

"This came Special Delivery, sir," he told Quinn. "I'd almost swear it's been addressed in Butch's unique style of printing."

Quinn took the envelope swiftly, but bided his time in opening it until the window shades were drawn. He ripped the seal, slid the contents into his lap and whistled in amazement at the fantastic assortment of papers.

"It's from Butch all right," he said, "but what is it? Say—look at these! Eight letters addressed to Adam Hewitt, all from town officials, and all stating that they do not know of the property Hewitt apparently asked them about."

"Hewitt," Silk said softly. "Joe Titus' partner in crime. Trying to find out where Joe had concealed the loot from his raids."

"Just that," Quinn agreed. "He got nowhere, according to these letters. What I'd like to know is how Butch laid his hands on them. Hewitt would be careful about things like this. They directly involve him."

"In the murder of Mrs. Titus?" Silk asked.

"Yes, of course. We can assume that Mrs. Titus may have learned that the house her husband bought before his arrest was, in reality, meant to be a hiding place for his loot. It's beginning to jell, Silk. A few more ingredients like this and we'll have something."

"Would you mind explaining?" Silk begged.

"Mrs. Titus married Joe," said Tony Quinn, "and, at the time, did not know he was a crook. Therefore, it's safe to assume she did not realize he had stolen all these treasures, nor even that they had been stolen. She did know about the

house. Perhaps Joe told her about it. Anyway, she had the plans which Joe had had drawn up. She intended to move in after she married Slater and went to Owen, the architect, about renovating the house."

Silk sat down on the edge of a chair. "Then someone else also discovered the whereabouts of the house and made up his mind that Mrs. Titus should not live in it because the loot would be discovered. Is that it, sir?"

"Something of the kind. Hewitt saw, or heard about the blue-prints, and began writing letters describing the house to various town officials hoping he might spot it that way. This puts Hewitt definitely in the running as our killer."

Silk looked at the other papers on Quinn's lap. "Some of those seem to have another person's writing on them."

Quinn picked up the letter which had been addressed to Mrs. Titus. The address was typed. He opened it and removed the fifty-dollar bills which had confused Butch. He studied them intently for a little while, closed his eyes, and furrowed his brow as he spoke.

"All this money sent to Mrs. Titus. As it was in this envelope, perhaps Butch was the first to open it. But why should anyone pay her off? If it is a payoff. At least there is nothing accompanying the money to identify the sender. Silk, I wonder if Mrs. Titus was being supported by someone whose identity she did not know. Someone who had worked with Joe Titus and been a partner in his business of stealing priceless art treasures."

Silk was excited and showed it. "Yes—I'd say yes," he agreed eagerly. "Maybe Joe had made arrangements with this

[Turn page]

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man to support Mrs. Titus until the stuff was disposed of and then she was to get Joe's share."

Quinn shook his head. "Such honor among thieves belongs in the fairy tale class. I think she—or someone close to her—knew the identity of this other person, and forced him to keep up the payments. If we learn that Mrs. Titus had no visible means of support, then we can be certain she lived on these anonymous donations."

SILK nodded quickly. "That should be easy to check, sir," he said.

"And we'll check it soon," Quinn assured. "Now, more than ever, I feel that she was murdered because she discovered the existence of that loot. It accounts for her breaking off with Slater so abruptly and for no cause that he could figure out. She didn't know what to do. She thought she might be accused of hiding this loot."

"Phyllis Titus didn't want Slater mixed up in it. But the man who had worked with her husband discovered what had happened. He waited for her in the lobby. Luck sometimes runs with a killer, and this time he had plenty of it. Slater showed up, was seen with Mrs. Titus. But he was not seen going away except by me, when I was prowling as the Black Bat and couldn't clear Slater."

"Who did it then? Hewitt?"

"I don't know," Quinn said almost dreamily, and with his eyes still closed. "As Joe Titus' crime partner, he must have at least suspected these side line activities of Joe's. Then we have Max Bethall, Mrs. Titus' uncle. We know he had something to do with engineering the marriage. Perhaps he hoped to keep Joe tied up nicely so he couldn't pull a doublecross."

"There is also Hank, Joe's brother, and a crook in his own right. I don't know how close those brothers were, but being in practically the same business they must have had some connections with one another."

"Three suspects aren't bad," Silk opined.

"Oh, we have more than that. We have Watrous, a publisher who is almost too eager to convict Slater because he realizes that with Slater's execution, no further work on the case will be done. If he is the man, he also knows that the Black Bat can probably clear Slater,

and suspects that I may be the Black Bat.

"Never forget Shane's corpse which was put on our front porch. And, come to think of it, Shane knew Watrous and would do business with a man of his social position. Also, when those burglaries were committed, the jobs were well-planned by someone who had ready access to all the articles stolen. Watrous would have such a chance."

"But there is also a reporter named Gentry who talked to Joe Titus before he was executed. Perhaps Gentry was the last outside person to see him alive, and Joe may have talked too much."

"We have Oliver Owen, the architect, too. What if he is lying? Suppose Mrs. Titus told him where the house was and Slater didn't know that. Suppose Owen went to look it over and found the loot? He might have killed Mrs. Titus then, to protect his knowledge."

"We must even consider Slater himself. Who knows? A murderer is still a murderer if he pays someone else to commit the actual crime. The whole thing worked so smoothly that Slater could have been a part of it."

"I think we have some work cut out for us, sir," Silk said mournfully.

"Indeed we have. Carol is due to call shortly. After we learn how Butch is getting along, we'll begin a hunt for this Titus country house. Not as Tony Quinn, Special D.A., but as the Black Bat. Stand by the phone while I get things ready."

Carol's report came within fifteen minutes. Silk took it, listening mostly, although Quinn heard his sigh of relief, which meant that Butch was not in any dire danger. Silk hung up and turned to Quinn.

"She had quite a bit to report on, sir," silk said. "Butch is going to be fine—in time. He has recovered consciousness. McGrath has a detective hanging around and Butch was wised up by Carol on what to say, without this copper knowing it. He told a story of a stick-up."

"But what really happened?" asked Quinn. "Was Carol able to find out?"

"Leave it to her. She sent the cop on an errand. Butch said he trailed Bethall to Hewitt's house somewhere on Long Island. Bethall talked to Hewitt first, seemed to get nowhere, and later on lured him out of the house. Then he

burglarized the place and got some of those papers Butch mailed. Butch saw somebody else tailing Bethall, convinced Bethall he could be of help, and nailed the other shadow. The fellow turned out to be one of Hank Titus' boys."

"Good—so far." Quinn smiled in satisfaction. "It all backs up my points."

"There is more, sir. Bethall hired Butch as a bodyguard, drove him to town, and went to Mrs. Titus' apartment. He took a few things from there, which Butch also sent along. Butch grabbed him, knocked him out, and went back to the apartment where he stuffed everything into an envelope and mailed it. Then Hank Titus came with a couple of men. They are the ones who finished off Butch. What happened to Bethall, no one seems to know as yet."

Quinn ran his fingers through his hair, then arose abruptly. "Get into something dark, take along a flash and a gun," he instructed Silk. "We're going hunting. . . .

NEAR midnight, the Black Bat and Silk were about twenty miles inside Connecticut and moving along one of the lesser used highways. In a short time they began to see old houses, like the one which Joe Titus had apparently purchased.

"Seems funny a man like Titus—a crook and killer—would want to buy an old, old place to live in, or even hide his loot," Silk mused aloud. "Didn't that article Gentry wrote about Titus' last statement indicate he meant to live there?"

"Yes," the Black Bat answered. "Perhaps there is a definite reason why Titus wanted such a place. In fact, I'd bet on it. Titus, at one time, was busy robbing homes in this vicinity. He did a two-year stretch for it. So maybe during the course of these escapades he found a place which happened to suit his purposes exactly."

When they caught sight of the first gasoline station along the way which advertised Emerald Gas it was still open. The Black Bat stopped the coupe and got out.

He adjusted his wide-brimmed black hat.

"Silk," he instructed, "drive into that station. You have a description of Mrs. Titus' car. Its color was unique enough to be remembered. Ask if she stopped

here to have it filled up. Ask also if there is one of those very old houses nearby, say one that has been unoccupied for the past three or four years. Then drive on down the road. I'll flag you somewhere after I make a detour of the gas station on foot."

Silk picked Quinn up twenty minutes later.

The gas station attendant, Silk said, did not remember the car nor did he know about any such house. But he had indicated that some of the other gas stations might.

The Black Bat let Silk remain behind the wheel.

SHORTLY they repeated the operation with another gas station and drew similarly negative results. The Black Bat did some thinking as they drove to the next one.

"The earth lodged beneath the fenders of Mrs. Titus' car was distinctly of a clay formation," he said ruminatively. "I wonder if there could be a brick yard anywhere around here. The consistency of that mud seemed ideal for making bricks, and may even have fallen off some truck carrying a load of the mud."

"I'll ask at the next stop," Silk said.

They were getting deeper and deeper into rural surroundings. They passed through two small towns which were fast asleep. Traffic was medium, but enough to warrant gasoline stations staying open this late. They soon came to the next one.

Silk picked up the Black Bat later.

"Nothing on the light blue coupe nor an empty ancient house," he reported. "According to that station manager, anything with walls and a roof has been occupied ever since the war began. There is a brick yard, though, six or eight miles further on."

"Maybe we're getting warm then," the Black Bat said. "All we can do is keep trying. And it has occurred to me, Silk, that one strange thing is the fact that if Mrs. Titus knew about this place, and her husband had purchased it so long ago, who paid the taxes on it? I think that is what Bethall was looking for at both Hewitt's place and Mrs. Titus' apartment when Butch followed him."

"I can't answer that one," Silk said, "but I think there's another one of those gas stations just ahead. I saw the green sign at the last turn in the road."

CHAPTER XIII

House of Secrets

GETTING out of the car the Black Bat watched Silk drive into the station. Then the Black Bat slipped out of sight.

The man who came to serve Silk was an old, toothless, and rather disreputable figure. Silk asked him about the blue coupe

driven by Mrs. Titus.

"Yep," the man said, and Silk's hopes soared. "I recollect that car all right. Don't get many of them flashy jobs in these parts. A woman was drivin' too. She tipped me seventy cents—her change. Leastwise, I think it was a tip."

"Just what do you mean?" Silk asked. "Didn't she tell you to keep the change?"

"Nope—just told me to fill the tank as fast as I could. Didn't want no oil or water, or even to have her windshield washed. I aim to give service like the company orders me to, but them that are in too much of a hurry don't get it, that's all."

"Ah, she was in a hurry?" Silk said.

"Never did see a woman so flustered. She gave me a bill. I went to fetch the change, and she was off like a flash."

Silk hoped he would draw the same luck with his next question.

"You've just earned yourself five dollars, mister," he said. "And there is five more if you can tell me where she'd been."

"Reckon I can't earn it." The old fellow shook his head. "I don't know. She only said three words to me. 'Fill 'er up.'"

"But wait," Silk cautioned. "She visited an old house not far from here. It was built in Sixteen-fifty, or around that date. And it has been vacant for about four years."

"The Collins place," the old man said promptly. "Guess everybody knows about it around here. Collins was the county treasurer in them days. He had it built—by hand. Reckon it will last another three-four hundred years too. Them days, as I heard it told, there was Indians in these parts raidin' and killin'. And British soldiers goin' around col-

lectin' taxes nobody wanted to pay. Collins built that house like a fort."

Silk placed two five-dollar bills into the withered hand.

"Now tell me where I can find that house," he said.

"Two miles ahead. Along the old brickyard road. It's the only turn-off you'll find, so you can't miss it."

"Just one more thing," Silk said. "Was that house ever robbed? Perhaps five years ago?"

The old man snickered. "Don't see why you got to ask me all them questions, mister, because you answer 'em too. Sure was robbed. People who owned it then lost a lot of stuff."

Silk thanked him fervently, drove away and picked up the Black Bat when he was out of sight of the gas station. He duly reported his conversation with the old man.

"We've hit it!" the Black Bat gloated. "And what you told me is decidedly interesting. The house was robbed. That points a finger at Joe Titus. The original builder was a civic official in days when Indians raided and tax collectors were gouging the farmers around here."

"We can assume then, that this Collins, who lived in Sixteen-fifty, probably kept quite a bit of gold on hand. As it was in danger of being taken from him, he more than likely had a hiding place built into the house."

Silk whistled. "Titus found it, realized it might be a nice cache for his stolen stuff and bought the house! It tallies, sir."

"Like a column of figures," the Black Bat said, in a gratified voice. "But before we pay the house a visit, let's drive through town and see if we can spot the town hall. I'd like a good look at the realty records."

The town hall looked like a church, set back against a wide sweep of carefully tended lawn. There were a few houses nearby, all darkened. The Black Bat dropped off and arranged with Silk to pick him up. Even Silk, who was accustomed to the Black Bat's methods of getting about, couldn't see the dark and now hooded figure, after he was a dozen yards from the car.

The Black Bat carried a set of burglar tools, all finely made and in miniature size. He tackled the rear door and had it opened in three or four minutes. His eyes penetrated the darkness easily

and he had no need for light. He reached the town clerk's offices and unlocked these also. A moment later he was delving into the enormous record books.

HE SOON found the listing of a house in the name of Mark Graham who had acquired it not long before Joe Titus had been arrested for the last time. It was the Collins place.

The Black Bat next looked for the tax records. Tracing the Collins house in this book was easy. His gloved finger ran down the list, stopped, and his lips went grim under his hood.

The taxes for the place had been paid by Mark Graham for only the first year. After that, the records indicated, checks had been received made out by Floyd Watrous.

Perhaps, flashed through the Black Bat's mind, Floyd Watrous had far more than just a publisher's interest in convicting and punishing Slater.

The Black Bat told all this to Silk while they drove toward the old house.

"Then we're about finished running down the murderer," Silk said. "Watrous worked with Joe Titus. He paid the taxes on this place so nobody would take it over and the loot would remain intact. It was a safe place for the stuff. Watrous wouldn't have dared store it in town. Those things were as hot as they were valuable."

"It begins to look like that," the Black Bat agreed. "Still, we have no definite proof against Watrous. Not for the murder of Mrs. Titus at any rate. But we've taken several long strides in the right direction."

They came within sight of the old house soon afterward and Silk doused his lights and drove slowly by the place. The Black Bat's uncannily night sight surveyed everything closely.

The house was two stories high and of the familiar Colonial type. It was in need of painting, and the place had not been cared for. Huge, spreading trees, as old as the house probably, shaded the place and made it black dark by night. Shrubs and grass had grown wild. A white picket fence was sagging, or down in several places.

Yet the house possessed an undeniable charm. A flagstone walk ran around the place. There were no neighbors for half a mile and the dirt road was of that red clay which had helped to locate the

place.

The night was without moon or stars, and Silk could see nothing. He stopped the car well behind the house at the Black Bat's orders and waited while the Black Bat hunted a spot where the coupé could be well-hidden. When a grove was found, both men approached the house on foot.

"My one worry," the Black Bat whispered, "is that the man who is responsible for these crimes became frightened enough to come out here and strip the place of the loot. You will recall that at least one portrait was disposed of to Shane. Maybe nothing was left here."

"But we have discovered that Watrous paid the taxes and therefore must have known all about it," Silk offered. "That helps. He's our man. He must be."

"Perhaps, Silk. Personally, I'll hold any decision in abeyance until we have definite proof of his guilt. Be careful now. I'd hate to run into a trap at this stage of our little chase."

They mounted the porch steps, crossed to the door, and the Black Bat studied it. There was a modern lock on the door. He attacked it with his instruments.

Soon they were inside and while the house had been closed up tightly, there was no musty odor. The Black Bat's strange eyes saw no traces of dust either.

"Our theory about Mrs. Titus coming here and cleaning the place up seems to have been a good one," he said. "She really worked at it. Perhaps when we find where she stopped abruptly, we'll have a fair idea of where she found the loot, became frightened, and dashed back to the city."

BUT the entire house was scrupulously clean, every room. The Black Bat and Silk sat down in an upstairs bedroom. The Black Bat was not in despair about their luck, but he recognized the amount of work facing them.

"There is probably a secret room," he said. "In a newer house, into which the room has been built after construction of the house, such places are not hard to locate. No matter how careful the work is done, some trace of it remains. But here we are faced with a different proposition. The secret room was built right along with the house, has existed for centuries, and become so blended in the whole building that a search may reveal nothing."

"We'll have to measure the outside, then measure every room," Silk said. "It may even be in the cellar and dug down. Shall we begin?"

"Look in the cellar," the Black Bat ordered. "See if there is any rope around, which we can use as a tape measure. I'll keep searching up here."

Silk hurried downstairs. The Black Bat moved slowly along the hallway, eyes penetrating the darkness and examining every inch of walls and floors. He saw cigarette ashes near the stairway. They had fallen lightly and still retained the shape of the cigarette. He guessed, from this, that they must have been dropped recently or Mrs. Titus would have cleaned them up. He bit off a mild oath. If anyone had entered this house since she had cleaned it, that person's purpose could only be to remove the loot.

Silk returned with a good length of rope. They had started work in one of the rooms facing the front of the house when the Black Bat suddenly hissed a warning and crossed the room quickly to a window.

"There's a car coming our way," he said. "Without lights. A heavy car and moving slowly, as if the driver is looking for this house."

Silk quickly gathered up the rope. "We'd better get out of here, sir. This house could be a mighty good trap for us."

"There isn't time," the Black Bat said. "The car has stopped. Three—four—six men are getting out. Hank Titus and his gang. But how in the world were they tipped off that we'd be here?"

"I don't know, but it's time to take action." Silk pulled a heavy automatic out of his pocket. "Hank and his boys are killers."

The Black Bat laid a restraining hand on Silk's forearm.

"Wait! I wonder what on earth they're up to. Not one of them is coming toward the house. They're simply spreading out and taking up positions to cover the entrance. Silk, they don't know anyone is inside the house, but they expect someone to show up. The trap isn't for us."

Silk peered out of the window, but he couldn't see a thing. The Black Bat had his gun in his hand. If Hank Titus were laying a trap, it was quite possible the Black Bat and Silk would be drawn into

it.

"We'll go downstairs and unlock the rear door," he said. "Don't make a sound. It's quiet as a tomb around here and noises will carry. Put your free hand on my shoulder and I'll lead the way."

CHAPTER XIV

Fire in the Night



WITH an exit prepared, the Black Bat felt a little better. He and Silk could have slipped out easily, but both were highly intrigued by the developments, and both were determined to see the affair through.

Almost an hour went by. Now and then Silk saw the tips of cigarettes glow as nervous crooks consumed them quickly. Then the Black Bat heard an approaching car. Like Hank's, it was traveling without lights, but it stopped directly in front of the entrance to the house. The Black Bat counted four men getting out.

"Adam Hewitt and three of his picked men," he whispered to Silk. "There are going to be fireworks. And we shall be part of them. Maybe we can explode louder than the whole lot. Here's the plan."

Silk felt a tingle of anticipation.

"As soon as they begin fighting," the Black Bat went on, "we'll slip out the back. You find a hiding place and stay there to cover me if things go wrong. I'm going to try and get close enough to Hank Titus to grab him. In the mêlée and darkness, nobody will know what happened. Then we'll try to make Hank talk. Not by force or threats, but by the use of gentle psychology. It works oftener and better. Let's go!"

They were passing through the kitchen when the fury broke. No shots were fired. Neither side wished to raise any alarm even though the police authority in a town like this couldn't hope to compete with such a mob. They shouted though, and fought like wildcats. The Black Bat imagined skulls were being pounded unmercifully and the odds were all in Hank's favor, for his men outnumbered Hewitt's.

Silk took refuge behind an overgrown bush, lying flat and keeping his automatic trained. He squinted into the darkness, but saw no trace of the Black Bat's movements.

One man suddenly materialized out of the gloom. He was running madly, with another after him. The pursuing man held what looked like a piece of lead pipe. He gained, closed in, and swung the weapon. The fleeing man went down, to slide a few feet on his face before he stopped. His attacker whirled and raced back to where the fight was more concentrated.

The Black Bat, meanwhile, skirted the scene, watching the fighting men until he picked out Hank. The gangster held a clubbed gun in one hand, a blackjack in the other. The Black Bat remembered Butch and the drubbing he had taken at Hank's command. Nailing Hank was going to be a pleasure.

Hank was looking for his special victim too—and saw him. Hewitt, knowing the battle to be lost, was trying to move quietly away, reach his car and drive off. Hank gave a shout of triumph and raced after the man.

Hewitt veered to the left, darted through the darkness and passed within three feet of the Black Bat without seeing him. Hank came up fast. He passed the Black Bat, too, but discovered him. An arm suddenly wound around Hank's neck, throttling the yell that started to well up. His head jerked back. He couldn't see a thing, not even the gloved fist that smacked the point of his chin. He grew limp in the Black Bat's grasp.

The other fights were quieting down. Hewitt had apparently reached his car and two of his men piled in. The car drove off with a mad grinding of gears and tires.

Then the hunt for Hank began. It ended inside the old house where flashlights now broke the darkness. The Black Bat hoisted Hank over one shoulder and moved away. Silk joined him and they hurried on until they were deep in a forest, well behind the house.

"You're still carrying that rope," the Black Bat whispered, "Tie him up, Silk. Then lash him to the trunk of that tree. Leave him sitting up so he can talk easily. Then get back where he can't see you. Don't snap on your light no matter what happens. Hank is going to talk, because he'll feel like talking. Only

he won't know just who he is talking to."

Before Hank recovered, the Black Bat heard the hood's men departing. Enough noise had been created to make staying here dangerous and perhaps the men were at a loss for orders. At any rate, they were soon gone and intense quiet settled over the area.

IT WAS broken by Hank's first groan. The Black Bat, seated about a dozen feet away, watched carefully until Hank opened his eyes and began to struggle. Then the Black Bat spoke. His voice was by no means an exact duplicate of Hewitt's, but to a man half groggy from a knockout punch, it sufficed.

"Hank, you nitwit," the Black Bat said, "what was the big idea of hi-jacking us? Why didn't you let me know you were after the stuff too? There's enough for both of us."

"Cut me loose." Hank strained at the ropes. "Where are my boys? I'll kill you for this."

"You're in no position to talk about killing anybody," the Black Bat said in Hewitt's voice. "The boys have all gone. They don't know what happened to you. Now can you realize the spot you're in?"

"What do you want?" Hank grumbled.

"How did you know we were coming here?"

Hank didn't reply at once. He seemed to be thinking heavily and some of the antagonism was missing when he spoke.

"Hewitt, I think we were both made fools of. My tip came through an anonymous phone call. Some man. He said you and your boys had discovered the house and were on your way here, and that I was to get out here fast. I don't know who spilled the information that I'd been looking for this place for years, but this man knew it."

"We're a couple of chumps," the Black Bat said, still acting as Hewitt. "My tip was an anonymous call too. Somebody set us against one another. We'd get further by cooperation. What do you say?"

"Untie me," Hank replied. "I'm with you all the way."

"Not quite yet, Hank. Not until I'm satisfied. Maybe you know less than I think you do, so start the ball rolling by telling me what you do know."

"If this is some kind of a trick—"

"It's no trick. You can't help your-

self if it is. Talk, Hank."

"My brother cached a lot of stuff out here," growled Hank. "I knew he had it somewhere. His wife forgot all about the house, I guess, until that sap came along and they planned to get married. She must have come out here then, and found the stuff."

"It that why you knocked her off?" the Black Bat asked.

"Me?" Hank shouted. "Me knock her off? Listen, Phyllis was okay. No matter what she did, I wouldn't have harmed her. She found out what Joe was and she stuck with him, right through to the end. I didn't kill her!"

"Do you think I did, Hank?"

"Somebody did. They got Slater, and with enough evidence to burn him, but I can't see him as the killer. Unless he found out about this stuff and decided to get it all for himself. You never can tell."

"I didn't do it either," the Black Bat said. "Joe was my partner, but he never confided in me much toward the end. You were his brother. You know plenty, and if we're going to work together from now on, you'll have to talk some more."

"Ask the questions," Hank said sourly.

"You didn't kill her and neither did I. That leaves Bethall. What of him?"

"Nix. Bethall was risking a lot to find this place himself. You ought to know. He faded you for a nice loss, by busting into your house."

"Yes, he did," the Black Bat retorted. "And got nothing. When I find him I'll square that."

Hank laughed harshly. "I took care of Bethall. He's home with a busted jaw and enough bruises to keep him quiet for a week. So it ain't Bethall, nor you nor me. Who is it then?"

"The architect? Phyllis hired one, showed him the plans and if he came out here and found the stuff, he might have got ideas."

"Could be," Hank agreed. "There's nobody else."

"Sure there is. A guy named Floyd Watrous who publishes the *Globe-Star*. I don't like the way he's pushing Quinn into trying Slater for murder. He's in such a big rush, maybe he has reasons."

"Watrous? Never heard of him."

"Watrous has a man working for him, named Gentry. Chris Gentry. He was the man who interviewed your brother at Sing Sing before they burned Joe. He

could have been sent by Watrous to prod Joe a bit into telling where he'd hid the stuff."

"Not Joe," Hank derided. "He was my brother, remember? He wouldn't talk if they tortured him. Anyway he knew Gentry liked him. Because when Gentry wrote stuff about Joe, he went easy."

THE Black Bat dropped his acting and walked closer. He threw the beam of a small flash on Hank. It reflected enough light so that Hank saw the black hood. He emitted a wild scream.

"Thank you, Hank," the Black Bat bowed ironically. "You presented me with a lot of information I wouldn't have been able to drag out of you with a team of horses. I'm going to cut you loose now. Start for town, because if I find you again, I'll start shooting first."

"But I haven't got a car!" yelled Hank.

"Walk. The air will do your conscience good. It needs an airing."

Hank found his bonds cut. He got to his feet, rubbed his wrists and finally turned and started walking. After several steps he decided that was too slow and broke into a run.

The Black Bat went over to where Silk was hidden and sat down beside him.

"Well," he said, "we solved part of the affair. Hank, Bethall and Hewitt knew the existence of the loot, were all after it, but none of them even knew where it was hidden until Hewitt and Hank got anonymous phone calls tonight. It was a trick on the part of the murderer to get them out of the way. Let them fight it out, perhaps with the hope they'd both be killed. That sounds all right, doesn't it?"

"I don't know," Silk said slowly. "The man behind this is a killer. If he wanted to get rid of anybody, he'd be more apt to take direct measures. This way there was danger of Hank and Hewitt joining forces."

"I wondered if you'd think in that vein," the Black Bat said. "Because those were my thoughts too. There must be some other reason."

Abruptly he stopped talking and jumped to his feet. He ran around to a cleared space and looked in the direction of the house. The whole area was pinkish in color and rapidly becoming

crimson. The Black Bat could hear the snap of flames.

"The house is on fire!" he called to Silk.

They raced toward it, but didn't bother to approach beyond the edge of the clearing. A house so old is tinderwood and this one was burning as if it had been sprayed with gasoline. The fire seemed to have started in the cellar or on the first floor, but the flames were already consuming the upper story and even as they watched, part of the roof fell in.

"This will draw plenty of attention," the Black Bat said. "We'll have to stay out of the way until it's all over. Then I want a good look at the ruins."

Silk shook his head sadly. "There won't be any ruins, sir. Not the way it's burning."

CHAPTER XV

The Closing Net



LONG afterwards, when it was getting close toward dawn, the fire apparatus left and everyone who lived close by went back to bed. Then Silk and the Black Bat emerged from their hiding place and poked amidst the ruins.

The Black Bat's eyes spotted those elusive bits of wreckage which were important. A corner of painted canvas; a piece of a gilt frame; some badly smashed bits of china. He gathered them all up.

They were home before daylight and at work in the lab. The Black Bat put all of his finds under a large magnifying glass for close study.

"Only you and I would realize it, Silk," he said, "but there is a connection between the meeting of those two gangs and the fire. Somebody arranged for the rival gangs to meet there and fight it out. Possibly this person hoped they'd make enough racket to attract the police. Then, when the house burned down, it might be construed as something which had resulted from the fight."

"I know," Silk stated bluntly. "That way, the murderer could put an end to this hunt for the treasures. By letting everyone assume they had been de-

stroyed. Then he could dispose of the stuff far more easily. But what I don't understand is that the treasures seemed to have been in the house."

The Black Bat looked up. "I would have been willing to bet a fortune that the stuff was removed before the stage was set for the fire. Yet I find that this corner of canvas, for instance, is part of a genuine portrait. Nothing faked. So are some of the bits of porcelain from broken vases just as genuine."

"Maybe the fire really was an accident," Silk said.

"Oh, no. Not that fire. It started in too many places. Our man arranged half a dozen arson bombs to go off at the height of the gang fight, or shortly after it happened. The house was old, dry, and once the flames began, no one could have gone inside to salvage anything, even if the stuff could have been located."

Silk subsided, left the lab and went to the kitchen where he began preparing breakfast to the accompaniment of prodigious yawns. He wondered if he would ever get eight consecutive hours of sleep again. He carried a cup of coffee to the lab and found Quinn excited.

"The first two items I examined were genuine," he explained. "The others are fakes! Naturally the murderer was willing to sacrifice some genuine stuff to convince any suspicious person that all of the loot had been destroyed."

"The murderer has what is left then," Silk said. "Where does that leave us? We don't know who he is."

The Black Bat bent over the magnifying glass again. "Who says we don't. And no questions now, because I haven't all the answers. There is, however, one thing you can do."

Silk was wide-awake now. He moved closer to the lab bench.

"One of our definite leads lies in the fact that the murderer overheard McGrath accusing me of being the Black Bat," Tony Quinn said. "We are reasonably certain that neither Bethall, Hank Titus or Hewitt could have been that person. So whoever it was came to the office to find out what was going on. He had to have a good reason and did have, though we never learned what it was because he didn't stay long enough."

"That architect had been sent for and should have come," Silk said quickly. "His excuse for not appearing was one

of the flimsiest I ever heard."

"Yes, that's true. This person was suddenly placed on the defensive by McGrath's statements. He left at once. But bear this in mind, Silk. When he entered the building, it was after midnight. Slater wasn't arrested until then. Now the killer had no reason to suspect anything, so he came openly. Which meant he must have used the night elevator."

"I can see that," Silk admitted, "but darned if I know what it means. Unless—" his voice became brittle with excitement—"the elevator operator could identify him."

The Black Bat smiled. "You're still on the beam, Silk. The night operator is named Larry Tupham. But the last I knew, he wasn't reporting for work and seems to have been on a binge. Something fairly habitual with him, I imagine."

"This time, however, it may not have been habit which sent him off, but the cunning, well-laid plans of a murderer who also realized Tupham could identify him. That's why I want you to find Tupham right after you deliver me to the courthouse."

"I'll find him—and he'll talk," Silk promised. "You're going to start picking the jury this morning, then?"

"What else can I do?" The Black Bat walked over to a steel locker and removed his somber clothing. He put on the tweeds of Tony Quinn, hooked the white cane over his arm and walked out of the lab. "Let's have breakfast. There isn't time enough to get any sleep."

CCOURT convened at ten. Slater was brought in, looking worried and hollow-eyed. He gave Quinn a curt nod. Quinn went to work. It required no more than an hour and a half to select the jury which was duly sworn in, and court was then adjourned until two in the afternoon when evidence would be taken.

Silk returned from his mission in time to escort Quinn back to his office. There, in strict privacy, he reported on his task of finding the elevator operator.

"He isn't drunk now, sir. Though he was. A mixture of too much liquor and something I believe was poison."

"He isn't dead?" Quinn cried.

"No, and he isn't going to die. But he's in a coma and can't help one whit. I talked to his wife. Tupham came home

the morning after the murder happened. He was roaring drunk then, and kept raving about his good friend with an inexhaustible pocketbook and a generosity that surpassed anything Tupham had ever known before."

"Where did Tupham do his drinking? If it was in a bar, this man may have been with him and the bartender should know something."

"I covered that. Tupham came into the bar with a stranger who didn't say much and who insisted upon sitting in a booth in the darkest part of the cafe. And those places don't use strong lights for their best illuminated areas. At closing time—four in the morning—the stranger half-carried Tupham out. Nobody seems to know what this chap really looked like except that he appeared to be young, and had an average build."

"The description is meagre, but it fits," Quinn said. "We can't assign detectives to guard Tupham because what he knows is of no police value. He was given poison because he could have identified the man who came to my office and overheard me accused of being the Black Bat. We can't go into that without displaying too much interest. Have any other attempts been made on Tupham's life? Anything suspicious?"

"No, sir. When Tupham's wife realized he wasn't groaning from a hang-over, she called a doctor. He told her it was probably rotten booze, but it wasn't. Tupham drank only the best that night. They took him to a hospital where he is occupying a ward bed. Easy to get at. I wonder why the killer didn't go back and do a good job on him?"

"That's what worries me," Quinn said. "He doesn't seem to care so long as Tupham can't talk rationally for a while. I should judge our killer has his plans all made and he won't be around these parts much longer. We'll have to chance that. Now I've got to begin thinking about the trial and how I can stall in getting the testimony of my witnesses. That's hard to do because I'm used to getting the truth out of them as quickly as possible."

At noon, Quinn had lunch sent in. He was in the middle of it when Christopher Gentry was announced. The newspaperman entered and sat down. He seemed worried about something.

"Mr. Quinn," he said, "have you dis-

covered anything in this case which might make my death important to someone?"

Quinn looked startled. "Your death, Mr. Gentry?"

"This morning, when I left my home and crossed the street to catch a bus, somebody tried to run me down. It was deliberate and premeditated, because the car had been parked at the curb. It zigzagged all over the road. I barely got clear. That was no accident, Mr. Quinn."

"Apparently not," Quinn sympathized. "But you have no direct connection with this case. Or have you?"

"I wish I knew," Gentry said. "Last night I took home some old copies of the *Globe-Star*. I wanted to study my stories on Joe Titus. Could anyone object to that?"

"Not unless you found something in the story which seems important," said Quinn.

"But that's just it. I didn't. And on top of all this, Mr. Watrous has just given me an assignment in Alaska. I'm to cover it as a homesteading and vacation place. I've got to leave soon. Watrous wants everything settled today because he is going away himself."

"Watrous?" Quinn asked blankly.

GENTRY nodded, forgetting Quinn could not see.

"Yes," he said then quickly. "His wife has been in London for some weeks and has taken sick. He's sailing tonight. Well, if I think of anything which might make my death important to anyone, I'll phone you. Maybe I'd better go to Alaska at that. Might be safer."

"I wish I could help you," Quinn told him sincerely. "Please phone if you think of anything, and I'll do all I can. And watch yourself. If that was an attempt at murder, the driver of the car may try again."

"Don't worry." Gentry grimaced. "I look up and down before I step off any curb from now on. I'll drop in again before I leave."

After he had gone, Silk came back into the office.

"It has to be Watrous," he said. "First he tried to kill Gentry and when he failed, he took an easier way out by sending him as far away as possible. And Watrous is going away, too, until the heat dies down. Or maybe to arrange for smuggling that loot."

"Watrous will not sail if he is implicated," Quinn said. "How is Butch? Have you heard?"

"Doing nicely. Carol is still with him, of course."

"Good—and tell her to keep her eyes open in case another attempt is made on Butch's life. Right now I'm going back to court and start the trial. It's odd, making the motions to send a man to the chair when you know he's innocent of the crime."

The trial began promptly. Six witnesses had testified before four o'clock. Quinn had never drawn such concise and important testimony from any group of witnesses even though he tried desperately to slow them down. The defense worked fast, too. Mainly because there was no defense, no issues to challenge, nothing to work on.

Quinn rested his case and the defense attorney immediately called Slater to the stand. Quinn arose to address the court, asking that Slater's testimony be postponed until the morning.

"I intend to spend a lot of time breaking down his statements," Quinn said. "I would not care to begin this afternoon, be compelled to adjourn until morning, and allow the defense time to frame some answers to my questions."

The defense attorney jumped up to object. The judge waved him aside and adjourned court. Quinn walked out hurriedly, on Silk's arm.

"I feel like an assorted dozen low heels," he murmured. "The lowest kind there is. But I got a little extra time, at any rate. We're going directly home, Silk."

In the car Silk mused over the suspects.

"I wish I had an idea who it might be," he said, after a time. "You know. I'm sure you do, but I can't figure it out. There are only three people. With two-hundred-and-fifty-pound Floyd Watrous just as heavy with suspicion as he is with fat. Maybe Owen, the architect. He's been pretty quiet. Gentry? How would he know enough about it all to start this rolling? Yet it has to be one of those men."

"It is, Silk," Quinn said soberly. "And just now you mentioned the biggest piece of single evidence—or clue, if you want to call it that—which we have. Park right in front of the house. We may have to leave in a hurry."

CHAPTER XVI

Murderer Uncovered

FOR an hour Quinn sat in the library and seemed to be dozing. But his mind was working at top speed. He had everything except evidence and there appeared to be no way of getting it. Suspicion of a man is no legal proof, and he had only a few shreds of proved facts. Hardly enough to work on.

Christopher Gentry phoned at eight o'clock. He seemed to be highly agitated.

"I found something," he blurted. "It may not mean much, but when I interviewed Joe Titus the night before he was executed, he told me about what his plans had been before he was sentenced to die. Among other things he wanted to quit racketeering and crime, and retire to a country home which he had already purchased in the hope of living there some day. He described the house, told me where it was, and I put the whole business into my story. Yet when I read the story over just now, it came to me that all of this had been edited out."

"But I don't see—" Quinn hesitated.

"It means something," insisted Gentry. "That part of my story carried the real meat of the interview, the sob stuff which Watrous always did go for. And another thing. A man named Douglas Shane was murdered. The night of the crime, Watrous sent me to his house to pick up a brief-case. The way I understood it, Shane was with Watrous and had forgotten the case. I was to walk right into the house and get it. Well, I found the door open, but there was no brief-case. When I reported this to Watrous, he told me to forget the whole thing."

"Perhaps we'd better have Watrous explain it," Quinn said. "The part about editing your story doesn't seem to mean much, but his connection with Douglas Shane does."

"Then you'd better hurry," Gentry advised. "He'll be boarding his ship and sailing at midnight. I'll try to be there.

He seems to be packing off in an awful rush."

"Yes," Quinn urged. "What were you going to say?"

There was no answer. Quinn pressed the phone firmly against his ear. Still there was no sound beyond the steady buzzing of the instrument. Then someone at the other end quietly cut off the connection. . . .

At eleven o'clock, Silk and Quinn met Captain McGrath at the dock.

"Well, this seems to be it," McGrath said. "I went to Gentry's home when you phoned. Somebody must have popped him good. There was a little blood on the floor, a chair was tipped over, and Gentry was missing. There's an alarm out for him, but I think he was knocked off. Because he knew too much. Do we go aboard and take Watrous now?"

"Why not?" Quinn asked. "We know he is aboard. But handle things quietly. Remember we've little against Watrous. How about the check on his baggage I asked you to make?"

"For a guy who is making a hurried trip to a sick wife in London, Watrous is certainly taking enough stuff along. Five big trunks of it, all stowed below decks by now. It came aboard this afternoon."

"We'll have to let it ride, Mac," said Quinn. "We have no warrant to impound it and before we get one, the ship will have sailed. Let's go aboard."

McGrath's badge got them past the gangplank officers and another flash of it encouraged a steward to show them Watrous' cabin, a first class accommodation on the best deck. There were lights inside. Watrous was not on deck, like all the other passengers. He didn't appear to be excited about the trip at all.

McGrath rapped smartly on the door. Watrous opened it, stepped back in amazement, and eyed his three visitors with considerable apprehension. McGrath started searching the cabin.

"What is this?" Watrous demanded indignantly. "What's the idea?"

Quinn sat down, white cane between his knees, sightless eyes staring at nothing.

"We've a few questions to ask, Mr. Watrous," he said. "First of all, where is Gentry?"

"Chris Gentry? How do I know?"

"Let it pass," Quinn said. "Frankly,

Mr. Watrous, we believe you are guilty of murder. Perhaps two murders."

WATROUS' fat face turned white. He sat down heavily and the chair creaked under his weight. He gaped at Quinn, looked at Silk, then transferred his gaze to McGrath who was busy rooting in Watrous' baggage.

"I—I killed someone?" Watrous wavered. "Two murders?"

"The death of Mrs. Titus and that of Douglas Shane. You can't talk about it now. There isn't time. I'm sorry, Watrous, but you'll have to come ashore."

"But it's all so silly," Watrous cried. "And I have to sail. My wife is sick. I received a cable this morning. There won't be another ship leaving—"

"Planes leave every day," Quinn reminded him, "and if your wife is really sick, you can get priority, I'm certain. It even seems odd to me that you are going to her this slow way when a plane would get you there by morning."

"I don't like flying," Watrous argued. "And anyway I doubt my wife is as sick as her cable indicates. I tried to reach her by transatlantic phone and couldn't. I called some friends and they said she was all right last night."

McGrath rang for a steward. "We haven't got all night," the Captain said. "I'm not interested in taking a trip to England. Come on, Watrous. If we're wrong, we'll be very, very sorry."

Watrous bristled. "You don't know how sorry you'll be! Very well, I can't resist. I take it this is an arrest."

"For murder," Quinn said quietly. "Take him away, Captain. Use handcuffs, but hide them to the public if you can. Silk and I will remain until the luggage is off."

McGrath looked at Quinn keenly, shrugged, and encircled Watrous' wrist with steel. He led the fat man out. Watrous didn't protest any longer. He seemed beyond that stage.

On shore, McGrath put Watrous into a police car which was parked half a block from Tony Quinn's sedan. McGrath didn't pull away. He sat there, watching the car with a puzzled expression on his face. Watrous remained stonily silent.

Then they saw Silk leading Quinn down the gangplank. People were beginning to move faster. The first all ashore signal had been given. Silk and

Quinn disappeared for a moment behind a solid partition, then reappeared. Quinn used his cane expertly, stopped at the curb until Silk opened the car door, then got in.

McGrath nodded in satisfaction. He drove away too. But what neither McGrath nor Watrous saw was the face of the person in Tony Quinn's gray topcoat. They would have been rather amazed, for the features were those of a very pretty girl whose blond hair was neatly tucked up under the fedora and who walked exactly like a blind man.

For during those few seconds when Silk and Tony Quinn had disappeared from view, Carol Baldwin had taken Quinn's place. At this moment, he was the Black Bat, making his way up the gangplank. He was dressed in black, as usual, but the clothing would attract no attention. He wore that wide-brimmed hat and moved fast.

The gangplank was being raised and people were yelling wildly. The deck throbbed to the rhythm of the great engines and tugs hooted derisively as they began pulling the big ship away from its pier.

The Black Bat stood at the after rail, leaning over slightly and keeping his face averted from other passengers. In a few moments the excitement of the sailing died away and passengers went to their cabins to unpack and get settled for the night.

The Black Bat was still at the rail half an hour later, though he had moved forward some and was fairly close to the cabin from which Floyd Watrous had been taken. He watched the sea intently until he heard the distant sound of a fast speedboat. It zigzagged twice in a signal. The Black Bat reached for the hood concealed beneath his clothing.

THERE were still a few people on deck. Still wearing the hat, he moved toward Watrous' cabin. It was illuminated. The Black Bat saw two people emerge from a cabin two doors away. He gave them time to get out of sight, walked up to the door and efficiently unlocked it. Inside he went straight to the phone. He asked for the purser.

"I'd like to know if there is a Mr. Floyd Watrous aboard," he said.

The purser told him to hold on, spent a moment looking over his lists, then

said there was a Floyd Watrous on board.

"Good," the Black Bat said. "I want him presented with a bottle of champagne. Right now. Have the steward tell him it's a gift from Mr. Paul Bannerman."

The Black Bat waited five minutes, stepped out on deck again and relocked the door. He saw a white-coated steward with a bottle of champagne on a tray, looking for Watrous' cabin. The man rapped on the door.

"It's the steward, sir," the white-coated man called. "A friend of yours ordered a bottle of champagne for you. You are Mr. Watrous?"

The cabin door opened only part way and the lights inside had winked out. Whoever it was inside, accepted the bottle.

"It is from a Mr. Paul Bannerman," the steward said. "Thank you, sir."

The cabin door closed promptly, the steward walked away, and the Black Bat watched his chance to don the somber hood. Over it he placed the wide-brimmed hat and marched straight to the cabin door.

"Who is it?" a voice answered his knock.

"I'm sorry, sir," the Black Bat said. "This is the steward again. There was an error about that bottle of champagne. It was for a Mr. Waters."

The bolt turned, the door opened and the bottle was extended from the darkened cabin. The Black Bat's gun pressed forward.

"You may have the champagne, Mr. Gentry," he said. "You will probably need it for your nerves."

CHAPTER XVII

McGrath Kicks Himself



RAPIDLY Gentry snapped on the lights and backed up. He held a nickel-plated gun in his hand, but he hadn't been prepared for anything like this. And with a heavy automatic pushed firmly into the pit of his stomach, he thought it best to drop his weapon.

The Black Bat kicked it away,

defly twisted Gentry about and searched him. Then he pushed the newspaperman into a chair.

"The loot Joe Titus so carefully stole at your direction four and five years ago, is included among the baggage Watrous sent aboard," the Black Bat said sternly. "I know it is, Gentry. Watrous was taken off ship, under arrest for two murders you committed. You convinced Captain McGrath and Tony Quinn that Watrous was the guilty man."

Gentry was biting his lip. He didn't speak, but behind those glasses, eyes now turned ratty were darting about seeking an avenue of escape. The Black Bat's gun was as steady as his voice.

"Perhaps," he said, "you'd prefer listening to me tell Captain McGrath just what happened. And don't move, Gentry, or I'll shoot. Frankly, I think I'd like to shoot you."

"You will anyhow," Gentry finally shouted. "Because I know who you are. I know whose face is behind that hood. Go ahead, take me in and see what happens. I'll tell the whole world that the Black Bat is Tony Quinn!"

"Would you?" The Black Bat laughed. "That worries me terribly. Sit tight now."

The Black Bat reached for the phone beside him, asked the operator to put him on the ship-to-shore circuit and connect him with Captain McGrath at Police Headquarters. In a surprisingly short time McGrath was on the wire.

"Good evening, Captain," the Black Bat said. "I appreciate very much what you and Quinn did for me. In taking Watrous off the ship as a prisoner, you opened the way for the real murderer to step into Watrous' cabin, take his place, and nearly make a getaway."

"What are you talking about?" McGrath shouted. "Who is this?"

"Why, you don't recognize my voice, Captain. And I thought we were such close friends. This is the Black Bat. I've got Christopher Gentry here with me. He killed Mrs. Titus and he murdered Douglas Shane. His plans were simple. Turn suspicion on Watrous. Do it cleverly until the time came really to put on the pressure. Then fake a cable causing Watrous to sail for Europe."

"Next, put aboard ship, in Watrous' name, several trunks containing the loot

which Joe Titus had stolen. Somewhere on the voyage, have those trunks brought to his cabin where the loot could be removed and packed for smuggling. Why, Gentry even has a passport in Watrous' name, but with his own picture on it, of course."

"Where are you now?" McGrath exclaimed.

"Aboard ship in the cabin from which you took Watrous. And don't have the ship's officers try to apprehend me, Captain. If you do, I'll escape and leave no particle of evidence to help you convict Gentry."

"I'll behave," McGrath promised. "Go ahead."

The Black Bat kept his gun pointed at Gentry and watched the man's face turn paler and paler as he spoke.

"Gentry," he said "as an accredited newspaperman, could gain access to all sorts of places where treasures were kept. He contacted Joe Titus and they worked together, Gentry as inside man, Joe as the actual thief. The things they stole were priceless but hot to handle. They had to be cooled off. Titus got himself a house in the country and hid the stuff there. Then he slipped, and was sent to the chair.

"All this you may have guessed by now. But did you ever realize that Joe Titus allowed Gentry to interview him when he refused all other such requests? He made Gentry swear to send Phyllis a sum of money every week and when the loot was finally disposed of, to hand her a lump sum in settlement, and yet never explain what it was all about. I imagine that Phyllis took the weekly cash donation thinking it came from Hewitt, who had been Joe's partner and with whom Joe conceivably could have left enough cash to support his widow."

"Listen! McGrath broke in. "This man Slater insists he saw you outside of Mrs. Titus' apartment house when the crime was committed. Is that true?"

THE Black Bat chuckled over the phone.

"Of course it is. That's why I became so interested and worked rather quietly and diligently to find the real murderer and absolve Slater. Naturally I was in no position to come forward and alibi him, so I took a more direct method of proving his innocence."

"I can understand that," McGrath re-

marked. "How'd you know Gentry killed Mrs. Titus?"

"Because if it wasn't Slater, it had to be someone who resembled Slater enough in size and build to deceive the doorman of the apartment building. Do you recall that he saw Slater get out of the taxi with Mrs. Titus? Then the doorman turned around. When he looked in the direction of the entrance once more, Mrs. Titus was almost through the door, and with her was a man who looked like Slater—but wasn't."

"Okay," McGrath said. "I'm kicking myself."

"You should, Captain. Watrous, your suspect, is a fat man who couldn't possibly be mistaken for Slater. The architect might have been, but he wasn't actually involved except by chance. That left Gentry, who had it all planned.

"Mrs. Titus, in time, discovered the loot. Gentry knew it and had to kill her. Douglas Shane purchased one stolen painting from Gentry because Gentry needed cash to finance all of this business. I discovered Shane admiring the stolen painting. He got away from me and foolishly went to Gentry for protection. So Gentry had to kill him too."

"And Gentry took Watrous' place aboard ship!" McGrath marveled. "He's got nerve, that guy."

"Quite a bit, Captain. He made it appear as though he had just tumbled to the fact that Watrous cut out Joe Titus' description of his country home in the newspaper interview purposely. He pretended to be the near victim of a hit-and-run driver. He maintained that Watrous was sending him away unexpectedly. So suspicion against Watrous made action necessary

"And Gentry, by his own statements and actions, could have been the victim of Watrous' third murder. Yet all the while Gentry was aboard waiting until Watrous should be taken off. Then he moved into his cabin, to carry on as Watrous, and probably get away with the whole thing. Watrous never did like publicity. Few people knew him by sight, so assuming his identity could succeed."

"I'll have the ship intercepted by Harbor Police," McGrath warned.

"Do so at once," the Black Bat said. "And notify Tony Quinn of all this. I think he should be present when Gentry is hauled off the ship."

McGrath said something indistinguishable.

Gentry shot out of his chair in one bold attempt to reach the door. He didn't get halfway to it. The Black Bat hit him hard and Gentry went down. The Black Bat took a small metal box from his pocket, selected a black sticker shaped like a bat in full flight. He moistened the glued side and pasted the sticker between Gentry's eyes. Then he tied up the killer.

"As a rule," he told the unconscious man, "those things only go on dead people. But you're doomed anyway, so it won't make much difference."

He stepped out of the cabin, moved rapidly to the after rail and peered into the night. The speedy launch was not far away. He looked around, vaulted the rail and dived neatly into the harbor waters. . . .

McGrath was on the dock as the Harbor Patrol boat headed for shore. Before it docked, Silk drove up and Tony Quinn climbed out of the car. McGrath didn't even look surprised. Quinn and Silk stood to one side and talked quietly.

"Carol did a good job posing as me to trick Mac," Quinn chuckled. "And again in picking me up after my jump from the ship. You cooperated beautifully by staying home to answer McGrath's call, then picking me up so I could switch to dry clothes and get rid of the Black Bat regalia. I'm grateful to you both."

"It was split second stuff," Silk laughed. "But it worked. I wonder what Gentry will think when he sees you."

"Gentry has enough on his mind," Quinn said. "You know the story. How Joe Titus and Gentry engineered the robberies. How Gentry kept the loot and planned to cash in on it. How Hewitt, Hank Titus and Bethall all guessed Joe had left something valuable and were trying to find it."

"Gentry kept Phyllis content and quiet by paying her off. He began pinning suspicion on Watrous as soon as he knew I was on the case. He poisoned the elevator operator, put Shane's body on our porch to stall me if I was the Black Bat, as he suspected from McGrath's accusations in my office."

"He went to Shane's house, for instance, so he could say later that Watrous had sent him. He made up a story

which would account for his disappearance and make Watrous even more suspected than ever. He even paid the taxes on that empty house and signed Watrous' name to a special checking account he started somewhere. Gentry's scheme was good, and it almost worked."

"Here he comes, sir," Silk warned.

GENTRY, cuffed to two Harbor Policemen, was brought onto the dock. He faced McGrath.

"Okay," he said, "you've got me. But I'm here to say that the Black Bat is Tony Quinn."

"I beg your pardon." Quinn moved forward on Silk's arm.

Gentry stared, his mouth open in awe. McGrath laughed derisively.

"Maybe," McGrath said, "you'd be interested to know that Quinn has been right here for some time and that I phoned him three minutes after the Black Bat phoned me from the ship. Now, have you anything more to say?"

"No." Gentry's shoulders sagged. "No—I've said too much already."

"Take him away," McGrath ordered. He walked over beside Quinn. "Imagine that guy thinking you are the Black Bat. Where'd he ever get such an idea?"

"I'm sure I don't know," Quinn replied. "Others seem to suspect me, too, sometimes. But now that you realize I couldn't be in two places at the same time, perhaps you are convinced also."

"Perhaps." McGrath winked. "But I'd like it better if you had talked to me when I phoned your house a little while ago. Silk said you were there, but Silk could have been lying. And then I heard somebody talk about a speed-boat racing away from that liner. Of course it means nothing. Gentry is convinced you can't be the Black Bat. Why should I think any different. But it was a swell bit of work, eh, Quinn?"

"Good night," Quinn said.

He watched McGrath walk rapidly to his car. Quinn spoke to Silk.

"He's a pretty swell sort, Silk, for all his blustering and suspicions. Honestly, I'd give a lot to know what he'd do if he ever yanked the hood off the Black Bat's head and saw me under it."

Silk shuddered. "Suppose we don't talk about things like that, sir. Suppose we just go home and go to bed. Maybe I'll have a nightmare and find the answer to that problem."



"You'll have to help me," Whitney Burk said. "There's something wrong with the clasp"

THE STICKUP

By JACK KOFOED

When Miss Whitney Burk's ex-convict chauffeur schemes to betray her, the result is a doublecross that boomerangs!

PINE TREE DRIVE was dark. The palms made a fretted tracery against the full moon of Miami Beach. There was a sweet warmth and a heavy smell of jasmine in the air.

Duff Hardy, who was chauffeuring Miss Whitney Burk's car, surreptitiously smoked a cigarette, cuddling it in the palm of his hand between puffs. He knew his employer would not be annoyed at his smoking, but he had a regard for

appearances. A chauffeur, who drove a Rolls Royce, was supposed to be on his dignity. His nerves were not as good as they should have been, and the cigarette helped.

Duff thought about Miss Whitney Burk. The newspapers said she had fifty million dollars, but you wouldn't know it from the way she acted. She was kind and friendly, and never put on the high hat. That's why it made it

tough to go through with this deal. Miss Whitney Burk was to be robbed of the famous jewels she wore, and again borrowing from the newspapers, they were worth a quarter of a million dollars.

If he hadn't needed money so desperately, Duff wouldn't have gone in on the deal, because he liked his employer very much. It was a dirty trick any way you looked at it. He had met Miss Burk while he was in prison. She was a member of the Board of Visitors, or Trustees, or whatever you called them, and came once a month. Duff wasn't a criminal in the accepted sense of the word. He had shot his wife in a brawl, when they were both drunk, and had been given ten years for manslaughter. Outside of that, his record was as clean as a cocker spaniel's tooth.

Miss Burk had helped him get a parole, and had given him a job when he was released. Duff, who was big and good looking in a solemn kind of way, was grateful. In fact, his eagerness to serve her, sometimes embarrassed Miss Whitney Burk a little. Once he heard her say to a friend: "I think Duff would willingly die for me." His chest swelled out, and he told himself that he sure would. He'd die for her any time. Just give him the chance.

But that was before he met Trixie Cato, who liked men—men who would spend money on her. Duff was crazy about her, but he knew he could retain her only as long as he had money. He needed Trixie as much as he needed the sun in the morning and dinner at night. He couldn't give her up. That would be as bad as going back to the Big House. Driving along Pine Tree Drive now he thought of her fondly.

It was quiet. Somehow the stillness crept in, and was like a physical touch. There was not even the rustle of a breeze among the palms, and at this time of the year that was a little unusual and a little ominous.

ONE night, when he had been out with Trixie, he met Red Curry in one of the South Beach bars. Curry had been in the penitentiary when Duff was there, and they had become friendly. Red was hard up, too. He was working as a dishwasher until something happened to give him a break.

They left Trixie for a few minutes, and had a drink by themselves.

"I hear you're workin' for that Burk dame," Red said.

"Yeah. She's the finest woman in the world. I'd die for her," said Duff, a little self-consciously.

Curry grunted contemptuously. "Sentiment never got a guy nothin'. If you want to keep that Cato chicken for yourself, you've got to get more dough than Whitney Burk'll give you for chauffeur-in' her around. Why not put the bite on her?"

Duff's face wore an outraged look.

"She got me outa the pen," he said. "She gave me a job. What do you think I am, a doublecrosser, pullin' a fast one on her?"

Red sloughed down his Scotch and soda.

"Okay, okay," he said, "don't be touchy. Let's go back to Trixie. I hear she's a little miffed, because you ain't shellin' out the way you used to."

"I'm down near the end of my roll," Duff admitted.

"If you think that's an excuse with Trixie, you're crazy," the stickup man said.

Duff remembered that as he drove along Pine Tree Drive. He remembered a lot of other things. The silence in prison—silence like tonight's that wrapped itself around you like a cloak. Sometimes he would wake in the middle of the night, when the stillness worked through his consciousness, and sit upright in bed, trembling in every nerve. Then, he thought of Trixie again and of the things Red Curry said to him every time they met.

Look at all that jewelry Whitney Burk's got. If we take it, it won't hurt her a nickel's worth. She's got it insured. Who'll lose? The insurance companies. What have the insurance companies ever done for you? Did they get you out of jail? Did they give you a job? You want to keep Trixie? Well, you can't do it unless you get some heavy sugar.

Duff kept saying no, no, no. He wouldn't double-cross Miss Whitney Burk, not if they gave him a million, not if he never saw Trixie Cato again. But he knew he was weakening. He couldn't do without Trixie. When he thought it over, he began to see Red had some points in his favor. Miss Burk wouldn't be hurt. He'd only be rooking some big corporation, and what the blazes did he care about a corporation?

That's the way the chauffeur argued with himself, and if you argue with yourself long enough, you'll be convinced. There were only two points, really. He had to have money, and this way he might be able to get it without hurting Miss Whitney Burk.

Suddenly the silence of the night was broken. The smooth purr of a car behind them was growing louder. Duff held the glowing end of his cigarette to his wrist watch. This was the time. Right on the second. The boys were coming.

He had given in just two nights before. Trixie and Red were with him. The tab in the bar was eight dollars, and he only had six.

"So what?" Curry said, "I'll take it." He handed the waiter a ten-dollar bill, and told him to keep the change.

Trixie said, in a disappointed voice, "I'm sure gettin' low when my boy friend is busted."

That had decided Duff. He couldn't stand any more. Trixie was slipping out of his fingers, and he couldn't let that happen.

"Don't worry, kid," he said hoarsely. "I'll have dough soon. Plenty. More than you ever saw in your life."

Red grinned at him. "Good," he said. That was all.

But Trixie was curious. "You get big dough?" she scoffed. "Where?"

"Never mind," Curry broke in. "It'll be enough for you after he comes up with it."

Later Duff and Red talked over plans. Duff still didn't like it. He kept thinking of how good Miss Whitney Burk had been to him, and how horribly disappointed she would be if she ever knew. But, she wouldn't know. He'd be in the clear. Curry had cut in one of his friends for the actual stickup. Duff was to tip them off when Miss Burk was wearing her jewels, where she was going, and the spot to make the play.

WELL, tonight there had been a big party at the Surf Club, one of those big parties, where women try to outshine each other. Miss Burk had told Duff to drop her at the club, and come back at midnight, because she was going to play golf the next day, and didn't want to be tired out. So, Duff telephoned Red and his pal. They had stolen a car, and would do the job on

Pine Tree Drive three blocks from Miss Burk's home.

The car behind was coming faster now. Duff edged the Rolls Royce closer to the side of the road. He wanted to give the boys all the room they needed. His heart was beating fast.

Duff began to think of what would happen afterward. The cops would jump to the conclusion that this was an inside job, because he was an ex-con. They'd give him a going over, try to make him talk. That was all right. It was worth it for fifty thousand dollars—and Trixie. He wouldn't talk. Nobody in the world could make him talk. He just felt a little rotten, though, because he was pulling this trick on Miss Burk.

The other automobile whizzed by, then suddenly cut in to block off the Rolls. Duff jammed on his brakes, which screamed in protest.

"What, in heaven's name!" exclaimed Miss Burk.

I should have had a gun along, Duff thought. Then, I could fire it before they took it away, and it would make me look like a hero, yah, what a crazy idea that is! They wouldn't give me a license for a gun, because I've been in jail. Anyway the noise of a shot would bring people running. I gotta think better than that when the coppers start talking to me.

Two figures emerged from the car. They wore masks and carried pistols.

"What is it, Duff?" Miss Burk said.

He answered in a low, cautious voice. "Looks like a stickup. Don't talk, and do whatever they tell you. I'd rather be killed than have anything happen to you. The cops always say a guy like me is the finger. You've been too good to me. I ain't in on this. You gotta know I ain't in on this. I couldn't be after you've been so swell."

"I'm sure you're not," said Whitney Burk. "Don't worry. I'll see that you aren't blamed."

The beam of a huge flashlight struck Duff in the eyes. Another was turned on Miss Burk. Behind the paths of those yellow glares everything was pitch black.

"We don't want to hurt anybody," a voice—Red Curry's—said. "All we want is the ice you're wearin', lady. Nobody will lose anything—nobody but a crummy insurance company. So, don't get foolish."

Duff thought: This is old stuff to Red. He knows just what to do. But, hurry up. Hurry up. If anybody comes along here there may be shootin'.

"Jab that ice pick in the tires," Red said to his companion. "They might get a silly idea like following us. Come on, lady, shed those bracelets and rings and other stuff. We're busy guys, and if we take more than a couple of minutes on each job, we don't earn union wages." He opened the door of the limousine, and flooded the interior with yellow light.

"Of course," said Miss Burk. She seemed quite calm, and began taking off her jewelry, and handing them to the man. There was a *whee-ee-ee* of suddenly escaping air as the tires were punctured.

"I'm afraid you'll have to help me with this necklace," Whitney said. "There seems to be something wrong with the clasp."

Curry laughed. "You think maybe you or that car jockey of yours can get a fast look at me? No thanks. If you can't undo it, lift it over your head. It will be easier that way."

Right on the ball, Duff thought. Not worried a bit. Now me, I'm shaking like a leaf. I wish I had Red's nerve.

Miss Burk unfastened the clasp. There hadn't been anything wrong with it. In a moment she was as free of jewels as Lady Godiva had been of clothes, when she rode through the streets of Coventry.

There is a woman! Duff said to himself. Nothing upsets her. More than ever he felt low and mean. She had been so grand to him, and now he was doing this to her.

To keep himself from getting too jumpy, he tried to conjure up the sight of Trixie Cato's face. And it seemed that anything he did was all right if it brought her to him. Anything. Anything at all—even this.

"Okay," said Curry behind his mask. "I guess we've got everything. Thanks, Miss Burk. Most of the dames I stick up cry, and beg, and everything. You're all right. You're number one on my stickup parade."

"I have five bucks," Duff broke in with pretended sarcasm. "Don't you want that, too? After all, dough is dough."

"Forget it, funny man. We don't take money from guys like you. And I never did like peanuts. When we're out of

sight, start walking. You'll make it all right, but I hope the lady don't get her feet blistered in those slippers. Good night, all."

THE shadows disappeared into the darkness. The motor of the holdup car had been running all the time. Gears meshed, and the automobile slid into the velvet night.

Miss Burk stepped out of her car.

"All right, Duff," she said, "I guess we've had it. Did you notice anything that might help the police when we report this?"

"Only that they were driving a Packard sedan. I couldn't see the license plate, but that probably wouldn't help much, because it's a cinch they stole it."

Miss Burk sighed.

"It's lucky we're not far from home," she said. "My feet are killing me already."

The chauffeur thought: Ain't that a heck of a reaction for a woman who's been clipped for a couple hundred grand? But, after all, it's not her headache. Not if she kept up her insurance premiums.

They walked in silence. Duff was thinking: I'll meet Curry tomorrow, and find out what the score is. I should be able to get some money right away. But I'll have to be careful with it. If I made a splurge, it would tip the coppers. But I'll give Trixie a handful, and tell her to play it close to the chest. She will, too. She's a smart kid.

When they reached the house, Miss Burk called the police right away.

"Right, ma'am," said the desk sergeant. "We'll send someone over right away."

Within ten minutes a squad car pulled up in front of the house, and two plainclothes men came in. They didn't look like the detectives you see in New York and St. Paul and San Francisco. They wore sport coats and saddle shoes. The one who seemed to be in charge was named McGinnis. He did all the talking.

This was the tough part of the job. Duff made a tremendous effort not to blow up, or make any wise cracks. Miss Burk was backing him up, and that was the difference. She packed a lot of weight in Miami Beach, as who wouldn't, with fifty million dollars?

"Well, Miss Burk," said McGinnis, "this isn't exactly a surprise to us. We figure that any rich person who hires an

ex-con is in for an unpleasant surprise sooner or later."

"I simply won't listen to that sort of talk," Whitney Burk said stormily. "I know Duff, and I trust him. He had nothing to do with what happened tonight."

What a girl, thought Duff, what a girl!

"It's got all the earmarks of an inside job," McGinnis persisted. "He cased the layout, and his pals pulled the job."

"I didn't," said Duff desperately. "You know what Miss Burk has done for me. I'm not rat enough to turn on her. I'm not a crook, anyway. Sure, I did time for killing my wife when I was drunk." He felt his act was perfect and became more confident. They'd never pin anything on him. "Anybody might have done that. Honest, Mr. McGinnis, I didn't have anything to do with it. If I'd had a gun I'd-a shot it out with them."

"I know he would," said Whitney Burk.

"Okay, Duff, okay," the detective said. "I'll take your word for it—now. But don't get any sudden ideas about visiting friends in Canada or South America. We'll probably want to have a little chat with you later. Right now I want to talk with Miss Burk—alone."

Well, that was all right. She was one hundred percent for him. She would stand up for him better than he could stand up for himself. Duff would have liked to hang around and listen on the other side of the door but that was dangerous. He went to his room over the garage, undressed, and went to bed. But he couldn't sleep. He lay there, arms under his head, staring into the darkness.

Sure, he was a rat, a dirty, lowdown, stinking rat. Only a rat would turn against someone who had done more for him than anyone else in the world. But, he couldn't help it. Trixie was in his blood and he couldn't get her out. He couldn't live without her and he couldn't have her unless he had money. Well, he'd have it now. Yes, and he really wasn't hurting Whitney Burk. She would get back the value of the jewels from the insurance company. If you looked at it right, he had only helped himself to happiness. Why get sentimental?

Then he began thinking about Red

Curry and Pete Ebersole, who had helped out on the job. It was a cinch he couldn't see them tomorrow. The police would put a tail on him for a few days. Even Miss Burk couldn't talk them out of suspecting him. Duff had made arrangements about calling Red. He'd phone him tomorrow, find out what the dope was. Curry would get rid of the hot stuff as fast as he could. He could slip the money to Trixie, and Trixie could pass the money to Duff. The police didn't have anything on his girl. No record. Nothin'.

DUFF lit a cigarette. He got up and looked out of the window. The plainclothes men were climbing into their car. He heard the whirr-r of the starter, and then they drove away.

Tomorrow—tomorrow—Duff couldn't wait for it to come. He shut his eyes, and thought about Trixie Cato. That made up for what he had done to Miss Whitney Burk. But he was too jittery to wait until tomorrow to hear from Curry. He wanted to know now.

It must have been almost four o'clock when he worked his nerve up to the pitch where he could slip into the house, and call Curry's number. No one answered. He tried three or four times, and still no answer. Where was the guy? Where was he?

The chauffeur wasn't very chipper when he arose after an hour or two of troubled sleep. He had to get tires, and take them to the Rolls Royce and put them on. If Miss Whitney hadn't insisted on going along, he would have had a chance to call Curry again, but she was there all the time.

Duff began to worry about that. Was she keeping her eye on him? Had she begun to doubt? That couldn't be. He needed her to protect him from the police. If she became suspicious, the cops would know it. Then, they'd nab him, and they had ways of making a guy talk. Duff didn't kid himself that he was tough enough to take what they dished out. He wasn't tough at all.

But, he told himself, it was just nerves. There wasn't any change in Whitney Burk. The change was in him. His nerves were skittering. But somehow or other, she found things for him to do, and there were always other servants around, so he couldn't get a chance to call Red Curry. If Miss Burk had only

kept her golf date, everything would have been all right. But he could see that, after what had happened, she didn't care about golf.

Finally, at noon, he took the roadster, and went to a drug store on Collins Avenue. He bought cigarettes and shaving cream, though he had enough of each. Then, when it seemed that no one was watching, he ducked into a telephone booth, and called Curry's number. Again, there was no answer.

Well, he couldn't hang around the drug store. Duff knew that, if he went back to the house, he'd be nervous and restless, which was a bad sign, but he had to go back to the house. He'd have to wait until evening before calling Trixie, because, where she worked, employees were not allowed to receive telephone calls.

By this time Duff had forgotten all about how badly he had acted toward Miss Whitney Burk. He was too worried about his own affairs. Red wouldn't have doublecrossed him. But, why not? Everybody doublecrossed everybody else.

The detectives didn't come around, and that was a good sign. Or was it? Maybe they had caught Red, and were grilling him. If Red didn't talk, Ebersole might. Then, the first thing you know, a squad car would come dashing up, and they'd put the cuffs on him, and he'd go back to jail, and then he'd never see Trixie any more.

There hadn't been anything in the morning paper about the stickup, because it had been reported too late. When he couldn't stand it any longer, Duff went back to the drug store to get the evening sheet.

Across the top of page one a glaring black headline read:

THREE KILLED IN STOLEN CAR

Somehow it seemed to Duff, holding the paper in his trembling hands, that he knew what the story was even before he read it. Three people identified as Frank (Red) Curry, Peter Ebersole, both convicts, and a waitress named Trixie Cato, were in a stolen Packard, when it crashed, while going seventy miles an hour, near Fort Lauderdale. In the car was a bag containing jewels stolen the night before from Miss Whitney Burk.

The doublecrosser! The dirty doublecrosser! Red had been running away

not only with the fortune in diamonds, he was stealing Duff's girl, too!

THE chauffeur put the papers back in the rack, and lit a cigarette. He noticed that his fingers were not trembling. That was funny. He should have been ready to fall apart.

There was nothing left, absolutely nothing. The only reason he had betrayed Whitney Burk was because he had to have money in order to keep Trixie for himself, and Trixie had betrayed him because Red Curry promised her more than Duff could have given her.

Duff walked out into the sunlight, his feet dragging. He was glad they were dead. Yes, glad. It was pretty clear what had happened. They had framed it between them. How could Trixie have kissed him so ardently, the last time they were together, when all the time she had known she was going off with Curry? How could she have done that to him? Duff smiled wryly. He knew. Hadn't he done the same thing, in a way, to the woman who had done more for him than anyone else?

Detective McGinnis was standing outside the store when Duff came out. It didn't matter. Nothing mattered now. Perhaps McGinnis had discovered some connection between Miss Burk's chauffeur and the stickup men. Jail again? Without Trixie life would be a jail anyway.

McGinnis came over. "Hello, Duff." "Hello."

"I'm sorry about last night," the detective said, "but I guess you'll understand. From the start, this looked like an inside job, and since you had a record, well, any cop would figure you were in on it. But, I can see now that you weren't."

"Why?" asked Duff, listlessly. "What do you see today that you didn't see last night?"

The detective grinned.

"We check everybody pretty closely. We knew you and Red Curry had met in the penitentiary. We knew Trixie Cato was your girl. When a guy runs off with another fellow's sweetie, it's a cinch they weren't working together."

"That doesn't prove anything," said Duff. "I could have fingered the job for Red, and he could have doublecrossed me after it was pulled."

McGinnis shook his head.

"There's another thing, Duff," he said.

"I've had my eye on you for a long time. I know how much Miss Burk did for you, and how grateful you were. No, I don't believe the worst rat in the world would pull one like that."

Duff said to himself: Keep your mouth shut! This McGinnis is a wise cop. He's fooled now, but keep gabbin', and he'll know everything. Sure, I'm a rat. Nobody can argue that away, but I can't go back to stir, no matter how much I deserve it. I don't know how I'm going to stay around Miss Whitney, either. If Red hadn't pulled that fast one on me, I'd have had plenty of dough. I could have gone away and—Heaven help me, I'll never be able to forget Trixie.

"Well," he said, "you got the jewels back for Miss Burk, so there's nothing more to worry about."

McGinnis lit a cigarette, and leaned lazily against the store front.

"You know," he said, "that's the funniest thing of all. Curry was one of the smartest stickup men in the country in his day. But was he fooled this time."

"What do you mean?" Duff asked.

"He thought he had a quarter million dollars worth of stuff," McGinnis chuckled. "To make himself solid with Trixie, he had even given her an emerald-cut diamond ring. We found it on her hand—third finger, left hand—when we dragged her body out of the car—"

"Red wouldn't have married her," Duff said thickly. "He wasn't that kind. He was just doublecrossing her. Everything is a doublecross."

"That's not what I mean," McGinnis said. "Those weren't real diamonds Miss Burk was wearing. We had warned her it was dangerous to go around with a fortune on her neck and fingers. Being a smart woman, she had duplicates made, and put the real stones in her safety deposit box! Red Curry got himself killed over a lot of fake diamonds!"

Duff sucked in his breath with a dry, hard sound. He couldn't take any more. His knees felt like sand, and his mouth was dry.

The hard reflection of the sun off the sidewalks hurt his eyes.

"Well, thanks," he said to the detective, "I'm glad you know I'm in the clear. I've got to go back to the house now. Good-by."

"Good-by," said the detective, "and good luck. I'm sorry your dame treated you so bad."

DUFF climbed into the car, but he fumbled clumsily with the ignition key and clutch for several minutes before he was able to get the coupe away from the curb.

This was the final blow. There wouldn't have been any reward for the way he had treated Whitney Burk, even if Curry had been on the level with him. He wouldn't have had money to keep Trixie Cato. Everything would have been fouled up, worse than it was before.

Duff felt sick and empty inside. When he arrived at the house, Miss Burk had gone out. He was glad of that. He couldn't have looked at her.

Duff went into the library. Miss Whitney kept a pistol in the drawer of her desk. It was like a toy, small and pearl-handled, but it would be enough. He'd have to leave a note. At first, he thought of confessing everything. Then he knew that wouldn't do. It would only hurt this woman, who had done so much for him, and maybe next time she wouldn't be willing to help somebody who needed help as much as Duff had when he was in the penitentiary.

So he just scrawled in pencil on a piece of her stationery: "I can't go along without Trixie. Thanks for everything."

But Duff knew that was not the real reason. He might be able to forget Trixie sooner or later, but he just couldn't live with himself after what he had done.

He looked around the big, quiet library, and sighed. It had been very nice here—nicer than any place he had known in all his life. He put the pistol in his pocket, and went out on the lawn. It was cool and lovely under the palm trees, and he sucked the fragrance into his lungs. It was a lot different from the Big House, from which Miss Whitney Burk had rescued him.

Duff went into the garage, and up the stairs to his little apartment. Phony jewels! he thought, but I guess it wouldn't have made much difference even if they had been real. I'd have felt the same way I do now.

He pulled off his shirt. There was cold sweat on his skin. He propped a picture of Trixie on the bureau, where he could see it, and stared at her.

"You—you—" But he couldn't finish.

Then, he shut his eyes, and put the muzzle of the pistol into his mouth, and pulled the trigger!

LET MURDER SLEEP

By
NORMAN A. DANIELS

When Lieutenant Langan threatens to unmask the slayer of his buddy's Dad, the danger of sudden death once more stalks the musty halls of a mansion!

CHAPTER I

Mental Case

FIRST Lieutenant David Langan, USMC, returned the snappy salute of the M.P. on duty at the hospital gate. "I'm looking for Colonel Catlin of the medical staff," Langan said.

"He's the big boy, sir. You'll find him in his lab. That's where he spends most of his time working on the mental cases here. Say, you fought in the Pacific, huh? I mean, sir, I noticed the ribbons."

"First wave on Saipan," Langan grunted. "That's where a pal of mine got his. He's at this hospital now. The Colonel wanted to see me about him and I flew here as soon as I landed in Frisco. You said something about mental cases here. They handle the regular wounded too, don't they?"

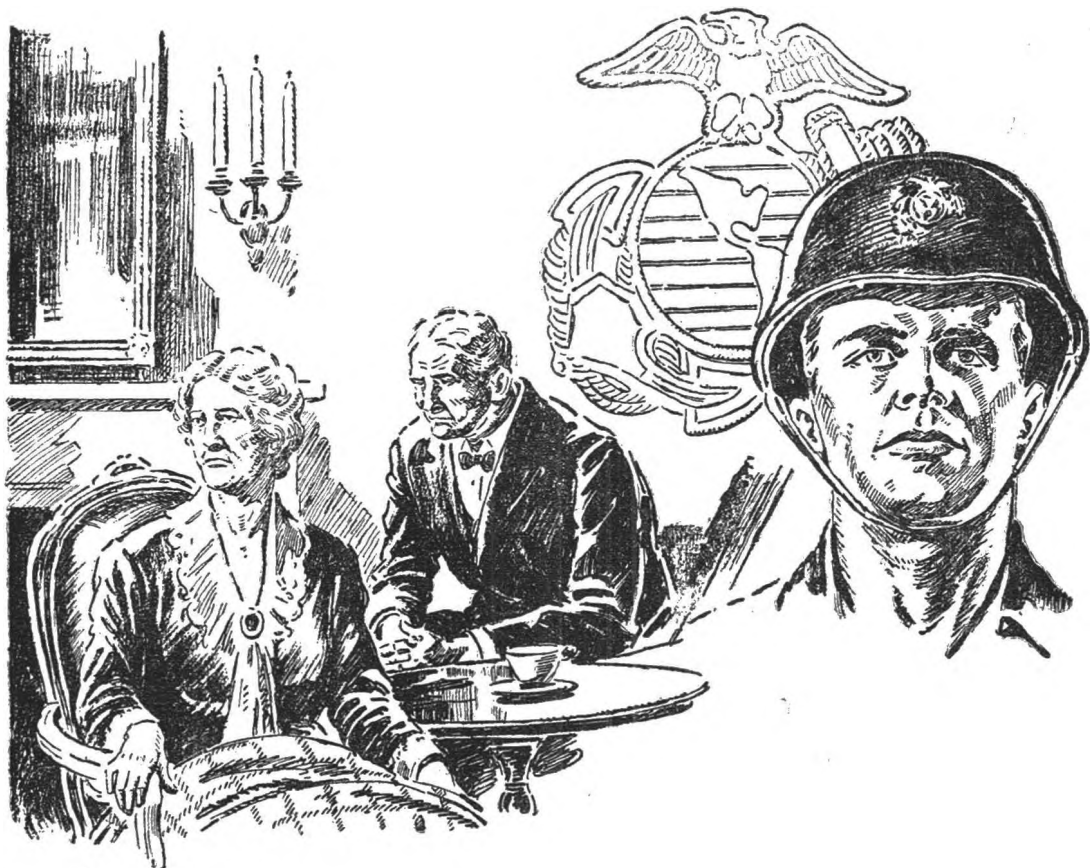
"No, sir. Just mental stuff. Oh, some of the boys were shot up badly. That's what made them kind of wacky and lined them up for this place. But if you got a pal here, believe me, he'll be okay. The old man—that is, the Colonel—has never let one of the boys down yet, sir."

"Thanks," Langan said, and felt a little better. He had himself announced by the Colonel's orderly, stopped before the Colonel's desk, and came to attention.

Catlin was a bulky man of evident great strength and stamina. There were deep hollows under his eyes though,



Langan smashed another punch with plenty of steam behind it and the killer let go of the revolver and dropped to the floor



showing that he worked much to hard.

"At ease, Lieutenant." He leaned back in his swivel chair. "Sit down, Langan. We don't have much formality around here. I sent for you because I want to talk to you about Lieutenant Phil Sterling. He was your pal, I understand."

"Yes, sir. We started at boot camp together, received our promotions at the same time and fought in companies that were side by side, until that Jap nearly got me and sent Phil—off."

"Hm, yes. Tell me about that. You see, Lieutenant, Sterling can't speak. He isn't a mute. Not that at all, but there is a sort of paralysis that affects his vocal cords. He is definitely a psychotic. He was not wounded, has no history to warrant his going off that way, and yet we can't seem to help him. That's why I want to know exactly what happened. And I also want all the history of the man you can give me."

"His history, sir? Well, when he was seven, he was sent to a private school. He stayed there until he was ten, trans-

ferred to another. At sixteen he was in Paris studying. The war picked him up there. He was nineteen then. He rushed home and was in it before Pearl Harbor. His parents are dead."

"Are you certain of that?"

LIEUTENANT LANGAN hesitated. "Well, not from personal knowledge, sir. Just what Phil told me. He has an aunt and uncle living on an estate not very far from this hospital, right here on Long Island. Phil went away from that house when he was seven and he has never been home since."

Colonel Catlin made some notes. "All right. Now tell me about what happened on Saipan."

"We fought our way about a mile from the beachhead, sir. Phil's company and mine were so decimated that we joined forces. The Japs began shelling us pretty bad. We waited for our own artillery and air support and dived into a shell hole while we waited. That's where it happened."

A COMPLETE CRIME NOVELET

"You were wounded, I think. Is that correct?"

"Yes, sir. I caught a chunk of shrapnel in the back. It sort of made me go numb. I couldn't move a muscle, although I was fully conscious. Phil lay beside me, cussing a blue streak. Just before it happened, we killed three Japs. Phil got two of them."

"Did he display any emotion at that time?"

"No, sir. None. Well, a Jap was prowling around and saw me. He didn't see Phil. The Jap figured I was easy meat and jumped into the shell hole. He picked up a big rock and was just about to brain me with it when Phil shot him."

"Then what happened?"

"I'm not sure. Phil came over to me. He was wild-eyed. He started muttering. Then he emptied his carbine into the Jap who was already dead. I guess Phil cracked up then. I watched him go rigid. He was that way when the medics found us. They shipped him off. That's all I know, sir."

Colonel Catlin made more notes. "It doesn't help us much. We're nearly at the end of our rope with him. He doesn't respond to any treatment. Most men talk under narcosis, but it has no effect on him. I'm going to try one last resort. Hypnotism. You may be present if you like, Lieutenant."

"Thank you, sir," Langan said. "I'd like to see Phil again."

THE Colonel picked up his phone and issued orders.

"Very well," he said. "Sterling is being brought down. We'll conduct the experiment in this office. And don't be disappointed if he shows no sign of recognition."

"Thanks for the warning," Langan said. "Colonel, what happened to him?"

"I don't know, frankly. Battle fatigue, the ever present element of peril, the fact that you were nearly killed. All may have been contributing factors. Yet somewhere in this boy's past is the real reason that made him crack mentally. The war just brought it out. If we can discover what it was, we may be able to cure him."

Langan sat very rigid when Phil was brought in. They were almost exactly the same age. Their build was identical so, in the past, they had sometimes worn

each other's clothes. On many occasions they had even been mistaken for each other. But now there was a ghastly difference. Phil Sterling was gaunt, thin and hollow-cheeked. His eyes were dead looking. He walked stiffly and showed no sign of recognizing Langan. He sat down.

Colonel Catlin stepped up before him. "Look at me, Lieutenant. You do understand what I'm saying. Look straight into my eyes. That's it. Keep looking. Don't waver the slightest. Now, clasp your hands tightly. As tightly as you can. Keep staring at me."

A moment went by.

"You are going to sleep," the Colonel said, rather sharply. He repeated this and then once again.

Phil Sterling's eyelids fluttered, his head nodded and he began to breathe more heavily.

The Colonel stepped back.

"With a willing subject hypnosis is an easy and safe practice. He is under now. I'm going to take him back through his lifetime. He will recall everything. Philip, you can hear me now and you will answer. You are six years old. Tell me what your name is."

PHIL STERLING'S voice was that of a man, but possessed the hesitation and doubt characteristic of a six-year-old boy.

"My name is Philip Sterling and I live at Maple Grove Farms where my Daddy lives too."

"Are you happy with your Daddy? Are you very happy?"

"Daddy bought me a pony. I love my pony. I am going to call him Pal."

Colonel Catlin sighed. "All right, Philip. You are now seven. When was your birthday, Philip?"

An amazing thing happened to the hypnotized man. His head came up, though his eyes were quite glazed. A look of unholy terror passed across his face, disappeared, then came back and stayed.

"My birthday is March second. It was last Thursday. I'm afraid. I'm awful scared."

"What made you afraid, Philip? Go on, tell us. You're a nice little boy. You haven't done anything wrong. Tell us what happened."

"He was holding a big stone. He hit the man. He hit him lots of times. Then

he saw me. I ran away. I ran and ran and ran and ran until I couldn't run any more. I fell down. I couldn't move. Then he picked me up and carried me into the house. My throat hurt where he put his hands. It hurt awful bad, when I woke up, too."

"Was it at night when the man hit someone with the big stone, Philip?"

"Yes. It was dark. I wasn't scared of the dark. I went to see how my rabbit was. When I woke up, it was morning. Uncle Bart said Daddy had gone away. I told him I was scared and he said I was dreaming."

"Why are you afraid?" Colonel Catlin snapped.

"I'm scared the man will hit me with the stone, too."

"Who was the man?"

"I don't know. It was dark. I couldn't see him. I'm awful scared. I want Daddy."

THE Colonel kept on, gradually raising Phil's age up to seventeen. Now Phil spoke far more intelligently and with a poise that came from splendid training in the best schools.

"You are in Paris, studying, Philip," the Colonel said. "What is your name?"

There was no answer. The look of horror had slowly left the patient's face. His jaws were slack, his whole body quiet in the artificial slumber.

"*Comment vous appelez-vous?*" Colonel Catlin demanded.

"Philip Sterling, *Monsieur le professeur.*" Phil continued to talk, but only in French.

In the subconscious he was back at a Parisian school.

Colonel Catlin walked away from him for a moment, gazed thoughtfully out of the window and then rapidly returned. He slapped Phil across the cheek. Phil raised his head. His eyes were no longer glazed with sleep. There was only that strange, vacant look of the mentally ill to be seen. An orderly came in and led Phil away.

Colonel Catlin sat down behind his desk.

"Well, that worked anyway," he said.

Langan mopped his face. "I—I feel as if I were back in that shell hole. Colonel, what is the meaning of that story he told? Was his mind really back to the time when he was seven years old?"

"Yes. Sterling saw something happen.

Possibly a murder. He was too young really to know. But it appears his father vanished that night. So we can assume that his father was either the murderer or the murdered. Young Philip was immediately sent away to school. He was a boy, his brain in the formative processes. He forgot what he saw that night. He deliberately put it far back in his mind and it stayed there until he saw the Jap raise a stone to kill you. Then it came back to him. It was more of a shock than his brain could stand, after all that fighting. He snapped. There it is, Lieutenant."

"But what can we do for him?" Langan asked. "There surely must be some cure."

CATLIN nodded. "There is. If we can convince him that he really saw a murder that night, show him who the victim was and bring the murderer to task, it would cure him. That deeply hidden fear would go away. But how, Lieutenant? How can we find out what happened fifteen years ago? There is nothing to go on."

Langan's eyes sparkled. "Sir, I've got a fifteen-day leave. You could get it extended, if necessary. Suppose I go to Phil's home where his people live, where all this happened."

Catlin shrugged.

"What good would it do? If a murderer was there, he'd simply get rid of you quickly."

Langan leaned forward. "Not if I went as Lieutenant Phil Sterling, sir. I could get away with it. His people haven't laid eyes on him since he was a small boy. Give me his dog tag, his possessions, and a letter to his folks telling about certain treatment I must receive. I can pretend I'm still ill. I won't have to talk much. Your instructions would be to the effect that I must be left alone. Then I'd have a chance to look around, sir."

Catlin shook his head. "We'd be poaching into something that doesn't concern us. It's a matter for the police. Or wait—perhaps you are right. Who knows? It might work. I'll want time to think this over, Lieutenant. Take a walk for half an hour or so. You realize there may be some danger."

Langan laughed.

"Yes, sir. Seems as if I met danger before. And Phil saved my life. Remember that, sir?"

CHAPTER II

Death Strikes

LANGAN rang the bell and then took time to study the house. He guessed it was eighty or ninety years old. It was one of those relics with twenty or thirty rooms, high ceilings and half a million dollars' worth of furnishings. The estate was large and hemmed in by a steel fence. The whole place gave off an elusive air of decay. But no neglect was visible. The landscaping was perfect, and the exterior of the mansion in tiptop shape. The decay was an illusive, impossible-to-find thing, but it was there.

The door opened. The man framed in it was about sixty, white-haired and almost saintly looking, except for his eyes. They were deep, hard looking, and sul-
len.

"You're Uncle Bart," Langan took a flyer and hit the bull's-eye.

Bart Crane's jaw fell agape. He backed up a pace. "Philip. You're Philip. But I thought you were ill? That is, they wouldn't let anyone see you."

"I'm okay now, Uncle Bart," Langan said. "Nearly okay anyway. The doctors thought I ought to go home. I have a letter here."

Bart turned his head and shouted. "Reggie, go tell Helen that Philip has come home. Hurry!"

Phil Sterling's cousin came out of a room down the hall, stared in awe at the uniformed Lieutenant. This cousin was a pale, sickly looking man of about forty and while his clothes were of the best quality, they looked shabby on him. His hundred-and-five-pound frame didn't seem strong enough to support clothing. He finished his scrutiny and then ran up the stairs with the message.

"Come in, Philip," Bart said. "Welcome home. It's been a long, long time. You were only ten or eleven when we saw you last."

"Seven," Langan corrected. "I was seven years old when you sent me to that school."

"Yes—yes, of course. It doesn't seem that long. Why, it was fifteen years ago.

You've grown into a man."

"What did you think I'd grow into—a flower?" Langan said testily. "Uncle Bart, I'm still sick. I can't do a lot of talking nor answer many questions. Anything that taxes my brain isn't good for me. I need a lot of rest and quiet."

"Yes, yes, of course, Phil. But you must see your Aunt Helen first. She's been very ill from a stroke, and she's confined to her room. Can't take more than a step or two. You'll have to go up."

"Of course," Langan said.

He put down the small bag he carried and walked to the stairs. He'd watched Reggie turn left at the top of them and Langan did the same thing. He heard voices and traced them easily to the proper room. He knocked. A woman's voice told him to come in. It was an imperious voice. Sickly or not, Helen Crane issued the orders in this house and expected them to be obeyed.

Langan opened the door and saw a heavy set woman who had evidently been very attractive at one time. She raised one arm toward him. Langan, feeling like a hypocrite, went to her side and kissed her.

"Little Philip, grown into a man," she said. "An officer. I'm so proud of you, Philip. You're—getting better? We tried to see you, but it wasn't permitted. From all reports we thought you were—well—"

"Worse than I look?" Langan grinned. "I'm not too good, Aunt Helen. But it's nice to be back. Nothing has changed. Nothing."

Langan was interrupted by a trim girl in a nurse's uniform who came in and without the slightest hesitation, ordered Uncle Bart and Reggie out of the room. When she turned to Langan, he thought he'd never seen bluer eyes.

"I realize you can't know your aunt's condition, Lieutenant Sterling, but she must not be excited or made tired. I'm afraid you'll have to leave."

Langan gulped. He glanced at Helen over the nurse's shoulder. "Yes, ma'am," he said.

Then he found himself in the hallway looking at a closed door. Langan shrugged.

AN OLD man, in gardener's clothes, came toward him carrying Langan's bag. He was stooped and incred-

ibly wrinkled, but he had bright little eyes that scrutinized Langan carefully.

"Welcome home, Philip," he said. "I knew you'd come back some day. Why did you come?"

Langan shrugged. "To rest. I've been sick."

"No, no. That's just an excuse. You returned to find out what happened to your father. Well, I'll help you. There is something foul in this house. *Someone* foul. I don't know who it is."

Langan took the old man's arm but wisely let him lead the way to the room that had been Philip's. Inside, Langan closed the door. He dropped his voice to a whisper.

"Yes, that's why I came back. Later you'll have to tell me all you know. Everything."

"I'd better go," the old man said. "I've been afraid of them ever since it happened. Philip, you don't look like your father, or mother, either. But I suppose that happens now and then. I'll see you tonight at my cottage. Come alone."

He walked out of the room quickly and Langan sat down with a thump. He'd been prepared for almost anything, but hardly the set-up in this household. Langan was still staring out of the window, when the door opened and the nurse walked in.

"You should be in bed, Lieutenant," she said. "I'll give you five minutes to get beneath the covers. Those are orders. I was an army nurse and I know how to interpret the instructions Colonel Catlin sent in his letter. It's bed!"

Langan grinned. "You're not in the army now. And if you were, I'm Marine Corps. Furthermore, I'll bet I outrank you, anyhow. Look, I feel fine. Perfect. Sit down and talk to me. I'm a stranger here. I was seven when I left this house, and everything is strange."

She sat down uneasily. "Yes, I know. They told me. You look very fit to me, Lieutenant, not at all what I expected. What can I tell you?"

Langan looked sheepish. "Remember now, I was a kid when I was here last. That old man who showed me to this room. I—can't even remember who he is. Oh, I know he worked here, but his name escapes me."

"He is Marc Hale and you should be ashamed of yourself. He's the nicest person here." She colored and gulped.



Two hands, holding the rock, appeared at the mouth of the well, and then the missile fell, narrowly missing Langan

"I—didn't mean to say that. The others are nice enough, but Marc—well, he's human."

"And the others are stuffed shirts. Go on, you can talk freely to me."

She arose. "Thanks, I will. Get to bed, pronto! Five minutes, Lieutenant!"

Langan sighed and started removing his tunic. He was under the covers when she returned. She had a bottle of pills in her hand.

"These are a sedative the Colonel suggested I give you. I talked to him on the phone. He told me you should take one only if you cannot sleep. I'll look in again. If you are not awake at dinner time, I'll save you a tray."

Langan watched her walk out and close the door. He chuckled and recalled that he didn't even know her name. He picked up the bottle of pills. The label had been inscribed with ink. Absently he reached for a glass of water. He spilled some on his fingers, more on the bottle, and the label was slightly washed out by the water.

He put the bottle and the glass back on the table, stared at the ceiling and suddenly felt exhausted. He hadn't slept much on the flight from Honolulu. It had been very rough. At Honolulu Colonel Catlin's message had been waiting for him and he was off again. It had been almost forty-eight hours since he'd had more than a cat-nap.

Langan was asleep in two minutes. He didn't need the influence of any drug, but his sleep was so deep that it resembled one induced by pills. When he opened his eyes again, it was dark. He fumbled for the night table lamp and turned it on.

THEN he remembered his date with old Marc Hale. Langan got his feet on the floor, rumbled his hair and yawned sleepily. It was ten-thirty. He reached for the water carafe and his eyes fell on the bottle of pills. He picked it up slowly. Something was wrong here. He distinctly recalled smearing the inked-in label, but it wasn't smeared now.

Langan removed the screw top and peered at the pills. He dumped some into his hand. They were just white pills. He tasted of one, very cautiously. He'd tasted sleeping pills before, but none

like these. They had a sharp, burning taste.

He put the bottle back.

The big house seemed to be fast asleep. Langan dressed hurriedly and slipped out of the house without seeing anyone. He made his way around to the back of the estate and located the gardener's cottage promptly. There were lights in the windows and all the other outbuildings were pitch dark.

Langan hurried to the cottage and rapped smartly on the door. There was no answer and he began to feel something that resembled those moments when he crawled on all fours through an enemy infested jungle, as if something unpleasant was going to happen at any moment. He could almost smell death in the air.

He tried the door. It wasn't locked. He pushed it open and gave a gasp of horror. Old Marc Hale was home, and yet he wasn't. His body sagged limply across the arm of the chair he occupied. His face had that gray look of death and a fearsome expression of horror upon it. Langan closed the door quickly. He felt Hale's wrist and there was no pulse. He looked the body over carefully and didn't find so much as a scratch.

Langan peered out of the window, across the darkened estate. Then he searched the small quarters. In the bedroom he found pills indicating that Hale suffered from a heart condition. Apparently the old man had just dropped dead. But that look of horror on his face told another story. It hinted of murder!

CHAPTER III

No Escape



QUIETLY Langan left the death room. Outside, in the darkness, he shuddered. He'd hardly bargained for anything quite like this. Old Marc had been silenced by death. Whatever he'd wanted to tell was impossible now. Langan started walking.

He saw a low, half rotten structure, no more than two or three feet high,

standing in a small compound, formed by rusted fence wire. Suddenly it came back to him. Seven-year-old Phil Sterling had been seeing if his rabbits were all right when he had been distracted by a man killing another person with a rock.

Langan looked the thing over. It was a rabbit hutch all right. He crouched to a height which he hoped equalled that of Phil when he was seven years old, and let his gaze rove around. There were many bushes and shrubs here. They'd grown with the years all right, but he believed that old Marc kept them trimmed down to a height which they'd reached fifteen years ago. They were all old bushes, and well rooted.

Through a row of lilacs he could see what looked like a well house. This was far back on the estate, fully half a mile, he realized. Langan walked toward the well house, which was boarded up with weatherbeaten lengths of wood. They squealed in protest as he pried two of them up far enough to peer into the old well.

Langan lighted a match and dropped it down the shaft, but it went out before he could estimate the depth. He found some old letters in his pocket, touched a match to these and let them get going good. He dropped this flaming torch into the well. He learned then that the well wasn't so deep and that the bottom was covered with stones. Not big ones, but a large number of medium-sized rocks. Langan went hunting for a rope.

In the tool house he found all the equipment he needed. Ten minutes later he was lowering himself on the rope. He had also discovered in the tool house a flashlight which helped greatly. Upon reaching the bottom of the well, Langan began removing the stones and trying to pile them against one side of the well, regardless of what such work did to his uniform.

He spent a half hour at it and began to possess doubts. He was wasting time, precious time. He knew he couldn't get away with this masquerade forever. Then the ray of his flash picked out something much paler than the rocks. Langan picked up a piece of bone. It looked like a human forearm.

He began digging faster, careless now of the noise he made. Gradually he uncovered a twisted and mangled skeleton.

There was a ring on one bony finger. He removed this and thrust it into his pocket without a second glance. It was time to get out of here. What this place needed was investigation by a dozen policemen.

He stuck the flashlight into his belt, took a firm grip on the rope and got his feet against the sides of the well. He had scrambled up about a yard when a rock fell, missing him by about a foot, but the whizz of it made him drop back to the bottom of the old, dry well. Another rock came catapulting down. This one grazed his shoulder.

He flattened himself against the side of the well and realized he was in a devil of a fix. It was impossible to escape those rocks. Sooner or later one would conk him good. Then he'd fall and more of these heavy stones would crush him to death.

"Hey!" he yelled, and turned the beam of his flashlight upwards. All he saw were two hands holding a rock. He saw it drop and got out of the way. The hands appeared again with another rock. He couldn't tell whether they were the hands of a man or woman, old or young. He was too busy watching the stones they held.

He was struck again, this time painfully enough so that he yelled. He heard the sound of quick footsteps and then silence. There were no more rocks.

LANGAN held his breath. Perhaps it was a trick. If he climbed up the rope, the killer would be waiting at the top to brain him. Yet he couldn't stay here.

There were footsteps again. He heard them tread upon boards surrounding the well house. Then, silhouetted against the darkened sky, he saw a form. Langan snapped on the flash. The pretty nurse screamed and drew back quickly.

"Nurse!" Langan called. "Nurse, get me out of here! And watch out. There's a killer loose."

Her head appeared again. "Wh-who are you?"

"Philip Sterling. Someone tried to kill me. I'm coming up. Stand by."

He climbed the rope and set his jaw near the top. If that nurse was mixed up in this, he was a dead man. But her two arms came down to help him. He clambered out of the well and mopped

his face. "That was a little too close to be f-funny," he gulped.

She stared at him. "I went to your room and you were not there. I looked all over the house for you. Then I came out to search the estate. I thought I heard a voice, and then the sound of someone running."

"The voice was mine. The running steps those of a killer. Nurse—Oh, hang it, what's your name? I can't just keep calling you Nurse."

"I'm Joan Abbott. Lieutenant, don't you think if you took one of those sleeping pills now, you'd feel calmer."

He seized both her shoulders. "Now, wait! I'm far from being daffy. Listen to me. Fifteen years ago Phil—that is, I saw someone kill someone else right here. I tried to run away. The murderer caught me, choked me into unconsciousness and when I woke up in bed, they told me I'd been having a nightmare. But it was real—the truth. I just found a skeleton, covered up with stones, at the bottom of the well."

"Please," Joan said. "We'd better go back to the house, Lieutenant. *Toute de suite.*"

"What? What did you say?"

Joan stepped back a pace. "You're not Philip Sterling. That was French I spoke. He knew French forwards and backwards. His letters home were written in French when he was in Paris. I saw some of them. Who—are—you?"

"Okay. But keep your voice down. Phil is still at the hospital. He can't be cured until the truth of what happened here is known. I'm really a marine lieutenant, and Phil saved my life. Now I'm trying to save his sanity. Colonel Catlin is working with me. But if you tell the others then the whole thing is off."

"I think I'll take my car for a little drive to the village and telephone Colonel Catlin," Joan said. "If he backs you up, all right. If he does not, I'm returning with the police."

"Bring the cops anyway," Langan said. "The skeleton in the well isn't the only cadaver around here. Old Marc promised to tell me something tonight, and he's dead. I think somebody scared him to death."

Joan drew in a sharp breath, turned and ran toward the gardener's cottage. She entered and Langan followed her. Later when they came out of the cottage,

Joan was somber faced.

"I believe everything you have told me," she said. "All along I've had a feeling something was wrong here, something terribly wrong. Lieutenant—"

"Dave, that's me," Langan introduced himself. "Dave Langan. Listen, go get that car of yours. Bring the police. A whole flock of them. I don't mind fighting Japs, but this sort of thing, this murder stuff, is sure getting me down."

"This way," Joan said. She turned and hastened away, and Langan followed her to the long garage, big enough to house a dozen cars. There were two inside, a large, old limousine and a snappy little roadster. Joan got behind the wheel of the roadster and stepped on the starter. There was no response. After she tried again, Langan raised the hood.

"No use," he told her. "The wiring has been stripped away. Wait until I see if the big ark has been sabotaged too."

IT HAD been—thoroughly. Langan took a hitch at his tunic belt.

"Okay! So they think we're trapped here. I imagine the telephone system has gone out of order, too. I know we're a couple of miles from the nearest neighbors, but to a marine and an army nurse a couple of miles are duck soup. Let's go!"

"No—wait," Joan said. "Dave, they might guess we'd do that and be ready for us. Anyway it will take us an hour to get help. By that time they can rearrange the whole picture here and there won't be any skeleton to find. Marc will be dead in bed, not in a chair looking as if he'd seen a million devils before he died."

Langan sat down on the running board. "You're right, of course. I'm an idiot. Joan, the man in the well is either Phil's father or someone his father murdered. Offhand, I'd say it was his father. Someone knew I was down there in the well, and he, or they, have got to take action. But I can act too. There is an answer to this somewhere. There has to be. We've got to find it for Phil's sake."

"To say nothing of our own."

Joan shuddered and pressed closer against Langan. "I'm scared stiff, Dave. I don't know what to do."

"Let's reason this out." Langan put his arm around her. It felt nice. "There are three people in that house. One of them is a killer. I don't believe all three

know what happened, though it's possible."

"What are you trying to tell me, Dave?" Joan asked.

"That if one person in that house is innocent, no attempt will be openly made against us while everyone is together. Furthermore, I doubt if you are suspected as knowing too much. Was the old lady asleep when you left her?"

"She'd just dropped off, Dave."

"Let's go back. Slip into her room and act as if you never left. I'm going to have a look around and, later, maybe I'll talk to them all."

"It may be very dangerous."

"It was dangerous in that shell hole too, when Phil cracked up. I intend to see this through."

CHAPTER IV

Sleeping Pills



AS HE had promised, Langan waited for five minutes, after Joan entered the house. Then he went directly to the second floor rooms. He met Joan in the hallway, carrying a medicine tray. She spoke in a whisper.

"Aunt Helen was asleep when I returned.

She never missed me. She thought I'd been here all the time."

"Good," Langan said. "Listen, do you know if there are any caffeine tablets around?"

"Yes. There are some in one of the medicine cabinets. Why?"

"Put the bottle under the pillow in my room," Langan said. "And don't ask so many questions."

He grinned at her and went on down the hall. He tapped lightly on Uncle Bart's door, but received no answer. He walked in.

The two room suite was inexpensively furnished, contrasting with the rest of the house. Bart wasn't there.

Langan at once began searching the rooms, with special attention to a desk in the small study. There were enough account books to show that Uncle Bart and Aunt Helen lived quite simply with their only income from a bank which acted as executor of the estate.

Other papers indicated that the real worth of the estate left by Phil's missing, and now legally dead father, was held in trust for Phil. Langan began to comprehend that Uncle Bart and Aunt Helen were hardly more than caretakers. Apparently they supported Cousin Reggie.

Langan left the suite quietly. Passing along the second floor railing, he could look down into the large reception hall. The living room door was open and he heard Uncle Bart's voice.

"Where have you been, Reggie?" he demanded. "You know very well we have a great deal to talk over now that Phil has returned."

"I was asleep," Reggie answered. "I thought we'd let it all go until tomorrow, when Phil feels a little better. Uncle Bart, do you think he'll be able to talk intelligently?"

"I don't know. He was a pretty sick boy, but he seems to have recovered quite nicely. He'll have to be told—about his father. The nurse is bringing Helen down shortly. Then we'll waken Phil and have it over with."

Langan slipped toward Reggie's rooms without waiting to hear anything more. He did know one thing. Reggie and Bart were not in league against him. One was fooling the other with lies. Bart, who said he called Reggie and perhaps hadn't. Or Reggie who claimed to have been asleep, but could have been dumping big rocks down the well.

Reggie's suite was even plainer than Bart's. The furniture seemed newer, but was definitely cheap. There was a ceiling high bookcase covering one whole wall and it was well filled with books. Reggie's taste in literature ran to ancient volumes, apparently, and to diversified subjects from Plato to Dickens. Langan examined a half dozen of the books.

He couldn't afford to be caught here so he left as quickly as possible. He made a trip to his room, came out again and walked slowly down the stairs, leaning heavily on the bannister like a recently hospitalized man might be expected to do.

Reggie heard him coming and stepped into the hallway.

"Well, Phil," he said with a smile. "We were just going to see if you could stand a little family gathering."

"Sure," Langan said. "I woke up and couldn't get back to sleep. I'm going to make coffee. Anyone want a cup?"

Without waiting for an answer, Phil made his way to the kitchen and put on a large pot of coffee. While it heated, he stared out of the back door windows at the cottage where Marc Hale sat dead. What secret had Marc wanted to tell him? The old man must either have known, or shrewdly guessed, both the identity of the skeleton in the well and the man who murdered him fifteen years before.

Langan put five cups on a tray, transferred the coffee percolator to it also and carried the whole business into the living room. Aunt Helen had been carried downstairs and was seated in one of the big chairs. Langan smiled in her direction and he proceeded to fill the cups.

He served one to each person and nobody refused.

Langan sat down. "I think it's time for a conference," he said. "Nurse, you're perfectly welcome to sit in if you like, but should you become bored, you may leave."

Joan nodded, but didn't say anything. Langan sipped his coffee. So did all the others.

"Now that I'm back, I'll have to take over the estate," Langan said. "Naturally, things will go on just as they have since I was away. As to that point, being away, there are some questions. First, why was I sent away and never given an opportunity to come back? At seven, a boy isn't often shipped to a school."

Bart looked at Aunt Helen. She inclined her head briefly.

"Phil, you will learn the truth some time," she said. "It might as well be now. Fifteen years ago something dreadful happened on this estate. A man was killed. You may have witnessed the murder. You were discovered screaming in your room. You told a fantastic story which we believed was nothing but a nightmare. However, we discovered that two people were missing. Your father's business partner and—your father."

"Go on," Langan said. "I know something happened to Dad."

BART took a long breath. It was plain he felt reluctant to talk about the old tragedy.

"We searched the estate thoroughly, expecting to find one of them dead. Murdered! Because despite the fact we

had convinced you that you had been dreaming, we believed every word you said. One of those two men, your father or his partner, had been murdered. The other man was the murderer. We never tried to find out. The partner was a single man, not very well known in these parts and he wasn't reported missing. We did report that your father had vanished, but no trace of him was ever found."

"But if Dad is a murderer, I've got to find and help him," Langan said. "If he was killed, I've got to find the man who murdered him."

"Let it alone," Helen urged shrilly. "Fifteen years have gone by. There is some consolation in not knowing the full truth."

Langan got up and paced the floor. He poured more coffee, passed it around. No one refused. He went out to the porch and sat down for more than an hour. Finally he returned to the living room.

"Maybe Marc Hale knows something," he suggested.

"Perhaps," Bart acceded. "Marc stayed on all these years. There was no provision made to pay him. We were supposed to do the work. That is, Reggie agreed to take care of the estate but Marc wanted to stay, so we let him. How he lived, we don't know."

Langan shook his head angrily. "We'd better sleep on it. There's no use being hasty. Perhaps it is best to let murder sleep. I don't know. I can't think any more. I'm going to my room."

It was well after midnight. Langan sat at the window until three. Then he walked into the hallway, making plenty of noise. The door of Bart's rooms opened. Bart was fully dressed. Reggie came out too, in pajamas and a robe. Joan appeared. It seemed that Aunt Helen couldn't sleep either.

"We're all nerves, the whole lot of us," Langan said. "Nurse, what about those sleeping pills I was supposed to take? Would they harm any of us?"

"Why, no," she said. "They're just a mild sedative. Perhaps we all need something like that. I'll get them."

She returned in a moment with the bottle. Langan took one and flipped it into his mouth. He removed it a moment later. Reggie shrugged and accepted one. Aunt Helen gratefully took one of them, but Uncle Bart waved a hand at

the proffered pills.

"I never take that stuff. Never! And I won't start now."

"Why?" Langan asked. "Do you think they are poisonous?"

"Certainly not. I don't need sleeping tablets. A walk around the estate will do me much more good."

"Let's go downstairs," Langan said. "The pills won't work for a while. We can talk. Coming, Joan?"

He took her arm and piloted her down the steps. Bart and Reggie carried Aunt Helen and placed her in her usual chair. Joan threw a blanket over her lap.

"Reggie, have you ever worked at anything?" Langan said.

"Of course he has," Helen put in. "He worked for your father a long time. He was capable too. Very capable."

"There's a dead man in the well," Langan said. "One of you knows that. Marc Hale is dead too. One of you also knows that. He wasn't exactly murdered, though I expect a killer went after him with the intention of murdering him."

Helen sat very erect. "Phil, what are you talking about? Joan, perhaps he'd better be put to bed."

"Hold onto your hats," Langan said. "I'm not Phil. I'm his best friend. Phil is extremely sick. I'm trying to help him. His father was murdered and so was his father's business partner, by the same man for the same reason. Two attempts were made to kill me, once by slipping into my room as I slept and substituting poison for the sleeping pills on my night table. Again, by dumping rocks down the well where I found Phil's father."

"This is all silly," Bart shouted. "Phil, your trouble is mental. They made a mistake letting you out of the hospital."

LANGAN tossed a ring on the table. "Have a look at that. I found it on the skeleton. Anyone recognize it?"

"It's—your father's ring," Bart said slowly.

"Phil Sterling's father's ring," Langan corrected. "So his body has been in the well. The body of the partner was disposed of even more thoroughly. I haven't any idea where it is. Bart, after the firm was closed, how were the books?"

"In a mess. No one could make head or tail of them."

"That's what I thought. So, assuming

both partners were murdered, that provides us with a motive. Someone had looted the firm's money, was found out and resorted to murder to cover his tracks. He arranged things to look as if one partner had killed the other and persuaded the only relatives of these men to keep quiet and create no suspicion about violence. The partner had no relatives. You agreed to throw no suspicion on either man because you were afraid Phil's father was a murderer and had run away."

Reggie got up. "Are you trying to point a finger at one of us?" he demanded.

"At you," Langan said calmly. "Aunt Helen, you look sleepy."

"It's that pill," she murmured. "I can't stay awake!"

Joan hurried to her side. Langan faced Reggie. "And why hasn't the pill affected you? Bart refused to take one. He'll stay awake for a long time because there was enough caffeine in that coffee I served to insure the fact that none of us would be sleepy. I wanted to see who would take those pills because I knew the murderer would be afraid to take one. He'd substituted poison for the real sleeping pills. Only I switched back."

Reggie bit his lip. "Those pills rarely work on me."

"You palmed the one Joan gave you," Langan accused. "It's in your dressing gown pocket."

Reggie plunged a hand into one pocket. He pulled out a nickel-plated revolver, not a pill. Langan never gave him a chance to level the weapon. He streaked across the five yards of intervening space in a fraction of a second. One outthrust hand hit Reggie's right shoulder. The gun went off but, as Reggie pulled the trigger, he was already being pushed around to one side.

Langan smashed home another punch to the shoulder, with plenty of steam behind it this time. Reggie screamed and the gun fell from his fingers. Langan stepped closer. This man was a killer and no marine takes chances with a murderer. Langan doubled him up with a blow to the pit of the stomach and then laid him out full length with a punch to the jaw.

He bent over Reggie and found the sleeping pill in his pocket.

"And that," he said grimly, "is that!

Reggie kept Marc Hale here because Marc knew the truth. I think Marc kept quiet until Phil returned. Reggie knew he'd talk then. He went to kill Marc, but scared him to death instead."

"But Reggie had no money," Bart said. "He lived on what we gave him."

"Reggie had plenty of money. It's salted away in extremely valuable books which he bought with the money he stole from Phil's father and his partner. He could cash in on them any time he wanted to. Perhaps he did occasionally, to get cash to pay off Marc. When I came home, and he thought I was Phil, he knew I'd make inquiries and Reggie couldn't stand an investigation. My friend, Phil, saw him kill his father. Phil ran, but Reggie caught up with him, choked him into unconsciousness and put him to bed. When Phil awoke, you all believed he'd been through nothing more than a nightmare.

"But Phil knew better. You sent him away, and wouldn't permit him to return for you didn't want him to find out about his father. The memory of what Phil

saw was retained in his mind. When a Jap tried to kill me the same way that Reggie killed Phil's father, that memory returned and under the duress of battle, it made Phil's mind snap. But he'll be all right when he learns the truth."

"Reggie tried to kill you, believing you were Phil?" Bart said, wonderingly. "Even though Reggie was convinced you were his cousin?"

"Why not?" Langan snapped. "He murdered Phil's father, didn't he? Killing a cousin, who was known to have been demented, was an easy out. He'd have convinced anyone that Phil had taken his own life. I imagine the phone wires are cut. Bart, see if you can make one of the cars in the garage run. Joan can go for the police. I'm staying here, to keep Reggie company."

Langan looked down at the limp form of the killer. "And I hope when he wakes up, he tries to get away," he said grimly. "I'm praying he tries it, because while I'm not Phil Sterling, I'm his best friend and Phil owes Reggie a lot."



"When Steve McCleod Dies He'll Go Out Sitting Down—in the Electric Chair!"

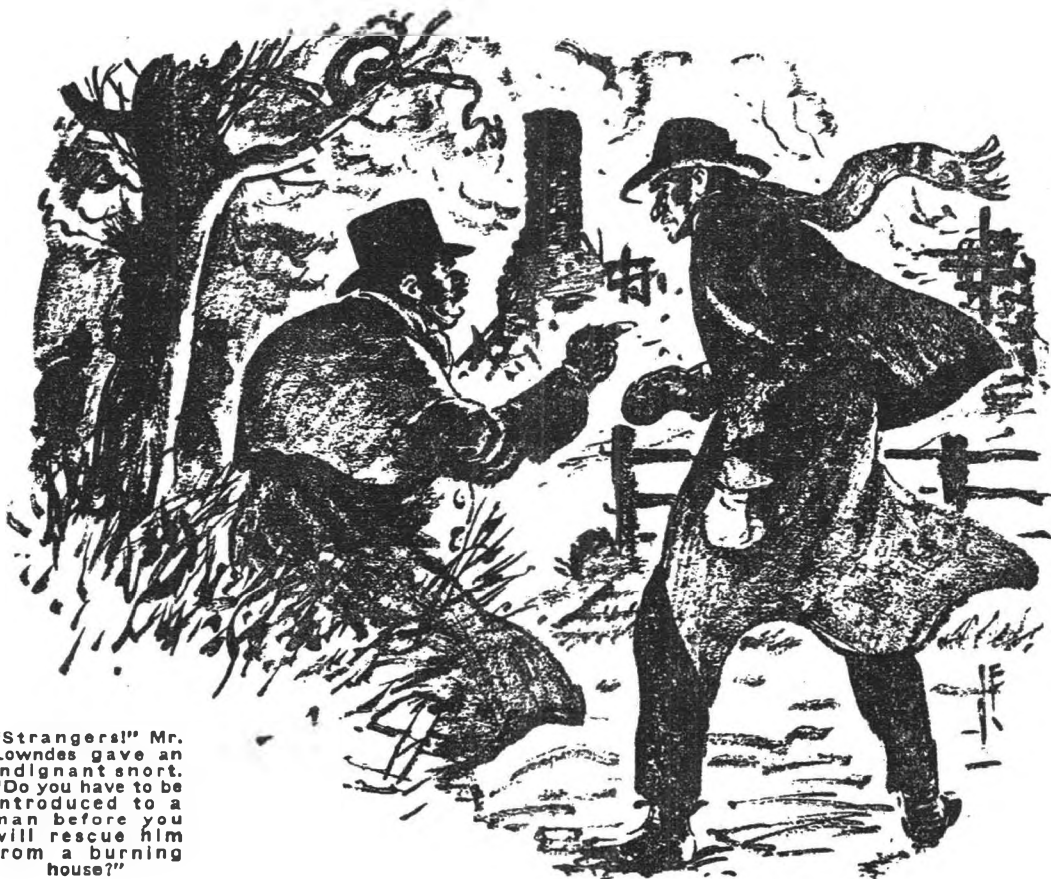
THAT was the dynamic response of Tony Quinn when battered and hysterical Clyde Ainsley had suggested: "I'll help you get McCleod. I'll know him—even after ten years. I'll be glad to kill him if you wish!"

Clyde Ainsley was a man who had once been brutally victimized by Steve McCleod—and now Ainsley wanted vengeance! Tony Quinn, the Black Bat, willingly accepted Ainsley's help—but insisted that it be perfectly legal help.

"You're covered with blood," said Tony Quinn, "and you have a murder knife in your hand. You admit knowing about a murder. Perhaps you committed it. If McCleod framed you this time, he'll be around. Maybe something at the scene of the crime will give him away. Let's go!"

That's how Tony Quinn set forth on the trail of **THE LONG AGO MURDER**—a ten-year-old murder from which stemmed many other crimes. The whole story's told next issue in **THE LONG AGO MURDER**, by G. WAYMAN JONES, one of the most baffling and exciting novels in which the Black Bat has ever played a part.

The Black Bat, Silk, Butch and Carol Baldwin are at their best in **THE LONG AGO MURDER**—a novel that will hold you breathless as you follow its surprising and ingenious twists and turns of plot. Look forward to a humdinger of a mystery!



"Strangers!" Mr. Lowndes gave an indignant snort. "Do you have to be introduced to a man before you will rescue him from a burning house?"

THE FARMER FINDS A BODY

By LEO MARR

When a "corpse" gets too lively, crime stirs anew!

MR. WINFIELD SCOTT GOSS made his first mistake in marrying a girl whose maiden name was Udderzook. For with her, he acquired a brother-in-law named William Udderzook, a man of ideas.

Mr. Goss was an inventor of sorts. He had produced a practical ratchet screwdriver of which he was very proud and he always carried one to show chance acquaintances. He was also experimenting with a formula for synthetic rubber, placing him, in this year 1872, much ahead of his time.

Brother-in-law William Udderzook

found this scientific activity fascinating. From his house on York Road, four miles outside of Baltimore, it was just a minute to the Goss cottage further down the road, and Mr. Udderzook spent much time with the inventor, watching, and helping where he could.

It is a matter of court testimony, that on the night of February 2, 1872, Mr. Udderzook glanced out of the window of his house and saw the Goss cottage in flames.

He rushed out at once, but found the fire roaring so hotly that it was impossible to get near the doomed building.

AN AMAZING TRUE MURDER STORY

Neighbors gathered, but found themselves equally helpless.

The telephone was not to spring from Mr. Bell's fertile brain until four years later, but even had the instrument been in use at the time, it would not have been possible to summon help. The horse-drawn steam engines of the Baltimore fire companies could not gallop four full miles.

So the cottage burned to the ground, while Mr. Udderzook looked on. In the light of the dying flames, he saw Mr. Lowndes, owner of the cottage who had rented it to Mr. Goss, approaching. To Mr. Lowndes, Udderzook mentioned for the first time, the fear that was in him.

"I think he is in the house," Mr. Udderzook said.

"Who?"

"Mr. Goss."

"Mr. Goss! You think he is in there and you did not give the alarm at once? We might have saved him!"

Mr. Udderzook shook his head sadly.

"I saw the fire too late. When I rushed over from my house, it was already a mass of flames. No human being could exist in it. I—I didn't want to say anything about Mr. Goss to these strangers."

"Strangers!" Mr. Lowndes snorted. "Do you have to be introduced to a man before you will ask his assistance in pulling someone out of a fire that is burning him to death?"

Mr. Udderzook looked pained, then forgiving, as though he realized Mr. Lowndes' excitement had carried him away. He sighed, shook his head and walked off without replying.

THE next day, from Baltimore, came the insurance agent, who had been notified of Mr. Goss' death. He was pleased to find Mr. Udderzook with the widow, for Mr. Udderzook knew so much about the affair that he could answer all questions.

"It is most fortunate," Mr. Udderzook said gravely, "that my sister—Mrs. Goss—was away at the time. Otherwise, I gravely fear we should have had two tragedies instead of one."

"Tell me what occurred, as accurately as you remember," the insurance investigator suggested. There was \$25,000 at stake and he could hardly be blamed for being careful.

"I spent the entire afternoon with Mr. Goss," Udderzook related. "He was mak-

ing some test tube experiments and I watched him and helped where I could. I had brought some things over that Mr. Goss wanted—a gallon of kerosene for the lamps, a bottle of whisky and an axe. Mr. Campbell Goss—a brother of the—uh—deceased, was there also earlier in the evening, but left and knew nothing of the fire until the next day."

"Did anything happen that seemed unusual?" the insurance man asked.

"Only one thing. I had helped Mr. Goss fill his lamp from the demijohn of kerosene. He said he preferred to be alone while he worked, so I left and went over to the home of a neighbor, a Mr. Engel. Some time later Mr. Engel and I walked over to see how Mr. Goss was coming along and we found him having trouble with the lamp. I suggested we get him a better lamp. I went back to my house and while there I saw the flames."

"Then you think it was a faulty lamp which may have burst and set the house aflame?"

"It would seem so," Mr. Udderzook said.

"And that was the last you saw of Mr. Goss?"

"I never saw him again. I am certain he was in the house. Had he escaped, he would surely have run to my home."

When the sadness of the funeral was over, and what was ostensibly the charred remains of Mr. Goss laid to rest in a Baltimore cemetery, Mrs. Goss once more made inquiries about the insurance. After all she was now a lorn widow, without other means of support and the \$25,000, for which Mr. Goss had been insured, was a substantial sum.

Already she had made some plans involving business loans to Mr. Udderzook and to Mr. Campbell Goss. Since these two gentlemen were actively interested in the settlement it was only natural that they should act as her agents with the insurance company.

Whenever the investigator called on Mrs. Goss, he found one or the other of the brothers present. This was most convenient, for there were some very pertinent questions he wanted to ask, questions which the brothers-in-law frequently found impertinent.

For example, one of the questions he wanted to ask was this: Where did Mr. Campbell Goss go on the night of the fire? He didn't go home as Mr. Udder-

zook had said. He had been seen traveling toward the railroad station in a wagon with another man whom he had picked up near the cottage. The witness had not been able to identify the other man, due to darkness.

These and other unanswered questions irked the insurance company sufficiently to keep them from making out a check to Mrs. Goss. Their next move was to hire a junk dealer to sift through the ruins of the burned cottage and see what could be found. He found nothing, though he sifted with care.

Yet, strangely enough, a week later Mr. Campbell Goss returned to the scene of the fire, and with Mr. Udderzook watching, retrieved his late brother's watch, chain and keys from the ashes.

It seemed as though led by some strange instinct, he had gone directly to the spot where they were. The insurance investigator marveled at this exhibition of accuracy.

Under further investigation it developed that Mr. Winfield Scott Goss' income was only \$1,200 a year, which made a \$25,000 policy on his life fantastic. It would have cost him at least \$600 a year, or half his income, to keep up with the premiums.

It was further discovered that on the day of the fire Mr. Goss had drawn out his entire bank balance and closed the account.

"I am shocked," Mr. Udderzook remarked when told of this. "I had no idea. This is a most mystifying incident."

A YEAR dragged its weary length by while the insurance company stalled on the payment and continued to snoop and while Goss and Udderzook, Inc., complained bitterly. At length Mr. Udderzook advised Mrs. Goss to sue.

The case went to trial in the Baltimore courts and the insurance company quickly made it evident that for their money there was something rotten in Baltimore.

"We respectfully petition the court for permission to exhume the body of the alleged Winfield Scott Goss and to perform an autopsy."

Permission was granted. The body was exhumed. And now a curious matter was brought to light.

Mrs. Goss had testified that her husband had a perfect set of teeth, had never visited a dentist and never had

any dental trouble. In this she was supported by Mr. Udderzook and Mr. Campbell Goss.

The exhumed body, however, slightly the worse for wear, was examined by three doctors and a dentist who made a startling report.

"The corpse that has been exhumed has only two teeth."

The insurance investigators, who had been skating on thin ice for so long, were delighted. So far as they were concerned, this was a very strong chunk of proof that dirty work had indeed been done.

But they reckoned without juries. Mrs. Goss appeared in widow's weeds and sobbed heartbrokenly in court and the jury melted in its shoes. Besides an insurance company was only a corporation and corporations had plenty of money, didn't they? The jury awarded the full amount to the widow.

Joy reigned in the Goss-Udderzook camp. But not for long. The insurance company appealed, submitting as new evidence the hard and annoying fact that the dead and exhumed corpse was not Mr. Winfield Scott Goss.

"Locate Winfield Scott Goss," the investigator was told. "Chances are he's hiding somewhere and waiting for this whole thing to blow over. It's an obvious swindle."

Mr. Udderzook learned of this new campaign, since there was no great effort to keep it a secret. Suspicion had pointed no finger at him. Yet he felt impelled to action.

Presently he turned up in Jenner-ville, Pennsylvania, the scene of his boyhood. With him was a middle-aged man—a heavy-set quiet man, whom the hotel keeper remembered as an invalid.

They stayed one day at the Jennerville hotel and then checked out in the evening, driving away in a rented rig. About midnight, Mr. Udderzook returned to the stable alone, turned in his buggy, paid the bill and departed.

When the livery stable attendant began to unhitch he was astonished at the condition of the carriage. Dashboard and bow-irons were broken. An oilcloth and two blankets were missing. And fallen down between the cushions was a large seal ring, set with a bloodstone.

"Something certainly was going on here," the stableman mused. "Looks like a fight."

Next day a farmer, driving to Jenner-ville through a wooded section, observed to his surprise, a large flock of buzzards lined up on the fence rails and perched in the tree branches along the road. He had never seen so many before.

"Must be a dead squirrel or rabbit around," he thought and drove on.

But when he came back that way several hours later, the buzzards were still there. And the thought occurred to him that there were far too many of the birds for one small rabbit or squirrel to have attracted them.

He decided to have a look. Beating his way through the wild blackberry briars and the poison ivy, he plunged into the woods. Within a few feet he found the thing that was causing all the interest of the buzzards. The dismembered body of a man was here—trunk and head partly buried in a shallow trench and covered with earth and leaves—legs similarly half-covered a few yards away.

Police and insurance men descended upon the once quiet copse known as Baer Woods. The body was identified by the hotel man of Jennersville as the middle-aged, heavy set man who had stayed there with Mr. Udderzook. The damaged rig was examined and the seal ring impounded as evidence.

THERE was no doubt now. Mr. Winfield Scott Goss had been found. And this time he was truly dead.

Mr. Udderzook was enjoying an untroubled supper when the police of West Chester, Pennsylvania made an unannounced call.

"What is the meaning of this outrage?" Mr. Udderzook demanded arrogantly. It was his swan song. The steel bracelets clicked with finality on his wrists and the plot reached its climax.

"The conspiracy might have had a prolonged success," said one of the insurance men who had remained with the case until its end, "except for one thing. Mr. Winfield Scott Goss grew very tired of remaining under cover. He began to dislike the role of a dead man in which he had been cast. Roaming the country under the name of 'J. C. Wilson' annoyed him. He craved conviviality. He liked to talk to people, to show them his ratchet screwdriver, his big seal ring.

"He went from town to town, from tavern to tavern, making new acquaintances. Whenever he signed the register

of a hotel as J. C. Wilson, he was virtually signing away the life of Mr. Udderzook. He made no effort to conceal his penmanship and his trademark of screwdriver and ring were too easily remembered.

"Mr. Udderzook, upon whose shoulders reposed the responsibility of keeping Mr. Goss under cover until the insurance money was collected, felt the time had come to get rid of him. We were asking too many embarrassing questions about the dead man in the ruins of the cottage. How long the conspiracy to defraud the insurance company would have existed if it hadn't been for the discovery of the body in Baer Woods, I won't venture to state."

The baffling thing was the still unanswered question: whose body was it that had burned in the Goss cottage? If Mr. Udderzook knew, he never told. He went on trial at West Chester for the murder of Winfield Scott Goss in October.

Sam Rhodes, a brother-in-law of Udderzook, was a surprise witness for the state. Rhodes had long ago washed his hands of his relative, considering him a crook. He testified that Udderzook had once tried to involve him in a shady enterprise which Rhodes had declined.

On the day of the fire, Rhodes testified, Udderzook had asked him to help take a man into the woods for the purpose of poisoning him with laudanum and taking all his money. Rhodes had refused, but had not gone to the authorities with the story, not being sure that Udderzook had been serious.

That it was serious now, no one could doubt. The defense lawyers were so shocked that they withdrew at once from the case, leaving Udderzook high and dry.

After two days of deliberation the jury finally returned a verdict of guilty. William Udderzook was executed on November 12, 1874, in the presence of high dignitaries attired in frock coats and high hats, in accordance with the prevailing fashions of the day.

Udderzook never broke down, never faltered in his plea of innocence, charging that the whole thing was a plot of the insurance companies to frame him.

"It is my desire," he wrote, before his execution, "that my remains will rest in Baltimore, if not in the same lot, at

(Concluded on page 90)

THE VISITING CORPSE

By DONALD BAYNE HOBART

Private Detective Mugs Kelly finds it slightly annoying to discover a dead man in his office during lunch hour!

I UNLOCKED the door of my office, stepped inside and there he was sitting at my desk. I stopped whistling. It didn't seem right to whistle in the presence of the dead and I didn't like the tune much anyway. My first glance had revealed the gray-haired man at the desk had a black hole in his forehead where the bullet had entered his brain. It seemed to have killed him instantly for he was slumped back limply in the chair.

"Very nice," I muttered. "But I don't like strangers cluttering up my office—dead or alive."

There was something about the affair that made me instantly suspect this was a frame-up, and I wasn't having any if I could help it. Not me—"Mugs" Kelly! I'm big and tough and have a face that even a mother would have to learn to love. Nothing horrible, but just repulsive in a nice sort of way. But my looks haven't hurt my work as a private detective anyway.

As I started to move closer to the desk to take a closer gander at the late Mr. Somebody, a faint sound from the doorway behind me made me whirl and reach for the gun in my shoulder holster. But I didn't draw. A big moon-faced man was standing there, watching me with mild interest.

"Fleas?" he asked, noticing the way I was holding my right hand thrust beneath the left lapel of my coat. "Or just a Napoleon complex?"

"Well, well!" I took my hand away from the gun butt. "Who are you and what are you doing here?"

"The name is Ed Healey," he said pulling back his coat and giving me a glimpse of a badge. "Police Headquarters." He stared at the corpse and the

black hole in its head. "Anything wrong? Or is this customary?"

"The deceased is defunct," I said. Healey's presence didn't add to my happiness. "No, it's not customary. Who told you there was something wrong?"

"We get a call from a lug by the name of Kelly," Healey answered. "He says he has an office at Twenty-five Ten in this building, and that he wants to see a detective at once, because he's gonna be murdered. So here I am."

"Which is bringing coppers to Centre Street, if you ask me," I said. "I'm Kelly. I didn't phone the Bureau. And I'm a detective—private."

Healey just nodded and strolled into the office. He walked over to the desk and stood staring down at the dead man. I could feel the wheels of justice grinding away like a meat chopper and that

I was the hamburger. Healey sighed and looked at me.

"Ten years ago, when I was a second grade detective I would have asked why you killed him, Kelly," he said. "But I've found out it's hopeless. What's your story?"

AFTER telling him how I had been out for lunch, come back, and found the dead man sitting at my desk, I mentioned I had never seen the dead man before in my life.

"Nice touch—you're finding the office door locked. I like it."

Healey went to the door and examined the lock. It was the kind that locks automatically when you close the door, and only can be opened with the key that's made for it.

"Let's see your gun and permit," he said finally.

I showed him both. He glanced at the permit and handed it back to me. Then



he sniffed the barrel of my automatic, slipped out the clip, saw it was filled with cartridges and snapped it back in place.

"The gun that killed him is lying under the desk," I said, and I got a kick out of the expression on Healey's big face. He just looked silly as he handed back my automatic.

"Thanks," he said.

There were voices out in the hall. Two men were arguing about something. I didn't know what they were talking about until they came closer, and then I could hear them clearly.

"I tell you I heard the sound of a shot not more than fifteen minutes ago," one man said. "And it came from one of the offices along this corridor. I didn't pay much attention at the time, Ward. But after I went down in the elevator and met you in the lobby, I got thinking about it and it worried me."

"Aw, you worry about the darndest things, Barton," said the other man. "Even if you did hear a shot, it's none of our business."

Healey had also been listening. He stepped to the door.

"You did hear a shot, Mr. Barton," he said. "And it was murder. Your name's Barton and your name's Ward, huh? Good. Come in here please, both of you."

I stood watching as Healey stepped back and Barton and Ward entered the office. They looked like ordinary business men, but then I have seen few crooks who look like they are supposed to look, and a lot of tough appearing eggs who turned out to be just average citizens. With me suspicion is second nature.

Healey closed the door of the office after them. I looked at him and went over to the phone on my desk. He glanced at me and frowned as I reached for the phone.

"What's the idea, Kelly?" Healey demanded.

"I was going to call Homicide," I said.

"Not yet," Healey said. "I'm gonna solve the case myself first. This is easy."

"All right." I moved away from the phone.

"Good heavens," exclaimed Barton, staring at the dead man. "It's Carson Culpepper. Don't you recognize him, Ward?"

"I do." Ward nodded. "He was the president of the Culpepper Tool Com-

pany. They have offices on this floor."

"That's right," said Barton. "I've heard he was eccentric—always insisted on handling all the firm's money himself. Even went to the bank every week to get the payroll—but he paid high salaries to the people who worked for him."

"I suppose you are detectives," said Ward, looking at Healey and then at me. "And I see no reason for your holding us here merely because Mr. Barton thought he heard a shot and was foolish enough to investigate."

"That's right," said Barton. "I resent being detained here."

It had taken them quite some time to reach the boiling point, and I wondered if they had suddenly decided to put on an act.

"Take it easy, gentlemen," said Healey soothingly. "We are not holding you here for any reason. You have been a help to us in identifying Mr. Carson J. Culpepper, and Mr. Kelly and I are grateful."

"We are," I said, merely because Healey glanced at me as though he expected me to say something. "And for suggesting the motive for Mr. Culpepper's murder."

"Motive?" Healey looked surprised. "What do you mean by that, Kelly?"

"This is Friday, isn't it?" I asked.

"That's right." Healey nodded. "What of it?"

"Most firms pay their employees on Fridays these days," I said. "I'll bet that Culpepper went to the bank to get the payroll money for his firm. When he returned with the cash, he was murdered and the money stolen. Then the body was left in my office."

"Maybe you're right, Kelly," said Healey. He turned to the other two men. "What is your business, Mr. Barton?"

"I'm an attorney," said Barton. "Fred Barton is the name."

"And I'm in the advertising business," Ward said. "We both have offices on this floor, too. Anything else?"

"No, that's all," said Healey. "You can leave now. Thanks for your assistance."

HE OPENED the door and Barton and Ward left without saying anything further. When we were alone in the office, I looked at Healey.

"Murder by person or persons un-

known?" I asked. "You just got rid of your two best suspects."

"They didn't do it," Healey said. "You made some mistakes, Kelly."

I didn't like the way he said it. There was a nasty note in his tone.

"What do you mean by that?" I asked.

"Suggesting that Culpepper was murdered and robbed of the payroll money was pretty pat," said Healey. "Could be that you robbed and killed him, then dragged his body into this office and placed him in that chair. Then you came back, unlocked the door and pretended that finding a body in your office was a great big surprise."

"I'm not sure Culpepper was carrying any payroll money," I said. "And neither are you, Healey. Suppose we find out?"

"How?" demanded Healey.

"I'll show you." I picked up the phone book and looked through it.

"Ah! Here's the number of the Culpepper company. I'll call them, say I'm the police and ask if Culpepper was bringing the money."

"All right," said Healey. "And ask what he was carrying the money in while you're at it."

I dialed a number and waited until a voice answered.

"This is Detective Kelly," I said over the phone. "Can you tell me if Mr. Carson Culpepper is missing, after going to the bank to get the payroll money for the firm? . . . Oh, I see . . . Well, we have bad news for you. Mr. Culpepper has been found murdered . . . Yes, in Room Twenty-five Ten." I gave the building address. "How did Mr. Culpepper usually carry the money? . . . I see. Thank you."

Then I hung up and looked at Healey. He was frowning.

"You didn't need to tell them all that," he said. "Was he carrying the money?"

"He was," I said. "He always carried it in a brief case."

Healey started to say something, then lapsed into silence as a knock sounded on the closed door of the office. I went to the door and for the first time I took a good look at the lock. The catch was fixed on the inside so that it wouldn't lock when it was closed. I hadn't noticed because when I returned to the office, I'd turned the key before trying the door-knob.

Fred Barton was standing out in the hall. He looked worried.

"I had to come back," he said. "I just remembered one or two things that might be important."

"Such as what?" Healey demanded after Barton had entered the office and I had closed the door behind him, leaving it still unlocked.

"Well, in the first place the door of this office was shut when I heard the shot," said the attorney. "So I wasn't quite sure where the sound had come from at the time."

"All right," said Healey impatiently. "That doesn't seem so important."

"But there was something else," said Barton. "I also found an empty brief case out in the hall with the initials C.J.C. on it." The attorney smiled. "Mr. Culpepper was no fool. He merely carried the brief case as a blind. He never put the payroll money in it."

"Oh, he didn't," said Healey. "Then how did he carry the money?"

"I just talked to his secretary," said Barton. "Culpepper always carried the payroll money in a money-belt beneath his clothes."

"So that's why—" Healey began, then broke off abruptly.

For the moment he had forgotten all about Mugs Kelly. What was a bad mistake on his part.

"So that's why you didn't get the money when you killed him, Healey?" I said, covering the big man with my gun.

"Kelly!" Healey glared at me. "Are you crazy. I told you I was from Police Headquarters."

"Sure," I said. "And the wolf also told Red Riding Hood he was her grandmother. You were the one who made mistakes, Healey. First your not wanting me to phone Homicide made me suspicious; second, though you pretended not to know Culpepper's name, you were the only one who mentioned his middle initial."

BARTON was surprised. "But if he is the killer, why has he been hanging around, pretending to be a detective?" he asked.

"Because he held up Culpepper in the hall, forced him into this office and shot him," I said. "Then he discovered the money he was after wasn't in the brief case, so he hung around trying to learn where it was hidden. You told him where it was when you mentioned the money-

belt. My door was unlocked—though I thought I had locked it when I went out to lunch. Healey knew that and brought him in here.”

“Smart, aren’t you,” Healey snapped.

He lunged toward me, reaching for the gun in my right hand. I let go with my left and hit him squarely on the chin, putting plenty of beef behind the blow. He went down so hard that he rattled all the furniture in the office.

Before he could get up the door opened and the Homicide Squad surged in. I knew the lieutenant in charge and he grinned at me.

“That phone call you made to me was pretty wild, Mugs,” he said. “But we thought we had better investigate, so

here we are.”

“Phone call?” said Healey as he sat dazedly. “What phone call?”

“The one I didn’t make to the Culpeper company when I dialed Lieutenant Norton’s office at Headquarters instead,” I said. “There’s your murderer, Lieutenant. Take him away.”

They did—and Healey admitted the whole thing. I had visions of a newspaper headline, with the name of Mugs Kelly prominently featured, but the police got all the credit. I didn’t even get a mention. Which was all right with me. Suppose they had featured me and run my picture?

That might have scared away all my customers!

THE FARMER FINDS A BODY

(Concluded from page 86)

least the same cemetery with those of W. S. Goss, a friend very dear to me, that our bodies may return to mother earth and our spirits may mingle together on the bright sunny banks of deliverance where pleasures never end.”

The testimony had pretty well proved that this body which Mr. Udderzook yearned to lie near was that of some

wretched unknown whom Campbell Scott and Udderzook had carried in a wagon to the cottage before setting it afire. Certainly it was not his “dear friend” Mr. Goss, whom he had later chopped up in a Pennsylvania woods.

Be that as it may, Udderzook got his wish. He lies for all eternity near the remains of his unknown victim.



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SHROUD OF GUILT

By

ANTHONY TOMPKINS

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A man about Atwood's age and build was slumped over the desk

EXPERT IN MURDER

By WAYLAND RICE

The killer almost got away with it—until a shrewd sleuth added up all the figures and came through with the answer!

HOMICIDE LIEUTENANT JEFF PIERCE pushed away his highball. It was only half gone but he'd nursed it so long it was flat. No one was paying attention to him. Doug Atwood was at the speaker's table, and when he talked everyone listened.

It was a medium-sized affair. About one hundred people were present to wish Inspector Grogan happiness and long life and to hope he'd deplete the pension

fund by living a long time. Grogan was popular and he was retiring.

Lieutenant Pierce was here only because he liked Grogan. He disliked parties and consequently hadn't been listening to the speeches. But he realized Atwood was making a lot of sense even if he did weave a bit and stumble over a word now and then. The man wasn't drunk. No alcohol-soaked brain could have evolved such a brilliant speech. Atwood was just a bit tight and

enjoying it.

He said, "You men—most of you officers of the law or connected with the fight against crime in some manner—know my kind of work. I've been an insurance investigator for more than twenty-five years. Now I take exception to a statement made by Inspector Grogan. Even though I respect and honor him, he was wrong. He claimed that nobody can get away with murder."

"Not many do," Grogan called out good-naturedly.

"Ah," Atwood laid a finger against his nose and smirked wisely, "the worthy Inspector now amends his statement. But even so, I say that plenty of people get away with murder. I've run across several cases. The murderer strikes and then lets the investigation go on unhampered. It never touches him. He isn't even suspected."

"Give us facts, not conjectures," someone shouted.

Atwood grinned. "Facts you want? Well, it's done often. People are killed in a hunting accident. People fall down steps and break their skulls. Auto accidents happen. People fall in front of trains and subway cars. They take poison accidentally—or so it seems. Unloaded guns sprout bullets for no accountable reason. Why, gentlemen, I could name four men who killed and got away with it. Four very important men. They killed for various reasons, but each gained financially through insurance policies. That's where I came in. My investigation wasn't of the police type. I obtained some evidence, but not enough for conviction. These murderers were paid off by the company. I doubt that even one of them had so much as a single uneasy moment."

"Name them," another voice called out. "Give us facts, Atwood."

Atwood chuckled. "Name them, he says. Now, gentlemen, how in the world can I do such a thing? Without proof to back up my statements I'd surely libel those killers. They could sue me and they probably would, because none of them are afraid of a murder conviction. But, just to arouse your interest, one of those men happens to be in this audience. He knows exactly what I mean. Look around you. Some of you will look into the eyes of a man who committed murder and got away with it."

Lieutenant Pierce slowly rotated the

highball glass and wondered if booze made fools of men as completely as it had of Atwood. The insurance investigator was usually reticent. Tongue-tied, sometimes, when he was gathering information. Now his tongue wagged loosely. Pierce thought that if he happened to be the murderer to whom Atwood referred, he'd be contemplating a fresh murder right now. If booze oiled Atwood's tongue this time, it would do so again, and some time he might name names. Pierce noticed that the insurance investigator was winding up his speech and that his voice was growing thicker.

Atwood was easily fifty, partially bald, and what hair he had was grey. He was a medium-sized man with a pleasant face and looked more like a successful merchant than a clever investigator.

The party finally came to an end. Pierce didn't leave at once. He waited for Atwood and took the man's arm. They walked into the lobby of the hotel where the affair had taken place, and both men sat down. It was almost one in the morning.

"Doug, you'd better lay off drinking if it affects you that way," Pierce said, "or are you aware of what you said in there?"

Atwood grinned. "I was a bit under, wasn't I? And what I said served no purpose other than to warn those four killers I'm wise to them."

"Are there really four men who got away with murder?" Pierce asked. "And was one of them present at the meeting?"

Atwood nodded. "I told the truth. Now wait, I know what's on your mind. As a Homicide Squad dick you're set to make me talk. Honestly, Lieutenant, if I had any sort of evidence on these men, I'd bring it to you on a silver platter. In each case I was forced to recommend insurance payments to these killers and it rankled pretty deeply. Yet, what could I do? You need evidence to withhold payments. Evidence to convict them of murder, and there was none."

Pierce leaned back and slowly rolled an unlit cigarette between his fingers. "Perhaps these four men had no inkling that you knew about them and their deeds. But they know it now. At least one does. Put yourself in the place of this killer, Doug. You'd be scared stiff, as he is now. Remember that adage which has been proved time and time

again? A murderer will murder once more if he is pressed. I'm not half so worried about running those men down as I am for your safety."

"I know what you mean," Atwood conceded. "But the chances are against it, and I'll tell you why. None of these four men knows the others. Each case was remote. The man in the audience tonight—yes, he knows I suspect him. But he's a coward. Anyway, in this kind of work, you forget to be afraid. Now I'm going home. I've probably let myself in for one swell hangover."

PIERCE arose. "I'm going with you, Doug. Call it premonition or just plain foolishness. I'll sleep better if I know you're okay."

They walked out, turned south and headed for the uptown subway. Pierce glanced around, alert to see if anyone who had been at the party, was hanging around. He saw no familiar faces.

They went down the steps to the subway platform. It was deserted. Atwood fumbled in his pocket.

"Got a nickel, Lieutenant?" he asked. "The change booth is closed."

Pierce found two nickels and paid Atwood's fare. The insurance investigator leaned against a pillar. In the hazy light he looked pale and haggard.

"Trouble is," he explained, "I drink so seldom the stuff hits me like dynamite. Now look, Lieutenant, this is all a lot of nonsense. You don't have to tag along to protect me. Those killers—all of them—know very well I haven't a shred of proof."

"But they—or one at least—knows you're still working on it and you're a smart baby. Chances are you'll stumble onto something and a killer will go half mad wondering just how much you know. Anyway, I'd be taking this same subway, so stop beefing."

A train was coming in now and the roaring sound made Atwood wince. With a yelp he clapped his hands to his head as if to shut out the racket. Pierce was at his side instantly.

"Something just slapped into this pillar," Atwood exclaimed. "Hey, look! The paint is gouged away."

Pierce stepped close to the pillar and examined the nick. "A bullet did that," he said and turned around quickly.

There were a few people on the platform now. The train had stopped, some

passengers had gotten off. Any one of them could have fired a shot as the train rolled to a stop. The crack of a small caliber gun might not even be heard a dozen feet away. Or a man could have slipped down the stairway to the street, remained hidden and fired when the noise of the train was at its loudest.

Pierce started looking around. He found the bullet in less than three minutes. It lay close by the wall at the end of the platform, and there was another nick in that wall. The bullet was shapeless, but looked like a .25.

Atwood shuddered. "You win, Lieutenant. That slug was meant for me. It missed, caromed off the pillar and hit this wall. I was lucky, that's all."

"The man who fired that shot knows darned well he missed," Pierce said. "He'll try again because you scared the daylights out of him. Doug, without being a pessimist, you can realize he might not fail next time. Who is he?"

Atwood laughed. "Oh, no. I'm mentioning no names. Even if he does kill me, you won't be able to hang it on him. Not for the first kill, nor for my murder, because he's very smart."

"You just can't let him get away with it again," Pierce argued.

"No, I can't. I was thinking, Lieutenant, that it's possible some friend of the other three men may have been present tonight. Someone who also knows the truth. Now, the man who fired at me can't be in two places at the same time. It just isn't possible. So, if I telephone each man, I can narrow down the suspects to those who are not at home. Stay right here. I don't want you close by to listen while I dial or mention names."

Atwood hurried to the other end of the platform where there was an open phone booth. He stepped up to the instrument, glanced over his shoulder to make certain Pierce wasn't within earshot and began dialing. The noise of express trains were passing through the station and of locals whuffing to a stop was great enough so that Pierce did not hear one word of Atwood's conversations.

Atwood came back shortly, looking grim. "Well, I eliminated three of them. Got them out of bed, but they are home and couldn't have reached their residences by this time if any one of them had fired that shot."

"How about the fourth?" Pierce asked.

"No answer. And he's the chap who was at the party tonight. Yet he does have an alibi of sorts. He lives quite a distance away and maybe hasn't got home yet."

"Well, you're going home fast," Pierce declared. "Soon as we leave the subway, we take a cab. Doug, for heaven's sake, don't laugh this off. You ought to know better. You're as much a policeman as I, except you carry no gun or badge."

Atwood shuddered. "I'll tell you something, Lieutenant. If you ever drink too much and feel a hangover coming on, let someone take a pot-shot at you. It's a positive cure for the morning-after blues. I've decided not to go home. I couldn't sleep anyway. I'm going to the office and do some work. In connection with the fellow who killed his wife three years ago and knows I'm aware it was murder."

"I'm tagging along," Pierce said. "Once you're locked in your office, I won't worry any further, but until then you're a nice open target for a man with a gun."

They rode the next train for half a dozen station stops, got off and went to the street. Pierce preceded Atwood and looked around. He signaled a taxi before he called the investigator out of the subway exit. They rode to the skyscraper where Atwood maintained his offices on one of the top floors.

There were no attendants on duty and the lobby door was locked, but Atwood had a key. A self-service elevator was provided for use after midnight. Atwood pressed the proper button and the cage rose smoothly.

"Doug, I'm asking you again for the name of the man who was at the party tonight," Pierce said. "If he does succeed in killing you, I want something to go on. Maybe he won't be convicted of murdering his wife, but I'll get him for killing you."

Atwood laughed. "Nothing doing. You're a cop, essentially a man of action. You'll haul the guy in, and I'll be open for a libel suit because you'll have nothing on him. I'll make a bargain with you though. If he tries again—and misses—I'll give you his name."

"It's your life," Pierce shrugged.

They got off the elevator and walked down the corridor. Atwood took keys from his pocket and unlocked the office door. He turned and offered his hand.

"Thanks, anyway, Lieutenant. I'm okay now."

"We hope," Pierce said. "Good night and watch your step. You can't get careless for a second when a murderer is gunning for you and what happened in the subway tonight was no accident."

Pierce started walking back to the open elevator. He was stepping inside when Atwood's voice reached him. It was hoarse and shaky with fear. Pierce ran back.

"I'm keeping my promise," Atwood said. "I'll tell you the name of the man who I suspect shot at me. Who murdered his wife three years ago and got away with it. Because he did try to get me again, Lieutenant. He failed, but—he got somebody else."

Pierce hurried into the office. The lights were on. A man slumped over Atwood's desk, his back toward the door. On the desk beside him was a glass half full of water. Pierce noted several things quickly. The dead man was about Atwood's build and age. He was partially bald with a halo of grey hair like Atwood's. He wore a grey, double-breasted business suit, almost like the one Atwood wore. Pierce would easily have mistaken the man for Atwood.

"Who is he?" he asked.

Atwood sat down slowly. "Paul Carter. Attached to our West Coast office with a job just like mine. He was following up a case and using my office."

Pierce bent over the glass and sniffed. There was no odor. He looked the corpse over carefully. There was no blood and no abrasions or lacerations were visible. Pierce dipped a finger into the glass and tasted gingerly of the water adhering to it.

"Poison," he said. "I can't identify it. Doug, your murderer set a trap for you. He found this man here and thought you'd come here directly from the subway station. He was daring enough to get into the office, probably with a key, and then slip up behind the man he thought was you. Or, maybe, Carter left the office for a moment, and the killer poisoned the glass of water then."

"His name"—Atwood spat the words—"is Baynard Eaton. He's an attorney and he was at the affair tonight. Three years ago he went hunting with his wife. She was shot by someone. Eaton claims it was another hunter who fired without identifying his target. It happened in

a rural community in a distant state. That kind of accident is common there. Eaton wasn't even suspected. But he had an insurance policy for a hundred thousand on his wife with a double indemnity clause in case of accidental death."

"You didn't notice Eaton around the subway platform?" Pierce asked.

"No, I did not. I doubted the little rat had nerve enough to kill again. I was wrong. Now listen, Lieutenant, I've told the truth. Paul Carter was one of my best friends. He died for me. I'd do anything to avenge his death, but we still have nothing on Eaton. Nothing, except motive. And how do you account for a motive based on a crime Eaton didn't commit, according to the evidence at hand?"

Pierce called Headquarters, made a brief report and then sat down to wait for the Medical Examiner and the other experts who follow in the wake of violent death.

IT WAS almost an hour later when the Medical Examiner gave a report.

"Death occurred at about one-fifteen. Five minutes either way. The poison was aconitine. Works very fast and results in a peculiar sort of rigor which advances by timed stages. It's simple to determine the time of death when this poison is used."

Fingerprint men reported no luck. The body was removed and soon Pierce and Atwood were alone again. Atwood smoked cigars as if they were cigarettes. He went to the filing cabinets finally, yanked open a drawer and then cursed.

"It's gone. The file on Baynard Eaton. He must have hung around until Paul died. Then he swiped the file. And, worse than that, he probably knows he made a mistake and I'm still alive."

Pierce pulled down the brim of his hat. "I'm going to arrest him, Doug. You're not safe so long as he is free. We've nothing on the man, but I'll hold him on suspicion of murdering his wife. We'll have a chance then, to check on him. Talk to people who might have seen him and could place him near this office at the time of the murder. It happened at one-fifteen.

"Here is how I figure it. Eaton knew you'd take that subway, knew what station you'd board the train at. He left a good while before we did, got on a train

further uptown and saw us on the platform. Before the train stopped, he took a shot at you, firing through an open window or from between cars. He had plenty of chances. There were few people on the train."

"You're right on the beam, Lieutenant," Atwood agreed excitedly. "Eaton knew he missed, but he figured I'd probably go to the office while I was sore, to check on his case. Or he planned to put poison in the thermos jug on my desk so I'd get it in the morning. He found Paul Carter there, mistook him for me and killed him. The time element proves it. If we could only find someone who saw him in this vicinity."

"I'm going to try," Pierce said. "But I don't intend delaying his arrest. Want to come along?"

Atwood shook his head. "If you don't mind, I'm staying here for about five or ten minutes. I'll meet you at the lobby door. I want to look over my files on those other three men. We could be wrong about Eaton. One of the others might have done the job."

"How about naming them too?"

"No. Not unless I find some link between one of them and someone who was at the party tonight. If I discover anything suspicious, I'll talk. Otherwise I can't."

Pierce knew what Baynard Eaton looked like. He was a mousy little man with a good law practice that depended more on skill for finding loopholes in the law than on fighting openly in court. Except that he was a widower, Pierce could recall nothing more about him. The detective had not even known the circumstances of Mrs. Eaton's death until Doug Atwood had told him.

Pierce descended to the almost deserted street and looked around. A Department of Sanitation man was sweeping the gutter a block away. Pierce went up to him and showed his badge. The street cleaner had seen no one enter that office building until the police had arrived after the murder.

There was a drug store on the next corner, still open. Pierce went there. A sleepy-eyed clerk grew more awake after a glance at Pierce's badge. Pierce asked more questions.

"No, sir," the clerk declared, "I didn't see anybody who acted suspicious or answered the description you just gave me. Say, it wasn't Mr. Atwood who was

killed, was it?"

"No. It was a friend of his."

"I'm glad it wasn't Mr. Atwood. He's a customer and a nice guy. He was in here only this morning, getting a prescription filled. I wish I could help you, Lieutenant."

"So do I," Pierce said fervently. "If you hear anything, let me know."

Outside, Pierce whistled for a cab, picked up Atwood in front of the office building and gave the driver Baynard Eaton's address. It was across the river on Long Island. Pierce and Atwood were silent during the trip. Finally the cab rolled to a stop in front of a large and imposing house. There were lights on the second floor.

"He either just got in or he's suffering from a bad conscience," Atwood said grimly. "Since his wife's death he's lived alone here. Inherited a lot of money from her, besides the two hundred grand the policy paid off. Look, suppose we both jump down his throat. Maybe he'll scare and talk."

"It's worth trying," Pierce granted. "Thought of it myself, though if he withstood an investigation of his wife's death, he'll probably laugh in our faces. Let's go!"

They walked up the path to the porch and went up the steps without any effort to be quiet. Pierce put his finger against the doorbell and held it there. They heard footsteps within, heard someone come down from the second floor. Then the porch light snapped on. The door opened a crack and Baynard Eaton looked out.

His face was drawn and lined, his eyes bright with terror. Pierce flashed his badge and gave the door a shove. It was stopped by the burglar chain which was in place on the inside. Eaton turned and raced out of sight. They heard him scurrying up the stairs.

"Go around the back," Pierce snapped. "Grab him if he comes out. I'll go in the hard way."

Pierce drew back, launched an attack on the door, but that burglar chain held. He was crouched to whack the door again when he heard a single shot from upstairs. Pierce hurried over to a window and kicked it in. Atwood, who had heard the shot, too, came running from the rear of the house.

The two men went through the broken window, hurried up the stairs and found

Eaton in the bathroom. He'd stepped in front of the mirror, thrust the muzzle of a gun into his mouth and pulled the trigger. Pierce shuddered and turned away.

"And that's that," he said. "Eaton knew we'd come after him. His bags are in the next room, half packed. He intended to run for it, but he knew the game was up when we arrived. Call Headquarters, Doug."

More than an hour later, Atwood was saying, "Well, I'm safe now and the murder of Paul Carter is avenged."

Pierce had other ideas. "Doug, you're still sitting on top of a volcano. This whole story will be publicized now. The other three killers who know you suspect them, will realize you haven't abandoned their cases any more than you gave up with Eaton. Their names, man. We might have saved Carter's life if you'd named Eaton in time."

"No," Atwood insisted stubbornly. "I can't do it, Lieutenant. Not right now. I need time to think. Maybe tomorrow. Right now I want to go home. I've got a headache worse than the hangover that threatened me earlier tonight."

"Okay," Pierce sighed, "run along. See me at my office in the morning. About eleven. I'm going to run through Eaton's papers and things. There might be a confession somewhere and it would clear this up neatly."

Atwood hesitated, as if he'd like to stay and be in on the search. Finally though, he stifled his yawns and departed. Pierce broke into the dead man's desk but did not find very much. He located several old bank books and found evidence that Eaton had deposited a check for two hundred thousand dollars. Blood money from the murder of his wife.

He hadn't kept the money very long though. There wasn't much left in any of his accounts, but Pierce knew that a man who kills for money, usually goes through it fast.

Pierce put out most of the lights, helped himself to a cigar from the humidor on Eaton's desk and sat back to do some thinking. The whole thing was so patently clear that the detective was irritated because he felt something was lacking.

Eaton had listened to Atwood's silly declamation about men who get away with murder. It had scared the daylight out of him. He'd taken a shot at Atwood,

missed and then gone to Atwood's office to arrange a death trap. He found Carter there, thought he was Atwood and killed him. Then he'd hurried home where either remorse or terror had struck him. Of course he knew Atwood wasn't dead. He must have examined Carter's body before he left the office. That, coupled with seeing Atwood accompanied by a detective, had been too much for him.

Pierce reflected that men think they can commit murder and get away with it. But could they? Suddenly he sat bolt upright. His mind went over every last detail of the evening. His lips grew tight, his whole face deadly grim.

Pierce had arranged for a police car to be left, and it was parked at the curb. He drove back to Atwood's office. It was locked but he found some cleaning people on one of the lower floors. His badge was a good pass. A scrub woman let him in.

"What floor were you working on about one o'clock?" Pierce asked.

"Right here," she replied. "I was in and out of the offices on this floor. The other cops asked me a lot of questions, but I didn't see anybody go in or out of Mr. Atwood's office, sir."

"Thanks," Pierce said.

HE CLOSED the door, went over to the desk at which the dead man had been seated and dropped into the same chair. The whole surface of the desk and every flat object in the room had been dusted for fingerprints. Most of the chemical had been removed, however. The telephone was clear of it. He recalled that an especially fastidious detective had carefully wiped it off.

Pierce arose and walked to a bathroom which was part of this office suite. He opened the medicine cabinet and took out a can of after-shave talcum. He returned to the desk, dumped some powder onto a bit of paper and carefully blew it onto the phone. This was a crude way of looking for prints, but it worked. He found some on the telephone.

Then he opened the desk drawers and searched through them. In the top one he found a box of capsules bearing a label written by the druggist down the street. It also carried a doctor's name and address. Pierce used his handkerchief to lift the phone and dialed the doctor's number.

"Did you prescribe medicine for Douglas Atwood?" he asked. "A white powder contained in capsules?"

"I don't even know Douglas Atwood," the doctor replied sourly. "This is a devil of a time to get me out of bed."

"I know, but it's important," Pierce explained. "This is the police. Homicide Lieutenant Pierce talking. Did you have a patient named Paul Carter, perhaps?"

"Carter? Yes, I did. He was suffering from a mild heart condition. I prescribed something for it. In capsule form. I gave him a few pills here and told him when they were gone he was to start taking the prescription."

"Now think carefully," Pierce begged. "You gave him pills. I want to determine when he would have taken the last one. Can you help me there?"

The doctor was fully awake now, recognizing in Pierce's voice a certain urgency.

"Let's see, he came to me at one this afternoon. Never saw the man before. He was from out of town. He took a pill at one o'clock. I gave him three more so he'd take one at four, another at seven, then again at ten, and that would be the last one."

"He'd begin taking the capsules at one o'clock then?"

"Yes, if he followed my orders."

Pierce thanked him and hung up, being very careful not to mar the prints on the phone. He called Headquarters and had them send a fingerprint man along. Half an hour later, Pierce knew who had handled the telephone after it had been dusted the first time.

He began systematically going through Atwood's files then, studying fairly recent cases first.

It was dawn when he pulled up in front of the apartment house where Atwood lived. Pierce went straight to the insurance investigator's floor and rang the buzzer.

Atwood let him in. He was dressed in pajamas and robe. His hair was tousled and his eyes sleepy.

"I need some information," Pierce explained. "Do you mind?"

"Of course not," Atwood said. "Why should I? Come on in."

"Got a drink?" Pierce asked after he sat down in the cozy living room.

Atwood shook his head. "I'm sorry. I never keep any of the stuff around."

What's up, Lieutenant?"

"You drink very little," Pierce said slowly. "In fact, I always had an idea you were a teetotaler. Until the party tonight. Doug, I want the names of the other three men you suspect of murder."

"You don't get them," Atwood said quickly. "Look, I explained why I couldn't tell you. I'd be accusing those men of murder with nothing to back me up. You'd arrest them. They'd find out where your information came from. You'd have to let them go and in self-defense, if nothing else, they'd sue me. Lieutenant, you have to have facts before you can accuse a man of murder."

"Yes, I know that. Doug, are you giving me the real reason? Or is there another? Let's say you blackmailed those three men. Eaton too. You can't afford to have me start an investigation. You found evidence that they were murderers, all right, but you concealed the evidence for a big slice of the insurance money and more blackmail later on."

Atwood blinked owlishly. "I've been asleep," he said slowly. "Am I still asleep and dreaming? What are you trying to say, Lieutenant?"

"That a man could commit murder and get away with it. Especially a smart man. An expert in murder, as you happen to be. You killed Paul Carter because he was checking on you. You went to the drug store and got his prescription filled. It was then that you saw a chance to get rid of him. You removed the harmless capsules and replaced them with others filled with aconitine."

Atwood was biting his lower lip, but he said nothing. His eyes were steady and growing hard. Pierce went on.

"Aconitine isn't easy to obtain. It's not a common drug and is so deadly that a careful check is made by anyone who handles the stuff. But six or seven months ago you worked on a suicide case. A druggist who swallowed that particular poison. You retained some that was left over."

Atwood stirred restlessly. "So I murdered Paul Carter. Lieutenant, I'm afraid you couldn't prove it if it was true."

"Maybe I can. You knew Carter would take a capsule at one o'clock. You entered the office alone, after I escorted you there. It was very simple to replace the poisoned capsules with the harmless ones, then empty the contents of a couple

into the glass of water Carter had drunk from. It was easy to fake the attempt on your life in the subway station. You merely went there earlier in the evening, put a gouge in that pillar and another in the further wall. After we got there, you flipped a spent bullet over near the wall and acted out the rest of it."

"And I killed Eaton too?" Atwood demanded.

"In a sense you did. He had paid you blackmail. He was scared stiff of being arrested. You made that speech tonight for his benefit alone. You don't drink, but you did tonight, as an excuse for talking the way you did. You didn't telephone Eaton or any of the other three murder suspects from the subway station to check on them. I know, because you had no change. Not even a single nickel for subway fare. I had to pay it, remember? That set me thinking. You'd said Eaton wasn't home and that the others were because you wanted Eaton blamed. You had a pretty good idea he'd either kill himself or at least run away.

"You stalled in the office before we left for Eaton's place. The phone had been dusted for prints and the dust removed. Therefore, there couldn't be a print on it. But I found your prints there. You called Eaton and told him I was coming out to make the pinch. Eaton played right into your game by turning coward and shooting himself."

Atwood smiled a little. He reached for a large cigarette box on a table beside him, dipped a hand into it and brought out a gun. Before he could level the weapon, Pierce sprang at him. He grabbed Atwood's right wrist and kept the gun aimed toward the ceiling. Atwood's free hand gripped the detective's throat. Pierce began methodically pounding his own free right hand into Atwood, right over the heart.

But Atwood was desperate and fighting for his life. His grip grew tighter and tighter until Pierce's senses began to reel. Still Pierce kept up the heavy pounding. The table lamp behind him started to swim. His lungs screamed for air. He summoned all the strength he had left, drew back his fist and let go with one final punch.

Atwood had taken all he could stand. Pierce's last blow doubled him up. He let go of the gun, screamed once and

(Concluded on page 108)

RUN FROM A DEAD MAN

By NELS LEROY JORGENSEN

It's a lucky thing for mysterious and beautiful Joan Maturin that Black Burton's around to save her from a frame!

BURTON paid off his taxi while Joan Maturin was still getting the change from the fare for hers in front of the big apartment-hotel. He was able to observe that she cast a single apprehensive glance over her shoulder, then went swiftly in through the big revolving doors.

By that time he was ahead of her. She had not noticed him, but even that would not have mattered greatly, since she knew him only casually. Beside, she wasn't looking for people she might

know here at this end of town. She wanted anonymity.

Burton would have blended into any scene like this one, in any case. He was quietly and unobtrusively dressed and the white splash of his starched shirt front against the black silk lapels of his correct dinner jacket matched a dozen such splashes in the ultra-fashionable and yet quiet lobby of the Concord Arms on upper Park Avenue.

He knew in advance where she would be going. Vivian had guessed. Vivian had asked him to watch her carefully and had said there would be trouble. There was something exceptionally foul in the blackmail line involved, Vivian



"Looks like stalemate, Con," Black Burton said to the man who stood with pistol in hand. "If I shoot—I kill!"

had hinted, and this Joan Maturin, the girl who had confided in Vivian in her distress, was desperate. She was desperate enough to kill if need be.

Stuart Burton—"Black" Burton—professional gambler, by choice and not necessity, consultant of the New York Police at times, knew about blackmail. He had encountered it before.

No one noticed him when he stepped into one of the elevators, and no one remarked him among the eight or nine people traveling upward. He got out with two other passengers on the nineteenth floor, watched them as they turned to the left, then deliberately turned right and found a corridor. In moments more he was climbing the fire stairs toward the roof and the penthouse he knew was there.

He moved unhurriedly. Always Burton seemed to move unhurriedly. It was deceptive—like the speed of his draw. Never did circumstances appear to affect his manner. Always carefully tailored, impeccable, quiet, he was never conspicuous, whether at a gambling table, a night club, or against a cruder background.

Emerging upon the roof he surveyed its extent, ignoring the wisps of murk trailing from the Hudson River even at this height, stepping carefully toward where a low parapet surrounded the penthouse. In the distance the ribbon of the river was blurred and the lights on it shone through heavy mist. Foghorns made harsh noises.

Crouching a little outside the penthouse he was able to see, but he could not hear. He looked into the spaciouly luxurious living room, but could not see the entrance.

He had known Joan Maturin would be here because Vivian had told him where she was headed. She was standing on one side of a big library desk and facing the owner of the apartment. She did not look happy to be there. She was exceptionally beautiful, in exquisitely tailored clothes, and bore all the subtler marks of fine breeding, even to the faint disdain with which she was confronting the man at the ornate desk.

Rupert Hannay sat there in all his gross elegance, like a well-groomed toad. In a heavy way Hannay was handsome, even though his hair was beginning to thin out and his jowls were becoming more noticeable. Still he looked the man of fashion he was reputed to be.

Burton knew him casually as a gambler, a professional bridge expert with whom he would never play.

The situation looked tense, but with no sound coming from beyond the tall French windows, Burton was unprepared when the girl stopped speaking, whipped an automatic from her bag, and threw up its snout.

In that moment sudden darkness descended. And as the room blacked out, a red stab of flame split the darkness, then another. Burton brushed a hand against the automatic under his left armpit, then crashed open the windows. A voice struck at him as he groped, stumbling, into the dark room.

"Who is that? I'll shoot! I warn you I'll shoot!"

He could not see Hannay, only a dim shape where he must have fallen.

"I think you've done enough shooting tonight, Joan," Burton said dryly. "Better hold steady for a minute. This is Burton!"

From the shadows he heard a quick-drawn breath, and noted that the scent of perfume penetrated the reek of cordite.

He found a light. The girl stood against the desk facing him defiantly. Her parted lips were vividly red. Her beret was rakishly askew. Burton sensed she was on the verge of hysterics.

"Did you kill him?" he said abruptly. "I was outside, but the lights went off."

"How did you get here?" she cried. "Why are you here?"

"That is hardly the question. You know me, don't you?"

"You're Vivian's—you're Black Burton!"

"Yes. My wife told me she was sure you were getting into some kind of desperate trouble tonight and it looks as though she was right. But she didn't know what it was. I know Hannay is—was—dabbling in blackmail, so I can guess a little."

He turned from her and made a swift examination of the dead man on the floor, touching little in the process. Hannay had been in dinner clothes, but had removed his coat and slipped on a dressing gown. Burton got up.

"You haven't answered my question," he said mildly. "Did you kill him?"

"I—I don't think I did. There was another shot."

"But there's nobody else here."

"The lights went out just then. I

thought—"

"Thought there was somebody else here?" He frowned.

"Somebody was here, earlier," she insisted. "I passed him when I came in."

"Am I supposed to guess who it was?" he asked coolly. Somehow he must prevent those hysterics.

She forced back a tearful laugh. "It was Senator Laidlaw Pope!" she said. "And I knew you wouldn't believe me!"

"Oddly, I do believe you," Burton said, frowning. "Hannay rounded up a lot of backing for Pope in the last election. Pope, I believe, has an apartment in this hotel, too. He—you passed him? How?"

"Yes," she said. "But I don't think he saw me." Then she faltered, "Hannay—I came here . . . I would have killed him, I think, if—if he—"

"You can tell me about that later," Burton said. "And about Pope too. Right now we're clearing out. I have friends on the Police Force, but no Homicide man in the world is going to believe that a young society beauty could stand with a smoking gun in Rupert Hannay's apartment—with Hannay a corpse!—and have just stepped in to get another lesson in bridge! Let's get going!"

Quickly he steered her toward the terrace. A puff of damp fog hit them in the face. Burton led the way to the fire-escape which still remained in the rear of the hotel as a reminder of other days, and leading to an enclosed courtyard below. Reaching it, he pushed her expensive evening bag into her hands. Inside the penthouse the phone began to ring madly.

"That means we've got seconds," he told her. "They'll need to know at the desk why it isn't answered!"

His shoulders were a bulk in the fog as he went down the fire-escape. Following, she tried to ask questions but he stopped her.

"Not now!" he whispered. "All you need to know is that Vivian knew you were in trouble and sent me. Hurry!"

It might have been odd to some to think of the former Vivian Drake as the wife of a professional gambler, but Joan Maturin knew the story. On the same social level, Vivian and her husband had found years back that their lives ran in different channels, though they loved one another. She had her life and he had his. Hers was society and its glitter. His was the excitement and daring to be

found in gambling. At times it led him into danger, for it lay at the edge of the world of crime. But he had chosen it. It could not have been otherwise.

When they reached the court Burton caught Joan's arm when she would have started for a taxi standing fog-wrapped at the next corner.

"No!" he said. "For tonight forget that you're one of Manhattan's most talked-about debutantes! You're a girl running as fast as she can from a dead man—a murdered man! We're walking. You've got to remember whether Senator Pope did see you or not. And I must hear what you have to say. But first we've got to put some space between us and the corpse."

He seemed unhurried, though the girl was aware that his every movement was calculated. They paused under a street lamp. Yellow glow spilled through swirling fog over them, outlining a tall, slender man with inscrutable eyes, and a girl in absurdly high heels that accentuated her slimness and a short skirt that looked costly—and was.

"It's Senator Pope that bothers me," he said. "If he remembers seeing you." He shook his head. "It'd be a big help, Joan, if you could keep that face of yours out of the rotogravures." He asked quickly: "Was your gun registered?"

"I don't know," she said, her voice low. "I borrowed it from one of our chauffeurs. But my fingerprints will be on it."

A Fifth Avenue bus rolled to a stop and he pushed her ahead of him up its steps.

"They'll get around to that," he said dryly. When they had found seats he added, "The police have lines on Rupert Hannay. Actually he's known to be a blackmailer. Society man and bridge expert—that made a swell front for him. But I've still to find out what he wanted with you?"

"My—brother," she answered after a space.

"Armand! What's he up to now?"

"He's in a Baltimore hospital," she said. "His flying license had been suspended but he took up a Piper Cub anyway, and cracked. Did you know that he's supposed to be making a brilliant marriage this fall?"

"I read something about it." Burton nodded. "Money and family involved. Could there be love too?"

"Strangely enough, yes! Only Rupert Hannay discovered what has been a family secret for years: Once, Armand married some cheap little thing in Philadelphia. A supposed prom trotter—while he was still in his junior year at college." She glanced swiftly at the gambler's impassive face and rushed on: "The marriage was annulled of course. Father settled with her, privately. A week after that she was killed in an auto crash, with some student. Hannay knew all this, even though Dad had tried to hush it up. Hannay wanted to marry me—the price of his silence." She paused, moistened her lips, and went on doggedly: "You see, Hannay found out something else too. Armand and the girl you think he's only engaged to were married six months ago. When that made him a bigamist!"

"Is your Armand a complete fool?"

"Not complete! Only irresponsible. But I'm certain he believed at the time that he was free. He's not—wicked."

"No," Burton agreed dryly. "Just accustomed to letting someone else carry his burdens and doing as he pleases. But that isn't our problem now. It's you. Hannay tried to force you into marriage by threatening to expose Armand, and Hannay banked on being what is called socially acceptable. No wonder Vivian was sure you'd get into trouble. You did. I'm glad I chose to follow you the way I did."

He had pressed the button and they descended at Forty-second Street. He took her arm and they walked.

"We've got to keep moving," he said. "I know things about Hannay, but I can't prove them, yet."

"Where do we go now?" she asked submissively.

"Toward Greenwich Village, I think. Listen—as a blackmailer, Hannay had to be in touch with a muscleman. I can guess who that was. Con Bugatti, in the Village. There may have been a split-up. Anyway, it's best I see Bugatti." He looked down at her. "Bugatti is what they call tough," he said.

She squared her shoulders. "Let's go!" she said.

"First," he said, "I want to see a pal of mine downtown—Lieutenant Dalton of Homicide. Here's a cab!"

In the taxi they were silent. Once or twice the girl glanced up at the gambler's profile, and suddenly realized that con-

fidence was replacing her awful feeling of panic, because of the man beside her—Black Burton of whom she knew so little and had heard so much. He was a legend.

"Perhaps you don't know what a muscleman is," he was saying. "But you do know now that Hannay, under his bridge-player exterior, was a society blackmailer, as they're called by the yellow press. And blackmailers use musclemen—making collections, contributing ideas. Bugatti may even be the man we've got to find—the murderer. Thieves fall out, you know."

"I can't help remembering," she said in a small voice, "that my—my pistol exploded. But I'm sure," she added hurriedly, "that it wasn't the only shot. I can swear there was another!"

Burton nodded gravely. The cab drew up and the door opened. He paid the driver at the corner of Eighth Street and Sixth Avenue and when the cab drew away in the settling fog, looked about. Then he steered his companion across an almost-deserted thoroughfare.

"If we can get to Lieutenant Dalton's apartment privately, and see him," he told her, "it will mean a breathing space. And we need it!"

"I'd like awfully," the girl said, "to stop running, some time."

A policeman was walking down the street in their direction. They were just passing the half-opened door of an all-night coffee shop and it was impossible not to hear the abrupt break-in over the radio inside:

"... a girl or a woman at some time during the evening. Thus far the visitor has not been identified . . . gun caliber and markings are being examined . . . Police say there are definite clues and they are pursuing—"

Burton touched the girl's soft arm. "We're not stopping yet!" he said. "Unless somebody stops us!" Suddenly he drew his breath in sharply. "That plain-clothesman up there just falling into step with the beat patrolman!" he said. "That's McElroy, and he knows me! Mac worked with Dalton on a case I broke for them. He'll make a good guess where we're headed."

The two lawmen were coming closer. A parked sedan stood at the curb. Burton swung open the car door, pushed the girl inside, then hesitated for a perceptible second like a man searching through his

pocket for keys. He did not look backward when he slid into the driver's seat. The keys were in the ignition!

As Burton's foot found the starter the policeman's head jerked up. He commenced running. The motor caught and the gears meshed.

"Hi, there! Hey, you!"

The sedan jerked away from the curb and bounced into the street. The policeman yelled again. McElroy had halted in his tracks.

As the car went swerving toward the next corner Burton said:

"That'll do it! McElroy is with Narcotics, but he knows me and will tie me up with Dalton. He'll be able to figure you out with the radios talking."

Behind them, a police siren began to scream. Burton felt the girl's frightened eyes fixed on his face as he turned the car into a side street.

"Get ready to abandon ship!" he said quietly. "Next corner! . . . Now!"

He allowed the sedan to skid into the curb and threw open the door. The big machine was still quivering when the girl's high heels hit the pavement. Burton was immediately behind her. The siren broke into a new wail.

"Walk as though nothing had happened," Burton commanded.

As they walked, the police car sped past the corner and wailed on. Behind it another one shrilled. It was proceeding more cautiously. It came on at a slow speed, and its big spotlight cut through the fog-wisps. Joan was breathing rapidly.

As the cruising car slowed up some twenty yards behind, Burton suddenly caught the girl's elbow and steered her into a dark vestibule. He bent toward the names on the bell board, as though uncertain. The patrol car eased past with dragging slowness.

A voice, edged and soft, came at Burton's elbow. Something definitely hard prodded his ribs. A small dark individual with ratty eyes peering from under a jerked-down fedora hat had materialized in the vestibule.

"Burton, ain't it?" he was saying. "Nice seein' you—but we thought we would. The boss sent a couple of the lads out to watch for you. Come in!"

Burton had frozen. There was a chance to draw his gun and only he knew the lightning of his draw. But the girl was there and the area was small.

Besides, he needed to know more.

The boss. That meant Bugatti. And in the eyes of the wispy man in the vestibule there was a glitter that spelt heroin to anyone who knew. The menace of the close held gun was real, and Joan's presence complicated the situation.

"All right," Burton said softly. "Where do we go?"

"That door behind you. It's open. Stairs in back—down. Then we cross a nice court and we're at Con's back door. *Our* way in, not the City Direct'ry's. Get it?"

When Burton made a move to half-turn he felt the hard thing pressing against his ribs and he stood like a stone man while the hood reached inside his jacket and freed the gun from its shoulder holster.

"Dangerous things down this way, guns are," was the ratty man's comment.

Burton's mind was racing, trying to figure out the play. Bugatti had sent out men to round him up. Bugatti had known what Black Burton's moves would be. Why did he want Burton? Racketeer and underworld figure that he was, Bugatti kept out of sight most of the time. It looked as though he might be deeply in this Hannay business after all. What had been a long guess on Burton's part had become an unwelcome certainty.

Proceeding across the wide areaway at the building's rear, they brought up before a set of steps descending into a poorly lighted basement. It was empty and clean.

A squat black door opened in front of them.

"Our playmate Bugatti does a bit of gambling in off hours, I hear," Burton murmured. "This evidently is the route over which his hoods steer his suckers when there's a game on. But what I'm wondering about is, how he located us."

Their guide pushed open another door. "Word gets around, don't it?" he said, out of the side of his thin-lipped mouth, with an unpleasant grin. "Like we hear you're supposed to be tough, Burton. We figure, too. At least, Con can figure. You're on the lam, and it's known there's a pair of you. Even the coppers've got you figured on bein' somewheres in this section of town."

"Maybe," Burton said. "But where did you get the tip that I was in the play?"

"Could be a little birdie. Anyway, we

had you spotted uptown. Con figured it was a cinch you'd be hittin' out to see your pal on Homicide—Dalton. We've had Dalton's movements covered for the last three-quarters of an hour . . . You go in here!"

A man with glazed eyes stepped back to leer at them as they passed into a small dark corridor, then Burton and Joan found themselves pushed gently but firmly into a room that was unlike the outside where there could be heard the sound of clinking glasses, roulette balls, the soft chink of poker chips. In this room there was only Bugatti, a large scarred desk and two chairs.

Burton touched Joan's arm, his face a mask. "Don't forget," he said, "I wanted to see this Bugatti. He holds the key."

Bugatti did not get up at their entrance, but kept on playing solitaire. He was a fleshy man with swarthy features, pouched eyes and fat hands. He wore clothes of perfect cut, but they failed to make his huge body anything but a coarse and oily hulk.

He nodded to the rat-eyed man.

"Okay," he said. "Better stay with us, Smokey, and hear." Then, to Burton, "Long time I've wanted to know you. Maybe by rights you ought to be thanking me for covering you right now. Dumb as coppers are, they'd have guessed you'd be making for a contact with Dalton of Homicide. Everybody, includin' me, wants to know what you know. The two of you."

"Do they? What do we know, Bugatti?"

The big fleshy shoulders hunched over and the cigar was a wet brown stick in the big fingers as it was withdrawn from the loose lips.

"Let's not open up by kiddin' one another, Burton," Bugatti said softly. "Maybe you didn't figure out there might be some tie-up between Hannay and me?"

"It was a pretty safe bet that you were handling his rough stuff," Burton said coolly. "You made nice fronts for one another. An underworld gambler with a strong-arm squad at his disposal and an uptown bridge 'expert' with an 'in' that let him learn secrets. But even so, what about it?"

Bugatti shrugged. "Guessin'! You ain't provin' anything. Maybe we should talk about you and the wren here. It might bring you back to earth."

"You're talking right now," Burton

said. "You knew I was uptown tonight. We know what happened. Where do we go from there? Are you calling the cops?"

Bugatti shrugged. He spread his flabby hands and a ruby finger ring winked.

"We know Hannay's safe was opened," he said softly. "He opened it himself, maybe to show this kid what he had on her brother. But what was in Hannay's safe was mostly my stuff—stuff I'd turned over to him to work on. That's why you're here, Burton. I want that stuff. Give—and then get out!"

The glittering black eyes menaced. Burton hesitated. What Bugatti had just said meant that the contents of that safe had not been discovered yet, and those contents, wherever they were, might still provide bait for a trap! Maybe they were still there. Probably they were. Slowly he shook his head.

"You drew the wrong cards, Bugatti," he said. "We left in too much of a hurry to get what was in that safe. I'm sorry, but that's the truth. Even if I had found what you're after I wouldn't be fool enough to be carrying it with me—not tonight. It's blackmail dope, I know. But I haven't got it."

Bugatti came to his feet with an effort, his eyes hooded against a tiny red gleam in their depths.

"So that's the way it's gonna be," he said gently. "I forgot I'm up against Black Burton, the gambler who works with the cops. You got that stuff and slipped it into an envelope and mailed it somewhere, figuring to pick it up tomorrow, maybe. Well, you won't! Get this straight, because it means easy forty or fifty or maybe sixty grand to me, maybe more—I'm getting it! And when I say that, it means you're givin' it! Am I talkin' plain enough?"

Burton shook his head. "I can hear you, but we can't bargain, Bugatti. I've told you the truth. What next?"

Bugatti's heavy-lidded gaze was on the unmoving girl. She looked slim and pale and helpless, but her eyes shone with defiance and her small head went up. Slowly shaking his head he spoke carefully:

"You've gone to a lot of trouble for this moll tonight, Burton. You ain't finished yet. She's stayin' on here with me—us!—till I get what I want. You can get it! She won't look so pretty any more in the Sunday supplements with

that face changed. Or maybe she won't be in any papers ever any more! I got to have what I said, Burton. I'm tellin' you again—give!"

There was a total absence of bluster in Bugatti's voice that made his words more compelling. Already he had implicated himself so far that he could not afford to relent now. He could and would go through with the play he had begun.

This undoubtedly was a soundproofed room. There was Bugatti in front, and the dope-ridden hood behind. Burton knew well that his trail and Joan's had been well-covered, because he had seen to that himself. Bugatti held all the cards, and for once in his career the famed speed of the Burton draw was useless. If he held a gun in his hand for only a fractional second, he would be master of the situation.

The idea persisted. Burton's face showed nothing. He only took a quick step backward, almost as though he were recoiling from the portent of what he had just heard. He heard a growl of warning from between his shoulder-blades. He tensed.

Another backward step—and Burton's heel had come down viciously on the hood's instep. He crashed himself backward, suddenly a cold and ruthless fury, deadly in his very silence, whirling as he moved.

He and "Smokey" went smashing into the back wall together, and a muffled explosion came. Then almost as they struck the floor in one heap, on the heels of that explosion, the man under him went limp. The reek of cordite was bitter in that small room. And instantly he knew, as he smelled fresh-spilled blood that either he, in battling for the gun, or Bugatti, by an unlucky shot, had killed the bodyguard.

Smokey's pistol was somehow in Burton's hand. The gun was leveling upward at Bugatti. Smokey's body was momentarily a shield.

While the acrid gunsmoke lifted and wavered across the room, while Bugatti himself stood crouched, pistol in hand, Burton said:

"Looks like a stalemate, Con. You can shoot but it'll only mess up your little punk a little more. Maybe he won't care, now, though. But if I shoot—I kill. Do we understand each other?"

Con Bugatti's face had gone pale and there were beads of sweat rivuleting

down his jaws which had turned a brownish pasty color. But even then Burton knew that it was not all caused by fear. It was because Bugatti was for the first time confronting a force stronger than himself.

"I'll get you, Burton!" the man said in a hoarse, wheezing, voice. "I'll get you! But right now you're holding the cards. What's the play?"

"I want out. I want you to conduct us out of this place yourself and into a taxicab. With this gun as close as your own skin to you all the time." Burton stood over the racketeer now. "You made the wrong play, Con. I tried to tell you so and it was the truth. Now, do we go?"

Bugatti took a long look at his henchman on the floor. He mopped at his forehead. Murder was in the opaque depths of his eyes, but when he spoke, his voice was once more smooth.

"You made your own break, Burton. *This* time! I should have believed more of what I heard about you. But next time there ain't gonna be any break." He breathed deeply. "Yes, we go."

Only then did Joan Maturin move. She ranged herself alongside Burton, as close to him as she could get. Burton kept his gun in Bugatti's back until he had retrieved his own automatic from the dead hood's side pocket, and shoved it into its holster. Bugatti called out and the door was opened.

Eyes, shining and suspicious, glittering, watched their procession through smoke layers when they walked out into the damp court. The mist outside had deepened. It was fog now. At the outer door Bugatti spoke in a strained hoarse voice to a man there.

"Get Mr. Burton a cab, Arty. It's all right."

The man looked suspicious, but he went out into the street. A taxi drew up a moment later, its door sagging open. Burton pushed Joan ahead.

"We're still running," he reminded her. Then he turned to Bugatti. "As I told you, you were playing the wrong cards, Con. Running an organization like yours, I gave you credit for a lot of brains. Blackmail! Keep it in mind that that's one thing even a rat might kill for."

He slammed into the cab and Bugatti stood on the curb watching him out of narrowed, speculative eyes.

In the cab, Joan Maturin sat white

and silent. She still had not spoken.

"I didn't plan on letting you in for anything like that back there, Joan," Burton said. "Unfortunately it's not over yet. Bugatti gave me a steer though. It was blackmail all right, just as I thought, and Bugatti not only made the collections when the going got too tough for the smooth approach, but also dug up and provided 'material.' He as good as confessed to that. But Bugatti backed our friend Senator Pope, too. And he and Hannay wouldn't be combining to back anybody unless in some way they could hope to control him."

He leaned forward, tapped on the glass partition, and ordered their chauffeur to pull up in front of an all-night drug store in the Fifties. When he got out he pressed Joan's hand. "Sit tight," he murmured. "I still want my friend Lieutenant Dalton in on the finish, if I can contact him. Remember we're still fugitives. If we fell into the hands of the wrong police, it wouldn't be so good for either of us."

When he reentered the cab his mouth was tight. "Upper Park Avenue," he told the driver, named a street and added to Joan, "From there we walk." The man nodded without comment and seven minutes later Burton and Joan stood watching the cab spurt away. Fog was drifting around them like a playing ghost.

"Did you get in touch with your friend?" she whispered.

"Lieutenant Dalton? I located him. Let's go."

"What do I do?" Her voice was quite steady now.

He glanced at the watch on his wrist. "It's late," he said. "Right now, at the Concord Arms, there'll be only one boy to take care of the elevators. You walk in there alone and ignore the desk. Tell the boy you have an appointment with Senator Pope and that if the Senator is not in you'll wait. You don't look at all like a burglar and if the boy should have seen you before he won't be likely to connect you with what's happened tonight, with you asking for Pope. You'll make it. Follow that far?"

"Yes."

"Get out at Pope's floor and use the staircase to get upstairs. I'll be there, to let you into Hannay's suite."

Her eyes widened. "Do you mean that?"

"Every word of it, unless you want to check out. Now—on your way!" He touched her shoulder lightly, then watched her slim figure until mist-tendrils swallowed it. When she was out of sight he jerked down his hat-brim and circled to the rear entrance of the hotel.

The radio flashes and Bugatti's attitude had combined to indicate that Hannay's body had been discovered and removed, so it was not likely that there would be a police guard in Hannay's suite now. Burton counted on this. The police would have no remote reason for suspecting that anyone connected with the murder would want to return—at least, not the same night. In any case the chance had to be taken. Tomorrow, Burton was convinced would be too late.

The hardest job he had assigned for his own share was the long ascent of the fire stairs. By the time he reached the outside of the murdered man's apartment he was breathing hard. He circled the terrace. It was empty, and the gray fog was still blanketing it.

But what he had hoped for was not materializing. Through the mist-blurred window panes opening on the terrace he was able to see the interior of the big room and the tall, spare figure bent over the safe. It was not the figure he had counted on seeing though. He saw the figure straighten up abruptly. The safe door flew open and papers came spilling out.

Simultaneously came the sharp buzz of the foyer bell.

Pulses hammering, Burton told himself that it was impossible Joan should have disobeyed, that this summons on the foyer buzzer could not be from her. Then there came a crash at the outer door and under cover of the noise he was able to see a window open. He whirled like a cat as he heard Joan's breathless voice at his side.

"He's not there! Why did you send me there?"

"Pope, you mean?" Burton whispered. "I didn't expect he would be there. At least I hoped he wouldn't be." Burton turned her so that she could see into the low-lighted room. "He's not there," he added, "because he's here."

Her parted lips choked on a cry. She stared. "But it can't be—Senator Pope!"

"It's Pope all right," he told her steadily. "The man you believed left here when you came in earlier. Hannay

must have been displaying his blackmail wares to him. Hannay might have had the safe open when he was shot but he probably was too wary for that. So the probabilities are that he removed what he needed for the evening, and put it in that open drawer there—the drawer that's holding Pope's future."

"He couldn't have had the chance to get back to the safe—afterward!" Joan protested. "We were there too soon, and he—Pope—had to leave in a hurry, not to be seen." She gasped. "That's why he's come back now! But the others will guess that!"

His grip tight on her arm Burton said in her ear:

"Senator Pope was submitting to genteel blackmail through Hannay, via Bugatti. He turned out to be just another whited sepulchre after all. Good man, Pope, but that devil Bugatti must have dug up something out of his past and continued to stick close to his career. Hannay handled the matter for Bugatti later on. I know what it was. Dalton told me once, apropos of nothing, except he was talking of Bugatti."

"Was it criminal?" she whispered, her eyes still on the scene in front of them.

"Morally, yes. When Pope was on the Bench, prior to his legislative career, he had the final and deciding vote as an Appeals Court Justice in a case of election frauds. It was known Bugatti had engineered the fraud in question and he must have been the middleman who paid Pope off. Pope was badly in need of money about then and I suppose he reasoned that he wasn't hurting anybody if he took it. The proof of the whole mess must be there!"

The harsh ringing of the foyer bell again broke in. Burton leaned forward. The man in the big room beyond the French windows stood there looking like a trapped criminal. His eyes went to the windows. He began stuffing papers into his pockets and plunged for the terrace.

At that instant the outer door crashed open.

"Hold it!" a harsh voice commanded. "If you don't you're dead!"

Wild-eyed, the legislator whirled in the center of the room. Dimmed lights revealed his face as haggard and drawn. Perspiration stood out on it in huge globules. All the elegance of his platform appearance had forsaken him. All the man the public knew was gone.

Bugatti came in. Behind Bugatti shouldered a second man.

Halting in the room's center, his legs spread wide apart, Bugatti said in a voice hardly louder than a whisper:

"And I thought I was wise! Had it all doped out it was the dame who did that business tonight, maybe with Burton's help! Never even figured you'd have the nerve for a kill, even with words. Give me what you've got there, Senator. I can still find a use for it." He held out his hands. Yellow light smoked in his eyes. "Give! Then we can all go home and let some other saps take the rap for the whole job." He added, when Pope did not move, "Give, I said—and now!"

But suddenly Senator Pope was cowed no longer. Joan felt Burton's slight movement and she saw his aquiline face, bent forward, tight, light from the indoors spilling over its carved planes. His right hand was hovering over his coat lapel.

But even his movement was too late. No one there could have reasoned with the stinging, prodding desperation that had led Senator Pope step by step up to this moment. The self-reproach and agony of soul that had turned him into a killer. Even Burton hadn't figured it. Bugatti had more reason to anticipate it, but he hadn't.

Pope had been edging warily toward the low fire that burned in the grate below the mantel. Swiftly he dropped the papers he had been clutching into the flames and swung around with a pistol in his hand, eyes feverish.

"Want it?" he was crying. "Come and get it, all of it, Bugatti!" His voice rose in a mad peal of laughter. "There's my life and reputation in those flames! See if anything on this earth can take 'em from me again!"

"Stop it, you fool!" Bugatti yelled. "We can talk this over!"

But he had no intention of talking. His henchman fired. Pope sank down to one knee coincident with the flash, but his own gun was raised and his face was aflame.

Burton crashed through the windows. "The rest of the party is mine," he said evenly. "It's a night for giving, Bugatti!"

At the threshold Joan closed her eyes and her breath seemed to stop as the roar of gunflame shook the room. Perhaps in

his colder moments Bugatti would not have risked what he did. But before his greedy eyes he could see twisting, shriveling up, being obliterated for all time, what he had always been willing to kill for. He could not understand a man who thought more of honor than of life. For Pope knew he had to die.

Joan was half-crouched behind the heavily ornate rampart that the big desk made. The thud and roar of gunplay filled the room.

Then as suddenly as it had begun it was over. Bugatti was slumping, his hand failing to grip the desk edge because there was no strength remaining in his arm. There was a swift vision of Senator Pope, on his feet again somehow, snarling like a madman, a crimson mask for a face, but in its distorted lines was triumph before he fell.

Across the room Bugatti lay stiffening under two of Burton's spaced shots. Burton was turning somewhat wearily while the roar of gunfire still rocked the room and Pope's victim groaned on the floor, blood pouring from his wound.

"I think that's all," Burton said in a distant voice. "That stuff they had on your brother, Joan—where is it?"

"It's here, where the Senator left it," she barely breathed.

"Add it to Pope's contribution in the fire. Dalton, I think, will understand,

when he comes. And he's on the way."

"You knew where to tell him to come?" she demanded.

"It had to finish here," Burton said. "It began here."

"What is there for him to understand?"

"What? Why that Hannay's apartment was broken into by hoodlums he'd been associated with. Gangsters from downtown. That will be readily believed. Then, that Senator Pope came up here to look for something a few minutes ago and that the men evidently came back. We don't know why. Dalton might like to guess. The newspapers can guess too. You—I hope you understand that Pope saw his chance when he passed you in the hall tonight. He didn't go out, not all the way out. Or if he did he unlatched the door first and sneaked back, then turned out the lights as you were facing Hannay." She nodded comprehension. "But it still seems to me that most of Pope's public life was too decent to carry a smell with it to the grave. A link with Con Bugatti."

She agreed with only a nod. At last the sound of gunfire seemed to be dying. Joan was quiet.

"And—and I shan't have to run any more," she whispered.

She thought of how tired Black Burton looked.

EXPERT IN MURDER

(Concluded from page 98)

collapsed. Pierce staggered away, holding the gun. He dialed Headquarters and, in a croaking voice that surprised him, asked for help. Then he looked at Atwood.

"The expert in murder," he wheezed. "Doug, you may know all about clever killers and probably you profited by all your investigations, but when you're trapped, you act like any other rat. You fight back. Drawing that gun was a con-

fession of guilt. Up to then I didn't have much on you except circumstantial evidence.

"All the things I related were true. I know you murdered Carter and I can prove why, but a smart defense attorney would have made mincemeat out of evidence like that. Now a jury will think twice. Put out your hands, Doug. I'm cuffing you. I'm afraid of experts like you."



NEXT ISSUE'S FEATURED BLACK BAT NOVEL

THE LONG AGO MURDER

By G. WAYMAN JONES

OFF THE RECORD

(Continued from page 9)

the back way and returned to their car where Clyde Ainsley had remained, waiting. They started off, and Quinn noticed shortly that a car was following them. With a sudden burst of speed the car behind pulled alongside and a man leaned out.

"Police," the man called. "Pull over."

Quinn's car was forced to halt, and two men got out of the other car and swaggered over.

"They're not police," Silk gasped suddenly. "They look more like gorillas."

But it was too late now. The oncoming pair had guns in their hands. They yanked open the door of Quinn's car.

"What'll we do?" asked one of the gunmen. "Blast 'em here?" And his finger tightened eagerly on the trigger.

Tony Quinn saw quick and sudden death staring him in the face, closer perhaps than it had ever been to him before. . . .

This is the suspense-packed opening of **THE LONG AGO MURDER**, by G. Wayman Jones, the suspenseful Black Bat novel that heads the line-up in the next issue of **BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE**. Things go from bad to worse for Tony Quinn—until the Black Bat takes a hand, and confronts the desperate, ruthless menace that has put countless innocent lives in jeopardy! **THE LONG AGO MURDER** is a novel of breathless excitement, mystery, chills—and terror! You'll remember it the rest of your life!

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LETTERS FROM READERS

INCE again we have a bulging mailbag, filled with hundreds of swell letters. And, strangely enough, among the letters we like best are some that tell us what they don't like about **BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE**. If you tell us what you don't like, it gives us a pretty good idea of what you will like.

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[Turn page]

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Here are some excerpts from letters recently received:

I have been a great follower of your book for a long period now. I had not even heard of **BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE** until a friend of mine told me about the Black Bat. I decided to read one of your books, and have followed the Black Bat's adventures ever since.

I cannot see a flaw in any part of your stories. The characters are marvelous, the story exciting and brimful of action. I object to the criticism of people who don't want Tony Quinn to see like a cat in the dark, and I also object to the criticism that McGrath should quit trying to prove Tony is the Black



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Please don't change the story. Just leave it as is. Yours for more success.—*Bob Martin, Tulsa, Okla.*

How long is Tony Quinn going to keep on being Special District Attorney? I get tired reading about McGrath's attempts to prove he is the Black Bat. Why don't you have a story where Quinn has to run for re-election, and goes out making speeches to get votes? Then the crooks who don't like him could try to pull something to keep him from getting enough votes to be elected, or maybe disgrace him on election day. It would make a good story. Tell G. Wayman Jones he is a good writer.—*Keenan Burns, North Platte, Nebraska.*

I have been reading BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE for quite a while and it's my favorite magazine. When G. Wayman Jones started writing these stories he was right on the ball. I never get tired of reading about Tony Quinn and his pals.

I especially like Captain McGrath, so please don't take him out. I also like your short stories. But Tony Quinn is my favorite.

I have just finished THE LAKESIDE MYSTERY, and it was very good. I was kept in suspense when I read BLIND MAN'S BLUFF. But all of your books are very good,

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so keep up your good work.—*Annabelle Hinderliter, Creve Coeur, Ill.*

I think the Black Bat, Tony Quinn, is an ideal character. I hope you don't change him for I like the stories about him better than any others I have ever read. I like Silk, Butch, and Carol also. I wish I had a picture of the Black Bat. I like to have pictures of people like him.—*Junior Ellis, Lafayette, Tenn.*

Dropping you a card to tell you the stories I like best are about the Black Bat. I sure do like to read detective stories, and I hope to read many more about the Black Bat.—*Doone Ridling, Center Ridge, Ark.*

Have been reading **BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE** for many years and have enjoyed it better than any other mystery magazine out. G. Wayman Jones does a grand job with his Black Bat stories. In fact, my reason for dropping you this note is to complain that the magazine doesn't come out often enough.—*Mitzi Satin, Chicago, Ill.*

I have just finished the June issue and I thought **THE MURDER PROPHET**, by G. Wayman Jones, was swell. I also liked **POSTSCRIPT TO AN ELECTRIC CHAIR**, by Sam Merwin, Jr., and **POST HYPNOTIC**, by Samuel Mines. I didn't think **THE RATTLER**, by Edward Churchill, was so hot—*Anatole F. Fossetti, Limon, Colo.*



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When are Tony Quinn and Carol Baldwin going to get married? I think it would be much better if they worked closer together on the murder cases. I do not think there is enough romance in your stories.—Mrs. C. R. Brownsleigh, Long Beach, Calif.

I liked the letter that James Aldous wrote, stating that Tony Quinn should get a Seeing Eye dog. I think it would be a good idea to have a dog in the stories. Everybody likes animals.—Charlie V. Maxtice, Jr., Evanston, Ill.

Well, that's all the missives we'll quote from this time, but next issue we'll be back with many more! Drop us a letter or a postcard telling us your ideas and opinions about BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE.

Thanks to all of you for your swell letters and, remember, if you'd like to see your name in this column, you'd better sit down and write us that letter or postcard—NOW! Please address all communications to The Editor, BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. So long. Be seeing you again next issue!

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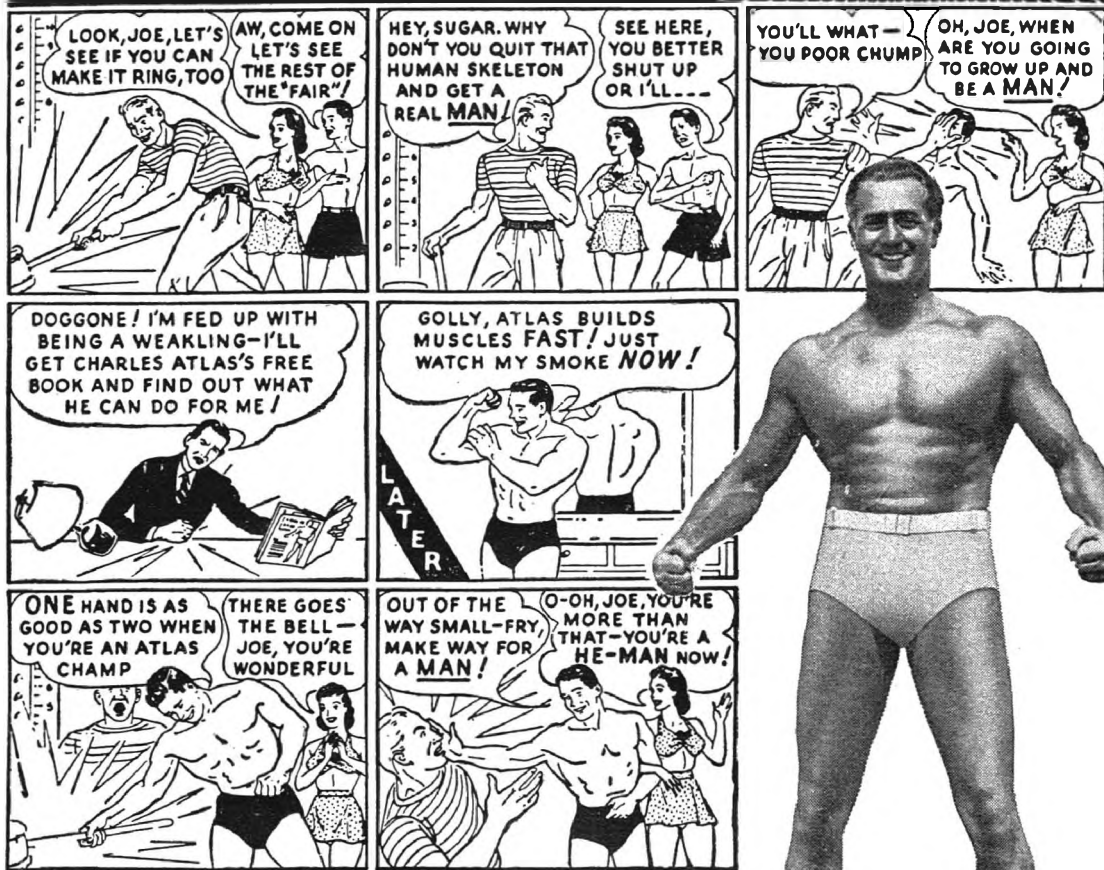
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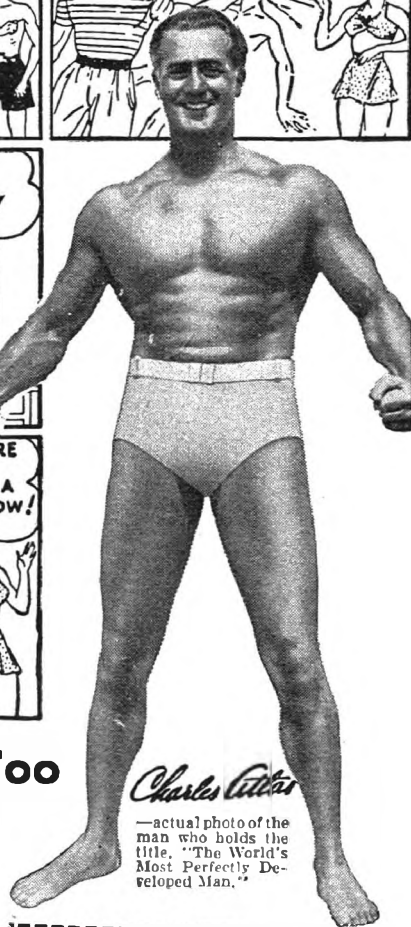
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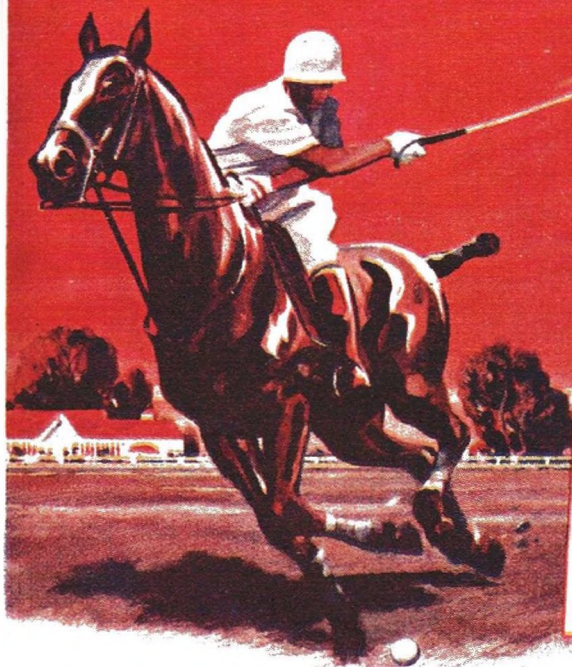
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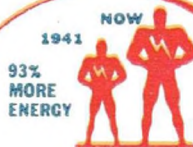
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