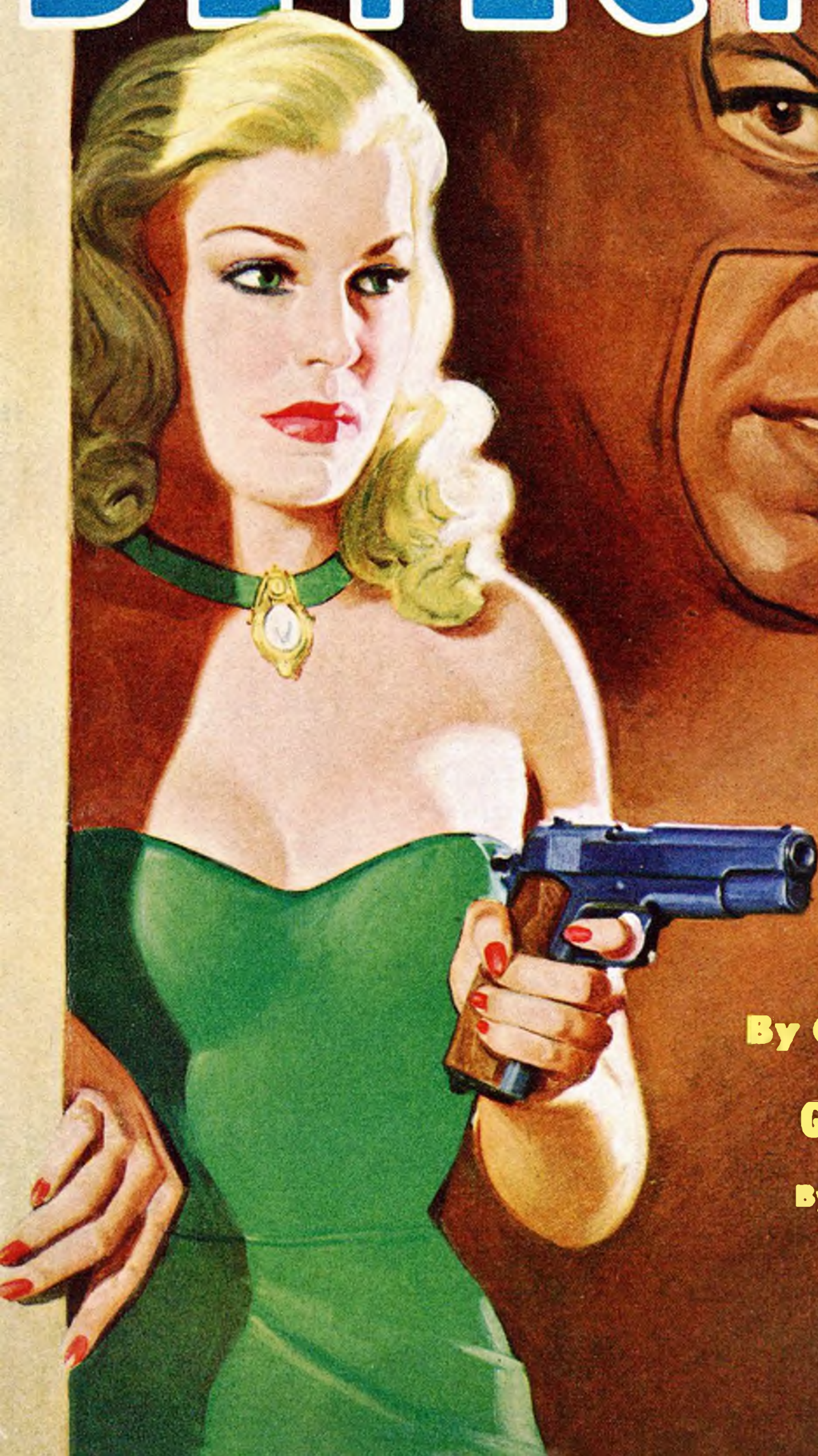


FALL
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BLACK BOOK

DETECTIVE



FEATURING

THE BLACK BAT
**FIGHTS
FOR LIFE**

A Tony Quinn Mystery Novel

By **G. WAYMAN JONES**

GUNPLAY AT JULIO'S

A Black Burton Novel

By **NELS LEROY JORGENSEN**

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BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE

Vol. XXVIII, No. 2

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

Fall, 1950

A COMPLETE TONY QUINN NOVEL



THE BLACK BAT FIGHTS FOR LIFE

By G. Wayman Jones

When Tony Quinn falls into a killer's trap, he finds there's more to the crime picture in his home city than readily meets the eye!

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A COMPLETE NOVELET

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Black Burton, the gambling adventurer, takes the biggest gamble of his life when he sidesteps the law to avenge a grim killing!

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Private eye Pete Nelson didn't need a crystal ball in this case

IN THE BAG.....Carroll John Daly 87

The kidnaping of wealthy Margaret Neihmer was a real smooth job

THUBWAY THAM ITH RAIDED.....Johnston McCulley 111

When cops bother this little pickpocket, they'd better be honest

THE CORNY KILLER.....Benton Braden 119

J. Elmer Dalton worked a foolproof gag—that became a bad joke!

AND

OFF THE RECORD.....The Editor 6

A live-wire department where readers and the editor get together

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BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE. Published quarterly by Better Publications, Inc., 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. N. L. Pines, President. Entered as second-class matter July 12, 1948, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of March 3, 1879. Copyright, 1950, by Better Publications, Inc. Subscription (12 issues), \$2.40; single copies, \$0.20; foreign and Canadian postage extra. Names of all characters used in stories and semi-fiction articles are fictitious. If the name of any living person or existing institution is used, it is a coincidence. Manuscripts must be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope and are submitted at the author's risk. In corresponding with this publication, please include your postal zone number, if any.

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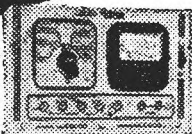
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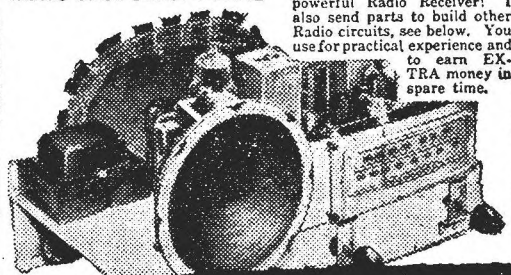
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in RADIO-
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OFF THE RECORD

A DEPARTMENT WHERE READERS AND THE EDITOR MEET

THE Black Bat said, "This has gone far enough!"

A gang of daring robbers, led by Willie Burke, was laughing at the law. One after another, they knocked over banks in the various suburbs of the city, and made away with a fortune in loot.

But they left a trail of blood behind—a path strewn with murdered men. And now, with the police getting nowhere in breaking up their crimes, the Black Bat knew it was time to take a hand.

Through clever investigation, the Black Bat learned the whereabouts of one member of the Willie Burke outfit. A thug named Fred Lansing was holed up in a cheap apartment at the northwest corner of State and Lincoln Streets.

The Killer's Lair

The Black Bat went up to the third floor, crept down the corridor until he saw the brass numbers tacked to the door of Lansing's hideout. Lansing had not been in touch with Willie Burke since the last getaway, the Black Bat knew. Therefore, it was reasonable to assume that Lansing had not yet been paid his share of the haul. He'd need it, perhaps be expecting it. Only some powerful reason would make Lansing open up. Money was reason enough—if Lansing believed it was there.

The Black Bat placed an envelope on the floor, shoved it forward so just the thinner end of it slipped beneath the door. Then he put his fingertips against the door and scratched a couple of times.

"Who is it?"

The Black Bat did not answer the voice that came from within. He drew one of his guns and lined himself up against the wall beside the door. Lan-

ing was approaching now. In a moment he'd see the fragment of envelope beneath the door and try to pull it all the way under. But the bulk of it would prevent that. There'd be only one way he could get that envelope—by opening the door.

That was exactly what happened.

Lansing jiggled the envelope for a time, but could not get it through. Slowly a key turned and a bolt slipped back. The door opened a crack. Still the Black Bat made no move. The envelope was jiggled again, but it remained stuck. Someone exploded into an exasperated oath and the door was yanked wide open. That was when the Black Bat went through it.

His leap carried him up to Lansing before the man had a chance to raise the gun he was holding. Lansing gave a half strangled scream and then a black gloved hand choked off the rest of the cry. The Black Bat's other hand seized Lansing's right wrist and gave it one expert twist. The revolver clattered to the floor.

Staring at Death

Lansing was suddenly flung back. When he recovered his balance, he was facing the Black Bat—and the gun pointed squarely at him. Lansing slowly raised his hands.

"Okay," he said bitterly, "I know when I'm licked."

The Black Bat locked the door, searched Lansing, and finally turned out the light so the room was plunged into darkness.

"Now, let's have a talk," the Black Bat said.

But what the Black Bat didn't notice was the figure that appeared just then on the fire escape landing outside the

window. The figure of a man, bent on murder—

The Black Bat didn't know it, but right then he was caught—between two killers!

That's just one of the many exciting incidents in **THE LEAGUE OF FACELESS MEN**, by G. Wyman Jones, stirring new Black Bat novel to be featured in the next issue of **BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE**.

Again and again the Black Bat faces peril and death as he takes the trail of the cleverest bank robber of modern times. Hunted by the police on one hand, and marked for extermination by bandits on the other, the Black Bat is at his rootin' tootin' fightingest best!

You'll thrill to every page as, with his loyal helpers, Silk, Butch, and lovely Carol Baldwin, the Black Bat meets the supreme test of his career!

Remember the title:
THE LEAGUE OF FACELESS MEN.
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'Teen-Age Thief

Also in the next issue—**PART OF THE NIGHT**, a mystery novelet by Carroll John Daly.

They called him "Angel" Allen. He was a young man of sixteen, but he had the angel face of a boy of twelve. Under the direction of a hardened criminal, he was sent out to steal. Then, one night, on the shadowy and narrow path that lies between lawlessness and decency, he ran into murder, and with a gun in his fist, Angel Allen made his final, fatal choice. . . .

You'll find **PART OF THE NIGHT** thrilling, heart-warming stuff, and the characters in it the kind of people you yourself might know!

There'll be many other fast-action tales of crime and mystery—plus many exciting special features—in the next **BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE**!

LETTERS FROM READERS

GATHER around now, you Black Bat fans, and let's see what's in the mail bag this time. As you know, this is
[Turn page]

"You ought to get a medal!"

says!

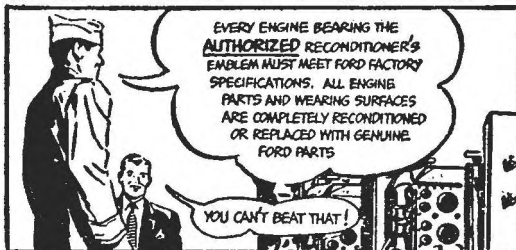
"NOT ME," FRED COMES BACK.
"THE FORD-AUTHORIZED RECONDITIONER SHOULD GET IT."



I STOPPED TO TELL MY MECHANIC FRIEND, FRED, HOW FRISKY MY FORD IS SINCE I GOT MY RECONDITIONED ENGINE.

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the column where each reader can step up and speak his piece—saying what he likes or does not like about Black Book Detective. If you haven't written recently, why not write today and join the friendly fun?

Dear Editor: I have been reading detective books for a few years and BBD is one of the most interesting. I never miss an issue. The PHANTOM DETECTIVE is one of my favorites, too. I think it would be a good idea if the Black Bat and the Phantom worked together some times as they are both very good detectives.

Why is it that G. Wayman Jones made that mistake in the recent Black Bat novel, MURDER TOWN? In Chapter Six, he writes, "The Black Bat drew off one silk glove, put the flat of his hand against the nearest wall and began lightly fanning the surface."—Armand Robert, Central, La.

That was no mistake, Armand, but a very clever trick on the part of the Black Bat. By passing his hand in a fanning motion over the wall, he was able to locate the picture that was hidden under the wall paper.

Incidentally, you new readers might be interested in knowing that the PHANTOM DETECTIVE is one of our companion magazines, and that if you enjoy the adventures of the Black Bat, you most certainly would like to follow the thrilling exploits of the Phantom, as well.

Dear Editor: I have just finished reading the current issue of your magazine about the Black Bat (Tony Quinn). My sisters and I think this is the best detective story on the market, although we have only read the last three issues. From now on, it is a must on our list.

Those letters in the back of the magazine are interesting, but we do not agree with the ones disapproving of Tony Quinn and calling the stories too imaginary and too much like fairy tales. The stories are very plausible, detailed and interesting—take it from one who has read different kinds of these stories for many years. I heartily approve. Long may the Black Bat continue his work.—Marj -----, Woodstock, Ontario.

Thanks for your nice letter, Marj. But, as you know, we are equally happy to get letters criticizing our stories, for they help us to improve our magazine.

Dear Editor: I am a staunch reader of BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE, but once in a (Concluded on page 129)

In your Mind's Eye

The Secret of MENTAL CREATING

IF you just like to dream; read no further. There comes a time when your fancies *must* be brought into light—and stand the test of every-day, hard realities. Are you one of the thousands—perhaps millions—whose thoughts never get beyond the stage of *wistful wishing*? Do you often come to from a daydream with the sigh, "If only I could bring it about—*make it real*?"

All things begin with thought—it is what follows that may take your life out of the class of those who hope and dream. Thought energy, like anything else, can be dissipated—or it can be made to produce actual effects. *If you know how to place your thoughts* you can stimulate the creative processes within your mind—through them you can assemble things and conditions of your world into a happy life of accomplishment. *Mental creating* does not depend upon a magical process. It consists of *knowing how* to marshal your thoughts into a power that draws, compels and organizes your experiences into a worth-while design of living.

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The **ROSICRUCIANS**
(AMORC)

SAN JOSE

CALIFORNIA

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The Rosicrucians (AMORC),
San Jose, California.

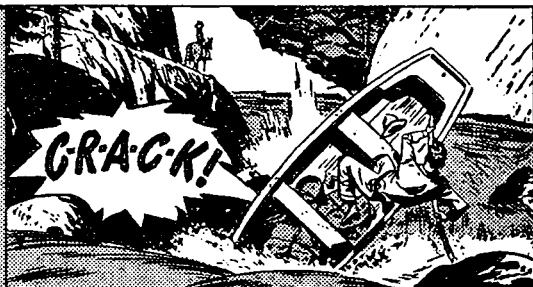
Please send free copy of "The Mastery of Life,"
and I shall read it as directed.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....

LUCK WAS WITH TOM WHEN...



ON VACATION, TOM MAHONEY IS SHOOTING THE LAST AND MOST DANGEROUS RAPIDS IN HIS LONG TRIP THROUGH MAD CANYON WHEN . . .



GRAB MY HORSE'S TAIL!



TALKS CHEAP, BUT I'M CERTAINLY GRATEFUL . . .

FORGET IT, STRANGER. COME ON, LET'S HEAD FOR THE 'LAZY U'. YOU'LL NEVER MAKE TOWN ON FOOT



THAT YOU, BETH? SUPPER'S ABOUT READY

OKAY, DAD, BETTER SET ANOTHER PLACE. WE HAVE COMPANY



HERE'S DRY DUDS AND A RAZOR, TOO

THANKS A LOT



WHAT AN EASY SHAVE! I EXPECTED TROUBLE WITH TWO DAYS' WHISKERS

THIN GILLETTES ALWAYS SKIM OFF WHISKERS QUICK AND EASY



CAN I GET A TRAIN IN UTE CITY?

FISHIN'S GOOD HERE AND WE LIKE COMPANY. WHY NOT STAY A FEW DAYS?

I HOPE HE DOES. HE'S HANDSOME



WHILE YOU'RE SHOPPING, I'LL WIRE MY FOLKS

TELL THEM YOU DON'T KNOW WHEN YOU'LL BE BACK

NEXT MORNING

YOUR FACE LOOKS WELL GROOMED AND FEELS SWELL AFTER A REFRESHING THIN GILLETTE SHAVE. THIS LOW-PRICE BLADE IS WONDERFULLY KEEN AND LONG LASTING. ALSO IT FITS YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR ACCURATELY AND PROTECTS YOU FROM THE DISCOMFORT OF ORDINARY BLADES. ASK FOR THIN GILLETTES IN THE CONVENIENT 10-BLADE PACKAGE WITH USED-BLADE COMPARTMENT

THIN Gillette 10 BLADES

THIN Gillette 10-BLADE PACKAGE

10-25¢

4-10¢

NEW TEN-BLADE PACKAGE HAS COMPARTMENT FOR USED BLADES

 A black and white illustration of a smiling man's face, likely Tom Mahoney, used as part of the Gillette advertisement.

A TONY QUINN NOVEL BY G. WAYMAN JONES

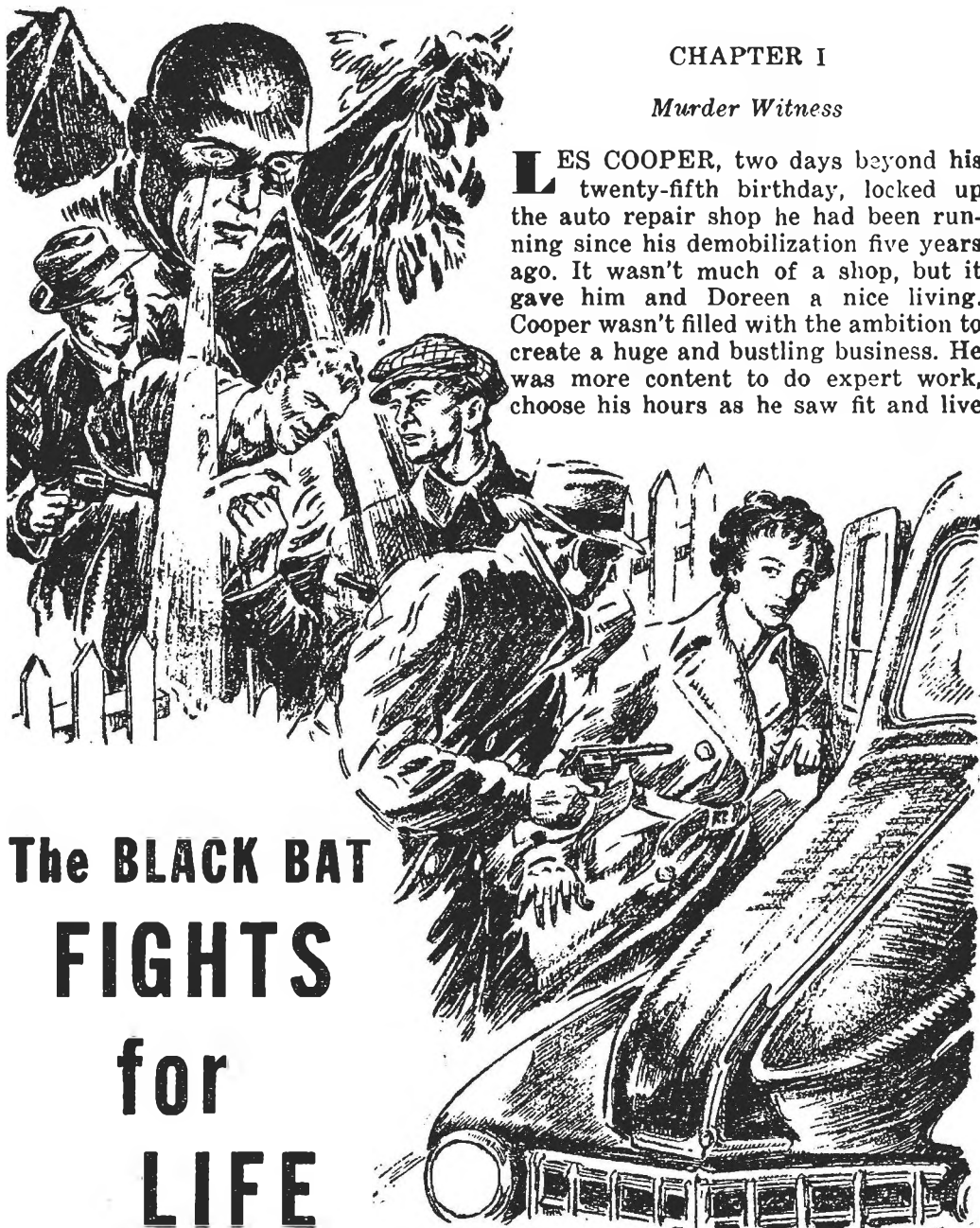
When the Black Bat falls into a killer's trap, he finds there's more to the crime picture in his home city than meets the eye!

CHAPTER I

Murder Witness

LES COOPER, two days beyond his twenty-fifth birthday, locked up the auto repair shop he had been running since his demobilization five years ago. It wasn't much of a shop, but it gave him and Doreen a nice living. Cooper wasn't filled with the ambition to create a huge and bustling business. He was more content to do expert work, choose his hours as he saw fit and live

The **BLACK BAT**
FIGHTS
for
LIFE



You Can Send a Killer Like Spade Vernon to

in moderate comfort. That was what Doreen wanted too.

They owned a five-room bungalow, had a lot of friends, a small bank account and plenty of good health and happiness. Cooper was about five feet seven, sandy-haired and blue-eyed. He was, in all respects, just an average man.

He drove his new car from the garage to the corner and remembered he had to buy cigarettes. It was late, so old Mr. Holcomb's tobacco store was closed. Cooper walked into the Fairlawn Bar and Grill. He bought his cigarettes and decided to have a glass of beer. These formalities dispensed with, he remembered that he'd forgotten to call Doreen. She liked to know when he would be home, and there would be a midnight snack waiting for him.

The single phone booth was busy, so Cooper had another glass of beer. The place was not inspiring, not conducive to gaiety. Besides the man in the phone booth there was only one other customer. The bartender was half asleep and looked as if he wished everybody would clear out so he could lock up and go home.

Cooper spotted a dish of pretzels into which the other customer had been methodically dipping, but had apparently pushed to one side. Cooper moved along the bar toward the dish. This customer had kept his back turned on Cooper all the time and he couldn't be seen in the mirror behind the bar because that was painted over with a list of prices.

Cooper, reaching for the pretzels, brushed gently against the man's left shoulder. Like a flash the man twisted around and one hand darted toward his armpit, then hesitated. His face was a startling white. Not the pallor that comes from lack of sunlight, or even a long illness. It was the color of fear. It was the white that comes when terror drains the blood from the face.

Cooper could almost feel the man's terror.

"Sorry, pal," he said. "I just want a

pretzel, if you're through with them."

The man growled something and turned his back. Cooper shrugged, pushed the bowl of pretzels toward his part of the bar and ate a couple. He idly wondered what this man feared so much that it made him reach for a gun when someone brushed against him. Cooper hadn't seen a gun, but he had an idea that was what this man had been after.

The phone booth door opened and put an end to his idle conjectures. The man inside walked briskly out of the place, with a familiar farewell to the bartender. Cooper finished his beer, stuffed another pretzel into his mouth and walked to the phone booth.

INSIDE he hummed as he dialed. Then Doreen's voice reached him. He wondered, somewhere far back in his mind, if any other girl had ever had a voice as soft and lovely.

"I'm on my way," he said. "Be there in about fifteen minutes, honey."

"Okay, Les," Doreen replied. "I'll turn on the garage light for you. Want coffee?"

"Sure," Cooper told her. "Who wants to sleep anyhow? So long, beautiful."

He hung up, twisted slightly and started to push the booth doors open. But he stopped and his eyes widened. The drab picture at the bar hadn't changed much. The bartender was still dozing over a racing form. The lone customer was pouring himself another shot out of a bottle he had evidently purchased for his exclusive use. But two men were slowly moving toward the bar and a third had his back against the café door.

This little scene wouldn't have startled Cooper too much except that the approaching pair had guns in their hands. One of them stepped up behind the frightened customer and jabbed the gun hard into the small of his back. The customer stiffened, came erect from his lounging position at the bar and slowly raised his hands.

the Chair, but That Won't Stop His Crimes!

The other gunman reached the bartender before that startled individual raised his head and opened sleepy eyes. The gunman was lifting his weapon as he approached. Quickly he brought it down against the barkeep's balding skull. The bartender's head and shoulders dropped against the bar and then he slowly slid off it. The last thing to vanish from Cooper's amazed sight was

frightened man had his back against the bar, his hands raised high. He was pleading with the gunmen in a high-pitched, almost strident voice. One of the pair yanked a gun out of the holster beneath the frightened man's coat. He dropped it into his own pocket.

Then both men backed away a few steps, guns level. The frightened man had stopped begging for his life. Ap-



THE BLACK BAT

the bartender's right hand, which seemed to be clutching at air, like a drowning man's hand does as he goes down for the last time.

Cooper promptly buckled his knees and slipped down below the glass part of the phone booth door. He wasn't looking for any crack on the head or maybe a bullet through his chest. Cooper wasn't exactly afraid, but he wasn't foolish either. That little scene he had just witnessed had the makings of a ruthless murder.

After a moment he took a chance and looked out into the room again. The

parently he knew it was no use. Cooper was fumbling in his pocket for a nickel. He wondered if he could drop a coin into the phone box without its clang being heard out there, and call the police. But he didn't have to wonder for long. There wasn't a single coin in his pockets. He had spent the last of them for that final beer.

Nobody looked in the direction of the phone booth and since it was almost hidden beside the end booth, in a dark spot, Cooper was fairly safe. If he burst out of there and charged those two gunmen the odds were by no means in his favor.



And he had an idea that if they were going to kill this man, they wouldn't mind killing anyone who interfered, either. Perhaps, a couple of years ago, he might have taken a chance, but now he had Doreen to think about—and a home and a business. With surprise he realized that the rashness of youth had left him.

He did push the door open half an inch, carefully. The picture out there hadn't changed. The frightened man still had his back against the bar and his hands were raised high. The bartender was apparently unconscious on the floor, completely out of sight. The gunmen were about ten feet away. The way they had their guns aimed reminded Cooper of a firing squad.

Then one of the pair spoke. Not loudly, but his voice carried.

"Spade," he said, "he's all yours!"

The third man who so far had only guarded the door, walked slowly forward. He had no gun in his hand, but he seemed to be enjoying this tableau hugely. The frightened man was beginning to tremble. He had difficulty holding his arms up.

THE man called "Spade" stopped a foot away from the man, and slapped him twice across the face. Hit

him hard. The pallid skin turned a vivid red where Spade's hand had struck.

"You didn't think you'd get away with it, Pete," Spade said. "Not really."

Pete—the victim—moved his mouth, but no words came out. Spade laughed

there only as long as he never becomes a sucker. Well, you made one out of me and you're going to pay for it."

"Spade, I'll do anything you say!" the pale man pleaded. "Anything!"

Spade nodded. "Okay, Pete. I just wanted to be sure you were cooperative. Remember—you said anything."



With nothing else he could do, the Black Bat's automatic flamed, got the gunman in the chest (Chapter X)

at him and slapped him again. This blow seemed to knock Pete's brains back into position. "Spade—I made a mistake!" he chattered. "Honest, it won't happen again. I'll make it up to you!"

"Look," Spade said with some degree of patience, "when a guy pushes himself up to the position I hold, he stays



"I meant it, too!" Pete cried fervently. "Just ask me, Spade. Ask me!"

"Okay," Spade said in a tight voice. "I'd like to have you drop dead!"

Pete opened his mouth to scream—and so did Cooper, who had been watching all this while his nerves quivered more and more. He couldn't stand it any longer. They were going to kill that guy and he couldn't just hide and let them do it. He put the flat of his hand against the phone booth door and got set to rush them.

Then suddenly he realized he had waited a fraction of a second too long. Spade was moving back and there was a long two-edged knife in his hand. Part of the blade glittered evilly, part of it was dark-colored. And the frightened man called Pete wasn't trying to hold his arms high any more. He was slowly wilting, like a flower brought into a too hot room.

His knees were the first to go. Somehow his back stayed against the edge of the bar, and he slid down in sections. Knees first, then his arms fell, his shoulders dropped. Next his head sank down until his chin rested against his chest. He was sliding faster and faster. The back of his head bumped gently against the bar—just enough to throw him off that strange and delicate balance. He pitched forward, fell on his face and lay still.

Spade laughed once. Cooper would have thought such laughs existed only in someone's morbid imagination. It sent chills up and down his spine. Spade was backing away. He yanked a cloth off a table in a booth and wiped the knife with it. Then he put the knife under his coat. He gave a curt nod. The two gunmen put away their weapons. One of them opened the barroom door and stepped out.

In a moment a car motor started up. The other gunman darted out. Spade gave the place a last careful going over and seemed to be satisfied that this was a murder he would probably get away with. From where he now stood, he couldn't even see the phone booth.

The café door slammed shut behind him. As Cooper came out of the booth he heard a car pull away. He ran to

where the frightened man had fallen, knelt beside him and expertly felt for a pulse. The Marine Corps Medical Service had taught him to know the difference between life and death, and he knew this man would never be frightened again.

Cooper straightened up and ran behind the bar. The bartender was still unconscious and probably would stay that way for a little while longer. Cooper stood up, walked to the cash register and punched the no-sale key. He took out a nickel and ran back to the phone booth.

He dropped the coin into the slot, dialed "O" and tried to yell for the police. Not a word came out of him. Only a hissing exhalation of breath. He took a firmer grip on himself.

"Get me the police," he croaked to the operator. "Emergency."

CHAPTER II

Open and Shut Case



PLACING a stack of photos before the still shaken Les Cooper, Inspector McGrath waited for him to look them over. McGrath was a heavy-set, shrewd-eyed and pugnacious detective who had risen from the ranks. There were no flourishes about McGrath. When he was excited, his closely cropped mustache seemed to bristle. When he was determined, his jaw stuck out. The jaw was sticking out now.

"Okay, Mr. Cooper," McGrath said. "We've checked that café and from the phone booth where you were hidden, you had a perfect view of anybody in the place. There was enough light for you to see everything, too."

"I told you all that," Cooper said impatiently. "How much longer do I have to stick around?"

"It all depends," McGrath grunted.

"Depends on what?" Cooper asked

desperately. "Look, my wife was expecting me an hour ago—"

"Sure," McGrath soothed him. "If she doesn't believe your story when you finally get home, send her to me. I got a wife, too, and I know how they are sometimes."

"But why can't I phone her, Inspector?"

"Because I say you can't," McGrath growled. Then he seemed to relent a little. "Look, Mr. Cooper, we don't know you. Sure, maybe you're okay in every respect, but we have no proof."

"But what's that got to do with it?"

"Plenty. From what you've told us, the man who committed that murder has no idea it was witnessed and he thinks he's in the clear. So long as he keeps thinking that way, it'll be easy to round him up."

"Then let's get on with it, Inspector." I want to go home."

"Sure, Mr. Cooper. This stack of Rogues' Gallery pictures is for you to look over. You saw three men in that café. If you recognize any picture, say so. Now go ahead. Take plenty of time."

Cooper studied the first full face and profile and laid the picture to one side.

"I got an idea you know who the murderer is already," he observed, and with more interest he kept studying one card after another.

Then suddenly the square face of the murderer popped up under his gaze!

"That's him!" He couldn't keep the note of triumph out of his voice.

"You're sure?" McGrath demanded.

"Of course I am. I watched him for about five or six minutes. And I'm not likely to be mistaken in the face of a man I saw knife another, am I?"

McGrath nodded. "See that phone on the desk?" he said. "Call your wife if you want to, but don't say one word about what's happened. Just that you're okay and you'll be home soon. I'm staying right here beside you."

Cooper eagerly grabbed the phone. When it was answered, somehow he convinced a greatly worried Doreen that everything was fine. He felt better when

he hung up. McGrath had sent for a detail of men and had given them quiet instructions. They had filed out, and a manhunt had begun.

McGrath lit the stub of a cigar of a brand that smelled bad even when it was fresh. Now its aroma made Cooper cough. He lit a cigarette in self-defense.

"The guy you identified," McGrath said, "is named Spade Vernon. Know him?"

Cooper frowned. "The name seems familiar."

"It ought to be, Cooper. I got the tip-off the minute you told me the guy had been called Spade by his pals. Spade Vernon—probably the biggest criminal operator in town. A real big shot."

"Oh-oh," Cooper said, his voice mournful. "He won't like me any for fingering him."

"He won't," McGrath agreed. "The information you have could be plenty dangerous to you, but we'll give you all the protection you need. For the rest of it—as I suppose you'd like to know—the man he killed was named Montaya—Pete Montaya. He was one of Spade's third or fourth lieutenants in charge of floating dice games. Likely some of these games haven't been paying off as well as usual. Pete must have been lining his own pockets with Spade's dough. Which isn't the proper thing to do—with a man like Spade."

COOPER nodded, and the light of understanding flickered in his eyes.

"I see it now," he said. "That's about what the murderer hinted at too. He also told this Pete character that he'd risen to the top and couldn't let anybody make a sucker out of him."

"Exactly," McGrath said. "Pete shouldn't have tried it—if he wanted to stay healthy. He wasn't much of a guy, though. Nobody's going to weep for him. He was as bad as Spade, maybe worse. But the law doesn't recognize the character or reputation of a murder victim. It only understands that there's a dead man and that whoever killed him is going to pay for it. Even if it's just a cheap, smelly little murder like this."

"Can this man Spade Vernon swing enough weight to get away with this?" Cooper asked.

McGrath shook his head. "Not with your testimony against him, he can't. The barkeep saw nothing. Even if he had, he wouldn't talk. . . . Listen, Mr. Cooper, *you* won't renege on this, will you?"

"Why should I?" Cooper asked in surprise. "I saw murder committed. I'm not interested in either the victim or the killer, beyond seeing that justice is done."

"Good." McGrath got up. "We'll have Spade here in short order. You'll have to identify him in the line-up, but meanwhile let's take a little walk."

"Sure," Cooper said. "Where to?"

"I want you to meet the District Attorney who will be in charge of the case, Tony Quinn. He has an office just down the hall. Ever hear of him?"

"Why, yes," Cooper said thoughtfully. "He's blind, isn't he?"

"Yep. A little more than ten years ago—that was before he lost his eyesight—he was elected D.A. Now he's an appointed Special D.A. and they throw every tough case they get his way. Not that he minds."

"But—being blind—is he any good?" Cooper asked.

McGrath laughed as they walked out into the corridor. "Any good?" he repeated. "Mr. Cooper, the first thing a defense attorney asks is will Quinn prosecute. Brother, *is* he good! Like I started to say, he wasn't blind when he was elected and he did a sweet job as D.A. They were lining him up for the governorship. Then his luck gave out."

"You mean, he went blind?" Cooper asked.

"Uh-huh. He was prosecuting a big shot crook—somebody like this Spade Vernon. The evidence was most on paper and Quinn was going to show the jury what it consisted of. Some of this big shot's pals tried to destroy the papers by throwing a fast acting acid on them. Quinn stopped them—but the acid hit him in the face and blinded him instantly."

Cooper whistled. "No wonder he hates crooks."

McGrath shook his head. "He doesn't hate anybody, Mr. Cooper. He just does his job. You'll like him. I think . . . Yes, he's here. I see the light under the door of his office here at Headquarters. All you have to do is tell him your story, just like you told it to me."

"I'll be glad to," Cooper said. "If it means I can go home pretty soon."

McGrath opened the office door. It was only a makeshift office.

There were two men in the room. One of them, the man behind the desk, was in his late thirties. He would have been a striking-looking man except for ugly scars around his eyes. They were deeply etched and glistened in the light.

He wore gray tweeds, had a pleasant smile, and gave Cooper a warm hand-clasp in greeting. Everything about Tony Quinn was pleasant and alive. All but the eyes. They were seemingly dead in their sockets and stared unseeingly straight ahead.

The other man, at whom Cooper only glanced disinterestedly, was a slim fellow of forty-five who was almost bald. When he moved, it was with the grace of a professional dancer. He had cold eyes, as alert as Quinn's were dead. This man was "Silk" Kirby who, as McGrath could have told Cooper, rarely left Quinn's side.

"Sit down, Mr. Cooper," Quinn said. "Make yourself comfortable, then tell me exactly what happened. I know you've told your story to the police already, but I have to hear it also—and from your lips, not from a stenographer's notes."

LES COOPER found himself liking this soft-spoken blind man tremendously as he began his story quickly. He left nothing out. Listening, Quinn leaned back in his chair, made a steeple of his hands and stared straight ahead with those blank eyes.

When Cooper had finished, Quinn leaned forward. "A convincing and intelligent story, Mr. Cooper," he complimented. "Now you must understand,

this man you accuse will have an alibi. We can break that. But he may use threats against you. Come to me if he does. You'll be blasted from all sides in court because Spade has a high-powered battery of lawyers. You'll be called a liar in sixty different variations of the word. If there is anything in your past that's detrimental, they'll dig it up. So you might as well tell me now, if you have anything you'd rather conceal."

Cooper grinned. He would have told this blind man anything.

"Well, Mr. Quinn," he said, "I seem to remember that I was picked up twice for playing hooky when I was nine or ten. That, until right now, has been my only meeting with the law. If you call a truant officer the law."

"Good," Quinn said.

The phone on his desk rang and he almost knocked it over reaching for the instrument. He said "hello," and did some listening. Then he replaced the phone in its cradle.

"They've already picked up Spade Vernon, Inspector," he informed. "Right on his heels will come the lawyers and all kinds of writs. Take Mr. Cooper to the line-up room. And Spade is to be told nothing. He believes he was picked up purely as a routine precaution—which often happens when something goes wrong around town. Have Mr. Cooper pick Spade out of the line-up, then we'll see what the 'big shot' has to say."

Quinn arose and instantly Silk Kirby was at his side. All four men walked down the corridor to a room that looked like a small theater. Rows of seats faced a small stage which now was brilliantly illuminated.

As they sat down, a dozen men silently filed onto the stage. They stood with their backs against the wall, flooded by the powerful lights. McGrath whispered something to Cooper and the garage owner climbed the four small steps to the stage.

Without the slightest hesitation, he walked down before the row of men and then placed a hand on the shoulder of Spade Vernon.



Suddenly the rifleman toppled and fell
(Chap. XVII)

"This is the man I saw in the bar-room," he said. "The man I saw knife another man to death."

Spade Vernon's half-smirk vanished. For a moment he stood there in a sweat, staring at this unknown accuser. Then he snarled a curse and became sullenly quiet. Quinn stepped forward, escorted by Silk.

"Spade Vernon," Quinn said, "you are charged with the murder of Peter Montaya and you are to be held without bail. Is there any statement you want to make?"

Spade had rapidly recovered from the initial shock this witness had given him. He stepped forward.

"Look, Mr. Quinn," he said earnestly, "this is a bum rap. This guy, whoever he is, made a mistake fingering me. I didn't even know Pete was dead." He shrugged. "Okay—so you got to hold me. I ain't kicking, because I'll be out fast."

"Take him away," Quinn said. He turned to Cooper. "I think you'd like to go home, too. Inspector!"

"Yes, sir." McGrath came forward.

"Send Mr. Cooper home in a police car and assign a permanent guard to him. Three shifts of men who will keep Cooper under constant observation."

"I was thinking that might be a good idea," McGrath said. "I'll attend to it, Tony."

Cooper began to chuckle. "Oh, look here now, I can take care of myself. I'm not exactly—helpless."

Quinn shook his head. "You probably could—in a fair fight. But Spade Vernon's friends aren't going to fight fairly. They'll knife you in the back. Mr. Cooper, you can send Spade to the electric chair. A long delayed destination for him, but his pals aren't going to stand by and watch this done. They'll fight—and they're dirty fighters."

Cooper whistled softly. "I see what you mean, Mr. Quinn. Okay, I'll take the protection, and welcome it. But look—if this Spade is such an important guy among criminals, and as bad as he's painted, how come he never got sent up before?"

Quinn laughed without much mirth. "Mr. Cooper, Spade happens to have influential friends. Clever friends. In fact, we've often thought that Spade only fronted for some people who wouldn't risk their good reputations by associating with him or his criminal activities, but who do like the money these crimes return."

"In other words," Cooper grunted, "this guy Spade has drag."

"That's a mild way to express it," Quinn told him. "Go on home now, but keep your eyes open."

"I guess I better." Cooper grinned. "If I don't, Spade's friends might close them for me. Permanently."

CHAPTER III

The Go-Between



WEEK later Tony Quinn was eating breakfast while Silk Kirby read the morning newspapers to him. Silk finally laid the paper down.

"You know, sir," he commented, "I don't like the way this Spade Vernon thing is pro-

gressing, not one bit."

"Why not, Silk?" Quinn asked.

"He's taking it too calmly. He's got something up his sleeve, sir."

"So you have that feeling, too." Quinn buttered a piece of toast. "Yes, Silk, we've got Spade all wrapped up. He was so sure of himself he never bothered to frame a really good alibi and the one he gave when he thought he was being brought in for a routine check fell to pieces. Les Cooper's eye-witness story of the murder is going to send Spade to the electric chair."

"If," Silk amended, "Cooper ever tells it."

Quinn nodded. "We know a couple of feelers have been put out to him about forgetting his story, or not being too sure of it. But Cooper isn't buying that kind of money."

"They'll kill him, sir."

"I doubt it, Silk. We have Cooper's sworn testimony before the grand jury. That will stand—unless he himself changes it on the witness stand at the trial. That is the only recourse the Vernon faction has left now. To make him change his story."

"They'll try it, sir," Silk warned. "I know their ways."

"All right, maybe they will. We can handle that. But killing Cooper will only throw more guilt on Spade and he knows it. Spade is all done, Silk. We've got him cold."

Silk poured coffee for Quinn, and added cream. "Do you think Spade will talk, sir?" he asked dubiously.

"About his connections?" Quinn asked. "Maybe—if they don't come through with plenty of help. I'm hoping that as the execution day draws closer and closer, Spade is going to lose some of that steel-plated nerve of his and try to make a deal."

"Will you get him a reprieve if he talks, sir?"

Quinn leaned back. "Silk, for a long time this city has been in the grip of crooks who are so clever that few people even know they exist. They operate through men like Spade—but they do all the planning. They have the say about how gambling places are to be run, what sections of the city will be cursed with reeferers and stronger narcotics, what places will be robbed—and what men will be murdered. Spade is only a tool. A dangerous one, I'll grant, but he isn't the top man in this town."

"Do you think he knows who is at the top?" Silk asked.

"I'm positive of it, Silk. Spade isn't the type who could work blind for anyone. He knows, all right, but nothing short of facing the chair and knowing he has been abandoned will make him open up."

"I imagine you're right," Silk sighed as he arose. "But I'm worried about Cooper. . . . Well, the trial starts in a couple of days. How did you ever make the court move that fast?"

Quinn chuckled. "Oh, Spade's lawyers were set to ask the usual delays, but I

beat them to it. I said the State was prepared and if Spade was as innocent as his attorneys profess him to be, his side of the case wouldn't need six months of preparation either. They fell into it, Silk, and couldn't get out. His lawyers bragged too much and too loud about his lily-white innocence."

"Just the same"—Silk began stacking dishes—"I wouldn't want to be in Cooper's shoes. . . . Will you be ready in about ten minutes, sir?"

"I'm ready now," Quinn said. "But take your time. There's nothing pressing at the office today."

Silk cleared the table but Quinn kept sitting there, thinking back. During much of his career as a D.A. Spade Vernon had flaunted himself and his power, defying the authorities. Other crooks of his caliber had been seized, tried and convicted without heavy pressure being put on the prosecution. So it would seem that none of them had Spade's type of protection, or were as important—to somebody. To Quinn this meant that Spade was probably the only contact between the gangs who carried out orders and the man or men who reaped the greatest profits and stayed far in some remote background.

QUINN had half-expected before now that Spade would offer to deal. His kind were mostly alike, and Spade knew the odds were stacked against him this time. Quinn's mind went back to some of the other desperate and dangerous men he had helped punish during his years in office. It seemed a lifetime ago that the acid had been hurled into his face and had eaten away his sight in the space of a few ghastly moments.

But he remembered those days of darkness only too well. He remembered, too, how Silk Kirby had come into his life. Silk had once been the smartest confidence man in the country, but once when his luck was down he had forgotten his pride in his "calling" and had set out on a burglary job. Fate had arranged it that he had chosen Tony Quinn's home. Due to arguments put

forward by Quinn at that time, when he had discovered the marauder, Silk had forsaken his old life, and had remained as the confidential servant of the man he had come to rob.

After Quinn's tragic accident, Silk Kirby had become more—he was now Tony Quinn's "eyes," and utterly trusted in all things. But he still retained his knowledge of the underworld. What he knew of crooks and their ways had many times proved invaluable to the Special D.A.

But Silk Kirby was not the only one who held Quinn's entire confidence. There were three people in the whole world who knew—and kept—his innermost secret.

One of them was a lovely girl, blond Carol Baldwin, through whom Quinn had succeeded in recovering his sight. For Tony Quinn was not blind. In fact, his sight was better than that of the average person. During the months when he had really been blind he had tried to find hope by visiting famous oculists all over the world. Luckily, he was wealthy enough to do this, but it gained him nothing.

Then Carol had appeared with a strange offer. Her father, a police sergeant in a mid-western city, lay dying from a bullet wound inflicted by a cheap killer. Sergeant Baldwin had followed Quinn's meteoric career with approval, and now he believed he had a chance to help Quinn. He had consulted a fine, but little known surgeon in his mid-western city, who was of the opinion that he might transplant portions of Sergeant Baldwin's eyes onto the acid-etched eyes of Tony Quinn. When the sergeant's daughter had brought the offer, Quinn had seized the opportunity. The operation was performed—a forerunner of many operations like it, and almost all of them successful.

Sergeant Baldwin died soon after, from the bullet wound. Quinn, his eyes bandaged, had secretly returned home, accompanied only by Silk. For Quinn had a good reason for secrecy, since he already had made up his mind that if he should see again, his life would be

devoted to hunting down criminals. That much he owed to Sergeant Baldwin, and it was important to his plan that it be believed he was still blind.

When the bandages were removed, Quinn *could* see! And there was a startling bonus from nature, as if to repay him for the long period of blindness. By some freak of the operation, Quinn discovered he could see as well in complete darkness as in full daylight.

The main reason for keeping the recovery of his sight secret was because he wanted to assume a dual identity, in one of which he could fight crime and criminals without wading through the red tape that fenced in a policeman or a D.A. But the scars around his eyes had remained, and because of these he was forced to wear a black hood when in his second role identity. He also wore black clothing when he was on the prowl. So that it was inevitable that he soon became known as the Black Bat. Now that name was feared in the farthest reaches of the underworld.

AS Anthony Quinn, Special District Attorney, he could work against crime in the open; as the Black Bat he could prowl the night and take swift and direct action against crooks. The Black Bat needed no search warrants, no writs, no delays. He fought with guns, knives, or his bare fists, whatever the situation called for and, when necessary, he killed.

The three people who knew his secret had become his own personal little band of crime fighters. Silk, of course, knew of Quinn's dual identity and was an invaluable assistant. Carol Baldwin had placed herself at Quinn's service after the death of her father, to carry on his work. She had soon showed that she possessed the courage and acumen necessary to handle almost any kind of dangerous situation. It also was inevitable that the lovely blond young Carol and Quinn should fall in love. Some day they hoped to be married, but that could not be until Quinn had given up his hazardous double life.

The third member of Quinn's group

was a giant of a man named O'Leary. He had had a first name, somewhere in his past, but it was forgotten by everyone, and he was now called "Butch." Not possessed of Silk's smoothness, Butch made up for this by his brute strength and complete loyalty to Tony Quinn. Having a natural hatred for men who lived by violence, Butch wouldn't have exchanged places with anyone in the world, now that he was associated with a man who fought crime, and who once had done a favor for him he had never forgotten.

In order to operate secretly, Quinn had created a crime laboratory behind a hidden door in his library. There he had amassed a full and complete library of books on criminology and sciences allied to it. Every scientific device to trace down clues had been installed, and Quinn had become a master at the scientific approach to crime. From this lab a tunnel ran to the rear of his grounds in a beautiful and exclusive suburban section of the town, allowing him to come and go freely.

As the fame of the Black Bat grew, so did certain suspicions that Tony Quinn knew more about the black-clad avenger than he was telling. But even those who most wondered about him soon became convinced that no blind man could possibly be the Black Bat—and so far as it was known, Tony Quinn was blind. Only one man still felt certain that Quinn not only could see, but actually was the daring Black Bat. That man was Inspector McGrath. He had taken a vow to hunt down and unmask the Black Bat, because of his flouting of the law.

Several times McGrath had almost succeeded, and as many times he had quietly turned away from the chance to lift that somber hood. And that in the face of the fact that because of the Black Bat's many infractions of the law he was fair game for any officer. Most lawmen, however, felt certain he was on their side and helping them, even though his methods were unorthodox and highly illegal. It had become not unusual for them to wink the other eye.



McGRATH

All these thoughts ran through Tony Quinn's mind as he waited at the dining room table for Silk to bring the car around. He sighed in complete satisfaction with his way of life. What he was most interested in now was when the Black Bat would be forced into action again.

Certainly the murder case now getting ready for trial did not call for any interference from the Black Bat. It was an open and shut affair, with conviction certain. And yet Quinn had been entertaining the same doubts as Silk lately. Spade Vernon had taken it all too quietly. It was as if he still had a card to play—and a big one. His attorneys weren't resisting a quick trial, as they should have been. And somewhere, Quinn felt sure, the man or men behind Spade were scheming and planning.

Half an hour later Silk pulled the car to the curb in front of the big state building where Quinn maintained his offices. Silk got out of the car, ran around and opened the door. He helped Quinn alight and the supposed blind man lightly rested his left hand on Silk's arm. With the right hand Quinn tapped a white cane to guide him.

Employees called cherry greetings and Quinn answered them, calling almost everyone by name. At first this had aroused some curiosity until he proved beyond any doubt that while he could not see, his ears had developed extra sensory powers, and he recognized people by their steps and voices.

IN his office, the daily procession of visitors began. People with complaints that ran from verbal insults by neighbors to the actual revelation of serious crime.

At eleven-thirty the receptionist in the main office called on the intercom to announce a man who gave his name as Byron Chanlor and who refused to state his business except to Quinn personally.

When Chanlor entered, he turned out to be a small, slim man. While Quinn's blank eyes gave no indication that he could see, he guessed the visitor's height as about five-feet-four, and his weight just short of a hundred pounds. He had thinning hair, pale watery gray eyes, and wore big shell-rimmed glasses. He was apparently a shy individual, for as he stood in front of Quinn's desk it was evident he didn't quite know how to begin.

"All right," Quinn said. "If you have a complaint to make, I'm here to listen."

"Well, you see"—Chanlor kept rolling his hat between his nervous fingers—"you see it—it isn't exactly a complaint. It's more like—well, I suppose you'd call it a message."

"From whom?" Quinn demanded and even Silk looked up with some interest in his eyes.

Chanlor shifted his feet, wet his lips. "I—I'm just an ordinary person, Mr. Quinn. I've never been mixed up with the law before. I don't know exactly how to begin. But it happened with a telephone call."

"Yes?" Quinn prompted him.

"I was in the barbershop. Jules Pulver's place where I've been getting my hair cut for years. Right in the middle of my hair being cut, someone asked for me on the telephone. Naturally, I an-

swered. Well, this man didn't give me any name. He just said I was to come and see you."

"About what?" Quinn asked.

"I was to—to ask you something. And—and I'd be paid for my trouble, but I don't want any money. I don't want to get mixed up in this at all, but I guess I can't help myself now, can I?"

"Apparently not," Quinn said. "Go ahead. What was the question you were supposed to ask me?"

"It—it's about someone I never heard of. I—I think I have it straight. I was to ask you if you'd make a deal on the Spade Vernon case and if you would, this man who called me would throw you a couple of important crooks. I don't think he actually means throwing people at you. It sounded like a figure of speech."

CHAPTER IV

Danger Moves In



QUINN'S fingers clenched into fists. It was beginning now. They were showing their fangs. First, this mild pressure and some attractive offer. When that was refused, the pressure would become greater.

"Mr. Chanlor," Quinn said, "this message you delivered happens to be of the greatest importance. And so vital that I must be absolutely certain you were simply chosen to deliver it, and are not directly concerned with the situation in any way."

"Y-yes," Chanlor gulped.

"Silk," Quinn called crisply, "please search Mr. Chanlor and make certain of his identity. Then check up on him by telephone."

"Yes, sir." Silk approached Chanlor, who backed slowly away.

"But I told you I didn't want to get mixed up in this," Chanlor said. "I don't know what it's all about!"

"Stand still," Silk barked. "You are mixed up in it whether you like it or

not. Stand still, will you?"

Chanlor moistened his lips again and clumsily submitted to being searched. He carried papers showing he lived in a modest suburban section of town, that he worked as a bookkeeper for a wholesale house and had worked there so long that he had a twenty-five-year service pin clipped to his wallet.

"I don't like to wear it on my lapel, like the others do," Chanlor explained, "because I don't want any special favors. Look, Mr. Quinn, if this man calls again, I'll tell him to get himself another messenger."

"Oh, no, you won't," Quinn said. "You happen to be an excellent messenger, because I think you're trustworthy. Now, how is this strange man supposed to get in touch with you again?"

"I don't know," Chanlor declared, with a sincerity Quinn couldn't question.

"Then listen carefully, Mr. Chanlor. Just go about your business as if nothing happened. When you receive another mysterious phone call, deliver my answer."

"Yes, sir," Chanlor said nervously.

"You will tell this man I do not make deals. Is that clear?"

"You do not make deals. Oh, yes, sir, that's perfectly clear. I'll be glad to deliver the message. Very glad to, Mr. Quinn."

"Good," Quinn said. "You can go along now. If our check on you is okay, you haven't a thing to fear."

"Thank you. Thank you very much." Chanlor backed toward the door, eyeing Silk with evident concern. "I'll deliver the message. Good-by, Mr. Quinn."

He turned and bolted for the door, got it open, and came to a quick stop. He turned somewhat slowly.

"About this—this money that was promised me. Can I accept it?"

"Why not?" Quinn replied. "I hope you make good use of it."

Chanlor smiled for the first time during his visit then, as he closed the door. Quinn instantly reached for the phone and dialed an office just down the hall.

"Quinn speaking," he said. "Lieutenant, have a man take a plant on a fellow

who is just leaving my office. He's a little fellow, bashful and scary. You can't miss him. I want to know everywhere he goes and whom he sees."

"Right," a detective replied crisply. "I'll take care of it, sir."

Quinn hung up. He glanced at Silk. "Well," he asked, "what do you think?"

Silk wagged his head. "I was a con man myself, sir, and I guess I know more about con men than anybody, but I can't place that guy. He's either the McCoy, or the smartest actor I've ever come across."

Quinn nodded. "Exactly what I was thinking. Well, we'll soon know—I hope. But Silk, you've got to admit this is a clever way to contact me."

"It's too clever," Silk remarked. "I'm going to check on that runt right now. . . ."

THE night before the trial, Doreen

Cooper was too nervous to sit at home. Her husband did his best to deride any possibility of danger, but he couldn't do too good a job of it, because he also had an ominous feeling about the whole business.

One thing Les Cooper did know—whatever happened it must not touch Doreen. He watched her fit that perky little hat on her dark hair and tuck loose strands under the hat, as though they would stay there. He had known Doreen since high school days. She had been a pretty kid then and the years had only added something which elevated her into the class of true beauty.

Doreen saw him eying her reflection in the mirror and winked at him.

"I'm just being foolish, Les. I know I am, but if there isn't any danger, why do the police insist on guarding you day and night?"

"Just a precaution." Les stretched lazily. "Step on it, will you? I want to get home early and get a good night's sleep. They're putting me on the witness stand right after they pick the jury and it may be a tough day when Spade Vernon's lawyers start in on me."

She wrinkled her nose. "Poof," she said. "All you have to do is tell the truth,

and the smartest lawyers in the world can't break that down. Okay, Les, I'm ready. Is that detective still out there?"

Cooper glanced out of the window. "Sure he is. When we get home, let's invite him in for a cup of coffee."

"Don't we always?" Doreen smiled.

The bulky detective trailed them to the movies and sat right behind them. He stayed outside an ice-cream parlor while they attacked something gooey known as a Cherry Bloom Special. He trailed them home and took up his usual position near the little white gate.

The neighborhood was built up with small houses like Les Cooper's. It was noisy enough by day, for every one of those bungalows seemed to sprout kids, but by night there were few sections any more quiet. Doreen filled the coffee pot before she took off her hat and coat. In a few moments the coffee was perking gaily. She got out some cold chicken, mixed it with celery and mayonnaise and made a salad. She spread this on bread and stacked up a few sandwiches.

Then she went to the kitchen door.

"Les!" she called. "Les—will you ask that policeman in?"

"Sure thing."

Cooper dropped the newspaper he was reading. He went to the door. The bulky man was standing just outside the gate. Cooper called him. The man raised a hand in a signal he had heard, then started walking toward the porch.

"Doreen's made some sandwiches and coffee, Officer," Cooper said. "We thought—"

Cooper stopped in the middle of the sentence and stared at the gun in the detective's fist. For a moment he thought he wasn't seeing right. Then he studied the man more carefully. This wasn't the detective who had followed them.

"Just keep quiet, Cooper," the man said, "and walk into the house. Nobody's going to be hurt unless you won't do as we say."

"All right," Cooper said softly. "I'm not fooling around with any gunman. What happened to the detective?"

"He'll be okay, except for a headache and a session with the inspector," the

gunman said. "Get going, friend."

Doreen was carrying two cups of coffee when she saw the gun, but she steadied herself and put the cups down on the cocktail table in the living room.

"Doreen," Cooper said, "this man isn't our detective. He must be a friend of Spade Vernon, but he says nobody will get hurt if we do as he says."

Doreen sat down slowly. "I understand."

The gunman took off his hat as he sat down, and he laid the gun rather carelessly in his lap. Both Cooper and Doreen stared at him. He grinned back.

"Oh, no," he chuckled. "I'm not Spade Vernon. I just look like him. I'm his brother. My name's Deke."

"Oh!" Doreen said weakly.

DEKE VERNON made himself more comfortable.

"Now look," he said, "you're nice folks. In my own way, I'm not so bad either. We just go about things different. I got no beef against you, Mr. Cooper. You saw my brother knock off a man who deserved to be killed. That was his business."

"What do you want?" Cooper demanded.

"Take it easy," Deke said. "Like I told you, Spade slipped when he missed seeing you. Lucky for you he did because Spade never stopped to think very often. Okay—so you called the cops. Sure, I don't blame you for that. You told them what you saw. That's okay too."

"Then why do you come here and point a gun at us?" Doreen asked.

"Because, Mrs. Cooper, I don't want your husband to testify in court against my brother. It's as simple as that."

"Now look here—" Cooper began.

"There's no use arguing," Deke said. "No use at all."

"What are you going to do—kill him?" Doreen asked. "Kill us?"

Deke shook his head. He had a wide face, lips that were a trifle too thick and eyes that were a trifle too small. But otherwise he looked much like any average business man. He was carefully dressed in well-selected clothes. Above

all, he was no counterpart of some caricature of a gangster. Which, Cooper decided, made him all the more dangerous.

"Killing you won't do my brother any good," Deke said. "They'll read your testimony before the grand jury and it'll be accepted as evidence. Killing you is the last thing I'll do—and believe me, I'm glad of it."

"What then?" Cooper demanded.

"You'll just tell that blind D.A. you can't testify. You can tell him maybe you made a mistake, or you can tell him the truth. I don't care one way or another."

"And if I don't?" Cooper countered.

Deke rubbed his nose. "Look, here's the way we stand. When I leave here, your wife is coming with me—"

Doreen bit her lip, smearing the lipstick. Cooper slowly got to his feet. His hands were clenched, his face pale.

"So you're that kind of a rat," he said coldly.

Deke shrugged. "What else can I do? Listen, Spade is my brother. If you had a brother and he was in the same spot, you'd do what I'm doing. If you had the nerve. Sit down."

"If you didn't have that gun—"

"Yeah, but I have, friend." Deke raised his voice a trifle. "Sit down, I said."

Doreen picked up a cup of coffee and sipped it.

"Les," she said, "you can't do anything. Let him talk."

Cooper sat down, his eyes still blazing in helpless fury. Deke relaxed too. For a moment nobody spoke. Then Deke Vernon rubbed his nose again.

"Here's the set-up, and it's not too bad, Mr. Cooper. I'm taking your wife away with me. She'll be treated fine. We won't tie her up or anything like that unless she makes it necessary. We'll feed her well, give her books, a radio—anything she wants."

"And I'm to tell Mr. Quinn that I can't testify," said Cooper bitterly. "That I've forgotten all about seeing your brother kill a man."

"If that's the way you want to handle it," Deke shrugged. "He won't be-

lieve you. In fact, he may have you tossed smack into the cooler. So why not just tell him the truth? Tell him if you send my brother to the chair, your wife will die the same minute my brother does."

Doreen emitted a small cry of fear. Deke made some pacifying motions toward her.

"Don't worry, Mrs. Cooper. I know Quinn, and I know the cops. Once they're sure I mean business, they'll do something about Spade. I don't care what they do so long as they don't burn him—and they won't. Well, I guess that's it. Get your things, Mrs. Cooper. Bring along a suitcase, anything you want. I've got a girl friend who'll take care of you. She'll buy anything you forget. Wait and see. This will work out."

DOREEN arose slowly.

"Mr. Vernon," she said, "it might be easier if you acted like a gangster and beat us up or—or something. This way I'm more scared than ever."

"Who's a gangster?" Deke chuckled. "I'm a business man. You know something? I never handled a tommy-gun in my life. I even hate to carry this cannon around. But sometimes you can't help it. What do you say—let's keep this on a nice basis. It'll be easier all around."

Cooper got up. "I suppose it will," he said. "I wish I'd just sneaked out of the bar that night and never said a word about what I saw." He reached down for the second cup of coffee and raised it to his lips. "Frankly, I even hated testifying against your brother. It's against my nature to help send a man to his death even though he deserves it."

Cooper started to put the coffee down. Suddenly he hurled the contents of the cup in Deke's big face. As it splashed into the gangster's eyes, Cooper followed the hot liquid in a dive that sent both him and Deke sprawling out of the overturned chair and onto the floor.

Deke was strong and he knew how to fight, but Cooper was younger and knew just a little more. In something less than two minutes he had Deke pinned to the floor. He called to Doreen:

"Darling! Get on the phone quick!"

Her voice came to him like something out of a dream. "Les, it's no use. Get up. It's no use."

Cooper twisted his head. Two men stood on either side of Doreen and each held a drawn gun. Cooper heaved a great sigh and arose. Deke got up, too, mopping the coffee out of his face with a handkerchief.

One of the gunmen stepped up to Cooper and raised his gun.

"You smart guy," he growled. "I'll show you."

"Hold it," Deke said sharply. "You don't have to slug him. I don't blame the guy. Look, Cooper, I'm forgetting all about this little incident. What I said before still goes. Your wife will be safe and comfortable. She'll stay that way—until eleven o'clock some Thursday night when they burn my brother. Then, so help me, I'll kill her!"

Cooper shouldered the scowling thug out of the way and went over to Doreen. He took both her hands.

"Darling, we're licked. I don't care what happens to Spade. They can pin medals on him for all of me. I won't testify. I'll tell Quinn the whole truth, make him understand why I can't swear I saw Spade kill a man."

"Do whatever you think best," Doreen said. "I—I'll try to let you know how I am. If they let me."

Deke walked over and stood beside Cooper.

"You can write a letter every day. Maybe we can even arrange a phone call. Like I said—we got nothing against you two people. All I'm trying to do is save my brother's life. Now we'd better start moving."

Cooper had never felt more helpless in his life than he did as he watched Deke take Doreen's arm and lead her across the porch, down the steps and through the little white gate. A car pulled up seemingly out of nowhere. Doreen got in. Deke paused beside the car a moment and turned around.

"Cooper," he called softly, "you'll find the cop in your garage. I think he's okay, but you better make sure. So

long. You'll be hearing from me."

Cooper didn't reply. He just stood there and watched the car drive off and wondered how such a thing could happen in this day and age. Then he turned on his heel and started running around the house to the garage.

He found the detective manacled with his own handcuffs, gagged, and well tied up to the front bumper of the car. He was conscious and crimson-faced with wrath. Cooper cut him loose, found the keys to the handcuffs in the detective's pocket and unlocked them. Then he quietly told the man everything that had happened.

CHAPTER V

Not Strictly Legal



TONY QUINN occupied an old leather chair in the library of his home. He was slowly filling a pipe, tamping the tobacco down. Silk stood by, ready to hand him a lighter. Inspector McGrath was pacing the rug and Les Cooper sat slumped in a chair with

one hand covering his face.

"I should have guessed this would happen," McGrath said, "and used half a dozen men instead of one lunkhead who lets a punk slip up behind him and slam him on the head with a gun. Well, that cop is going to walk the longest beat in the dreariest section."

"Oh, don't take it out on him," Quinn said. "I'm the one who should be held responsible. I promised Mr. Cooper nothing would happen. Though I admit I never thought Deke Vernon would go to this extreme."

"Well, what are we going to do about it?" McGrath demanded. "I know Deke. He's a smart boy. He's got it all over his brother Spade."

Quinn nodded, his sightless eyes as blank as ever. "We're faced with some ugly facts, Mac. If Mr. Cooper testifies, Spade is going to the chair. When he

does, Deke will certainly kill Mrs. Cooper. That I will not permit."

"Yeah?" McGrath demanded. "How are you going to stop it?"

"By postponing the trial, for one thing. Yes, I'm letting myself be intimidated. I can't help it, Mac. I refuse to risk Mrs. Cooper's life, even if it means Spade will eventually go free."

"It's a plain and simple snatch with Spade the ransom," McGrath said. "If we turn him loose, we're both cooked. Tony, there's no way out."

Cooper raised his head. "I don't know much about this, Mr. Quinn, but if—if you let Spade go and Doreen was released, you might be able to pick up Spade again. I'll testify against him any other time. But I—I just can't do it now."

"I know," Quinn told him in a soothing voice. "I don't blame you. Nobody does. But turning Spade loose won't solve anything. Your wife will probably be released unharmed, but they'll kill you. And don't think they can't."

"I'll take my chances, so long as Doreen is safe," Cooper said.

Quinn shook his head. "I'm sure of that, but it's no go, Mr. Cooper. . . . Mac, how close are Spade and his brother Deke?"

"Spade is the oldest, by a couple of years," McGrath said. "He practically brought up Deke. They're close all right. Deke would go through with this."

"Do you think he can be trusted not to harm Mrs. Cooper?"

"I think so, Tony. Deke never was a mug."

"He struck me as being okay," Cooper said. "That is, as far as his kind can be okay."

"But he will carry out his threat," Quinn said musingly. "We're sure of that. Furthermore, he'll stay out of sight. He had plenty of time to find a safe hiding place for both himself and Mrs. Cooper. Finding her will be just about impossible. Even if we do, Deke may kill her."

Cooper gulped. "Mr. Quinn, I trusted you from the first. I still do, but don't let anything happen to Doreen! I couldn't stand that. Don't you understand? She comes first!"

"Of course she does," Quinn agreed. "We can't even operate against him by stealth. If he hears of it, there's no telling what may happen. Mac, I've made up my mind."

"You name it," McGrath grumbled. "I've been out on a limb over this all by myself. I'd like some company."

"I shall ask for a postponement of the trial," Quinn said. "Deke will try to contact me. I think he'll use that bashful little character, Byron Chanlor, who already approached me."

"What are you going to do?" McGrath demanded. "Wait until they tell you what they want, then knuckle under to those crooks? It'll be the finish of you, Tony."

"What happens to me doesn't matter, Mac. Not one bit. But we won't simply sit and wait. Spade may know about this. Perhaps we can even learn where they might have Doreen held a prisoner."

[Turn page]

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McGrath was twisting about uneasily.

IT won't work," he argued. "If Spade knew this was going to happen, the minute you start working on him, he'll know it did happen. All he has to do is keep his mouth shut, and he's pretty good at that."

"We've got to work on him," Quinn said. "We must take advantage of anything that can help us, even if it seems hopeless. First I want a little time to think, Mac. To set up some plan. Then I'll call your office and let you know what's to be done."

"What about me?" Cooper asked. "Can't I help?"

"I'm afraid not, Mr. Cooper," Quinn said. "I know how you feel and I wish there was something you could do. Your job is to sit tight—and believe me that's going to be harder than taking a tommy-gun and going after those crooks."

Cooper nodded. "You know, Mr. Quinn, so long as you're handling this, I've got confidence Doreen will come out of it okay."

"Thank you," Quinn said gravely. "Whatever I do, the safety of your wife will come first."

"Look," Cooper said, "the way these people operate, there must be a big gang of them. They seem to know everything that goes on."

"They do," McGrath grunted. "We know a lot about Deke and Spade Vernon's gang, except for one thing. We don't know who their connections are."

"Connections?" Cooper asked.

Quinn explained it. "This city, Mr. Cooper, has just about been taken over by a band of crooks who operate so quietly the citizens don't even know they exist. But they do, and they are powerful. We've had an idea for some time that neither Deke nor Spade actually controls any of the gang."

"You mean there's somebody else—even smarter? From whom Deke and Spade take their orders?"

"We believe that," Quinn said. "There isn't the slightest bit of evidence that such leadership exists, but we

know men like Deke and Spade. They haven't the ability to operate and plan in the manner this gang has planned and operated."

Cooper bit his lower lip. "Then it's worse than I thought."

"It couldn't be any worse," Quinn said. "I don't believe in pulling punches at a time like this. In the long run we may have to knuckle under. If we do, Spade will clear out. They'll see to it that he never shows his face again, but the prestige the gang will attain from doing this will make them stronger than ever."

"But—but Doreen will be okay?"

"You have my word on it. They won't kill her unless we block them, because that would only insure Spade's fate. If it becomes necessary and I'm certain there is no other way out, I'll exchange Spade for Mrs. Cooper. You have my promise."

"That's good enough for me," Cooper said. "May I—go home now?"

"Of course," Quinn said. "And thanks for being honest about this. For telling us the whole truth. You could have simply insisted you made a mistake in identifying Spade."

Cooper walked up to the chair in which Quinn sat and stuck out a hand toward him. Quinn ignored it completely and Cooper flushed. He had forgotten this man was blind. He walked rapidly out of the house, followed by Silk, who opened the door for him.

McGrath slumped into a chair beside Quinn's.

"Look, Tony, it's all right to give that kid some peace of mind, but we've got to handle this mess according to regulations."

"I agree," Quinn said slowly. "And we can't waste any time. Deke won't be patient. So I want you to bring Spade to my office in about an hour."

"You mean, take him out of a cell? Tony, that's risking a lot. They may be waiting and watching for a chance to grab him."

"I know that," Quinn said, "but we've got to take the chance. I'll give you a written order for your own protection

in case anything happens. But I want Spade at my office tonight, in one hour. I can't work on him in the visitor's room at the jail. Or even at Police Headquarters."

"But Tony, I don't see—" McGrath began.

QUINN interrupted him. "Mac, we're pretty sure Spade knows what's happened. We've got to let him think he can win out. Make him overconfident and he may slip. That has to be done in the proper environment, and that's neither in the prison nor in your office. Shackle him hand and foot if you like. How can he get away?"

McGrath arose. "Whatever you say, Tony. All I want is results. I'm half tempted to forget I'm a cop and work Spade over until he yelps."

"You'd get nothing, and only risk Mrs. Cooper's life, Mac. They've got the jump on us so long as they hold her."

McGrath nodded. "You're right, of course. Deke Vernon would do just about anything to save his brother and we—well, we're just stuck. Even if they do kill Mrs. Cooper, we can't do anything except go ahead with Spade's trial for the murder of Pete Montaya."

"Then you realize we have to take chances, work this out in our own way, Mac. And who knows—maybe as we progress, some ugly head will pop up out of the mess and we'll also have the brains directing Deke and Spade."

McGrath jammed on his hat and chewed his unlit cigar to a pulp. After he was gone, Silk moved about the library, fussing with bric-a-brac, emptying ash trays and keeping himself generally busy.

"Carol and Butch are in the lab, sir," he finally said.

"Good," Quinn said. "I want you in there, too."

Silk began putting out the lights. He drew the library shades to the bottom of each window. When this was done and Quinn felt certain no prying eyes could see him, he arose, hung his white cane on his arm and walked with long strides

to one book-lined section of the wall. Now he showed none of the hesitant movements of a blind man and his eyes were no longer blank and staring. They were alive—and greatly troubled.

He reached behind a row of books, encountered an electric lock and a section of the bookcase swung silently back to reveal a narrow door. Quinn went through it into his large, white-tiled laboratory.

Carol Baldwin came toward him eagerly, her hands outstretched. He took them and looked down at her for a moment, then held her close. She spoke in a bare whisper.

"Tony, Tony, what can we do about this? Silk told me the whole story."

They sat down on a leather divan. Opposite them stood Butch, grinning widely. Butch appeared to have no neck and his massive head to be settled snugly on his broad shoulders. His hands were huge, his arms thick and powerful. There was no superfluous fat on him, but he was enormous.

Silk entered then and closed the door. He walked over to the wall and stood beside a battery of differently colored electric light bulbs on a panel. These bulbs gave warning if anyone approached the house from any direction and provided an opportunity for Quinn and Silk to get set to receive visitors.

"Now you know what's happened," Quinn said. "Spade Vernon is charged with murder. Les Cooper's testimony can send him to the chair, but Cooper can't testify now because Spade's brother has kidnaped Cooper's wife."

"Tony," Carol said, "won't they kill her and pretend she's alive?"

"No, Carol. They can't do that because they know if any exchange is made, they'll have to show Mrs. Cooper alive and well. Otherwise there'd be no point to our letting Spade go."

Butch's grin had been fading and his face was creased in lines of thought. "Look," he said, "you ain't letting that killer go, are you?"

"In a way, yes," Quinn said. "That's why I asked you here. I need help."

"Boy!" Butch cried. "We're going to

have action in this one. I'm betting the Black Bat is moving in."

"Yes," Quinn said, "he is. But what the results are going to be, I can't prophesy."

"Sir"—Silk frowned—"I don't see how it can be done, without just knuckling under to Deke Vernon."

"We're not doing that," Quinn said grimly. "Here is the set-up. The law has Spade. But Deke has Mrs. Cooper. Therefore we have an impasse. Deke, above all, doesn't want his brother killed, any more than Cooper wants his wife murdered."

Still Carol was not satisfied.

"But Tony," she asked, "where does that put us? Where does it put you, as the Black Bat?"

"Right in the middle, Carol. We can make only one move, basing that upon the fact that Deke is risking a lot, even his own life, to save Spade. So if Spade is placed in the same position as Mrs. Cooper is right now—"

"Holy smokes!" Silk gasped. "A snatch!"

"It's inelegantly put," Quinn conceded, "but that's what it is. The Black Bat is going to kidnap Spade Vernon. Yank him right out of Inspector McGrath's grasp and hold him!"

Carol shook her pretty head.

"Tony, you will still have that same impasse."

"In a way, yes," he admitted. "Except for one thing. Deke knows that whatever happens, Spade will be dealt with according to law. A slow and creaking process. But if Spade is in the hands of the Black Bat, Deke won't know what will happen or how fast. We'll put him on the defensive too."

"Boy!" Butch cried. "Is McGrath going to be sore about this?"

"He'll be against us and so will every other policeman," Quinn said. "It puts us in double jeopardy because Deke is going all out to find us, and his brother. It'll probably be the most dangerous job we've ever tackled. If any of you don't want a part in it, all you have to do is say so."

"I'm in," Butch said promptly.

"Tony," Carol chided gently, "we're not pulling out. You know that."

"How are you going to grab Spade?" Silk was already planning the deal.

CHAPTER VI

Shoot to Kill



ILK, behind the wheel of Tony Quinn's big car, was parked on a quiet corner. Carol, in a sedan, a much lighter car, was four blocks away, also waiting. Butch and Tony Quinn were still in the laboratory.

Quinn had opened a steel locker there and quickly removed the clothes he wore as blind Tony Quinn. In their place he donned black crepe-soled shoes, a black suit, shirt and tie. He drew thin black gloves over his hands, slung a brace of heavy automatics under his coat and finally drew on the closely fitting jet black hood which covered his entire head.

While he dressed, he gave Butch final instructions.

"You'll be in the coupé," he said, "parked at the mouth of the alley I showed you on the map. The street is quiet at this time of the night. I'll handle the details, then turn Spade over to you. From then on, Butch, he is your responsibility."

"I like that kind." Butch grinned. "A tough monkey whose britches are too big for him. Do I get to smack the guy if he squawks?"

"I want him all in one piece, if that's what you mean," the Black Bat said. "But never forget that he's a killer and slippery. If he gets away from you, Butch, an innocent girl may die."

"He won't get away," Butch promised meaningly.

"Good. I'll deliver him to you. Take him to the lake, to that cabin we keep up there. It's isolated. Later on, Carol will bring you supplies. Tie Spade up, and make sure there's no chance of his



SILK

slipping out of the ropes. Then stay with him. He is not to be out of your sight for one second."

"I got it," Butch said.

"Your job, Butch, is the most important of all. Everything depends upon having Spade ready for delivery, in case we have to make an exchange of prisoners."

"He may be a little rocky, but he'll be ready," Butch promised.

The Black Bat nodded. "We're all set then. McGrath will bring Spade along that street. There's a traffic light on the corner which can be manually operated and Carol will take care of that end. The one thing this calls for is speed."

"Yeah," Butch agreed. "They'll radio the snatch all over. Maybe even get road blocks set up."

"You'll have a few minutes," Quinn said. "Precious few, so don't waste any of them. I guess that's all. Let's go, Butch."

Butch went first, dropping through the trap-door set in the floor of the lab. The Black Bat followed and proceeded along a short tunnel which opened into the garden house at the rear of the property. There they waited a moment while the Black Bat's uncanny

sight penetrated the darkness and searched for any possibility of a prowler.

When he was certain they were unobserved, he gave a signal. Butch moved rapidly, for all his bulk, toward a gate and a rather run-down-looking car parked near it. That car was a souped-up job capable of showing its exhaust to practically anything on the road.

The street was private, serving Quinn's house alone. It was at the end of a dead-end street on which Quinn's home was located. This was part of a great city, but the skyscrapers and the jammed apartment houses hadn't reached this section yet. The houses were occupied by wealthy people and had fairly spacious yards and plenty of trees. The whole area had an almost rural atmosphere.

Butch was already at the wheel and had the car in motion when a dark shadow moved silently toward it. The Black Bat made hardly a blur in the night. Once in the car, he placed a wide-brimmed hat on his head to hide the black hood.

In quick time they were at the rendezvous. Butch pulled to the curb. Soon Carol walked casually around a

corner and stood beside a traffic control pole. There was no one on the street. She opened the control door with a key which Quinn had provided.

They were all set, and none too soon. A car turned the corner several blocks down the avenue, and moved rapidly along. As it passed one intersection behind that where Carol waited, she turned the traffic lever and the light flashed red.

THE car rolled to a stop. Butch was already backed into the mouth of an alley. As Inspector McGrath's sedan slid to a halt in obedience to the red light, a figure streaked from a doorway, came up behind the sedan and yanked open the door beside McGrath!

McGrath gave a startled gasp, began to reach for his service pistol, and stopped. He was staring along the muzzle of a big automatic and into brilliant eyes that peered at him from the slits in that black hood. "Hey—what's the idea?" McGrath growled.

"I'm sorry, Inspector," the Black Bat said. "I'm taking your passenger."

"You're what?" McGrath yelled.

"Keep your voice down," the Black Bat warned. "Now slide out from behind the wheel, Inspector, I mean it!"

"Yeah," McGrath said tightly, "I think you do. I don't know what your game is, but so help me—"

He made a grab for the Black Bat's gun. It jerked away, raised and came down against the back of McGrath's neck. The inspector fell across the wheel and stayed there—quiet.

The Black Bat darted around the front of the car, his gun ready to cut Spade down if he tried to escape. He pulled the door open beside the gangster. "All right," he said, "let's go!"

"Yeah—yeah, sure," Spade gloated. "Say, this is okay. You're the Black Bat, ain't you?"

"I am."

"I always said you were one of us," Spade chuckled. "Brother, you'll be paid good for this. Paid in bigger dough than you ever knew existed. Who sent you? Deke?"

"Stop talking and start moving," the

Black Bat said. "I'll take you to a getaway car. And remember this—someone bigger than Deke sent me."

Spade nodded and laughed. "I knew they wouldn't let me rot in the cell, or get fried. They can't afford to. Look—what can I do about these chains? That cop shackled my ankles, too."

"You can hobble. Come on!"

The Black Bat grasped Spade's arm. They hurried as fast as Spade could travel and in a few seconds they reached the coupé waiting in the alley. Beside it towered Butch.

"Spade," the Black Bat said, "you're going to be well taken care of."

"You're darned right I am. Who's this big overgrown gorilla?"

"You'll get to know him well," the Black Bat said. "Butch, meet Spade Vernon. A man who murdered in cold blood and who probably likes to kill."

Butch stepped forward. "Glad to meet you, Spade. Here's my hand on it."

Spade saw only a fantastically big fist moving toward his jaw. It collided and Spade saw nothing else. Butch promptly threw him into the car.

"I'm on my way," he said.

The Black Bat swung aboard, too. Butch rolled the car onto the street, which was still deserted. He rounded the corner where Silk was waiting with Tony Quinn's sedan. The Black Bat took a quick look around, dropped off the coupé and streaked for the sedan.

He climbed into the back. There were the tweeds which Tony Quinn usually wore, and the white cane that stamped him as a blind man. Working fast, not even glancing up as they whisked by Inspector McGrath's stalled car, he changed from the regalia of the Black Bat to the casual garb of Tony Quinn.

He stuffed the dark clothes into a well-hidden compartment in the back of the car, checked everything to be sure he'd left no clues of his dual identity behind, then climbed into the front seat. He put the white cane between his knees, leaned back and over those bright eyes came the film of blindness.

Hardly more than three or four minutes had elapsed since the Black Bat had

begun his work. Soon Silk stopped in front of the building where Quinn had his offices. Without hurrying, they went inside. A watchman, who also operated the lone night elevator, commented on the time.

In Quinn's office he sat down to await the results of the Black Bat's most daring coup. Plenty of fur was going to start flying any moment. After ten minutes, Quinn picked up the phone and dialed Headquarters. He asked if McGrath had left with the prisoner and was told he should have been there by now.

"Good," Quinn said. "I've been waiting for some time and I couldn't help but wonder if anything had happened. McGrath will probably get here any minute."

But it was half an hour before McGrath stormed into the office. Quinn's blank eyes stared straight ahead, but after McGrath had slammed the door, Quinn gave a startled gasp.

"Mac—you're alone. What's happened? Where is Spade Vernon?"

"He was snatched," McGrath shouted. "Grabbed right from under my nose!"

"Snatched?" Quinn cried. "Mac, do you mean his friends—?"

"Yeah, but only one friend. Tony, do you know anything about this?"

"I?" Quinn asked, bewildered.

"Yes, you. Spade was grabbed by the Black Bat."

"Are you sure?"

"Sure? Why, that rat banged me on the head!"

"I mean, was it really the Black Bat, or someone dressed like him?"

"Don't you think I know the real Black Bat when I meet him? Listen, Tony, for years I've had an idea you were the Black Bat. Maybe I was wrong. I hope so. Because tonight the Black Bat showed his colors. Like I always said, he's no Robin Hood. He's out for everything he can get. He took Spade because he was paid to do it."

"No, Mac," Quinn argued. "I refuse to believe that."

"Why?" McGrath demanded. "Be-

cause you're the Black Bat?"

"We've had that out many times," Quinn sighed resignedly. "I'm a blind man. I've been waiting here, wondering what kept you."

"Yeah, and I've been wondering how anybody knew I was bringing Spade to your office tonight," McGrath growled. "Tony, there has to be some kind of collusion. If you're not the Black Bat, then he's working with you."

"On a kidnaping?" Quinn said sternly. "Don't be a fool, Mac."

"Okay, okay." McGrath picked up the telephone and began dialing. "I'm going to ask you once more, Tony. Are you the Black Bat?"

"I've answered you too many times to do it again," Quinn said.

"Then I hope you're telling the truth." McGrath pressed the phone tighter to his ear. "Hello! This is Inspector McGrath. Give me the radio room and make it snappy."

"Mac—" Quinn began.

"Hold it!" McGrath waved a hand at him. "I know what I'm doing, and like I said, I hope you're telling me the truth. Hello! Inspector McGrath. Are you sending out a general alarm for Spade Vernon yet? Okay, it's a mighty good thing you are. Well, I want something added. Spade was snatched by the Black Bat. In that alarm include the Black Bat as a wanted man. Add that he is to be shot on sight! That's all!"

CHAPTER VII

Second Contact



BY morning, everything had broken loose. Quinn's office was filled with newspapermen and photographers. He gave a press interview, told them in a measured voice that his office was doing everything possible to apprehend Spade Vernon and the Black Bat. But from no one did the newsmen get the slightest hint that

another person was being held prisoner by Spade Vernon's brother.

McGrath stayed away, kept himself busy directing the most thorough man-hunt he had ever conducted. Tony Quinn was driven home by Silk late that afternoon. Silk had never seen him so worried.

Quinn ate but little dinner and went at once to the library where he dropped into his usual chair and reached for a pipe. Silk, after finishing his work in the kitchen, came into the library and substituted a clean ash tray for the one at Quinn's elbow.

"The house is under observation," Silk said. "Front and back."

"By whom?" Quinn asked.

"I can smell a cop ten miles off," Silk grumbled. "This time McGrath is out to get you, sir."

Quinn settled a little lower in the leather chair. "I've been afraid of that, Silk. From what I overheard today, everyone thinks the Black Bat has turned outlaw and McGrath's orders to shoot to kill will be obeyed."

"I heard that, too," Silk commented. "What's the next move, sir?"

"We'll wait," Quinn said quietly. "They have to act first. Silk, am I doing it right this time? Have I made a mistake in hijacking Spade Vernon and holding him so that Doreen Cooper won't be killed?"

Silk energetically dusted the ash tray. "If you had let Spade go to save her, you'd have been condemned," Silk said. "If you went to work as the Black Bat and evened things up—as you did—you're faced with the same situation. I believe you did right. As district attorney, you could have been stopped by court order. Nobody can stop the Black Bat."

Quinn nodded. "Thank you, Silk. Once

we get Doreen Cooper out of Deke's hands, we can return Spade to face that murder charge. It's all fundamentally simple. Whatever we do, it's to free Doreen and save her life. Nothing else matters until that is accomplished."

SILK began fussing with bric-a-brac on a table nearby. "What about Spade? Butch hasn't got in touch with us yet."

"The only thing that will make Butch call us is if Spade happens to escape. But I intend to go up to the lake and see them. Spade may know something. Right now, however, I've got to hold myself available. Deke Vernon is bound to have something to say to me."

"Suppose I take the car and drive downtown to get the early editions of the morning paper?" Silk suggested. "I'm curious to see how this thing is being accepted editorially."

"A good idea," Quinn nodded. "It wouldn't take much to unseat me as Special D.A., Silk. Most people don't think a blind man can do a good job in that office, anyhow."

"You'll be all right, sir?"

"Why not?" Quinn smiled. "Anyway, it won't take you long."

Silk hurried out of the room. In a few moments Quinn heard the car start-er whine and soon after that his apparently unseeing eyes spotted the sweep of headlights as Silk turned onto the street and drove past the house.

No more than two minutes went by before Quinn slowly pushed himself straighter in the chair and took a firm grip on the heavy white cane which he had propped against the table. Someone was on the front porch.

These were the situations Tony Quinn dreaded. For as a blind man he would be an easy victim for some killer, and

FEATURED IN

THE LEAGUE of A TONY QUINN NOVEL



his only way out must be to reveal the fact that he was not blind. He guessed that whoever was prowling on the porch must have seen Silk drive off and knew that Quinn was alone.

There was a shadowy blur across the window overlooking the porch. The man moved too fast for even Quinn's strange sight to get a glimpse of him. But he came back and this time he cupped his hands around his eyes to shut off the light and enable him to peer directly into the room. Now Quinn saw who he was. That shy, slimly built messenger whom Deke Vernon had chosen for some mysterious reason had come to pay a visit. And Byron Chanlor was going about this in an odd manner.

CHANLOR disappeared from the window, and the door buzzer sounded. Quinn arose, held the white cane slanting forward, and made his way slowly out of the library, into the hall, and to the front door. He fumbled for the knob, turned it, and let Byron Chanlor in.

Chanlor didn't seem quite as shy. "Good evening, Mr. Quinn," he said. "I'm here again."

"I don't seem to recognize the voice," Quinn said in a puzzled tone.

"It's Byron Chanlor, Mr. Quinn. You know—I came to see you at your office."

Quinn nodded eagerly. "Oh, yes. The go-between. I hope you've had a message."

"Oh, yes," Chanlor said. "I—I'd rather talk inside, if you don't mind."

"I'm sorry," Quinn said. He closed the door. "We'll go into the library. Follow me, please."

On the way Quinn brushed against the arm of a light chair and knocked it askew. He kept going and Chanlor padded at his heels. Quinn found his leather

chair and sat down. Chanlor was looking intently around the room. He placed his hat on a table, glanced at Quinn, then quietly started pulling open a drawer in that table.

As he moved he started talking.

"I delivered your message, Mr. Quinn. I did just what you told me."

"Good." Quinn stared straight ahead, apparently oblivious of the fact that Chanlor had the drawer almost half-open now. "How was contact made with you?"

"By phone," Chanlor explained. "I live in a rooming house. At half-past six—I get up at six—I was coming down the stairs and the hall phone rang. Nobody else was awake, so I answered it. You'd almost swear the man who called knew I was on my way down."

"Was there any way he could have known?" Quinn asked.

"Not that I'm aware of."

Chanlor was peering into the drawer. There were some papers inside and he lifted out a handful of these and began going through them. They were just receipted household bills, but Quinn wondered why this little man was so nosy.

"Well," Quinn said, "What happened when you answered the phone?"

Chanlor looked up, realizing he had delayed too long in answering.

"I—that is, nothing really happened, Mr. Quinn. The same voice asked me if I'd gone to see you. I said yes, and I told him you sent word you would not make any deals."

"That was at six-thirty this morning," Quinn said. "You're sure about that?"

"Positive. I keep regular hours. The landlady says you can set a clock by me. But I think regularity is a wonderful thing and—"

[Turn page]

NEXT ISSUE!

FACELESS MEN

By G. WAYMAN JONES



"No doubt," Quinn broke in. "Is that all that happened?"

Chanlor put the papers back into the drawer and began closing it softly.

"Why, no. I received another message. It's strange how they know where I'll be and all that. I finished my work and got out at four this afternoon. I cook my own breakfast and I go to a big self-service market every day for oranges and things I need. Well, I was at the cereal counter looking for a box of oatmeal. I'd finished my supply—"

"Get on with it," Quinn ordered testily.

Chanlor flushed. He had the table drawer closed and seemed to be looking for other things to examine.

"I have to tell you all the details so you'll understand, Mr. Quinn. The cereal counter is piled high—above my head. From the other side of the counter a man spoke to me. I couldn't see him. He told me to take the box of oatmeal at the end of the display. I didn't want it. It had been opened."

"But you did." Quinn was trying to curb his impatience.

"Yes. I do as I'm told. I paid for the box, too. When I got outside, I removed the cover and half the oatmeal had been dumped out, but there were two letters inside."

"You have them?"

"Of course. One was addressed to me. I'll read it."

HE fumbled in his pocket and took out two white envelopes. Quinn saw that the envelopes had been addressed on a typewriter. Chanlor unfolded one piece of letter paper.

"It says," he went on, "I was to see you again and tell you that the fact that Spade Vernon was taken by the Black Bat makes no difference. It's your job to get him back and then fulfill the deal. Otherwise, someone is going to get hurt."

"Is that all?" Quinn asked.

"Well, there was a—a hundred dollar bill in the envelope. For me."

"I see. Didn't you tell me there were two envelopes?"

"Yes, Mr. Quinn. The other one is addressed to somebody named Les Cooper. But there's no street or number or anything."

"Leave it here," Quinn told him. "I know Mr. Cooper. I'll see that he gets it."

Chanlor laid the envelope on the table. "Yes, sir. It's right here on the table. I—I guess I'll go now. There isn't anything else you want me to do?"

"Only come to me as quickly as possible if you get any more messages," Quinn said.

Chanlor was backing away slowly. His eyes kept darting around the room. He spotted a brief-case Quinn had brought from the office, propped in a chair. Chanlor went over to it, quietly opened it and kept jabbering to cover up any sound he might make. There were only legal documents inside. He slid them back, replaced the brief-case and walked briskly out of the room. Quinn heard the door close, but he didn't make a move.

In his mind was the idea that Chanlor should have placed that envelope for Les Cooper in his lap—or right beside him, instead of on that table ten feet away. Therefore Quinn sat quiet, his apparently sightless eyes staring straight ahead. Only his hands kept moving on the crook of the cane he held between his legs.

Quinn's hearing was exceptionally acute. During the long period of actual blindness he had learned to depend upon his hearing. Now small sounds which would escape any average person were easily picked up by him. He could almost feel Byron Chanlor's squinty little eyes watching. Two or three minutes later he heard the door open softly and close with only a bare click of the latch. Chanlor had faked his first departure, but his second was real.

Still Quinn stayed where he was. Anyone with Chanlor's vast curiosity might move to the side of the house and peer through windows. Moreover, there were Captain McGrath's detectives to keep in mind.

Then Quinn heard a car pull up before the house. Silk wasn't taking the time

to drive around to the garage in back. The newspapers must have contained something that Silk deemed highly important.

Silk was talking as he entered the room. "There's the devil to pay, sir. The *Sphere* is riding you hard, with an editorial personally written by Allan Lang. It's rather stiff, sir."

"What does it say?" Quinn asked wearily.

"It insists you be dropped at once. And McGrath, too, for taking such an important prisoner out from behind bars. And he also lights into the police commissioner."

"That is the worst of the lot?" Quinn asked.

"Well, a couple of others aren't too complimentary, but Lang's paper is the only one that carries so much weight. The other important newspapers call attention to your past record and think you might work something out."

"All right, Silk," Quinn said. "While you were gone, I had a visitor."

Silk was unfolding one of the other newspapers. "Yes, sir, I guessed that. I noticed a letter on the table. But there's something even more important. It's in Jim Moody's column. He isn't too critical, which is all to the good."

"Yes—Moody carries plenty of influence. Go on, Silk."

"Moody makes an open appeal for the Black Bat to get in touch with him."

"Well—we progress, Silk. That's what I've been hoping for, though I had no idea exactly how they'd try to get hold of the Black Bat. Now, before we start planning, we've a little job. My visitor was Byron Chanlor. Apparently Deke Vernon got after him—in a rather clever way, too. I'll tell you about that later. Right now, the letter Chanlor left is for Les Cooper and I imagine it's from his wife. I want you to phone Cooper. Tell him we have this letter and if he likes, you'll read it to him over the phone."

"Yes, sir," Silk answered.

Silk put down the newspapers and walked briskly to a table where there was a phone extension. He checked

the number, dialed and got an immediate response. He spoke a moment or two, then turned to Quinn.

"He says he'll be grateful if it is read to him," Silk said.

"Good. Go ahead—read it to him. I'm interested in what it says myself."

Silk broke the seal, extracted the letter and unfolded it. Then he began reading.

Darling: They are allowing me to write just a few lines. I am being treated very well. Under the circumstances I am as comfortable as it is possible to be. I am not tied up and anything I ask for is brought to me.

However, I have been warned that unless things happen exactly as these people want them, I will be killed. I think they mean it, but I am sure everything will turn out well. Try not to worry about me too much and I shall write again, when I can.

Doreen

Silk stopped talking and gave a great sigh.

"He hung up, sir," he told Quinn.

CHAPTER VIII

Gun at His Elbow



FOR the next hour Quinn sat quietly in the library while Silk read aloud everything in the newspapers concerning the case. While editors, with the exception of Allan Lang and his important daily, were cautiously defending Tony Quinn, Special D.A., it was clear that they were only giving him the benefit of the doubt and were none too enthusiastic.

But without exception, the papers had changed their attitudes toward the Black Bat. They were of one opinion—it was time he was wiped out of existence. This, Quinn realized, would encourage policemen to follow McGrath's orders to shoot to kill the man in the black hood on sight.

"You've got to be mighty careful, sir," Silk said.

"I know," Quinn replied. "McGrath is going to be on my trail every minute. But, Silk, we've got to go through with

it. I promised Les Cooper that nothing would happen to his wife and I mean it. I'll get her away from Deke Vernon even if it means the finish of the Black Bat."

"And the finish of Tony Quinn," Silk sighed. "I'm with you, but I don't see how we can work it."

"There's Jim Moody, the columnist. He wouldn't be advertising for me unless Deke had approached him. I've got to see Moody, Silk. And as the Black Bat."

"It could be a trap," Silk warned. "McGrath's really got his Irish up this time and Moody might be working with him. Besides, McGrath must have seen that item and he'll be watching Moody, too."

"I have to take the risk," Quinn said. "And we can't wait. Start putting out the lights. I'm going to bed early."

Silk obeyed, and in a few moments he was escorting blind Tony Quinn up the stairs to the second floor of the house. Quinn methodically made his usual preparations to retire. An hour later the last light in the house was extinguished.

Quinn lay in bed staring at the ceiling and trying to make plans. He discovered that there were none to make. He could only follow the leads provided by Doreen Cooper's kidnapers. For once, the Black Bat was purely on the defensive, and Quinn didn't like it. He had battled crooks and killers of all kinds, but he had never been faced with quite the amount of danger this problem presented.

Besides that, he wasn't satisfied. There seemed to be something else in the background, something vague, but it was there. The case had begun with a gang killing, but now it had grown out of all proportions. Someone appeared to be building it up, pushing it along.

Spade was safe, so far as Quinn knew. And Spade must know a great deal about the criminal element in this great city. So much that those who operated behind the scenes couldn't afford to risk his talking. Maybe that was the underlying cause of the pressure which seemed to be arising.

Quinn got out of bed and slipped into soft slippers. He donned a robe and walked quietly out of the room into the hall. Silk was also in bed, but wide awake. At Silk's door, Quinn paused.

"I'm going out," he said softly. "To see Jim Moody and find out why he wants the Black Bat. If I run into trouble, McGrath is going to hot-foot it here to see if Tony Quinn is missing. I'll work as fast as I dare, but if McGrath beats me, it's up to you to stall him."

"I'll do it if I have to use a baseball bat," Silk replied from the darkened room.

Quinn went downstairs, into the library, and straight toward the secret entrance to the lab. Now his uncanny sight was of the greatest service. He could move about freely, with no danger of stumbling against objects. Every piece of furniture was as clear to him in that jet darkness, as if it were full daylight and the rooms were sun-drenched. He opened the hidden door, slipped through, and half-hoped that Carol would be waiting for him. There was nobody in the lab.

He proceeded to the steel lockers where he kept his regalia, and put on the somber clothing. He put the robe, pajamas and slippers close to the secret door so he could step into them fast.

JUST before slipping the black hood over his head, he carefully examined a brace of automatics. He might be walking into the gravest danger and he intended to fight his way out—unless this was a trap set by McGrath and his police.

After a final check in the mirror, the Black Bat entered the tunnel. Halfway along it he began realizing just how difficult things were going to be. He could reach the garden house easily enough, but McGrath had detectives planted around the place. If they saw that coupé, which was always parked along the dead end street beside Quinn's house, they would be bound to stop it. And he needed that car badly. It was almost impossible for a hooded man to make his

way across town on foot.

Emerging through a well-hidden trapdoor in the floor of the garden house, the Black Bat carefully scrutinized the grounds behind his home. He saw through the darkness easily enough, and there was a burly man posted at the gate leading to the dead-end side street. That was serious enough, but the coupé which the Black Bat intended to use was gone.

It couldn't be traced to Tony Quinn but, lacking it, the Black Bat was in

What you are looking for is on the street behind your home.

That was all, but it was enough. The Black Bat mentally blessed the day Carol had become one of his little band. He kept his eyes on the detective at the gate, made his way noiselessly to the extreme rear of the estate and there he scaled a wire fence.

He landed lightly in the yard behind his estate, hurried through it and saw the coupé waiting just down the street. As he raced toward it, the door of the



CAROL

trouble. Then he saw that a piece of plain cord had been tied to the brass pull chain of the overhead light. It was no innovation of his and there was no need for it. It looped upward and disappeared behind a metal reflector below the bulb.

The Black Bat reached up, gave the cord a yank and it pulled freely from behind the reflector. He stepped upon a box, thrust his hand behind the reflector and found a tightly folded bit of paper. He unfolded it and read a brief message. It wasn't addressed to him and was unsigned, but the writing was Carol's.

car opened. It pulled away as he climbed inside. Carol was at the wheel.

"Oh, Tony!" she exhaled sharply. "They've really got you hemmed in. I've been waiting here for hours."

"What happened?" The Black Bat was again adjusting the wide-brimmed hat which concealed the hood he wore.

"I followed Byron Chanlor to your house. When he approached, he drew the attention of the guard at the rear of the estate. I decided to chance getting into the lab. I reached the garden house, then saw the coupé and knew you'd need it. I also realized I wouldn't be able to leave once the guard came back. So I

scribbled the note to you and got over to where the car was parked without being noticed. The guard began watching me. I just got into the coupé and drove away as if I'd left it parked there. I don't think they suspected anything. Before I left, I saw two more watching the house."

"They're McGrath's boys," the Black Bat explained. "You handled this exactly right, Carol. But you'll have to stay away from the lab. You can call me on the private wire, however, and I know how to call you."

"How bad is it, Tony?" she asked.

"Worse than anything we've ever faced," he replied grimly. "We're fighting for Doreen Cooper's life, but we have to fight the police as well as Deke Vernon and his men. Don't worry about it. We'll make out somehow. . . . Did Byron Chanlor prove interesting?"

"He's a smug little man without a friend in the world," Carol said. "He's a bookkeeper, working for small wages and scared of his boss. He lives in a rooming house of fair type. His habits are so regular he's a bore. But I can't learn that he even takes a drink and I'm sure that if Deke Vernon ever faced him, Chanlor would faint dead away."

THE Black Bat nodded.

"Just the way I had him pictured—until this evening when he came to see me with a message from Deke."

"A message?" Carol exclaimed. "But Tony, how in the world did he get it? I trailed him all day long."

"He had two letters, Carol. He told me he went into a self-service market and someone on the other side of a counter display talked to him. He could not see the man, but he was told to buy a certain box of oatmeal. He did and there were two letters and a hundred dollars inside of the letter addressed to him."

"I followed him into that store," Carol said. "If anyone spoke to him, I didn't notice it. But I did see him step into a doorway when he left the store and he fussed with a package. That must have been when he found the notes."

"You didn't see anyone on the other

side of the cereal counter?" the Black Bat asked.

"Why, no, Tony. There were a lot of people in the store. Chanlor could be telling the truth. He probably is. I think he'd be afraid to rig anything."

"I'm not so sure. He acted like a sneak thief when he was in the library at home. Looking into a table drawer, into my brief-case. Of course he had no idea I could see him."

"Is that so?" Carol said musingly. "I'll have to be much more careful. I didn't think he had the brains to act crooked. That is, if you want me to keep watching him."

"I do. Deke seems to reach him when he wants him, and if you can spot how that is done, find out who his messenger is and where he goes, we may find Doreen. And that is all we're after."

"I'll keep my eyes open," Carol said.

"I know you will. And call Silk on the private wire whenever you can. Also call my office. I can talk to you there, if it's important enough. McGrath may start tapping my phone wires, so just give me a hint about what you want to say."

"All right, Tony," she said. "But where are we going now?"

"You're dropping off along the next deserted stretch of the street," the Black Bat told her. "I'm heading for the home of Jim Moody, the columnist. He had an item in tonight's paper indicating that he'd like to see the Black Bat." Carol's right hand rested tightly on the Black Bat's arm.

"Tony, be careful. Moody is vicious. He'd give anything to be the man who'd unmask the Black Bat."

"I know, and I won't take any chances. Better pull in to the curb now. Look—soon I hope to ride up to the lake and see Butch and Spade. If you'd like to come along, I'll pick you up."

"I'd love to, Tony. I'll be home, watching from my window. Drive by, circle the block and when you come past again, I'll be ready to jump into the car."

A moment later he watched her walk briskly around the corner, then he pulled away from the curb. He knew where Jim Moody lived and was glad that

it was in a private home and not some hotel or apartment house to which quiet entry would have been difficult.

The Black Bat drove past the columnist's home and saw that it was a fairly large house in a suburban area and set back from the street about a hundred and fifty feet. There was a high hedge around the property and the lawn was shrubbed thickly enough to make an approach fairly easy.

The Black Bat parked the car and sat there a while, watching the neighborhood until he was certain that any trap would be closely confined to Moody's house. Then he entered a yard three houses from the columnist's place.

As he neared the house, he drew a gun and flipped the safety to the off position. If there was a trap and it had been set by McGrath, he would have to get out of it without gunplay. But if Deke Vernon had arranged this and his killers were on hand to receive the Black Bat, there would be shooting.

THE eerie figure reached the back of Moody's home and came to an abrupt halt when he saw the rear door ajar. He realized that Moody would be expecting him, and possibly the newspaper man was trying to make things as easy as possible. But the Black Bat didn't use that entrance. He skirted the house, went around to the front and risked a quick look into the living room through one of the windows. The room was in darkness, but his strange eyesight penetrated the gloom, and he saw that there was no one waiting.

The window was locked. The Black Bat took a flat kit of finely made burglar tools from his pocket, selected a thin strip of flexible steel and inserted it between the window and frame. He located the latch, worked it aside and pushed the window up an inch at a time.

There seemed to be no breeze to move the curtains or create a warning draft. He got the window high, hoisted himself up and squirmed through. Gun in hand again, he faced the room and listened intently. There was not a sound. He closed the window quietly and, on

crepe-soled shoes, crossed to the center hall. He could look into the dining room. That also appeared to be empty.

Reaching it, he skirted the table and chairs to move toward a swinging door to the butler's pantry. That was provided with a small window and he peered through it. He could see into the kitchen and he was directly opposite the partly opened kitchen door.

He pushed the swinging door gently, got it half-open and listened again. Now he could hear faint but steady breathing. Someone was in the kitchen. He slipped through the door, eased it back into place and flattened himself against the wall of the narrow passageway.

Edging forward he saw the rounded end of a kitchen work table and on it lay a nickel-plated revolver, hammer back. The gun was cocked and ready for instant action.

Two feet away, seated in a steel chair that was tilted back against the table, sat a slender, tall man with a narrow face. He was partially bald, looked to be about forty-five years old, and in good trim. Apparently he had been waiting there for a long time because for all his good intentions, he was dozing.

The Black Bat's gloved hand snaked around the corner of the butler's pantry, rested lightly on the revolver and picked it up without making the slightest sound. He moved the hammer out of its dangerous position, eased himself into the kitchen and stopped directly before the dozing man.

CHAPTER IX

The Man Who Wouldn't Talk



JIM MOODY awoke with a start that brought him to his feet. All he could see was a dim figure standing four feet in front of him. His half-opened mouth closed with a snap. He sat down again, slowly. His left hand draped itself on the edge of the table, close by where the revolver had been.

"So"—Moody's voice was a croak at first—"you answered my little invitation."

"I did," the man in black replied. "And I'm waiting to hear what it's all about."

"Deke Vernon came to see me," Moody said.

"Deke is wanted for kidnaping," the Black Bat said quietly. "Why didn't you turn him in?"

Moody laughed. He was becoming more sure of himself. "You ask me that? You—who turned kidnaper, too? What do you think I am, Back Bat? A thorough fool?"

"I've got an open mind about that, Mr. Moody. Go ahead—tell me what Deke wants."

"He wants to meet you. What did you expect? Now listen, I've no use for your kind. A man who goes around with his face hooded can't be honest. No matter what you have done to help the law in the past, or what local officialdom thinks of you, I believe you're nothing but a clever crook and a murderer!"

"You commit a few murders yourself—with words," the Black Bat said. "But we're wasting time. The fact that we don't like one another is now established. Give me Deke's message and then go ahead and try to doublecross both of us. I've no reason to think you won't. Except for one small thing."

"Yes?" Moody's hand was moving slowly, trying to locate the gun. "What is that one small thing?"

"The fact that you like to keep on breathing," the Black Bat told him. "Deke wouldn't go for a doublecross—and neither would I."

"You're not scaring me," Moody said harshly. "But I agreed to deliver the message and I will. Deke wants to meet you. He's willing to negotiate and he wants absolute proof that his brother is alive. At three o'clock this morning he'll be at Two-twenty-five White Street, on the second floor. That's all I know. He told me nothing else."

"Did you see him personally?" the Black Bat asked.

"He phoned me, but I'm sure it was

Deke. Are you keeping that date, Black Bat?"

"I intend to," the man in black replied. "But you won't be there."

Moody half arose and at the same time his hand grabbed vainly in the darkness for the gun he had left on the table. When he realized it was no longer there, the Black Bat could see with his miraculous eyes that the man's face turned pasty. He started backing into a corner.

The Black Bat laughed. "I took your gun, Moody," he jibed. "I'm going to keep it, but I wondered if it was purely for defense, or whether you intended to point it at me and hold me for the police. However, because you did make a try for it just now makes what I have to do a great deal easier."

Moody opened his mouth to yell. A black gloved fist closed it with a single punch that straightened Moody up, almost lifting him from the floor. As he started falling, the Black Bat seized him, eased him back into the chair, then propped him there. He searched the kitchen, found a clean dish cloth with which he gagged the man. In further search he located a ball of heavy cord and used this to tie Moody up securely.

There was a good-sized cupboard beside the sink and he crammed Moody inside it. Then he slipped through the back door, cut across the yard and in a few moments was back in his coupé.

It was almost midnight now, and his meeting with Deke Vernon was set for three o'clock. There was plenty of time before then to reach the lake and find out if Spade would talk.

The Black Bat slipped the wide-brimmed hat on his head and drove boldly through the center of the city to the residential section where Carol had her small apartment. He drove slowly past the place, circled the block and, as she had promised, Carol was ready when he returned.

THEY headed for the speedway leading out of town while the Black Bat told her exactly what had happened.

Carol listened intently and with growing horror.

"Tony, everyone is against you this time!" she said anxiously. "Moody has never criticized the Black Bat before. Now he—he waits for you with a gun!"

The Black Bat nodded grimly. "He meant to use it, too, Carol. Of course we must remember that Moody is a newspaperman. The aggressive kind who doesn't care much how he gets his items, just so long as he gets them—and first."

"Tony, do you think he'd have turned you in?" asked Carol.

"I'm pretty certain of it," the Black Bat answered.

"Even if it meant that Doreen Cooper would be murdered?"

"I don't believe Moody would give Mrs. Cooper any thought at all. Nor anyone else except himself. If he gets out of that cupboard I stuck him in, he'll probably call McGrath. They'll both want to be around when the Black Bat keeps a date with Deke Vernon. You're right, Carol. This time everyone is against us."

Carol shook her head sadly. "All that newspaper talk about the Black Bat being a plain crook," she sighed. "Oh, Tony, after all you've done for—for everyone!"

The Black Bat chuckled without much humor. "A man who wears a hood doesn't rate sympathy," he reminded. "But I'm going ahead. I'll get Mrs. Cooper out of their hands somehow."

Soon they had left the city behind them and were streaking north along

an almost deserted state highway. Five miles from the lake where the Black Bat had a summer cottage, he began some evasive tactics, just on the hunch that he and Carol might have been trailed by someone clever enough not to have shown himself.

It was shortly after one when the coupé rolled into a shed beside the cottage by the lake. The Black Bat got out and, as he turned, a huge form materialized from around the corner of the shed.

"Oh," Butch grunted. "I didn't expect you so soon. Hi-ya, Carol."

"Is everything all right?" the Black Bat asked.

"Sure." Butch grinned. "Spade, he ain't feeling too good. I got him locked up in that room where you used to keep all your tackle and stuff. It's got no windows and I figured he wouldn't be likely to dig a hole through the wall of logs."

"But Butch," Carol said, "you told us Spade wasn't feeling good."

"He ain't. It was all because of an idea. When I brought in his supper, Spade had an idea he was going out and I had me an idea he wasn't. My idea was better. But I had to change Spade's menu from a steak to soup. There's something wrong with his jaw, I guess."

The Black Bat laughed softly. "Remember this, Butch. Spade is all we have between us and the murder of an innocent woman. If he gets away—well, use your own imagination."

"He won't," Butch promised, as he had before. "Not if I have to bust both his legs."

[Turn page]

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"I'm going to talk to him," announced the Black Bat. "Alone. Stay out here with Carol, Butch. I don't want her seen. Is Spade's room dark?"

"Yes. I ripped out the wiring so he couldn't use it to lasso me with or anything like that. Matter of fact, I haven't turned on any lights at all."

"Good. I'll be right back."

The Black Bat entered the cottage and walked directly to a stout door. He turned the key, pushed the door open quickly and slipped inside. Then he put his back against the door and stayed there. Spade Vernon was lying on a cot, but he quickly sat up and tried to peer through the darkness.

"Who is it?" he demanded. "There's someone in here with me. Listen—if it's you, you big gorilla, I'm getting you for that poke on the jaw, so help me, if it's the last thing I do—"

"Relax, Spade," the man in black said. "This is the Black Bat."

SPADE, in the act of arising, sat down heavily.

"Well, it's about time. What's the idea? Why'd you snatch me from that copper, then have that big monkey knock me out and bring me here? Where am I, anyhow? What have I done to you?"

"Nothing, Spade," the Black Bat said. "Would you rather be in a cell, waiting to go on trial for murder?"

"Okay, okay," Spade grumbled. "Give me the pitch."

"I took you away from the police because I need men like you."

"You need men like *me*?" Spade gasped. "Listen, all you ever did for guys like me was gun us out or turn us over to the cops."

"That's all in the past. I've learned, Spade, that there's no money in working against men like you, and I'm looking for money. Do you want to work for me?"

"Now wait a minute," Spade parried. "I figured you snatched me because my brother put the snatch on the wife of a witness who could send me to the chair."

"How did you know Mrs. Cooper had been kidnaped? And how did you know your brother did it?"

Spade laughed. "I got ways and means of learning things. I'm no dumb punk who plays for pennies."

"You haven't answered my question," the Black Bat said. "Do you want to work for me?"

"Sure—if there's dough in it, and plenty. Also protection—and the kind that makes sure I don't burn."

"All right, Spade. But we begin on even terms. Who have you worked for up to now?"

"Oh no, you don't!" Spade cried. "You want me to tell you that, you first got to take off the hood you wear and turn on a light so I can see you."

"Thanks, Spade," the Black Bat said quietly. "All I wanted to be sure of was that you did work for someone else. I know better than to try to force his identity from you."

"So it was all a gag," Spade said mournfully. "Well, go ahead and work me over. I can't tell you who I work for because I don't know."

"I believe you do, Spade," the Black Bat said. "But if you happen to be telling the truth, you'll soon find out who he is."

"What do you mean by that crack?" Spade demanded.

"You'll see him—when he comes to kill you, Spade. Because he is going to kill you. A man who knows too much and who has been arrested for murder and is the kind who might make a deal becomes a liability instead of an asset. Right now this man behind the scenes is trying to locate you. Maybe he'll succeed, but don't start hoping. Because if he does, you'll be greeted with a flaming gun. Good night, Spade."

"Hey! Wait! Wait!" Spade's voice was almost imploring. "You can't prove that."

"I wouldn't even try. There's only one way out of this for you, Spade."

"I'm listening," the murderer said cautiously.

"Where has your brother taken Mrs. Cooper?"

Spade broke into loud laughter. "Why don't you hand me a gun and let me shoot myself? It would be the same thing if I told you that. Sure Deke has got Mrs. Cooper. Because as long as he has her, they won't burn me."

"But if she is freed, Spade, you're washed up," the Black Bat reminded him. "The one chance you have is to talk right now and then hope the jury will take into consideration the fact that you risked your life so Mrs. Cooper wouldn't die. Men have won mercy for less than that."

Spade lay down and put his hands behind his head. He closed his eyes.

"So long, Black Bat," he said coldly. "You're all done, even if you don't know it. You grabbed me so the dame wouldn't be killed. That means you won't dare knock me off. You've got to make an exchange. Me for Mrs. Cooper. And you'll do it. See me any time you want to swap me for her. Otherwise, don't bother me."

CHAPTER X

Brand of the Black Bat



THE Black Bat let Carol off near her apartment; he waited a few moments while she phoned Silk on the private wire to the lab. Her signal from the window indicated that everything was quiet at Tony Quinn's home.

The Black Bat drove away, located Two-twenty-five White Street and studied the two-story building. It was a large building, with half a dozen stores of various types on the first floor. The windows of the second floor were painted over and lettered "BRYAN'S BILLIARDS." A darkened neon sign above the entrance bore the same advertisement.

It was exactly three in the morning when he had finished preparing a strategic retreat. In this section the buildings were two stories high for the entire block, affording a rooftop escape if

need be. So he parked the coupé around the corner at the end of the block.

At three-five he slipped up to the entrance of the pool hall. The door was not locked. He stepped inside, drew a gun and made his way up the stairs without making a sound. There were two large swinging doors leading into the big pool hall and he pushed one of them open a crack. Not a sound reached him.

There were better than thirty tables in this large place. These he could plainly see despite the darkness, because of his peculiar eyes. Above him, and slightly behind the spot where he stood outside the doors, was a weak electric light bulb dangling from the ceiling. Framed by that light he would be a perfect target, so he reached one gloved hand up and loosened the bulb until the light went out.

He sensed a trap, actually expected one, but if he could turn the tables on those who were prepared to spring it, there was a possibility he would capture some lesser crook than Spade—a type who would talk under the proper persuasion. To gain such an advantage, the Black Bat was entirely willing to risk his life.

Now, feeling somewhat more secure in total darkness, he pushed open one door and stepped into the pool hall. His automatic was level, finger tight against the trigger. He turned his head slowly from side to side, trying to pick up any faint sound of breathing.

Then, far at the end of the long room, he saw a thin line of yellow light close to the floor. Yet even his keen eyes could not find any signs of a door. He moved forward, fully aware that all these tables could easily conceal twenty men.

Suddenly a faint scraping noise, like that made by shoe leather against a wooden floor, made him hastily crouch behind one of the tables. The sound was not repeated. He stayed down below the edge of the tables and zigzagged from one to the other, gradually closing the distance between himself and that tantalizing strip of light.

He was within four tables of it, and

studying what seemed to be a blank wall for signs of a door, when a gun roared, like a cannon in that vast room. A bullet zipped past him and hit one of the tables well behind where he was crouched.

The Black Bat didn't make the mistake of moving. He breathed softly, kept his eyes searching the region from which the streak of gunfire had emanated and waited for any motion made by the gunman. When nothing happened the silence put his nerves on edge. He reached up, fingers dusting the surface of the green billiard cloth until he located a billiard ball. He threw this in the direction from which the shot had come.

It made a great clatter. Someone seemed to be struggling behind one of the last tables. The Black Bat knew that shot might have been heard on the street and if it drew police, he would be squarely lodged between two enemies. For he was a man with friends limited to three, and he could expect no help from any of these right now.

He had to make the first move. Rising up suddenly he darted around one table, intent on closing the distance. He saw a man rise up, gun level. It began throwing flame and death. The Black Bat held his own fire for he wanted this man alive, and he seemed to be the only person here.

HE had ducked behind the second to the last row of tables. The killer was no more than thirty feet away now. The Black Bat had no idea who he was, for the gunman had moved fast and wore his hat-brim pulled down over his face.

The scraping sound came again, indicating that the killer was bracing his feet against the floor to rise swiftly and start shooting. Suddenly the Black Bat saw a man rise up. The Black Bat straightened also, ready to shoot it out.

The man he faced gave a sharp cry. The next instant a light was turned on far at the rear of the place. Well behind the Black Bat, another gunman opened fire.

The Black Bat dropped fast. A bullet

clipped a chunk from the edge of the table which served as his shield. He was trapped now. While the man in front of him waited to shoot, the one at the rear could dodge his way closer. Even with his uncanny sight and his expert handling of a gun, the Black Bat couldn't face enemies in opposite directions.

It was a fight to a finish now. He'd had a bare glimpse of the man in front of him and had seen a face creased in harsh lines of hate. The features of a killer. They were going to shoot it out, but they could bide their time, knowing that police would arrive quickly.

The Black Bat had to move fast. Once the area was surrounded, even he would not have much of a chance to escape. He risked his life by standing erect, whirling suddenly and firing at the swinging light which illuminated the hall. His first bullet smashed the bulb, but as he swung back, the gunman only two tables in front of him, was sighting his gun, intent on making a single shot count well.

The Black Bat's automatic flamed. There was nothing else he could do. The bullet hit the man in the chest, throwing him backward. Behind the Black Bat the second gunman started shooting and the Black Bat jumped agilely aside. In the darkness that second killer wouldn't be able to find him.

The Black Bat's eyes searched the gloom, saw a form make a dive for the swinging doors and slap them open. Whoever the fellow was, he didn't stand on ceremony. Instead of running down the stairs, he jumped, and the resultant clatter indicated that he had missed his footing and fallen the rest of the way.

There was little time to do any thinking, but it occurred to the Black Bat that it was odd this trap had been set with only two men, when they could have used a dozen. He hurried to where his victim had fallen. The man was not dead, but it was clear that he had little chance of living. The Black Bat, hastily examining the wound, saw that there was nothing he could do. He did take a small box from his pocket and extract

from it a black sticker formed in the shape of a bat in full flight. He affixed this to the dying man's forehead. It was the brand of the Black Bat, the proof of who had been guilty of this, for he fully accepted the blame for any killings he was forced to do.

That done, he sped toward the wall from the base of which the faint yellow streak of light still came. There must be some sort of a secret panel here and he quickly withdrew his hand from its black glove. Gently he passed the bare hand across the surface of the wall until he found the seams of an inch-square piece of wood set into the wall. He pushed this. There was a click and a narrow door slid back.

The Black Bat wiped away any possible fingerprints before he looked into another room, a longer one equipped with roulette tables, bird cage tables and every other manner of gambling device he had ever seen.

He whistled sharply in surprise but the whistle died on a slow, descending note when he spotted a ceiling-high vault at the far end of the gambling room. The door yawned wide open. Ledgers and papers were thrown onto the floor, two tin cash-boxes had been jimmied open, and the steel door of an inner vault had been forced.

THE wail of a siren made the Black Bat's hair stand on end. He quickly closed the hidden panel and put out the telltale light. Then he hurried to a window which had been frosted over. He unlocked it, raised it high and looked down into a spacious rear areaway. It was much too high to risk a jump.

He twisted his body to peer upward and noticed that the edge of the roof was within easy reach. The sirens were coming closer and there were more of them. The police must be coming in droves. He squirmed through the window, supported himself precariously on the edge of it and got a finger hold on the edge of the roof. He didn't know what he would find up there, but the roof seemed to be his one and only way out.

He hoisted himself up, got a knee over

the roof edge, and in a moment he was lying prone on the rooftop, getting back his breath and letting sizzling nerves cool off.

There was a great deal of activity below him now. As soon as he could he made his way to the front of the building, dropped flat and peered over the edge. He counted eight radio cars, parked to block the street, before he gave up counting. More were coming every moment, and the high-pitched sirens of emergency trucks were getting louder.

Then he heard Inspector McGrath's voice giving orders over a loud speaker set up on one of the police cars. The Black Bat groaned. With McGrath in charge, every avenue of escape would be well plugged.

"He's still in that building," McGrath's voice roared, "or on the roof. No place else he can go. The streets are blocked off, and we've got men enough to bottle him up. Start closing in!"

The Black Bat had only a few moments on the rooftop before they would reach it. He didn't draw a gun. No matter how grave the danger, he knew he would never open fire on the police. Rather than that he would let them take him. And it seemed that was exactly what they would do.

McGrath gave more orders.

"Bring up those searchlight trucks! I want the building lighted on all four sides. Emergency truck, bring your ladders! We're going up to the roof and from so many sides he won't be able to fight us all off."

A searchlight snapped on, bathing the side of the building. The Black Bat had to drop flat. He didn't stay there, but squirmed to the middle of the roof where there was less danger of being seen, then straightened up to begin running toward the adjoining building. His only chance lay across those rooftops, and it was a dangerously slim one.

The space between this building and its neighbor wasn't too great for a leap. The Black Bat quickly retreated from close to the edge and got ready to make a running jump for it.

He had already started when he saw the outline of men on the next rooftop. Police! Armed with tommy-guns, riot shotguns and tear-gas guns! He spun on his heel. The rooftop in the opposite direction was sprouting policemen, too. They would see him in a moment. The searchlights, being turned on one by one, were gradually illuminating the roof.

He saw a skylight, but breaking through that wouldn't help. The building must be full of police by now. But the skylight rose from the roof about two feet and gave him some semblance of protection. He dropped flat behind it.

McGrath's voice came again over the loudspeaker.

"Attention, everyone! Attention! The watchman in the building has just been found. He lived long enough to tell us the Black Bat looted the safe and came back and shot him. There was a Black Bat sticker pasted on the watchman's forehead. The Black Bat has completely turned killer! Move with caution. He's clever, and a crack shot. He probably won't be taken alive. The orders I gave before, stand. Shoot him on sight—and shoot to kill!"

CHAPTER XI

On the Rooftop



MORE and more the searchlights were illuminating the roof. The men on top of the adjoining buildings were advancing, too. Some of them had ladders which they could use to cross over above the alleys. In a few moments the interior of the building would have been completely searched, and McGrath would know he had to be on the roof.

They would bring up searchlights, set them on the neighboring buildings and flood everything with brilliant light. The Black Bat had only a few moments left. He lay on the roof, shielded by the

skylight, and stared at the black sky. There was an end to all things and this was the finish of the Black Bat. They would have him for murder—a perfect case. There would even be something about his having looted the gambling room safe.

He had been fighting a smart gang and they had won. They had lured him into a trap they knew he couldn't refuse to enter, and they had rigged armed robbery and murder against him. From now on, all they had to do was withdraw and let the police take the risks and the glory. This was a masterpiece of strategy—and its conclusion was no more than seconds away.

For the first time in his exciting career the Black Bat gave up planning to escape, for every avenue was closed to him. What he had to do now was plan his defeat. Itchy-fingered police would probably start shooting at the first sight of him. He not only didn't want to be killed, but he *had* to live. Even locked up, there might be some chance of still maneuvering his three aides to rescue Doreen Cooper.

"Inspector," someone called down from an adjoining rooftop "we've got the searchlights set up. We can sweep the roof with them."

Over the loud-speaker came McGrath's voice.

"Okay, stand by. You men with ladders—set them against the wall and start climbing. When we sweep that rooftop, we'll do it from every direction. He can't cover all sides. Wait for the command, then go!"

The Black Bat had often wondered what he would do, how he would feel when a moment like this finally arrived. He found himself thinking of Carol. This would hit her hardest, even though he knew he could keep her out of it. Silk would be involved, but Silk was prepared for such an eventuality, and knew how to face it. Butch would still have Spade Vernon. Whatever action Butch took, Spade wouldn't enjoy it.

But Doreen Cooper would probably be killed. That hurt more than anything. The end of the line was a rough



BUTCH

place. Far rougher than the Black Bat had ever imagined it. Time was slipping away fast. Time—he had no more of it. A ladder scraped against the side of the building. Then another and another. The Black Bat raised himself on one elbow, studied the nearby rooftops. There were enough police on them to capture fifty Black Bats.

The men were passing the word along to McGrath.

"Ladder west side ready. Ladder east side in place—south—north. Searchlights set—all covered."

The Black Bat sighed. It was time. If they shot him, that would be a quick end to it. Probably a merciful end. But he wanted to live because of Doreen Cooper. He prepared to stand erect, raise his hands and call out his surrender.

Suddenly, somewhere in the distance, the Black Bat heard gunshots. Faint, excited voices followed and the rising whine of sirens. Then McGrath gave clipped orders over the loudspeaker.

"Abandon the building! The Black Bat was seen driving away over on Cliff Street. He slipped through our lines somehow. All cars begin converging on

Cliff Street! Keep your radios tuned for further orders. Move!"

The Black Bat's knees wilted. He dropped weakly to the rooftop. As he lay there, he saw the police on the roofs, hurrying for the exits. Below, the searchlights were being snapped off. The sirens made a bedlam of the night. And above it all came McGrath's voice, grimly issuing orders which sent cars speeding to cut off any idea of escape from Cliff Street.

THE Black Bat didn't know exactly what had happened, but he had a good idea. And he knew it was time to move. He sped across the rooftop, leaped the chasm between buildings and ran across the second roof.

He leaped again, sped through the roof exit of the third structure and ran down the steps of a mercantile building.

When he reached the first floor he made his way to the rear of some sort of a shop and unlocked the back door. He hurried toward the street. His coupé was parked where he had left it. The car had attracted no attention because there was plenty of all-night parking here.

More distantly now, McGrath could be heard. He must be directing the man-hunt by radio, for the loudspeaker had grown silent. There were people on the streets, plenty of them, though they took care to stay well away from the involved area.

The Black Bat came out of the alley, put his back against a building, and found his luck holding. There were plenty of shadows on that wall and he could move unseen. He sprinted across the sidewalk, yanked open the door of the coupé and slid inside.

QUICKLY he pulled the wide-brimmed hat from where he kept it jammed down behind the seat, straightened the hat and put it on. Then he started the car and also its radio, which was tuned in on police calls.

McGrath, he heard at once, was still directing the search. The Black Bat listened until he understood exactly what areas would be dangerous. Then he headed in the opposite direction. In a few moments he was rolling as fast as he dared toward the section of the city where Tony Quinn lived.

McGrath would be bound to check on Quinn. Nothing could make him abandon the idea that Tony Quinn and the Black Bat were the same person. As the Black Bat rolled along he heard McGrath's voice off the air and someone else take command. That meant McGrath would be already on his way to the Quinn home.

The Black Bat turned down the street behind his home, slid to the curb and leaped out. He plunged into one of the yards. His night-sight was of the greatest help now. He avoided pitfalls which would have slowed up anyone with only normal eyesight.

Scaling the steel fence, he landed on his own property, and saw no sign of any guard. He sped toward the garden house, found the trap-door wide open, dropped into the tunnel, and took time to pull the door closed and came out into the lab. He had swiftly removed the hood, and now hastily peeled off his coat, tie and shirt. He kicked off the

shoes, removed his trousers.

Over the back of a chair his pajamas and robe were draped. He put them on faster than he'd ever done in his life. He slid bare feet into the slippers, tied the belt of the robe, and picked up his white cane propped against the chair too.

As he neared the secret door to the library, he glanced at the panel of colored lights. A blue one was lit, showing that the front door was open.

Quinn paused for only a fraction of a second and the mask of blindness came over his eyes. Then he opened the door, moved into the library, and at a glance saw what his alibi was to be. A long table was strewn with lawbooks, many of them open. There was even a cloud of tobacco smoke hovering above his favorite chair, and his pipe was lit.

He sat down quickly, puffed on the pipe and listened to Silk desperately trying to delay Inspector McGrath at the front door.

"Mr. Quinn gave orders he wasn't to be disturbed," Silk was saying.

"Yeah? Well, I'm disturbing him." McGrath was still panting from his exertions in hastening here.

"You show up any time at all," Silk bellowed. "Here it is, the middle of the night and you come barging in—"

"Quinn is not here!" McGrath yelled. "I know he isn't here. Because the Black Bat just wormed his way out of a net I set for him and he can't be back here. There hasn't been time for him to get here!"

"Maybe," Silk parried, "I ought to demand a warrant. After all—"

"Warrant, my eye!" McGrath howled. "Do you let me by or shall I slap you down?"

Quinn raised his voice. "Silk, let him in. I didn't want to be disturbed, but this must be important."

HE heard McGrath gasp. Then there were approaching steps and as the two men neared the library, Silk was giving Quinn his cues.

"We've been up half the night trying to find some kind of a law which would

let Mr. Quinn handle the Vernon-Cooper case so Mrs. Cooper wouldn't be killed, and Spade Vernon be kept under murder indictment. You understand, McGrath?"

"Inspector McGrath to you," the irate officer snapped.

"You understand that the responsibility of breaking in here like this is on your own head, not mine."

"You and your responsibility!" McGrath growled.

He entered the room. Quinn, a pad on his lap, pencil in his hand and a pipe clenched between his teeth, was staring in the general direction of the officer.

"Mac," Quinn said in a chiding voice, "what's the matter with you?"

McGrath walked closer, bent over, and looked straight into those blank eyes. His mustache bristled, his fingers clenched and unclenched. Then he suddenly sat down, slid into a slump in the chair and slowly and impersonally began to swear.

"Look here," Quinn said somewhat testily. "What's wrong, Mac?"

"Wrong?" McGrath closed his eyes and exhaled a breath that amounted to a groan. "I'll tell you what's wrong! We had the Black Bat sewed up in the neatest trap ever set. Yeah! A perfect trap that I'd have sworn no man could get out of. Not even *him*."

"And he did?" Quinn marveled.

"Why else do you think I'm here?" McGrath's rage was growing. "I *still* think you're the Black Bat. I always will, no matter in how many places you seem to be at the same time. And, Tony, a little while ago I ordered my men to shoot down the Black Bat."

"I've never heard you so vehement," Quinn commented mildly.

"Listen! The Black Bat snatched Spade Vernon away from me. Busted me on the head to do it."

"You ought to be thankful he did," Quinn said. "Otherwise, for all your ranting about him, people might think you worked in collusion with him, Mac."

"Stop interrupting me," McGrath growled. "Okay—so it looks as if he's holding Spade as a hostage against the

safety of Mrs. Cooper. Some people might say that's not such a bad idea. It might not be, either, if that was all the Black Bat wanted. But I always said he'd turn out-and-out crook some day. I've said from the start that he snatched Spade for money."

"Oh, come now," Quinn protested.

"He did, Tony. Now I can prove it. Because tonight he broke into a mighty well-hidden gambling joint where plenty of cash is kept in the safe. He held one of the two watchmen under his gun, stepped up to the safe and opened it by using the combination."

"Well, how does that prove your theory?" Quinn wanted to know.

"Theory? You call it a theory? Listen—there were only two people who knew the combo of that vault, and Spade was one of them. Get it now? The Black Bat is making him talk, tell about places where he can get a good haul. Not only that, but he went hunting for documents he could use for blackmail. But he made a little slip."

"Go on," Quinn said, and added, in all honesty: "This is extremely interesting."

"He thought there was only *one* watchman, and there were two. The second one shot it out with him and got killed. The first one who had already looked down the muzzle of the Black Bat's gun, was smarter. He ran for it. But first he managed to call us. We got there before the shooting stopped."

"And you learned all this from the surviving watchman?" Quinn said quickly.

"And from the one who died. He was still alive when we got there. Besides, the Black Bat had put one of those blasted stickers of his on the dying man's forehead. Well, he branded his last kill, Tony. He's as bad—or worse—than the rottenest murderer I've ever come up against."

"Amazing," Quinn said softly. "But Mac, you must be certain it couldn't have been me. Silk and I have been working. You know how Silk looks up the law for me, reads it, and I try to put it to use. I couldn't sleep tonight. I

was too worried about Doreen Cooper. Silk heard me get up and admitted he wasn't sleepy, so we both came down—"

"Tony," McGrath warned, "I'm going to check on that."

"Why not? Though I don't see how you can, because only Silk and I were here."

"I've got ways," McGrath said mysteriously. "Remember—the Black Bat is all done. Washed up. He won't get away next time."

"I can hardly believe all this," Quinn sighed. "The Black Bat has worked with both of us in the past and in my opinion he's always been on our side. But then, what am I worrying about? Just because you think I'm the Black Bat doesn't place me in his dangerous position."

McGrath pulled down the brim of his hat.

"Good night!" he said sourly, and stalked out.

CHAPTER XII

The Growing Pressure



NO sooner had McGrath stamped out of the house than Silk came back and raised one shade a bit. Then he and Quinn went back to their law books. Once Quinn glanced out of the window overlooking the street and saw McGrath in conversation with three men. Finally the inspector got into his car and drove off. The three men faded out of sight.

"He just checked with those detectives he has posted around the house," Quinn said to Silk.

"Good," Silk approved. "I hoped he would."

"Now suppose you brief me on what actually happened," Quinn urged. "I know you must have put on one of my spare outfits and drawn the police away from that building, but how did you know where I was and what to do?"

Silk chuckled. "You had Carol call me

to see if I'd heard from Butch. Well, she was worried about you heading into trouble so she asked me to tune in on police radio calls, which I did. She also told me the address where you had been sent by that columnist, Jim Moody."

"Go on, Silk," Quinn urged.

"Well, I began picking up McGrath's radio orders to close in on that building and I knew why. Somebody had sprung a trap on you. I got out of bed, put on a robe and picked up one of your canes. I walked like a blind man and made sure I passed the windows slowly so those dicks outside would see my shadow outlined against the window shades. I guess they did."

"You put it over, Silk. And you got me out of the most serious predicament I've ever been in."

"But Carol helped, sir. She told me not to use the garden gate, or one of your cars."

"Oh?" Quinn's eyebrows raised. "How did you draw McGrath's men away from that building then? You must have had a car, Silk."

Silk grinned a little and rubbed his chin. "Well you see, sir, with the police working against us so strenuously, I figured all rules were off and—well, I was a pretty good crook in my day, so I just swiped a car."

Quinn laughed. "I guess there wasn't much else you could do. But how did you draw them off, get away and return here before McGrath arrived?"

"I was close enough to the scene," Silk said, "to hear McGrath giving his orders over that loud speaker. When I thought the right moment had arrived, I parked the car, got out and entered an alley. There I put on the Black Bat regalia over my own clothes. When I was ready, police cars were still coming from all sections of town, so I simply let a couple of policemen see me. I gave them a good chase for a little while and I knew they'd call for a lot of help. Then I lost them, left the car where it wouldn't be found for some time, and took a taxi home, sir. Of course I didn't come straight here. I left the taxi a few blocks away from the house."

"You took a lot of chances, Silk," said Quinn. "And I know the situation called for them. I want you to know I appreciate what you did."

"It was fun," Silk said, grinning. "Kind of like old times." He added hastily, "Not that I want to go back to those days."

"Well," Quinn said, "as I see it right now, we're worse off than ever. Jim Moody had a gun, Silk, and he admitted he would have tried to hold me. What I don't understand is why the police weren't there. They must have read Moody's invitation to the Black Bat."

Silk nodded. "I was wondering the same thing. Perhaps Moody might talk—if you saw him again."

"I intend to," Quinn grunted. "He could be innocent, of course. But that trap had one purpose, Silk—to discredit the Black Bat and make it seem as if he had hijacked Spade Vernon for more reasons than simply to make him tell where Doreen Cooper is held—or to use him as a hostage for her security."

"I know. I heard McGrath tell how Spade must have been forced to reveal the combination of the gambling house safe so the Black Bat could rob it. You know, sir, this is beginning to take some kind of definite shape."

"Go on, Silk. I'm interested in your theories."

"It begins to look as if somebody is as anxious to discredit the Black Bat as to kill him, or even free Spade Vernon."

QUINN settled deeper in his chair. "We think alike, Silk," he said mildly. "My opinion is that some terrific pressure is going to be exerted—and soon. If they had wanted the Black Bat just to work over him so they could find Spade, that trap would have been set with a lot more than two watchmen. As it looks now, there wasn't even a trap."

"You *did* kill one of the watchmen?" Silk asked.

"Yes, I had to, or he'd have killed me. Those men were more than plain watchmen, Silk, especially the one who told

McGrath the Black Bat held him at gun point and looted the safe. I also intend to pay that watchman a visit soon. Maybe he'll tell the truth—and tell who put him up to that fairy tale."

Before long Quinn would be due at his office. He needed rest, so he stayed in the chair, dozing and thinking, until Silk called him for breakfast.

As he ate, Silk read to him the editorials and stories in the morning newspapers. All were beginning to swing toward the opinions of Allan Lang's *Sphere*—that Tony Quinn possibly couldn't handle a case of this kind. What was more, they were unanimously insisting that the police do something drastic about the Black Bat. The story of his supposed raid and robbery of the pool hall gambling room the night before was fully exploited.

When Quinn and Silk reached the office at nine-thirty, they found Byron Chanlor nervously waiting for them. Quinn asked the little bookkeeper to come into the private office. Chanlor began talking the moment the door closed.

"There was another phone call at six-thirty this morning," he said. "The same man, I—I think. Anyway he told me to come and see you again, Mr. Quinn."

"What does he want this time?"

Quinn had sat down behind the desk. Silk went into the next room to sort the mail.

"He said I was to tell you that nothing has changed except he wants faster action. He says you've got to capture the Black Bat."

Chanlor walked softly toward the desk as he spoke. Nearing it, he extended his right arm. The forefinger pointed straight at Quinn's blank-looking eyes and Chanlor slowly moved it closer and closer until it seemed he was intent on poking out one of those blind eyes. He kept talking.

"Just because the Black Bat has got Spade Vernon doesn't mean a thing. That's what this man told me to tell you. He says you got twenty-four hours now to produce the Black Bat and take the hood off his head."

Quinn hardly heard the threat. That finger was within an inch or two of his right eye and moving all the time. Quinn had been put to severe tests of his eyesight before, but this one was the most disconcerting of all. He wanted to close his eyes against that advancing finger, but if he so much as flicked an eyelash, Chanlor would be able to guess that he could see.

"Silk!" Quinn called.

Like a flash, Chanlor pulled his arm back and retreated from the edge of the desk.

Silk had recognized a note of urgency in Quinn's voice and came instantly into the room.

"Silk," Quinn said, "was there anything in this morning's mail about the Vernon case? Any threatening letters? Or possibly, is there a letter from Mrs. Cooper?"

"No, sir," Silk said.

"Thank you."

Quinn was more relaxed now. Chanlor fiddled with his hat and looked as if he wanted to get out of there.

"That—that's all, Mr. Quinn," Chanlor said. "I wish there was something more I could do."

"You happen to be one of the most important links in this case," Quinn told him. "Just let me know immediately if there are any other messages."

CHANLOR nodded and got out of there fast. When the door closed on him, Quinn yanked a handkerchief from his pocket and mopped his moist face.

"Our retiring, shy little friend is something more than he appears to be," he told Silk. "A moment ago he was shoving a finger at my eye, trying to make me react. Byron Chanlor, for some reason, doesn't think I'm blind."

Silk's features went grim. "Maybe he ought to be taken care of, sir. There are ways."

"No—not yet. He interests me, even if he does put me in a cold sweat. And we happen to need him. I'm also wondering if he thinks I'm the Black Bat, and if he does, where he got the idea."

"There's another headache waiting for you," Silk said. "They called me in the other office. Allan Lang, the publisher of that newspaper which demands your resignation is outside. Shall I send him away?"

"Why, of course not, Silk. Let the man in. He's a taxpayer and he has a right to criticize all he wants."

Silk wasn't convinced, but he went out to summon Allan Lang. The publisher walked slowly into the office. He was a big man in his early fifties, with that special assurance and manner that comes of long association with plenty of money.

He was bushy-haired, and wore a frown that he seemed to have been born with, it was so deeply etched.

LANG sat down precisely, but occupied only the edge of the chair. He put his Homburg on the corner of Quinn's desk and leaned forward slightly.

"I'm glad to see you again, Mr. Quinn," he said. "But don't tell me you're glad to see me. I've been riding you."

Quinn chuckled.

"So I understand, Mr. Lang. You don't seem to think I'm doing a satisfactory job."

Lang heaved a long sigh. "I think you're capable of being the best district attorney this state has ever seen—if you were in possession of your sight."

"You have plenty of company with that idea," Quinn said, without rancor.

"Personally," Lang went on, "I believe you're completely trustworthy. I respect you for what you have done. I backed you years ago, when you could see. I know that the loss of your sight occurred in line of duty. I'm taking all these things into full consideration, and I want you to know it."

"Consideration for what?" Quinn asked.

"Please let me finish," Lang implored. "This job is difficult enough as it is. . . . Mr. Quinn, you asked Inspector McGrath to transport Spade Vernon to your office."

CHAPTER XIII

The Threat of Silence

"I did," Quinn admitted.

"Only you and McGrath knew this was to be done. Will you grant me that?"

"Yes—because it's true. . . . Look here—you're not insinuating that I sold out to the Black Bat, are you?"

"No, no!" Lang waved his hand in emphasis. "I do mean, however, that someone found out. And the only way that was possible was by watching you, staying close to you. If you were not blind, this might not have happened. But outwitting a blind man is relatively simple."

Quinn nodded slowly. "I see. My infirmity makes me incapable of safely handling my job."

"In so many words—yes. Quinn, I hate to ride a blind man—any man. Especially one with your record. But, I also have a duty to my readers, to this city and state. My suggestion is that you resign."

"Your suggestion, or your order, Mr. Lang?" Quinn asked.

Lang flushed slightly. "Quinn, I'm giving you a chance. Right now you're at the top. If you quit, it will be with honor. If you don't, I'll drive you out of office."

"Mmm," Quinn mused. "You could do it, too. If I permitted it."

"If you—" Lang jumped to his feet angrily.

"Yes, Mr. Lang. I'm not quitting. I'll get Spade Vernon back, I'll do my utmost to see that Mrs. Cooper is unharmed, and I'll send up Deke Vernon for kidnaping."

"All right," Lang said. "I warned you, Quinn. And you're not the only one. This city's Police Department has been inefficient long enough. I might even say stupid. I'm going after your scalp and that of Inspector McGrath and the police commissioner. I won't pull any punches. The fact that you're blind will make no difference to me. In fact, I intend to dwell considerably on that fact."

"Thank you for warning me," Quinn said quietly. "At least I'll know what's coming."



ES COOPER was announced in midafternoon. Quinn had him sent in at once. Cooper was waving a letter as he approached Quinn's desk.

"I've heard from Doreen again!" he explained. "A letter in this afternoon's mail."

"I hope it contained good news," Quinn said.

"Mr. Quinn," Cooper said, "this is getting worse. Doreen says she is still being treated all right, that there is a young woman who stays with her and sees that she has everything she wants. She says she finds it hard to believe that she is being held by kidnapers and murderers, and that all this girl talks about is how she would do anything for Deke."

"Your wife actually wrote that?" Quinn marvelled.

"Why, yes. I—I suppose it was just meant to show me that she isn't in any danger."

"Yes," Quinn replied. "And that's why Deke let it go through. What else does it say?"

Cooper groaned. "The bad part comes next. I'm to tell you that unless you have Spade Vernon safely back in twenty-four hours, they—they'll kill Doreen!"

"Pressure again," Quinn said grimly. "Is that all she said, Mr. Cooper?"

"All? Isn't it enough? How can you get Spade back? You've got to! You must!"

"I know," Quinn soothed him. "And your wife is doing a great deal to help me."

"Doreen? But how. I don't see—"

"You'll learn about that some other time," Quinn said. "I'll try to find the Black Bat, somehow. We're not finished yet."

"I don't know," Cooper said doubtfully. "Mr. Quinn, I hate to tell you this,

but all the talk I hear is that you ought to quit. You and everybody else responsible for what's happened."

Quinn's features clouded. "So it's already becoming gossip," he said dully. "Thanks, Mr. Cooper. But right now I want you to go home and stay there. Notify me at once if you hear anything else."

Cooper left, every move he made showing that he was far from satisfied. Silk came into the room as Cooper closed the door from the outside. Silk looked as worried as Cooper had.

"Silk," Quinn said at once, "they're beginning to push us from all directions. Twenty-four hours—tomorrow afternoon, they say, and they'll kill Doreen, unless Spade is back in a cell."

"I heard," Silk said. "First it came from that mousy Chanlor, now from Cooper. But how can we do anything about it?"

"We can always turn Spade over for Doreen Cooper. If it comes to that we will, but first I've a couple of cards to play. Get hold of Carol and have her be at the corner near her home around five o'clock."

"Yes, sir," Silk said.

Quinn smiled a little. "Mrs. Cooper pulled a fast one on Deke," he said. "To make her husband be assured she is well treated and that Deke will probably keep his word to let her go, she brought out the fact that Deke's girl friend is helping guard her."

Silk whistled sharply. "Then if we could find *her*—"

"Exactly," Quinn said. "That's what I want Carol to do, if she can. Deke took good care to hide himself, but I wonder if he took the same precautions with his girl friend. You might see if you can dig up anything from Deke's record where a girl is concerned."

"Right away," Silk promised. "But it's an awful long shot, and no time. We've only got until tomorrow afternoon."

"I know, Silk, but we'll be working on this, too. I'm going to pass the word around that I'll be walking around town, sitting in a parked car at different sec-

tions, all so that Deke will be able to find me alone. That way we won't have to explain to McGrath why I'm not home, because I won't be. It looks as if we might have a busy night, Silk."

BY the time it was dark, Silk had accomplished certain preparations he had discussed with the special district attorney. He drove Quinn around the center of the city for a while. Quinn even got out and walked alone down a few busy streets. But by shortly after seven, Silk had driven in a roundabout way to a quiet side road on the outskirts and there the Black Bat's coupé was waiting.

"Carol parked it here," Silk explained. "And she reported that she's had a little success in checking on Deke's girl friend. He has several, but when she finds the one who hasn't been around for the last day or two, she may have her lead."

"Fine," Quinn said. "Did you discover where that gambling house watchman lives?"

"Yes. In a cheap hotel downtown. Are you going to see him?"

"That's my first stop—if there is a back way into the place. That watchman lied, Silk, and I want to know why. . . . By the way, how bad were the evening papers?"

"Plenty," Silk said. "They're after McGrath and the commissioner now. There's a lot of talk that the Department needs revamping and that somebody like Allan Lang ought to take it over."

"Lang?" Quinn cried, surprise in his voice.

"That columnist, Jim Moody, suggested it, sir. And Moody took his whole column to write about his meeting with the Black Bat. He says he was slugged without provocation and almost died in a cabinet where you locked him in. He wasn't found until this morning, when the housekeeper showed up."

"I see," Quinn mused. "That's interesting, but it has little to do with our finding Doreen Cooper. . . . Keep an eye out, Silk. I'm going to change into

the Black Bat's outfit. . . ."

The name on a card tacked below the bell said "Mart Rhodes." The Black Bat, alone in the narrow, poorly lighted hallway of the cheap hotel, lightly pressed an ear against the panel of the door.

He could hear someone moving about inside the room.

He walked noiselessly down the hall and removed the weak electric light bulb from its socket. There were no other lights, so the corridor was promptly darkened. He returned to the door, listened again, and heard bedsprings squeak.

He saw light through the keyhole, but suddenly this winked out. Then the Black Bat took his kit of burglar tools from his pocket and selected a pair of extra thin pliers. These he fitted into the old-fashioned lock and grasped the key on the inside of the door. He turned it slowly, making no noise at all. When the bolt slid all the way back, he withdrew the pliers, pulled a gun from its holster and grasped the knob hard.

He turned it until the door opened under his pressure.

It stayed open only long enough to let him slip inside.

His eyes penetrated the darkness in the room. That watchman who had done his best to kill him the night before was lying in bed. He had heard no sound except the slight clicking the knob had made when the Black Bat closed the door.

But that had made the watchman slowly push himself up on one elbow and listen.

When he still heard nothing more, he reached for the table lamp beside the bed. But it didn't seem to be there. Breathing hard he swept the bare surface of the table with his hand. Then he swung his feet off the bed. That was when he felt the cold muzzle of a gun poked against his neck.

"Who—who is it?" he choked.

There was no answer. He moistened his lips, bared his teeth in a grimace of fear, but he didn't move. The gun still rested firmly against his neck.

"L-look—what do you want?" he croaked. "How'd you get in here? What's the big idea, huh?"

Silence still answered him. He found his lips dry again.

"Why don't you answer me?" he implored, and his voice quavered as much as his hand. "What do you want?"

THE silence was far worse than threats or commands. The watchman gave a bleat of terror. He had to do something. He planted his feet on the floor, braced himself and slowly arose. The gun didn't seem to follow him.

He tried to peer through the darkness, but it was impossible. He tottered over to a chair and fell into it.

"You're making a mistake," he said. "I ain't got any dough. Yeah—a mistake. Tell me what you want. Talk, or I'm going to do plenty of hollering myself!"

But he knew he wouldn't. That man in the darkness hadn't moved. It wasn't necessary, because the watchman knew he could send a bullet flying faster than any man could ever make a dive for the door.

The fellow was sweating profusely, cursing himself for having pulled down the window shade. If there was only a little light, he might see who this was. But then, he thought, if he couldn't see this man with the gun, how could he himself be seen?

He lifted one foot and placed it firmly on the floor. Then he got the other foot planted and pushed himself to a standing position. He took a couple of experimental steps in his bare feet, and turned toward the door.

If he could reach it, get the door open, that gunman wouldn't dare shoot.

Nothing happened. He prayed the floor wouldn't squeak under his weight, took several more steps and guessed he could find the knob with some fumbling.

He had to do it right—and fast. His life depended on it.

He reached out one hand, moving it

slowly, feeling for the knob. His fingers touched something. He tried again. The gunman was standing in front of him. He exhaled sharply. His hand moved upward. He knew what he would find, and he dreaded it. He felt a shoulder, followed the contour of it. Then, where the neck and the face should have been, he felt smooth cloth. That was when he screamed.

A gloved hand promptly covered his mouth before the scream grew to more than a gurgle. He was lifted, carried across the room and thrown onto the bed.

"No!" he begged when the hand was removed from his lips. "No—don't kill me. I had to do it. I tell you I *had* to do it!"

Still there was no reply, but he knew that a hooded man stood there in the darkness and that the gun was ready. The truth burst from his lips in a torrent.

"Deke made me do it. Honest! He said I was to tell Joey, the guy you knocked off, that you'd been there before and opened the vault. Joey was out. It was his lunch hour. I told him to keep his eyes and ears open. Then you came in. I called the cops. Joey tried to get you. I—I didn't mean to shoot. I—I didn't want to kill you, but I was scared. I was scared, I tell you! I had to shoot. You believe me, don't you?"

Only that same terrorizing silence answered him.

"That wasn't the story I told the cops," the watchman hurried on, "but I'll tell them different. I'll tell them the truth. Don't kill me! Please! I ain't nobody. I had to do like I was told. You gotta believe that!"

He fell over onto the bed and buried his face in the pillow. How long he stayed he wasn't sure, but when he lifted his head again he saw a faint light beneath his door. He sat up quickly. That light hadn't been there before. He reached toward the table. The lamp was on it again. He took a long breath and snapped the switch.

Then he emitted a low groan. There was no one in the room. He jumped up

and sprang to the door, turning the knob. The door was locked, the key was on the inside. He staggered back to the chair and sat down heavily.

It could have been a dream. All except that hooded face—and that gun muzzle which had rested against his neck. It *could* have been a dream. He told himself that a dozen times. He was still telling himself that a little later when he bought a bus ticket for some place a thousand miles away. He wasn't sure just where—the name of the town had tumbled from his lips. He didn't care, so long as it was far away.

He never noticed the slim, thin-faced man who stood behind him as he bought the ticket and who promptly stepped out of line without making a purchase himself.

CHAPTER XIV

Indelible Brand



BYRON CHANLOR lived in two small rooms in a rooming house of good type. He had the best quarters in the place and got the most attention from his landlady, because he always paid his rent promptly. He liked living there where nobody bothered him,

and he was a big shot. Other roomers said, "Hello" to him, with respect in their voices.

But right now Byron Chanlor was wondering if maybe he wouldn't like to move to a better place, after all. The idea had come with the three one-hundred-dollar bills he had received in payment for acting as a go-between for Deke Vernon with Tony Quinn. He'd had the bills changed to fives and they made an interesting stack as he counted them for the tenth time. If this kept on, he decided, he might soon have a tidy sum tucked away. Maybe enough to make that attractive girl who had moved into the next room look at him twice.

He knew her name already. Lila Ben-

net. She was auburn-haired, green-eyed, built with curves, and she had class. Chanlor had never known a girl like her. She didn't talk much about herself, but she showed her interest in him by all the questions she asked. He had taken her to dinner, and to a better place than he usually frequented and let her see that roll of bills when he paid the check. They had made quite an impression.

When someone knocked gently on the door, he was certain it must be Lila. He gathered up the money, stuffed it into his pocket and took time to slick his sparse hair down a little. Then he opened the door.

The hallway was mysteriously darkened, but he had a glimpse of a man all in black, with his head sheathed in a black hood. Only a glimpse, for one gloved hand shot out and hit Chanlor squarely on the chest. He went hurtling backward, stumbled over a chair and fell. As he hit the floor, the lights winked out.

"All right," the Black Bat said. "Get up. Pick up the chair and sit down in it."

"Yes, sir—yes, sir." Chanlor obeyed quickly. "I—I know who you are. You're the Black Bat. I want to help you if I can."

"I'm sure you do," the Black Bat said. "And I'll tell you exactly how you can."

Chanlor gulped. It was time to put a certain plan of his own into execution. But now that the time had arrived, he wasn't sure if he had the nerve to carry it through or not.

"I'll do anything I can," he offered again helpfully.

"You have never seen any of the people who gave you messages for Tony Quinn?" the Black Bat asked.

"Oh no—not a sign. But I expect I'll be wanted again soon now."

"Good," the Black Bat said. "Then this is what you must do. Tell whoever talks to you that I am willing to make a trade. Spade Vernon for Doreen Cooper."

"All right," Chanlor said. "I'll tell them that."

"I'll have Spade Vernon in Myrtle Park—you know, that big public playground park near the outskirts of town. Few people ever go there at night. Tell them to bring Doreen Cooper to the statue of John Paul Jones, in the center of the park. I'll be there about midnight. Is that clear?"

"I'll remember every word of it," Chanlor promised.

"There's one more thing," the Black Bat said. "You are not to tell Tony Quinn about this, nor the police."

"I won't! I promise!"

"If the police should show up," the Black Bat went on, "I'm afraid I'd have to pay you another visit and you won't like it, Mr. Chanlor."

"I—I'll say nothing to—to anyone," Chanlor vowed. "And I've got something for you. Maybe it will help. You see, one of the ways of getting me to do what they wanted was by putting a message in a box of breakfast cereal I was told to purchase. I kept the box. I thought maybe there might be fingerprints on it or—or something. I'll get it for you right away. Won't take a second."

Chanlor walked briskly to his kitchenette, climbed onto a chair and opened a cabinet door. The box he wanted was on the top shelf. He reached for it, knowing its exact locataion. But before he picked up the container, he moved his hand beyond it a little and brought his thumb down on an ink pad. He knew his thumb was well coated with the indelible ink he had taken from the office. He also knew how difficult that ink was to remove.

CHANLOR started to climb down. His foot slipped and he toppled. The Black Bat automatically reached up to steady him. Chanlor dropped the box of oatmeal and floundered about on the edge of the chair until he slid off it.

Chanlor's hand gripped the Black Bat's wrist, slid up along the arm until he felt warm flesh. He squeezed his thumb hard against the skin, then he straightened up and murmured apolo-

gies. He picked up the cereal container.

The Black Bat took it, studied the box in the darkness and knew the glazed paper surface would hardly retain prints. Besides, any number of people could have handled it. He placed the box on the table, backed out of the kitchenette and closed the door.

By the time Chanlor got it open, there was nobody in the apartment. Chanlor turned on the lights, looked at his ink-smeared thumb and grinned in satisfaction. Maybe nobody else could trap the Black Bat, but he could. And if it worked, his cleverness would be publicized all over the county. Lila Bennett would go for him then all right.

Meanwhile the Black Bat left the rooming house by the rear, waited in the doorway a few moments and tried to puzzle out Byron Chanlor. Somehow this little man with his shy ways and inoffensive manner was importantly involved and not just as a go-between. Moreover, his act of pretending to fall off that chair had a meaning the Black Bat couldn't fathom. Chanlor, he felt sure, was far more important to this case than he seemed to be. For one thing, the man had actually tried to determine whether or not Tony Quinn really was blind.

Silk, driving the coupé, swung around the corner and slowly cruised down the street. He slowed up when he saw the dark form flit from the doorway. The Black Bat jumped into the car and quickly put on the wide-brimmed hat. Silk drove out of the neighborhood as quickly as possible.

"Well," the Black Bat said, "I set up the meeting to exchange hostages."

Silk wagged his head solemnly. "I can't help but think, sir, that it's a gesture of defeat on your part, and that's never happened before."

"I know," the Black Bat admitted. "But I don't care what I have to do as long as I can save Doreen Cooper."

"But are you sure Deke Vernon won't doublecross you?" Silk asked.

"I'm certain he'll try, Silk. But in trying he has to come into the open, and he must leave some sort of a trail. I'll

promise you this—if I don't get Doreen, Deke isn't going to get his brother."

Silk rolled into an express highway. "Well, we'll soon have Spade ready for the transfer."

The Black Bat nodded thoughtfully. "Silk, I don't want Spade to see you. That means you'll have to stay strictly out of this. Pull off the speedway and drive back to where you left the sedan. I'll take the coupé and collect Spade. You drive around town. Keep on the move and don't go near the house."

Silk didn't like the idea, but he recognized the wisdom of it. He did as ordered and soon the Black Bat was heading out of the city toward the lake. His mind kept going over this bizarre affair. From the beginning, when Les Cooper had witnessed a murder, to the present moment where terrific pressure was being built up against both Tony Quinn and the Black Bat.

Now, it seemed, Allan Lang was going even further and demanding that Inspector McGrath be dismissed for his laxity in allowing Spade Vernon's kidnapping by the Black Bat. More than that, Lang seemed intent on cleaning out the Police Department, from the commissioner right on down. This had turned into a reform campaign. Jim Moody, with his influential column, was even suggesting Allan Lang as a new and more efficient police commissioner.

THE murder and the two kidnappings had already moved into the background, and the whole affair had become a debate as to whether or not the police were on their toes and able to cope with crime. This wasn't the first time the Black Bat had seen a reform movement begin, but not with all the pressure and influence that was being exerted now.

The manner by which the Black Bat was being discredited added another mystery. They had even sacrificed the chance to capture or kill him, preferring to set up circumstances which would defame him as a wanton killer and thief.

His shooting of the watchman was

something he could clear up if it ever became necessary. He had frightened the second watchman into admitting he had lied, and had sent him fleeing out of the city away from the Black Bat's vengeance. He knew where that watchman was, too. Silk had seen to that.

The Black Bat turned into the lake road, proceeded along it and finally came to a stop near the cabin garage. Butch materialized out of the darkness, prepared to do battle.

"Hello, Butch." The Black Bat climbed out of the car. "Is everything all right?"

"Sure, except I'm getting bored stiff," Butch replied. "Heck, I don't even know what's happening."

"There's plenty going on—and none of it good," the Black Bat told him. "Don't worry about the action. You're going to get that right now. I've made an appointment to swap Spade for Doreen Cooper."

"Hey!" Butch protested seriously. "That means you're licked."

"Well, perhaps I am, for the moment," the Black Bat admitted. "They set a twenty-four hour deadline, with Doreen's life hanging in the balance."

"I see," Butch said morosely. "There ain't much else you can do. Okay—I'll get Spade."

"We've plenty of time," the Black Bat said. "The appointment isn't until midnight. And Carol is working on it. I want to give her a little more time. Get into the car, Butch, and I'll brief you on everything that has happened up to now. A great deal depends on what Carol finds out—and soon. . . ."

Carol Baldwin, however, was not making swift progress. She was plodding ahead, but only slowly. By means of the records on Deke Vernon in the laboratory files at Tony Quinn's home, she had determined that Deke had several girl friends. She had found one newspaper clipping of five months before which indicated that he had been in a café brawl over some show girl, but her name had not been used, and the story seemed to have been dropped.

Carol didn't have Tony Quinn to rely

upon for guidance. The whole investigation was hers to handle alone—and she knew a girl's life depended on the success of her efforts.

Carol had learned a great deal in her years with the Black Bat, though, and she put this experience to use. First, she set up a camera in the lab to take her own picture. She developed this, dried the negative in a hurry and made a copy of a stock picture of Deke Vernon which was in the Black Bat's files.

By superimposition she created one photo of the two pictures. It showed a head and shoulders shot of herself and Deke Vernon as if the picture had been taken of them together. All this took more time than she liked to spend and it was time for dinner by the time she succeeded in slipping out of the lab without being spotted by any of Inspector McGrath's men.

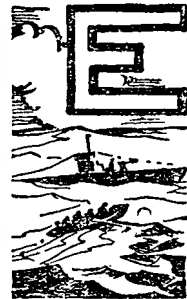
She drove her own car to the vicinity of the café where Deke had been in a fight over a girl, according to the newspaper clipping. Carol parked, applied makeup repairs and added more rouge and lipstick than she usually used, before heading for the showy entrance.

The café was a plush place, but not yet going full blast for the evening. Carol asked the headwaiter whom she should see about a job. He gave her a professional scrutiny. Seeming to like what he saw, he escorted her to an office marked "Private."

Carol's lone-hand struggle had begun.

CHAPTER XV

Showgirl



ENTERING the office a little timidly, Carol was introduced to a slim, nervous man who said his name was Mallory. He gave her a careful look and motioned to a chair.

"I'll tell you, honey," he said in a too familiar tone, "right now there's nothing doing here, but pret-

ty soon I expect one of the girls to give notice. It's a show girl part. How about that?"

Carol nodded eagerly. "That's exactly what I'm looking for, Mr. Mallory. You see, I'm not so much interested in the salary, but I want to work because I—well, I'm searching for someone."

"Now hold on," Mallory said quickly. "It's a man, isn't it?"

"My husband," Carol said. "He ran out on me. But he likes places like this. He likes girl shows. I thought if I got a job here, he'd eventually drift in. . . ."

"Nothing doing," Mallory growled. "I'm not sticking my neck out, getting mixed up in anything like that. Next thing I know the guy will walk in and you'll maybe cut him down with one of them pearl-handled automatics they always show a picture of in the newspapers. Along with the X marks the spot photo. . . . So long, baby."

Carol was wide-eyed. "But I have no intention of doing such a thing, Mr. Mallory."

"Maybe you haven't," Mallory countered. "But if that don't happen, the guy will maybe show up and wipe the floor with you. With me, too. I know those kind of dopes. He must be a sap to walk out on a doll like you."

"I'm sure he wouldn't do that either, Mr. Mallory," Carol said. "Now I have some professional shots in my purse. I—well, I used to be a show girl before. That was how Deke met me."

As she spoke, she opened her purse and dumped half the contents onto the desk. Among the items that slid out was the picture of Deke and herself. Mallory saw it and blinked a few times. The photo was no masterpiece and wouldn't stand a careful inspection, but it had served its purpose so Carol crammed it back into her purse.

"Look, honey, never mind," Mallory said. "I told you there's no opening right now. Leave your name and address. Soon as I get a spot, you'll be the girl to get it."

"Oh thank you!" Carol gave him a dazzling smile. "I'm sure I'll fit into your awfully nice club. And you don't have

to worry about my husband."

"Yeah?" Mallory grunted. "Where'd you meet a heel like him?"

Carol was ready for that one too. "In Miami—a year and a half ago. It was one of those sweep-you-off-your-feet courtships. What a heel he turned out to be! But I shouldn't bother you with my troubles. Thanks for seeing me, and giving me a chance."

"Think nothing of it," Mallory said. "Nothing at all."

Carol walked to the door, dazzled him again with one of those smiles and then went out. She didn't quite close the door. There was nobody in the corridor so she merely put her back against the wall beside the door and listened. In something less than ten seconds, Mallory was dialing.

She heard his voice plainly. "Hello. Look, I've got to talk to Lila Bennett—it's important. Sure I'll wait."

Carol made a mental note of the name. The wait was rather lengthy and every moment she spent in that corridor was risky, but she couldn't leave. Then Mallory gave a groan of despair.

"You're sure she's not in her room?" he said, "When did you see her last? Yesterday? Yeah, yeah—I know where she works. She works for me, and she didn't show up here either. Thanks. Just leave word she's to call me the second she gets home."

Carol got out of there fast. She found a side exit, and came out on a cross street. Then she walked around the corner to the front of the place. It was equipped with photos of the various girls in the show and Lila Bennett seemed to be the star.

THE doorman gave her an appraising glance and she smiled at him.

"Did you notice Lila come in yet?" she asked.

"Lila Bennett? Nope, she ain't showed up in the last couple days. The boss is kinda sore about it, too."

"He's so sore he hired me to take her place," Carol confided. "But I'm not anxious to sign if Lila is coming back. Maybe if I could talk to her—"

"Look, baby," the doorman said softly, "you keep outa Lila's hair. She's got a boy friend with influence, and you can spell that in lights."

Carol looked downcast. "That's what I was afraid of. I've simply got to see Lila and ask her if it's all right. Maybe she's gone and married this boy friend of hers or something."

"Well," the doorman said, "I can tell you where she lives if that'll help. I heard her tell the cab driver. Funny too, because she moved from a pretty classy joint to this rooming house. Eighteen-twenty-five Tremont Avenue. Yeah, that's the address."

Carol handed him a folded bill. "I'm grateful," she said. "Don't tell Mr. Malory what I'm going to do. If I get the job, if Lila says it's okay, I'll give you another ten spot."

"I never even saw you," the doorman said, and smirked at her.

So far, things were going well. Lila Bennett was Deke's girl all right. She'd just changed her address, and Carol wondered about that. She hadn't shown up in a couple of days, which checked with the fact that she must be the one who was helping guard Doreen Cooper. At least the identification of Deke's girl friend was accomplished, though that didn't help much in determining where she—and Doreen Cooper—were right now.

Carol drove to the Tremont Avenue address and parked nearby. She walked boldly up to the rooming house door. It was a big place and the door wasn't kept locked. She entered, saw no one about and spotted the mail slots. Lila Bennett's name was there, but as Carol began to turn away she saw the name of Byron Chanlor. It struck a responsive chord in her memory. The name was unusual. . . .

Then she knew! Byron Chanlor was the shy, self-effacing go-between whom the Black Bat didn't trust. Lila's room was Number 23, Chanlor's 25. Apparently they lived next door to one another. That might be the reason Lila had so recently moved to this place from much more luxurious quarters.

Carol walked blandly up the stairs, located Number 23 and saw that there was no key in the old-fashioned lock. She always carried a set of skelton keys with which Quinn had provided her, and she tried two of them without success. The third slid the bolt back. She looked around for a few seconds, then walked into the room.

It was a rather weird place. Lila had not brought many clothes with her. A suitcase hadn't even been completely unpacked. Carol checked the clothes closet—empty. She opened bureau drawers. They held only a few essential articles of clothing. The bottom drawer was locked. Intrigued, Carol examined the lock and as she did she noticed a fairly heavy rubber cable leading from beneath the bureau over under the cot which served as a bed. She followed the wire and moved the cot to see where it terminated.

There was some sort of a flat disc held to the wall by strips of adhesive. Carol whistled softly. That was a highly sensitive mike, capable of picking up anything said right through the wall. And Byron Chanlor lived next door!

It would be a recording apparatus without question, set to begin operation when anyone spoke or made a noise next door. Carol pulled the bureau away from the wall. The entire thin back of it had been pried away so the bottom could be lifted out while the still nailed top acted as a hinge.

The cable led into the bottom drawer. Carol pulled the back away sufficiently to find the tape recorder. She was fairly familiar with these devices and this one could play back the tape. Carol went to work on it. She rewound the used tape, turned the switch to the playback, and listened while her heart pounded so hard it almost drowned out the words.

"All right, Chanlor," someone said, "you're doing fine so far. But how about that trick I told you about?"

"Look," a thinner voice, which must be Chanlor's, replied. "The Black Bat showed up, just as you said he would, and I did exactly as you told me. I inked my thumb on a pad of indelible

ink I had hidden in the pantry. I pretended to fall off the chair I was standing on and the Black Bat grabbed me. I pushed up his sleeve and I pressed the inked finger against his wrist—high up. Oh, he's branded all right."

CAROL tried desperately to place the voice that started talking again. "Okay," it said. "If this works, you'll get your money. The Black Bat is branded and he hasn't any idea it's happened. There's a good chance he won't see that ink mark, or pay much attention to it if he does. But if I see it, on the arm of a man I suspect—"

"Do you mean Quinn?" Chanlor asked. "You must be wrong. I tested him and he's blind. He's blind as a bat."

"Yeah," the half-familiar voice rumbled. "As a bat. The Black Bat! This time I've got him!"

There was a little more, none of it important. The tape was still moving, but nothing was registered on it. Carol shut off the machine. She had to reach Quinn fast. She had to—before he removed his Black Bat regalia and this other man came to him and spotted the ink brand on Tony Quinn.

Carol noticed that there were half a dozen spare rolls of tape. She removed one from its container, closed the box again. Then she rolled up the one on the machine, removed it and replaced it with the fresh spool. She pushed the bureau back, checked the furniture to see that she left no traces, then started looking over every personal possession of Lila's. For all she had done wasn't helping much in finding Doreen.

There was nothing, not even a scrap of paper. Lila had been exasperatingly careful. Carol knew she was at the end of the trail. Doreen was still in grave danger and a great peril was closing in on the Black Bat!

Carol realized that the only thing she could do now was to find Tony Quinn or Silk as fast as possible. She moved toward the door. Somewhere downstairs a phone rang several times. Carol stayed where she was. Then a woman's shrill voiced called out:

"Mr. Chanlor! Mr. Chanlor!"

Next door someone seemed to jump out of a chair and run to the door, open it and start running down the hall. The voice identified as that of Byron Chanlor on the recording tape was announcing that he was on his way.

"It's the same man who called you before," the woman—apparently the landlady—explained. "I didn't think you were home."

"Thank you," Chanlor said. "Now, if you don't mind—"

"Since when did I make a practice of listening to my roomers' phone conversations?" the woman asked indignantly, then a door slammed.

Carol quickly slipped out of the room to the stairway and looked down the steps. At the foot of them stood Byron Chanlor, nervously speaking into the wall telephone.

"Yes, yes, I understand," he was saying. "All right, I'll repeat it. In thirty minutes exactly. A doorway—Rogers' Smoke Shop at the corner of Broad and White Streets. Yes, a discarded wrinkled piece of paper rolled up. I'll find it. And—and thanks for the money."

Chanlor's voice tapered off as if the other party had hung up. Chanlor hurried back upstairs. Carol was out of sight until he closed the door of his room, then she hurried downstairs, through the front door and walked as fast as she could without attracting attention, to where she had parked her car.

In less than ten minutes she was parked across the street from the darkened store with the deep doorway, above which was a sign saying:

ROGERS' SMOKE SHOP

Carol got out of the car, walked across the street and entered the doorway. There was no rolled-up piece of discarded paper there yet. She was in time.

The messenger with another set of instructions for Byron Chanlor hadn't arrived yet.

CHAPTER XVI

Double Menace

RETURNING to her car, Carol slipped down behind the wheel so she couldn't readily be seen, and waited. Ten more minutes crawled by. Precious minutes which could mean disaster for the Black Bat. And yet Carol had to consider Doreen Cooper, too. The Black Bat would have wanted her to act exactly as she was doing.

Then she saw a man come to a halt opposite the doorway. He lit a cigarette, stood there smoking for a moment or two, but he casually turned so that he could check every direction. Then he dipped a hand into his coat pocket, took out a crumpled bit of paper and threw it into the doorway. This done he started walking away fast.

Carol left the car and followed him. If she lost him, she would lose her chance of finding Doreen. Possibly the Black Bat was already lost. She had no way of knowing when that tape had recorded the plot to expose Tony Quinn as the Black Bat. Carol's decision to see the thing through was probably the most difficult one she had ever been called upon to make.

The man exerted some caution, but it was apparent he had no idea he was being followed. He turned a corner. Carol walked right on by. The man was halfway down the block. She took the opposite side of the street, stayed near the building shadows and kept on the trail.

The man walked another half a dozen blocks before he came to an abrupt stop. Carol quietly stepped into a darkened alley. The man lit another cigarette, taking his time about it. He turned in every direction, scrutinizing the neighborhood.

Then he seemed to make up his mind. He threw away the cigarette and walked straight up to a door which he had to open with a key. Carol studied

the three-story building. This was a commercial neighborhood, where every ground floor was occupied by stores of various types, most of them cheap. There was a darkened sign on the side of the building, but she could make out the letters that spelled:

ELITE BOWLING ALLEYS
LADIES WELCOME

There were no lights on in the place. Carol weighed the advisability of invading the building and decided against it, mostly because she wanted to reach Tony Quinn or Silk. She hurried away, located a drug store in the next block and entered the phone booth there. She dialed, held her breath and heard the private wire to Quinn's lab ring again and again. There was no answer.

She deflected the hook, got back her coin and used it once more. This time she called Quinn's office. Again, there was no answer. In sheer desperation she tried the regular listed number to his home. This phone, too, remained unanswered.

Carol walked slowly out of the place. She was certainly on her own this time. There seemed nothing else to do except try to find Doreen and get her away from Deke. Carol walked back to the bowling alley. There wasn't a light in the whole building.

The door was locked and any attempt to open it might be heard. Carol realized that Doreen might be murdered if Deke knew she was on the verge of being rescued. What must be done required the greatest amount of skill, and Carol wasn't sure she possessed it.

She realized, too, how precious time was and she threw off her momentary hesitation. She made her way behind the building by means of an alley. Halfway along it, she opened her purse and extracted a small, highly potent automatic. If she had to shoot to save Doreen's life, she was fully prepared to do so.

Carol reached the back of the old building and, as she had suspected, it was provided with a fire-escape. It was an ancient affair without a weighted

ladder at the bottom. Carol put the gun back into her handbag, grasped the leather handle with her teeth and began running. She gave a leap, grabbed the bottom of the fire-escape—and slipped off.

She clattered to the hard ground, got up and scooted for the darkest place she could find. No windows opened, nobody came out to see what was going on. Apparently the noise hadn't been heard. She did a repeat and this time managed to hoist herself up on the dirty fire-escape.

AT the first landing she waited long enough to steady her nerves and get back her wind. Then she took stock. Not a window showed a trace of light. She might be on the wrong trail and the mere thought of it made her shudder.

She climbed to the second floor and tried the window there. It wouldn't budge. She went to the third floor and again her efforts to open a window were in vain. There was nothing left to do but reach the roof, and she climbed there as silently as possible.

She didn't dare risk the use of a flashlight and the darkness forced her to move slowly. She headed toward a skylight. It was tightly sealed. The glass had been painted over and if she broke it, she would only find herself trapped on the roof. There didn't seem to be a single way to turn, and she felt sure that Doreen must be in this building.

She tried to think of what the Black Bat would do under these conditions. Probably invade the place no matter how much noise he made. Carol couldn't do that. The best thing she could think of was to try and reach the Black Bat again. Keep trying until she did. And at the same time she could warn the Black Bat about that ink brand on his arm.

Carol moved toward the fire-escape again. As she prepared to crawl onto it, she heard a car motor. Headlights swept across the courtyard below. Hastily she drew back and lay flat on the rooftop,

oblivious to the dirt that smeared her clothes.

A man got out of the car, leaving the headlights burning. The lights were aimed at the wall of another building and reflected enough for Carol to have a dim view of the court.

The man entered the building and was gone for two or three minutes. Then he emerged and stood beside the car. He seemed to be listening intently. Finally he waved a hand. Carol saw two women scurry toward the car and get into the back seat. The driver got in, and another man scurried from the doorway and got in with the two women. Carol watched in helpless fury as the car pulled away.

Doreen had been whisked from this hiding place right beneath Carol's eyes! For one of the few times in her life she felt like giving way to tears.

There seemed to be but one thing she could do. The Black Bat must somehow be warned about the ink brand on his arm, described in that recording machine tape. Also, he must be told that they were going to keep the appointment and bring Doreen along as agreed.

She started down the fire-escape and had reached the landing at the first floor when her heart stopped beating. Another car was coming down the alley, its headlights flooding the courtyard. Carol lay flat on the filthy steel landing. She clutched her small gun, determined that if they spotted her they would have to come and get her.

The driver of the car tapped his horn button once. Carol heard the door of the building open. Three men emerged. She could see them plainly enough to be able to identify them again, but she also saw something else. Each man carried a high-powered rifle equipped with telescopic sights.

One of them was chuckling. "Deke's gonna be awful sore when the Black Bat don't show up with Spade."

"He'll knock the dame off sure," another man said, and laughed. "And while he's doing that, we take care of the Black Bat and Spade."

"Deke's sure gonna wonder what it's

all about," the first speaker said, getting into the car. "Well, let's go. The deadline is midnight."

As the car started to pull away, Carol began scrambling down the rest of the way. She dropped off the lower rung of the fire-escape, ran as fast as possible to the street and saw the car with those four men just turning a corner.

Her brain was spinning. That brand on the Black Bat's arm suddenly seemed inconsequential. The quarette now turning the corner were setting a death trap for the Black Bat! Deke had been sent to some imaginary rendezvous point with Doreen while these other men were keeping the appointment with the Black Bat at midnight.

CAROL knew that if she lost them she would also lose her final chance to do something about upsetting their plans. She raced to where she had left her car and a moment later she was swinging around the same corner the men had taken. It was a wide avenue, without too much traffic, and right now the lights were red all the way along. The car she was after had stopped and was just getting up speed again.

Carol stayed as far behind it as she dared, followed the car uptown almost to the city limits. She saw it roll through the entrance to a playground park. The Black Bat would likely have chosen a meeting place like this. Secluded by night but open enough so that he would have room to move around, and should any shooting occur, there would hardly be any innocent bystanders.

Carol shut off the lights of her car as she turned into the park. The sedan was moving rather slowly now. It passed beneath an arched bridge and finally stopped in one of the remotest sections of the park. Three of the men got out quickly and dispersed themselves in the darkness. The fourth sat behind the wheel, obviously the lure. He turned off the headlights, but let the parking lights stay on.

Somewhere in the gloom, Carol knew that the Black Bat was closing in. The moment he appeared, those men with

the rifles would shoot to kill. Carol rolled her car off the road, got out and took the small gun from her handbag. She, too, was prepared to shoot to kill!

CHAPTER XVII

The Double Cross



Of course Butch drove the coupé. Spade Vernon, squeezed between Butch's huge bulk and the Black Bat's slender form, couldn't move a muscle. His hands rested on his lap, the wrists taped together. He was glowering and ill at ease.

When they entered the park, Spade's restlessness became greater. He kept moistening his dry lips and once a shudder ran through his body. Neither Butch nor the Black Bat spoke until the car was well within the limits of the park.

"Pull over," the Black Bat ordered then. "We'll go the rest of the way on foot. Spade, I'm telling you again. Watch yourself."

"What's gonna happen to me?" Spade tried to put conviction into his voice and failed miserably. "You ain't got the idea my own brother is gonna cut me down, have you?"

"Spade," the Black Bat said, "I've been trying to convince you that this might be more than just an exchange of hostages, such as you for Doreen Cooper. It might be a trap."

"For you maybe," Spade grunted.

"And you," the Black Bat amended. "This thing has become something bigger than you think, Spade. If you had half the sense you think you have, you'd talk. Because you know a great deal and the people you work for are well aware of it."

"I don't know a thing," Spade commented sourly.

"You're dangerous to them because they're afraid you might make a deal. Suppose Deke is here, with Mrs. Cooper, and the exchange goes off, without a

hitch. What happens afterwards? If the police don't get you, Spade, your own pals will."

Spade clamped his jaws together and refused to say another word. Butch took his arm and propelled him along behind the Black Bat, whose strange eyes were penetrating the darkness. The Black Bat came to an abrupt halt.

"There's a car waiting," he said in a low voice. "A man behind the wheel. I don't see any sign of Doreen, but they'd hardly put her where we might snatch her away from them. Keep Spade quiet, Butch, even if you have to muzzle him with a fist."

"Look," Butch whispered, "let me go see who's in that car."

"Not on your life," the Black Bat said. "This is my picnic. If anything happens, don't try to help. Get Spade out of here fast. Remember, if we lose him, we lose the whole game. He's the only thing that stands between us and failure."

Butch only nodded his big head, but his fingers secured a firmer grasp on Spade's arm and his right hand was doubled into a lethal-sized fist. Spade had the shakes again.

The Black Bat stepped boldly from the fringe of bushes and walked straight toward the car. The first rifle shot came from behind Butch and the slug zipped between his head and Spade's.

With his foot Butch tripped Spade, and his hands hurled him to the ground. He rolled the helpless man beneath the brush and dropped down beside him. The Black Bat had whirled around at the sound of the shot. There was an automatic in each hand, but he couldn't see a target. He had recognized that weapon as a rifle, from the report, which meant he was probably outranged and in a bad position.

The flat report of another rifle, from a different direction, followed on the heels of a small spurt of grass and dirt at the Black Bat's feet. Then, suddenly, he was enveloped in the ray of a powerful searchlight operated by the man inside the sedan.

He threw himself to one side, but the light followed him persistently. Both his guns exploded. The light winked off to the accompaniment of shattering glass. That was enough for the driver. He had the motor running, the car in gear, and it started off with a jolt. The Black Bat dropped flat and hoped that the darkness would conceal him.

Another rifle shot cracked in the distance. They still had the range. They could still probably see him, and he had an idea the rifles were equipped with night telescopic sights. He had to reach some sort of shelter.

THERE was a clump of heavy foliage to the left. He arose to a crouch, started running. He saw a man rise up from the protection of that bush toward which he was headed. The man had a rifle at his shoulder and he must have a perfect bead.

The Black Bat expected to feel the searching impact of the high-powered bullet. There wasn't even time to raise his own guns, even if the range had given him half a chance, which it didn't. He heard the gun go off. It sounded puny and weak for the size of the weapon.

Then he realized he had seen no flame from the muzzle of the gun and was startled to see the rifleman stagger forward a few steps, grimly try to raise the rifle which now slanted downward. He didn't quite make it. He simply toppled and fell with a crash.

The Black Bat didn't know just how that happened, but he was taking no chances. Guns ready, he lay prone, waiting for another of those gunmen to show. The brush up ahead crackled and his fingers tightened on the trigger. He broke out in a chill sweat when he saw who was emerging. He had nearly thrown a fusillade of slugs at Carol.

The Black Bat leaped to his feet and dashed toward her. There were no more rifle shots. He encircled her waist with one arm and literally carried her back into the foliage.

"Thanks." He was breathing hard. "Thanks, Carol. I don't know how you did it, but—"

"Tony, Tony!" she whispered. "I had to—to shoot him. It was him or you. Tony—Doreen isn't here. They sent Deke and Doreen to some other spot. They—they were going to kill you and—and Spade."

"Now we know our guesswork was right," the Black Bat grunted. "Carol, you've got to get out of here."

"Wait, Tony," she whispered. "There's something else. Deke will kill Doreen now."

"We can't do a thing about it," the Black Bat replied. "We've done everything possible and we still have Spade. Maybe Deke will take one more chance."

"And Tony, I found out who Deke's girl friend is. Her name is Lila Bennett. I searched her room in the boarding house she's just moved into and I found a transcribing machine. The mike was attached to the wall of Byron Chanlor's room, next door. I played some of the tape. Tony—Chanlor has branded you."

"What?" the Black Bat exclaimed unbelievably.

"Something on your arm—indelible ink."

The Black Bat slid his guns into their holsters, yanked up his sleeve and looked at his arm. There was nothing. He tried the other arm and saw the smear of ink.

"Well, what do you know!" he marveled. "Carol, this could have queered me."

"I know, Tony. There was another man with Chanlor—someone who thinks you're Tony Quinn and if you are, he'll see the mark on your arm and know it's the truth."

"You mean he would have if you hadn't warned me," the Black Bat chuckled. "I've been underestimating Mr. Chanlor."

"Do you know what I think, Tony? I think his shyness is all an act, and that he isn't a go-between at all. He's the leader of all these men!"

"It could be, Carol. We'll soon find out. Right now we'd better get away from here. You have your car?"

"Yes. It's hidden."

"Then stay right here," he ordered.

"Don't move. I'll send Butch and Spade away in Butch's car. At least, we still have Spade."

The Black Bat took a long breath, started running fast across the cleared space. The rifleman who lay face down on the grass wasn't moaning any more. There wasn't time to attend to him. The Black Bat kept on going until he found Butch and Spade.

"Spade," the Black Bat said, "are you convinced now? All those bullets weren't meant for me. Some of them had your name nicely engraved on them."

"You're batty," Spade grumbled, but he wasn't quite so sure of himself.

"The first slug sailed right between our ears," Butch said. "That ought to convince him."

The Black Bat nodded crisply. "I know. Maybe if Spade has a chance to think this over, he'll see we've been telling him the truth. Keep riding around with him, Butch, and keep your radio tuned in. I'll contact you with further instructions."

"I'm on my way," Butch said.

HE wondered what had happened across that cleared space, but he couldn't ask with Spade present. Butch grabbed Spade by the collar and the seat of the pants, lifted him off the ground and hurried to where he had left his car.

The Black Bat quickly returned to Carol and waited a few moments. Finally he slipped out to where the gunman lay, and examined him. The man had a bad wound in his shoulder, but the bleeding had stopped. He was unconscious mainly from shock. The Black Bat pasted one of his stickers on the man's forehead, then he and Carol sped toward where her car was hidden.

As she headed back to town, the Black Bat gave her the facts as he knew them.

"All along," he explained, "we've suspected that there's been an organized ring of criminals here in town, but so cleverly handled and controlled that they rarely showed their hand. They didn't go in for any strong-arm stuff—no burglaries and things like that which

CHAPTER XVIII

The Black Bat's Surrender

would call attention to their existence. They've been getting rich through gambling joints, narcotics—things like that."

"And you think Spade was a part of the mob?" Carol asked.

"I'm sure of it," the Black Bat replied. "But he grew a little too big for his britches and when he found one of his own men doublecrossing him, he forgot to ask for orders and simply went and killed the man. That was the crime Les Cooper witnessed in the grill."

"But, Tony, have you any idea who heads these men?" Carol asked.

"Some, but no evidence to take direct action on. They are smart, make certain they remain just a shadowy background to the whole thing. But they are still crooks, Carol, and crooks are greedy. They're never satisfied. Most of the time it's this avarice that finally knocks them over."

"Do you mean they're after something bigger?"

"I'm sure of it. I think I know what it is, too. However, I'm still convinced we can't do a thing until Doreen is free and safe. I wonder what Deke did when he found I wasn't where they told him I would be."

"What can we do?" Carol asked. "They'll never take Doreen back to the hiding place where I saw her. I'm sure of it."

"I've got to switch back to Tony Quinn," the Black Bat said. "Silk is driving around town. In"—the Black Bat glanced at his watch—"fifteen minutes we can pick him up. I'll transfer to his car, go home and see if Deke shows his hand."

"Don't forget that brand," Carol said. "And I'll give you the tape recording, too."

"You accomplished a great deal," the Black Bat said softly. "It was a great day for me when you joined our group. Look—after you drop me off, keep your radio tuned in. You'll get orders over our short wave. Now let's go find Silk. I imagine he's quietly going insane with worry by now."



HUNTING up Silk, the Black Bat had him follow Carol's car to a secluded spot, and made a fast transfer. He got into the back seat, opened a well-hidden compartment and took out Tony Quinn's clothing. He changed into it as fast as possible, hid the Black Bat's regalia, then climbed into the front seat beside Silk. While he did all this, he told Silk what had happened.

Tony Quinn put the white cane between his knees and that blank, staring look of a blind man came over his eyes. It was still there when Silk parked the car in front of the house and helped Quinn enter. Inside Quinn immediately went to the lab and proceeded to use chemicals on the indelible ink brand smeared on his forearm. He removed it successfully, then took the roll of tape from his pocket, clipped it into a playback machine which was part of his equipment, and turned it on. When he heard the voices of the two men he suddenly began to laugh.

He was still laughing when he came back to the library and sat down in his favorite chair. There wasn't time to explain that laughter to Silk for someone was ringing the doorbell. Silk disappeared for a few moments and returned with Byron Chanlor. The little man was highly agitated.

"I've been trying to find you, Mr. Quinn," he burst out. "You weren't home—"

"I know," Quinn said. "I've been riding around, trying to locate Deke Vernon, if possible. Have you learned anything else?"

"I had a phone call a little while ago," Chanlor explained hurriedly. "This time a different voice gave me orders. I was to tell you that you have one more chance."

"Yes?" Quinn asked eagerly.

"You've got to reach the Black Bat somehow. I—I wish I could have got to you sooner. There isn't much time left. Spade Vernon must be released and told to go to the regular place and meet Deke. If he isn't there by three o'clock this morning, they'll kill the Cooper woman. That's only a short time off now. I—I forgot my watch. You must wear a wrist-watch. Excuse me, please—"

Chanlor had moved closer. Suddenly he seized Quinn's hand and pushed up the sleeve. Quinn had to restrain himself when he saw the look of disappointment on Chanlor's face at not finding the ink smear. It was ludicrous.

"I wear my watch on the other wrist, Mr. Chanlor," Quinn said gently, "and I can tell you what time it is."

"You can?" Chanlor gulped. "Then—then how much time is there left?"

Quinn exposed a rather large wrist-watch. The fingers of his other hand touched the open dial gently. "It's quarter of one, Mr. Chanlor. I have to read my wrist-watch with my fingertips."

Again Chanlor looked disappointed. He had half expected Quinn to slip, and read an ordinary watch with his eyes. Chanlor backed up, nervous now, and eager to get away.

"I'd better go home and wait for any more phone calls," he said. "You think that's best, don't you?"

"Of course," Quinn told him. "And thanks for all the help you've given me so far."

Silk saw Chanlor out. He returned with a deep frown between his eyes.

"That guy is either the biggest sap I ever met or as smart a crook as ever came up," he growled. "I noticed how he looked for the ink smear."

"Don't worry about Mr. Chanlor." Quinn laughed. "He falls in your first category. He's a sap. But we can't bother about him now. Deke seems to be as desperate as we are, Silk. He wants another chance. Keep careful watch around the place. I'm going into the lab and radio Butch and Carol."

"You're going to let Spade go free?" Silk asked.

"What else can I do?" Quinn commented. "Maybe Deke will keep his word and let Doreen go. Maybe he won't. But if we don't surrender Spade, we know he'll certainly kill Doreen, so Spade is going to be freed."

"And trailed, I hope," Silk said.

"Yes. I'll be there when they turn him loose. At half-past two this morning, Butch will let him go. Maybe he'll lead me to Doreen. . . . Silk, we cannot make a move until she is safe."

"I know," Silk said. "Well, it'll be over tonight, I hope. One way or another."

Quinn was heading for the lab door. "There's only one way, Silk. It has to end like that."

IN the lab, Quinn sat down before a short wave radio set. He turned it on and in a few moments he was in contact with Carol. He gave her careful instructions and had her repeat them. Then he called Butch who reported that Spade still refused to talk.

"All right—we're licked," Quinn said. "At half-past two, let Spade go free and tell him Deke has been in touch with Tony Quinn and I've reached him in turn. Deke sends word to Spade that he is to go to the usual place, wherever that is. And Spade is not to be followed. This is our last chance to save Doreen Cooper. Don't muff it. They've won, and we're surrendering and hoping that Deke will keep his word."

Over the loudspeaker in the lab, Quinn heard Spade's raucous laughter. Quinn smiled tightly and laid out a fresh somber outfit for the Black Bat. He loaded the guns, placed them handy, and was set to move fast for what could be the final act.

One of the colored lights on the panel was blinking as he moved toward the door. Someone was coming up the walk to the front door. Quinn quickly slipped into the library and sat down.

It was Inspector McGrath who walked slowly into the room. Quinn had never seen him look so worried. McGrath chewed his stub of a cigar for a few seconds, then he said:

"Tony, you wouldn't have been way uptown in a certain playground park tonight?"

Quinn raised his voice. "Silk, did we go to any such park?"

Silk approached quickly. "No, sir. You told me to stay close to the center of town and I did."

"You heard that," Quinn told McGrath. "I've been trying to give Deke a chance to find me. We drove around. I walked the streets a lot. Nothing happened."

"Something did happen up at that park," McGrath grumbled. "I'm not sure just what, but the Black Bat was there. Of course, that wouldn't be you. However, he shot one of our better known musclemen and branded him with a sticker. The mug won't die, but he won't talk either. Says he was just taking a walk and somebody plugged him."

"I wish they'd do something. Deke and his men. Mac, I'm worried sick over Doreen Cooper."

"Yeah," McGrath said. "So am I—with additions. Allan Lang made a speech to a voters' league tonight. And Jim Moody, the columnist, addressed a women's club. They want you out. Me out. The commissioner and every high police official bearing any responsibility for what's happened."

Quinn whistled softly. "Bad as that, eh? How did the audiences take it?"

"How do you think? Lang's a pretty good speaker and he's got a lot to talk about. Moody is playing it all up big in his column, but tonight he pulled a masterpiece. He had Les Cooper on the platform with him."

Quinn shook his head. "Time is running out, Mac. I don't care a whit what Lang and Moody do or say. All I'm interested in is getting Spade Vernon back in a cell and taking Doreen Cooper out of Deke Vernon's hands."

"Okay," McGrath grumbled. "I agree, but what can we do? Besides, all the big brass at Headquarters are starting to clean out their desks. The administration knows darned well it can't buck Lang for long and somebody has to take

the rap. So you and me and the others, we're the whipping boys."

"And Lang will move in?" Quinn asked.

"Who else? Tony, I'm afraid this is the last time we'll meet officially. I'll be hunting a job. But I warn you that, badge or no badge, I'll never stop looking for the Black Bat. You know he's responsible for this whole blasted affair. If he'd stayed out—"

"Now wait a minute," Quinn said. "If he had, we'd be faced with the same situation. Let Spade go or Doreen would die. Either way, we'd be blamed. When the Black Bat took Spade out of your hands, he checkmated Deke."

"Yeah," McGrath said in a discouraged voice, "but he didn't help us any. He made it worse—gave Lang and Moody plenty to base their claims on. Well, we're finished. I don't see any answer. However, we can part friends. Here's my hand on it."

QUINN stretched his right hand blindly toward McGrath. In doing so, he allowed the sleeve of his coat to pull far back, revealing a good part of the forearm. McGrath took the hand, held it firmly and while he talked, he slowly twisted the arm a bit so that it was fully exposed on all sides. That certain eagerness in his eyes changed to a puzzled, almost amazed look.

"Anything wrong, Mac?" Quinn asked.

"Oh no. Nothing at all, Tony." McGrath let go of the hand. "I'm just upset. It occurred to me that Lang will probably see to it I don't even get a pension."

"Well," Quinn said, in a tone of dismissal, "maybe it'll work out."

He wanted McGrath to leave. There wasn't too much time and he needed all of it to get set. Butch would free Spade soon. The Black Bat had to be there. No other chance to free Doreen would ever present itself.

With aggravating slowness, McGrath sat down, and stayed there for better than half an hour. He droned on and on, trying to draw out Quinn's opinions.

McGrath was no fool. He realized there was something behind all this. Something bigger than Spade Vernon's life.

At ten minutes after two he finally walked with Silk to the door. Silk watched him drive off, then he hurried back to the library. Quinn was already moving toward the secret door.

"I'll try to keep in touch by radio," Silk said. "That is, unless you want me to go along."

"I wish you could, Silk," Quinn told him. "I may need all the help I can get, but somebody has to stay here."

The doorbell began ringing insistently. Quinn immediately hurried back to his chair while Silk went to the front door. When he returned, Allan Lang and Jim Moody, the columnist, preceded him.

"It's Mr. Lang and Mr. Moody, sir," Silk announced.

"At this time of the morning?" Quinn asked.

"Quinn," Lang said, "we're here to see if there isn't some way to resolve this unfortunate affair. There must be. We're all reasonable men. We want to hear your version of the whole sorry episode."

"The others involved aren't so important," Moody chimed in. "You can always get capable police officials, certainly more capable and efficient than those now in office. But a district attorney with your abilities, Mr. Quinn, is hard to come by."

"You don't mind, of course, if we take up a little of your time?" Lang said and his voice had suddenly turned oily.

Tony Quinn hoped they wouldn't notice the thin film of sweat that was already moistening his forehead. They were going to keep him here, hold him down. They would be here until after Deke's final deadline had passed. The whole unholy plot was starkly clear to Quinn now. His suspicions, based on flimsy clues until now, had been correct.

Only one of his opinions remained intact and stronger than ever. These two men headed all the quiet crime in this city. He had never underestimated them, but now he realized he should have

granted them even more credit for their cleverness.

McGrath had been more open than ever about his suspicions that Tony Quinn and the Black Bat were one and the same. Lang and Moody had heard of it, perhaps even suspected long before. Now they were going to see to it that if it were true, the Black Bat would not be prowling the night, and that before dawn Doreen Cooper would be dead!

CHAPTER XIX

Hideout



DOWNTOWN, in a quiet section of the city, Butch pulled up to the curb at two twenty-five. He peeled the tape off Spade Vernon's wrists none too gently, then reached over the man to open the car door.

"Get out," he said, "and get going. Your brother says you're to go to the usual place, wherever that is. And get there fast. Deke's waiting until three o'clock, then he's killing that woman."

Spade stepped to the sidewalk, pulled down his sleeves and dusted his coat in slow motion. "Okay, you overgrown gorilla," Spade said. "But I'm not forgetting what's happened, understand? I'm not forgetting one thing, and some night you'll see me again. Only you won't have a chance to use your fists, because I'll kill you."

"I'll be waiting," Butch purred. "And if your brother murders that girl, so help me, I'll look both of you up. What I'll do won't be done with a gun or a knife. All I need is my bare hands. Now beat it."

Spade smirked at him. "You ain't planning on tailing me, chum?"

"You know I'm not," Butch said gruffly. "We want that woman alive."

Spade laughed. "So long, sucker. And tell the Black Bat for me that he's all done, too. The big sap thought I'd fall for his line about me being the target

in the park. The guys who did that shooting were my pals. They were gunning at him."

"Yeah," Butch grunted. "Get going before I decide this might be all a mistake. Because if I do, they'll find you in little pieces."

Spade backed up hastily, sought for some kind of a savage retort, but took another look at Butch's scowling face. He turned and walked hurriedly away. Butch drove off in the opposite direction, but before he proceeded a hundred feet he was in radio contact with Carol.

"Okay—pick him up and don't lose him. I'll be trailing you."

"Check." Carol's voice came over. "I've got him spotted now."

Carol watched Spade hurry past the street intersection. She gave him a good start, for he showed no inclination to hail any of the night owl cabs that rolled past. Apparently he didn't have far to go. He turned east after half a dozen blocks, but still showed no signs of being in a hurry. Finally he came to a complete stop and sat down on the steps of a brownstone front house.

Carol rolled to the curb a block and a half away. Undoubtedly he had seen her car so she got out, locked the car, and walked blissfully up the steps of another brownstone. There she flattened herself against the door.

She could still see him, and if Spade intended to reach his brother before three o'clock, he would have to be on the move soon. Finally he arose, flipped a cigarette into the gutter and strolled on. He turned the corner and Carol lost him, but before she reached that same corner, she spotted Butch's huge bulk taking up the trail. Butch was moving carefully.

Carol sped back to her car, got in and picked up the radio-phone.

"Hello," she said. "Hello. Calling the lab. Come on in, lab."

This was what the Black Bat would be waiting for. Perhaps he wasn't in the lab, but somewhere in the neighborhood, and would pick up that signal. It was a situation that called for the talents of the man in black.

Carol pressed the phone closer to her ear and called out a signal again. There was no answer. Silk, at least, should be in the lab with instructions. She raised her voice and there was a frantic note in it. The radio remained dead.

Carol hung up the phone. Something must have happened to Silk and the Black Bat. Something they couldn't cope with. Therefore, it was up to her and Butch to reach Doreen. Every second that ticked by on the dashboard clock placed Doreen closer and closer to death. Carol didn't make the mistake of believing that Spade and Deke would ever allow her to go free. Not now, when they had won their battle.

SHE drove down the street, turned into the dreary avenue and saw no one. Spade had vanished. She slowed the car, just rolled along, and breathed again only when she saw Butch move out to intercept her.

He got into the car fast.

"Pull over," he said. "Spade went into that Surplus Goods wholesale shop. They were expecting him. Somebody opened the door. We'll have to wait for the Black Bat."

"Butch," Carol exclaimed, "I can't reach him! I don't know why I can't, but I know we can't wait. We've got to get in there and find Doreen."

Butch exhaled sharply. "That's bad, Carol. This is a tight spot. Think we can handle it?"

"If we don't," Carol said grimly, "Doreen will be killed and we'll probably wind up on the next slabs. Come on— We're getting inside that place somehow."

"If I have to tear the roof off, we'll get in," Butch vowed. "Let's go."

There wasn't time to study the building beyond noting that it was two stories high, of frame construction, old and dirty. The windows were full of odds and ends, from used tires to cheap work shoes. All the stock was piled high, so as to obscure any view of the interior.

They slipped down the alley beside the place and reached some sort of a rickety loading platform in the rear.

Carol climbed onto it, approached a sliding door and saw the padlock sealing it. To remove that would mean noise, and give a warning. She looked for some other means of entry.

There was a window, its glass too dirty to see through. She stepped closer and wished she had the Black Bat's uncanny eyesight. A window might be forced silently and her hopes were riding high until she saw the bars on the inside. She signaled Butch. He came to her side and lowered his head for her to whisper to him.

"It's either that barred window or the sliding door," she said. "We'll have to force the door."

"It'll make too much noise," Butch argued. "Let's try the window."

He moved over beneath it, put two thick fingers against the upper frame and pushed. The window creaked upward. He couldn't stop that noise and he held his breath as he moved it higher and higher. The heavy bars were fully exposed then.

Butch rubbed his hands, grasped the bars and began exerting pressure. The muscles in his neck stood out, his shoulders were hunched over, his legs slightly bent to brace himself. It looked impossible, but the bars were bending. He had to give up, finally.

"It's no use," he whispered. "I can't get through that space."

"But I can," Carol said. "Butch, I'm going in alone! Maybe I can find Doreen. If I do, I'll send her down to that sliding door. I'll give her time enough to make it, then fire a single shot. When you hear that, smash those doors down. Get Doreen away from here. Never mind about me, Butch. Do you understand?"

"Yeah," Butch said. "I don't like it, but there's no other way, I guess. Here." He made a stirrup of his hands. "Let's go!"

He lifted Carol without effort and helped her slide between the bars he had spread just far enough to allow her to squirm through. Carol eased herself to the floor, used a pencil flash and saw that she was in some sort of a store-room.

She could hear laughter and men's voices as she crossed the room and carefully opened a door. She looked out into the office behind the store. Spade and Deke were there. So were two other men and they were gaily passing a bottle between them.

Carol saw a narrow stairway to the left. On the plain newel post hung a woman's coat. Doreen must be upstairs. Carol quietly removed her shoes, drew the automatic from her handbag and flipped off the safety.

Then she stepped through the door, put her back against the wall and side-stepped as fast as she dared. Deke and Spade were still laughing and patting each other on the back, but soon they'd settle down to the grim business of disposing of a now unwanted hostage.

Carol reached the stairs, went up them backward, her gun aimed and ready for action. She didn't think she was going to get away with this, but she had to try. She had to keep on going.

At the top of the stairs, she paused to get her bearings. There was a weak electric light bulb illuminating a narrow hallway off which were two flimsy doors. She put her ear against one of them, heard nothing, and moved on. At the second one she could hear someone humming.

Carol grasped the knob tightly, turned it and slowly pushed the door open. All in one split second she saw someone lying on a cot, huddled beneath a blanket. In the middle of the floor, combing her hair, stood Lila Bennett, whose face Carol had seen in the advertising billboards outside a café.

Lila started turning. Carol gave one light leap and brought down the gun as hard as she could. It hit Lila squarely. With a strangled cry she started falling. Carol seized her. The girl on the cot sat bolt upright, her mouth opened to scream. Carol dragged Lila over to the cot.

"Are you Doreen?" Carol asked.

The girl on the cot nodded eagerly. Carol motioned her off the cot, placed Lila on it and pulled the blanket up.

"We haven't got much chance, Doreen," she said. "Never mind who I am. Just do as I say. Spade is free—he's downstairs with Deke. That means they don't need you any longer."

"They'll kill me!" Doreen gasped. "I know they will."

"Not if you move fast," Carol said. "It's a long shot, but any kind of a chance is good now. Take off your shoes, sneak down the steps. At the bottom, move along the wall to the supply room door. Go through it and head for the big door at the end of the room. Is that clear?"

Doreen nodded in understanding. "But aren't you coming?"

"We both can't make it. Don't worry about me. I'll give you three minutes. Then I'm going to fire a shot. When that happens, a friend of mine will break down that door and you are to go with him. Get going! Those mugs downstairs won't wait long. They've got to move out of town fast."

Doreen hesitated, as if she wanted no part of it so long as Carol seemed to be sacrificing her own life. Carol gestured with the gun. Doreen turned, kicked off her shoes and fled.

Carol stepped to the window and raised it quietly. She could look down in back, but an overhanging roof projected out over the platform so she couldn't see Butch.

Carol was slowly counting. And praying. At any second she expected to hear Doreen challenged. Then she knew the allotted time must be up. Carol pointed her gun out into the night and pulled the trigger.

Instantly she heard Butch crash against the sliding door and rip the hasp out of its moorings. Deke, Spade and the others were on the move, too. At least two of them were hurrying up the stairs. Carol leaned far out of the window.

Deke burst into the room first, gun in his fist. Behind him was Spade, also armed. Carol began yelling at the top of her voice.

"There they go, Deke! It's the Black Bat down there!"

Spade and Deke saw someone lying beneath a blanket in the gloomy room. They saw a blonde leaning out of the window telling them what was happening. Neither took time to check the identity of these girls.

"Let's go, Deke!" Spade shouted.

They headed for the steps and Carol turned around, momentarily safe. So she believed. Then she heard Deke and Spade stop and curse. They came back to the room, their hands up. Following them were the other two men.

"Deke," Spade said, "the Black Bat was right. They didn't care if I got away. All they wanted to do was kill me. They tried it before, but I wouldn't believe the Black Bat."

"Now listen, boys," Deke said, "we can settle this. We didn't even hint we'd talk. You got no reason."

"Sorry, Deke," one of the men said. "There's nothing personal in this, understand. But Spade is wanted for murder and that makes him hotter'n fire. You're wanted for a snatch, which is just as bad, and the cops will catch up with you. Then you'll have to talk, or go to the chair. The big boy says he can't take chances."

CAROL, back in the shadows, was bringing her gun around. Deke and Spade stood between her and the two gunmen. In a second they would open fire. Carol couldn't shoot without hitting Deke or Spade.

Then Lila, on the cot, stirred and moaned. Deke twisted his head.

"Lila!" he yelled. "Hey, it's Lila!"

Deke stepped toward her, heedless of the two startled gunmen. Carol's little automatic flamed. One of the gunmen yowled. Spade hurled himself at the other one. Then, as Carol prepared to shoot again, she saw an enormous figure suddenly barge into the room. One clubbed fist hit the wounded gunman on top of the head and he went down heavily. The other man was struggling with Spade. Butch reached out, yanked the gunman free and threw a mighty fist into his face. He let go of the man.

Deke and Spade were reaching for

their guns, but Carol fired a warning shot into the floor. Butch stepped closer. His hands darted out. He grabbed each man by the neck, held them apart for a second and then brought them violently together. Their skulls cracked and both went limp. Butch dropped them.

"Doreen is okay." He grinned happily. "I figured she could take care of herself, seeing nobody came out to follow her. How'm I doin', Carol?"

"Wonderful, Butch," Carol answered. "I'll tie up the two gunmen. You bring the car around, and carry Deke and Spade down. Then we'll cheer up Inspector McGrath. You'll have to be the Black Bat. There's an outfit in the car."

"Okay," Butch said. "McGrath will be so excited he won't notice the difference. It worked before. It'll work this time."

"One more thing," Carol said. "Take this ink pad and do exactly as I say. Tony told me how this is to be done over the short wave."

CHAPTER XX

The Men Behind Crime



NOCKING the ash off his cigar Allan Lang resumed his chair. He was smiling politely. Jim Moody was slumped down, one leg over the arm of his chair.

"Mr. Quinn," Lang said, "are you nervous about something?"

"Should I be?" Quinn asked, and hoped that his voice didn't quaver. He felt as if it might at any second. The clock on the table showed that it was three-thirty. This pair had deliberately remained here, suspecting he was the Black Bat and keeping him from taking any action while Spade escaped and Doreen Cooper died.

"We're trying to be fair, you understand," Lang went on. "How about some suggestions on your part, Quinn?"

Quinn stood up. "We've talked and talked without getting anywhere, gentlemen. I'm tired."

"But we're giving you a chance," Moody protested.

"I don't want it," Quinn said quietly. "Moody, through your column, you've set the stage to make Lang police commissioner. I don't think I could operate as a district attorney with you two running the Police Department. That's all I have to say."

"Sit down, Quinn," Lang snapped. "We're not through yet."

He paused, for they could all plainly hear a car stopping in front of the house. Silk moved to the door.

Quinn sat down wearily. He didn't care any more. This would be McGrath, announcing that Doreen was dead, that perhaps a strange blonde girl had been found dead too. And a great hulk of a man they couldn't identify.

McGrath came into the room, preceded by Deke and Spade, chained together by ankle and leg cuffs.

"Okay," Deke said bitterly, "all deals are off. Inspector, those two men—Moody and Lang—run this town. They're trying to get a better strangle hold on it by taking over the Police Department. Yeah, Spade killed a guy. And I snatched Mrs. Cooper to save him. I thought these two heels were with me, but all they did was use me to promote themselves."

"Be careful what you're saying!" Lang shouted.

"It's no use, Lang!" McGrath broke in. "The Black Bat came to see me a few minutes ago, and—"

"The Black Bat!" Moody and Lang chorused, and stared at Tony Quinn.

"Who else would have captured these two monkeys, and sent Doreen Cooper home safely? Silk, go call in my boys. I've got a couple of fresh fish for them. And send in Byron Chanlor, too."

"Chanlor—here?" Quinn asked. "Mac, what's this all about?"

"I'll give you the details later," McGrath said. "One thing, Tony, I shot my mouth off about you being the Black Bat. Well, I know you're not."

"Just a moment," Quinn said. "I'm beginning to understand. Lang and Moody thought I was the Black Bat, too."

That's why they came here tonight, to keep me from going out and capturing Spade and Deke."

Quinn began to laugh. Chanlor came in, as shy as ever. He stayed close by McGrath for protection. Other detectives swarmed into the house. Spade and Deke were still shouting their accusations and backing them up with indisputable proof. They told where there were safe deposit boxes, papers to involve Lang and Moody. They told how Lang's newspaper had been slipping and how he needed fast money and lots of it.

McGrath borrowed handcuffs from one of his men and stepped up to Lang. He clamped the cuffs in place. The cold steel made Lang wince and he backed away slightly. McGrath reached out to grab him.

Chanlor, standing alongside, let out an unearthly yell. He was pointing at an ink smear on McGrath's forearm.

"That's it!" he screamed. "That's the mark I put on the Black Bat. You are the Black Bat. You been fooling me! You're the Black Bat. You got to be!"

QUINN was still wiping the tears of laughter out of his eyes when he and Silk went to meet Carol and Butch in the lab. "It musta worked," Butch said, and grinned. "I inked McGrath's arm up good."

"It worked to perfection," Quinn chuckled. "Chanlor is still accusing Mac."

"And it was McGrath who hired Chanlor to do that, to test your sight also?" Silk asked.

"Of course. That was McGrath's voice recorded on the tape Carol found."

"Then I hope they lock him up, too," Silk declared fervently.

"Oh no," Quinn objected. "Mac will suffer enough as it is. I don't blame him much. After all, I did yank an important prisoner right out of his grasp."

"Tony," Carol said, "did you know Lang and Moody were behind this?"

Quinn shook his head. "No. Though I did suspect it would be someone like that pair. Whoever backed this gang

had to have influence and know what was going on. Of course they weren't actively into the mess until after Doreen was kidnaped. Then they intended to let her be killed. They planned to kill Spade, too, so neither of them could talk. Spade and Deke must have been somewhat rebellious, perhaps because they weren't getting enough out of the gang. But Lang and Moody planned their most important move later. They saw a chance to walk in and take over the law enforcement agency of this city. If they'd succeeded, this would have been one sweet hot bed of crime."

"But you did know, later, that it was Lang and Moody?" Carol asked.

"Yes—when Moody advertised for the Black Bat, he could have had police on the scene. After all, the Black Bat was already listed as a kidnaper. But Moody kept them away because he wanted me to walk into a better trap. One in which Deke and Spade would also die and forever remove them as a menace to their operations."

"Moody knew about the trap in that pool room?" Silk asked.

"Of course he did. It was another attempt to make out the Black Bat as a cold-blooded killer and a thief besides. They simply robbed their own safe. But they also tipped their hand. Moody was tied up when I left him, but I didn't tie him too tightly. He could have got away. I stuffed him into a cupboard, and I didn't want him to smother to death. But he claimed he wasn't freed until the next morning. That was a lie and I knew it. He'd have been dead if he stayed in that place all night. But he probably got back in there next morning for the benefit of his housekeeper. Next I looked for some move as to what he was really after and it came when he proposed Lang for commissioner and both of them began riding everybody."

"Well, Spade and Deke will talk that pair into prison," Silk commented.

"They will—and McGrath will round up the whole outfit. Moody and Lang were well-concealed, but they came into the open after Doreen was snatched and I had Spade. Then the whole thing began

growing, snowballing into the final shape of what they were after—control of the whole city.”

“Tony,” Carol asked, “what about Byron Chanlor?”

“That’s easy,” Quinn chuckled. “Deke had his girl friend cultivate Chanlor and they got him to act as go-between. McGrath also hired him—to find out if I was the Black Bat.”

“Poor McGrath.” Carol didn’t say it as if she meant it.

Quinn put his arm around her. “Now I want to hear what you and Butch did. Believe me, I owe you my gratitude.

Butch shifted his feet uneasily. “Well, it was like this . . .”

Silk nudged Butch hard. “Get going,” he said. “Can’t you see that Tony wants Carol to tell him about it. Alone.”

Butch gulped, nodded and headed for the trap-door. Silk went to the kitchen to start breakfast. Carol put her head on Quinn’s shoulder.

“It’s an awfully long story, darling.”

“I’m glad,” Quinn replied. “I rarely get a chance to be with you for long and one never knows when something else will break and we’ll have to go our own ways again.”

“One never does know,” Carol said blissfully. “Does one? What Butch and I did can wait.”

Quinn thought so too.

THE CRIME QUIZ

HERE’S your chance to see how much you know about crime! Give yourself 10 points for each question you answer correctly. A score of 60 is good. 80 ranks you as an amateur detective. If you are 100 per cent correct—you’re a super-sleuth! The answers are on Page 128—if you must look!

1. If a stain shows every evidence of being blood except that it is green in color—what is it?
2. A moulage is: a. confused evidence? b. a plastic mold? c. an East Indian weapon?
3. With the introduction of fingerprinting, what other system of criminal identification was started on the way out?
4. In what year did the famous Lindbergh kidnaping occur?
5. What is hot ice?
6. A man is found shot through the eye. Would it be a better guess to tab it as a suicide—or a murder?
7. Here are some scrambled detectives and their authors. See if you can match them up. Mark yourself perfect if you correctly link three out of four.
a. Tony Quinn—Arthur Conan Doyle
b. Sherlock Holmes—G. Wayman Jones
c. The Saint—Frances and Richard Lockridge
d. Mr. and Mrs. North—Leslie Charteris
8. True or false? Carbon monoxide in pure form has a characteristic bitter almond odor.
9. Achilles was murdered by Paris. In what spot did Paris plant his fatal arrow?
10. Is a lead bullet more deadly than a wooden one?

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The **SHADOW** on the Door

By C. K. M. SCANLON

PPETER NELSON was young, brown haired and good looking. He was quietly but neatly dressed and looked more like a junior executive than a successful private investigator. It was late spring and Nelson wore no hat or topcoat as he strode briskly along a corridor of a big office building in midtown Manhattan.

"This must be it," Nelson muttered, halting in front of a closed glass-paneled door that was just like seventy-six other doors along the corridor save for one important detail. There was no firm name lettered on the door, merely number 724. "Have fun, Nelson."

He opened the door and stepped into an extremely chi-chi reception room. The furnishings were modernistic, the lighting indirect. A thin-faced, thin-haired man sat at a desk that was merely a glass table top supported by four legs. He wore a gray and blue checked sports coat, fawn colored slacks. A striped scarf was draped about his neck ascot fashion.

"Who's for tennis?" Nelson said softly.

"I beg your pardon?" The thin-faced man reached for a pair of shell-rimmed glasses lying on the desk in front of him, and slowly put them on. He made a production out of it. "I'm Orville Arnold, who are you?"

"Peter Nelson is the name," Nelson said. "Mrs. Martin is expecting me."

"Now?" demanded Arnold, gazing at his wrist watch. "At precisely sixteen minutes and two seconds after two P.M.?"

"Now," said Nelson, glancing at his own wrist watch. "At sixteen minutes and three seconds after two P.M. Weather clear, track fast."

"But Madam never sees anyone between two and three," Arnold protested. "It is her hour for contemplation, the time when she feels her astral body is in tune with the infinite."

"No?" exclaimed Nelson in amazement, but there was a twinkle in his blue eyes. "You mean she can actually

do it? Blend the waddlink to the caw-flu?"

"Yes, of course, certainly," said Arnold looking a bit confused. "Madam is wonderful."

"She also has a temper such as has never been encountered on land or sea," said Nelson. "And she is going to be awfully mad if you don't tell her that I'm here."

"I wouldn't like that," Arnold said. "It would be just too distressing for words." He picked up the phone on the desk. "Let me speak to Madam. . . . Yes, I know. . . . But there is a Mr. Nelson here who insists she is expecting him. . . . Suppose you just tell her he is here and call me back, Nellie."

"Coward," said Nelson as Arnold put down the phone with a sigh of relief. "Don't you know that the way to face a lioness is to look her straight in the eye and then run away from there fast?"

The phone rang and Arnold jumped. He looked at it anxiously and then slowly reached out and picked it up.

"Yes?" Arnold said. "I see. Thank you, Nellie."

HE put down the phone and then sat for a moment gazing at Nelson in amazement.

"I don't think much of this necktie either," Nelson said. "But then I never did believe a man's only friend was his cravat. But tell me all, Orville."

"Mrs. Martin said she would see you in her private office at once," Arnold said in complete confusion. "Right through that door there." He nodded toward a closed door. "You must know where the buried is bodied. I mean—what do I mean?"

"Don't give it a thought, Orville," Nelson said as he headed for the door. "If you do, I'm sure you will find that you just phrased a coin."

Nelson opened and stepped through the door, closing it behind him. He found himself in a small brightly lighted hall at the end of which was a closed glass-paneled door. He went to this and knocked.

"Come in," a woman's voice said.

He opened the door and stepped into a small, comfortably furnished office. A stout woman sat in a comfortable chair gazing at him. She wore her dark hair in a short bob and she was wearing a tailored business dress of gray. She was in her late forties or early fifties.

"So nice to see you, Mr. Nelson," she said languidly.

"Don't give me that, Kate." Nelson walked over to her chair and leaned down and kissed her on the left cheek. "This is Pete, the kid from the old carny days, remember?"

"I certainly do," Kate Martin said with an affectionate smile as he dropped into a chair near her. "And what a fresh brat you were sometimes, Pete."

"I've changed in fifteen years," Nelson said. "After all I was only fourteen then. Now I'm the breezy type. Nice setup you have here, Kate. So you are still telling fortunes just as you used to do as Princess Gilda back at the Carnival."

"Only I really believe it now, Pete," Kate said. "I wouldn't charge twenty-five dollars for a consultation if I didn't. I have helped some people, I think—with others I've failed. It isn't a case of their believing what I tell them about the future as much as it is their making that future come true by having confidence in themselves."

"You didn't phone me and ask me to come here this afternoon because you wanted to talk about the past or the future, Kate," said Nelson. "I suspect you're more interested in the present."

"That's right." Kate Martin nodded. "I needed the services of a private detective so I looked through the classified phone directory. I saw the name of Peter Howard Nelson, and decided it must be you."

"It was," said Nelson. "And here I am. Now tell me why you think you need a private detective, Kate?"

"Because I feel that I need protection if I expect to keep on living," said the stout woman. "I'm sure that someone plans to murder me, Pete. I don't want to report it to the police. They would

just think I was silly, for I haven't any real proof."

"What makes you think someone might want to kill you then?" Nelson asked.

"The strange phone calls I have been getting during the past two or three weeks," Kate said. "At first I thought it was just some crank and then I began to wonder. It was a man who called the first time. He said, 'I don't like the tone of your threats, Madam Martin, and you won't get a cent from me.' I told him I hadn't the faintest idea what he was talking about and hung up."

"If I didn't know you so well, I would think you were going in for a bit of blackmail, Kate," Nelson said. "That would be possible, wouldn't it?"

"Why, yes, I guess it would," Kate said in surprise. "I never thought of it before. You see, I don't tell fortunes with cards or a crystal ball or anything like that any more. Perhaps some fortune tellers really are able to look into the future I'm not sure about that one way or the other. But I work differently."

"How?" Nelson asked.

"People come to me and tell me their problems," Kate said. "Tell me as much as they wish about their troubles. I listen, and try to give them good advice with a bit of predicting as to just what the future may hold for them."

"Some of them talk too freely, and tell you things that could be used against them?" Nelson demanded.

"Sometimes they do," said Kate. "But it is all confidential. I see them here in my office and there is never anyone else present."

"Who is Orville Arnold?"

"My secretary. I never did know how to save money, and he is quite good at handling my financial affairs. Orville and the telephone operator, Nellie Carter, are my whole staff."

"You have been getting more of those threatening phone calls?" Nelson asked.

"At least six of them," Kate said. "Four from men and two from women. How about it, Pete? Will you take the

case? I'll pay you whatever fee you ask."

"I'll see what I can do, Kate," Nelson rose to his feet. "I haven't forgotten how good you and the rest of the bunch at the carny were to an orphan kid. How you gave me jobs to do, and paid me, too. There won't be any fee, as far as you are concerned."

"Thanks, Pete," said Madam Martin gratefully. "I knew you would help me."

NELSON smiled at her as he went to the door of the office, opened it and stepped out into the hall. He closed the door behind him, and then swiftly examined the front of the door. He found nothing and then glanced down at the thick carpet.

He knelt down and found what he was seeking, a thin wire that ran beneath the carpet all along the hall, and through a tiny hole in the wall on into Kate Martin's private office. Unless Nelson had been looking for the wire, he would not have seen it for it was well concealed.

"Believe it or not you have been waiting for a street car ever since they took up the tracks on Forty-second Street," a soft voice said behind him.

As he knelt there Nelson glanced back over his shoulder and saw a pretty dark-haired girl standing a short distance away looking at him.

"Either that or I'm a praying mantis looking for a home," said Nelson getting to his feet and looking at the girl admiringly. "And if you are Nellie Carter I've got the right number."

"I'm Nellie," said the girl lightly. "I knew there was some good reason besides his face when I refused Joe Doax's proposal of marriage. It was because a Mr. Nelson was coming into my life. When shall we set the wedding date?"

"Not so fast," said Nelson. "We haven't even fallen in love yet."

"Don't quibble over trifles," said Nellie. "I'm sure you are the right one for me. A man who keeps his ear to the wall and his nose to the grindstone."

"To the floor, not grindstone," said

Nelson. "I'm an old friend of Mrs. Martin."

"Of course," said Nellie sweetly. "And you were just listening at the door to make sure she doesn't talk in her sleep." The switchboard operator frowned. "I don't think she will like it, Mr. Nelson."

"Since you are wearing your hat, I judge you are going somewhere, Nellie," Nelson said, moving along the hall toward her. "Suppose we stroll out into the wide blue yonder and discuss this at greater length."

"I'm thrilled," Nellie said, hurrying along the hall toward the closed door leading into the reception room. "The whole idea sounds just too revolting for words."

She opened the door and then gave a horrified gasp. She swayed and then

same wire that Nelson had discovered outside of Kate Martin's private office.

"Stay here, Nellie," Nelson said, hurrying back along the hall to Kate's private office. "I'm sure Mr. Adam won't bother you or try to get away."

He drew open the door of the office and stepped inside, closing the door behind him.

Kate got to her feet as she saw the expression on his face.

"What's wrong, Pete?" she asked anxiously.

"Arnold has just been murdered," Nelson said. "A man named Fuller Adam stabbed Arnold in the back. Adam claimed he couldn't stand being blackmailed any longer."

"Where is Adam now?" Kate asked coldly.

"In the reception room," said Nel-

NEXT ISSUE'S BLACK BAT NOVEL

THE LEAGUE OF FACELESS MEN

By G. WAYMAN JONES

leaned weakly against the side of the open door. Nelson stepped past her into the reception room. Then he halted and stood staring.

Orville Arnold was sprawled face downward across the desk, the handle of a knife sticking out of his back, his gray and blue sports coat stained with blood. Across from the desk a big man dressed in ordinary business clothes and with a gray hat lying on the floor beside him, sat in a chair his face buried in his hands.

"I killed him," he said, lifting his head and looking at Nelson and the girl. "My name is Fuller Adam. I had to do it. I just couldn't stand being blackmailed any longer. I—I just phoned the police and told them to come here."

"I see," Nelson said.

There was an ornate cabinet at one side of the reception room not far from the desk. Nelson walked over to this and opened the doors of the cabinet. Inside the cabinet was a tape recording machine. A wire ran down from this and around the wall to the hall. The

son. "Nellie is there, too. Listen, Kate is there any place a microphone might be hidden in this office? There is a recording machine out in the reception room and a wire from it leading in here. Every time you talked to one of your clients or whatever you call them, Arnold must have recorded the whole conversation on the machine."

"Then he has been blackmailing my clients," Kate said. "No wonder they were calling up and threatening me. But I didn't think it would be Arnold who would be killed."

"I know you didn't," Nelson said. "But let's try and find that mike."

They searched around the room and found nothing out of the way. Then the stout woman went to her desk and Nelson followed her. Kate drew out the center drawer. There was no sign of a microphone there, but Kate casually picked up a small automatic with her left hand.

"There's Nellie listening outside," Nelson said. "See her shadow through the glass part of the door."

THE girl's shadow was clearly visible as she stood outside the closed door. Kate and Nelson stared at it. Then Nelson swiftly grabbed the automatic out of the stout woman's hand.

"I wouldn't want you to do anything foolish with this gun, Kate," he said. He drew open the right hand top drawer of the desk. The microphone was there. "Of course you knew about this. You and Arnold have been working the blackmail racket together.

"That's not true," Madam Martin said sullenly.

"Yes, it is, and I'm sorry," Nelson said. "I noticed when I first talked to you today that there was a hardness about you that wasn't there fifteen years ago. You've changed, Kate, changed a lot during the years."

There was the murmur of deep voices in the outer office and Nelson knew the police had arrived.

"You said your clients paid you twenty-five dollars for the advice you gave them," Nelson went on. "That would mean you would have to talk to a lot of people every day to even make enough money to pay the rent here, to say nothing of whatever you pay Nellie and paid Arnold. You had to work the blackmail angle to get by."

"And I asked you to take this case because you were an old friend," Kate said bitterly.

"That's why you picked me—because I was an old friend," said Nelson. "Evidently Orville Arnold had become too greedy, and you were losing control over him. You wanted me to discover

he was the blackmailer. You were sure that since I was an old friend I wouldn't believe you had anything to do with it, no matter what Arnold said."

The door opened and Nellie and two quiet men who looked like police detectives stood there listening.

"You got your clients to tell you secrets of their past, things they probably had kept hidden for years," Nelson said. "And the mike was picking up their words and carrying them out to the recording machine. Words that Arnold used to blackmail certain people who were rich enough to make it worthwhile. I'm sorry, Kate, but that's the way it happened."

There were questions and then the police took Kate and Fuller Adam away. Arnold's body had been removed. Nelson had managed to convince the detectives that Nellie Carter knew nothing about the blackmail angle. She had been just the switchboard operator. Both Nelson and Nellie had been told they would have to appear as witnesses at the trial. They left the office together and went down in the elevator.

"Strange," Nellie said. "I was just kidding when I said that about a Mr. Nelson coming into my life—but I was right, Peter."

"And I take back what I said about our not even having fallen in love yet," Nelson said. "I get the darnedest pain in my heart every time I even look at you, Nellie."

"That's not love—that's indigestion." Nellie gasped. "What am I saying? I feel a pain in my heart, too."

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"What happens to be the trouble?" I asked as he lifted the gun



When wealthy Margaret Neihmer is kidnaped, the job's a smooth one and the ransom seems to be—

IN THE BAG

APPEARING for only a few moments at the side entrance of the Fairview Bank, I tucked my gold-headed cane under my left arm. Then I hurried down the street, tightly clutching my black bag. It was very heavy. One not familiar with money would hardly believe that twenty thousand dollars could weigh so much. Indeed, one familiar with money would hardly believe it.

It was not far to the railroad station and I already had my ticket and pullman accommodation to the city. I didn't loiter in the small Fairview station but passed the new lockers where one could make a deposit in a slot and obtain for himself a convenient steel depository for a bag.

In the city, I knew that such lockers were scattered about not only in the railroad stations but at the bus ter-

By CARROLL JOHN DALY

minals and in subway stations. The bus terminal I was thinking of had a separate room containing nothing but lockers. I knew about that locker-room.

The train came. A porter in a white coat climbed from a pullman car and placed the step for me, and offered to take my bag. But I held it tightly and smiled at him.

When I was seated in my high backed pullman chair with the white towel behind my head, I really thought of my mission. Certainly, there was a thrill in it. Anyone—even the vice president of a small suburban bank must feel that thrill. Upon my actions rested the life or death of a young woman engaged to be married. She was Margaret Neihmer, the kidnaped daughter of Oliver J. Neihmer, president of the Bank of Fairway. She was to be released in my custody upon the payment of twenty thousand dollars in cash.

In the dining car at supper, I watched the other passengers. Someone on that train was to meet me and direct me to these criminals, who held the young woman prisoner. The police had not been notified. Only the girl's father, Oliver Niehmer, and I—and, oh yes, the World Wide Detective Agency of New York City knew. The kidnapers had warned Oliver Neihmer against the police, and now, against a private agency.

A private detective had gone to make contact—and that detective was never seen or heard from again. This did not, necessarily, mean that he was dead—for his disappearance was less than twenty-four hours old. But he had gone to rescue the girl—gone, without money. And now the kidnapers were threatening death to Margaret, unless their demands were met.

The kidnapers had been in touch with Oliver Neihmer, both by note and by phone, and been explicit in their instructions. They insisted that the vice president of the bank, or the cashier, bring the money. The vice president being away, they had accepted the cashier—but this detective, Harold Haines, entered the case. A mistake which I must rectify, at once, to save the girl's life.

OLIVER NEIHMER had obtained the money and arranged for the cashier to take it with him, and then—

"May I sit down here?"

My thoughts were broken off. I looked up from the table and saw the woman. Young, nicely spoken, nice-looking and nicely dressed. Then I got a whiff of the perfume, and I wasn't so sure. Too much lipstick. Too much eye shadow—and, yes, I felt that her eyelashes were too long. Nice family, was my verdict, but bad companions. It is my business to size up people quickly. A lot depends on that in my profession.

I stood up and indicated the empty chair opposite me at the table for two. She leaned across the table so that her head was close to me as she sat down. Her voice was throaty and low. She asked:

"You are Mr. C. P. Peterson, vice president of the bank at Fairview?"

"Yes." I tried to use the best banking technique and not be too nervous—though a little nervousness would be natural. "I am Charles Philip Peterson, first vice president of the Fairway bank."

"Good," she whispered, and then louder: "Please, sit down, Mr. Peterson." And her voice low again, "It might be best if we seem to know each other and to have met again by accident."

"Quite," I said, removing my pince-nez and cleaning them carefully before replacing them. "And you are?"

"Of course," she nodded brightly. "I should have a name. Miss Andrews—Miss Betty Andrews. For form's sake." She extended her hand.

She had to prompt me then, before I gave her my card and my driver's license. She looked at them down in her lap, then handed them back to me as the waiter came.

"The card read," she went on when we were alone, "Fairway Bank in the center, and your name under vice president down in the left hand corner. Aren't you more important?"

"It is a business card Miss Andrews," I explained. "You never heard of an institution being subservient to an individual."

"I see." I think she was making small talk to put me at my ease. "How long have you been with the bank? You could really pass for thirty-two."

"Very kind." I looked at her now as if she were one of the bank's customers, and I ceased to be nervous—at least not so nervous acting. "I am, as my

license no doubt informed you, forty-two. I have been with the bank twenty-three years—since I was nineteen. Is there anything else you want to know or must know?"

"Not really." She smiled at me now and accepted her soup. "It must be a very important position, and command a handsome salary."

"I am afraid," I told her, "the ordinary layman is grossly misinformed about the salaries paid employees in financial institutions. If you, or your contemporaries, had thought of me in a financial way, you would have been disappointed. My salary is forty-five hundred a year—and my expenses, including charitable work, organizations, and a standard of living one in my position must assume—well—" I spread my hands slightly, smiled with my mouth, but put banker's eyes on her and asked, "Anything else?"

"I suppose," she watched me carefully from steady brown eyes, "that the black bag between your feet should speak for itself. I presume it contains—I mean there is to be no dickering—twenty thousand dollars."

"There will be no dickering," I told her. "The twenty thousand will be at the disposal of the principals when the young woman is turned over to me. I can't say I was in favor of the transaction."

"No," she looked at me steadily. "I can believe that. It is not your daughter that you are redeeming."

"Miss Andrews," I told her, "I came into the bank as a very young man. Mr. Neihmer has been most generous to me. He is in trouble. Our cashier, Mr. Otis, was taken ill. I returned from a trip to New York and he gave me this commission. I don't like it. But I intend to carry it out to the letter. Is anything—has anything gone wrong?"

"No," she said quickly. "You and I Mr. Peterson, are, in a way, acting for someone else. You seek the principals in this matter. I bring you to them. I simply wish to warn you that it would be disastrous to the interest of Miss Neihmer if you should call the police."

"I have no intention of doing any such thing. What an inane thought."

"But there was an attempt to release the girl without paying the money. Or so it seemed. A detective from a private agency made contact and—" I guess the

surprised look in my face stopped her. She said quickly, "You didn't know that about the detective?"

"No." I hoped I showed alarm. "Mr. Neihmer told me that only he and I knew. Now—" I looked down at the bag at my feet and my gold-headed cane across it—"I have been taken advantage of and left myself open to a—"

"No need for you to be alarmed." She stretched a hand across the table and gripped at my wrist. "Everything is quite all right. After all, you are simply the agent with the money to purchase something for your client."

"But I should have been told." I feigned annoyance.

"Perhaps Mr. Neihmer thought you might not go through with it, if you knew."

"And I wouldn't have. I certainly would not have. Why—" my hands came apart—"my good faith might even be doubted. This detective—I never even heard of him." I hope I lied well. I'm quite sure I did. I might almost say, I lied like a banker.

THE girl was trying to quiet my alarm now. And indeed, I didn't want her to know—nor these criminals who would steal a young girl—that I was at all aware of any detective.

After supper we separated, for our chairs were in different cars. I read during the rest of the trip. I felt that the girl might watch me. All my plans were made. I had the money. If I was sensible, I would turn it over to them for the girl. If they were sensible, they would turn the girl over to me for the money. It was nothing but a question of a trade.

I frowned slightly over my book. *Your Bank and You*, it was called. A little opus written by a banker. Very well done too. You would think the bank had no other purpose but to serve the depositor. The officials and the stockholders were the forgotten men. One walked into a bank and helped oneself, it seemed. Very, very amusing.

The girl caught up to me going down the ramp into the station. She gripped my arm. Then she laughed.

"You have the bag chained to your wrist. Did you think I'd snatch it?"

"Really," I told her, "it is no laughing matter. Do you realize my responsibility? We turn here." And when she

wanted to know why, I explained: "The bus terminal. I am going to park this bag in one of the hundreds of public lockers here, until the transaction is satisfactorily terminated." And when her hand gripped at my wrist and she looked around, I added: "There is a policeman over there by the corner—two of them. If you signal anyone, or attempt to acquire the bag—I'll cry out to them."

"And what about the girl. They—she will be hurt."

"As you pointed out," I said, "the girl does not belong to me. Nor does the money."

We went on in silence. The locker-room was a large affair off the bus terminal. I said to the girl:

"You are to wait outside." And when she tried to tell me that I should bring the money with me, "No, I have planned this thing my way. You stay here." I was adamant, and then I added, "It is no reflection on either you or your integrity. I never trust anyone in money matters. It is a rule of the bank."

I went inside. The girl waited outside by a window. I could see her head through the dirty pane glass. I knew exactly what I wanted to do. Only four or five people were making use of the lockers. I went down the length of the room, through a little archway.

It was like an annex. The lockers had become quite popular and this new addition was built. It took me only a minute to turn to the right, be alone in the small room. Choosing a locker, 1212-A, I slipped the bag in. I closed and locked it, secreted my key carefully, and went out and joined the girl. Her nose had been pressed to the glass.

"That was quick," she said. "I know you didn't talk to anyone. If you had, I wouldn't have been here. So you don't trust the boys."

"Hardly," I replied. "I never trust anyone."

She looked at me closely. At my gold-headed cane. At the black ribbon that hung down from my pince-nez. She shook her head.

"For a skinny little middle-aged runt, you are pretty pompous and full of dignity." And shaking her head at my frown, "I guess you'll handle the boys all right. You'll surely impress them."

"I intend to impress them with one thing," I ignored her sarcasm and said

with dignity. "For the girl, Margaret Neihmer, they can receive the money and no questions asked. Where do we go now? It is getting quite late and it is very dark."

She indicated a taxi and we stepped in. She gave the driver the name of a prominent hotel. As we drove through the city traffic, she watched behind us continually. I sat stiff and erect, my hands clasped upon my gold-headed stick. We did not talk.

Before we reached the hotel, she tapped on the glass and gave the driver other instructions—to continue uptown. Five minutes later she had him stop on a dark street across from the park. We got out and, although she looked at me, I stood silently waiting. She finally paid the driver. The cab drove away.

"And now what?" I asked.

"We wait," she said.

"And then?"

"I have no idea where we are going."

"So they didn't trust you."

"It's not that." She tossed her head slightly. "But you might have had another detective, or even the police watching. And they might—I'm not used to this."

"You do not seem to be," I looked steadily at her in the shadows, "the type of a girl who would enter into an act to snatch another from her home and mistreat her. One of these kidnapers is perhaps your gentleman friend?"

"She isn't mistreated." And when I still looked at her, she flushed up and said, "He never had a chance. His parents were poor. His father was killed and his mother died of starvation and a broken heart, and he—he—they hounded him into prison. He's getting back some of what is his."

"So that is what he told you."

"It's the truth," she said.

But she didn't believe it. Only pretended to herself that she did.

"You're in love with him?"

"It's none of your business," she flared up. "Society won't let him work for anyone else. As soon as he gets a job, the police hound him out of it."

"You are," I told her in a fatherly way, "a very unfortunate young woman, but very much in love. There, there, I have no intention of—"

I stopped and jarred erect. I had seen the shadow or felt it, but I was still surprised. And I was right. It was

a gun sticking into my side. The voice said:

"Don't move Peterson. Well, honey, did you frisk him?"

"Frisk him?" She seemed doubtful, and then with her voice changing and growing hard like a poor actress, "Search him? Why I thought you better."

WHEN the man did, I got a fair look at him. Not much taller than I was and about as slender. Crowding thirty, I should say, but he could have been much younger. Hard, and cold, and cruel and yes—handsome, I suppose, in a greasy sort of way.

I could tell before I smelled it, that there was oil on his hair—an affectation I find quite repulsive. He was thorough in his search, even coming across a couple of letters addressed "Charles Philip Peterson, Bank of Fairview."

"Where is the money?" There was disappointment in his voice, more than anything else.

"I have it, on deposit, and will turn it over for the girl. You see—"

The girl came in. She told him where I had put the bag. He questioned her but she didn't know which steel depository it was in.

"Like that," he looked at me. "Smart guy, eh? You got a key? Where's that?"

"In a safe place," and when he stepped back and lifted the gun, I explained:

"What appears to be the trouble? You intend to turn over Miss Neihmer. I intend to pay you the money. That is what I came for."

"Then why didn't you bring it?"

"Really," I said. "What is wrong with my arrangements?"

"You don't arrange things. We do that," he said. Then he hesitated. "We'll—come on. I've got the car here. We'll leave it up to my partner. Is the key to the box on you?"

"It is in a safe place," I told him.

He kept the gun on me, but leaned over and whispered to the girl. She whispered back, and he seemed in a better frame of mind as the three of us walked to the corner, across the street, and so to a small old sedan.

I felt keenly my responsibility to Mr. Neihmer and his daughter. I was quite aware too, that I was exposing

myself to some personal danger. What had become of this detective, Harold Haines? Also, there was no attempt to blindfold me. If the girl was armed or not, I didn't know. She sat in the back with me and the man drove the car. He spoke only once and that was to say back over his shoulder:

"I hope, Mr. Peterson, for your own good, you'll let us make the arrangements when you arrive. Isn't that right, honey?"

Honey said it was. Then she wanted to know if it was best to bring her along, or shouldn't she meet him some place later. It seemed now that this young girl wasn't quite as hard and as sophisticated as she was before. But the driver shook his head and said she was to come.

We drove over toward the river. The traffic grew less and less. At last we entered a deserted street, down to the end of it, and with a sudden turn were over the sidewalk and into a garage that was attached to a dilapidated old three-story house. That was the end of the ride.

The car stopped. The engine died. The doors closed. Absolute darkness. Then an overhead light in the attached garage. I saw the man plainly, who watched us climb from the car. He was bigger, and older, and harder looking than our young companion who had driven the car. If our way of living is written on our faces, this man had lived a life of great evil. I don't think I ever saw a more sinister face.

One could expect nothing in the way of decency from him. I looked from the older to the younger man. Evil, too, was written upon that face—but not yet so thoroughly stamped in. I was glad indeed that I had planted the bag in the bus terminal. I think even there, I foresaw tragedy.

The younger one was explaining, with many gestures, about the bag. He was saying, "Honey says the key is still on him. She couldn't see where—that is which locker he put the bag in. But she knows he didn't meet anyone, or give the key to anyone."

"But the bag? He had it with him?" the older man asked the girl.

She gulped and nodded. She wasn't liking things any too much.

"All right," the older man said. "The bag is there and he is here. We won't

have any trouble getting the key and getting the money." He looked directly at me then. I was right. There was not one redeeming feature about that face. He sneered. "You won't give us any trouble about the bag, will you Mr. Peterson?"

"I hope not," I said with fitting dignity. "If the girl is alive and well, and delivered to me, I see no cause for trouble of any kind. My mission is to turn over the money for the safe delivery of the girl. Here is my suggestion, indeed the only way I will do business. You will release the girl now in my custody. We will go to the bus terminal. I will either give you the key then, or retrieve the bag and hand it to you. You may have my word that I will take no further steps in the matter. Is that quite satisfactory?"

"That," said the older man in a hard, metallic voice, "will be just divine. You are a great little fixer, Mr. Peterson. Mr. Neihmer was wise in his choice of a vice president, and I was fortunate in accepting his suggestion. Would you like to see Miss Neihmer? Shall I bring her downstairs? But come inside."

There were lights on in the house downstairs, but the windows were boarded up and curtains before them so efficient that no light had shown from outside. I said:

"I would as soon see Margaret where she is," I said. "I could report later to her father."

"Now that is fine," the big man answered as he laughed. His laugh was like a sleigh on dry pavement. "We're not exactly the Ritz, you know, but her accommodations are fair. Come upstairs. You, too, sister. You're part of the show now."

We all went upstairs to the third floor. The hall was dimly lit and had a musty smell, and the old boards creaked. A few steps along the top landing, the big man opened a door. A radio gave soft music. Darkness within. He pressed on the flashlight he held in his hand, and I saw the girl. It was not too nice a sight.

MARGARET NEIHMER sat in a corner of the room. Her hair was wild. Her face was streaked with dirt and tears, and yet there was a defiant gleam in her eyes that I liked. The light shone on her and on the heavy cords

that bound her hands and feet. I heard the other girl, known only as Honey, utter a gasp behind me, and the big man curse.

"There she is," he said. "She got loose and ran all over the house. So I had to tie her up. Want to talk to her?"

Margaret Neihmer didn't know me when I spoke to her which I did not think a bit surprising under the circumstances. I crossed to her, and kneeling, put an arm around her. Then the torch went out. The older man was speaking to the younger one about "Honey."

"She's soft, Ed," he said. "Why she's crying," and I heard hysterical sobs behind me. Then the sound as if an open hand had struck the girl, the thud as if she had gone down, and the grunt from the younger man. And Ed, the younger man, said, "Hey—what you doin', Gargon?"

But I was holding the girl, Margaret, and whispering rapidly to her. Then aloud I was saying:

"Of course, you know me Margaret. Your Uncle Charles from the bank. There—you'll be all right. I've come to take you home." I was whispering to her again when the lights snapped on in the room. But the light hadn't gone on before I heard Margaret whisper: "There's a dead man. Down in the cellar."

The overhead bulb gave plenty of light. Too much light. It was not a pleasant room. Margaret was looking at me with uncertain quizzical eyes. Then she burst out with:

"Uncle Charles, Uncle Charles—take me home. Take me home." And the tears came.

I turned now in rightful indignation. I saw the woman known as Honey getting to her feet, and the cut on her mouth where the older man, called Gargon, had struck her. She looked from the younger Ed to the older Gargon. First in uncertainty. Then in alarm. Finally in panic, I thought.

"This," said Gargon, dragging a couple of plain wooden kitchen chairs out from the wall, "is as good a place as any to do business. Mister, I want that key, and the number of the box where the black bag and the dough is. I want it now."

"But," I objected, "I told you the arrangements."

"Those," he said, "are your arrange-

ments. Listen to mine. You've got five minutes to produce that key. If you don't I'll light a fire under your feet for it—or under the girl's feet. Give it a thought."

"But what good would that do?"

"Good?" He opened his eyes wide. "No good. But it would produce the key. Come on, Ed. I want a word with you outside. You stay here, Honey. Tell him to be a nice gent because I'm an impatient man."

They went out of the room and down the hall. Boards creaked on the stairs. The girl Honey looked at me. Then at the bound girl. Then she followed the two men, slowly, softly—furtively.

The radio played on—classical music. Honey was back in a couple of minutes. She was white. She was shaking. She said, without preliminary:

"They're going to kill us. All of us. You, the girl—me." And when I said nothing, "And Ed only objected once. Don't you see. She's seen his face. He wore a mask and she jerked it off and—there's a dead man—some place. Don't you understand? They are going to kill us—all of us. Why don't you do something?"

I could have laughed but I didn't. Instead, I said:

"Why didn't you run out of the house—down the stairs?"

"They're sitting on the stairs!" Her hand went to her mouth. "What will I do?"

"Listen," I grabbed her by both shoulders, "they'll want to torture me for the key. I can't stand physical pain. The big man will get the key. Say to him, 'Be sure you don't let anything happen to Mr. Peterson until you are certain you have the money.'" She looked blankly at me. I shook her. I repeated what I said before. And when she seemed to be listening, I went on. "Don't let Ed stay behind when Gargon goes for the bag. You can do that by asking Ed to stay. Don't you see? The big man then will think you want to work on Ed." I went over and over it with her. I shook her, made her understand. Made her understand she mustn't let them suspect that she knew they were going to kill her.

"What good will it do, if they leave us here alive, tied up," she gasped, "and then come back?"

"You leave that to me," I said. "Do

what I told you. Your life will depend on it." I didn't say anything about my life, or Margaret's life—just her life. I knew what would be important to her.

They came and closed and locked the door. Then they were gone again for a few minutes. I could hear feet in the hall when they returned. I could hear, too, the setting down of something heavy. At last the door opened. Both men came in. Ed didn't look at the girl they called Honey. He didn't look pale, either. His eyes were a little brighter. It struck me then that he had, no doubt, permitted himself a sniff of snow.

GARGON, the big man, didn't waste time. He walked right over to the still bound girl, lifted one of her feet, tore at the shoelaces, dragged off the shoe, then the stocking. He had a match lit when I spoke. "I'll trust you," I said. "I'll submit to your arrangements."

"Where's the key?"

I lifted my cane, unscrewed the top of it, opened it and the key fell out.

"Not bad," he said, and examined the cane.

"It's a long glass tube," I told him. "It was given me as a present, a bit of a joke. It holds a drink."

He shook the cane; the glass tube fell out and smashed on the floor.

"Not bad," he said again, and looked at me. "Who'd have thought it." Then he looked at the key, said half to Ed, half to himself, "1212-A. Okay. Ed, we'll bring in the stuff."

They did. Two large five-gallon cans. From the odor it was easy to tell it was gasoline. It didn't take much imagination to know what use it was going to be put to. I looked at Honey. This was the big moment. She spoke up. She did it well. She should have. Her life depended on it.

"If you are thinking of wiping out the vice president and the girl," she said, "better be sure of the money first."

Ed turned in surprise. The big man put down one of the huge tins.

"Why?" Gargon said to Honey, "Do you think he was tricky with that bag?"

"No—" she insisted. "But Ed is in on the dough. I want to be sure he gets it." She shrugged her shoulders and jerked her thumb at me. "He couldn't talk any more if he was dead."

"Smart?" Ed looked at the big man. "Honey's smart!"

Honey said above the radio that was jazzy now:

"Ed and I could stay here and watch them," and after a pause, "unless Ed is afraid of— But you wouldn't walk off with all the dough, would you, Gargon?"

There was an argument back and forth for a bit, but it was Ed who struck me with his gun. I saw it coming, turned my head, and took it more or less on the jaw. Not an easy thing to do. But concussion can turn up so easily later. I was right about Ed. He would be as bad as the other man in a few years. If he lived that long. Which I doubted. I doubted it very much!

Consciousness floated back to me quickly. The girl, Margaret, had been screaming, but she wasn't now. No sound but the radio—very low. I was lying on my back on the floor. My hands, and arms, and feet, and even my legs, were bound tightly. There was a gag in my mouth. The smell of gasoline was very strong. For a moment I almost felt panic for the first time in my life. But not quite. I was afraid they had trusted me too much about that money in the bag, and might toss a match into the room.

Certainly, there was no odor of fire, nor the crackling of flames. I opened one eye and felt relieved. Margaret was still alive. She had been gagged. Then I saw the girl Honey. She was trussed up across the room from me. Gagged too. I didn't feel sorry for her.

"We better hurry," I heard Ed say. And then, "Listen, Gargon, don't you think we might touch this off now? How could he fool us on the bag?"

"I don't know," Gargon said. "But he fooled you on the key. I didn't like that cane trick. It was out of character. I thought you liked Honey. Now you want to hurry her."

"I don't know," Ed sounded nervous. "Just want to get it over with. She was a nice kid."

"Well," and for a split second three lives hung in the balance. Then Gargon said, "No. It's a hundred to one he's on the level, but I want to have the twenty grand in my—in our hands." He came over to me then, and kicked me on the side of the face. "If you lied, I'll come back and cut you to ribbons—for the truth." They went then. I heard Ed speak at the door.

"Might as well leave it open—make a draft—and we won't have to come back in. Just toss a match."

Ed was fast catching up to his older companion. I wonder if the girl Honey could hear him. Love is a strange thing. She was entitled to a little suffering, I thought.

A door closed far below. I listened. Maybe I heard the motor start. Maybe I didn't. But I did hear it race as the car left the garage—or at least when it left the house. For I think the car waited a bit while someone closed the garage doors. The radio made it hard to tell.

I was uncomfortable, of course. But I'm a patient man. My nose told me there was no hurry. No smell of burning gasoline.

In five minutes I began to stir. The light was on. I oriented myself, and then slid my back slowly along the floor. Gargon was a shrewd ruthless man. I had no doubt that the dead man in the cellar was the detective Haines from the World Wide Detective Agency.

I had no doubt that Gargon had killed men before—perhaps many times. But he was not over clever. He had had his clue. I had tipped my hand. He had even recognized the clue and done nothing about it. Why, he had said, "was not in character with the cane" and to my shame, he was right.

He had even disclosed my weakness. But he had done nothing about it. With a cleverer man I would be dead. But then, I was dealing with criminals, and kidnapers, and murderers. If they were clever men, they would be none of these three things. So I forgave myself.

EVEN though the fingers of my hands were tied tightly behind me, they had not yet become too numb to manipulate. So I jerked up my feet and wiggled along on my back. At last my fingers touched the edge of the rug. I wiggled along to the torn corner of it. Felt very carefully. I had no intention of getting excited and cutting myself. For beneath the corner of that rug, were three tiny knives of the sharpest lengths of fine steel.

Yes, and each one of them had a round handle—strong but no thicker than a match. Rough and dull each handle was, with a sharp point on the end. I found the first of them without

much trouble. They too, had been secreted in my gold-headed cane. I had carefully placed them under the rug when Honey was eavesdropping on the two men on the stairs.

Don't think it was the first time I had ever manipulated this bit of horse play. I did it before, on more than one occasion, to save my life. But I had done it in rehearsal, so to speak—hundreds of times—tied up in every conceivable way. I had even had myself timed with a stop watch, for the situation might arise where time meant everything.

Now I sort of lazed on the job. Located a crack, jammed down the point, and gently rubbed the strong cord that bound my wrists against the sharp blade. Did I cut myself? I did not. It

so long to convince her."

"Ronald's aunt?" I asked her. "Isn't she satisfied with the daughter of bank president for her nephew?"

"It's such a small bank," Margaret was crying softly. "Mrs. Richards, Ronald's aunt, is our biggest depositor. It couldn't be kept from the papers, could it?"

"So far," I told her, "only you, and I, and your father and a most trustworthy head of a detective agency know about it. It might be kept quiet."

"Oh could it?" And then, "Who are you? Why was I—but I knew why I was to call you Uncle Charles. Those terrible men, thought you were Charles Philip Peterson of the bank, and—but who are you?"

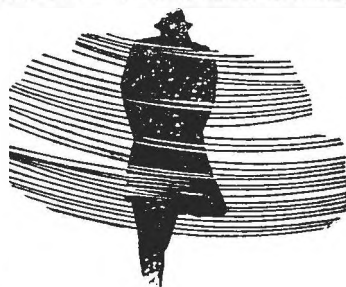
The Shadows of Guilt Gather Around
Young "Angel" Allen in —

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was strong, tough rope. My blade went through it like it was butter.

In two minutes and ten seconds, I was a free man. After that, I freed the girl Margaret Neihmer.

There was a bit of pain while the blood ran back into her swollen ankles and wrists. I rubbed them gently. Certainly, I gave her all the attention. The girl called Honey could wait. She did wait too, putting those big eyes of hers on me with alarm and wonder. I must have worked on Margaret for half an hour—maybe more.

And what goes through the mind of a young girl who has just been saved from being kidnaped, and, surely, had heard that she faced death? Death that must have seemed certain to her. Even I, who have seen so much of life—yes, and death, must live and learn. Youth is such a strange and glorious state, especially female youth.

"What will Ronald's aunt say?" she blurted out. "She will never approve of our marriage now. There'll be the notoriety which she abhors. And it took

I nodded toward the girl in the corner and pressed a finger against Margaret Neihmer's lips. It was a pretty mouth too!

She said again, "But it couldn't be kept quiet, could it? Those men will have to be caught and punished, or some other girl might suffer. You saved my life, and I haven't thanked you. I don't understand—" and her hands going suddenly to her ears, "Can't you shut off that radio?"

I was untying Honey now. Above everything else, she wanted to talk. She was relieved and frightened. Not too dumb. And her first words were,

"I helped, you know. You'll let me go? I really knew nothing. You'll take care of me!" And then in alarm, "It's been a long time. They will be coming back!"

And the girl Margaret's voice, pleading now, "Will you please turn off that radio. It's been going day and night since I've been here. I can't stand it."

I went to the machine and had my hand on the dial, when the music stopped. I turned the power up as a

voice said, "We interrupt this program to bring you a local flash." I held the knob and waited.

The voice went on, "The police have reached the scene of the bomb explosion in the locker-room of the Bus Terminal. Both of the two men were killed instantly. Fortunately, the explosion took place in the little addition to the locker-room. A man standing in the doorway, saw two men hurry in and go directly to a steel depository furthest from the door.

"The taller and heavier man opened the locker and reached in, but the younger man was hanging close over his shoulder. The only witness said that they appeared to be both grabbing for a black bag when the explosion came. Fortunately, though the explosion was of great intensity, it was confined to a small space. Although the witness was badly shaken, he was not hurt. More later."

"I think," I turned to Margaret, "that if you and your father wish, there need be no notoriety of any kind. Indeed, he might carry on with the tale that you are visiting an aunt." And to the girl Honey, "I'm sure this young lady will have nothing to say."

That young lady, Honey, came up to me then, and threw her arms around me. "Mr. Peterson," she said, "you have been so considerate. I never did really care anything about Ed. You thought me—pretty and—"

The push came from me. Sitting down on the floor, suddenly, was her own idea. When she came to her feet, I chucked my thumb toward the door.

"Beat it, sister," I told her. "I never could stand the odor of cheap perfume."

And Honey was gone. Dashing from the room.

JUST at present, I am finishing this report on the train back to Fairview, to return Margaret to her anxious pater. Margaret is quite herself and wishes to keep the kidnaping from the public. She is not naive, but somehow she missed the conversation in that third floor room—or at least she missed the significance of the exploding bag and the happy demise of two unmissed characters—namely: Ed Trader and John Gargon. I shall not enlighten her.

I see by the early morning paper that both these gentlemen have been identi-

fied, and both are quite dead. And of all things, the police suspecting that they blew themselves up with their own contraption, as John Gargon was known to be quite a hand at safe blowing.

Margaret is now convinced, from my persuasive talk, that both these men will meet their just punishment for some other crime besides that of snatching her. Indeed I have promised her that.

Let me assure you that that is the truth. When John Gargon and Ed Trader left that old house on their last ride, I was not thinking of the suffering of a young girl kidnaped, nor even the indignity of the threatened death by fire; that had been heaped upon my bowed head.

I was thinking of the dead man that Margaret had seen in the cellar, and which I knew then—and verified before leaving the house—as your faithful operator and my esteemed contemporary, Harold Haines.

So my duty to my client, Oliver J. Neihmer, and his daughter Margaret, ended when she was set free. But my duty to your august firm and my own person, ended when the pair who killed Harold Haines paid the price.

SPECIAL OPERATOR,

Willie

Alias Charles Philip Peterson.

Suggested conclusion. That since neither the agency, nor I, have a license to lose in this state, and since our client wishes it all very hush-hush—and our duty is to our client—our work, therefore, remain of the greatest confidence. . . .

J. B. Stanton, head of the World Wide Detective Agency, stood over his silent partner until the fat man had read Willie's report for the second time and fully digested it. Then he spoke.

"Willie," he said slowly, "is the best and by far the highest paid detective in the business. But I am not amused by the character impersonations in his office reports. In fact, it nauseates me. Willie has had me on the phone. I have retrieved the real bag of money and returned it to Mr. Neihmer. Mr. Neihmer does want silence and we do lose the credit."

"You mean the dubious credit." The silent partner grinned and clasped his hands across his ample girth. "I suppose in a way Willie sent them to their

death. Strange little actor, Willie—but quite an artist. His report,” he tapped the neatly typed sheets he still held, “is in character when it needs to be. And if he gets a kick out of sending it in that way because he knows it annoys you—why worry about it.

“Look how familiar he was with the vice president’s salary, and the little touch of carrying a book on banking. I particularly liked his reference to the perfume, and the oil on Ed’s hair. He commands a high price. But he does a high class job. It was smart, that gold-headed cane like the real Peterson always did carry, not to mention the knives in it. Willie certainly placed his life in great danger.”

“I don’t know about that.” Stanton shook his head. “He makes it look like it. But he always had things in hand. He had the money in another locker over in the railroad station, and the key to it in an envelope at the Biltmore Hotel. I don’t like the idea of secrecy from the police. It could cause us trouble.”

“Would you,” the blue eyes of the silent partner twinkled, “would you like to explain it all to the police? That would present some difficulties even to you, I imagine. No, Willie worked it out well,” and with a slight chuckle. “A neat little touch there, I thought, when he let Honey pay for the taxi. I wasn’t quite certain if it was our Willie creeping in, or actually the banker Peterson. But he did place himself in considerable danger. Margaret Neihmer might have given him away.”

“I daresay he had something else up his sleeve to cover that.”

“Come now,” said the silent partner severely. “You don’t do Willie justice. These two men planned a horrible

death for, not only Willie and the Neihmer girl, but one of their own because they felt she might weaken and talk. And don’t tell me Willie didn’t know that danger when he went into the case.

“Our Willie must have more than suspected it from the beginning. Haines had disappeared. There could be but one reason. They had discovered him and killed him. The first murder begets other murders. No, J. B.—Willie’s life hung on the flick of a match. You underestimate the daring and the courage of Willie.”

J. B. Stanton began to bob his head up and down very slowly as the whole truth dawned on him.

“Harold Haines was a good man,” the silent partner went on very seriously. “He had Willie’s determination but, unfortunately, not Willie’s brains. I liked that boy Haines. I like the way Willie paid them off. I like it a lot. What of Harold Haines—of the body. Was that difficult?”

“No,” snapped Stanton, “it wasn’t. The police had an anonymous call. Then they notified me of finding Haines’ body. An anonymous call.”

“Willie, of course.”

“Who else? A hard, cold, calculating little man, Willie. But as you say, Haines was a fine boy. And Willie did mete out justice. It was swift and sure, and deadly!”

Stanton turned and went to the door, and tore open the telegram his secretary gave him. He read it slowly.

The silent partner looked at his watch. “I’m waiting,” he said, “to have a talk with Willie.”

“You’ll have to wait.” Stanton tossed the telegram over to him. “It’s from Willie. He’s gone fishing.”

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dropped into that heated
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CHAPTER I

Murder at Night

BURTON had just finished smoothing down the points of his black wing tie when Ricci Gaspard called. He told the man at the annunciator in the foyer to send him up. Then, instead of putting on his coat and fumbling to work the .38 harness under his shoulder, he simply dropped the automatic into a pocket of his dressing gown and went

with quiet determination to the door.

The gambler had just arrived in New York from London, and until his own apartment in the Village was readied, he was occupying a friend's place in midtown New York, minus the services of Han Soy, who was preparing the Tenth Street place.

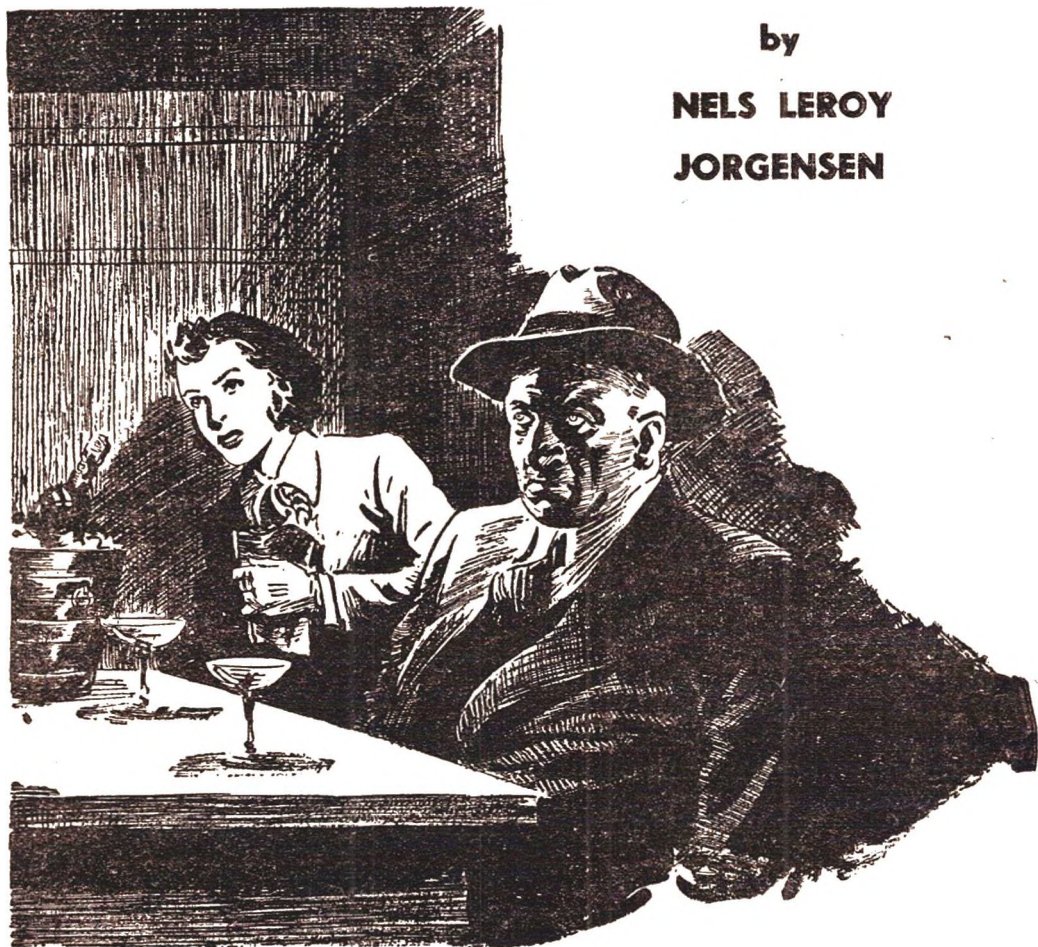
He frowned. Always, wherever he

A Gambling Adventurer Sidesteps the Law to

GUNPLAY AT JULIO'S

by

**NELS LEROY
JORGENSEN**



moved, he'd found trouble, but Ricci Gaspard's call, on the heels of his arrival, suggested that it might be coming to meet him. Ricci Gaspard was a gambler, too, but of a different sort. Raceless from a blend of races, Gaspard had more than luck at cards to thank for his racing cars, polo ponies, elaborate hotel suites and what other spoils he

chose from men or women.

Burton strapped on his wrist watch. Then he opened the door.

TWO men were there. His dark features tightened. True, Ricci Gaspard had never been an avowed enemy, yet Burton, for his part, was known as a square gambler who had fought in the

Exact Vengeance for the Killing of a Friend!

past against practises he knew existed in such places as Gaspard operated. Slipping off the safety catch of the automatic in his hand, he stepped back a little.

"Come in, Gaspard. You forgot to mention you weren't alone."

Gaspard was sleek and gross but his face was hard; underneath a rakish hat brim his eyes bored black and a cigar rolled in his mouth, a cigar he jerked out carelessly to speak.

"Meaning Dutch? He's okay, he'll behave. Dutch Ordway, this is Mister Burton—Black Burton to you!" Then: "Dutch does a lot of driving—and other things—for me."

Burton gestured. The room beyond lay in soft pleasant shadows. A cellar-stair stood there prominently. Ordway spied it, started for it, until a motion from his employer checked him. He sucked in his breath and retreated into half gloom.

Gaspard, when he got to the center of the room, halted.

"Just got back, I hear, Burton."

"Did you walk in here to welcome me home?"

Gaspard's chuckle sounded again. "I admit I been watching steamers and trains. But no, I didn't come to welcome you home. I wish maybe you'd of stayed away. But it was no job having you tailed here once I knew you were in." He tossed his cigar into an urn, said softly, flatly, "They tell me you got a date with young Malloughby tonight. Is that right?"

Burton looked at his watch. "Yes, and in a very few minutes from now. What about it?"

"For his sake—don't keep it!"

Burton's eyes clouded. "Suppose you enlarge on that idea?" he suggested.

"Sure! It's this way: Malloughby's a nice kid—social register, Bar Harbor, Southampton—all that. Only he gambles too much. I know, I got plenty of his IOU's. Now he's off gambling himself, he says, and you know what he's up to now?"

"I know. That's why I'm to meet him. He's tied up in a kind of partnership

with a man named Dirk Richardson and they're opening this new club. I was going along to see if Ted needed any money personally—not for the club—I've heard he was pretty well stripped. He would be; he's been playing your tables, they tell me."

In the shadows Ordway stirred angrily but Ricci Gaspard merely shrugged.

"You must come down and play at one of my houses again, sometime, Burton. I think we'll please you. But just now—I don't want Dirk Richardson and Malloughby to open right where they are. I have some interests in that vicinity that I don't want pried into. Savvy? Undoubtedly the kid will be able to draw a good crowd with his society gang. That's the idea, I guess. Too good! But I want you to advise him to clear out—shut up shop."

"For his health, you mean?"

Gaspard's eyes flickered. "Just that. For his health. That's what I mean."

Burton's face was inscrutable. "I'm not doing that, Gaspard. But I'll be sure to tell him what you said. And I must remember to tell my friends on the Force, too."

Gaspard's face grew ugly. "You mean that punk Dalton?"

"I might have been thinking of Lieutenant Dalton—of Homicide. I've heard a good piece of your underworld has your label for him." Burton waited.

"All right—if it's not your way then it'll have to my way. You won't like it any better." Gaspard jerked a shoulder and he and his gunman marched to the door.

Burton made sure it was shut and then went back to complete his dressing. He strapped on the shoulder harness, fitted the .38 snugly into place, lifted his arms into his jacket.

He missed Han Soy. Only that day he and the Chinese servant who had been his almost inseparable companion for many years, had arrived in Manhattan. They had been abroad for some time and Han Soy had taken it upon himself to see that the Village apartment which was his employer's home in New York

was in perfect order, while Burton stayed at a friend's place.

The gambler's wife, the lovely Vivian, remained in Europe. That meant little, for the same roof had not sheltered them both at once for some years. They had early recognized that while they loved one another, a gambler and a society beauty had separate lives. Now—something about Gaspard's call made Burton glad that his wife was safe. Gaspard would stop at nothing.

Certainly Gaspard was no friend. But he was not the only enemy either. Perhaps Ned Dalton, Lieutenant on Homicide, was Burton's closest friend in New York. In the past Burton had helped blast the way of Law side by side with the man who had risen from the ranks to a high post in the Manhattan Police.

But Gaspard had timed that call, and Burton wondered why. It was not logical that Gaspard, crooked character that he was, would have believed he could scare Burton off. He must have some sinister reason for not wanting another gambling place in the district, on the street he called his "own."

Burton knew the inference. Gaspard was a "fence." Numerous robberies in the vicinity and no arrests and no recoveries of the fortune in money and jewels that had been hi-jacked from the wealthy crowd that supported the gambling tables made it clear that, in some way, Gaspard was running with the hi-jackers and was probably a "fence" who did not want others in his vicinity. His places offered a splendid location for a selected traffic.

Gaspard knew and respected Burton and knew he was a friend of Malloughby's. He might even have thought to call off Malloughby by his present means, until he could reorganize. Only now it was too late.

BURTON slid back his taxi window and asked for a little more speed. The driver turned his head slightly to say, "Doin' my best, skipper," and then landed in a traffic jam. Burton sat back until they were free of it, feeling the need for haste, and after that they made

time. Two minutes later they were tearing up from the west end of a dark street in the mid-fifties, heading east again. This block was almost empty of traffic.

But even so the time was not good enough. Not good enough to save Ted Malloughby's young life.

A lone black sedan came edging slowly along the curb. Suddenly it darted in close and began to spout flame.

At the top of the steps of one of the regular brownstone-fronted houses had been standing a tall, impeccably clad figure in the black and white of evening dress. A small glow from a discreet bronze light played over his head, outlining wide shoulders, slender hips, fair, brushed-back hair.

Then with the rat-tat-tat of an automatic's fire, Ted Malloughby's body caved in at the middle, swayed, to come plunging down the steps and sprawl at the foot of them in a heap.

Burton heard his driver's curse as the car jerked to a stop. He stepped to the curb, bent over, glanced beyond. The slow-crawling black car had picked up speed, was nearing the corner and the light was green ahead of it!

Burton knew without asking that he had engaged the kind of driver who would take no pleasure in a chase. He hurried on, snapping free his gun. Behind him the street was rising in excitement. A police whistle shrilled. Someone screamed.

He had only a ragged glimpse of the men in the sedan. A burst of fire came at him suddenly from a car that had trailed the first car. He dove into shadows. The men, he could see, were below the level of the tonneau but the driver was clear.

Burton ran a few yards, dodged, flattened as a new burst came from the follow-up car, then let fly. Three shots he drove into the sedan's interior.

The car swerved giddily. But then something happened. He knew what it was. He had succeeded in winging the driver and another had taken his place. Despite the whistles and shouts the second sedan got under way once more,

slewing crazily into a gutter before it was righted, then it was gone. A red light came and traffic commenced to flow in a mighty flood across the avenue.

Burton turned back to where he had left his friend. He went tiredly. He had no need to ask if Ted had been killed. He knew that in advance.

He shoved past the ghoulish group at the curb, paused only momentarily to gaze at the crimson stain at the foot of the steps; then, eyes bleak, swung upward. His manner was such that even the policeman there did not see fit to halt him.

Inside the doorway, under the pallid rays of the discreet lamp, stood Dirk Richardson, Ted Malloughby's partner.

Burton gripped his arm. He was shaking.

"Richardson!" he snapped. "You know me—Burton! Get me to a phone—quick!"

Richardson, a slim man in his late forties, inclined to pallor and baldness, appeared more unnerved than anyone. Even so, he was a gambler and he must have been in scenes like this before. While Burton frowned at him quizzically, he bobbed his head vaguely, licked his lips, then led the way to a tiny office on the second floor.

"They brought him upstairs," he said, then pointed to the telephone.

Burton had no eyes for the tidy little den. Papers were strewn but comfortably so. Richardson stood in the doorway, uncertain, like a man waiting for a word of comfort, wavering.

"It's all right," Burton said. "Thanks. You'd better get a drink for yourself. They'll want you." He dialed.

A moment later there came Ricci Gaspard's mocking voice: "Yes? What is it?"

Burton responded. "I knew you'd have an alibi. I don't need to tell you the news. You made it. I only wanted to be sure about where you were—or weren't."

"How nice? What happened?"

"Malloughby was gunned out. Strange you should have been telling me he

would be! Only a few minutes ago."

"How sad! His sister will be desolate. She is all alone now, with so few friends—"

"Sister? Yes, he had a sister, didn't he? Maybe later I'll take you up and come and play with you, Gaspard. I wouldn't be surprised at all if I did. Right now I'm busy."

He hung up quickly. That mocking voice disturbed him. He knew Gaspard was responsible for the night's work, and he thought he knew why: Gaspard had to keep this section under his own heel. But Gaspard had got himself an alibi. He was too big a racketeer to do his own dirty work anyway. But one of his men had a .38 slug somewhere in him. Burton could verify that!

CHAPTER II

Girl Bait



He emerged from Dirk Richardson's office to find himself in the midst of a confused scene out of which order was growing rapidly. A police car had a moment before whined to the curb, bluecoats had possession, an ambulance stood behind.

The street was closed off just in front. Naturally the traffic could not be halted, not at this hour, so a mounted policeman was prancing a mettled horse in the street's center and roaring explosive commands to eastbound cars to keep moving.

Burton paused. He had not seen Richardson in a good light, only enough to recognize the man's extreme nervousness. A nervousness that a professional gambler would have scorned to show, even at the sight of sudden death. Of course this would mean the end of the enterprise and he'd be on the loose again. Burton turned away.

A burly form was straightening up from beside the dead body. Ned Dalton of Homicide was pushing back damp

hair at the edge of his forehead. He recognized Burton, moved.

They were old friends, these two. Dalton, one time a uniformed cop on a beat, had a mind never given to swift, inductive reasoning. He was a cop and he wanted to be just that: a good cop. Some years back, when he had been a detective sergeant, with Burton's aid he had made a flash arrest in a murder case and from that time on his movements had been watched. Later there was another homicide in lower Manhattan, this time a gambler. Between Burton and Dalton they had turned over to the D.A. a murderer whose name had shocked a town seldom shocked, and Dalton made his lieutenantcy in Homicide. Now he shook hands with his friend, smiled a little.

"Knew you got in today but didn't figure you'd be in a mess like this so soon. I might have known. It's your kind of meat."

Burton's answering smile was crooked. "That's just it, Ned—I was too close."

Dalton's eyes narrowed. "Suppose you give," he said softly, ignoring those in the rear and drawing the gambler a little away. "They handed this case to me."

Burton told what he knew of the evening. He ended with: "But I telephoned Gaspard right after the shooting. He answered the phone himself."

"Sure of his voice?"

"More! I think he was simply sitting there waiting for the call, knowing it would come. He was gloating. Gaspard didn't do it himself. His personal alibi is foolproof. But he's got men." Burton frowned. "Where was Ted hit?" he demanded.

"Bullet entered under the left rib, hit the heart. Only one. But what's on your mind?"

"Maybe nothing. But Ted was out there waiting for me, I think. I had an idea that, just as I came up, he was turning a little, that maybe someone had called him from inside. If he'd gone back in right then—" Burton frowned.

"You saw that sedan, I take it. May-

be two, but I mean the murder sedan. Recognize anybody in it?"

"Not to swear a life away, no. But I left a mark on its driver. I think I could tell exactly where I placed that shot. If it's my cartridge, with my .38 markings, it can prove lots."

"Usually," Dalton said, "you can tell where you place your shots. Now what? If Malloughby was a friend of yours I suppose this'll mean another wild night for Headquarters."

Outside the night was still warm. Burton walked down the dark street slowly. His right hand felt inside his coat pocket, ejected the clip of cartridges from his automatic, pushed it back in place with new cartridges in it. He was sure that Ned Dalton's prediction about a wild night was a true one. A warm fog had settled. The street had taken on a sheen of glistening, mirror-like damp. The fog was not thick but it was sufficient to make taxi lights and street lamps glow with a dull diffused sort of radiance.

Noting shadows, he walked warily. He knew the game he had entered that night was a desperate one and that it had just begun. It would be over when Homicide had Ted Malloughby's killer under lock and key. Until that time, he, Burton, was a menace.

Light heels came click-clicking along the shining pavement in the rear. A slight figure was approaching. A girl. He continued on his way slowly, in his mind's eye the picture of a slim, graceful figure hurrying too fast down that now almost-deserted street. Hurrying for a Fifth Avenue bus perhaps, or the taxi rank near the corner of the farther side.

He drew in slightly toward the buildings to let her pass. He was in no particular hurry; now he was rid of the scene behind him he needed to think. Then a strange, breathless voice was in his ear, at his left shoulder, something hard was jammed sharp into his ribs. A girl's voice was choking out:

"You—Black Burton! Before I kill you—and I'm going to—tell me why you and your friends killed Ted!"

Burton halted. Reflected light shone gently on the small upturned face. It was a pretty face, piquant in other scenes, with red lips made more for laughter than tears and eyes made for dancing lights instead of the horror lurking in them now.

"Ted!" Yes, Malloughby had had a sister, that was true. Her name, he remembered, was Lucia. He recalled her as a feature in photos of late night clubs, bazaars, horse shows and the like. She had even endorsed a cigarette. A debutante of only two years grace. She had been, until the crash in the family fortunes had left two parentless children almost penniless, the acknowledged leader of her own daring set. That she had courage no one doubted. Now it was frantic courage, hysteria-inspired. And Burton had never approved of guns in the hands of women.

HE said gently, "You must be Lucia Malloughby. But why the gun—for me?"

"You killed him! No, not perhaps with your gun, your own gun, but you made the date that put him where he could be killed. Back there they told me. He was to meet you, waited on the steps. A phone call had just come to say you'd pass by and pick him up in your taxicab, and he went out—"

"Who told you about the phone call?"

"Does it matter? The switchboard girl told me, after I'd been told by Dirk Richardson!"

He was silent. He seemed to have forgotten that gun at his ribs. She was trembling. At last he said:

"Lucia Malloughby, have you ever killed?" His voice was soft, disarming.

He could hear the catch in her breath. He went on quickly: "It wasn't Black Burton who shot down your brother, Miss Malloughby. But I see where you could have believed it was. Listen to me! If you're intent on taking revenge for his murder—and that, incidentally, is what I was starting out to do—you can do it later, if it's me. I heard those shots. I was trying to get there in time to prevent what happened. Ted was not killed

by any bullets from my gun and an inquest will show that."

"How do I know—now—?" She was half convinced, more perhaps, by his calm and the steady coolness in his voice, than by his words. She wavered and he had his chance.

Her small pistol muzzle moved a little and when it did his left hand clamped down hard on her small wrist. The wrist twisted outward. She gave a smothered cry. As the weapon loosened he put out his free hand to catch it, said quietly:

"You might as well drop it. Not much sense pulling the trigger now, is there?"

He heard her indrawn breath, a new sob of chagrin. The gun came free and lay in his palm. It was a small black automatic, but a deadly weapon at reasonably close range.

She was quivering now, he saw. And then, before anything else could be said, something—some instinct—caused him to glance back down the street. The fog still clung but in that brief instant he saw the lone black sedan bearing down—one of the two sedans he had seen earlier, he was intuitively sure.

Again the street was almost empty. Again that black cruiser was rolling its juggernaut way. Burton snapped:

"Quick!—Down!"

And he threw her with him into the black slit of the convenient areaway. He could hear her quick gasp. In the same moment the sedan was at the curb and lead from two automatics was beginning to lace across the glistening pavement. A storm of it.

Once again whistles shrilled alarm. Burton's gun was free. He crouched and sent two shots into the rear of the big car, aiming mostly for the tires.

He saw a head outlined, the black muzzle of a gun. As the car began picking up speed he turned from a vain attempt at the tires to another target. Flame belched back at the roar of his own automatic. Lead slapped against the side of the building.

But inside the sedan, as it broke free, a dark figure lay slumped half across an open door. Blood dripped from a hole

in its jaw. Burton's eyes held amber light in their depths.

The car veered once more, then gathered sudden panicky speed. It vanished. All the whistles and commands from the Law for it to halt could not prevent its rounding that Fifth Avenue corner and speeding off downtown. Its movements had been timed well.

Against his side Burton could feel the girl's body still quivering. He steadied her as she got to her feet.

"What—what was it?"

"Some people who don't like me." She had not comprehended it all and he was just as pleased. "I don't think they were after you, except you were there. The people who know I'm not going to rest till I've got Ted's killers by the heels. It's over." He steadied her, spoke swiftly to head off the nervous reaction that was coming. "I've told you I'm going to get that crowd. And I think it will be tonight. If you want to help get your brother's killers—you can. Now you understand a little."

She blinked back tears and threw back her head.

"How can I help?"

He touched her arm. "There's a restaurant a little away from the corner on the other side. We might drop in there and have some strong coffee. Or even brandy. Then I'll tell you." As though she had never had fear of him, she now accepted his hand on her arm and moved closer. "You'll be able to help, if you want to."

SHE was prettier than he had realized, even with the traces of grief and shock still on her. They entered the small restaurant and he steered her to a table in the rear. She absented herself for a moment and while she was gone he ordered two pots of coffee, strong, and two champagnes.

When she returned he noted admiringly that she had done wonders in repairing the ravages that the last hour had made. There was a new glitter in her eyes when she came back and sat down. Her lips were red, her cheeks, under the healthy tan, were flushed but

smoothly olive and beautiful. Giving her a cigarette, motioning to the coffee and brandy, he leaned over to say:

"Do you want to try to believe me now, Lucia? If you do, how did you manage to arrive there at the club so soon after the first shooting? That's important! We can forget that last little party; that was for me. I don't think you were recognized, so we can start clear from there."

"I think I want to believe you—Black Burton," she said hesitantly. "And I don't think I was recognized. The fact is I hadn't intended to go anywhere tonight. Gambling places, I know, don't hit their stride until after midnight. But I received a telephone call."

When she stopped, looked away, he pressed: "Still reluctant? I'll help. Do you know a man named Gaspard? A gambler with places downtown and pushing in uptown here?"

She stared with dilated eyes. "How did you guess?" she demanded.

"It wasn't too much of a guess," he said. "But I gather you know him! Know any of the places he operates?"

"A little. I've been with—Ted." The tears threatened to come welling up again. "What—what about—this Gaspard? And why do you ask if I know of him?"

"You tell me. What did he say when he telephoned? It was he who phoned, wasn't it?"

"He said he wanted to warn me that my brother was on the spot tonight. That I might help to save him if I persuaded him in time to postpone his opening—for good. That I must get Ted to avoid the gambler known as 'Black Burton.' That this Burton was, as he said, 'trying to take over.'"

Burton's eyes half closed. "Mr. Gaspard," he said, through cigarette smoke wreathing his dark features, "has something of the Machiavelli in him. He wants, briefly, to keep that district his own. That's first; no publicity there. Quiet! It'll be quiet, after tonight, he thinks. And he wants it that way because Ricci Gaspard is a big dealer in stolen goods and he slips it out of that

district from time to time, judiciously. He is, in other words, a 'fence', aside from anything else.

"All the robberies in that part of town he's connected with, and the people robbed, are wealthy. It takes care and time to dispose of loot like he's got in his own places. It means he can't have a crowd around! Nor police. He came to me tonight and suggested I talk Ted out of this venture."

When she looked curious he continued, "It was really a threat of course. No concessions. Naturally I refused. Ted was no coward and he wouldn't have listened. But Gaspard knew I still had a date with him, knew it well. I was about to offer your brother what ready cash he might need for personal expenditures until things got going, knowing how it was."

After a space of silence she said, "I understood Dirk Richardson had a fair amount of capital."

"He might have had, once. Not now. Do you know him?"

"Casually. He was supposed to be the professional, the man in the know, to make a good combination." She sipped at her brandy. Her eyes were dry, now, brightly eager. "What is it that I'm to do," she breathed, "to help?"

"First—telephone Gaspard. Return his call. Then do as he tells you to do."

She sat back. "What?"

"It may sound mad but—just that. Only he mustn't know we've talked, yet." Burton's eyes hardened. "You see, Gaspard's idea is to have that district for his own, and with Ted out of the way he believes he can handle you easily. Richardson won't be much, not if I know his type. Besides, I want you to know the truth, all of it, even if it's written that you have to hear it with gunplay as an obbligator. You will, before daylight! Here's your automatic back. Now make that call."

She wet her lips. Her eyes wondered, but she rose to do his bidding. He finished his brandy and as she came back he arose to hear her say, breathlessly:

"Somehow I got the feeling that he knows something has gone wrong

somewhere. He's so desperately anxious to convince me of your guilt! He said he wanted me to come down to him, said he knew it would bring you like—a fly to molasses."

Her eyes held a question and Burton said, "He wasn't being funny either. You're not meeting him at his place?"

"No. You know *Julio's* and Gaspard's back court adjoin. Ted said he suspected Gaspard really owns both and *Julio's* keeps on as a smart bar-grill-restaurant but just a front and an introduction for some of his newer clients."

"Ted guessed right there," Burton said. He laid some money on the table, went to the door with her. "You're leaving me here. But you'll see me later. Count on it!"

CHAPTER III

The Spider and the Fly



BURTON waited a full fifteen minutes. Then he hailed a new taxicab and directed the driver to drop him at Sheridan Square.

In his own mind there were no questions. But that wasn't enough. The first thing was to prove to this heartbroken but gallant girl that her brother had fallen victim to the guns of lawless men who would stop at nothing even now. The next was to take vengeance for Ted and for her. And, maybe the Law.

Even so, Ricci Gaspard was a smooth and convincing talker; sending her into his hands was a long chance. He had got Ted out of the way; now for his purposes as well as for the safety of his own skin, he had to remove Burton. He had failed—maybe twice, once when he had sent the girl after him. But he could talk still.

Burton smiled grimly, for he knew his friend Dalton would have to agree with him this was definitely not a police case. The issues were too much on the borderline.

Now that Ted was removed, Dirk Richardson remained a symbol. Not a strong character but there. Burton could fit most of the pieces of the puzzle together but even to him the case was not closed. Somewhere in the jigsaw there lurked an unknown element and he needed to find out what it was.

How had Ted happened to be there in response to a fake telephone call just then? Could Gaspard, sitting downtown like a spider in a web, have timed it thus carefully? What voice had brought Ted out to what was undeniably a "spot"?

Across from a low-lit sign that spelled out *Julio's* near the corner of the Square, Burton dismissed the cab and went into a telephone booth. He dialed, viewing the square as he called, and when a voice answered he spoke cautiously.

"Mr. Gaspard. No name!"

A brief hesitation; the instrument was laid down, and then at last came Gaspard's voice, low: "Well?"

"Hello, Ricci. Burton. Miss Malloughby there yet?"

A puzzled pause, then, "Not here—yet. But she will be. You knew she was to come?"

Burton's reply was ready: "She's heard by now that your name has been mentioned in this thing. I've been uptown and know she was there—afterward. I had an idea she'd get in touch with you. It isn't surprising."

"Guess not. Coming in tonight?"

"Yes. I wanted to see Miss Malloughby, though. She'll be in your place?"

"No." A low chuckle came. "No. But they just brought me a chit. She's arrived."

"*Julio's*, then I gather."

"*Julio's* it is. Come in some time and we'll talk. Tough, that kill tonight, eh, Burton?"

"Yes. And you had an alibi, too, I know. But more than one man has gone to a hot seat for instigating a kill. You don't have to be on the spot or even holding a gun if you're an accessory. Or did you know that?"

"I know a lot of things," Gaspard chuckled. "You're coming in? With your

tin cops in all their glory?"

"Have I needed cops to help me out before? No, if it was a cop case you wouldn't be so afraid of me, Ricci, afraid enough to try to have me killed! I'll see you later, as I said."

The booth had been warm and Burton stepped immediately into the open air—just in time to see a slipping, jerking figure in the act of stepping off the curb as the lights turned.

"Better wait for the green light, Dutch!" he said.

Dutch Ordway whirled, stepped back to the curb. His shoulder, under his coat, was lumpy with hasty and unfinished bandaging. Under shaggy yellow eyebrows, pale washed-out eyes glittered with fear and defiance. There was the impression that the lights of *Julio's* aided the defiance.

Burton came close, while the smaller man with the apelike torso stood flat-footed considering him warily.

"Haven't you had time to get that shoulder patched up yet, Dutch?"

A curse. "It's neuritis! And what's it to you, Burton?"

"Maybe I'm anxious about your health. If I'm not mistaken there's a chunk of my lead in there yet. I conserve my lead. No, you've hardly had time to see a doc, have you?" Burton went on: "And you won't have much more time, not tonight."

EVIL glinted in the small eyes. "You drilled Tony Saccatto higher up, didn't you, Burton?"

"Was that Tony Saccatto? And you driving?" Burton's voice had been low. But it had a chill in it.

"What's all that got to do with—with—?"

"With Ted Malloughby's kill, you were going to say? We both know, don't we?" Burton spoke carefully. He knew this man feared him, for all his bravado. "Would you like to throw in with the Law and take the easy way out, Dutch?"

"Meaning what?"

"Meaning I'm giving you a chance to save a worthless hide. I've got this kill sewed up right now but there are spots

still not fitting together. I know you drove both cars. I don't care what you did with Tony Saccatto's body; I know he's dead. But if you talked a little—" Burton's voice trailed off.

Dutch Ordway's eyes became more piglike than before. He looked away, seemed to gather reassurance from the bright lights of the Square, the sign over *Julio's*. He said:

"Let me make a call first, will you? Then I'll tell you what I think of your ideas."

BURTON nodded. Dutch was probably going to telephone to Gaspard. But Gaspard already knew he was on the way.

He watched while Dutch went into a booth. His eyes never left the broken-nosed profile there. Ordway finished the call and came across to him at last.

Burton eyed him. "Did the boss reassure you?"

"Did he what?"

"Did he tell you it was all right?"

"Nuts! I didn't call the boss! I—"

Burton knew the man could have bitten his tongue out for that break. And with it another piece of the puzzle tumbled into place. He knew Ordway had told the truth. After all, why should he have called to warn that Burton was outside when Burton had suggested for himself that he had a rendezvous?

"Good! Run along, Dutch. See you later!"

Ordway hesitated. Shuffled.

Burton said, "If you don't make any more bad breaks you'll be alive to tell your story to the State tomorrow. Personally, I don't think you did any kills.

I've got the impression you're mean but not much with a gun, Dutch."

The light changed and Dutch Ordway, with a whispered curse, stumbled across the wide street. His back vanished into *Julio's*.

More than once in that last half hour Ricci Gaspard had been called away from the intimate table in the small booth at the rear of *Julio's*, on the second floor. It was a quiet, well-ordered place, favoring low lighting and deep wood paneling. Across the black maw of the court, from time to time, muted sounds could be heard from the gambling rooms, where the long bar prevailed downstairs and where play went on heavily.

There was a bottle of chilled champagne on the table in a bucket, two glasses. Before Lucia sat a glass that had merely been touched. By her hand lay her small bag, its contents partly spilled out, as though she had had recourse from time to time to powder or lipstick. There were shadows under her brave young eyes.

Now Gaspard slid back into his place with a worried frown. His eyes were muddled. Lighting a cigarette, he tossed off a glass of wine, drummed on the table with short fingers.

"I have tried to convince you," he said. "But I keep getting the idea that Burton must have contacted you in some way. If he did, I don't know what he told you, what he wants you to believe; but this you've got to believe because you know it for yourself: I tried to keep Ted from opening tonight. You've got to admit that."

She nodded with frozen composure. "I know it. But now I can see it was a threat."

"You mean—?"

"I mean that his and Richardson's place was in your way there, in that street. You're doing more than running salons *privées*, Mr. Gaspard." She swallowed the lump in her throat, ignored the swift narrowing of his eyes, continued. "I don't think Ted knew what was back of it all." Her voice broke at last.



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CHAPTER IV

A Little Gunplay

GASPARD bit his lip. Suddenly a commotion came, not a great one, but a disturbance for this place. Ordway plunged in and threw himself without apology down into the inglenook seat beside the girl. Beads of perspiration were on his forehead and his small eyes held fire.

"Boss! Boss, I just seen Burton!"

"Where?" Instantly Gaspard was alert.

The girl tightened. She believed that whatever Burton had in mind his movements must be kept in secrecy until he decided to show himself.

"Outside! Across the Square!" Regardless of whose glass it was Dutch picked up a drink and tossed it off in one gulp. "He knows I carry one of his slugs in my shoulder and you should of ought to let me get to some doc right off. That slug's from his gun and he—"

Deliberately Gaspard leaned across the table, evil-eyed. He dropped a salt cellar into a napkin and smashed it across the big hood's face.

Lucia shrank back as far as she could into her corner, drawing the small bag with her. She had known a trace of doubt before. But now she knew the rest. This man Dutch was panicky even at the nearness of Black Burton and he had told her what he knew. Not all, but enough for her. Gaspard's face was a mottled livid mask. Her eyes held horror.

Ordway, as though he were some yellow cur chastised by a savage master, sank back. His eyes rolled. He was wetting his lips. Face ugly, Gaspard turned to the girl.

"So you heard that," he said jerkily. "Well, it's what you might have guessed at that. I didn't kill your brother. Dutch didn't. He's too yellow; I had him trail the kill."

Then a low smooth voice dropped into

that heated cubicle. Black Burton seemed to be lounging almost carelessly against the broad side of the booth. His dark eyes mocked.

"No," he said. "No, you didn't kill him, Ricci. Even I can be your alibi for that. You only planned it, in detail. Dutch drove the car. He had somebody with him. Whether that somebody aimed straight or simply fired for some other reason I can't tell you yet. There'll be an autopsy. But I know who killed Ted Malloughby now—not the same man who shot at me—"

He was interrupted. White-faced, hatless, Dirk Richardson came plunging into the scene. Still further the girl shrank back into the shadows until the wall held her erect and she still pulled her toy vanity bag with her.

Richardson cried out: "Gawd, Ricci, he knows! Burton! Get him now before it's too late—"

He jerked a gun. No one had heeded the girl. But the toy pistol slipped from her bag and into her palm. Her eyes were alight, feverish. No fear in them now. She heard Burton saying:

"I made sure Ordway called you, Richardson. But I was afraid at first he'd just reported here. When I knew that wasn't the case—he was stupid enough to tell me—the last piece of the puzzle was in place. You were the man who put Ted on the spot, Richardson, weren't you? And it was you—personally, this time—who killed him. From inside. Because you were taking orders from Ricci and because you were afraid. Just the same as you're yellow with fear right now!"

Then gun thunder blasted loose to snap the awful tension. Ordway was fumbling clumsily to free his gun; luckily for Burton he was already partially disabled. Burton's attention was mostly for Ricci Gaspard.

Richardson swung, fired once, hysterically. Burton felt a lead slug burn past his jaw. Then he swiveled a little to meet Ricci Gaspard, part way to his feet but dangerous. He jerked back then. Whirled to cover Malloughby's erstwhile partner—fired. Richardson went down

with a blast that sent him staggering.

Ordway had his gun up as Burton turned. Two guns were leveled at the intruder now. He could see Gaspard's evil, gloating eyes for only an instant. Gaspard was the most dangerous, whatever the outcome; and he had to chance the girl in some way spoiling his aim for the first shot. That was all Burton needed, space for one shot.

He got it. As Gaspard came up, gun flaming, Burton drove a .38 slug through his middle.

He felt it might be his last shot, but almost in the same instant another report came, a lesser report and somewhat smothered, from the corner of the booth.

White-faced, on her feet now, Lucia Malloughby was clutching her small gun and Dutch Ordway was slumping across the table, his weapon in his fist but useless, his shoulder completely shattered and his good arm hanging limp.

Outside a police whistle blew.

Much later, in a quiet room at police headquarters, Burton sat on a lumpy couch and held close to him the trembling girl. All about them was the hum of the great building that never knew sleep, but a hum ever muted. Dalton slammed open a door and came in. He held two glasses and he was scowling. His heavy jaw was set grimly.

Ignoring Burton he held out a glass toward Lucia Malloughby.

"Drink this off," he said in a voice that belied his scowl. "I had it fixed special for you."

She accepted the glass obediently. She seemed quieter now. Dalton handed the second glass, from which the aroma of good Scotch came, to the gambler. "It's luck," he said, "that Ordway

isn't going to die right away. Else you might be in a sweet mess. Dutch seems to want to talk."

"Fine! But even so ballistics might prove, I imagine, that I was right in my guess that Richardson shot Malloughby. Does Dutch agree to that?" Dalton nodded; Burton went on: "Ricci was taking no chances with his tools. He had Richardson scared first, then he held out a better offer to him. He had to cover that loot he'd cached in the district he claimed as his and he wanted no intruders to call attention to his places."

"We've found some of the loot," Dalton agreed. "In that big house of his down the block. More was in back of *Julio's*. He had to move his stuff by degrees. Gambling houses always attract rich people and jewels, he figured that; gambling was only a come-on for him. Right?"

"Right! But Richardson was the tool he needed for his plans when Malloughby threatened to open and so first he scared Richardson and then promised to provide a smoke-screen for him, to make it look as though the kill was from outside. That went off well enough—only then he had to get me."

Dalton nodded. "That's the way it's doped," he said. "If he'd only stopped with his ambitions in the first place! But there have been so many other guys with that same idea, Burton—get to you. Richardson was undoubtedly going to throw in with Gaspard after the smoke cleared away. Then you stepped in." He looked at the girl, her bowed, lovely head. "Well," he said gently, "Ted Malloughby didn't have to wait long for the payoff for his kill. If he's the gambler I think he was he'll be getting a laugh right now!"

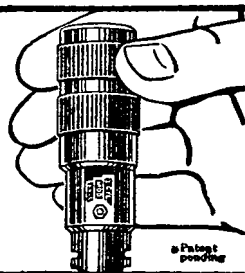
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Tham was almost happy to see
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*When cops bother
the little pickpocket
they'd better be honest
cops—or beware!*

Thubway Tham Ith Raided

by JOHNSTON McCULLEY

THE lodging house operated by Nosey Moore, retired burglar, occupied the second and third floors of a rather ramshackle building on a side street in downtown New York. Mr. Moore was no longer a lawbreaker, his last term in stir having convinced him that crime does not pay. But other lawbreakers drifted to his establishment under the mistaken belief that he was a

kindred soul and would always extend sympathy and help in dark hours.

Mr. Moore, however, was strictly a law-and-order man personally, and wanted no part of his tenants' confidences, basing his attitude on the well known fact that what he didn't know he couldn't tell.

He did, nevertheless, have a modicum of sympathy for those who traveled on

the shady side of the straight and narrow path, and aided them in slight ways whenever he could, that is if they were his tenants and paid their rent strictly in advance—which they did if they wished to remain beneath Mr. Moore's leaky roof.

Not being what could be called a modern hostelry in any sense of the word, the establishment did not have room telephones. It did, however, have a buzzer in each room, and if there was a telephone call for a tenant, Mr. Moore punched a button and the buzzer in the tenant's room sounded, and said tenant hurried to the office and answered the phone call.

One long buzz meant a phone call, two short buzzes meant a personal caller.

And Nosey Moore unbent from his strict legal life to the extent of doing one thing at which the police might have frowned. If officers of the law appeared suddenly and unexpectedly, Nosey threw a little switch under his battered desk and pressed a button—and three short buzzes sounded in every room in the place. Three short buzzes meant "Cops."

A tenant of long standing in Nosey's place was Thubway Tham, the little pickpocket who got his name from the fact that he usually worked in the subway during rush hours. Toward Tham, Nosey exhibited a greater degree of friendship than he did toward his other guests. Outside his strictly professional acts, Tham was an honest man, and strangely enough Nosey admired honesty. And there was something about the little dip that evoked Nosey's paternal feelings.

ON this morning about ten of the clock, Thubway Tham was in the dingy little room he called home. He had taken a sponge bath and had dressed, and was perusing the sports page of the morning paper, which he paid Nosey to have delivered at his door.

Tham had lifted a leather the day before, the act netting him thirty-two

dollars, all profit, so had no immediate need for funds. He was even in the position of a man able to wager a couple of books on a bangtail, and at the moment was trying to select the horse which would be honored by a transaction made with a "bookie" at the cigar store on the corner.

Three short buzzes sounded on the buzzer.

Tham jumped like a man who had received an electric shock. The alarm indicated a menace. Not that Tham, at the moment, was expecting trouble from the police. He was in the clear. There was no incriminating evidence on his person or in his room. But that buzzer alarm meant that police were in the place, undoubtedly after someone.

Tham tiptoed to the door and listened. Voices came up the stairs from the floor below. He could hear Nosey Moore protesting with vehemence:

"Whazat? Whazat? You goin' to raid the place? Whaz wrong?"

"Oh, we're checking around some," another voice replied. "We're not accusing you of anything, Nosey. But your tenants are a bit on the shady side, and we're looking around, that's all."

"You'll scare the pants offen them all," Nosey declared. "They'll be movin' out on me. I don't know anything 'bout their business, bein' busy runnin' my own."

"You're in the clear yourself, Nosey, far as we know," the other voice responded. "But maybe some of your guests aren't. We've got the front and back doors guarded, and the fire-escape is being watched. So we'll just wander from room to room, if you don't mind, and pay visits."

"You're a new one on me," Tham heard Nosey say. "What'd you say your name is?"

"Ed Cagley, working out of Headquarters. I'm handling this squad."

"You ask down at Headquarters, they'll say I'm all right," Nosey protested.

"If you're wise, you'll stay all right," Detective Ed Cagley replied.

Tham decided he did not like the of-

ficer's voice. There was a quality in it that denoted a capacity for shrewdness, and a hint that Cagley was an officer who always got his man either by fair means or foul.

Not like Detective Craddock, for instance. Craddock, Tham's old friend-enemy, fought fair. If he ever got Tham with the goods, he would send him up the river for a stretch, but if he got him he would do it fairly under the strict rules of the game.

Standing at the door of the room, Tham could hear the police pounding on doors, the nervous replies of men being questioned. Once he heard Detective Ed Cagley bellow, "Take this man in for questioning."

Tham began growing nervous himself, though he could think of no reason why he should. He hadn't been unusually active lately, and his small haul the day before had not been anything to arouse the police to special activity. Nevertheless, he grew nervous.

This new detective might not know him, and might on the spur of the moment send him in for questioning. There was always the chance that the cops were blistering the town, or certain portions thereof, to gain favorable mention in the Press. And Tham knew well that a tired magistrate could and probably would send him to do thirty days on the Island for vagrancy if Tham could not explain readily his means of honest sustenance.

Tham had no ambition to do thirty days anywhere. Though known to the police, and especially to Detective Craddock, as a dip, he never had been convicted of wrongdoing. His luck had held through the years; but Tham was superstitious to the extent of believing that luck changed at intervals, and that a change might be due now.

THE tumult on the floor below reached an end, and Tham heard the heavy tread of shoes on the rickety stairs. The cops were coming up to his floor.

Tham took a gulp of water from a glass on the table beside his bed, quickly

lit a fresh cigarette, and held the newspaper in his left hand. When he opened the door, he wanted his appearance to be that of an innocent man resting while he read the news.

The pounding on his door came, finally, and Tham took a deep breath and crossed the room to turn the key and pull the door open. A questioning expression was in his face as he looked at the two men before him.

One was a burly individual who looked like a flatfoot in plain clothes, which he was, having recently been promoted to the plain-clothes squad. The other man was tall, thin, wiry, with his hat cocked on one side of his head. He looked crafty, Tham decided.

"Police," this man remarked, flashing a badge.

"Yeth, thir," Tham responded. "Can I be of thervith to you, thir?"

The tall thin man brushed Tham aside and stared into the room, and the burly man blocked the doorway as a truck blocks the mouth of an alley.

"Name, job and so forth!" the thin man demanded.

"Folkth call me Thubway Tham."

"Um! Name sounds familiar. You live here all the time?"

"I have had a room here for more than three yearth," Tham explained.

"What's your business? What do you work at? How do you pay your rent and so forth?"

Tham squinted his eyes a bit and said, softly, "Athk Craddock."

"Craddock?" The thin man's eyes opened wide.

"Craddock," Tham repeated. "You know him?"

"I do, since our days in the Police Academy. Ask Craddock, you say. Um!"

"And who are you, if I may athk?" Tham wanted to know.

"Cagley. Headquarters. Special detail work. Why should I ask Craddock about you?"

"Perhapth he would be annoyed if— if I wath annoyed by any copth."

"So? One of Craddock's stoolies, are you?"

Tham resented that and felt rage

well up within him. He was no stool pigeon, but this did not seem to be the best time to make a declaration. So Tham remained silent and squinted again.

"You know much about the mugs who live here?" Cagley asked.

"Very little. I do not conthern mythelf with them much. Folkth come and go all the time here in Nothey'th plath."

"Thubway Tham—um! I remember now. You're the dip Craddock has been trying to throw into the jug for a long time. Swears he'll land you if it takes him the rest of his life. And you're trying to give me the impression you're Craddock's stoolie!"

"I thaid nothin' of the thort," Tham declared. "You athked me about my buthineth, and I thaid to athk Craddock."

"Oh? You mean Craddock makes all that play about being hot after you just as a cover up while you stool for him?"

"I am thayin' nothin'," Tham replied. "If you had a thtool, would you want him goin' around tellin' everybody he wath your thtool?"

"Flatten against the wa'l and get your hands up," Cagley ordered. "I'm frisking you."

ANGRILY Tham grumbled, but obeyed. Cagley found a few crumpled bills remaining from Tham's haul of the day before, a penknife, a pencil, a handkerchief that needed laundering, and a bit of crumpled paper with a few scrawled notations on it.

"What's this?" Cagley asked.

"A bet I made yethterday on a bang-tail that ran away back in the dutht."

"Um. I think I'll send you in to be held for questioning."

"I ain't done anything," Tham complained. "Why thend me in to take up the time of thoht folkth down at Head-quarterth? And Craddock might not like it."

"You think Craddock wouldn't like it? Well, that'd suit me just fine! If I can get something on you, after Craddock has tried for years and failed, that'd spike him!"

"I thought you thaid you wath Craddock'th friend?"

"I said nothing of the sort. I said I've known him from Police Academy days, and so I have. And I hate his insides! I hated him the first day we met. If I can spike him, so much the better. I've been trying for a long time to get ahead of him. And we're both coming up for promotion soon. If I can land you, Bud, after Craddock's failed for so long, it'll be a feather in my cap, and a black mark on Craddock's record."

"You ain't got anything to take me in for," Tham complained again. "You thearthed me. Thearth the room, too. You have accuthed me of bein' a dip, and you copth have no proof of that. I'll have my lawyer thee the Com-mithioner! I'll have you thlapped back in uniform and thet to poundin' the pavementh again!"

"Aw, shut up!" Detective Cagley exploded. "You and your threats!"

Cagley searched the room, which did not take long. A few articles of clothing, shaving utensils, a small radio—that was about all. Cagley even rolled back the ragged rug to see if anything incriminating was under it, and found nothing. He opened the room's one window and inspected the soot-smearred ledge outside.

Tham stood against the wall enraged and watched. He had about given up hope. Arraigned on a charge of vagrancy, he would draw thirty days at least. After that, he would be a marked man.

The burly man in the doorway stood aside suddenly, and Tham almost gave a cry of joy as he saw Detective Craddock.

"Hello, Ed," Craddock said to Cagley. "You working on the Spencer case, too?"

"Hello, Craddock. Spencer case? Never heard of it. I'm with a squad on a shakedown cruise. Checking the rat holes. Why ask me about the Spencer case?"

"Because you seem to be roughing up Tham here. I just came to quiz him some myself, about the Spencer case. Tham knows a lot of facts about a lot of people."

"I'm going to send him in for routine questioning," Cagley declared.

"Lay off, Ed," Craddock warned. "You might muss up something important. Leave Tham to me, and go on checking rat holes. If you don't believe that's the thing to do, phone the Captain and find out."

Cagley looked slightly bewildered. If Craddock was on an important case and needed to pump Thubway Tham for information, it was proper for Cagley to bow out, and quickly.

"What is this Spencer case?" Cagley asked.

"Very hush-hush. Big gent involved."

"Okay, have your way," Cagley decided. "I didn't know this lisping runt was a stoolie of yours."

Cagley went out and down the hall, followed by the burly man, and Tham heard him pound on another door. Craddock looked at Tham and grinned.

"Sorry if my friend annoyed you, Tham," Craddock said.

"He ith no friend of yourth, Craddock. He thaid he hated your inthideth. Thaid he alwayth had."

"That feeling is mutual between us, Tham. I just happened to drop in, and found what was going on. Didn't want you bothered by Cagley. I don't want you vagged, Tham. Because I want to catch you with the goods and send you to the Big House, where you belong."

FOR a moment or two the little pick-pocket frowned thoughtfully. Then he looked at Craddock. "What ith thith Thpentheth cath?" Tham asked. "I don't know anybody named Thpentheth."

"Neither do I, Tham. Thought of that name on the spur of the moment, as we educated men put it so handily. I just wanted to get Cagley off your neck, so made him think I'm on an important case and wanted info out of you."

"Well, thankth, Craddock!"

"Keep your thanks, Tham, No friendship in it. Merely wanted to clear Cagley out of the way. You're my meat, Tham. No other copper is going to take you in. I'll do that—and it won't be for vagrancy when I do."

"How you talk!" Tham said. "Like I'm a criminal or thomthin' like that."

"Let us have no comedy before luncheon, Tham. It is bad for the digestion. You going for a ride on the subway today?"

"Pothibly tho. It ith too early in the day to dethide an important quethtion like that."

"If you do, Tham, I may tag right along behind you and watch your nimble fingers."

Tham grinned. "Oh, but you can't do that, Craddock. You are tho buthy on the Thpentheth cath, remember? What ith all thith thcrap between you and thith Cagley?"

"We never got on, Tham. He's a smarty in cop business. I wouldn't trust him as much as ten feet, and some of our superiors don't, either. Take a man like him and let him think he's too smart, and first thing you know we've got a crooked cop. I got a couple of pats on the back from the Captain recently, and it burned Cagley up. He'll get something on me if he can—or maybe try to frame something."

"Like that, ith it? How you copth do carry on," Tham remarked.

Tham got his coat and hat from the closet and put them on. "I have not had my breakfast yet," he explained to Craddock. "If you will honor me, Craddock, I'll thet 'em up to the ectent of a cup of java at the greathy thpoon plath down at the corner."

"No coffee, Tham—thanks just the same. But I'll walk that far with you and get you out of Ed Cagley's clutches."

They stepped into the hall, and Tham closed and locked the door. Cagley came down the hall, to stop beside them.

"Maybe I'd better take this man in for questioning, Craddock," he said. "He may know a lot about some of the gents who room here. And there's no doubt about him being a vag."

"I told you to keep your hands off Tham," Craddock replied, with some heat. "I don't meddle in your cases. As it happens, I'm taking Tham up the street right now."

Some of Cagley's squad men were still working at the end of the hall, and one pounded on the last door. An instant later, there was a commotion. A wild-looking man jerked the door open and dashed into the hall.

"One side, coppers!" he yelled.

He crashed against the man who had knocked on the door and hurled him aside. He charged along the narrow hall toward the stairs, straight at Tham, Craddock and Cagley. And he held a gun before him.

"One way!" he yelled. "I'll blast blazes outa any cop as gets in my way."

Tham knew the man for a new tenant who had checked in only two days before with Nosey Moore. Probably he was a wanted man who thought this raid was in an effort to capture him. He was making a desperate attempt to get away, and had only the one possible avenue of escape.

The event had occurred unexpectedly and in a few seconds of time. Down the hall, a cop jerked out his service gun and yelled for the fugitive to halt. Cagley swerved aside and bumped into Craddock and Tham.

Tham still held the key in his hand, and he inserted it in the lock and turned it quickly, to throw the door open so it would be possible to dodge back into the room away from probable gunfire.

CAGLEY was trying to get his gun out of its holster, and Craddock was trying to recover his balance. The wild man with the gun came charging on down the hall. The squad man behind him gave chase, afraid at that instant to fire lest he hit Cagley or Craddock.

The fugitive was upon the three at the door before anyone could get into action. He slashed with the barrel of his gun, and Cagley dodged the blow at his head and reeled back against Tham, to be caught in Tham's arms. Craddock struck at the wild man and missed, and half sprawled on the floor. The squad man fired a wild shot that almost scorched Tham's ear as the fugitive got to the head of the stairs in his wild flight.

"Got him! Nicked him!" the squad man yelled, and charged on.

On the lower floor, there was more commotion as the wild man charged down, to sprawl on the floor in front of Nosey Moore's desk as weakness from a wound robbed him of strength. Cagley had regained his balance, and now ran to the head of the stairs and disappeared.

"Lock your door again and come along with me, Tham," Craddock instructed, "or that ass Cagley will be sending you in to be held as a material witness. Be just like him."

Tham had another moment of fright. If held as a material witness, he would be unable to make bail. He would languish in jail, and if the wild man lived and stood trial, that trial might not be held for months. If Tham was witness at a trial, any defense attorney would pry into his life and reveal him as a shady character.

Tham went along with Craddock down the stairs. The wounded man was propped up against the wall, a squad man was telephoning for an ambulance. Cagley was triumphant as he looked at Craddock.

"A pat on the back for me, Craddock," Cagley said. "Right under your nose, too. This is a man wanted for murder. That's why he made a break for it. Just confessed—thought he was going to die."

"Congratulations," Craddock said, feebly. "Hope I have as much good luck with the Spencer case. Come along, Tham! I've got some business with you."

In the excitement, Cagley did not try to stop their exit. Down on the street, Tham felt relieved. He marched along beside Craddock toward the corner.

"After that, I'll take that cup of coffee, Tham," the detective said. "The devil sure takes care of his own. Cagley will certainly get a pat on the back for that capture."

"If he ith a wrong one, he will get hith thooner or later," Tham made prophecy. "Crime doeth not pay, tho I've heard."

As he walked along beside Craddock, his right hand was in his coat pocket. Tham's face was a mask, but his heart was hammering at his ribs. He had held Detective Cagley in his arms for an instant back there in the lodging house, as the wild man had charged through the hall. And habit was strong with Tham; his nimble fingers had gone to work from force of habit.

They went into the little restaurant, and Tham ordered a simple breakfast and Craddock a cup of coffee. As Tham ate, Craddock sipped his coffee and watched the passersby on the street. Tham's right hand strayed into his coat pocket now and then.

His sensitive fingers opened a wallet and extracted some currency, which Tham slipped into a vest pocket while Craddock was looking through the window. But in Tham's pocket was an incriminating wallet which he could not at the moment discard.

"Going to take a subway ride, Tham?" Craddock asked, turning to him and grinning.

"Yeth. I think I'll ride up to Timeth Thquare, and go to my favorite newth

reel theatre," Tham replied.

"I'll go along, Tham."

"Craddock, you are a petht. If I wath inclined to lift a leather, would I do it with a detective right bethide me?"

"Probably not, Tham. That's why I'm going along."

They left the restaurant, walked a block and descended into the subway. A meager crowd was on the platform, so Tham could not ditch the leather. They caught an uptown express, and the car they entered had only a few passengers. It was a dull hour on the subway.

BUT, at the next stop, people crowded in. And, as the train neared Times Square a few minutes later, Tham got up with Craddock and went with him along the aisle to the middle door of the car. At Times Square there was always an amount of rushing on the part of passengers trying to get on and off the train.

Tham was ready for action. As the door flew open and the inevitable crowding, jostling and elbowing began, Tham bumped against a rather distinguished-

[Turn page]

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looking man with gray hair. And in that instant the incriminating wallet was taken from Tham's coat pocket and deftly dropped into a pocket of the distinguished-looking gentleman's coat.

On the platform, Tham gave a real sigh of relief. He listened to Craddock's chatter as they went up the stairs to the street. At the top, Tham stopped.

"Craddock, I mean it—honetht," Tham said. "I am goin' to the newth reel theater. I promith to keep my handth in my own pocketth all the retht of thith day. Maybe crime doeth not pay."

"It didn't pay that poor devil who got shot at Nosey Moore's," Craddock said. "I'll take you at your word, Tham. Got some business to tend to, anyhow. But I'll have my eye on you again soon, lad. Because, I'm going to—"

"Catch me with the goodth and thend me to the Big Houth up the river for a long thtretch, I know," Tham completed for him. "Good huntin', ath thome folkth remark."

THAM marched up the street as Craddock watched, and got in line before the news reel theater. His fingers extracted some currency from his vest pocket, and Tham counted it swiftly as he peeled off a dollar bill preparatory to buying a ticket. He had nicked Detective Ed Cagley for sixty dollars, and the feeling of sweet revenge seemed to double the amount. And when he got back to Nosey Moore's lodging house that evening, Nosey beckoned him.

"Your old friend, Detective Craddock, phoned," Nosey reported. "You're to call him back right away. Here's the number."

Tham wondered what had happened now. He put through the call, to a number he did not know, and finally had Craddock on the wire.

"Tham? I wanted to tell you, Tham, that a couple of strange things have happened."

"Yeth?" Tham questioned.

"Yes. Maybe you can throw light on a problem. Detective Cagley reported that his wallet is missing, and he half accused you of lifting it during the ruckus at Nosey Moore's."

"Why, the thilly nitwit!" Tham exploded. "You were right there yourthelf, Craddock. That wild man ruthin' through the hall, and the thootin' and all. And me tryin' to get the door of my room open tho I could dodge inthide. Why, the fool!"

"Hold it, Tham!" Craddock roared from the other end of the line. "And listen! The wallet was found by an elderly gentleman of fine reputation. Seems it had been dropped into his pocket as he boarded a subway train at Times Square. He turned it in personally—to the Commissioner."

"Well, my goodneth!" Tham said.

"It was Cagley's wallet, all right. And in it were a couple of documents that interested the Commissioner considerably. Seems they reveal that Cagley has been having dealings with a certain boss racketeer along bribery lines. Anyhow, he's been relieved from duty and charges have been filed against him."

"Well, for goodneth thake!" Tham said.

"Something tells me, Tham, that Cagley won't bother either of us for a few years. I wonder how that wallet got in the elderly gentleman's pocket."

"Oh, thoth thingth happen at timeth," Tham responded. "It ith Fate, perhapth."

"Perhaps," Craddock echoed. "Though I have my doubts. Well, Tham, keep your hands in your own pockets, or I'll be looking you up."

"Any time, Craddock. You are alwayth welcome. My addreth ith thtill Nothey Moore'th plath. Let thith thing be a lethon to you, Craddock. If you mutht go through life bein' a cop, alwayth be an honetht one," Tham advised.

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*J. Elmer Dalton worked
a foolproof gag
till ex-Sheriff Cullom took
the trail of a bad joke!*

THE CORNY KILLER

By BENTON BRADEN

THIS J. Elmer Dalton was just another tourist to me as he signed the registration card I laid out for him. I have twenty-four cabins in my court and as there is a complete turnover almost every day, I don't pay too much attention to incoming guests other than to see that they are clean and apparently decent.

J. Elmer Dalton passed this inspection at first glance. He was a large, red-faced

man, well-dressed. He asked for a cabin down at the end of the line.

"Might save you some complaints," he chuckled. "Sometimes I snore pretty loud. Once I snored so loud I woke up the Angel Gabriel and he started blowing his horn like mad. So the farther away you can get me from your other guests the better it will be."

I noted that Cabin Twenty-four was vacant so I handed him the key to it and

told him he couldn't miss it because it was the last cabin to the west. I asked him if he wanted to be called in the morning. He said he snored so loud he'd wake himself up. There was little doubt that J. Elmer Dalton considered himself quite a comedian.

He got in his car and drove on down to Twenty-four. It had been dark for two hours and I watched until I saw the lights go on in the cabin. That let me out except for one thing. I have found out that guests remember little things and I have made it a practice to serve hot coffee to incoming guests. In hot weather I make it lemonade. Tourists remember little things like that and they'll drive fifty miles out of their way to stay at a place where they have received such small courtesies.

I have the pots of steaming coffee all ready and I generally serve it within five minutes. But some more cars rolled up and I'd say it was about thirty minutes before I started for J. Elmer Dalton's cabin with a tray. The lights were on in the cabin and I saw the dim shape of his car so I was sure he was there. But when I knocked on the door of the cabin there was no response. After a moment I knocked again with the same result.

MY court is at the edge of Mooreville, about a mile from the business section and almost invariably folks drive when they go in to town. But it was possible that J. Elmer had decided to walk for exercise after driving all day. I decided to take the tray in and leave it on a table. At least he would see that my intentions had been good when he came back.

I carry a master key but I tried the doorknob first. The door was locked. I fished the master key out of my pocket, unlocked the door and pushed it open with my knee. I started in to the cabin.

I stopped in my tracks when I saw there was a woman lying on the bed. I didn't like this at all because J. Elmer Dalton had assured me he was alone. I don't stand for stuff like that and I knew I would have to boot J. Elmer out the minute I saw him. I had made a little

noise and I thought it was strange that the woman didn't move. She could hardly be asleep. I coughed loudly but she didn't move a muscle. Her face was turned toward the wall so I couldn't see if her eyes were open. I decided to speak right out.

"Lady," I said, "the man who rented this cabin for the night assured me that he was alone. It happens that I have very strict rules for my guests and I will have to ask you and Mr. Dalton to—"

I don't have any recollection of what happened at that instant. But later, when I was able to order my thoughts a little, I knew that J. Elmer Dalton had socked me on the back of the head with a very hard object, probably a gun. I didn't feel the blow. There was just a sudden blackout.

I don't know how long I was unconscious. But when my brain began to function a little again and I opened my eyes, I was lying right where I had fallen, on the floor of Cabin Twenty-four. Curiously my first thought was that the steaming coffee I had been carrying had suddenly turned cold. I was drenched with the stuff and I was clammy cold.

My head was throbbing so hard that I closed my eyes again and groaned. But I was beginning to remember. After a minute I opened my eyes. I couldn't see a thing from the floor so I steeled myself against the pain, used my elbows and pushed myself up. I blinked my surprise and alarm.

That woman was still lying on the bed. So far as I could see she hadn't moved since I had first seen her. Her position seemed to be exactly the same. I managed to get on my feet and reel over to the bed so I could get a look at her face. One quick glance was enough.

The woman was dead. The marks on her throat were fair evidence that she had been strangled. Obviously, from the viewpoint of J. Elmer Dalton, I had appeared on the scene with the coffee at just the wrong moment. I had arrived just as J. Elmer was leaving. He had reasoned that the body of the woman would not be discovered until morning and that he could be far away by that

time. He had knocked me out to gain time. My best guess at the moment was that he had gained about thirty minutes. I couldn't have been out much longer than that.

I was confident that the killer wouldn't be able to get far. I had the number of his car and could give a fair general description of him. Fleeing in panic like this, he'd probably lose his head and leave a plain trail. I was wrong about that.

I knew I couldn't do anything myself and that I had to have help. I staggered out of the cabin. Again I got a surprise. J. Elmer Dalton's car was still there. He hadn't been foolish enough to try to make his getaway in that car.

My name is Jim Cullom and I had served as sheriff of this western Kansas county for twenty years. I had built this tourist court and retired. My chief deputy, Jed Harkness, had succeeded me. I managed to make it back to the office. Then I called Jed. I was lucky enough to get him on the wire right away.

Jed came and took charge of Cabin Twenty-four. He also called Doc Higgins. Doc Higgins came and looked me over. He decided my skull hadn't cracked under the impact of that blow but he insisted that I go to bed and stay there until he was sure there was no serious concussion. I didn't protest too much. I had a giant, economy size headache and I was glad to swallow a couple of Doc Higgins' pills and stretch out on one of my well-advertised inner spring mattresses. They called Sam Lattimore, who runs the camp for me when I go on fishing trips, to come out and take charge.

I reasoned that it would be a simple matter for us to catch up with J. Elmer Dalton anyway. It was true that my description wasn't very definite. But we had his car that could be traced. And we had the body of this woman. Such a woman was sure to be reported missing in a matter of days. It shouldn't be too hard to identify her, I thought.

But it was. When, about thirty hours later, those pills that Doc Higgins gave me, wore off, I found that they hadn't even made a start at identifying her.

There wasn't a mark on her clothing that could be traced. There wasn't a bit of luggage in that car that J. Elmer Dalton had been driving. There wasn't a fingerprint on it either.

Now I don't claim to be as smart as some of these city detectives who go at their cases with psychology and science. But after the long years I had served as sheriff I knew that this case was going to be a bit out of the ordinary run of murders. J. Elmer Dalton had committed no crime of passion. He had planned this kill very carefully and somewhere in the background there was a plain motive for it. Unfortunately the motive was a puzzler. To be honest about it, the whole procedure puzzled me.

The woman had been dead when J. Elmer Dalton had driven into my court and asked for a cabin. She had either been in the rear compartment or on the floorboards below the back seat. It was dark so I wouldn't have spotted her there by any casual inspection of the car. The fact that there was no luggage in the car convinced me he had never intended to take the car with him when he left.

WHY had J. Elmer Dalton, after strangling this woman, driven into my court and rented a cabin? Why hadn't he hidden the body somewhere? There was just one answer to this. J. Elmer had to have a well-lighted room where he could examine the body of the victim and make sure there were no identifying marks on her clothing. Her shoes were missing and it looked like a label had been removed from her coat. Now he was sure that she could not be identified. He was also sure that the car he had left at Cabin Twenty-four would furnish no clue to his real identity.

All this convinced me the murder had been planned with care and for a very good motive. Still, at first, I had no doubt that J. Elmer Dalton would have made a slip somewhere. Sooner or later his victim would be reported as missing and the crime would be traced to him.

But as days—and then weeks—passed by, it became evident that J. Elmer

hadn't made any of the usual mistakes. His victim remained unidentified. Jed Harkness made every effort to trace her. A man came from Michigan with the idea that she might be his sister. A woman made the long trip from Virginia to look at her. But when they looked at the body they shook their heads.

The dead woman was about forty-five and she was by no means a beauty. We could assume that, in life, she had been a plain, unattractive female. Since J. Elmer Dalton had been a large, vigorous man, almost handsome in a way, this seemed to rule out any theory that there could have been a love affair involved. My guess was that he was several years younger than his victim.

My responsibility in the matter ended when I called Jed Harkness, the present sheriff, and turned the case over to him. What happened from then on should have been of no great concern to me. But I couldn't get J. Elmer Dalton off my mind. And the more I thought about him the madder I got. My court had been free from any serious crime until J. Elmer had seen fit to dump his victim in Cabin Twenty-four. That kind of publicity doesn't do a tourist court any good.

Not only that but J. Elmer had hit me an awful wallop on the back of the head. My head still ached a little whenever I thought of it. After two months J. Elmer Dalton was becoming sort of an obsession with me. I felt that he had gotten away with a vicious murder—at my expense. I went over the facts again and again, hoping that I would be able to spot some clue that could be followed up. But J. Elmer hadn't left any clues.

What he had to have was a motive for the crime. At last I began speculating on the motive. There might have been fifty motives for such a crime, I thought at first. But when I tried them out, one by one, the usual motives didn't quite fit. Then I found one motive that did dovetail into the facts. With such a motive J. Elmer Dalton might well have followed his peculiar procedure.

Naturally Jed Harkness had checked the murder car without great difficulty.

It had been purchased on a used car lot at Omaha by a man who gave his name as F. Gerald Simms. The car salesman couldn't remember a thing about F. Gerald Simms. The car had a new battery in it. The battery had been sold at a retail auto supply store in Sioux City, Iowa. The store could furnish no name or description of the buyer. Jed Harkness checked with the police at Omaha and Sioux City but they had no record of any missing woman in that vicinity.

That battery had been purchased three weeks after the car had been sold. That seemed fair evidence that J. Elmer Dalton had been operating somewhere in that section of the country. That was all I had—except this possible motive.

After being a sheriff for more than twenty years a man becomes something like a coon dog that picks up a scent. He instinctively wants to get on the trail. And I'll admit I had a strong yearning to come face to face with this J. Elmer Dalton just once more. I got hold of Sam Lattimore and asked him to run the court for me a few days. Then I grabbed a train for Omaha.

During the next ten days I did a lot of traveling, all short jumps. I rented a car and made quick calls at county seats in Nebraska and Iowa. I knew I was playing a long shot so I had made up my mind not to become discouraged easily. I looked at records in forty-seven counties without results. But when I visited the forty-eighth county I found a name on the records that brought a grim smile to my lips.

The name was H. Oscar Horne. When I compared that signature with the handwriting on the registration car that J. Elmer Dalton had signed at my tourist court that night I knew there couldn't be any mistake. H. Oscar Horne and J. Elmer Dalton were one and the same person.

The bright girl clerk at the bureau couldn't remember a thing about H. Oscar Horne until I prodded her memory a bit.

"A tall, red-faced man," I urged. "A good dresser and not bad looking. A pompous type. Inclined to be jovial and

a bit corny in his talk."

"I think I remember him," the girl smiled. "He's the one that told me not to make a mistake and give him a dog license. And laughed heartily at his own joke."

"That's the lad," I said. "J. Elmer Dalton was a guy who just had to pull a corny gag, whether the occasion was marriage or murder."

Half an hour later I talked to a middle-aged school teacher.

"Of course, I remember Mr. Horne," she said. "He married one of my best friends, Emma Clay. They left right after the ceremony for his home in California."

"Have you heard from Emma since?" I asked.

"Yes," she said. "I had a letter from her about two weeks later. A short note saying that she and her husband were about to leave on a trip to South America. Said they might be gone for months and she might not find time to write."

"Was the letter in her own handwriting?" I questioned.

"It was typewritten. Emma could type. But she signed it. At least it looked like her signature. Is there something wrong?"

"There is," I told her. Later I told the sheriff of that county the story, too. I convinced him that it would be better not to give the facts any publicity at the present time. If we wanted to catch up with J. Elmer Dalton it would be better for him to keep on thinking that he had successfully concealed his crime.

But I had been right in guessing the motive for the murder. Emma Clay had been a schoolteacher in this town, an old maid schoolteacher. No one could recall that she had ever had a beau until this J. Elmer Dalton appeared on the scene. I also found out that Emma Clay was worth about sixteen thousand dollars. She had it invested in government bonds. She had sold the government bonds a few days before her marriage and bought some negotiable securities. A quiet wedding—and that had been the

[Turn page]

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end of Emma Clay. The wedding trip had ended in death for her in Cabin Twenty-four.

IT was obvious now why J. Elmer had left Emma Clay's body in that cabin. He was sure, after he had carefully checked everything in that cabin, that she would never be identified. Since she had had few friends, had married and moved away from the town where she had taught, those friends would assume she had simply neglected to write them. The odds were twenty to one that no one would ever report her as a missing person.

I went back to Mooreville, Kansas, and took charge of my tourist court again. But now we had a little more to work on. I had Jed Harkness send out letters to police in ten states. About two hundred letters of inquiry Jed mailed out.

Jed got a reply from Bismarck, North Dakota. They had a record of a case that was somewhat similar to the case of Emma Clay. A spinster named Mamie Stone had married a man named J. Homer Baird and left for the latter's home in Seattle. One of Mamie's friends had received a typewritten letter from her some time later. The letter hadn't sounded just right to this friend and she had asked the police to check. The police had checked with Seattle but had been unable to find any trace of Mamie Stone or J. Homer Baird. This Mamie Stone had been worth about ten thousand dollars.

Jed and I sent out some more letters after receiving that reply. A few days later we received an answer from the police in Butte, Montana. A woman had been found strangled to death in a tourist court in Butte two days after Mamie Stone had departed from North Dakota on her wedding trip. The body had never been identified. The cases of Mamie Stone and Emma Clay were identical in almost every detail. Two spinsters without close relatives and with few friends had vanished, leaving no one to be greatly concerned about their futures.

J. Elmer Dalton must have been sure

by this time that he had a clue-proof murder racket. I had found two of his victims and there might be more. I'd never have gotten anywhere if I hadn't been lucky enough to figure out the motive for the murders. But, guessing that he had married the women in order to get hold of their money, I could also guess that the marriage licenses had been obtained only two or three days before the crimes. That had made it easy for me to check at the marriage license bureaus. I had only to look at the records for the week preceding the marriage and murder.

Yes, J. Elmer Dalton, being a man who did not shrink at murder, was convinced that he had a safe and profitable procedure. All he had to do was be careful in his selection of victims, make sure that they had no close relatives or friends who would investigate if they did not hear from the brides immediately. A casual inquiry, begun weeks or months later, was no menace to him.

Three months had passed since I had been knocked unconscious in that cabin that held the body of Emma Clay. Was J. Elmer Dalton now holed up somewhere, taking it easy on his murder profits? Or was he, after a couple of months of pleasant relaxation, again looking over the field and searching for another victim who could meet his peculiar requirements? From what I knew about J. Elmer I felt that he was a man who would practice his profession with some regularity.

Some four months later, at nearly two o'clock on a December afternoon, I knocked on the door of a small bungalow in Glenwood, Arkansas. I didn't wait for an answer to my knock. I opened the door, took a quick look, then walked into a small living room.

There were seven people in that room and they all turned and looked at me, waiting as though they expected me to explain the reason for the interruption. Five of the persons were women. One of the two men was obviously a minister. One of the women was bedecked as a bride. She wore no wedding gown of white but she was dressed more elabo-

rately than the other women and she carried a bouquet of flowers in her hand. She was about fifty, rather thin, and she was no beauty. But she was blushing and simpering.

It was the large, red-faced man who stood by the minister who broke the silence first. His face spread in a beaming smile.

"Brother," he said jovially, "you must have the wrong address. Or if you're peddling vacuum cleaners you're maybe thirty minutes premature." He winked broadly at the bride. "Ain't that right, Della? Don't you think we'd better finish the ceremony before we start buying household gadgets?"

Everybody laughed heartily at this sally. The bride looked at her groom with adoration. You could see that she thought he was about the smartest man in the world. I didn't smile. But I relaxed just a little as I realized that J. Elmer Dalton didn't remember me. Of course, he had just seen me for a minute or so when I was dressed in the uniform

[Turn page]

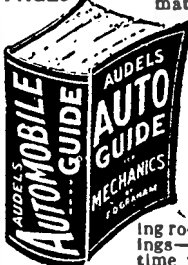
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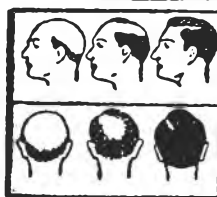
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slacks and jacket I wear about the court. And his mind had been on other things at that time. Now I wore a neat business suit and an overcoat. Instead of a cap I held a fedora in my hand.

"I'm not selling vacuum cleaners," I said.

"Well, what d' yuh want, then?" J. Elmer Dalton asked a bit sharply. "We're about to have a wedding here and I can't recall that you are an invited guest. If you got in the wrong door by mistake you better beat it."

"I didn't open the wrong door," I told him. "I guess you don't remember me. But I remember you, J. Elmer Dalton. I particularly remember the sock you gave me on the head in my tourist court at Mooreville, Kansas."

He didn't flinch. But I could see the fleck in his eyes when I mentioned that name. And I could see his hands slowly close.

"What you're saying doesn't make any sense," he said coolly. "I never saw you before. I never even heard of any such place as that. You got a bum tip somewhere along the line, brother. Now I'd just suggest that you get on out of here for the present. If you got any complaints to make you can go to the proper place and make them and we'll settle it all later."

"You've played your string out, J. Elmer," I told him. "There will be no wedding—with its aftermath—this time. I'm taking you with me—right now!"

"You must be crazy!" the bride cried out in a shrill voice. "You're not going to touch Oscar. He's the finest man in the world and I'm going to marry him here and now. You get out of here!"

He had sold her the full bill of goods, all right. No doubt she had turned over every cent she had to him, in cash or negotiable securities.

"I'm going to take him with me, lady," I told her. "Later you're going to find out what you missed—by not marrying him. I wouldn't want to shock you right now with the details. But I've had a hard time catching up with J. Elmer Dalton,

or Oscar as you call him. I happened to find out that he had conducted some operations in Nebraska and North Dakota. With winter coming on I reasoned that he'd pick a warmer climate for his next performance.

"I took a good look at a map and did some guessing. Then I wrote about five hundred letters to marriage bureaus in Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Arkansas. I asked the bureau clerks to look out for a big, red-faced man who always applied for a marriage license with a corny joke. I sent along samples of his signature and a statement of his crimes to show how serious the matter was. I also informed them of the type of woman he would be marrying. Some other little things.

"Yesterday I got a phone call from the clerk of the marriage bureau here. A. J. Oscar Ford had obtained a license to marry Della Hays. He had made his usual joke, warning the clerk not to give him a dog license by mistake. J. Oscar Ford is quite a comedian all right. But he also happens to be a killer. He's going with me right now."

J. Elmer Dalton saw that he wasn't going to get any chance to stall until he'd have a chance to make a getaway. He had a gun and he went for it. He may have been an expert at strangling but he wasn't so fancy with a gun. I'm no wizard myself even if I was a sheriff for more than twenty years but I had

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no trouble beating him to the draw. I shot him through the shoulder and I knew I couldn't miss more than an inch at ten feet. I put a second shot right through the shoulder joint and he dropped his gun and staggered back against the wall.

Della Hays had charged me like a tigress and was trying to claw my face. The minister came in and grabbed her as I pushed her away. It would take more than my word to convince Della that her intended was not an upright citizen. When she finally realized how close she had come to death it would be a hard jolt for her to take.

The minister wasn't so hard to convince. He took charge of the woman while I marched J. Elmer Dalton out of that room. This time the tables were reversed. It was J. Elmer Dalton, instead of his bride, who was going to his death.

Answers to the "Crime Quiz" on Page 81

1. It's blood. Occasionally, bloodstains are acted upon chemically by the substance on which they are found and turn green, blue, black—and even white. The green color is caused by formation of an oxide of copper when blood is in contact with certain wallpapers.
2. A moulage is a plastic mold of an object—such as a head, footprint, tire track, etc.—for future use as evidence.
3. The Bertillon System.
4. 1932.
5. Stolen diamonds.
6. Murder. Suicides almost never shoot themselves through the eye.
7. Here they are, matched correctly:
 - a. Tony Quinn—G Wayman Jones
 - b. Sherlock Holmes—Arthur Conan Doyle
 - c. The Saint—Leslie Charteris
 - d. Mr. and Mrs. North—Frances and Richard Lockridge
8. False. It's odorless.
9. In the heel.
10. No. A wooden bullet kills just as surely as a lead one.

OFF THE RECORD

(Concluded from page 8)

while your writers get overenthusiastic, as in NOT SO TOUGH, by Rollin Fitzsimmons, in your recent issue. Tell Mr. Fitzsimmons that on page 124 of his story he has made his hero a walking arsenal, as he has him drawing his one gun twice without ever putting it away. But as a whole, your stories are the best, and more power to you.—Lee Minich, Kansas City.

Thanks for pointing that out to us, Lee. We hate to be contrary, but if you read the paragraphs in question carefully, we think you'll agree that everything is perfectly in order. There is not one gun—but *two*. The first gun the detective draws is that belonging to the corpse. Detective Holton draws it to show Manning that the corpse had been armed and out to kill. The second gun Detective Holton draws is his own weapon.

Does that make it clear?

Dear Editor: I just finished reading your latest issue of BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE and I wish to say I am so delighted, and I enjoyed it so much, I just can't tell how happy I am to get the book. I have been reading it for more than two years. I would like very much if you would try to publish it oftener. I don't think that the Black Bat and Carol should get married. I enjoy it so much the way it is.—Mrs. Emma Thomas, Box 701, Homer, La.

Our concluding letter is from the Golden State.

Dear Editor: I read three different magazines you publish, THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE, TEXAS RANGERS, and BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE, and enjoy reading them all. What I want to know is, what happened to Satan Hall? I haven't seen a story about him in a long time.—Claudia Johnson, 962 E. 22nd St., Los Angeles, Calif.

Satan Hall is one of our favorites, too—and we'll try to bring him back to BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE again soon.

Thanks for all your letters. We'll be back again next issue with many more. Here's hoping there'll be one from you. Please address all correspondence to The Editor, BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y.

So until next issue—happy reading to everybody, and thanks again for writing!

—THE EDITOR.

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