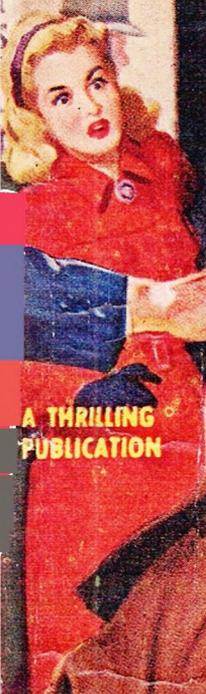


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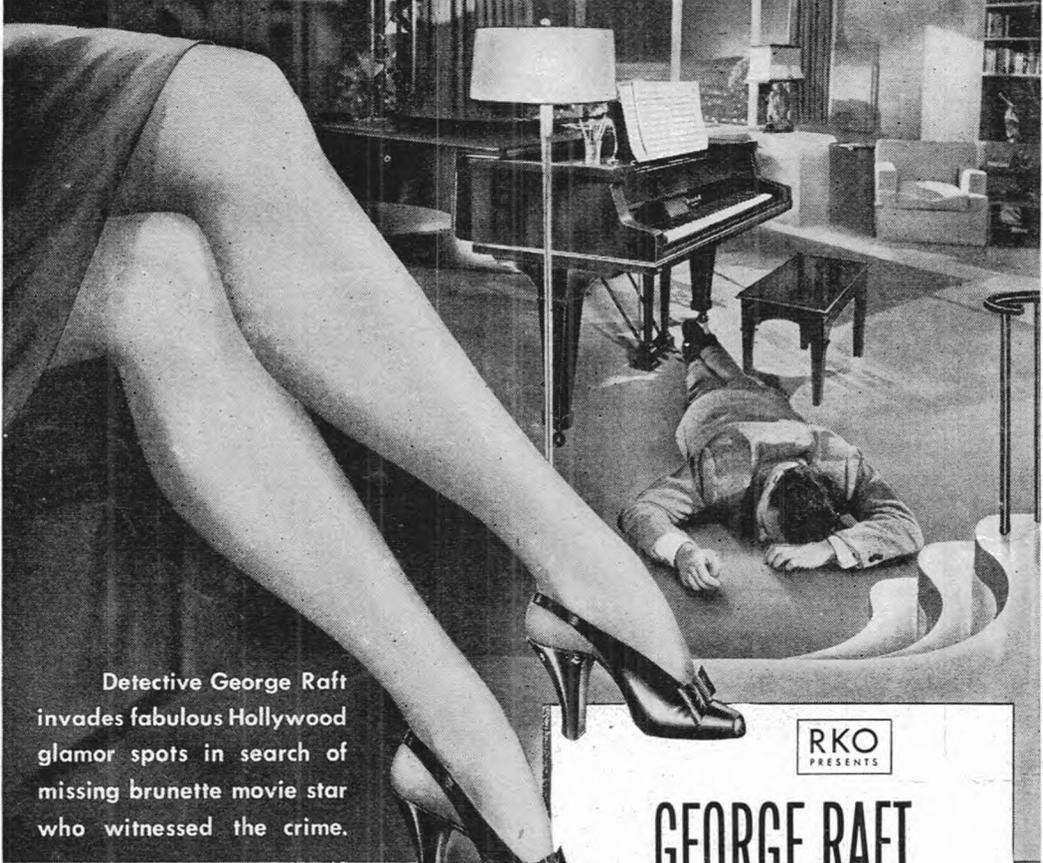
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BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE

Vol. XXII, No. 1

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

February, 1947

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by G. Wayman Jones

When Willie Wilkerson asks for a room and bath at a little hotel in New York, he unknowingly checks in for a grim murder mystery which calls for Tony Quinn's keen sleuthing talents! The Black Bat dares danger and death as he battles to smash a diabolical and sinister conspiracy! 11

A COMPLETE NOVELET

- MURDER IS PATIENT**.....*Wayland Rice* 90
Stan Bruce battles to block the sinister, evil schemes of the crafty slayer who prowls an ancient mansion, intent on dealing doom!

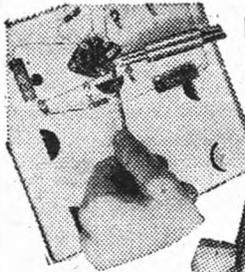
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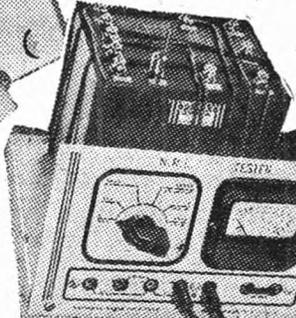
- OFF THE RECORD**.....*The Editor* 6
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Crime stalks Harvard, and a janitor unearths clues in this true story

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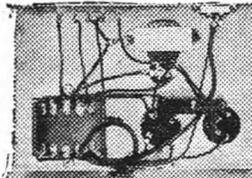
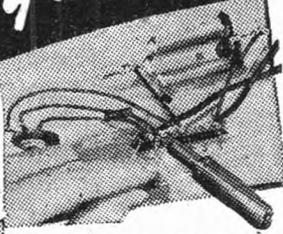


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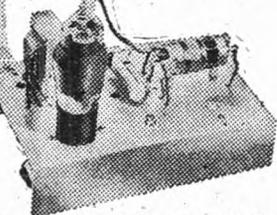
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OFF THE RECORD

A DEPARTMENT WHERE READERS AND THE EDITOR MEET

A GAINST the peaceful background of a Florida west coast resort, Tony Quinn works on one of the most baffling cases of his career in the **LAKESIDE MYSTERY**, the pulsating Black Bat novel by G. Wayman Jones in the next issue of **BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE**.

It is a peculiar sort of kidnaping that brings Tony Quinn into the affair. Quinn first notices that a strange man has replaced Silk Kirby at the wheel of his car, standing outside the court house. However, as a "blind" man, the Black Bat cannot reveal the fact that he has discovered anything amiss.

Quinn is driven to a house and here he finds Captain McGrath of the New York Police and Inspector Roger Graystone of Scotland Yard. Silk Kirby is also present, and quite at ease. Graystone explains why it was necessary to bring Quinn secretly to the house.

International Crooks

"Tony, before the war began, Scotland Yard had information about a new gang of international crooks," the inspector says. "They intended to specialize in big things. The war halted their plans, of course. Now it seems, they have begun operations."

"Exactly how?" Quinn asks.

"About a month ago the wife of Lord Kingsford went to Mexico with her seven months' old child. A boy whom Lord Kingsford had never seen. He'd been on active naval duty. He expected to meet his wife and son in Mexico. A few hours after Lady Kingsford arrived in Mexico she was set upon by two or three men. She resisted and was so badly beaten that she is still confined to a hospital. The child was kidnaped."

"How do you know the job was done by a gang of international crooks?" Quinn demands.

"They informed Lady Kingsford of that fact," says Inspector Graystone. "They also

told her the child would be perfectly safe, taken to a healthful spot and well cared for. The contact point was a certain Florida hotel. In my opinion they placed the child on some sort of boat, crossed the Gulf of Mexico and landed on the west coast of Florida, not far from the spot arranged to be the contact point."

The Warning Note

As the men talk Quinn learns that the Scotland Yard inspector has been to the Florida hotel—but received a note warning him to leave almost as soon as he arrived. Not wishing to endanger the life of the baby, Graystone left—being driven to the airport in the car of another guest. The taxi which was sent for to take the inspector to the plane, was deliberately wrecked and the driver killed. Evidently the crooks thought that Graystone was in the cab.

The situation is complicated by the fact that there are three baby boys at the hotel, any one which may be the Kingsford child.

"I see," Quinn comments thoughtfully. "Now you state that the child is being openly held in a Florida hotel. That's rather out of my jurisdiction, Inspector. What do you expect me to do about this?"

"The hotel is named Okoochee Inn."

Quinn whistles softly. "So that's it! Somehow you discovered I'm taking a vacation there."

A Dangerous Mission

Inspector Graystone had discovered just that—and it was arranged that Tony Quinn would try to identify and rescue the kidnaped child when he got to the hotel. But it was a dangerous mission, for shortly after Quinn and Silk Kirby leave Graystone and McGrath the car of the police officials is forced off the road by another automobile.

The inspector is shot and killed and Captain McGrath badly wounded.

However McGrath manages to reach Tony

(Continued on page 8)



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OFF THE RECORD

(Continued from page 6)

Quinn's house and tell the supposedly blind man what has happened. Unknown to McGrath, the Black Bat has called in his aides and Silk Kirby, Carol Baldwin, and Butch Leary now know the whole kidnaping story. It is arranged for all of them to go to the Florida resort and work on the case—each in his or her own way.

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The Black Bat's eyes swept through the darkness, studying the area. Finally he braced himself against a pine tree and quickly removed shoes and socks. He left those on a large bog, rolled up his trousers as high as possible and deliberately waded into the swamp.

It didn't take him long to locate what he came to find. Very shortly he lifted the head and shoulders of a corpse out of the mire. He dragged the body to drier ground. It was the chambermaid. She was gagged and bound. Death had been caused by some one adept at the art of strangling.

The Black Bat quickly searched the two pockets of her uniform. They contained nothing. He straightened up slowly, unaware that he was being watched. This poor woman, he decided, had died because she saw or heard something. Was it the same thing which had required the murder of Inspector Graystone?

The Black Bat returned to the bog upon which he had left his socks and shoes. He dried some of the water from his feet with a black handkerchief, propped himself against the tree once more and put the sock and shoes back on. He bent to tie the laces.

He never was certain if that act saved his life or if the gunman was a rotten shot. The bullet whizzed above his head and about a foot or two to the left of him.

The Black Bat straightened, put one foot firmly down and pivoted on it until he was behind the tree. His own automatic was in his gloved fist. He knew the direction from which the shot had originated and he stood quietly listening, his head cocked slightly to one side.

He heard it then. The soft crunch of a man's weight on a bog after a short jump. The Black

(Continued on page 112)

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BUCK. MAY I DRIVE
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TIME. WHY NOT
JOIN US?

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WHEN YOU SHAVE WITH THIN GILLETES.
THEY'RE THE SHARPEST, LONGEST-LASTING
BLADES IN THE LOW-PRICE FIELD. WHAT'S MORE
... AND THIS IS IMPORTANT... THEY FIT YOUR
GILLETTE RAZOR PERFECTLY, PROTECTING YOU
FROM THE IRRITATION CAUSED BY MISFIT
BLADES AND FAULTY SHAVING
METHODS. ASK FOR THIN
GILLETES





Tuzac leaped to his feet and raised both hands (CHAPTER VII)

THE CRIME TO COME

By G. WAYMAN JONES

When Willie Wilkerson asks for a room and bath at a little New York hotel, he unknowingly checks in for a grim murder mystery which calls for Tony Quinn's keen sleuthing talents!

CHAPTER I

STRANGER IN TOWN

HE WAS a rather puny-looking man. His name was William Wilkerson, and everybody called him Willie. In the small town where he came from,

that is. Here in New York he wasn't even noticed. He didn't know anyone. He could have cursed—if he had been the cursing type—the boss who had sent him here to get some critically needed supplies for the factory. Willie Wilkerson didn't like New York, and never had.

At the moment, he liked it less than

A COMPLETE BLACK BAT NOVEL

The Black Bat Dares Danger and Death as He

ever. He had spent four dollars on taxi fares already, traveling from one hotel to another, and was still without a place to sleep. It was almost nine in the evening and he was getting wrought up about sleeping in a park. His two traveling bags were growing incredibly heavy. He had been on a train all night and day and hadn't slept. He never could, on trains. Willie's fatigue and desperation were becoming pathetic.

He lugged his bags out of another hotel lobby and spent ten minutes flagging a cab. This time he drew a sympathetic driver. A man named Constantinos Spireglios, according to his license card. Willie always tried to remember the names of the drivers, just in case a policeman might ask him some time or other.

"Kinda tough, ain't it, bud?" The driver wagged his head. "You got to have a reservation days ahead in this town. Where'll it be?"

"I don't know." Willie was, at least, glad of someone to talk to. "I haven't the faintest idea. I've been to seven hotels already and nobody checks out any more. Do you know of any place where I could find a room? I'm not particular, so long as it's clean and quiet."

The driver rubbed his chin. "In this town, mister, that's a big order. Especially the quiet part. You don't mind goin' way uptown?"

"Uptown, downtown, midtown or cross-town." Willie sighed. "Just so I get some sleep."

"Well, there's a little joint up around a Hundred and Second Street. Not many know of the place. It's just got permanent guests, like a boarding house. The other day I takes two guys there and they were talkin'. A cab driver keeps his ears open, pal. I heard 'em say they could always get a room there. Want to take a chance?"

"Yes—yes, anything," Willie agreed. "Anything at all."

SOME thirty-five minutes later, Willie was deposited, baggage and all, on the sidewalk in front of the Wilton Hotel. It was a narrow building and quite tall, maybe fifteen or sixteen stories.

Willie was not impressed, but if he could get a room there, snuggle under covers and just sleep, it would be better

than the promises of the Waldorf-Astoria. He paid the driver, in a wild splurge added a half dollar tip, and toted his bags into the hotel lobby.

He was received without gusto, acclaim or bellboys. A bored desk clerk spun the register card holder around. "Single, with bath. Yeah, I got. Four-fifty a day, or cheaper by the week."

"I'll only be here a couple of days," Willie said. "Thanks. Thanks very much."

He registered, got his key and carried the luggage to a creaky elevator operated by a man who was as old and creaky as the lift. Willie got out on the twelfth floor and hunted his own room. He let himself in, and was pleasantly surprised.

It was a small room, but clean, and the furniture was comfortable. Most of all, the bed. Willie sat down wearily on the edge of it, opened one bag and took out pajamas, toothbrush and liquid tooth soap. For a moment he half convinced himself not to bother with all that routine, but simply to lean back, close his eyes and sleep. But he staggered to his feet and cleaned up. As he wound his watch, he noticed that it was ten forty-five.

He got beneath the covers, put his hands behind his head and stared up at the ceiling. A red neon sign was flashing somewhere and the ceiling was alternately pink and black. Willie sighed in sheer contentment and wondered what lucky fate had brought him that cab driver and, finally, this hotel room.

"Four-fifty," he muttered sleepily. "I guess that's a little high, but you have to pay for quiet in New York. Yes, sir, if I had to pay half of it and the firm the other half, I'd still be happy. Ahhh. . ."

He closed his eyes, snapped off the light, took what he hoped would be his last conscious breath for seven or eight hours—and then sat bolt upright. A General Sherman tank had hit the wall beside the bed.

Some three or four minutes later, Willie Wilkerson was pretty certain why this was not a popular hotel, nor expensive. Its walls were made of papier-mache, or something just as fragile. Sounds carried through the walls as if the partitions didn't exist.

What Willie had first heard, seemed to have been a whisky bottle hurled at the

Fights to Smash a Sinister Crime Conspiracy!

wall. Now voices reached him. One, especially, was that of an angry man. The other was soothing, in a raspy sort of way. Willie pulled the covers up over his head and tried to convince himself he could sleep even with this racket.

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

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

and we're sticking. There's a fortune in it."

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

"You're crazy," Raspy Voice derided. "Who ever mentioned a word about killing anyone?"

"Nobody—yet. But get the setup. We don't know who we work for. Only that every guy like us who is worth his salt



THE BLACK BAT

"Quiet," Raspy Voice warned. "Everything is on the level. You're just too drunk not to realize that."

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

"Shut up!" Raspy Voice warned ominously. "We both agreed to take this job

has been hired. We sit around and get paid more dough than we made by knocking off that last tank-town bank. For doing nothing. It don't make sense, and there's got to be something back of it. For dough like that, there's murder! I'm telling you."

"And I'm telling you to shut up," Raspy Voice snarled. "Our orders were not to talk. What you need is a walk in the air to sober up. Put on your clothes."

"Okay, okay," the alcoholic voice said. "Maybe you're right. We get the dough, so why should we ask a lot of questions?"

Sure, we'll take a walk. That's all we ever do is walk half the night, and bunk in here all day."

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

Therefore, Willie dressed in considerable haste. He was no longer sleepy. He wondered if he would ever sleep again. In three or four minutes, he was lacing his shoes. He heard the door of the next room open and close, heard two pairs of feet walk rapidly down the hall.

Willie had to see what those men looked like. He seized the knob of his own door, tugged, and almost fell backward. In his excitement, he had forgotten that the door was locked.

He unlocked it, opened it a bit, and peered out. He could still hear the footsteps. He twisted his head. At the far end of the narrow and dimly lighted hallway, he had a glimpse of two men. Just their backs. One was tall and rugged-looking, like someone who might be expected to work in a coal mine or at some such job. Where a strong and broad back was needed.

The other man was smaller, slightly stooped, and thin.

They didn't ring for the elevator, but proceeded toward the fire stairway. Directly above this exit was a red light that illuminated the doorway fairly well.

The tall man passed straight through. The smaller man paused, lit a match, and brought the flame to the tip of a cigarette that he held between his lips. He half-turned as the match flame went out. Willie couldn't see much of his face except for the nose. He had a large nose for such a small man. It was a thin, long nose, almost a caricature of the real thing.

Then the door closed and they were gone.

Willie rushed back, got into his vest and coat, seized his hat, and started running down the hall. Halfway along it, he paused, turned and went back. Not to his own room, but to the one next door in which those two tough-talking men lived.

Willie tried the knob. He had been fairly certain he hadn't heard the key turn, and it seemed he was right, for the

door opened easily. He stepped inside. It was dark, for the single curtain was drawn. Willie turned on the light.

The room was in disarray, as if both men had been in all day long. There were two open suitcases against one wall. Willie peered into the nearest one and inhaled sharply. Half-hidden by some clothing was a heavy automatic. That was enough for Willie. He needed nothing more.

As fast as he could travel now, he headed for the elevator. It came in answer to his ring and he rode to the lobby. With a nervous look in the direction of the sleepy-eyed desk clerk, he kept on going.

Outside, by some miracle, he got the first cab he flagged. Willie clambered in. "Po-police Head-quarters."

He tried to make the words sound important, but they didn't. They were much too filled with terror. And Willie didn't know, or had forgotten, that in a big city there are precinct station houses, usually nearby, where complaints are handled.

He couldn't think straight anyway. In his town there were no precincts. Just Headquarters, and that was where he wanted to go.

CHAPTER II

DEATH AT HIS ELBOW



THE cab driver was the strong, silent type who drove well and kept his mind on his business. It was a long ride. Willie thought it would never end. And then he was getting out in front of an imposing-looking building. He wondered if he had been driven to the State Capitol instead of to Police Headquarters, until he saw the two green lights on either side of the entrance.

Willie paid the driver, stormed those steps like a valiant soldier and barged into the huge lobby. He saw an Information desk and hurried up to it. A bored sergeant lifted one eyebrow inquisitively.

"Th-ere is going to be a big crime committed," Willie managed. "A very big crime. By men who have guns. You've got to stop it."

"Down that hall, brother," the sergeant said as he pointed. "Look for a door with the name of Captain McGrath on it. Tell him your story."

"But there isn't time. You're an officer—"



The two men walked in—and came to a sudden halt, for at least a dozen weapons were leveled at them
(CHAPTER XV)

"I'm the hostess," the Information sergeant growled. "Go on—see Captain McGrath."

Willie was used to taking orders. He scampered to the corridor, went down it and located Captain McGrath's office. He knocked gently and a gruff voice told him to come in, and couldn't he see that notice that said "Walk In"?

Captain McGrath was a bulky short man, who wore a heavy black, closely clipped mustache. His coat and vest were off. A service pistol peeked out of a shoulder clip. McGrath was unimaginative, stolid, but a good cop for all that. He listened patiently to Willie's story.

"Now look," he said, "you either got a mighty active imagination, or you were dreaming. Crooks don't talk loudly about crimes they haven't committed yet. They clam up good and tight until after it's done. That's when they brag."

"But one of the men was intoxicated," Willie insisted. "And angry because he didn't know what was in store for him. He wanted to know what sort of a crime he was supposed to commit. And he said it must be murder because he was being paid so much for doing nothing that it had to be murder."

"Look, you could be right," McGrath replied. "I'm not arguing that point. Suppose we tell it to the desk lieutenant and let him assign a couple of men to make a routine check of those two mugs. Come on—we'll make the arrangements."

McGrath swung into his coat and vest with one motion. He had learned that over the years when he had to move fast, which was often enough. He led Willie to the main office. Willie didn't like that. It was too public. At least five people were lounging around.

McGrath wasn't fazed by any of them. He walked up to the desk.

There was a tall, white-haired man in a black homburg and black topcoat leaning against the long desk. Under the coat, he wore a tuxedo. He was telling the desk lieutenant that he was Roland Manning, that he had lost his wallet, and was giving a detailed description of it.

McGrath glanced at him and nodded.

"Hello, Mr. Manning. You got troubles too?"

Roland Manning offered his hand.

"Ah, Captain McGrath. Yes, I guess we all have business in a police station sooner or later. I lost my wallet. Stupid thing to do. I'm hoping it will turn up."

"Sure it will," McGrath said. "Empty. Bet on that. Excuse me, Mr. Manning. My friend here has an important story to tell." McGrath winked at Manning and indicated Willie with a slight jerk of his head.

Willie told the desk lieutenant his story in detail. The desk lieutenant was not particularly impressed. He picked up the phone and asked for two plainclothes men.

McGrath leaned against the desk and looked around the vast room. He knew a couple of other people there, too, and nodded in their direction. One was Bert McDonald, natty and rotund fight promoter, who waved back. McGrath wondered if there were any important fights coming up. Maybe he could promote a couple of tickets. He meant to see about that.

Then there was another man whom he didn't recognize at first, although the handsome face was familiar enough to be tantalizing. McGrath didn't recall who he was until later. Then he knew he had seen that face almost every day, over a newspaper column that gossiped about people of wealth and society. The name was Cliff Cordee.

WHILE they waited for the detectives to arrive there was a bit of commotion that left Willie Wilkerson big-eyed with excitement. He would have something to tell the folks back home after this. A man in handcuffs was led in.

McGrath grinned at him.

"Well, well—Stephan Tuzac. Did somebody catch you dealing one from the bottom, Tuzac?"

Stephan Tuzac grinned broadly, and it was really a broad grin for he had a wide face. Coarse features, too, and oily black hair. But his clothes were as good as Roland Manning's. Willie expected him to speak with an accent, but Tuzac's words were polished and tinged with good humor.

"Hello, Captain McGrath." He bowed ironically. "You know very well I do not cheat. I could never have achieved my present status as a gambler if I did. No—it's just one of those things. The game was too loud, I imagine."

The two detectives arrived then. The desk lieutenant briefed them on Willie's story and gave crisp orders to go to the hotel and locate those two men, search their rooms, and find out what it was all about. Captain McGrath turned to Willie.

"Why don't you go over there and sit down? The boys won't be long and you can see how a big town Police Department operates. Who knows—they might bring in a murderer."

Willie had all but forgotten the angry dispute in the next room. He was having the time of his life. He sat down beside Cliff Cordee who leaned over and asked Willie more facts about his story. If it was worthwhile, he explained, he would pass it on to a crime reporter. Willie told the story in great detail.

A full hour went by. Then Captain McGrath strode importantly back into the room and summoned Willie with a flick of his forefinger. McGrath's features were stern.

"Now, look," he said, "you don't act or appear like a hophead or a souse. I think the big town is too much for you. Go back to your hotel and get some sleep. There's nothing to your story, understand? Not a thing."

"But I tell you—" Willie began desperately.

He was aware of the smiles on the faces of the men who were around him.

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

Willie still tried to protest. McGrath shut him off wearily. He didn't get tough. Willie was not the type of man you could get tough with.

"Be reasonable, Mr. Wilkerson," McGrath said. "What have we got to go on? Nothing! I don't say you're a liar. You're just mistaken. Maybe what you heard was a radio program. Now, suppose I act on your complaint. I tell the D.A. Maybe the Special D.A., who handles crime stuff like this. Man, if I ever told your story to Tony Quinn, he'd laugh me smack back into a lieutenantcy. Go on home, Mr. Wilkerson. Please."

"You won't—help me then, Captain?"

"I'd do everything I could if there was a single thing to go on. There isn't. Good night, Mr. Wilkerson."

McGrath turned on his heel and stalked off. Willie just stood there. Nobody said



McGRATH

anything. Willie raised his head resolutely.

"Well," he said aloud and with an unheard-of belligerency, for him, "if no one here will help me, maybe this Special District Attorney will."

He walked over to a row of phone booths and checked the address of Anthony Quinn. He memorized it and walked out of Police Headquarters.

Two blocks away, Willie spotted a patrolman. He had a sudden and intense distaste for policemen, but at least this one could tell him what direction to head in. He made his inquiry, got a clear answer, and started off.

Tony Quinn, it seemed, lived some distance away. Willie took a subway first. It was 12:45, and the subway station platform was crowded. Willie was apprehensive. He didn't know why, but he had an eerie feeling that all was not exactly right.

He looked around. About six feet to his left stood a huge man and Willie promptly shied away from him. He looked like a montage of all the murderers and crooks Willie had ever seen in the movies.

HE REALLY was an enormous man, towering well above everyone else. He had a flattish nose, a broad forehead, and while he looked as tough as leather, there was a certain kindness in his calm eyes. His arms were incredibly long, and ended in hands that were the size of boxing gloves. His shoulders were un-

usually broad and powerful-looking.

A train was rumbling into the station. The crowd surged forward, carrying Willie along.

He never did know what really happened. He felt a shoulder lodge against the small of his back.

The train was still moving fast, and at that moment the shoulder gave Willie a tremendous shove.

He shot toward the edge of the platform and a scream of terror came from his lips. He somehow managed to skid to a stop, but it was a most precarious stop, and he was leaning over the edge, vainly trying to get his balance while scores of people stood there in transfixed horror.

That is, all but one was transfixed. The enormous man spread both arms wide and the people around him were thrown back. In two amazing leaps he paced the oncoming train and beat it to where Willie stood.

Willie was toppling. Falling in front of the train as surely as fate.

The big man's right hand shot out. Thick fingers grasped Willie by the shoulder. Not just the coat, but by flesh and bone.

Willie was hoisted back and up. The train whizzed past.

The big man gave a sharp cry of pain. His left hand had also moved out to seize Willie if both hands were needed. The edge of the train car had hit this left hand a numbing, glancing blow that drew blood.

Willie found himself suddenly free. He gave a bleat of alarm, turned and fled. He didn't bother to thank his rescuer, nor to get aboard the train. He flew up the steps, exited to the street, and waved both hands wildly for a cab.

IT took him five nervous minutes to get one. He popped inside and gave Tony Quinn's address.

Willie felt a little better. One thing he knew. That shove had been deliberate. It had been nothing short of a ruthless attempt to murder him. He had ridden a long way, but was still shivering when the cab pulled up rather abruptly, and the driver turned around.

"Hey, mister," he said, "the number you want is at the end of this block. I can't go any further. The road is under repairs."

Willie got out and paid the driver. He

skirted the highway road blocking signs and hurried down the dark sidewalk.

This was a residential part of town. The houses were all large and expensive-looking, set well back on landscaped property.

High hedges ran along the sidewalk and Willie became more scared with every step he took.

He was no more than a hundred yards from his destination when he heard the branches of a hedge scrape. The sound came from just ahead of him. He saw the bush move. Willie thought straight and fast then, for someone with as little experience in this sort of thing as he possessed.

He wheeled to the left and darted to the middle of the road. He began running and picked up considerable speed. He was fairly certain he heard voices mumble, and catlike footsteps behind him, but he didn't waste any time looking over his shoulder.

He just ran.

He was still running when he came to the gate of Tony Quinn's home. If the gate had been closed, Willie would have gone right through it. Fortunately, nothing impeded his way.

He reached the porch and began punching the doorbell.

The door opened, framing a bald-headed man of medium height and slim build. Willie wasn't in a mood to announce himself. He wanted in and wanted it badly. He pushed by the astonished man, into the hallway, twisted around and slammed the door shut. Then he sank weakly into a chair.

"Are you—are you Mr. Quinn?" he gasped.

"Mr. Quinn is in the library, sir," the bald-headed man said. "It's very late. Is your business urgent?"

"Urgent?" Willie squeaked. "Listen here! They tried to kill me twice already. Where is Mr. Quinn? Maybe he'll believe me. And look—if anyone comes to the door, you haven't seen me. Why those—those men would come right in here after me! Maybe they will. I've got to see Mr. Quinn right away!"

"Silk!" The voice came from somewhere in the depths of the large house. It was a calm, steady voice. "Is something wrong, Silk?"

Silk bowed slightly toward Willie and said:

"If you will follow me, sir."

CHAPTER III

THE INFORMER MUST DIE



WILLIE WILKERSON followed so closely that he almost walked up Silk Kirby's heels. He popped into a library and saw a man seated in a comfortable old leather chair beside a fireplace. The man wore a tweed jacket. There was a white cane between his knees, and he was smoking a pipe that gave off a pleasant aroma.

He was a good-looking man, though Willie didn't notice, except for the area around his eyes. There the flesh was deeply scarred. He didn't look at Willie when he spoke.

"Calm yourself, man," he said. "I know you are much excited and frightened over something. Silk, bring the gentleman a drink. He really needs one. Now, what can I do for you?"

"I—I tried to tell Captain McGrath," Willie said breathlessly, "but he wouldn't listen to me. Nobody will listen. You must, Mr. Quinn! If I have to leave here, they'll kill me. No, thank you, I don't want a drink. I never drink. Thanks just the same. It happened when I was trying to go to sleep in my hotel room. Hotel Wilton on a Hundred and Second Street. West, I think. No, East. Oh, I'm not sure. I'm not sure of anything except they tried to kill me twice while I was on my way here."

"Who tried to kill you?" The face Willie looked at was impassive.

"I don't know," Willie answered miserably. "I never saw them. They shoved me in front of a subway train. A big man saved me. If it hadn't been for him, I'd be dead. Then, right here in this block, I heard someone behind the hedges. They were waiting for me. They knew I was coming here. But I got away from them."

"You walked here?" Quinn frowned.

"No. No, I was too scared to walk, and it was a long distance out here. I took a cab but your street is blocked by road signs. The cab couldn't get down it. I had to walk, and they were waiting."

Silk Kirby, who stood respectfully by, broke into Willie's rush of words.

"Hollis Street is blocked, sir, but not ours. That's the street two blocks east."

"Go have a look, Silk," Quinn said. "Now, my friend, tell me your name and

the entire story. Tell it simply and try to calm yourself."

Willie told his story. Somehow, he felt more composed, and safer with this man. Just his presence had a soothing effect on Willie's nerves. He told a good, lucid story too.

Quinn's pipe went out. He leaned forward, tapped it against the edge of the fireplace and then reached for more tobacco. His hand went out slowly, feeling around the surface of the table next to his chair. He knocked over a tall lighter:

"What's the matter, sir?" Willie said. "The humidior is right there."

"I'm blind," Quinn said. "Thank you." His fingers closed around the humidior.

Willie's apprehension came back with a wild rush. A blind man! What good would he be if those assassins came here? Willie looked around nervously. Then Quinn spoke again, and Willie's nerves ceased to quiver.

"Mr. Wilkerson, your story is amazing. You apparently overheard two men discussing a crime they were about to commit. Yet you don't know what sort of crime nor who those men were. Captain McGrath was skeptical—and I don't blame him. His detectives found an old man in the room next to yours. He had lived there for a long time. Your story is full of holes."

"Then you don't believe me either?" Willie groaned.

"I didn't say that." Quinn's voice was sharp. "I'd be glad to believe you if there was the least thing to back up your story." His head suddenly cocked to one side. Then he nodded. "Silk, my butler, is coming back. Don't be alarmed when he enters."

Silk hurried into the room.

"I went to the head of the block, sir," he said quickly. "No road signs. They're still down at Hollis Street."

"But I tell you they were there!" Willie protested shrilly. "Don't you believe me? What kind of a city is this? I've tried and tried to make everyone understand. But they all think I'm crazy or had nightmares. If you send me out of here, I'll be dead before morning! I wish I'd never come here. I wish I'd just packed my things and gone back to my own town."

Quinn called Silk.

"Those road signs could have been moved," he said. "I don't like this, Silk. McGrath's detectives were not impressed by Mr. Wilkerson's story, and could have

been easily fooled. Suppose you run over to that hotel. Have a look around and come right back. I'll keep Mr. Wilkerson here."

SILK required no second invitation. He hurried out to the garage and got a fast coupe. He drove to Wilkerson's hotel, and parked a block away. From the glove compartment he took a small, flat automatic and dropped it into his pocket.

Unlike McGrath and the other policemen, Silk had been impressed by Wilkerson's story. Silk knew how to judge people. Once, his freedom and financial condition had depended upon it. For Silk had been one of the best confidence men who ever gave the nation's police departments severe headaches. Silk would have laid odds on Willie's integrity and sanity.

Silk knew these third-rate hotels and how they were operated. He walked up to the desk. The clerk was dozing again, but he awakened promptly when he saw a five-dollar bill laid on the desk.

Silk winked at him.

"A look at your register, pal. I'm hunting for a friend of mine."

The clerk winked back, spread out half a dozen registry cards on the desk and Silk glanced at them. He winked mysteriously again, and walked to the elevator.

Something was wrong. Willie had stated his room was on the twelfth floor, while the registry card showed him to be on the eleventh floor. Silk got out on the eleventh floor and soon stood in front of Wilkerson's room. It was locked, but the locks of such hotels are simply constructed and Silk opened it in two minutes.

Willie's two bags were on the floor, one open. His pajamas had been hastily flung across the unmade bed. In the bathroom, his toothbrush lay on the sink and beside it was a bottle of liquid tooth cleanser. Silk picked it up. The sides of the bottle were sticky. Some of the red stuff had run down it. Enough of it so that the sink should have been stained red beneath the bottle, but it wasn't.

Silk walked out of the room and went next door. He knocked smartly. A sleepy voice told him to go away, but Silk kept knocking. Finally, the door opened and an old man with touseled hair peered at him.

"This is the second time I been woke up," he complained. "What the heck is going on?"

"I'm looking for a friend who lives next door to you. Have you seen him?"

"Ain't nobody next door. Least there wasn't yesterday. Will you go away?"

Silk went away fast—to the twelfth floor this time. There he opened the room in line with the eleventh floor room where he had found Willie's things. The room was empty, the bed made. Silk walked across the room and into the bathroom. He snapped on the light. There, on the sink, was a round ring of reddish liquid tooth cleanser.

Silk dropped a hand into his coat pocket, nestled fingers around the gun there and went to the room next door. He knocked, received no answer and opened it. This room was empty, but it smelled of stale tobacco smoke and of liquor.

He opened drawers and found nothing. He began a systematic search. The room had been carefully stripped of everything but the furniture. Silk picked up the waste-basket. It was also empty, but as he started to put it down, a bit of paper gleamed from the bottom of the basket. He found that it was lightly adhering to the bottom by some sticky stuff. It was just a torn scrap of newspaper, but Silk noticed that two of the sides had been carefully cut with scissors. He didn't take time to read the item.

In the lobby again, he went over to the desk and that smooth tongue of his persuaded the clerk to produce the registry cards again. Silk grew a trifle clumsy then. The cards all fell to the floor. He picked them up, with profuse apologies, neatly stacked them, thanked the clerk, and walked out. In his pocket was Willie Wilkerson's registration card.

Back in the coupe, Silk turned on the dome light and studied that card. Willie had said he had been assigned to a room on the twelfth floor. Yet his things were on the eleventh. The registry card showed no indications of having been tampered with, and Willie's room was listed as being on the eleventh floor. Silk frowned and drove home.

Willie and Quinn were still in the library. Silk handed Willie the card.

"Is that your writing?" he asked.

"Yes, of course," Willie said. "I signed that card when I registered at the hotel. I—Wait! That looks like my writing, but I'm not certain. I—say, this claims I was assigned to the eleventh floor. That's wrong. I was on the twelfth floor."

Taking the card back, Silk spoke to Quinn.

"This man is telling the truth, sir. His possessions are on the eleventh floor. There was an old man next door who didn't know the room assigned to Mr. Wilkerson on this registry card was occupied. But on the twelfth floor I found a room which had recently been checked out. I think someone wrote a new card, gave Mr. Wilkerson a different room, and moved his things to it. When the police arrived, they went by the registry card, just as I did. Only they weren't suspicious, and I was."

"Mr. Wilkerson, we both believe you," Quinn said. "I promise that there will be an investigation made."

Willie's eyes showed his gratitude. But then his face clouded.

"What happens to me, though? They tried to kill me twice."

"Silk," Quinn said, "prepare a guest room. Mr. Wilkerson will stay here with us until it is perfectly safe for him to leave. Mr. Wilkerson, I can tell by your voice that you must be exhausted. You can go with Silk and rest easily. No one will get in here."

Willie expressed his thanks fervently. He fell asleep promptly in the room assigned to him. Silk closed the door quietly and went downstairs.

CHAPTER IV

MAN IN BLACK



AFTER a few minutes, when Silk walked into the library, Tony Quinn was pacing the floor. His cane had been abandoned and he seemed to have no trouble in moving about. His eyes had changed too. They were not the staring eyes of a blind man now, but alive and warm. He spoke in a low voice.

"It looks, Silk, as if we've run into something strange. What do you think about it?"

Silk sat down, no longer acting as a servant. He lit a cigarette and puffed on it slowly. Through the haze of smoke, his eyes looked narrow and beady.

"There was some crooked passing about at his hotel," he said. "That's clear. McGrath's boys checked him against the register and went to the wrong room. Wilkerson's stuff had been switched from



Butch went plunging down, vaguely conscious of the angry shouts and shots that followed him (CHAPTER IX)

the twelfth floor to the eleventh. In a hurry, too, because they missed up in a clue."

Silk went on to tell about the red ring from the liquid tooth cleanser.

"They didn't have to be too careful about it, I suppose," he went on. "Wilkerson's story was so fantastic as to be hardly believed, and McGrath's sleuths wouldn't have looked too hard. In the room next to the one that Wilkerson really occupied, I found this piece of newspaper. Nothing else—and I checked that place carefully."

Quinn laid the piece of newspaper on a table.

"This was clipped from a larger page," he said, as he studied it. "Then the item was torn up. I wonder why. One side contains shipping news, the other just part of an advertisement. Well, it's something. Maybe not important, but what happens from now on will prove that."

"We've certainly got a problem," Silk said. "Until now, a crime was committed before we went to work. Now we've got to find out what crime is planned and stop it. The thing must be important if they tried to kill the little guy twice. I wonder how they got on to him?"

"I asked about that," Quinn explained. "He told his story to the desk lieutenant at Headquarters, and there were several people around. They held him there for about an hour, giving the criminal elements involved enough time to get set. You're right though. We're working in reverse, and I don't like it. Not enough to go on."

"Who overheard Wilkerson at Police Headquarters?" Silk asked. "There's where it all started."

"You think as I do," Quinn replied. "Yes, I agree. Willie saw no one from the moment he left his room until he reached Headquarters. Except a cab driver who didn't talk or ask any questions. At Headquarters, there were several people. Willie's identification of them is a trifle hazy, except that he heard Stephan Tuzac being booked for gambling."

"Tuzac, eh?" Silk frowned. "He's a bad one. What are you going to do about it, sir?"

"See McGrath in the morning. Find out who overheard Willie. Have the room at the hotel gone over. That's about all we can do. Willie saw the two men, but only from the back. Or wait—one of them turned a trifle, and Willie noted that the

smaller of the pair had a particularly large nose. Not much to go on, is it?"

"No sir," Silk agreed. "Especially since we don't know when the intended crime is going to be pulled, and we have to work as if it were scheduled for the next minute or two. Maybe we should let the thing break first."

Quinn rejected the idea.

"I don't agree with you. This may be something big and important. After all, the police are supposed to prevent crime, and we're policemen—in a rough sort of way."

"Rough is right," Silk laughed. One eyebrow shot upward. "Do you suppose this is something for the Black Bat, sir?"

"Maybe." Quinn replied. "Right now the Black Bat would be as stuck as we are. However, we'll see in the morning. Is the house securely locked up?"

"Yes. Furthermore, I intend to sit up for the rest of the evening. I'm not tired, sir, and if anyone should get at Willie and—wipe him out—we'd be even worse off."

"Good fellow," Quinn continued. "I didn't want to suggest that. Tomorrow we'll give Willie a gun, lock him in here and hope for the best. Good night, Silk. Perhaps your hope may be realized, and the Black Bat will be forced into this."

Tony Quinn picked up his cane. An astounding change came over his eyes. They grew dead and staring, the eyes of a blind man. He tapped his way across the room with the cane, carefully mounted the stairs, and blundered around preparing for bed.

TONY QUINN was not blind. He had been, however, and now he pretended blindness because it gave him a better opportunity to act as the Black Bat without drawing suspicion upon himself.

It all had come about years ago. Quinn had been the District Attorney then, not a Special D.A. assigned to difficult cases, as he was now. He had been known as a hard-hitting, crusading prosecutor with an excellent record of convictions.

During one trial, criminals attempted to destroy certain evidence by throwing acid upon it. Quinn had moved in to prevent this, and had received the contents of an acid bottle full in the face. He had gone blind instantly from the searing, corrosive liquid. The deep scars around his eyes had been caused by that.

For a time he had hoped to recover his sight, but as the weeks progressed, he had

come to know that this could never happen without the help of something not much short of a miracle. He resigned his office and started on a tour of the pre-war world, seeking some surgeon who could give him a measure of hope. None had been able to do so. It was the same old story wherever he went. Part of his eyes had been actually destroyed. There was nothing left to heal.

Fortunately, Quinn was a wealthy man, and he had no financial worries. He had returned home, weary and resigned to spending the rest of his life in a world of darkness. Gradually, he had become adjusted to his affliction. And grimly started to develop other senses to recompense partially for the loss of his eyes.

His hearing had grown abnormally acute, his sense of touch sharp. He had learned to sense the presence of impeding objects. He had memorized sounds, footsteps and voices. He had learned how to read Braille and get about alone, to a limited extent.

He had Silk to help him. Silk, who had been a clever criminal, but had given it all up and become Quinn's right-hand man after he had come to rob Quinn, but had been persuaded to see the error of his ways.

Then the miracle had come to pass. One night Tony Quinn had a visitor. A lovely girl named Carol Baldwin. She had come with a strange offer. Her father, a police officer in a city far away, had been shot by thieves. He lay dying and, through Carol, he had sent an astounding offer of parts of his eyes. He thought if they should be transplanted to Quinn's, that perhaps Quinn would see again. At any rate, Carol's father would need his eyes only a short time longer. He couldn't get better. And a surgeon in that small town believed he could perform a successful operation.

Quinn, ready to seize upon anything, took advantage of the offer. The operation was performed. Carol's father died soon afterward, but with the hope that his legacy would make it possible for Tony Quinn to carry on his crusades against criminals. Then there had been weeks of worry while Quinn waited for his eyes to heal. Finally, he removed the bandages.

The operation had been a complete success. He could see once more and Nature, in a compensating mood, had added a strange bonus. Tony Quinn could not only see again, but he could see in inky dark-

ness. Faint colors, small obscure objects, were clear to his eyes in the darkest room.

Tony Quinn now was ready to carry out his promise to Carol's father, that if his sight was restored, he would carry on the fight against crime. More, he was prepared to do so now with facilities no normal man possessed.

He had decided to pretend blindness and work under cover. In that way, he would never be impeded by the red tape of the law. So he had become the Black Bat, an eerie figure garbed entirely in black, who wore a somber hood over his head. The hood was vital because of those telltale scars.

The Black Bat had soon announced his presence and in a short time was in full action. Carol Baldwin joined his ranks, to carry on where her father had been forced by crooks to quit, and she had proved herself quite capable of the dangerous work involved. Silk Kirby took an active part, as was to be expected, and there was still a fourth member of the Black Bat's little group who had dedicated their lives to fighting crime. This fourth member was the giantlike "Butch" O'Leary. Butch had a first name, but probably didn't remember it himself. His nickname was perfect for he was huge, a fighter, and incredibly strong.

These three people knew that Tony Quinn could see, and they alone knew he was the Black Bat. A few others suspected, notably Captain McGrath, who had sworn to arrest the Black Bat. McGrath believed he had reason enough for that—and probably had. For the Black Bat abided by no rules. He would kill when necessary to protect innocent lives, he broke into places, appropriated objects which were valuable as clues, and generally got around any law that checked him. McGrath's determination had grown into an obsession, though he had declared truces now and then, to work with the Black Bat, though never coming in personal contact with him.

QUINN plunged into his work with his customary vigor. He studied all phases of crime detection. He prepared a crime laboratory which rivaled anything the police had. It was part of his home, but so well-hidden that no one had ever seen it except his own little band of allies.

From the lab, a tunnel led to a garden house at the rear of the grounds around

his home. From there, quick exit could be made to a blind street running to the west of the property. Carol and Butch always used this means of entering and leaving the Quinn home. So did Tony Quinn himself, when he ventured out as the Black Bat.

He had mastered keys, locks, and all methods of gaining entrance anywhere. He had become proficient in the use of various weapons, and used them when necessary. He had built up an extensive file on criminals.

Finally Tony Quinn, blind lawyer, had been selected to act as a Special District Attorney, specializing in the more difficult cases. He had proved he could handle these perfectly and the authority his office lent him helped a great deal.

And now, it seemed, the Black Bat was plunging headlong into one of the strangest cases of his career. He had to stop a crime not yet committed, the nature of which he hadn't the vaguest idea as yet. He knew only that it must be important because no array of crooks engaged in planning a minor law infringement would have attempted murder in order to further their scheme. All he had to go on was Willie Wilkerson's flimsy testimony which hardly served to more than establish the intent to commit a crime.

Tony Quinn slept fitfully that night. He was worried and nervous. He had a feeling that he was faced with something as dangerous and important as any investigation he had ever handled. And with far less to go on than ever before.

CHAPTER V

CONGRESS OF CROOKS



IN THE morning, Willie Wilkerson breakfasted with Tony Quinn and Silk Kirby. He was rested and confident about the outcome now, so great was his faith in the Special District Attorney. At nine, Quinn was ready to leave for his office.

"I have had Silk place a gun on the table," he said to Willie. "Take it and use it if necessary. Don't let anyone in, keep all doors and windows locked, and stay out of sight."

"Of course I'll do as you say, Mr. Quinn," Willie replied. "But somehow things look different by daylight. Oh, I

told the truth last night. I did hear all that in my hotel room, but perhaps I could have been wrong about the attack in the subway station. There was a big crowd and I've read where people are accidentally pushed off the platform sometimes."

"It does happen," Quinn admitted. "What about the attempt on your life when you were looking for me?"

Willie flushed slightly.

"There wasn't any real attempt, Mr. Quinn. I thought someone was trying to waylay me, but I didn't see anyone. I was scared. My imagination may have run away with me. I don't want to make any trouble."

"Trouble?" Quinn frowned. "Understand this. What you heard last night was decidedly important. It must have been. I'll grant you could have imagined footpads lying in wait just up the street. I'll admit the episode at the subway station could have been an accident. But what about switching your hotel rooms? What about the road block signs removed from Hollis Street to block off the road leading to my house, so you'd be compelled to walk here and become easy prey for the man or men waiting? No, Mr. Wilkerson, you can't brush off what happened last night. There are too many factors pointing to the truth. Your life is in danger."

Willie began to develop jitters all over again. He was glad to have the gun, and Quinn was certain the man would take good care of himself.

Silk brought the car around. Quinn stepped to the porch. His blank, staring eyes seemed to be entirely blind, but he was carefully scanning the street for any signs of strangers. There seemed to be no one. Using his cane, he tapped his way down the steps. He heard the door key turn. Willie was taking no chances.

Quinn was driven on the long trip downtown and spent a busy half-hour in the office. He attended to the most important mail, talked to a couple of complainants and signed some warrants. Then he sent for Captain McGrath.

The sturdy detective soon arrived. He entered Quinn's private office at once, and lit a frayed cigar as he sat down. Quinn's eyes were staring into space.

"Mac," Quinn said, "last night a man named Wilkerson came to see you."

"That screwball?" McGrath scoffed. "Don't tell me you fell for his line?"

"Frankly, I did. Though I could be wrong. He wasn't satisfied with the treatment he got at your hands, Mac, so he came to see me. On his way, someone tried to push him in front of a subway train. A bit later he barely got clear of someone who was waiting to nab him or kill him close by my home."

McGrath rotated the cigar slowly between his lips.

"Personally, Quinn," he said after a thoughtful moment, "I think Wilkerson's imagination is too big. He claims he heard two men in the next room to his, talking about some vague plans for a still vaguer crime. Okay—that could be true. I sent two men to investigate. They reported that Wilkerson's next door neighbor was an old duffer who had lived there a long time, and wasn't harboring any crooks. Wilkerson also claimed he saw a gun in a suitcase in that room. That was a lie."

"I'm afraid it wasn't, Captain," Quinn said. "The two men you sent inquired at the desk for the location of Wilkerson's room. The clerk checked it against his registry card and told them. But someone had switched cards and the new one gave Wilkerson's room as being one floor below that to which he had been originally assigned. Meantime the two men he had heard got away from there fast."

McGrath's complacency was suffering badly.

"I suppose you went to the hotel and investigated all this yourself, eh?" he said grumpily.

"You know better than that, Mac," Quinn said. "I did send Silk though, and he reported these facts to me. Wilkerson stayed at my home last night. He was afraid to leave, and I was afraid to let him go. He's there right now."

McGRATH pushed his chair closer to the desk.

"Okay, Tony," he said. "So maybe you're right. Still, what have we to go on? Just Wilkerson's statements. He heard plans for a crime. What sort of a crime? He saw only the backs of both crooks. You can't make identifications that way. How can we take any action, assuming Wilkerson isn't suffering from hallucinations?"

"Your trouble, Mac, lies in the fact that this is an unusual case," Quinn said. "It is one of intangibles. Nothing has happened yet, but it may, and our job is to prevent this. Suppose we tackle the whole thing from a fresh angle. Has anything out of the ordinary been occurring, lately?"

"Not to my knowledge." McGrath answered and shook his head.

"Has there been any unexplained activity on the part of the crooked element in town?" Quinn persisted. "I don't mean definite action, but more like suspicious actions. Too much money. Or even too much quiet on their part."

"Nothing," McGrath growled. Then he hesitated a moment. "We did pick up a couple of out-of-town gorillas last night. Around midnight. One of my Broadway Squad detectives spotted them. They got sassy, so he locked them up."

"Two recognized gorillas got sassy with a detective? They must have been rather sure of themselves. Where are those two men now?"

"At the line-up. We're letting them go later, because we haven't a doggone thing on them. One is Fritz Ogden, the other a torpedo named Cannon Young. Tough guys with bad records."

Quinn arose.

[Turn page]

Many Never Suspect Cause of Backaches

This Old Treatment Often Brings Happy Relief

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

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

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

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

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, a stimulant diuretic, used successfully by millions for over 50 years. Doan's give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills. · 446 ·

- "Silk," he called. "Will you get my hat and cane? I'm going with Captain McGrath to the police line-up. You are to come with us. And, Mac, before we go into the line-up room, I want to know what those two men had in their possession. Can do?"

"Why not?" McGrath shrugged. "Their stuff is with the property clerk. I think this is all a lot of nonsense, but who am I to argue with a D.A.? Let's get it over with."

At Police Headquarters, after McGrath had given an order, an officer went away, and returned with two bulky envelopes which he handed to the Captain. McGrath spilled their contents on a desk and rapidly enumerated the articles for Quinn's benefit. Each of the men who had been picked up had had approximately three hundred dollars in cash. The other things consisted of keys, combs, handkerchiefs, and racing forms. And each man had a ticket to the coming heavyweight championship fight scheduled to be held soon at a huge stadium in town.

"Those tickets," Quinn said. "Are they together?"

"No," McGrath grunted. "Young's is ringside, fifth row, section E. Ogden's is way back. A much cheaper seat, and across the stadium from section E."

"Now that's odd," Quinn mused. "Two men, friends apparently, purchase tickets for an important fight. Yet they don't sit together. Not even close by one another. Mac, are the backs of the tickets stamped? I mean, do they indicate the date of purchase?"

McGrath flipped them over.

"Yes. Bought from a broker. Same date, same broker. I might be able to check on the exact time if you like."

"Do that," Quinn said. "Meanwhile, Silk can lead me into the line-up room. Incidentally, have the officer in charge there ask these two hoodlums just why they came to town."

Silk led Quinn into the large room where two hundred and fifty detectives were assembled. Bright lights played upon a small stage across which offenders arrested during the past twenty-four hours were led.

There was a dowdy female shoplifter on display at the moment. An old hand who talked back to the captain who was questioning her. Then a sullen-faced young burglar was brought into view. He wouldn't open his mouth.

Quinn and Silk, standing at the rear of the room, waited patiently. The captain in charge had already been tipped off by McGrath. He called the names of "Cannon" Young and Fritz Ogden. They marched to the center of the stage and stood there, blinking in the strong light, and grinning like a couple of would-be actors on amateur night.

"You two monkeys come from St. Louis," the interrogator said. "What are you doing in New York?"

Cannon Young answered that one. "Boy, what a town! A couple of guys looking for some fun are heaved in the clink. Fritz and me, we came here to see the fights. Is that a crime?"

"Where'd you two get the price of tickets—and the money you had on you?"

"We worked in a war plant and saved our dough," Fritz growled. "We want a lawyer. You can't hold us. Maybe we did get tough with the fella who pinched us. But we didn't know he was a cop. We figured he was just some wise guy who thought we were a couple of yokels."

THE captain in charge read off a list of crimes attributed to the pair. Quinn listened with considerable interest. Both men were expert stickup artists, specializing in rough robbery. Fritz had once been suspected of a murder in connection with one holdup. Both were trigger men, fast with guns, and tough enough to shoot it out with anyone.

"Okay," the captain said. "You two are free. Just remember this. Our best detectives have viewed both of you. From now on you're marked men. Get your things and get out of here."

They smirked. Fritz bowed slightly to his invisible audience. They marched off stage and were led out to the main desk to be freed.

Quinn and Silk went to Captain McGrath's office.

"There's something wrong, Silk," Quinn said. "I can't lay a finger on it, but those two gorillas were too sure of themselves. They have too much money, and those fight tickets may be important."

McGrath bustled into the room.

"I checked on those tickets," he told Quinn. "They were bought at Sander's ticket agency around midnight last night by the same man. But he didn't answer the description of either of those two monkeys who have 'em now. I also sent a couple of men to go over those rooms

at Wilkerson's hotel. And I've been wondering. If Young and Ogden are the pair Wilkerson heard talking, maybe he can recognize them."

"No," Quinn said. "I doubt it. That pair in the line-up were husky men, about the same height and build, and neither one has a specially large nose. Wilkerson wouldn't be able to identify them. Mac, I want you to address the detectives in the line-up room after the morning parade of criminals is over. Ask the boys if they've noticed any undue influx of crooks to town lately."

"Sure, but I still say this is all the bunk," McGrath sneered. "You've got an idea something big is in the wind. All on account of the runt Wilkerson saying he heard a couple of guys talking about some job or other. Suppose he is telling the truth? Maybe fifty crimes were hatched last night. Doesn't mean a thing."

"Unless," Quinn added judiciously, "his story about almost being killed is true. Then it would seem there must be something huge behind it."

McGrath was rapidly losing patience.

"Now look, Tony. I don't want to seem high-handed about this. But how did the crooks get wind of the fact that Wilkerson knew about them? How could they have got set to kill him so fast? Things just don't check."

"But they do!" Quinn insisted as he smiled faintly. "Several people heard Wilkerson tell his version of what happened. He said there were four or five people in the main office of Headquarters last night. One of them was Stephan Tuzac. Who were the others?"

"Tuzac is a gambler, Tony. He's never been suspected of anything but gambling. Roland Manning, the well-known financier, was there, reporting his wallet missing. Cliff Cordee, the society columnist, was looking for a tip-off in connection with a certain pinch for drunken driving. And Bert McDonald, the fight promoter, dropped in for a chat. He's a pal of the desk lieutenant, and comes in now and then."

"A fight promoter and some strange fight tickets," Quinn said musingly. "That's the first two items to tie up. Mac, any one of those people might have been there purposely. They might have known that Wilkerson had reported what he heard and wanted a line on him. Or they might have been there purely by coincidence. If either is true, this man could

easily have flashed word that Wilkerson was dangerous, and that he was to be eliminated."

McGrath threw up his hands.

"All we've got is theory and the word of a guy who strikes me as being a crackpot. How can we act?"

"We can't—just yet," Quinn admitted. "Thanks anyway, Mac. And let me know what your men find in checking those hotel rooms. I'm ready, Silk. We'll return to the office."

McGrath watched Quinn, holding onto Silk's arm, walk away. The captain shook his head and wondered if Quinn were getting soft-brained. He would have been rather interested in the low instructions Quinn gave Silk, however.

"When we reach the main office," was what Quinn said, "I'll chat with the desk lieutenant. You slip into a phone booth and call Carol. Tell her to get over here right away. Give her a good description of those two gorillas, and have Carol trail them. She'll have to work fast. And carefully. Those two men can be highly dangerous."

CHAPTER VI

DEATH COMES CALLING



OR the remainder of the day, Quinn was busy with routine work. He tried two cases early in the afternoon, spent more time listening to the everlasting parade of complainants who fill a district attorney's office. Some he soothed. He patched up quarrels, and in a few cases issued warrants. He almost forgot the strange case of Willie Wilkerson.

At five-thirty, he called it a day. Silk drove him home.

"McGrath phoned," he told Silk on the way. "He sent a couple of men to examine those hotel rooms. Even Mac, pig-headed as he is about this, had to admit there is something wrong. They couldn't find any fingerprints. The room to which Wilkerson claimed he was assigned showed no prints, but Wilkerson was there for some time and there should have been prints. The room where his baggage was found later, was similarly free of prints."

Silk turned the corner into their street. "Frankly, sir," he said, "I can't blame McGrath too much. We've nothing to go

on. Not even a crime."

"Yes, I know, Silk." Tony Quinn sighed. "It's much more exasperating than a clueless murder. At least, then we know something has happened, and what it is. Well, all we can do is wait. Drop me in front of the house so the neighbors can watch me act like a blind man. You may put the car away. Unless Carol has learned something, we'll hardly be able to take any sort of action tonight."

Quinn got out of the car, thrust his cane at an angle, and felt his way along with it. He opened the gate leading into the grounds of his home, proceeded up the path and the porch steps. He took a key from his pocket, inserted it, and let himself into the house.

Instantly, he closed the door. The odor of illuminating gas was strong. It came from the kitchen, for that was the only room piped with gas.

Quinn wanted to rush into it, but paused, realizing that Wilkerson should have greeted him, and there was only a grim silence. In combination with the odor of gas, that was bad. Yet someone might be hiding in the house. Or Wilkerson might be around and unaware either of the escaping gas or the presence of Quinn.

For Quinn to drop his pose as a blind man could be dangerous. Therefore he moved slowly toward the kitchen. He had to investigate the escaping gas.

As he passed through the dining room the odor became stronger, almost choking. He pushed the swinging doors of the butler's pantry. The kitchen door was tightly closed, but he found that it opened freely enough.

Quinn did two things fast. He scooped up a chair and smashed the window. Then he lifted Wilkerson's head out of the gas stove oven. But fresh air wouldn't do Wilkerson any good. He was dead, and had been dead for some time.

Silk let himself in quickly. He had heard the crashing of the window, and had a gun in his fist. He thrust it into his pocket and opened more doors and windows. Quinn was bending over Wilkerson. He straightened up with a sigh.

"We were so doubtful," he berated himself. "We believed this little guy, but we couldn't recognize the importance of his story. Now they've killed him. Silk, search the house. Check the doors. Find out how the killers got in. I'll telephone McGrath."

Silk was standing beside the kitchen table. He picked up a piece of paper.

"Maybe you'd better have a look at this, sir," he suggested. "Wilkerson wrote it. It's a suicide note."

Quinn took the note quickly. It wasn't long, and read:

To Mr. Quinn:

Nobody is to be blamed for this. I did it myself. I lied about that story. It never happened. I wanted to make a big shot of myself so the folks back home would think I was a hero. I guess I went too far. Now they'll say I'm a dope. Send my things home and excuse me for all the trouble I caused. There wasn't two crooks talking in the next room. Nobody tried to kill me. I just lied.

William Wilkerson

"And that"—Silk sighed deeply—"is that. It's in his handwriting. Matches his signature on the registry card. I guess he took us for an awful ride, sir, and McGrath will never forget it."

"Poor little guy," Quinn said softly. "He tried to help us, but he couldn't cope with the forces he wanted to fight."

Silk gaped.

"Then you still believe what he said? But this suicide note! And there's no sign of a fight. How'd anyone get in here?"

"Yes, Silk," Tony Quinn said soberly, "I still believe in Wilkerson. This note could be forged. You thought the hotel registry card was last night. There are no clues, no sign of a fight, but two husky men could have tricked Wilkerson into opening the door and grabbed him fast before he could offer the slightest resistance. He could have been gagged, without any trace of it showing on his corpse, and his head held into the gas oven. No, Silk, I refuse to believe this is suicide."

"But there is no evidence of anything else," Silk protested heatedly. "You must have evidence, sir."

"We'll find it." Quinn was grim. "Do as I say. Look over the house. I'll notify McGrath. It's going to be tough watching him gloat."

AND McGrath gloated. The medical examiner arrived, studied the setup and examined the body. He promptly pronounced it suicide. Willie Wilkerson was removed then, in a wicker basket. The house was cleared of all those people who must attend in the wake of death and violence. Only McGrath was left.

He accepted a drink from Silk, touched glasses with Quinn and relaxed.

"Looks like you were wrong, Tony," he said expansively. "I'll admit the little guy had me puzzled too, but the whole thing was so patently dumb it had to be a mass of lies." He squinted at Quinn and smiled slightly. "You know, I don't believe even the Black Bat could have made anything out of it. Do you?"

Quinn sipped his drink.

"Why ask me, Mac? I've told you a thousand times that I am not the Black Bat. Well, maybe you're right about Wilkerson. Just out of curiosity, what were your results when you asked the men at the line-up about the presence of out-of-town crooks?"

"Plenty of 'em in town," McGrath ad-

you of that right now. I merely asked a question. Any congress of crooks interests me."

"Well," McGrath told him, "for the most part, they are bad eggs. I mean rough-house guys who don't mind slugging with a sap or shooting it out. Their records show that plainly enough. There don't seem to be any smoothies among 'em—gents from forgery rackets or confidence games. Just the heavy muscle boys are here."

"I understand," Quinn said. "Is there any special spot where they seem to hang out?"

"Those guys gang up?" McGrath decided. "Never, Tony. Put more than two



SILK

mitted. "Still, that isn't unusual. Championship fights always draw a heavy criminal element. I guess crooks enjoy seeing somebody fighting hard, but handicapped by rules."

"Exactly what sort of criminals, Mac?" asked Quinn.

McGrath put his glass down.

"One thing about you, Tony, you don't give up, do you? I'll bet you still believe that little guy was telling the truth. I'll bet you're going to try and convince me he didn't take his own life, but was maybe murdered."

Quinn shook his head.

"No, Mac, I wouldn't try to convince

of 'em in one room and there's a fight in two minutes. Those boys are individualists. Some drop in at one of Stephan Tuzac's gambling joints on Carmody Street. Mostly though, they're quiet, and give us no trouble."

"That's when men like that are the most dangerous, Mac. Thanks very much. If anything new develops, let me know."

After McGrath departed, Tony Quinn sat in moody silence in his usual chair near the library fireplace. His eyes were still dead and staring, but behind those eyes a brain was working hard, trying to perform the impossible; trying to conjure up the nature of the crime which William

Wilkerson had overheard in the planning.

It was a crime in which a number of strong-armed, ruthless criminals were required. And they were commanded by someone the criminals themselves did not know. Wilkerson had overheard that part clearly.

Silk entered.

"Carol is in the laboratory, sir," he murmured.

He walked to the windows and drew all the shades.

Quinn discarded his cane for the moment and strode with long, eager steps toward one wall of the library. He opened a narrow door that was skillfully concealed. It led him into the white-walled, beautifully fitted lab.

A lovely blond girl came toward Quinn with both hands outstretched. He took them and drew her close for a moment.

Over her shoulder Quinn saw that he had a second visitor. Butch O'Leary was sitting astride a laboratory stool, but his bulk hid the stool so successfully that he seemed to be perched in midair and looking quite comfortable about it. On his left hand was a rather crude bandage.

Quinn and Carol sat down on a leather davenport. He offered her a cigarette, lit his own, and listened to her brief report.

"I picked up those two men in front of Headquarters," Carol told him. "They went to the Hotel Rutledge where they've been staying for the past four days. Stayed in their room until dinner, when they ate in a place just off Sixth Avenue. The food was atrocious. I had to eat there too. After that, they dropped into a news-reel theatre for an hour, came out, and walked a few blocks. Then they went to their room and—that's all."

"It isn't much," Quinn remarked. "Just evidence that they are under orders to keep out of trouble. I'm glad you picked up Butch. He might have been useful if those gorillas had discovered you were on their trail."

"But I didn't pick up Butch," Carol said. "He was in the lab when I got here."

QUINN looked inquisitively over at the huge man.

"I got a problem," Butch said. "It worried me all day and all last night too, so I figured I better come over and see what you think of it."

"What happened, Butch?" Quinn asked.

"Last night, around one in the morning, I was heading home. I was in the subway

station downtown. It was pretty crowded, but I noticed a little runt, mostly because he took one look at me and got scared. Or looked that way. So I watched him. When an express started to roll into the station, a guy elbows his way to a point right behind the runt.

"All of a sudden he gives the runt a shove, right into the path of the train. I reached out and grabbed the little guy. I wanted to find out what it was all about, but the runt scrambled and the guy who pushed him faded too. I—hurt my hand when the train hit it. Nothing much."

Quinn's face was expressionless.

"This runt, as you call him, Butch," he said. "How was he dressed?"

"He had on a dark suit and a tie that didn't match. I think it had a green stripe. His shoes were black, and his hat a floppy brown felt. He reminded me of a hick, right off the farms. I been worried ever since. That was a deliberate attempt to commit a murder. You didn't hear of a runt being knocked off, did you?"

"Yes, Butch, I did," Tony Quinn said grimly. "His name was William Wilkerson. He overheard two gorillas talking about a crime, and went to Captain McGrath who didn't believe him. Then he came here. to this house, to see me. I did believe him. He described the attack in the subway station just as you described it now, even to stating that a giant had pulled him back from in front of the train. And this benefactor had injured his left hand doing it."

Butch beamed.

"Say, I'm glad. The little guy looked like he needed a friend."

"He doesn't any more, Butch." Quinn shook his head. "He died in this house. In the kitchen, just a short time ago. He left a suicide note saying that his story was a pack of lies meant only to convince the people back in his home town that he was a daring adventurer. I was morally certain he'd been murdered, and that the note was a forgery. Now, with you to back up one large feature of his story, I know he told the truth and that he was murdered."

"Here—in this house?" Carol cried. "Tony, do they think you're involved?"

"I imagine so," Quinn replied. "But only as a member of the D.A.'s staff. If I appear to accept Wilkerson's death as suicide, they'll probably drop any ideas of my being still actively involved. McGrath is satisfied on the suicide count,

so I'll be too, so far as anyone else is concerned. But I intend to find out who killed Wilkerson, and what crime he overheard in the process of being plotted or discussed. It's something important. It requires the services of tough, hard-boiled gorillas and someone is in control of them."

"Any idea who it might be?" Carol asked.

"There are possibilities. When Wilkerson told his story at Police Headquarters he was overheard by several persons. It's obvious, from what developed immediately afterward, that one of these people started the ball rolling. The society columnist, Cliff Cordee, was one. Roland Manning, the financier, was also present. A fight promoter named Bert McDonald overheard the story, and so did Stephan Tuzac, the gambler."

"But you don't know what's in the wind, Tony?" Carol asked.

"No. Wilkerson didn't hear enough even to guess the nature of the crime. That's the difficult part. We don't know what we are fighting, nor whom. The only tangible evidence of something big being in the works is the sudden influx of a number of thugs."

"What are we going to do then?" Butch growled. "We can't move until they pull the stunt, whatever it is."

"We can, Butch," Quinn countered. "We must determine what they are up to and stop them. The type of men being imported indicates a crime of violence on a large scale. If those gorillas were chosen for their ruthlessness, we may expect killing and a lot of rough play. I have a couple of ideas."

"I hope we're included in them," Carol said.

"Indeed you are. Where would I ever get without you two, anyway? Carol, pick up Cliff Cordee's trail. See if you can determine why he was hanging around Police Headquarters when Wilkerson was there. Look into his financial records and his recent associates. Check especially to see if he is involved in any big-time society function. You can start right away. There's no time to lose, for we don't know when this crime is scheduled to be committed."

"I'm on my way," Carol said. "I'll report in to Silk whenever I find anything of interest."

"What about me?" Butch asked.

"I've something right up your alley,"

Quinn answered. "How'd you like to bump together the heads of a couple of hot shots?"

Butch rubbed his enormous hands.

"Now"—he grinned in anticipation—"you're talking!"

CHAPTER VII

STICKUP



CAROL BALDWIN clambered down into the tunnel and started on her assignment. Tony Quinn walked over to a steel locker, opened it and removed the outfit of the Black Bat. He quickly changed into the black suit, shoes, socks

and shirt.

He tested the mechanism of a heavy automatic and slid it into a shoulder clip. Then he drew a black, close-fitting hood over his head and studied the effect in the mirror. He removed the hood, finally, and replaced it with a wide-brimmed black hat.

Wearing that hood was a risky business. While he drove about city streets, the wide-brimmed hat was far better. Its brim concealed his features quite well, especially the acid-etched scars around his eyes.

When he was all ready, Quinn called Silk into the lab.

"Butch and I are going out," he informed. "Not for long. Stall, if anybody comes or phones. And Silk, do you remember Wilkerson telling us how a big man seized him after he was pushed in front of the subway train last night?"

Silk stared at Butch.

"I'll be darned!" he gasped. "It was Butch, and the little man was telling the truth. He was murdered then?"

"He was murdered," Quinn repeated in a monotone. "Let's go, Butch."

They dropped into the tunnel, doubled up because its ceiling was low, and made their way to a garden house far at the rear of the grounds. It was quite dark now.

The Black Bat looked across the garden toward the short, blind street beside his house. His abnormal eyesight penetrated the darkness easily. No one was watching, but he was doubly careful now. Murderers had entered his home and killed Wilkerson. That was evidence of both skill and suspicion on their part.

The Black Bat seemed almost to be in

noiseless flight as he moved toward the garden gate. His crepe-soled shoes made no sound at all and he was expert in the art of moving about quietly.

There was a cheap little coupe parked on the side street. It was fictitiously registered, and always there. The car looked shabby and ready to fall into a heap of ruin, but its looks were deceiving. That car was a marvel of engineering. Its motor was as powerful as anything on the road.

Butch joined him and the Black Bat drove. He kept to streets that were not jammed with traffic. Finally he turned a corner quite far uptown. He slowed a bit and indicated a four-story brownstone front in a modest section of town.

"That, Butch," the Black Bat said, "is one of Stephan Tuzac's best gambling joints. I have information that some of the imported gorillas frequent the place. We're going to hang around and if a couple come out, I want them stuck up. Take this gun."

He passed over a cheap nickel-plated pistol. Butch scowled.

"Gun? I don't need a gun."

"It's for effect. Pull your hat down, turn up your collar and act like a cheap stickup man. Get into an argument with them and do your stuff. I want them knocked out."

"My specialty." Butch beamed. "When do we start?"

The Black Bat parked the car a block away.

"I'm going to try and get inside," he said. "Just for a look around. If I see any of those monkeys leaving, I'll try to tip you off. Your job is to dodge into the alley just west of the house, and stay there."

Butch got out of the car and slipped away into the night. The Black Bat waited a few minutes until the street was deserted, then he got out too. A blurry shadow darted between two of the houses. Any pedestrian passing by might have thought he saw someone, but would not have been certain of it.

At the rear of the gambling house, the Black Bat stopped to study his problem. Darkness meant nothing to him. As he moved toward a rear door, objects which would have tripped a person with only normal eyesight were visible to the Black Bat, and easily avoided.

He realized that a gambling house might be well-protected, and that cau-

tion was necessary. Yet, like many of these brownstone fronts, this one was equipped with a fire-escape at the rear. The Black Bat went up this slowly until he reached the second floor. From the ground no sign of him was visible.

He studied the lock on the window facing the fire-escape. It was a good lock, quite impossible to get at. The Black Bat took a small flat kit from his pocket. It contained burglar tools scientifically fashioned with his own hands. In two minutes he had cut the whole pane of glass out of its frame and had it propped on the fire-escape.

HE SLIPPED into what seemed to be a store-room. It was filled with tables and some spare roulette wheels. Chairs were stacked high and there was considerable worn living room furniture of an expensive type. Stephan Tuzac went in for class, and gave his customers their money's worth.

The Black Bat had slipped on the tight-fitting hood now and his coat was open so he could reach for a gun fast. He tried the door. It was locked from the outside, but the key was in the lock. He used a pair of fine pliers which fitted easily into the keyhole and seized the key to turn it gently.

The Black Bat opened the door a crack. He seemed to be on some sort of a second floor landing. He crept out and peered over a railing. Below was an ornate gambling room, not too well-filled, because it was still early in the evening. He saw at least one pair of tough-looking citizens.

The Black Bat recognized both of these men as ex-gangsters who had once tantalized the New York police, but had thought it healthier to move to some safer part of the country. Now they were back. Why? The Black Bat would have given a lot to know.

Apparently, Tuzac's protective organization was not in full swing until the gambling really got started. The Black Bat met no opposition as he crept along the balcony to a door on which was lettered the word "PRIVATE."

He tried the door gently. Some electrical mechanism clicked.

"Come in, Joe," a voice called. "It's about time you got here."

The Black Bat drew his gun, pushed the door open, and stepped inside. He closed the door behind him. Seated back of a rather lavish desk, in a distinctly



CAROL

ornate office, sat Stephan Tuzac, the gambler. He was busy with some papers and didn't look up.

"Sit down, Joe," he invited, and his eyes raised.

Tuzac leaped to his feet. The chair went skidding out from under him. He gulped and raised both hands shoulder high.

"The Black Bat!" He said it unbelievably.

"Hello, Tuzac," the Black Bat replied. "Sit down. I've a little business with you."

Tuzac was not a crack gambler without having developed a gambler's indifference. The moment the shock of meeting that black-clad figure passed, he was suave and calm again.

"Thanks." He pulled the chair back and sat down. "You startled me. In fact, you scared the living daylight out of me. Sit down yourself. Frankly, I have nothing but a great deal of admiration for you."

The Black Bat lowered his gun, but he didn't accept the invitation to be seated. He stepped closer to the desk.

"Tuzac," he said, "I'm not interested in the fact that you break the law by operating a gambling house. I break a few laws myself, now and then. Your reputation for running an honest game is good. I

have no argument with you. All I need is some information. Like the reason why you have, tacked to the wall behind you, the seating plan for the stadium where a championship fight is going to be held shortly."

Tuzac twisted around and glanced at the map. He looked back at the Black Bat.

"It's a curious question," he said, "but I'll answer it because I have absolutely nothing to hide. You know that tickets to the fight are hard to get. Bert McDonald, the promoter of that scrap, comes here a lot. We're not exactly close friends, but we know one another. I thought I might accommodate some of my good friends and customers by getting them tickets. McDonald agreed, turned over a batch, and gave me the seating plan."

"I believe you," the Black Bat said simply. "Now it has come to my attention that your place is being visited by an assortment of mugs. Men with bad criminal records. Probably many of them are strangers to you, but you'll know the type I mean."

Tuzac leaned back and rubbed his chin. "You wouldn't be interested in a commission to kick them all out, would you, Black Bat?" he finally said. "They have me scared stiff. I've been wondering if they're casing the place for a stickup."

"Have any of them been provided with fight tickets by you?" asked the Black Bat.

Tuzac shook his head.

"I told you those tickets were for friends of mine only. Want one, Black Bat? Strictly on the house. I'd like to see you show up in that mask. Or, better yet, without it. I'm curious to know just who you are."

THE Black Bat laughed.

"You're not a bad fellow, Tuzac. You live up to your reputation well. I'm leaving now. I would likely change my opinion of you if anyone tried to stop me."

"When you go out of the office," Tuzac said, "turn left. At the end of the balcony you'll find a door. It leads to the cellar and a nice quick exit. Nobody is on guard. Things don't begin to buzz around here for another two hours yet and my boys are not posted until then. Whatever you are after, good luck in getting it, and I'll help all I can if you want me for anything. You see, Black Bat, in my eyes you're as important as the cops. More important I'd say, because cops would pinch me and you won't. In fact, I was locked up last night for awhile. Oh, I'm a law-breaker all right, but not the type you go after, and those you do are as deadly enemies of mine as they are to society in general. Drop in again."

The Black Bat backed out of the room. The balcony was clear. He saw the door which Tuzac had indicated and decided to test the gambler's word.

It was an easy way out, and no one tried to stop him. He wound up in the alley where Butch was waiting.

Butch had no inkling of the Black Bat's approach and gave a startled jump when a hand was lightly laid upon his shoulder. He whirled, big arms ready to lash out jaw-breaking punches. He relaxed at the sight of the black hood.

"There are two hoodlums inside," the Black Bat said. "I expect they won't stay long because if all of them have the same instructions as the pair Wilkerson observed, they are required to stay under cover as much as possible. That means being home early. When they come out, go into your act."

They waited almost an hour while the gambling house began to grow busier. Then Butch saw the pair emerge. They walked briskly in the direction of the alley where Butch was concealed. The

Black Bat merely stepped back and vanished in the gloom.

Butch drew the gun, his hand encompassing so much of it that the weapon was hardly visible. There was a huge grin on his wide face as he stepped out and jabbed the gun into one man's middle.

"Move into the alley, gents, and make it snappy," he growled. "No funny stuff or I'll plug the both of you!"

CHAPTER VIII

FIRST CLUE



BOTH men were astounded enough to be frozen to the spot until another jab of the gun woke one of them up. They marched ahead of Butch, their hands stiffly held away from their bodies. Butch lined them up against the wall and started going through their pockets. He took everything they had.

"Sorry, gents," he said. "But guys who spend their dough in Tuzac's joint got more dough for a guy like me. Be good and you won't be hurt."

One of the pair let out a low curse. "Sap!" he snarled. "Taken like a couple of hicks. You, with the gat, have a good look at us. Maybe you'll recognize real talent."

Butch squinted at them.

"What I see of your puss don't look so good to me, pal. Take off your wrist-watch. Make it snappy. I got a date."

One of them stripped off his watch.

"Okay," he grouched. "But we're right guys and we don't like being stuck up. Later, we'll look for you, pal, and when we find you—"

"Yeah, yeah," Butch snorted. "That's the unpleasant part of my profession. The customers always make threats. Only you got to be able to back 'em up. Say—maybe you'd like to try."

"Would we!" One of the pair was tremblingly eager about it.

Butch calmly stuffed the gun into his pocket.

"Let's go," he invited pleasantly.

The two gunmen looked at one another in open wonder, but the proposition was too attractive to ignore. They suddenly leaped at Butch. Two enormous arms shot out. Thick fingers curled around each man's throat. Both gunmen were lifted off their feet, held apart and then

their heads were brought together with a crack that resembled the report of a lion tamer's whip. The pair grew limp. Butch dropped them, dusted his hands, and beamed.

The Black Bat came out of the darkness, knelt and rapidly went through the pockets of the unconscious men. He studied everything, especially the ticket each man had for the championship fight. Like the pair whose possessions he had investigated at Headquarters, these two had seats far apart.

The Black Bat also concentrated on a small slip of paper containing two telephone numbers. He memorized these and put everything back. He kept their money because this must resemble a genuine holdup and nothing else.

Two minutes later, the Black Bat and Butch were driving away.

"That," Butch said, "was fun. Yes, sir, scientific too. You never heard one squeak out of either rat and they'll have headaches that'll be worse than they had in the days of the old gin mills."

"It was neat," the Black Bat approved. "Interesting, too. I'm wondering if all those imported hoodlums have tickets to the fight. And if so, what it means."

"Maybe there'll be enough of 'em to stick up the place," Butch ventured. "Wouldn't that be something? Sticking up the whole stadium."

"Oh no, Butch," the Black Bat objected. "Not that. There'll be a hundred thousand people in the stadium. No gang could hold them up. But it does look as if these mugs were planning something in connection with the fight."

"They could stick up the cashier's office," Butch suggested.

"For what? By the time the fights start, every last ticket will have been sold. Most of them are gone now. All they'll take in at the gate will be a few bleacher seat sales. This is bigger than that. Drive home, Butch."

Butch made good speed on the way home. Arriving on the street behind the house, they left the car and made their way through the tunnel to Tony Quinn's laboratory.

On entering the lab, the Black Bat proceeded straight to a panel on which were an assortment of colored electric bulbs. A crimson one glowed, indicating that Silk had snapped a switch into the house. This color was evidence that there was someone waiting to see Tony Quinn.

Working fast, the Black Bat stripped off his regalia, placed it in the steel locker, and hurriedly donned the clothing of Tony Quinn. He picked up his cane.

"Stay here, Butch," he told the giant.

Quinn opened the secret door boldly, knowing that Silk would hardly permit a visitor to wait where it could be seen. He crept to the hallway. Silk was standing near the front door. Promptly Silk moved so that he blocked the living room doorway. Quinn passed by unseen, went up the staircase silently and to his room. He waited a moment or two, closed the door as he exited, and this time he used his cane in descending the staircase.

SILK hurried up to meet him and help him down.

"A stranger," Silk said, without moving his lips. "Insisted on seeing you. Been here ten minutes. Told him you were napping."

Silk led blind Tony Quinn into the living room. A man of about thirty-five arose quickly, walked toward Quinn, and extended his hand. Then he dropped the hand somewhat sheepishly, as if he had forgotten that he was facing a blind man.

"I'm terribly sorry to bother you this way, Mr. Quinn," he said. "My name is Edward Shelley, Junior."

"Are you a relative of the Edward Shelley who is—was, a private detective then?" Quinn asked.

Shelley was a clean-cut individual with coal-black hair and snapping black eyes. He was well-dressed and nicely mannered. Obviously, he had been given an excellent education.

"Yes, sir," he said. "I'm his son. That's why I came here. About my father's death."

"Sit down, please," Quinn said, and fumbled with his hand for a chair of his own.

He propped the white cane between his knees and blank eyes stared somewhat to the left of where Shelley sat.

"My father was killed in an auto accident last week," Shelley said. "You know that, of course. The day it happened I was being discharged from the Army. When Dad branched out with a New York office, I stayed in Denver with my mother. She died not long after I entered the Service."

"I'm sorry about your father's death," Quinn said. "He was a unique private operator. I don't believe the slightest censure was ever turned upon him. But

why did you want to see me?"

"Because I think my father was murdered!"

"Hmmm." Quinn's features indicated interest. "Have you anything to back up your statement?"

"No," young Shelley said. "Nothing at all. I've taken over the detective agency and I intend to keep running it. Dad would have wanted that. But I talked to him on the phone the day before he was killed, and he seemed worried. When I asked him about it, he told me to hurry here because he needed me. There was something up. Something big."

"Concerning whom, Mr. Shelley?" murmured Tony Quinn. "Did your father mention any names?"

"No, he did not. Whatever it was, he worked on it alone without confiding in any of our operators. That indicates the importance of the case. If you recall the accident, it was one of the kind which could have been murder, but calculated not to leave a single clue."

"His automobile went off an embankment, I recall. A chauffeur was driving," Quinn said. "The car caught fire. Your father was not burned, but the chauffeur was unrecognizable. Little of the car was left. Yes, I'll concede murders have been performed that way. Some of them with success."

"Exactly, Mr. Quinn," declared Shelley. "Put the facts together. Dad was worried. He needed me. He admitted there was something big in the wind, but there was no file on whatever he was doing. Dad rarely kept case histories of the stuff he handled personally. I'm convinced he was murdered, and I want an investigation made."

"I'll be glad to order one," Quinn said slowly. "Of course we have but little to go on. You understand that."

"Yes," Shelley agreed. "There was one item. It may mean nothing, Mr. Quinn, but locked in Dad's desk where he keeps only important papers, was a dossier on a man. I don't know him, just of him. His name is Bert McDonald and he is promoting the championship fight to be held in a couple of days. The record on him was so complete that Dad must have made an exhaustive investigation."

Quinn frowned. Bert McDonald and his championship fight was cropping up in unexpected places.

"Was your father working for McDonald, perhaps?" Quinn asked.

"No," Shelley said quickly. "I made certain of that by calling McDonald. He'd never even heard of Dad."

"I see. Have you that dossier with you?"

Shelley removed a bulky file from his inner pocket.

"Good," Quinn went on. "Would you mind leaving it with me? And come to my office tomorrow afternoon. I'll have the medical examiner's and the police reports thoroughly gone over. If the slightest suspicion of foul play shows up, I'll order a complete investigation."

Shelley arose.

"Thank you, Mr. Quinn. Dad used to say you were a square shooter. I appreciate your giving me your time and, also, what you will try to do for me. It's pretty hard, stepping into an agency as big as mine. I never had much training, you see, but I'm determined to carry it on."

AFTER Shelley had left and driven away, Silk and Quinn walked into the library and thence to the lab where Butch was dozing on the davenport. Quinn sat down at the long lab bench and glanced through the file on Bert McDonald. It showed nothing exceptional. McDonald had battled his way to the top, from handling stumble-bum fighters until he was big time and had champs under his wing. Financially, he seemed sound, and his morals were good. He had never married, and all his interest lay in boxing.

"I wonder why this was ever compiled," Quinn grunted. "Young Shelley doesn't even know who his father's client was—the customer who asked to have McDonald investigated. Well, it has to be put aside for the moment in favor of things as important and more easily resolved."

Quinn wrote down two telephone numbers and handed the slip to Silk.

"Find out who has these numbers," he instructed. "Or wait. One of them doesn't seem to be a local exchange. And it's familiar. Darned familiar."

Silk glanced at the paper.

"It should be. He smiled. "You've sent enough people there. The second number is Sing Sing Prison."

"Ah!" Quinn's eyes grew bright with interest. "Something at last. All right, see who owns the other number."

Using the power of the District Attorney's office, Silk had no trouble in checking.

"It's the home telephone of Loren Crane, Attorney-at-Law," he reported.

Quinn digested that, doodled a bit on a pad before him, then reached for the lab telephone. He called the prison and asked for the night warden.

"Hello, Hank," he said. "This is Tony Quinn in New York. I need some information immediately. Does there happen to be a convict, preferably a guerrilla, who is due for release soon? And whose attorney is Loren Crane? Maybe Crane paid him a visit recently."

The night warden laughed. "Crane has so many customers up here it's hard to distinguish, Mr. Quinn. But only one of his clients is due for release soon. Louie Lorrain gets out in the morning. He answers your description of a gorilla. Does that help?"

"A great deal," Quinn murmured. "Thanks very much, Hank."

CHAPTER IX

MORNING BATTLE



QUINN hung up and turned around to face Silk and Butch who were watching him, and listening with considerable curiosity. Quinn grinned at them.

"One of the mugs Butch stuck up had these phone numbers on him," he remarked. "Proof that he either had, or was going to check on when Louie Lorrain was getting out of prison. Now that's interesting, because Louie is a guerrilla. A dangerous, ruthless man like all the crooks who've come here presumably to see the championship fight. So Louie will bear watching, and that's your job, Butch."

"Swell." Butch beamed. "I like to tail mugs because if they get fresh, they give me something to slug 'em for. What do I do?"

"Use your own car," instructed Quinn. "Be outside the prison tomorrow and when Louie comes out, get on his trail and stay there. Be careful. Those men may be getting suspicious. Find out whom he contacts and where he goes. Go home now and get some sleep, so you'll be wide awake in the morning."

"I'm on my way." Butch arose, then hesitated. "Say, I took more than six hundred bucks off those two birds. What shall I do with it?"

"There is a church close by where you live, Butch," Tony Quinn said thoughtfully. "Stop in and put it in their poor box. At least something good will come of all this."

Silk sat down slowly on the divan.

"We're not progressing far, are we?" he asked moodily.

"Not too fast," Quinn admitted. "Unlike most of our work, we have two goals this time—to determine who is behind this, and what they are after. They're getting set to pull some huge crime, Silk. It seems to be connected with the championship fight, although I'm darned if I know what they expect to get there. Cash?"

"Hardly! There won't be much because all tickets are being sold at agencies. Maybe a snatch? I doubt it. There are too many of those hoodlums around, and each man must have a purpose or he wouldn't be hired—and, incidentally, paid off. Wilkerson stumbled onto something. It cost him his life, but we're going to see that he didn't die in vain."

"If we could only figure out Bert McDonald's stand in this mess," Silk groaned.

"He's in it up to his fat neck," Quinn replied. "Those tickets each hoodlum carries has a meaning of some sort. Each seat appears to be away from the others, as though an effort is being made to plant these men as far as possible, and so cover the whole stadium. But we cannot forget that McDonald may not be our culprit. There were others who might have tipped off those men to attack Wilkerson. Roland Manning, for instance. Tuzac or Cliff Cordee. Incidentally, have you heard from Carol? She's been watching Cordee."

"She phoned about an hour ago," Silk said. "Cordee has gone to bed, apparently, and Carol said she'd come here as soon as she was certain he really was in for the night."

"Good." Quinn looked pleased. "I'll wait in here. You might make some coffee, Silk—and sandwiches. One thing about crime, it gives you an appetite. Make plenty."

"Yes, sir," Silk grumbled. "I'm glad Butch is gone though. I'd spend half the night trying to satisfy his appetite."

Carol appeared half an hour later and sailed into the coffee and sandwiches with gusto. Between bites, she told of her experiences.

"Dull, Tony. Incredibly dull. Cordee is a nice-looking chap, but so high hat

I'll bet he has to duck under bridges like the George Washington span. He left his hotel where I picked him up and had tea at the St. Moritz, where somebody was showing off new styles. From there, he went to a dinner in honor of Mrs. Sterling whose daughter is going to be married next Saturday.

"Cordee ate enough for two people. I bet he hasn't picked up a check in years. Then, with me tagging along behind him, he went to a charity ball, shook hands with all the men, beamed at the ladies and slipped out a side door around ten o'clock. I nearly lost him. He went straight back to his hotel. I waited around and phoned his room. He answered in a voice thick with sleep. That's all."

"Not too helpful." Quinn sighed. "Tackle him again tomorrow. And if he lights some place where it seems he'll stay for hours, see what you can do about Ronald Manning."

"Two men." Carol's eyes were mischievous. "You trust me utterly, don't you, Tony? They're nice-looking too."

"One of 'em may be a killer," Quinn growled.

Then he laughed and sat down beside Carol. . . .

IT WAS eleven the next morning when Louie Lorrain walked through the last prison gate, a free man. Butch, watching from down the road a bit, thought that Louie should be kept locked up on general principles. He looked like a man who belonged firmly and irrevocably in prison. His face was cruel, his eyes piggish and sullen. He smiled coldly at two men who were there to meet him, and called something derisive back at the gate guard.

Louie got into the car and it drove off. Butch gave him a half-mile advantage, then started in pursuit. They rolled down the smooth highway between rolling upper New York State hills. Butch, with his eyes glued on the car ahead, paid little or no attention to vehicles behind him. He didn't notice the sedan which pulled out of a side road and followed at a discreet distance.

It was going to be a long drive, Butch reasoned, so he settled back comfortably. Nothing would happen until they reached the city. Then he would have to be on a double alert. All he hoped was that the three men in the car ahead wouldn't notice the way he clung to their tail.

Butch had covered more than twenty

miles, when suddenly the car ahead made a sharp and unexpected turn into a side road. Butch made it too, though he had to brake his car hard. No apprehension struck him, for Butch was a type that never worried. If anything happened, he could meet it.

The car containing Louie kept going, not fast now, along this narrow and rutted side road. It was a rather desolate country. They passed two farmhouses and then, stretching out before them, was wide-open country. Half a mile ahead was a bridge, spanning a swollen and rapid river.

The car ahead was halfway across it when the driver came to an abrupt stop. So did Butch, and so did the car which was directly behind him now. Butch sensed that he was in a trap, that these men had suspected Louie might be trailed, and that the car behind had taken up the chase of the pursuer.

Butch got out. He grinned broadly, for two reasons. One was to impress these men that he was nothing more than an ordinary man taking a little ride in the country. Reason Number Two was more genuine. It looked like a fight and Butch was always prepared for one.

Louie came from the car ahead. He was scowling. Behind him strode the other two men and from the opposite direction two more closed in. Five against one. Butch wasn't worried, though he realized these were men who had long ago mastered the art of savage and tricky fighting.

"Who are you?" Louie demanded. His tone sounded as though he was going to take a poke at Butch, no matter what answer came.

"Ethan Allen," Butch said. "I belong to the Green Mountain Boys. See any boys in green around here?"

"Wise guy," Louie snarled. "Try this one to cool you off."

His fist started out all right, but something exploded in his face. It felt like a mule's kick. He flew across the bridge and was stopped only by the railing.

Butch didn't wait to be attacked again. He made a flying leap at the two men who had been riding with Louie. He got one of them, lifted him and flung him at the other man who was trying to draw a gun. Both crashed to the bridge, but by now the other pair were upon him.

A knife flashed. Butch felt white-hot fire bite through his side. He stifled a groan, brought one mighty hand down

and the knife wielder's wrist snapped.

Then all five were upon him, fighting and kicking. One of them used a gun butt with considerable effect. Butch went down on one knee. They swarmed over him, the gun butt playing a tattoo on his head. Butch felt his senses reeling. Suddenly he pitched forward and lay still. He was not unconscious, but the borderline between him and unconsciousness was narrow indeed.

He could hear Louie talking.

"Remember, don't kill him yet. He's got to talk first. We sure were tipped right that somebody might trail me. Lift

himself. It didn't work. The other four men were upon him like wolves fighting over a slain deer. The gun butt operated on him some more. One of the men wrapped arms around Butch's legs and tugged. Ordinarily, the fellow might as well have tugged at the trunk of a great oak tree, but Butch was weak from loss of blood, tired to a point of collapse, and he fell forward. The only good thing that came of it was that he carried one man down with him and under him.

Butch summoned all the strength he had left. His right fist snapped against the thug's jaw. There was a crunching



BUTCH

him up so I can make hash out of his face."

One man grasped Butch's collar and hoisted him into a slumped position. Louie drew back a fist and lashed out with it. Butch didn't seem to respond to the blow. Louie stepped closer. He was smiling now. Louie liked this. He slapped Butch across the mouth, then started to beat a steady tattoo across his face.

QUITE suddenly Louie was lifted into the air. Nothing supported him. It was a foot which collided with his middle that raised him. He dropped, and didn't move except to howl and curse.

Butch made one frantic effort to free

himself. It didn't work. The other four men were upon him like wolves fighting over a slain deer. The gun butt operated on him some more. One of the men wrapped arms around Butch's legs and tugged. Ordinarily, the fellow might as well have tugged at the trunk of a great oak tree, but Butch was weak from loss of blood, tired to a point of collapse, and he fell forward. The only good thing that came of it was that he carried one man down with him and under him.

Butch summoned all the strength he had left. His right fist snapped against the thug's jaw. There was a crunching sound that gave Butch a great deal of satisfaction—and then his world turned black.

He was awakened by what he thought was a heavy tank rolling over his body. It proved to be Louie engaged in the pleasant task of kicking in Butch's ribs. Accompanied by each kick was a demand for him to identify himself. Butch knew his clothes were half-torn off his body. Apparently they had searched him, but he carried nothing which connected him with the Black Bat.

They would kill him soon. He was certain of that for, after all, someone might come along. Butch opened one eye warily. Behind Louie stood the man with

the knife. He was grimly testing its sharpness against a thumb. Louie stepped back.

"We can't waste any more time!" he snarled. "Okay—stick him."

The man with the knife started forward. Butch got the flat of both hands against the bridge, tensed every muscle. It was no use rising, trying to flatten this man and crash the others. He couldn't do it and knew that. There was just one way out. Butch didn't like it, but he didn't like the idea of being murdered either.

As the man with the knife bent down, Butch came up. The knife slashed at him, missed, and Butch didn't even pause to poke the man who wielded it. He reeled toward the side of the bridge, seized the rail and, with one mighty last effort, vaulted the rail.

He went plunging down, vaguely conscious of the angry shouts that followed him. The water came up in one great silvery sheet. He hit it and went down—down.

Butch was too weak to care much now. His feet hit bottom. Half consciously he gave himself a thrust upward. His head broke the surface and he thought a lot of angry bees were buzzing around.

Then he remembered the men on the bridge, and knew that those bees were made of steel. Their buzz meant death. Butch gulped in a lungful of air and went down again. The cool water helped to bring his wits back. He tried to swim under water but his entire left side had grown numb with paralysis. That knife wound was worse than he had believed. He was getting weaker and weaker, too. He swallowed some water, rose quickly, and the bees began buzzing again.

One bee was slightly more accurate. Something exploded against Butch's head. With a final conscious effort, he turned his body over, and that was all he remembered. . . .

On the bridge five men went to their cars with an assorted lot of limps and groans. But they were satisfied. The man who had trailed them was dead. Louie looked over the bridge just before climbing into the car. There was no sign of the man in the water.

"We should have made him talk first," Louie said tartly. "There were five of us against him."

The man with the broken wrist stopped swearing for a moment.

"That guy was bigger than all five of us

put together," he said. "He must have been a cop, even if we didn't find a badge on him. Who else would be tailing you?"

"That's right," Louie said slowly. "It proves we can't miss now. And it also proves that we're working for a man with brains. Who else would ever have figured out that I'd be trailed as soon as I left prison. Let's go, boys. I been away from the city a long time. I want to see the lights again."

They gave one last look down into the river. No one swam or floated there.

CHAPTER X

TICKETS TO MURDER?



McGRATH answered an urgent request from Tony Quinn, and on his arrival was instantly admitted to the Special District Attorney's office. Quinn was seated behind his desk. Silk stood at the far end of the room, idly looking out of the window.

"Mac," Quinn said, "something has turned up. I don't know whether or not it is connected with the murder of William Wilkerson. Or wait—you don't agree that was murder, do you?"

McGrath's cigar rolled around at a furious rate.

"Okay, rub it in if you like," he rumbled. "Yes, I think he was knocked off, and I think everything he told us was the truth."

Quinn showed his surprise. "How in the world did you come to such a conclusion, Mac?"

McGrath drew a long breath. He was a man who hated to admit he had been wrong, but who would rather make such an admission than lie.

"The thing looked so darned mixed up to me that I went over to the hotel where Wilkerson stayed," he said, a little reluctantly. "I took along the best fingerprint man on the force. We went over the room assigned to Wilkerson. Somebody had swiped the registry card, by the way, but the clerk remembered the room. We found no trace of Wilkerson's prints. Well, if he'd been there long enough to go to bed, he must have touched something in the room. That utter lack of prints was a giveaway."

"Go on, Mac," Quinn urged. "You're getting more interesting by the minute."

"I then checked the room directly above and found his prints there," the captain said. "Somebody had done a careful job of eliminating them, but we had one thing in our favor. The bedroom furniture is modern. The dresser has no handles on the drawers, just gouged out slots under each drawer. In two of those slots we got some fairly good prints. Enough to prove that Wilkerson had been there."

"And the room next door?" asked Tony Quinn. "The one where he claimed those criminals had been?"

"Clean as a whistle. Two men had been living in it for two weeks. They didn't check out, but they never came back either. That's all I know. I hope you know more."

"I wish I did." Quinn shook his head. "Mac, do you know anything about the death of Edward Shelley, the private detective?"

"Not much," said McGrath. "I knew Shelley. One of the best. His car went into a ditch, caught fire, and the chauffeur was burned to a crisp. Shelley got a broken neck when he either jumped or was thrown clear as the car turned over."

"Is there any possibility that it could have been murder?" Quinn asked.

McGrath shrugged.

"Accidents of that kind can always be rigged. If you say so, I'll go over the thing myself."

"I wish you would, Mac," Quinn told him. "See if the remains of the car show it might have been tampered with. Find out if Shelley's death could have occurred before the accident, and try to discover all you can about the chauffeur."

"On him I promise nothing," McGrath grunted. "Shelley just picked him up some place and gave him the job. He killed himself and Shelley the first day on the job. His body is unclaimed, and will probably go to Potter's Field. We can't even find out where he lived before he went to work for Shelley."

"Well, try again," Quinn insisted. "Assign several men to the task. I'm going to come clean on this, Mac. Shelley's son came to see me last night and he is suspicious of the circumstances under which his father died."

"Maybe he's gone a little daffy with the idea of owning a big time private detective agency all of a sudden," McGrath suggested.

"No, he seems level-headed. Besides,

he has a clue. His father was working on a case which no one knows a thing about. Shelley never kept records of the stuff he handled personally. But young Shelley discovered a brand new file on Bert McDonald, the fight promoter."

"So what?" McGrath countered. "McDonald may have got himself mixed up in some case Shelley worked on, and Shelley wanted to find out about him."

"The file was too complete." Quinn shook his head. "Besides something else points to McDonald. It happens that I know the town is full of tough yeggs. All of a type, and evidently recruited from all over the country. At Headquarters, I went through the possessions of one pair, as you know. Each man had a ticket to the fight McDonald was promoting. Other men of this type possess tickets to that fight also."

McGRATH'S cigar dangled from his lips like a cigarette. The full realization of what Quinn's words meant struck him speechless for a moment.

"I got it!" he blurted finally. "Tony, it's clear enough. Wilkerson told us some huge plot was being hatched, and these guerrillas seem to be a part of it. They're going to stick up the stadium the night of the fight!"

"There will be a hundred thousand or more people present, Mac," Quinn reminded him. "Also, the cash in the till won't be too high, because most of the tickets were sold days ago. Certainly there won't be enough cash to attract all the muscle men that have shown up so far."

McGrath was thinking hard.

"That's true. A general stickup seems impossible. But suppose those muscle boys have seats spread all over the stadium. Suppose they are special seats which have been arranged so that a mug would be close to somebody with a lot of money. You know, there are sports who attend those battles and carry a lot of cash for betting. Suppose each yegg, at an agreed-upon time, would go to work on his victim. Fifty howls of 'Thief!' would go up in fifty different parts of the stadium. There'd be a near riot. The thieves could get away."

Quinn thought that one over.

"Mac," he finally confessed, "you're bordering on genius today. Such a theory is not only practical, but it explains why these tough boys really do have seats in

various parts of the stadium."

"They have?" McGrath roared. "Then you can bet that's what is due to happen! And McDonald must be involved in some way. Perhaps innocently, perhaps as the boss of the whole affair. Don't forget Wilkerson's story of how those two crooks mentioned a mysterious leader."

"I haven't forgotten," Quinn assured him. "The fight is tomorrow night. That gives you a little time to take precautions. Even if your theory is wrong, this crime is aimed at the stadium in some manner."

"I'll have the place covered so closely the slap of the fighter's gloves won't be able to get out," the captain promised. "Want me to pick up McDonald?"

"Oh, no," Quinn said, quickly. "By all means don't arrest him, and let only the most trusted people know you intend to guard the stadium. Keep it all dark, Mac."

McGrath arose.

"I guess you're right. Let me know if anything else happens. And, Tony, this is one spot where I wouldn't mind meeting the Black Bat."

"I'm afraid he isn't interested in this." Quinn smiled. "At least, he hasn't shown himself so far and, of course, no one can contact him. Not even I."

McGrath grinned crookedly and hurried away. Silk came over and sat down.

"First time McGrath ever thought up a lucid explanation to anything," he remarked. "And I've got to admit his idea is practical."

"Yes, it is," Quinn agreed. "Even if he's wrong, a strong guard at the fight wouldn't be bad. Something is going to happen there, Silk. Everything points to the stadium. See if you can get McDonald on the phone and ask him to step over here as soon as possible."

"Yes, sir." Silk arose quickly. "You don't believe you'll be tipping your hand?"

"I doubt it. Nevertheless, I intend to be quite frank with Mr. McDonald."

For two hours, Quinn went to work on routine business. Then McDonald was announced. He came into the office, angrily crimson, and none too cordial.

"I don't know what you want," he exploded. "But can't it be put off until after the fight? I'm very busy. There are a million last-minute things to do."

"I'm sorry, Mr. McDonald," Quinn said soothingly, "but this is necessary. I want you to tell me why Edward Shelley, the private detective who was killed a couple

of days ago, should have been so greatly interested in you."

"In me?" McDonald gaped. "Why, I never even knew the man."

"He was interested enough to compile a full dossier on you. A private detective does not waste his time with such things unless it means something. Are you mixed up with anything that Shelley might have been investigating?"

"If I am, I don't know it." McDonald sat down slowly. "That's the truth. I swear it."

"Why were you at Police Headquarters night before last?" asked Quinn.

"I wanted to see the inspector who'll be in charge of protecting the stadium. He was out, so I hung around awhile."

"When did you get there and when did you leave?" Quinn asked, more sharply.

"Why—it was around ten, I guess, when I walked in," McDonald said. "I'm well-known there. I pass out tickets to some of the fights and I like to hang around the place. Something always happens in a police station."

"And you left when?"

"No earlier than twelve. The inspector showed up around ten-thirty and we went to his office for about an hour. Why are you asking me all these questions?"

QUINN disregarded McDonald's interrogation.

"Can you prove you were there between eleven-thirty and twelve?" he asked instead. "Now, wait. That isn't as silly as it sounds. A number of people will swear you were there, but nobody paid any special attention to the time. I want to know if you placed yourself on record in some manner and established yourself at Police Headquarters between those hours."

"But how?" McDonald protested. "I didn't check the time."

"Perhaps you made a phone call. Some definite act."

McDonald's worried brow smoothed.

"Yes, I made a call. To my office. My secretary was working overtime. You know how it is when a champ fight date nears. I remember now. She kidded me by saying something about double pay for overtime, and that it was twenty minutes of twelve then. Sure—that fixes it."

"You called no one else?"

"No. Not a soul."

"That's all, then," Quinn said. "Thank you. How are the tickets going?"

"I have a few good ones left. Say, I'll leave you a couple. On the house."

Quinn laughed.

"I'm afraid I wouldn't appreciate a boxing match. Have you forgotten that I'm blind?"

McDonald made a wry face.

"Frankly, yes. You work as efficiently as a man with sight. I'm sorry."

CHAPTER XI

THE TRAP



EARLY that night, in the lab, Carol made a report about watching Cordee.

"If what he does comes under the heading of work, I'm for it," she said. "He got up about noon, dropped in at his newspaper office for no longer than ten minutes. He came out and went to a luncheon again, at which a lot of paintings by some obscure artist were exhibited. From what I could gather, the affair would last well into the afternoon, and I didn't want to hang around."

"There is still Roland Manning," Quinn chuckled. "An older man, and much safer to watch. As far as I'm concerned, that is."

Carol pretended to glare at him.

"I picked up Manning easily enough," she told him. "Believe it or not, he keeps office hours. He came out of his building in a big rush. I had to bribe my cab driver five dollars to follow him. He went to the offices of the British Legation here. Naturally I couldn't get past the door, so I contented myself with hanging around outside. Then, lo and behold, up comes Cliff Cordee in a terrific rush. He'd apparently cut the luncheon short and he seemed to be mightily excited. He stayed in there about fifteen minutes. Manning came out meanwhile. I let him go. Cordee, of all places, went straight back to the office he came from."

"Not much there," Silk opined.

"On the surface there seems little," Quinn agreed. "But you never can tell. I wonder why Butch hasn't returned. Maybe he has something of importance to tell us. Seems to me he should be here by now."

"I'm worried," Silk said. "He could have called, at least. That Louie Lorrain he was tailing is a bad one. Butch may have waded into something tough."

"One thing we do know," Quinn said as he frowned deeply. "If anything has happened to Butch, Lorrain knows what it is. We can find him. Meanwhile, there's another little job for you, Carol. A prosaic bit of work, but necessary. Remember this piece of newspaper clipping? Silk found it in the waste-basket of the room where Wilkerson said those two criminals lived."

"Looks like nothing more than a scrap of paper to me." Carol glanced at it. "Some shipping news on one side, part of an ad on the other. Even the shipping news isn't important these days. Nobody travels across the ocean much as yet."

"But some do, even if in minor instances," Quinn said. "I've done a bit of work on the clipping. It is from the *Sphere*. Paper and printing match perfectly. Go to their morgue and start looking. Begin with two days ago and work back. Find out what was in the column those crooks clipped out. And let me know as quickly as possible."

Carol tucked the clipping into her purse. "It will be needle-in-the-haystack business, Tony. I'll do my best."

They watched her disappear into the underground passage. Tony Quinn glanced at his watch.

"You'll have to take over here," he said to Silk. "I'm going to find out what happened to Butch. That means seeing Louie Lorrain, but I know the address he gave the Parole Board. This is his first day out of prison and he'll be bound to remain close by, just in case the police decide to check up on him. Butch is in trouble, Silk. And the trouble men like Louie furnish is the worst possible type. I don't believe I've ever been more worried, because Butch never gives up. He'd fight until he was killed."

"And he's big and dumb enough to tip his hand," Silk grumbled.

"Perhaps." Quinn shook his head worriedly. "But we can't lose sight of the fact that we're fighting a clever man this time, Silk. A man who is apt to try and think as we'd think if we were on the correct trail. Louie is a natural for that assembly of thugs. Maybe the two men Butch and I tackled and searched reported it, and their leader guessed it was more than just a casual stickup. Maybe he guessed those phone numbers had been found and perhaps acted upon. So to make certain, he also put someone to watch Louie leaving prison."

"Someone to follow anybody who got on Louie's trail," Silk said musingly. "Yes, I can see how dangerous that might have been. Butch wouldn't look for a shadow. He could have been surprised in such a way that— Or no! No, I won't believe they got him without suffering plenty of damage themselves. You know Butch too well."

Quinn walked briskly over to the telephone.

"You've given me an idea at least," he said. "The first hospital anyone coming in from Ossining would encounter is the Chase Memorial. I'm going to work on a hunch."

QUINN called the hospital and asked if any emergency cases had come in during the day.

"Someone who'd been in a bad accident with considerable damage to the head," he added.

The call was shifted to the emergency room where Quinn repeated his questions to an interne.

"No, sir," came the reply. "No auto accident cases. We did have one man who'd been kicked by a horse though. A fracture of the jaw and bruises."

"His name?" Quinn asked quickly.

"Sam Anderson. He didn't look like a Swede to me though. Nor like a farmer or anyone who'd know much about horses. He talked tough, acted tough, and was dressed sharp."

"I see," Quinn said. "Thank you very much."

He turned around to face Silk.

"That does it," he said grimly. "Butch has been in a fight all right, and laid one of them out with the customary broken jaw. We've got to find him."

Quinn walked briskly to the steel locker and got out his somber clothing for his role of the Black Bat. Besides the heavy gun, he also took along a target pistol of small calibre.

"Louie Lorrain understands one language," he observed. "Force! He's going to talk, Silk, or the Black Bat may commit the first cold-blooded murder of his career! You're to stand by. I may need you in a hurry."

The coupe was waiting when they came out of the tunnel. The Black Bat, wearing his broad-brimmed hat, got behind the wheel, checked the address Louie had given the Parole Board, and headed in that direction. It was not a city address,

but one in a small town on Long Island, some twenty miles away.

The Black Bat disliked the fact that he was compelled to drive at a reasonable speed, stop for all traffic lights, and conduct himself in such a manner as to attract no attention. He would have preferred driving there with wide-open siren and red flasher lights blinking.

He was somewhat surprised to find that Louie occupied a one-story, one-family dwelling in what appeared to be a very nice locality. The house was isolated just enough to suit Louie's purposes as a gangster and crook. He could come and go unobserved. The men who worked with him were allowed similar accessibility.

The Black Bat parked the coupe where it wouldn't be easily spotted, changed from hat to black hood, and examined his gun once more. Louie was not the type to surrender meekly. He was much more apt to shoot it out.

The house was dark and locked up. But the Black Bat gained entrance without any trouble. Inside, the place smelled musty, although it had been recently cleaned and dusted. Obviously Louie hadn't come here yet, though he certainly intended to because the refrigerator was well-stocked and so was the pantry.

He was likely in New York, enjoying the lights and activity after his term in prison. This was his residence, according to Parole Board records, so he was bound to return here before morning.

The Black Bat made himself comfortable in the living room where he sat facing the front door. It was quiet, there was no distractions except the mental one of worrying about Butch, and the Black Bat could think lucidly.

He went back over the whole affair from its beginning with Willie Wilkerson. Therein, lay one of the complete mysteries. Why had Willie been murdered? Attempts to kill him before he talked to Tony Quinn had failed.

Obviously he had told the Special D.A. everything he knew so why, then, had his death still remained a necessity? Willie had done all the possible damage he was capable of doing. There was something more than merely the fact that he had seen one thug from the back and the other in rather vague profile. The Black Bat meant to dig into this phase of the investigation as soon as possible.

Then there were the suspects, none of

whom had displayed any slips as yet. Roland Manning had been at Headquarters and had overheard Willie's complaint. But Manning's visit to Headquarters had been fairly well motivated. Of course, the Black Bat realized, he could have easily made up his story of losing a wallet. But Manning's reputation seemed to be good, his financial status secure enough. He played the stock market heavily, but so did some of the others.

Like Cliff Cordee, the prominent society columnist. Cordee lived equally by his wits and his job. It gave him entree to all sorts of affairs, free food, and sometimes lodging. He had to maintain a fairly expensive front, but his income from the column was moderately high. If the intended crime pertained to an act against the upper fringes of society, Cordee was in the best possible position to make plans. So far, however, there was not an iota of a clue which pointed in that direction.

FOR an out-and-out crime boss, Stephan Tuzac was the best bet. As a big time gambler, he was already outside the law and would have many friends among the underworld element. Contrasted to this, was Tuzac's excellent reputation for running honest games. Undoubtedly the man made money at high speed. Would he, then, be willing to risk everything on some crime of major proportions? As a gambler in everything he did, the facts said "Yes." But Tuzac had always showed considerable caution in all his moves.

Of them all, Bert McDonald was slowly being driven into an unenviable spot by developments. The fight tickets all or most of those crooks carried. The fact that an honest private eye had been checking on him to the extent of preparing an extensive dossier indicated that McDonald was involved in something important. Then the private detective's death was suspected by his own son as being murder. If it was, then McDonald could easily be suspected of having engineered it because Edward Shelley had been getting too close.

It was odd how all four men had been at Headquarters when Willie had told his story. Perhaps, by coincidence alone, the leader of the intended crime had been present. Tuzac, of course, was eliminated from any suspicion of having deliberately gone to Headquarters. He had been dragged there in handcuffs and under arrest.

McDonald had wanted to discuss police

protection at the stadium—a good and legitimate reason for being present. Cordee had some vaguer reason connected with the arrest of a socialite.

As for the crime itself, all clues pointed unerringly at the championship fight as its scene. The whole thing was exasperating in that the crime was not clear. There were no clues such as usually found as an aftermath of a crime, because the deed had not yet been committed. The Black Bat decided that preventing crime was a great deal more difficult than tracking it down.

A full hour and a half went by. It was getting late, but the Black Bat stuck it out. He had to. The welfare of one of his friends and allies seemed to be in the balance, and Louie alone could tip the scales.

The Black Bat forced himself to continue thinking calmly and he made plans for action. They were based on the meager clues he had so far developed. The finger of suspicion pointed at the stadium fight and the death of Edward Shelley, private detective. There was a connection. The Black Bat felt certain of it.

Then all thoughts vanished from his mind. A car had stopped in front of the house. Its door slammed shut and footsteps hurried along the path toward the house. It was Louie Lorrain, and the taxi which had brought him home was already pulling away. Louie was alone.

CHAPTER XII

VENGEANCE OF THE BLACK BAT



LOUIE, a trifle high after a couple of drinks, was humming as he unlocked the door of his house. It was nice to be back. He blessed the day when impulse had led him to buy this place. It was perfect, because he could operate easily

from here and not be under the everlasting scrutiny of police spies in the guise of bellboys, doormen, and apartment house attendants.

He thrust his key back into his vest pocket, kicked the door shut behind him and reached for the living room wall switch.

"Don't turn on that light, Louie!" A voice, harsh with anger, came out of the darkness.

Louie didn't have a gun. Not on him. He hadn't dared, because Broadway Squad detectives like to frisk men just out of prison. But there was a gun in the drawer of a table halfway across the living room. It had been there before he went to prison. It was fully loaded and nothing could have happened to it during the months Louie had been away.

His crafty mind told him it was best to stall. He raised his hands.

"What is this?" he demanded irately. "Some kind of a joke?"

"It's far from being funny," the voice replied. "Walk straight ahead. You'll come to a foot stool. Sit down on it. If you attempt to get up, you'll never move again."

Louie was squinting, trying to penetrate the darkness, but that was impossible. Every window shade was drawn and the gloom intense. He stumbled forward, encountered the foot stool, and by sense of feel alone sat down on it. He couldn't see his enemy, but the quality of that voice from the darkness sent shivers up and down his spine.

"What do you want?" he demanded. "Who are you, anyhow?"

"I'm the Black Bat," the voice answered curtly.

"But—but why are you after me?" Louie gulped. "There's some mistake. I just got out of stir this morning."

"I know very well you were released this morning. I know that you were met at the prison by friends and taken to New York. Before you were released, there was a job planned for you. It involves all the worst elements of an ordinarily bad underworld. Men like you, who'd fight it out if you were in danger of being captured, who have the twisted brains that make you think you are supreme, so long as there is a gun in your fist. The type to use that gun even when murder isn't necessary. Louie, I want to know what that job is."

"I don't know what you're talking about!" the ex-convict shouted. "There's been some mistake."

"You're making it then," the Black Bat said. "Because if you don't talk there is one inevitable finish for you, Louie. An end you'll come to eventually, but it can happen in the next five minutes if you don't talk."

"Wh-what do you mean by that?"

"You'll talk or I'll kill you," said the voice inexorably. "As simple as that."

"You wouldn't dare!" Louie scoffed. "This is nothing but a bluff."

Three things happened simultaneously. A jet of red flame, the bark of a small calibre gun, and the buzz of its bullet whizzing half an inch from Louie's ear. The ex-convict almost slid off the foot stool in amazement, and slow terror began to creep over him.

"I could have put that bullet an inch or two further to the left and you'd be dead right now," the Black Bat said. "The next one will be closer."

"No!" Louie gulped. "No, don't. It's dark in here. You can't see where those slugs are going."

"Then tell me who contacted you," demanded the Black Bat. "Talk fast. I haven't any time to waste."

Louie didn't know what course to follow. If he kept quiet, he would probably be a dead man within the next couple of minutes. He knew well enough that the Black Bat had killed criminal scum before. It was better to talk and stall. Stall until he could reach that gun or find some loophole by which he could escape or even tackle this man he could not even see.

"It was Cannon Young," he said. "He came to visit me in stir about a month ago. He—only said there was a job for me. I haven't had time to talk about the details."

"Empty your pockets, Louie," ordered the Black Bat. "Put everything in them on the floor in front of you. If you happen to be packing a gun, remove it with plenty of caution. Get going!"

LOUIE wondered why such terror had taken possession of him. He had faced guns, and had sneered at them. He had faced enemies who were crack shots and trigger happy, but he had never felt like this before. He began cleaning out his pockets. There wasn't much. A fat wad of bills, his keys, his parole papers—and a ticket to the championship fight.

"That ticket," the Black Bat said. "Where did you get it?"

"I bought it, naturally," said Louie. "They don't hand 'em out."

"You're a liar. That's a ringside ticket and they've all been sold for days. You were in prison until this morning. Where did you get that ticket?"

Louie moistened his lips. "Cannon Young gave it to me. Is there any law against my seeing that fight?"

"There certainly is," said the grim Black Bat. "The law of life and death. Alive, you may see it. Dead, you won't, and at the moment you are closer to death than life. One more lie and you'll go over the line quickly. What's the job you were hired for?"

The Black Bat could see Louie's eyes and his facial expression as he denied knowing any details. The ex-convict was not acting. There was no need for it. Louie believed he was shielded by the same darkness that protected the Black Bat. His expression was that of despair, mingled with anxiety. He did not know the details of the crime. The Black Bat doubted strongly that any of the muscle and trigger men knew. They were being paid to stand by.

"Who did you meet tonight?" he asked.

"Just Young and Fritz Ogden. Look, I'll talk. I'll tell everything I know, because I'm in the clear. I haven't done anything. It's no crime to talk about jobs for the future. Cannon told me we'd all be sitting pretty in twenty-four hours, that all I had to do was take orders, but they wouldn't be given until tomorrow."

"Suppose we change the subject for the moment and go back to your release from prison," the Black Bat said. "Cannon Young met you. Somewhere along the road back to town, things happened. There is, for instance, a decided swelling along your left cheek as if you had been struck. There is a cut just below the hairline of your forehead. You handle your left arm as though it hurts. Who messed you up, Louie?"

"Me—we were just horsing around," Louie gulped. "The boys were glad to see me back."

Louie fell off the foot stool. The second bullet nicked his jowl. It was no accidental

shot, but well-aimed by a man who must be able to see what he was doing even in this inky darkness. The ex-convict's apprehension grew. This man could see in the dark! He had spotted that ticket.

Louie climbed back onto his stool and applied a hand to the superficial wound alongside his jaw.

"That was as close as a bullet can be without killing you," the Black Bat said quietly. "Don't make me shoot again. Who messed you up?"

"Some big galoot. I don't know who he was. Maybe a stickup man. He was following us and we stopped to find out why. He sailed into us, and we fought it out."

"How many of you?" demanded the Black Bat.

"Just me and Cannon," Louie said, then added hastily, "No—no there were three others, besides me. See, I'm telling the truth."

"You heard me pull back the hammer of my gun," the Black Bat replied. "I meant it as a hint. Now, this man who attacked all five of you, what happened to him?"

"He—jumped over the bridge into the river."

"He jumped or was dumped, Louie? That would be a bad question to answer with a lie."

"Honest, he jumped. He busted Malloy's jaw—"

"Did you see him swimming or floating?"

"N-no. Maybe he hit his head on a rock or something. But he was alive when he jumped. We ran his car into the brush. After all, if he did kill himself, I didn't want to get into any trouble. I'm on parole. If they send me back, it means a long stretch. We didn't pick a fight with

[Turn page]

"Is There Any Reason Why Somebody Might Want to Kill You?"



THAT was the question which Hank Ames asked Chris Leonard—and it was more than a sixty-four dollar question! In fact, it involved millions—though Hank didn't know it at the time. He'd saved Leonard from being run over by a car—and it seemed to him that the driver was deliberately trying to run Leonard down. But the minute Hank began voicing his suspicions things started to get hot for him in **MURDER MAKES THE LUCK**, an action mystery novelet by Norman A. Daniels coming in our next issue. It's a terrific yarn—packed with surprises on every page!

the guy. I still don't know what he wanted."

"Describe the location of that bridge, Louie," ordered the Black Bat. "The precise location. If it's wrong, I'll come back and dispense with any formalities such as target practise."

Louie thought he had found his chance, the opportunity he had waited and sweated it out for.

"I can draw you a good map," he said quickly. "That's easier than trying to put it in words. Let me get some paper and a pencil."

"Go ahead. And Louie, it might interest you to know that I can see every move you make. Darkness doesn't matter to me."

"I—I guessed that."

THE ex-convict arose and walked haltingly over toward the table. He was thinking hard as he felt his way along and finally reached for the table drawer. Maybe the Black Bat could see in darkness. He had exhibited evidence that he could, but he couldn't see through wood. He wouldn't know that Louie was going for a gun.

But Louie was at a distinct disadvantage still. His eyes could not penetrate the darkness and therefore could find no target.

Louie fumbled in the drawer. His fingers encountered the automatic, and he took time enough to slip the safety to the off position. There was paper and some pencils in the drawer too. That was a distinct break.

"I can't see what I'm doing!" he protested shrilly. "Can I turn on the lamp on this table?"

"You may turn it on," the Black Bat said. "I can't expect you to draw a map in total darkness."

Louie smiled thinly. He found the lamp and turned it on. He glanced up and, as his eyes became accustomed to the dull glow from the lamp, he saw the Black Bat for the first time. It was a rather awesome spectacle, this figure encased in black. And the two eyes peering through the slits in the hood were bright and alert.

Louie brought out two pieces of paper and laid them on the desk. He rattled things in the drawer for a second.

"Can't find the pencil," he explained.

He bent down to peer into the drawer. His left hand, stiff from having been battered by Butch, groped for a pencil.

He found one, held it aloft, and hoped the Black Bat's gaze would be transferred to it momentarily.

Louie's right hand was in the table drawer. The Black Bat couldn't see that unless his eyes were able to penetrate substances as well as darkness. Louie leaned over the table and began to draw the map with his left hand.

Suddenly, Louie lifted the gun. If he was rusty in handling a weapon after those months in prison, he didn't show it. The gun spat flame at the precise instant it was in a level position. The Black Bat, seated in a high-backed, overstuffed chair, was jerked off balance by the force of the heavy slug.

Louie didn't know that. Louie, in fact, didn't know anything for he was busy in the act of dying. There was a bullet-hole precisely between his eyes.

The Black Bat leaped to his feet. The explosion of Louie's heavy gun could have been heard for blocks. The Black Bat put a hand gently to his shoulder. The fingers encountered blood. He quietly cleaned them on a handkerchief, tucked it into his pocket again and withdrew a small metal box. This contained the cut-out figures of a bat in full flight. The paper was black and provided with adhesive on the back.

The Black Bat walked over to where Louie lay and fastened one of these stickers to the man's dead cheek. They were the Black Bat's sign that he accepted the guilt for a killing.

He picked up the map. It was complete, and much better than he had hoped for. The thing might be all wrong, but he had to risk that. There wasn't even time to search Louie for articles he may not have placed in the little heap on the floor.

The Black Bat made his way out of the house, reached his car and drove away. His shoulder ached badly, but he was certain that Louie's bullet hadn't even scraped bone. But his whole shoulder was smeared with blood and getting stiff. He headed out of town.

It was more than an hour later when he scanned the highway for signs of that side road which Louie and his men had taken. He found it and soon came upon the bridge. Louie had indicated where Butch's car had been hidden. The Black Bat got out of the coupe and hurried toward the designated spot.

Louie, in his eagerness to allay the Black Bat's suspicions, had made a truth-

ful map. The car was exactly where he had indicated it would be. When the Black Bat saw it, his hopes of finding Butch alive were dissipated fast. If Butch had been able to get out of the river, he would have surely returned to where the car was parked and at least tried to drive it home. At that moment, no particle of remorse for killing Louie existed in the Black Bat's heart.

He yanked open the sedan door. Huddled on the floor lay Butch. The Black Bat seized Butch's wrist and felt for a pulse. There was one, not too good, but he was still alive. There was a nasty bullet wound along his forehead and Butch's ordinarily big face was swollen to massive proportions. Blood clotted his right side.

The Black Bat raced back to where his coupe was parked. He drove it off the road and directly beside the sedan. Then he transferred Butch to the coupe. No easy task, for the man was enormous, and a complete dead weight.

Two minutes later, the Black Bat was rolling as fast as he dared, back to the city. Butch was in bad shape, suffering from his wounds, the beating he had taken and, quite possibly, he was half drowned.

CHAPTER XIII

VISITOR IN THE NIGHT



SILK helped carry Butch into the house. They didn't use the tunnel this time, but carried the inert form through the house and into the lab via the library panel. Carol was waiting. All three went to work at once.

"He's been stabbed," the Black Bat said. "The wound is quite deep. Silk, get some brandy and hot coffee. He's beginning to moan a bit. And fetch all the bandages in the house. Work fast. If we can avoid calling a doctor, so much the better, but if Butch doesn't improve he's going to a hospital, no matter what the risk involved."

It was half an hour later when the Black Bat finished. He was satisfied. The wounds were properly cleansed, and none required stitching or surgery. Butch was awake, weak, but nevertheless eager for battle. He told what had happened, how he had managed to retain consciousness,

reached the river bank, and finally stagger and crawl to the car, where he had collapsed.

"Louie is dead," the Black Bat said. "I killed him. He fired first."

"Tony!" Carol cried. "Your shoulder! I thought the blood came from Butch. You're hurt!"

"Not badly." The Black Bat smiled grimly. "Help me off with my coat and shirt. A simple bandage will do the trick. Looks like the Black Bat's little band is fifty per cent casualty this time. And hurry, will you, Carol? I have another trip to make."

Carol looked at the wound.

"But, Tony, you can't!"

"I'm sorry," he told her. "I can and I will. Put some sort of a bandage on there. We'll do a better job when I return. And, Silk—if anybody heard the shooting at Louie's place and reported it, Captain McGrath is going to arrive here presently. I can't wait for him, so you'll have to take on the burden of holding him in check. Get me a fresh shirt and one of the other black coats."

The Black Bat donned these, moving rather stiffly, for the wound was burning like fire. He forced back grunts of pain and mustered a smile for Carol's benefit. He left the lab via the tunnel, reached the coupe, and drove away quickly.

It was late, the streets were deserted, and that meant he had to move with even greater caution than usual. When he reached his destination he parked the coupe near the mouth of an alley, peered around, then got out to dart into the dark maw of the passage between two great buildings.

It required only a few more minutes to reach the second floor corridor of one building and slow up as he approached a door labeled:

EDWARD SHELLEY, PRIVATE INVESTIGATIONS

The Black Bat stepped up to the door and listened. He knew the office was kept open all night, but doubted if more than one operator, who probably served the telephone, was there. He couldn't hear any talking, at any rate, so he opened the door carefully.

It led into a nicely done waiting room. There was a gentle buzzing somewhere inside, an electrical signal made when the waiting room door opened. The Black Bat moved fast across the office, flattened himself against the wall, and waited.

He heard footsteps approaching. The door opened and a man about fifty-five entered the room. He looked around with a puzzled expression that changed to one of alarm as a gun was pressed against his back. The gun he carried on his hip was expertly removed.

"You may turn around now and lower your arms," a voice told him. "There's nothing to fear."

The operative obeyed, and his eyes went wide when he saw the black-hooded man.

"Yes, I'm the Black Bat," the hooded figure said. "I don't fight honest private detectives. All I want is some information. Are you alone?"

"Yes." The man nodded. "If anything happens, I call the other boys by phone. Come inside. You can put the gun away, Black Bat. First of all, I know you're as much a crime fighter as I or any regular police officer. Secondly, I've lived fifty-four years so far. I don't want to end my life now."

The Black Bat slipped his gun back into its holster and laughed a bit. He followed the detective into Shelley's private office.

The detective pointed at the large desk.

"Make yourself comfortable. My name is Keaton. What can I do for you?"

"Do you think Edward Shelley was murdered?" the Black Bat asked bluntly.

KEATON rolled that around in his mind for a moment.

"Well," he finally said, "there were some peculiar things about it. First of all, his chauffeur was brand new. In fact, we operators had never seen him. But the chauffeur was killed, too, so it couldn't have been murder he engineered. Murderers usually get clear of traps they set for other people."

"Then there is no direct evidence?" the Black Bat asked. "The agency is not investigating?"

"Young Shelley is," said Keaton. "I know he suspects some dirty work. Nice kid. First time I've laid eyes on him since he was about five years old. That was when I worked the Pacific Coast office. Been here for more than twenty years now. Shelley came along too, when the agency got so big it needed him. His wife and the boy stayed in California. She was sick, and needed that climate."

"I see. The boy grew up there, went into the Army and when he was discharged, he reported to his father here.

Is that right?"

"Yes. Mrs. Shelley died some years ago. The Pacific office dwindled pretty much, and the boy figured he'd be more useful here. He did say his father ordered him East because of some big case."

"What case, Keaton?" The Black Bat grew alert.

"I don't know." Keaton shook his head. "Nobody knows, not even the boy. Shelley always worked like that. If something highly confidential turned up, he handled the thing all by himself. He never kept records of it and never talked about the job."

"Was he exceptionally busy just before his death?" the Black Bat asked.

"Not more than usual. But he took things with an easy stride. You couldn't tell when he had an important job on his mind. He had to take it easy. This agency has sixty operators on the payroll."

The Black Bat whistled softly behind the hood.

"I knew it was a large agency, but that's bigger than I expected. You do general work besides investigations, I take it?"

"Oh, sure. We guard estates, functions, a few exclusive jewelry shops. Things like that. It's not all peeking through keyholes."

The Black Bat's gloved fingers toyed with the base of a tall, slim, sterling silver desk lighter.

"Do you have a schedule of functions the agency will guard?" he asked.

Keaton shook his head negatively.

"Only man who knows about such things is young Shelley. And his secretary, I suppose. That's so if anything slips, the agency can't be blamed. Only the boss. There can't be a leak that way."

"I see. A good arrangement. When we passed through the other office, I noticed you maintain quite an arsenal here."

"A mighty good one, from tommy-guns to sidearms, Keaton replied. "Young Shelley just put in all new stuff. The most modern weapons, tear gas, billy clubs and saps. Everything, even to nice new badges. That kid is really going to run this office right."

"There was a file which the dead Mr. Shelley had collected," the Black Bat observed. "About a man named McDonald. Know anything about that?"

"Not a thing," Keaton told him. "Like I said, the old man handled his personal cases in his hat. I think the kid is going to do the same thing. Not a bad idea anyway.

Helps to keep an agency like this right on the level. I wish I could help you more, even if I don't have any idea what it's all about."

A chuckle came from behind the black hood.

"I know little more than you, Keaton. But thanks. You have been helpful. Perhaps, before this is over, we'll be pitching in side-by-side. Good night, and thanks again."

The Black Bat disappeared through the door. Keaton shrugged and then lit a cigar. He didn't notice that the tall silver desk lighter had vanished.

CLIFF CORDEE awoke with a start of terror. The lights in his bedroom were not lit and he could see no one, but he sensed the presence of an intruder and he was almost positive his name had been called.

"Who—is—it?" he asked nervously. "Someone is in this room."

A form, darker than the gloom, moved toward Cordee's bedside, and the columnist shrank back against the wall.

"There is no need to be alarmed," a voice said soothingly. "I'm the Black Bat. I'm sorry to have frightened you, but I can't approach people quite like anyone else. I have to contact them rather unexpectedly."

"What do you want?" mumbled the columnist.

"Just the answers to a few questions. You were at Police Headquarters when a man named Wilkerson told the police about overhearing some plans concerning a crime. You talked to that man while he waited for his story to be investigated. What did you talk about?"

Cordee gradually conquered his fear. He wanted a cigarette badly, but didn't dare reach for one.

"We talked about what he'd heard," he said. "Or claimed to have heard."

"Did you telephone the story to your newspaper?" asked the Black Bat.

"No, of course not. The detectives returned and said it was all a pack of lies. Anyway, I'm not a crime reporter."

"Did you use the telephone at all that night while you were at Headquarters?"

"Why—yes," Cordee said thoughtfully.

"I phoned the city desk to include a certain item I'd left out of my column until I had the proof that it was true."

"Roland Manning was at Headquarters also," reminded the Black Bat. "Did he

use the phone?"

"Yes. So did everybody, I guess. That fight promoter was on the wire once."

"Why," the Black Bat asked softly, "did you visit the British Legation today?"

Cordee gasped.

"How did—how did you ever get such an idea? I don't even know where the British Legation is."

"Then you didn't go there?"

"Certainly not," Cordee lied stoutly. "If you think I did, there's some mistake. What business could I have there?"

Cordee moistened his lips and wanted a cigarette more than ever. He waited for the next question, but none came. Three or four minutes went by. Cordee cleared his throat, moved restlessly, then swung his legs off the edge of the bed.

"I don't know what this is all about," he said half angrily, "and I'd refuse to answer a single question except for the fact I know you have a mighty good reason behind this visit. Still, I believe I should be told. Black Bat! Are you there?"

Cordee snapped on a light. There was no one in the room. He sat down on the edge of the bed weakly and lit his cigarette. He consumed it in four huge puffs. It didn't taste too good.

CHAPTER XIV

ON THE WARPATH

ROLAND MANNING was awake at four A.M. busily engaged in cleaning out the desk in his study. He heard no sound, but wondered where the sudden draft was coming from. All the windows and doors were closed. He straightened from his task and looked around.

Standing beside a partially open French window was the Black Bat. Manning held a sheaf of papers in his hand and they fluttered. He put them on the desk.

"I hope," he said uncertainly, "that you really are the Black Bat, and not some second story man wearing a hood."

"I'm the Black Bat, Mr. Manning. Please sit down. There are a few things that need straightening out, and you can help me."

Manning seemed to understand.

"It's about the death of that inoffensive little man who told the police about some crime or other that was being cooked up.

I read that he had committed suicide, but didn't seem the type to me. What can I do to help?"

"The night you first saw Wilkerson, you were at Headquarters to report the loss of a wallet," said the Black Bat. "Did you ever get it back?"

"What on earth has that to do— Excuse me. You ask the questions don't you? Yes, the wallet was mailed back to me. The papers it contained were intact. The money was gone."

"Did you notice who used the telephone at Police Headquarters that night?" his visitor asked. "I mean, of course, McDonald and Cordee."

"Why, they both did," Manning replied. "In fact, McDonald was in the booth that I headed for. I phoned, too, if that means anything. I called a friend of mine who was with me when I missed the wallet. She wasn't home."

"And just one more thing, Mr. Manning," said the Black Bat. "Yesterday you visited the British Legation. Would you mind telling me why?"

Manning whistled sharply.

"So I've been trailed, eh? This must be more serious than I believed. Yes, I visited the British Legation. I'm leaving for London on a plane tomorrow night. I had to have my passport visaed. Wait, I'll show you."

Manning produced a brand new passport from a brief case that lay on his desk. The visa stamp was plain and dated the day before.

"That's why I'm up so late," Manning went on. "I intend to be gone for about a month, perhaps two, and there is so much cleaning up to be done."

"I hope you have a successful trip," the Black Bat said pleasantly. "And thanks for allowing me to take up your time."

The Black Bat stepped out through the French window. There was a rustling sound and he was gone. Manning went over to a side table where decanters had been placed. He poured himself a good-sized drink of whisky and swallowed it in one gulp. . . .

When the Black Bat returned to his laboratory, Butch was sitting up and making short work of a thick steak. He grinned at the Black Bat and went on eating. Silk was somewhere in the house.

Carol came forward to help Quinn remove his coat. He stepped behind a screen and changed from the dark clothing of the Black Bat to the tweeds he wore as

Tony Quinn. Then he came out and sat down beside Carol.

"No signs of Captain McGrath, I take it?" he asked her.

"Not yet." Carol answered. "But he'll be around. Every time he finds evidence that the Black Bat has been at work, he pays you a visit. Sometimes he scares me, Tony. One day he might get here too quickly, find you gone, and perhaps lay a trap. If he unmasked you, the whole game would be up. It would be the end of the Black Bat. Maybe of Tony Quinn too, because there are quite a lot of people in town who would pay well to have the Black Bat killed. And Tony—that shoulder. How is it?"

"Just a little stiff," Quinn assured her. "McGrath is a problem to be handled as the occasion arises. Now about that newspaper clipping. Did you get it?"

CAROL produced the whole page from a week-old newspaper. Quinn read the list of ships due to arrive in New York. Most of them were freighters, but since no luxury liners were as yet in service, all these smaller vessels carried passengers.

"How are you progressing, Tony?" Carol asked. "Is there any clue as to the crime these men intend to stage?"

"Plenty—and all pointing straight at the championship fight tomorrow night. Whatever is planned, it will be an undertaking that requires the use of about fifty of the toughest muscle men ever assembled in one group. That means violence. Shooting, if things get out of hand—which they probably will. Unless we stop this, it's likely that innocent people will lose their lives by this time tomorrow night."

"What are you going to do?" Carol asked.

"I don't know," Quinn replied slowly. "I'm not absolutely positive that these crooks are aiming at the stadium. Sometimes it almost looks as if they wanted us to think so. Yet the planned crime must be one of large proportions, and I know of nothing else quite as large as the fight tomorrow night. If we only knew just what they intended to do! A general stickup, a series of personal holdups, kidnaping or an attack on the treasurer's office. We have no idea, and therefore it's impossible to create a defense against their plans."

"Did you learn why Cordee and Manning visited the British Legation?" Carol asked.

"Cordee swears he did not." Quinn laughed shortly. "Manning admits he did, to have his passport visaed. He's leaving for London tomorrow night."

"Then that must let him out of it entirely," Carol said thoughtfully. "We can feel certain that the ringleader of our crime-to-come would remain here to share in the profits. And Cordee is a liar. He did go to the Legation."

"If you say so, he was there," Quinn said. "Now what have we got? A shipping list which includes ships arriving from England tomorrow. The British Legation. Those two items tie up, Carol. I'm beginning to wonder. Excuse me a moment."

Quinn arose and went to a telephone at the far end of the lab. He put through a call to Scotland Yard in London. Then, as he hung up, a colored bulb glowed. Silk was signaling that visitors were arriving.

Quinn seized his cane.

"McGrath on the warpath," he told Carol and Butch. "Nobody else would come at this time of the morning. If that London call is put through before I return, Carol, tell them I'll call back."

Quinn hurried to the secret door, let himself out of the lab and sprinted for the hallway. He heard footsteps on the walk. Before the visitor reached the porch, Quinn was upstairs and quickly stripping off his clothes.

He mussed the bed, rumbled his hair, and took a pair of wrinkled pajamas from a hamper. He put these on and presented the appearance of a man who had been in bed asleep for a long time.

The doorbell rang insistently and kept on ringing. Silk would take his time answering it, and be dressed in pajamas and robe too, when he let McGrath in. Quinn closed his eyes. He was already in bed. McGrath was coming up the stairs.

The bedroom door was opened and the lights were turned on. McGrath stalked across the room and stood beside the bed. He reached one hand down as if to shake Quinn awake. Quinn repressed a shudder. If McGrath squeezed that wounded shoulder, the pain might give him away. The wound might begin bleeding too, and a blind man would have a difficult time accounting for a bullet-hole through his shoulder.

Quinn sat bolt upright. His eyes were wide open and staring blindly.

"There is someone in this room," he exclaimed tensely.

"Cool off," McGrath grunted. "It's just

me. I thought maybe I might find that you were out for the evening. But, as always, I'm wrong."

Quinn rubbed his face.

"Oh, I'm beginning to understand. The Black Bat has been prowling."

"With a gun," McGrath said unhappily. "He killed a hoodlum named Louie Lorrain who got out of prison only this morning. And I found something plenty interesting, Tony. Louie fired back. I discovered the slug from his gun buried in a chair. Somebody who sat in that chair was hit by it. There was a good-sized bloodstain too. You're not, by some chance, sporting a bullet-hole anywhere on your body?"

"I wasn't when I went to bed about eleven o'clock," Quinn said, with a tight laugh.

"Suppose I ask you to take off your clothes," McGrath said cautiously.

QUINN sighed and held out his hands helplessly.

"Mac, you're becoming unbearable. You try all sort of tricks in your attempts to prove I'm not blind. You've compelled me to visit eye specialists who pronounced me incurable. You've spied on me, suspected me for years, and never found one iota of evidence that I'm the Black Bat. It's impossible and irksome. The Black Bat can see. You'll admit so much. I'm totally blind. Therefore, I cannot be prowling about."

McGrath's voice was smug. "Then I take it, you refuse to prove you have not been perforated by Louie Lorrain's slug?"

"I have not made such a refusal." Quinn fumbled for his slippers. "If you'll wait one moment, I'll be glad to show you that I am quite intact. Help me off with this pajama jacket."

"No, wait a minute." McGrath stepped back hastily. "You better not. I haven't any right to make you prove that. If I'm wrong, you'll never let me live it down. You're too eager, Quinn. Anyway, I've more important news."

Quinn sat down on the bed again, hoping his relief was not evident.

"About our crime-in-the-future?" he asked.

"What else? You remember that Wilkerson described one of the two lugs he saw as being the owner of a large nose? Well, I had all the boys watch those imported mugs. I told them if they saw any tough-looking stranger consorting with

known criminals and this stranger had a nose so big that it drew attention, to haul him in.

"They brought me a nice goldfish by the name of Georgie Orans. A hoodlum from the Pacific Coast. Things happened just right. While I was talking to Orans, I got word of Louie's murder. I told Orans I knew he did it. The guy howled his head off."

"Naturally," Quinn said tensely. "You asked him for an alibi, then?"

"You're a swell thunder stealer, Tony." McGrath almost roared. "Yes, I made him tell me where he had been. He and a big, broad-shouldered guy were living in a cheap hotel downtown. He claimed they'd been there for a month, but when I started to check up, he switched stories and finally admitted he had been staying at the Hotel Wilton. He and his chum are the birds Wilkerson heard and saw."

"Excellent, Mac. You forced him into a corner. What else did he admit?"

CHAPTER XV

APPROACHING DEADLINE



JUST for a moment McGrath did did not answer Tony Quinn. Plainly he was feeling pretty proud of himself. His chest swelled out a bit. He removed cellophane from a fresh cigar, carefully bit off the tip and applied a match. He was taking his time, reveling in the fact that for once he'd got further along the trail than Tony Quinn had.

"He admitted practically everything," McGrath finally said. "He knew he was licked, looked for a break, and I promised him one for the whole story. He told me he and his pal had lived at the Hotel Wilton ever since they had come to town two weeks ago. They were paid three hundred a week, but couldn't do the town up brown. They were ordered to remain inside most of the time and stay out of trouble completely."

"How did he contact this man who paid him, and gave those orders?" asked the Special D. A.

"He didn't," said the captain. "The ringleader did all the approaching, but Orans swears he never saw him. Only talked to him on the telephone. The calls were made from inside the hotel, Tony. The ringleader was right there."

"In the hotel?" Quinn exclaimed.

"That's right. We raided the joint tonight. It looked like a nice quiet place, didn't it? Or were you there at all? Anyhow, the fourteenth floor was used as a gambling house. And guess who ran it?"

"Tuzac." Quinn's voice seemed puzzled. "Tuzac, of course."

"Again you hit it on the button." McGrath puffed slowly on his cigar, enjoying this to the hilt. "Here's how I figure it. The ringleader made that hotel his headquarters. A lot of people went in and out—gamblers—so he'd hardly be noticed. Well, he saw Wilkerson watching those two hoodlums and guessed what had happened. Maybe he trailed Wilkerson all the way to Headquarters. Then he had to know exactly what had happened, and what Wilkerson told us. He couldn't just walk into Headquarters, so he pulled a neat stunt."

"Tuzac got himself arrested," said Quinn. "Is that what you mean?"

"Exactly. I found out that an anonymous tip had come in to raid one of Tuzac's regular joints. The boys did, and brought him downtown. The joint wasn't far from Headquarters so it was natural they would bring him there. Now that call, Tony, hit the Vice Squad about ten or fifteen minutes before Wilkerson showed up. Get it?"

"Somebody overheard Wilkerson tell his cab driver to go to Police Headquarters," Quinn said. "Mac, that's wonderful work. But did this Orans know anything about the crime that gang intends to pull?"

"He was pretty cagey," McGrath confessed. "I couldn't get much out of him except he was to use that ticket to the championship fight tomorrow, and that some place on his way there he would be given definite instructions. Those same orders probably went out to all the boys who were brought into town."

"Take every precaution," Quinn warned. "It's all clear now. This Orans and his companion were in the room next door to Wilkerson. This ringleader telephoned and perhaps gave some order which Orans' pal resented. He was intoxicated and began telling his troubles aloud. Wilkerson overheard that part. It also explains just why Wilkerson was murdered after he had told us all he knew. The ringleader was afraid Wilkerson might have seen him. Maybe he did, but never realized it. What about this ringleader? Doesn't Orans know anything

about him? How did Orans contact the mystery man in the first place?"

"Seems a monkey named Cannon Young, one of those birds we had locked up for awhile, is the first lieutenant of the gang and made all arrangements to assemble these mugs. I've got a still alarm out for Cannon, but he seems to have vanished."

"It doesn't matter so much now," Quinn said. "Just guard the stadium."

"All days off and vacations are canceled," McGrath said. "Every available man we have will be on duty. Whatever stunt they intend to pull won't work, Tony. Not with a couple of thousand cops

spread all over the area and inside the stadium."

"Good. We'll have them then. It's the best bit of work you ever did, Mac."

"Thanks." McGrath grinned from ear to ear. "Now what about Tuzac? His game was in that hotel. He was pinched too opportunely. He has all sorts of underworld connections. He's our man. The ringleader. Maybe we ought to pick him up."

"I wouldn't, Mac," advised Quinn. "Let them think we know nothing. You see, if arresting these men on mere suspicion would have helped, I'd have ordered it

[Turn page]

The Message That Spelled Doom!

THE new guest at the Hotel Okeechee, named for the Florida lake upon which it bordered, was no sooner comfortable in his room than he noticed the note which was propped up against a water decanter. He seized it and read the brief message. His face turned ashen. The note wasn't very long, but to the point. It read:

"Mr. Graystone: We meant what we said. Unless you leave this hotel within the hour the baby will die. Next time any detective, Scotland Yard, regular American officer or F.B.I. agent comes here, it's the finish. You will take a car to town, board the 6:15 plane for New York and leave for London on a Clipper no later than tomorrow night. This is not a suggestion. It's a command."

Inspector Graystone of Scotland Yard wasn't accustomed to being ordered around. But he obeyed this command, for not to do so might have meant the death of a kidnaped child. However, as Graystone left the hotel, someone else arrived—and the newcomer was none other than Tony Quinn, the Masked Nemesis of Crime known as The Black Bat, who was ready to face all dangers in a fight for justice against an international combine of crooks and killers! Never has Tony Quinn tackled a more baffling and exciting case!



Follow the Black Bat at His Sleuthing Best in

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Crime Action Novel

By G. WAYMAN JONES

FEATURED IN OUR NEXT ISSUE!

long ago. We've nothing on them, nor on Tuzac. Nothing which can be proved, that is. Therefore, let them go ahead. If they're prevented from attempting to carry out the crime, we'll be compelled to release them shortly. They'll hatch up another scheme and one more case like this will put all of us under the care of a psychiatrist."

"I hoped you'd say that." McGrath arose, beaming. "Well, I got lots of work to do. Oh, yes, not that it makes any difference now, but we found nothing on Edward Shelley's wrecked and burned car which showed it had been tampered with. But we didn't find anything accidentally wrong which could have sent the car off the road either. Good night, Tony. And I'm sorry about accusing you of being the Black Bat. Sometimes I go a little haywire on him."

WHEN Tony Quinn returned to the lab, his overseas call had not yet been completed. He told Carol and Butch what had happened. Then the phone rang and he sprang to answer it. He listened mostly, made some notes and hung up.

"That wasn't London," he said. "It was Washington. The F.B.I. Identification Bureau. I'll explain later on. Now both of you know what McGrath believes. I don't blame him. The facts are all there, but McGrath is wrong. The crime we are trying to stop isn't aimed at the stadium nor anywhere near it."

"Tony—what then?" Carol cried.

•He shook his head wearily.

"I don't know, yet. I'm not sure, except that the stadium is a red herring meant to concentrate the attention of the police upon it. I— There's my call from Scotland Yard." He hurried to the phone. "Yes, this is Tony Quinn of the New York District Attorney's office. Hanley—hello. How are you? How is crime in England these days?"

There was some sort of a reply that made Quinn grin. Then he said, "Hanley, there are three ships due from England in New York tomorrow. I want to know if anyone important is on them. They are the *Liberator*, the *Swanton*, and the *Loch Kenny*. Three medium-sized freighters, all carrying passengers. No, I don't require a whole list of the passengers. All I want to know is someone important. Yes—that would be it. Now give it to me again, slowly. Good, Hanley. You've done us a great favor. Those people? I swear that

not the slightest harm will come to them. Thanks again and good-by."

He hung up and his eyes had become bright and stern.

"I think we're finished for tonight," he said. "Tomorrow, we'll hash it over. Butch, you're to remain here until you are well again. Carol, I may need you in the morning."

"I'll be here, Tony," she said simply. "Butch will need some care too. . . ."

The following night, thousands of people made their way to the huge stadium where a championship fight was to take place. Few noticed, or wondered about the exceptionally heavy police guard. There seemed to be patrolmen every twenty feet. The gold badges of ranking officers were common, too, and there were radio cars ready at every corner, fully manned and prepared for action.

A select group of men noticed this. They spent about half an hour walking about, milling with the crowd and studying the situation. They met, shortly afterward, in a cafe down the street and talked it over. One of the men stepped into a phone booth, dialed a number, and made a terse report.

"Every cop in town is at the stadium," was what he said. "We're all set."

He hung up, emerged, and grinned widely. So did his companions, but their smiles died away suddenly as six husky men strolled into the cafe. Each wore a badge on his lapel and carried a gun in his hand.

One of the crooks started a dash for the phone booth. A gun cracked, and the crook ended his sprint in a sliding dive that ended up against the phone booth, where he lay still.

Meanwhile, at the Shelley Detective Agency, things were progressing also. Young Edward Shelley was speaking to the two score men assembled in the main office.

"All right, we're ready. Remember, you are to patrol and watch. If you see any known criminals, arrest them quietly. You'll be guarding an important social function, but the people attending it are not to even know you are there. All of you have guns. I hope you won't need them. Good luck. Oh, yes, there's a ten-dollar bonus for every man if nothing happens, and you don't alarm people at the party. Get going now."

They filed out to where cars were parked and waiting. In a few moments

they were across town, over a bridge, and heading for a Long Island estate. The cars were in line, like a miniature parade. A siren wailed behind them and two motorcycle cops overtook the party. The cars were waved to the side of the road. Private detectives kept guns ready. This could be some part of a trick.

THEN a large sedan pulled up. From the rear door stepped blind Tony Quinn, Special District Attorney. They all knew him. Silk took his arm and led him to the first car where the men in charge of this detail were seated.

Quinn smiled.

"Sorry, boys," he said, "but this is now police business. Where were you heading?"

"The Welch estate, Mr. Quinn." It was Kearny who spoke, the private detective Quinn had already met in his guise of the Black Bat. "What's up?"

"The party you are supposed to guard has been shifted to the Russell estate. That's three miles west of the Welch place. The two motorcycle police will escort you there."

"But our orders were to cover the Welch estate," the private detective objected. "My name is Kearny. I'm in charge of this detail."

"You now have fresh orders," Quinn answered. "For purposes of security the change was made at the last moment, and only those people invited to the affair have any inkling of the change. You men know me. This is not a trick of any sort. Do as I say—please."

"Okay," Kearny shrugged. "But first I've got to tell the boss."

"You won't be able to reach him, Mr. Kearny," Quinn said. "The Edward Shelley you knew is already under arrest and locked up. The real Edward Shelley is dead. He was the unidentified chauffeur who died in that accident with his father. They were murdered so that this pseudo-Shelley, junior, could show up and take charge of the agency with the express idea of helping plot something that is now ready to take full shape."

"Okay," Kearny said bitterly. "I don't understand it, but I'm taking your orders, Mr. Quinn. That guy we knew as young Shelley was too nice about things. Much too nice. If he had been like his old man, he'd have been tougher. Let your motorcycle jockeys take us to the new assignment and we'll guard the place. Trust us."

"Excellent, Mr. Kearny," Quinn said. "The whole thing will be explained in full detail tomorrow. Remember, no one makes a phone call or goes off anywhere."

"Just let 'em try," Kearny growled.

Quinn waited there while the parade of cars rolled away. Then he hurried back to his sedan. Silk piloted it at a fast clip, and there was a broad grin of anticipation on his face. Silk was dressed in the formal clothing of a butler. . . .

At the rambling, well-shrubbed estate of Martin Welch, every light in the big house was illuminated. The sounds of an orchestra tuning up could be heard clearly. A uniformed butler stood beside the door ready to receive guests.

Behind the house, in a large parking space before the garage, were a score of expensive cars. Their chauffeurs, in uniform, were lounging about. They had roving eyes for chauffeurs, though, and each man kept a hand deep in his side coat pocket.

Half an hour went by and then seven cars, in line, turned into the driveway which led to the house. They came to a stop. Two men got out. One of them turned toward the line of cars.

"Stay as you are, boys," he ordered, "until we get the orders."

The pair walked importantly to the porch and up the steps where they were stopped by the butler. The spokesman reached into his pocket and produced a leather badge case.

"We're from the Shelley Agency," he said. "Mr. Welch knows about it."

"Will you please step inside, gentlemen?" The butler moved back from the doorway. "Mr. Welch is waiting with your instructions."

The men nodded and walked into the house. The butler closed the door.

"This way, gentlemen." He bowed slightly and indicated the living room.

They walked in—and came to a sudden halt. At least a dozen submachine-guns were leveled at them. They looked around wildly. A man with staring blind eyes and with a white cane between his knees, sat comfortably in a large chair.

"Boys," he said, "you're finished before you begin. It might pay to cooperate with us. The one who walks onto the porch and calls in half of the men from those cars will receive some consideration when you come up for sentence."

Both men started talking at once. Silk, in the butler's uniform, drew a gun and

poked it against the ribs of the nearest man.

"You," he said. "Get going."

"One moment," Tony Quinn called out. "It might interest you to know that machine-guns are now trained on every car. If there is a battle, a lot of men are going to die. Tipping them off will be quite useless."

"You'll be committing suicide if you do," Silk added harshly. "I'll shoot if you so much as make a signal. Just ask half the men to come into the house for inside assignments."

CHAPTER XVI

ROUNDUP



ODDING, the crook went to the porch, covered every second by Silk. He called out the necessary orders, retreated, and was taken in tow by two detectives.

The men in the cars got out.

Half of them marched in a column of twos, and were admitted. There was nobody in the hallway except the butler. It was a large hallway with four doors leading off it.

Quite suddenly those four doors bristled with guns. Arms shot ceilingward. Not a sound was made. Nobody tried to break away and run for it. The situation didn't exactly look as if anybody could get away with such an act.

Handcuffs closed around unresisting wrists. The men were led into one of the rooms and lined up against the walls. Then the crook who had ordered them into the house stepped back to the porch and delivered another command. He ordered the rest of the men to line up in front of the porch for instructions.

They obeyed quickly. Behind them, detectives moved from the cover of heavy brush and foilage. It was all over in less than ten minutes.

Captain McGrath, gun in hand, entered the house and approached Tony Quinn.

"It worked like a charm!" he exulted. "Not a shot fired, nobody even scratched. We'll haul these birds off right away—but what about the ringleader?"

Quinn arose.

"Silk, look over the men who are under arrest. Select one who is built like you. Strip him of his clothes and put them on. We've got to move fast."

Quinn and McGrath were already in a police limousine when Silk emerged. He was no longer clad in the immaculate garments of a butler. He assumed a slouching walk, combined with a slight swagger. Silk was no novice at acting out roles like this. As a confidence man, he had specialized in them.

"Fine," McGrath approved. "You should see him, Tony. He looks like a gutter rat. Okay, Silk—take one of the cars those mugs brought. Three detectives will ride with you, crouched down so they can't be seen. Let's go!"

With Quinn and McGrath leading the way, they headed back toward town. McGrath was chuckling contentedly.

"What a sap I was, to fall for their line. Those fight tickets were issued those mugs simply to throw us off the trail. While we watched the stadium, a fine collection of guerrillas, disguised as private detectives, would stick up this party. It was clever to arrange for the party to take place at another estate."

"The affair couldn't be canceled," Quinn said. "It is in honor of some guests from England. People of the royal family, traveling without a lot of publicity. This was the only honor they agreed to accept, and everyone of importance was invited. Mac, I saw a list of the guests. I'll lay any odds that two million dollars worth of diamonds, rubies and emeralds will attend that affair. These men intended to cover the party as private detectives. Mr. Welch had asked the Shelley Agency to furnish plenty of guards. The man who is behind all this arranged it. By suggestion alone, he got things all set."

"Don't tell me," McGrath urged. "Let me guess. Tuzac is out, of course."

"Tuzac was merely used," Quinn explained. "When Wilkerson acted, the ringleader couldn't stop him, and had to take steps. Tuzac ran that gambling place in the hotel and was a good victim. The ringleader had him arrested in another of Tuzac's places."

"And Bert McDonald, the fight promoter—he was used too?"

"In some ways, McDonald unknowingly helped the game along, but he had nothing to do with it," Quinn remarked casually. "Right now, I imagine he's counting the noses of thousands cramming the stadium and wondering just what the gate will be. The fake Shelley, of course, made us believe his father had been investigating McDonald, even to the extent of preparing

a complete file on him."

McGrath leaned back with a satisfied grunt.

"It's Cordee, of course," he said expansively. "As a social column reporter he has an in. He knew all about this party which was kept so secret. He had time to plan the whole thing."

"Wait and see," Quinn grinned.

THE police car made a sudden turn. Quinn was thrown against the cushions and his shoulder shrieked in painful protest. He winced and grunted.

"What's wrong?" McGrath asked.

"My cane," Quinn explained. "When we made that turn, it caught my left thigh."

"You don't say." McGrath's eyes were narrowed. "I'd have sworn the cane didn't move and it was only your shoulder that hit the cushions."

Quinn changed the subject skillfully.

"Driver," he called, "pull over now and let Silk take the lead. You are to follow quite far behind."

Silk's car shot ahead. Shortly they drove straight toward the airport where a flagship was poised and ready for a take-off. Silk's car rolled to a halt and Silk got out. He had been careful not to stop near any of the field lights.

He took a small suitcase from the car and strode importantly in the direction of the largest building. Someone hissed at him from the darkness. He turned quickly. A man had stepped from behind a hangar and was approaching rapidly. He held a suitcase which was a twin to the one Silk carried.

"You idiot," the man in the shadows snapped. "You were told where to meet me. How did it go?"

"Boss, you never seen anything so perfect." Silk's voice was raspy. "We stripped them of everything that glittered. This bag is crammed full. All I got to make sure of, is that the one you got is crammed too. How about it?"

"Take a look." The man extended his bag. Silk reached for it, but his hand overshoot the bag and grasped the man's wrist. Silk gave that wrist an expert twist and at the same time let out a piercing whistle. Detectives, headed by McGrath, streaked from the cars.

"Well, what do you know!" McGrath grunted. His handcuffs encircled the wrists of Roland Manning. "Were you going some place, Mr. Manning? Maybe a

nice little trip to London? Come on—the only trip you'll take is to prison. Frisk him, boys."

* * * * *

Tony Quinn, Captain McGrath, and Silk raised highball glasses in a silent toast. Quinn sat in his usual chair in the library. Silk served the drinks and then sat down.

"I did some work alone, Mac," Quinn explained. "In other phases of the case, the Black Bat moved in. Jointly, we discovered that Manning, McDonald, Tuzac and Cordee all telephoned right after Wilkerson told his story in their presence. Now someone at Headquarters had to summon help and lay those two traps for Wilkerson. Cordee said he phoned his paper. McDonald phoned his secretary. Tuzac called his attorney. They all admitted that and in each case the calls could easily be checked.

"Manning, on the other hand, stated that he telephoned some girl who had been with him when he lost his wallet. She wasn't home, so he said. But Manning phoned those orders. He couldn't say he had telephoned anyone in particular because he knew the person he named would be interviewed. So he had to be satisfied with making his call vague. That aroused my first suspicion.

"Then Wilkerson quite apparently admitted the man who murdered him. Which meant that Wilkerson knew the man and trusted him. Wilkerson had been told that Manning was a financier, an important man, and had been impressed. He let Manning in, and died for it. He would never have let Tuzac in, for instance. Nor McDonald, who is a tough-looking individual and an excellent living portrait of what a gang leader should look like. Therefore, it was Cordee or Manning.

"Both were seen entering the British Legation. Cordee lied like a gentleman and denied he had been there. That was because he was under strict orders to say nothing about this party until it was all over. He had gone to the legation for story color and couldn't admit it.

"Manning, however, freely admitted it and proved his reasons for going. What he intended to do was take those jewels, board the plane for London, and be there just about the time we were waking up to the fact that one of the biggest holdups in history had just come off. Manning, like many wealthy people, wanted more. The bag he carried contained a lot of money. The promised payoff right to the penny.

In London Manning could have sold those gems easily. Long before any description of them was forwarded."

MCGRATH moved restlessly, though completely absorbed.

"But how did you tumble to the fact that Shelley was a fake?" he asked.

"I didn't," said Tony Quinn. "The Black Bat handled that end of it. Don't ask me how he grew suspicious of Shelley, but he visited his office and lifted something that had the fake Shelley's prints on it. He brought this object to me. Silk developed the prints, classified them, and I talked to the F.B.I. I knew that the real Shelley had been in the Army and that his prints were on file. I got their classification and they did not match those of the man we knew as Shelley. The Black Bat also discovered that all operatives had been given new guns and badges. The old ones went to the men who were to stage the holdup.

"That was the real tip-off. There was a bit of newspaper clipping that helped, too. The date of the party tonight depended upon when the important guests would arrive. Manning clipped that item concerning shipping news, but tore it up later and one piece adhered to the bottom of a wastebasket. Silk found it and that added one more little piece to the puzzle.

"One of the pair Willie overheard was Manning's first lieutenant. I suppose Manning showed him the shipping list when they were making plans. Later, he thought he destroyed that list. Manning, as a crook

leader, made his headquarters in the Hotel Wilton.

"Like you, Mac, I was certain the stadium was the main attraction. Manning had to create some sort of a red herring after Wilkerson had talked. So he thought of the fight tonight and made us concentrate on that. But I couldn't see what a gang of fifty men, or so, could do there. I looked for something else—and found it. With the Black Bat's help."

McGrath finished his drink and arose. "I must be running along, Tony. Some of those birds will want to sing and I have to supervise taking their statements. You helped me out of a spot. I'd have been concentrating on the stadium while those guerrillas pulled their job."

Quinn offered his hand and McGrath took it. The burly detective squinted at Quinn. He raised his left hand and moved it toward Quinn's shoulder as if to slap it hard. The hand paused. The arm dropped.

"Nope," McGrath said, "I can't do it. I don't want to know the truth. Not now. I'd be some heel to take advantage of a situation like this after what you just did to help me."

Quinn wore a puzzled frown. "I don't seem to understand what you're talking about, Mac."

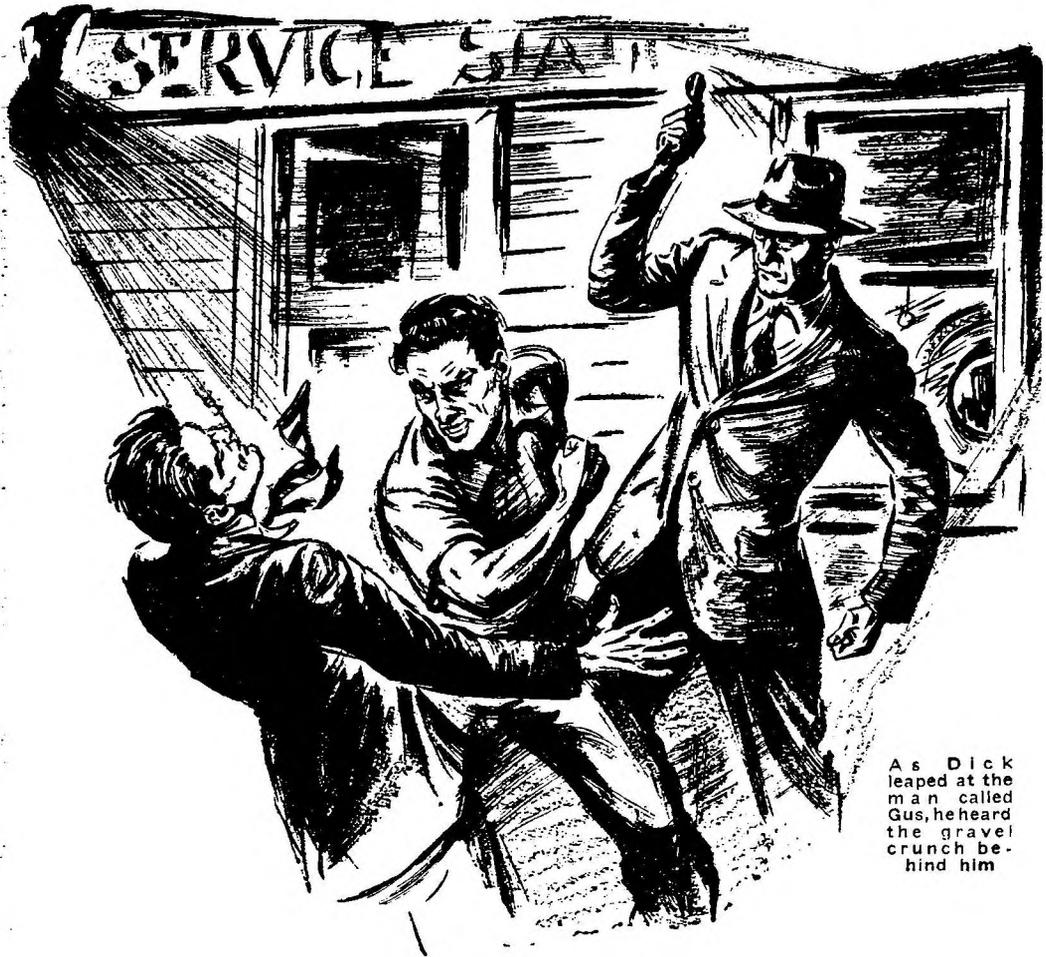
McGrath smiled broadly. "Forget it. Just pretend I never opened my fool mouth."

McGrath strode from the house, still smiling.

Tony Quinn's grin was much broader though.



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As Dick leaped at the man called Gus, he heard the gravel crunch behind him.

DEATH REACHES OUT

By NORMAN A. DANIELS

When vicious crooks besiege a Vermont gas station, Pacific war veteran Dick Hale springs into some whirlwind action!

THE jeep sailed past a huge limousine, squeaky horn clamoring for the right of way. Dick Hale, at the wheel of the jeep, grinned and waved at the laughing people in the big car. He was used to being chuckled at, but for his money the jeep was a better car than the limousine. Especially for what he had in mind for the bantam vehicle.

It was Army surplus and at the gas station he and his brother Ronnie owned, it would come in handy.

Dick had seen those little cars nudge

much bigger ones out of a ditch.

He reached the top of the grade and got set for the first look at his gas station in three years. He had dreamed of it, and battled with the thought of that brick-red filling station always before him. It represented independence, that elusive something for which he had fought.

The station should do well too, Dick thought. Along this pike it was the only filling station for seven miles in either direction, and when tourist travel started

in these hills there should be plenty doing.

The jeep rolled over the crest of the hill as though it, too, was eager for a glimpse of its future home. Dick saw the station and shouted in joy. Nothing had been changed. He knew from Ronnie's letters that while gas had been rationed and travel sadly restricted, business had been practically nil, but Ronnie had weathered it somehow. Now they could do things and go places.

Dick brought the heel of his hand down on the horn button when he was a quarter of a mile away and rolled into the station at forty miles an hour. He tramped on the brakes. A great cloud of dust from skidding wheels enveloped everything. Dick wondered where his brother was, and what he looked like after all those months.

He saw him a moment later. Ronnie peered out of the upstairs window of their living quarters. Dick saw his eyes widen. He vanished and then came out of the doorway with that stiff-legged stride of his.

Dick realized suddenly that he and his younger brother looked a great deal alike. They were both fair, tall and rugged, though Dick had a twenty-pound edge as to weight. He thought that Ronnie looked scrawny.

LATER, while Dick ate a bowl of soup and some crackers, Ronnie just sat there staring at him. Dick grinned.

"Hey, what's eating you?" he asked. "I've been home for twenty minutes now and not a question as to how many Japs I knocked off. Ronnie, is anything wrong?"

"Wrong? Oh no, Dick. Not at all. I'm just glad to have you back, that's all. I've changed a little, I suppose. Living up here all alone. It can get pretty lonesome, you know. A man starts talking to himself. It's all changed now that you're home again."

Dick whacked his brother across the shoulders, arose and picked up his bag. He walked toward the narrow steps leading upstairs. Ronnie moved as if to intercept him, then stepped back and said nothing. Dick climbed the stairs and frowned deeper with every step. There was something wrong. Ronnie seemed glad to welcome him, but he lacked nine-

tenths of his old enthusiasm.

Dick stepped into his room. It looked like paradise. He found his clothes cleaned and neat. He stripped off the uniform and put on slacks and a sport shirt. Outside, somebody honked and Ronnie went out to sell some gas. That wasn't like the kid either. Patrons had never had to honk for service before. Dick wondered if his brother's artificial leg was giving him trouble.

Then Dick saw the two suitcases. They were bulging. He went to Ronnie's room and found that the clothes closet was bare. He opened the suitcases. They were filled with Ronnie's things.

Dick lit a cigarette and walked slowly downstairs. Ronnie was in the little cubby-hole they called an office. Dick sat down on a high stool.

"Come on, kid," he urged, "tell me what's cooking? Why are you packed and ready to go away? You knew I was coming home."

Ronnie turned away. "Why not? I've been here for three years without a day off. Haven't I a right to a little vacation? I thought, when you came back, I'd go away for a while."

Dick dropped a hand on his brother's shoulder and spun him around.

"Let's have the truth this time. You're scared, kid. Something is the matter and I'm cutting myself in on the deal. Spill it."

Ronnie sighed. "Dick, whatever is wrong doesn't concern you. All I'll admit is that I'm in danger as long as I stay here. After a while it may blow over. That's why I planned to take a trip."

"What danger?" Dick asked softly.

"Oh, what's the use?" Ronnie said. "You'll probably find out anyway. Look, Dick, about a year after you went away, all this began. I was working here late one afternoon. Just about dark a big car came swerving down the road. It had a flat, but was running on the rim. It pulled in here and I went out to see what I could do."

"And ran into a peck of trouble," Dick said. "Go ahead."

"There were three men in the car. They aimed guns at me. They forced me to take them in the jalopy you and I owned. One of them carried a black metal box. They threw this into the back of the jalopy and two of them got

in back with it. The other one sat beside me and kept a gun in my ribs all the way."

"Crooks?" Dick asked.

"They'd just held up the Spartan factory in town. The box contained the cash payroll. Anyway I couldn't help myself. I drove as fast as I could make the old crate work, but there were State troopers after us. I couldn't outrun motorcycle cops and fast police cruisers."

"Why didn't you wreck the car and those punks with it?" Dick asked. "Even if it meant some risk to yourself."

"I tried to, but the one with the gun was smart. If I'd turned the wheel, he'd have murdered me. But when the police started to gain and do some shooting, they ordered me to turn off the main road and proceed along a dirt road. You know the one. The Armstrong Trail. A mile north.

"Did they get away?" Dick asked.

"Not for long. All three of them jumped out and scattered. The police came and I told them what had happened. They believed me. It took about an hour to round up the crooks, but no one ever found the metal box full of cash."

DICK whistled low and thoughtfully.

"So that's it," he said. "Keep talking kid."

"The three men were given four years—but they got out of prison this morning. A month after they were sent away, a shifty-eyed man drove up one night and told me I'd better take mighty good care of the money or those crooks would kill me when they got out."

"Good night!" Dick gasped. "You didn't have it, did you?"

"No. But they are certain I did have it—and that I kept it. They claimed each expected the other to take the box when they ran for it. When each denied taking it, the box should have been in the car. Only it wasn't. Now they're coming back and if I don't turn it over, Dick, they'll kill me."

"Think so?" Dick asked. "I don't. Not while I'm here they won't."

"But you don't understand," Ronnie said. "They're about the toughest men I've ever seen. Once a month somebody would drive in and tell me to hang onto

the money or I'd get my throat slit. And I've been spied on a hundred times. By friends of those three men. I'll bet if I tried to leave, I wouldn't get far. But I was going anyway."

"Now think back," Dick urged. "You stopped the car and they piled out. Leaving the box of money in the car, they say. What did you do?"

"There was a lot of shooting. The State Police were firing at the car. So I jumped out too and hugged the ground until I could call out that I wasn't mixed up in this of my own free will."

"And when the State Police got there, who went near the car?"

"Well, there were two civilians with the party—Jerry Carter and Paul Stark, from the village. I guess they were around the car. Especially while I talked to the police."

"Stark always was a bum," Dick commented dryly. "He'd steal anything loose. Ronnie, it won't do just to find out who swiped that money. We've got to defend ourselves against those three mugs. They'd never believe anything except that you kept the cash and hid it."

"They'll kill me if I don't turn it over, Dick," said Ronnie. "I know they will. What am I going to do? I'm not like you. I can't fight worth a darn."

Dick grinned. "If you thought I was good before this man's war, you ought to see me now. I've been taught how to handle a man in sixty different ways. Now listen—you'd better clear out. Go to the farm and stay there. They won't be able to trace you. I'll tell them I just bought the place. Maybe they'll get discouraged and go away."

Ronnie nodded eagerly. "All right. It might work. Anyway they have nothing against you. I'll get my things. I . . . gosh, I haven't got a car. The jalopy fell apart a year ago and I sold it for junk."

"There's a neat little jeep out front," Dick said. "Take it."

"I'll go get my things." Ronnie went to the door. "Thanks, Dick. I was afraid if I ran away, they might burn the place down or something. And I'm going to stop at the State Police barracks and tell them the whole story. That way you'll get some protection too."

"Okay—get going," Dick said. "It's dark outside. If they spot you, I guarantee they won't catch the jeep. Just

head straight across lots and hang on."

Ronnie ran up the stairs. Dick looked around the workshop for some sort of a weapon. He wondered what manner of fool he had been to sell all those war souvenirs. But he knew why. He had seen enough of death and destruction and the things with which they were accomplished. But a nice .45, or a carbine, would have felt good at this moment. Those crooks were bound to come back.

Halfway up the steps, Ronnie stopped and called down.

"Hey, Dick, I forgot. Paul Stark has been hanging around for weeks. I never liked him and he never liked me, but he has certainly stuck around. I think those crooks have been paying him to watch me."

"Okay," Dick called back. "If Paul shows, I'll take him apart a little. Now hurry, will you?"

RONNIE was moving across the floor upstairs when Dick saw the car start pulling in. Some intuition told him it was bringing trouble. He picked up a large screw-driver, turned on the power motor and started the grinding wheel. In less than two minutes he had sharpened the point of the screw-driver to stiletto fineness. He hefted the thing for throwing purposes. It wouldn't be much good.

He thrust it into his belt and walked out. The car had rolled to a stop in front of the tanks.

Dick walked up to it. "Yes, sir, how many?" he asked.

"Fill it up, bud," the man behind the wheel said. "Brimful."

If this was the group just out of prison, Dick thought, they meant to get something for nothing at any rate. He removed the tank cap, thrust the hose into the opening and turned on the juice. Gasoline began to splash into the tank.

Dick, directly behind the car, stretched up a bit to look through the rear window. One of the two men in the rear seat had taken a gun out of his pocket and was spinning the cylinder. Dick bent hastily, took the screw-driver out of his belt and crept to the left rear tire. He sliced a gash in the side of the tire, forced the sharp screw-driver deeper, until the air hissed. Then he pulled it out. That slow leak would flatten the tire in about five minutes.

He attacked the right rear in the same way. Now, if Ronnie saw a chance to get out of the building and reach the jeep, he could hightail and they would be able to do little about stopping him. If they opened fire, Dick was determined he would start something fast.

He shut off the tank motor, hung up the hose and put the cap in place. Then he walked around to the side of the car. They didn't even give him time to say how much the gas cost. The rear door opened and a gun was pointed at Dick.

"What's the idea?" he asked. "If this is a stick up, you sure came to the wrong place. There isn't ten bucks in the till."

"Just keep your mitts up a little, chum," the man with the gun said.

He got out, put a hand against Dick's chest and shoved him back toward the station where the light was better. The other two men got out and lined up beside the gunman.

"Well, is this the guy?" the gunman asked. "It's been a long time, and I never did get a good look at him."

"Sure it's the hick," the taller of the other two said. "I made up my mind I'd never forget him. Look, pal, maybe we're all wrong about you. Maybe not. If you hijacked that dough so the cops wouldn't get it, okay. Just hand it over. We'll give you a cut and be on our way. But if you spent it, we'll slice the heart out of you."

"Worse than that," one of the others commented sharply. "We spent a long time in stir earning that dough. It's ours, so come through with it."

Dick hoped the look of astonishment on his face seemed genuine.

"What is this?" he demanded. "What are you guys talking about? What money?"

"I told you it would be like this." The gunman glanced at his pals. "He cached it or spent it."

"Wait a minute," Dick said hastily. "I'm beginning to understand. You think the man who owned this gas station has some of your money. Well, maybe he has, I wouldn't know. I just bought the place two days ago. Nice and cheap. The fellow who owned it acted as if he wanted to get away quickly."

The gunman smirked. "What a story! Listen, pal, we all had a good look at you. Carlo there, says it was you. Gus

is sure of it, and so am I. Now stop clowning and kick in—or you'll kick off. Know what I mean?"

Dick shrugged. "If you don't believe me, there's nothing I can do. Check up. Find out the truth. That's what I'm telling you."

Carlo, the smaller and darker man, stepped closed.

"If that's the truth, I'll apologize, pal. But it ain't, and I never apologize. We've had you watched plenty. We talked to the guy who kept tabs on you. He said this station wasn't sold as of a couple of hours ago and you were still here. Anyway, don't you think we remember you? Now stop fooling around. Where's the dough?"

"I haven't got it," Dick said. "I never had it."

THE man with the gun stepped back. The weapon stayed level.

"Take him inside," he ordered the others. "I'll keep the gun on him. If he lifts a hand, I'll plant one in his middle. Go to work on him. We can make him talk."

Dick looked around helplessly. Resistance in the face of that gun and the killer was useless. Yet he wanted to prevent them from going inside. Ronnie had to have his chance to get clear, and the only exit from upstairs would be blocked.

Dick thought he saw a shadowy form move just off the side of the highway. It didn't appear again.

His mind went back to the predicament he was in. They would continue to believe he was Ronnie. He looked so much like his brother. They would work him over, but Dick had undergone some of that before. He could take it. Ronnie wouldn't be able to.

Suddenly Dick made a sideward jump. The gun cracked and the bullet slapped into the side of the gas station. Dick charged straight at the man called Carlo. He reached him while the thug was trying to draw a gun. Dick drove a punch to the man's middle and followed it up with another to the jaw. Both connected.

He let Carlo fall and leaped at the man called Gus. He had the punch wound up and Gus was backing away hastily, but Dick couldn't look in two directions at once. He heard gravel crunch be-

hind him, tried to twist about, but he was too late. The gun butt smashed him across the back of the head.

He wasn't out, but was so groggy his muscles and nerves refused to coordinate. Before he could force them back into working order, the crooks had him. He was hustled into the gas station and the window curtain was pulled down. Dazedly, Dick wondered if Ronnie had escaped and was lying in wait near the jeep. He fervently prayed so.

Carlo, the dark-featured man who had gone down under Dick's fists, was sitting on the edge of the work-bench. He took a knife from his pocket and touched a spring. The blade flew out. Carlo looked at it fondly.

"For nearly busting my jaw you're going to get plenty," he promised. "But it won't be anything compared to what I'll dish out unless you come through with the dough. Maybe you think you're tough. Pal, you don't know what a tough guy is."

Dick thought he did, but he made no comments. It was coming now. He hoped he could make enough racket so that Ronnie could at least jump out of the window. Dick bit his lip. That was one thing Ronnie could not do—jump out of the window. Not with an artificial leg.

Carlo stepped closer. The other pair held Dick's arms tightly. The knife started toward his throat. At that instant came a dragging sound upstairs.

Instantly, three guns appeared. Carlo shoved the muzzle of his weapon into Dick's middle.

"See what that was," he told the others. "If anybody is upstairs, rub 'em out. We don't want any witnesses."

"Wait a minute," Dick said. "I guess I lose this little game. My kid brother is upstairs. He doesn't know anything about this. I've got the money. It's still in the tin box and well-hidden."

Six eyes glittered in anticipation. But Carlo reiterated his command to bring Ronnie down. Dick raised his voice.

"Ronnie—it's okay! Nothing to worry about. Just a little misunderstanding. Do what they want."

Two minutes later Ronnie was shoved into the room. He staggered across the floor and almost fell. Dick's face went dark with rage.

"Take it easy," he snapped. "The kid

only has one leg. The left one is a false leg."

Carlo grinned. "Say, he looks more like the grease monkey who drove us than this other one does."

"You're crazy!" Dick shouted.

"Maybe," Carlo said. "Maybe not. You might be fronting for him. Anyway I got me an idea if we stick a blade into this guy, you'll sing faster than if we stuck you a little. . . Gus, work him over."

Dick looked down at the gun hard against his stomach, looked up into Carlo's sardonic eyes and made a decision.

"If you lay a finger on him, you can slice me to ribbons before I'll tell where that money is. I know when I'm licked. I told you that. Let him alone and I'll take you to where the tin box is hidden."

CARLO mulled that over for a few moments and decided Dick might be right. The money was more important. Anyway, once they had it, they could also get some fun out of these two afterward.

"Jamey," Carlo said, "you stay with the kid. Gus and I will take this other guy and get the dough."

"No, you don't!" the tall crook named Jamey shouted. "How do I know but you two will leave me here holding the bag? I don't trust you guys."

Carlo showed his teeth in a snarl. "I ought to bust you one. Okay—you and Gus go with him for the dough and I'll take care of the kid. And listen, if you run out on me, I'll start gunning for you and never stop!"

Jamey seized Dick by the arm and hustled him out of the gas station. Gus followed and Carlo satisfied his outraged nerves by slapping Ronnie across the face half a dozen times. Ronnie didn't make a sound.

Dick found his throat dry. He had to do something. He was leading this pair on a wild goose chase, and when they brought him back, they would kill Ronnie, then him. Death was already reaching out for both of them.

Dick stepped up to the sedan. "If we're going in that," he said, "you'd better take a good look at your tires. I'd say you ran over a couple of hundred pieces of glass or some tacks."

Jamey kicked the flat tire and cursed. Gus was more practical.

"Okay, wise guy, I think you did that. But there's some kind of a crate over there in the dark. It'll run, so just get started toward it. And, pal, you're not giving us a wrong steer by any chance?"

"I said I'd take you to the place where I hid the metal box, and I will. Don't you think I know what will happen to me and my brother if I trick you?"

"Yeah—and take it from me, you wouldn't like it, pal. Especially the way Carlo knocks a man off. Hey, what kind of a crate is this?"

"It's an old jeep," Dick explained. "I bought it a couple of weeks ago for handling road jobs."

"Get in and drive," Jamey commanded. "If anybody you know passes us, we're a couple of customers with a car stalled down the road a few miles. You're taking us back. Get that?"

"You're the top sergeant," Dick said, and grimaced.

Both men clambered into the jeep. Dick started it and backed carefully out of the yard. He glanced toward the station, but the window curtain was all the way down and prevented him from seeing anything except the shadow of Carlo.

When he reached the highway he stepped the jeep up to thirty-five. He headed in the direction of the Old Armstrong Trail, because they would expect him to go toward the spot where their escape car had been stalled.

"I shoved the box under my car that day," he explained. "Nobody saw it. They were too busy looking for you. After they searched the car, I got the box under the seat. Then I drove away when they said I could. I turned north and parked for a while. As soon as I knew they weren't suspicious of me, I buried the box. It's just this side of the bridge across that river. Maybe you crossed the bridge."

"Yeah, we did. Okay, pal, you just find it for us and you're in the clear. We'll make Carlo lay off you too, even if you did slug him. He had it coming."

"Just hurry it up," Gus warned. "You leave Carlo alone with somebody like that kid brother of yours and he goes off the handle. Especially when he's got a knife in his hand."

The jeep shot forward so fast the two-ex-convicts were thrown off balance.

"Hey!" Gus said, "You trying to play some kind of a trick? My gun almost

went off that time."

"I'm just taking your advice about stepping on it," Dick said. "I don't want to get back and find my brother sliced up. Carlo struck me as being slightly off the handle. You said go fast."

They hung on as the jeep gained speed. They topped a hill, and at the bottom of it they could see the wooden bridge over the wide river. Dick's jaw was clamped tight.

AT THAT moment he was not driving along a Vermont highway in peacetime. He was riding that jeep over shell-pocked, rutted dirt roads on some Pacific island where every bush and every turn might secrete a band of desperate Japs. He was alerted against air raids. He had orders what to do in the event of either kind of attack. Leap from the jeep and take cover. He had done it time and again. It was like jumping from a bucking bronc, but he had practiced enough to know how to do it.

He pondered the idea of turning the jeep over. It might work, but if one of those crooks wasn't killed or knocked out, he would use his gun. It was too risky. There had to be some other way, and not far from here. Dick had to get back to the gas station before Carlo's impatience took the form of sadism. He would kill Ronnie without the slightest show of mercy.

He and Ronnie were going to be killed anyway. Dick had a firm conviction about that. Taking a poke at Carlo had been a mistake. Carlo wouldn't forget, and his idea of revenge was death.

Dick thought then, that of all the spots he had ever been in, this one was the worst. And yet he had come all the way home to it. Thousands of miles. Was his life going to end so quickly, after all the plans he had made? Had he escaped snipers' bullets, shell fragments, air bombardments and everything else the Japs could throw at him to end up like this?

His jaw got tighter than ever.

Dick was doing about sixty. In the jeep it seemed like a hundred and sixty. Gus was yelling orders for him to slow down. Dick's lips parted slightly in a grin. He threw his head back.

"I'll turn off at the bottom, and stop beside the bridge. Don't worry, the brakes are swell."

Nearing the bottom he braced his left foot firmly against the floor of the jeep and started curving his left arm in front of his face. At better than sixty, the jeep reached the entrance to the bridge and kept going. Gus made a savage swipe with the gun butt, but probably missed on purpose. It must have entered his thick skull that they might be holding guns on Dick, but he held their lives in the hollow of his palm.

Dick's arm came up. He gave the wheel a hard yank. The jeep hit the aged wooden railing. It plowed through. For one sickening moment the four wheels were spinning madly against nothing but air while the jeep started down toward the river.

Both Dick's feet propelled him upright and acted like pistons as he leaped clear of the jeep. He had one last impression that both Gus and Jamey were holding their arms over their eyes, then there was a terrific splash somewhere to his right.

Dick was under water too. He fought his way to the surface, breathed in some air and started swimming. He didn't look for the pair of thugs. If they couldn't swim, that was their hard luck.

When he reached the shore, he climbed up and stood there shivering slightly as he regained his composure. Then he started up the bank toward the highway and trotted along it. This was going to take some time, but couldn't be helped. He kept on going, never breaking into a mad run because that would tire him too quickly. A steady loping trot covered ground and conserved strength too. He had learned a lot in the Army.

It seemed hours before he came to Maxwell's produce stand alongside the road. It was closed now, and had been for two weeks, if the Maxwells retained their old schedule. But there was a telephone inside. He doubted it had been cut off yet.

He smashed the padlock with a stone, forced the door open and sped for the phone. As it buzzed in his ear, he offered a fervent prayer of thanks. He called the State Police barracks. They were eight miles away, but those motorcycle boys and radio patrol cars would move fast.

Dick started his run back. As he neared the gas station he saw that it was still lit up, though the pump lights had

been extinguished to discourage any business. Dick stopped long enough to pick up a thick piece of wood that would be a good club.

DESPITE his feverish anxiety to cover ground fast, he was shaking. Wet clothes and dry cold air were a combination to insure shivers.

He wondered if he would find Ronnie dead. If Carlo's insane homicidal tendencies had boiled over. Dick knew one thing—if Carlo had killed Ronnie, they would never take Carlo to prison and the electric chair. Not even if he started shooting as Dick rushed him.

There was an ominous silence at the gas station. Club raised, Dick maneuvered toward the door. He tried to peer through it, but couldn't. The curtain was too thick. He grasped the knob, turned it slowly, and took a long breath. Then he flung the door wide.

Ronnie lay in the middle of the floor. His false leg was stretched out stiffly. His head was covered with blood, and there was more of it on the floor.

Carlo was not in sight. Dick dropped the club and knelt beside Ronnie, turned him over. Ronnie's face was gray, but he was breathing. His pulse was fairly good.

"So you came back alone." Carlo's voice came from the open door.

Dick rose slowly. The thug had his gun ready for business. Carlo said nothing until he had kicked the door shut.

"Well, well, don't tell me you got rid of Gus and Jamey so easy. That was a favor, pal. Now if you'll tell me where the dough is, I'll just keep it all to myself and as a reward I'll shoot you through the back of the head where it won't hurt. I had other ideas, but when a guy does me a favor, I reward him."

Dick glanced at the alarm clock on the work-bench. He figured that slightly more than ten minutes had elapsed since he had called the police. He side-stepped slightly until he was in line with the shaded window, and half-raised his arms.

"You shouldn't have told me that, Carlo," he said. "Because if you're going to kill me anyway, why should I tell you where the money is? And I'm not worried about your using a knife on me. To do that you have to come close. A Jap

tried it on me once. He's dead. So get out your knife and let's see if you're any better than the Jap."

Carlo's broad grin faded. Then it came back wider than ever.

"But, pal," he protested, "I can keep the roscoe on you and carve up that brother of yours while you watch me. That wouldn't be so nice."

Dick made two more side-steps.

"Stand where you are," Carlo said. "What's the idea?"

"Do you want to dicker?" Dick asked. "I'm willing to pay for my brother's life. I told the truth about selling the gas station. The new owner takes possession tomorrow and the cash he paid us—is hidden here. Let my brother go. Give him a good start and I'll show you where the money is hidden. You can have it."

Carlo's eyes were avaricious. He was falling for this line—hard. And every second that went by was giving the State troopers more time to get here.

"Nix," Carlo said. "The kid stays. You show me where the dough is or I'll go to work on him and shoot the legs from under you if you try to stop me."

Carlo was standing in front of the curtained window now. The overhead light was directly above him, so he threw a sharp shadow on the window shade. A neat shadow, gun and all. Dick thought he heard a car in the distance, then heard the gravel grate just a trifle.

Dick spoke as loudly as he dared.

"You're a dangerous man, Carlo! You got out of prison this morning and I know you'll fight it out with anyone. You'll kill me finally—I'm sure of that. I guess I have to take my chances and let you have the money!"

There were two quick shots. They smashed the window, slit the shade and hit Carlo in the side. He reeled, tried to turn around and Dick jumped him.

Carlo was not wounded badly. He was fighting like a tiger when the door opened and State troopers came in. Dick had Carlo against the wall by then. He carefully measured the crook for a haymaker, but at the last moment pulled it slightly, contenting himself with a glancing blow off Carlo's jaw.

Dick explained swiftly to the troopers.

"I ditched the other pair in the river," he said then. "If they can swim, they'll either be trying to get back here or be close by the bridge."

TWO men were dispatched to round up Gus and Jamey, if they hadn't drowned.

Ronnie came out of it under the ministrations of Dick and a trooper. They got him to his feet.

"Carlo stepped up to me and hit me over the head with his gun two or three times," he told them. "That's all I remember."

Dick glanced at the handcuffed, surly prisoner.

"Carlo," he said grimly, "you knocked my brother out for just one purpose. So you could slip away from here while the two pals you're doublecrossing were gone with me, to the spot where you hid that tin box of money two years ago, and make sure it was safe. With Ronnie unconscious he wouldn't know you were gone, and you could be back before your pals were. Ronnie didn't take it. You leaped out of the car with the box under your arm. Your pals didn't notice. You hid it!"

Dick stepped close and looked down at Carlo's muddy shoes.

"Yes, and I know where you hid it. Somewhere in the field where Ronnie stopped the car two years ago. That's clay on your shoes and that field is all clay. You got that on your shoes tonight, then you crossed Anderson's buckwheat field. The grain is imbedded in the clay dust. You finally stopped near a spring. That's where the fresh mud on those shoes came from. The tin box is hidden there. When I left here three years ago, there was only one spring there—and probably it's there still. Just beyond the buckwheat field."

"The kid swiped that dough," Carlo said sullenly. "He admitted it. That's why I slugged him."

"Let's take a look," the State Trooper sergeant in charge suggested. "I remember that case. We really wondered if Ronnie had nailed the cash. I'm not making any accusation, Dick, but the tin box had better be near the spring."

They took Carlo along. Dick found the spring. He saw where the ground had been hastily dug with a flat piece of board. Dick used the same board and burrowed in the wet ground until he was forced to admit that the tin box was not there.

Carlo laughed. "The kid told me he had the dough. I slugged him once and

he got scared and told me he'd hid it here. So I knocked him out and came over here to look for it. The tin box wasn't there."

The State Police Sergeant shook his head. "I'm sorry, Dick, but Ronnie will have to come with us until this is straightened out."

Dick turned to Ronnie. "Did you hide that box of money?" he asked.

"No," Ronnie said. "I didn't. Carlo is lying."

"I wish we could believe that," the State Police Sergeant said. "Let's go."

Dick trailed behind them, his brain whirling. It looked as though Ronnie had really kept the money. That is, so far as anyone except himself could believe. Suddenly Dick started running until he caught up with the others.

"Sergeant," he said, "I know where that money is! Drive us into town. I tell you I'm sure."

"Did you retrieve it then?" the sergeant asked. "And hide it somewhere else?"

"I'll answer any questions you like. Later on. All I ask now is a break. How about it?"

"What can we lose?" The sergeant shrugged. "Come on. Ronnie, stay close by me."

They reached the gas station and found a patrol car there with two sorry looking ex-convicts in it, both handcuffed. They looked like drowned rats. Then the procession started toward the village. Under Dick's direction they proceeded along a street near the center of town and came to a stop in front of a ramshackle old cottage.

"Sergeant," Dick said, "line those three mugs up and force them to go on the porch and stand right in front of the door. All the rest of us must stand to one side and out of sight if possible."

GRUNTING something, the sergeant did as Dick requested. Carlo, Gus and Jamey were lined up. They all moved stealthily. Then Dick rapped hard on the door. A light was turned on, the door opened, and a thin-faced man peered out. He turned pale.

"No!" he screeched. "No, you don't have to kill me. I just took it so nobody else would find it. You got to believe me! You got—"

Dick grabbed him before he could slam

the door. He turned the man over to the sergeant.

"This is Paul Stark," he explained. "A sniveling small-town crook. He kept an eye on Ronnie and was paid for it by these crooks. He knew they'd be here so he hid somewhere near the gas station. When Carlo went for the tin box he had hidden, Stark watched him dig it up and rebury it near the spring. Then Stark dug it up again. I'll bet it's in the house or buried in the back yard."

They found the box in ten minutes. Ronnie was freed.

"Gosh, Dick!" he said. "Everything turned out okay except for your jeep. I'm sorry."

"About the jeep?" Dick grinned. "Huh! Easy to see you know little about

them. Tomorrow I'll take a line, swim into the river and find the jeep. I'll have it pulled out, and half an hour later it'll ride us back to the gas station. Those cars can take it, Ronnie."

"So can the Hales," Ronnie said. "Especially you."

"Me?" Dick scoffed. "Listen, Ronnie, I haven't forgotten when that drunken hired hand went amuck in our tractor. He was running me down while I dozed near the end of the field. You pulled me out from under even though it meant you were knocked down and lost your leg. This is some of the interest on what I owe you for that. The principal will have to wait for something more important than three ex-convicts. Let's go home. We've a lot of chinning to do."



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THE GRIM REAPER stalks the cloistered halls of learning in Q. Patrick's gripping crime thriller, *MURDER AT CAMBRIDGE*, appearing complete in January THRILLING MYSTERY NOVEL. It's a "must" for detective fans.

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RICHARD CURTIS VAN LOAN, the world's greatest sleuth, battles to track down an evil band of killers in *THE CHINESE PUZZLE*, a complete mystery novel by Robert Wallace which is featured in the current issue of *THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE*.

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WHEN rich and conservative Peter Ander goes berserk there's murder in the wind in *THE GRAVE MUST BE DEEP*, by Norman A. Daniels, the exciting book-length mystery novel in *POPULAR DETECTIVE* for January. It's a whodunit that will keep you guessing from start to finish!



Angel kept her distance from her uncle's body, standing behind the rough board counter

HOMICIDE AT HANGOVER HOLLOW

By JASON LEE

Cantankerous women can make gawky Sheriff Shank Chatwood run for cover, but not too far away to stem a crime wave!

SHERIFF "SHANK" CHATWOOD felt low enough to walk under a rug without bending his knees. He rued the day that the good citizens of Hangover Hollow had elected him sheriff. And he had a dark suspicion that the good citizens of Hangover Hollow were rueing that day also.

Death and robbers were galloping around the town with a free and unhampered hand. Unhampered because

so far Shank hadn't found so much as a small hatchet toward putting the axe on either one or the other.

Shank didn't look much like a sheriff anyway. He bore a close resemblance to a motheaten cowpoke just come to town after a bad winter. Shank spent enough for his fancy Western regalias, but he just wasn't constructed to look well in any kind of clothes.

He was six-feet-three, weighed one-

sixty, and gave the impression of being a bunch of entirely unrelated arms and legs thrown together at random. His freckled face was long and thin, and regardless of how much tractor oil and water he put on his red head, no two hairs would ever go in the same direction at the same time. But most people found Shank likable enough, with his infectious grin and friendly, easy-going manner.

On this dank Monday ayem, though, he wore the expression of a bankrupt undertaker. Even his big black dog, Booger Boy, had caught Shank's miseries and was watching his master with moist-eyed sympathy.

Shank frowned at some illegible notes that lay on his battered roll-top desk, and wished again that he hadn't been so eager to make a start for himself and quit school so soon. He should have finished the third grade anyway. If he had, he would be able to read his own writing now. Or write so he could read it. As it was, he had to fall back on his memory, which wasn't too good. What he needed was a secretary.

A secretary! Hm-m-m! Shank gazed out at the fog which was rolling down from the hills and had a vision of a smooth, delectable blonde. Shank forgot his miseries until Susie Lou Puffstone kicked the vision down. Susie Lou had an annoying habit of jumping down Shank's long skinny neck every time he even looked cross-eyed at another girl.

Susie Lou was Shank's fiancee and she was neither delectable nor blond. She was dark, had stringy black hair, and was what she called pleasingly plump. She was also fat.

Shank had never been certain how he got engaged to her. It had happened at the schoolhouse dance. Susie Lou had asked him to take her out to the wagon so she could take off her shoes and rest her feet. Of course Shank had taken some deep samples from a jug of applejack which was in her pappy's wagon, but he'd almost dropped when they went back in and Susie Lou announced they were engaged.

SHANK couldn't see any way out of it. Susie Lou's pappy, Big George Puffstone, had escorted two of his incumbent son-in-laws to the altar with a scattergun. And Shank, as a high county

official, felt it would be beneath his dignity to be herded to the altar in such a manner.

The phone rang. Shank groaned when he heard Susie Lou's shrill voice over the wire.

"I guess you're not feeling so good this morning, huh?" she began.

Shank allowed as to how he guessed he wasn't.

"Well, it's a surprise to me that you don't resign and let somebody who could do it take your job. I been listening in on our party line and the things people are saying about you are embarrassing for papa and me. With me engaged to you and everything. You should think of us, Shank!"

"I'll catch the rascals pretty soon now," Shank defended himself. "But it takes time."

"Time, hah!" she screeched. "It's been six weeks since the first robbery took place and you still haven't found a clue. I bet you wouldn't know a clue if one kicked you in the face. Time. Hah! As I said, Shank, it's embarrassing for papa and me."

"Well, sweetie pie, I know I'm not good enough for you," Shank said, "so if you want to call the engagement off, I'll understand."

"Oh, so now you're trying to get out of marrying me! Why, you philander."

She hung up in a huff. Shank sighed, intensely relieved. But his relief didn't last long. For the door burst open and Horace Brass, the district attorney, and his stepson, "Chubby" Cadbury, shoved in.

Horace Brass was egg-shaped and carried himself with an exaggerated self-importance. Up and down he was about five-six, and he weighed two hundred. His big florid face resembled a mean horse Shank had once owned.

Chubby Cadbury was an overfed young man with straight blond hair and a permanent sneer on his fat face. He went in for fast cars, women, and lots of befuddling beverages. He also had a great love for cards, although cards did not return this affection. Recently he'd been trailing around after his stepfather, claiming he meant to enter politics.

Horace slammed a soft, fat fist down on Shank's desk.

"What have you done about the Simpson robbery and dog killing?" he demanded.

"Why, nothin' yet," Shank admitted. "Just heard about it about a half-hour ago."

"Do you realize," Horace went on sternly, "that this is the sixth robbery and dog killing in less than two months? Do you realize that all the victims are important people in this community, Shank?"

Shank said he understood all of that.

"Yeah," Chubby Cadbury sneered, "he understands it now that you've drawn him a picture of it, Pops."

Shank gave Chubby a cold glance that indicated he could get along without any help from the sidelines. Horace beamed at his stepson.

"A smart deduction, my boy!"

He whirled back on Shank, jolted his outsize bread basket against the corner of the desk, and all but knocked himself out.

"You better put a girdle on that," Shank suggested. "You're goin' to hurt yourself real bad some day if you don't."

Horace looked as if he were going to blow a half-dozen gaskets. With a trembling hand he pulled a bag of chocolates out of his pocket. He plopped two big fat ones into his mouth and masticated them fast. Horace ate chocolates to soothe his nerves, his doctor having advised that smoking was out.

"Now, you listen to me, Shank Chatwood!" Horace blustered. "You haven't even commenced to solve these robberies and dog killings. It's got so people are afraid to go to bed at night. It's a disgrace! I'm going to take action. If you haven't made some progress on these heinous crimes by dark tonight, I'm going to call the governor, have you removed from office and a new sheriff appointed!"

"That's telling him, Pops!" Chubby applauded.

"Furthermore," Horace continued, "I think I'll suggest Chubby here for the new sheriff. A finer, more fearless young man never walked the streets of Hangover Hollow!"

Chubby preened himself, and Shank spat disgustedly into his spittoon.

"Why, that fat little squirt couldn't catch fleas in a dog pound!" the sheriff said.

Chubby edged forward. "Lissen," he said ominously, "don't you go saying things like that!"

"Shut up!" Shank snapped coldly.

"Don't give me none of your lip or I'll shove both of 'em back through your teeth. Or let Booger Boy do it for me."

AT THE mention of the dog, Chubby's pale little narrow-set eyes slithered to the dog, and he edged his stocky body back.

"You better keep that dog off me," he warned. "I'll kill him the first time he touches me."

Shank unfolded his six-feet-three from his chair with a surprising amount of speed. He shoved his hands into his hip pockets and moved toward Chubby who retreated against the wall. Shank shot his thin face down into Chubby's fat one.

"You touch my dog," Shank said softly, "and you'll find out about Life Here-after a heap sooner than you'd ever figured on! Get that, squirt?"

Chubby shuffled uneasily and looked at his stepfather for support.

"Now, listen, Shank!" Horace shouted. "You can't threaten my boy like that. You get busy and solve these crimes or I'm calling the governor. That's final!"

After they left, Shank flopped back down in his chair and tried to figure the thing out. He realized that some of the dogs which had been poisoned had been dear to their owners. In two cases he happened to know the owners thought a heck of a lot more of their dogs than they did some members of their family. Besides the dogs had belonged to well-to-do people and the whole thing was a serious matter.

According to the local vet, the dogs had been poisoned by strychnine given to them in candy. Horace Brass contended that the vet didn't know from nothing. Horace said dogs wouldn't eat candy, and if they did, they'd be sure to chew it up first and the strychnine would be so bitter they'd spit it right out.

Shank knew better. Booger Boy had a sweet tooth. You could toss him a half-dozen chocolates and he'd gulp one after the other without chewing up any of them. Shank knew other dogs that would do the same thing.

But tracing the strychnine was the bad chore. Most everybody around Hangover Hollow bought it in small or big quantities sometime during the year for rat and gopher poison and such like. So most anybody might have a supply on hand.

Shank was really worried about the dogs. He knew how he'd feel if something happened to Booger Boy. Truth was, he was a lot more worried about the dogs than he was about the robberies, because the people who'd been robbed were mostly insured anyway. You could replace stolen articles, but you couldn't replace a dog.

And every person who had been robbed had been a victim after the family dog was killed. Which meant the robber was a thirty-third degree polecat.

Most of the stolen stuff ran to money, diamonds, and other jewelry which could be turned into cash easily. Of course the robber wasn't turning anything into cash in Hangover Hollow, for that would be about as good as signing his own bastille sentence. Naturally he was taking them to some fence in a nearby city. Shank had notified the police in all nearby cities, and hoped to pick up something from them, but so far nothing had come of it. Either the robber was smart enough to dismount the jewels before he sold them, or else he had a good fence.

However, things like Mrs. Guffey's diamond bracelet and diamond ear screws, and Mrs. Delson's dragon-shaped brooch were heirlooms which couldn't be dismounted very well, and which were so well-known they wouldn't be of any use except maybe for keepsakes. Shank didn't figure a fence would be eager to pay for keepsakes, so the robber likely still had the heirlooms in his possession.

Shank felt he'd done everything he could, but he'd had bad luck so far. After the second robbery, Shank had got a few select citizens to patrol the community for several nights. But the night after he had called the patrollers off, another dog was killed, another house robbed. And Shank realized he couldn't ask citizens to stay up every night indefinitely.

But that didn't help Shank's position any. He was in the midst of what practically amounted to a hornet's nest. The citizenry of Hangover Hollow were demanding drastic action; Susie Lou was screaming that her family honor had been blackened by Shank's inability to nab the dog killer and robber; and Horace Brass was making a threat to call the governor. Shank didn't doubt that Horace would, either. Horace Brass always kept promises like that.

A woman's piercing scream jerked Shank halfway out of his chair. He looked out the window to see Chubby Cadbury's low-swung yellow convertible go careening by. Shank muttered blasphemy. Something ought to be done about Chubby's driving. Chubby took a lot of sadistic pleasure in cutting down Main Street at seventy, sending women and children to the curbs, screaming, and scattering motorists and any other vehicles unfortunate enough to be on the street. Some day the blue-blooded skunk would kill somebody.

SHANK figured Chubby was heading for Strongfort, a nearby city. Probably he was tired of doing his home work on politics and was going to the city to practise his extracurricular studies in pasteboards, petticoats and liquid pain killer.

The phone jangled. Shank cringed, fearing it was Susie Lou again. It wasn't. It was Horace Brass, fit to be tied.

Phineas Aspinwall, the grocer, had been found dead.

Shank hung up, herded Booger Boy into a cell and locked him up despite the dog's mournful protests. It was a mean thing to do, but with all the poisoning going on, Shank preferred Booger Boy in a cell rather than a grave.

When Shank got to the grocery store, a crowd had accumulated and Horace Brass was swaggering about telling everybody to keep calm, that Phineas' death was plain suicide, and that he, Horace Brass, would attend to everything.

Angel Aspinwall, Phineas' niece, who clerked in the store, was behind the counter, crying softly. It occurred to Shank that Angel was in reality an angel, as she looked like one, walked like one and was all in all his choice of a delectable chick. She had spun gold hair, big blue eyes, and curves that awed Shank. He felt like he ought to go over and comfort her, but word of such action would get back to Susie Lou faster than a cat with its tail on fire could move.

Shank finally got the crowd out of the store, and he and Horace went back to look at the remains. Phineas was slumped in a chair in the storeroom near the pot-bellied stove, with a .38 revolver lying on the floor in front of the rough board counter where the grocer weighed out supplies. The bullet

had entered the back of his head and his face was not nice to look at.

"Plain case of suicide," Horace stated pompously. "Couldn't be anything else. I wouldn't have bothered you except as a formality."

"Well, it don't look like suicide to me," Shank said shortly. "Never heard of a man shooting hisself in the back of the head before."

"How many suicides did you ever see before?" Horace demanded sarcastically.

"We-ell, not any, but—"

"Hah!" Horace sneered. "That's what I thought! So don't go trying to make a mystery out of it so you can get folks' minds off the dog murders and robberies. I say it's suicide, and it is. Wait'll Doc Simmons gets here, and he'll tell you the same thing."

Shank didn't say any more, but he knew it was not suicide. He went back into the store and asked Angel if she felt up to answering a few questions. Angel dried her big blue eyes and said she did.

It seemed that Phineas came down about seven every morning and opened the store. Angel didn't come down till ten. This morning when she got down, the store was still closed. She had become alarmed, called in help, and they had discovered her uncle.

"Do you know of any reason why Phineas would kill hisself?" Shank asked.

Angel thought it over. "Well, of course he wasn't feeling so well because of the new chain store opening across the street, and with Aunt Emma acting like she did. But that doesn't look like enough reason for him to commit suicide."

"How do you mean the way Aunt Emma acted?" Shank said, and knew that any way Emma Aspinwall acted would be wrong. She was a twenty-one jewel battle-ax.

Angel looked uneasy.

"Well, you see, Uncle Phineas wanted Aunt Emma to give him some of their savings—all of their savings are in her name—to modernize the store so he'd stand a chance with the new one. But Aunt Emma refused and they had words about it. I knew Uncle Phineas went out last night feeling very bad, and I think he spent the night down here. He sometimes does—or did."

"See there?" Horace crowed. "Phineas

wanted to remodel the store, his wife wouldn't let him, and he killed himself. There's your motive for suicide! He saw failure in front of him. A lifetime's work gone to ruin. There you are, Shank!"

Shank shook his head gloomily as he watched Horace poke a disappointed nose into his empty chocolate sack. Horace lifted his head, looked around hungrily. His eyes brightened when he spotted a box of candy behind the counter. He edged over and lifted the lid.

"Nice looking chocolates," he remarked, and selected one which he tossed in his mouth.

He scooped up a handful, dumped them into his empty sack and began to strut around the store, eating and crediting his ability to get to the bottom of things so fast to his amazing mental agility. But on about the third chocolate he stopped and looked at it like he had bitten into a worm.

"I don't believe I care for these," he said weakly, and plumped the sack down on the counter.

"Yeah," Shank said, "I reckon they do taste sorta funny, after eating two or three pounds in one morning."

HORACE was about to retort when Doc Simmons came bustling in. Doc was the local vet and coroner. A lanky gray-headed man who wore horn-rimmed glasses and an ancient brown hat of the same vintage as his brown corduroys. Two or three townsmen slipped in with him, unnoticed, and tagged along when Shank and Horace followed Doc back to the storeroom. Angel slid in, too, but kept her distance from her uncle's body, standing behind the rough board counter.

Just for a minute, though, for as soon as Shank saw the voluntary witnesses, he shooed them all out, with a peremptory order for them to wait outside in the street, if they wanted to know anything. Angel did not have to be urged to turn and run back into the store.

As soon as they were gone, Doc examined the remains briefly, and said one word.

Horace protested, but not so strongly. Horace looked sick.

"But, Doc, it couldn't be murder. That's foolish!"

Doc looked at Horace over his horn-rimmed glasses.

"It may be foolish, Horace, but it's sure murder. First place, Phineas, would've almost had to hold the gun in both hands to fire it from that angle. And the gun would've fallen behind him, not way out there to the side like it is. Then there's not enough powder burns to indicate the gun was held against his head, as he would've had to do if he'd fired it himself. Nope, Horace, it's murder!"

All Horace could do was to shake his head feebly. Tiny rivulets of sweat were trickling down his big horse face that was sagging badly and was the color of wet cement.

"Why, what ails you?" Doc asked in a sarcastic falsetto. "Is it something you eat, or does a stiff make you sick to your little stummick?"

"I need a doctor," Horace groaned weakly.

Doc started toward him.

"I don't mean a horse doctor!" yelled Horace, stumbling back.

Doc grinned.

"I've treated horses that had more sense about eating than you've got, Horace. And since you're so particular, I'd rather have a nice pig for a patient anyway. Only you'd better go home and bed down for a spell. You don't," he added sweetly, "look long for this world to me."

Horace shot him a malevolent glance and started out. He stopped to insist once more that Phineas' death was suicide, then waddled slowly out of the storeroom, holding his unhappy grub basket tenderly.

"How long's Phineas been dead?" Shank asked as they heard the store door slam.

Doc Simmons did some more examining and said he figured maybe Phineas had gone to his glory, or otherwise, around midnight, maybe an hour one way or the other.

"And," he repeated, "he was murdered!"

"I think so too," Shank agreed. "But we're goin' have a rough time making Horace believe it."

"Horace thinks with his stummick," Doc said disgustedly. "He hasn't got a brain."

Shank shook his head and went back into the store. Angel was looking sad and forlorn and again Shank had a violent urge to comfort her with something

besides words. But there was always Susie Lou, and the crowd on the street in front of the store was still staring through the windows.

"Have you told your aunt yet?" Shank asked her gently.

"Oh, I hadn't thought of her," Angel said. "She—she won't care much, but I guess she'll have to be told."

Shank didn't think Emma Aspinwall would care much either, but as Angel said, she would have to be told.

"Shank," Angel quavered, "would you mind telling her? I don't think I can."

"Why sure I'll tell her," Shank said generously. "My duty, as a matter of fact. I'll just ask a couple of the women folks out front to step in here and stay with you, then I'll be on my way."

Angel thanked him with her eyes and Shank stumbled out at an altitude of about three thousand feet.

Emma Aspinwall was a big, brawny woman with blowzy black hair and mean black eyes. She opened the door to Shank's knock.

"Well, what do you want?" she asked, like maybe he was selling phony oil stock or something.

Shank told her what he had come to say.

"Dead, is he?" she remarked, in about the same tone she would use in referring to a dead chicken.

"Yes, and I'll have to ask you some questions," Shank said curtly, and moved to go in the door.

"You clean them big feet of yours if you're coming in my house!" she screeched.

HE CLEANED his feet and went in. With resentful eyes she watched him sit down as though she were afraid he'd hurt the chair.

"If he shot hisself," she complained, before Shank could say anything, "I don't know what questions you'd have to ask me."

"I didn't say he'd shot hisself," Shank denied mildly. "I said Horace Brass thinks so. Doc Simmons and I think Phineas was murdered."

"Hah! And what would a horse doctor be knowing about murder and suicide? I think Horace is right."

"Then Phineas did have a reason for taking his life?" Shank asked quickly.

That jolted her. "Why no." Her mean little eyes scurried uneasily around the

room. "I didn't mean that exactly."

"Well, just what did you mean then?"

She spread her thick, red hands.

"Oh, just that who'd want to kill Phineas?" she answered. "He didn't have any money, and he didn't have the nerve to make any enemies. He never had any spunk. We'd have starved to death if I hadn't pushed him on day and night ever since we married."

"When Phineas left here last night after your quarrel, was he feeling pretty low?" Shank asked.

"After our quarrel!" Emma screamed, and her puffy face turned a vicious red. "Who said we had a quarrel? Hah! I bet that sneaking little niece of his has been making talk. Angel, bah! She should've been called Devil! And if the little sneak thinks I'm going to let her stay around here now and mooch off me, she's funny in the head!"

"But you and Phineas did have a quarrel?" Shank insisted.

"Oh, I wouldn't say it was a quarrel," Emma sniffed. "Phineas had a foolish idea of spending a lot of money remodeling the store. As if fancy fixtures would make more money! I just told him absolutely no. He never had any money sense. I'm the one with the business head in this family."

Suddenly she perched her head to one side, and her eyes took on a confidential gleam.

"I hear there's an undertaker over to Strongfort who does real nice funerals for about two hundred less than this robber over here. You know anything about that, Shank?"

Shank felt his hair turning white fast. The big balloon couldn't be pinned down to anything.

"How much insurance did Phineas have?" he inquired shortly.

"Plenty!" Emma said primly. "I saw to that!"

"I reckon you get all of it, don't you?"

"Naturally!"

"Well, how much is it?"

"That's none of your business!"

"Well, I reckon maybe it is. Insurance is always a good motive for murder. Provided there's enough of it, and of course provided Phineas was murdered."

Emma Aspinwall's mouth became a straight hard line across her pouchy face and Shank felt as if her eyes were poking holes in him. Slowly and ominously she got up.

"Shank Chatwood," she screeched, "are you accusing me of killing Phineas for his insurance? Why, you ignorant moron, you get right out of here!"

She started toward him and Shank got off his chair as if it were a cactus bush.

"Now, wait a minute, Emma. Don't go off half-cocked."

"Get out of my house!" she screamed. "You hear me? Get out of my house!"

She grabbed up a vase and heaved it. She missed only because Shank was so thin he was hard to hit.

Shank got.

Shank decided he'd better go by Horace's house and see if he couldn't change the D. A.'s mind about Phineas' death being suicide. The doctor's car was parked in front of Horace's house, so Shank guessed maybe Horace had been pretty sick.

Horace had been sick. He had been poisoned as a matter of fact, and although the doctor said he would pull through, the inflated D. A. still looked like a new corpse.

Feebly, Horace whispered that his being poisoned by the candy in Phineas' store proved beyond any possible shadow of a doubt that Phineas had killed himself. Phineas had been the one who had been killing the dogs with strychnine-filled chocolates, and then robbing the houses. Phineas no doubt figured the D. A. was about to catch him and had shot himself rather than face disgrace and prison. And to tell the truth, Horace added, he had suspected Phineas Aspinwall of the crime wave all along.

Shank knew confounded well that Horace hadn't had a ghost of a suspicion of Phineas until he had nearly killed himself eating pinched chocolates. However, Shank had to admit that the poisoned candy in Phineas' store did look pretty bad. Horace ordered Shank to search the store for the stuff that had been stolen at Simpson's last night, and the sheriff left feeling lower than something you find under a cellar board.

SHANK didn't find the stuff that had been stolen at Simpson's but he did find Mrs. Guffey's diamond bracelet, one of her likewise ear screws, and Mrs. Delson's dragon brooch. Angel had stayed with him while he searched, and when he found the stuff in an empty baking powder can, her face turned whiter than the neat white blouse she wore. Shank

thought for sure she was going to faint, and put his arm around her just in case.

And as he did, the front door burst open and in bounced Susie Lou. All hundred and seventy-five pounds of her. She pulled up short, her eyes bulged, and she took her fighting stance with her hands on her hips.

"So!" she yelled. "This is the way you catch dog killers and robbers! Why you philander, you trifier, you blonde-hunter, you masher, you bum, you good-for-nothing, you!" She lowered her head and shook a thick accusing finger at Shank. "All right for you, you cheater! I'm going to tell papa about this. He will tend to you!"

Susie Lou whirled around and went bouncing out, slamming the door so hard that some jars of sour pickles on the shelves did a brief ballet.

"Oh, I'm so sorry," Angel said contritely.

Shank patted her shoulder awkwardly.

"Why that's all right. Think nothing of it."

He felt very good for a minute, thinking that this would doubtless finish his engagement with Susie Lou. But he felt very bad again when he looked down in the can at the jewels. They sure made Horace's solution near about airtight. Shank didn't have much use for robbers, but at least stealing was a clean crime. But poisoning dogs! Shank felt right sick.

"Angel," he said, "I'm sure sorry about this, but it looks like your uncle wasn't the man we thought he was."

"But he couldn't have done those things!" she said stoutly. "Aunt Emma wouldn't let him have a dog, but he was fond of them. And he certainly wouldn't have killed Simpson's dog, because Simpson and Uncle Phineas were good friends. Uncle Phineas often stopped there and visited with him. Besides Uncle Phineas wouldn't have stolen anything either!"

"But there's the candy," Shank reminded her miserably.

Angel started, then turned and frowned at the box of candy behind the counter.

"You know, Shank, I wondered where that had come from when Mr. Brass went back there and got some. I just had a vague idea that a candy salesman had left it for Uncle Phineas, but I was so upset I didn't say anything about it."

Shank shook his head unhappily.

"Well, regardless of what you and I think, Horace is going to claim Phineas did the whole thing."

"But he didn't," Angel repeated, her voice breaking.

"Now, now, don't take it like that," Shank said, patting her shoulder again. "If Phineas did, he did because he was forced to. Emma wouldn't let him have money to remodel, and he had to get it some way."

"Shank, you've got to prove he didn't!" Angel caught the lapels of his jacket and looked up into his eyes. Shank began to float. "Will you do it for me?" she pleaded. "Will you?"

Shank gulped. His Adam's apple shot up and down frantically.

"Angel, I'll sure enough try!" he promised fervently. "And now I think you better get out of here. I'll get some of the men to stay till Emma decides what she wants done with the body. You have anywhere to go besides her house?"

Angel said she was going to a friend's, as she didn't think she could bear Emma right now. And Shank, recalling his recent encounter with the old battle-ax, certainly didn't blame Angel.

Back at his office, Shank let Booger Boy out, and flopped down at his desk to do some serious calculating. It was all very well to promise a beautiful doll you'd prove her uncle wasn't a criminal while you were gazing into her eyes, because looking into Angel's miraculous blue eyes made a man feel like he could do anything. But away from the magic of her eyes—well, that was something else again.

However, despite the black evidence against Phineas, Shank realized there were some things which didn't fit together at all. Horace was real handy at skidding right across details which didn't fit one of his theories, but Shank liked for everything to come out even.

One thing which stuck out like a sore toe was Phineas killing the dogs. Shank couldn't get that. He kept recalling the time a couple of years back when he'd picked up Phineas one Sunday afternoon way back in the hills. Phineas had been carrying a big dog that he'd found caught in a steel trap. Phineas had never been overly strong, but he had meant to lug that big dog five or six miles into town to the vet. And a man who would do that really liked dogs. So Phineas

wouldn't have had to kill the dogs to get in a house. He could have made friends with them.

And so just to make sure he had done his full duty toward making everything come out even, and also recalling, with an attack of heart staggers, the look in Angel's eyes, Shank decided to do some slewfooting on his own.

AT ELEVEN that night Shank wandered into the spacious grounds of Horace Brass' home. He figured by this time the house would be asleep, and he guessed it was, as all the windows were dark. He went by the garage to see if Chubby's car was in yet. It wasn't, and probably wouldn't be for several hours yet, which was just fine.

Shank went to the back door, got out a little gadget he had taken from a burglar one time, and in a few minutes had the door open. He pulled in a deep breath and wondered why his hands were shaking and why he was sweating so much, since it was a pretty cool night. He also wondered what would happen if he was caught breaking and entering the district attorney's house.

He finally got up to Chubby's room without stumbling over too many things. With his pocket flash he saw that the drapes were heavy enough to keep any light from showing outside, and the door was solid, so he boldly turned on the lights. Twenty minutes of diligent work told him Chubby's room was innocent of jewels, ill-gotten folding cash, or poison.

So Shank tried the bathroom. In the medicine cabinet was a can of talcum which wore its top a little crooked. Shank took it down, saw it had been pried open and recapped. He opened it, poked his long finger down into it and sure enough came up with Mrs. Guffey's other diamond ear screw. He dropped it back into the powder and put the can in his pocket.

There was no poison in the bathroom, but Shank had a hunch he had missed something. He went back into the room and decided to search the closet again. Maybe he had missed something in the shoes and boots. He got down on his knees and a heavy overcoat got in his way. He elbowed it aside and thought it must be made out of plastic or something as it was so stiff and heavy. Only it

seemed to be in sort of sections.

Shank jerked the coat open and felt of the lining. This was the jackpot! That heaviness was some of U-Sam's greenbacks which had been sewed in very crudely.

Shank started to get up and back out of the closet when he discovered a pair of shoes outside the closet and these had pants to go with them. He saw the heels lift up and knew something besides the heels would come down. Shank dived back into the closet and the blow that was intended for his head caught him smack between the shoulder blades. It must have been a railroad spike with a pile driver behind it.

Shank shook the red and blackness out of his eyes and whirled around, coming up. Chubby Cadbury had lifted his trusty .45 and was about to come down for another blow. It never got there. Shank grabbed his wrist, jumped on him and literally rode him to the floor. The .45 went off about the same time the can of talcum bounced out of Shank's pocket, and there was enough powder smoke in the room to start a four-alarm fire.

But the blasphemy Chubby was spouting was hotter than any fire would ever be. Shank heard the gun hit the floor.

And Shank had always figured Chubby for a softie! Shank had always been wrong. Chubby got his knees into Shank's sawdust, and almost catapulted the sheriff across the room, but Shank held on by threads. Then the fat boy rolled over on the sheriff and bounced his head against the floor. A band began to play a bolero with ice picks in Shank's head.

Somewhere through the smoke he saw Horace Brass' face looming over them with a thick cane in his hand and maneuvering for a hit. Shank got his hands on Chubby's thumbs, pulled them slowly backward, and had the satisfaction of hearing the fat boy scream.

But his satisfaction died almost before it was born because he saw the big cane coming down. He jerked Chubby over in that general direction and Horace made a bull's-eye on Chubby's head.

Shank climbed slowly out of the entanglement.

"Good heavens!" Horace screamed. "I hit Chubby instead of you!"

He made a feeble pass at Shank, then began to back up, feeling around for a chair. He found one, sank into it. Horace

was still a sick man. His face was drenched with sweat and he looked as if he had lost fifteen pounds.

Shank dusted himself off, and sank down on the bed. He was feeling kind of feeble himself.

"Will you explain this?" Horace said hoarsely. "Great Scott! This is an outrage!"

"Well, before you get too outraged," Shank said, "I want to show you something." He went to the closet, took out the overcoat. "This Chubby's?"

"Why yes, I suppose so," Horace admitted suspiciously.

Shank spread it out and ripped loose the crude sewing. The sweat seemed to freeze on Horace's face. It was a good spell before he could speak. He tried several times but couldn't do anything but make strangling noises. Finally he got it out that it was an outrage, a plant, and everything but evidence against his stepson, but there wasn't much conviction in his stumbling voice.

Shank pointed a long finger to the small snowstorm of powder and the ear screw which lay in it. He explained to Horace about the ear screw.

HORACE commenced to look really sick. Not sick from poison, but the other kind of sick

"But how—why did you ever suspect Chubby in the first place?" he stammered.

"Well, I figured all along," Shank admitted modestly, "that it was somebody pretty close to you or to me. We'd patrol the community for several nights and then right after we stopped, another dog would be killed, and another house robbed. Chubby was in a place to know when we'd stopped, and was the only person in the know who I figured would do a thing like that.

"He was also the only person around

spending a lot more money than he should've had, and who spent enough time with gamblers and crooks to get acquainted with a fence. Furthermore, only the heirlooms which couldn't be fenced were in Phineas' store. There wasn't any money or any of Al Simpson's stuff. And Chubby made his worst slip-up when he planted only one ear screw as there should've been two.

"But the thing which made me sure it wasn't Phineas was the dogs. Phineas really liked dogs, and wouldn't have had to kill them to get in places. And what probably happened last night was that after his row with his wife, Phineas went for one of his walks, stopped by Simpson's to visit with the dog which was a friend of his.

"When he didn't find the dog, he investigated and ran into Chubby. Which was bad for Chubby, of course. Chubby had a gun, forced Phineas to go down to his store where he killed him, then came back here, got the box of poisoned candy and jewelry to plant on Phineas. And Chubby was in such a hurry that he got only one ear screw, or he was so nervous he didn't notice."

Horace was so stunned by all of it that he forgot to ask Shank how he'd got in the house to get the evidence on Chubby. Shank forgot to mention it, too.

When Shank got Chubby locked up securely, he rushed back to his office to call Angel. It was only a little after twelve and he knew she would be anxious. The phone jangled just as he started to pick it up. He beamed. Angel was probably calling him.

Only Angel wasn't. It was Susie Lou. "I have decided to forgive my silly boy," she cooed over the phone. "And where has my silly boy been tonight? I've been trying to call you for—"

Shank groaned, and put the talking receiver down on the desk.



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The janitor broke through the wall, and the light he held showed a dismembered body

THE PROFESSOR SETTLES UP

By LEO MARR

Crime stalks Harvard—and a janitor unearths the clues!

AT A little after two o'clock on Friday, November 23rd, 1849, Professor John White Webster emerged from his laboratories in the Massachusetts Medical College with a happy smile illuminating his cherubic features.

A casual glance would never have classified Professor Webster as a worrier. Silky mutton-chop whiskers framed a round, bland countenance that seemed at peace with the world. Yet, for a Professor of

Chemistry and Minerology at Harvard, Webster led a hectic existence.

It all sprang from the fact that his salary was only \$1200 a year, his responsibilities a wife and three daughters, and his own tastes on the lavish side. Professor Webster liked good living, good entertaining, sumptuous dinners for important guests and all the other niceties of the dignified life that have an annoying way of running into money.

Moreover, he was used to money, for

AN ASTONISHING TRUE STORY OF CRIME

he had inherited a goodly sum from his father, which he had run through like water through a lace curtain.

Finding himself in need, with bills piling up, Professor Webster had gone the way of all flesh, and had begun to borrow. And, as always, he had become a thorn in the side of his friends, continually borrowing small sums here and there which were rarely repaid, and which accumulated.

A BUSINESS DEAL

Eventually, Dr. Webster came to borrow from the eminent Dr. George Parkman. This was no friendly accommodation, but a straight business deal. For Dr. Parkman, or the famous Parkman family, who had donated the ground upon which Harvard's Medical School stood, and after whom the present chair of Anatomy was named, had forsaken a career in medicine for the easier and more lucrative channels of finance.

Part of his activities included lending money at usurious rates. In the New England of that time this was considered an admirable business by all but the victims.

Dr. Webster's initial loan was for \$400, for which Parkman took a note on some personal possessions. It did not last long. Nor was it paid. Webster was living continually above his income and could not possibly set aside any money to repay his debts.

In 1847, Webster came to Parkman to ask for an extension on the old note and a new loan of \$2430, for which he offered a mortgage on practically all his personal possessions.

"This is quite a sum, Professor." Dr. Parkman frowned. His false teeth chattered a little as he spoke, and his jutting, square chin pushed forward like a certain ill-starred dictator who came almost a hundred years after Parkman.

MONEY-LENDING MEDICO

Dr. Webster, perspiring, explained that the sum was necessary to straighten out his tangled affairs and simplify them for easier control. Grudgingly, Parkman produced the money and accepted a mortgage.

He should have known that lending money to a man like Webster was like dropping it into a bottomless well. It

was not long before Webster was desperate again. And now he could no longer go back to Parkman. In his extremity he did a rash and desperate thing.

He went to Parkman's brother-in-law, Robert Gould Shaw, an extremely wealthy man. In response to Dr. Webster's tale of woe, Shaw bought the Professor's mineral collection for \$1200, a price which the professor gloomily said was equal to giving it away. What he did not mention was that the mineral collection was not legally his to sell, since Dr. Parkman already held a mortgage on it.

It was inevitable that Shaw innocently should mention his new acquisition to Dr. Parkman. And the money-lending medico nearly hit the ceiling with his protruding chin.

"That mineral collection was not his to sell!" he raged. "This is irresponsible and rascally conduct!" With which he stormed off to corner the irresponsible professor.

It was Monday, the 19th of November, 1849, when Parkman shoved his way, unannounced, into Professor Webster's private quarters and face the apprehensive pedagogue.

"Dr. Webster, this shilly-shallying must stop!" Parkman said angrily, pounding his heavy cane on the table top. "Are you ready for me tonight?"

THE COLD FINGERS OF FEAR

Professor Webster paled. Over Dr. Parkman's shoulder he saw the apologetic face of Littlefield, the janitor, who had tried, and failed, to stop Parkman from forcing his way in. Professor Webster motioned and Littlefield disappeared, but lingered within earshot to hear the rest of this engrossing conversation.

"No, I am not ready for you, Doctor," Webster replied.

"We cannot go on this way," Dr. Parkman said angrily. "What you have done is fraud and any man less patient than myself would long ago have ordered your incarceration. I insist that you make restitution or I shall hold you responsible for swindling both Mr. Shaw and myself."

Fear laid cold fingers on Professor Webster's heart.

"I will see you tomorrow, Doctor," he said.

"Something must be accomplished tomorrow," Parkman warned.

With that, he rushed out, nearly catch-

ing Littlefield in the act of eavesdropping in the passage.

Despite the threat, nothing was accomplished "tomorrow" for the simple reason that Professor Webster had no money and no place to get it. It was the 23rd, four days later, before Dr. Parkman got any action. Then Professor Webster paid an unexpected visit to the Parkman house at 8 Walnut Street.

"Please come to the college at one-thirty," he requested, "and I will settle our account in full."

Appeased, Dr. Parkman pulled in his chin and said he would be there. Apparently he was, for a few minutes past 1:30 Littlefield, the janitor, saw him on the campus striding in the general direction of the medical college, his frock coat flapping around his storklike legs.

Littlefield did not actually see him enter the College, however, and this was an important point. For no one ever saw Dr. Parkman again. He disappeared utterly and completely.

LOYAL JANITOR

When two nights had passed a general alarm was sent out and the authorities began to search, covering empty buildings and cellars and dredging the river.

The manhunt was still in feverish force when Professor Webster called at the Parkman house to offer his sympathies and condolences, and to tell what he knew.

"I had an appointment with Dr. Parkman at one-thirty," he related. "In my quarters. I paid him four hundred and eighty-three dollars, money I owed him, and he went out with the money in his hand."

"Good heavens!" said a member of the Parkman family. "Do you think someone saw the money and waylaid him, Professor?"

"That it a horrible thought," Professor Webster said, appalled. "Yet, I wonder. It certainly seems strange that he should leave me with money in his hand and at once disappear."

The rumor spread swiftly that Dr. Parkman had been murdered for the money in his possession. Yet another rumor had it that Dr. Parkman had never been seen leaving the Harvard campus and that his body would yet be found on the premises.

This offended the loyalty of Littlefield, the janitor. Yet there were one or two things which troubled him. One was the

memory of the overheard argument between Webster and Parkman. Another was Webster's sudden generosity in giving Littlefield a turkey for Thanksgiving. Suspicion bloomed in the janitor's mind.

"Dr. Webster's been acting strange," he told his wife. "I ain't seen him in four days, but I hear the sound of running water all the time and he keeps a fire going in that furnace of his."

FIRE AND WATER

At the first opportunity, Littlefield had a look through Webster's rooms. There was nothing there. But there was a vaulted chamber underneath the apartment which was inexplicably sealed. Littlefield determined to have a look into it.

With his wife holding a light, the janitor chopped away at the thick brick wall. It took three days, including Thanksgiving, the day he should have been enjoying the turkey Webster had given him. On Friday, just a week after Dr. Parkman had first been reported missing, Littlefield broke through the wall and put his head and a light inside.

"The first thing I saw," he reported, "was the pelvis of a man and two parts of a leg. Water from the sink was running down on these remains." Then, with a restraint gesture amounting to genius he added the clincher, "I knew it was no place for these things."

The police thought so too. They broke in on Dr. Webster and seized him.

"What does this mean?" the Professor demanded.

"It means we are done looking for Dr. Parkman. You are in custody for his murder."

Excitement ran so high in Boston after the arrest that the Governor called out the militia to preserve order. Overnight the Webster-Parkman case assumed the status of America's classic murder.

When Professor Webster was brought to trial in March, 1850, legions of his friends passionately avowed his innocence. Many felt that there was not even real proof that the meagre remains could be identified at Dr. Parkman.

Charles Sumner believed Webster was innocent, but Rufus Choate, the greatest lawyer of the time, after listening to Webster's story, advised him to plead guilty to manslaughter. When Webster refused, Choate declined to take the case.

GUILTY IN THE FIRST DEGREE

The State based its case on the testimony of Littlefield, who had heard many incriminating bits of conversation, who had observed Professor's strange behavior on the days following Parkman's disappearance, and who had actually found the body. Also on the testimony of Dr. Nathan Keep, Parkman's dentist, who was a good friend of Webster's as well. As Dr. Keep identified the bits of plate found in Webster's furnace as parts of the teeth he had made for Parkman, tears poured down his cheeks. He seemed to feel that his words were sealing the doom of not one, but two men whom he had liked.

The defense tore into Littlefield's story, in an attempt to prove that he knew entirely too much about Parkman, and that he might have placed the body in the vault himself, just to throw the blame on Professor Webster. For motive they suggested the \$483 which Parkman was supposed to have clutched in his hand when he had emerged from that meeting.

Character witnesses were called to prove that Webster, nearly sixty years old, with a sedentary and intellectual lifetime behind him, was not capable of such a passionate crime. Jared Sparks, President of Harvard, testified that he had known Professor Webster for years, and that the defendant was a kindly and religious man who would not step on an ant.

The jury was unimpressed. In spite of the fact that the State's case was purely circumstantial, for no living soul had seen Parkman enter the Medical College and no one had seen him and Webster together, they were out only three hours before bringing in a verdict of "Guilty in the first degree."

FINAL CONFESSION

Professor Webster maintained his innocence stoutly. Writing to the Governor of the State, he said:

To him who seeth in secret and before Whom I may ere long be called to appear, would I appeal for the truth of what I now declare. Repeating in the most solemn manner, and under the fullest sense of my responsibility as

a man and as Christian, that I am wholly innocent of this charge to the truth of which the Searcher of all hearts is witness. . .

All appeals failed and the execution was set for the last Friday in August, 1850. A few days before, Professor Webster resolved his doubts and made his peace with man and God. He wrote out a full confession. It read:

I was engaged at my lecture room table when he came in. He asked if I had the money. When I said no, he began heaping upon me the most bitter taunts and opprobrious epithets. I cannot tell how long the torrent of threats and invectives continued and I can now recall to memory but a small portion of what he said. I could not stop him and soon my temper was up. I forgot everything. I felt nothing but the sting of his words.

I was excited to the highest degree of passion; and while he was speaking and gesticulating in the most violent and menacing manner, thrusting his fist into my face, in my fury I seized whatever thing was handiest—it was a stick of wood—and dealt him an instantaneous blow with all the force that passion could give it.

He fell instantly upon the pavement. He did not move. I stooped down over him and he seemed to be lifeless. Blood flowed from his mouth and I got a sponge and wiped it away. I got some ammonia and applied it to his nose, but without effect.

It never occurred to me to go out and declare what had been done and obtain assistance. I saw nothing but the alternative of a successful removal and concealment of the body on the one hand, and of infamy and destruction on the other.

He dragged the body into an adjoining room, burned the clothes in the furnace and dismembered the corpse.

With his confession, Webster's friends, who had so far stuck to him, fell away. Only his loyal wife and daughters remained steadfast to the end.

A rather bitter anecdote followed shortly after these tragic proceedings. At a trial in Boston, a famous lawyer was cross-examining a witness. The judge thought the witness was being treated roughly.

"Remember," he rebuked the lawyer, "you are questioning a Harvard Professor."

"Yes, I know, Your Honor," said the lawyer. "We hanged one of them the other day."

Coming Next Issue: THE FARMER FINDS A BODY, another exciting true story of crime by LEO MARR

"Get away from that door," the shop owner shouted



IT COULD HAPPEN TO YOU

By **BILL ANSON**

A mysterious package puts Don Marble on a strange spot

HE WAS a complete pest, this furtive little stranger with the green glasses and whining voice, who plucked fearfully at Don Marble's coat sleeve on the railroad station platform.

"Look, mister," the little man insisted, "you're goin' to Greenwood on the five forty-five local, ain't you?"

"I'm busy," Don Marble said brusquely, shaking off the stranger's grasping fingers. "Don't bother me."

Don was busy, for his eyes were focused on a pint-sized blonde in a red tam and blue coat with trick brass buttons. He was waiting to discover which coach she was going to choose in the suburban train that was slowly backing into the city station. For two weeks now, Don Marble had been jockeying through the commuters in an attempt to sit beside her. And always something had happened at the last moment.

"I'll give you a buck, mister," the bothersome stranger whined. "All you have to do is f deliver this package to the Greenwood Watch Repair across the street from the station."

"I don't want a buck," Don Marble snapped. "Get somebody else, darn it."

The wheel brakes of the local train squeaked. There was a rattling of couplings,

a toot from the steam engine, and the platform crowd surged toward the coach steps.

"I've got to go back to the office!" the pest said excitedly, thrusting his package into Don Marble's hands. "Give a fellow a break, mister. Please!"

Before Don could throw the package back, the stranger darted away in the crowd. Not twenty feet away, the blonde in the red tam was making for the end coach. Don set out after her like a quarterback following a rival end who was scheduled to receive a pass.

A half-dozen men offered interference, but Don Marble slid past them, spun around once when he almost upset a hatchet-faced woman with a bulging suitcase. He nearly dropped the package given him by the green-eyed pest.

With a groan of dismay, he saw the blonde's trim legs going up the steps of the last coach. She was followed by two jostling business men.

At that moment, his ears caught the sharp explosion of guns near the railroad station. A scream echoed. A shout went up from the platform crowd. There was the wail of a police siren.

Luckily for Don Marble, the two business men on the steps of the last coach turned to see what was happening. Not Don! He

scrambled past them, lunged through the train door, and spied the girl in the red tam. Don Marble walked into the coach with affected dignity and sat down beside her.

SO FAR, so good, Don told himself. But this wasn't his last hurdle. It was only the first. Now there was the problem of engaging her in conversation, and he mustn't give her the impression that he was a wolf.

Don Marble was anything but a wolf. In fact, he was a shy, modest, serious-minded young bank teller, tall and thin, with clear blue eyes, but whose irregular features could not be called handsome.

Most girls thought he was as commonplace as an old shoe, and sometimes a bore. He never did know what to say to girls. They baffled him. But he would have given his right arm if a nice, respectable young lady—like the one in the red tam and the blue coat with the trick brass buttons—would go steady with him.

As Don Marble rested the stranger's package in his lap and unfolded his evening paper, he heard a commuter entering the train coach call out to another man:

"The police shot a man trying to get on this train."

"What was he—a pickpocket?" the second passenger asked.

"I don't know," was the answer. "They ought to be careful, shooting in the crowd."

Out of the corner of his eye, Don saw that the blonde was staring moodily out the window, apparently indifferent to what had happened at the station, and indifferent to him. All that Don knew about her was that she was one of the most attractive girls he had ever seen, and that she had but recently moved to suburban Greenwood. She lived in a house back up on the hill across from the local depot, only three blocks from Don's own home. That would make it convenient if they ever went to the movies together.

Don spread his paper. His arm jostled the girl in the seat.

"I beg your pardon," he murmured.

Her head turned toward him. Her eyes were a deep shade of green and her nose was slightly turned-up. She didn't use much make-up. She didn't have to. She was as pretty as a Christmas present.

"That's all right," she said, with a warm smile, then turned away again.

Don's heart did a nip-up. She hadn't looked at him scornfully. She hadn't moved farther away from him, as if he were poison. She had even spoken to him. But what would he do or say next to attract her attention?

There was a long whistle. The train couplings clattered. The local started to move. Now the commuters were crowding the aisle, and not a few men looked down at Don enviously. He sat still, trying to concentrate

on the headlines of the evening paper. One that stood out caught his eye. It read:

BLACK MARKETEE VANISHES

Police Throw Out Dragnet
For "Diamond Jake" Karloff
Who Jumps \$20,000 Bail Bond

Foul Play Suspected

Had Been Willing To Testify
Against Sugar Coupon Ring

But Don couldn't get interested in the story that followed. He opened his paper to the second page, and his arm jostled the girl in the red tam again.

"Oh, I'm so sorry," Don Marble said again with some nervousness, for he didn't want her to think he was clumsy. "It must be this package I have in my lap that makes me do it."

The girl looked at him sharply, then she smiled again.

"Why don't you put the package on the rack?" she asked.

"Why, I never thought of it," Don replied, and he stood up quickly. "But I don't want to forget it. You see," he went on, gathering confidence and hoping against hope to continue their conversation, "this package isn't mine. In fact, I don't know who it belongs to."

The blonde's eyes were puzzled.

"I'll remind you when you get off," she said.

"That would be swell of you," Don said. Laying the package on the wall rack, he sat down. "It's a funny thing," he hurried on, red in the face, "but a man came up to me in the station and offered to give me a buck—I mean, a dollar—if I would deliver it. Of course, I wouldn't take a dollar. I work in a bank. I've got a good job."

The girl stared up at the package.

"Isn't that a dollar bill tucked under the string?" she asked.

"Well, can you beat that!" Don exclaimed, and got up to take the package. "So it is—a dollar, tucked right under the string here. I never even noticed it. I'll give it to the watch repair man. You see, this stranger just threw the package at me and rushed off. He said he had to get back to his office."

The blonde with the green eyes looked at the address on the package.

"It must be an alarm clock," she said. "It's the right shape to be one, and it's addressed to the Greenwood Watch Repair. That's right across the street from the depot, isn't it?"

"Gosh, an alarm clock!" Don exclaimed excitedly, although he didn't care a hang about what was in the package. What he wanted was to interest the girl enough for

her to keep on talking.

"That man at the station was certainly taking a chance," he rushed on, "because you can't get alarm clocks—even busted ones. They're almost as valuable as steaks. But suppose it's a diamond wrist-watch, or something like that? Yes, that man took a big chance."

THE girl smiled again, showing even white teeth.

"Well, you don't look like a thief," she said. "But I wouldn't throw that dollar away, or give it to the watch man. After all, you didn't ask to take the package, did you?"

"No, I didn't," Don said hastily. "But just the same I'm not going to accept the dollar. For all I know this package might be a practical joke, or something like that."

"You're not going to open it, are you?" the girl asked in alarm.

Don chuckled. This was certainly fun. Here they were talking now as if they had known each other for a long time.

"No, I won't open it," he said. "There might be a mouse in it, and that would scare the daylight out of you."

She drew herself up haughtily.

"I'm not afraid of mice," she said severely.

"You're not!" Don exclaimed, wide-eyed with surprise.

She laughed gaily.

"I suppose you think every girl is afraid of mice," she said. "Well, I work in a laboratory where they have all kinds of white mice and guinea pigs. If you did open that package, and there were any mice in it why I'd just take them home with me and then give them to my boss tomorrow."

"Well, I'll be darned!" Don exclaimed. "I certainly am glad to meet a real sensible girl." His eyes grew eager. Now was his chance! "Say, you live up on the hill across from the depot in Greenwood, don't you? I live there, too."

There it was, just as easy as falling off a log.

He had met her. She wasn't hard to talk to. She was much more intelligent than most girls, and she was just as pretty as—no she was prettier than a Christmas present. She was as pretty as the Christmas tree angel. She was real sensible, too. She wasn't afraid of mice. She worked for a research scientist.

Before long she told him that her name was Madeline Cummings, for by that time they had dropped the package as a subject of conversation. Don told her all about Greenwood and its movies, and about the free golf links and tennis courts, and how nice it was to go canoeing on the river. He told her about his father and his mother and his kid sister.

She told him about her father and her

mother and her kid brother.

The forty-five-minute trip was altogether too short. The train was soon grinding to a halt at Greenwood. The passengers got up from their seats and pushed toward the doors.

"Maybe we could walk up the hill together," Don Marble suggested.

"What about your package?" she asked. "You forgot."

"I certainly did! But look! The clock place is just across the street. Why don't you stop there with me, and perhaps we'll see what's inside the package."

They clambered down the train steps together, just as if they had known each other all their lives. Don took Madeline's arm to steer her through the crowd and the waiting automobiles at the edge of the street, and across the asphalt where the taxi cabs hooted at them.

It made Don feel like a million to be holding Madeline's arm. She was just as cute as all get-out. She was his girl now, and nobody was ever going to take her away from him. He would walk up the hill with her right to her house, and then he would suggest going to the movies. That would be just swell.

"Here it is," she said, nodding at the shop with the sign over the door reading:

"GREENWOOD WATCH REPAIR"

Don opened the shop door and held it for her. A bell tinkled as the door closed. There was nobody inside.

Shelves lined one wall and the counter ran along the other wall.

They stood at the counter, and Don rapped briskly on the glass with a knuckle.

A back door opened and a stout, scowling man with a green eyeshade moved behind the counter and came waddling toward them. He was a grouchy type, and sloppy, too. He wore no necktie, and the sleeves of his dirty shirt were rolled up.

"If you've got a watch to be fixed," he growled, "you'll have to go somewhere else. I'm too busy."

Dan scowled severely.

"We haven't got a watch to be fixed," he said. "We've got a package for you. A stranger gave it to me in the city. He wanted me to deliver it. There was a dollar tucked under the string, but I don't want the dollar. You can take that dollar off his bill."

The shop owner stared at the package, then read the inked address. He removed his green eyeshade and studied Don Marble with black shoe-button eyes.

"Who gave it to you?" he demanded.

"He doesn't know the man's name," Madeline Cummings spoke up, "and he's not going to take the thing back. Don't you

want the business?"

"Just a minute, Miss," the shop owner said angrily. "I'm talking to the young man. I don't accept every package that comes along. It may have a piece of old junk in it. Then somebody will claim they left a valuable clock here. I'll get sued."

"Well, open it up, and see what it is," Madeline said with dignity.

"Sure, open it up," Don insisted. "We'll be witnesses."

THE shop proprietor stared bitterly at the two for a moment, then picked up the package and glared at it. He put it down and fumbled with the string knots as if his mind were still not made up. But shortly the string was untied, and he slowly removed the outside paper covering of a box of about one-half the size of the usual shoe box.

Don and Madeline watched him lift the cover. There was a layer of crumbled tissue paper next. This the shop owner whisked up.

What lay under the tissue paper was so extraordinary that for a brief instant nobody realized what it was.

Then Madeline let out a scream of horror, and fell back from the counter.

"Good grief!" Don Marble exclaimed. "It's a dead man's hand! It's been chopped off!"

A crimson-soaked hand, cut off at the wrist, lay on a bed of tissue paper within the box. What made the sight even more gruesome was that on the middle finger of the hand was a huge diamond ring. Though it couldn't have been a real diamond, for it did not reflect the light from the window. It was just a big chunk of five-and-ten-cent-store glass, a rank imitation of a square-cut diamond set in cheap steel.

"Diamond Jake!" the watch repair man suddenly snarled.

He slapped the box cover down on the horrible evidence of human torture.

Madeline swayed back against Don Marble, as if she were going to faint. He caught her. He, too, felt slightly sick, but he fought to keep his wits and his courage.

"Better go for the police," he said huskily. "It must be the hand of that racketeer who was mentioned in the newspaper headlines. They said the police were looking for a Diamond Jake."

"The police?" the shop owner snapped, glaring at the couple. "You saw what was inside the—" He broke off short. A horrible grimace spread over his coarse, unshaven face. His hand darted inside his shirt, and came out with a .32-caliber revolver. "Sure, you saw!" he raged. "You might be planting Jake's finger on me! Get away from that door, before I shoot both of you!"

Don Marble felt the blond girl stiffen in his

arms. Her head came up. She was suddenly alive, and defiant.

"You wouldn't dare shoot!" she cried. "You most likely know more about this than you've admitted."

"Shut up!" the shop owner shouted. "Get into the back room. Quick!"

Beads of sweat were appearing on his brow. His black eyes were narrowed to slits. He meant business all right. There were no two ways about it. And there were no two ways about the fact that he knew more about Diamond Jake Karloff than was good either for him or good for Don Marble and Madeline Cummings.

"We better go, Madeline," Don said. "He'll kill us sure."

"I'll go, Don," the girl in the red tam said, "but we're not going to let him do anything to us."

"That's the girl," Don said.

As they started down the shop, the watch repair man, with drawn pistol moved along behind the counter.

Don drew open the door to a rear room, and as the bell tinkled he heard the girl whisper:

"Grab something to hit him with Don!"

She went into the back room, and Don followed. The shop owner, directly behind him closed the door.

"Go on through that next door and down into the cellar," the watch repair man ordered. "If you obey orders without trying to start something you won't get hurt. I'm only going to keep you on ice for a few hours."

As Madeline started toward the second door, Don was trembling with anxiety—but it was for her. His eyes ran around the benches and tables of the small room with its single barred window. In the corner he spied a small printing press.

There were stacks of paper in rectangular shape beside it.

"Remember, Don!" Madeline whispered as she pulled open a door that revealed a flight of dark rickety stairs descending to the cellar.

Don's eyes found a heavy spanner resting on a shelf near the printing press and the door.

"I'm ready, Madeline!" he called to her.

"Shut up!" cried the shop owner. "You try any tricks on me and I'll shut you up—good."

A scream of terror broke from Madeline's lips.

"Mice!" she cried. "Mice—mice—mice!"

She had leaped back from the cellar stairs, whirled, and was climbing upon a table, screaming with hysterics.

DON MARBLE was completely astonished. But no more so than the shop owner. But Don was the first to recover his wits. He had sprang across the room

and grabbed for the steel spanner. He saw the shop owner starting toward the table upon which Madeline was standing and screaming hysterically.

"Get down from there, you little fool!" the unshaven crook shouted.

Don leaped, holding the spanner behind him and above his head. At the moment the shop owner spun around and saw Don's weapon come down hard. The steel struck the crook just above the ear. The pistol in the shop owner's fist went off with a flaming crash, but the bullet whipped past Don and into the wall. With a gurgle the crook fell forward, struck the floor with his chest and then his face. The gun clattered from his hand and Don Marble pounced on it.

Madeline Cummings was strangely quiet now. She climbed down from the table and promptly went to a telephone on a shelf beside the door.

"That was splendid, Don," she said as she dialed the operator. Then she spoke into the phone. "Give me the police, Operator. . . . Is this the Greenwood police? . . . This is Miss Cummings speaking for Mr. Marble. We are at the Greenwood Watch Repair across from the depot . . . Yes, that is it . . . We have just caught the man who is making all the fake sugar coupons . . ."

Don realized then that she also was telling the police about the little man at the rail-

road station in the city, and about the hand of Diamond Jake Karloff in the box. Don himself was icy cold and shaking. But she certainly had a level head. She wasn't afraid of mice. She wasn't afraid of crooks. She wasn't afraid of anything.

"Gosh, you're wonderful, Madeline!" Don said when she hung up the phone. "I never knew a girl could be like you."

Madeline took her compact from her bag and powdered her nose.

"The police told me that it was the little man with green glasses who was shot in the city, Don," she said confidentially. "They were following him to find out where he got a lot of sugar coupons he had been selling. He evidently killed Diamond Jake, and they think he was sending the package to this shop as a warning to our friend there on the floor not to talk to the police. They say the coupons were so badly printed that they were easily spotted as counterfeits. It's all just like the movies, isn't it?"

Don gulped. He wasn't cold any more. He was flushing fiery red.

"That reminds me of something, Madeline," he mumbled. "How about going to the movies with me tonight? Please say you'll go."

"Oh, I'd love to, Don. I really was hoping you'd ask me, because there's a swell gangster picture on."



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His voice strident and shrill, Wilbur Kilburn harangued the lynch mob

MURDER IS PATIENT

By WAYLAND RICE

Stan Bruce battles to block the sinister schemes of the crafty slayer who prowls a musty ancient mansion, intent on delivering death to every member of the Trent family!

CHAPTER I

THE OLD MAN DIES

STAN BRUCE turned briskly into the gate and marched up the rather long path toward the big white house. Stan Bruce didn't feel quite at home in civilian clothes after four years in battle helmet and green Marine uniform. He was slim, tall and hardened from war in the Pacific. The bullet which had shattered part of his thigh bone was still imbedded there, but it didn't hurt much.

At the moment he gave no thought to it. Stan Bruce's emotions were at a white heat. His hands were two tight fists, his jaw protruded and his gray eyes sparkled

as they'd done when he faced Japs. Stan was going into battle again and this time he was going to love it.

The size of the house amazed him somewhat. He had known that Roger Trent came of a wealthy family. His grandfather had started this rock-ribbed New England town and virtually owned it at one time. But the house was quite enormous and the grounds spacious and well cared for.

The town itself had already fascinated Stan. There was the tiny Main Street with its usual row of small stores. Typical small-town people lounged along the streets.

It was a half-manufacturing, half-farming area. A carpet factory hired prac-

*A Complete
Novelet*



cally everyone in town who didn't own or work on farms. There was no reconversion rush here. True, the factory was again engaged in making textiles, but no new workers were brought in. The townspeople buckled down to do the job themselves. Strangers were welcome in this town, so long as they didn't stay too long, but each new face was carefully scrutinized.

Stan marched up onto the rambling porch. Through the screened front door came sounds of revelry and Stan walked over to peer through one of the big windows. There were fifteen or eighteen people in the large living room but Stan was interested in only one man.

He watched Roger Trent carry a tray from one guest to another and pick up empty cocktail glasses. Trent stopped in front of a very old man who seemed to occupy the place of honor in his deep leather upholstered chair. The old man looked up at Trent, smiled and shook his head slightly.

It was Roger Trent whom Stan had come to see—and knock his block off. He owed Roger a sound beating and he meant to give it to him. But not at a social affair like this. In the first place, while he had been a Marine and used to odds, he didn't feel like having fifteen people heave him out the door.

SO HE quietly opened the screen, stepped into the house and started to walk softly down the hall. Then he caught a glimpse of Trent coming out into the hall with a well-loaded tray and promptly ducked for cover. Balancing the tray, Trent pushed open another door and went into the kitchen. The clink of glasses and the sound of running water drew Stan to that door.

Roger Trent was busy rinsing the cocktail glasses. Stan saw, without much interest, that each glass was numbered for identification. Roger lined them up, seized a large cocktail shaker and measured jiggers of whisky into it. Then he measured the proper proportions of vermouth, stirred the mixture vigorously and poured a little into one glass. He raised this to his lips, tasted of it and nodded in approval.

Next, he proceeded to fill each glass. For a moment Stan was tempted to step into the kitchen, close the door and let Roger have his licking. But the thought stopped him. They must be Roger's friends

and would react with vigor to an attack upon him. So he decided again to bide his time.

From the doorway Stan watched Trent extract marachino cherries from a narrow-necked bottle with a silver fork, and drop one into each glass. This done, Trent set the glasses back on the tray. As he lifted it and turned around, Stan stepped back out of sight. Roger passed within three feet of the spot where Stan was hiding. Humming gayly, Roger marched toward the living room with the tray.

Stan smiled. In a little while Roger wouldn't be able to hum. Not if humming entailed the use of a healthy and whole jaw because Stan intended to break it. His hands were still bunched up into massive fists and were aching for action.

The hall wasn't been used much just now, and Stan discovered that he could move about there all he chose. He went to the door and watched. Roger was passing the drinks around. He reached the old man who started to shake his head again, then changed his mind with a shrug, and started to take a glass from tray. But Roger must have said something because the old man moved his hand and got a glass from the other end of the tray.

Somebody yelled "Happy birthday, Grandfather Trent!" and all glasses were raised. The old man acknowledged this salute with a cheerful grin, waited until the others had partaken of the cocktail and then he drained his glass in a single gulp.

One minute later he groaned, clamped both hands against his middle, and started to rise. Roger set the tray down and sprang to help him. So did another chap about Roger's age. Roger called out. A severely dressed woman entered the room from what seemed to be a sort of pantry where coffee cups and sandwiches were piled high on a table. Stan had a glimpse of them as the swinging door was briefly opened.

The woman sped back to the pantry and returned with a glass full of effervescent fluid. Grandfather Trent took this, drank it greedily and relaxed again. He seemed to be much better, except for the grayish pallor of his face. Whatever sort of attack he'd suffered must have been severe enough although he tried desperately to conceal his pain.

But the episode more or less killed the party, although sandwiches and coffee were served. After the refreshments, the

guests pushed a table in front of the old man and loaded it with gifts. With shaking hands he opened the packages, thanked each donor, and shook hands with them all. Then the party was over.

Stan ducked out the front door and hid among the bushes until the last guest had departed. Then he stole up on the porch again and peered through the screen door. Grandfather Trent was being helped up the stairs by the woman. Apparently she was a cook and housekeeper. Holding his other arm was the young man who attempted to help Grandfather Trent when he suffered that attack.

Standing at the foot of the stairs, Roger Trent watched them go up, turning, with a start, as another old man shuffled up and spoke to him. Roger nodded, moved aside and the second man also mounted the stairs. Roger was now alone on the first floor. The moment Stan had been waiting for had arrived.

Stan stepped inside the hallway.

"Roger," he called softly.

ROGER swung about. His eyes widened with surprise. Then he smiled, warmly, extending his hand and took several steps toward Stan. He hesitated, his outstretched hand dropped and his smile died away.

"No," he said slowly. "No, I suppose you wouldn't want to shake hands with me and I don't blame you. Stan, I've been hoping and dreading you'd finally catch up with me. I want to talk to you."

Stan nodded and followed Roger into a study. Roger closed the door and sat down.

"Stan, if you slug me, I'll take it without a murmur," he said. "I deserve it. I'm probably the most complete heel in existence but, believe me, I'm trying hard to overcome my own weaknesses. I've learned my lesson."

"Rog, I came here to push your face in," Stan said. "I've always intended to punch you on the nose, but just now I changed my mind. In college you stole my best clothes, you pawned valuables belonging to me. You cheated in exams, bluffed your way along. You always were lucky in not getting caught. But then, after I enlisted and was shipped out, you pulled the supreme rotten trick. You married my girl, Nora Lang. To make matters worse, you abandoned her."

Roger inhaled deeply on a cigarette he'd been lighting as Stan spoke.

"Yes," he said, "I've done all those things. I admit it. Why don't you beat me up?"

"Because, to be honest. I feel sorry for you," Stan answered. "I arrived in town and did a little checking. I find that you haven't a friend here. You owe money to every shop, you've insulted about every girl here and fought with their boy friends. You delighted in trying to kick up dust with your roadsters, sending the townspeople fleeing and choking while you laughed at them. I think you're crazy. I'm sorry for you."

Roger smiled wanly.

"Yes, I'm the most detested person in town. I should be the leading citizen. My grandfather started this town and has run it for years. Everything the town is, it owes to Granddad. He's kind, generous and thoughtful. The direct opposite of me. But I'm trying, Stan."

"Trying to do what?" Stan asked glumly.

"Reform, if you want to put it that way. But mainly, you are concerned about Nora. Yes, I was the heel again. After you left, I rushed her. I was in love with her, Stan. Genuinely in love. I still am. That's why I left her."

"Some way of demonstrating your love," Stan scoffed.

"Some way is right," Roger replied. "But, Stan, I wasn't good enough for her and the poor kid found out afterwards that she was crazy about you. I left her so I wouldn't make any more trouble. I've offered to cooperate in any steps she wants to take to gain her freedom. I want her to be free of me. I'm not worthy of Nora and you are. Mind you, no one else on earth ever made me so happy, but I bring only trouble in huge quantities wherever I go."

"So I've noticed," Stan said grimly. "However, you're not a liar. I know that. I'll have a talk with Nora and see if this mess can be straightened out. Then I'll come back here to discuss it with—"

"Roger! Roger!"

Someone came running down the steps screaming the name. Roger jumped out and rushed into the hall, followed by Stan Bruce. It was the young man who'd helped Grandfather Trent upstairs. He was coming down the steps three at a time. His face was deathly pale.

"Something has happened to the old man," he shrieked. "I heard him groan and went into his room. I think he's dead!"

Roger flew up the steps and Stan was at his heels. They hurried into the old man's room. A single look at that gray face against the pillow was full confirmation of death. Stan pushed Roger aside, picked up the old man's wrist and felt for a pulse. There was none.

"I think your grandfather is dead, Rog," he said quietly. "But just the same you'd better get a doctor and find out."

CHAPTER II

THE POISONER



HALF hour later, Stan Bruce had met the other occupants of the house. The young man was Roger's cousin, Wilbur Kilburn, who also lived there. The second old man had been Peter Sleeth, Grandfather Trent's lifelong friend, a man without money who had been supported by Grandfather Trent for nearly eighteen years. Despite his age, he possessed sly eyes and cold, uncompromising lips. The housekeeper, Mrs. Mealey, was now on the telephone, broadcasting the news via her brother, Tim Carley, who puttered around the estate as a gardener when he was sober enough to work.

The doctor arrived promptly. Stan accompanied him to the bedroom and stood by while the examination was made. The doctor straightened up.

"Trent was poisoned," he said sharply. "I think it's arsenic. However I can confirm it by a post mortem. Go downstairs and call Chief Craig of the Police. I doubt if he can handle this. We've never had a homicide in town before, but he's the police force and he ought to know."

"How sure are you it was murder, doc?" Stan gasped.

"If a man commits suicide, he usually leaves certain objects behind," the doctor said, very patiently. "A glass or the bottle of poison. Or a teaspoon, perhaps, or a suicide note. Did you see any such objects in here?"

"No, sir," Stan said slowly. "I guess the police had better be notified."

Chief Matt Craig arrived quickly. He was about forty-five or fifty—a red-faced, red-haired man of even temperament. But clearly he was incapable of handling anything such as murder. But Craig was determined to do his best. He summoned everyone into the living room, closed the

door and favored Roger Trent with a suspicious stare.

"All right, let's have it," he said. "What happened here tonight?"

Roger seemed stunned by the swift course of events. As he talked, he kept smoking a cigarette, and tried to mask his apprehension.

"We had a birthday party for grandfather tonight," he explained. "Just a gathering of his friends. There were cocktails, coffee and sandwiches. Mrs. Mealey served the food. I mixed and served the drinks."

Peter Sleeth shuffled forward, his bent figure seeming to suddenly gain fresh strength.

"Wait a minute!" he said sharply. "Roger, you mixed the drinks. Your grandfather didn't drink until the last round when you insisted that he take one. He gulped it down and had a bad attack of abdominal pain. He was very sick."

Chief Craig rubbed his jaw uneasily.

"Those cocktail glasses," he said. "Where are they? In the kitchen? Have they been washed?"

"No, sir," Roger said. "I just put the tray in the kitchen and left them for Mrs. Mealey to clean up."

"I never laid a hand on 'em," Mrs. Mealey said tartly.

Chief Craig left the room. Stan Bruce followed him, but the others remained in the living room. Stan watched the chief peering at the tray full of glasses.

"Chief, I'm a novice at this sort of thing, but I may be able to help a bit," Stan said. "You're trying to find which is the dead man's glass. Each glass is numbered. The figures are etched right into the sides of the glass. If you find out which number the dead man used, it will make your job easier."

"Just who are you?" Craig demanded, not unkindly.

"My name is Stan Bruce. I can't exactly be called a friend of Roger's but I did room with him at college."

"Roger is a fool," Craig said. "I don't think he has a friend in the world. But what you told me is a good suggestion. Maybe you can help, and heaven knows I need help."

"Wait here," Stan said. "I'll try to find out which glass was the old man's."

He hurried back to the living room and looked keenly at the three men and the dour housekeeper for a moment before he spoke.

"Rog, you served those drinks. Mr. Sleeth says that your grandfather didn't drink except the last time when he was to be toasted. Therefore, you must have carried back one more glass than you brought in from the kitchen. What was the number of it?"

Roger seemed startled.

"Number twenty-two. There are two dozen glasses in the set. Mrs. Mealey always arranged them according to their numbers. I recall reaching up for Granddad's glass. There were three left on the shelf, so it must have been twenty-two I took down."

"Twenty-three and four are still on the shelf," Stan spoke up. "Thanks. I'll be right back."

HE RETURNED to the kitchen where Chief Craig was sniffing each glass and making a wry face.

"Don't like the stuff myself. Say, when you've smelled of twenty glasses, they all smell alike. Find anything, Stan?"

"Number Twenty-two was the dead man's glass, Chief," Stan said. "But if the doctor is correct, you won't smell anything. Trent died of arsenic poisoning and arsenic has no odor. I'd suggest you take all the glasses for chemical analysis and concentrate on Number Twenty-two."

Chief Craig picked up the tray.

"You're right," he said. "I'll bring 'em to the high school chemistry lab and have the teacher analyze them. You intend to stay here, Stan?"

"Until this is cleaned up, yes."

"Good. You can represent me. See that nobody leaves. You're the only man I don't suspect."

"Why me?" Stan asked bluntly.

"Because I happen to know that Roger comes into the old man's estate. There's motive enough. But I have others on the list, too. That other young fellow, Wilbur, is a lazy, good-for-nothing, but he gets a little money too. And old Peter Sleeth—well, he's sponged on Trent for nearly a quarter of a century, far as I remember, and Trent was getting sick of him. Sleeth has turned crotchety and thinks he owns the place. Trent was going to kick him out."

"Whew!" Stan breathed. "You know a great deal, Chief."

Craig grinned coldly.

"That's the advantage of being Chief of Police in a small town instead of a large city. I know everybody's business. Well,

I'll be back soon as I can. Got to wait for Doc to examine the body. Nobody is to leave. I'll send up a man to sort of watch outside the house. Don't tell the others I'm taking that precaution."

Stan went to the door with Craig and let him out. The doctor had already left with the undertaker's men who had come for the body. Stan went back to the living room. He looked at young Trent.

"Rog," he said slowly. "Did you make your grandfather take any certain glass on that tray?"

"Yes," Roger replied. "Of course I did. Everyone else had his or her own glass and knew the number. Granddad's was a fresh glass. He wouldn't have known the number so I told him."

"Then you had control of the drinks," Stan remarked. "You could have forced a poisoned cocktail on him. Rog—did you kill him?"

Roger's fists came up belligerently and he advanced on Stan. But stopped halfway across the room and his arms dropped to his sides.

"I'm an idiot," he said. "No, I didn't kill him. I loved Granddad. I'd have given my life for him. What on earth are you getting at, Stan?"

"We think that your grandfather was murdered," Stan said. "If he is poisoned, it couldn't be suicide because there are no traces of suicide. That makes murder or accidental death the only alternatives and we can cross off the idea of an accident."

Peter Sleeth arose slowly, his lined face set and stern.

"Roger, I think you did kill him," he quavered. "Right after he drank that cocktail, he became very sick. Even then the poison was taking hold. You killed him because you were sick of waiting for him to die naturally. You wanted his money!"

"Sit down, you old fossil!" Wilbur cried. He walked over to Roger's side. "Rog, we've never got along. Maybe we're both at fault, but right now I'm going to stand by you no matter what happens and I think any insinuations that the old man was murdered are silly."

Stan sat down, watching them. Sleeth started to argue and accusations flew back and forth. Stan merely sat there and listened, searching for some thoughtlessly dropped word which might furnish a clue as to the truth. But enlightenment did not come. The talk was all vague and general.

When Chief Craig returned, his features

were grim, and his voice somber.

"Trent was killed by arsenic trioxide," he said. "I think it was murder, but I ain't making any accusations. Not yet. I just know there was poison in the cocktail glass. You're all suspected—except Stan here who has no reason for killing the old man. But he was here when it happened, so he stays, too. Nobody is to leave town. The feller who tries it is going to get locked up. That's all I got to say."

He turned and walked out. Roger Trent slumped down into one of the chairs. Wilbur began to pace the floor. Old Sleeth just sat there, munching his toothless gums and glowering at Roger. Stan gave a long sigh. Mrs. Mealey bustled into the room, glaring at everyone. She gathered up some things and departed, still glaring.

STAN sat there, lost in thought. Everything pointed to Roger as the assassin. He had mixed the drinks. Poison had been found in the cocktail glass. The old man had suffered an attack an instant after he had drunk his cocktail, but from there on the poison had seemed to work slowly. Roger had controlled the drinks, practically forcing that particular glass on his grandfather. Certainly the facts indicated he was the killer. But when Stan looked at Roger, he could hardly believe it.

Roger was an admitted heel. He was a man who had always taken advantage of everyone with whom he came in contact. Yet he seemed completely stunned by what had happened and no person, not even the best actor in the world, could have faked the grief written on his face now.

Suddenly old Peter Sleeth began to sob. Stan looked at him with considerable interest.

"What happens to me now?" Sleeth said, brokenly. "I'm poor. I have no friends, no one to take care of me. Trent always looked after me. He was generous and kind. I'm an old man and helpless. What happens to me?"

Roger glanced up at him.

"I'll take care of you for the time being," he said. "I must because Chief Craig says you have to remain. But when it's all over, you can shift for yourself, Peter. I'm not the fool my grandfather was. You're a leech, a bloodsucking leech, preying on this family too long. I won't have you in the house."

Sleeth began to curse in a low monotone until Stan silenced him with a sharp

word. Wilbur Kilburn went into the kitchen and came back with a bottle of whisky and some glasses. He poured a drink, raised it and then shuddered. He put the glass down untasted.

"I don't blame you," Roger said. "There's a poisoner here. I'm not the murderer, but all of us have reasons for killing Granddad—even you, Stan. Oh, you needn't look so startled! You hate me beyond all measure—and with good reason. You came here to beat me up and changed your mind. Why? Could it be that you poisoned the glass so I'd get blamed for it? That would be a clever form of revenge, eh?"

Stan laughed.

"You're talking nonsense, Roger," he said. "I wasn't near the glasses. I merely watched you prepare the drinks and if you want to make accusations, you should be willing to face them, too. I'll have to testify that no one else could possibly have poisoned your grandfather's drink. You handled the glasses and served your grandfather first, and I saw you make him take that certain glass even after he reached for another one. Think that over."

Roger clamped his temples between both hands.

"I'm sorry, Stan. I talked out of turn, but my mind is trying to find some solution. The whole thing is crazy so far as you are concerned. Forgive me for making such a silly accusation. And now I'm going to town and get a drink."

"Better not, Rog," Wilbur advised. "I know Chief Craig didn't say we couldn't leave the house; just that we were to remain in town. But Rog, the people around here don't like you. By now the news has spread everywhere. It's going to make quite a sensation and some of the people might—well, get violent if they see you."

"I can take care of myself," Roger grumbled. "And I need a drink. If any of you want to try and stop me, go ahead."

He stalked out. Peter Sleeth shuffled upstairs to his room. Wilbur Kilburn lighted another cigarette.

"Roger has always been an idiot," he said. "He doesn't stop to think. He can't realize how people in this town feel about him, how much they liked the old man. They're likely to lynch Roger."

Stan shrugged.

"We had no authority to stop him. He's over twenty-one," he said. "I'm going to look around."

"For what?" Wilbur asked.

"Poison," Stan said briefly. "And I don't want any help."

He heard Roger drive away in his roadster. He went into the kitchen. Mrs. Mealey had gone upstairs. Stan examined the pantry shelves, looked in corners, and the ironing board closet.

Finally he went down to the cellar. He checked there for nearly an hour before he found what he was searching for. Tucked up on one of the rafters and concealed by some old pieces of cloth, he discovered a small paper bag. It contained a fine white powder. It was arsenic. There was no indication where it had come from. Stan started up the cellar steps.

He heard the front door close and the sound of someone staggering across the floor above him. He hurried faster emerged from the cellar just in time to spring to Roger Trent's side and keep him from tumbling to the floor. Roger's face was bloody and puffed. His clothes were torn and covered with mud and dirt.

"The miserable fools," Roger moaned. "They ganged up and tried to kill me. They threw rocks, and knocked me down and kicked me. All the time they kept shouting that I'd murdered my grandfather for his money. I was tried, found guilty and they were in the process of executing me when Chief Craig interfered. He saved my life."

CHAPTER III

ATTACK IN THE STORM



IN THE morning Roger came down to breakfast. There were several pieces of adhesive on his face. Yet his puffed and battered eyes were still sparkling with rage. Mrs. Mealey served him with the same aloofness she'd have used with a leper. Roger angrily called her to a halt as she headed for the kitchen.

"Thanks to you and your loose tongue, I was nearly killed last night," he said. "The mob that attacked me was headed by your brother, Tim. It happens that I own this property, for a little while at least. While I do, he no longer works here and you can tell him that when you make your next report to him."

Mrs. Mealey flounced out of the room. Stan Bruce studied Roger for a moment.

"Rog, you just mentioned something about owning the estate for a short time,"

he said. "What did you mean?"

"None of your blasted business!" Roger shouted and arose. "I'm sick of the lot of you. I wish I could throw you all out. Including you, Stan, with your prying ways. Oh, I know you think I killed him. Well, I didn't."

Roger stormed out, leaving his breakfast unfinished. Soon they heard his roadster pull out of the driveway. Stan went to a window. Another car was following the roadster. Chief Craig was taking no chances, but Stan compared the two cars and wondered how the policeman ever hoped to keep up with the cream colored, sleek job that Roger was driving.

Trent was gone all day. Chief Craig came to the house and never even mentioned his name. Sleeth called the officer upstairs.

When Craig came down again, he asked Stan Bruce innumerable questions about old man Trent's birthday party. Stan told him everything he had seen.

"I watched Roger every moment," he told the chief. "He didn't leave the kitchen and no one else went in. I didn't see him drop anything into the cocktail. If he had, I would certainly have noticed it. That's all I know."

Craig rubbed his chin thoughtfully, eyeing Stan.

"I talked with Sleeth," Craig said. "He claims Roger made an accusation, involving you, Stan. How about it?"

Stan gulped. He'd been expecting this ever since Sleeth had called Craig upstairs.

"I enlisted in the Marines right after Pearl Harbor," Stan explained. "I was shipped out fast and left a mighty nice girl behind. Roger knew her, rushed her so hard she lost her head and married him. It was a mistake. Nora knows it now and so does Roger. He was man enough to admit it and offer his help in getting her out of the mess. Of course I didn't murder the old man so Roger would be blamed. I didn't even know who the old man was until I came here."

"I figured it that way," the police chief said. "Well, Roger nearly got killed last night. When you see him, tell him to stay away from town. Plenty of people are sore at him, especially Mrs. Mealey's brother Tim. Tim's a born trouble-maker and now that Roger has fired him, there's no telling what he'll do."

"I know," Stan replied. "But nothing can influence Roger, not even the threat of

that crowd in town."

"Where did he go?" Craig demanded. "He drove so fast my man couldn't keep up with him. All right—I can see by your expression you either don't know or you won't tell me. Roger's an odd one. Say, how long was he married to that girl?"

"He still is married to her." Stan answered. "He lived with her about two months. That was in the winter of Nineteen-Forty-Two. Why?"

Craig rubbed his chin, as was his habit when thinking. His manner showed he was puzzled.

"Funny," he said. "Roger left college soon as the war started. I never even heard he'd got married. But if he left his wife early in Nineteen-Forty-Three, where'd he go? He didn't show up here until early last year. Everybody figured he was in the Army or Navy."

"Why, that's about two years which are unaccounted for," Stan said. "Chief, you've got to ask him about that. Make him tell. And, incidentally, why hasn't he been locked up?"

"That's what everybody in town is asking," Craig said with a smile. "But I'm kinda slow about things like that. I want to be danged sure he killed the old man and I ain't. Not yet. There's evidence enough, I'll admit that, but not the kind I want. Nobody saw him put that poison in the glass."

"You know, there's something missing from the evidence against him," Stan said, with a frown. "I can't exactly put my finger on it but, like you, I think Roger deserves the benefit of the doubt."

CRAIG pulled himself out of the chair. "Yep," he agreed. "And we're about the only ones who'll give him the benefit. If he was tried tomorrow, the jury would convict him without leaving the box. Every man, woman and child in town has convicted him already."

Stan knew this was the case.

"Chief, is there a chance a mob will go after Roger again?"

"I wouldn't give a hoot in tarnation for Roger's chances if he goes to town again," Craig said. "It's all people talk about. The town's come to life after a hundred years and they're mad—mad clear through. They got to have somebody to take out their spite on and Roger is a good specimen of orneriness. Not a soul ever liked him. He was the freshest kid ever sprouted. Some say he was born mean."

Craig got up to go and Stan went to the door with him.

"He ought to be grateful to you for being fair with him," Stan said. "I honestly don't know why I bother because I disliked Roger. Maybe it was what he said about wanting to reform that made me change. I don't know, but I'll stand by him."

Craig grinned.

"You'll put a rope around his neck if you ever tell your story on the witness stand. Myself, I can't believe he's guilty because the one person in the world whom Roger loved was the old man. Watch him tonight. There may be trouble."

Roger came home shortly after dark. He looked tired and dusty, as if he'd driven far at a furious rate. But he offered no explanations as to where he'd been, although his fury of the morning seemed to have subsided. After a dinner, which nobody seemed to enjoy, Stan left the house and started to walk to town.

There was lightning and thunder in the distance. Stan wondered if he was going to get drenched before he got back. He found the usually sleepy town buzzing with excitement. There were little groups gathered on the corners. Eyes followed Stan when he appeared. The townspeople all knew of his connection with the case. Stan headed for the one cafe in the village.

He pushed open the swinging doors and coughed as stale tobacco smoke smacked him head-on. The room was nearly deserted and he walked to one end of the bar. The bartender drifted over and swabbed listlessly with a dank cloth.

"Beer," Stan said. It wasn't cold enough for his taste but he made no comment. The bartender hung around as if waiting for Stan to talk.

"Too bad about old Trent, wasn't it?" Stan said softly.

"He was the nicest man in town," said the bartender. "My wife was sick when she had her last kid. Near died, but the old man put up money and hired the best doctors. He never let me pay him back, either except in drinks on the house. Last time I saw him was six or seven months ago. He never came in here again."

"You must have done something which made him sore," Stan said.

But he wasn't really interested. There was some loud talking going on in the back room. An angry man with a strident voice seemed to be haranguing some other

men. Stan was trying to listen to the voice and the barkeep at the same time. It was a difficult task.

"Made him sore?" the barkeep indignantly swabbed the bar. "Not me. I'd have given my right arm for him. Met him one morning outside and he stopped for a chat. I asked him to drink a few. He just laughed and said he guessed he was a little too old for that any more."

Stan eyed the barkeep with fresh interest.

He was beginning to have a hunch. He jerked a thumb toward the rear room.

"What's going on?"

The barkeep's lips compressed tightly.

"That's Tim Carley shooting off his mouth. He's talking about lynching Roger. Says Craig won't do anything because he's scared of the money Roger's got now. Tim has paid for a few bottles and is setting up drinks for the crowd there. I don't like it. That bunch ain't much good. No telling what they'll do."

"Lynching is an ugly thing to talk about," Stan said. "Listen—if they get out of hand and march away from here in a group, you'd beter call Chief Craig and tell him."

"I'd already made up my mind to do that. Craig can handle 'em. They're scared stiff of him. Never mind paying for the beer. It's on the house."

AFTER thanking him, Stan walked softly to the backroom door and listened. Tim Carley was really giving it to them strong. He talked about getting a rope and Stan shivered. Roger ought to be warned. These men were getting more drunk and dangerous every moment. They were listening to Carley and applauding what he said. It was an evil situation.

Stan left the tavern. Outside, it was raining very hard with lightning playing around overhead like a spiteful demon. He pulled up his coat collar and started moving fast toward the big house, a full mile away. The storm seemed to grow worse as he hurried on. Just outside the town, he left the sidewalk and started to trot. He cut through a field. Somewhere ahead of him lightning struck with a thunderous crash. Something had been hit.

Stan shivered. The weather was match-

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ing the despair and tragedy at the old house. He could see the top gables of the dwelling now. This path led directly there and it was used by everyone. Stan didn't like having the tall trees all around him at such a time. It was no place to be during a thunderstorm.

A thunder clap rattled his teeth. That one was close. He started to run again. Then the entire heavens seemed to open up and crack down upon his skull. There was sensation of falling—falling—into a pit which grew deeper and darker the longer he fell. There was no bottom—only oblivion.

CHAPTER IV

MOB LAW



WHEN Stan opened his eyes, they were promptly filled with rain. He closed them quickly. After a moment or two he realized something unusual was going on not far from where he lay. He tried to get up and couldn't. He was pinned down to the ground. This caused him to open his eyes again, rain or no rain. He was lying beneath a very large and very heavy tree branch. It held him as tightly as a vise.

Blood was trickling down his cheek because he could taste it when he licked his lips. Once more he tried to push that branch away. It moved slightly, but he was too weak to get entirely free. He lay back to rest and then became aware of the voices not far away. He shouted, but couldn't make anybody hear him. The storm drowned out his voice.

Suddenly he heard Wilbur Kilburn's voice, strident and shrill, carrying well above the storm sounds.

"Don't be fools," Kilburn yelled. "Roger is entitled to a fair trial. Pay no attention to Tim Carley. He's sore because Roger fired him. You men are half drunk. Tim is totally so. Go back home and throw that rope away. Don't you know lynching is murder?"

Someone shouted a derisive question. Stan couldn't hear what it was but he heard Wilbur's response.

"Maybe Roger did kill the old man, but you're not judge or jury, or executioners. This is the United States, where a fair trial is every man's right. What if you get

into a jam some day yourselves? Would you want a mob to hang you without a trial? Go home, I say. Sober up, think things over and in the morning you'll bless the fact that I happened along."

The noise of the storm had lessened for now Stan could hear the crowd muttering. Apparently the men had been influenced by Kilburn's arguments for soon Stan heard them clumping away. He tried again to move the branch and this time it slipped a few inches off his chest. He was sore from head to foot, cold and thoroughly wet.

If he lay here, he'd be liable to get pneumonia. Stan summoned all his strength and this time he managed to lift the branch and wriggle out from under it. He arose, shaking and unnerved. His head had a long gash in it—that much he could feel—but no bones seemed to be broken. He passed his wet hands across his clothes and encountered mud, thick, slimy mud. It was all over the front of his clothes.

But, he thought, that branch had knocked him on his back. Why then, was there mud all over the front of his suit? Certainly he hadn't done any struggling face down. The branch had held him pinned firmly on his back.

He looked around and got another surprise. Now he was close to the house, which he hadn't been when struck down. Stan found some matches which were dry enough to ignite. He lighted one, cupped it in his hands and looked keenly at the branch. It was oak.

Stan now staggered over to the trees nearby and used the rest of the matches examining them. There were no oaks in the vicinity. But somewhat further along, he did find the oak from which this branch had fallen. There had been no hurricane to blow this branch a matter of fifty yards. So how had it got there?

Gradually, Stan began to realize that he had not been felled by the branch, but by a club. Whoever had hit him must have believed he was dead and dragged the branch over, dropped it across him and left him there for someone else to find. Unless Craig, when he arrived to view the remains, happened to wonder how an oak branch had fallen where there were no oak trees, the thing would have been put down as an accident. Stan shivered and began walking slowly and painfully toward the house.

When he reached it, old Peter Sleeth

was on the front porch. His clothes were soaked and his shoes were caked with mud. Sleeth growled a surly greeting when he saw Stan.

"Where is Roger?" Stan asked. "Talk fast. His life may be in danger."

"I don't know," Sleeth mumbled. "I've been looking for him myself. That young fool may have gone into town. Wilbur just came in, excited and worried. What's going on?"

Stan brushed past him without answering. Wilbur was coming down the steps. He stopped in surprise when he saw Stan.

"Thank heavens, you came, Stan!" he cried, after a moment. "Roger has disappeared and there's a gang of lynchers out looking for him. I thought I succeeded in getting them to go home, but I can't be sure. If they ever see Roger, nothing can save him."

"We've got to find him," Stan said. "Get some flashlights, if you have any. Hurry!"

TEN minutes later they were prowling around in the darkness, throwing their flashlight rays in all directions. It didn't take them very long to locate Roger. He was beneath a big maple, but his feet weren't on the ground. The rope around his neck prevented that. Roger was dead.

"Blast them!" Wilbur shrieked. "Stupid, ignorant, alcohol-filled fiends! I went out to meet them and Roger must have heard them and fled. But evidently they saw him and this took place, Stan, it's an awful way for a man to die."

"It is, indeed!" Stan said grimly. "Throw the ray of your flash alongside mine. There, on the ground beneath the tree—see the footprints? Plenty of them. Different shoes too. There must have been half a dozen men here. Now let's see the noose. It's an amateur job—just a looped rope."

"His face," Wilbur turned away hurriedly and made funny noises in his throat. "They must have—beaten and kicked him."

"Go back to the house and call Chief Craig," Stan said. "Maybe Roger was guilty of murder, but he didn't deserve this. Tell Craig to hurry."

Stan waited until Wilbur was gone. Then, using the flashlight, he studied the footprints in the ground. Grass, for some reason, had refused to grow beneath this

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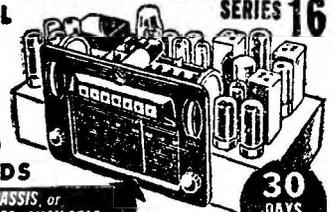
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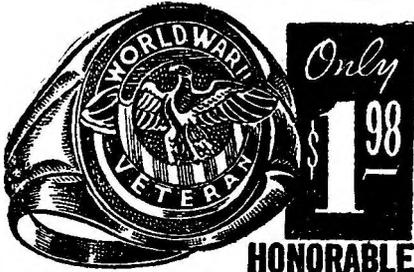
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tree and the earth was very muddy and soft. Stan frowned, picked up a small stick and inserted it into the nearest heel mark. He marked off the depth of the heel mark on the stick and then repeated his performance with a score of similar marks. His frown grew deeper and deeper.

He looked at the gently swaying body again. Roger must have been unmercifully beaten. His hair was matted with a mixture of blood and rain. His clothes were all but ripped from his body. Stan looked keenly at Roger's hands and fingernails. He bit his lower lip in exasperation.

He had time to do some thinking then. Foremost came the fact that he, himself, was slated for death. He wondered why. His evidence would have sent Roger to the gallows, anyway. Certainly Roger was guilty. No other person could have possibly poisoned that cocktail. Nobody else had come near it.

Then Stan heard voices. One was feminine and familiar. He gave a wild shout and started running in that direction. His flash stabbed through the darkness until it centered upon Chief Craig and a girl. She was swathed in a large raincoat evidently borrowed from Chief Craig who was holding her arm tightly.

"Nora!" Stan yelled. "Nora, don't come any closer. What on earth are you doing here?"

Her oval face wreathed in a troubled smile, Nora Trent, formerly Nora Lang, came directly into Stan's arms. He held her for a moment and then repeated his question.

She looked up at him, amazed.

"But, Stan, you phoned and asked me to come. It was a long way. I came as promptly as I could."

For a moment Stan was speechless with surprise.

"I phoned you! Nora, I didn't. But I'm beginning to see what this is all about now. Chief, there's something rather grisly just beyond those shrubs. I'd rather Nora didn't see it."

"Stan—it's Roger," Nora said. "What happened?"

"Take it easy, darling," Stan said. "Roger is dead and I think he was murdered."

Nora shivered and snuggled closer into his arms. Chief Craig rubbed his rain dripping chin.

"I understood Wilbur to say that Roger

had been lynched," Craig said.

"Anyone could assume that easily enough," Stan answered. "But I don't go by assumption. Chief how come you weren't around tonight when Tim Carley led that howling mob up here?"

"I was called to a place on the town limits," Craig said. "It turned out to be a fake call. Somebody wanted to get me out of the way. Listen—you take Nora to the house. I'll do what I can here and then try to round up the men who took Roger. So help me, they'll all face murder charges if I can lay my hands on them."

Stan shook his head.

"Those men disbanded and went home. Some may have met Roger and done this, but I doubt it. Anyway, the members of that mob will never talk. Each one is as guilty as another. They'll alibi themselves the moment they hear the news for Wilbur is sure to say something about it in the house, and Mrs. Mealey will burn up the telephone wires giving warnings. Come to the house as soon as you can."

STAN turned to lead Nora away but paused for a final word.

"Chief, be very careful," he called. "There are footprints around the tree that must be preserved. Roger can't be helped. I assure you of that. Don't muss up those prints."

Craig agreed, and Stan walked silently with Nora toward the house. Nearing it he stopped, made her face him and he kissed her gently.

"Nora, darling, I've got to do something I hoped I never would have to do. I've got to take you into that house and there may be an attempt made on your life."

Nora stared at him.

"What do you mean?"

"You were lured up here," Stan told her. "There can be only one reason; you are Roger's wife and, now since he's dead you will inherit the Trent estate. Someone has selected you as the next victim. Maybe the killer searched Roger's possessions, or went through my pockets last night."

"I had your address and married name in my notebook. From now on, the Trent house and land and a lot of money are yours, if you live to enjoy them. And you will live, darling. Stay close to me. Don't leave me for an instant. That is a house of sudden death."

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"I'm not afraid," Nora said stoutly. "Oh, Stan, it's horrible, Roger being killed this way after murdering his grandfather."
 "He didn't kill him," Stan said. "Roger was a skunk in a lot of ways. He could make more enemies than anyone I've ever met, but he realized his mistakes. Last night we talked and Roger had changed. I really felt sorry for him, Nora, even though he treated us both the way he did. At heart he wasn't such a bad sort and, I swear I'll get the man who killed him."

CHAPTER V

HOUSE OF DEATH



CHIEF CRAIG didn't return to the Trent house for more than five hours. It was early morning when he came in. Mrs. Mealey had gone up to bed, but the rest of the Trent guests had waited up for the old police chief.

Wilbur was sitting with Stan and Nora in the living room downstairs. He acted as if he were still jittery over the two murders. Chief Craig seemed tired and worn. His shoes were muddy.

"Well, I know the names of some of that lynch gang," he said. "Of course they all claim they went straight home. They claim Wilbur made 'em see the folly of their ways before it was too late. But a few of 'em may have met Roger and finished him off. I ain't saying they did or they didn't, but it seems to me—well, how can I talk about what's still vague in my mind?"

Stan was seated on the davenport beside Nora.

"Chief, how about talking with the attorney for the estate," he suggested. "Get him to come here at once. There are a few things about the grandfather's will you ought to know about."

Old Peter Sleeth stirred uneasily in his chair.

"Hey!" he said, suddenly. "Why is this young interloper permitted to take charge here, Craig? Aren't you the Chief of Police?"

Craig nodded.
 "I sure am," he snapped. "But this young fellow seems to be pretty good at detecting. So he stays and carries on. I'll get Attorney Moore over here right away."

Uneasily they waited for the lawyer to

arrive. No one talked much. Sleeth appeared to be worried about something. Finally he went upstairs, awakened Mrs. Mealey and brought her down. She was dressed in a faded wrapper. In the meantime Wilbur Kilburn continued to sit and stare into space, as if brooding over the death of his cousin.

At last the lawyer arrived. He was a mild little man with an enormous briefcase. Over the telephone Craig had already explained what was needed of him. He had brought a copy of the old man's will along with him and was all prepared to read it. Soon after he arrived, he put on his spectacles and began.

Roger was to inherit the entire estate, but if he died without wife or issue, then the estate was to be divided, half to the township and the remainder between Peter Sleeth, Wilbur Kilburn and Mrs. Mealey in equal shares. The same provisions held if Roger's wife or children died.

Stan arose to his feet.

"Chief, I believe Nora was brought here to be killed. As Roger's widow, she now owns his estate, but if she dies, the provisions of the will go into effect. Your motive for murder lies there. Who witnessed the will?"

The lawyer glanced at Sleeth.

"Peter Sleeth and Mrs. Mealey," he said. "But the old man made no secret of what was in it."

Stan called Mrs. Mealey into the living room and ordered her to remain there.

"Now, Chief," said Stan, "sit here beside Nora and guard her till I return."

Then he went into the kitchen. He recalled that when the old man was seized with those abdominal pains after drinking the cocktail, Mrs. Mealey had hurried out of the kitchen with a glass of some foaming medicine. Stan investigated the kitchen, found nothing and then looked in the medicine cabinet of a lavatory. There he found a bottle bearing a drug store label and the name of an out-of-town doctor.

Stan went upstairs, got a phone book and soon found the number of the doctor listed in a nearby city. He put through a call, did some careful explaining and asked his questions. When he hung up, there was a pleased expression on his face.

For a few minutes he sat in the chair

[Turn page]

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1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business manager are: Publisher, Better Publications, Inc., 10 East 40th Street, New York, N. Y.; Editor, Harvey Burns, 10 East 40th Street, New York, N. Y.; Managing Editor, None; Business Manager, H. L. Herbert, 10 East 40th Street, New York, N. Y.
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thinking and then he made three more long distance calls, each one to a prison in three adjoining states. Again he smiled with satisfaction.

Downstairs he went once more, and faced the group.

"I have to work fast," he said. "Nora is scheduled to be killed in some fashion so that no blame will attach itself to anyone here. Yet, among us is a killer—a very astute murderer who takes advantage of situations that arise and plans carefully in the short space of time allotted him. To save Nora from death—for I confess I'm afraid this killer may win if we let him stay loose—I'm going to tell you a few things."

"Bosh!" said Nora. "Take your time, Stan. I'm not afraid."

STAN smiled at her. "I know that," he said. Then his face grew stern.

"We have the old man dead and Roger apparently the one and only person who could have poisoned the cocktail. I can testify to that. We all know the old man drank the cocktail and was gripped by pain. But was it from poison? I talked to the bartender at the cafe in town. He told me that the old man was a regular visitor at the bar until some months ago when he stopped going there. Long time drinkers don't quit that way as a rule unless—they can't take it any more.

"And so, working upon this presumption, I wondered if alcohol made Grandfather Trent ill the moment it hit his stomach. I talked to an out-of-town doctor who was treating the old man. This doctor told me that he had a severe stomach condition, one bound to be fatal in a few more months and that alcohol was a forbidden beverage. He took a drink that night only under Roger's persuasion. It made him ill, but he recovered."

Craig was wide-eyed.
"Do you mean to tell me that cocktail wasn't loaded with death when he drank it?" the Chief asked.

"That's correct," Stan answered. "The poison which killed the old man was administered in something else. It had to be that way. Roger couldn't have poisoned the cocktail or I'd have seen him do it. I think the old man was forced to drink the poison after he had retired. Now Roger couldn't be blamed for that because he was with me every second until the old

man died. Peter Sleeth has a motive, but he's old and decrepit. I can't see him forcing poison down another person's throat. Mrs. Mealey was in the kitchen all the time."

Automatically, all eyes fastened on Wilbur. He was red-faced, started to arise and thought better of it. He sank back.

"Prove it," he grunted.

Craig moved up to him.

"There's proof enough. You're the only one who could have done it and I'm arresting you for murder!"

"Wait a minute," Wilbur exclaimed hurriedly. "I—didn't tell the exact truth about the old man's death. I wanted to get Roger in wrong. Now I realize it was a terrible thing to do. Roger was lynched because of what I did. The old man—committed suicide. He left a note. I—I took it. Also the glass of poison."

"You had the glass in your pocket when you came down," Stan said accusingly. "You let Roger and me go upstairs and then you slipped into the kitchen and swished a little of the poison around in the glass you knew the old man had drunk from. I thought it was suicide. It had to be. The old man would have yelled

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and fought if anyone tried to force poison down his throat. And he seemed to have died quite suddenly and peacefully. Ah along I know there was something wrong with the picture.

"You, Wilbur, shouted that you had heard the old man groan and you had gone to his room. I think you went there to kill him, but he was dead already. He had enough arsenic in him to kill swiftly. He wouldn't have groaned. That was a lie."

"All right, it was," Wilbur declared beligerently. "But I didn't kill him. His note will prove it. Maybe I did wrong and maybe I can be sent to jail for it, but I didn't kill anyone. I hated Roger. Everyone hated him."

"You murdered Roger," Stan said quietly. "Don't deny it, Wilbur. You wanted him out of the way for a reason only you and I know. Roger vanished for over two years. I found out where he went. When a man drops out of sight so completely and never talks about it, there must be a reason. Roger was in prison for manslaughter.

"The combination of booze and a powerful car finally caught up with him. He ran down and killed two children. That changed him—along with his prison term where he had time to think. He made arrangements to turn over a large part of the estate he would some day inherit, to the families of these children he killed.

"If that happened, there wouldn't be much left. Not enough for Roger to support you and Sleeth. That's what Roger



meant when he said he'd own the estate for a little while anyhow. He knew he'd have to surrender most of it. I even think he wanted to. The day he drove away and refused to say where he'd gone, he spent with lawyers representing the estates of those children. He sensed that his own life was in danger."

"But you said Wilbur killed Roger," Craig broke in anxiously.

"He did. Wilbur contrived to reach Tim Carley and put a flea in his ear. Carley is impressionable, mean and surly. I imagine Wilbur even supplied him with money to get the boys drunk. At any rate Wilbur knew I was in town and he stopped me on the way back—with a club. While I lay there, Wilbur also stopped the crowd of would-be lynchers. I never will believe they would have gone through with it. He persuaded them to go home and they did, meekly."

HERE Stan paused to send a scornful glance at Wilbur, before resuming.

"But it was all part of Wilbur's plan."
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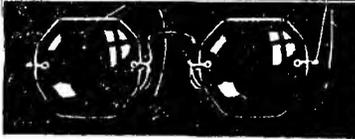
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I was supposed to hear him argue the crowd out of lynching Roger and thereby he would become a good fellow, above all suspicion. To make me stay put he even dragged a heavy branch some distance and pinned me down with it. After arguing with the mob, he hurried home, told Roger they were coming for him and offered to help him get away.

"Naturally Roger was glad of the help and went along with him. Wilbur promptly slugged him, ripped his clothes, and kicked and beat him while he lay unconscious. The hand of the corpse prove this. They show no signs of having been used to resist any mob as Roger surely would have resisted. The rankest coward will fight for his life.

"Wilbur strung Roger up. He had ample time. He went to a grassy spot, changed his shoes to others which would leave different tracks, and walked around the muddy ground. He repeated this until the shoe marks indicated that a number of different men had been there. Only Wilbur made one little error. Each shoe mark was exactly as deep as another. They were all made by shoes occupied by someone whose weight never varied. And Wilbur walked in the mud while I was there. His shoe marks made tracks exactly as deep as all the other marks."

Wilbur hung his head. He seemed to be utterly dejected.

"Wilbur was a patient man," Stan went on. "In his case murder was just as patient. He bided his time until the proper moment came, and then he seized it, and made the most of the opportunity. Every-

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thing points to Wilbur, but I had no evidence the old man committed suicide. Wilbur revealed that."

For a long moment there was silence in the room. They were still fascinated by what Stan had revealed.

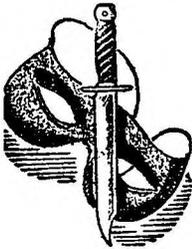
It was then that Wilber made his last desperate try for revenge—revenge against the woman who had arisen at the last moment to stand between him and the Trent fortune. Like a flash he leaped to his feet and sprang toward her with outstretched talon like fingers.

"You little wench, I'll kill you!" he shrieked.

But Stan was moving also, just as fast as Wilbur. His big fist thudded once and Wilbur went staggering back. But he was up again like a rubber ball, this time with a knife glittering in his hand. Stan's muscular fingers reached out and closed like steel bands around his wrist with bone-crushing force, and Wilbur screeched for a second time, and collapsed to the floor in a dead faint.

For a moment or two Stan stood looking down at him. Then he glanced up at Chief Craig.

"That was a fool trick to try on an ex-Marine who fought Japs all over the Pacific," he said. "There he is, Craig—the killer. He's all yours. And now, come on, Nora. Let's get out of here!"



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OFF THE RECORD

(Continued from page 8)

Bat's automatic leveled and roared. As the din of the explosion quieted down, the Black Bat heard more jumping. He started in pursuit, moving with incredible swiftness.

That's just a mere taste of the action—THE LAKESIDE MYSTERY is a yarn packed with excitement from beginning to end. It's one of the most intriguing of G. Wayman Jones' fascinating Tony Quinn novels and you will enjoy every moment of it. Look forward to a yarn that will hold you spell-bound as you follow Tony Quinn on a trail that leads to astonishing revelations—with smashing surprises every step of the way!

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LETTERS FROM READERS

WE CERTAINLY appreciate the many fine letters that we are constantly receiving and we want your opinion, too. How did you like the stories in this issue of BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE? Which story appealed to you the most? Write and tell us! With the help of your suggestions, comments and criticisms, we are better able to plan future issues of BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE for your greater entertainment.

And now let's take a look at just a few of the many letters we have been receiving:

It may be of interest to you that this is the first letter concerning any story I have read in the past, but I just had to tell you that short story, KILLERS CAN'T KICK, by Robert Sidney Bowen, certainly rates a letter. Let's have more yarns like that. I like the Tony Quinn stories also.

—Ernest D. Criscuolo, Syracuse, N. Y.

Thanks for your letter, Ernest. No doubt Robert Sidney Bowen will be pleased, for an author always enjoys a cheer for one of his yarns.

I have been reading BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE for some time—and I sure enjoy every

Fight INFANTILE PARALYSIS!

Join the
1947 MARCH OF DIMES
January 15th to 30th

issue. I particularly liked **THE SURVIVOR MURDERS** and **THE RELUCTANT JUROR**. Keep up the good work.

—Bob Marshall, Chicago, Ill.

We like those yarns, too, Bob—and thanks for writing.

Just finished reading the last two issues of the magazine. Think I liked **THE SURVIVOR MURDERS** a little better than **THE MAN BEHIND MURDER** of the two Tony Quinn novels I read. My favorites among the shorts were **DEATH FENCED IN** by Jean Francis Webb and **TWO THOUSAND AND ONE VICTIMS** by Norman A. Daniels.

—Daniel Wood, Philadelphia, Pa.

Thanks for your letter, Dan—as we have said before we value the opinions of all of our readers.

I liked the **SURVIVOR MURDERS**, **KILLERS CAN'T KICK**, **MURDERER'S RETURN**, **DEATH WITNESS**—and to be truthful just about all the stories in the issues of **BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE** that I have read.

—Mrs. John White, New York, N. Y.

Hope we keep right on pleasing you so well, Mrs. White—and we'll try to do just that!

That's all for this time—but let's hear from more of our readers. Please address all letters and postcard to The Editor, **BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE**, 10 East 40th Street, New York, 16, N. Y. Be seeing you next issue—happy reading to everybody!

—THE EDITOR



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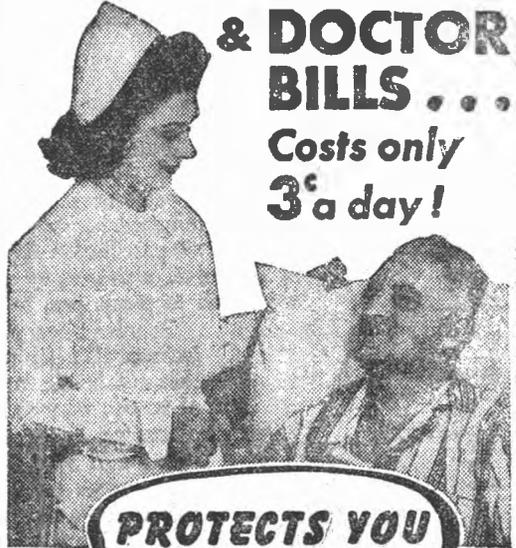
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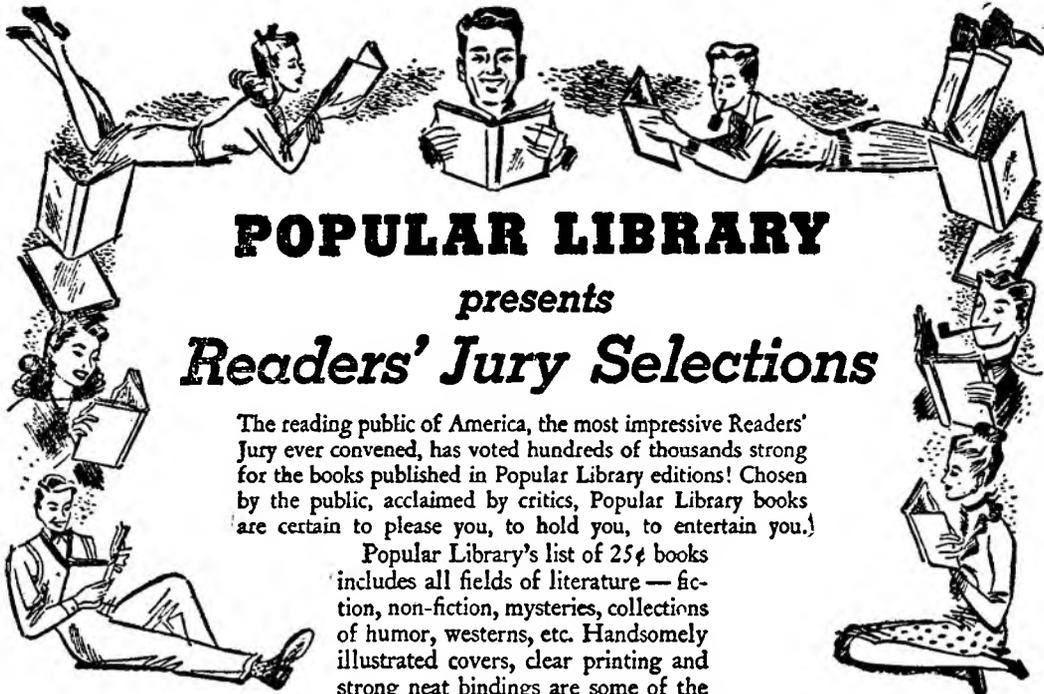
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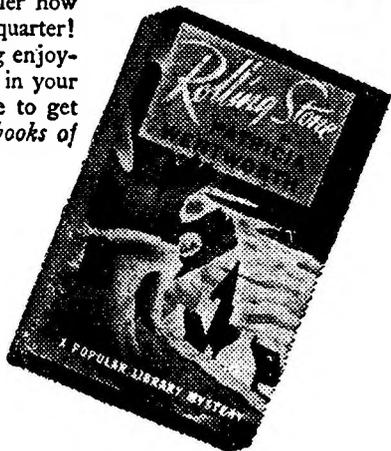
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- THE RIGHT MURDER.....by Craig Rice
- ROMANCE IN THE FIRST DEGREE.....by Octavus Roy Cohen
- TROUBLE SHOOTER.....by Ernest Haycox
- DIVIDEND ON DEATH.....by Brett Halliday