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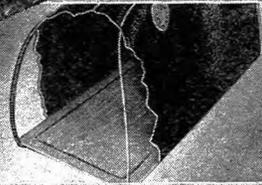
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BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE

Vol. XXI, No. 3

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

Fall Issue

A COMPLETE BLACK BAT NOVEL



With Malice Aforethought

By **G. Wayman Jones**

When John Todd is convicted of murder, the case has some amazing repercussions that put Special District Attorney Tony Quinn, the Nemesis of the underworld, in the toughest spot of his entire career! Follow the Black Bat as he battles to clear himself of grim charges made by his foes! 11

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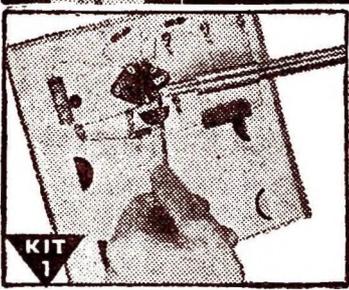
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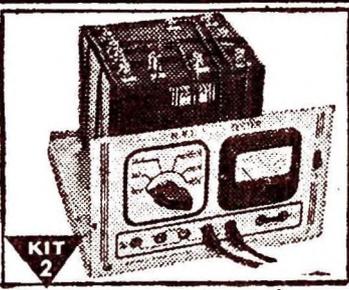


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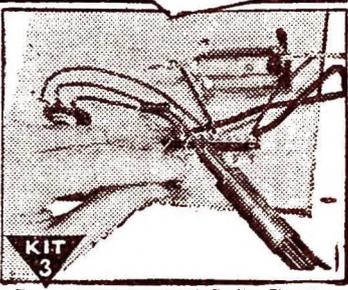
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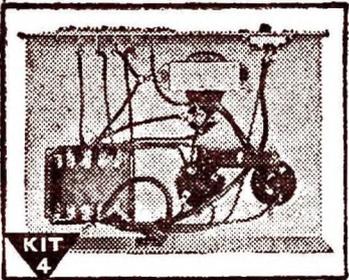
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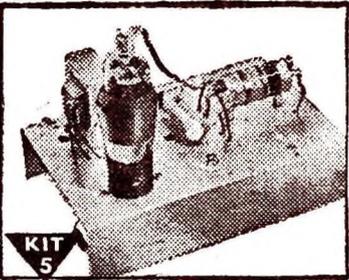
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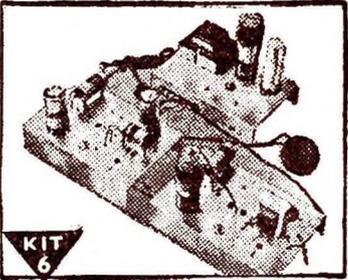
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OFF THE RECORD

A DEPARTMENT WHERE READERS
AND THE EDITOR MEET

WHEN Willie Wilkerson asked for a room and a bath at a second-string, uptown New York Hotel, he didn't expect that the rate of four-fifty a day would include a murder! But that's what happens in **THE CRIME TO COME**, the exciting Black Bat novel by G. Wayman Jones in the next issue of **BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE**. It isn't long, of course, before Tony Quinn, Special District Attorney, has to step in to take a hand, and it requires all the ingenuity the Black Bat, Carol Baldwin, Silk, and Butch can muster to solve the case.

It all started when Wilkerson, a rather puny looking man, arrived in New York to buy some critically needed supplies for the factory he represented. The hotels were all so crowded that he was almost resigned to spend the night sleeping on a park bench. Then he found the seedy old hostelry uptown that offered him accommodations.

Strange Voices

Wilkerson had no sooner climbed in bed than he heard what sounded like a whisky bottle hurled at the wall in the next room. Now, voices reached him. One, especially, was that of an angry man. The other was soothing, in a raspy sort of way. Willie pulled the covers up over his head and tried to convince himself that he could sleep even with this racket.

He didn't sleep. Soon he pulled the covers down and deliberately listened while he slowly lost all desire for sleep. The angry man was still ranting, but it made some sense now.

"I tell you," he shouted drunkenly, "there's a catch in it. There's got to be a catch in it."

"Quiet," Raspy Voice warned. "Everything is on the level. You're just too drunk to realize that."

"On the level, eh? How can it be on the level? We're told to hole up here. For weeks. I'm sick of it. We can't go out except at night. No drinking unless we do it in the room and nobody else must be with us. We eat in joints, sleep in a dump like this and can't go anywhere to spend a dime.

Yet we get paid in the hundreds."

"Shut up," Raspy Voice warned ominously. "We both agreed to take this job and we're sticking. There's a fortune in it."

"How many people are we going to have to kill?" the drunken man demanded. His voice was muted somewhat, but still clear to Willie Wilkerson's perked up ears. "That's what I want to know. How many people do we knock off?"

"You're crazy," Raspy Voice decided. "Whoever mentioned a word about killing anyone?"

"Nobody—yet. But get the set-up. We don't know who we work for. We sit around and get paid more dough than we made by knocking off that last tank-town bank—for doing nothing. It don't make sense and there's got to be something back of it. For dough like that, there's murder. I'm telling you."

Crime in the Wind

Willie Wilkerson swung his legs off the edge of the bed. He was trembling slightly, but he knew what he had to do. There was a crime of some sort in the wind. A very important crime, and it was his duty to inform the police about it. Also, to get a look at those two men—if he could.

He got his opportunity a short while later when the two men went out for a walk. Out in the hall he saw them, but just their backs. One was tall and rugged looking, like someone who might be expected to work in a coal mine or some such job where a strong and broad back was needed. The second man was smaller, slightly stooped and very thin. When they had gone down, Wilkerson hurried to the room where they lived.

He was fairly certain he hadn't heard the key turn and it seemed he was right for the door opened easily. The room was in disarray. And, half hidden by clothing in an open suitcase, was a heavy automatic.

Wilkerson didn't need to see any more. He hurried downtown to Police Headquarters to report what he had discovered.

(Continued on page 8)



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OFF THE RECORD

(Continued from page 6)

But down at Police Headquarters Captain McGrath seemed very doubtful of Wilkerson's story. Reluctantly, he assigned two men to make a check of the suspects in the fleabag hotel. He had an idea Wilkerson either had a very active imagination or he was dreaming.

And an hour later, he seemed even more sure of it. McGrath summoned Wilkerson and told him to go back to his hotel, that there was nothing to his story.

"There's no use arguing," McGrath sighed. "The two detectives found your room. They went into the one next door to it and there's an old guy sleeping there. He rented that room by the week and he's lived there for six months. He didn't have any guns, he's harmless, and he doesn't know a thing about two gorillas like you described. Next time you get nightmares like that, tell 'em to somebody else."

Enter—Tony Quinn!

Willie Wilkerson still tried to protest, but McGrath shut him up.

"What you want me to?" he asked. "Maybe you'd like me to go to the Special D.A. who handles crime stuff like this. Man, if I ever told your story to Tony Quinn, he'd laugh me smack into a lieutenantcy."

Wilkerson didn't argue any more, for the captain unwittingly had given him the clue he wanted. Outside, he looked up the address of Anthony Quinn in a phone book. Then he went down into the subway that would take him to Quinn's home.

On the subway platform, a man whom Wilkerson didn't see, tried to shove him in front of an onrushing train. Later, from behind the hedges near Tony Quinn's house, a second attempt was made on the little fellow's life. By pure luck, Wilkerson escaped both times.

In contrast to Captain McGrath, the supposedly blind district attorney Tony Quinn believed Wilkerson's story and immediately put Silk, his confidential aide, to check on the hotel where Wilkerson reported he had heard the murder planned. By clever detective work Silk solved the mystery of why the police had been able to find no trace of the two would-be killers Wilkerson had overheard.

And then Tony Quinn took over. He saw at once it was going to be the most unusual case of his career. Ordinarily, crime had been committed when the Black Bat undertook an assignment. This time, the crime had not yet been committed, and it was up to him not only to find out who was going to be killed, but to prevent the murder—if he could.

(Continued on page 111)

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One of the Black Bat's hands shot out, and he flung the bullets on the bed (CHAPTER V)

WITH MALICE AFORETHOUGHT

By G. WAYMAN JONES

When John Todd is convicted of murder, the case has some amazing repercussions that put Special District Attorney Tony Quinn in the toughest spot of his entire career!

CHAPTER I

The Innocent Dead

THE library was a large room, expansively but decorously furnished, and with massive leather chairs and divans. It was quite obviously a man's room, and its occupant was a man who sat before a fireplace, staring with apparently unseeing eyes into the few embers that were left.

He was a sturdily built person, and would have been rather handsome had it not been for those dead, staring eyes of

the blind, and deep, glistening scars around them.

A clock, somewhere in the house, struck eleven slowly as if it were trying to postpone the passage of time to its utmost. The man in the chair shuddered. Eleven o'clock this Thursday night might mean little to most people, but this particular hour and this particular time of night was something to dread for one select group, of which Tony Quinn, the man who sat there was an important member.

Quinn's hand clutched the crook of a white cane until his knuckles were al-

The Black Bat Fights to Clear Himself of the

most as dead-white as the cane. A slim, almost bald man of about forty-five, came into the room carrying a tray on which was a bottle of Scotch, soda, ice and a glass. He was the blind man's serving man, and closest companion, "Silk" Kirby.

"I thought you might need one or two, sir," Kirby said gently. "I know just how these nights affect you."

Quinn didn't move. "Thanks, Silk," he murmured. "I'd like a stiff one, please. You know, being a Special District Attorney has certain compensations which I enjoy, but it has one drawback that I dread."

"I know, sir." Silk said as he nodded. "But someone has to do it." He glanced at an electric clock over the mantel. "He's dead by now, I imagine. They work pretty fast up there. And he deserved the electric chair. All you did was your sworn duty. If you hadn't, someone else would have done it."

Quinn passed a hand over his forehead. "I know," he sighed. "I keep telling myself that. I keep adding the idea that John Todd richly deserved whatever he just went through. He murdered his own uncle, with malice aforethought. An old and kindly man. Yet John Todd was a human being, too. I helped take his life. It isn't a pleasant thought. Silk."

SILK vigorously stirred the scotch and soda, handed it to Quinn and then, with a slow shake of his head, mixed another for himself. Quinn's apparently sightless eyes flickered. The mask of blindness suddenly disappeared and clear, shrewd eyes tried to laugh a little. He raised his glass.

"Here is confusion to crime, Silk," he said. "Only I wish people would stop murdering their fellowmen. In war or in peace."

"Or at least do their killing outside the province over which you hold jurisdiction." Silk smiled and was more practical in his toast.

They drank a little. Silk sat down. He was a servant, but a highly privileged one.

"It wasn't much of a case, sir," he re-

flected. "Just a stupid man who couldn't wait for his uncle to die a natural death so he'd come into his money. Now what's he got? Not even his own life."

"You're right." Quinn answered. "It wasn't much of a case. John Todd needed money quickly. His only source was his uncle's estate, but his uncle refused to cooperate by dying, so Todd hurried it along. Rather a bloodthirsty method he used, too. You'll remember that Wilbur Stone, his uncle, was accustomed to taking long walks about dawn, that Todd knew it and arranged to be driving home at that time. He deliberately drove over to the wrong side of the road and even chased the poor old man with his car until he struck him down. Then Todd backed up, got out, and made certain he was dead."

"Neatly planned and all," Silk said. It would have looked like the work of a hit-and-run driver if all had gone according to plan. But Todd, like all killers, couldn't foresee everything. Like the two men who noticed him driving along that road just before the accident. Like that hunter who was stalking game in the woods bordering the road, and saw the whole thing. You can't beat fate, sir. Darn few people get away with murder."

"Only this afternoon Todd demanded a reprieve and swore he was innocent," Quinn sighed. "That would make it about the twentieth time. But those-witnesses fixed him. He couldn't get around them."

"The witnesses—and the D.A. who prosecuted," Silk observed drily. "Todd, or his lawyer, couldn't get around that D.A. either. I think your handling of the trial was about the most masterful thing you ever did, sir, and I've watched and listened to plenty of your cases."

Quinn allowed himself a soft chuckle. "Lawton Leslie, Todd's defense attorney, darn near had apoplexy," he said. "I don't believe he likes me much, Silk. But Leslie would have been bothered even more if I'd brought out still another witness."

"Another?" Silk asked. "I didn't know there was one."

"Few people did. The circumstances were a bit unusual. You recall that Todd

Sinister Charges Levelled at Him by His Foes!

ran down his uncle along a deserted section of highway just within the jurisdiction of my office. Well, along one side of the road was the forest where Brad Cowan, the hunter, saw it happen. On the other side of the road was a tall fence. The limits of a large orphanage."

"I remember that," Silk said.

"Well, a twelve-year-old boy was

not. Because if they discovered he had tried to run away, the orphanage officials wouldn't like him any more. If the case went against me, I would have used him, but it didn't. I had witnesses enough, so I let it ride. Afterward, I told Attorney Leslie, just to convince him his client was guilty."

"I wonder if he's convinced now—now



THE BLACK BAT

among those being cared for at the orphanage. I don't think he liked it there. The morning of the murder he was getting set to leave without permission. A regular prison break it was. He was in the act of climbing the fence beside the road when Todd came along in his car. The boy got scared at what he saw, slipped back to the dormitory and wasn't even missed."

Silk nodded. "So that's the kid who came to your office and wanted to see you privately," Silk remarked. "You never did tell me what he wanted."

Quinn laughed. "I promised him I wouldn't. He told me the whole story, said he'd go into court and tell it to the jury if I asked him to, but he'd rather

that his client has been executed?" Silk put the empty glasses on the tray and started for the kitchen.

Before he crossed the room, the doorbell buzzed long and insistently. Silk sighed, put the tray on a table and went to answer it. There was nothing especially surprising in a visitor at this hour. District attorneys don't keep regulation hours, nor do thieves and murderers.

IN THE library, Tony Quinn's eyes assumed their blank staring aspect again. He heard excited voices in the hallway, rapid footsteps approaching, and when the visitor stormed into the room, Quinn saw him. Only his visitor didn't know that.

The man who came in was tall, rugged-looking, with pink cheeks and a tanned face. It was twisted in lines of horror now, and his eyes were sick-looking.

"I'm blind," Quinn said. "I don't recognize your footsteps so you must be a stranger."

"My name is Raymond Alvin." The man sat down on the edge of a chair and twisted his hat nervously. "I—I'm too late. I knew that the instant I learned the news. John Todd has been—executed, hasn't he?"

"Unless there was a reprieve I knew nothing about. Why are you interested, Mr. Alvin?"

"Because Todd is—was—innocent! I killed that old man. It was an accident."

Quinn's expression never altered, although inwardly he writhed in horror. This was the one thing of which any district attorney's nightmares are composed.

"Suppose you tell me all about it, Mr. Alvin," he said tonelessly.

"The morning it happened—at dawn—I was driving home," said Alvin. "I—I was under the weather a bit, I guess. No! Why not be honest? I was plastered. I knew I was driving like a maniac. I never saw the old man at all, but I felt my car hit something."

"What kind of a car do you drive, Mr. Alvin?" Quinn asked crisply.

"A Packard. Gray, nineteen-forty-two model. Let me keep talking, will you? After I felt the car hit, I managed to stop, back up and then I got out. I saw that the man was dead. I lost my head. I drove home as fast as I could, put the car away and packed some bags. I—I went by train to Canada. Far north, where I had a hunting lodge. I had no radio, no contacts with anyone. I was hiding out. But a man can't hide from his conscience. I knew eventually I'd have to come back. Why—oh why, didn't I return sooner?"

He closed his eyes tightly and pressed both hands against his forehead.

"Keep on, please," Quinn said quietly.

Alvin looked up, harrow-eyed.

"I bought a newspaper at the station right after I got off the train," he said. "You can imagine how hungry for news I must have been. Seven months in the wilds. I saw a notice of the execution and read it over a cup of coffee in the station restaurant. I read that the sup-

posed murder victim was Wilbur Stone, but I killed him, not Todd. It was an accident, not murder!"

"And you came directly here?"

"No. The newspaper story had your name in it, of course, but I telephoned the prison first. He had—just been—killed up there. He died, swearing he was innocent, Mr. Quinn. And he was. He was! I killed two men, not one. I'm the murderer!"

"Mr. Alvin," Quinn said, "you fully realize the seriousness of this statement you have made? I prosecuted Todd, and I was convinced that he killed his uncle. There were witnesses who swore they saw him do it. The jury was convinced too."

"But you were wrong!" Alvin cried. "All of you were wrong. I did it! I killed Wilbur Stone. My car is still in my garage, just as I left it. Bloody fender and all. I tell you an innocent man died!"

Quinn spoke gruffly now.

"Mr. Alvin, if investigation determines that your statements are true, you will be held on an extremely serious charge. In fact, you are under arrest right now. Silk, get Captain McGrath of the Detective Bureau on the phone and tell him to come over here at once."

"No!" Alvin jumped to his feet. "No, wait! I can't go through with it. I ran away in the first place because I'm a coward. Now two men are dead because of me. I'm still a coward, worse than ever. Don't call the police! Don't, I tell you!"

"Get McGrath," Quinn said stonily.

Alvin reached for his hip pocket. Quinn saw the move and could have stopped him, but Quinn was supposed to be blind and he had to carry through the part. Alvin produced a nickel-plated revolver and turned it toward Silk. Blind Tony Quinn was no dangerous enemy.

"If you touch that phone, I'll shoot!" he stormed. "I'm not going to give myself up. I changed my mind! Quinn, you'll send me to the chair, too. I could take prison, but not electrocution. I couldn't take that! Both of you—one move to stop me and I'll shoot! What's the difference? I've killed two already."

Silk, hands slightly raised, backed away as if to block the door and put up a fight. Alvin moved toward him, pistol



Butch yanked the rifle away, shoved the man back, and hit him once (CHAPTER IX)

leveled and determination in his eyes. Silk, with a shrug, finally stepped aside. Alvin backed through the door, tersely commanded Silk to follow him and one minute later he had left the house and was running away into the night.

CHAPTER II

Allies of the Black Bat



QUINN was on his feet, his face deeply lined when Silk came back to the library.

"Silk, if that man isn't telling a lie, we've helped do a ghastly thing!" he exclaimed tensely. "I must be sure. Get McGrath—or wait! Call Butch first. Have him come

over here as fast as he can. Then check the address of this Raymond Alvin, if you can. He said his car—the one he claims killed Wilbur Stone—is still in his garage. I want Butch to go over there and find it. Look the car over. If there is blood on the fenders, have him scrape some of it off carefully. And bring it here, along with a detailed description of the damage to the car."

Silk hurried to make the phone call, first finding Alvin's address in the phone book. There was only one man listed with that name and Silk worked on the assumption it was the man who had just hurried away.

Silk was waiting when, within a short time "Butch" O'Leary showed up, and gave the man precise orders.

Quinn had resumed his chair. In a few moments, he realized, this startling news would be all over town. There were enough people who hated Tony Quinn to see that he suffered for it to the utmost. And Quinn had made up his mind that if he was responsible, he deserved all the censure and punishment that possibly could be inflicted upon him.

He thought back to those witnesses who had been so positive. They could be wrong. Witnesses had erred before, and while some charitable friends might claim that Quinn had only done his duty, Quinn realized that his first duty was to make absolutely certain a murder charge is proved by the truth and not the guess-

work of witnesses.

He felt about a dozen years older than he had at eleven o'clock. Puzzled too, because there were certain aspects of all this that did not ring quite true. Yet he would soon know, and he shivered apprehensively in merely thinking about it.

Tony Quinn was a Special District Attorney, a post which had been especially created for his talents. Once he had been the top man—District Attorney—and in full charge. He had proved himself to be a hard-hitting, crusading prosecutor who had built up an excellent reputation.

Then one day in court when he had been presenting important visual evidence against a criminal, some crooks had attempted to destroy this evidence by hurling acid upon it. Quinn had tried to intercept them and the acid had struck him full in the eyes.

He had gone blind almost instantly, for the acid seared deeply. Not only his eyes, but all around them, too, where it had been the cause of those deep, glistening scars that would remain forever.

Quinn had resigned his position as soon as doctors had told him there was no hope in recovering his sight. Fortunately he was independently wealthy, and had suffered no reverses because of his retirement. He had toured the world, before war tore it apart, and visited all the greatest eye surgeons he could locate. In every case he had drawn the same result. No hope! No hope!

Finally he had returned home and prepared to settle down to the monotony of being sightless. Yet, quite typically, he had not allowed his handicap to get the best of him. He had learned Braille, trained himself to improve his hearing until it had become abnormally acute. His sense of touch became keen too, and he developed his sense of smell to a remarkable degree.

Moving about in this permanent night had become easier as he had progressed. He had learned how to sense barriers in his way and how to avoid them. He learned to memorize voices and footsteps and other sounds which were too trivial for a person who could see to bother about.

And yet, despite his determination, he had been gripped by despair at the time. His only comfort had been in his close

friendship with Silk Kirby. Silk, who had once been an extremely clever confidence man, had come to Tony Quinn's home one night, long ago, to rob it, when his fortunes had been at especially low ebb. Instead, after a heart-to-heart talk with persuasive Tony Quinn, he had remained in the home of the man he had intended to rob, with a new purpose in life, and had become Quinn's best friend and loyal ally. Silk bouyed up Quinn's spirits to some extent, and took excellent care of him.

Then, one night when Quinn had believed he could not feel any more depressed than he was, by his blindness, he had had a visitor. A lovely girl named Carol Baldwin. She had come from her small Midwestern home town with a weird proposition.

Her father, she had explained, was a law officer who lay dying of a bandit's bullet. He had followed Tony Quinn's career intently and believed he might be of service to him. Mr. Baldwin had proposed that Quinn accept parts of his eyes in the hope they might enable the stricken district attorney to see again and carry on once more, his battle against crime.

QUINN had accepted. The surgery had been performed out West by a little known doctor who had been sworn to secrecy. That had been several years ago and from this first experimental operation had come the modern methods of curing blindness in many cases by the grafting of healthy cornea tissue to those of blind eyes.

Tony Quinn had returned home. Carol's father had died shortly afterward, and then had ensued long weeks of waiting while the delicate scars healed and the grafted cornea grew to become an integral part of Quinn's eyes.

Then, in the night he had removed the bandages, he had discovered that he could not only see, but that nature had granted him an eerie bonus for his months of darkness. Tony Quinn had learned that he could see in the dark as well as a normal man sees in broad daylight!

To his amazement, he discovered that in a blacked-out room he could move about easily, see every piece of furniture, read fine print and easily distinguish even soft pastel colors from a dis-



McGRATH

tance. Quinn had appreciated this phenomenon and had put it to good use.

One condition of the sacrifice Carol's father had made was that if the operation proved successful, Quinn should carry on his fight against crime. Quinn had planned to do so immediately on regaining his sight. But when he had been District Attorney, he had often railed against the red tape that hindered him. So he had determined to battle criminals in a new manner. By using slyness when necessary, or ruthlessness when it was demanded of him. To pay no attention to the rules of law any more than the crooks did.

It would be necessary that he work under cover, of course, otherwise his life might not be worth much. The type of men he intended to fight would quickly band together and kill a menace such as Quinn meant to become. So he had adopted a close-fitting black hood which covered his entire head. This enabled him to conceal the tell-tale scars left by the acid.

He had called himself the Black Bat and that had quickly become a name that made the underworld writhe.

The Black Bat struck with the suddenness and force of lightning. He killed when it was necessary. Kidnaped when occasion demanded it. He broke into places like a thief, with the exception that his methods were skilled and

scientific. Nothing stopped him, not even the police. For they soon knew of his operations and while they may have secretly blessed him, the Black Bat violated enough laws to make himself a criminal of sorts, also. So there now was a standing order to arrest the Black Bat.

One police officer, Captain McGrath, of Headquarters, had taken it upon himself to see that this order was carried out. So far McGrath had tried his best, and had failed so often that capturing the Black Bat had become a fetish with him.

He was a good officer, a plugger and hard worker. He was completely honest and except for this passion to nail the Black Bat, he was an excellent policeman. And yet, even Captain McGrath often had doubts as to his decision to make the capture. The Black Bat did much more good than harm and, more than once, McGrath had called a truce and worked with him.

Also, Captain McGrath had somehow acquired the idea that Tony Quinn was not blind, and that it was he who was hidden behind the black hood. He had openly accused Quinn, and had done his best to prove his theory. He had come close, sometimes, but not close enough. Still, his continued efforts constituted a menace to the Black Bat.

Silk Kirby, naturally, knew the whole secret and worked closely with the Black Bat. Carol Baldwin also had come East after her father's death, and joined forces with Quinn and while the Black Bat might originally have possessed certain doubts as to her capability in work of this sort, he had soon changed his mind. Carol was courageous and clever. Often it was her work that tipped the balance of the scales in favor of the Black Bat's own particular form of justice.

ANOTHER recruit joined this tiny band. His name was O'Leary, with a first name that had been forgotten long ago in favor of the title "Butch" which fitted him perfectly. He was a huge man, more than six feet tall and heavily built. His hands were the size of boxing gloves and his wide shoulder spread made his passage through doorways a little awkward.

Butch was not smooth or clever, but he made up for these deficiencies by a

complete devotion to the Black Bat and his cause, as his expression of appreciation of a favor Tony Quinn had done for him. His dogged determination to do his best and, most of all, his astounding strength in the everlasting battle were as valuable as cleverness.

Tony Quinn had established a crime laboratory in his home. It was entered by two ways—from the library through a hidden door, and by a tunnel which began in the garden house behind the Quinn home. This latter entrance was the one used by Carol and Butch, and by Tony Quinn when he entered or left in the guise of the Black Bat.

The laboratory was complete. Quinn had spent a large portion of his fortune on it, and constantly he studied all the various scientific ways of locating clues and running down criminals. The acute senses he developed while blind helped enormously too. He was now a crime stalker with a reputation that had never been blemished. The underworld had long ago sworn to kill him, but had never made any headway.

But right now Tony Quinn was probably more worried than ever before in his life. It looked as if he had been instrumental in sending an innocent man to the electric chair!

CHAPTER III

Publicly Accused



SILK announced Captain McGrath shortly afterwards. McGrath bustled into the library.

He was a compact man who firmly believed a detective should look like a detective. Square-toed shoes for foot comfort, which was necessary

after many years of pounding beats, a derby hat, and an inevitable cigar which he chewed more than he smoked, filled in the characterization. He had a scrubby mustache and hard, calculating eyes.

Once on a case he clung to it with the tenacity of a bulldog.

"Hello, Mac."

Quinn stuck out a hand vaguely in greeting. McGrath seized it.

"Look here, Tony," he said, "you and I have had a lot of fights in our day. I think you're the Black Bat, and sometime I'll run you in for it. But I just learned what happened. About the execution of John Todd. That guy Alvin phoned the D.A. and told him the whole story."

"How does the D.A. feel about it?" Quinn asked, with a wry smile.

McGrath sat down.

"Silk," he called, "be a good guy and bring me a drink. Never mind the fixings—just something to warm up my spine. It's gone dead with cold—and apprehension. Tony, I'll tell you the truth. The D.A. has never liked you. He appointed you because of pressure put upon him by people who know you're a better prosecutor than he is, blind or not blind."

"I've realized that Archer resented me," Quinn said. "He sends me all the tough nuts to crack, hoping I'll stub my toe sometime."

"Yeah," McGrath grunted. "I'll stub his nose sometime too. Well, he's already made a statement to the press. If you muffed this, he's going to fire you."

"If I did muff it, I ought to be fired," Quinn groaned. "Has any specific action been taken so far?"

"Only by me," McGrath answered. "The D.A. seems content to let it ride until your neck is in the noose. But I moved in—with not such good results. You remember there were two witnesses who saw Todd driving his car along the road where Wilbur Stone was killed. They placed Todd at the scene of the crime. Well, they're both engineers and it seems they departed for South America about a month ago. They're already somewhere in the jungles of Brazil, expect to stay there for at least two years, and they can't be contacted."

"Score one for the D.A.," Quinn said tightly. "What about Brad Cowan, the hunter who swore he saw the crime committed?"

McGrath took time out to accept the drink Silk proffered, to roll some of it around on his tongue, and then emit a low groan of despair.

"I thought of him at once and set out to get him," he said. "I did. I hauled him to Headquarters and ran smack into the D.A. Cowan was grabbed right out of my hands, is being questioned now."

"Well, that's that," Quinn said. "Thanks for trying to help, Mac. I appreciate it."

McGrath sipped more of his drink.

"Look here, Tony," he said then, "this has the smell of a frame-up to me. You'd never make a mistake like that. Well, if it is a frame, I'm with you all the way through. And if the Black Bat chooses to take a hand, I'm with him too."

Quinn whistled.

"Coming from you, that's going all out, Mac. If I were the Black Bat, I'd really feel elated and a little proud. But I'm not, you know."

"A matter of opinion," McGrath grunted. "But let it go. I mean all that just the same. Keep in mind the fact that even if you aren't the Black Bat, that as Tony Quinn you've got a raft of enemies. They'd stab you in the back in one second if they thought they could get away with it. Maybe this is a knife in the back, delivered by somebody who knows the ins and outs of the fine art of doublecrossing. Oh yes, the D.A. called in John Todd's defense attorney. He was spitting fire when he passed me by at Headquarters a little while ago."

Quinn's shoulders drooped a little.

"Mac," he said soberly, "if John Todd was sent to the electric chair by error, I wouldn't even put up a defense for myself. But if this is some scheme to discredit me, I'm going at them with all I've got. You can help by picking up this man Raymond Alvin. Officially now, I order his arrest. I've still got the power because I haven't been kicked out yet."

McGrath arose quickly.

"I'll send out an alarm right away," he promised. "When he's brought in, I'll hold him just for you. Let the D.A. or the defense attorney work on him, and he's liable to say anything."

"Good." Quinn arose too. "I'll be grateful for that. Let me know as soon as you collect him. I'll either be right here or at the D.A.'s office. I've a hunch they'll be sending for me soon. . . ."

AN HOUR later, Tony Quinn's big car pulled up in front of Police Headquarters. Silk ducked from behind the wheel, ran around the car and helped blind Tony Quinn out. Holding his employer's arm, Silk deftly piloted him up the wide stairs and through the door.

If Tony Quinn's professional reputation was being blasted by all this, his personal reputation was not. There were greetings on all sides, and offers of help. Shortly, Quinn entered the D.A.'s Headquarters office and sat down. His apparently sightless eyes were staring straight ahead, but they saw everything that went on.

District Attorney Archer was a slim, blond-mustached popinjay of a man with a tremendous regard for his own ability. He had always resented Tony Quinn because of his prowess, and the fact that no matter how tough his assignments were, he generally came through with the solution.

Seated near Archer's desk was Lawton Leslie, pompous and self-important defense attorney.

There was a smug smile on his face, and absolutely no sign of compassion for his late client.

And, nervously wringing his felt hat into a shapeless mass, sat the star witness at the trial. Brad Cowan, whom Quinn had never liked.

It looked as if the bad news was being lined up.

Archer cleared his throat.

"Quinn," he said, "I'm sorry all this has happened, but you realize the terrible seriousness of it. When a District Attorney sends an innocent man to the electric chair, steps must be taken."

"If the charge is found to be true," Quinn broke in. "I'm waiting for proof."

Defense Attorney Leslie arose and spoke with the sonorous voice he usually reserved for a jury. "The proof will be furnished, Mr. Quinn, and all facts inquired into. We shall begin with Mr. Cowan, if you don't mind. Mr. Cowan has, more or less, retracted much of the testimony he offered in court under your prompting, may I point out."

QUINN'S temper flared. "He told what he claimed was the truth. You worked on him during cross-examination, didn't you? Without breaking down one word of his testimony?"

"Yes, I admit that. But he has changed his story. As attorney for the late Mr. John Todd, I hold it upon myself to exert all my talents to get at the truth."

"You should have exerted your talents

—if any—in breaking down Cowan's testimony if he lied during the trial," Quinn snapped. "Anything short of that is dereliction of duty or plain cussed stupidity."

"We'll have no personal animosities flaring up here, gentlemen," Archer butted in to say. "I am only after the truth. Quinn, Cowan told you one story. About his being on a hunting trip the morning that Wilbur Stone was killed. How he had seen the car deliberately chase Stone over the road and strike him down. How the driver got out to ascertain whether or not Stone was dead, and when he discovered he was, the driver promptly fled. That evidence was what put John Todd into the electric chair tonight."

"You omitted part of the testimony," Quinn said. "Cowan also swore he memorized the numbers of the death car and that he positively identified John Todd as being the man who got out of the car."

"Yes—yes, of course," Archer purred. "I was coming to that."

Quinn thought that the D.A. was pretty sure of himself and all but smacking his lips over the prospect of finally pinning a failure onto Quinn's reputation.

"Suppose," Quinn suggested, "we let Cowan talk."

ARCHER shrugged.

"Cowan, will you repeat what you just told us?"

Cowan's hat assumed an even more strangulated shape. He didn't raise his eyes.

"Well," he mumbled, "I was pretty sure of those numbers. And I was pretty sure I recognized Todd. Only, since the trial, I had to go to an eye doctor who told me I didn't see so well."

"Isn't it true, Cowan," Quinn asked, "that on the morning all this happened, you'd had rather good luck hunting pheasant and rabbit?"

"I got three rabbits and two pheasants," Cowan said proudly.

"Then that morning your aim was good. You were able to sight your rifle in an excellent manner. That doesn't indicate poor eyesight, Mr. Cowan. But go ahead."

"Let me interrupt just a moment," Archer said. "To explain a few things

and make Cowan's statements clearer. After this Ray Alvin phoned, we quite naturally did our best to round him up. We failed, but we did find some pictures of him in his office. Cowan was shown these photographs. Go ahead, Cowan."

"Well," the erstwhile hunter gulped, "the man in the picture looked more like the guy I saw get out of that car than John Todd did. They look a little alike, but Alvin is the exact image of the man I saw."

"You were sure that Todd was the man, and you saw him in the flesh, not just a picture!" Quinn roared. "Haven't you a mind of your own? Or who is paying you so that you'll switch your story like this?"

COWAN looked startled.

"Why—why, I consider that an insult! Yes, sir, a nasty insult. Maybe I'll sue you for this. And listen here, if you hadn't put those words in my mouth during the trial, I'd maybe have said I wasn't sure. But you never gave me a chance. You asked me those questions, and I had to answer. You made me say it was Todd. Say I was sure that it was him."

Quinn arose, and Silk was at his side instantly.

"Gentlemen," Quinn said, "I don't profess to know what this is all about. I'm being bluntly accused of carelessness that resulted in a man's execution. The only evidence you have offered so far is the testimony of this witness who seems to switch his story with whatever mood possesses him.

"The facts of the case haven't been investigated. Where is Alvin's car, that he says struck down Wilbur Stone? Where are the other witnesses who placed Todd at the scene of the crime, despite his testimony that he was miles away? Get these facts and then call me. Meanwhile, I'll exert every effort I can to determine for myself just what the truth of this entire matter is.

"I'll add only one thing. I have ordered the arrest of Raymond Alvin. If Mr. Cowan persists in his present testimony, I shall order his arrest on a charge of perjury. That's all. Good night!"



The body of the man with the patch over one eye hung from one of the rafters (Chap. XII)

CHAPTER IV

Death Moves Fast

NOBODY said a word or tried to stop Quinn, as Silk led the blind man out of the office, but Archer's face was a mask of rage. Defense Attorney Leslie huffed and puffed like a walrus, and Cowan was desperately trying to tear his hat into slices.

"I had to get out of there before I broke a blood vessel," Quinn whispered to Silk, outside. "And there are things to be done before Archer beats me to it. Home, Silk, as fast as you can travel without breaking our necks."

Butch O'Leary was in the laboratory when Quinn arrived. So was Carol Baldwin and she went straight into Quinn's arms.

"I don't believe it, Tony!" she said fiercely. "I think it's a deliberate plot to discredit you."

"We'll hope that is it," Quinn said soberly. "Butch, how did you make out about Alvin's car?"

Butch carefully placed a folded bit of paper on the lab bench.

"It's there all right," he told Quinn. "The front left fender dented pretty bad. Just like John Todd's fender was bent. Dried blood on it. I scraped some off. I searched the car too. Nothing doing."

"Where was the car?" asked Quinn.

"This guy Alvin is a big shot of some kind," Butch explained. "He's got a house on Long Island. Maybe fifteen rooms in it and all closed up and dusty. The garage is in the rear. Just one car in it."

"Score one for Alvin's story." Quinn sat down on a leather divan with Carol. "All right, we're going to work. Butch, keep on with Alvin. Check every fact about him, especially how long he has been gone, and where he was the day Wilbur Stone was killed. If you should happen to run across Alvin, kidnap him."

"Sure. It'll be a pleasure." Butch grinned.

Quinn faced Carol.

"There was another witness I didn't

use at the trial," he said. "A twelve-year-old boy named Kip Evans. He's an inmate of the Welfare Orphanage. The morning of the killing he was scaling the orphanage fence. Go see him. Get him away from there if you have to adopt him. He's our one ace-in-the-hole. He knows whom he saw that morning. On your way, both of you."

Carol disappeared through the trapdoor which led into the tunnel. Butch followed, with a confident grin and a wave of his massive arm. Quinn remained seated for several minutes, his mind going over these startling events, seeking something in them which would point toward a frame-up.

The disappearance of two witnesses by their going into South American jungles could not be construed as suspicious. They were engineers, and expected to take on contracts like this. The way Brad Cowan had changed his story was another thing. It smacked of intimidation or bribery. Quinn was by no means through with Cowan yet.

Archer, the D.A., was naturally vindictive and aching to destroy Tony Quinn's hard-earned reputation to the benefit of his own. Defense Attorney Leslie's defense of Todd had collapsed with a hollow thud when Quinn had gone to work. Leslie had been seething with rage and he didn't appear to have cooled off as yet.

Quinn automatically put the D.A. out of the running as a man who would actually try a frame-up. No matter what his talents for a doublecross were, he was still honest enough to stand by his oath as a public attorney. He would take advantage of any situation that offered itself, but he wouldn't manufacture detrimental evidence against Quinn no matter how much he resented him.

But there were others, so far quiescent in these post-execution affairs. John Todd's family, for instance. He had two sons, about twenty-six and twenty-nine respectively. Stanley and Dean Todd. They had taken their father's conviction stoically enough, but they were of the same breed as the man who had gone to the chair. Which meant they were sly and treacherous—and greedy.

Philip Ridgely and his sister Eve were John Todd's cousins, and nephew and niece of Wilbur Stone. They had stuck by Todd through it all, providing cash

and help of any kind that he needed. Quinn remembered them as nice enough people, cool toward him, which was only natural because he was on the other side of the fence.

Quinn gave up. There was not enough to go on yet.

He had a couple of channels. Kip Evans, the boy from the orphanage, shared in importance with Ray Alvin, the self-confessed killer of Wilbur Todd. Upon both of these, Quinn intended to concentrate most of his efforts. The boy was too young to be intimidated or bribed. Alvin was so deep in the mess that his own neck hung in the balance. He was in no position to put up any sort of fight.

QUINN picked up his cane, arose, and that mantle of blindness came over his eyes once more. He walked to the secret door into the library. Silk opened it and they filed out.

Silk raised the window shades, which were always drawn when the hidden door was in use. Quinn sat down in his accustomed chair before the fireplace and stuffed tobacco into a pipe. He looked and acted like a totally blind man. It was dangerous to drop that mask for even an instant when there was the slightest likelihood of being observed.

The phone clamored and Silk went to the further end of the room to answer it.

"For you, sir," he said. "I don't know who it is, but he's plenty excited."

Quinn tapped his way across the room, picked up the phone and spoke. The voice he heard was strained and high-pitched.

"Quinn? This is Ray Alvin. I'm at the Hotel Montgomery. Hang on to the phone. In ten seconds you'll hear a gun go off. I can't stand it! I killed two men. I've always been a craven coward, and I can't take it. I've thought the whole thing over and I'm merely phoning so that you'll be quite certain I took my own life. Ready, Quinn? Here I go!"

There was a violent explosion in the receiver.

Quinn dropped the phone.

"Get the car quickly!" he told Silk. "Alvin just shot himself. Or he says he did. While you're bringing the car out front, I'll get hold of McGrath. Snap it up, Silk!"

McGrath was already in the Hotel Montgomery lobby, armed with a key to Alvin's room, when Quinn entered on Silk's arm. They proceeded to an elevator which was being held in readiness.

"I just got here," McGrath said. "Was on my way up when I heard your cane tapping into the lobby. So he knocked himself off, eh? Nobody heard the shot, incidentally. I expected that might happen. Dead men don't talk, eh, Tony?"

"They are remarkably silent," Quinn agreed. "Be careful when you go in. There might be clues."

McGrath said nothing more until after they were out of the elevator. Then he took Quinn's other arm and as they hurried down the corridor, he spoke softly.

"So you think Alvin was part of some frame-up and was murdered? Well, so do I. At least, we agree on something. Here we are."

McGrath inserted the key, gave it a twist and flung the door open. It was a large single room. In one corner was a fairly big flat-topped desk. On it was the telephone base, and the instrument itself dangled off the edge. Alvin was on the desk too—at least the upper third of him was. His head lay on the surface in a pool of blood that was growing wider and wider. His right hand hung limply beside him and it loosely held that same nickel-plated revolver he had shoved at Silk.

Quinn, of course, gave no indication that he saw any of this.

"Mac," he said nervously, "I smell gunsmoke. What do you see?"

McGrath was making a cursory examination of the corpse. He looked up.

"The bullet got him in the right temple," he said. "He must have died instantly. Gun's still in his right hand. The door was locked from inside, but anyone could have closed it. There's a snap lock."

"Leaving a room immediately after a shot was fired would have been highly dangerous," Quinn said. "If Alvin was killed, his murderer must have had another method of getting out. See about the windows. Look for a ledge, Mac."

McGrath ran up one of the two windows and leaned out. When he popped back into the room, he was mildly excited.

"If that was a hunch, it was a good one, Tony. There is a ledge right out-

side, more than a foot wide. I looked up and down. This is the only ledge on the building. Sort of an ornament."

"Mac," Quinn said, "go to some other room and call the desk. Find out when Alvin checked in and see if he deliberately asked for this particular room or for this floor. Hurry!"

McGrath disappeared, and Silk quietly closed the room door after him. Quinn dropped his mask of blindness and went to work fast. He dropped to his knees beside the corpse and, without touching a thing, studied the position of the gun and the dead man's grip on it. Then he hurried to the window and looked out. There was a wide ledge, and to Quinn it was the one symbol of hope he possessed.

ANYONE could have stepped out, crawled along the ledge and reached another window. That is, anyone with nerve enough, and a brand new murderer, intent upon getting clear and avoiding any chance of being seen, would have taken such a risk.

Quinn was standing in the center of the room, both hands resting on his cane, when McGrath returned.

"The desk clerk's records show that Alvin checked in at eleven-twenty last night," the detective-captain said. "He had several bags, went straight to his room and came down again within five minutes. At eleven forty-five he was back, looking as if he'd been very sick. He did ask for a room on this floor, and especially wanted one at the back of the house where he believed it would be quieter."

"Or safer from observation," Quinn mused. "What's directly across from the windows, Mac?"

"Blank wall. You're right. If he chose this room because he was told to select it, then the man who told him is the murderer, because he knew about the ledge and the fact that he could crawl along it easily. I'm going to check on the other rooms on either side of this one. Be back in a few minutes."

As soon as McGrath was gone, Quinn went into action again. He seized the dead man's collar and grimly raised the head, turning it so that he could stare intently at the sagging mouth. He gently put the dead man's head exactly where it had been.

"I was looking to see if he had been

gagged," Quinn told Silk. "There's no evidence of it. Maybe he was drugged. An autopsy will show. Or the killer could have merely persuaded Alvin this was all part of the same game. Even had him actually make the phone call and punctuated Alvin's final sentence with a bullet. Of course, this is all theory. The whole thing may be just as Alvin claimed."

"Theory, my hat," Silk grumbled. "This is a frame and pointed right at you. Only it's been done so cleverly there's not a trace. Remember, I used to be a crook myself. I know how to get behind a man, hold him down with a hand over his mouth and a knee in his midriff and still have one hand free with which to use the phone. Clues or no clues, I say that Alvin didn't kill himself."

Quinn went over and sat down on the edge of the bed. He looked grim.

"No matter how he died, Silk," he said, "this puts us in a terrible position. All we have left is young Kip Evans and now I'm beginning to worry about him."

CHAPTER V

The Man in Black



MCGRATH came back and reported that a room two doors away was not occupied, and that the window was unlocked, but otherwise there were no clues to be seen with the naked eye.

"You'd better report this now," Quinn said. "Silk, take me back

home. Archer is bound to come down here, and I don't want to face any fireworks at the moment. I'm tired and a little ill about the whole thing. It's a devil of a mess to be in and have to depend on other people's eyes for help, no matter how good those eyes are or the people who use them. Good night, Mac. Tell the story exactly as it occurred."

Silk maneuvered the car away from the curb moments later.

"Sir, it's time we started a counter-attack, don't you think?" he said. "So far we've only been on the receiving end of things."

"I'm thinking of that right now," Quinn replied. "First though, I want to talk to Kip Evans and have him tell his story to the D.A. and other competent witnesses. Kip's story backs up my handling of the case perfectly. I'm certain that Alvin was murdered. One thing convinces me of it. The fact that he asked for, and got, that certain room on a floor provided with a ledge. Otherwise, his actions were normal."

"He must have been a good actor," Silk offered.

"Indeed. Which means we need a good line on him. Granting, of course, that we're correct in believing that John Todd was not an innocent man when he died in the chair last night."

Returning to the house, Silk at once drew the library shades and Quinn went to the secret door. Carol was restlessly pacing the big laboratory. She rushed up to Quinn.

"Kip Evans ran away from the orphanage two nights ago, Tony!" she cried. "He left a note saying that he was being adopted by somebody who was giving him a pony and taking him to a ranch. There isn't a trace of how he got out or whom he met."

Quinn's lips tightened into a thin line.

"So it's like that! Now I am convinced this is some sort of a plot. Kip's leaving so coincidentally simply isn't an accident. He was lured out of the orphanage and spirited away some place."

"But, Tony," Carol argued, "I thought you never used him as a witness and kept his story secret."

"I did—up to a certain point," said Quinn. "John Todd's defense lawyer was so insistent about his client's innocence that I wanted to convince him

that justice was being done. So I told him about Kip. Heaven knows whom Leslie told."

"That big blabbermouth!" Silk broke in. "Maybe he didn't tell a soul, but used the information himself. He's not above it. He hated you before the trial, and was ready to murder you afterwards. You made a fool of him in open court."

"Silk, you're right to a certain extent," Quinn said quietly. "Yet we have no shred of proof. Not a shred. That proof we shall have to dig up and it won't be easy. We've little time because Archer is going to take action as soon as he is notified of Alvin's suicide. Carol, will you warm up the coupé? I'll be out there in five minutes."

When Carol had hurried away to the cheap little car that was always parked on the side street by Quinn's home, Quinn went to a steel locker and removed several articles of clothing. He took off the tweeds he wore and in their place donned clothing that was all black. Finally he drew a black hood over his head and studied the reflection, to be certain there were no flaws.

Tony Quinn had disappeared, to be replaced by the Black Bat. The enemy of all crime was now fighting a bitter battle to save himself.

He removed the hood, folded it and thrust it into a pocket. Next he strapped on a shoulder holster containing a heavy automatic. A small kit of burglar tools went into a pocket where it lay flat. He needed no flashlight, for his eyes functioned as well in darkness as in light.

"I'll be gone an hour or two at least," he said to Silk as he made his preparations. "Archer may show up—and Mc-

[Turn page]



Grath. Tell them I'm quite ill over the whole thing and that I went to bed, leaving orders that I was not to be disturbed. It'll be tough getting rid of them, Silk. That's your part. Wish me luck. I've a feeling I shall need every scrap all of us can conjure up."

He slipped through the trap-door, made his way along the low-roofed tunnel, and came out in the garden house. It was a dark night and he was in no danger of being seen, but he took all precautions just the same. Before leaving the garden house, he studied the grounds carefully, his eyes sweeping through the darkness easily.

WHEN he was certain that no one lay in observant concealment, he ran lightly toward a gate, went through it, and popped into the coupé which began moving as soon as he was inside.

"We're going to visit Brad Cowan, the hunter who first swore he saw Todd kill his uncle and then wasn't so sure after he looked at a picture of Alvin," the Black Bat told Carol. "Maybe Cowan scares easily. We'll find out. Turn right, and as we head for the little town I want I'll tell you where he lives."

It was in a modest Long Island neighborhood composed of four- and five-room one-story houses that all looked alike. Cowan was a widower, and lived alone. Quinn knew that much.

Carol stopped the car at a convenient spot. Quinn whipped off the wide-brimmed black hat he wore on expeditions of this kind. The hat was merely insurance against being spotted. Wearing a hood would attract attention, but with the brim of the hat turned down, Quinn's features and especially the tell-tale scars around his eyes, were well shielded.

He drew on the hood, slipped his automatic up and down in its holster a few times and then, with a pat on Carol's hand, he was gone, swallowed up by the darkness as if by magic.

The Black Bat circled the house carefully, making sure that Cowan was not being protected by a guard of detectives assigned from Archer's office. He located a window that was open high. Through it he could hear someone snoring rather noisily. He hoisted himself up a bit, parted the thin curtains and looked through the darkness. At least

Cowan seemed to have no guilty conscience. He was sleeping soundly.

The Black Bat went through the window easily and took the precaution of closing it. Then he stepped to Cowan's bedside and deftly ran a hand beneath the pillow. His gloved fingers encountered a small gun, and he withdrew it. The gun was loaded and ready for business.

Without making a sound, the Black Bat removed the cartridges, replaced the gun and shook Cowan awake. As the sleeping man sat bolt upright, blinking and terrified, the Black Bat snapped on the table lamp beside the bed. Cowan took one look at the somber-clad man and opened his mouth to yell. The Black Bat's hand slapped across it quickly and he poked the muzzle of his huge gun under Cowan's nose.

"None of that," he warned. "I'm not here to hurt you. I'm the Black Bat. If I let go, will you keep your voice down?"

Cowan nodded energetically, and the Black Bat stepped back a pace. Cowan slowly massaged his lips as if the Black Bat's hand had been tainted.

"Wh-what do you want wi-with me?" he demanded nervously.

The Black Bat pulled up a chair and sat down.

"Just a quiet little conversation. It happens, Mr. Cowan, that I have a great deal of respect for Tony Quinn. He makes few errors. Besides, he is totally blind, quite helpless, and needs a friend. I have appointed myself to act in his interests."

Cowan got his nerve back.

"You're wasting time," he growled. "Quinn is wrong. He sent an innocent man to his death in the chair and the D.A. is going to ask that Quinn's appointment be canceled tomorrow morning."

"Naturally we all expected that," the Black Bat agreed. "It can't be helped. Now, suppose you tell me why you changed your story so drastically."

"I made a mistake, that's all," Cowan answered sullenly. "It wasn't all my fault. Quinn told me what to say, and convinced me that Todd was guilty and ought to be burned."

"You were absolutely positive in court, Mr. Cowan," reminded the Black Bat. "You had many weeks to think it over and if there were any doubts in your

mind, you should have gone to Quinn or some other competent authority and admitted you might have made a mistake."

"But I didn't think so until after Alvin came back and said he killed Wilbur Stone!" protested Cowan. "Alvin was about the same build as Todd and he drove the same kind of a car. Besides, he admitted he did the killing, so I must have been wrong!"

The Black Bat's head nodded.

"So you're just a little man who doesn't know his own mind. Get up, Cowan. I'm going to search these premises and you're tagging along. Come on—out of bed!"

Deliberately, Quinn turned his back on the man. He heard Cowan go for the gun, heard it click, and he turned around slowly. One hand shot out and flung the bullets on top of the bed.

"So you'd really have killed me, wouldn't you, Cowan? That's an odd thing for an innocent man to do."

"You're nothing but a crook and a murderer!" Cowan raged and dropped the gun. "Maybe you intend to kill me. I was only protecting myself."

"Of course. Now walk over, face the wall and stay that way while I search this room. One little move toward the door, Mr. Cowan, and I shall promptly put a bullet through your leg. Is that clear?"

COWAN began trembling, and he tottered over to the wall quickly. He seemed to be trying to merge himself with the array of flowers on the wallpaper pattern.

The Black Bat searched the room, dumping the contents of drawers to the floor and pawing through the things they contained. He stripped the bed, prodded the mattress, went through the small clothes closet and then, keeping Cowan with him, he searched the whole house. It didn't take long and was quite unsuccessful.

There were a few things of minor interest which he memorized. Like the mortgaged deed to the house and a letter from the bank, dunning for payment on the mortgage. There were several other bills too, none big, but all well in arrears. Cowan seemed to be in need of money rather badly.

"One thing more," the Black Bat said. "Immediately after you saw the killing

those months ago, what did you do?"

"I—I ran to where Mr. Stone was lying and made sure I couldn't help him. Then I went to find a telephone. There weren't any houses close by. I was gone maybe ten or fifteen minutes. At that hour in the morning there was no traffic at all. Then I waited until the cops came."

"On your way to reach a telephone, do you recall hearing the motor of an automobile anywhere?"

Cowan hesitated and seemed to be puzzled whether or not he should lie. Two bright eyes were shining through the darkness at him and he decided it might be healthier to tell the truth.

"Y-yes. I thought I heard a car. I'm not sure though. I was too excited."

Cowan raised his head and tried to peer through the darkness. He thought those eyes had disappeared. He muttered something, and moved a couple of steps. Nobody commanded him to stand fast. He swept out an arm experimentally, and became certain his visitor in black had gone.

Cowan raced for the telephone.

CHAPTER VI

Voice on the Wire



CAROL drove away from the neighborhood fast, because there might be radio cars in plenty at any minute. The Black Bat, wearing his wide-brimmed hat now, was slumped in his corner of the car.

"Cowan is a liar," he observed drily. "And the little squirt actually tried to kill me when I gave him the opportunity. I wonder if he is mixed up in this. Or is he simply seeking more of the publicity he gloried in during the trial?"

"Then your mission wasn't much of a success?" Carol asked.

"Oh, but it was. Decidedly so. Cowan slipped with one little thing that backs up a vague theory I've been working on."

"May I ask what it is, Tony?"

The Black Bat's gloved hand slowly drew itself around Carol's shoulders and tightened.

"You have to ask such a question, Carol?" he said softly. "Of course, I'll tell you. Alvin struck me as being a rather sincere man. I may be wrong, but I believe that he really thought he did kill Wilbur Stone that dawn. I'm fairly well convinced he did run away, actually believing he was in danger of arrest. If he did, it was part of some scheme. That's all I can tell you now."

"And did he really commit suicide, Tony?" asked Carol.

"I'm not convinced of that at all," the Black Bat said soberly. "Head north at the next intersection. We'll pass Alvin's home—it's an estate of some size out here—and I mean pass it because there might be a guard thrown around the place. If not, I'm going in for a quick look."

The large house apparently was not guarded. The Black Bat slipped up to the back door, examined the lock, and went to work on it with a slim bit of metal from his kit of tools. The task required almost ten minutes, but finally the lock gave way. There were no burglar chains impeding him and if there had been, a small but strong pair of cutting pliers was ready to cut through the links.

The house smelled as if it had been closed up for months. Dust was thick over everything. The Black Bat's eyes scanned the floor, looking for footprints and finding none. He checked on every room and was certain that nobody had entered that house from the moment Alvin had left it to run away.

Then his eyes fell upon the telephone. It was free of dust. He knelt on the floor. At closer range he saw scuff marks made by someone who had walked carefully. The dust was disturbed, but ordinary eyes would have had difficulty in detecting this fact even in broad daylight.

The Black Bat began to straighten up. At that moment, the morguelike quiet that filled this dead man's house was shattered by the clamor of the telephone bell.

It came so unexpectedly that the Black Bat jumped nervously. He hesitated a second or two, then lifted the receiver. With his mouth some distance from the transmitter, he growled a greeting.

He was more than mildly surprised

when a woman's voice came over the wire. It was a low, rather cultured voice.

"I did as you suggested. There isn't a trace of anything wrong, and anyway he would never notice. Do you hear me? He would never—"

The Black Bat suddenly dropped the phone and dived for the floor. A gun cut loose. Two bullets whizzed above the Black Bat and slammed into the wall. Another did its best to ferret out his position on the floor, only the Black Bat had wriggled quickly from the spot. His own gun was drawn and ready.

There was an open window. The draft from it had given him the first hint of impending danger. Suddenly, he arose and dashed toward it. Hardly stopping, he dived through, landed lightly, and was up again fast. His eyes searched the darkness vainly. All trace of the intruder was gone.

After a few minutes spent in a vain search, he returned to the house, realizing he could not remain long. All he did was listen at the phone again—to a dead wire. Then he studied the floor from the phone table to the window through which the shooting had occurred. He saw a faint trail made by someone who had used this unorthodox method of entering and leaving the house.

Apparently, the gunman had come merely to answer the phone and take that weird message. He had raised the window while the Black Bat had been intent upon listening to that woman's voice. Quickly the man had determined what was going on and had taken steps to end the danger fast. Only the cool draft from the window, warning him, had saved the Black Bat's life.

CAROL was in an impatient sweat when he reached the car. She held a wicked-looking gun in her hand and was ready for trouble.

"I heard the shots," she said. "Tony, what happened?"

"Enough. Get away from here fast. Maybe the man who fired at me will call the police anonymously. I—Listen." A siren died away in the distance. "There are radio cars closing in. Head into the next driveway or turn off the road and park. Shut off your lights."

Carol quickly obeyed. The Black Bat squirmed around, watching the highway

until he saw two radio cars whisk past. Then Carol backed out and stepped up speed toward the city.

"I don't know who did the shooting," the Black Bat told her, more at ease now. "Before I had a chance to turn around, he was firing. Then he departed in considerable haste. Maybe he heard that the Black Bat can see at night. At any rate, he's gone. There was a telephone call though. The darndest thing you ever heard."

you could only tell what happened, find out what that phone call meant—"

"I know, but I can't. Head for home. Silk is probably having nightmares trying to fend off McGrath and Archer. And, Carol, there's a woman mixed up in this. I'll probably need your help when I track her down."

"My dish." Carol spoke with satisfaction. "Just give me the orders, Tony."

It was almost dawn when she pulled up, and the Black Bat darted from the



SILK

"That's what he was after then—the phone call?" Carol queried.

"Undoubtedly. It was a woman on the wire. She said, word for word, 'I did as you suggested. There isn't a trace of anything wrong and anyway, he would never notice.'"

"Odd," Carol mused. "What did she mean?"

"I wish I knew," the Black Bat sighed. "At any rate, we've got them on the run and I'm surer than ever that this is all a plot. Against me. It may be gangland's big effort to get me out of the D. A.'s office, or an attempt on the part of someone who is afraid of me to remove me as an obstacle."

"It's aimed at Tony Quinn," Carol agreed. "We can be certain of that. If

car to the garden gate. A moment later, he was in the lab. There was a panel of colored lights to warn if any phone calls came and were unanswered, or if anyone besides Silk was in the house. The board was dark.

The Black Bat quickly stripped off his regalia, put on the tweeds of Tony Quinn and entered the library through the hidden door. It was pitch-dark.

Silk's voice came out of the gloom.

"You've been gone a long time, sir. Archer phoned about ten times. The last time he all but threatened to hang me. McGrath came, too, but he was reasonable, said he didn't blame you for feeling sick over the whole thing. He went away nice and polite."

Quinn chuckled.

"Perhaps he was giving me a chance to operate as the Black Bat. Well, I operated, and with some results. Two people tried to kill me."

"The best news I've heard yet," Silk declared fervently. "As a rule, any attempt to kill you is deplorable, but in this case it shows somebody is after your hide."

"There's a woman with a nice voice mixed up in it too, Silk. How or why I don't know, but I'll try to find out. Nothing new?"

Silk hesitated.

"Well, you might as well know, sir," he said. "The morning papers are out and full of it. The *Examiner* is running a full column editorial written by Arthur King. You know how he hates and fights you. That column borders on the libelous."

"I'll read it for breakfast," Quinn yawned. "King is a pretty vindictive fellow. He doesn't dislike me for any particular reason except that he has always contended a blind man has no place in the office of the District Attorney, but I got in anyway. He's never forgotten, and ever since he has looked for an opportunity to ride me."

"I wonder," Silk half-whispered, "if he hated you enough to cause all this? Sounds crazy, I know, but King doesn't stop at much to get his own ends."

Quinn rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"It's something to mull over, Silk," he admitted. "In fact, King once threatened to get me in one way or another. His newspaper has been catering to crooks so much I've wondered if it could be subsidized by the criminal element who want to have their own man elected to office. Through King, these underworld elements may be starting a campaign. We shall see. Right now, I'm going to bed."

QUINN passed close by Silk and punched him lightly on the chest. With a reassuring laugh that Quinn hoped sounded as though it came from the heart, he climbed the stairs to his bedroom. He turned on no lights, naturally. He needed none and anyway he was supposed to be asleep in bed.

He was tired, too, and in the morning he would need to have every faculty alert. He stepped into pajamas, ran a hand across his chin, and decided to

shave in the morning. He was aware that his head did ache badly, and not from excitement. He was used to that, the headache came from those long moments of actual worry.

He entered the bathroom. The door was almost closed and he frowned. He had left it wide open. Silk must have been up here.

Quinn swung the medicine cabinet door back, reached inside for toothbrush and dental cream. Then he sniffed. There was a sweetish odor in the air. Like faint perfume. A man possessed of only average smelling sense might not have detected it, but it was there. Quinn took down a can of talcum. The odor didn't match that in the bathroom.

He shrugged and decided he must have been dreaming. He brushed his teeth, drank some water and decided to take a headache pill. His hand reached up automatically for the bottle which always stood in a certain position on the third shelf. During his long period of blindness, Quinn had acquired the habit of being extremely careful about bottles and pills.

He dumped a pill into his hand, and then he gasped. Through the darkness he read the label. The pills in this bottle were a poisonous disinfectant. Looking up, he studied the array of bottles. The headache pills had been moved to the spot formerly occupied by the poison.

Like a flash of lightning the voice on the telephone came back to him: "I did as you suggested. There isn't a trace of anything wrong and anyway he would never notice."

Notice what? That the bottles had been exchanged? That a man in Quinn's position might naturally feel the need of a headache pill before this case went much further, if not this very night? And who wouldn't notice anyhow? A blind man, who couldn't see that there had been an exchange of bottles?

There, in the darkness, fine beads of perspiration formed on Quinn's forehead. This was a deliberate attempt to poison him. Whoever had entered the house must have done so with a key. That meant a first-class crook, well-versed in the science of locks. A burglar who used face powder. The woman on the wire!

It would have worked so easily. Quinn

would swallow poison and perhaps die before he could summon aid. The thing would be quickly construed as an accident, with plenty of mental reservations. Quinn might be well expected to take his own life after the ghastly mistake he was supposed to have made. And do it in such a fashion as to make the deed look like an accident.

Tony Quinn carefully inspected his bedroom for more booby-traps, then checked the whole floor. He didn't bother Silk. The man needed sleep too.

Quinn finally slid between cool sheets, lay on his back, eyes wide open and with no pretense of being the eyes of a blind man. He stared into the darkness, trying to sort out the weird things that had happened in the last several hours.

Then he fell asleep quite peacefully.

CHAPTER VII

Deadline



THE NEXT day was a nightmare. District Attorney Archer came to Quinn's office and made a formal demand that Quinn resign. It was hard to take after all those years of service, during which Quinn's record had been spotless. But this case of the unjust execution of John Todd had created a maelstrom. The Examiner, especially, was vehement in its castigation of Tony Quinn and resolutely demanded that he be discharged.

Quinn refused to resign.

"This thing hasn't been fully investigated as yet, and until it is, I'm sticking," he told Archer. "You can exert your prerogative and fire me if you choose, but should this affair turn out differently than you expect, it may be you who'll begin taking it on the chin."

"Turn out differently?" Archer scoffed. "Quinn, how could it be any different? John Todd was convicted upon what seems to be nothing more than circumstantial evidence. There wasn't enough evidence to warrant your demand for a first-degree murder conviction."

"The judge and jury thought so,"

Quinn said mildly.

"The judge and jury!" Archer shrugged. "You know as well as I do that the power of oratory sways them. Especially a jury. And you're gifted with the ability to make twelve people believe anything. Tell me, how do you think anything else will come out of this except what has come out already? What are you driving at?"

"I'm not sure," Quinn said slowly. "However, I'm still convinced that Todd murdered his uncle. Alvin either lied or he was mistaken. That angle is as dead as Alvin right now, because death sealed his lips. Things have occurred with such finality, Archer, that they seem to be part of some plan."

"Plan for what?" Archer was becoming irritable.

"For discrediting me. I have many enemies, some of them big and some small, but they'd all delight in seeing me kicked out of office. Take that hunter, Cowan. He switched testimony only after Todd had been executed. Prior to that, he pointed a finger straight at Todd and solemnly swore he was the murderer. Todd's lawyer couldn't break him down and he tried hard enough. Why not? Because Cowan really was certain that the man he saw was Todd."

Archer shrugged.

"Quinn, I don't pretend to understand what's in your mind," the D.A. said. "Yet I have a duty to perform, whether I like it or not. Unless you present positive proof that John Todd murdered his uncle—within the next forty-eight hours—I'll be compelled to demand your resignation. If I do less, I'll be criticized as badly as you. That's final. Good day."

He marched out of Quinn's office. Silk emerged from an anteroom from which he had heard everything. His face was grim.

"I'd like to go back to my old confidence game and take him proper," he said sourly. "He needs to have that ego of his deflated."

"Forty-eight hours," Quinn said. "I wonder if I can do it? So far, we haven't much to go on. Just a mysterious woman's voice on the telephone, and an attempt to kill me."

"They go together," Silk said. "Maybe it was a trap. The killer saw you in the house and arranged the phone call to get

you in line with his gun."

"I'm not referring to that attempt, Silk. There was another. Sometime, while you and I were busy in Alvin's hotel room, a woman entered our house and rearranged bottles of medicine in my cabinet so that if I were really blind, I should have taken a poisonous pill instead of a headache tablet."

"Entered the house?" Silk gasped.

"I detected the odor of perfume or scented face powder. She closed the bathroom door part way after leaving, and the odor remained. This morning I examined the front door lock. There were a few faint scratches, as if several keys had been tried and one or two of them hadn't fit at all, and had slipped along the metal framework of the lock."

Silk sat down heavily.

"But for anybody to get by that lock with a key means one thing, sir. The lock is rather special. The only way a key could be worked on it is by testing, filing and testing again. That takes somebody trained in the art of house-breaking. And a woman—"

"I know, Silk," Quinn nodded. "It puzzles me, too. Except for John Todd's cousin, there isn't a woman involved. Furthermore, it means we must be mighty careful. The house may be under observation and if an intruder should ever stumble upon the entrance to the lab, it's all off as far as we're concerned."

"What a time for something like that to happen!" Silk groaned. "Imagine how they'd play it up now if they discovered you're the Black Bat! The *Examiner* would really go to work on you."

"It has me worried," Quinn confessed. "Now there's a time limit set. So we cannot afford to waste a moment. Get in touch with Butch and Carol. Have them go over Alvin's car, in the garage behind his home, and take it apart if necessary. I want to know if it has been used recently and they are especially to look for fingerprints of a small boy. It's a gray sedan—like the one Todd used in killing his uncle—and a gray sedan was involved in the kidnaping of Kip Evans. Tell Carol and Butch to meet us in the lab early this evening."

SILK turned toward the outer door. "I'll call from outside," he said. "We got to be most careful now."

"And hurry back," Quinn cautioned. "It's mid-afternoon already and we've things to do. Foremost of which is a visit to the home of John Todd. I want to see how his two sons and his two cousins react."

"That's one visit we won't enjoy, sir," Silk paused on his way to the door to say. "But I suppose it's necessary. I'll be back in ten minutes."

While Silk was gone, Quinn had a visitor. Arthur King, publisher of the *Examiner*, was announced. King stalked into the office. He was a tall scarecrow of a man with a rough manner and a high sense of his importance and power. He didn't sit down at Quinn's suggestion.

"No, thanks," he rejected the polite offer. "I'll stand, because I don't intend to stay but a moment. You know what I think of you, Quinn. Not personally, but as a member of the District Attorney's staff. An important member."

"Your newspaper editorials are read to me." Quinn inclined his head gently. "I do know your attitude, Mr. King."

"Then you can realize that I'm going to fight until you're thrown out of office. It's been my everlasting contention that a blind man cannot take on such a responsibility. A man bereft of his sight should recognize the fact that he is no longer capable of functioning in such an important post. Today's editorial will show that if you'd been able to see, you would have known enough to distrust the witnesses who helped murder John Todd."

"All right," Quinn said. "You're entitled to print anything you like about me so long as it is merely an opinion—or the solid truth. But why come here to tell me when I could have it all read to me for a mere nickel?"

"Because I'm handling this thing myself," snapped King. "It's that important. I'm my own reporter and, as such, I'm here for an interview. All I desire is an answer to one question. What action has been taken to put you out of office?"

Quinn grinned.

"I was asked to resign," he answered. "I refused. I was then given forty-eight hours to prove that John Todd was legally and rightfully executed as the result of honest and correct testimony."

"Forty-eight hours, eh? That's twice too long. What do you intend to do about it?"



CAROL

"Prove that John Todd was a murderer. I proved it once. I shall try to do so again. This time so it will stick, no matter how many people come forward and claim to have killed Wilbur Stone."

"Great!" King approved with scornful heartiness. "It will make excellent reading. Thank you—and I wish you good luck."

"Yes, you do," Quinn chuckled. "Oh, Mr. King, do you mind if I ask a question?"

KING turned around as he neared the door:

"Ask away. I'll answer anything I can."

"Who are you going to run for D.A. at the next election? You know that if I'm thrown out, Archer won't last either. There'll be a clear field, and I was merely wondering whom Pete Conroy wanted you to back."

King's face started to grow pink at the jowls and the color kept mounting. His hands clenched tightly as if he were trying to resist an impulse to lash out at this blind man.

"Pete Conroy," King finally said, "is a crook. I do not associate with people of his type. He does not give me orders as

to whom I should or should not back. Your statement is libelous."

"Sue me," Quinn encouraged easily. "Pete Conroy would give his left arm to get me out of office, so that his various branches of crime could flourish. He's routed elections before, but he always needs backing. Someone to front for him. I just wondered, that's all. Good afternoon, Mr. King."

THE DOOR slammed hard enough to make the glass half of it rattle dangerously. Quinn didn't laugh at King's anger. This had ceased to be a laughing matter long ago, though he tried hard to keep up a good front. He had struck pay dirt with that accusation. King was being egged on by Conroy.

Quinn gave considerable thought to the idea of Pete Conroy arranging all these matters to force Quinn out of office. It was in his line to try something like this, especially since every other move he had ever made had failed miserably.

With his own men in the D. A.'s office, Conroy could throw open his gambling houses and other such places, smash his way into all sorts of legal undertakings, and make them give a profit to him. Conroy had millions at stake, and whatever

lay behind this attempt to make an idiot out of Quinn was motivated by greed.

A scheme like this was costly and dangerous, hardly the work of someone who merely hated Quinn, or even feared him.

CHAPTER VIII

Booby-Trap



PHONE call from Captain McGrath interrupted Quinn's train of thought. McGrath was chuckling good-naturedly.

"Can you imagine what happened, Tony?" he asked at once. "Last night the Black Bat moved in. Yes, sir, he scared the

living daylight out of Cowan. So you have him on your side now. If you run across him, tell him for me that I'm bowing out of my determination to catch him. Just for the present though."

"He'll undoubtedly appreciate that," Quinn said grimly. "Anything else that's new?"

"I got a report on the autopsy on Alvin. The medical examiner's office is listing it as a clear-cut suicide. No traces of drugs or violence of any kind."

"Then that's out," Quinn grunted. "Thanks, Mac. I'll get in touch with you if anything develops. Incidentally I've been granted forty-eight hours to clear myself or quit."

McGrath's language at that point became a trifle strong. He had definite opinions of District Attorney Archer, and expressed them. He was still mumbling as he hung up.

When Silk returned, Quinn was ready to leave. The Special D.A. stared moodily ahead while Silk drove to the Long Island home of the late Wilbur Stone.

Silk broke in on his thoughts.

"Say," Silk asked, "did it occur to you that the house where Stone lived was also the residence of John Todd, and that the place isn't far from Alvin's home? No more than three-quarters of a mile."

"I realize that, Silk. It probably means nothing."

Silk pulled into the circular driveway in front of Wilbur Stone's elaborate

residence, got out and helped Quinn to alight. He led him up the steps and onto the porch.

A stately-looking woman opened the door, and her rather severe features became brooding and dark.

"Mr. Quinn, the man who sent my cousin to an unjust death," she said. "Why did you come here? Haven't you tortured us enough?"

"It's Miss Ridgely, isn't it?" Quinn parried. "I want to talk to you—and the others. Official business."

She tossed her head.

"Which means if we refuse to let you enter and subject us to questioning, you will send the police. Very well, it seems there is nothing I can do to stop you. Come in."

Silk led Quinn into a large living room and helped him into a chair. Eve Ridgely disappeared for a few moments. When she returned, her lanky brother, Philip, was with her.

"It's Philip Ridgely, sir," Silk explained supposedly for Quinn's benefit. "John Todd's two sons are not here."

"They will be down directly," Philip Ridgely said. "What do you want with us, Quinn? I thought by this time you'd be locked up for the crime you have committed."

"Please," Quinn said patiently. "I didn't come here to argue. I know you have reason to dislike and even abuse me, but I have a duty to perform."

"Duty?" Eve Ridgely snapped. "I think you used that expression when you told the jury how you hated asking them to send my cousin to his death. Duty, indeed. I've had enough. I refuse to take any part in this fiasco."

She stalked out of the room. Quinn was frowning slightly and doing his best to associate her voice with that of the woman who had so mysteriously phoned the Alvin home the night before. There appeared to be little similarity.

Philip Ridgely sat down primly.

"Make this as fast as you can, please," he said coldly. "What do you wish to know?"

"During the early dawn hours of the day Wilbur Stone was killed, where were you and your sister?" Quinn said flatly.

Ridgely's eyes opened wide and a faint element of fear came over his face.

"Are you trying to connect me with the death now?" he demanded. "Aren't

you satisfied with sending John to the electric chair? Is it your intention to send another person there too? I refuse to answer questions of that nature, Mr. Quinn."

"It's your privilege, sir. I can see that we shall get no cooperation here."

Quinn had begun to arise when two pairs of feet clattered down the staircase in the hall. The two people who had the most cause to hate Tony Quinn came into the room.

JOHN TODD'S sons were not much alike in appearance. Stan, the elder, was slightly overweight and wore shell-rimmed glasses that gave him an owlish appearance.

Dean Todd was wide-shouldered, thick-necked, and looked hard, with a veneer of polish however. He stepped up to Quinn, extended his hand, then grinned sheepishly when he recalled that those dead eyes were blind.

"We're glad to see you, Mr. Quinn," he said. "Please sit down again. Don't pay any attention to Eve or Philip. They're just bitter about the whole thing."

"And aren't you?" Quinn asked in surprise.

"Well, we didn't exactly enjoy this, but it wasn't your fault. John Todd was my father, and Stan's. Maybe we ought to hate you, but we talked it over at considerable length. You see, no man could have made such a speech to a jury without being firmly convinced my father was a murderer. That means you honestly believed he was. And those witnesses seemed sincere enough too. You almost had us wondering if—if Dad hadn't been rightfully sentenced."

"That's a lot of nonsense," Philip Ridgely put in angrily.

"Shut up, Phil," Stan Todd said curtly. "Dean and I are old enough to know what we're doing. Mr. Quinn, I agree with my brother. A dreadful mistake has been made, but it wasn't your fault. Not entirely. It was the fault of so many factors that no one should be blamed."

"Thank you," Quinn said sincerely. "I'll admit I did not expect such consideration."

"About that question Philip so foolishly refused to answer," Dean said. "I'll tell you. The morning Wilbur was killed, Philip was right here in the

house. Eve had gone to the city the day before to spend the night. Stan and I were here also. Does that satisfy you, Mr. Quinn?"

"Yes, and thanks. If your father died unjustly, I'm terribly sorry to have been involved. Perhaps before this is all over, you may wish it had never begun. I'm warning you, fairly, that I shall try to prove your father actually did murder Wilbur Stone. If I can't, I'll be the first to admit my error."

Stan Todd looked startled.

"I—don't know what to say to that, Mr. Quinn," he said slowly. "Naturally, we've all been terribly affected by what has happened. There was some relief when we learned that Dad was innocent. Now you don't intend to let that new verdict stand."

"Who can blame him?" Dean Todd said hotly. "Quinn has every right and every reason to prove his handling of the trial was fair and just. I'd do the same if I were in his position. Anyway, Dad is dead. Proving him innocent can't bring him back. Proving him guilty can no longer harm him, and after what we went through so far, a little more won't hurt us either. Go to it, Quinn, though I'm afraid I can't wish you luck."

"Gentlemen," Quinn said, "I'm really amazed by your attitude. Yet it is very welcome because you two, the children of the man I'm accused of sending unjustly to the chair, above all should fight anything I might do to further the proof of your father's guilt. Instead of that, I find you willing to help me. I almost wish I didn't have to go through with this."

"But you do, for your own sake," said Dean Todd. "And, frankly, Mr. Quinn, we'd like to know the whole truth, too. Dad had an ungovernable temper. We do, too, though we try hard to keep it down. It is logical to believe that he might have become so angry over something that he did kill Wilbur. Mind you, we don't believe it, but the whole thing is possible."

Quinn signaled Silk who took his arm immediately.

"I may have to call on you again," the Special D. A. said. "There are certain strange ramifications to all this with which I'm not at all satisfied."

"Come any time," Stan said. "We're usually home."

I OUTSIDE, in the car, Silk exhaled slowly.

"That was the darnedest thing I ever went through," he finally commented. "What do you think of it, sir?"

"I don't exactly know. Those two boys—they're men, really, because the younger is twenty-six—acted so oddly that it almost seemed to be forced. Philip and Eve were righteously angry and behaved as normal people would."

"Why did you go there in the first place?" Silk wanted to know.

"Mainly to size them up at close range. The question I asked wasn't just an excuse either. I actually wanted to know where those people were at the time Wilbur Stone was killed. You see, Silk, I'm now rather convinced that John Todd had assistance in the murder. Whoever helped him, is now intent upon proving him innocent and hang the cost. Why? That's what I want to know."

"I never considered it from that angle," Silk said. "I thought it was just your enemies behind it."

"Perhaps you're right. Both theories could be correct, with the two elements working together. I wonder how Carol and Butch made out with Alvin's car? We've got to find a clue somewhere. The conspirators have Kip Evans, a helpless twelve-year-old boy, in their hands. No telling what they'll do to eliminate him as a possible witness in my favor."

During the remainder of the ride back to town, Quinn was silent and busy with his thoughts. Reaching home, Silk drove around to the rear of the house, used the back entrance, and pulled up before the garage. It had been raining hard for half an hour. The ground was wet and spongy.

Quinn climbed out of the car, tapped his way with the white cane he carried and gave no indication that he was anything but a totally blind man. Ever since the strange attempt on his life, he was extremely wary of being observed.

As customary he didn't wait for Silk to put the car in the garage, but continued along the path alone. He had a key to the rear door.

Halfway along the path, Quinn's steps faltered. Through the darkness and the rain, his eyes swept the ground before him and saw the wire when he was still some distance away from it.

It was a plain electric light wire, ap-

parently blown off its insulators. The wire which led from the house to the garage. Now it had sagged until part of it lay directly across the path, so that anyone who could not see was bound to stumble upon it.

Perhaps the wire only carried a mild load of electricity and was harmless under ordinary circumstances, but now the ground was soaking wet. It would form a connection and, at the least, cripple the person who came into contact with it. The wire was supposed to be insulated, but Quinn's eyes saw that the insulation had been stripped away.

It was another subtle trap for him. Apparently whoever wanted his life, didn't care whether the results looked like suicide or accident. Just so long as Tony Quinn died.

Maybe whoever had arranged it was lurking somewhere in the darkness waiting and watching!

CHAPTER IX

Start of a Trail



REALIZING what he was up against, Tony Quinn broke out in a cold sweat. If he deliberately avoided the wire and there was an audience, suspicion would arise at once that he was not blind. And yet, he couldn't possibly risk bungling

into the wire. There was only one thing to do.

Quite deliberately, although there was no sign of this, Quinn tripped on one of the calcimined rocks lining the edge of the path. He seemed to be thrown off balance and fell forward with his arms outflung. Fingers missed the dangerous wire by no more than an inch.

Silk came running up and bent to help Quinn. As he arose, Quinn whispered news of the menace confronting them. Silk promptly carried out his part to perfection.

"I shouldn't have let you go ahead, sir," he said, quickly apologetic. "Now look what happened. You're covered with mud. Better come back to the garage and let me wipe some of it off you."

[Turn to page 38]

TERRY TRAPPED THE ALIEN SMUGGLERS AND THEN . . .

HURRYING TO REACH HER UNCLE'S CAMP ON LAKE MURON BEFORE DARK, BETTY ADAMS STUMBLES UPON MYSTERIOUS DOINGS IN WATKINS COVE



HERE'S YOUR CUT, CORBETT... THREE HUNDRED BUCKS. GUIDE 'EM TO TONY'S SHACK AND YOU'RE THROUGH

OKAY, LOUIE. ANOTHER LOAD TOMORROW NIGHT?

HANDS UP!



YOU CAN SEE WHY I HAD TO COVER YOUR MOUTH . . . ONE PEEP WOULD HAVE SPOILED OUR SHOW

GRACIOUS! AND THE "SIGNALER" IS YOUR MAN!



SENATOR CONGDON'S CAMP, MISS? WHY YOU'RE THREE MILES OUT OF YOUR WAY

COME BACK TO BORDER PATROL HEADQUARTERS AND I'LL DRIVE YOU OVER



DO YOU MIND IF I USE YOUR PHONE? UNCLE HARRY MAY BE WORRIED

GO RIGHT AHEAD. MEANWHILE, IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME, I'LL CLEAN UP



THIS BLADE'S A HONEY... THREE DAYS' WHISKERS GONE LIKE MAGIC!

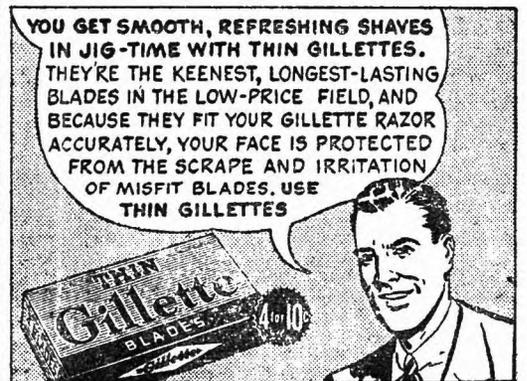
THIN GILLETTES ARE PLENTY KEEN AND EASY SHAVING, TERRY



WHY, UNCLE, DO YOU KNOW MR. CORBETT?

KNOW HIM? WHY MAJOR CORBETT WAS MY BEST INTELLIGENCE OFFICER!

I'D BEEN PLANNING TO VISIT YOU AFTER I CRACKED THIS CASE, COLONEL . . . I MEAN SENATOR



YOU GET SMOOTH, REFRESHING SHAVES IN JIG-TIME WITH THIN GILLETTES. THEY'RE THE KEENEST, LONGEST-LASTING BLADES IN THE LOW-PRICE FIELD, AND BECAUSE THEY FIT YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR ACCURATELY, YOUR FACE IS PROTECTED FROM THE SCRAPE AND IRRITATION OF MISFIT BLADES. USE THIN GILLETTES

"A good idea," Quinn laughed. "I thought I knew that path too well to veer off it. Let me have your arm, Silk."

They returned to the garage where Silk proceeded to wipe off the dirt. They stood close by the big wide-open doors of the garage and Quinn's eyes tried to locate some sign of a lurking killer. Once he cocked his head as if to listen intently.

"Someone just went over the fence into the next yard," he whispered to Silk. "All I hope is that I made the fall genuine enough. If many more of these booby-traps are laid for me and I avoid them, whoever is responsible will become suspicious."

"Just to make certain, sir," Silk said, "when we head for the house, I'll discover that wire."

Silk went to one of the two cars in the garage and took a gun out of a glove compartment. He thrust this into his belt and kept his free hand on the butt. He led Quinn up to the wire, made his discovery and helped Quinn step over the menace. Inside the house, Silk made a quick but thorough survey of the premises. There was no sign of an entry.

Quinn changed clothes and went to the library where Silk fussed around as an excuse to talk.

"I saw enough of that wire to know it couldn't be an accident," he said. "The part that went over the path was stripped bare."

"It wasn't done with the finesse of switching medicine bottles," Quinn conceded, "but I'll swear the few steps I heard were those of a woman. I'm fairly certain also that I heard the swish of a dress."

"That Eve Ridgely is vindictive enough to try something like this," Silk observed.

"True, but I find it hard to believe." Quinn shook his head. "In the first place, she certainly couldn't be bribed to help a killer. Wilbur Stone left them all a large estate. And she just doesn't seem the type, though I've been fooled before in trying to type people. See if Carol and Butch have arrived yet."

Silk left the room and went to the kitchen where there was a hidden signal arranged to indicate the presence of anyone in the lab. The signal was dark. He returned to report that apparently they had not arrived yet.

"That's strange," Quinn frowned. "Their job shouldn't have taken this long. I wonder if they got on the track of Kip Evans."

"Or blundered into a lot of trouble," Silk added ominously. . . .

He might have been prophetic, for at that moment Butch and Carol were in the midst of plenty of trouble, but due to their own alertness and courage they were not the ones who were on the receiving end.

It had been late afternoon when the two had arrived in the Long Island neighborhood where Ray Alvin had lived.

Reaching his estate, they slipped around to the back and Butch forced the garage door.

They stepped inside and closed it quickly behind them. Carol drew a flashlight from her handbag, clambered into the car and began poking around, looking for a clue.

Butch studied the motor and looked at the oil rod. This car was supposed to have been in this garage and not in use for seven months. It was dusty, all right, but the oil in the crankcase should have been thicker. The battery had not run down, either, for the lights were quite strong.

"You can't tell me this wagon hasn't been used lately," Butch said, as he thrust a head into the tonneau where Carol was at work. "Somebody's had it out."

Carol thrust back the seat cushion which she had raised. She sat down and held her open hand toward Butch, palm upward.

"Jackpot," she said triumphantly. "That's an agate in my hand. One of those things kids play marbles with. Kip Evans, believing he was being adopted, would have packed along all the possessions he could carry, and I think this agate was in his pocket. What would a grown man like Ray Alvin be doing with marbles?"

"Unless Alvin took some other kid for a little spin before all this started," Butch said. "Heck, that's too much to believe. Sure Kip was in this car."

"Go outside," Carol said, "and study any tire marks on the driveway. Keep down, so the hedge hides you. Don't spend too much time at it. You might be seen."

WHILE Butch complied with this request, Carol continued searching the car, but she found nothing more. There were no signs of fingerprints, another highly suspicious feature. She was waiting just inside the door when Butch came back.

"There are marks all right," he said. "This bus was driven out and back just once. It's got pretty good tires, and the tread marks still show a little."

"Then we must assume that this car was used in taking Kip away from the orphanage," Carol reasoned. "Now, of course, it's highly possible that Kip was taken some distance before the car was returned, or he was brought back here in it. With the first idea, we can do nothing. The second can certainly be acted upon."

"How?"

"If Kip was brought here—and you say there are no marks of any other car on the driveway—then his destination was somewhere in this vicinity. Perhaps he is being held close by. Butch, we're going to make a little tour."

"But gosh, Carol," Butch objected, "we can't just barge around searching people's houses."

"I don't intend to. They'd hardly dare risk moving Kip far. By the time they reached this garage, he must have been growing aware that it was all part of some trick. Of course they could have doped him, or hit him hard enough to knock him out but, even so, it's dangerous carrying around an unconscious boy. Especially one connected with Tony's case and whose escape from the orphanage might bring close police attention. That's also the reason why I doubt they took him far. Let's amble around."

They left the premises and walked down along the back of the estate. Behind it was high grass of an open field and beyond that, a fairly thick clump of trees.

They entered the coolness of the shade and discovered a narrow, rather well-worn path.

Half a mile along this, they came upon a small cabin. It was more like a shack than a cabin, but habitable.

It was dusk now and the yellow light of oil-lamps was flickering through the windows.

"Follow my lead, Butch," Carol said. "Stay in the background if you can. Act

like a chauffeur or something. I'm going into this shack. If Kip is there, be prepared for trouble."

"Prepared?" Butch grunted. "Heck, I'm looking for it."

They went up to the door and Carol rapped hard on the rough panel. The door opened instantly and a hungry-looking man with a black patch over one eye, glared at them.

"Whaddye want," he demanded.

"I'm looking for a little boy," Carol said, and watched the man intently for signs of guilt. She saw none.

"Ain't no kids around here. Ain't nobody. I don't like people. Go away."

"Just a moment," Carol said quickly, as the door began to close. "It's my little boy. I live up the road a bit. He wandered off. He's lost. Perhaps you heard him crying."

"I ain't heard a thing. Women ought to take better care of their brats."

HE BEGAN closing the door again, and Butch came forward.

"Wait a minute," Butch said harshly. "Be careful what you call that boy." He glanced at Carol. "Ma'am, this man acts funny to me. Maybe he's a kidnaper. I think we ought to take a look inside his place."

The one-eyed man promptly popped back into the house and reappeared with a brand new rifle. As he started to raise it, Butch stepped through the door. One massive arm shot out to grasp the man by the throat. The other took a grip on the rifle, and with one twist tore it free. Butch threw the gun on the filthy bed in the single room.

"Me," he grunted, "I don't like having guns poked at me. I ought to break your jaw."

He let go and the one-eyed man fled toward a corner of the shack.

"You can't come in here!" he chattered. "It's against the law. I had a right to shoot you!"

"One more word and you won't talk again for a month!" Butch roared.

Carol was hastily searching the place. She was about to give it all up as a bad hunch when she spotted the cap hanging on the back of a chair. It was too small to be a man's cap. She promptly picked it up.

"This looks like the cap my son wore." She waved it toward the one-eyed man.

"I'd like an explanation, or I shall call the police."

"I found that cap a long time ago," the one-eyed man snarled. "Is it a crime to keep something you find? Go on and call the cops. I ain't done nothing."

"Let's go," Carol said, and tucked the cap into her handbag.

THEY filed through the door and Butch pulled it shut. A dozen steps along the path, Butch turned and darted back toward the house.

He flattened himself against the wall beside the door.

It opened cautiously. The one-eyed man saw Carol walking away. He had the rifle again. Now he brought it to his shoulder. The gun was still wavering, in the act of being sighted, when Butch leaped.

He yanked the gun away, shoved the man back into the shack and hit him once. Bones crunched from that blow and the one-eyed man dropped heavily. Butch bent over him for a moment or two then, with the rifle stuck under his arm, he hurried out to catch up with Carol.

"I wanted to do that when I first laid eyes on him," he said contentedly. "So I did."

"What?" Carol asked, and then grimaced. "As if I didn't know. You broke his jaw, Butch. All right, he had it coming. That was a smart move on your part to figure he was going to shoot at us. I think he meant only to scare us, but I don't like being scared with bullets. I see you took the gun."

"Yeah—and something else." Butch showed Carol a roll of bills. "There's hardly anything to eat in that shanty and no clothes except what he wears on his back. But this is a brand new rifle and worth a lot of money. So I searched him and I found this. Sixty bucks. Looks like the change from a hundred dollars after he bought the rifle."

"That's interesting," Carol said. "I wonder what Tony will make of it. We'd better get back. It's dark, and starting to rain."

"Just the same," Butch said, "we didn't do so bad for an afternoon's work."

"If that boy's cap can be traced, we did a lot, Butch," Carol answered. "Hurry! It's going to come down hard in a few minutes."

Home Work



HASTENING to where they had left the car, Carol and Butch were soon on their way to Quinn's laboratory.

They made a quick trip of it and, reaching the Quinn home they entered the lab without being seen. Carol closed a switch which would signal Silk they

had arrived.

Tony Quinn promptly entered the lab and Carol told him exactly what had occurred.

"Good work," he commended.

He took the cap and carried it over to the lab bench. There he placed it beneath a strong light and turned it inside out. Carefully he looked for hair and found one short piece.

"It looks about the same color as I remember Kip's to be," he said. "I'm convinced the boy was held in that shack and by that one-eyed man. We'll get to him later. At the moment I have more work for both of you. Arthur King, as you probably know, is publisher of the *Examiner*, and if you've had time to read it, you know that he is riding me pretty hard."

"I read it," Carol said, jaw tightening. "It's like hitting a man when he's down."

Quinn shrugged.

"Anything is fair in the game of politics," he commented. "It's my opinion that King is tied up, somehow, with an underworld boss named Pete Conroy. Maybe financially, or perhaps Conroy has something on King. Anyhow, Conroy doesn't like our present administration. He dipped into politics some time ago, and has tried to get his own people in office. Which would mean Conroy's illegal enterprises would be wide open."

"And you want us to find out if there is a connection?" Carol asked.

"Butch had better handle it," Quinn amended. "So, Butch, get on Arthur King's tail and watch him. Find out who he talks to, who comes to his office and where he goes. Don't get involved if you can help it."

"My dish." Butch rubbed his enor-

mous hands. "I've been reading them editorials too. Now King says the State ought to pay Todd's sons a lot of money for burning him when he was innocent."

"That's a new development," Quinn answered as he frowned. "King would think of something like that. However, if Todd was unjustly executed, I'd back up even a man like King. The two Todd boys, I understand, get all of Todd's estate. He, in turn, must have inherited a lot of money from the uncle he killed. If he killed him."

"You sound discouraged, Tony," Carol said. "Is it as bad as that?"

"Worse." Quinn lit a cigarette and blew a column of smoke straight upwards. He left his head tilted back like that as he spoke. "I'm fishing without any bait. Maybe I haven't even got a sinker on my line—perhaps not even a line. The people I suspect aren't such great candidates for scheming a plot to discredit me."

"King has a motive," Carol reminded him.

"True—and he wouldn't stop at much. Yet, I'd still be around and know what's going on. Opposition papers would listen to me even if I was thrown out of office. King knows I'd go on fighting him. Oh, he'd try it. We can safely assume that, but he knows his limitations—and Conroy's. It just doesn't seem to be enough."

"How about Todd's relatives, then?" Carol asked.

"Well, Eve Ridgely was especially antagonistic," Quinn told her. "A rather natural feeling, of course. She refused to talk to me. I'm wondering if she was afraid I might ask her some questions she couldn't answer. And, remember, there is a woman involved somewhere in this maze."

"The only one identified with the case is Eve," Carol said.

"Yes, I know. She and her brother have reason to hate me and try to wreck my reputation. So have Todd's two sons, even more so than the Ridgelys. But what is it going to get them? Proof that Todd was innocent? Maybe, but that's small comfort when he's already dead. No—behind all this is something else. The key to the whole thing, and it's still missing. We haven't enough to go on."

"Did you forget Leslie, the defense attorney?" Silk queried.

"No, indeed. In fact, he's your assignment, Carol. Cover him and watch everything he does. Maybe we can dig up some specific reason why Leslie might profit by proving that Todd was innocent. If Leslie is involved, bank on it, money is involved too."

"We'll report in every hour," Carol said. "Come along, Butch. One thing we musn't forget is the deadline that Archer set."

WHEN Carol and Butch had gone, Quinn went to work in his laboratory. He took the sample of dried blood which Butch had scraped off Alvin's car, put it into solution and allowed one drop to fall upon a microscope slide. He studied this, using a bloodcell-counting mesh screen. When he finally straightened up, he heaved a long sigh of despair.

"Silk," he said slowly, "you recall that there was no blood on Todd's car after the accident. Leslie dwelt on that a great deal during the trial. I maintained Todd had time to clean it off to such an extent that even modern blood-detecting apparatus would have failed to find any trace. There was only that bent fender and Todd swore he had dented it long before Wilbur Stone was run down."

"What about the blood samples you just inspected?" asked Silk. "Off Alvin's car?"

"It types with that of Wilbur Stone. I got details of his blood analysis this afternoon from the medical examiner's office. Just because these types do match is no indication or proof of Alvin's guilt because it's a common type of blood. Yet it points further to the fact that Alvin told the truth."

"Which only puts us back more than ever," Silk observed.

There was no despair in his voice, for Silk had never doubted Todd's guilt for a moment. He was, however, wondering if this scheme against Quinn was so perfect that it couldn't be broken.

Quinn went over to the telephone and called Captain McGrath at Headquarters.

"Mac," he said, when his call was answered, "I want an alarm sent out for Kip Evans, the boy who disappeared from the orphanage. I've reason to believe he was kidnapped so that his testimony couldn't be used. I also think he may be held somewhere close by. Broadcast the alarm and keep sending it out. I

want the kidnapers, if any, to hear it and be compelled to keep Kip where he is now. They won't dare lug him around if they know every cop is looking for him."

"I'll do it right away," McGrath said. "Say, I understand you paid the Ridgelys and the Todds a little visit this afternoon."

"So I did. What of it?"

"You stirred up plenty of trouble, Quinn. Seems the Ridgelys think you should be drawn and quartered while the Todd boys are sympathetic with your troubles. After you left, the four of them got into a terrific argument. It ended when the Ridgelys packed their bags and stalked out in a big huff. They're registered at the Simplex Apartment Hotel and it looks like they've broken off with the Todd boys for good."

"You can never judge what people will do," Quinn observed. "I thought the Todd boys would hate me, and the Ridgelys might try to tame down their hatred. It's the other way around now. Nothing else new, Mac?"

"Only that I got a line on those two engineers who were witnesses to the trial. I understand they can be contacted by radio and I'm making the attempt to question them that way. It will take some time though."

"Good. Keep trying, Mac, and thanks."

"I wish there was more I could do, Tony. Oh, yes, this struck me as awfully odd. Those two engineers were sought out and hired by a firm which Eve and Philip Ridgely practically own."

"That's more than odd." Quinn's eyes narrowed a trifle. "It's downright suspicious. Their removal from the scene may have been premeditated. We'll attempt to find out. Let me know as soon as you hear from them."

Quinn hung up and all the worry and care on his face was erased by that news. He had something to go on. Not much, it was true, but important. He had wondered how it happened that those two witnesses had been given assignments so far away at a time when they were so vitally needed.

And perhaps he might know more tonight, when he gave a little attention to attorney Leslie himself. . . .

At nine-thirty that night, a cheap-looking coupe drove past the suburban

home of attorney Lawton Leslie. It slowed a block away where the corner was quite dark and a black-clad figure moved away from it with such speed that even a sharp-eyed, attentive person might have believed it was nothing more than imagination. The coupe, with Silk at the wheel, continued on its way.

The Black Bat reached the rear of Leslie's home and began prowling. There were two servants in the kitchen and he avoided that side of the house. Around to the left, he peered through one lighted window.

ATTORNEY LESLIE was apparently doing some home work. Shell-rimmed glasses took the place of the more formal spectacles he flourished in court. He seemed to be deep in a mass of papers.

The Black Bat scrutinized the room carefully. There was no telephone in it. He had suspected that would be the case because Leslie had purchased the house during the war when phones had not been available. Like everyone else, he hadn't been able to get an extension from the one instrument that must be somewhere else in the house.

The Black Bat moved into the shadows and waited. From the darkness he saw the coupe coming slowly up the street. The Black Bat drew a small flashlight from his pocket, one used for signaling only. He snapped it on once, briefly. The coupe immediately picked up speed.

The Black Bat returned to the window to listen and watch. His sensitive ears detected the sound of a phone ringing somewhere in the front of the house, and a servant soon appeared to tell Leslie he was wanted on the phone. Leslie hurried out.

The Black Bat smiled. That was Silk telephoning. He would pretend to be a prospective client and keep Leslie busy for a little while, at least.

Raising the window quietly, the Black Bat slipped into the room, crossed it, and gently pulled the door shut. Then he hurried to Leslie's desk and looked at the papers on which the lawyer had been working.

At the moment, Leslie appeared to be busy drawing up a petition asking cash indemnity for the unjust execution of John Todd. The sum asked was staggering, and certainly would not be granted.

But a substantial amount might be, if the thing was handled properly and presented to a jury in the correct manner.

Also, on the desk, was a carbon copy of a bill to the two Todd boys which Leslie apparently had taken home from the office. It was merely for services rendered, but it amounted to eight thousand dollars.

The Black Bat knew this couldn't be Leslie's fee for defending their father, so something else must have come up to require his services. What had it been?

CHAPTER XI

The Initialed Key



FOOTSTEPS in the hall announced that Leslie was returning. The Black Bat slipped behind the door so that when it was opened, he would be hidden. Leslie slammed it without looking behind him, and returned to his desk.

He sat down, and for an instant, his eyes rested on the eerie figure in black. Leslie paid no attention whatsoever for about one second, and then he did the best double-take the Black Bat had ever seen.

Leslie also tried to do something else. He had a desk drawer half-open and his hand was frantically fumbling for a gun. He stopped that. Silently but eloquently, the automatic in the Black Bat's fist was a warning.

"Keep your voice down," the Black Bat cautioned. "I don't want any servants wondering if you've started talking to yourself. Put both hands flat down on your desk, lean way forward, and stay that way. Good. Now we can talk a little business."

Leslie recovered his wits promptly enough, even though an element of fear shone in his too-wide eyes.

"You're the Black Bat," he accused, "and you're helping Tony Quinn. I know you have helped him before and now I am convinced you are two of a kind. Crooks!"

A chuckle came from behind the black hood.

"I'm afraid you're off the track, Leslie.

Neither of us is a crook. Perhaps my methods are, shall we say, unusual? They get results though. Quinn, on the other hand, is a blind man who needs and deserves help. His only interest is in bringing out the full truth. If it proves he made the serious error of sending an innocent man to the chair, he is quite willing to face the consequences. Do you understand that?"

"The fact that he has retained you to help is an indication of desperation," Leslie said, with a sneer in his voice. "Of course he sent the wrong man to the chair. His eloquence convinced a jury and a judge of something which was not true. There can be such a thing as too forceful a district attorney."

"Or the defense too notoriously weak." The Black Bat laughed. "Mr. Leslie, I've come to the conclusion that it's all a neat frame-up. Created by someone who has something to gain. There are several people who would profit by Quinn's dismissal. You are one of them."

"I?" Leslie cried. "Are you accusing me of framing Quinn?"

"Not as yet. But you will profit. I read that petition to pay the Todd boys a fantastic sum as indemnity. Your cut on a thing of that kind would be at least twenty thousand dollars. Murder, my dear barrister, has been done for much less. Frame-ups have been concocted for a fraction of that sum."

"A lot of nonsense." Leslie raised his voice, but toned it down quickly when the Black Bat's automatic centered on the tip of the attorney's nose. "I haven't even propositioned the Todd boys about this. They've taken a strange attitude, as if they want to drop the whole thing so it will be forgotten."

"And you don't because there is money in it for you. What about that bill for eight thousand dollars? A lot of money, Mr. Leslie. And I know it was not for defending their father. What did you do for the Todd boys that entails such a fee?"

"None of your business. A lawyer's work is as confidential as a confessional."

"To ordinary people, Mr. Leslie," the Black Bat said. "But I'm not ordinary. What's that bill for?"

"You can't make me talk," Leslie snapped. "I object—"

"This is not a court of law," the Black

Bat said. "I can make you talk and I will, but you won't like my methods. If that bill is accounted for legally, and is for honest work you have done, why are you afraid to answer me?"

Leslie looked along the barrel of the Black Bat's gun—from the wrong end of it. He sighed.

"It's for my work in settling John Todd's estate," he said. "There wasn't much at first, but now the amount involved is large. My fee is not unusual."

"Then why didn't you say so?" The Black Bat lowered his gun a trifle. "It was a simple question, but you took so long in answering it that I wonder if you're telling the truth. Is your reluctance to talk due to the presence of someone eavesdropping?"

"Eavesdropping?" Leslie looked hurriedly around the room. "What do you mean?"

"That door on your left. Where does it lead?"

"Into a supply closet. Nobody is there. What sort of game is this?"

"Someone pulled the door tightly shut about half a minute ago, Mr. Leslie. I think you ought to have a look. Go ahead. I'll be right in back of you. My gun and I."

LESLIE gulped, arose, and walked to the door. He yanked it open. The closet was spacious and very dark. Leslie stepped gingerly into the middle of the doorway. A hand shoved the small of his back hard and he catapulted into the closet. The door closed, a key turned and the Black Bat laughed as he hurried to the window. He was through it and across the yard before Leslie summoned courage enough to begin shouting for help.

The coupe picked up the Black Bat and he made a quick replacement of the hood with his wide-brimmed black bat.

"Leslie is just intent on making as much money as possible out of this," he told Silk. "He doesn't offer us much of a lead. Consult that map Carol gave you so we can find the shack where Kip seems to have been held. I want a little talk with the one-eyed individual who lives there and has too much money and a too expensive new rifle for someone in his circumstances."

"He'll have a heck of a time talking

after what Butch did to his jaw," Silk said, grinning. "I know just about where that place is. After you pass it, you come upon a clearing and a hill. On top of this is the Dockerel Castle. Ever hear of it?"

"Yes. I understand it was built by an eccentric who had enough money to cater to his whims. I've heard the place is actually large enough to be called a castle."

"So doggone big nobody will live in it," said Silk. "Dockerel died about fifteen years ago and the place has been idle ever since. I wondered, when Carol told of the one-eyed man, if he was some kind of a watchman for the place."

"We'll find out. Keep your speed down, Silk. McGrath has patrols out hunting Kip Evans and we don't want to be stopped. While Mac has declared a truce with us, the rest of the Police Department hasn't."

Silk let the Black Bat out, turned the car around and drove onto a side road where he parked and extinguished all lights. The Black Bat found the trail to the shack, followed it, and saw that the cabin was illuminated.

He stepped up to the door and knocked. There was no answer. He tried the cheap latch and discovered the door was unlocked. He drew a gun. This could be a trap.

If the one-eyed man worked for a kidnaper and he had reported that Carol and Butch had discovered Kip's cap in the shack, a return visit by police could be expected. But the one-room shack seemed to be empty.

There was a heavy smell of cheap bacon grease, the oilstove was hot and a frying pan had even been set at the back of it. There was bacon in the pan, now fried to a charred, thin crisp. On a nearby table stood an open can of beans with an empty pan beside it.

To all appearances, the occupant of the cabin had been in the act of preparing dinner when he had been interrupted, had gone outside, and never returned. There were no signs of a struggle, so the man must have gone willingly. That pointed to a visit from whoever had paid him to hold Kip. Perhaps the one-eyed man would be coming back.

The Black Bat spied a key lying on the floor just inside the door. He picked up the massive piece of metal. It was

a strange key, like something that might have been used hundreds of years ago. The thing weighed half a pound and was elaborately wrought, with what seemed to be the letter "D" woven into the design.

The Black Bat moved quickly then. He might now have the clue for which he had been looking!

He knew exactly where the Dockerel castlelike mansion was located. The trail was dark and twisting, but as he moved

before he attempted to scale the wall. Gates were no invitation to him. They only served to outline a target or to warn of his coming.

He scaled the fence without any trouble, dropped lightly to the ground and stayed there, crouched in the darkness, while he listened intently for any telltale noises. Only the sound of night insects reached him. They had a tendency to lull him into a dangerous sense of security.



BUTCH

along it he saw things as clearly as if there were a spotlight over his shoulder.

He burst through the final fringe of forest and the castle loomed up. It was atop a hill and surrounded by a high stone fence, on the other side of which a moat might reasonably be expected. The place looked exactly like a castle in some child's book of fairy tales. There were spires and gables, oblong windows and parapets.

The Black Bat stopped at the closed gate. It was created in the same design as the key he had found in the shack. Proof that the one-eyed man must have had access to the estate, if not to the castle itself.

Moving cautiously, the figure in black made a quick half-circuit of the place

HE MANEUVERED his way close to the castle. Windows were securely boarded up. So was everything but the front door, and that stood ajar! A neat invitation. To what?

The Black Bat had his gun ready and he was using to the utmost every sense he possessed. He pushed the door open further and swept away the darkness with his strange vision. He looked into a vast reception hallway, big enough for an ice-skating rink.

There probably was not a stick of furniture in this huge white elephant of a place. Furniture could be turned into cash, where the castle was just another piece of expensive, unwanted property.

And in this empty house, where the lightest sound would have carried even

to normal ears, the Black Bat's abnormal hearing detected nothing. Shadows meant little to him.

He was certain that no one lurked anywhere within sight.

Yet he hesitated, because finding that key seemed to him to be part of a trap. It had been too conveniently dropped, and the open door suggested trouble.

Inside the place, he felt as if he had been locked in a cold dismal vault. His rubber-soled and -heeled shoes made a soft squishing sound every time he took a step. The silence was so severe it made his skin crawl, and there was a dampness that seemed to enshroud him like grave clothes.

But he went on. If anything was to be found here, he meant to find it.

The first floor was easy to search. It contained half a dozen enormous rooms, wholly barren, and a big kitchen with two old-fashioned coal-stoves. These were ice-cold.

The Black Bat returned to the reception hall and started up the straight staircase. It seemed extraordinarily steep, perhaps in keeping with the architectural period in history this place was supposed to represent. He knew there were at least two more floors, and he meant to inspect them.

Moving up the stairs, he kept close to the wall so that squeaks from the old wood might be eliminated as much as possible. Even so, he was close enough to the hand-rail to seize it when the fourth or fifth step unexpectedly gave way underfoot.

To save himself, the Black Bat threw his weight against the hand-rail. Something scraped above him. He looked quickly and without the slightest hesitation vaulted the hand-rail and landed on the floor below.

Down that staircase, as if it had been aimed, hurtled a gigantic cement urn. It hit the stairs about where he had been standing. If he had not been gifted with his extraordinary sight so that he had been able to penetrate the darkness and see that missile coming, he would have been crushed to death by it.

A shower of fragments struck him and the noise seemed greater than a pitched battle between the biggest howitzers. It seemed as though hours were required before the din died away and the castle resumed its terrible silence.

Castle of Death



UN READY, the Black Bat went up the staircase again, avoiding that treacherous step and keeping his hands off the rail. At the top he relaxed somewhat. It had been a trap, of course, but he had sprung it. Nobody had been waiting up there to topple the urn at

him.

The huge concrete object had been placed on a large flat surface of the top newel post and propped against a block of stone so that it balanced there, ready to fall with the slightest disturbance. The Black Bat shook the hand-rail. The newel post shook too, so much that he knew his own efforts to retain his balance had acted as the trigger. It was a clever, neat bit of work, and as deadly as a cobra.

Certain now that he would find something, the Black Bat began a search of the second floor. Only one door was closed, and he regarded it with studied suspicion. One trap might mean another, yet he had to see the inside of that room.

The door was equipped with a massive doorknob. His gloved hands closed around it and he turned the knob as gently as possible, using every precaution for silence. Yet the knob squealed like a cornered rat. He grunted, gave the knob a hard twist, and flung the door wide open. His gun leveled and his finger was tight against the trigger.

What he saw did not need shooting. It required burial. Hanging from one of the rafters overhead, was a body that still turned gently as twisted rope righted itself. Quinn needed only a look at the eye-patch to know that this was the man who had lived in that shack, and to find whom had offered good possibilities of discovering where Kip Evans was hidden.

The jaw, swollen from Butch's punch, gave the corpse a macabre appearance, as if the dead man were sticking out his chin belligerently.

The Black Bat surveyed the rest of the

room, then stepped closer to the body. It was still warm. The man had not been dead long, for in this clammy atmosphere, it would have cooled rapidly.

The Black Bat noticed one tightly clenched hand, raised it and pried apart the fingers with no great difficulty. They were holding a few strands of brownish hair. He held these closer to the eye-slits in his hood. The hair was gray near the roots, indicative of a dyeing job. And these were hairs from a woman's head.

Eve Ridgely's head, if the Black Bat recalled the color of her hair properly. And he had thought it looked dyed. He put these grisly souvenirs between two pieces of paper and thrust them into his pocket.

There was nothing he could do for the one-eyed man. He had sold himself for money, and had died as most people of that sort do. He had ceased to be useful and must have been a decided menace to whoever murdered him.

A further search of the place revealed nothing. Not a sign that Kip had been there, but it was such an ideal spot in which to hide a kidnaped child that the Black Bat was fairly certain Kip had been there.

Proceeding down the hallway, the Black Bat suddenly lunged to one side and his gun almost threw a bullet at the fleeting image that seemed literally to fly before him. He smiled tightly. This place was doing things to his nerves. What he had seen was only his own reflection in a full-length mirror just beyond one open door.

But he saw something else too. A fine film of pinkish substance on the floor just below the mirror. Bending, he touched the tip of his gloved finger

against the stuff. It clung and he lifted it toward his nose. This was face powder. The mysterious woman again. The Black Bat winced. He was as far from learning her identity as he was in proving that John Todd's execution had been justified.

It seemed from these two meager clues—hair clutched in the dead man's hand and the face powder—that a woman had killed him and then dutifully repaired any damage to her makeup before leaving this grim place. Such clues might easily be as false as they were disconcerting, except for that mysterious phone call to Alvin's home. That had been made by a woman.

There was nothing else to be done here. The police would have to be notified about the murder, but there wasn't even any hurry about that. Nobody could help the one-eyed victim of his own avidity.

The Black Bat left the castle and shuddered as he passed through the door. He had never in his lifetime been so glad to leave a place.

SILK was with the coupe and ready to roll. The Black Bat got in and sat in contemplative silence for a few moments while Silk maneuvered back to the highway.

"Anything of interest in that place?" Silk queried.

"A dead man," the Black Bat said. "The one-eyed man who lived in that cabin. Somebody hanged him from a rafter. The clues point straight toward the murderer as being a woman, and somewhat less directly at Eve Ridgely."

"Oho," Silk grunted. "Looks like the trail leads to Wilbur Stone's house

[Turn page]

Can't Keep Grandma In Her Chair

She's as Lively as a Youngster—Now her Backache is better

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 40 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.

Advt.

again. Where do we go from here?"

"To Stone's home. If Eve Ridgely left a comb or brush there, and some of her face powder, we'd have definite clues to work on. Let me out just this side of the place. It isn't far from here."

Once again, the Black Bat melted into the darkness and effected a stealthy entrance to a dwelling. From the front hallway, he could hear muted voices and a frequent clicking sound. He followed the trail to the source of this noise and it seemed to come from behind a closed door.

An instant later, he recognized the sound and the voices. Stan and Dean Todd were playing a game of pool. The Black Bat remembered that, during his visit here as Tony Quinn, he had noticed a pool table in the game room.

He tiptoed softly away, climbed the stairs, and looked for Eve Ridgely's former quarters.

They were easy to locate because she was the only woman who had been living in the house.

The suite of living room and bedroom she had occupied was attractively furnished in pink and gold. Obviously, Eve liked the better—and more expensive—things in life.

The Black Bat went straight to the dresser, found nothing, and turned to the vanity with a huge mirror hanging behind it. The top of the vanity was swept clean of the usual array of bottles and jars.

He opened drawers carefully. In one he found a large white comb. Clinging to the teeth were brown hairs. The Black Bat helped himself to some specimens and put them between the folds of some tissue paper he found. Then he searched further, with results sufficient to satisfy him. There was a bottle of hair dye and a box of powder that carried the identical scent impregnating the powder he had discovered in the abandoned castle.

He had enough, and it was time to leave.

When he reached the bottom of the staircase, he realized that the clicking of pool balls had stopped. Some sixth sense alerted him.

He eased the automatic out of the holster, took one more step and a gun flamed at him.

The bullet missed by perhaps a foot.

The Black Bat gave one mighty dive across the hallway for the doubtful security offered by a big high-backed chair.

There was a faint light to his left and he knew it had been sufficient to silhouette him for an instant. Now, as he watched, Dean Todd stepped cautiously out of one room, a heavy long-barreled revolver in his hand. The Black Bat took careful aim.

"Todd," he called out, "drop that gun or I'll shoot it out of your hand."

Dean Todd didn't move. His brother Stan elbowed himself a bit out of the room, to stare over Dean's shoulder. Both had ludicrous looks of complete mystification on their faces.

"It's pitch-dark where we are," Dean whispered. "He's bluffing. He can't actually see us."

"Drop the gun," the Black Bat warned again. "This time I'm not fooling. I can see you, and I heard what you whispered. At this moment, Stan has his hand on your right shoulder and he is looking over your left. Stan is wearing a gray shirt open at the neck. You, Dean Todd, have on a smoking jacket that is too big for you. It must have belonged to your father. Now—will you drop that gun!"

"W-w-who are you?" Dean Todd stammered.

STAN seemed incapable of uttering a word.

"This is the Black Bat," came out of the darkness. "I'm not looking for trouble, but I can handle it."

Instantly, Dean let go of the heavy pistol and it struck the floor with a terrific clatter.

He kicked it away.

"W-we thought you were a-a burglar," he said, in scared apology.

The Black Bat arose and came from behind the chair.

"I can't say I blame you, gentlemen. I don't announce my little visits, but you have nothing to fear from me. Upon your promise to behave, I'll put my gun away."

"Oh, we wouldn't try anything—not with you," Stan called back, and attempted a sickly laugh. "We're both too young to die."

"Good. Then suppose you go back into that room. Leave the light out. I can see in the dark like a cat."

BOTH young men retreated until the pool table stopped them. The Black Bat leaned against the framework of the doorway.

"Now that we've met," he said, "I might as well tell you I'm actively trying to prove that Tony Quinn was right when he sent your father to the electric chair. That's fair enough warning to both of you. If you want to talk, despite that fact, I have a couple of questions to ask."

"All we want is for the truth to be known," Stan cried. "If it hurts us, that's okay too. Maybe our father did kill Uncle Wilbur. We don't pretend to know. Dad had a vicious temper and, before it happened, he argued more and more with Uncle Wilbur. What do you want to know from us?"

"Your attitude is commendable," the Black Bat said warmly. "I understand that Eve and Philip left this house today."

"How in the world did you know that?" Stan asked. "We were trying to keep it hushed up."

"But they did leave."

"Oh, gosh, yes. We had a terrific row. You see, Quinn was here this afternoon. Eve wanted to throw him out. Philip was a little better mannered, but after Quinn left, he exploded. He told Dean and me that we had behaved badly, that we should resent Quinn as much as they did because he put our father in the chair. Dean and I just don't feel that way, and we said so. The argument that arose practically lifted the roof off this old house."

"It ended when Eve and Philip packed a few things and left," Dean broke in. "They said they were going to the Simplex Apartments. Anyway, they phoned to see if there was a vacant furnished suite, and there seemed to be one."

"Have you heard from them since?" the Black Bat asked.

"No," Stan answered. "In fact, we telephoned the Simplex and we were told that they'd stayed there only a couple of hours and then left, bag and baggage. We were talking it over while we played pool. Seems to us that Eve and Phil purposely called those apartments to make us think that's where they were going when they had another destination in mind all the time. They cer-

tainly must be sore at us."

"Are you quite certain that they checked out?"

"As certain as three phone calls could make us. What's it all about anyway? Why are they trying to ruin Quinn? He just did what he was paid to do."

"There are those who'd argue that point," the Black Bat said. "Did you have any visitors tonight?"

"Why—yes. Attorney Leslie dropped in. Say, were you really at his house tonight?"

"I was. Didn't he appreciate my company?"

THE two brothers laughed.

"Man alive, was he scared and sore!" Dean said. "He didn't get out of that supply closet for twenty minutes. Yelled himself hoarse."

"Why did he come here?" the Black Bat asked.

"Oh, something to do with Dad's estate. He gave us a bill for services rendered that would knock your eyes out. Maybe before this is all over, we'll have Tony Quinn working for us. Wouldn't that be something?"

"We couldn't do that," Stan objected. "It's going a bit too far."

"Tell me this," the Black Bat said. "Did Leslie at any time have occasion to go to the second floor?"

"Why, yes, he did," Stan answered. "Dad's old study is up there, and he said he wanted some papers from the desk. Knew just where they were and we didn't have to bother. That was earlier this evening, before dinner. He returned later. What in the world has the old boy been up to?"

"I wish I knew," the Black Bat sighed. "Thank you, gentlemen. I appreciate everything except the bullet that whizzed past my head."

"I'm sorry about that," Stan said. "I honestly thought you were a burglar. I wish I hadn't been so impetuous with the trigger. I might have—Dean, was that the door closing?"

"Sounded like it," Dean said. "He must have gone. Say, do you really believe he can see in the dark like he said?"

"We certainly weren't spotlighted," Stan answered. "Come on, let's finish the game. My nerves need some cooling off."

CHAPTER XIII

Three Objectives

IT WAS around midnight when Tony Quinn called a meeting in his hidden laboratory. Silk, Butch and Carol were there. Quinn puffed slowly as he spoke.

"We've been handling this with one idea in mind," he said. "That I am the sole target of the conspirators. That ruining my career

is the motive back of all this. I'm now beginning to wonder if that's all there is to it."

Butch spoke up:

"I been too busy tailing guys to know all that's happened. But the way you explain it now, this guy King who publishes that newspaper, isn't mixed up in it. That's wrong. He's swimming in the mess."

Quinn looked interested.

"I could change my mind again, Butch," he said. "I was beginning to believe that King was merely taking advantage of a situation to force me out of office, but that he did not create this trouble."

"Maybe he didn't," Butch said with emphasis, "but if you get heaved out, he sure stands to clean up. It's this way. King and Pete Conroy, who runs all the rackets, are in partnership. I ran across a couple of old pals of mine. They figured I was looking for some kind of strong-arm work and they tapped me for a job as classy bouncer. They're lining up everybody who will fill that bill, because they expect Conroy to open up all his places and run them wide. He and King have had several conferences."

"I thought there might be a connection," Quinn puffed slowly on his pipe. "King was just a shade too vindictive. He acted as though he had a lot more at stake than merely doing his civic duty. King has a motive to get me out of office. My dismissal will also wreck Archer's career, and he comes up for reelection soon. But I maintain that King and Conroy can simply be taking advantage of things that someone else began."

"They're both no good," Butch vowed. "King's a smart guy too. He could plan something like this to get rid of you. If it cost him a hundred grand, that would be cheap, because he stands to make millions if he can put it over."

"Then we won't eliminate King and Conroy," Quinn said. "Not yet. Still, we have other and brighter suspects. At the moment we can feel certain that Brad Cowan, who hunted pheasant and saw murder, has been bribed and perhaps intimidated as well. He's a weak link. We'll go to work on him soon."

"Don't forget Eve and Philip Ridgely," Carol added. "When old Wilbur Stone died, they came into a great deal of money."

"I'm not likely to forget them," Quinn said. "At the moment they have vanished. The Todd boys didn't want to make any fuss and the Ridgelys were desirous of taking fast action against me. It led to a quarrel and the Ridgelys moved out, went to a residential apartment, but didn't remain there long. Furthermore, I have some rather definite proof that Eve Ridgely either killed that one-eyed hermit, or she was present in the old castle when he was murdered."

"I thought that was face powder you were fooling with under the microscope, Tony," Carol said. "Is your evidence conclusive?"

"The one-eyed murder victim clutched a few strands of woman's hair. Dyed, exactly as Eve's was dyed. The same hair, in fact. I found face powder in the castle. Eve Ridgely used powder of precisely the same brand. In fact, the evidence is so darn strong against her, it looks planted."

"But who in the world would want to frame the Ridgelys?" Silk asked.

"I don't know. Besides all this, there have been two attempts on my life. Rather crude tries, but whoever did it believes I am blind, and that great finesse was not necessary. Here, too, I find clues that point to a woman. Eve Ridgely? I don't know."

"That lawyer Leslie, whom you told me to watch, visited the Todd boys early this evening," Carol switched the subject. "Trailing him wasn't difficult. He's so preoccupied that he doesn't see or hear a thing."

"Leslie did go to see the Todds," Quinn said. "Twice tonight, as a matter

of fact. Perhaps it was on a mission that is easily explained. But while he was at the house, he went to the second floor alone. I'm wondering if he did so mainly to get samples of Eve's hair and some of her face powder.

"Leslie is shrewd, greedy, and angry enough at me to take almost any measures. And yet, what does he get out of it? For a man to commit murder, there must be a motive stronger than mere dislike of a person. And the man behind this has murdered two people so far."

CAROL shuddered a little, as she looked up at Quinn.

"Alvin and the one-eyed man," she murmured. "But Tony, are you positive that Alvin was murdered? The police and the medical examiner's office seem satisfied it was suicide."

"The murderer meant them to feel that way, Carol. It isn't too difficult to rig a murder so that it appears to be suicide. Especially if there is ample time to think it all out, and even more so, if the murderer is in his victim's confidence so he can approach without creating a racket or leaving clues."

"Do you think, then, that Alvin was a partner to this scheme?" Carol went on.

"No, I do not. Alvin came to see me that night and acted the part of a genuinely worried and harassed man in a natural manner. He was not faking. It's my belief that he honestly thought he had killed Wilbur Stone, that his running away was a natural move on his part, and that someone else took advantage of it to frame this whole plot. I intend to put McGrath to work on that angle. Alvin's place of refuge in Canada needs investigating. All of which adds up to one thing. This is no time to stop work."

"Anything you say," Butch offered hopefully.

"We have three important things to do." Quinn counted them off on his fingers. "Find another trail that leads to Kip Evans. That's the most important, because a boy's life may be at stake. Next, trace every move that Alvin made from the moment his train pulled into the railroad station to the moment when that shot was fired. Third—*cherchez la femme*. The woman who so carelessly spills clues all around the place,

has twice tried to kill me, and with whom I once talked on the phone at Alvin's home."

"Suppose you assign me to the Number Three problem," Carol suggested. "The woman. If she tried to kill you, I'd like to get my hands on her."

Quinn arose, tapped his pipe into an ash-tray and grinned.

"All right. I have a hunch. It may not pan out, but it's worth following. Excuse me just one moment."

Quinn walked to the further side of the laboratory which was lined with steel filing cabinets. He consulted a card index and studied various folders containing the records of men he had sent to prison—or who deserved to go there. He returned to the divan with one folder.

"A dossier on a man named Doran," he said, and patted the folder with the tips of his fingers. "Doran is a four-timer. He's doing life right now. I sent him up two years ago. At the time Doran was almost caught red-handed in the commission of a crime. Remember, I said almost. Nobody saw him do it, but there was enough circumstantial evidence to convict him."

"What are you getting at, Tony?" Carol asked.

They were all highly interested, leaning forward, and centering their attention full on Quinn. He smiled at them.

"If we suppose that Eve Ridgely is not the woman we're after, and that she is being framed, then there must be another woman. But who is she? I reason it this way. If John Todd is officially pronounced the victim of my courtroom technique and the fact becomes clear that he was executed solely upon circumstantial evidence, then it is to be expected I might have made a similar error during my career."

"Like the case of Doran?" Silk asked.

"Exactly. Doran has a wife who, at one time, was a rather noted crook herself. And no mean antagonist for the police either. When they arrested Mollie Doran, they had a battle on their hands. She hates police and police officials."

"I'm beginning to understand," Carol said. "The murderer needed help so he looked around for someone who had no connection with him at any time. Someone who might benefit if you were proved to have sent an innocent man to the

chair. And Mollie Doran fits, because her husband is serving life on evidence she may hold as purely circumstantial."

"That's it," Quinn said. "Mollie may be helping so that she can get her husband out of prison. Therefore, as she is the only woman with such a motive, and talented enough to carry out plans of this sort, I believe Mollie should be investigated."

"Leave her to me." Carol drew on her gloves with considerable force. "If she's a tough egg, so much the better. Where can I find her, Tony?"

QUINN consulted the file and gave Carol the address.

"Mollie fits perfectly," he added. "Whoever arranged the bottles in my medicine cabinet, forced entrance to the house by using a key. Mollie used to be an expert at that sort of thing."

"I'm on my way," Carol announced grimly.

"Just a moment," Quinn begged. "Stay away from her, Carol. We don't want it known that we have tumbled to this fresh lead. She can, you know, lead us directly to whoever is scheming up all of this."

"Eventually I'll get near enough to her to swing a fist," Carol vowed. "I'll check in on the phone whenever I can."

Carol disappeared into the tunnel. Butch edged his chair forward expectantly. Quinn looked at him, recognized the eagerness that filled the big man and smiled.

"Your job is Alvin," he said. "Now, I noticed that in his hotel room were two bags. Expensive pieces of luggage, but on one the handle seemed to have broken almost off. Any redcap at the station who handled that bag would recall it. Question them. See if you can pick up the trail from the train to a taxi. Let me know the moment you feel sure you have found Alvin's trail. It shouldn't take long."

"Sissy stuff," Butch grunted. "But okay, I'll do it. Only promise me that when you locate the place where they are holding Kip Evans, I'll be invited to go get him."

"You'll be there if it's possible," Quinn said. "We'll probably need you to bat down a few doors."

After Butch had gone, Silk entered the house to perform some of the house-

hold duties he had neglected. Quinn sat down at the telephone and called Captain McGrath.

"Nothing doing yet on reaching those two engineers in Brazil," McGrath told him. "But I've got absolute proof that their work down there is in connection with some assets Eve and Philip Ridgely own."

"Mac," Quinn said thoughtfully, "you know that the Ridgelys have vanished. I'm wondering if it's possible they sailed for South America, just to get out of the limelight, or if not, to see about their holdings down there."

"Maybe they took a powder on us," McGrath suggested. "It's an idea, anyhow. There are a few ships sailing that way now. I'll study sailings and radio their description to any ship they might have taken."

"Excellent," Quinn approved. "There is not much time left before I'll be thrown out of office. We must work faster than ever. And, Mac, I've been wondering about Alvin. I can't make myself believe he committed suicide."

"I hate to believe it myself," McGrath said, "but—"

"Yes, I know. Still, why not make sure? Check the taxi records at the Hack License Bureau. You know about when Alvin registered at the hotel. See what cab brought him there, talk to the driver, and find out if Alvin was accompanied by anyone. Go through the hotel again for people who might have seen a visitor at Alvin's door. Study phone calls and all that."

"It's as good as done, Tony," promised Captain McGrath. "Let you know later."

CHAPTER XIV

Midnight Intruder



ONCE again, when Tony Quinn returned to the library, he was the blind lawyer, dependent upon his cane when he moved about. But the lines of worry which had constantly crossed his forehead were gone. He even hummed lightly as he refilled his pipe.

From Carol, Butch and Silk, he had

learned much. From the activities of McGrath, the Ridgelys, the two Todd boys, and especially Attorney Leslie, he had gained a store of information that was percolating pleasantly in his mind.

And these thoughts were gradually but certainly centering upon one definite objective.

After several minutes of deep thinking, Quinn called Silk.

"There is one thing left to do," he told Kirby. "The night before the murder of Wilbur Stone, Alvin claimed to have been intoxicated. Now remember it was dawn when Stone was hit. Bars close

long before that, except for roadside cafes which might safely violate the law or have private affairs going on. Being 'good and plastered,' as Alvin described his condition, indicates he had been drinking right up to the time he started to drive home."

"He might have had a bottle," Silk suggested.

"But there was none in his car, though of course, he could have emptied it and thrown it away. I've another idea, however. Alvin was a member of the Sun-downer Golf Club which is about three

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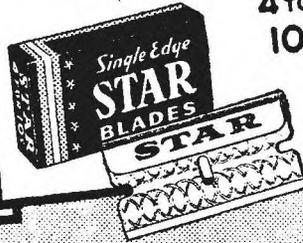
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miles north of where Stone was struck. I have an idea that's where he got himself drunk. It's midnight now, but that club keeps late hours. Take a run up there, find out if Alvin was at the club that night and if anyone else connected with this case was present. It won't take you long."

"I'll be gone no more than an hour, sir." Silk turned away, hesitated, and looked back. "But you'll be alone here. What if that woman returns with some new method of killing you? You're supposed to be blind. You couldn't defend yourself without giving away the fact that you really can see."

"I'll take my chances," Quinn said.

It was approximately forty minutes after Silk's departure when Quinn began to wonder if he should have risked staying in the house alone. At his orders, Silk had extinguished every light and the house was dark.

Seated in his library, fashioning a plan of action which he hoped would end this mess, Quinn tensed as he heard the click of the front door lock. Someone was entering. And the only person who had a key other than Silk, was that mysterious woman who had gained entry into the house once before to set a death trap.

He bent his head slightly to listen. The door didn't close again, indicating it had been left ajar so that a quick exit could be made. Then he heard light footsteps. Short steps like those a woman might make. They were coming toward the library.

Quinn quickly moved around in the chair so that he faced the door. If anyone entered with a gun or a knife, he would have to defend himself, and it would be a risky business. Not only to save his life, but to keep from the intruder the fact that he could see.

His eyes penetrated the darkness and his hands gripped the arms of his chair as he prepared himself for a quick leap. Then he got another scare. There were two people in the house who didn't belong there. One who had entered first and was now close to the library door and another who had just pushed open the front door to enter.

Quinn glanced at a long table halfway across the room. There was a loaded gun in its drawer, but he could never reach the weapon in time.

A head carefully peered around the

edge of the library door. Quinn saw a woman of about thirty-six or seven. Not a beautiful woman by any means. She had scraggly, dyed hair that looked stringy as it hung down from a cheap hat she wore. Her face was too thin and had harsh lines. Bright rouge and too much lipstick didn't tend to improve her appearance.

She stepped into the room. Unlike Tony Quinn, her eyes could not penetrate the darkness and she had no idea Quinn was in the room. In one hand she held an open handbag. The other hand was immersed in its contents, fumbling around nervously. Quinn wondered if it could be for a gun.

BUT what worried him even more were the slow, light footsteps that followed in the woman's wake. The other intruder might be the murderer. Quinn had both feet firmly planted on the floor and could spring up in an instant if necessary.

The woman moved carefully, feeling her way along so that she would not collide with any furniture, and she seemed to be headed for that long table. Suddenly she stopped short and looked behind her. She, too, had heard those other steps, and they had alarmed her. The steps ceased and the woman appeared to be more or less reassured.

She fumbled further in the handbag and was in the act of bringing some object out of it when a tornado in skirts flashed through the darkness from the library door. It was Carol Baldwin and she was swinging her own handbag. It was a large one, and Quinn knew it contained a heavy thirty-two caliber gun.

Before the intruder could turn to defend herself, Carol's bag swung down and struck the woman squarely on the head. With a little moan she slumped to the floor and lay there, quiet.

"Are you—all right?" Carol whispered. "Tony, are you here?"

"Everything is under control, and that was some wallop," Quinn said, and hurried toward Carol.

Then he knelt beside the woman. Looking up, he said:

"She'll be unconscious for some time."

Carol leaned weakly against a chair.

"I picked up her trail about an hour and a half ago," she explained. "That's Mrs. Mollie Doran whose husband is do-

ing life in prison. She came directly here and hung around, studying the house. There were lights on and she didn't get too close. Then the lights went out and Silk drove one of the cars down the driveway. You could see he was alone in the car. She waited a little longer, then entered with a key. Tony, I saw her fumbling in that handbag. I think she was going to kill you."

Quinn turned on a small table lamp, solely for Carol's benefit. He was holding Mollie Doran's bag. He dumped its contents on the table. There was no gun. Nothing any more lethal than a fingernail file. He examined a folded paper and whistled softly.

"She didn't come here to kill me this time, Carol. She came to plant something which might interest my enemies. It's a letter typed on one of Philip Ridgely's letterheads, indicating he didn't want to pay me any more money for railroading John Todd to the electric chair."

"But what kind of a frame-up is that?" Carol gasped. "Who'd believe it? Everyone knows you're wealthy enough so that you'd hardly be interested in accepting any crooked money."

"Everyone except, possibly, Mollie Doran." Quinn frowned. Suddenly he extinguished the light, took Carol's arm and propelled her toward the front of the house and the wide-open door. Quinn was sure he had frightened away someone by turning on the library table lamp. Distantly, he could hear a car pull away hurriedly.

"I think Mollie was sent here on some trumped-up excuse, like planting incriminating and fake evidence. She did only that. The phone call I intercepted by that mysterious woman who likely was Mollie, simply indicated that she had placed something in the house, and that I wouldn't notice it because I'm blind. She could have meant papers of this sort."

"But why?" Carol asked.

"Two reasons. The man who actually did attempt to rig those murder traps wasn't even an amateur burglar, and couldn't effect a quiet entrance. He let Mollie get in and, while she was busy, he may have slipped in and waited. I think he was waiting down the street, but I alarmed him and he is gone."

"I came through the garden," Carol

said. "I saw no one. What is your second reason?"

Quinn patted her cheek.

"I'm not prepared to explain that at the moment. Not enough to go on. Anyway, thanks for what you did. It was nice work. Mollie has no idea who conked her. Silk will be back in a few minutes and he'll take the responsibility. I don't want Mollie to know that you and I are associated in any way, so you'd best get away from here."

"I'll go into the lab," Carol said obstinately. "If that warhorse recovers, you may need help again, and I want to be here just in case."

"It's a deal. Hurry now, before she awakens. If she does, I'll have to tap her again."

CHAPTER XV

Someone to Talk



JUST a few minutes after Carol reluctantly entered the lab, there were footsteps rushing across the porch and Silk came in with a gun in his fist. Quinn met him.

"Everything is under control," he said. "Mollie Doran paid me a visit. Carol was right behind her and walloped her a blow that would have made Butch envious. You're to say you hit her. She's in the library, sleeping it off, and this time, Silk, we've got someone who will talk. I'm sure of it."

They lifted Mollie and placed her on a divan. When she awakened, Silk was standing above her and Quinn was seated in his usual chair near the fireplace. Mollie raised herself into a sitting position and rubbed the back of her neck. Her eyes were hard and cold.

"So I muffed it," she said. "Well, why don't you call the police?"

"Bring her over here," Quinn instructed Silk. "And watch her. If she tries to get away, slug her again."

Mollie gave Silk a half-sick look.

"So it was you."

Silk didn't answer, but helped her up and over to a chair facing Quinn. She sat down and demanded a cigarette

which Silk furnished.

"I really don't hold much against you," Mrs. Doran," Quinn said. "You were trying to get your husband out of prison by planting false evidence in my house which showed I dishonestly sent a man to his death. Who suggested planting that document?"

Mollie blew smoke into his face.

"You know who I am," she drawled. "You know my husband. Well, I'm as tough as he is. I'm not talking."

Quinn clucked his tongue.

"Too bad, because you're going to be arrested on two attempts at murdering me."

She wriggled deeper into the chair and the cigarette dangled limply from between lips that started to tremble.

"Murder? Is this another frame?"

"It is not. You were in my home once before. Perhaps twice. The first time someone rearranged bottles in my medicine cabinet so that I would have taken poison instead of a headache tablet. The second time someone pulled down an electric light wire, stripped it bare and left it for me to stumble against. Murder attempts, Mrs. Doran."

She snatched the cigarette from her mouth.

"Listen, I didn't do either of those things!" she snapped. "Okay—I did plant some phony evidence. Once, right here in this room, like I was told to do. The second time I planted it in one of your cars in the garage. Sure, I saw you fall that night, but I didn't know anything about that wire."

"Let me tell you just what happened, Mrs. Doran," Quinn said, properly sympathetic. "Someone approached you with this proposition of proving I had convinced the conviction of John Todd, and that if it was proved, you could insist I had also sent your husband to prison on purely circumstantial evidence. Am I right?"

"I got to know more about those attempts on your life," Mollie insisted.

"Very well. They actually were set. Now you claim to have planted phony evidence twice. What happened to it? I can tell you. After you left, or even while you were still here, the man who talked you into this, entered my house also. He retrieved the evidence you had planted because it was so silly no one would have believed it anyhow. Then

he rigged these traps meant to take my life. That is, if you didn't do it."

She puffed furiously for a moment.

"I didn't," she said then. "And if you tell me this, I know it's the truth. Sure, somebody sent me."

"Who was it?" Quinn asked gently, betraying none of the elation he felt.

"I don't know." She dashed his hopes.

"It was a man. He telephoned me. I met him just once, in a park where it was so dark I couldn't see him. He told me if I helped, my husband would get out of prison. He said he'd see to it and handle the whole thing."

"Promises like that are easily made," Quinn said.

"Sure, I know. But this man claimed he was a lawyer."

Silk gave a start of excitement. Quinn slowly settled back in his chair.

"A lawyer," he said softly. "That may help, Mrs. Doran. At any rate, I'm convinced you did not try to kill me. That you burglarized my home simply because you were made to believe it would help get your husband out of prison. You were just a dope. Later, I shall ask you to try and identify the voice of the man who talked you into this. Will you cooperate?"

SHE shrugged.

"What else can I do? I'll be in jail, won't I?"

"No, I hardly believe so. Perhaps if I'd been in your position, I'd have done the same thing to help someone I love. I could see that you get several years in prison. You may go free if you promise to hold yourself available. Tomorrow, perhaps, I shall need you."

She gaped at him.

"You're going to trust me?" she asked unbelievably.

"Why not? If you don't show up, you'll serve time for burglarizing my home and abetting a would-be murderer. You have everything to lose by running away. Everything to gain by helping me."

Mollie Doran arose and crushed out the cigarette.

"I'll be around," she said. "That's a promise. Mostly my promises aren't worth much, but this one is."

"Show Mrs. Doran to the door, Silk," Quinn instructed. "Oh, yes. See that she gives you the key she fashioned to

let herself into my home."

When Silk returned, Quinn asked him to sit down.

"Tomorrow," he said, "I think we shall wrap up more candidates for the electric chair."

"You know who it is then?"

"I'm quite certain of it. Without sufficient proof for a conviction, but that proof I'm prepared to get. What I told Mrs. Doran was the truth. She was merely being used. Perhaps only because she knew how to enter a house, but I think the reason was more important. Those who told her to come here wanted clues left which would indicate the presence of a woman. I've noticed that all during the case. Mrs. Doran did not visit that abandoned castle where the one-eyed man was killed. The evidence there was simply planted."

"Maybe what I found out won't be very useful if you know all the answers," Silk said. "I know them too, of course. It's Leslie, John Todd's attorney. Mrs. Doran all but slapped him into prison with her identification."

"What did you find out, Silk?"

"Wilbur Stone was killed around dawn, when he was accustomed to take long, solitary walks. Right up until almost the time that he was killed, Alvin was at the club attending a party, and he got himself nicely spiffed. He was staggering when he left. And Attorney Leslie was at that same party."

"Anyone else we know, Silk?"

"Yes. The party was something of a neighborhood affair. The Todds, Ridgelys and Alvin lived quite close together. They were all present. The two Todd boys left early. Eve and Philip Ridgely dropped in, had one drink and went off again."

"Everyone was there, it seems, except our publisher friend Mr. King. Well, tomorrow will tell the story. It must, because if I fail, there will be a brand new Special D.A. in my office. Let's go to bed, Silk. Carol is in the lab. I'll tell her the party is over for tonight. . . ."

In the morning before going to the office, Quinn talked to Butch who came to report. Butch had been unsuccessful in picking up Alvin's trail, and he was highly disgusted.

"I know it was a tame assignment," Quinn said, "but I have another for you

today, Butch. This one is right up your alley."

Quinn walked over to his locker and took from it the Black Bat's regalia.

"Stay right here," he told Butch. "Sometime within the next couple of hours, Silk or I will call you. The moment he, or I, gives the word, squeeze into this costume and go get Kip Evans."

"You know where the kid is?" Butch blinked owlshly.

"I think I've been fairly certain for some time," Quinn said. "I'll write the address on this paper and place it in this drawer. You are inclined to be impulsive, Butch, so don't look at it until you get the 'go-ahead' signal. Everything depends on timing."

"I'll go batty wondering," grumbled Butch, "but okay. It's better that way. I hate guys who snatch kids, and maybe I wouldn't be able to wait."

AN HOUR later, Tony Quinn walked into his office tapping the white cane he always carried, and escorted by Silk. Shortly afterward, Captain McGrath was announced.

"Things don't look so good," McGrath said as he sat down. "We're putting together a few small pieces, but Archer is going to hold that deadline and we can't possibly finish the job before then."

"Tell me what you learned," Quinn suggested.

"Alvin really lived like a hermit up there in Canada," said the police captain. "I had the police check. He arrived about the time he claimed he had. He received no mail or messages, but just before he boarded the train to come back, he sent a telegram. What was in it was read to me over the phone. It said that he was on his way back to face things. It was addressed to—Dean Todd."

"Do you know what that signified?" Quinn asked.

"Sure. Todd lived with the Ridgelys. The wire was really meant for them. I found the cab driver who brought Alvin to the hotel where he finally knocked himself off. He told me Alvin had him stop the cab so he could make a phone call, so that must have been for the Ridgelys."

"And the Ridgelys are now aboard a ship bound for South America," Quinn mused. "Mac, send four big uniformed patrolmen to bring in Brad Cowan. They

are to handle it as if they were afraid an attack might be made upon him. Also send for Arthur King, the two Todd boys, Attorney Leslie and a Mrs. Doran whose address I will give you. I want Mrs. Doran here first, followed by Brad Cowan, and then the Todd boys. Everything clear?"

McGrath nodded and clamped teeth firmly on his soggy cigar.

"I know the signs. You're going to pull a fast one. Well, it had better work. One thing, we can always yank the Ridgelys off the boat. See you later."

CHAPTER XVI

Frightened Witness



WORRIED, and in custody of a detective, Mrs. Doran was the first to arrive. Quinn quickly put her at ease.

"This is where you earn your freedom, Mrs. Doran," he said.

"On my right is the door to an adjoining office. It's hardly more than a filing room, but

you'll be comfortable there. I want you to listen to the voices of every person who talks with me. Try to determine which voice belongs to the man who urged you to break into my home."

"I thought you'd changed your mind and this was a real pinch," she said in relief. "Okay, if this man shows up, I'll know his voice."

"Just one more thing," Quinn said. "You telephoned a number a couple of nights ago and made a report. While the connection was open, you heard shots. Is that correct?"

"Yes, sir. The man gave me that number to call and a time when I was to call. I thought somebody had been killed."

"Someone was only almost killed," Quinn remarked quietly.

Brad Cowan was ushered in next. He was just as belligerent and cocksure as ever.

"If you're going to try and make me change my story, it can't be done," he announced immediately. "I'm telling the truth, and I'd have told it at the trial if you hadn't put words into my mouth.

Also, what's the idea of sending four big cops after me? I certainly didn't do anything."

"I was trying to protect you, Mr. Cowan," Quinn said smoothly.

"Protect me from whom? I'm not afraid of anyone."

"True, but only because you don't know all the facts. I shall tell them to you. First of all, let me say that I know you are lying, and that you have been paid to lie. Naturally, you won't admit it, because I'd send you to prison for conspiracy. Despite these obvious facts, I hold nothing against you, Mr. Cowan. Or certainly not enough to want to see you murdered."

"What are you giving me?" Cowan sneered. "I thought you were too smart to try and scare a guy into talking."

"I'm still on the D.A.'s staff," Quinn said. "In such a capacity, my duty is to prevent crime, and by warning you I may save your life. Let me talk now. It's for your own good, believe me."

"Go ahead," Cowan laughed. "You're slipping, Quinn."

"The man named Alvin, who admitted running down Wilbur Stone and whose story you back up, is dead," said Quinn. "Suicide, the papers called it, but that was because we didn't release any other information. He was actually murdered, Cowan."

"I don't believe it," Cowan said promptly.

"Suit yourself," Quinn replied. "Facts are facts, however. The murderer subdued him, called me on the phone and pretended to be Alvin. I wasn't familiar with Alvin's voice so I was temporarily fooled. Then he shot Alvin, climbed to a ledge outside the window, and followed this to another room through which he made his escape."

"Prove it!" Cowan challenged with a smirk.

"Oh, we can do that. Besides, Alvin wasn't the only victim. We found the body of a one-eyed man hanging by the neck in an old abandoned house. This man had also helped a murderer because he was greedy. We got on his trail and he foolishly told the murderer how close we were. In doing so, he was responsible for his own death because the murderer realized he was no longer useful and might even be a decided menace. So he hanged him."

Cowan was obviously impressed by this story. Quinn opened a drawer, felt around in it and took out a grisly picture.

McGrath's men had snapped it in the old castle and it showed the one-eyed man dangling from a rope.

"This has been described to me," Quinn said. "I'm glad I can't see it. Have a look."

COWAN looked, and paled. Quinn went on talking.

"Perhaps now you understand we have only your welfare at heart. I'm not asking you to talk because, by doing so, you'd only railroad yourself into a cell. All I desire to do is see that you are not murdered—as this man was, and as Alvin was murdered."

"I—I think it's all a put-up job," Cowan declared, without much force in his words.

"Think as you wish. But remember this, Mr. Cowan. You have made a sworn statement to the effect that it was Alvin you saw, and not John Todd. With that statement you have done all the murderer wants of you. Like Alvin and the one-eyed man, you have ceased to be of value to him, and you constitute a menace."

"Wh-what do you want me to do? Remember, this is all hooley to me, but I'm interested."

"Who wouldn't be, with his own life at stake?" Quinn said. "All I want is for you to stay in protective custody. It involves nothing, and must be done voluntarily. It isn't an admission of conspiracy. Perhaps you'd like to think it over a bit. Yes, you'd better do that. Go to the door on my left. It leads to an adjoining office. Make yourself com-

fortable. Accept my assurance that you'll be perfectly safe there."

"I—I guess maybe I will."

Cowan arose, and walked to the door. He opened it carefully, and peered into the empty room, then stepped inside and closed the door behind him. Quinn twisted his swivel chair back to face the desk just in time to get a message that the Todd brothers were waiting.

QUINN lifted his phone, dialed a number and said one word:

"Now!"

Then he sent for the Todd boys.

They shook hands with him and sat down. Quinn's apparently sightless eyes were trained on a blank wall directly between the two men.

"We have come to certain conclusions," he said. "We need your help rather badly. First of all, let me say that we have found Eve and Philip Ridgely."

"They never called us," Dean Todd said. "Where did they go?"

"They left on a ship for South America and are en route now. I shall make arrangements to have them removed soon, and brought back here. Evidence against them is piling up. I believe they were attempting to frame me. Now I'm going to show both of you a gun. Look at it very carefully."

Quinn opened a desk drawer and fumbled a bit. He drew out a blue automatic and placed it rather uncertainly on the desk.

"That's it. Have a look."

Stan Todd picked up the weapon, looked carefully, then handed it to Dean. Both men declared that they had never seen the weapon before.

[Turn page]

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Justly Dead

"But you must have," Quinn said. "Take it over by the window where there is more light. This is most important."

They walked to the window in obedience. Quinn's phone rang. He excused himself and answered it. He listened for about half a minute, then swiveled around quickly.

"Boys, I'm having an unexpected visitor. I don't want him to see you. Step into the next office. Make it fast. He's already at the door."

Dean Todd, still clutching the formidable-looking automatic, seized the doorknob and yanked the door open. He barged into the next room. Brad Cowan, seated in the far corner, jumped to his feet and began yelling.

"Don't! Don't shoot me. I didn't tell a thing. I didn't talk! Honest, I didn't. You've got to believe me!"

A quieter voice spoke behind the backs of both Todd brothers.

"The game is over, boys. Cowan just pointed a great big finger of accusation at you."

DEAN raised the automatic. Stan Todd started maneuvering toward the man he thought was blind.

"Hold it!" This was Silk's voice.

Stan Todd turned.

Silk, holding a gun, had stepped into the room.

"That automatic you have is unloaded, Mr. Todd," Silk said. "My gun is not. Line up against the wall or try to get past me. I'd prefer the latter."

The brothers slowly put their backs against the wall. Dean let go of the automatic. McGrath entered. With him came Leslie and King. Quinn walked back into his office and called Mrs. Doran's name. She popped out of the smaller room, her face flushed with excitement. She pointed at Dean and Stan Todd.

"The taller one is the man who met me in the park. The other one talked to me on the telephone. I'm sure."

"What's the use?" Dean Todd said. "We should have known better than try to avenge our father's death by framing someone like you, Quinn."

"Avenge isn't the precise word, boys," Quinn said. "Bring them into my office. You others, please sit down. I'll tell you what this is all about."



LIGHTING his pipe, Tony Quinn leaned back and stared sightlessly into space.

"Are you present, Arthur King?" he asked. "Good! It may interest you to know that you were quite high on a list of suspects. The way you attempted to aid the plot against me indicated you had more than the motive of public service. I find you are in league with a well-known racketeer. Your objective was to get me out of office, and put your own man in. All this is being investigated. If I get the proof, you will be promptly indicted. Which ends the matter so far as you are concerned.

"Leslie, you rated a high place, too. You hated me because I'd triumphed in the case of the State against John Todd. And in other cases. Nothing would have pleased you more than my dismissal. And yet you did more to help me than anyone else. Unknowingly, of course. All along I have had a staunch ally. The Black Bat.

"Through this mysterious person, I learned that you were handling first, the Wilbur Stone estate, and then John Todd's estate. The work was hard and involved. Because John Todd was a legal heir of Wilbur Stone until he was convicted of murdering him to get his share of Stone's fortune. By murdering him, he sacrificed his claim and it all went to the Ridgelys who were prepared to see that they got all of it.

"However, when doubt arose as to John Todd's guilt, everything was off again. Proved innocent, he would have been Wilbur Stone's heir. But John Todd was dead. Nevertheless, he would have inherited, because he had been alive when Stone died. Prove him innocent and the estate was his. Upon his death it went to his sons. That's what they were after. The same money their father murdered his own uncle to obtain."

"You're right, of course," Leslie gulped. "I never suspected. Really I

didn't know."

"You might have guessed," Quinn grunted. "You're a bigger fool than I thought, Leslie, and twice as greedy. Because you could tap the estate for a lot of money if things went through. But you didn't know that the Todd boys were framing you, too. They told Mrs. Doran, who unknowingly aided them, that they were attorneys. You, being the only member of the legal profession involved, became the answer to that one."

Leslie turned beet-red.

"Curse them!" he shouted. "They actually convinced me their father had been unjustly executed."

"John Todd was guilty," Quinn said. "He knew it, so did his sons, and so did you, Leslie. Though as far as you're concerned, I can't prove it. I shall, however, do my utmost to see that you don't profit materially from your mistakes whether they were intentional or just dumb."

"What about the Ridgelys?" McGrath said. "How do they fit in?"

"Pawns, like everyone else," Quinn said. "Someone upon whom suspicion would be fastened if I refused to believe this plot was aimed solely at discrediting me. Or the boys may have planned to kill them when the evidence mounted, and take their portion of the estate. The Todd boys could work easily. While one remained in the house, the other could go abroad. They'd alibi one another, and they actually did just that."

"The Ridgelys will probably tell us their version when they are contacted. It would seem that the Todd boys deliberately created trouble so the Ridgelys would get out of the house, and for a reason I'll explain later. The Ridgelys were badly affected by the conviction of John Todd and they were even more subjected to public scrutiny since the whole thing was rehashed."

"The Todd boys knew they would go away somewhere, actually disappear to get out of this unpleasant limelight. They did better than the Todds expected. The Ridgelys decided it was a good time to see about their Brazilian holdings. I'll also lay comfortable odds that the Todd boys manipulated things so that the Ridgelys hired those two engineers whose testimony helped send John Todd to the chair."

"And Alvin was murdered?" McGrath

wanted to know.

"Of course he was. To explain his strange actions, I'll do some theorizing. Most of my statements can be backed up by facts and proofs. Alvin originally was meant to take the blame for the death of Wilbur Stone. John Todd planned it, and his sons helped. The plan should have worked like this."

"Alvin would be made to become intoxicated. Shortly before he left the Sundowner Club, John Todd preceded him and killed Stone. Then Alvin was supposed to come along and run over the body. One of the Todd boys would be with him to make certain he stopped, and to smear some blood on the fender of Alvin's car. Alvin would then firmly believe he had killed the man."

"That's how it was planned, but a couple of things shot those plans to bits. First of all, John Todd intended to have an alibi, but the two engineers saw him driving down that road and wrecked the alibi. Then Cowan, hunting in the forest, saw the whole thing. Todd knew he'd been spotted."

QUINN paused a moment, to relight his pipe. Nobody spoke.

"But Cowan had to go some distance for help," he went on then. "During his absence, Alvin came by, with one of the Todd boys accompanying him. Alvin ran over the already dead man as scheduled. He became frantic. Perhaps John Todd found an opportunity to talk to his son who rode with Alvin. At any rate, this Todd boy convinced Alvin he ought to run away."

"Alvin didn't need much encouragement. He did run away, to hide for months. John Todd was arrested and convicted. Then Alvin decided he couldn't live with himself any longer. He wired Todd, thinking he was still alive, or perhaps one of the Todd sons. At any rate, his telegram told when he would arrive. It would be after the execution."

"The Todd boys knew they couldn't stop it, but they figured out a cute little scheme. By proving their father had died an innocent man, they could come into the estate he was supposed to share with the Ridgelys. That's what they attempted and, for a time, things progressed in their favor perfectly."

"Alvin called them and said he was go-

ing to confess. He came to me here and the Todds had another break. Alvin's courage dissipated again, he pulled a gun on Silk and got away. The Todd boys met him. They had him registered at a hotel which was necessary for their plans. One of them then visited Alvin, subdued him and telephoned me, pretending to be Alvin. He made his confession again and told me he was killing himself. The Todd boy then shot Alvin, went through a window, along a ledge and exited through another room.

All they had to do from then on was sit back and let things take their course. There was another clue. I told Attorney Leslie about a certain twelve-year-old boy named Kip Evans who had also witnessed the murder and could identify John Todd. Leslie, whom did you tell?"

Leslie hemmed and hawed, then finally spoke.

"I—I felt it my duty—to save my reputation, that is. Oh, hang it, I wanted to convince the Todd boys and the Ridgelys that I'd done everything humanly possible, and that John Todd was guilty. I told them about the boy."

"Kip Evans," Tony Quinn went on calmly, "was promptly kidnaped. The Todds did that too, aided by a one-eyed hermit who lived not far from the Todd home. The boy was hidden in the old Dockerel castle. But the one-eyed man was cornered. He went to the Todd boys and told them somebody was on his trail. They took him to the castle, got the boy out of there and murdered the man who helped them for the money they gave him.

"They sprinkled a few clues about the castle to indicate Eve had been there. Then, going back to the home where they lived, they promptly engineered a big fight with the Ridgelys so they would leave the place. That was to get rid of them so a good spot for holding Kip Evans would be available."

McGrath started for the door.

"I'd better find the kid, Tony."

"I'm sure he'll be here soon," Quinn said. "I doubt they cornered him. He was to be a source of intimidation if they were cornered. Neither expected to fall into a trap like the one they came upon in this office. Captain, the Black Bat is arranging to free Kip Evans."

"But he can't," McGrath yelled. "It isn't possible. You're right here and—"

McGrath bit his lip to stop talking, and Quinn allowed a bare smile to come over his face.

"So I believe that Cowan will now confess he was paid to change his story. How about it, Cowan?"

The hunter seemed to be shriveled up. He just nodded his head weakly.

"That's it, gentlemen," Quinn said. "If this wasn't a plot aimed directly at me, there had to be a motive. I found it, and the motive convicts the Todd boys. I'll prosecute them for two murders, those of Alvin and the one-eyed hermit who was killed in the castle. John Todd was justly executed, and is justly dead."

There were voices outside the office. The door opened and a tow-headed boy burst into the room. He ran directly to Quinn's desk.

"I'm here—I'm here!" he shrilled. "The Black Bat came and rescued me."

"Kip Evans."

Quinn reached out and found the boy's head. He tousled his hair and laughed.

KIP was crammed full of excitement. He noticed the Todd boys.

"That's them!" he accused. "They took me away and hid me. I think they were going to kill me. Once I heard them arguing about it, but one said if I was alive, maybe they could use me if you were going to capture them, Mr. Quinn. I was tied up."

"And then the Black Bat came?" Quinn chuckled. "You're sure about it, Kip?"

"Sure I'm sure. He had on all black clothes and a black hood over his head. Gosh, he was a big guy. He looked all around to see if anybody was in the house, and I think he wished he'd find somebody."

Captain McGrath issued some crisp orders. Cowan and the Todd boys were led away. King slunk out of the office and attorney Leslie cleared his throat and stepped up to Quinn's desk.

"We'll probably have our disputes from time to time, Quinn, but I say let bygones be bygones."

"Indeed?" Quinn's eyebrows shot up. "It's a fine time to think of that. I hope you defend the Todd boys. I'll enjoy a session in court with you again."

Captain McGrath returned, gave Quinn a covert look and gently took Kip Evans by the arm. He led the boy to the

outer office. Quinn lit a cigarette, leaned back and smiled. Silk was smiling too.

"Butch fooled the boy neatly and McGrath is about ready to tear his own hair out by the roots," Silk said. "He can't figure this one."

"McGrath was so decent about it all"—Quinn chuckled—"that I felt like admitting my dual identity. He'd have kept the secret. But McGrath is a lot of fun when he goes on the warpath. I'm glad now I kept it from him."

"You've known for some time that the Todd boys were guilty," Silk accused.

"Well, for a little while only. When I visited their house as the Black Bat, they did their utmost to kill me. Not because they mistook me for a burglar, as they insisted, but they knew I was getting close. That gave me ideas and from there on, it was fairly clear sailing. Their whole plot crumpled to bits."

"And you're clear. I'd like to see D. A. Archer's face when he learns how you proved John Todd was guilty. Say, maybe those two boys of Todd's knew where Alvin was and wouldn't bring

him back because they figured if the old man died, they'd get the money."

Quinn arose.

"You might expect it of them, but I hardly think so. Alvin's return precipitated the whole thing. Let's go home, Silk. Butch and Carol will be waiting and we really have something to celebrate tonight."

They walked into the outer office, Quinn on Silk's arm. Captain McGrath was seated on a bench with Kip Evans, asking him over and over again to be certain it was the Black Bat he had seen. McGrath looked up, saw Quinn and Silk and his face reddened.

"I'm telling you," Kip insisted for the tenth time. "It was the Black Bat."

Silk murmured that Kip had been talking to McGrath. Quinn threw back his head and laughed.

"Did you hear what he said, Mac? It was the Black Bat and while he was there, I was here. What do you say to that?"

"I—can't find the words," McGrath answered in a tired voice.



*"Nobody Believed This Poor Fellow's Story—
and Now They've Put Him Out of the Way
by Killing Him!"*

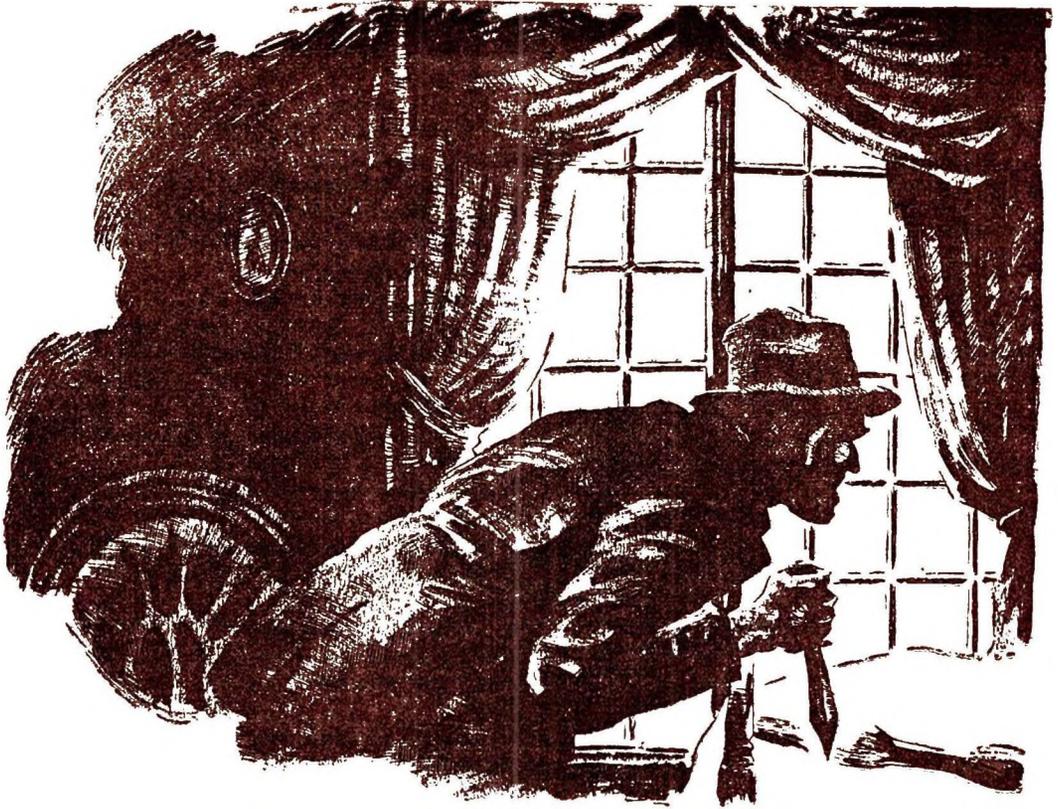
THAT was Tony Quinn's summing-up when the body of William Wilkerson was found. But no one shared Tony's opinion. Wilkerson was dead in Quinn's kitchen. There was no sign of a struggle. Everything pointed to suicide via the gas route. And there was a note, written by Wilkerson denying the statements he had previously made, statements to the effect that he had accidentally gotten wind of—THE CRIME TO COME!

Tony Quinn thought the "suicide note" a forgery. He also implicitly believed that Wilkerson had stumbled on a gigantic crime plot, and had been murdered because of what he knew! And so Tony Quinn, as the Black Bat, went on the trail of the most baffling crime of all—the trail of THE CRIME TO COME!

G. Wayman Jones' next complete Black Bat novel is a smashingly different yarn that will hold you spellbound! It's action-packed—it's suspenseful—it's dynamic—it's THE CRIME TO COME!

Tony Quinn and his aides are at their sleuthing best—and G. Wayman Jones is at top form—in next issue's exciting masterpiece of mystery, THE CRIME TO COME!





THE EDGE OF DEATH

By RICHARD BRIDGES

Hired by a beautiful girl to solve the mystery of her father's disappearance, ex-service man Jeff Ward uses Commando tactics to get to the bottom of a grim crime!

CHAPTER I

Blind Ad

JEFF WARD ran down the steps two at a time. He was a tall, rangy man, and moved with the grace of a professional athlete—which he was not.

The morning mail had arrived and he was interested in receiving a reply to the blind advertisement he had answered. It had been a strange ad, but tailored to fit Jeff exactly. It asked for a man, unafraid of danger, young, strong and preferably an ex-Ranger. Jeff an-

swered all those requirements, except that referring to courage. He doubted if anyone had been more scared under fire than he.

The letter was there, in a plain envelope. Jeff ripped it open. The message was brief.

You will report to 1169 Whiting Drive this afternoon at two sharp. The wages will be more than ample.

I. Chalmer.

Jeff studied the address again. It was in a nice section of the city and spelled money in big letters. Jeff wanted some. Before he had joined in the fight



*An Exciting
Complete
Novelet*

As Jeff sat up, a dark form holding a knife, lunged at him

against the Menace of 1940, he had been private secretary to a pompous stuffed shirt. He liked the work, but his having been a Commando for over four years, then a Ranger, had left him with a keen desire for something a little less humdrum and yet entailing something along the lines of work he had been trained for in school and at which he had worked before the war.

He put on his best suit. He had only two, and both were new, for he had grown completely out of his pre-war clothing. A glance in the mirror of his little room reflected a closely shaven face, clear brown eyes, and a firmly cut chin. He threw a topcoat on his arm and hurried out.

At one minute of two he rang the bell of the elaborate house which was not one whit less imposing than he had imagined it would be. He expected a uniformed flunky to let him in, but instead a girl opened the door. She made Jeff blink slightly, though he was growing used to pretty girls again after four years of having seen few of them.

But this one was outstanding. He thought her eyes were violet, but he was wrong. They were a dark blue. Her hair was not quite blond, but a soft brown, and done in an attractive up-sweep. Her lips were just right. Jeff had no other description for them. And in a neatly tailored suit she was a dream.

Jeff located his tongue finally.

"I'm looking for someone named I. Chalmer," he said.

"You have a letter of confirmation?" The girl's voice was just as he thought it would be—rich and soft.

HE PRODUCED the letter. She glanced at her wrist-watch.

"Good," she said. "You're precisely on time, which is something most of the others were not. Come in, please."

"Then I've got competition?" Jeff asked.

"An even dozen men have been interviewed so far. Follow me, please."

She led him into a library. It had French doors which were open, although there was something of a chill in the air. They overlooked a nicely kept yard.

The girl sat down, idly folding the letter until it was hardly more than a narrow strip of paper. Jeff grasped the idea that she was nervous.

"You were in the war?" she asked.

He nodded. "Commando," he said.

"But that was a British outfit, wasn't it?"

"Yes. You see, I didn't wait until we got in. I served with the Canadians."

"That's quite all right," she approved. "Frankly, Mr. Ward what we are seeking is a man who isn't afraid. Our reference to a Ranger was only meant to bring the proper type of applicant here. I suppose you aren't afraid of—death?"

"Death? You mean dead people? Well, no. I've seen death in a hundred different forms. I was at Belsen, you see. One of the first to arrive. If you mean afraid of dying—I'm scared stiff. Everybody is."

She smiled and Jeff's head spun crazily. That was some smile, he thought.

"I suppose so," she agreed. "However, I rather believe being scared helps. It makes you fight better. We . . . Oh—oh!"

The last "Oh!" was drawn out as a slow intake of breath. Jeff twisted his head around. A man was approaching him from the rear, a particularly unsavory-looking man and he had a gun in his fist. A glittering, blue-black automatic. Quite apparently, he had come through one of the French doors.

All this Jeff saw and considered in an instant. He was suddenly on his feet and even before he straightened up, the chair he had occupied was hurtling back toward the gunman. The man moved agilely aside, but before he could regain his balance, Jeff was at him.

Jeff's left hand clipped down in a chopping blow that paralyzed the wrist of the man's gun hand. Jeff's right traveled in one brief arc and collided with a chin. The impact made a snapping sound, like that of a whip.

Jeff grasped the man by the collar, spun him around and kicked the fallen gun into a corner. Then he grasped the man by the seat of the pants, propelled him toward the French doors and lifted him suddenly. The man went flying across the narrow balcony, cleared the shrubs and landed on the lawn. He didn't move.

Jeff turned around and stopped short. The girl was laughing until tears streamed down her cheeks, threatening to ruin the light film of make-up she used.

"What on earth?" Jeff exclaimed.

"You were wonderful!" She arose. "But I'm afraid poor Jan isn't going to think so."

"Jan?" Jeff frowned.

"The man whom you threw out. He's Jan Nixon, my handyman and chauffeur. Ever since nine this morning he's been creeping up on applicants for this job. He was rather roughly handled a couple of times, but nothing like this. Incidentally, the job is yours, Mr. Ward."

Jeff sat down slowly.

"So that was all a trick," he said irately. "I might have broken his fool neck. Do you realize that? I'm trained to kill a man in forty different ways. And for what? Just so you could see how fast my reactions were. Maybe I don't want this job. And where is this I. Chalmer I'm supposed to work for?"

She dimpled. "I'm Irene Chalmer. Mr. Ward, if you'll just listen for a moment, I'll explain. And I'll begin by saying I'll pay three hundred a month and your keep. Is that attractive?"

"Yes." Jeff almost added, "and so are you."

"Your task is to open up a house in the country. A particularly loathsome house to me. It's a big house, and no one has lived in it for eight years. Next door is a similar place in which someone was murdered eight years ago."

Jeff sighed. "I thought it would wind up with something like this. What you need, Miss Chalmer, is a private detective."

"I had one," she replied with a shudder. "Two years ago I sent a private detective up there to go through the house. He posed as a relief caretaker while old McGee was ill. He—didn't do so well. They found him dead. Of a broken neck."

JEFF blinked. Maybe this would be interesting at that, but he was thoughtful enough to realize there would be no future in it, even if he didn't get himself killed. Irene Chalmer promptly dissolved those ideas, as if she had been reading his mind.

"I'm not hiring you as bodyguard or anything like that," she said. "I—I've got to do something about that house, and I'm afraid to go there. Whether you succeed or not, I'll promise to keep you on as my secretary at the same

wages, for as long as you care to work for me. If you agree, I'll tell you the entire story, but there must be no backing out."

Jeff crossed his legs. "All right. I'm ready."

She seemed vastly relieved. "And I'm glad," she told him. "You're exactly the type of man I wanted. The others were—well, not up to my expectations . . . Have a cigarette, Mr. Ward. Then sit back and listen."

He lit cigarettes for both of them, resumed his chair and puffed slowly while she talked.

"Eight years ago," she began, "my father, Glen Simms, and Edward Bishop were partners and operating the Allan Hardware Manufacturing Company. You've heard of the firm?"

Jeff nodded. Who hadn't? It was a several million dollar enterprise, just now getting back to peacetime work. It gave employment to a whole medium-sized city of people.

"My father and Glen Simms became bitter enemies," the girl went on, "but they were held together by the business. Their enmity became worse and worse. Dad was hot-headed and Glen Simms positively vicious. They had several fist fights. Once, I'm sorry to say, Dad shot at Simms in a moment of frenzied rage."

"Then, eight years ago they must have really had it out. They lived next door to one another, in big, elaborate houses. This particular night they were in Simms' home. Dad had gone there to administer a horsewhipping to Simms. Yes, he actually took along a whip. Simms was all alone over there. No one was ever seen coming out of that house again."

Jeff gaped. "Do you mean your father killed Simms?"

She nodded. "Don't think I'm cold-blooded, Mr. Ward. However, Simms disappeared and so did Dad. Neither ever showed up again. The Simms house was searched a dozen times. There were no bodies—nothing."

"But maybe they both went off somewhere."

"No." She shook her head sadly. "Five months later I received a letter from Dad. He admitted killing Simms, said he could never come back, and would continue to live in obscurity somewhere. Last year he was officially

proclaimed deceased and I came into his estate. There was no one else. My mother died years ago."

"That's highly interesting, but do you fully realize what you are asking me to do?"

"Yes. You may discover evidence which will prove my father is a murderer. That's what I want—if such evidence exists. But I must know one way or the other. It is true that Dad wrote, confessing he was a murderer. No one knows this, of course. Yet I feel that, while Dad had a violent temper, he would stop short of taking a life. Even the life of Glen Simms whom he hated so much. I want you to learn the truth."

"There is something else behind this, though," Jeff said.

"You are clever," she admitted. "Yes, there is. One month ago a real estate dealer named Philip Wharton approached me and said he had a client for my father's home. He offered a price that should have made me snatch it. A price so big I became suspicious."

"Who is this client?" Jeff asked.

"Mr. Wharton refuses to divulge his identity. Can't you see, Mr. Ward? This means someone may want my father's home to search it, possibly to find evidence with which to blackmail me, or reveal Dad as a murderer."

THE former Ranger nodded thoughtfully.

"Logical," he said, "but you've forgotten one thing. The murder—if there was one—is supposed to have taken place in Simms' home."

"That house has been searched so often there is no possibility of a body being hidden there," Irene declared positively. "Perhaps Dad brought the corpse to his own house. He was all alone there at the time. No one seems to have thought of that. Oh, the State Police searched all right, but not as exhaustively as they did at Simms' place. I'm getting frightened. Something has to be done. I haven't heard from Dad since that one letter, seven and a half years ago. I think he's dead. The truth can't hurt him now. I'm willing to take a chance."

Jeff arose. "Give me the address and written permission to enter. I'll go as soon as I pack a few things."

"I'll phone McGee, the caretaker," she

said. "He's an irascible old duffer. He used to work in the factory until he had an accident. It almost blinded him. He has only one eye now. They retired him, but after—it all happened, we gave him a job watching the house. Good luck, Jeff. I shall call you that now, Mr. Ward, since you are going to work for me."

She extended a slim hand that felt familiar in Jeff's grasp. It was not, he knew. It was just an illusion, like the moment when he had first seen her and recognized her as someone he knew well. The girl who had accompanied him through Dieppe, Normandy, Salerno and a dozen other places. The girl who had shared his fox-holes with him, the long dangerous trek over enemy occupied territory, who had crouched beside him behind shell-ripped debris. A phantom girl, but to Jeff, as real as the hand he clasped.

"Thanks," he said, "for calling me Jeff." She just smiled and let go of his hand. Jeff turned away with an effort.

CHAPTER II

House of Murder



THE Chalmer House was not exactly isolated. There was the similarly abandoned mansion of Glen Simms next door, and a colony of smaller dwellings half a mile away. But eight years had allowed the shrubbery to grow higher than a man's head and had laid a bed of leaves a foot thick over everything.

The house itself, like Simms' place, was heavily boarded up. Jeff walked around it. Les McGee, the caretaker, lived above the garage back of the house. It was a long way back, for this was a good-sized estate.

Between it and Simms' property was a high, solid fence. An obvious spite fence, now fallen away in several places. Jeff smiled wryly at the thought of two elderly men who had acted like a couple of kids. But the smile died when he recalled that murder may have been the outcome.

There were feeble lights in the two-room apartment above the garage. Jeff banged on the door. A window opened above him and he looked up. Framed in it, visible because of the background of light, was a wizen-faced old man. He looked absolutely terror-stricken.

"I'm Jeff Ward," Jeff called. "Miss Chalmer wired you to expect me."

"I'm comin' down," McGee said. "You wait right there."

In a few moments he joined Jeff who saw then that the man was about five feet nothing, with legs so bowed that if they had been straightened out he would have risen about a foot in stature. He had watery, frightened blue eyes and the most subservient manner Jeff had ever encountered. His lack of spunk was so great that it was amazing.

"I'm glad you've come," he said. "Yes, sir, mighty glad. Ever since the other one came to take my place the time I had pneumonia, I been scared. He was killed, you know. By them that lives in the houses."

"Whoa!" Jeff cautioned. "Both those houses are abandoned."

"No, they ain't. I see lights sometimes, through the chinks. In both of 'em. I know who lives there too. It's Ed Chalmer. He killed Simms, but he didn't run away. He just stays there and hides, so nobody can ever find him or the body of the man he killed."

Jeff had a mental reservation about this old man's sanity, but he kept it to himself.

McGee furnished a key when they reached the Chalmer house. His hand shook as he turned it over.

"You ain't makin' me go in there," he declared. "No, sir. I'll quit first. When I went to work for Mr. Bishop, right after it all happened, I made him agree I didn't have to go into the house."

"Bishop hired you?" Jeff frowned. "What has he got to do with it all?"

"He had all the money then. After he died, the courts took over and Miss Chalmer's been gettin' her share ever since."

"After Bishop died? What did he die of and when?"

"Six months after Chalmer killed Simms, Bishop died. Of a bullet in the head. He put it there himself."

Jeff idly flipped the key as he walked back to the front of the house. He was

wondering if he had taken on more than he bargained for. All three original owners of the hardware business were dead. At least two were dead by violence, and the third was supposed to be a murderer at large. Irene Chalmer hadn't mentioned anything about Bishop's death.

Jeff turned the key in the lock. It squealed to high heaven. He had to push the door open and use considerable force. There was electricity on the premises, he knew, and his hand reached for the light switch. And stopped, without turning it on. His nostrils were quivering.

Faintly, but definitely, he got the odor of gasoline and oil. He knew all about such things as booby traps. Light switches were one thing to avoid if a trap was suspected.

Instead, Jeff lit matches. He discovered the first heap of gasoline- and oil-soaked waste in a corner beside the cellar door. There were a dozen others, and two of them were heaped around bared light wires. All were cunningly camouflaged. The Nazis had been good at that too, Jeff remembered. If he had turned that switch, he would have set the place afire. It was old, unused, and dry. He might not have escaped before the flames engulfed him.

Jeff removed all the danger spots, repaired the wiring and turned on the lights. All the furniture, he saw, was enclosed in dust coverings, which he was supposed to remove. Part of his job was to make this place habitable before Irene Chalmer arrived.

HE SHUDDERED. The place could give a strong, healthy man the creeps even if it had no sordid history behind it.

Jeff walked across the whole house to stare at the gloomy dwelling next door. He could only peer through a crack in the lumber boarding up each window. And he had already seen that the Simms place was similarly boarded up.

Jeff went through the house then, from attic to cellar. He looked especially for signs of anyone having lived here. There were none. The kitchen, he would have sworn, hadn't been used since the place had been closed up those years ago. There was no foodstuff of any kind.

But places to hide a corpse? Or a skeleton, it would be now. There were

a hundred. The fourth, and top, floor was provided with servants' rooms that had slanting ceilings, cubby-holes and storage closets galore. There was no time to investigate them now. If one contained the corpse of a man murdered eight years ago, it would keep another twenty-four hours.

Jeff selected the master bedroom as his temporary quarters. It seemed a trifle cleaner than the others. He unpacked his bag, got some old cloth and dusted the furniture. Then he stowed his things away. It was after midnight when he finished.

He was rather grim as he climbed the wide, circular staircase to the second floor and the room he had selected for himself. Sleep in a house of this kind seemed impossible, but he was tired. He had taken a two-hundred-mile bus trip over bad roads with lengthy, tiresome stops.

At one-thirty, he crawled between covers that hadn't been used in years and smelled musty. He snapped off the bedside table lamp, closed his eyes and decided that if sleep didn't come in fifteen minutes, he would get up and stay up.

The room was filled with shadows that flitted like an assortment of romping ghosts and he realized that they were formed by the lights in McGee's quarters shining through the myriad chinks in the window boards. He was certain he would never get to sleep, but one minute later he was snoring lightly.

After four years of the most hazardous adventuring a man can endure, though, Jeff Ward had learned to slumber with one ear open. It was a squeak that awakened him. He grumbled, started to turn over, and remembered, hazily, where he was. He had moved to sit up when a dark form lunged at him.

The man must have been standing only half a dozen feet away because he crossed the floor in an instant. Jeff, in the act of sitting up, hurled himself to one side. An attack like that was made only by a man with a knife and this blade slit through the bed covers and the mattress.

Then Jeff seized an arm, a firm, hairy arm. He gave a tug. It should have been a tremendous pull, calculated to throw the man across the bed, but Jeff was still half asleep and all his strength was not in the maneuver.

Instead of falling onto the bed, the at-

tacker lashed out with his left arm and clipped Jeff neatly across the cheek with a fist that wound up against his nose. Jeff was hurled back by the force of the blow and he let go of the man's knife hand.

The attacker jerked back from the bed, turned and fled. Jeff was out of bed in an instant. He snapped the light switch. Nothing happened. The main switch probably had been pulled.

Fumbling, because the layout of the house was not familiar, Jeff reached the staircase and went down it cautiously. The attacker might be lying in wait, and the house was pitch-dark. But now Jeff was ready for anything. Wide awake, muscles and nerves tense, he almost hoped the man would move in again.

Half-way down the steps, he came to an abrupt halt. Someone was banging on the huge brass knocker on the front door. Jeff took a hitch in his pajama trousers, wondered if he had ever walked across a colder floor, and opened the door.

The man who stood there was incredibly thin. If he had worn a stove-pipe hat, he would have been an exact duplicate of a cartoonist's dream of an anti-saloon league official. He looked like a sad undertaker.

"Who are you?" he demanded in a voice that was piping out of fright.

"Maybe I should ask the same question," Jeff replied suspiciously.

This could have been the man who had tried to knife him moments ago. A smart guy would have known that Jeff would be in hot pursuit, could have reached the porch and promptly and audaciously turned around to knock at the door like a newly arrived visitor.

"My name is Wharton," the thin man said. "Philip Wharton. This property is under my control."

"You're a liar," Jeff said amiably. "You're only a real estate agent who is trying to buy this house. Come in. Miss Chalmer sent me down here to open the place. A moment ago someone tried to kill me. Turned off the lights too. See?"

JEFF snapped the hall switch and the lights turned on. He felt a trifle sheepish, but he was grateful for the light. He indicated the library, and closed the front door tightly before he followed Wharton. The real estate man sat down gingerly on one dust-cloth-

covered chair.

"I was driving by about half an hour ago," he explained, "and I thought I saw lights through the cracks in the boards. Of course, I told myself I was crazy. Yet on my way back, I couldn't resist the impulse to make sure."

"Oh, naturally."

Jeff was wondering what this man had been doing way out here at this time of night. And also wondering where his attacker could have gone.

"After all"—Wharton was displaying all his dignity—"I have an interest in this residence. When is Miss Chalmer arriving?"

"I don't know," Jeff said, with a crooked grin. "I just work here. And tell me, if you saw lights, why didn't you assume that McGee might be inside?"

"McGee?" Wharton chuckled. "You don't know him or you wouldn't ask such a question. McGee is afraid of dead people and places where they've been. When his wife died seven years ago he wouldn't even go to the funeral. He crosses the street when he comes to a funeral parlor and he doesn't whistle when he passes a cemetery. He screams and runs. So you see, McGee wouldn't set foot in here."

"But I thought the alleged murder took place in Simm's house," Jeff argued.

"It did. But a man was killed here too. Murder, some people said. I say it was an accident. He was a caretaker who was hired when McGee got sick. He wasn't afraid of deserted places and came inside for a look. He tumbled off the second floor landing and broke his fool neck. Murder? Nonsense!"

Jeff did a bit of lying which he believed was called for.

"Mr. Wharton, I'm Miss Chalmer's new business manager. She will accept my advice on any propositions, including the one concerned with your desire to buy this place."

Wharton leaned closer and on his skinny face was something only he would term a smile.

"Listen, my friend, I know a right man when I meet one. Help me put over this deal and I'll see that you get a cut."

"Who is your client?" asked Jeff.

"I can't tell you that." Wharton's smile faded. "I don't even know who he is myself. He does all business by phone and won't leave his number. But he is

willing to pay handsomely. I think Miss Chalmer ought to sell."

"I don't," Jeff said, as he arose. "Not yet. Good night, Mr. Wharton. It's chilly down here and I'm not dressed for it."

Jeff walked into the hallway and saw why it was even colder than before. The front door was partly open. Jeff groaned. His attacker had escaped. He himself was slipping, and the only excuse he had was the arrival of Wharton. Jeff wondered if the dour real estate man had anything to do with it. Like a lookout who sensed things had gone wrong and had taken action to pave the way for his ally's escape.

Wharton didn't seem to notice the open door. He said something in a gruff voice and went on out. Jeff heard his car start a moment later.

Jeff locked up—tight—then went back to his room. The light was on because he had left the switch open. He headed for his bed and before climbing in, picked up a knife that lay on the covers. The attacker had dropped it.

The knife was interesting—sharp on both sides, wide-bladed and thin. Its handle was covered with fake jewels. Jeff put the thing under his pillow.

When he awoke again, it was daylight, though in that boarded-up room it was difficult to realize the fact.

CHAPTER III

Tombstone



IT WAS mid-afternoon when a car rolled up. The man who drove it was the stooge who had come at Jeff Ward with a gun. Irene's chauffeur. In the rear seat was Irene and a slim, strikingly handsome young man faultlessly dressed and faultlessly mannered.

Jeff went out to greet them.

"I didn't expect you quite so soon," he told Irene. "I have the first floor and your room ready though."

"Dismal old place, isn't it?" Irene looked with distaste at the surroundings. "And to think that when I was a little girl I thought this was a palace. Jeff, I

want you to meet Zack Bishop. His father and mine used to be in business together."

Jeff shook hands. "I've heard about your father," he acknowledged. "Do you live in the town here?"

Zack laughed. "Good heavens, no. I like city life. Irene picked me up this morning. She explained the circumstances and I thought—er—possibly you might want to enter the house next door. I have a key to it."

"I'll probably tear both places down, brick by brick," Jeff said. "Last night I found this house arranged to go up in smoke, with me inside. I spiked that. Later on, someone slipped in. Don't ask me how. Whoever it was, did his level best to carve me into little pieces. With this!"

He pulled the big knife out of his belt. Irene stared at it. One hand reached out and lightly touched the jeweled haft. Zack was staring, too, in complete bewilderment.

"Whose is it?" Jeff asked brusquely.

Irene shifted her eyes to his and he saw that she had gone pale. Without a word, she turned and ran up the stairs. Jeff thought he heard a half-choked sob from her. He started after her, but Zack seized his elbow.

"Wait a minute, old boy. I can explain about the knife and why Irene was upset. That knife belonged to her father. The night he went over to visit—and maybe murder Glen Simms, he took the knife along. It has never been seen since."

Jeff hefted the weapon thoughtfully. "It's an easy knife to recognize all right. But why should she be upset?"

Zack lit a cigarette. "Jeff, Irene says you're apparently tactful and understanding. She believes her father is still alive and a fugitive. On the way here she was rather bitter about hiring you. Just in the event her father comes back to—well, hide the evidences of his crime."

Jeff tucked the blade beneath his belt once more.

"Irene will probably want to cry this out," he said. "Come into the library, Bishop. There are things I've got to know."

Zack Bishop summed up all of Jeff's questions and answered them in a group.

"The arrangement between my father,

Glen Simms, and Ed Chalmer was this. They owned a huge, profitable manufacturing plant. As partners. If one died, the remaining two took over. If two died, the survivor handled the whole business. With one proviso. The heirs of those who died had to be taken care of out of the profits.

"I see." Jeff frowned. "Then Irene's income is from those profits?"

"Exactly. They run high. Thirty thousand last year. Not bad, eh? You see, we don't know whether or not there are any survivors. Either Irene's father killed Simms, or Simms killed him. Nobody can say, because a corpse has never been found. It is clear though that one met death at the hands of the other. Dad lived a few months after it happened. Then I came into possession of the business. Technically, that is, because Irene gets her share. Simms left no relatives."

"You and Irene, then, divide the profits," Jeff said. "Have you ever examined those premises next door?"

Zack shrugged. "At least a dozen times. If a corpse is hidden there, it's certainly in a good spot. State troopers dug up the cellar, inch by inch. They ripped out the furnace, ran lines up and down the spacing between walls and ripped up parts of the floors."

"Without result," Jeff commented wryly. "What use is there for me to examine that house? I couldn't do any better than that. Just the same, we might take a quick look."

"Why not?" Zack shrugged. "Right now, if you wish. I have the key."

THEY called upstairs and told Irene where they were going. Her voice came back with some of its usual cheerfulness. Zack led the way across the estate. It was not more than a hundred yards between front doors.

Jeff lagged behind a little. He stopped beside a high hedge, where the spite fence had fallen completely away. Zack had maneuvered through the hedge, but Jeff had to look for the opening, and he couldn't spot it. He decided to crash his way through and drew back a little.

Something hissed in front of his face. The crack of a rifle came and Jeff did a nose dive into the brush. He stayed there too, for a couple of minutes. Zack came running back to the hedge calling his name.

"Hit the sod!" Jeff yelled. "Someone just took a pot shot at me. You could be next."

Zack gasped and fell flat. After a moment or two, Jeff crawled back a few yards, arose to all fours and listened. He heard nothing and began running, bent low, in the direction of the shot. He saw no one. Looking around, he realized that a killer on the ground would have had a difficult time seeing him because of the high brush, but anyone inside the house or in McGee's quarters above the garage, could have spotted him.

Jeff went back to the hedge and after a few minutes found the tree into which the bullet had ripped. It created a downward furrow, proving that the gun from which it had been fired had been aimed from somewhere above ground level.

"What on earth?" Zack gulped.

"Attempt Number Three," Jeff said grimly. "Bishop, somebody doesn't want me around here and I'm beginning to wonder why. What does this person expect I'll find that the police couldn't? Come on, let's go into Simms' place."

"Do you think we should?" Zack protested. "After all, it might be dangerous and . . . Oh, come on. A man can only die once."

Jeff nodded. "We seem to be on the edge of death right now. At least, I am. You can retreat. And while we're on this subject of death, I want to know more about your father's."

Zack was standing at the front door with the key half extended toward the lock. He turned, his right hand still holding the key extended.

"Just what do you mean?" he demanded, and there was some color in his cheeks.

"Well, your father was a member of this ill-fated trio. Not long after Simms or Chalmer, or both were killed, your father also died. Violently. It might be construed that your father killed them both and then himself after he discovered he couldn't live with his conscience any longer."

Zack glared. "Why, I ought to—"

"Now wait!" Jeff begged. "Other people have thought of that idea and may rehash it. If we can kill the whole thing for good you're better off."

Zack relaxed a trifle. "I suppose you're right, at that. Dad really did shoot himself. He was dying anyhow.

An incurable, painful illness. We weren't surprised. He'd hinted that he could hardly stand the agony."

"And there you are," Jeff said. "If you have such proof, there is nothing else to it. Come on, open the door and let's see what's inside."

If the Chalmer house had smelled dusty and dank, this one was twice as bad. There was no electricity, but Jeff had provided himself with a flashlight and together they toured the first floor carefully.

It was in the kitchen that they discovered their first clue. A pan containing soup. Just a few drops, but moist. Then there were half a dozen cans of staple groceries on the shelf. A half-hearted attempt had been made to conceal them behind piles of dishes.

"Irene's father!" Zack exclaimed softly. "He's come back. Who else could it be?"

"You may be right," Jeff admitted. "Let's search the rest of the place."

They investigated the two upper floors without result. If anyone had passed along here, they had flown, because the accumulated dust had not been disturbed in the least.

Finally they walked down to the cellar. Jeff's flashlight swept away the darkness and he methodically sprayed the floor, looking for footprints of recent vintage, or some sign of a grave. Suddenly the ray of light centered on one wall and stayed there. Neither man moved. The only sound was their heavy breathing.

A GOOD-SIZED hole had been cut through the high cement wall. A hole big enough to have accommodated a human body.

"He not only came back," Zack groaned, "but he removed the evidences of his crime. Simms' corpse must have been sealed up in the wall and the work so carefully done that the police never saw a trace of it."

Jeff didn't reply. He propped the flash against some debris and carefully turned over the large sections of cement which had been dug out of the wall. It was like working a jigsaw puzzle on a huge scale, but he finally got the pieces together in fair juxtaposition.

"Take a look," he told Zack. "I noticed one of the chunks of cement had

Graveyard

thick black lines on it. Now that most of the pieces are assembled, do you notice what has been drawn on that cement wall?"

"It looks like a tombstone!" Zack exclaimed.

"Exactly. A well done bit of work too. Whoever drew this was good at free hand drawing. But if you think this hole was made since I got here, you're mistaken. The wall was ripped down months ago. The condition of the cement blocks proves it."

Zack was growing more excited. "Then someone discovered where the body was hidden and drew this tombstone to mark the spot. I wonder who found it!"

"I could give a guess," said Jeff, "but I won't. Not now. Hold the light, Bishop."

Jeff Ward hunted around for a heavy instrument. He found a rusted old pick and used it to chop the cement slabs into smaller pieces. He worked carefully, sifted all the cement dust through his fingers.

Suddenly he stood erect. Nestled in the palm of his hand was a steel-jacketed bullet, badly gouged but still recognizable.

"Think hard," he said to Zack. "When was this cement wall installed? How long before the murder or murders took place?"

"Why, I don't know. But maybe I could find out. All three families used the same contractor for any work of this sort."

"Then find out as quickly as possible. Go into town now."

"If you'd only explain—" Zack pleaded.

"It's obvious enough," Jeff said softly. "Whoever drew that tombstone didn't use it to mark the place where a corpse was hidden behind the wall. How could the artist have known without tearing the wall down? He wanted to mark something else. A bullet-hole which he believed he recognized as such."

"But we thought Chalmer used a knife!"

"We don't know what happened. Only the murderer does. But this bullet-hole indicates something. It also explains one thing that has worried me . . . Will you get started and find out about the cement?"



"STARTING out at once, Zack Bishop took Irene's car and chauffeur. Jeff went back to the Chalmer house. Irene was in the living room when he entered it, and he sat down opposite her.

"That knife, Jeff," she said. "I've got to explain about it."

"The knife means nothing," Jeff broke in. "I think the murder, eight years ago, was done with a gun that fired this bullet."

He extended the slug and Irene frowned at sight of it.

"Dad was afraid of guns," she said, in a low voice. "He never owned one and refused to have one in the house. Jeff, if there was any shooting done, Dad didn't do it!"

"Good," he said. "Then we're getting somewhere. Can you furnish me with the name and address of the private detective who took old McGee's place two years ago?"

"I remember it. His name was Folsom—Hugh Folsom. He lived with his wife and one child at Twenty-two-thirty-five Blake Road. In town here. I know because I've been providing for the child ever since. I felt I owed that to Folsom."

"What sort of private detective was he?"

"Not a regular one, with an office and all. Just a man who did investigating as a side line. He'd done some for Dad and I called on him."

"Thank heaven for a memory like yours," Jeff almost chortled. "Now, how long was he on this property before he met his death?"

"Why, almost two weeks. McGee was practically ready to return, Folsom reported to me on four occasions, saying he had found nothing."

"Folsom," Jeff observed, "was the kind of guy who wanted to be certain before he reported facts. He found something all right. I'm pretty sure of that. Is there a phone here?"

"In McGee's quarters," Irene said.

"Jeff, what's it all about? Where did Zack go rushing off to?"

"It would take too long to explain now," he told her. "And there are too many things to do."

He hurried into the hallway, found a bit of cloth and gingerly dusted the floor beneath the second floor balcony. Then he climbed the stairs to the balcony and studied the rail closely; the floor there also. He seemed satisfied with what he found—or didn't find.

Next, he went to McGee's quarters. The old man was puttering around a rather extensive flower garden beside the garage. He looked up at Jeff and in broad daylight Jeff noticed that McGee's right eye was glass. It gave him an oddly staring appearance.

"Miss Chalmer has been wondering where you've been, McGee," Jeff said. "Don't you think you'd better go in and see her?"

McGee threw down his hoe with a shrug of irritation.

"I don't see why. I do my work regular. She's got no kick coming. But I'll go."

Jeff watched him walk along the path and waited a full three minutes after the caretaker disappeared. Then he hurried upstairs to McGee's quarters and located the telephone. He found the number of the private detective's home and called the widow.

"I hate to bring up memories," he said, "but Miss Chalmer—my boss—wants to know if your husband had ever taken any art lessons."

"Why, no," she said. "But he could draw quite well. I often said he'd made a mistake in not following it up."

"Thank you," Jeff replied. "That's all we wanted to know. Miss Chalmer will undoubtedly look in on you soon and explain everything. Thanks again."

Jeff looked around McGee's small living room. It was neat and tidy. There were two unusually nice-looking chairs in petit point coverings, a small table made of several kinds of inlaid wood. The old-fashioned roll-top desk was ancient. Jeff opened a drawer or two. He discovered four bankbooks and whistled at the amounts in each. Old McGee wasn't badly off at all.

Then he stepped to the window and looked out. McGee was coming back, a sour expression on his face. Jeff ran

downstairs, but too late to avoid being seen coming down the stairs that led to McGee's living quarters.

McGee suddenly grabbed an old ax handle.

"You were prowling around!" he accused. "Maybe you stole my money. I got money hid up there. And that haughty girl didn't want to see me. You sent me there to get rid of me!"

JEFF managed to get out of the garage, and backed away from the slowly advancing threat of the upraised ax handle. He could have tackled this old man easily, but he didn't want to hurt him. McGee kept moving forward, swinging his club.

Jeff suddenly found himself in the flower garden. McGee didn't seem to notice. He took one savage swipe with his weapon, missed, and Jeff lunged for the club. He missed, tripped and fell heavily. He felt something strike his hip with enough force to make him dizzy with pain. Then McGee was coming at him again. Jeff was getting tired of it. The old fool should have more sense.

Jeff avoided another swing of the club, grabbed an ankle and tugged. McGee came tumbling down. Jeff wrenched the club out of his hand and hurled it far away. He lifted McGee and shook him slightly.

"You idiot!" he shouted. "I went to your rooms to use the phone. It's the only one on the premises and it's paid for by Miss Chalmer. Don't you think she had a right to ask me to use it?"

Jeff let go of the chastened man and stepped back. His ankle hit that same object which had collided so painfully with his hip. He looked down. It was an iron pipe with a screw top.

"I guess it's that blamed temper of mine." McGee was apologetic. "Been living alone too long. Got to thinking everything here belongs to me, and I should know better. I just work here. I been saving my money for years. I get a pension from the plant on account of this eye. That, and what I get paid for watching this place, gives me a pretty good income. I don't get to town often and I let the money pile up. I been scared for years somebody would get it."

"All right," Jeff said. "Forget the whole thing. And, McGee, have you

noticed any lights in the Simms place lately? I mean during the past two or three days?"

"They were there last night. Scared me so I couldn't sleep. I didn't see any lights for years, until about a month ago. Then maybe once a week."

"If you see any more, come to the house and tell me right away," Jeff warned. "We all may be in considerable danger and your help is needed. Remember—any lights, notify me at once."

"I'll keep a sharp eye out," McGee promised.

Zack Bishop returned soon after Jeff was back in the house. He had news.

"The contractor said part of that wall had been torn down because they had been installing some new intake pipes for the oil furnace. They tried to cut through and part of the wall caved in. That was about two weeks before all this happened."

Jeff nodded. "Don't mention this to anyone," he said. "And, Bishop, what do you know about a real estate dealer named Wharton?"

"Tricky. A sly scoundrel. He's been known to put over a lot of shady deals. My opinion is that he's money hungry."

"He looks it," Jeff commented. "Irene is upstairs. I think she wants to talk to you about selling this place."

"She should," Zack said. "I wish that offer she got anonymously, had come to me. I'd sell in a minute."

Zack ran upstairs and Jeff strolled out into the back again. He smoked a few cigarettes, stared at the ground, and paced between shrubs and trees methodically.

He ran all details of this mess through his mind. Considered them from every angle. Zack, he realized, was more than suspicious, although Jeff, fairly enough, realized some of his suspicion was due to the fact that Zack was seeing too much of Irene. But Zack now apparently ran the factory. His father could have murdered both Simms and Irene's father to gain possession of the place. Later, when he realized what he had done, he could have taken his own life. There was only Zack's word for it that the suicide had been because of ill health.

True, Zack was paying Irene her share of the profits, but he could be hiding a great deal. Then, too, it was through his father's effort and his continued ac-

quiescence that McGee had been put in charge of the premises and was kept there. And when McGee was ill and a private detective sent to inspect the premises, the man had been killed. By accident, according to the evidence, but Jeff knew better. The man had been murdered.

MCGEE, himself, was an odd character. He had a lot of money, but Jeff knew he had been pensioned off at the plant and also was paid a weekly salary for his work on the estate. He lived frugally, and could have accumulated all that money honestly.

Then there was Wharton, the cadaverous real estate agent. His actions were definitely tied up with the case. He wanted to buy the place for a client he claimed was unknown even to him. Yet Jeff knew that if Wharton had wanted to identify this client, he could have done so. And Wharton's presence at the house so soon after the attempts on Jeff's life did nothing to dim the suspicions against him.

With reference to those attacks, Zack could have made them and driven back to the city in plenty of time for Irene to pick him up.

But what worried Jeff more than anything was the question of what really happened in one of these houses eight years ago. Had Irene's father murdered Simms and actually vanished? The letter she had received indicated this, but such a letter could easily have been forged. Or was it her father who lay dead somewhere nearby, with Simms the fugitive?

CHAPTER V

Murder from the Past



CALMLY and carefully Jeff formulated a plan of action. He returned to the house and found Irene and Zack in the living rooms. Jeff stood looking down at them.

"I'm ready to give up," he said. "How can I be expected to find out what happened eight years ago? There never were any

witnesses, nor was there any evidence even then. Miss Chalmers, if you want my advice, sell this place at once."

"But, Jeff—" she began protesting.

He cut her off. "Suppose I did discover the truth? What then? Would it bring the dead back to life? Would it do you any good to discover that your father was a murderer? Drop the whole thing. Let the past keep its victims and its secrets."

"Exactly what I've been trying to tell her," Zack said cordially. "Irene, I think you should take that advice. And work fast too."

She hesitated, but it was clear that she realized both these men were sincere.

"Jeff," she said, "I thought, because of your background, you'd see this through. I was afraid I'd renege, but if you kept on going, I wouldn't stop you. Perhaps you are both right. Anyway, I'm tired of the whole thing. Do as you wish."

Jeff didn't make any comments. He merely hurried out of the house and around to McGee's quarters. The old caretaker was puttering in the flower garden.

"McGee," Jeff said, "I've got to use the phone again. Miss Chalmer has decided to get rid of this place at once. I want to reach Wharton."

"What becomes of me then?" McGee demanded irascibly. "After all, the years I put in here should count for something."

"Maybe the new owner will keep you on," Jeff told him. "At any rate, you'll stay until the place changes hands. That won't be long. Miss Chalmer is eager to get rid of it as quickly as possible."

McGee trailed along and stood listening while Jeff called Wharton.

"This is Miss Chalmer's business agent," Jeff told the real estate agent. "I've persuaded her to sell. However, she insists upon action. Can you contact your client at once?"

"I don't see how," Wharton said. "He told me to wait for his call. I swear I don't know who he is. All I can do is wait. Explain to Miss Chalmer, will you?"

"I'll explain," Jeff said. "But she's temperamental. Right now she wants to sell if there is quick action. Tomorrow she may change her mind. Do what you can and let me know the moment you have any news. Call the garage here."

Jeff hung up, nodded to McGee, and returned to the house. Irene was slowly ascending the staircase to the second floor and she didn't turn around as Jeff entered. Zack seemed to have disappeared.

Jeff found newspapers Zack had brought along and killed an hour reading them. Finally, he prepared food for two out of supplies he had brought from the town. Irene came down to eat, but she had little to say.

Jeff knew he had disappointed her tremendously.

AT EIGHT that night, Zack returned. Ten minutes after his arrival, Wharton appeared, and the real estate man was highly excited.

"He telephoned me!" he exclaimed. "Everything is set. I have the papers drawn up. All we need is Miss Chalmer's signature."

Jeff placed the document on a table before Irene, took a fountain pen from his pocket, and handed it to her. Irene hesitated, looking around the room almost longingly. Finally, she wrote her name.

"I don't even know who is taking possession," she said. "But perhaps you are right, Jeff. You and Zack. Why should I keep this place as a memento of everything that is sad in my life?"

Wharton all but snatched the deed from the table. He pranced out of the room and one minute after he had vanished, Jeff raced for the door. He offered no explanations. Zack's car was parked in front and he appropriated it without hesitation.

Zack and Irene looked at one another in vast surprise and tried to figure out what Jeff's strange actions meant.

Two hours went by before they knew. Then Jeff returned. With him was Wharton and old McGee. Both looked sullen.

"Imagine who the purchaser is," Jeff said. "Nobody but McGee. It seems he accumulated enough money to make the down payment, and wanted the place. McGee, how in the world did you hope to pay the mortgage installments?"

"I know somebody who'll buy from me at a big profit," McGee said angrily. "That's legal, ain't it? But if you knew it was me trying to buy, you'd smell a rat and I'd never get the place."

JEFF threw the deeds on the table in front of Irene.

"And he still hasn't got the place," he said. "I trailed Wharton, and when his mysterious client showed up, I collared both of them. McGee never signed, so the deal is off. I think it ought to remain off."

"But, Jeff"—Irene looked up quickly—"you said it was better to sell. If McGee can make a profit, I don't care."

"McGee wanted this place for only one reason," Jeff snapped. "Miss Chalmer, that letter your father sent you seven and a half years ago. Where is it?"

"I—don't know," she said slowly. "It disappeared."

"Sure it did," snapped Jeff. "McGee stole it, because he also wrote it. Seven and a half years ago you were not more than fourteen or fifteen years old. You were too young to consider the letter as a clue, too young to realize that the handwriting was not your father's. I know what happened eight years ago."

"Jeff—what? Tell us. It doesn't make any difference if you prove Dad is a murderer."

"He is no killer, Irene. It's true, he probably went over to Simms to horse-whip him. But when he got there, Simms was more than likely dead, and his murderer was ready to kill again. In fact, I think he wanted to kill your father too. Yes, it was McGee. Motive? He's a sourpuss with a rotten temper. A man who couldn't see that safety rules wouldn't permit him to remain as an employee of the plant after that accident which cost him one eye. The pension wasn't enough. He thought he had been thrown out, and wanted revenge. He'd have killed Zack's father too, if he'd had the opportunity. Look at him now if you don't believe me."

McGee's good eye was glaring. His fingers closed and unclosed. There was a snarl on his lips.

"There's a good portrait of a killer." Jeff went on. "He had to get possession of this place so he could remove the bodies. Both bodies, because he killed both men. With a gun. He murdered them in the cellar of the Simms' house next door. That private detective found one of the bullet-holes and meant to bring it to the attention of the authorities, but McGee beat him to it. McGee was supposed to be ill, but he was able to

come out here and commit another murder. He killed the private detective somewhere else. Probably in his quarters, after luring him there. Then he put the body in the house to simulate an accident.

"But the victim didn't fall over the railing. A man who does that leaves marks—scratches on the floor and the railing. Marks where he fell, and there were none. Your local police were not up on things like that, and accepted the obvious. McGee didn't want anything about the bullet-hole to come out. He cut the wall away, but not well enough to hide the evidence that private detective found."

"But he had such a long time to do it right!" Zack argued.

"Sure he did, but McGee has a conscience too, and a wholesome fear of being in these lonely houses for long. Maybe he sees ghosts—of the two men he killed.

"He tried to frighten me, or even kill me, when I first arrived. Then he took a pot shot at me. That shot could only have come from the garage. Every window in the house is boarded up so closely that no gun muzzle could get through.

"Why did he want to kill me? I didn't matter, but through me or my death, he might frighten Irene into selling. Just as by saying he saw lights in the houses he gave them the reputation of being haunted.

"He stole your father's knife, Miss Chalmer, and kept it. When he attacked me, he left it behind purposely, so you'd think your father was still alive and maybe you'd want to get out from under fast. Similarly, he planted evidence to show that someone really had been living in Simms' house."

"But where are the bodies?" Zack kept protesting. "The police found nothing."

"They looked only in and around the house," Jeff said. "Just prior to the murders, there was a new oil furnace installed. Also a new fuel tank was buried out back. The old one was abandoned. You discovered that from the contractor who told you about the wall, Bishop. The cement was still fairly soft there and took the bullet. But it gave me an idea too. McGee has a flower garden in back. A poor one, because he knows little about flowers and probably doesn't like them anyway."

SUDDENLY McGee gave a scream of rage. He reached under his coat and Jeff went flying at him. The tussle was brief. When it was over, Jeff held McGee with one hand and a nickel-plated revolver with the other.

"This does it," he said triumphantly. "I'll bet it's the same gun that killed Simms and your father, Miss Chalmer. We'll find out by comparing its rifling with the slug I took out of the wall and, possibly, bullets we'll find in or near the bodies."

"But where, man?" Zack shouted. "You must produce those bodies! Skeletons, now, of course!"

"I know just where they are," said Jeff Ward. "Inside the old fuel tank, the abandoned tank which was left in the ground. It's the only place they could be. McGee dragged them out, cut a hole in the tank somehow. Probably that wasn't hard because the tank must have been pretty well gone to be left there and not reclaimed. McGee started his flower garden to cover up the digging,

but if he owned the house, all further attempts to find a body would stop. Perhaps that was McGee's only solution. But he's so afraid of dead men, it's possible he couldn't make himself exhume them."

Zack rushed toward the door.

"I'm calling the police! They'll dig up that tank. Watch McGee!"

Jeff fondled the gun. "I'm almost wishing he's make a break for it."

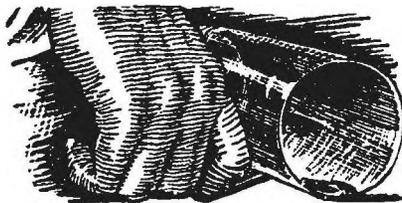
Hours later, the whole truth was known, augmented with a detailed confession by McGee. Jeff went upstairs to pack. When he came down, Irene was alone in the house.

"I told you, Jeff," she said, "that solving this wouldn't mean the end of your job."

He shrugged. "That's just your way of thanking me," he said. "You have Zack. He's all you'll need."

She smiled slightly. "I—sent Zack away. Jeff, I need you much more."

A few moments later, Jeff knew he would remain with Irene—for life.



The Fatal Glass Held—Death!

AGED but spry and merry Grandfather Trent lifted the glass and quaffed its contents—and then suddenly collapsed. A few moments later he was dead—and the doctor pronounced it arsenic poisoning. And added that the event bore all the earmarks of murder. Stan Bruce, visiting the Trent home, thought so too—and his suspicions were directed against young Roger Trent. But then death struck again—and this time all Stan's deductions were bowled over like a house of cards. It soon became apparent that there was a plot on foot to exterminate all the Trents—slowly. And that meant Stan had to act—swiftly! For one of the year's most breath-taking mysteries, look forward to

MURDER IS PATIENT

By WAYLAND RICE

A Complete Novelet Coming Next Issue!



Duffy stooped over the corpse and then held up a white object

A DETECTIVE'S LIFE IS EASY

By RAY CUMMINGS

So believes Jacqueline Dolan, police sleuth's better half, and she immediately sets about the job of proving it, too!

MY BRIDE, Jacqueline, is peculiar. Mentally, I mean. So far as looks go, she's wonderful. Big baby-blue eyes, fluffy bobbed blond hair and curves in all the right places. I'm crazy about her. I wouldn't want a nicer little bride. But, mentally, there are peculiarities.

For instance, there was this summer evening when I decided to take Jackie to my chess club, where a visiting celebrity was giving an exhibition of simultaneous play. Jackie is always obliging. She pouted, but that was all.

We got a late start. I'm a police detective, and there was some routine work—nothing important, but still it was about nine o'clock before I got home. I had a quick supper, waited for Jackie to fix her hair, paint her fingernails and such. The club is only about a mile across town from our home. It was a nice night, so I decided we would walk.

Walking through town with Jackie is tough going. We had to stop at almost every lighted shop window. Especially hosiery, lingerie and stuff like that. You'd be surprised how many lingerie

stores there are in ten blocks. Finally I couldn't stand it.

"Aw, come on," I told her. "I'm in a hurry."

"Why?" she asked.

"Because we've already missed the lecture, and the games will have started."

"Oh," she said. "Are you going to play, Tom?"

"No, just watch. But I'd like to see the openings."

"Why?" she said.

"Well, because—"

"I should think the finish would be more exciting than the beginning," she said. "Oh Tom, look at these darling nylons! Tom, please, let's buy just one pair!"

See what I mean? Anyway, we never did get to that chess exhibition, as it happened. At the corner of State and Main we passed the police station, and by a freak of bad luck, out of it came Captain MacKenzie, on the run toward his parked car. He saw us and stopped while I introduced him to Jackie.

"The little bride—well, well!" Mac looked his appreciation.

"Hello," Jackie said. She beamed on Mac. "So this is the boss?" she said. "My goodness, you don't look so cross and unreasonable. You look just darling."

See what I mean? Well, when we got that straightened out, Mac announced that he was in a hurry because there had been a murder out in the West End section. Mac had just arrived at the station.

"Sergeant Duffy's out there now," he said. "Want to come along, Dolan?"

"Oh—somebody's been killed?" Jackie was thrilled. "Take me, Tom! Take me! I want to see you working—looking at dead corpses and guessing who killed them and all that. It always sounds so exciting."

Of course, Mac didn't know Jackie. "Come ahead," he said.

IT WAS a big old-fashioned frame house of two stories, out in that part of town where the streets are cut through, but nothing much else had arrived there yet. This was one of the original farmhouses, owned by a spinster of forty, named Mary Blake. The town had grown into her farm property, and she had got rich selling it piecemeal.

It was this Mary Blake who had just

been found murdered. Her companion-housekeeper, Jean Grear, had come home and found Mary Blake lying on the sitting room floor, with a knife in her chest.

"And who did it?" Jackie wanted to know, when Mac told us all this. "Why would anybody stick a knife into her? My, but this is exciting!"

"That," Mac said, "is what we hope we can find out."

"And you'll just listen," I told Jackie.

"Oh," Jackie said.

The Blake farmhouse, from the outside, was a gloomy sort of place—a big square house set in the midst of those empty, naked streets, with a few trees around. No street lights were in yet, and since this night was cloudy, the whole section looked just right for a nice murder.

There was only one other house nearby. It was dark as we passed it—a newly-built, cheap bungalow style affair.

"Mary Blake's only neighbor," Mac observed. "And Duffy thinks he'll show me how smart he is. He phoned he's already rung the neighbor into the thing. He's got her over at the Blake house now, questioning her."

She sounded interesting. Her name was Vivian Johnson—an ex-chorus girl who was supposed to be living here recuperating from an illness, and writing a book on "Life in the Chorus," or something like that.

The Blake house was full of a lot of more or less meaningless activity by the time we got there, with Duffy's men prowling around to see what they could turn up. Dr. Grace, the medical examiner, hadn't come yet. The corpse was still on the living room floor, with one of Duffy's men at the living room door.

Duffy himself was in the big, old-fashioned dining room, flinging questions at the people whom I imagine, he was calling his three suspects. They were Jean Grear, the thirty-year-old companion-housekeeper who had discovered the murder. A man named Harrington Carse, who had a small real estate office in town and was a frequent visitor at the Blake place. Duffy had heard about him from the housekeeper, had phoned to town and had him brought out here. Then there was the ex-chorus girl neighbor, Vivian Johnson.

"Well, for an hour's work, I see you've been making speed," Mac observed.

"Sure, sure," Duffy agreed. "There's plenty stuff around here to go on, but it ain't so simple. Listen, lemme give you the dope how it stands."

I shoved Jackie into a corner out of the way. To say that Jackie was excited would be the understatement of the month. She was shaking. She flung an awed glance at the two women and the man across the room.

"Tom!" she whispered. "One of them did it, maybe. Just think, here we are right in the same room with a real killer! Tom, maybe that housekeeper didn't tell the truth when she said she found the— the corpse. Maybe she was here all the time and did it herself, and now she's just pretending."

"Thanks," I said. "We'll keep that in mind."

"And I don't like the look of that man, do you? He looks sneaky."

Harrington Carse looked shocked and nervous, but you couldn't call it sneaky. He was a big, rather good-looking fellow of about forty, a little stooped, with thin sandy hair and horn-rimmed glasses.

"And that chorus girl! Tom, she's frightfully made up. I wouldn't trust her. I wouldn't trust her not to stick a knife into anybody, would you?"

"Yes," I said. "Now take it easy, Jackie."

Jean Grear, the housekeeper, was explaining to Mac how she had found the body. She was a large, good-looking young woman, simply dressed, with brown hair somewhat primly parted in the middle and pulled into a knot at the back.

"I was in town," she said. "I left here about seven o'clock. Mary was upstairs. I was going to the early movies. I told Mary I'd be back about nine o'clock."

"Had she said anything about expecting a visitor?" Mac asked.

"No—no she hadn't."

"But listen, Mac," Duffy put in. "She didn't go to the movies. She ain't got no alibi at all to prove she wasn't right here."

"What did you do?" Mac said to the housekeeper.

She hadn't liked the picture. It was a nice summer night, so she had just taken a long walk. No, she hadn't met anybody. Then she had come home. The front door was unlocked, as it usually was. She had noticed a light burning

upstairs, in Mary Blake's bedroom, and there was a light in the sitting room. Then she had found the body, lying on the sitting room floor.

MISS GREAR told it quietly. She didn't look exactly frightened, but she certainly was tense and nervous.

"Look," Duffy said. "She admits she knows that Mary Blake's will leaves her property and cash maybe up to fifty grand."

"I've been with Miss Blake constantly for fifteen years," Jean Grear said. "Am I being accused of killing her?"

"Nobody's accusing anyone," Mac said. "You, Mr. Carse—when did you last see Miss Blake?"

"A couple of days ago," Carse said. "Yes, I think it was Thursday evening. We've been friends for over ten years. We were consulting on the sale of some property for her—I've sold quite a bit of her original acreage. And we were talking about her investments."

"I see," Mac agreed.

"Miss Blake was rather a recluse," Carse added. "I suppose that's why Sergeant Duffy thought of me and Miss Johnson." He flung Vivian Johnson a glance.

"I was her friend," Vivian retorted. "I ain't afraid to say so."

"You came over here quite often?" Mac said.

"Sure I did. Nearly every day. She liked hearing about New York. I'd read her parts of my book, and tell her things."

"But you didn't drop over here this evening?"

"No, I sure didn't. I was just goin' to bed—I got a rotten headache—when policemen come and hauled me over here.

"She'd been borrowin' money from Miss Blake," Duffy put in. "Miss Grear says so."

"Okay, so what?" Vivian retorted. "She's been helpin' me out till I put the book over. Is that a crime?"

Beside me I could feel Jackie getting ready to burst out again.

"Why, it's just like a puzzle, isn't it, Tom?" Jackie whispered.

"Yeah, crossword," I agreed. "Or maybe a jig-saw."

"I just know one of those three did it!"

"Unless some tramp wandered up from the railroad tracks, bumped her off, and

is now on a fast freight headed west," I said.

"Oh," Jackie said.

I don't think Mac was any too optimistic about pinning anything on one of those three in a hurry. He was just more or less killing time waiting for Dr. Grace to arrive. As a matter of fact, there was some basis for just figuring it an ordinary robbery and murder by some chance marauder. Mary Blake had been wearing a ring and a brooch of some value—at least Jean Grear said so—and they now were gone.

"Let's go take a look at the corpse," Mac said.

Duffy led us into the living room. I kept Jackie behind me. Sometimes a corpse that has been knifed is not too good to look at. They had thrown a couch drape over it. Duffy uncovered it.

Mary Blake had been a fragile little woman, with fluffy, prematurely gray hair. She had a pretty, doll-like look about her. In life, especially if she were smiling and vivacious, she might have looked even younger than her forty years. But lying here now, some signs of age were obvious. Her face, quite pretty, showed very few wrinkles, and there were only slight puffs under the eyes. But I could see that she had been a woman who had been making efforts to cling to her youth. Her lips were carefully rouged, her eyes made up, her hair fluffed and artificially waved in girlish fashion.

"Look," Duffy was saying, "there's no signs of a struggle, nothing like that. She was standin' up—see, there's no chair near her—talkin' to the killer. It was somebody she knew pretty well. Ain't that likely? An' look at the size of her. Either of those two women, to say nothing of the man, could have made a sudden jab with that knife."

"Could have," Mac agreed.

The knife was a sharp, thin affair, an ornamental paper knife or something of the sort. Anyway Jean Grear said it was always here in the room. The killer had had a thought for fingerprints, which maybe wouldn't be the case with a passing tramp. A narrow scarf from the table here had been snatched up, and any possible prints removed from the knife handle. The little scarf was still loosely wrapped around it, lying on the thin

chest of the corpse.

"I figure it like this," Duffy was telling us. "She was upstairs—she heard Miss Grear, or some visitor down here, or at the front door. So she came down, in the pretty negligee thing—"

The sound of an arriving car outside made us turn toward the hall. Jackie had been standing beside me, gazing at the corpse with a sort of thrilled, awed horror.

"What's that in her hand?" Jackie said suddenly.

Mary Blake's right hand was clenched. There was the end of a shiny little white metal object sticking out.

"Oh, that," Duffy said. "I was gonna mention it." He stooped, loosened the fingers of the corpse a little. "There's a bunch more of them things on the bureau up in her bedroom. An' one of them's on the floor up there at head of the stairs. It's some kind of thingamajig for her hair, ain't it?"

JACKIE was crowding close to us. "Why, that's an aluminum hair curler," she said. "Before you go to bed you—"

"Do your hair up in curls with them," I said. "Okay, thanks, Jackie."

"Then she was up there doing her hair up in curlers," Jackie said. "And maybe she heard that housekeeper woman coming back from the movies. Or maybe the bell rang, and—"

"Maybe," I said. "Okay, Jackie. Thanks a lot."

One of Duffy's men from the hall called:

"It's Dr. Grace, Sarge."

"Good," Duffy said.

We were all starting for the hall.

"You know," I said to Mac, "I'm inclined to think this is an inside job."

"Me too," he agreed.

"The theft of her ring and brooch—if there was a theft—that could easily be a plant."

"Tom, listen!" Jackie was clinging to my arm as we reached the hall. She was positively bursting. "Tom, if she was upstairs with her hair done up in curlers and—"

"If you want to figure motives," Mac said. "Well, each one of those three has one."

"Tom, listen!"

"If it was a woman did it," Duffy said

as we went along the hall, toward where Dr. Grace was arriving at the front door, "I'm wonderin' if maybe the angle of the knife jab would be different or somethin' from what a man would use."

"I thought of that," Mac said. "We'll ask Dr. Grace to figure it. That knife thrust must have gone into her heart."

"Tom, listen! I'm trying to tell you—"

A woman can be annoying, but I always try to hold my temper with Jackie.

"Please," I said, "take it easy, Jackie."

"But Tom, I'm trying to tell you—"

"Sure. She had her hair done up in curlers. We know it."

"That's what I mean!" Jackie was positively struggling with me, shoving me to one side in the hall. "I'm trying to tell you—"

She had me over in a dim corner of the hall, by the dining room. There was a side entrance here that led outside into the garden. I shook off Jackie's excited grip.

"Jackie, what are you trying to tell me?"

"Why—why, I'm trying to tell you I know who killed her!"

"You *what*?"

"Why, it's so simple, Tom! She had her hair done up in curlers, and when she came downstairs she was taking them out in a hurry. She left some of them on the bureau, and one she dropped on the floor on the stairs as she came down."

"Okay, so she did."

"And one she had just taken out and it was in her hand when she got into the sitting room. It's so simple, Tom!"

"Is it?"

"Of course it is. A woman wouldn't take her hair out of curlers to come downstairs to see another woman! But for a man, she would! Women look awful in curlers. There isn't a woman living who would want a man to see her in them."

I got it! You couldn't miss it.

"It's that man Harrington Carse!" Jackie was saying. "He came to call and when he rang the bell, Mary Blake may-

be looked out the window, or called down to him. And when she found out who it was, she—"

I guess in her excitement Jackie was talking pretty loud. Loud enough anyway for a shadowy figure just outside the dining room door to hear her. It was Carse, and what he heard was probably enough to frighten the life out of him.

"Tom, you've got him!" Jackie was saying.

She didn't get any further with it because Carse came at us with a rush. I guess in an unreasoning panic he was making a run for that side door and we were between it and him. Anyway, I heard him rip out a startled, muttered curse, saw his big shadowy figure making a lunge.

It came so quickly, unexpectedly, that he might have got past me, but Jackie who had surreptitiously loosened an ankle strap, flipped out her foot and kicked off her slipper. The slipper flew up with a whirl, and with good luck the sharp high heel of it hit Carse a smack in the eye. He let out a bellow and reeled sideward, enough, anyway, to give me a chance to nail him on the jaw.

Which I did—and he went down, with me on top of him. Jackie was squealing for me to crack him some more. But I didn't have to, not much anyway, because the fight went right out of him.

Then Mac and Duffy came piling on us, yanked him out from under me. And with Jackie babbling at them, they pounded him with questions and accusations about how he had juggled Mary Blake's investments that he was handling. Which evidently, because she got wise to it, was what caused him to kill her.

The sudden windup to the affair certainly caused a commotion there in that hall. In the midst of it, I found Jackie standing gazing at me.

"Wasn't it exciting!" Jackie said. "And so simple! Why, detective work is easy, Tom! Is that all you do with yourself all day? I wondered."



Next Issue's Novel

THE BLACK BAT in THE CRIME TO COME

*Accused of a brilliant crime, Jim Bartlett
turns the tables on a killer!*



Bartlett sprang forward and his fist smashed solidly against the killer's jaw

MURDER with COLORED LIGHTS

By CURTISS T. GARDNER

RED velvet curtains parted to reveal a small stage at one end of the long, table-filled, hotel banquet room. Four men walked out on the stage. Three of them wore ordinary business suits. The fourth was dressed in a loose-fitting laboratory coat which was criss-crossed with wires and studded with rows of Christmas-tree bulbs.

Jim Bartlett, District Safety Engineer for Imperial Casualty Company, stepped to the footlights. He felt nervous as a cat, but didn't show it. His lean, intelligent face wore a smile as he bowed slightly in the direction of the raised, head table, where the insurance company's officials were seated. More than two hundred pairs of eyes be-

longing to Imperial's Middle Atlantic Region field force turned to him from the smaller tables which filled the whole floor space.

"Ten o'clock at night, after a full day sitting on those hard chairs and after the big meal we've just eaten," Bartlett said in his easy pleasant way, "isn't the best time for absorbing more instruction. We know you fellows must all be tired after two days of this sales meeting. So we've tried to make our little offering entertaining and dramatic as well as informative."

He gestured toward the boxlike apparatus behind him. Rows of ordinary light bulbs hung from a metal rod. An electric fan perched on top of the box, together with a

soldering-iron, a toaster and other electrical gadgets.

"We intend to demonstrate," Bartlett went on, "how death can lurk in something as apparently harmless as the light socket over your laundry tub. How a man can die by turning on his electric fan. We also propose to show you how such electrical hazards in the home can be completely eliminated by following a few simple, common sense rules."

He now reached out to touch the sleeve of the man in the oddly wired coverall.

"Your own Ken Omar of the Renewal Sales Division has kindly consented to act as our human Christmas tree. The idea is this: Ken will wear gloves with a metal contact attached to the fingers and connected with his trick coat. A similar metal plate on Ken's shoes will act as a ground. During the course of the demonstration, we shall have Ken touch various electrical devices which are improperly insulated or otherwise defective. When he does so, the lighting of the Christmas tree bulbs will trace for you visually, the course the current would take through the body of a person who touched the same object with unprotected hands."

Bartlett nodded toward the slender, dark complexioned, black-haired man who had seated himself behind the boxlike apparatus.

"In designing the demonstration clothing Ken Omar is wearing, every precaution has been taken to avoid his receiving an accidental shock. But to make a certainty doubly certain—always desirable in safety work—we have put your Regional Underwriter, Charlie Jackson, up here with his hand on an emergency switch which can be thrown to disconnect the current instantly should anything go wrong."

Bartlett grinned.

"Last, but by no means least, Dave Grant of your local office sales force is going to act as lecturer or demonstrator, or whatever you want to call him."

From the audience someone shouted:

"What will you do, Bart?"

Bart laughed.

"I'm taking it easy," he said. "Master of ceremonies, if you like. I want to watch the show as one of the audience. If it goes off as well as we expect, Dave Grant will be putting on similar demonstrations for various clubs and business organizations throughout the territory. Mr. Polk"—he bobbed his head in the direction of the head table—"thinks it should be productive not only of goodwill but of considerable gravy business for Dave as well as for you all."

Cheers and whistles followed.

"Good for Dave. Good for 'Golden Boy!'" a girl's voice cried. The executives at the head table joined in the general laugh.

It was easy to see why Dave Grant had acquired the nickname of "Golden Boy." Handsome as a matinee idol, his skin was beautifully bronzed from long exposure to sun on the beach in front of the riverside home he had acquired several years before. An outstanding producer of new business for Imperial Casualty, Grant's income ran consistently near the ten thousand a year level.

"Okay, Dave, you take over now," Bartlett said. He went down steps at the side of the stage, finding himself a seat at a table on floor level, beside his stout, red-faced assistant, "Rudy" Nieman.

KEN OMAR was pulling on the heavy work gloves. Dave Grant launched into a layman's explanation of Ohm's Law, illustrated by large-sized charts, showing how a comparatively small amount of electrical current might be sufficient to electrocute a man if skin resistance were reduced through sweating hands, contact with water, or other not uncommon circumstances.

"We have here an ordinary pull-socket lamp," Grant continued smoothly. "It has a rubber insulated base and looks to be in perfect condition. Actually the insulation has been damaged—a condition which happens frequently through excessive wear or natural deterioration. You will note that when Ken Omar touches this, without being grounded, no current passes through his body."

As Grant spoke, Omar grasped the socket with his metal tipped gloves. The Christmas tree bulbs remained unlighted.

"Now suppose," Grant went on, "that Ken was connected in some way with a ground for the current. See what would happen then!"

Ken Omar set a metal tipped shoe firmly on a flat, grounded steel plate on the stage floor beside him. Instantly, red, blue and yellow points of light blossomed along the arm which grasped the lamp socket, across his chest and down the side of his leg toward the grounded foot.

"You can see that the flow of current here would be directly through the heart and could very readily result in a fatal accident," Grant proceeded to explain. "Let's see now what can be done to eliminate a hazard of this sort. First, we can make sure no socket

is located near a possible ground. Then—a very simple precaution—we could tie a piece of cord to the pull socket, so—”

From his vantage point out front, Bartlett was watching Ken Omar, noting that the renewal salesman did not move a muscle. Omar looked rigid as an iron bar. There was a staring expression in his eyes, while his rather small, sharp features showed newly etched lines of strain.

Bartlett felt a sudden constriction in his own stomach. He leaped from his seat.

“Pull that switch, Charlie!” he yelled at Jackson, the underwriter.

He heard the switch click as he took the steps to the stage in two bounds. His assistant, Nieman, was right behind him. The lights on Omar’s tan-colored coverall did not even flicker, but remained lighted brilliantly.

Bartlett now whipped his belt from his trousers, threw it looped around Omar’s body. Nieman helped by grabbing the other end. Both men were careful to avoid touching the rigid, renewal salesman.

“Come on now, pull, Rudy!” Bartlett yelled.

They heaved on the belt. The colored lights went out abruptly. Ken Omar, relaxing as suddenly, fell flat on his face on the wooden flooring.

The banquet room was in immediate confusion with everyone leaving their tables and surging toward the stage. Excited voices babbled.

“What happened? Accident! Ken’s electrocuted!”

Regional Vice-President Waldo Polk shouldered his way through the crush. Polk was a tall, middle-aged man, whose once slim waist was beginning to thicken. He had a lantern jaw that looked a trifle lopsided, as if sometime in childhood he’d received a heavy blow which affected the subsequent growth of the bone structure.

“How badly is Omar hurt?” Polk demanded in his harsh, arrogant manner.

Rudy Nieman had pulled off the prostrate renewal salesman’s gloves and shoes, torn open the wired coat and now sat astride the man’s back, vigorously administering artificial respiration.

He grunted with his effort.

“Can’t tell yet, sir. But it looks very bad. He’s not breathing at all.”

“A fine demonstration!” Polk sounded furious. “A half-baked idea, Bartlett. It would be careless on the part of a cub engineer, but when a district supervisor lets a

device like this be used without proper testing. The company was on the verge of a serious mistake making you regional safety manager!”

Bartlett didn’t reply at once. He’d been peering into the control box, trying to see why the emergency switch had not functioned properly. Now he straightened, holding one of the shoes Omar had worn.

“It was tested,” he told the vice-president quietly. “Naturally! I tried it myself not more than an hour ago.”

The sea of crowding faces pressed closer, tongues making a babel of sound. Above the uproar, Polk’s strident voice cut cold as an ice saw.

“Stand back! Everyone outside!” His steel-grey eyes sought out a couple of faces. “Here you: Smith, Emory! You fellows take charge of clearing this room.” He swung back to Bartlett. “Don’t try to alibi yourself, Bartlett. You’re just making a bad matter worse.”

“Look, sir!” Bartlett said. He held out the shoe. “As an added precaution, the inside of this was insulated with sponge rubber. Now the insulation’s been torn out and part of the shoe lining, too. The metal electrode was bound to press against the wearer’s foot.”

Polk sniffed.

“What are you trying to prove, Bartlett? Do you think anyone would possibly have hurt Omar deliberately?”

Rudy Nieman got to his feet, red face crimson from exertion.

“He’s worse than hurt, sir. Ken’s dead!”

“What good was the emergency switch?” the dark visaged Charlie Jackson said accusingly. “You sure had me kidded, Bartlett, that I was doing any good up here.”

“The switch would have prevented trouble,” Bartlett said curtly, “if it hadn’t been shorted.” He appealed again to Polk. “You’ll surely recall, sir, that we’d planned a surprise ending for the demonstration. We were going to show how an electrical device could be rendered fool-proof by use of a special ground wire and fuse that would cut off the current in event of a short, before the operator could be injured.

“We even had a rat trap rigged to go off with a bang when the fuse blew for a dramatic wind-up. But the switch and fuse have been shorted around the metal jaws of the trap. There are burned spots on each side of the wooden base.”

Dave Grant had also been peering into the control box.

"If there was a short in the wiring, what caused it?"

"That's what I'd like to know," Bartlett said grimly. "The apparatus has been tampered with."

"Are you trying to say I monkeyed with it?" Charlie Jackson demanded hotly.

Bartlett eyed the dark-faced underwriter reflectively. "That's not what I said, but it's a possibility at that. You didn't get along with Omar, did you? Everyone in the office knows how he's gone over your head to Mr. Polk on several risks you didn't want to have renewed."

JACKSON'S sallow cheeks were suffused with blood. He took a step forward menacingly, fists knotted. "You're accusing me of—"

Bartlett glanced at the incredulous faces around him and deliberately dropped his town-buster bomb.

"I'm making no definite accusations," he said, "but I am saying that Ken Omar's death was no accident. It looks more like premeditated murder."

"Murder!" Vice-President Polk sounded ready to explode. "We all make occasional mistakes, Bartlett. Yours has cost the life of one of our good men. The company might overlook your mistake in the long run. But what I can't condone is your apparent intention to squirm out of all responsibility."

Bartlett heard a stifled sob behind him. It was Bess Travers, the district clerical supervisor. Bess had always been able to make Bartlett's pulse beat faster. Her diminutive figure was definitely professional model quality. The way her red-gold hair grew into a widow's peak in the center of her high, smooth forehead gave her face a heart-shaped contour.

"I heard it all," Bess said in a strangled tone. "How can you do such a thing, Bart? How can you try to put the blame on someone else?"

The look in Bartlett's eyes was one of mortal hurt. But he faced her squarely. "Because someone killed Ken Omar deliberately, Bess. And because I intend to make it my business to find out who that someone is."

She turned away from him to hurry down the short steps, joining the subdued remnants of the crowd ebbing from the banquet room. A lump of solid ice formed in the pit of Bartlett's stomach, although he could see how the girl must feel. She had liked Ken

Omar enough to go out on more than one date with the renewal salesman.

"Look," said Charlie Jackson vindictively. "Maybe Bartlett tampered with that wiring himself. So he'd have a clear field with the chick."

"Stop it, both of you!" Waldo Polk said. "I'm not going to have a scandal. The company has spent several thousand dollars arranging this sales meeting. I don't intend to see that money thrown down a rat-hole."

"What's more important?" Bartlett demanded hotly. "Saving a few dollars for a hundred million dollar company, or seeing a murderer brought to justice?"

"All this talk about murder is sheer nonsense," Polk stated flatly. "I want you to forget it, Bartlett. You won't be promoted to regional safety manager, naturally, after all this, but you won't be fired, either. Unless you persist in this idiotic accusation." He left the threat unfinished.

"Get it straight," Bartlett told Polk. "Big boss or not, I'm not letting you saddle me with responsibility for this. I'm going to investigate. And you can't fire me without Home Office approval."

"I shall certainly recommend it to Home Office," Polk announced icily.

"If I can't prove my point," Bartlett told the man, "you can take my job and throw it out the window. If I do prove it, I'll accept your public apology."

He stalked away, torn between anger and despair.

How ironic the tricks life played! This visual demonstration of low voltage hazards had come to him like an inspiration. Same as his previous campaign for guarding punch presses in the industrial plants.

The punch press idea had brought much favorable publicity to the company as well as considerable new business from metal-working establishments. Bartlett's suggestion that Home Office establish a research laboratory for the study of occupational diseases had also gone over beautifully.

The way Bartlett had consistently blended originality and showmanship with his expert technical knowledge was what had first attracted attention of company higher-ups. The result of this was, that he was earmarked for promotion to Ed Cooley's job as regional safety manager in the Middle West when Cooley got his transfer to Home Office next month. Now it looked as if what Bartlett had actually been staging, was the finish of his own promising career.

He went first to a telephone, reported the

fatality to police headquarters, emphasizing that he wished to make a personal statement in connection with the case. Mental upset made him almost sick at his stomach as he left the phone booth. He felt the need of a stimulant, turned toward the hotel's ornate Lotus Cocktail Lounge.

Little groups of Imperial employees clustered at the various tables, all of them talking excitedly. The conversation died when Bartlett appeared. No one invited him to join them.

He saw Bess Travers with some of the girls from the claims and the auditing departments. Bess turned her pretty, heart-shaped face away, pert little chin elevated, as Bartlett came near.

Never before had he felt so utterly alone. Like an outcast, a pariah, the injustice of it cut him like a sword. Mouth set in a grim line, he swerved toward the bar at the far end of the gleaming lounge. He ordered bourbon straight, filling the glass to the very brim.

From behind, a hand clapped his shoulder. It was Rudy Nieman who had followed him down from the banquet room.

"Tough break, fellow," Nieman said sympathetically. "But it's not your fault. You're taking it too personally."

"How can I help that?" Bartlett shoved the bottle toward Nieman, motioned the bartender to bring another glass. "You know there was nothing wrong with that apparatus an hour before the show went on. You helped me test it."

"Sure, I know," Nieman said. "But you're just getting yourself in bad with Polk. Why stir up things? You know the big boss doesn't give a hoot about Ken Omar. All that worries Polk is the impression his Region makes on the brass hats at Home Office."

"That's a rotten attitude!" Bartlett replied. He tossed off his glass, poured another.

"You've lived long enough to know the facts of life," Rudy Nieman remarked unfeelingly. "Why I'll bet Polk's even secretly glad to have Omar out of the way. He'd have got rid of the man long ago except that Omar's uncle is an assistant secretary. Polk's had Omar on the carpet half a dozen times the last few months."

Bartlett was surprised.

"I didn't know that. Why?"

Devoting all his time and thought to doing an outstanding job in his own department, grapevine rumors and office politics were

something in which Bartlett had taken no interest. He wondered suddenly if that had been another bad mistake.

"Been so much renewal business lost," Rudy Nieman went on bitterly. "Mostly personal auto accounts, too. Polk is all in an uproar. If it weren't for Dave Grant's swell new business production, the local office would be slipping badly. The boss had an angry scene with Omar and Jackson both, just the day before this meeting. Omar complained about Jackson's hard-boiled underwriting attitude. They had a real blow-off. Just one big, happy family!"

"I don't see how this bickering affects the situation," said Bartlett. "Simply makes it more obvious that Omar was killed deliberately. What would you want me to do, let a murderer get away with it?"

RUDY NIEMAN pounded Bart's back again.

"You won't be able to pin murder on any of our people," he said flatly. "Best thing you could do is forget that angle. Try to play ball with Polk. Look after yourself. I don't want you to get the axe, Bart. I've enjoyed working with you too much."

Bartlett looked up to meet his assistant's eyes. Their coldness belied Nieman's words of solicitude. In a flash of comprehension, Bartlett realized how greatly Nieman stood to profit if he, Jim Bartlett, should be discharged. Nieman would step into his shoes immediately. Into the District job, certainly. With the manpower shortage, Rudy Nieman might conceivably get the tremendous break of stepping clear up into the Regional job.

Bartlett gulped his second drink abruptly, turned on his heel. He felt worse instead of better. An urgent need for solitude, a chance to think this thing out alone, gripped him.

Under his breath he cursed the subterranean windings of office intrigue as he took the elevator to his room on one of the hotel's top floors. How unfortunate advancement often stems from skillful flattery of superiors and exaggerated attention to surface appearances, rather than from hard, conscientious, constructive application to the job. This is a fact which the greedy or lazy in almost any large organization, strive continually to exploit to their own advantage.

Bartlett reached his room number, twisted the key in the door lock. The door did not open. Surprised, he twisted the key back again. This time the door swung inward quite easily. It had been left unlocked.

Fleetingly Jim Bartlett wondered about that. He was sure the night latch was on when he left for downstairs after showering and dressing for the banquet. Some careless chambermaid, no doubt. Inefficient workers.

Bartlett shrugged. He knew the problems management faces in finding competent help in boom times. Inside the room, the window also had been pulled shut and the heat turned on. The room, on such a mild Spring evening, was like a bake oven. The atmosphere was stifling and it smelled of the hot pipes. Sweat began to make his skin clammy.

The window was wide and high. Bartlett's room at the front of the tall structure faced a principal business thoroughfare. The clang of street cars and the hoot of taxi horns rose to his ears from the pavement eighteen floors below. He pulled up the window sash. A puff of breeze was pleasantly cool against his warm-moist skin.

He was starting to turn back into the room when a flying body struck him hard from behind. Bartlett had no time to see his attacker. His thighs struck the edge of the window casing, acting as a fulcrum for his body, curving it through the opening, like a diver beginning a forward one-and-a-half.

Surprise and cold terror tore an involuntary yell from his lips, cut off in the middle by a solid grunt as he landed flat on his stomach against the small, ornamental railing which formed a part of the stonework outside at the room floor level. His fingers, clutching wildly, caught the masonry, held, as momentum would have rolled him over to the sheer drop in front.

With breath knocked out of him, heart thudding dully, Bartlett clung to the cold stone. His head hung over so his horrified eyes gazed straight down into the abyss he had so narrowly avoided.

From this height, the two and three story shop buildings across the street looked like units from some child's toy village. In the light that spilled from their show windows, stragglng pedestrians on the sidewalks were tiny insects barely crawling.

High places always affected Bartlett with that queer, familiar urge to leap. Resisting it, Bart's nails dug against the stonework so hard that his strained wrists began to ache. Suddenly giddy, he shut his eyes. His head turned slowly upward.

His unknown assailant, Bartlett knew, would probably have lingered to watch the body of his victim land, a crushed and pulpy mass, on the pavement below. If so, Bartlett

realized he still might die by falling. A hand-to-hand struggle at the window would be inevitable, with himself at a disadvantage and the killer fighting now for his own life.

But the lighted oblong above his head, when Bartlett opened his eyes again, was empty. The murderer evidently had not lingered.

Moving an inch at a time, Bartlett shifted his weight with infinite care. His balance on the narrow railing was precarious in the extreme. Finally he managed to get his fingers on the window ledge. A moment later he pulled himself across the sill into the safety of the room.

His clothes were drenched with sweat, while his legs felt as if they were made of rubber. From the large pier glass over the dresser, his own face stared out at him chalky white, enormous-eyed. Limply he dropped into a chair to let the numbness drain from his limbs and the fog from his brain.

Memory took him back swiftly over the past two days of the sales meeting. The room at the hotel was a time-saving device. Polk had thought it would save a lot of time chasing back and forth to the office if all the men who had an important part in the meeting, would simply live there until the conclave was over.

During the two days, Bartlett had received a number of company callers. Hardly one of them had failed to look out the window, with some comment on the ornamental stonework visible just outside. His potential murderer, however, could not have known of the railing or he would have chosen some other way to get him out of the way.

Suddenly he had the answer. His lips compressed to a hard, thin line. By trying to kill him, Ken Omar's slayer had only succeeded in revealing his own identity. Bartlett got to his feet, his plan of action clear.

He took the elevator back downstairs. The cage paused momentarily at the mezzanine level. Bess Travers and a couple of her girls from the clerical division got on. They were wearing hats and coats, ready evidently to go home for the night. Bess met his eyes, started to look away. Something in his face stopped her. When the cage halted at the lobby, she dropped behind the other girls.

"What—what is it, Bart?" she whispered. "You look so strange! Sort of dangerous. I've never seen you look this way before."

"It isn't every night that someone tries to throw me out an eighteenth story window," he said quietly.

Bess gasped and her lovely eyes widened.

"They didn't—oh-h-h!"

Bart nodded.

"If I look dangerous it's because I am. Dangerous for a killer. I intend to trap him—and tonight."

"Do be careful," she said faintly. "I wouldn't want you to be hurt, Bart. Truly I wouldn't."

JIM BARTLETT gave her a tender smile.

"My danger is past," he said confidently. "The killer missed his chance. He expected my death would be put down to suicide. Remorse about Ken Omar. Instead, I know now who I'm looking for and he doesn't yet suspect that I'm wise to him."

"Who—who is it?"

He shook his head, gave her a twisted grin.

Wait till I have evidence to prove my point. You can help me if you will. I want to get into the underwriting files at the office. You have the keys."

The other girls were waiting for Bess a few steps ahead.

"Go along," she called to them. "I've decided to stay awhile yet. See you in the morning."

They went out.

"I'll go with you to the office, Bart," Bess said then. "I'll do whatever I can to help. I—I'm sorry—"

Her hand touched his. Her skin felt cool and smooth.

At this hour of night, the big Regional office was silent and deserted. Bartlett flipped a switch near the door. Long rows of desks stretched half a city block in length to vanish finally into gloom at the still unlighted farthest end. He stopped near a private office whose ground glass door bore the words, "Waldo Polk," Vice-President."

Just outside the sanctum of the Regional boss, was the desk space assigned the rank and file of the sales force. Bartlett went straight to the desk which had belonged to Ken Omar. Swiftly he pulled drawers open, pawing through the untidy litter of papers and rate manuals inside. In the shallow middle drawer he found something that made him straighten with a grunt of satisfaction. Bess Travers watched curiously as he opened an unsealed envelope, took out an automobile policy ready for mailing. He studied the typing on the policy declarations for a moment.

"I was right! What a break!" he whispered tensely.

"What's unusual about a policy in a renewal salesman's desk?" Bess asked. "I don't see—"

His finger now indicated two lines of typing.

"Name of insured: B. Huntington Rayburn!" he read for her. "Occupation: safety engineer for Atlas Weighing Machine Company.' The break comes because I happen to know Rayburn personally. I also know he always signs himself Bennett H. Rayburn."

"You know the girls in the policy writing unit simply copy the information they're given from the Underwriting Department," Bess said. "I still don't understand."

"Of course you don't," Bartlett agreed. He was grinning broadly. "But you will. Let me have the keys to the underwriting files now, will you, Bess?"

He spent half an hour rooting through various folders, checking frequently with other folders in the automobile cancelled files. At the end of that time he said: "Okay. Got all I need, thanks to you. Now, let's get back to the hotel and have it out with Polk."

Inside the vice-presidential suite, ice clinked comfortably in tall amber glasses. Enjoying Polk's pre-war Scotch and earnestly in conversation with the Regional boss were 'Golden Boy' Dave Grant and Rudy Nieman.

They all seemed surprised to see Bartlett and the girl. Nieman nodded negligently. Grant flashed his customary winning smile. Polk's inquiring stare held no trace of friendliness.

"I've come," Bartlett said bluntly to Polk, "to prove that Omar was murdered. Then I'll accept that apology from you."

"We've just been discussing your attitude, Bartlett," Polk answered frigidly. "I've told Nieman I'm considering him for your job and—"

"Don't count on it too much, Rudy," Bartlett advised grimly. "Now, if you'll get Jackson in here, Mr. Polk, I'll go ahead and nail down my points."

"Why do we need Jackson?"

"He ought to sit in on this, by all means. You'll soon understand."

With obvious reluctance, Polk reached for the telephone on its small stand.

"If you'll have him paged in the bar, sir."

Dave Grant could not restrain his curiosity.

"What're you trying to do, Bart, pin the accident on Charlie?"

"It wasn't an accident," Bartlett snapped.

"I've said it before and I repeat it. Omar was killed deliberately. The insulation was removed from that shoe. The wiring on the laboratory smock was altered. Furthermore, the emergency switch was shorted. Any flat piece of metal laid across the jaws of the rat trap could have accomplished that last result. The killer picked up the evidence while we were all watching Omar."

"I get you," Grant said. "You mean Charlie was the one behind the control box all the time, so he had opportunity."

Bartlett didn't answer. The silence was strained for the next few moments until a rap sounded on the door and Jackson appeared. A cigarette drooped in the corner of the underwriter's mouth, his dark face looked slightly flushed.

"Jackson would have had opportunity for finagling the safety switch," Bartlett said then, "but he would never have made the mistake of trying to push me out my window. Charlie came to see me this morning before the meeting started and he commented on the rail outside that window."

Jackson seemed confused.

"What gives? Why . . ."

"Omar's slayer tried to polish me off too so there'd be no investigation," Bartlett answered. "That was a mistake because I'd have had an almost impossible task proving anything. But after taking that dive, I knew the real killer must have been someone who hadn't been up to my room. That boiled it down to just one person. It enabled me to find the motive, too."

Polk showed sudden interest.

"Go on, Bartlett, I'm listening."

"You've been worried about lost renewals," Bart went on. "Omar couldn't seem to hold the auto accounts. You thought he was doing a bum job. But the poor fellow wasn't to blame. He was up against a smooth racket. Those lost policies never went off the books at all. For instance, if we lost the renewal of John Doe, we got a new account under the name of J. S. Doe, or Jane Doe. The same policyholder under a slightly different handle."

Bartlett now swung accusingly to Dave Grant.

"No wonder you have such a nice coat of

tan! No wonder you can afford a home on the river! With the amount of commissions you've been knocking down from phony new business—"

Grant jumped to his feet, handsome face contorted with rage and fear. "That's a lie! My production is—"

"Omar got wise finally," Bartlett went on calmly. "I found one of your new business policies in his desk. It had no place there. He must have told you the game was up. So you arranged it to have him electrocuted. You knew the way you'd operated was the same as embezzling from the company, if you were exposed it meant jail, as well as the end of your profitable racket."

"I'll never go to jail," Grant snarled. His hand streaked suddenly to the inside of his coat, came out holding a flat, ugly-looking automatic. "I'll have to knock you all off now. You came up here and I got into an argument, Bartlett. Before I could intervene, you'd shot everyone."

The deadly snout of the gun focused on Bartlett's chest at point blank range. Bess Travers grabbed the telephone, threw it with all her strength at Grant. The short cord kept it from striking Grant. But it disconcerted him.

The gun wavered for an instant.

That instant was just long enough. Bartlett sprang forward. His fist smashed solidly against the killer's jaw. Grant reeled backward against the wall. Bartlett dived on top of him. He struck again, hard. And yet again.

Nieman and Jackson picked Grant from the floor. The beefy assistant levered the dazed salesman's arm into a bone breaking hold behind Grant's back.

Waldo Polk relaxed suddenly in one of his rare smiles. "Good work, Bart," he said. "You'll get that apology in the morning when I make public announcement of your elevation to the Regional job."

Bartlett met Bess Travers' eyes and read the message in them. She nodded slightly.

"I don't like to add to your problems, sir," he said, "but I think you'd better inform Home Office that you'll be needing a new clerical supervisor in this office before very long."

Asey Mayo, beloved and popular Cape Cod sleuth, stars in **PROOF OF THE PUDDING**, a brilliant book-length mystery novel by **PHOEBE ATWOOD TAYLOR** in the November **DETECTIVE NOVEL MAGAZINE—**

15c Everywhere!



Joe Small steps out with a mean-looking knife in his hand

DEAD ON DEPARTURE

By DONALD BAYNE HOBART

Detective Mugs Kelly makes double talk speak volumes!

YOU take a lug who gets killing ideas when he finds a knife handy, let him go wandering around with a bunch of people he doesn't like, and what have you? I'll tell you—you've got murder, that's what.

"Mugs" Kelly is my name, and while there are some who consider me tall, dark and repulsive I don't take much stock in such flattery. I'm a private detective of the old school—P. S. No. 10—and while I'm not the world's greatest investigator I get along all right.

I am spending a two-week summer vacation down in Atlantic City when I get mixed up with this hunk of homicide. There I am sitting out on the beach in my bathing suit and exhibiting the manly torso when a tall, thin man drops down beside me on the sand and begins to babble away in double-talk.

"It would be a lovely day if it wasn't for the smatterwilink," he says. "Now you take those clouds out there, if it wasn't for the gregson on the limped they would be lap-torial."

"Go away," I tell him. "You bother me."

"I've got to talk to you," he says, looking around like he expects the sheriff's posse to come galloping over the hill at any moment. "I know that you're a private detective named Kelly."

"You're slipping," I say. "You're talking sense."

"I know." He nods. "That other stuff—the wistory on the blinken—is just an act." He suddenly looks frightened. "Joe Small is my name and I expect to be killed at any moment."

"That's natural," I say. "You're just asking for murder when you go around spouting that double-talk."

"I can't help it," says Small. "It's a habit—my public demands it. I'm one of the best double-talk artists in show business. Why when I go on the radio they avcadory with rippleblurts."

"Forget it," I tell him. "I'm not your public—which makes me grateful for small favors. What's this about your being killed?"

"I'm with a house party down in Ventnor,"

Small says. "Three men and three gals who rented a cottage along the beach. I'm one of the three men, and ever since we've been there I'm sure someone has been trying to murder me."

"There's the Ventnor City Police, the Atlantic City Police and the New Jersey State Police," I remind. "Why don't you tell them your troubles? Out of a resort with so many visitors, why pick on me?"

"Because I'm afraid the police would laugh at me," says Small. "Besides, suppose they should investigate and I am wrong. I'd be in a tough spot with the rest of the gang on the house party."

"Something to that," I agreed. "But where do I come in?"

"I want to hire you to protect me," says this Joe Small, and he seems to have forgotten all about the double-talk.

MUGS KELLY has never been one to let a little thing like a vacation prevent him from earning a little extra dough. So when Small offers me two hundred bucks to guard him for a week, I take the job with all the reluctance of a hungry fish leaping for bait.

"It's a deal," I say. "But how about the merry little playmates on the house party? There's something about my map that might not appeal to them."

"You're just being modest," Small tells me, looking me straight in the face. "You are not really ugly, Kelly. No, I wouldn't say that—just grotesque."

"I like the double-talk better," I tell him.

Anyway we talk the whole thing over. He gives me the address of the cottage down in Ventnor, and it is agreed that I will show up there that afternoon as an old friend of Joe Small's from New York.

Then Small leaves me and I decide to take a swim. It is around eleven A.M. and there are plenty of people on the beach and in the water. I'm a fair swimmer, so I plow through the surf and out beyond the breakers. I get out where they are rolling long and easy and try floating.

All of a sudden somebody grabs me by both ankles and pulls me under. Naturally I don't like the idea of drowning just because somebody wants to play rough, so I start fighting. I get moving around fast, and get loose. Then I see a blurry face beneath the water and give it a good shove.

My lungs are about bursting for air, so I come to the surface and start breathing again. By this time I'm sure that somebody doesn't like me.

The man who tried to drown me doesn't come to the surface anywhere near me, but as I wait and watch two men appear, one to my right and the other to my left. They are both swimming toward the beach and paying no attention to me, so I don't know if either one of them happens to be my playful pal.

I head back to the beach, and decide I've had enough swimming for one day. So I walk up to the bathhouse, change into my clothes and head for the Boardwalk. I was beginning to suspect that the attempt on my life is connected with my little chat with Joe Small, and that isn't double-talk.

That afternoon I arrive at the cottage in Ventnor by taxi. I am carrying my bag and trying to look like I just got off a train from New York. I pay the cab driver and go up the steps of the cottage—at least that's what they call it, but to me it looks like a good-sized stucco house.

I ring the front door bell and in a few moments the door is opened and a stout man stands there gazing at me. Then he smiles and holds out his right hand.

"Why Mugs Kelly," he says. "This is a pleasant surprise."

I blink and shake hands limply, for as far as I can remember I have never seen this stout man before in my life.

"Who is it, Dan?" asks a man's voice from behind my stout friend. "Did you say Mugs Kelly?"

"That's right," says the fat gent as he releases my hand. "But I'm disappointed. He doesn't seem to remember me." He smiles at me again. "Don't tell me you have forgotten your old pal Dan Harper."

"Oh, sure, I remember you now," I say dazedly. "We went to different schools together."

"I'll bet Mugs doesn't remember me either," says the other fellow, who is big and heavy-featured and has thick, curly hair. "I'm Craig Carson, Kelly."

They lead me into the house and along the hall to a big living room. Here there are three girls dressed in slacks and halters and I think I've blundered in on part of a musical show rehearsal. I don't see any sign of Joe Small around, and his not being there worries me.

"Oh, goody!" cries one of the girls as she sees me. "Just what we need around here—another man. What with Sally and Nancy taking up all of Dan and Craig's time, poor little Dotty has been just so lonely."

I decided that poor little Dotty is one of those coy dames that you never knew whether to kiss or kill.

"Where's Joe Small?" I asked. "He invited me here."

"That's right." This Craig Carson nods. "Too bad about Joe. He had to leave suddenly. Was called back to New York just an hour ago. He asked us to tell you how sorry he was to have to leave without seeing you."

"He left a note for you, Kelly," the stout man remarks. He draws a sealed envelope out of his pocket and hands it to me. "Here it is—I was keeping it for you."

"I phoned the express company to come and get Joe's trunk like you told me to do, Craig," says the girl one of the men has called Nancy. "They said they would pick it up this afternoon."

I STICK the note into my pocket. I don't want to read it now, in front of everyone. Harper introduces me to the girls—Sally Lanceford, a tall, pretty blonde, Nancy Ashland, a good-looking brunette, and Dotty Dawson, a redhead.

Harper shows me up to my room and leaves me there. I wait until I am alone, then open the note from Small. There are two hundred-dollar bills in the envelope with the note—and the note reads:

Dear Mugs:

Sorry I was called away, but it is a case of —em-llik-ot-gniog-era-yeht so I have to leave. But I know you will—rorrim ni sdrawkcab daer—so thanks for everything.

Joe Small.

I keep looking at the note. It strikes me that even for a lug who goes in for double-talk Small has overdone it in the note. I can't even pronounce words like those.

"Looks like the man is writing backwards," I muttered, and then I give a start.

I try reading some of the stuff backwards and get results. The last part of it reads:

Read backwards in mirror.

So I try that, and it don't work. But I can read the other line backwards without the mirror and it reads:

They are going to kill me.

Since Small has told me he is afraid of being murdered when I talked to him on the beach that morning I don't find the note gives me any fresh news. All the same I am beginning to suspect he has already been killed. As far as I am concerned his having been called back to New York in such a hurry is a lot of mularkey.

I get my gun and shoulder holster out of

my bag and put it on. The weight of it resting just under my left arm feels good. I've found that an automatic is a handy thing to have around at times.

An idea strikes me. The others are all downstairs and I decide that now will be a good time for me to take a look at the second floor of the house. I slip out of my room and into the hall. Just as I do I hear a loud groan from the room across from mine.

The door opens and Dan Harper comes staggering out.

"Got me," mutters the stout man, as he sees me.

Then he sprawls face downward on the hall floor.

His back is covered with blood and it looks like someone has stabbed him. I go to him and examine him—but he is dead. I get to my feet and step into the room he just left, my gun ready in my hand.

There is no one in the room. The window is closed and a big wardrobe trunk stands against the wall. I search the room, looking into the empty clothes closet and under the bed. Not a sign of anyone. Then I look at the tag that is tied on the trunk.

It is addressed to Joe Small, at a New York hotel, and the handwriting is the same as that on the note I received from the double-talking man.

Right then, out in the hall, a woman screams. I can guess what has happened. One of the girls has come upstairs and seen Harper's body lying there. I wait a moment, then hear more voices. I drop my gun back into the holster and step out into the hall.

Craig Carson and the three girls are there—gathered around the body. Sally is crying, Nancy is pale and trembling, and Dotty looks like she is going to be good and sick. Carson glares at me.

"What happened, Kelly?" he demands. "Who killed Harper?"

"Termites, for all I know," I say. "I heard a moan and he came out of the room I've just been searching. Then he dropped to the floor and died." I look hard at Carson. "Any reason for Small hating Harper?"

"I don't know," Carson frowns. "I thought we were all good friends until we came here on this house party, but Small was acting strangely before he left."

"I heard him quarreling with Dan last night," says Sally. "He refused to pay Dan ten thousand dollars that Small apparently owed him."

"Small owes me five thousand," says Carson. "He borrowed it from us last winter—claimed he needed it as part of the money to

finance a show he was going to produce—but he never put the show on. Just yesterday I learned that Small lost the money gambling.”

“Were either of you two swimming this morning?” I asked. “I mean up on the Atlantic City part of the beach.”

“No, not this morning,” Carson tells me. “But Small went for a walk up the beach in his bathing suit.”

“What was the idea of pretending you were old pals of mine when I first reached the house?” I ask. “You know I never saw you or Harper before.”

“It was just a gag,” says Carson. “Small suggested that we pretend we were old friends of yours when you arrived. He showed us a picture of you, along with a newspaper account of some case you had solved and told us he had invited you here.” The big man stares at the body. “It doesn’t seem funny now.”

“Take the girls downstairs and phone for the police,” I order him. “This is murder—and we need the police here. “I’ll be down in a few minutes.”

CARSON don’t argue. He herds the girls downstairs, leaving me alone with the corpse in the hall. I go back into the room I have just searched. My gun is again in my hand. I take careful aim and fire at the big wardrobe trunk. The bullet goes right through the trunk with a tearing sound.

I back to the wall as the big trunk suddenly swings open and Joe Small steps out of it with a mean-looking knife in his hand. My arm jerks back to cover him, my funnybone hits the wall so hard that the pain makes me drop my gun.

“So you were smarter than I thought,” growls Small, advancing toward me with the knife raised to strike. “I figured you were just a dumb private detective when I hired you.”

“Oh, sure,” I say. “So you pulled me down

under the water when I was swimming this morning. You wanted me to think that one of the other men had spotted me talking to you on the beach and was trying to drown me to keep me from helping you. I guess you thought that would convince me you were really in danger.”

“Right,” says Small. “I had them all believing I had left here. Then I sneaked back and hid in the trunk. It’s a trick trunk I bought from a magician—you can open or close it from inside by pressing a button.”

“Then you planned to kill Harper and keep hidden in the trunk,” I accuse. “I was supposed to believe that Carson was the murderer and had killed you, and found a way to get rid of the body, and also that the story about you leaving here was just a stall on Carson’s part. I might have believed it at that, if you hadn’t written the New York hotel address on the trunk tag in your own handwriting. That tipped me off that you really had planned to leave here.”

“You’re smarter than I thought, all right,” snarls Small. “But you won’t live long enough to tell anybody what you know. Harper made a mistake in getting tough about that money I borrowed from him, so I killed him—and if Carson should be accused of Harper’s murder that suits me fine. If the expressmen took me away in the trunk no one could ever prove I was here at the time of the killing.”

He lunges at me then, but I duck and grab up my gun. I bring it up roaring. Small staggers back as the bullet blows into his chest and, drops to the floor, and is still.

“I heard most of it,” Carson suddenly says from the doorway. “The rotten killer!”

“As a murderer I’m afraid he was better at double-talk,” I say, as I stare at the dead killer lying there. “He got the wilump on the ratherforjell.”

“Huh?” Carson mumbles blankly.

“Think nothing of it,” I say. “I merely remarked he is dead on departure!”

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D'Arzac suddenly smashed his fist into the detective's face

CODE GIRL

By BARRY PEROWNE

Framed for murder in Paris, Lois Warren uses her razor-keen wits to turn the tables on a clever and resourceful slayer!

THE circle of light from Lois' torch, roaming over the wall, discovered the words, Rue des Jumeaux. She took a small address-book from her pocket, turned the ray of light on the pages. They were covered with addresses in her neat handwriting.

As codist in the Embassy service, she seemed, since she had come to Paris, to have

been asked by almost everybody she knew at home to look up someone or other over here.

People were always writing, "Please look up my friends!"

She found, now, the entry she sought: D'Arzac, Georges and Gabrielle, 8 Rue des Jumeaux, near Avenue Malakoff.

"Eight," Lois murmured, and putting the

book away, turned into the side street.

It was very dark. She shone the ray of her torch up at the houses each side. They were massive and opulent, with elaborate, wide doorways of glazed glass and wrought iron. The numbers were over the doors. Four. Six. Eight. . . .

Lois Warren walked up two broad, marble steps, pressed a button to the right of the door. There was a whir, the door clicked open. Inside, she went up four more steps, covered now with red carpet. Paris was still on reduced electricity—the only light in the hall was a small bulb burning over the name-indicator. Also, through a glass door on the right, there showed a dim glow which came, she guessed, from the concierge's basement kitchen.

Looking for people in Europe these days was apt to be chancy business, and Lois glanced at the name-indicator with some trepidation. But the name was there: D'Arzac—Eighth Floor.

The elevator, of course, was without electricity, and Lois Warren climbed the carpeted stairs, using her torch—there was only one small bulb burning on each landing—and rehearsing in her mind just what she was going to say to these strangers.

Not wishing to present herself to them with her breathing quickened by the climb, she paused when she reached the top landing. At that moment, a few paces from her, the door of the apartment here opened and a man glanced out. The light of the bulb over the door scarcely reached as far as Lois and, evidently not seeing her, he made as though to draw back into the apartment.

"Monsieur D'Arzac?" she said quickly.

He checked his movement. As she walked forward, his eyes slid over her trim figure, in a belted, tan coat, a tan soft felt hat with a jay's feather in the band.

"I am D'Arzac," he said lifting his eyebrows questioningly.

HE WAS thirty-seven or thirty-eight, with dark eyes, dark hair closely trimmed with a small, tight wave in it, an olive complexion. He was slender, not much taller than Lois herself, and wore a gray suit with a double-breasted waistcoat.

"Joan Tracy asked me to be sure and look you and your wife up," Lois said, smiling. "You remember Joan?"

"Of course," he said.

He made no move to open the door wider. His eyes were fixed on her, yet she had the feeling that his attention was strained in-

ward, toward the apartment.

She felt a tinge of embarrassment.

"I called your telephone number twice today," she explained, "but got no reply. As this was my one free night in quite a while, I thought if I was going to do as Joan asked—"

"Of course, of course!" He opened the door wider, smiled at her. "Please come in."

There was no real reason why Lois should have felt, suddenly, that she did not want to go in. But she felt that way. She did not want to enter this apartment at all. She wanted to be back in the Avenue Malakoff, back in the broad Bois where she could see the lights of the traffic busily circling the Etoile. The revulsion disconcerted her.

She found herself stammering.

"No, really—you probably have some engagement. I've only a few minutes, anyway. I just wanted to be able to write Joan that I'd seen you."

"Please!" he said. "A friend of Joan Tracy's?" He was, now, all cordiality. "I insist! A minute or two—"

She could not refuse. She went in. . . .

She found herself in a hall walled with mirrors, reflecting furniture of Chinese lacquer. On the parquet floor lay a rug of white bearskin. The fragrance of expensive perfume, Chanel or Lelong, was in the air. Here there was no shortage of light—a crystal chandelier and crystal wall-candles shone softly.

D'Arzac ushered her, between glass doors standing open, into a large lounge with a wine-rich carpet, cream-colored deep chairs and settees, tall windows with quilted, cream curtains closely drawn. He waved a hand at the windows.

"You would like our views of Paris," he told her. "This is a penthouse, you know. We have a small roof garden." He pushed forward a chair for her, glanced at a gold-chain watch on his slim wrist. "My wife—Gabrielle—will be back soon."

"She isn't in?" Lois asked.

"I am expecting her at any moment," D'Arzac said.

"Is that your wife?" Lois asked.

She was looking at a portrait in oils over the mantelpiece, a portrait of a girl about her own age but as dark as Lois was fair—a girl with blue-black hair flying back from a white face—thin, bizarre and reckless.

D'Arzac did not answer immediately, and Lois glanced at him. He was standing near the centre of the room, looking not at the portrait but at her—looking not as though

he saw her, but with an expression both absent yet curiously tense, like that of a man working out some intricate calculation. He seemed to recollect himself abruptly.

"Yes, that's Gabrielle," he said, smiling. "But we must talk about Joan. You must give me all her news. It has been so long—so much has happened. But first we must celebrate—a bottle of champagne! You will excuse me a moment? We keep our wine in the concierge's cellar."

"I'd much rather you didn't bother," Lois said quickly. "I must go now, anyway. I—"

He was already on his way to the door. He turned and smiled at her.

"I shall be only a moment."

Reluctantly Lois settled back in her chair—and so brought into view, in a mirror on the wall between two of the tall windows, the reflection of the hall through the open glass doors. Thus she saw D'Arzac open a mirror-door to the left of the hall, and with a glance back toward the lounge, pluck an overcoat and hat hurriedly from the closet.

Then he opened the door of the apartment and went out.

The moment the door closed behind him, Lois sat up. Her heart was going thump, thump, thump. Why, she wondered, should he have taken a coat and hat—and been so furtive about it—merely to go down to the cellar? It looked as though the revulsion she had felt against entering this apartment had not been so irrational after all. There was something wrong here. Not only her nerves told her so, but her reason, too.

SHE WAS a codist. She lived by the exercise of her reason. When she had been interviewed for her job, they had asked her if she had the type of mind that was interested in puzzles.

"You see, codes," they had told her, "are subject to mutilation—the result of encoding under pressure at the other end, or faulty transmitting conditions, all sorts of reasons. You've got to be able to unravel those mutilations by deduction—'snagging,' we call it. You've got to be able to see things from the angle of the codist at the other end, as well as your own, so that you can figure out the mistakes she might have made. And you've got to be able to do it with top priority messages—with the heat on, with First Secretaries and even Charges d'Affaires fuming at your shoulder!"

Already the trained mind behind her charming, youthful face and her candid gray

eyes was isolating the threads of this puzzle concerning the D'Arzac apartment.

Why, just as she had reached the top landing, had D'Arzac opened the door of the apartment, anyway? It was not because he had heard her coming as the stairs were heavily carpeted. It was not because he was on his way out. He had had on neither hat nor coat then. Besides, he had been about to step back into the apartment, not seeing her, when she had spoken to him.

No, she thought, the reason he had opened that door had been to listen—to make sure, before he did go out, that there was nobody coming up, nobody he was going to meet on the stairs.

Her catching him at just that moment had merely delayed his departure, delayed it until he had thought up the excuse about the bottle of champagne. Now she realized why he had taken his hat and coat. It was because he had no intention of coming back.

It was because, very probably, he was not Georges D'Arzac at all!

She was on her feet with a thrill of excitement, looking around the big lounge—looking eagerly for a desk or bureau the drawers of which had been forced, or a picture awry that might conceal a rifled wall safe—looking for some sign that a thief had been here.

But if he were a thief, his objective must have been some other room. Here there was neither desk nor bureau, and the wall decorations were of Chinese scenes wrought delicately on silk and enclosed by cream panels. There were calla lilies in a bowl on the grand piano. Save for a man's overcoat and hat thrown carelessly on one of the deep chairs, the order of the room was unbroken, perfect.

Her eyes rested reflectively on the cream, double doors to the right of the mantelpiece. She went to them, turned the glass knob, opened the doors, and glanced into the room.

The lights were on, and she saw the foot instantly. It caught her glance and held it—a small foot in a gold sandal, the slender ankle bare under a trouser-end of peacock-blue silk.

Lois' heart thumped violently. She moved forward a pace, clear of the recess in which the door stood.

A girl in peacock-blue slacks and a little, gold-embroidered jacket was lying on her right side on the dove-gray carpet, one leg drawn up, her left hand lying childishly open behind her, her white forehead just touching the terra-cotta tiles of a fireplace. The tiles were splashed with blood.

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For a moment Lois did not breathe. A clock ticked industriously in the silence. The lights shone with an enchanted, sinister brilliance.

She did not know how long she stood there.

What shattered the spell harshly was the sudden rattle of a key thrust into a lock. It brought her around with a catch of the breath. She went back quickly into the lounge.

"Gabrielle?" a voice called.

Lois stopped dead, facing the glass doors.

It was the man she had thought might not be Georges D'Arzac. He was in the act of closing behind him the outer door of the apartment. His hat was in his hand, his coat over his arm. He thrust them into the closet, turned to enter the lounge, and saw Lois.

He looked at her without recognition, smiled politely.

"Pardon, I did not know we had visitors," he said, then looked at her more narrowly. "Something is wrong?"

Her incredulity, her bewilderment, held her voiceless, gazing at him. His eyes searched her face for an instant, then he walked past her.

"Gabrielle!"

He went to the door of the adjoining room. It seemed to Lois, turning to follow him with her eyes, that he stood for a long time in the doorway. Then he went into the room. She bit her lip, till the sharp pain pierced the numbness of her mind.

"I've got to think!" she said to herself. "What does this mean? What's his game?"

D'ARZAC reappeared in the doorway, his eyes fixed on her, brilliant and dark in his sallow, handsome face.

"What happened?" he said. Suddenly he came to her, gripped her shoulders, shook her so savagely that her hat fell to the carpet, a lock of blond hair, loosened, brushed her eyes. "What happened?"

Strangely his touch calmed, instead of frightening her. She looked at him steadily.

"You ought to know!" she said.

He looked into her eyes, smiling, his teeth tight. Then he thrust her from him, turned, caught up a telephone which stood on the mantelpiece, dialed a single number. Watching her sidelong, the receiver at his ear, he spoke into the telephone:

"Police?" He talked briefly, urgently, then

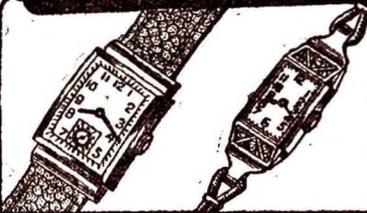
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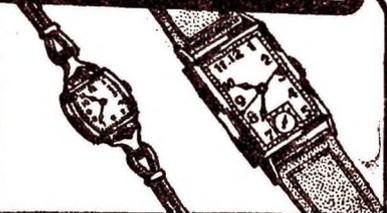


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clicked the receiver back on its hooks.

He glanced at Lois, then did a curious thing. He edged the toe of his neat shoe under her hat, which lay on the carpet, and with his foot flicked it toward the door of the adjoining room. He flicked the soft felt thus a second time, so that it fell in that room. Again he looked at her.

She said nothing. She was calm, but her mind raced. She saw his purpose, she realized her own position. D'Arzac had killed his wife, and was making a desperate play to shift the guilt to her—Lois.

Her mind seemed carried away from him now—armored against him, as it armored itself against the importunities of attachés and secretaries, creating from long practice in concentration a stillness of its own in the midst of tumult, to unravel the intricacies of mutilated code groups.

This was "the heat" as the Embassy never had imposed it. She knew that she dared not miss a trick. It was her wits against those of this desperate man, and the loser faced a murder charge.

Her neat mind separated the components of the situation as precisely as the groups of a code.

She glanced at the coat and hat lying on the chair. He must have flung them there when he first came in—thrown them there on his way to his wife's room. The way they lay suggested haste, perhaps anger.

Lois' gray eyes rested on him. A jealous man? He looked the type. He had perhaps received some information to bring him home with his jealousy inflamed—so that, going direct to Gabrielle's room, he had hurled accusations at her. In the end he must have struck her.

If he believed himself to have entered the house without being seen, his first thought, when he realized his wife was dead, would have been to get out as he had entered—unseen. It was the first move necessary to the creation of an alibi.

So, he had opened the door of the apartment to make sure the coast was clear and she, Lois, had been there to shatter the alibi at its initiation. For if she could prove that she had never seen him before tonight, no alibi could have withstood her precise description of him, and flight would have been a confession of guilt.

So, with his mind desperately preoccupied with the need to turn the catastrophe of her arrival into some sort of defense, he had asked her in. And now, into the picture forming in her mind, the pretext of the

champagne neatly fitted.

He had not gone down to fetch a bottle of champagne. He had gone down so that, putting on hat and overcoat, he could present himself with some trumped-up inquiry to the concierge, as though just arrived from the street.

D'Arzac lighted a cigarette. He was watching her warily.

Looking at him, Lois had the feeling that her silence, the absence in her of hysteria, worried him. He had not bargained for it.

He had counted on bewilderment, on tears, on terror—on an emotional reaction, not an intellectual one. He could not know that the very profession of the girl he sought to trap was the unraveling, under pressure, of intricate problems.

He did not understand her calm. And if he feared it, she reasoned, this could only be because, however good the story he planned to tell, he knew there must exist—apparent to her, and her only, if she saw with clear eyes—some demonstrable flaw.

She began to seek it—looking carefully, meticulously, around the room, re-examining, re-appraising—as systematically as, every day of her life, she sought the inversions and misplacements which led to mutilated code groups.

Abruptly, there rose to the silent apartment the squeal of brakes harshly applied.

"The police!" D'Arzac said.

He crushed out his cigarette in an ashtray on the piano, strode into the hall to open the outer door.

ALMOST at once the room was full of men. They looked at Lois, but did not speak to her. Several of them went into the adjoining room, where the dead girl lay. D'Arzac, after indicating the cream doors, was told to remain in the lounge. A cloaked gendarme stood between the glass doors leading to the hall and another stood in the hall.

A sense of panic haste leaped in Lois for a second, with the feeling that, if once she were taken from this room, the flaw she sought—the mutilation in D'Arzac's story—might remain forever concealed.

She exerted her will against panic. Her eyes returned to the one point of disorder in the room—the coat and hat thrown on to the chair. The reason he hadn't taken this particular coat and hat when he went "for champagne" was obvious. He couldn't have taken

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them without her seeing him, and he had not wanted her to see him take a coat and hat at all.

No, she thought, there was no help there.

The cream doors opened. A short, stoutish man, dressed in a black coat and striped trousers, reentered the room. He closed the doors behind him. He had a pink face, a pink scalp sparsely streaked with hair. He looked intently at Lois for a moment, then turned to D'Arzac.

"The deceased is your wife?"

"Yes."

"What do you know about this?"

"Only that when I came in and called my wife's name," D'Arzac said, his voice strained, "I saw this lady standing almost where she is now. She seemed dazed, yet there was a look in her face that made me alarmed for my wife. I seemed to sense something wrong. The doors of her room were open. I went in and found her lying as she is now."

"And then?"

"I put a hand to her heart and she was dead," D'Arzac said. He moistened his dry lips. "My wife had frequently been violently jealous, hysterical. At times her accusations were violent. I will not say they always had been ill-founded. But in this case, if she suspected this lady and myself to be known to each other, if she made wild accusations, she may have caused the momentary tussle that—that resulted in her death.

He broke off, with a catch of the breath.

"It is a tragic mistake," he went on. "I have never set eyes on this lady before. I do not even know why she came to see my wife."

So that, Lois thought, is his story. She studied him. He was acting, lying, with the brilliance of desperation. She felt a grudging respect for him. He had suggested to the detective's mind—the mind of a Frenchman, traditionally receptive to the idea of feminine jealousy—a motive for the alleged quarrel between his wife and Lois.

She saw the detective looking at her. It was at her hair that he looked, at its disarray, as though from a struggle. That, too, D'Arzac had contrived, very ingeniously.

The detective turned to D'Arzac.

"You touched nothing in the room there?"

"I put a hand to my wife's heart, as I have said," D'Arzac answered. "I disturbed nothing."

Again, the detective glanced at Lois. As surely as if he had spoken of it, she knew

that he was thinking of the tan felt hat with the jay's feather in the band lying beside the dead girl—as though fallen there in a struggle.

She felt the web of lies winding about her like a cobweb, with nightmare certainty. But her mind as stubbornly pursued the snag in D'Arzac's story, as though it were the touchstone of a mutilated message which she sought in the Codes Room of the Embassy at midnight.

"At what time did you enter the apartment, monsieur?" the detective asked.

D'Arzac glanced at his watch.

"About a quarter after nine, I think. I cannot be exact. The concierge, perhaps, can tell you."

The detective glanced across at the gen-darme near the glass door.

"Send for the concierge."

He turned, then, to Lois. Her name? Her address? Her business in Paris? Her purpose in visiting the D'Arzac apartment?

She answered the questions quietly, truthfully.

"At what time did you enter the apartment?"

"I don't know," Lois said honestly; "I didn't notice."

"What do you know of this affair?"

Lois told him precisely what had happened. As she came to the incident of the hat, the contrived disarray of her hair, D'Arzac moved sharply, his expression one of utter stupefaction. The detective soothed him with a gesture.

THE detective looked at Lois. His scrutiny was searching. She knew that he did not believe her. She realized that the very silence and watchfulness she had preserved was working against her now. It suggested she had been preparing her story, manipulating it to fit the revealed circumstances.

The outer door opened and closed. A gen-darme ushered an elderly woman in a black dress into the lounge.

"Ah, madame," the detective said. "A little question or so. You can perhaps tell us at what time Monsieur D'Arzac came in?"

"But precisely, monsieur. He called me up from my kitchen to the lodge to ask if there were any letters for him. It was then ten minutes after nine."

The detective nodded.

"Now, as to Madame D'Arzac? You can tell us if she has been in her apartment all evening?"

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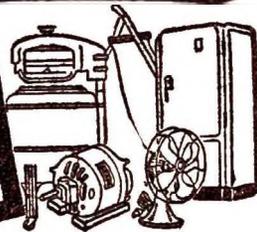
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"That I cannot say, monsieur. The tenants come and go, they receive visitors." The concierge shrugged. "If they do not call me to my lodge, it is chance if I happen to notice. As in the case," she added, with a glance at Lois, "of this lady."

"You saw this lady arrive?" the detective said sharply.

"It was by chance," the woman said nervously. "I was mounting the stairs from my kitchen to the lodge—I had need of a workbasket which was on my table—when I saw this lady crossing the hall to the stairs."

"At what time was this?"

"It would be about ten or fifteen minutes before nine."

"Merci, madame," the detective said suavely. "For the present, that will be all."

D'Arzac looked down at the carpet, but not before Lois had seen the flare of triumph in his eyes.

If the fact that she had been seen by the concierge had come to Lois as a shock, it was a slice of sheer luck for D'Arzac. It did not prove his story, but it had the effect of strongly corroborating it.

That the detective saw it so was betrayed by his tone as he said curtly:

"Mademoiselle, it will be necessary that you accompany us."

It was the moment Lois had been dreading. She felt profoundly that, if she left this room with the "snag" in D'Arzac's story undiscovered, her chance was gone. She never would be able to break through the web of falsehood in which he had enmeshed her.

She hesitated, seeking desperately in her mind for some pretext to keep them all here just a little longer. Even so, it was like when she was working away furiously at a snag in an Embassy message, with people jittering over her shoulder.

"Let it go!" they'd say. "The chief'll have to guess at it!"

Many times before she had sought pretexts for a few precious seconds of delay.

"You also, monsieur," the detective said to D'Arzac.

The glib man did not hesitate. He humbly inclined his head, and with the alacrity of a man who knew his sole peril lay in that room, picked up the overcoat and hat which lay on the deep chair.

Lois' voice broke from her suddenly, breathlessly:

"Wait!" she cried.

Her heart was beating violently. Her eyes were fixed on D'Arzac. He stood rigid, the

coat across his arm, the hat in his hand.

Lois felt the warmth in her cheeks.

"Monsieur," she said to the detective. "I beg of you. Will you for a moment call back the concierge?"

The detective looked at her steadily, then nodded to the gendarme.

Waiting, there grew in Lois that sense of excitement, of penetration, she often had experienced when, at last, a mutilated code group began to yield to reason.

The concierge reentered the room.

"Madame, we want you to tell us something," Lois said. "Are the coat and hat which Monsieur D'Arzac is holding the same coat and hat which he had when he came into your lodge at ten minutes after nine to-night?"

The concierge glanced at D'Arzac, shook her head.

Lois tried carefully to keep the breathlessness from her voice.

"There is a coat in the hall there," she said. "Would you mind bringing here the coat and hat which Monsieur D'Arzac had when he came into your lodge?"

The woman went into the hall. Lois did not look at D'Arzac. She did not look at the detective. There was not a sound in the apartment. After a moment, the concierge returned with an overcoat and hat.

"Those are the ones Monsieur D'Arzac had when he came into your lodge?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

LOIS looked at D'Arzac. "That coat and hat you are holding, monsieur—when did you put them on the chair there?"

"At luncheon," D'Arzac said.

"And you wore this other coat and hat this afternoon?" Lois asked.

D'Arzac hesitated, but the detective looked at him with sudden suspicion.

"Yes," D'Arzac said.

Lois turned to the detective.

"Believe it or not, monsieur, Monsieur D'Arzac was in this apartment when I arrived this evening," she said. "The pretext he made for leaving me here alone was that he was going to fetch champagne, but I saw him take from the closet that overcoat and hat which the concierge is holding. When he returned to the apartment, he was carrying that overcoat and hat. You follow me, monsieur?"

The detective nodded. "Yes, mademoiselle. Continue, please."

[Turn page]

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"As he was making a pretence of entering the apartment for the first time this evening, he saw me for the first time," Lois went on. "In fact, he rehearsed the story he has told you. It is strange to me that he didn't come in wearing the hat and coat, and take them off in the hall. It would have looked more convincing. Since he was pretending to have come in from the street, why didn't he wear them when he entered the concierge's lodge?" She looked at the woman. "Was he wearing them, madame?"

"Why, no," the woman said wonderingly. "He was carrying both the hat and the coat."

"This apartment is a penthouse, I believe," Lois said. "Is there a fire-escape?"

"Of course," the concierge said. "It is the law."

"That's the way the other man must have gone," Lois said.

"What other man?" the detective broke in harshly.

"The man that, when Monsieur D'Arzac came in this evening, he expected to catch with his wife. He didn't catch him. But that was the cause of the quarrel in which Monsieur D'Arzac struck his wife and killed her. It wasn't until he was on his way downstairs, on the pretext of fetching champagne but really in order to present himself to the concierge as though he had just come from the street, that he realized how near he'd come to surprising the other man. The other man barely had time to escape out onto the roof garden when he heard the sound of Monsieur D'Arzac's key in the lock."

"How can you possibly know this?" the detective demanded.

"I'm a codist," Lois said. "This is like a code—just like a code! It can't have happened any other way. Monsieur D'Arzac conceived his plan against me because he had no alternative. He felt he could count on the other man, whatever he might read in the paper as having happened after his escape from this apartment, continuing to lie

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low and keep out of it. Monsieur D'Arzac knew there was a flaw in his story, but he also knew that the only person to whom it might occur was I—and he evidently didn't think that very likely!"

She drew a long breath.

"Do you think," she said evenly, "that Monsieur D'Arzac could be persuaded to put on the hat and coat which he said he was wearing this afternoon?"

The detective looked at her for a second, then took the hat and coat from the concierge, turned to D'Arzac.

"Put down that hat and coat you are holding, monsieur, and put these on."

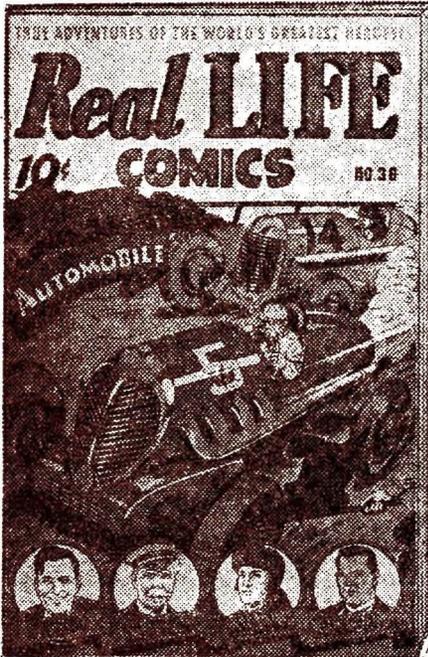
D'Arzac seemed not to hear. His eyes, with a dark shine in them, were fixed upon Lois.

"Put them on!" the detective repeated, dangerously.

D'Arzac dropped the coat and hat he was holding. He took the coat and hat from the detective. He raised the hat to put it on. Then, with a movement of frantic speed and fury, he smashed his fist, with the hat in it, full into the detective's face, and came straight—lunging and murderous—for Lois.

[Turn page]

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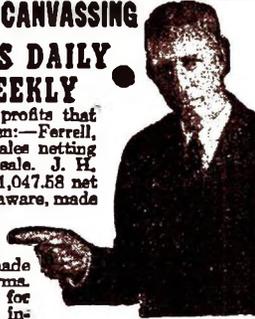
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The gendarme sprang in. His white truncheon swung and struck!

Lois pressed her hands to her face.

From far off, she heard the jangle, the sudden, vicious snap of handcuffs.

Soon the momentary reeling of her senses passed.

When she looked up, it was not at the stunned, manacled man on the carpet, or the gendarme kneeling beside him, or the detective dabbling blood from his lips. It was at the portrait over the mantelpiece that she looked—the portrait of the girl with blue-black hair flying back from a white face, poignant and fated.

Gabrielle!

Lois looked at the portrait. The thought shaped in her mind, What am I going to tell Joan Tracy when I write?

She drew a long breath that shuddered a little, as though she had been crying. With a curious, small gesture, like an appeal, she turned to the detective.

"I couldn't do anything else, could I?" she said. "I didn't know whether the hat and coat he took out of the closet were too big or too small. I only knew he'd have worn them if he could, but he couldn't. They didn't fit. They belonged to his wife's lover."

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Also in the next issue of **BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE** will be a splendid assortment of shorter detective stories. You'll like every one of them!

LETTERS FROM READERS

WHY not write us a postcard or letter and tell us what you think of **BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE**? It's only through your communications that we know what kind of stories you like best, and it's your kindly suggestions that enable us to maintain the high standards of this magazine.

The first letter selected for quotation in this issue comes from the Nutmeg State.

I have been reading **BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE** for two years. I thought the lead novel in your last issue, **THE MAN BEHIND MURDER**, was the best yet. I also enjoyed the short stories. Why don't you make **BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE** a monthly magazine? I'm kept in suspense waiting for each new issue.

Here's hoping you continue your good work!
—Herbert Osber, West Hartford, Conn.

Now here's a reader who is also a fan of some of the other magazines we publish. If you like **BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE**, why not get a copy of one of its companion magazines?

I'm just writing to tell you that **BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE** is tops with me. I also read some of your other books, and like them, too, especially **THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE** and **G-MEN DETECTIVE**.—Roy Smith, Naches, Wash.

This letter is from one of our newest readers:

The Spring issue of **BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE** was the first I ever read. All the stories were grand, but **THE MAN BEHIND MURDER**, with Tony Quinn, Silk, Carol, and Butch, was the best. Why can't Carol and Tony be
[Turn page]

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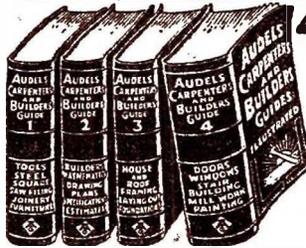
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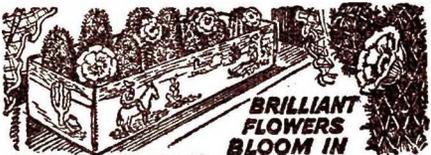
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more romantic? Anyway, it's tops, and it won't be the last one I shall read.—Mrs. Emily Chadwick, New Bern, N. C.

And here's another new reader!

I have just read my first copy of **BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE**. I found it very interesting. The stories I enjoyed most were the short ones. I'm going to make a habit of reading it every issue. Many of my buddies read it.—Philip Talbott, East Kelly Field, Texas.

Here's a vote against having more romance for Tony Quinn!

BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE is one of the best magazines I have read in the last five years, and I have read all the good ones. I don't think Carol Baldwin should marry Tony Quinn because there is no time for domestic life like Carol would want. Besides, if they should marry and Captain McGrath should find out that Tony is the Black Bat, then he could take Carol along on the arrest. If she doesn't marry Tony, she could continue to carry on if Tony were arrested. So let's keep things the way they are.—Mrs. Ozzie Mae Long, Carbondale, Ill.

Our last letter is from the South:

I am a reader of **BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE** and I think it's the best detective magazine there is. I can hardly wait for your next issue.—Roy Stroud, Dadeville, Ala.

Well, thanks, folks, for all your fine letters and all the nice things you had to say. Don't forget to keep the letters and postcards coming in. We sure appreciate hearing from you, so please write us today. Address all letters and postcards to The Editor, **BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE**, 10 East 40th Street, New York, 16, N. Y. So long until the next issue!

—THE EDITOR.

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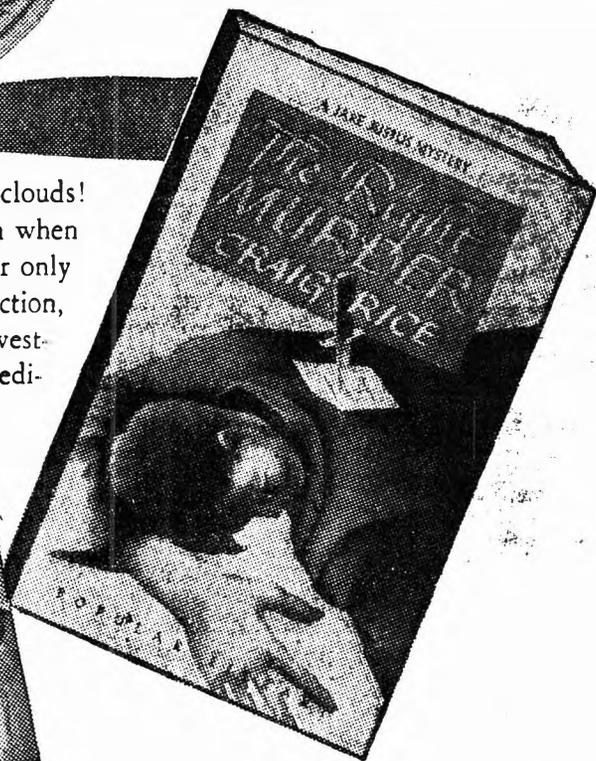
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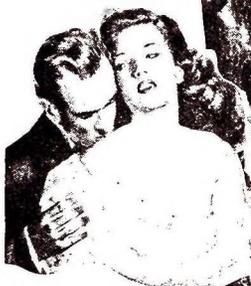
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