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EVERY
ISSUE!



A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

FEATURING

THE BLACK BAT'S DRAGON TRAIL

A LONG BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL FEATURING
TONY QUINN, MASKED NEMESIS OF CRIME

PARTIAL CONTENTS

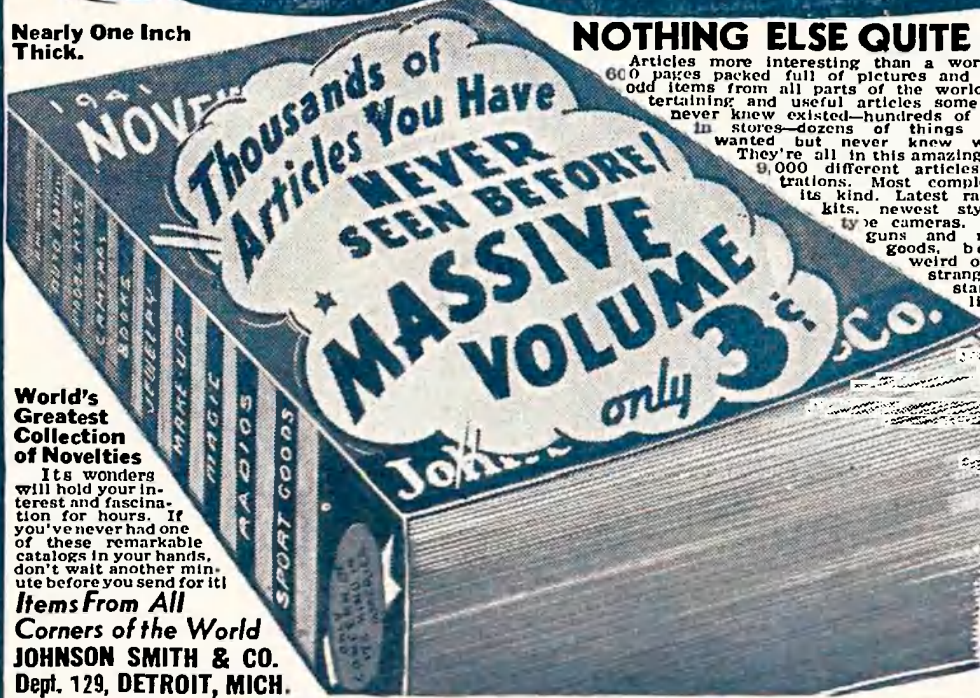
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• EVERY STORY BRAND-NEW •
BLACK BOOK
DETECTIVE
MAGAZINE.

Vol. 12, No. 2

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January, 1941

A Complete Book-Length Novel



**THE BLACK BAT'S
 DRAGON TRAIL**

Featuring Tony Quinn, Nemesis of Crime

By **G. WAYMAN JONES**

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PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

HE THOUGHT HE WAS LICKED - THEN A TIP GOT BILL A GOOD JOB!



I Trained These Men

Chief Operator Broadcasting Station

Before I completed your lessons, I obtained my Radio Broadcast Operator's license and immediately joined Station WMPC where I am now Chief Operator.

HOLLIS F. HAYES
327 Madison St.
Lapeer, Michigan

Service Manager for Four Stores

I was working in a garage when I enrolled with N. R. I. I am now Radio service manager for the M— Furniture Co. for their four stores.

JAMES B. RYAN
146 Second St.
Fall River, Mass.

\$15 a Week Extra in Spare Time

I am doing spare time Radio work, and I am averaging from \$700 to \$850 a year. Those extra dollars mean so much—the difference between just barely getting by and living comfortably.

JOHN WASHKO
87 New Cranberry
Hazleton, Penna.

\$200 to \$300 a Month in Own Business

For the last two years I have been in business for myself making between \$200 and \$300 a month. Business has steadily increased. I have N. B. I. to thank for my start in this field.

ARLIE J. FROEHNER
300 W. Texas Ave.
Geese Creek, Texas.

I WILL TRAIN YOU AT HOME in your spare time for a GOOD JOB IN RADIO

If you can't see a future in your present job; feel you'll never make much more money, if you're in a seasonal field, subject to lay offs, IT'S TIME NOW to investigate Radio. Trained Radio Technicians make good money, and you don't have to give up your present job or leave home to learn Radio. I train you at home nights in your spare time.

Why Many Radio Technicians Make \$30, \$40, \$50 a Week

Radio broadcasting stations employ operators, technicians, Radio manufacturers employ testers, inspectors, servicemen in good-pay jobs. Radio jobbers, dealers, employ installation and servicemen. Many Radio Technicians open their own Radio sales and repair businesses and make \$30, \$40, \$50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make \$5 to \$10 a week fixing Radios in spare time. Automobile, Police, Aviation, Commercial Radio; Loudspeaker Systems, Electronic Devices are other fields offering opportunities for which N. R. I. gives the required knowledge of Radio. Television promises to open good jobs soon.

Many Make \$5 to \$10 a Week Extra in Spare Time While Learning

The day you enroll, I start sending you Extra Money Job Sheets—start showing you how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your Course I send plans and directions which have helped many make \$5 to \$10 a week

extra in spare time while learning. I send special Radio equipment to conduct experiments and build circuits. This 50-50 training method makes learning at home interesting, fascinating, practical. YOU ALSO GET A MODERN, PROFESSIONAL, ALL-WAVE, ALL-PURPOSE SET SERVICING INSTRUMENT to help you make money fixing Radios while learning and equip you for full time work after you graduate.

Find Out What Radio, Television Offer You Act Today! Mail the coupon for my 64-page book, "Rich Rewards in Radio." It points out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television; tells about my Course in Radio and Television; shows more than 100 letters from men I have trained, telling what they are doing and earning. Read my money back agreement, MAIL COUPON in an envelope or paste on penny postcard—NOW!

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Dept. 1A09, National Radio Institute
Washington, D. C.



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AGE.....

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY..... STATE.....

THIS BOOK has shown hundreds how to MAKE MORE MONEY



OFF THE RECORD

A DEPARTMENT FOR READERS



IN the next issue, readers, we bring you one of the most sensational cases ever tackled by Tony Quinn—a baffling mystery packed with suspense and action from the first page to the last! **THE BLACK BAT'S JUSTICE**, by G. Wayman Jones, is a complete book-length thriller that will make you grip the sides of your chair tightly!

It's a novel that revolves around diamonds — those cold, glittering stones that have meant so much good and evil in the world. The symbols of love and happiness. The lure that has led men to crime and death.

Diamonds—the theme of many a bloodstained page in history!

The Plane of Death

Sinister forces are at work when a plane from Europe arrives with everyone on board either dead or sleeping strangely! There had been five million dollars worth of diamonds on the ship! Five million dollars in diamonds that apparently had vanished into thin air.

The case was so big that Captain McGrath of the Headquarters Squad longed for the co-operation of that mysterious menace of crimedom, the one man who was an enigma to police and underworld alike.

The black clad figure known as—**The Black Bat!**

Even though it was the dream of McGrath's existence to unmask the Black Bat—to prove that his suspicions of blind Tony Quinn were right—there were times when the captain and the whole police force from the commissioner down needed the Bat's aid.

Van der Veer's shipment of diamonds had been stolen, and his agents had been found mysteriously murdered. Five million dollars worth of gems missing. This was a case that

called for all of Tony Quinn's brains and daring, for not only had the diamonds been stolen from a plane while it was in flight but later Van der Veer had been found—dead!

All of this is in the action packed book length novel in the next issue of **BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE**, a novel of surprising revelations and tense moments from start to finish!

The Black Bat on the Trail

Tony Quinn and his three companions, Carol Baldwin, Silk Kirby and Butch O'Leary go into action, and of course it is the Black Bat who dominates the scene. In his regalia he assumes a sinister, eerie appearance. Law-breakers shudder when they hear his name or see one of those small black stickers which brand the Bat's work.

The Black Bat is on the trail!

But the Black Bat is not after petty crooks. He learns of a number of jewelry store robberies that have taken place before the five million dollars worth of diamonds were stolen from the transatlantic plane.

Is there some connection between these events? Why are all the dead men found with burns on their hands?

These and many other problems must be answered by the Black Bat!

Silk Kirby's Peril

Two gunmen lead Silk Kirby out into the night—and he knows that they are taking him to his death . . . Silk tenses his muscles, readies himself.

Then, like some great bird startled by intrusion, a weird figure suddenly arises from the tall grass and swoops down on the trio. The thugs yelp with fright and start to draw their guns.

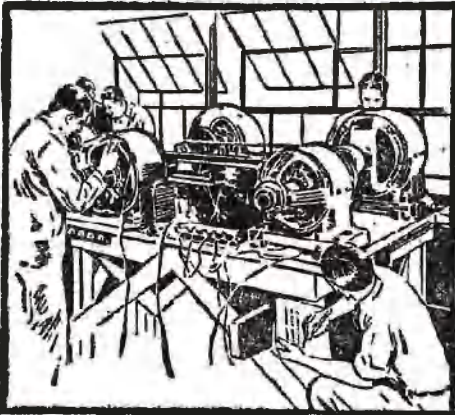
Silk expertly sticks a foot between
(Concluded on page 9)

TRAIN FOR A BETTER JOB IN ELECTRICITY

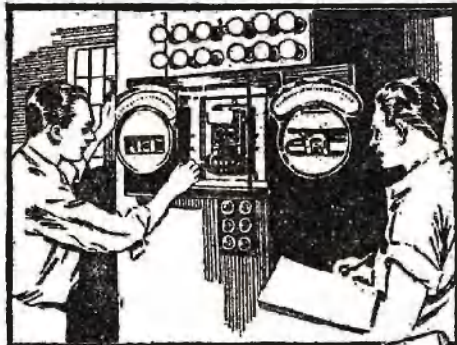
Pay Tuition After Graduation

ACTUAL WORK ON ACTUAL
ELECTRICAL MACHINERY

12 WEEKS SHOP TRAINING



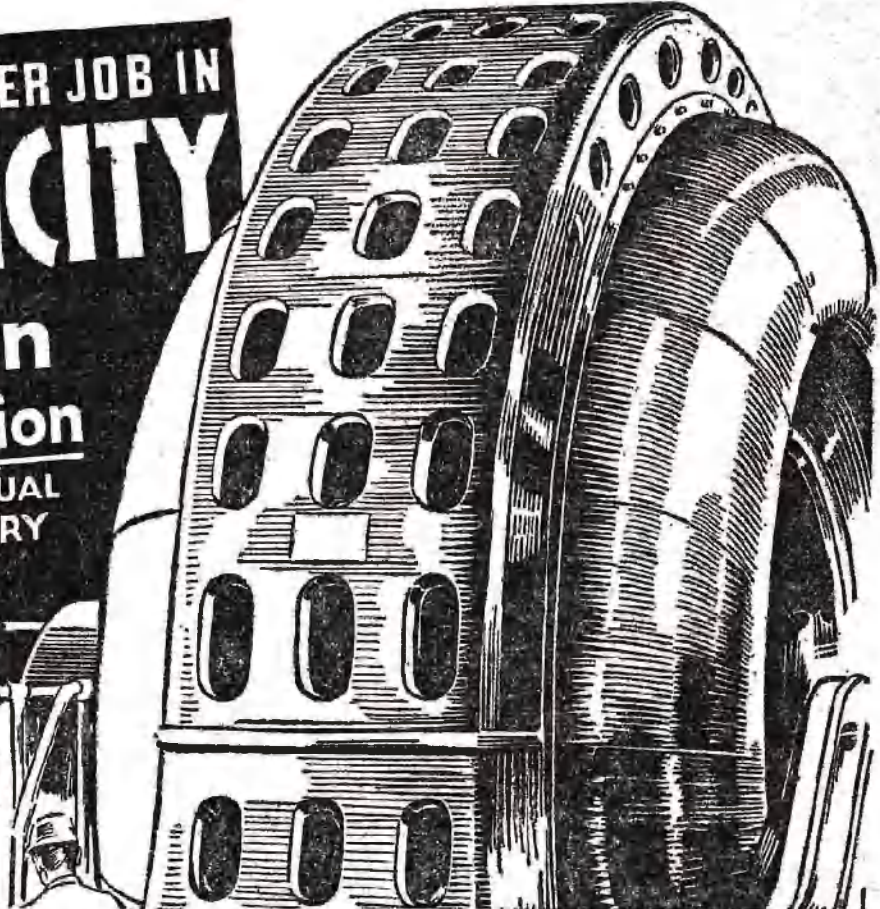
First you are told and shown what to do and how to do it. Then you do it yourself.



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FREE
BOOK**



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Coyne
Electrical
School



"MILLIONS FOR DEFENSE" . . . Means Thousands of New Good-Pay Jobs!

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at a Fraction of the Expense

This is a call for men everywhere to handle exclusive agency for one of the most unique business inventions of the day.

Forty years ago the horse and buggy business was supreme—today almost extinct. Twenty years ago the phonograph industry ran into many millions—today practically a relic. Only a comparatively few foresighted men saw the fortunes ahead in the automobile and the radio. Yet irresistible waves of public buying swept these men to fortune, and sent the buggy and the phonograph into the discard. So are great successes made by men able to detect the shift in public favor from one industry to another.

Now another change is taking place. An old established industry—an integral and important part of the nation's structure—in which millions of dollars change hands every year—is in thousands of cases being replaced by a truly astonishing, simple invention which does the work better—more reliably—AND AT A COST OFTEN AS LOW AS 2% OF WHAT IS ORDINARILY PAID! It has not required very long for men who have taken over the rights to this valuable invention to do a remarkable business, and show earnings which in these times are almost unheard of for the average man.

Not a "Gadget"—
Not a "Knick-Knack"—

but a valuable, proved device which has been sold successfully by business novices as well as seasoned veterans.

Make no mistake—this is no novelty—no flimsy creation which the inventor hopes to put on the market. You probably have seen nothing like it yet—perhaps never dreamed of the existence of such a device—yet it has already been used by corporations of outstanding prominence—by dealers of great corporations—by their branches—by doctors, newspapers, publishers—schools—hospitals, etc., etc., and by thousands of small business men. You don't have to convince a man that he should use an electric bulb to light his office instead of a gas lamp. Nor do you have to sell the same business man the idea that some day he may need something like this invention. The need is already there—the money is usually being spent right at that very moment—and the desirability of saving the greatest part of this expense is obvious immediately.

Some of the Savings
You Can Show

You walk into an office and put down before your prospect a letter from a sales organization showing that they did work in their own office for \$11 which formerly could have cost them over \$200. A building supply corporation pays our man \$70, whereas the bill could have been for \$1,600! An automobile dealer pays our representative \$15, whereas the expense could have been over \$1,000. A department store has expense of \$88.60, possible cost if done outside the business being well over \$2,000. And so on. We could not possibly list all cases here. These are just a few of the many actual cases which we place in your hands to work with. Practically every line of business and every section of the country is represented by these field reports which hammer across dazzling, convincing money-saving opportunities which hardly any business man can fail to understand.

Profits Typical of
the Young, Growing Industry

Going into this business is not like selling something offered in every grocery, drug or department store. For instance, when you take a \$7.50 order, \$5.83 can be your share. On \$1,500 worth of business, your share can be \$1,167.00. The very least you get as your part of every dollar's worth of business you do is 67 cents—on ten dollars' worth \$6.70, on a hundred dollars' worth \$67.00—in other words two thirds of every order you get is yours. Not only on the first order—but on repeat orders—and you have the opportunity of earning an even larger percentage.

This Business Has
Nothing to Do With
House to House Canvassing

Nor do you have to know anything about high-pressure selling. "Selling" is unnecessary in the ordinary sense of the word. Instead of hammering away at the customer and trying to "force" a sale, you make a dignified, business-like call, leave the installation—whatever size the customer says he will accept—at our risk, let the customer sell himself after the device is in and working. This does away with the need for pressure on the customer—it eliminates the handicap of trying to get the money before the customer has really convinced himself 100%. You simply tell what you offer, showing proof of success in that customer's particular line of business. Then leave the invention without a dollar down. It starts working at once. In a few short days, the installation should actually produce enough cash money to pay for the deal, with profits above the investment coming in at the same time. You then call back, collect your money. Nothing is so convincing as our offer to let results speak for themselves without risk to the customer! While others fail to get even a hearing, our men are making sales running into the hundreds. They have received the attention of the largest firms in the country, and sold to the smallest businesses by the thousands.

EARNINGS

One man in California earned over \$1,600 per month for three months—close to \$5,000 in 90 days' time. Another writes from Delaware—"Since I have been operating (just a little less than a month of actual selling) and not the full day at that, because I have been getting organized and had to spend at least half the day in the office, counting what I have sold outright and on trial, I have made just a little in excess of one thousand dollars profit for one month." A man working small city in N. Y. State made \$10,805 in 9 months. Texas man nets over \$300 in less than a week's time. Space does not permit mentioning here more than these few random cases. However, they are sufficient to indicate that the worthwhile future in this business is coupled with immediate earnings for the right kind of man. One man with us has already made over a thousand sales on which his earnings ran from \$5 to \$60 per sale and more. A great deal of this business was repeat business. Yet he had never done anything like this before coming with us. That is the kind of opportunity this business offers. The fact that this business has attracted to it such business men as former bankers, executives of businesses—men who demand only the highest type of opportunity and income—gives a fairly good picture of the kind of business this is. Our door is open, however, to the young man looking for the right field in which to make his start and develop his future.

No Money Need Be Risked

Is trying this business out. You can measure the possibilities and not be out a dollar. If you are looking for a business that is not overcrowded—a business that is just coming into its own—on the upgrade, instead of the downgrade—a business that offers the buyer relief from a burdensome, but unavoidable expense—a business that has a prospect practically in every office, store, or factory into which you can set foot—regardless of size—that is a necessity but does not have any price cutting to contend with as other necessities do—that because you control the sales in exclusive territory is your own business—*don't pay more on some individual sales than many men make in a week and sometimes in a month's time*—if such a business looks as if it is worth investigating, get in touch with us at once for the rights in your territory—don't delay—because the chances are that if you do wait, someone else will have written to us in the meantime—and if it turns out that you were the better man—we'd both be sorry. So for convenience, use the coupon below—but send it right away—or wire if you wish. But do it now. Address

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OFF THE RECORD

(Concluded from page 6)

the legs of one man and sends him crashing down. He lunges for the other man and the gangster's gun slaps Silk across the face and sends him reeling backwards.

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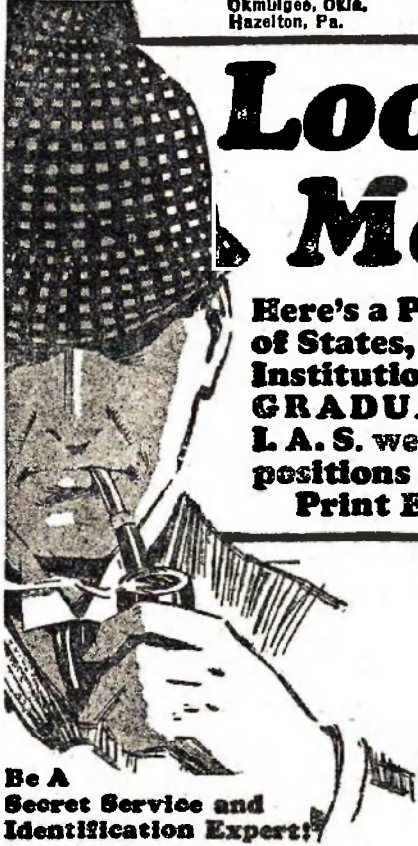
I would like to say I think yours is a swell mag, and I like the character *The Black Bat* very much. I would like the magazine to come out oftener.—Melvin Burkhart, Providence, R. I.

THE BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE MAGAZINE is great. Recently you said something about a club. I wish you would start a club.—Bernard Seme, Cleveland, O.

These letters are typical of many hundreds of others received. Come on, tell us whether you think we should inaugurate a club for readers—and be sure to give us your opinion of the magazine. I'd like to hear from each and every reader. The more letters, the better the magazine—and we're grateful to all who write us!

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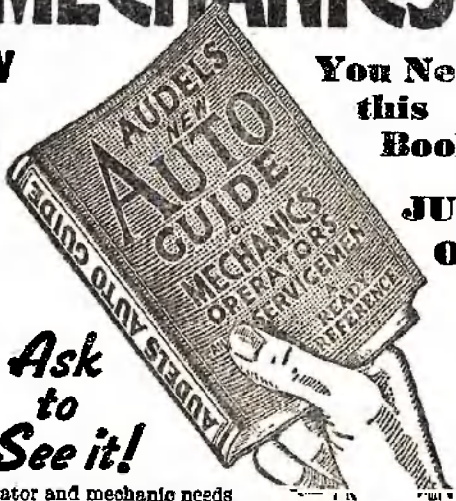
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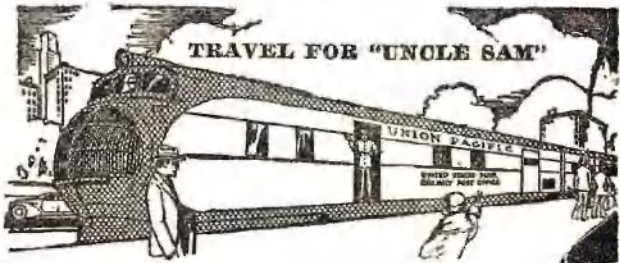


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THE BLACK BAT'S



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CHAPTER I

The Dragon Strikes

IT had been raining lightly. Down in Chinatown the wet pavement and cobblestones reflected the lights from a thousand windows and Neon signs. It shimmered upon

elderly Chinese, with hands tucked in their sleeves in patriarchial dignity, shuffling along with a younger generation in American clothes. It gleamed upon dozens of others threading their way in and out of the cafés to blend with the restless human tide—opulent

Tony Quinn Plays the Role of Hooded

DRAGON TRAIL



A stream of slugs ripped the gun from the gangster's hand (Chapter VI)

By G. WAYMAN JONES

Author of "The Black Bat and the Trojan Horse," "The Black Bat's Triumph," etc.

folk in search of food and exotic entertainment, panhandlers from the slums in search of handouts, and sharp-eyed, swarthy-faced men with upturned raincoat collars, hat brims pulled low over their eyes.

At the narrow entrance to a dim al-

ley one of the raincoated figures, moving casually as he approached, paused to light a cigarette. It gave him a chance to sweep his gaze up the street in both directions over his cupped hands and to look at the diamond-studded wrist-watch within inches of

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his eyes. There was a large diamond stickpin in his tie while still another stone glittered on a finger of his left hand.

"Eleven-thirty," the man muttered under his breath. "The others oughta be showin' up any time now if they ain't already here. Yep—here comes one of 'em."

He turned and stepped swiftly into the alley, melting into night that was Stygian. The second man paused a moment to glance furtively about him, then he, too, disappeared as though whisked from sight by an invisible hand. There came a muffled curse as he stumbled over some refuse underfoot. The anathema was followed by a chuckle from somewhere up ahead.

Within ten minutes several more men appeared in the alley. Presently several husky Chinese also approached and followed on the heels of the Americans. They made their way along the alley that was so narrow there hardly was room for the two big, sleek laundry trucks parked at the back of a ruined building that was windowless above. The white placards of a house wrecking company were pasted on the red bricks.

From the darkness a voice speaking in Cantonese from somewhere beside the trucks directed the Orientals to the front truck. The American mobsters who had gathered got into the second one. As the last man came in, a Chinese driver at the wheel of the rear truck stuck his head out and again whispered directions.

"If you will open the two back doors of the truck, Dragon," he said to one

of the gangsters, "you will find your friends inside."

The man obeyed. He crawled in, fumbling around for a seat. From the darkness up near the front came a growled complaint.

"I don't like joinin' up with a secret Chinese society one damned bit. This is the first time the boss has sent us on a job and not told us what it is. I think he's nuts, if you ask me." He sniffed audibly. "Besides I like workin' with guys of my own kind."

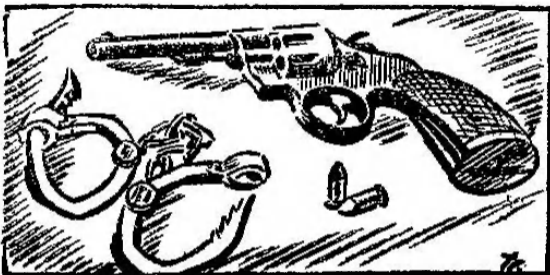
THE bespectacled Chinese sitting at the wheel of the truck turned in the darkness. He spoke in English that was cultured, and without a trace of accent.

"The Chinese members of the Dragon feel the same way, Flash, except myself," he said. "But they realize that what we are about to do would be utterly impossible with your specialized talents. I still think is foolish of Duke to endanger the profitable—ah—laundry business my little establishment has built up during the past two years by joining the Dragon. But like all Americans he's unable to resist a quick clean-up. A large sum in cash offered by the Dragon Master for a single job tonight fired Duke's greed. It is indeed regrettable."

"When are we gonna meet this guy we're supposed to address as 'Master'?" the man called "Flash" asked complainingly.

But the bespectacled laundryman at the wheel did not answer. He was too busy. The truck ahead, in which the Chinese rode, had begun to roll toward the opposite end of the alley, and he was quickly following.

Both shiny trucks rolled out into the street, and for three quarters of an hour their drivers worked their way across town by darkened side streets until at last they came to a building sitting alone at the edge of a small city park. Years before, the park and



Fiend of Crime Who Battens on Disaster!

the building had been the private grounds and museum of a multi-millionaire. On his death, it had been willed to the city.

It was dark with the loneliness of midnight around the building, near which the trucks presently stopped. Up ahead one of the Chinese got out and disappeared into the night. Ten minutes later he returned as silently as he had come, getting in beside the driver again.

"Everything is quiet," he informed in sing-song Chinese. "I saw nobody. There is a light in the watchman's cubbyhole at the back. Drive straight ahead without lights and pull up near the large door at the back."

Inside the marble halls of the building an elderly watchman in striped overalls made his rounds, punching his clock at regular stations along the dimly lit corridors. It was about twelve-thirty and time for him to lunch. He punched in the last station, went back among the glassed-in cases to his little room at the back, sat down on a bench in a corner, and opened his dinner pail.

As he ate, a new sound suddenly obtruded itself. The watchman paused, cocking an intent ear to listen. Again it came—a faint clicking from in back. He could not recognize the sound, for he could not guess that it was made as Flash probed the vitals of the locked door with an instrument as delicate and as specialized as those used by a brain surgeon. Already Flash had located the wires of the alarm system and burned them out with a torch.

The watchman put down his lunch and hurried out into the main building again, padding along with revolver in hand. He slipped through a room whose walls were covered with modern paintings and into the hallway leading to the back. He had almost reached the rear door when a menacing voice came from somewhere behind him.



The Black Bat

"Just drop the roscoe, pal, like a good guy."

The watchman whirled, making one single motion to lift his gun. He never got it up. The big .38 Police Special in the hand of the determined man who had spoken, rose and fell against his skull. The watchman's muffled cry was cut short, and the man who had attacked him caught him as he slumped.

He shoved the bleeding watchman to two other men who appeared dimly in the shadows.

"Take him back to his place and stay with him," he ordered gruffly. "If he wakes up whack him over the head again. Flash, get a couple of those Chinese to give you a hand with your cutting outfit. According to one of the guys who shows the rubbernecks around, the vault is downstairs. Come on."

THE two mobsters each took the watchman by a wrist and began dragging his limp form back along the polished floor. Flash directed two of the husky Chinese to pick up the huge, heavy suitcases containing his acetylene and oxygen tanks. He him-

self carried the torch and it was no ordinary one. It had cost him exactly two thousand dollars.

Down two dark flights of steps the party moved cautiously and silently. Bringing up the rear were several Chinese carrying ordinary canvas stretchers. Once they stopped and held flashlights while Flash knelt before a door and inserted an instrument into the lock. After a few moments' expert manipulation it clicked. They went down still another flight into a vault room deep beneath the earth's surface.

One of the Chinese who made up one half of the queerly assorted group looked dubious at sight of the massive door of the vault with its chilled steel. Flash saw the look, and chuckled, low in his throat.

"Sure, it's burglar-proof, pal, but don't worry," he said, and grinned broadly. "It takes heat to make steel burglar-proof, maybe you know. So all you got to do to cut it is to get something hotter. That's why this torch cost me two thousand slugs. It was made in Berlin by a screwy little professor. One of them scientific birds."

"You are quite sure the alarm system has been disconnected?" the Chinese who appeared to be in charge of his coterie asked uncertainly.

"He knows his business, buddy," growled a burly gangster impatiently. "Hurry up, Flash, and get that toy of yours busy."

The "expert" put on goggles, stuffed cotton plugs into his ears, adjusted the two gauges to more than four times the ordinary pressure on the short red and green hoses, and snapped a flint lighter to the torch. Yellow flame lashed out, then shortened, giving way to a blue light with such hissing intensity that it grated painfully into eardrums, like steel scraped across glass.

While the others stood around with palms over their ears Flash Mega, who long ago had gained a reputation with

the police for the facility with which he could handle just such a situation, set to work with the torch. Steel that would withstand the bite of an ordinary flame as though it were nothing but a lighted match soon began to give way as the torch ate viciously into metal. The white-hot stuff bubbled and foamed and ran down to splatter on the concrete floor in molten drops. For five minutes the cracksman worked the torch in a circular motion that ate a three-inch-wide hole deeper and deeper into metal.

Only an expert welder could have cut such a hole more than six inches deep into metal, due to back heat melting the tip of the torch. Yet presently the flame ate through, started a circular cut around the spokes of the vault door handle, and completed it. Flash shut off the torch, picked up a tiny crowbar that was almost a jimmy, pried loose the mechanism, and let it crash to the floor, leaving a gaping hole two feet in diameter.

The laundryman who had been so dubious stared in disbelief. Flash had cut through eighteen inches of solid burglar-proof steel! The cracksman grinned at Chow Seto, the Chinese who on other occasions than this was known as an innocuous laundryman, but said nothing.

The vault door swung open, and the master cracksman packed up his outfit. Chow Seto, followed by the others, went inside the vault. Several small crates were stacked in a corner. The bespectacled Chinese laundryman took a single look at the contents of one, then nodded to the others.

"This is it, gentlemen," he announced. "In these boxes we have a treasure worth approximately ten to eleven million dollars."

A BIG mobster who had been called Joe—Joe Mega, the brother of the expert Flash—gave a harsh laugh as he bent and picked up a green object from a box. It was of corroded bronze.

"A ceremonial vase of the Shang Dynasty, seventeen hundred and sixty-six to eleven hundred and twenty-two years before the coming of Christ," informed Chow Seto blandly. "One of the few things I learned at Columbia University before finding out that the — ah — laundry business pays better than a knowledge of the value of things of great antiquity."

"You mean to tell me that dopes pay millions for this junk?" demanded Joe in disbelief, juggling the precious vessel up and down in his hands. "Well, pal, it's a good thing the Duke didn't put me wise when I cased this joint for him or I'da told him he was nuts!"

Chow Seto almost winced as he quickly took the treasure from the hood's careless hands. He delivered rapid orders in Cantonese and the men brought in the stretchers. Quickly and efficiently the Orientals picked up the small crates and placed them on the stretchers to carry to the waiting trucks. In that treasure were altar pieces from the Sixth Century, a T'ang filigree gold crown once worn by an empress, Sung paintings on silk that rolled up like papyrus, delicate white Ting Yao pottery, and other antiques for which a collector would have sold his soul. Case after case was carried up the stairs and outside, where it was loaded into the guarded trucks.

Two of the mobsters were the last to come out of the building. They climbed into a truck and Joe's voice called to them from the front sharply:

"What about that watchman, Manni?"

"You never did know your own strength, Joe," came the laconic reply from the gangster called Manni, who among his intimates—and to the police—was known as Manni Torrio. "The guy's dead, Joe—that's all."

The trucks got under way, leaving behind a gaping back door. Silence descended over the place that had become a hall of death for an elderly

watchman whose only crime had been that he had tried to fulfill his duty. The Dragon had struck!

CHAPTER II

The Dragon Strikes Again



THREE quarters of an hour later the trucks were back at the place from which they had started. One of the Orientals knocked on the back door of the house beside the alleyway, and it was opened shortly by an elderly Chinese. Low orders were voiced and again the Orientals got busy.

Within short minutes the door had swallowed up crates, stretchers, and men. Chow Seto's two trucks rolled out and departed. The Chinese gunman himself, however, did not accompany them.

Inside the building the six American gangsters made their way along an ordinary passage where ancient boards creaked underfoot. The art collection had been taken away hurriedly, ahead of them. The aged Chinese led them through a door and down a flight of steps and along still another passage, the musty air of the catacombslike place filling their lungs, half choking them.

The narrow way was lit by a dim electric light bulb over another door. This door, the trained eyes of the mobsters saw at once was made of steel.

"Where's Chow?" asked Flash, before they reached the door. "I thought he was with us."

"Search me," Joe growled, and shrugged.

In front of the steel door the party came to a halt in a single file while the aged Oriental reached out a foot, unseen, and pressed twice on a thin, purposely warped board. Beneath that

board was an electric button that sounded a buzzer inside. Two rings would cause that door to open. But woe to him who stood before it unaware that his weight was sounding a warning that an enemy was without!

For a moment nothing was heard except the rasping breathing of the men standing in the cramped, musty passage, with heads bent to avoid scraping the rafters above. Then there came a metallic click as an electrically operated bolt was withdrawn and the door swung inward.

Flash, directly behind the aged Chinese, gave a muffled gasp of admiration as he peered over the old man's head.

Standing demurely with hands tucked in the sleeves of her embroidered pink silk Oriental costume was a Chinese girl of breath-taking beauty! About nineteen or twenty, Flash quickly judged.

"The Dragon Master welcomes the new members, Dragons," she said in English, and in a cultured voice. "You will follow me."

She turned and led the way.

"Get a load of that baby, Joe," Flash Mega muttered to his brother over his shoulder. "But hands off her! She's mine."

"Nix," his burly brother grunted, scowling. "It's bad enough to take a blood oath in a damn Chinese secret society without you muffin' the works by fallin' for a good-looking dame. You go monkeying around with her and you'll get in trouble. Dames and business don't mix. You know what Duke's orders are—keep our mouths shut and obey the orders of this Dragon Master guy we're goin' to see."

The mobsters followed the girl down a short flight of broad stone steps into the basementlike room, which was some forty-five or fifty feet square. Its floor was two stories below street level—and stepping into that room was like stepping into another world.

The place was decorated like a secret worship room in some ancient palace of old China. Rich drapes of Oriental splendor hung from the walls and thick rugs of untold value covered the concrete floor. There were no chairs. With a wave of her hand the girl directed the mobsters to sofas.

There were at least thirty Chinese present, as well as some Americans, though Chow Seto and the group of Chinese who had been in the trucks were missing. Some of the Chinese men were young, with American haircuts, and wearing American clothes. These Orientals held various positions in private homes, in cafes, and in laundries and art shops throughout the city. Others were little shopkeepers in Chinatown, and they wore the raiment that was their ancient heritage. And one Oriental's horny hands proclaimed him a farmer who had come from outside the city.

FLASH MEGA'S black eyes watched speculatively as the girl moved lightly across the room toward other broad stone steps leading up to an opening in the drapes. Joe saw the look on the face of his brother, and quickly realized its import.

"Lay off, Flash!" he growled again, jabbing a sharp elbow. "Dames are gonna get you in plenty trouble some of these days."

The girl who held Flash Mega's attention to the exclusion of all else crossed the room and ascended the short flight of steps. Here was a sort of stone altar surmounted by a carved dragon's head, in whose two eyes glowed two tiny red electric bulbs. The girl disappeared through the drapes.

The red bulbs forming the dragon's eyes above the men blinked three times and it grew quiet in the smoke-filled room, the sing-song Cantonese of the Orientals instantly dying down. The drapes parted again and a man stepped through, bowing low in obeisance to the dragon altar, his long-

nailed hands outstretched. Robes of green silk covered him from neck to the floor, and a weird green mask in the shape of a dragon's head concealed his features.

He straightened and his eyes surveyed the silent watchers below. When he spoke it was in a curiously high-pitched voice.

"I am the Dragon Master," he intoned. "Tonight the Dragon has performed a great service. Recently there was brought to this country from China certain priceless works of art to the value of many millions of dollars. The money was to be used as a war chest to buy badly needed airplanes for our country in her fight against an aggressor.

"Eight bankers and other financiers looked over the collection, and then formed what was known as 'Eight Incorporated' for the purpose of purchasing the treasure. However, these financiers quickly became victims of their own greed. Their art experts appraised the treasure at only eight millions of dollars, instead of the ten or eleven millions suggested as their worth by Dr. Ling, whose ability to fix an evaluation cannot be doubted."

The figure in green paused. Flash Mega spoke to his brother in an aside. His lips did not move, and his narrowed eyes were intent on the Dragon Master.

"That guy's voice is disguised, Joe—I'd lay a bet on it. There's something familiar about it, too. You reckon that's why Duke ain't here? You reckon it's him playing this Dragon business? Or do you think that the guy in that green thing is Chow Seto?"

He got an elbow jab and a surly, low-voiced growl for an answer, and the Dragon Master went on.

"It was then that I enlisted the services of our new American members," the high-pitched voice droned. "Tonight, with the aid of these new brothers, we have done the impossible. We have taken the treasure from a



McGrath

vault that was impregnable, and we will hold it until these evil eight are made to realize their foolhardiness. We shall again demand that ten millions in cash immediately be raised for its return, the money eventually to be paid over to proper representatives of the Chinese government."

"Just supposing they call your bluff like they did on the first note, pal?" put in Flash Mega, a disdainful grin crossing his face. Flash was not the sort to be impressed even by this pageantry before him.

"You underestimate the new society of which you are now a blood brother, Dragon," the Dragon Master said coldly. "Of course they again will refuse. So I have planned accordingly. They must be given proof that the Dragons mean business. Already I have selected the—shall we say victim?—whose ultimate fate will bring them to their senses. In this city lives one of the evil eight—a blind man who once was a district attorney. One Tony Quinn by name. He lives alone in his mansion with a single man servant. Perhaps you have heard of him?"

A snarling, bitter curse rumbled deep in Joe Mega's heavy chest. Rage

sent the dark red blood into his swarthy face, and his merciless eyes blazed.

"I oughta know the damned district attorney!" he shouted. "He sent two of the mob up the river before his eyes were put out by acid thrown at him. One of the guys was a special pal of mine. Duke's got it in for him, too—been swearing to get even with Quinn ever since!"

A chuckle came from the Dragon Master, though there was nothing pleasant in the sound.

"I think Duke need not trouble himself to seek revenge any longer. That will be done for him most efficiently, and you two may come along to witness it. As you possibly know, when the collection first was appraised, Harvey Belmont and the other men comprising Eight Incorporated presented Quinn with a little green jade Buddha in appreciation of certain of his former public services. It seems that he had broken up a gang attempting to blackmail Mr. Belmont and some of his friends. Tomorrow morning Quinn's body will be found, his neck broken and the jade Buddha beside him. Wrapped around the Buddha will be a note with our demands that unless the full ten millions, on which they first agreed, is paid at once, that the others will suffer a like fate."

"Supposing they don't come up with the dough?" put in Manni Torrio, also dubious.

"Then one by one the financiers whose greed was responsible for what has happened tonight will die violently and at once," the Dragon Master said without a single change in the monotone of his voice.

"Listen, pal," Flash Mega sneered, "I'm with you to the limit, and I sure want to be present when that ex-district attorney goes on his last ride. But don't go getting any foolish ideas about Commissioner Warner and his cops. One false move on your part and we'll all end up doing a Chinese fandango in the hot squat."

The Dragon Master did not answer that, but clapped his long-nailed hands twice.

"Observe!" he intoned.

THE drapes behind him parted and the most astounding person the mob had ever set eyes upon waddled through on dwarfed, crooked legs!

The man—or was he actually man?—was a Chinese not more than four and one half feet in height, yet weighing a full one hundred and sixty pounds. His pinhead with its huge ears was shaved slick until it glistened, except for a tiny topknot of black hair. The creature had no neck. Only a lump of muscle that looked to be as hard as iron was humped at the base of the small, bullet-shaped skull. It disappeared into shoulders that were a mass of muscle. The arms were abnormally long, almost touching the floor.

The brown monstrosity was stripped to the waist, the dwarfed legs being encased in black silk knee trousers cut short at the huge, knotted calves. No shoes were on the huge, twisted feet. Something in the set of the grotesque and misshapen body with the long dangling arms was reminiscent of a giant chimpanzee. The abnormality looked about with a pair of keen, intelligent, close-set eyes and then up at the Dragon Master.

"This is Ohmo," announced the man in green. "Do not be misled by his looks, for he is a most valuable asset to us. Ohmo is a mute and understands no English. He is quite harmless if left alone, but will blindly obey any order given by me."

"I get it!" The cracksman grinned, then laughed aloud. "You're sending this guy to pay a call on that ex-district attorney, huh?"

"He will be taken to pay a call on the honorable ex-district attorney," corrected the Dragon Master. "The rest of you Dragons will return to your respective positions throughout the city, unless you"—he looked di-

rectly at Flash Mega—"care to go along. For the rest of you, there is much work to be done. One Dragon already has his full instructions which will be carried out upon word from his Dragon Master. That particular Dragon will know who I mean, for he serves as personal servant to Harvey Belmont. That is all. You may go."

He spoke in Cantonese to the pin-headed monstrosity and it waddled back out of sight on short, bowed legs. The Dragon Master then stepped back a single step, bowed low to the altar again, with his long-nailed hands outstretched, and disappeared through the curtains.

The Dragon Master was gone.

CHAPTER III

Monster in the Night



IN the well equipped gymnasium of his home that evening Tony Quinn, stripped to a pair of white trunks, stood locked toe to toe, and struggled with all his strength to break the hold of the man whose clean-shaven head gleamed under the ceiling light. The man's underslung, aggressive jaw was clamped tight and nothing could be heard but the harsh breathing of the two struggling men. Then the former district attorney relaxed and let his weight sag.

There was a final grunt, a heave, and at the moment Quinn stopped long enough to get a fresh breath he unexpectedly went sailing through the air to land with a thud on the thick wrestling mat.

"How did that happen?" he complained, as he sat up, looking startled.

Jack "Butch" O'Leary, his wrestling mate, straightened his massive shoulders and grinned at the ludicrous look of surprise on Quinn's face.

"That's what you get for not shifting your weight like I've been drumming into you, Boss," he said, chuckling. The result was no surprise to a former boxer like O'Leary. "Just another case of keeping one jump ahead of your opponent," he said off-handedly. "Or, as you've heard it said—Jack Dempsey's famous remark, remember?—not forgetting to duck. You learn that in boxing as well as wrestling. Sorry I had to pull that one on you, Boss, but it'll teach you never to be off guard. You've learned fast."

"I've learned enough for this evening, anyhow, Butch," Quinn said, snapping upright in a flip-up. "As a ju-jutsu teacher you're tops. Anyway, it passes the time, doesn't it? Not much else to do. It's been pretty quiet lately."

"Quite right, sir," put in Silk Norton, Quinn's ever-ready right-hand man, valet and confidante, who had been standing by quietly watching the lessons in the ancient Japanese art of ju-jutsu. "For myself, I'm satisfied. There have been plenty of times since I've been trying to master this rather strenuous avocation of ours when I've almost wished for the peace of my former profession."

Quinn smiled at that, for before Silk Norton's reformation the little man had been a safe cracker *par excellence*.

Quinn was still smiling as he got into the glassed-in shower, watching his unconventional valet lay out blue silk pajamas and a red silk dressing gown. The little ex-confidence man who, hungry and desperate, had come in the night to rob him and had remained to become a faithful valet and valued friend would no more be content to play a role of idleness when it came to facing the foes of law and order than the others who made up the former district attorney's little circle. Beneath that high, bald forehead and the air of general slipperiness that exuded from him lay a keen brain that loved excitement. More

than a score of times that brain had proved a valuable asset to Quinn in the strange role Fate had destined him to play.

Quinn turned on the water. Seen under the flying spray his body was not strikingly muscular, but it was tall and well built. Strength and speed were packed into the supple lines that were deceptive.

To the world that knew about him, Anthony Quinn, once a virile, upstanding representative of law forces whose name had held terror for evil doers, was now an impotent blind man whose sight had been permanently destroyed by acid thrown at him in a crowded courtroom, and whose face was horribly scarred about the eyes. Day by day he could be seen tapping his way about the grounds of his estate or along the street near his home, sometimes led by the faithful Silk.

But for a long time he had seemed to live in a world apart. To those who paused long enough to give him a fleeting thought, the former brilliant and public servant appeared to be a retiring man hiding himself from the world and his former friends because of deep disgust with life and sensitiveness over his affliction.

SUCH actually had been the case during the long months when Tony Quinn had lived in a sea of blackness. But Nature had been as kind as possible, giving him something in return for what had been taken from him. As a result he had since realized that his senses of feel, smell, and hearing were far more acute than formerly. Under his sensitive fingers whatever he touched had begun to tell strange new stories. His sense of smell had sharpened. His ears had become the ears of a hound, picking up with ease and sifting multitudinous sounds that once had been inaudible.

More months had gone by until, in the darkness of a lonely night, a girl with golden hair and blue eyes had

come in through an open window like an angel out of nowhere to offer him hope where eye specialists had said there was no hope. Through a delicate operation by an unknown small town surgeon the corneas of the eyes of Carol Baldwin's policeman father—dying from paralysis brought on by a gangster bullet—had been given to him.

An extraordinary thing had occurred. When at last Tony Quinn had been allowed to remove the bandages he had been astounded by the miracle that had happened. His were the eyes of darkness as well as the eyes of day!

His were the eyes of a—black bat!

Because he had recognized this himself it had given the former district attorney the inspiration for his life work. And now the name of the Black Bat that he had taken for himself in a self-imposed crusade against crime had become almost legendary. By night he had become that figure of terror to the underworld—the Black Bat who prowled wherever evil stalked, and met it on its own grounds.

Unhampered by the red tape that tied the hands of men who were sworn to preserve law and order, and with professional ethics of his former position shuffled off, he had become a shadowy Nemesis of crime who brought panic to the underworld. Gangsters who long had been waxing fat and rich behind the protection of high-priced lawyers found themselves unprotected and at the mercy of a terrible avenger who, unknown and often unseen, fought them tooth and nail. The Black Bat met threat by action, intimidation by retaliation.

Quinn, fresh and virile, with nothing physical to indicate that he was the Black Bat, came out of his shower, dressed, and went into the living room to his favorite chair by the open fireplace. The damp, early summer night was warm and Silk Norton had pulled back the heavy drapes and opened the French windows to let in the night's damp coolness. After Butch O'Leary,

the other man of the trio who were Tony Quinn's two closest personal allies, had gone out through the secret tunnel to his boarding house a few blocks away, the slippery little valet came in carrying a glass of cold milk.

"Could I get you anything else, sir?" he asked, as he handed it to the supposedly blind man.

Silk was about forty, and a master at make-up and voice imitation. His perfect imitation of Quinn's voice more than once had fooled Captain McGrath, of Homicide, when the keen policeman, long suspicious that Quinn was the Black Bat, had phoned while the Black Bat was on the prowl.

"You can bring the new book on Chinese art you got for me, Silk," answered Quinn, setting down the empty glass. "I've become quite interested in the subject. I'm going to read a few hours before turning in."

"Very good, sir."

Silk brought the book from the library and then retired on noiseless feet, seeming to glide from the room. Quinn settled himself deeper into his chair to read into the small hours of the morning, as was his custom. The house grew deadly quiet. Midnight came and still Quinn read on. From somewhere off in the night came the faint, gloomy boom of a clock striking two.

QUINN did not quite know when the first foreign sounds penetrated his sensitive ears and told him he was not alone in the room. But the half raised book suddenly slid down beside him in the chair. At the same time there came a strange human smell to his sensitive nostrils.

Then a huge hand reached over the back of the chair as he ducked and shot up, wheeling to face a sight that sent the hair raising itself along the nape of his neck.

Standing at the back of his chair was a grotesque caricature of a human being, naked to the waist, and looking like some abysmal brute out of the

Neanderthal Age. Its glistening pin-head was sunk deep between the enormously wide shoulders like the sharp, slick head of a monster sea turtle protruding from its shell. A Chinese, undoubtedly, Quinn saw at that first swift glance, and the horrible being had paused for a split second, the green jade Buddha he had taken from another room clutched in one of the creature's oversized hands. But only for a split second.

Now, as Quinn faced it, the Thing dropped the Buddha and sprang through the air like a giant chimpanzee!

Quinn's right foot unconsciously had sought the cleverly hidden light switch that Butch had placed under the edge of the carpet for just such an emergency. His slippered foot clicked out the lights and plunged the room into darkness.

And the moment the lights went out Tony Quinn, ex-district attorney, became the Black Bat!

He flung himself sideward as the Thing cleared the distance separating them. It struck the exact spot where he had stood, a faint whistling sound emanating from its nostrils as it landed. He guessed then that the monster was a mute. It wheeled to pounce again upon its prey but the prey had become a flitting shadow. The Bat melted into the folds of the drapes against the wall.

The Thing's keen ears, however, caught the faint rustle inaudible to ordinary human ears and it whirled, leaping toward the spot. This time it caught its quarry. A hand with fingers like steel prongs closed over the Bat's wrist and crushed down. The bones almost gave way under the pressure. Quinn had not called for help—it had all happened too swiftly. Besides, the lessons Butch had so painstakingly taught him during the past weeks were standing him in good stead.

He let his weight sag against that of his attacker for a moment, just as

Butch had done earlier in the evening. An arm shot out at the deformed body. Then, in the pitch darkness of the room, there was a flurry of bodies, that faint whistling sound from the mute thug again, and the Thing hit the floor flat on its back with a jar that shook the house.

Such a terrific fall would have knocked the wind from an ordinary human and broken its grasp, but the monster's steel-banded fingers encircling the Bat's wrist only clamped down the harder—crushed until the bones threatened to crack. A moan of pain burst from the Bat's lips and he opened them to shout. But before he could call out, the Thing's other hand shot out from the floor and grabbed his ankle with the same crushing force. The hand jerked, and the Bat went down. His wrist was released and a paralyzing blow that almost broke his neck caught him just below the ear.

Ju-jutsu!

The whole world spun crazily before Quinn's pain-filled eyes. He was lifted as though he had been a child and thrown across the Thing's shoulders. As agilely as a monkey the Oriental monstrosity went out through the open French window to the ground, carrying the jade Buddha clasped in one huge hand.

It set off at a rocking run across the grounds, and even in his half paralyzed state, Tony Quinn found himself amazed that even a half human Thing like this, with such short, bowed legs, could move so fast. It slipped through the shrubbery, peered furtively about the dimly lit street, then loped on with its human burden across a back lot. Presently a large laundry truck loomed up near a row of trees.

A MAN got out from under the wheel and stepped to the ground as Quinn was carried to the truck. There was something vaguely familiar about this man but, half-dazed as

Quinn was, it eluded his memory at the moment. And when still another man got out of the rear of the truck, his looks also touched some chord of recognition uncertainly.

Then the ex-district attorney had it—when he saw the diamonds! These two were the notorious gangsters Flash Mega and his brother Joe! He had reason to remember them only too well during the time he had been in office—and to know the leader of the gang to which they belonged. "Duke" Kasini! For some reason Quinn had been kidnaped by a Chinese thug who was being aided by members of Kasini's big mob!

Flash chuckled softly in the darkness as he held open the doors of the truck for Quinn to be carried inside. Not for a moment did one of those over-sized hands of the distorted Oriental relax its grip on the captive's pinioned ones, and in them was the strength of a gorilla's hands. The Thing straddled his captive on the floor of the truck, looking inquiringly toward the muffled figure in green silk robes sitting on a seat near the front. The Dragon Master—though Tony Quinn could not yet know that. He did, however, recognize the man's speech when he murmured his approval in Cantonese.

"Master," Flash Mega said with a chuckle, "I take off my hat to this monkey man of yours. But he didn't kill him—yet—did he?"

"Ohmo never disobeys the orders of the Dragon Master," the man addressed intoned, in a curiously high-pitched voice. "I ordered him to bring this man alive, that you might witness but one of the many things I have taught him. Now, to the City Hall."

Joe Mega got back under the wheel. The creature now identified by the name, Ohmo, held Quinn in a deadly grip as those steel-banded fingers held his pinioned wrists as in a vise. As the truck eased away into the early morning darkness Quinn's bat eyes saw the Dragon Master take a piece of



The man at the controls saw a weird figure burst out of the night (CHAPTER VIII)

paper from his green robes and wrap it around the jade Buddha, snapping it snug with a rubber band. A note that probably would be left beside his body, Quinn knew instinctively.

For Tony Quinn was certain that Kasini and his mob, joining up with some kind of a secret society of thugs, had helped kidnap him only because they meant to leave him dead on the steps of the City Hall, or somewhere nearby.

Those two gangsters had good reasons for wishing him dead. Quinn well realized that. During his term as district attorney he had prosecuted hood after hood and sent them up the river. Some of the men had talked. Among things Quinn had learned was that Duke Kasini made regular trips to China to buy huge shipments of opium and smuggle it in by way of Marseilles and other European ports. He was well known in Shanghai where he worked hand in glove with dealers in the poppy.

Of course this information had been passed along to the Federal Bureau of Narcotics at Washington, but nothing had come of it to date, though men had been working on the tip assiduously. Knowing that a man was guilty, and securing enough concrete evidence to bring him to trial were two entirely different things.

The truck jolted on, working its way by devious side streets toward City Hall. Quinn had not moved. By now Flash had climbed over into the front seat beside his brother. And by now the grip on Tony Quinn's pinioned wrists had relaxed a trifle.

Joe Mega turned around then in the front seat, and spoke to the sinister figure in green.

"The City Hall's just around the block," he said. "But I still think—" and the mobster, callous murderer that he was, suppressed a slight shiver—"that a roscoe would do the job better. I don't mind bumpin' guys off, but that ape gives me the creeps."

The laundry truck swung sharply

around a corner, swaying. The Dragon Master spoke in Cantonese to the half naked Chinese still astride Quinn's pajama-clad body. Quinn moved then. He snapped up and heaved hard, grabbing at the jade Buddha beside the green-robed leader. As Ohmo fell sideward and turned like a cat, the jade piece in Quinn's hand smashed him alongside his shaved head. He fell like a log.

"Look out," yelled Flash Mega. "The guy's blind, but he's dangerous!"

His gun came up, but Quinn already had made a headlong dive and landed atop both Flash and his brother, at the wheel. The gun went clattering. Joe Mega fell over the wheel and the truck lurched wildly, smashing a front fender against a street light standard. The impact threw open the left door just as Quinn grabbed at the handle. He fell out over Mega, tumbling headlong to the pavement. He caught a brief flash of concrete coming up, heard the sudden wail of a siren as a police car shot into view down the street, and then stars exploded in his brain.

He was still sprawled unconscious on the pavement in his silk dressing gown, with the jade Buddha beside him, when more police cars and an ambulance arrived. In one of the cars were Police Commissioner Warner and Captain McGrath, of Homicide.

CHAPTER IV

Dragon Master's Ultimatum



At ten o'clock the following morning three police cars conveying two black limousines drew up in front of the curb at Tony Quinn's estate. A number of men, including two Chinese, got out of the two shiny machines and came up the walk to the house, followed by the

uniformed police who stopped to wait outside on guard when the others entered. Two more policemen patrolled the grounds.

Silk opened the front door and ushered the visitors into the spacious sitting room hung with heavy, expensive drapes.

"How's Tony, Silk?" asked rugged, gray-haired Commissioner Warner as the valet murmured for them to be seated.

A worried frown crossed the little man's sharp, pointed face.

"A very bad fall he had, sir. But he's managed to get out of bed to see you and give you more details of his unfortunate experience. Permit me to thank you, sir, on my own account for such quick action on the part of the police after I heard the commotion and discovered that he was missing."

Silk disappeared and Captain McGrath, always suspicious of Tony Quinn, whom he firmly believed, but could not prove, to be the Black Bat, let his eyes rove around the room as he reached for a cigar. McGrath was beefy-faced, and heavy-shouldered, with the tenacity of a bulldog. Duty was a fetish with him, and it was for this reason that he was determined, sooner or later, to catch Tony Quinn red-handed at his night-prowling activities, much as he liked the man. But such was Captain McGrath's stern creed that, had such evidence to warrant it been placed in his hands, he would have arrested his own brother for an infringement of the law as quickly as he would run in the lowest criminal in town.

"Maybe he's not hurt as bad as he's letting on," the captain grunted, biting off the end of the cigar. "The ambulance surgeon said it was only a bad lick on the head."

Before Commissioner Warner could answer, Quinn, guided by his valet, came in, tapping his way with a cane. From beneath the white bandage on his head his dead-looking eyes stared lifelessly ahead like two pools of col-

ored glass. His face was pale and drawn—thanks to some ministrations on the part of the clever Silk, though the visitors would never have guessed this. He looked ready to collapse, though waving away Warner's apologies for having brought him out of bed in this condition.

"By all means don't discourage the captain, Commissioner," he added, his voice weak and uncertain as he almost collapsed into a chair. "By the way, did he buy that rubber reducing belt I suggested?"

A LAUGH at McGrath's expense went around the room. His rapidly expanding middle was as sore a spot in his mind as his corns sometimes were to his feet. He bit down viciously on the unlit cigar.

"Go ahead and laugh," he growled. "But here's something you won't laugh off. I'm betting a month's pay that, after last night's little affair—you getting slugged night after we get news about that big museum being robbed of millions—that the Black Bat goes into action again."

Commissioner Warner had already briefly informed Quinn of that huge robbery, in which Quinn himself had a personal interest, since he was a member of Eight Incorporated who had contracted to buy it.

"And I'm betting another month's pay," the captain added grimly, "that this time I slap the cuffs on him. Any takers?"

"Captain, this is too good for an invalid to miss, so I'll take both bets," answered Quinn, smiling wanly. "And now, Commissioner, what can a helpless blind man do to help you gentlemen?"

Warner made the introductions, presenting the two Chinese first. Colonel Wang was thin, bespectacled, an army officer who appeared to speak but little English and this brokenly. His object in coming to America was twofold, he had told the commissioner, who relayed the information.

He had accompanied the fabulous treasure that had been brought to this country from China a month before, so that its sale should help the Chinese Government to purchase more guns, ammunition and planes. The Chinese colonel had been in charge of the armed Chinese guards who had guarded it with their lives. His second mission here was to select and test-hop the military planes that were to be bought and shipped back to China.

Professor Ling, the other Chinese, was a scholarly-looking little man in high white collar and business suit. With his wispy gray mustache and thin chin whiskers he looked much like a masquerading Mandarin patriarch who would have felt more at home in heavily embroidered robes of state. He owned an art antique shop in Chinatown and at one time had been curator of Eastern arts at the museum where the collection had been stolen.

Walter Dugro, one of the American visitors, was still tanned and rugged in spite of his fifty or so years. Some time before, he had taken over a bankrupt light plane factory and reorganized the business for the production of military planes. It was his deadly new experimental twin-engined bomber that Colonel Wang had been putting through its paces.

Warner introduced Paul Chivor next. About thirty-five or so, affable, and a flying soldier-of-fortune, Chivor was a handsome man who appeared to be well educated, cultured, and who spoke Cantonese fluently. For the most part he acted as interpreter for Colonel Wang.

Naturally Quinn knew the four bankers. Harvey Belmont, thin and aristocratic, was their recognized leader, and the others were Thompson, Harrison and Heffner. When Quinn had been district attorney he had broken up a blackmail gang that had tried to swindle them, though he had small personal liking for any

of them. They were all too eager for profit.

Quinn himself had wanted them to pay the full ten millions for the treasure, even though he had intended to turn over any excess profits he should make from the transaction to the Chinese Government when the treasure later would be sold for a still higher figure.

That was all an aside now, in Tony Quinn's mind, for his attention was on Commissioner Warner whose chief interest, at present, was in what had happened to the former district attorney the night before.

"First of all, Tony," the commissioner said, "you weren't in condition to tell coherently what happened when we brought you home at four this morning. So I'd like you to relate everything now to McGrath and myself."

He took from his pocket the green jade Buddha and put it on the table.

TONY QUINN could have told more the night before, had he cared to. He had deliberately declined to do so for two reasons. He wanted McGrath to think he was more badly hurt than he was, and he had wanted these men to come here, just as they now had come.

He told again of the attack, but omitted certain details. He did describe how he had been carried, half paralyzed, on a pair of naked shoulders to the truck from which he had eventually escaped. But he made no mention of having recognized his kidnapers. Despite the fact that the Bat usually made every possible effort to cooperate with the police to the fullest, he felt on this occasion he was justified in withholding this information. To give it would be to invite a renewed attempt on his life. He wanted the killer mob to feel secure for the moment.

He told of overhearing their plans, however, of happening to grasp the Buddha in his struggle with the thug,

and of his blind dive toward the front of the truck in a desperate effort to cause a smash-up. The bulldog McGrath interrupted.

"How'd you know which end of the truck was the front?" he demanded suspiciously. "You were struggling with this ape Thing and you say you were confused—"

"McGrath," gritted Warner in downright anger, "this is the last straw. I've warned you time and again that my patience would run out. Well, this morning you're going on a plainclothes beat in Chinatown to direct the dragnet of officers down there—captain or not. We'll see how

this Dragon society which has been defiant enough to admit they were responsible for the robbery, I know we're not up against amateurs.

"Whether or not you wish to pay the money they demand is your affair, though I advise against it. I brought you here to listen to Quinn's story, so you'll know the risk you're taking. It's plain enough to me he was kidnaped, as the most available of you members of Eight Incorporated, meaning to kill him to serve as an example to the rest of you what to expect, if you held out.

"It seems unbelievable that an up-to-the-date vault of burglar-proof

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your feet like that for awhile."

"But, Commissioner," interceded Tony Quinn, wanting the Homicide captain any place except down there, "please don't be so harsh on the captain. I'm sure he means nothing personal."

But Warner stood pat.

"And now, gentlemen," he said to the others around him, "you again see what you're up against. Naturally we're making every effort to recover the treasure. Suspects at the rate of nearly a hundred an hour are being brought in by the police dragnet. So far we've found nothing, nor do I expect to. After reading the note from

steel has been cut open. But the fact remains that it has been, that the treasure is gone, and that the city, as owners of the museum, is responsible to the Chinese Government and its ambassador for several millions of dollars. And now, Tony, perhaps you would like to have me read that note for you."

He opened the note and read:

To Those Concerned: Honorable greetings and a final warning from the Dragon. You have been given one chance to pay to a beleaguered country the full value of the treasure, ten millions of dollars. You have been given one warning of what would happen should you fail to do so. Should the honorable morning papers carry the story

that the guilty Eight Incorporated refuse our just demands, then others will suffer the Death of the Dragon before another day dawns. Your police protection will be of no avail.

The Dragon Master has spoken.

A short silence followed. Tony Quinn sat woodenly, his dead eyes in his bandaged head staring lifelessly into space. Finally McGrath spoke up again.

"Are you real sure you can't identify something about those guys—something they said or did?" he demanded. "You didn't by any chance feel a diamond as big as a coconut on the hand of one of them, did you?"

QUINN had to admire the tenacious officer. McGrath already had catalogued every cracksman in town who might have been able to have opened that supposedly impregnable vault. And a logical conclusion had been Flash Mega, always identifiable by his diamonds.

"If you're referring to Duke Kasini's mob, Captain," Quinn said, "it wouldn't hurt to look them up. Though I gather from what my valet has read to me that they've been laying low since Federal agents from the Narcotics Bureau recently confiscated nearly a quarter of a million dollars worth of their opium aboard a tanker. As I understand it, however, it could not definitely be pinned on Duke as the man who had brought it in, so he was freed again."

Harvey Belmont spoke up then, twisting and gripping his thin fingers nervously. But the eyes that went to the worried police commissioner were stubbornly uncompromising.

"Gentlemen, I'm going to speak bluntly," he said. "My colleagues and myself—aside from Quinn—are business men, not philanthropists. As chairman of Eight Incorporated, I organized the concern for the purpose of buying the Chinese art collection and holding it for later sale under more

favorable conditions. Naturally I'm upset that the city must be held responsible for the loss, since my colleagues and myself always have had an active hand in affairs of civic betterment. I, myself, arranged for the treasure to be placed in that particular vault, since everyone was certain it was entirely burglar-proof. It was a vault which, as most of you know, was willed to the city by one of my late business associates.

"But Dr. Ling, here, a foremost authority on Eastern arts, appraised the collection at a value of eight millions of dollars, in company with our own experts. I am still willing to go through with the agreement at that figure. But we are not paying the money to any secret society of thugs who cover their nefarious activities under the cloak of a comic opera name. How do we know we would ever get the collection back from them, for one thing?"

Dr. Ling spoke up then, nodding his wise head.

"Mr. Belmont is right. While the treasure is indeed worth two millions more under more favorable conditions, I advised the sale at the other figure in view of China's pressing need."

Belmont shot him a look tinged with irritation. In those few words the banker and the others had been revealed as men eager for a quick two millions in profits.

Thompson, however, nodded his bald head in agreement. He was a hump-shouldered man with discolored false plates of cheap make, and sat with his clammy hands clasped over his round little paunch. He wore cheap hand-me-down suits to save money and was notoriously a miser. He had objected strenuously to the others presenting the jade Buddha to Tony Quinn. Quinn could not see it anyhow, he had argued, so why waste the money it would bring?

"If the city wishes to gamble ten millions to get the treasure back, that's their business," he grumbled.

"Anytime they do I'm still willing to go through with the original agreement to pay eight millions for it."

Warner's brow furrowed with anxiety. That meant a big loss to the city should the demands of this Dragon society have to be met. Of course, there would be the insurance, but it would nowhere near cover the two millions extra now demanded, and which would have to be met by the city. The morning newspapers already were howling at his heels like a hungry wolf pack, demanding that the thieves be caught. Two millions meant a great deal to already overburdened taxpayers. City editors were demanding to know a lot of things, especially who had been responsible for the collection being placed in the vault.

So was the mayor who, oddly enough, had not been consulted about its temporary disposal.

Warner had spent two weary hours in the chief city official's office before calling on Quinn. Publicly, the mayor could not countenance the paying of the ransom by Eight Incorporated, but privately he, as well as Commissioner Warner, was hoping that they would be frightened enough by the Dragons' threat to do so.

WALTER DUGRO, the plane manufacturer, had been sitting quietly, taking little part in the conversation. Now he spoke up.

"Well, gentlemen, this unfortunate affair is having repercussions in more ways than one. While it's true that the emergency bills for home defense which have been passed in Washington will soon set my factory to humming, the delay on this order for my new bomber will mean a lot to the employees now not working. Had this affair not come up, I had hoped that a quick approval of the new ship by Colonel Wang would set us to work on orders to a country I admire for defending herself against a ruthless aggressor.



Silk

"But we have no proof that even after any monies are paid to this Dragon society, which professes to have purely patriotic motives, that the collection will be returned. I can only hope, however, that a solution will be reached soon. China is desperately in need of those planes, and my laid-off employees could use the work that will take them off Government relief rolls until other factories get into full swing."

They discussed the matter for another three quarters of an hour. Harvey Belmont and the other three members of Eight Incorporated were plainly a bit huffed that their business transaction, with its attendant two to three millions in quick profits, had been so openly discussed with outsiders. Quinn himself merely smiled, taking a passive attitude. His co-members were leaving the matter in Warner's hands, and demanding full police protection until the commissioner could wipe out the menace of the Dragon society and get back the treasure.

Most of the time Paul Chivor said nothing, though occasionally he bent over and conversed in Cantonese with Colonel Wang in a low voice.

Finally Thompson rose to his feet and reached for his hat where he had placed it on the table.

"I see no reason to waste further

time," he said to Commissioner Warner a trifle coldly. "After all, this is your affair. Our position in the matter has been made quite clear. I shall tell the newspapers flatly that we are *not* paying a single cent to this group of thugs. Good day, gentlemen."

The others rose and went out too, after shaking hands with Quinn who had tried to rise but could not seem to make it. He sat with outstretched hand as each came by. McGrath was purposely last, sticking out his own powerful paw. But instead of taking Quinn's hand he merely held his own within an inch of it, hoping—as he did hope time after time—that he would get proof that the man he was certain was not blind would forget himself and clasp it.

But Tony Quinn's dead-looking eyes only stared straight ahead.

"Are they all gone, Silk?" he asked his valet.

Commissioner Warner answered from the doorway.

"Not all, Tony. There's still a stubborn jackass Homicide captain standing there hoping you'll see his hand—when he ought to know you're as blind as a bat."

"Yeah, a Black Bat," McGrath said significantly, following his harried superior. He turned in the doorway. "Y'know, Quinn, I'm kind of glad the chief put me on the Chinatown detail. I've got a hunch that's where the Black Bat will show. So long."

Silk closed the door and watched until he was sure that all had gone. Belmont, plainly worried that he might be a victim of the Dragon society, was driven away by his Chinese valet under police escort. Police also went with the others.

Then the nearly bald little man who posed as a valet turned to Quinn.

"I'm a little worried about McGrath this time, sir," Silk said. "With him in charge in Chinatown this afternoon he'll give every officer special orders to be on the lookout for the Black Bat."

"I wouldn't worry too much about it, Silk," Quinn said carelessly. "The police know quite well that there's a thousand to one chance of the collection being down there. That's probably the last place it would be taken. By nightfall they'll have all suspects picked up and questioned. It will be reasonably quiet in Chinatown by then—I hope."

"What now, sir?"

"Call in Butch and Carol through the tunnel."

HALF an hour later the four of them sat together in a locked room. Silk was no longer the obsequious servant. He never was when attending such conferences, but gloried in being one of the Black Bat's trusted confidential allies. He sat comfortably in a big chair, with one of the highballs in which he occasionally indulged within easy reach.

Butch lounged in another chair and watched Quinn like a huge St. Bernard eyeing its master. Carol Baldwin, the golden-haired, blue-eyed girl who had brought back sight to a blind Tony Quinn, lay curled up like a soft young kitten on a nearby divan. Her face was filled with excitement.

"I think this calls for you to make the first move, Butch," Quinn was announcing to the former boxer. "First, I want you to study the pictures of Kasini's mob that I have in my private rogues' gallery. Take them along with you if necessary. Go down to Chinatown this afternoon and play the part of the panhandler around the laundries and cafes. You might possibly be able to spot the laundry truck used to kidnap me, though I doubt it. The lettering was, of course, false; as were the license plates. But even if you don't see it, you may be able to stumble onto something."

"And I?" asked Silk, sipping at his cold drink.

"With two policemen on the grounds, Silk, you'd better stick close to home. But you can get me Dr.

Ling's home address. I may decide to call on him. Also get all the information you can on Paul Chivor—when he learned to fly, and all that. I'm not quite sure about him yet. He's a little too suave and quiet. As for you, Carol, you'll be in Chinatown, too—for a rendezvous with Butch and myself. And now for a little surprise."

He reached into a pocket of his smoking jacket and brought forth three little silver whistles. He tossed one each to the three. Carol picked hers up, examined it briefly, then blew experimentally.

No sound came forth, but across the room Quinn put a hand to his ear and rubbed it. Her face brightened instantly.

"Ah! So that's it, Tony? These whistles are pitched too high for the average human ear. I've heard of such things. They say that Doberman-Pinscher police dogs in service in foreign countries can hear these whistles up to three miles."

He nodded. "Good girl, Carol! You don't read for nothing, do you? Yes, Silk and I have been experimenting with these whistles for two weeks. During the long months when I couldn't see I had to depend upon my senses of feel, smell, and hearing, you know—especially my hearing. I was astounded to find my ears getting sharper and sharper until I've almost the uncanny hearing that is to be found among certain animals. That's why I can hear these whistles.

"I can't hear them as far as a keen-eared animal could, but I have been able to hear them, if repeated often enough, up to a distance of several blocks. It's a little idea of mine in case some of you need help. Your signal will be one blow on your whistle, Carol. Yours will be two blasts, Silk. And, Butch, if you get in a tight spot blow three times and keep on blowing. Conceal them on your persons in such a manner that no ordinary search will reveal them."

For more than an hour more the



Carol

Black Bat discussed details of the crime which he hoped to solve. As he finished, the telephone rang. Silk answered.

"Just a moment, Commissioner," he murmured, "and I'll connect you with the phone in his bedroom."

Quinn went in and picked up the receiver.

"Tony," Warner's voice called, laughingly, "I didn't take that jade Buddha with me, but left it on the table."

"I'll ask Silk about it, Commissioner. If it's here—"

"No need to ask," came the chuckling reply. "That's why I called you up. Thompson took it. Picked it up under his hat when he left and showed it to me after we got out of the house. He says he feels it his 'duty' to return it to Dr. Ling until the collection is found, in view of recent events. I really couldn't ask the darned miser to return it, so I'm sure you'll understand."

"Quite. Think nothing of it, Commissioner."

Thompson was more of a miser than he had imagined, Quinn was thinking as he hung up, a smile touching his lips. But he was not giving up that jade gift so easily. The Black Bat was going to pay a visit to Dr. Ling's home above his art shop and collect a certain Buddha.

CHAPTER V

Butch Becomes a Panhandler

DOWN in Chinatown Butch moved along the narrow, crooked streets for awhile to get the lay of the land, and then got busy. Fortunately—for the appearance he wished to create in his panhandler rôle—he had not shaved for a couple of days. That fact, and a touch of dirt that had been smudged into his whiskers gave him a decidedly unwashed appearance. He wore a cast-off suit that long ago had seen better days, and a ragged, crumpled cap.

Inside his coat pocket were the pictures he had been studying in Quinn's private "morgue," as such reference collections are called in newspaper offices. The ex-boxer was fully aware of his limited mental capacity and that he could scarcely depend on his unsupported memory, so was taking no chance of muffing such an important mission for the Black Bat.

He walked into an art shop, his homely face and aggressive, underslung jaw making him look more than a mere panhandler. He looked positively frightening.

"Got a nickel for a cuppa cawfee, buddy?" he mumbled to the elderly Chinese proprietor.

The Chinese waved him out.

"Go 'way!" he shouted. "You get out or I call police."

Again and again the same thing happened. Butch was just beginning to congratulate himself on not being forced to beg for a living when a heavy hand fell on his shoulder from behind. He turned and looked into the glowering face of Homicide Captain McGrath, whose aching corns had not improved his acid temper any.

"Beat it," ordered the captain tersely. "We got a city flop-house for you

guys. Don't let me catch you around here again or I'll run you in."

Butch mumbled apologetically—and obeyed by heading right around the corner to resume operations. He spotted the Chow Seto Laundry again just as a man got out of a cab up the street and entered the place. Butch recognized Joe Mega easily. The "panhandler" unhesitatingly followed him in.

Mega was talking in a low-voiced tone to a scholarly-looking Chinese wearing shell-rimmed glasses. Even Butch's slow-thinking mind had no difficulty in recognizing that Oriental as Chow Seto, whose pictured face was one of the photographs in the former boxer's pocket. On the counter between the gangster was a tin container with a slot cut in its sealed top. Printed on the can were the words:

PLEASE HELP THE CHINESE
WOMEN AND CHILDREN MADE
HOMELESS BY THE WAR

As Butch came in he saw Joe Mega's fingers dropping a bright object into the can. A message of some kind, maybe.

Chow Seto looked up and saw Butch. It was the second time Butch had been in this place.

"Get out!" screamed the laundryman. "No comee back, I told you all same—"

"What's eating you, Chow?" demanded Mega of the Oriental. "Cut out the pidgin English with—"

Then he saw that the Chinese was talking to someone else and turned.

"Come on—get outa here, ya big ape," Joe Mega growled at Butch.

In his faithful way, Butch, the slow-witted, was a man of direct action. He knew that Joe Mega had been the driver of the laundry truck in which Quinn had been kidnaped, for Quinn had told him so. Mega also had taken his orders from the mysterious leader of the Dragon, who had been present on that death ride.

Therefore, to Butch's single-track mind Mega had dropped into the con-

tainer a note meant for the Dragon Master.

Butch acted automatically. He stepped half to one side and forward as Mega's hand went beneath his coat, and let drive with a right hook that had carried him high in the heavy-weight division. His iron-knuckled fist smacked against the mobster's swarthy jaw and Mega fell like a pole-axed ox. Butch snatched up the can containing the message.

BUT he had not counted on Chow Seta. Like a streak of light the slender Chinese snatched up a small replica of an old-fashioned bung starter from beneath the counter. His brown hand lashed out and the weapon caught Butch alongside the head. The can fell and went rolling across the floor as Butch crumpled on top of Mega. Chow Seto leaped nimbly over the counter, jabbering in Cantonese to two other Chinese in back.

He rolled Butch aside and got Joe Mega to his feet. The mobster was cursing savagely.

"I'll get the police—have him locked up for assault," said the Chinese. "Hold him here until I return."

"Don't be a damned idiot!" snapped Mega. "They might take a fool notion to search this place, like they've combed most of the other joints around here. I'll just beat this bum up and throw him out into the . . . For the love of Mike! Look there on the floor, Chow!"

He grunted expressively as he pointed to several objects that had dropped from Butch O'Leary's pockets as the Black Bat's emissary had fallen.

He bent swiftly, then straightened up with several rogues' gallery photos of Duke Kasini, some of his men, and some snapshots of several Chinese. Joe Mega's lips tightened menacingly as he studied the pictures.

"I get it," he said at last, glowering down at Butch. "The law says the cops can't search a place without a

warrant. So they sent this big dumb-looking bird around as a bum. Come on, help me lift him in back before somebody sees him."

"Do you think he's a Federal man snooping around?" demanded the Chinese as they carried the recumbent ex-boxer into the back room. Into his almond eyes behind the spectacles had come a look of uneasiness. "Ever since we lost that big shipment off the tanker I've been half expecting something like this. Those Federals never give up, Joe, don't forget."

"Well, you can forget that," growled the burly gangster. "He's only a flattie and he won't be a live one long. We're in the clear. Stop beefing. I'm banking nobody saw him come in here. They don't send men around on the tails of their own men."

Joe Mega let Butch O'Leary's legs drop heavily, then straightened up, looking at Chow Seto.

"I just brought you another customer," he said. "That was what I dropped in the can. The bellhop working for us over at the Lamont Hotel lined him up. Here, lift up that trap-door. We'll shove this bum down. . . ."

In the meantime, Tony Quinn waited impatiently until darkness, then slipped out through the tunnel to the gatehouse back of his home, leaving the two unsuspecting patrolmen on guard about the grounds and Silk Norton near the telephone. He got in the coupé that the ex-boxer had parked for him some distance away, and drove to Chinatown. At a street corner not too well lighted he parked and got out, strolling around with his hat brim pulled low over his eyes for a look at Dr. Ling's art shop and the living quarters above it.

When he reached the place he noticed that a pretty Chinese girl of eighteen or nineteen had crossed toward the shop from the other side of the street. He noticed something else, too. Flash Mega was tailing her. The gangster appeared to be interested in

a window display, but he was not taking his eyes from that girl.

The Black Bat turned swiftly and got back to the corner without attracting undue attention. There was a fire-escape overhead. He leaped, caught the bottom and pulled himself up. Slipping up four flights of the narrow iron steps of the fire-escape he came out on the roofs above Chinatown. From the shadow of a chimney he looked over the edge of the building into the street. Apparently the girl had disappeared inside the red stone building, for Flash Mega was following boldly.

Tony Quinn slipped out of his coat and put on the Black Bat outfit which, because of its construction, could be folded into a small, flat package and carried in a cleverly concealed pocket. He patted the two .38s into place under the ribbed and scalloped wings, then like a fitting shadow he cat-footed across until he came to Dr. Ling's roof. To his vast relief there was a skylight that afforded an entrance, thus not necessitating a swing over the edge of the roof for a try at a window.

HE raised the skylight, ears cocked, then slipped noiselessly into a room on the fourth floor. Apparently the art curator, Dr. Ling, was quite well off, for the room appeared to be the quarters of two or three servants. None were here now, however.

Down another flight of carpeted steps the Black Bat made his way to the third floor. No sounds of life here, either, and from this vantage point he could have heard voices from below. Perhaps Mega had not followed the girl inside after all, or had already been sent packing.

Then to the Black Bat's keen ears there came sounds from the pad of feet up the stairs toward where he crouched in the curtained hallway.

He melted back against the wall, looking about him. There was a door behind him and he tested the knob, his

eyes on the stairs below. A Chinese woman servant was coming up. The Black Bat's hand twisted the knob and it turned without difficulty. He eased himself into a bedroom—a woman's bedroom judging from the faint perfume in the air.

The Black Bat waited, half expecting someone outside to turn the knob. But the servant passed on by and ascended the last flight to her own quarters on the top floor under the skylight. The Black Bat waited a couple of minutes to make sure.

He opened the door a trifle, and this time he heard voices below. One voice apparently was that of the young Chinese girl he had seen on the street. She spoke in well modulated tones and in them was the iciness of a frozen mountain stream.

"What do you mean by coming to this house?" the Bat heard her demand of someone. Flash Mega, in all probability.

"Take it easy, I-tso," came the cracksman's roughly persuasive voice. "It ain't every doll I bother to follow home. How's about you and me for tonight, baby? You know, some Chinese eats, and—"

"Get out!"

But the gangster did not get out. He must have come boldly toward the girl for she started swiftly up the stairs. Flash Mega's heavy tread pounded after her.

"Get out, I tell you," she ordered again, though there was a touch of fear in her voice now. Flash was coming right on up.

"If you don't get out of here, I'll call the police," she said for the last time, and the fear in her voice was undisguised now.

The Black Bat looked hurriedly about him. That this bedroom was hers, and that she meant to take the sanctuary from the gangster here he had no doubt. He looked about him again for a place of concealment for himself, but saw nothing promising. The heavy drapes about the walls

would not hide him, once the lights were turned on.

Quickly the Black Bat crossed over in the darkness, loosened the bulbs from the two lights, then melted behind the drapes as the door opened. The girl tried to slam it shut but Flash Mega's foot caught it. He chuckled in the darkness when she snapped the switch and nothing happened.

"Listen, baby, you're gonna be nice to me when I try to date you up from now on," he said, a hint of threat in his voice. "It would be too bad if your father found out his precious daughter was a member of the Dragon society, wouldn't it?"

"I give you one more chance to go," I-tso said coldly to the mobster whose grin could be seen in the dim light of the hall. "I knew it was a mistake to enlist the help of such as you in our cause. Unless you go at once the Dragon Master will hear of this."

Flash Mega's answer was to push her into the room. He grabbed her by both arms and his voice grew ugly. He was living up fully to his reputation for surliness now.

"Nobody gives a damn about your Dragon Master," he said sneeringly. "That's got nothing to do with you and me. If it hadn't been for me that museum vault never woulda been opened. There wasn't another mobster on earth who coulda cracked that—"

"That will do, Dragon!"

FLASH MEGA drew in his breath with a rasping sound and whirled toward the door. How that green-robed figure in the dragon mask had got there he could not guess. But the figure was there just the same. The man in the green robe pointed a long-nailed finger in Flash Mega's face.

"You fool!" the Dragon Master accused thunderously. "You stupid, thick-witted fool! You dare endanger our cause by a silly infatuation for one who is a thousand times too good for your kind? To disobey me means death—the same kind of death that was dealt out to one of the evil eight tonight at dusk."

The Black Bat looked at that weird figure in the dragon mask and long, green silk robes. So he had made good the threat that had been made in the note, despite police protection for the eight? Was it Belmont he meant? He was the most likely. Had Ohmo somehow slipped through the cordon of police around Belmont's guarded mansion and dealt out death?

The Bat detected an undercurrent of murderous rage in Flash Mega's next words, though he apparently was trying to placate the Dragon Master.

"Honest, Boss—I mean Master—I was only kiddin' the dame—"

"Silence! I came here to see if Dr. Ling was in, hoping he might go to the remaining evil ones and persuade them to save themselves by paying the ransom. There soon will be only six,

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for another is about to die."

"Who?" whispered the cracksman softly.

"Harrison. He ought to slip out of town tonight in a plane flown by Paul Chivor. The plane will take off, yes. But neither Harrison nor his foolish pilot will arrive at the Harrison country estate alive. But that is not all. Harvey Belmont also must be taught a lesson."

The Black Bat's eyes narrowed. So Belmont had not been the first victim of the Dragon society. Who, then?

From beneath his green robes the dragon-masked man took a sealed envelope. He handed it to the mobster who slipped it inside his coat, as the Dragon Master, apparently through with his chiding for the time being, gave some low-voiced, hurried instructions.

The Chinese girl had gone over to the shaded light beside her bed, fumbled at the bulb, and discovered it to be loose. She screwed it tight again. The Black Bat knew then that he was about to be discovered.

He had hoped that things would turn out differently. It had been his intention to find out all he could, then leap across the room in the darkness and snatch the weird green mask from the Dragon Master's face. Now he waited, his hands on the .38s.

"In this envelope are sealed orders for one whose name is written," the Dragon Master was saying to Flash Mega. "I had intended sending them by another. But it is just as well. You will be interested because it concerns your friend, ex-District Attorney Quinn. We'll see if we can't complete the job this time. Now go."

It was at that moment that I-tso Ling managed to click on the light. And it was at that moment that a voice from across the room said quietly:

"Gentlemen, stand fast!"

Flash Mega's hand was still under his armpit where he had placed the letter in an inner coat pocket. It

came up with a gun as a startled cry burst from his thick lips.

"The Black Bat!"

Then gun thunder drowned out the sound of his voice.

CHAPTER VI

Dr. Ling's Daughter



NAPPING reports of the Black Bat's twin .38s filled the room, the sound mingling with the Chinese girl's scream. The gangster had jerked his own gun free, but the stream of slugs sent his way ripped it from his hand. The Black Bat could easily have killed the younger Mega. The mobster deserved killing. He was a thug without a spark of mercy in his heart and had been a party to the cold-blooded murder of an elderly watchman. Of that, the Black Bat was sure, even if Flash had not been the actual murderer himself—which the Nemesis of the underworld knew was a possibility.

But the Black Bat did not want to kill Flash Mega. He preferred to incapacitate the mobster and make him talk. Moreover, he wanted him out of the way now while he jerked the dragon head mask from that weird figure in green and took him prisoner.

The Black Bat had not counted on any interference from the girl. But as his deadly shots sent Flash Mega's gun spinning I-tso flung herself straight at the man in black, with arms outspread. Behind her the Dragon Master moved fast, diving through the door, with Flash Mega on his heels.

"Run, Master!" screamed I-tso Ling, throwing her arms around the man whose appearance always sent terror through those members of the underworld who had the misfortune to meet him.

The Black Bat flung her aside and

The Black Bat was grinning broadly as he climbed the fire-escape to the roof. He had an idea what would happen in that Chinese girl's bedroom as soon as he left. And, as if the Black Bat had the gift of second sight, as well as his actual double sight, things were happening there exactly as he visioned.

I-tso Ling turned on the lights as feet pounded up the stairs. McGrath, followed by two other police officers, unlocked the door and yanked it open. He gave a start at sight of the Chinese girl there alone.

"Where is he?" he roared.

"Who?" she countered innocently.

"Don't hand me that!" snapped the captain. "You know blamed well who, young lady. The Black Bat!" He barged in past her, looking sharply around. Then he glowered at her. "Go look in the mirror!" he commanded sternly.

She went to the mirror and looked. Squarely in the center of her smooth forehead was the insignia of the Black Bat, a tiny black bat with outspread ribbed wings. She removed it and turned. McGrath was looking out of the window.

"What was he doing here?" he snapped at her.

"I don't know," she confessed honestly. "But I do know that I'm glad he came. A—man—followed me into the house."

She made no mention of the Dragon Master, but the seeds of suspicion that the Bat had sown were beginning to bear fruit. . . .

Reaching the roof unseen in the dim light, the Black Bat melted into the shadows like a fleeting ghost, thankful that the soles of his specially made shoes were as soft as felt and made not a sound. In the lee of the chimney again he changed into his light topcoat with the specially constructed pockets to conceal his Black Bat outfit, then hurried to the street by way of the fire-escape. The change had taken but a short time, less than five minutes

having elapsed since he had left I-tso Ling's home. Yet hardly had he started toward the corner when a taxi shot out of an alley a short distance behind him.

The Black Bat instinctively darted into a doorway, hands near his guns. He suppressed a start of surprise at sight of Dr. Ling's daughter and a man she evidently had hastened from the back of the house to meet. The bespectacled Chinese was Colonel Wang!

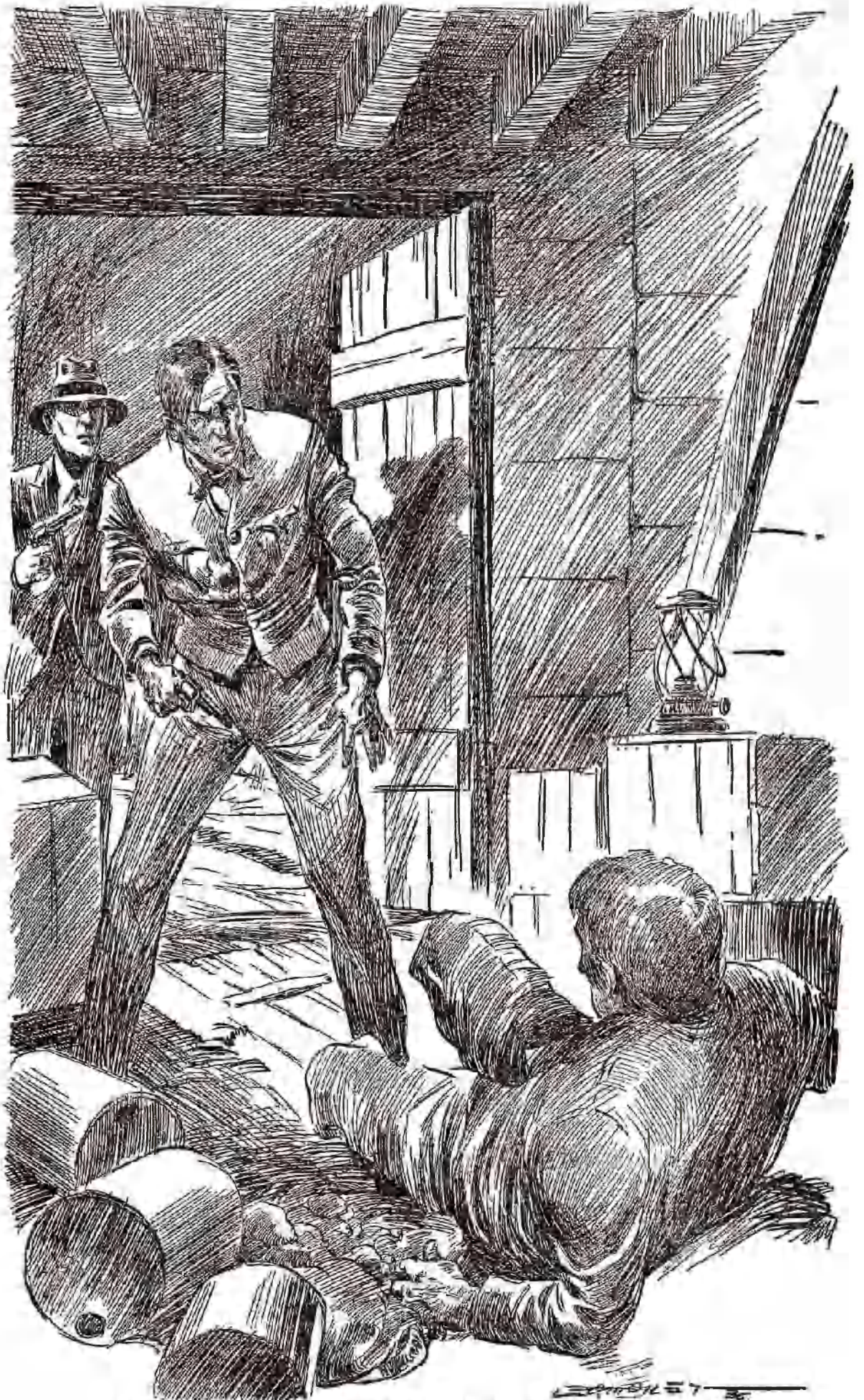
Rounding the corner then, the Black Bat walked quickly toward the heart of Chinatown for his rendezvous with Carol Baldwin. No one noticed the man with the wide-brimmed hat pulled low over his eyes, at least giving him no more than a casual glance. Least of all Captain McGrath who had barged out of Doctor Ling's house, flagged a passing cruiser, and was piling in beside the two husky police officers.

"To Tony Quinn's house and step on it," the Black Bat heard him order. "The only way he'll beat me there this time is to fly."

A young Chinese school boy of about ten, in rumpled cap, short-sleeved shirt, and knee breeches came down the street with a bundle of papers under one arm. The youngster waved a paper at the Black Bat.

"Wuxtry! Wuxtry! Read all about it! Big Banker knocked off in his office by the Dragon mob! Wuxtry!"

THE Black Bat bought the prof-fered paper and by the light of a street lamp saw Thompson's picture on the front page. The miserly financier, working late in his big office as was his custom, had been throttled in the washroom while his chauffeur and two uniformed policemen waited outside his locked door to take him home. There had been not a sound of a struggle from within, but finally the chauffeur, growing uneasy, had summoned a guard to unlock the door. Thompson had been found on the floor of the



Silk was thrown inside the barn like a sack of potatoes (CHAPTER XII)

leaped for the door to follow his quarry. Flash however, showed lightning presence of mind. Before the Black Bat could reach the door he heard the click of a key in the lock. Running feet pounded down the stairs. The Black Bat was locked in—with a pretty Chinese girl—unable to pursue the wily head of the Dragon society and his henchman.

He sheathed his guns and look at I-tso. She stood with her back to the wall, arms outspread, and now that her impulsive protective movement to save the Dragon Master was over, a fear she could not fight down began to show itself in her soft, almond-shaped eyes. She shrank back from the man who so much resembled a huge black bat.

"What are you going to do with me?" she whispered huskily.

"You should be turned across a knee first, I think," he answered sternly. "You have just allowed one murderer, probably two, to escape."

"What right have you to talk?" she demanded with sudden spirit. "Why do you try to thwart a just cause?"

"I deal out justice, instead of working against it," he told her, coming a step nearer. "This Dragon Master is not a patriot. Patriots do not hire gangsters. Who is he?"

"I don't know," she whispered in a low voice. "No one knows. He has a way of changing his real voice."

From outside the door came the sound of the hurried patter of footsteps coming down the stairs from the upper floor, and the servant's shrill voice came in Cantonese. I-tso answered back. The sound of the running footsteps receded toward the shop below.

"I told her to bring the police," I-tso said. "They must have heard those shots anyhow."

The Black Bat paid no attention.

"Who is the Dragon Master," he repeated sternly. "Your father?"

"No—no, I swear he isn't!" she cried, a note of hysteria in her voice.

"How did he get in here?"

"I don't know. I didn't know he was here until he spoke. Perhaps he told the truth. Perhaps he did come to see my father, who left the shop a little while ago at closing time."

To the Black Bat's question about where the treasure had been taken she shook her head.

"I think the Dragon Master himself took it away," was all she said.

"Where a patriotic cause is concerned, no man commits ruthless murder as this man has done," he told her firmly. "And he intends to commit more. Such a man would not hesitate to take your own life once the money has been paid. You are being duped—if you will only realize it."

From down below where the servant had unlocked the shop door came voices. Police were entering. A voice the Black Bat recognized was bellowing down there. McGrath's! The Black Bat grinned to himself and raised the window.

HE went back, clicked off the light, and his hands caught the Chinese girl by the shoulders.

"Until this Dragon society is broken up you and I must be enemies, I-tso Ling," he said firmly. "But if you'll help me I promise that once the treasure is returned, the full amount of its value will be used for the purpose intended."

And with that he was gone through the window to the roof above. He wanted to plant the seeds of distrust of the Dragon Master and his cohorts in this girl and in any others he could. Through that he might find a chink in the masked leader's armor and thwart his murderous scheme. But he had to work fast. Already one man was dead, according to the Dragon Master, two more were slated to die in a death plane within the hour, and there was to be another attempt on his own life this night—or at least on the life of blind Tony Quinn, former district attorney.

washroom with his neck horribly twisted. A jade Buddha that was known to have been in his possession had been missing.

The killer—Commissioner Warner, in giving the story to the newshounds had made no mention of Ohmo—had made his entrance and exit through a forced window, despite the fact that it was three stories above the ground.

It wasn't hard to visualize what had happened. The deformed Chinese thug probably had been driven in one of Chow Seto's closed laundry trucks to an alley somewhere nearby. Most likely Ohmo had made his way unseen across rooftops, like a huge monkey, to the top of the squat stone building housing the offices of Belmont and his associates. In the gathering dusk, he had climbed down like a human fly, opened and wriggled through the window into the washroom. There, he evidently had crept upon Thompson from behind and broken the financier's neck with a few wrenches of those monstrous hands with their iron strength.

"I wonder if Ohmo took the Buddha with him, as the commissioner seemed to think, or whether Thompson already had sent it to Dr. Ling's house?" muttered the Black Bat, as he tossed the paper into a trash container.

He hurried across the street to a cigar store on the corner and quickly located the office telephone number of the Dugro plant factory. There was no answer, and he tried the man's house. Somebody had to warn Dugro of what was about to happen to that plane. But again the Black Bat got no answer.

"I'll have to go myself," he said, under his breath. "I can get there about as quickly as McGrath can. Besides, I'll have to detour McGrath elsewhere."

He dialed again and got Commissioner Warner on the wire.

"Greetings, Commissioner," he said, smiling to himself. "This is The Black Bat. I've just missed renewing my

friendship with my old friend McGrath in the house of Dr. Ling. The Dragon Master was there, in green robes and a dragon mask. So was Flash Mega, one of Duke Kasini's men, and a cracksman extraordinary if there ever was one—as you know. I regret to say that both escaped, but I believe that's a clue to the looted museum vault, though I've heard that McGrath also had an idea Flash was involved, but somehow managed to wriggle out of the net of suspicion."

"Where's McGrath now?" barked the gray-haired police veteran.

The Black Bat chuckled. "In view of his hasty departure in a police cruiser I rather imagine he's speeding toward the house of former District Attorney Anthony Quinn. I would advise, however, that you call him by radio and detour him to Belmont's home. In giving orders to Flash Mega, this Dragon Master mentioned something about the financier being 'taught a lesson.' Good night, Commissioner."

He hurried out to another phone, not daring to risk Warner tracing the call. He had made no mention of the threat upon his own life, preferring to keep as many police away from his home as possible. Those two on guard were more than a source of worry already.

HE dialed a third time and almost immediately Silk Norton's familiar voice answered. Quickly he told Silk what had happened and that McGrath undoubtedly would show up there sooner or later. He also told of the new death threat to himself.

"I'm hurrying to the airport, Silk," he said. "I'll call or come home as soon as possible. If McGrath shows up stall him somehow."

"I'll do my best, sir. Commissioner Warner called a little while ago. My imitation of your voice worked quite well. He's been checking up on certain men. What he found out about Paul Chivor coincides with what an aviator friend told me a few minutes ago over long distance from Cali-

fornia. Chivor's reputation as a pilot is hardly spotless, sir. His regular transport pilot license was taken away from him out there quite a number of months ago for stunting a plane while drunk. He went to China but was prevented by the consul from enlisting for military service in a foreign army. I believed he stayed intoxicated most of the time. A sort of black sheep, as I understand it. My friend even had reports he was hitting the junk."

"Good heavens, Silk! Anything more?"

"Yes, sir. Chivor might possibly have met Duke Kasini while in China. At least word was circulated among the flying fraternity that he hung around the hotels in Nanking and Hankow where the opium dealers gathered, mooching drinks, until he finally wheedled himself into a job with the Chinese Government as some sort of aviation adviser. Then according to what Commissioner Warner told me, believing he was talking to you, Chivor came over with Colonel Wang with the treasure as a sort of assistant to help supervise packing and shipping the military planes back to China. Also to act as interpreter. Since then he's stayed in his hotel most of the time, drinking."

"And now he's flying Harrison out of town to his country estate in a plane that has been marked for destruction by the Dragon Master, Silk," the Black Bat said grimly. "I'm on my way."

He hung up and slid out into the night again. Carol was waiting at the place he had told her he would park the coupé. Something in her lovely face told him she had bad news. She showed him a copy of the paper.

"I know," he said, nodding. "Carol, Harrison is taking off for his private estate up state shortly in a plane flown by Paul Chivor. He's trying to slip away from this Dragon gang but is only hastening his death. The ship has been turned into some kind of death trap."

"You're going out there now?" Carol asked anxiously.

"As quickly as possible. You meet me here when I return. Try to contact Butch in the meantime, as we all agreed."

"He wasn't there, Tony!" Carol cried sharply. "Oh, I'm so afraid something has happened to him!"

"We'll have to chance it for the moment," the Black Bat said, shaking his head. "At least until I get this present important matter attended to. The place I'm going to is only two miles out, and I'll be back almost at once. I've got to talk to Chivor. Perhaps he can help us."

CHAPTER VII

Butch Meets the Duke



BACK in a low cellar somewhere in the rabbit warrens of Chinatown Butch O'Leary regained consciousness under a deluge of cold water thrown in his face a second time. He blinked his eyes and opened them as the slender Chinese laundryman who had slammed him put down the pail.

Big Butch's head was aching terribly. There was a peculiar smell in the air that was foreign to him, but Butch judged from the appearance of the place it was some kind of an underground storeroom. Nearly a dozen gangsters were crowded in the place with the Chinese, who seemed to be in charge.

"Feeling better, my hulking friend?" inquired the Oriental, sarcastically, solicitously.

He came closer to test the bonds that held the powerful prisoner in a straight-backed chair that had wooden arm rests.

"I feel like hell, and I'm not your friend, you slant-eyed hunk of chop

suey," growled Butch. At least he could still give vent to his feelings. "And if I ever get loose I'm gonna crack that dome of yours so hard they'll think it's an earthquake in Hongkong."

"You aren't going to get loose," was the bland reply. "But your funeral shall be worthy of one of your station. A cement coffin to preserve you in the water for years to come, a nice new laundry wagon for a hearse, a dozen men here to act as mourners, and flowers of a wondrous kind—poppies."

Joe Mega came over and looked down at the victim of Chow Seto's blow with the wooden mallet. Mega's own jaw was still aching from the sledge-hammer blow that had knocked him cold. His open palm lashed out and caught the helpless Butch a terrific slap on the cheek, leaving livid finger prints on the dirty skin.

"Who sent you down here, flattie?" he growled angrily.

"Go to the devil!" mumbled Butch, fighting the hardest battle of his life to keep calm. It was easy to realize what had happened, when he remembered the pictures they must have found on him. He had blundered! But they would get no information from him.

Joe Mega changed his tactics abruptly. In an effort to be cunning he let a genial smile break the lines of his surly face. He reached out and patted Butch gently on top of his shaved head.

"Now look, pal," he began wheedlingly, stroking Butch's bullet-shaped dome with the palm of his hand. "I'm a softie at heart when you get down to it. I wouldn't hurt a fly, see? Why, I even go out into the country once in a while to Chow Seto's brother's farm just to watch the birds and the bees, because I got a sentimental streak in me. But you take a guy like Duke now—the feller I work for. He ain't got none of them finer sentiments in him like I have.

Why, pal, I've seen him stick slivers whittled from a match under a guy's fingernails and then set 'em afire when the guy already had spilled, just to listen to him yell. He'll be here pretty soon, too. Why don'tcha just tell old Joe a few things before the boss comes in?"

Butch told him plenty—all of which concerned Mr. Mega's ancestors and where they undoubtedly had gone after the demise. He also suggested that Mr. Mega could go there.

"And you won't need your winter underwear either," the ex-boxer finished belligerently.

The ring of mobsters roared with laughter at Joe's expense, and so did the Chinese.

But Mega stepped back, his swarthy face contorted with rage. The temper he had made such a valiant effort to control had snapped. With a snarl he yanked out his gun and flipped the barrel into his hand for a handle. Butch braced himself for a brutal beating about the head and face by a gun butt, but he was stubbornly determined that it would not make him open up. What difference would one more beating make anyhow? He was probably doomed already. Unless—

The door opened abruptly and a man came in from some underground passage, moving with the effortless ease of a black panther. He wore an expensive blue suit, dark shirt, and a straw hat set at a rakish angle on his slick, greased-down black hair. He caught sight of the prisoner the instant he entered the room, saw what was about to happen.

"Hold it, Joe," he ordered sharply. "Where'd you get him? Who is he?"

JOE MEGA grunted an explanation, pointing to several pictures on the table which the new arrival went over to examine.

"He had 'em on him," Joe Mega said. "Maybe Chow Seto was right. Maybe this guy is a Fed after all."

"Well, we'll soon find out,"

answered the mob leader seating himself on the edge of the table with a leg draped over it.

He straightened the crease in his trousers, took out a gold-plated nail file and began to manicure his long, carefully polished fingernails. Carefully he looked over the pictures, each of which had the Rogues' Gallery number attached. The candid photograph of himself was a wide contrast to the man sitting on the table.

Finally he leaned forward toward the immobile prisoner. His voice was gentle but his eyes were those of a tiger.

"You're gonna talk, brother," he informed, "whatever and whoever you are. Before I get through with you you'll beg me to let you spill. You can save yourself a lot of trouble by doing it now. What were you doing snooping in Chow's place?"

"My socks were dirty," growled Butch. "I wanted him to wash 'em."

DUKE KASINI—for the dark-haired man was the notorious mob leader—sighed and rose from the table, slipping the gold plated nail file into his pocket.

"Blackie," he ordered one of his men, "you and Manni lash his hands palm down to the arms of the chair where he can't move 'em. Sharpen ten matches about an inch long to shove under his nails one at a time. When we start lighting the heads he'll talk."

Butch felt the cold sweat break out and begin to bead on his upper lip. He did not fear the devil himself, and he knew he would die before uttering a word that would endanger the cause of Tony Quinn, but this match business was a little hard to stomach. There would be plenty of pain before he lost consciousness.

But he refused to let himself be frightened into a panic.

He threw his weight backward and the chair tipped. It hit the floor with a crash and rolled over against several burlap bundles from which that

strange odor exuded. Butch's face came close to several tins with Chinese writing on them, and one had been opened. That was why the odor was so strong, and Butch knew enough to realize that the stuff was opium, from which heroin and other drugs were made. What he was staring at right now meant that the information District Attorney Anthony Quinn had been given by a couple of convicted mobsters about Duke Kasini was true. This looked like the gangster's storeroom for his contraband. But what could Butch O'Leary do about that now?

The two gangsters who had been called Manni and Blackie hauled him upright again, cursing, and shoved the chair nearer the table. While they untied one arm at a time and struggled to lash his palms down flat on the wooden arm rest Joe Mega methodically began sharpening matches to sliver points about an inch from the headed tip.

Then from somewhere outside there came the sound of feet hurrying along a passage. Flash Mega, followed by Chow Seto's two partners, came in. His swarthy face was a trifle paler than usual.

"I just come from the Dragon Master in Dr. Ling's house, Duke," he panted, shoving an envelope at the sleek mobster. "He said give you this . . . And, Duke—the Black Bat was there!"

All talking and other noise suddenly ceased as Flash Mega babbled his story of the hooded Nemesis who invariably appeared when a new crime wave struck the city. Gunmen looked at each other nervously. This meant more than simply dodging the police now. The Black Bat did not follow the rules laid down for the legally appointed minions of law and order. He made his own rules, for there was no reason for him to have to abide by legal red tape. Worst of all, everybody knew he could see in darkness as well as in day.

"That's not the worst of it either," put in one of the Chinese, his almond-shaped eyes showing his uneasiness. "I just heard a short-wave broadcast, for we've been tuned in on all police calls since last night. The order has gone out to round up Duke Kasini and every one of his mob for questioning!"

KASINI showed remarkable coolness. He knew what that meant, and it was an old story to him. It had happened again and again in his life.

He had been reading the note brought by Flash Mega, and now a slight sneer crossed his thin lips.

"Take it easy, you dopes!" he said coolly. "Don't we always get pulled in when something breaks? Haven't we always got our iron-clad alibis fixed up in advance? Let 'em pull us in. They've picked up about five hundred guys all over town today. Now cut out playing old women and listen."

He took a match from his pocket, snapped his thumbnail to the head, and let the flame lick at the envelope held between the fingers of his other hand. He dropped the burning note to the floor, then looked his men over, one by one. A hard grin crossed his handsome face.

"Belmont has just been snatched!" he told them. "The Dragon Master sent Ohmo right in after him when the Chinese valet squawked and brought the cops running. Some of us are to go over and pick up Belmont now. Then we're to go after Tony Quinn again, as a warning to the others—all that are left. They'll pay up soon."

"You or even that monkey man couldn't get within two blocks of Quinn's house now," Flash Mega said positively. "Why, the whole place will be crawlin' with cops!"

"Personally I hope they are there," answered the mob leader, with a shrug. "And at Belmont's, too. You guys didn't think we rung in with this Dragon outfit only because of a cut on that collection, did you?"

"Meaning what, Duke?" asked Blackie softly.

"Brighten up, Blackie. Every cop in town will be over in that district tonight. I knew they would be when this Dragon business broke. I figured it that way from the start. It's our chance to settle a little business with Old Whiskers—or the Feds who work for him—and grabbed that load of junk off the tanker. Come on!"

CHAPTER VIII

Death Plane



ONCE out of the heavier city traffic, the Black Bat made good time toward the airport. It lay less than two miles out beyond the city limits in a broad field just off the highway. Here, too, squatted the low, serrated buildings of Walter Dugro's plane factory. Once the field had been a municipal airport until increased traffic had necessitated a move to a larger one. Now it served merely as a test field for Dugro's planes and a few privately hangared jobs.

There were few lights about the place, except dim ones in Dugro's factory, which was not yet running night shifts for Government contracts in the new emergency program. From somewhere outside of the factory came the sound of an idling airplane motor in the night. That, the Black Bat thought swiftly, would be the plane that Chivor would pilot, taking Harrison to his country estate. The Black Bat must reach them before that plane took off!

He leaped from his car and hurried toward a high wire fence that surrounded the plant, looking this way and that along the deserted stretch of buildings. There was no sign of life, though two or three

parked cars were down near some darkened sheds. Probably one of these belonged to the watchman, and possibly another was the car of Paul Chivor who had unsuspectingly come out to fly a plane to his death.

The Black Bat tested the fence and found that it had not been charged. He had hardly believed it would be, since the Dugro factory was not yet actively engaged in building Dugro's new bomber for the Government. Then the Black Bat's lithe muscles carried him up and over the fence. He dropped lightly to the ground and at a swift, noiseless trot set off for the corner of the building.

Out front the plane motor was still idling. He rounded the corner and came onto the edge of the tarmac. A door in one of the Dugro buildings was open and it was from this that the plane evidently had been rolled before being warmed up. Now as the Black Bat paused suddenly, to ponder his next move, he saw a movement in the pilot's compartment of the high-winged cabin monoplane. A man's head was outlined for a moment—then the idling motor suddenly broke into stronger life!

With a roar of power it spun around on one wheel and taxied off down the side of the field toward the end of the runway to turn around for the take-off. The Black Bat leaped from his hiding place and tore out after the trundling plane. For fifty yards he raced it through the darkness, its twin landing lights throwing long fingers ahead on the darkened airport.

The man at the controls saw a weird figure burst out of the night and come in under the bobbing wing. A startled cry broke from him. His hand came up and jabbed out through the window. Flame lanced from it. Above the roar of his motor came the sharper, snapping reports of an automatic pistol. But the Black Bat had seen him and had ducked aside, his cry of warning drowned out.

Then the ship spun around on one

wheel into the runway, the powerful motor burst into full life, and under its eighteen hundred revolutions per minute the sleek, high-winged monoplane went skimming down the oiled runway and rose gracefully.

The Black Bat could only stand helplessly panting, and watch there in the darkness below. The plane was circling for a safe altitude before heading off cross country. It was now a thousand feet directly above the field. The twin landing lights set in the leading edge of the wing had been shut off.

Picking up two small objects his night-trained eyes discerned lying on the ground, the Black Bat promptly forgot them as a new thought flashed through his brain. The radio! That plane might have a radio. He set out at a run for the open door through which the plane had been rolled. He reached the edge of the building again and hurried along. The lights on the edge of the roof, shining down on the tarmac, blinked out and a uniformed watchman began rolling the door shut.

THE man gave a startled cry as a weird figure in a black hood and winglike appurtenances under its arms appeared in the opening.

"Quiet!" commanded the Black Bat, his automatic out and covering the watchman. "I mean no harm. On the contrary, I'm trying to save two lives. I tried to telephone here to warn them, but got no answer."

"The office is at the other end of the building," the watchman said, swallowing hard. "There is no—"

"Never mind. Has that plane that just took off got a radio?"

"Y-yes, sir," gasped the man, still badly frightened. "But it's been out of commission the last few days. They been meaning to have it fixed, but haven't got around to it."

"But there must be some way to get in touch with it! There's got to be! That plane is a death-trap, man! The pilot must be warned!"

"I'm sorry, sir, but there is no way I know of. You say there is something wrong with the ship?"

"More than wrong. You've heard of the Dragon Master who killed the financier Thompson in his office only a short time ago this evening? Well, that passenger being flown away is Harrison, Thompson's associate, and Harrison has also been doomed to die! Something is going to happen to him and to Chivor, his pilot!"

The watchman's face blanched with horror as he stared at the Black Bat.

"My God, sir, this is terrible!" he cried. "Mr. Chivor is not flying that plane! Mr. Dugro himself is at the controls!"

It was the Black Bat's turn to stare. He grabbed the man by the shoulders and shook him.

"Are you sure?"

The watchman nodded vigorously.

"Yes, sir. I just talked to him."

"Where's that Chivor fellow, the pilot who was supposed to fly Harrison?"

"I think you'd better come with me, sir," suggested the frightened man, hurrying back through the building.

The Black Bat followed him. They went into the huge interior, through a big sliding door of sheet metal, and into a big hangarlike room with an office at the back. A shiny new twin-engined light bomber stood before the door, its three-bladed metal props glinting dully from the dim lights overhead. This was the job that Colonel Wang had been testing recently. The published reports were that it would do better than three hundred miles an hour.

"Wait a minute," the Black Bat snapped sharply, leaping to the plane and looking inside the sleek fuselage toward the two pilots' seats. "Is this thing ready to fly?"

"Why—yes, sir."

"Then come on!" cried the Black Bat and hurried the man on toward the office. "Maybe it isn't too late, if Chivor is still here. Maybe we can

catch them! It's worth a try."

The watchman, however, merely stepped inside the office and pointed to the swivel chair back of a battered desk.

"There you are, sir," he announced disgustedly.

Paul Chivor lay sleeping soundly in the chair, his long legs and scuffed flying boots outspread on the desk top. He lay slumped back in the chair, reeking with the smell of whisky. His head hung to one side and saliva drooled from a corner of his mouth. He was snoring loudly, his good-looking face anything but handsome now.

"He came in about a half an hour ago — reeling," the watchman explained to the Black Bat. "I've never seen any man with so much in him and still able to keep his feet. He made me help him wheel out Mr. Dugro's plane, but wouldn't tell me what he was going to do. He kept mumbling something about it being a secret. I managed to slip away while he was warming the motor and telephoned Mr. Dugro on the shop phone.

"He said there wasn't time to get another pilot, so he jumped in his car and came right out. By that time Mr. Harrison had arrived. So Mr. Dugro flew him himself. He—he was going to spend the night at Mr. Harrison's country estate and fly back in the morning in time for Colonel Wang's final tests on the new bomber."

THE Black Bat shrugged. He could do little else. Once again the man in the green robe had made good his insidious threats. The Black Bat grabbed Paul Chivor and began to shake him. Chivor gave a strangled snore and opened his eyes.

"Uh-agh-w-what is it?" he mumbled.

"Get up!" commanded the man in black, shaking him again.

"Go 'way!" mumbled the pilot sleepily, pushing at the hands on his shoulders. "Don' wanna get up. Wanna go to sleep."

The Black Bat turned to the watchman and asked if he had any coffee. The man quickly unsnapped his lunch pail and brought out a black thermos bottle. He unscrewed the cap, poured it full, and handed it to the hooded man. Five minutes later Chivor was sitting weakly in the chair, blinking his eyes and sipping the last of the coffee. He was sobering up now, the sight of the grim, hooded figure above him helping to bring him around.

"Who the devil are you?" he finally grunted suspiciously.

"The Black Bat," was the grim reply. "Tonight you were supposed to fly Harrison to his estate up country a hundred miles or so. Why—"

"Well, what of it?" Chivor snapped testily. "I stopped in at a cocktail bar on the way out and took on a couple too many. I can fly better when I'm high than when I'm cold sober, any day. But Dugro came out here to the field, cursed me for getting blotto, so I came in the office here for a nap."

The Black Bat told him then what had happened, and that Dugro was now flying a death plane. Chivor's face turned dark with anger and resentment.

"What am I supposed to do—weep about it?" he snarled. "It's my neck I saved. If I hadn't have got crocked where do you think I'd be in the morning?"

There was truth in that, and nothing to be gained by further questions. The Black Bat stepped from the office and vanished. It took him only moments to slip out of his Black Bat outfit, stow it safely in its special pocket, and start his car. But all the way back to town he was frowning thoughtfully.

"That man was not as blotto as he pretended to be," the Black Bat concluded. "I saw a flicker of surprise in his eyes when I first shook him, and the coffee brought him out of it a little too quickly."

As soon as he got back to town he

telephoned Silk Norton. He asked about McGrath.

"No, sir, McGrath hasn't put in appearance yet," Silk informed, "but I've some bad news that just came over the radio. Dugro's plane exploded in the air about five miles south of town. The tail is believed to have been blown off by a small time bomb. Harrison was found dead in the wreckage beside the highway when two state troopers dashed up right after it spun into the ground."

"But Walter Dugro himself was flying that death-trap plane, Silk. What happened to him?"

"He jumped, sir, after vainly trying to get Mr. Harrison to. But it seems that Mr. Harrison was too frozen with fear. According to the newscast, Mr. Dugro crashed down through the limbs of a tree and was injured. The two state troopers who saw the plane crash beside the highway phoned for a police ambulance."

THE Black Bat could see how clever it had been. Harrison had told his associates that he was being sneaked out of town in Dugro's private plane. Somehow the Dragon Master had found out about it and had contrived to have a small time bomb placed in the tail of the plane, set to explode right after the take-off.

Who besides the dead man's associates knew about it? Only two men of whom the Black Bat could think—Paul Chivor and Colonel Wang. The bespectacled Chinese who had accompanied the collection to America had been at Dugro's factory for days testing out the new twin-engined fighter, and quite naturally would have been in a position to know what was happening.

And now the time bomb had exploded, the plane had crashed in what ordinarily might have looked like an accident, Harrison had been killed and Dugro had been badly injured.

"Silk," the Black Bat said to his eagerly listening valet, "do you think

you could get through a police guard that's been placed about Harvey Belmont's home, and open his private safe? Just a hunch I'm playing."

"I should be glad to try both, sir. As you know, I've been studying the science of—er—safes for some time. But what about Captain McGrath? Suppose he should show up here while I'm gone?"

"I've been thinking of that, Silk. Now listen carefully. I'll get hold of Carol and send her to you in the coupé. You meet her in the tunnel beneath the gatehouse with your make-up kit and a nurse's outfit you'll find in the closet. Make a nurse of her. She'll then arrive at my house in the regular way and explain to the two policemen on guard that I'm having a restless night and that she has come to relieve you. If McGrath shows up she'll positively refuse to let him disturb me. As soon as she arrives you let her in, then explain to the officers you're leaving her in charge and that you're going for a long walk, to try to shake off the effects of a hard night."

"I quite understand, sir. What am I to look for on my—er—walk?"

"I'll try to meet you. If not, see if there is a record of stock lists, or of various companies Belmont has a hand in. I certainly would have less reason to suspect a man of being the Dragon Master if a stock list showed his millions to be anything but paper millions. I don't suspect Belmont particularly, but he is still alive, and I have to take every possibility into consideration. We simply can't afford to overlook any bets."

The Black Bat found Carol on the street corner where she had agreed to meet him. Her face showed undeniable anxiety. She came hastily to meet him, placing a hand on his arm.

"Tony, I'm frightened about Butch," she told him, low-voiced. "He didn't meet me here. Furthermore, I saw two men I'm positive were Kasini mobsters come out of the Chow Seto Laundry around the corner with

bundles under their arms. Perhaps it really was their laundry they were taking home, but they went into a ramshackle hotel next door. Tony, I think they've got Butch!"

CHAPTER IX

Chinese Laundry



QUINN went with Carol back to the coupé. He got in and sat down, leaving the door open.

"Silk is expecting you, darling," he told her, and repeated what he had already told Silk.

That was a habit with the Black Bat, in order to impress his instructions. "You're to hurry to Silk at once. He'll meet you in the tunnel beneath the gatehouse with his make-up kit. He'll also have a nurse's outfit taken from the closet where we keep such things. You're to put it on and then come to the house the front way, through the police guard. Explain that I'm having a restless night and you've come to relieve Silk. McGrath will undoubtedly show up. When he does you're to refuse him admittance to my bedroom absolutely, on the grounds that the patient can't be disturbed."

He started to get out to leave her, but again she touched his arm.

"Please be careful, Tony," she said, low-voiced. "And—haven't you forgotten something?"

He bent swiftly, kissed her, then got from the car and faded into the night. He hurried through a dark alley, cut across a brighter lighted street, worked his way through the crowd until he rounded the corner and came to Chow Seto's Laundry.

The front door was locked and the place dark. The Black Bat, now in ordinary guise, went on to the corner and came in through the alley. In pitch darkness that was almost like

day to his bat eyes he slipped from his light topcoat and donned the Black Bat outfit. A hundred alley smells and sounds out of the night penetrated his keen senses as he leaped over a high board fence and came into the back yard of Chow Seto's place of business. He recognized it by the narrow gate where the laundry delivery trucks backed up to the rear door.

The Black Bat inspected the back windows, found them latched from within. No chance of entrance there unless he broke the pane. He replaced the thin steel tool he had taken from a scalloped rib of his bat outfit, brought forth a handful of keys, some of which were paper thin.

He inserted key after key in the lock of the door next. When he found the right one he sprung it, and pushed—only to find a bar across the door from within.

Because the window, though latched, was not barred, however, the Black Bat guessed that someone was in the place night and day. Either that, or the very fact that the place was easy to enter might be a clever blind.

The Black Bat looked swiftly about him. He went to a nearby trash barrel and brought out a discarded newspaper, soaking it at a dripping hydrant at the back of the ramshackle building. He pasted the sheets of paper to the window pane near the top. The dampness made them cling enough so that when the Black Bat pushed gently the pane gave way with but a faint tinkle. He reached through the hole, unlatched the window, and slid through.

His night-trained eyes already had taken in the room before entering. It was an ordinary back room such as might be found in any Chinese laundry. There was a gas plate, a table on which food could be served, and a bunk in one corner. Shirts by the hundreds hung everywhere on drying lines in both the back room and the larger one up front.

The Black Bat ducked under the flapping laundry and began exploring the front room. A peculiar smell came to his nostrils—one that he quickly recognized. He ignored it while hurriedly exploring the place, a .38 automatic in one hand. After all, it was not so unusual to pick up the odor of opium in a Chinese place like this. There were probably a hundred or more pipes near here, being smoked this minute by addicts of the poppy.

His eyes at once located the cleverly hidden trap-door in the back and he opened it up. A flight of narrow steps led down about eight feet into a cellar that was empty except for a few broken and discarded canned goods boxes. The concrete floor gave off no sound and the cracked walls were bare.

FINDING nothing in the cellar, he went back upstairs again, grimly thoughtful. That particular odor was still strong, and suddenly it gave him an idea. Many other things were done with opium except smoking it in pipes, in its crudest form.

In a corner of the front room of the establishment were dozens of packages of laundry tied neatly and ready for delivery. The Black Bat went over there and brought a package down from the shelf, and the string made a loud popping sound as it broke under his fingers. He pulled aside the wrapping paper.

The bundle contained half a dozen ordinary white shirts, ironed and folded neatly as only a Chinaman could do it. But unfolding one and shaking it, the Black Bat made a discovery. Several wafer-thin packages fell out of the collars and cuffs and the front pocket yielded more. Dope! Whether it was heroin, morphine, codein, cocaine or other derivatives of opium the Black Bat could not tell from the looks, but all were equally contraband.

The Bat went through a couple of other packages of laundry. More pa-

per envelopes. More white powders.

"So that's the connection?" the hooded man mumbled under his breath, a bit startled himself as the enormity of the scheme began to unfold itself.

Whatever these powders were they were derived from the alkaloid substance of opium. Opium smuggled in by Duke Kasini beyond any doubt!

The Black Bat's unerring diligence had at last uncovered the distributing plant of one of the biggest retail dope rings in the country!

He had started to replace the packages on the shelf when two things happened almost simultaneously. From behind him through the trap-door from which he had just emerged himself came a movement, and from somewhere below in that same empty cellar there came blast after blast on the high-pitched whistle he had given Butch.

The Black Bat wheeled with the speed of a startled cat and was already falling to the floor when he saw the Chinese beneath the raised trap-door pointing a gun at him. His own .38 exploded and the Oriental's gun went flying. He made a dive forward at the Chinese who ducked back down the steep steps.

The Black Bat came in on top of him almost head first, and together he and the Oriental he recognized on the instant as one of Chow Seto's partners crashed into the empty cellar. A startled yell came from the Chinese who had been behind the Black Bat's attacker.

Flame spurts lashed out in the cellar as the door thumped shut and one Chinese began screaming orders in Cantonese. The Black Bat's dive to one side in the darkness caused him to stumble over a box underfoot, though he could see plainly. The clatter made him a perfect target from less than five feet.

He saw a gun swing up, and his own snapping .38s gave back a death-laden answer. A stream of slugs poured

into the Chinese dope peddler. He dropped in his tracks, but the other partner had leaped in from the side with a long-bladed knife in his hand. He thought, of course, that that grim, hooded figure could not see, and that error in judgment proved fatal.

THE Black Bat disj'ked to kill at any time, even in self defense or in defense of his helpmates, but there was no choice now. And he also knew the misery and human suffering put upon the world by these dealers who had waxed rich through the terrible hold they had upon their victims. Sanitariums were filled with such victims trying to fight their way back to normalcy or some semblance of real living. So he shot the knifeman three times and then it was quiet in the cellar.

"Butch!" he called, searching the place for signs of a door. "Butch!"

There was no answer. Not in Butch's voice—but that whistle was still blowing blast after blast in the agreed signals from somewhere back of those four walls. The sound, pitched too high for an ordinary human ear, was coming from nearby.

Then the Black Bat noticed the place where he had stumbled over and knocked aside the box, with a resultant racket that might have been his undoing. Beneath it, barely discernible even in daylight probably, was something that looked like the head of a ten-penny nail. The Black Bat's foot pressed down on it. Almost at once a block of the concrete wall swung in. What he had thought, when examining the place, were cracks in the cement, actually were the cunningly concealed outlines of a secret door.

A short, narrow passage ran back about twenty feet to another door. The whistle blasts were coming from beyond it, and the Black Bat's hands slipped fresh clips into his automatics as he darted back.

He did not even hesitate. His muscular shoulder hit the wooden door

and it gave in under the impact. He almost fell into a low, cellarlike room.

Butch was alone and presented a startling sight. The massive-necked former boxer had been tied in an ordinary wooden chair but it no longer resembled one. He stood erect on his bound feet, the remains of the broken wood hanging from him in splinters.

"BOSS!" Butch cried. "I knew you would come—I knew it!"

He grinned delightedly, crow-hopping around on his tightly lashed feet.

"Boy, am I glad to see you!"

"Here, let me get at those bonds," ordered the Black Bat. "We've got to get out of here in a hurry. Someone might have heard those shots."

"Where's those two Chinese pals of that Chow Seto guy?" demanded the prisoner belligerently, flexing his muscles. "I'm gonna knock some heads together."

He looked disappointed when the Black Bat told him that they were beyond caring whether or not their heads were knocked together.

"Lucky for them," grunted Butch. "Say, they was workin' in with Duke Kasini, Boss. He left them here to watch me while he took his gang and went out to do some jobs."

Quickly he related all he had overheard and finished with the information that the banker, Harvey Belmont, had been kidnaped. The Black Bat nodded.

"I expected something like that," he said. "The Dragon Master said in Ling's house that Belmont needed a lesson. I have a feeling though, Butch, that they're going to be very careful not to hurt him. If Harvey Belmont really is the richest of the group who were to buy the treasure—as he's supposed to be—this Dragon Master is far too cunning to kill the goose that lays the golden egg. It's good psychology they're using, too. If Belmont is frightened enough, and sees that his partners are being killed, one by one, he'll put his life before his money.

He'll pay up, eventually . . . How did you get loose?"

Butch grinned and unconsciously flexed his iron muscles again.

"They were getting ready to give me the works with lighted matches shoved under the fingernails. They thought I was a Fed, or something looking for junk. But you know what them dopes did, Boss? They had already untied my hands from my sides and lashed 'em to the arm of that chair. But when this guy with the diamonds came in with some more orders from the Dragon Master they left those two Chinese to watch me and hit out.

"Pretty soon these two Chinese dope sellers hear a noise on a buzzer they got rigged up and they hit out. That was you upstairs, of course. Anyhow, being left alone a minute was all I needed. I gave one good heave and split off them chair arms like they were dried match sticks. The whistle was in the cuff of my sleeve so I started blowing while I rolled around and busted that chair to pieces. I didn't know if it was you upstairs, but I had a kind of hunch it was, and I was sure hoping so."

The Black Bat made a hurried inspection of the place.

"Think of the set-up, Butch," he pointed out. "Kasini smuggled in the stuff from China via Mexican or other ports, and this Chow Seto and his two partners probably picked it up in dirty laundry some way. From here the stuff went out to victims all over the city."

They hurried out through the door again, anxious to get away from this place, but sirens already were wailing to a stop in front of the laundry. They were likely to be trapped!

"Quick, Butch—out the back way!" ordered the Black Bat. "Head for home. Hurry, before they come around. Someone must have heard, and turned in an alarm as soon as that first shot was fired!"

He jumped quickly up the steps and cautiously raised the door an inch.

Butch crowded behind him, stumbling in the Stygian blackness. But already flashlights were playing out front, and there were the sounds of more police as other cruisers jerked to a stop outside."

"Hurry, Butch!" the Black Bat repeated. "It will take them a minute or two to find their way up that dark alley—they can't make it in the cruisers—and we must beat them to it! We've got to be gone before they get there!"

Even as he spoke in a hoarse whisper he was leaping through the hidden entrance in the cellar wall he had found, and up the steps to the laundry, closely followed by the massive-necked Butch. Hidden by the lines of drying shirts, they cat-footed to the rear room where the Black Bat had left the window raised.

The next instant they were cautiously emerging through the window in the alley where the Black Bat hastened away in one direction and Butch scuttled away in another.

Hidden by a high board fence a safe distance away, the Black Bat quickly shed his black, hooded garb. With his soft hat pulled down shieldingly low he slipped into the street where he found a passing cab, ordering the driver to an address on Pine Street.

After a time he got out at the address given, one in the middle of a block of residences. He waited until the taxi's tail-light had vanished back in the direction of Chinatown, then walked up the street. Three blocks away lay the smart home of Harvey Belmont.

On the next block over, the Black Bat cut in between two houses. But the man who emerged only moments later was an entirely different one. He had become a hooded black shadow.

From the back of the Belmont grounds the Black Bat leaped over a hedge into the shadow of an arbor. Only one patrolman was in sight, but even that alert bluecoat never realized that a flitting shadow passed within

fifteen feet of him. The Black Bat went in through a cellar window, climbed a flight of stairs to a large kitchen and paused. Only silence greeted his keenly listening ears.

On noiseless feet he moved into the dining room, then on into a living room beyond. A quick search disclosed no wall safe, unless one were hidden back of a sliding panel. Still as silently as a shadow he moved on into a luxurious library. Here, above an open fireplace, a panel had been slid back. The safe door was cracked partly open. The Black Bat smiled grimly behind his mask. And the smile became a wide grin when his keen eyes caught the outline of a shoe behind a heavy chair in a corner.

"All right, Silk, you can come out," he whispered, chuckling softly through the darkness.

CHAPTER X

Mystery Explosion



RINNING, Silk Norton rose from behind the chair. He looked the part of a typical yegg in felt-soled shoes and rumped suit. He came across the room to the Black Bat, carrying his tool kit.

"Oh, so it's you, sir," Silk whispered. "I'd just got the safe door open when I knew someone was in the house who had no business here. I can't say I heard anybody—it was more like I felt somebody had come in. I was pretty certain it was you, but when a man is doing a job like this he mustn't take chances."

Silk was taken completely by surprise at the news that Belmont had been kidnaped. Finding that no one was here when he had arrived himself, he had thought that perhaps the financier had changed his mind and gone to confer with the others of

Eight Incorporated, since they now had such vital matters to confer about.

"I couldn't listen in very much on the radio," he explained, "so haven't been able to keep up with everything that's been going on. One of the two officers on guard at our place insisted on being in the house most of the time. I kind of suspect it had something to do with personal orders from Captain McGrath, though the sandwiches and coffee might have been a contributing factor. Never have I seen such appetites! No wonder I was forced to stay in the kitchen a good deal of the time."

Silk had not taken anything from the opened safe as yet, so now the Black Bat began to sift the papers he saw there, not just certain of what he would find or what he might learn. He only knew that from Harvey Belmont's suite of offices in the squat building where his associate Thompson had been throttled, that the banking genius spun a financial web that spread all over the country, in various corporations.

The Black Bat soon found ample proof of how wide-spread was Belmont's money schemes. The financier kept a sort of record of various holding companies, bonding companies, insurance utilities, and a list of stocks of other companies in his home safe, probably copies of others in his offices.

Only two of the list were of more than passing interest to the Black Bat. One notation showed that he owned the controlling stock in the Dugro Aircraft Company. Another memorandum proved the financier to have been the sole owner of the Asiation Import and Export Company, of California.

"Here's an odd one, Silk," Quinn whispered to the little valet. "Asiation Import and Export. I've never heard of such a name."

"Sounds rather unusual, sir," Silk commented.

"A combination of Asiatic and Aviation, I imagine. . . . No—wait a min-

ute, Silk! It's coming back to me now. When the revolution first broke out in Spain there was a scramble on to buy up good used airplanes suitable for military service. They were sold to the Loyalists as well as to Franco, and some of the outfits like this one got into trouble with the State Department. I recall this one now in particular. Hmm! Our friend Belmont certainly has his fingers in a lot of pies, but he must have lost a pile of money before he got out of this one."

Abruptly the Black Bat paused and went rigid, his restraining hand on Silk's arm. Then he heard it again. Footsteps were creeping through the dining room. He motioned for Silk to replace the contents of the safe and close it. Gun in hand, the Black Bat slipped like a wraith to the door and stood watching as a shadowy figure came into the living room. It moved over to the window, saw the patrolling officer on duty there, unconscious that anything amiss was going on in the house he was guarding, then the wraith crept on toward the library.

It was at that moment that the Black Bat's voice whispered pleasantly from nearby:

"Good evening, Miss Ling. Visiting?"

THE girl gave a stifled gasp and turned to face the weird figure in the hood—the same she had met in her own bedroom earlier in the evening.

"So we meet again," said the Black Bat, coming closer to her. "And still enemies, I'm sorry to say. What are you doing, may I ask?"

"I've been hiding and waiting a chance to get away unseen," she answered.

"That's not a direct answer, I fear, though it sounds frank enough. You should know by now that my interest is China's interest insofar as this stolen art collection is concerned. Why did you come here? Who sent you? Your murderous Master?"

She shook her head, knowing he

could see in the darkness.

"No. He did not send me. But you heard him say in my father's house why he had come there—to get him to act as an intermediary for the others. After he left—"

"—out the back way presumably, you hurried out and joined Colonel Wang," the Black Bat finished.

A startled look came over I-tso's oval-shaped face. She tried to peer through the darkness into this man's hooded face, even coming a bit closer. The fear his appearance usually aroused in others was completely lacking.

"You know everything, don't you?" she whispered.

"No indeed, but enough to know that immediately after the Dragon Master disappeared from your father's house you left also, and rode away in a cab with the colonel. Why?"

"You probably wouldn't believe me if I told you," she answered quietly.

"I'd like to, I-tso Ling. But up to now you've given me little reason to do so. You're a Dragon and helped the murderous leader of that blackmailing crew to escape. He was in your house. That means that quite possibly your own father or Colonel Wang was present."

"No—no!" she cried in a strained whisper. "I swear that isn't true. They couldn't be. You see, since I met Wang a short time ago we have—well, we've come to mean much to each other. But my father wants me to stay here in America. He's violently opposed to my marrying someone else and going back to live in China when he—he already has another man picked out as my husband. I've been meeting the colonel secretly. That's what he was doing tonight—waiting for me."

"Where did you go then?"

"We rode around a bit, talking over our personal affairs, and I finally came here—after I left him."

"But at his suggestion, possibly. Naturally he's anxious for the ten million to be paid."

"Of course he is! After all, put yourself in his position. He came over with the treasure and may be held responsible to his superiors upon his return. I—I had to do something! So I came here to see Mr. Belmont and beg him to accede to the Dragon Master's demands tomorrow. But no—no!—Colonel Wang knows nothing of that! When I slipped in here, though, there was an uproar out front. Mr. Belmont had been kidnaped! From what I overheard them say, Mr. Belmont's valet—he is a Dragon, too—had sounded an alarm and drawn the officers to the front of the house. By the time it was over Ohmo had Mr. Belmont and was away. The valet fled, too, and joined Ohmo. I had just come in, unnoticed, and found myself unable to leave. I've been hiding here ever since, trying to get away unseen."

Instinctively the Black Bat knew the girl was telling the truth. Had she known of the orders to kidnap the financier she would have had no reason for coming here at this particular time. And she appeared to be entirely frank. Under his questioning she told of how the Dragon society had been organized three weeks previously by the man who wore the green robes and the green dragon's mask, and that none of them knew who he was. She had been horrified by the murders, and no one had seen the art collection since the robbery. It had vanished.

AFTER talking to her awhile, the Black Bat was certain that I-tso definitely was on his side now. With her as an ally he might be able to recover the treasure. He asked her to help him.

"It will mean death for me if I'm found out, but I'll do it," I-tso Ling told him unhesitatingly. "And I promise not to tell the colonel or my father. I think there will be another meeting of the Dragon society tomorrow night in the hidden cellar deep beneath those condemned buildings. I will be there—and do all I can."

There was nothing more to do but let the girl slip away and let Silk follow, without her having been aware that the little valet had been hiding in the library. The Black Bat took I-tso to the back of the house, pausing at the door.

"Wait here until the police officer reaches the front of the house," he instructed. "Then hurry away. Find out what you can about this man who calls himself the Dragon Master."

"How can I get in touch with you?" she whispered.

The face beneath the hood broke into a smile.

"You can't. The Black Bat has no friends or confidants. But I'll get in touch with you. We'll meet again—so don't lock your skylight."

His method of letting her and Silk slip away was simple. He went to the front of the house and slipped out through a window. He chuckled at the look of surprise on the face of the officer when he found himself covered by the Black Bat's guns.

Presently there came to the Black Bat's ears two blasts from Silk's whistle—blasts that the patrolling police officer could not possibly hear—informing the hooded man that Silk Norton was safely away from Harvey Belmont's deserted mansion. The Black Bat left the officer with his back turned, backed away under the trees, and then disappeared. He found Silk waiting and the two of them hurried toward the estate of Tony Quinn, not many blocks away.

"It's been quite an evening, sir," ventured the little valet, covering his baggy suit with a light topcoat and replacing the cap with a hat. "May I ask what now?"

"We'll go home now," the Black Bat said. "That Dragon Master is a devilishly cunning man, Silk. So far he's made good on every threat he has made. He said one of Eight Incorporated would die within hours—and Thompson was killed in his office. Harrison tried to pull a sneak

—and died in the wreckage of the plane taking him to safety, a wreck that almost cost Dugro his life also. Belmont has been kidnaped, and they're out for Tony Quinn's scalp. Maybe there's something doing right now at my house."

HIS words seemed almost prophetic, for when they approached within two blocks of the Tony Quinn estate the Black Bat saw something that happened too fast for words to describe it in the happening. A laundry truck rounded the corner some distance away and paused for not more than five seconds. Its rear doors opened, then slammed shut again. Quickly.

Then it shot away, and from the direction of Quinn's house there came a heavy explosion!

"Silk, follow that truck!" shouted the Black Bat. "Take that car!" He pointed to the coupé where Carol had left it. "Hurry!"

Silk kept running toward the car and the Black Bat sprinted unseen to the gatehouse. The little valet jumped in, spun the starter, and was off as an alert police cruiser shot around a corner ahead and took out in pursuit of the speeding laundry truck with the police cruiser coming up fast.

The police car gained like a hound on a rabbit. Silk slammed the accelerator to the floor and tried to keep up, cutting across a side street with tires screeching a protest. A couple of minutes later he came out of a side street and caught sight of the laundry truck under the street lights, with the cruiser coming up fast.

But once again the back doors were opened from within, and were closed again almost at once. It was enough. There was a shattering roar, a flash, and what had been a shiny new police car went rolling up over the curb in a mass of shattered steel with two inert things inside that once had been men in blue.

CHAPTER XI

A Blind Man's Nurse

PROBABLY the most disgusted man in the entire city at about the time the sound of the mysterious explosion in Tony Quinn's house went rocking away through the night, was Captain Mc-

Grath of Homicide.

McGrath was dazedly picking himself up off the grass outside of Tony Quinn's house with his ears ringing and a few dozen stray stars shooting all through the ozone. Nearby was a hole that looked like a small shell crater.

In a lifetime of police work it had been by far his most disastrous day. It had started with the special afternoon assignment the commissioner had given him in Chinatown. His work had been to direct the efforts of various cruisers and regular officers combing that section, while he himself circulated through the streets with an eye out for suspicious characters. But by late afternoon, when nothing had been uncovered, the hunt had cooled down and most of the cruisers had been directed back to their regular beats.

McGrath had just eased up a bit, keeping a weather eye on Dr. Ling's house because of the little Chinese scholar's connection with the case of the stolen treasure when he had answered a servant's alarm and gone in with two officers to investigate. The first thing that had greeted his eyes when he had opened the bedroom door of Dr. Ling's daughter had been a Black Bat insignia pasted squarely in the center of her forehead.

This had been too much. McGrath was tired and in bad humor. His corns were giving him hell, and to top it all off the Black Bat had shown up and

projected himself into the case—and, as usual, had disappeared before the captain could lay hands on him.

So the doughty officer had hurried out, hunted up a police cruiser, and ordered the officers to drive him to Quinn's house. But hardly had he got under way when that personal broadcast to him had come over the police radio, and Commissioner Warner's voice had dripped sarcasm. It had not made it easier for McGrath to know that every radio car in town was tuned in to that sermon and that the policemen occupants of the cars were grinning.

That realization had made his ears burn, for his attempts to get the Black Bat were well known to all the men in the department. The fact that he had never yet been able to put the cuffs on the elusive figure brought too much muffled laughter to suit him.

There had been nothing to do but order the two sober-faced radio officers to drive to Harvey Belmont's home. He had arrived just in time to find the place in an uproar over Belmont's kidnaping, and a dazed officer phoning Headquarters to broadcast the alarm that the Dragon Master had struck again.

By then McGrath knew that the Black Bat—if he was Tony Quinn—as the captain so firmly believed—probably was safely at home away from Chinatown. But Captain McGrath was a stubborn man. He had set out to go to Quinn's house, and all hell and high water was not going to stop him. He went, ordering the two officers in the cruiser to stop about two blocks away.

"Stay here until I get back," he grunted, as he got out of the car. "Keep an eye out for any suspicious cars cruising around."

He crossed over to the shrubbery, started through, and found a gun barrel squarely in his face.

"Hands up!" ordered the alert officer behind it. "No monkey business."

"Never mind — it's McGrath," growled the disgruntled detective, though he was secretly pleased at such vigilance on the part of the men he had personally instructed to keep an eye on Quinn. "Just came over for a routine checkup. Anything new?"

The bluecoat sheathed his pistol.

"Quinn hasn't left the house, sir. One of us has been in the kitchen and the other about the grounds all the time. But that pussy-footed valet of his went out. He sent for a nurse to relieve him tonight. She's inside."

MCGRATH'S suspicions promptly soared. A nurse, eh? Sure, Quinn had had a bad bump, but not that bad. He no more needed a nurse than McGrath himself did. The officer went to the front door and was admitted by a neat woman in white. She was quite pretty despite her streaked gray hair beneath the perched cap.

"Yes, what is it?" Carol asked crisply—though he could have no idea she was Carol.

He bit off the end of a cigar and looked her over.

"I'm Captain McGrath, of Homicide," he said. "How's Quinn coming along?"

"I gave him a hypo a little while ago," she murmured, "and he's finally dropped off to sleep. He'll be all right in a few days. All he needs is plenty of rest, and not to be disturbed."

"Maybe I'd better take a peak anyhow," suggested the bulldog captain. "You never can tell about those things. There have been threats against his life you know, from the same gang he got away from last night."

"No, no, you mustn't see him," she said firmly, shaking her head. "He can't be disturbed."

"I won't disturb him," said the doughty McGrath, and stalked into the house.

He headed straight for Tony Quinn's bedroom and opened the door enough to peek in. Carol held her

breath. But from the bandaged head visible under the edge of the covers there emanated regular snores. In fact, quite loud ones. Butch could sleep any time, anywhere.

McGrath closed the door, his face almost registering disappointment. But the bulldog in him would not let him give up. He eyed the nurse up and down, openly suspicious.

"Say, haven't I seen you somewhere before?" he demanded bluntly. "In a crowd or on the street or something?"

Carol blushed prettily and gave him a coy smile. In doing so she exposed two horrible buck teeth and a whole mouthful of others capped with gold. Her jaws looked like a pawnshop window filled with the stuff. He restrained his instinctive shudder.

"Why, Officer, you're rather old-fashioned in your technique, but then I guess we can't be choosy at our age," she told him, exposing those awful hash pounders again. "I'm off next week, so I could meet you downtown almost any night. We can have a good dinner, take in a show, go to a couple of night clubs, and—"

McGrath's face changed color. He almost fled from the house and started back to the waiting cruiser, reaching for a match.

The match was never lit, nor was the cigar. From some place nearby the very lawn itself seemed to erupt in a tremendous explosion that knocked him down and sent him rolling. He managed to scramble up, but reeled and fell again, choking on the cigar that had been rammed halfway down his throat. Falling on his face in that way, he had almost swallowed it. He was spitting out the mangled remains and cursing when Donovan and the other officer came running.

"Donovan!" he bellowed. "They threw a bomb or something!"

"Yee-ow!" yelled Donovan. "Look at that hole in the ground!"

The three of them broke into a hurried run to search the grounds, with

guns out. From down the street came the wailing of a siren as the two alert officers he had just left in the police cruiser glimpsed the laundry truck nearly three blocks distant from the house and set off in hot pursuit on what was to be their last chase.

McGrath and his men found nothing in their hurried search. The police captain's guess was that someone had sneaked in along the hedge and tried to throw a bomb through one of the French windows. The nurse's white-clad figure was there now, in plain sight. McGrath raced for those windows, but could not guess that Carol went cold all over as the big officer dashed in.

SHE was fighting the hardest battle of her life to keep calm. Always she had dreaded what she feared would be the inevitable day when McGrath would find out the facts about Tony Quinn, that in truth—as the bull-dog-minded police officer so keenly surmised—the former district attorney was the elusive Black Bat. Time after time Captain McGrath had missed beating Quinn into the house only by split seconds, but Carol had known that it could not always go on like that. The odds had to fall the other way sometime.

"What happened?" she demanded of him breathlessly, as he barged into the house.

Instinctively she placed herself between the big officer and the door leading into Tony Quinn's bedroom.

"An explosion!" barked McGrath. "Some rat sneaked up and tossed in a bomb!" His jaw shot out belligerently. "I want to see Quinn, sister—now!"

"You can't!" she declared defiantly. "You mustn't! He's had too much of a shock already."

"Out of my way!" he snapped, shoving her aside. "Hey, Quinn!" he belted, pushing past Carol who tried vainly to cling to his massive arm.

And then the sweetest sound that

Carol Baldwin ever expected to hear in life came from that sick room. There was a loud clatter, the stumbling fall of a body, and Quinn's voice began calling wildly:

"Silk! Silk! Where are you? What's happened?"

When Captain McGrath burst into the bedroom Quinn, in pajamas, was down on the floor beside his bed, getting to his knees. His dead eyes were staring all about while he fumbled with outstretched hands for some familiar object that would orientate him. In the dim glow of the night light on the medicine table Carol ran to his side and helped him up.

"Is that you, nurse?" he asked. "Where's my valet? Didn't I hear McGrath's voice?"

"Here, let me help you back into bed," she said soothingly, straightening the bandage she had fastened so that it fitted like a cap. "Your valet went for a walk, Mr. Quinn. And, yes—Captain McGrath is here."

"What happened, McGrath?" repeated Quinn dazedly. "I had just dozed off when the whole house shook as if there had been an explosion. It almost knocked me out of bed. I tried to get up—I guess I fell—"

McGrath hurriedly explained, then strode into the other room of Quinn's private suite to the telephone. One of the officers came in to report that there had been another explosion some blocks away. The burly detective ordered him to bar all people from coming into the grounds, and dialed Headquarters. Quinn could hear him explaining to Commissioner Warner.

"Oh, Tony, I've never been so frightened as I was when he came through that door!" Carol whispered breathlessly, as she bent over to straighten the covers. "My whole body seemed to turn to ice. How on earth did you do it? Butch was in that bed asleep only two or three minutes ago."

"I'm under it now," came a muffled voice from below, followed by a

strangled sneeze. "And I'm not asleep. That bomb woke me up. He rolled me out just after it went off."

"I had my pajamas on under my clothes, Carol," Quinn told her, in an answering whisper. "I made it here by a split hair. And, Carol, that was no ordinary bomb. Silk and I were a good two blocks from the house when we saw a laundry truck pull up under a street light nearly another block away. All we saw was the back doors open quickly then as quickly close. The explosion came almost instantly, yet the men responsible for it were a good three hundred yards away."

"What are you going to do now?" she asked quickly.

"I want you to get rid of everybody as quickly as possible," was all he could say then, because McGrath came back into the room.

AS the big officer entered, Quinn lay flat on his back again with the covers tucked up beneath the chin, around his bandaged head. His dead-looking eyes stared straight up over the foot of the bed.

"I just had Commissioner Warner on the phone," announced the captain. "He's sending more guards to patrol the grounds, though little good it'll do now. They won't come back."

"Is the commissioner coming here?" Quinn asked in a hollow voice.

McGrath shook his head. "He says he can't make it, and for me to take charge. He's having a meeting at Dugro's house tonight. They took Dugro straight there after his accident, instead of to the hospital. Professor Ling and that Wang fellow will be there for tonight's meeting, along with some others. They're going to decide what to do about the ransom."

Quinn would have liked to ask if any word of Belmont had come to the police, but sick and injured Tony Quinn would not know about that kidnaping yet. Carol, however, instinctively guessed that Quinn might want to know the latest developments in the

case of the financier.

"Oh, Captain," she said, "I heard over the radio about that horrible kidnaping of Mr. Harvey Belmont by his Chinese valet for the Dragon Master monster. Isn't it terrible! Has there been any word of Mr. Belmont yet?"

McGrath shook his head, absently reaching for a cigar.

"Not yet. But we'll probably hear soon." He saw the inquiring frown on Quinn's face, and told him the details of the kidnaping, briefly. "Somebody's bound to get word of, or from Belmont soon," he repeated. "Probably with a ransom demand of some kind concerning that treasure, for that's the only reason for the snatch. If they'd have wanted to kill Belmont the Chinese could have done it easily."

As he finished, he lighted his stogy. Quinn began coughing weakly when he caught a whiff of the cigar smoke. That was Carol's cue to get McGrath out of the room, which she did with vigor bordering on professional indignation.

"And furthermore," she told the big man as he let himself be shoed out, "I'm locking this door and keeping it locked the rest of the night! Nobody else gets in. If your men must make an investigation of this attempt to murder Mr. Quinn, kindly order them to do so quietly. He's a sick man."

McGrath agreed almost humbly, and went out. Already half a dozen police cars were racing up to the curb beyond the lawn. Uniformed cops were scouring the neighborhood. And it was only a short time before one drawn-faced bluecoat had arrived breathlessly with a story of one thing that had been found. The face of the big Homicide captain was drained white as he listened. His springy step was gone and his bull voice subdued as he went with the bluecoat to the waiting cruiser and got heavily into it.

They drove some blocks down the street to where a curious crowd was being shoed back by several grim-faced police. McGrath got out, forced

his way through the crowd and looked down at what was left of the new police cruiser.

The entire engine and front wheels had been blown away and the rest of the car was only twisted steel. McGrath's bulldog jaws clamped down until the muscles in his cheeks stood out like iron lumps as he looked at what was inside. Only minutes before those two mangled hings had been men who had driven him to Quinn's house.

"I'll get 'em, Fitz!" came soundlessly from between his clenched teeth. "I swear to you and Murphy that I'll get the hell's spawn who did this if I have to team up with the Black Bat!"

CHAPTER XII

A Raid on Mr. Whiskers



HURRIEDLY Tony Quinn got himself dressed. Except for that small shaded light on the medicine table, his bedroom was dark. As soon as he was ready he called in Carol and Butch and sat on the edge of the bed talking to them. In his hand was a plain metal disk. Butch had managed to grab it from the can with the slotted top before leaving Chow Seto's laundry, for oddly enough it had been set in place again on the counter after being the object of contention that had almost cost Butch O'Leary his life.

Quinn examined the lettering and numbers stamped on it. They read:

PLEASANT HOTEL, SHANGHAI—
0894-A ROOM 5930

"There's something phony about this," announced Quinn, turning the object over in his hands. "No hotel in Shanghai has nearly six thousand rooms."

"Perhaps it's a code of some kind," suggested Carol, her hand on his shoulder.

"Quite likely. Those last numbers look like telephone listings. We know that Chow Seto retails narcotics, and this may be something that has to do with it."

"Maybe it's some kind of a system like a friend of mine used during prohibition days," Butch suggested, brightening. "He used tags like the shoe repairman gives you when you leave a pair of shoes to be mended. You know—he tears it in half and writes your name on it beside a number. When you come back after 'em you got to give him the tag. That's the way my friend worked it. When a customer phoned in he had to give his name *and* his number, and it had to check with a file my friend kept beside the telephone. That way no cop could phone for a quart to be delivered and then pinch my friend when he showed up with it."

Quinn chuckled, but his eyes brightened.

"Butch, I believe you've hit it!" he exclaimed. "Let's take a look at this thing again. Pleasant would mean—"

"Placid," replied Carol promptly. "The telephone number is Placid five-nine-three-o. That's down in the Chinatown district, too."

"Chow Seto's probably." Quinn nodded and sent Butch for the telephone directory. He opened it and thumbed through. "Yes, here it is. Chow Seto Laundry. Placid five-nine-three-o."

"What about the other number then?" put in Butch. "You mean—"

"The other one is the drug user's number. I think it means that a new customer was added to the huge number who get their 'laundry' done at Chow Seto's establishment. His number is o-eight-nine-four-A. Quite simple now that you think of it, yet the average person would never connect the numbers with anything out of the ordinary."

Quinn got to his feet and slipped on

the light coat that, with the broad brimmed black hat he wore, always so effectively served to disguise his features to the casual observer.

"I'm going to Dugro's house to see what I can find out," Quinn told his two aides, again looking through the directory for an address. "Luckily the other car is parked on a side street, instead of being in the garage. Silk has the coupé . . . Keep this bedroom door locked, Carol, and don't let even Warner himself come in should he arrive. I rather imagine, though, that at this minute he's with Dugro, waiting for the others to show up."

His final instructions given, Tony Quinn went out through the tunnel and came up under the gatehouse. Police were on guard everywhere and he had to wait for several minutes before emerging through the hidden door.

Crowds were gathered along the streets. The explosion had rattled windows everywhere around and word had spread that another attempt had been made on the life of injured Tony Quinn.

"Must be kinda tough on a guy blind like that and flat on his back, to have them go heaving hand grenades at him," Quinn heard one man remark to another.

"Yeah," was the reply. "It musta been some of the mobs he sent up the river when he was D.A."

"And you don't know how near right you are, my friend," Quinn muttered under his breath as he passed by.

REACHING the parked car, he set out for Walter Dugro's house, taking a circular route across town to avoid traffic as much as possible. There was always the chance of some slight accident due to some reckless driver, and of a policeman making a routine inquiry, asking to see a driver's license. Blind men were not supposed to have licenses, or to be driving at all. And Tony Quinn was supposed to be home, injured, and living in a world of blackness.

As he headed the car on a round-about way along the warehouse district along the waterfront, he saw that the section was deserted. Not even a watchman was in sight.

"I'd better stop off and phone McGrath about Chow Seto's place right away," he decided. "It's possible that the art collection might—"

He broke off with a low exclamation and slowed down. A hundred yards away in the Stygian blackness between two big warehouses there was a faint glow. But it was not that that attracted the former district attorney's attention so much as did the trucks. Two of them were backed up to an open door—exact replicas of the truck in which he had been kidnaped. And standing on guard at the back of them were two mobsters with machine-guns. Others were hurriedly tossing packages into the back of the waiting trucks.

Quinn rolled his car on past, and parked unobtrusively at the curb not far away. Soon a fleeting shadow merged with the deeper ones around the building as a hooded figure with batlike wings under his arms moved toward the trucks.

Then the Black Bat's retentive memory clicked. This building was a warehouse leased by the Government to store certain types of contraband goods seized by customs men until proper disposal was made. It all came back now. For months Narcotics men had been smashing one ring after another in hauls all over the country. In the last raid, in the Black Bat's own city, a quarter of a million dollars' worth of stuff had been seized off a tanker.

It had been discovered that the dope smugglers had concocted a clever scheme. In the guise of plumbers some of them had come aboard carrying long sections of two-inch pipe to replace rusted ones in the ship's hold. The new pipes had been installed, the rusted ones filled with narcotics, the ends plugged, and the smugglers had

blandly carried the stuff out past the customs men. The dope had been found—but not the smugglers. Kasini, who had been suspected, had been rounded up and questioned but had had an iron-clad alibi.

“I always thought that confiscated narcotics were given to hospitals,” the Black Bat was thinking now. “But Kasini seems to have reason to believe that contraband is in that building. Perhaps his supply is getting short and he’s desperate.”

The two men with sub-machine-guns stood on guard near the trucks were talking in low tones.

“Did you see anything?” one of them suddenly said uneasily. “I thought I heard something brushin’ by me. Sorta slithering.”

Already the Black Bat had recognized that speaker, both by face and voice. The man was Manni Torrio, one of Duke Kasini’s chief lieutenants.

“You oughta lay off the snow,” the other man growled to Manni. “Ever since this Black Bat showed up at old Ling’s house the whole mob’s been jittery. Even the China boys were showing it when Duke went with them to pick up Belmont.”

“I’m plenty jittery,” Manni Torrio muttered, shifting his short weapon. “Every cop in town’s on the lookout for us since we lifted that art collection. They’re foaming over the old duck at the museum getting his head bashed in by Joe. That’s a burn for everyone of us if we get caught. And now Duke sends us to knock over Old Whiskers’ warehouse because he got tipped off his junk the Feds took off the tanker is still in here.”

THE Black Bat had awaited his opportunity and had slipped inside. He paused beside a stack of crates. So it had been “Joe” who had killed the elderly watchman at the museum! That would be Joe Mega, of course.

Over at the other side of the room was a monster safe of a kind the Black Bat had not seen in years. Almost as

large as a vault, it stood nearly seven feet high, and presumably had been installed when the ancient red brick building was erected. Now Flash Mega’s torch had found it like soft butter. The cracksman had already finished packing up his outfit while others hurriedly carried packages to the trucks.

The Black Bat fitted toward the door again, guns out. Someone caught sight of his moving shadow and cried out a warning as a spurt of fire lashed out. Flash Mega’s angry curses at the nervous mobster were drowned out in the snapping reports of the Black Bat’s two .38s. The mobster went down and hell broke loose in the warehouse as Manni Torrio opened up with his chopper.

The hail of death sprayed across the warehouse and the Black Bat dropped flat. The spray of .45s sieved a line of holes in the wall across the room. From outside came shouts, orders, curses, and the roar of starting motors.

“You fools!” yelled Mega’s rage-filled voice. “Now you’ve done it. Get outa here quick!”

“It’s the Black Bat!” screamed another mobster. “Come on, you guys!”

But for Mega to get out of that door was a problem. The Black Bat had worked his way to a spot where he was under cover himself, and had part of them cut off. Mega was behind the safe, cursing. He made the mistake of exposing a hand carrying the big suitcase containing his oxygen tank and one of the Black Bat’s .38s spanged off metal as the bullets ripped holes through leather.

Mega dropped the suitcases and broke for the door as the Black Bat’s guns clicked empty. He snatched out the clips and replaced them with loaded ones, but the delay had given the cracksman the brief chance he needed. Under a hail of protecting slugs from Manni Torrio’s deadly chopper Flash Mega made the trucks. Back doors were slammed shut.

From outside came the wail of a siren, followed by a second. The Black Bat looked about for a means of escape back to his car. But the car was nearly a hundred yards away down the street, and at about the spot where the police would stop. There wasn't a chance to get back to it and get away without being pursued.

He ran forward through the pitch blackness as the trucks pulled out. But not before he had bent swiftly above three men he had downed, his hands brushing them lightly in the darkness. He wanted to identify his work to the police so there would be no mistakes.

He leaped at the right rear fender of the second truck, his own momentum carrying him up on top of the shiny big vehicle. The truck shot out of the gate as two police cruisers came screaming down the waterfront, followed by another car. Men leaped from the third car and ran into the warehouse. It was deserted now except for the three dead or wounded men on the floor.

"The Black Bat," one of them, a Federal man, said significantly, as his flashlight played over the insignia pasted in the center of each man's forehead. "And he's certainly making things hot for the Kasini mob, whoever he may really be."

"Yes, but this one is on us, boys," commented another Federal agent. "We're a little late to close the trap. Through a fluke that wouldn't happen again in a lifetime that mob sprung the trigger and got away without getting caught. Ever since District Attorney Quinn tipped us off two years ago that Kasini was running in narcotics we've been on his trail. I thought we had him cold this time. Come on, let's see how the police are making out."

THE police were not making out at all, for the luck of some evil god seemed to ride with the drug-running members of the Dragon society that night. On top of the truck doing near-

ly seventy miles an hour the Black Bat saw the two cruisers coming up like sleek greyhounds. Then as the officers opened up with a fusillade, Manni Torrio opened the back door of the rear truck and poked out the short snout of his sub-machine-gun. It burst into snarling flame and a hail of slugs peppered both front tires of the nearest car.

It began to skid wildly, there came a rub-a-dub of deflated tires on the pavement, and the car almost overturned. The second cruiser coming up close behind and trying to get around into the clear, hooked fenders and began to skid sideward also. It swerved wildly with a squall of tires, tried to straighten out, and crashed against the curb with front wheels bent.

By the time the Federal men arrived in their own car, the two trucks had cut through a side street, shot across a main stem, ducked into an alley on the edge of town, then headed out the other direction into the country by a seldom used narrow road.

CHAPTER XIII

Silk Runs Into Trouble



CAUTIOUSLY following the truck that had just brought death to two policemen in their smashed car, Silk Norton was horrified at what he had just witnessed. As he drove with one hand he took a simple make-up kit from a hidden compartment in the coupé and began to work at his features, using the rear view mirror.

Porcelain caps cleverly, though hurriedly, set in place changed the shape of his jaws. A rubber pad back of his lower lip made it full and protruding. He streaked his hair gray. And a pair of thin glass eyecups did the rest. They changed his pale eyes into snap-

ping black ones.

As he worked, and sped along after the death vehicle, he kept tuned to the police broadcasts on the car radio, tense with dread of what he might hear. For all he knew Quinn's home might be a shambles by now, with Carol and the faithful Butch dead in it. But to his relief he soon found out differently.

Silk shut off the radio when he heard the gratifying news, and sighed his relief. The bomb had missed the house, falling short on the grounds. No one had been injured.

For nearly half an hour Silk followed the truck that was heading boldly back toward Chinatown. The Chinese driver was clever. By devious side streets and dark alleys he drove slowly, taxing Silk's wits to the utmost to trail him unnoticed. Presently when the truck cut around a corner, Silk was faced with the alternative of stopping or boldly following.

He slowed up, and finally drove around the corner into a dimly lit street. But the truck had vanished into thin air!

The little man headed the coupé toward the next corner and pulled up to the curb. Still no sign of his quarry going either direction on the cross street.

Where Silk got out of the car, he was decidedly puzzled. The driver of that truck couldn't have had time to round another corner a block further on. So Silk stuck his hands in his pockets and nonchalantly strolled back the way he had come. Halfway down the street he came to an opening so narrow it hardly would admit the passage of a car. It hadn't looked like an alley at a casual glance.

Silk took a look up and down the street, then stepped into the little alley. The narrow space lay between the backs of several high buildings. Above him were the faint outlines of an ancient type fire-escape.

A white card on the wall took his eye and he ventured a quick look from

a lighted match cupped in his hands. The placard was that of a house wrecking company. That told him that these buildings had been condemned and were untenanted—were in the hands of wreckers.

For nearly a hundred feet the little valet moved on noiseless felt soles up the narrow alley in darkness that was like black fog. Then, without warning, he came upon the outlines of the truck ahead.

He started to melt into a gaping doorway. Too late he became aware of a movement somewhere close by. He wheeled and tried to duck, but from out of the night the monster already had leaped. It looked like a bull ape out of the jungle as fingers that were like iron grabbed him by the throat and sank deep, shutting off his wind.

He tried to struggle, flailing his arms in the Thing's steel grasp. But it merely struck him a paralyzing blow that left him half conscious, then tossed him into the truck, where he was covered by Joe Mega's gun. He also recognized the Thing, as Butch had earlier, since Silk Norton also had studied that collection of pictures from Tony Quinn's private Rogues' Gallery.

"**CHOW,**" Joe Mega said, and chuckled, "this monkey man gets better all the time. We could use him in the mob after the Dragon Master gets done with him."

Mega threw the rays of a flashlight into Silk's face for a moment.

"He's pretty runty for a flattie. Maybe he's a Fed. We'll find out all right when we get inside. Now we can make two sing."

"It isn't coincidence that two men were caught prowling after us within the past hours, Joe," said the bespectacled Chinese who was Chow Seto, though Silk did not know that. There was a note of anxiety in the Oriental's voice. "There's something in the wind."

Joe Mega's voice took on an ugly tone. "Sure, there's plenty in the wind. A cut on a two million rake-off from that treasure. You're not going yellow on the mob, are you, Chow?"

The slender laundryman's voice had something dangerously razor-edged in it.

"You know me better than that. I've worked with Duke's mob too long. We were getting along well, just as we have for two years, until this Dragon business came up. I knew it would center the attention of the police on Chinatown and endanger us. But Duke's been getting too confident. It was stupid for him to send the others to raid a Government warehouse to get back a confiscated shipment. That doesn't ring true to me. Who ever heard of Federal men leaving such a cargo in—"

"Forget it," Mega cut in impatiently. "Let's get over to the laundry."

Leaving the deformed Thing who had attacked Silk in the condemned building, Chow drove the truck into the alley behind the laundry and backed up to the rear door. The doors that had opened and spewed out death to two police officers now opened again and Mega ushered Silk Norton out. Silk was bound and gagged with his own necktie and handkerchief. With his wrists behind his back he was taken inside.

Chow Seto had lifted a cleverly concealed trap-door in the back room and descended into the cellar. Silk managed to follow somehow, and Mega came last. On the floor the Chinese suddenly stumbled over something and fell against the wall in the darkness. Mega chuckled but the sound turned into a snarl of hate and fear as he flashed his light on the floor. Lying there with Black Bat insignia on their foreheads were Chow Seto's two partners.

With curses dripping from his lips the gangster leaped to the other side of the room and pressed the nail head that swung the secret wall section in-

ward. The other room was empty—except for the scattered remnants of a broken chair and Duke Kasini's picture on a table with the insignia of the Black Bat pasted across it.

Chow Seto looked at it and turned to Joe Mega. There was a look of terrible fear in the eyes of the Chinese dope peddler.

"Well, Joe?" he whispered.

Joe Mega covered his own shaken feelings with a sneer.

"Don't go off half cocked."

Chow Seto shrugged and picked up a five-gallon can of gasoline that was in a corner. Then the disguised Silk saw the murderous look that came into Joe Mega's cruel eyes as the gangster's gun came up, pointing squarely at the back of the Chinese. Silk could not even cry out because of the gag that had been shoved into his mouth.

The Chinese drug peddler was still turning when Mega shot him. He fell, and the gangster walked over and bent down. The gun roared twice more within inches of the Oriental's chest.

"You were pretty good in your way, pal," the gangster said softly, straightening with the gasoline can in his hand. "I sorta hated to bump you. But when guys start getting the chill up their backs they're dangerous to the mob."

HE began sloshing gasoline over the table and burlap bags in the corner. With a jerk of his head to Silk to walk ahead of him, he poured a trail of the liquid in through the passage to the cellar, up the steps, and into the kitchen. Warning Silk to stand pat he sloshed more gasoline all over the front room and almost everything in it. Something seemed to strike him as funny, for he began to chuckle.

"It'll be a joke on the guy who owns the hotel next door," he said to Silk. "All the mob had rooms there for hide-outs. Most of the time we came in through another underground passage. Too bad we can't stick around to watch it burn, pal."

Prodding Silk outside, he ordered the little valet into the front seat of the waiting truck. He climbed in himself and started the motor. From his coat pocket he took out a nondescript cigarette lighter and carefully polished it until no vestige of fingerprints could be left. Then he snapped a big thumb down. The flaming object arched through the air and fell through the open window into the gasoline-soaked rear room of the laundry.

What followed then was almost an explosion. As the truck shot out of the alley and got away a sheet of flame went up inside the building and roared through the two rooms, turning them into an inferno. The glassed front gave way and fire shot through into the street. Cries began to fill the air. Someone raced to the corner and turned in an alarm just as two big cars dashed up and spilled out several men.

Mega, looking back, uttered a curse, but his tone was a mixture of amazement tinged with relief.

"Those fellows are Feds, pal, or my eyes are getting bad," he muttered. "Another minute and you'd have been okay. . . . Hey, don't choke on me now!" For Silk seemed in imminent danger of doing just that. "Here, Ill take the gag out—somebody to talk to anyhow. But you'd better not try yellin'."

Behind them now flames threw a glow into the sky above Chinatown.

"I rather gather," Silk said dryly, when Joe Mega had jerked the gag from his mouth, "that Mr. Kasini's retail business will suffer something of a temporary set-back."

"Shut up!" growled the killer beside him. "I gotta think. I gotta think harder than I ever did before in my life. Every move we've made tonight has been busted up by that Black Bat. He nearly got Flash in old Ling's house. He slid into Chow's place and cleaned house there. No tellin' where he'll show next."

He drove on with his bound pris-

oner beside him, half muttering. Silk knew it would be useless to try getting the door open and jumping. Mega could handle him with one hand, or shoot him in the back before he got far.

Silk was still turning over in his mind a possible solution to what had seemed to him to be a terrible new explosive weapon unleashed by the Dragon Master. When he first had been thrown into the truck by the pin-headed Chinese thug he had half expected to find some kind of new infernal machine there. Actually there had been nothing he could see.

Presently, after they had driven out of the city, Joe Mega turned the truck into a dim road that led back among some trees. Ahead lay a ramshackle house with sheds and farm implements scattered about. Beyond was the flat outline of a small truck farm. Joe Mega drove up without lights and braked to a stop behind the house, shutting off the motor.

"All right, pal, it's the end of the line for you," he growled at Silk, gripping him by the collar and shoving him out.

A man loomed up out of the night and spoke sharply in Chinese.

"Talk English," Joe Mega growled.

"A thousand apologies, Dragon," the Chinese farmer replied. "I thought you were my brother, Chow Seto. I just caught a police broadcast from the city. All cars are searching for the men who robbed a warehouse and got away. All except three. They were found with a Black Bat insignia on their foreheads. One Dragon who was sent here earlier to me with a message will help you now."

WITH Joe Mega's blistering curses in his ears Silk was shoved toward a ramshackle barn. He was thrown inside like a sack of potatoes while Joe Mega and the gangster the Chinese had mentioned menaced him with their guns.

The place was foul and unsanitary

beyond description. The rank smell of manure filled the air, and a lantern burned dimly. At one of the stalls Joe Mega placed his burly shoulder against an old work horse's hip and shoved the animal aside. He bent over the manger, fumbled in the darkness with one hand, heaved hard and lifted one end. When he picked up the lantern a narrow flight of stairs leading down was revealed.

They descended into a cellar below the barn where Silk was shoved toward a chair. As in the cellar room in the laundry, burlap bags were piled up in a corner. Silk's eyes, however, were on several small stacked crates. He would have paid them scant attention except for their effect upon Joe Mega. The gangster's jaw was sagging.

Those were the crates that had been taken from the museum less than twenty-four hours before!

CHAPTER XIV

Black Bat to the Rescue



RIDING atop the cab of the big laundry truck the Black Bat still had held his precarious position as the machine sped out of town by a little used road and entered the country.

Up ahead of him the leading truck clicked off its lights and crept on for a short distance, before finally turning off among a group of trees. The second truck with the Black Bat atop the cab followed. Tensed and ready, the Black Bat waited until the truck lurched into a rut, then swiftly slid to the ground.

He arose to his feet and sped toward the house. His night piercing eyes saw a third laundry truck parked in back of a ramshackle house. Aside from that, there was no sign of life about.

The Black Bat melted into the shadows of the Chinese farmer's home. No

lights were visible as he slipped inside the house. The eyes behind the hood flicked over a small kitchen in a state of general untidiness. Near the stove were two objects that gave evidence the farmer who lived here spent much of his time in the kitchen. One was a dial telephone on a stand by a chair and the other was a high-powered radio adjusted to pick up police calls.

The Black Bat picked up the receiver and a silk-gloved finger dialed the telephone number of Walter Dugro. Dugro's voice itself answered.

"Good evening, Mr. Dugro," said the hooded man. "This is the Black Bat. I'm calling from the kitchen of a Chinese truck farmer about three miles out, I think, and I've called you because I understand Commissioner Warner is at your house. I've just arrived—unseen—with several members of the Dragon society after a raid some of the contingent made on a warehouse down in the dock district. I did my best to break it up, and at least caused Flash Mega to leave his safe-cutting equipment."

"The commissioner is here with me now, and has just heard the story from Headquarters," answered Dugro. "Just a moment—he's cutting in on a branch phone."

The gray-haired police official's crisp voice came over the wire.

"You, Black Bat, what's this about the Dragon society?"

"They've just gone into a barn out here, Commissioner, that I'm positive is too small to hold them all and the loot they're carrying. There must be an underground room of some sort. Here's the telephone number of this place. Trace the address. A flying squad of officers may be able to get out here and nab the entire outfit. All except Kasini and some of the Chinese members. I rather imagine they're the ones who have Belmont."

He gave Warner the number and told the official what had happened in the laundry in Chinatown when he had visited it, naturally omitting any

mention of Butch. And he now learned that Chow Seto's place as well as the rickety hotel next to it had gone up in roaring flames just as a squad of Federal men had swooped down. The fire was still uncontrolled.

"I should have phoned about Chow Seto sooner, Commissioner," the Black Bat said, with regret in his voice. "However, I don't suppose it really matters. If you can get some men out here in a hurry you can nab a number of the Dragon members red-handed."

The Black Bat quickly hung up the receiver as a sound came from somewhere behind him. Footsteps clomped onto the low back porch. Someone was coming. The Black Bat turned to step out of sight but stepped on a round stick of stovewood that acted like a roller. Even his cat-like muscles could not save him in time.

He hit the floor to the accompaniment of a clatter of rattling pans. Someone shouted excitedly in Chinese and a porch switch flooded the kitchen with light. A husky Chinese farmer leaped through the door.

The Black Bat came up fast, then dived at the Chinese as the man reached for a button hidden beneath a two-by-four back of the door jamb. A buzzer of some sort. He caught the Oriental's wrist as the farmer began to scream a warning. The Black Bat's hard fist lashed out and silk-covered knuckles smacked hard against the man's jaw. But the heavy Chinese had the strength of a bull. His head rolled to one side with the blow and he tried for a ju-jutsu hold.

BUT such tricks were no secret to the Black Bat and they went down in a flurry of flying arms and legs. A foot sent the table crashing. The radio went rolling with a tinkle of broken tubes.

The hooded man tried to get out his gun but the wily Chinese held his wrist and was threatening to break it as he tried to bend it back. Both men were panting so desperately with the

exertion that the Oriental was unable to cry out.

The single warning he had been able to give, however, had been enough. From outside came shots and the pound of running feet. The Chinese began to scream again, on his back on the floor. A brown hand snatched up a stick of stove wood. It went flying, then both men snapped to their feet again. For all his bulk, the Chinese was as quick as a cat. He plunged at the hooded figure as more feet hit the back porch, but in doing so he laid himself open to the kind of fighting that the Black Bat had learned from Butch O'Leary. The Black Bat's right fist came up in a short bone-snapping blow that numbed it to the elbow. The brother of Chow Seto went down and lay still.

The Black Bat wheeled toward the back door as men dived in. His twin .38s met fire with fire. One wild bullet shot out the light and chaos broke loose in the kitchen. A mobster went down in the doorway and another fell on top of him. The others who had come running whirled and dived back out into the night. Once again Kasini's mob were screaming to each other that the hooded devil was after them. He couldn't be shaken off. They were beginning to believe that no matter where they went that grim Nemesis would appear almost at once.

"That guy ain't human, I tell you!" Manni Torrio was shouting as he ran for the truck to get his chopper.

Inside the upset kitchen it was beginning to quiet down again as the last of the mobsters fled out, backing away and shooting. The Black Bat, however, was no longer there. He had ducked out the way he had come in. His hooded form flitted toward the truck where Torrio was emerging with his sub-machine-gun. Before the mobster realized what had happened the Black Bat had swung a hard blow at his jaw and grabbed the weapon, as Torrio screamed in fear and fell. From the protection of the truck's front the

deadly weapon began a staccato barking.

Crouching under cover whenever possible the Black Bat began working his way toward the barn. The mobsters themselves had fled to various vantage points. But the Black Bat had to see what was in that barn. As he reached it, and dodged inside, yellow light was coming from an underground room through a manger. The Black Bat slid over to the manger and looked down a lantern-lit opening—

for their drugs. And the stolen art collection was brought here! All the crates are downstairs.”

“Good! McGrath's on his way out here now with a flying squad. He can put a heavy guard over that treasure until morning.”

“I'm afraid it would do little good, sir,” the valet said wryly. “There seems to have been a slight switch made. When Joe Mega broke open one of the crates all he found was an ordinary vase of baked red clay. It's

\$5,000,000 in Diamonds at Stake!

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straight into the disguised face of Silk Norton who was coming up the rough stairs. Left alone in the commotion Silk had managed to get himself loose from his bonds.

Swiftly Silk related what had happened. He told tersely of his capture by Ohmo in the alley, of the murder of Chow Seto, and of Mega bringing him to the farm.

“The farmer is Chow Seto's brother, sir,” the little man said. “I gather they use this place as a second storeroom

now smashed into about a thousand pieces. Mega was that angry.”

That clinched the suspicions about the Dragon Master that the Black Bat had imparted to I-tso Ling. He had been sure that the man in green had no intention of returning the treasure, but was using the others as dupes. Of course it was the Dragon Master who had made the substitution.

“We've got to get out of here in a hurry, Silk,” the Black Bat said as they hurried toward the door. “We'll

take one of the trucks and you drive. I'll cover us with the machine-gun."

THEY got away in the same truck Silk had been brought in. As they pulled out the Chinese farmer came staggering out of the house shouting that he had heard the Black Bat telephoning the police. And at that information the mobsters were too busy with their own affairs to do more than fire a few shots at the escaping truck.

"We hadn't been in the barn but a little while," Silk finally said, as the truck sped along far ahead of the shooting, "until the others showed up with the loot they'd taken from the warehouse. And the minute they had opened some of the stolen cans you should have heard them yell! Those tins didn't contain dope, sir—there was nothing in them but ordinary mud! Which made me think that the tip Duke Kasini got about any contraband being in the warehouse was a trap set by narcotics agents."

"It looks that way. Yet for some unexplainable reason the Federal men arrived just a bit too late."

Silk nodded, his eyes on the road ahead. "So it would seem, sir. But those Dragons were really upset when they found the treasure was missing. Mega stormed and cursed. Somebody suggested that Kasini had double-crossed and framed his own men. But they were all wild, sir—and scared to death."

The Black Bat nodded and smiled beneath his hood.

"Things are beginning to happen, Silk—plenty," he said. . . .

* * * * *

A group of grim-faced men were in the living room of Dugro's home when Captain McGrath returned from a dash to the farm of Chow Seto's brother at instructions from Commissioner Warner. He reported to his superior that all the gangsters had fled, though some undoubtedly would be

rounded up. Heffner, one of the remaining members of Eight Incorporated, angular, bony-faced and with a clipped gray mustache, sat on a couch, his mental stress plain in his eyes. Dr. Ling was there, and the little art expert had been horrified at learning that the Dragon Master had been in his own home. Colonel Wang and Paul Chivor were also present. Chivor was mostly silent, as usual, speaking only occasionally in low-toned Cantonese with Colonel Wang.

Dugro was in pretty bad shape. His left ankle was bandaged and rested straight out on an ottoman in front of his armchair. His head was swathed in bandages that covered a cheek which had been ripped open by a broken limb when he crashed down through the tree branches in his parachute.

"Those twenty-four-foot service chutes weren't built for joy-riding, but only to get a man down safely," he explained. "If I had seen the tree sooner I could have slipped the chute and missed it. Lord, what a night!"

"The question is, what is to be done now," spoke up Dr. Ling in his precise English. "In view of the Dragon Master's unexpected appearance in my house to ask me to act as intermediary, I have decided to assume that responsibility. Some settlement must be arranged about the treasure, for already two lives have been taken because of it, and more are threatened."

Heffner looked at Commissioner Warner.

"What do you advise, Commissioner?" he suggested.

The police veteran shook his head.

"I'm not advising, Mr. Heffner. The decision as to whether the demands of this Dragon Master shall be met rests with the members of Eight Incorporated who are still alive."

A pleasant voice came from the doorway.

"Exactly my sentiments, Commissioner Warner. Good evening, gentlemen."

CHAPTER XV

Last Warning

EVERY man in the room twisted about to look at the hooded figure in black who stood in the doorway. He held an automatic in one hand and the gun seemed to be pointed

more in Captain McGrath's direction than at any of the others. The Black Bat smiled at the expression on the big officer's face.

"How'd you get through those cops out there?" demanded McGrath as the Black Bat came in and placed himself so that he could watch all doors.

"It's not their fault, Captain. Now that I am here I want to say that I'm sorry you didn't get those birds out at that farm before they had flown tonight. I'm more disappointed about the treasure. I thought we had it."

"So did I," growled the detective disgustedly. "But there wasn't a thing in a single crate but red clay pottery. But we got the Chinese farmer who owned the place. Found him hiding out in a ditch in the field. He broke for it and one of the officers downed him. He talked before he died. Said he had helped the Dragon Master bring the stuff from somewhere in town and exchange it. Then the leader in the green robes took it away."

"Unfortunate," said the Black Bat. "That farmer, Captain, was the brother of Chow Seto, the laundryman from whose establishment Duke Kasini's drugs were retailed. Chow Seto was killed by Joe Mega tonight, shot in the back when the Chinese became frightened. Incidentally, Captain, you can swear out a murder charge against Mega for the clubbing to death of the museum watchman when the treasure was stolen. Witnesses were Manni Torrio and Blackie, other members of the Kasini mob. I heard them discus-

sing it at the warehouse robbery tonight."

"Well I must say that I owe you an apology, Black Bat," put in Dugro warmly. "Had I known of the service you're rendering in this case I'd never have fired at you when you tried to stop me taking off in that plane, frightened though I was. Naturally I thought you were one of the Dragon Master's men, after Harrison. . . . You think then that these Chinese are members of Kasini's mob also, as well as of that Dragon society?"

"It's my theory that only four Chinese in this case are actual criminals—the three who worked Chow Seto's laundry, all of whom are dead, and likewise Chow Seto's brother, whose farm evidently was used as a drug cache. The rest of the Orientals have been duped into believing they're doing a great patriotic service for their mother country. There is one exception, of course. The monstrosity known as Ohmo."

"That's the ape Thing that grabbed Quinn in his house and also got Belmont," said McGrath, biting down viciously on his ever present cigar. "According to the officers on duty when I got there after the snatch, Belmont's Chinese valet began yelling from the front room, and they all responded except one man in the back. He turned just as the Thing grabbed him and almost broke his neck with a blow of its hand. It paralyzed him. Then the Thing went on, and a minute or two later was out again, carrying Belmont like a baby. By the time it got away that damned, doublecrossing Chinese valet had run through a door leaving the officers in the front room, snapped the lock, and then beat it out the back way before they could break through."

"That Thing, as you so aptly call it," said the Black Bat, "undoubtedly is possessed of hyper-senses and the cunning of a jungle beast. Furthermore, I'm certain it or he was the instrument of destruction that killed

those two police officers tonight."

Warner had been watching the Black Bat with vivid interest, and now he leaned forward in his chair tensely.

"Black Bat," he said tightly, "if you would tell the police who killed Fitzgerald and Murphy and how this green-robed madman did it, I'd almost write you a clean slate."

"Thank you, Commissioner, but I haven't been able to solve that riddle yet. All I'm certain of is—"

HE stopped short as from somewhere outside came the voices of two or three police officers, followed by some man's voice speaking angrily. Then footsteps sounded on the front porch.

"I'm all right, I tell you," snapped Harvey Belmont's voice. "You'd better remain outside."

The door opened and the financier strode in. He closed it behind him and stalked over to Commissioner Warner. Warner had risen, trying to mask his surprise at this sudden appearance of the financier. Moreover, Belmont looked anything but the victim of a kidnaping. He was dressed as though for the office, immaculate and dapper.

"You were supposed to give me protection, Commissioner?" he accused hotly. "What kind of a police force have we got in this town when a man is snatched from his own home under the noses of half a dozen officers?"

"Sit down, Mr. Belmont," said the commissioner quietly. "Suppose you just begin at the beginning and let's get this kidnaping business straight."

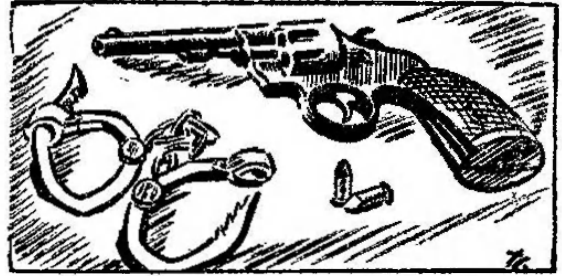
The financier sat down. He pulled out a handkerchief and mopped his face.

"It happened early this evening," Belmont began to tell the commissioner, twisting his thin, nervous hands as he had in Quinn's house. "As you know, I had sent away all servants except my Chinese valet. Quong, I knew was loyal—he has been with me for seven years. I was getting ready to

call Harrison and find out if he still meant to leave town or had decided to stay. Then came that horrible—Thing! I caught one glimpse of its pinhead and naked shoulders before it almost broke my neck with some kind of a ju-jutsu blow. It slung me across its shoulders and ran like the wind across the grounds to where a laundry truck was waiting in the darkness."

"Who was in it?" cut in McGrath.

"I—I saw only some Chinese. That monster Thing threw me in the back and jumped right in with me. Someone taped my eyes. They kept cursing the avaricious Americans who were cheating China in her hour of need. We rode for quite some time until we



came to a house. I've no idea where. The tape was never removed from my eyes. I was cursed and mauled and threatened but was not harmed otherwise."

"What became of your valet?" the commissioner asked. "We'll be able to pick him up easily."

For the first time, Harvey Belmont's eyes showed emotion. Into them came a look of sorrow. He shook his head.

"They shot him in that house they took me to, to insure against that very thing. It seems unbelievable that he would have been a party to such a thing as this Dragon business hold-up game. The poor fellow idolized me. Why, he'd even taught me to speak a few words of Chinese—like good-by and good morning and things like that.

"I was held in that house and threatened until I finally agreed to their demands. As soon as I did they took me out again and set me loose somewhere in the city. Two radio policemen

found me stumbling along with my eyes still taped and my hands tied behind my back. I made them take me home first before bringing me here."

He reached into his pocket and brought forth a small object that all of them in that room had seen before. It was a little green jade Buddha with a note snapped around it by rubber bands—the same Buddha that had been taken by Thompson from Tony Quinn's house. The financier handed the jade piece to Commissioner Warner.

"There are the demands, Commissioner, to which I've already agreed," he snapped, and added bluntly: "What else can a man do when he can get no police protection?"

QUIETLY the police official took the note from around the Buddha and opened it. He read:

To Those Concerned: This is the last warning from the Dragon. This is the last chance for those remaining members of the evil eight to accede to our just demands. Ten million dollars in cash must be collected at once and held in readiness to be delivered at the prescribed time and place. As soon as indications are given that these instructions are being followed, arrangements will be made for the return of the treasure and the money turned over to responsible representatives of the Chinese Government.

The Dragon has spoken.

Commissioner Warner passed the note around for the others to read and when it was returned to him he put it in his pocket. He said nothing for a moment. Finally he spoke.

"You say you've agreed to raise the money, Mr. Belmont?"

Heffner's face expressed angry indignation. He shot the official a hostile look fraught with meaning.

"Eight million and not a cent more, Commissioner!" he snapped. "Threats or no threats!"

He turned to look defiantly at the Black Bat as he hurled his ultimatum, but the window drapes near which the man in black had stood hung empty. The Black Bat was gone.

CHAPTER XVI

Surprise Visit



WHILE Tony Quinn breakfasted on Silk's incomparable waffles stripped with bacon, and coffee early the following morning, he perused the early editions of the newspapers. He sat in the kitchen in his dressing gown while the little valet attended to the dishes and kept an eye out for the two officers on duty about the grounds.

The papers were filled with the story of Belmont's kidnaping and subsequent release, though the banker had been tight-lipped to reporters on all details concerning the treasure or any statement concerning payment to the Chinese society. But there was one other account of significance. Heffner's home had been damaged by a mysterious explosion in the early hours of the morning! But the only damage done was to tear away a large section of an enclosed back porch.

"Did you read this account of Heffner's home being bombed, Silk?" asked Quinn.

"Yes, sir. I went through the papers before you got up."

"I see also where the body of Belmont's Chinese valet was fished out of the river early this morning," remarked Quinn. "A barge captain tied up at a pier saw it and notified the police. They recovered two bullets for the ballistic experts."

"That at least is something, sir."

Carol padded in from the spare bedroom she had occupied during the night, having difficulty keeping a pair of Quinn's house slippers on her feet. Her pretty face, minus the clever make-up Silk had applied the night before, rose above the folds of one of Quinn's silk dressing gowns beneath which she wore a pair of his pajamas.

"I'm starved," she announced. "Furthermore, I think it rude of you not to awaken me."

While she ate the breakfast, Silk quickly prepared for her, Quinn discussed the case with them both, and what their next moves should be. Then Butch slipped in through the tunnel.

"Nope, no breakfast for me right now," he declined, at Silk's look. "I had a snack—two plates of ham and eggs and toast and four cups of . . . Well, all right, I'll drink another cup of coffee with Carol. What's on the fire for today?"

"You, Carol, will stay on here as nurse," Quinn instructed. "And, Silk, I want you to find out where Paul Chivor is staying."

"Commissioner Warner has already mentioned that he and Colonel Wang are at the Hotel Lamont, sir. I believe it's not far from Chinatown."

Later in the morning Quinn and Butch left the house by the tunnel, Quinn wearing his usual broad-brimmed black hat pulled low over his eyes. A telephone call to the Hotel Lamont asking for Chivor in Room One Twenty-eight had elicited the information that Chivor's room was Two Twenty-six and that he was out.

Tony Quinn, the Black Bat now that he was again on the prowl, even in the bright morning hours, headed his car in the direction of Chinatown and the Hotel Lamont.

The hotel at which the flying Chinese colonel and the American pilot were staying proved to be a brick affair some five stories high. Butch stopped the coupé a short distance away and Quinn got out, his collar turned up. No one paid particular attention to the man who strolled along the sidewalk and then suddenly vanished. Quinn's lithe muscles carried him up over a board fence and into a small yard paved with brick. Overhead was a fire-escape. He leaped for the lower rung, pulled himself up and went up to the second floor. He

stepped into a carpeted hallway lined with doors on each side. Two Twenty-six was three doors down on the right.

QUINN'S skeleton keys quickly extracted a lock's secret and he slipped inside of the room occupied by Paul Chivor.

He began a quick search of the man's belongings. The two steamer trunks, however, were protected by a lock of some devilish combination so small that even Quinn's keys were helpless against them. He gave it up and looked about him.

The dresser drawers revealed nothing, so he went to the clothes closet. A low exclamation came from him as his silk-clad fingers felt a small metal object in a pocket of one of the suits. He brought forth a numbered disk, that was an exact duplicate of the one Butch had taken from Chow Seto's place the night before!

"So Paul Chivor is a drug user," the Black Bat said under his breath. "Probably started hitting the stuff in China. When he came over here with Wang and the treasure he had to find a new source of supply. So he contacted Chow Seto's Laundry and this is his identification which—"

He broke off in his soliloquy, his hyper-sensitive ears warning him that someone was in the hall.

"No, sir, Mr. Chivor," he heard a woman's voice say. "I haven't got to your room yet but I will right away."

Quinn stepped into a corner. With remarkable speed he slipped from his light coat and hat into the Black Bat outfit. He rolled his discarded clothing into a compact bundle and stowed it away just as the Black Bat rig had been. Footsteps were coming down the hall.

But to the Black Bat's surprise Chivor's soft footsteps on the thick carpeting went right on past his own door and down the hall toward the fire-escape through which the Black Bat had entered. The Black Bat risked cracking the door a trifle. He saw the

pilot stop in front of a corner room, glance casually about, then unlock the door and step inside.

Paul Chivor was sneaking into Colonel Wang's room!

The Black Bat opened the door wider, glanced up and down the hall. The maid's brooms and linen cart stood outside a door further down. From inside the room came the hum of her voice as she cleaned the room. The Black Bat stepped out, became a flitting shadow down the hall, pausing before Colonel Wang's door.

Gently he turned the knob. He slid into the room, a .38 automatic on one hand as Chivor, a cool look on his face, turned and faced him.

"Good morning, Mr. Chivor," greeted the Black Bat quietly.

The cool look left the pilot's face instantly and gave way to something resentfully surly. His handsome features grew dark.

"You certainly seem to get around, don't you?" he grunted.

"Sometimes it's unavoidably necessary," replied the Black Bat. Then his voice grew suddenly stern. "Why did you find it convenient to become intoxicated the other night when you were expected to save a man's life by flying him out of town?" he demanded.

"I told you why," Chivor said grumpily. "I stopped in at a bar and just happened to take a couple too many."

The Black Bat smiled beneath the black hood hiding his scarred features from this man who was so much of an enigma.

"I'm afraid I hardly can believe that, Mr. Chivor," he replied softly. "When I shook you awake in the chair in the watchman's office out at the hangar your eyes showed undeniable surprise at sight of me when you opened them. You quickly closed them to keep from showing it, feigning sleepiness due to overindulgence in alcohol. Further, you sobered up with remarkable speed on the coffee I gave you."

"Which means what?" growled Chivor, his eyes narrowing speculatively.

"That you had some reason for not wanting to fly Mr. Harrison in that death plane. You either knew that that plane was carrying him to his death or you had some other reason for not wanting to leave town."

Slowly the Black Bat's hand unclosed. A bright disk was lying in his black, silk-gloved palm.

"Mr. Chivor," he said, looking the man straight in the eyes, "would it by any chance have been that you had just put in an order to Chow Seto's laundry for some heroin or other dope earlier in the day, and were waiting around for a new supply of the 'snow' to show up?"

Chivor refused to answer.

CHAPTER XVII

A Call on a Lady



THE silence blanketed the room for a moment. The Black Bat was swiftly turning over in his mind the facts that Silk had found out about Chivor's life in California, of how the man had had his regular transport pilot's license taken away by a civil aeronautics inspector for stunting when he had been drinking too heavily.

The Black Bat also was remembering that the Asiation Export and Import outfit which Harvey Belmont now owned was a West Coast concern. Or had been before getting into trouble with the State Department over the shipment of planes to European belligerents as military fighters. That meant Chivor had known Belmont before seeing him here.

The hooded investigator tried a shot in the dark.

"Mr. Chivor," he said, "as you probably know, Harvey Belmont owns a

good deal of the stock in Mr. Dugro's present factory, presumably having been his financial backer. That means you undoubtedly knew Mr. Belmont while you were flying out on the Coast, and possibly Mr. Dugro as well, since one of their principal concerns out there was the Asiation Export and Import Company. Could your present dislike for Mr. Dugro—which has been plainly evident to me ever since you showed no concern that he might have been killed in that exploding plane—have any connection with your having been grounded while flying for them out there?"

The pilot's eyes began to grow hard and more speculative. Otherwise he displayed nothing more to express the evident surprise the Black Bat's question had caused.

"I'll say one thing for you, Black Bat, you really do find out things, don't you?" he admitted begrudgingly. "If you want to know the truth I was flying for Dugro out there before he sold the outfit to Belmont. Dugro went to China to sell new ships to that Government. But that didn't pan out, so he came back and got in touch with Belmont again. As near as I can find out, Dugro was sorry about Belmont losing so much dough in the company through him. In other words, Dugro had sold ships to Spain as fighters before he realized he was breaking the law. By the time Old Whiskers caught up with Asiation Export, Belmont was left holding the sack.

"Anyhow," — he shrugged — "Belmont turned right around and backed Dugro in this new venture, to get back the dough he'd lost. This present Chinese plane order will do it, with a couple of millions profit for Belmont."

"If Colonel Wang okays the Dugro bomber," supplemented the Black Bat.

"If the colonel okays the ship," Chivor repeated, nodding. "But I might as well tell you—that bomber is no good. It's a death-trap. I've tried to tell Wang so, but he's one of those

methodical Chinese who's got to find out things for himself. He'll find it out, too, if he ever puts her into a spin with a load test. She'll wind up like a corkscrew. It's in the design of the wing."

The Black Bat then asked Chivor bluntly why he had entered Wang's room so surreptitiously. But Chivor only growled something about being Wang's friend, and refused to answer further. Under the muzzle of the Black Bat's .38, Chivor left the room and entered his own. As soon as the pilot had closed his door the Black Bat, left in the dim hall, stripped off his hooded disguise and hastily donned his coat and hat, leaving again by the fire-escape. . . .

"What did you find out, Boss?" Butch demanded eagerly as the car was headed back toward the estate.

The Black Bat shook his head and frowned.

"Nothing of importance, except that Chivor is the new customer whose number was added to that of the laundry's customers."

"You think maybe he could be figuring on grabbing the dough all for himself when it's delivered?" suggested Butch.

"I wish I knew what has been decided about that pay-off," was the Black Bat's only answer.

THERE was only one way to find out, and as soon as the Black Bat was again Tony Quinn, safely home and in his bedroom, he called Commissioner Warner on the telephone.

"Good morning, Commissioner," he greeted, his voice that of the sick man he was supposed to be. "How are you?"

Commissioner Warner's voice told how he was. From its tone Quinn judged that the gray-haired police veteran had not slept much.

"Frankly, Tony," he told Quinn, "I'm on edge. With the money to redeem that treasure being raised this morning, and—"

"How much?" Quinn interrupted.

"Ten millions. Belmont and his associates are drawing on banks all over town. Of course you'll be called on for your share—if you haven't been already. Heffner has changed his mind most decidedly and is having more brought in by a special plane this morning. From out of town banks. He is frightened stiff. That explosion which tore off the corner of the back porch of his house came too close for comfort."

"Silk read me the account of it, Commissioner," Quinn said. "Wasn't there any clue of any sort?"

"Not a thing. Just a pile of splintered wood and broken glass. The grounds were alive with police officers, too—and they didn't hear a thing until the explosion came. There isn't a trace of any wiring, or any metal fragments of a bomb, to be found by our experts. The thing seemed to come right out of thin air, just as it did at your place."

Quinn asked about developments in the apprehension of Duke Kasini and his now decimated mob.

"They've disappeared as though swished right off the face of the earth, Tony," Warner informed, and sighed heavily. "We've combed this town with a fine-tooth comb—and not a sign of them."

Tony Quinn spoke a few minutes longer, then waited through the day, lying in bed and reading, though he was on tenderhooks, impatient to take a hand in the game. He was willing enough to put up his share of the redemption money, if there wasn't any other way, but he much preferred to get the treasure back.

There would be a reasonable profit for him and the remaining members of the Eight, later, even by paying ten millions, but he wanted that money to go to the proper channels. He was not thinking of profit for himself.

As soon as it was dark, the Black Bat went on the prowl again.

Once more when the Black Bat

reached the locality, a blanket of darkness lay over Chinatown. Neon signs from a hundred cafes and other places threw their iridescent glow against the night as though trying to push back its enveloping folds. On the crooked, cobblestoned streets the tide of humanity moved on, as ceaseless as the flow of a river.

From the darkness of a rooftop the Black Bat stood peering down a moment. Then on his felt-soled shoes he moved like a wraith across the roofs toward Dr. Ling's home.

As the Black Bat had suggested to I-tso Ling, she had left the skylight unlatched. That meant that she also had disposed of the servants temporarily, so that there would be none to be frightened by the Black Bat's sudden appearance. His silk-gloved fingers raised the lid and there came a rustling sound as he went down the steep steps into the upper hall.

He crept on noiseless feet to the second floor below. At the door of I-tso's bedroom he paused a moment, listening. From somewhere down in the shop on the ground floor came a faint murmur of voices. The Black Bat's hand turned the knob to the girl's bedroom and he went in.

She was not there. But in the darkness his night-trained eyes soon saw the piece of white paper tucked in the shaded lamp beside her bed. He crossed the room and unfolded the note. There was no need for him to turn on the light. Her writing was as plain to his eyes as though it had been broad daylight. She had written:

Black Bat,

If I'm not in when you come, I'll try to be in my father's shop downstairs.

I-tso Ling.

THE Black Bat took time to burn the note behind cupped hands before leaving. As he started down to the shop floor he discovered that the stairs leading down into the shop came out on a small balcony landing before going on down. From this the pro-

prietor could see over his wares from above, as well as observe any customers who might have entered while he was out.

From this landing the Black Bat now looked down to where I-tso Ling, her patriarchal little father, the professor, and Harvey Belmont were speaking. Strangely enough no lights were on, and the front shades were drawn tight.

Harvey Belmont was exhibiting extreme nervousness. In the darkness the Black Bat could see him twisting his thin hands as he usually did when under stress.

"I got the message just a few minutes ago," he was explaining to Dr. Ling. "I came right on down alone at once as I was instructed. There are no police about, the guards all having been withdrawn from us as the Dragon Master ordered."

"To say that I am horrified at what you have told me is a weak statement, Mr. Belmont," said the little Chinese art expert. He touched his daughter on the arm. "And now, my child, you will go upstairs to your room. This is a matter that does not concern one of such tender years. Mr. Belmont is here on a very grave mission. Go."

The girl obediently turned and felt her way up the steps. She made her way along the landing toward the second short flight leading up to the floor above. As she did so a hand crept out of the drapes and lightly touched hers. She gave a faint little gasp of surprise.

Then the Black Bat's whisper came softly in her ear. "Wait for me in your room."

The girl went on up the stairs and the Black Bat moved unseen down into the shop. He stood within five feet of the two men, yet neither were aware of it.

"But that's the orders that I received, Dr. Ling," Belmont was saying. "I was to come here to your shop and look for the instructions."

"May I ask what instructions, gentlemen?" asked a pleasant voice.

Belmont gave a half strangled cry of fear and stepped back, almost stumbling over a stone Buddha on the floor behind him. He recovered, however, as he seemed to recognize their visitor.

"How did you get in here?" demanded Dr. Ling crisply.

"A part of my—er—professional ethics, Dr. Ling. I believe that Mr. Belmont has been given orders by the Dragon Master to come here and look for instructions—right?"

"And I've been warned that if I make one false move I'll die by being blown to bits," the financier said quickly. "There was no mistaking the menace in that voice that spoke to me



on the telephone. It said that I was to come here to Dr. Ling's art shop and look for a little green jade Buddha that was part of the collection of stolen Chinese art. It was an exact duplicate of the one that was presented to Anthony Quinn."

"In that case, gentlemen, you need not bother to turn on the light," the Black Bat told them, and moved quickly away. "If you'll just stand there for a moment I shall be glad to get it for you."

It took him less than two minutes to find the familiar-looking little Buddha. It was back among a number of other art pieces on a small shelf. And when the Black Bat picked it up, he discovered that a folded note was on the under side, held in place by rubber bands. The Black Bat returned with it.

"Here it is, gentlemen," he announced gravely.

"Now come with me, both of you," said Dr. Ling.

IN a back room that served as office for the little Chinese, Dr. Ling switched on a light. Harvey Belmont took the Buddha and unfolded the note. The Bat, peering over his shoulder, read:

The Dragon is pleased to see that you have come to your senses, Mr. Belmont. It is regrettable that your two foolish colleagues were not so wise. The money you have raised today will be placed in a large suitcase. You will do this alone and without telephoning the police. At precisely ten o'clock tonight you will return to the Ling's shop and deliver this suitcase there. I left your instructions here so that you would have no trouble in finding the place when you deliver the money. To disobey means death.

The Dragon has spoken.

"But, gentlemen," gasped Dr. Ling, when he also had read the note, his almond eyes going first to one and then the other of his two unusual visitors, "this would appear as though I myself am a party to this insidious scheme. And I swear that never has that jade piece been in my humble establishment before this night."

"Quite likely it was left here by one of the many people who came in during the day to browse," suggested the Black Bat. "But it shows a devilish cunning on the part of the Dragon Master. By the time the money is delivered here it will be ordered taken to some other person. That way only one person will know where the final delivery to the Dragon Master himself will be made and in what manner. Very clever, gentlemen."

"Too clever," shot back Harvey Belmont, in a rage. "To think that a man would spend his life building up something only to have it taken away by some gangster from whom the police can't protect him! It's—"

But he spoke only to an empty doorway where the Black Bat had stepped back, for the hooded figure had vanished.

CHAPTER XVIII

Death of a Rat



CAUTIOUSLY the Bat slipped upstairs and opened the door to I-tso's bedroom. The girl was waiting in the darkened room.

"I'm frightened, Black Bat, very frightened," she confessed to him, coming nearer to him as though for protection. "You haven't forgotten I told you there's to be a meeting of the Dragons tonight at the regular place deep beneath the block of condemned buildings sometime near midnight?"

"I looked for an entrance last night after leaving the farm of Chow Seto's brother, but found only a steel door two flights down," the Black Bat said. "I had a pretty good idea that it is wired, so I did not go too close to it. I tried to find another entrance, but found none."

"There is one more—which I will tell you about," the girl whispered quickly. "But about this meeting—only Duke Kasini and his men will be present, except for the Dragon Master. They are to be paid off for opening the vault. The Chinese members who have been hiding them from the police have already been disbanded. The Dragon society is no more."

"Then why are you frightened?"

"Because," she said, "at ten o'clock tonight I have been ordered by the Dragon Master on pain of death to me and to my honorable father to take a certain suitcase full of money and deliver it to the home of Anthony Quinn!"

For an instant that was a startler for the Black Bat, but he showed nothing of his surprise. Here was a strange new twist, but he would be able to straighten it out all right, particularly now that he was forewarned.

"Don't worry too much about it," he told the Chinese girl. "I'll try to be around the Quinn house when you arrive, so I can telephone Commissioner Warner as soon as I find out where Quinn is going with that suitcase you deliver."

After a few more words with the girl he went up through the skylight again. Down in the street he sought the nearest telephone booth, and called the commissioner. The harried police official was still in his office.

"Good evening, Commissioner," the hooded man in the closed booth said. "This is the Black Bat. Have there been any new developments in the treasure ransom case yet?"

"Only one," answered the commissioner, who was always secretly glad to cooperate with the Black Bat. "Belmont has been ordered to deliver the money personally to some other person tonight. He couldn't—or wouldn't—tell me who that person is."

"I think I can enlighten you, Commissioner. The ransom is to be delivered by Harvey Belmont to Dr. Ling."

"Ling?" The commissioner's voice was startled. "It doesn't seem possible that—"

"And that isn't all," the Black Bat cut in. "Ling doesn't know it yet, but his own daughter has been ordered, on a threat of death, to take the money to Tony Quinn's house immediately upon its delivery to her father."

An explosive growl came from the other end of the line.

"The devil you say! But that means I'll probably get orders through Belmont to pull off the guard around Quinn's house—with that Dragon outfit after Quinn. If I pull off that guard I may be a party to Tony Quinn's murder!"

"It's something we'll have to risk, Commissioner. I can't imagine who Quinn is expected to contact with the money. Have you any knowledge of Paul Chivor's whereabouts?"

"I telephoned his hotel—the Lamont—a little while ago but he's not in.

Neither is Colonel Wang."

"Well, anyhow, here's some news of the utmost importance, Commissioner. Tonight the remaining members of Duke Kasini's fugitive mob are assembling at the orders of the Dragon Master. They'll be in a secret room deep beneath a group of condemned buildings on Exeter street in Chinatown. If you'll wait until they all gather and then surround that building with picked men, you probably will be able to bag the entire lot. Good luck, Commissioner."

QUINN left the telephone booth and headed toward Exeter street. The Chinese girl had given him exact instructions in the matter of effecting an entrance through one of the two passages. He wanted to find the thug Ohmo and, if necessary, put an end to the murderous monstrosity before it took more human life. And I-tso had told the Black Bat that Ohmo lived deep below the buildings when not on his grim errands for the green-robed Dragon Master.

Presently the Black Bat crawled in through a gaping window yawning in the night. He made his way along a crumbling hallway that had felt the passage of a thousand tenants. The floor was littered with refuse and fallen plaster and crumpled newspapers. Small wonder that the entire block of ancient slum edifices had been condemned by the city. Small wonder, too, that the Dragon Master had had a meeting room hastily prepared there when organizing the Dragon society.

And he had taken just the right way to draw the Chinese members into that murderous organization. The Black Bat knew Chinese psychology, knew how secret meetings, a green-robed leader, and a just cause to aid the mother country in her hour of need would appeal to the Orientals. Though most of them had taken little part in the affairs of the Dragon society, aside from helping in the kidnaping

of Harvey Belmont. One Dragon had been a servant in the Belmont house.

The Black Bat moved into the small kitchen of an ancient flat to an ordinary trap-door that led to a cellar. He raised it and went down. Through an underground passage he went on beneath three or four of the condemned tenement houses.

In the last of several cellars he passed through he paused. He knew he now was beneath the main building and somewhere near the meeting room. A peculiarly offensive odor came to his nostrils. It came from behind the next door.

The Black Bat's automatic came out as he grasped the knob. He opened it slowly, stepped into a room that he at once knew was the living quarters of Ohmo, the deformed Chinese. There was a pile of dirty blankets in a corner that served as bed, and a conglomeration of food-stuffs on a makeshift table in another corner. But the mute was nowhere about.

As the Black Bat looked about the room, voices came from somewhere nearby. He went out and turned into another short passage. There were heavy drapes ahead. He parted them with a finger to look through—and felt cold chills of surprise at sight of I-tso Ling talking to Flash Mega in front of a makeshift altar surmounted by a dragon's head! Beyond and below was the main meeting room.

How could I-tso have reached here ahead of him, he wondered. Then he remembered that after leaving her he had lost a little time making his telephone call. Evidently she had hurried here immediately. Why? Had she come to prepare a trap for the Black Bat in obedience to orders from the Dragon Master? Or could she have come to help him, in case he ran into trouble?

The fugitive gangster was far from the flashy character he had been only two days before. His swarthy face registered the fact that he was well aware that Duke Kasini's mob was in

a tight spot. Even so, at the moment his black eyes were all for the girl. He had a coil of fine electric wire in one hand.

"Listen, baby, I've been trying to see you," he was saying to I-tso. "We're getting paid off tonight. Only the Dragon guy is giving me and Joe all the mob's dough for wiring this joint with nitro. He's gonna blow all the rest of 'em into a thousand pieces. I ain't told Joe yet. But do you know what that means? With all the dough I'm gettin' tonight it's South America for me. But you're gonna be a fugitive, too—you're in on this Dragon business—so I've got the cute idea that I'm taking you with me tonight."

BEFORE she could express the contempt for the mobster that was plain in her eyes a buzzer almost over the Black Bat's head sounded twice. Someone was at the steel door at the opposite side of the room. The Black Bat melted back as Flash Mega's diamond-studded hand reached inside the curtains within inches of the Black Bat's face and pressed a button. From across the room came the click of an electrically operated bolt and the door swung open. Then the green-robed figure of the Dragon Master himself entered!

He came over to the altar to the other two. The girl shrank back in spite of her obvious efforts to remain calm.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded of her. "Did not I order you to remain in your room until ten o'clock?"

"Master, I wanted to be sure of my instructions—"

"You lie! Your punishment will be decided later. Go!"

Obediently she went to the steel door at the opposite side of the room, pulled back the handle on the electrically operated bolt, opened it and disappeared. The green-robed figure turned to Mega.

"You have wired everything accord-

ing to my instructions?" he demanded.

Flash Mega gave the Dragon Master a hard grin.

"Everything," he said boastfully. "It's a neat job too, pal—I mean Master. I was a pretty good radio man in my punk days. Boy, are a bunch of guys in this town gonna get a surprise tonight!"

The figure in green nodded.

"More than you think," the Dragon Master said coldly. "You disobeyed my orders again by your silly infatuation for one who is a thousand times too good for you." In a movement almost too swift for the eyes to follow, he whipped out an automatic. "You fool—to think I'd let you live now that you're no longer useful to me!"

The automatic spouted a snake's tongue lick of flame and Flash Mega's cry of surprise ended in the thud of his body to the concrete floor in front of the altar. But from the curtains over the doorway the Black Bat had stepped through and now his own .38 added its din to the other, deafening in the confines of the room deep under Chinatown. The Dragon Master's gun went spinning from his hand. He started to bend down after it, froze rigidly at the sight of the grim figure who had smashed all his plans.

"I think I've got you this time," the Bat informed him coolly. "I—"

He broke off as a strange, tinkling sound came to his ears. It was the sound of a whistle pitched too high for ordinary human ears—the same sort of whistle with which the Black Bat had supplied his own aides. And it was coming from inside that weird dragon mask!

From behind the Black Bat there came a rush of a body, and he wheeled just as Ohmo plunged through the curtains. The Thing took one single glance at the Black Bat as the Dragon Master shrieked orders in Cantonese. Then it sprang through the air straight at the intruder.

The Black Bat's .38 poured a stream

of slugs into Ohmo as he ducked aside to avoid that rush. Ohmo, however, grabbed him with one of those iron hands as he fell. A little bubbling sound came through the gorillalike nostrils that told of blood pouring into lungs. Yet as they fell together, the Black Bat trying to get out his second automatic, he knew that unless he worked loose Ohmo would crush the life from his body, even in dying.

And the pinheaded monstrosity was dying. The Black Bat could hear the strangle in the labored breathing. But the Thing was true to its master to the last. It had been ordered to kill the hooded Nemesis, and those terrible hands were summoning the last of their fading strength to obey.

A hand with fingers of steel closed over the Black Bat's right bicep and worked up to his neck. He flung himself this way and that, knotting his hard-muscled body as he strove to get out his other gun. At last he got it out, and as that huge hand found his throat, he began pumping bullet after bullet into the monster's naked body. It gave a final strangled sigh and relaxed.

Then the Black Bat was up and looking about him, shoving in fresh clips, wondering why the Dragon Master had not come to his killer monstrosity's aid. But the Dragon Master was gone.

A groan came from Flash Mega. The Black Bat bent over the dying gangster. Flash opened his eyes, looked up at the hooded Nemesis above him, and a faint, ironical grin broke his hard features.

"Joe always said I'd get in trouble on account of a dame," he mumbled, and died.

The Black Bat got out of the building as soon as possible. Where the Dragon Master had gone he had no idea. It was too late to hunt for him now.

He hurried home and went in through the tunnel. Once in the house,

he called in the others and told them of what had happened. After that there was nothing to do but wait until I-tso Ling arrived.

She came shortly before ten. The hidden Quinn, watching through a window, saw a car pull up at the curb below.

He focused his glasses on the driver, pulling him up close. The man at the wheel was Colonel Wang!

CHAPTER XIX

Death Flight



VASTLY interested, Silk hurried down and helped the Chinese girl bring up the suitcase containing package after package of bills in the biggest denominations printed. Silk brought the girl into the bedroom where Quinn was tucked under the covers, wearing the cap made of bandage.

"Mr. Quinn?" I-tso inquired in her soft voice, taking the chair Silk offered her. "I've been ordered by the Dragon Master to bring this suitcase to you with a message."

"To me?" he asked weakly. "Why should he send you to a sick man?"

"That I do not know. I only know that had I not obeyed my father would have paid with his life—as perhaps you know others have paid for disobedience to the Dragon Master's commands. Here is the message I was to deliver to you."

She handed him a note which Silk took from her.

"As you must have been told, Miss Ling, Mr. Quinn is stone-blind," said the valet. "Shall I read it to you, sir?"

At Quinn's weak gesture he opened it and read it aloud. The message stated:

Greetings from the Dragon, Mr. Quinn:

Knowing your interest in the cause of justice in spite of the fact that you also have an interest in Eight Incorporated, I know that you will be most eager to offer your humble services to China. You are to take this fund to which you have undoubtedly contributed and deliver it to Mr. Dugro, who has been given some instructions. This enclosed letter which you are to hand him will give him further instructions about what to do with the redemption fund. Mr. Dugro is waiting at the airport.

The Dragon has spoken.

"Well, of course I shall do everything possible to cooperate," said Quinn from his bed. "Though I had not expected to be called out of a sick bed. Thank you very much for coming, Miss Ling."

As soon as Silk showed I-tso Ling from the room Quinn leaped up out of bed and grabbed a pencil and paper. Hastily he printed a few sentences on it and slipped on his Black Bat outfit. Silk already had been told to keep the Chinese girl talking for a few minutes, and so it was that when she started back toward the car she was startled to see the Black Bat appear out of the night and hand her a note.

"Act on this immediately," he told her in a low voice. "Tell him the Black Bat will deliver the money. I'm going to—er—hijack Tony Quinn."

With Butch driving the coupé, the Black Bat presently saw the outlines of Dugro's plane factory buildings shape up. No lights at all showed. An air of gloom permeated the place. The Black Bat ordered the impatient Butch to stop some distance away, announcing that he would go on alone.

"Aw, Boss," pleaded Butch, "can't I just go in there with you and crack *somebody's* head?"

"Not this trip, Butch."

He took the heavy suitcase and, carrying it easily, went in through the gate and around the corner. The new bomber was sitting on the darkened tarmac, and Walter Dugro was pacing up and down not far away. He was not aware that anyone was near until the Black Bat spoke pleasantly.

"Good evening, Mr. Dugro."

Dugro whirled with an exclamation, then saw the Black Bat.

"Whew, you gave me a start, Black Bat! I—I was expecting Tony Quinn."

"I relieved him of the money, quite forcibly, on his way out here," the Black Bat said coolly. "I thought it best to take his place."

"Thank heaven you have it, anyway!" exclaimed the airplane manufacturer. "I received telephoned orders a little while ago to wait here with the ship ready. That was all."

"Right. I have your orders as to how and to whom you will deliver the ransom. If you'll step inside a moment you can read them."

DUGRO slid back the steel sliding door for them to enter. He opened the note and read it by the light of the match held by the Black Bat.

"Good lord!" he breathed.

"Bad news?"

"As far as any hope of thwarting this Dragon Master fellow is concerned."

"Suppose I go with you?"

Dugro pulled out his handkerchief and mopped his sweating face. His hand shook slightly as he returned it to a pocket.

"It will mean my death to disobey orders, Black Bat, but I'd feel a lot safer if you would," he said in unconcealed relief. "Just promise me you'll keep down out of sight when we land."

Dugro showed the Black Bat the note with the instructions. The airplane manufacturer's orders were to fly south to the Silverton Country Club and make a landing on a three-hundred-yard stretch of level turf on the golf course. Here he was to toss out the suitcase, then fly back again.

Donning parachutes, Dugro and the Black Bat went out to the ship. Then they were in the air, climbing up into the black night.

Dugro sat in the left hand seat, the wheel in his expert hands. The Black

Bat stood further back in the fuselage.

"You say we're to land on the golf course at Silverton?" the Black Bat asked, above the drone of the motors. "Isn't there danger of a crack-up with no ground lights?"

"I can handle her all right—I think. She lands pretty slow and I've got good landing lights in the wings."

"I suppose this Dragon Master would like nothing better than to know that the Black Bat was aboard," the hooded man suggested, with a dry chuckle. "With him out of the way the head of this sweet racket would have nothing to fear."

Dugro nodded. "That's right. The Black Bat almost spoiled everything for him. He would never be safe as long as the Black Bat was alive."

"Which, I think, is why you were so eager to let me come along," the Black Bat said coolly. "I became certain of that after noticing that your compass is *not* pointing south."

Dugro whirled in the seat, whipping out his gun with one hand. The plane lurched wildly. But the Black Bat had made a flying dive forward and grabbed the man who had been masquerading as the Dragon Master, pinioning his arms.

"Quick, Wang!" he yelled over his shoulder. "Come up here and get these controls!"

With motors roaring the ship went into a dive while the Black Bat struggled to unsnap Dugro's belt and drag him free of the controls. Leaping from where he had been lying prone behind ballast sandbags, Colonel Wang fell headlong down on top of both men and got into the pilot's seat.

When the Bat had printed that message and given it to I-tso Ling he had suspected that the bomber might play some part in this intricate extortion scheme, after the money should be delivered to Dugro, and the contents of his note to Wang had sent the Chinese racing to the field where Dugro was waiting. When Quinn had drawn Dugro inside the hangar to read the

message it had given the waiting Chinese time to hide himself back in the fuselage.

Dugro was fighting now like an insane man.

"I knew I should have shot you the moment you appeared," the airplane man panted. "That's what I was going to do later—then knock myself out after returning the treasure to the proper people." Somehow he seemed to be taking a keen joy in making this boastful clean breast of things.

"You're not trying to say that you actually intended to return it?" demanded the Black Bat.

DUGRO was subdued now. He lay on the floor of the droning ship as Wang circled and headed back toward the field.

"Yes. It is hidden in some empty motor crates in my factory. It was this way—Belmont didn't know that this bomber is a death-trap should it ever get into a spin with a load. I knew he'd never advance another penny for some corrections necessary in the wing design. In his greed to get that ten million dollar order he kept pressing me until I was desperate. I also knew Wang was going to find out the truth.

"So I had to stall them both—Wang on the tests, and Belmont. The only way out was to steal the treasure, force them to pay ransom for it, then use the money to have a dummy buyer buy out Belmont's share after telling him the plane was no good. That way I would have got control of my factory again, would have money to redesign the wing, and—" He glared at the Black Bat as he shouted wildly: "And I'd have done it too if it hadn't been for you!"

Wang circled the field at less than five hundred feet and let down the wheels. He brought the ship in for a landing. By now the front of the hangar was lit up, and as they rolled to a stop the Black Bat saw men emerge from it.

Dugro moved then, taking the Black Bat completely by surprise. He wrenched his right hand free and caught the hooded man with a terrific blow along the side of the neck.

The Black Bat's whole lower body went half paralyzed and his legs gave way. He tried to get up as Dugro leaped over him, dived through the fuselage door, and broke into a run.

And the Black Bat, trying to drag himself toward the door, saw him go—helpless to do a thing.

Then from the pilot's compartment behind him came the snapping reports of a 9 mm. Luger. Wang shooting through the open window. Dugro stumbled and went down, tried to get up, and lay still as more bullets from the Luger poured into him.

A familiar figure detached itself from the group emerging from the hangar. McGrath! He ran forward, poking his head in the door.

"Well, Black Bat, I knew I'd get you some day," he stated in a matter-of-fact voice to the prostrate figure on the floor of the fuselage. He brought out his handcuffs. "You should have known that. Here—stick 'em out."

A cool voice in broken English cut in then, its owner lining the Luger pistol at McGrath's thick middle.

"So sorry please," said Colonel Wang apologetically. "No take him tonight. Velly good friend of Wang."

CHAPTER XX

Checkmated Again



NOT ten minutes later the Black Bat still sat in the doorway of the plane talking to Chivor, Belmont, Dr. Ling, and McGrath. I-tso Ling, who had come to the airport with Wang, had put in appearance and was up in the pilot's seat with him.

"And so, gentlemen, that's about how it happened," said the Black Bat, finishing the long, detailed account he had been giving. "Dugro's Asiation Export outfit had been exporting planes to belligerents from California. He saw trouble brewing and tricked Mr. Belmont into buying him out while he skipped out to China until things quieted down. Later he came back and got Mr. Belmont to back him in this present plant. But the bomber was a failure and Dugro knew it. He had known Duke Kasini in China, and when he heard of the art collection being brought over he conceived the idea of settling all his troubles by a big coup. He organized the Dragon society merely as a front for his activities."

THE Black Bat looked at Paul Chivor who was with the others.

"I still don't know where you fit into this, Mr. Chivor," the Black Bat said. "Somehow, though I'm convinced you're not such a scoundrel as I was inclined to believe."

"Thank you," replied the pilot. "As a matter of fact, I'm with the Bureau of Narcotics. Before I joined the Bureau I was a pilot. I was flying for a California concern—Asiation Export—when word came from my superiors that a District Attorney Anthony Quinn of this city had a lead to the fact that Duke Kasini was smuggling in huge quantities of opium from China. We had been after him for years. My new assignment was to go to China and try to ferret him out from that end.

"So to make it look good I stunted a plane, got myself fired, and we arranged to have my regular license revoked. After which I pulled the drinking act and went to China. It took months and months, but I finally traced Kasini's shipments to European ports and finally here on a tanker. We got that last one, but he was too clever to put himself in the open. We laid a trap. I got word to Kasini that his

confiscated shipment of drugs was in an old warehouse, hoping he'd try to hijack it. I also contacted Chow Seto's laundry as a customer, to clinch my evidence.

"We waited and waited at the warehouse for Kasini to make his play. Nearly three weeks. He never seemingly took the bait. Finally, last night, one of our operatives telephoned that the whole mob had been seen near the Chow Seto laundry—around the hotel next door. We decided to take the gamble of grabbing them off there and convicting them on the evidence we already had. So we raced to the place, only to find it in roaring flames. By the time we got back to the warehouse the mob had struck—a fluke that wouldn't happen again in a hundred years."

"And now we've got them all surrounded down beneath those condemned buildings," Commissioner Warner said grimly. "If they don't come out we'll get them with tear gas."

"No—no, Commissioner!" the Black Bat shouted, and swiftly told how Flash Mega had wired the place with nitro. A startled look came over the commissioner's face as he swung to McGrath.

"Get on the phone and tell them to hold off!" he barked sharply, urgently. "Hurry!"

I-tso Ling moved hastily over to the Black Bat and bent with her lips to his ear. She whispered something in it. He turned to Warner and the others.

"It seems that Miss Ling was informed by the Dragon Master—Dugro—before she went to Quinn's house with the treasure that he had ordered Flash Mega to fix up some kind of devilish contraption that could be exploded when Dugro broadcasted on an unused wave length. I'm also assuming, of course, that after my departure the Dragon Master came back and removed the bodies of Mega and the thug so as not to arouse suspicion on

the part of the others when they assembled to be paid off."

MCGRATH had disappeared at a clumpy gallop, but shortly reappeared. He came up to Warner and shook his head.

"Too late, Chief. One of those condemned buildings went up about ten minutes ago. It just rose up a bit and then settled back again into a mass of bricks, Headquarters just told me. Fireman are digging in the wreckage for bodies. Dugro musta fixed it for that to happen right after he took off in the plane. He was a clever guy—just clever enough that we'll never know how he managed to almost blow me to kingdom come. And those two poor guys, Fitz and Murphy—"

The Black Bat rose to his feet in the doorway, still wearing the parachute.

"I think I can enlighten you, Captain," he said. "You will recall that after the explosion on Quinn's lawn only tiny splinters of wood were found by police experts. I also remembered then that Flash Mega was a nitro expert. My suspicions took shape when I found a strong bow and several arrows in the underground room of Ohmo, the Chinese thug. When the metal arrow head was unscrewed it revealed a tiny vial of nitro inside, with a nail plunger sticking out through the tip.

"Since an arrow has been fired a distance of several hundred yards it was an easy matter to place one on Quinn's lawn as a warning to Eight Incorporated. The police car was blown to pieces in the same manner. You will receive that peculiar arrow weapon by messenger tomorrow, Captain, along with the pistol I shot from the Dragon Master's hand in their underground meeting room tonight."

He took from his pocket the shells he had picked up on the airport the night Dugro had fired at him as he took off with Harrison. Compared with shells fired from Dugro's gun,

they would be final, conclusive proof.

McGrath took them and shoved them in his own pocket. Automatically he took out a cigar and bit off an end.

"All right, Black Bat, that winds up everything," he said. "All we need to do is have Mr. Belmont and his remaining associates buy the treasure with all this money they'll get back—and maybe buy a new vault door for the museum—and everything is clear. All except between you and me. I don't shoot sitting game. But there's nothing to prevent me hitting the breeze for Tony Quinn's house right now in a police cruiser to do a little settling of my own."

And the doughty officer hurried away. Belmont had taken little part in the conversation. He was too relieved at the return of the money. He looked at the Black Bat now.

"Could I give you a lift to town?" he asked politely.

The Black Bat shook his head, smiling.

"No thank you. But I'm going to ask Colonel Wang to see that I get home. I'm sure he won't mind."

He got inside the plane and closed the door. I-tso Ling translated to Wang in rapid Cantonese, ignoring her father's gesticulating commands to come with him at once. Wang nodded and spun the starter on the two motors. The speedy bomber roared down the runaway and lifted into the night. The Black Bat directed Wang to fly at less than a thousand feet over a certain section of town. Even the Chinese girl, confused by being in the air, would not know where he landed.

As Wang shut off the motors only short minutes later and the Black Bat braced himself to jump through the door, I-tso Ling did something that was entirely American. She leaned swiftly and pressed her lips to his cheek.

"That is from the future Mrs. Wang in appreciation for saving my husband's 'face,'" she murmured. "Yes, I'm returning with him to China.

When I tell my honorable father that I may be apprehended some day as a Dragon I'm sure he won't object."

Then she said something else that sounded to him like "*Tangtze*."

"I beg your pardon," said the Black Bat.

"It's one way of saying good-by in Chinese," I-tso Ling told him.

He braced his body against the door, held shut by the force of the slipstream, and tumbled out. A world of darkness rushed up at him. He counted five, pulled, and the big chute snapped him upright four hundred feet above the ground. As he landed and hurriedly rolled up the parachute there came the sound of a distant siren.

UCKILY the Black Bat had landed within two blocks of his own estate, on a vacant stretch of ground. He dashed for the gatehouse with the chute wadded in his arms, dropped in the tunnel and sped into the house just as Captain McGrath pulled up in front.

"Tony, where have you been?" cried Carol.

"I'll explain later," he said, laughing as he yanked off his clothes that were over his pajamas and jumped into bed.

"Here—give me that bandage, and get rid of those garments. McGrath's outside."

The big officer came barging in. Carol barely had time to open the bedroom door before he pushed past her and stopped short at sight of Quinn's bandaged head.

"Well, I'll be—be—dammit to hell!" said Captain McGrath in most un-officerlike fashion.

Tony Quinn looked up at him with his dead eyes and inquired in a weak voice:

"Is that you, McGrath? Did you catch the Dragon Master?"

"You know blamed well I did, but that I didn't get the Black Bat!" yelled back the disgruntled McGrath.

"I rather got that impression from the way you came charging in here. I believe that means you won a bet from me in saying that the Black Bat would show up in the Dragon case. But you also lost one by not capturing him. So I gather that we're even."

"Don't worry—we'll meet again," was the reply as the disgusted Captain McGrath headed for the door. I'll get you one of these days. So long!"

"*Tangtze*," Tony Quinn said coolly.

"Huh?" demanded McGrath suspiciously, abruptly, turning in the doorway.

"It's one way of saying good-by in Chinese," Quinn informed him laconically.

"Bah!" snapped Captain McGrath, slamming the front door as he went out.

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MOM PETRELLI'S BOY

By GERRY SETON



In his mind's eye, Moran saw Nick being led to the death cell

Detective Joe Moran Wears His Heart on His Sleeve—but There's Plenty of Courage in It!

THE blare of an old-fashioned player-piano grated on Moran's ear-drums as he hesitated in front of Mom Petrelli's tap-room. He had a job to do—and he didn't relish it. But a newly made detective can't decide what arrests are to be made. He gets his orders, and carries them out.

The captain had said: "Pick up Nick Petrelli. We have a tip that he was mixed up in the Vine Street holdup."

A policeman had been killed in that holdup, and Captain Dunn's voice was harsh and implacable. Moran wanted to tell him Nick Petrelli couldn't have had anything to do with the crime. Nick was a swell kid. This kind of thing wasn't in his line. But one look

at the captain's eyes told Moran there was no use arguing.

He hesitated in front of the tap-room just the same. This was his old neighborhood. He'd been a kid here. He'd pounded the pavement as a harness bull.

And all those years he had known Mom Petrelli.

He liked and pitied the hard-working Italian woman, with her sparkling black eyes and beaming smile. She'd had bad luck all her life. Just when she and her husband had licked adversity, old Nick died. There had been something of a mystery about the old man's death.

No one in the neighborhood ever

seemed to know just what caused it. And Mom wasn't one to talk. She sorrowed over her husband's passing, but confided in no one.

After awhile the folks in that section forgot all about Mr. Petrelli. All they knew was that the old lady was making ends meet through her own unaided efforts. Mom threw herself into the struggle for existence—not for herself, but for young Nick. He was all that mattered. For him she managed the tap-room in Arlington's toughest section. Her eagle eye marked the unpaid beers over the bar. When trouble started, she threw out the offensive customers herself.

The men who frequented the place were rugged, touchy characters—but they had a wholesome respect for Mom.

When she counted over the week's earnings, she chuckled to herself. They were hoarded to send her boy to college.

That's where he was now—at Arlington University, coming home over the week-ends to help Mom around the place. They said he had a girl at school, and sometimes a girl is good for a fellow, and sometimes she's bad for him, depending on what kind she is. Maybe this one wanted things Nick couldn't afford—and that's why he stuck up the gas station.

It was a clumsy job, anyway, Moran thought. Nick—if it was Nick—had worn a mask, but the attendant recognized his red college sweater and cap. They were Nick's trademark on that side of town. There weren't any other university boys in the neighborhood. When Mom bought those articles of clothing she never thought they might send Nick to the chair. It was a terrible thing to think of. Why did bad things have to happen to a good woman like her, Moran asked himself.

As for Nick, himself, Moran didn't know whether he was at the tap-room or not. Probably not—after pulling a thing like that—but it was the best place to pick up the trail. It was a cinch Mom didn't know anything about it, because the tip about Nick had not gone to the newspapers.

That made the job even tougher. It was like telling a mother her son had

been killed. Worse, because Mom would rather have seen her bambino dead than in a jam like this. She was proud and strong, but not strong enough to take such a blow. In his mind's eye, Moran saw Nick being led to the death cell.

WELL, no use stalling. That'd only make it harder than ever. Moran had to take Nick away from her, and he would rather have cut off his right hand than do it. Duty! It was a fine word—a ringing, resonant word, but now he hated it. The detective sighed, shook his head, pushed open the door, and went into the tap-room.

There was nothing fancy about it—just a bar, and a dozen tables. Smoke fogged the lights in the ceiling, and the narrow confines of the place were noisy with the chatter of customers. They were hard people. The percentage of tough men and criminals was very high in that section of town. Mom didn't care who they were. The money they spent was for Nick—and that was enough for her.

Mom Petrelli spied Moran, cried in her rich Neapolitan voice:

"Yo, Joe! Where you been this week? You no come to see me any more. Don't I treat you good, eh?"

Moran leaned on the bar. He couldn't meet Mom's eyes. He'd always been like a son of hers—next to Nick. He loved the old lady, and now he had to take away from her the one thing that made her life happy.

"I've been pretty busy, Mom," he said, trying to sound casual.

"What's-a matt'? You got a girl?"

Moran tried to grin, but it made his facial muscles seem warped.

"Not a chance. You're the only woman in my life."

"Huh!" she chuckled derisively. "A handsome fella like you, and no girl! I no believe-a that. But wait!" A smile warmed the rosy face framed in still beautiful black hair. "I gotta news—"

A lean man, with crooked eyes, lounged up to the bar.

"Never mind the gab. Gimme a beer—an' remember, cops won't do either you or me any good."

Moran slanted his gaze sidewise.

Bugs Malenti, Arlington's Public Enemy Number One. A tough guy. A killer. Everyone in that part of town did as Bugs said. There wasn't a cop on the force who wouldn't have given a month's pay to put a rap on Malenti that would stick, but no one had been able to do it so far. Moran itched to smash his fist into that sneering face, but there wouldn't be any point to it.

So he summoned a smile to his lips. Malenti knew everything that went on in a criminal way. Maybe he knew about Nick. Maybe he might let something slip. A smart guy, yes, but a braggart—and talkers sometimes told things they never intended to tell. Take it easy. This fellow might be the solution to the whole job.

"You seem kind of touchy, Bugs," he said. "What are you supposed to be around here—a board of censorship, or something?"

"Never mind that, copper," said Malenti unpleasantly. "If I don't want her to tell you tomorrow is Sunday, she won't do it; will you, Mom?"

Mrs. Petrelli shook her head. Obviously she was afraid of Bugs. Anybody could see that. But then, all the neighbors were, too. Malenti was a big shot. If the police couldn't number the men he had killed, Little Italy could.

Moran figured he knew what was going on. Mom had probably intended telling him Nick was coming home. Bugs was informing her as plainly as he could that he didn't want her to say anything about it. But that was where the whole thing had a phony sound.

Even though Moran was young, he was a pretty smart cop. Malenti knew that—and the way he had shoved himself into the conversation meant he *wanted* Moran to know he was shutting Mom up on the subject of young Nick.

Why? Bugs never left anything to chance. He always thought things out in advance. So, why did he make it plain that he wanted silence?

He wanted Moran to know that he knew all about Nick! There was a reason for that. What was it?

The detective shoved his untasted glass away.

"Were you going to tell me anything about Nick?" he asked Mrs. Petrelli.

Mom looked past him, into Bugs' malevolent eyes. She shook her head.

"No—no. What-a would I say about him? To a cop. You don't-a have nothin' to do with college boys."

"Sure he don't," said Malenti. "If he's smart he don't have nothin' to do with anybody around this joint, either."

Moran crowded down the anger in his throat. Wait. Just wait. That's all, Malenti. I'd trade a lieutenant's commission to get your scalp. If I could only do that, and save Mom some way. If I can't I'll get you, anyway.

"Okay, Mom," was all he said aloud. "Give my regards to Nick as soon as he gets home from school. I'm going to use your telephone if you don't mind. This is kind of an easy night, and I'm going to hang around awhile."

HIS hands were sweaty as he felt in his pocket for a nickel. The telephone booth was in back. He went into it.

He dialed the number, and while he listened to the staccato little whirl in his ears, tried to figure the thing out. Maybe Captain Dunn could help him. The precinct commander was smart.

On the face of it the thing didn't make sense. Bugs Malenti was pushing himself into the case. Why should he do that? He wasn't anxious to have the cops get anything on him. They'd be too anxious for the chance to grab it. Moran mentally arranged and re-arranged the facts, as he knew them.

Captain Dunn listened to what the young detective said. He gave no opinion. Instead, he asked:

"What do *you* make of it?"

"Of course, it's just a guess on my part," said Moran, "but Malenti wants me to know that he knows all about Nick—and is trying to cover him up. That means, in the first place, he wasn't anywhere near the scene of the crime, and has an alibi."

"Sure he has," said Dunn. "Bugs was here in the station, arguing with me when the thing happened. I'm his alibi. Laugh that off."

"Then he's framing something," said Moran. "Could it be that he was trying to rib me up so I'd forget about Nick, and tail him? If I did, his boys might help the kid to lam out of here."

"Don't worry about it," Dunn said. "I've got squad cars covering both the front and back of Mom Petrelli's place. A flea couldn't get away without being seen."

The detective pondered that for a moment. He hadn't been told anything about other men being on the assignment. The captain must know more than had been told him. That wasn't right. If he had to risk his neck—and break Mom's heart at the same time—he should know what it was all about.

"Look, Cap," he said, "why are you keeping me in the dark? What's this all about, anyway?"

"A good cop obeys orders." Dunn barked at him, "and doesn't ask questions. I can tell you only one thing. Bugs knows you're Nick's pal. That's why I sent you over there. He's a big mouth. He's likely to say more than he means to. And, you know as well as I do, that we want to get Malenti—get him for keeps. Things are moving on just as I figured they would. Go back there, and rib him into saying more. But—be careful, Joe."

Moran hung up. Why couldn't it just be Malenti they were after? That would be a pleasure. He'd be tickled to death to shoot it out with that thug any time. But in this case, no matter how the thing worked out, poor Mom would suffer. When she found out what Nick had done she'd die. There wasn't anything Detective Moran could do about it. The dice were in the hands of fate, and Detective Moran's heart was heavy.

Moran opened the door of the booth, and went back into the tap-room. All of the customers had gone. Probably Bugs had warned them away. They needed only a hint from him.

MALENTI was still there, huddled on a chair in a corner, smoking a cigarette very quiet and evil.

"So you're back again, are you, copper?" he asked insolently. "Well, don't ask Mom any more questions about Nick. They make her nervous, don't they, Mom?"

Mom was polishing glasses behind the bar. Her swarthy skin was tallowy. Her hands shook a little. She knew!

Bugs must have told her. And her heart was breaking as she tried to occupy herself with usual tasks. All her exuberance, all her unbounded gaiety, were gone. Her face was dark, brooding. Her gaze wandered restlessly between Malenti and Moran.

A grand old lady, Moran thought. She idolizes the ground her kid walks on. She'll fight like a tiger for him, too. The right or wrong of things don't matter so far as Mom is concerned. Her love goes above anything else. Nick's all she's got, and she'll tear out her heart for him—mine, too, if she has to see me take him. Nick and I were pals once, even if he is six years younger than I am. We fished and hunted together. Now I'm hunting *him*.

Moran leaned against the bar and looked at Bugs.

"Would it make you nervous if I asked about Nick?" he asked.

Malenti rose, shuffled toward the bar, his hand resting significantly in the pocket of his coat.

"Yes, it would," he said, "And when I'm nervous, my trigger finger gets twitchy."

The detective laughed.

"Save that baloney for somebody else. I'm going to have little chat with Mom—and you're going to pull that big nose of yours out of what doesn't concern you. Understand?"

Then, behind the bar, Mom suddenly stood straight and magnificent, her arms akimbo, her gaze traveling between the two tight-faced men.

"You two justa shut up, and letta me talk," she cried. "This is my place. Nicky—he's-a my boy. Bugs, he say Nick rob a place—kill a cop."

There was something deadly in her black eyes. Both men stared at her.

"Joe Moran, you my friend. No go try pulling any bad business on me, eh? You tella me. Bugs—he lie to anybody. He lie now to hurt me. Tella me the truth, Joe. Whatta you know about my Nick?"

The detective's mouth was dry as leather. His Adam's apple choked him. How could he verify what this lousy rat had told Mom—even if it was true? How could he strike all the joy of living out of her with a word? It would tear apart the whole fabric of her life

to say that Nick was a thief and a murderer.

It was too much to ask even of a policeman. The words trembled on his lips, and he couldn't utter them.

"All right, I'll tell her again," said Bugs. "After all, I'm the kid's pal, and not a lousy cop. Take it with your chin up, Mom. When I told you Nick stuck up a gas station down on Vine Street, and killed a harness bull in the get-away, I told you the truth. Moran is here to make the pinch. Ain't you, Moran?"

Joe's eyes were fixed on Mom. She gripped the edge of the bar with her strong hands, gripped it so hard that the knuckles showed white.

"Nick would not killa anybody," she said. "It's a lie. Tella me Bugs is lying, Joe. Just tella me that."

Malenti showed his teeth.

"He can't. It's just as I told you, Mom. The whole thing was a little new to Nick. That's bad, because, as it turns out, the bull doesn't even know anything is wrong."

"You getta Nick into this," said Mom suddenly.

The gangster reached out his hands, palms upward.

"You got me wrong. I wasn't in on it. I got witnesses to prove I was on the other side of town. Do you think I'd a' let Nick wear that red sweater and cap everybody knows he wears, if I'd been in on it? That's what tripped him up. That's why the cops are lookin' for him. He might just as well have left his callin' card."

Mom's vast bosom heaved emotionally. She did not look at Joe Moran. Her eyes were fixed on the gang leader.

"Looka, Bugs," she said. "You are a friend to my Nick, eh? You do for him what you can, no?"

"Sure. I'll get him out of this if I have to kick the police department apart."

"Why? I remember you no like his poppa so much."

Malenti stiffened. So did Moran. Moran could see the muscles ridge under Malenti's coat. He had been taken by surprise, and was getting himself ready for anything.

"What do you mean, Mom?" he asked.

"You know what I mean, Bugs. You never go for my Nick—why for Nicolino?"

"Well, I do. That's enough, ain't it? You ought to be glad he's got somebody to stand by him in a pinch like this. What in hell are you crabbin' about, anyway?"

Mom tightened her grip still more.

"I am notta crabbing, Bugs. But I want to know—how, if you are not inna this job—how do you know my Nicky shoot this cop?"

Bugs shrugged his lean shoulders.

"Everybody knows. Even flathead Moran here knows about it. The papers will probably be on the streets in ten minutes with the whole story."

Suddenly the whole thing was clear to Joe Moran. Those few clipped sentences told him everything.

The newspapers didn't know Nick Petrelli was suspected of murder. Nobody knew it but the police—and the man who had tipped them off! *That meant Bugs, himself, had been the stool pigeon!* And, it also meant that he had engineered the holdup himself, or had guilty knowledge of it. He was engineering this whole thing to have the blame placed on young Nick!

THE door opened and shut softly.

There came the click of it being latched. Moran glanced toward it. A slouch-shouldered man, with a cast in his eye. That was a hop-head they called Caruso, because he was always singing to himself. Caruso had a gun in his hand, a snub-nosed automatic.

"Stick 'em up, copper," he said. "Frisk him, Bugs."

Malenti wasn't used to taking orders. They annoyed him. But he apparently saw that something unexpected had happened, and when Joe raised his arms, Malenti took his gun.

"What's this all about, Caruso?" Bugs asked. "I'm doin' all right here without any help from you."

Caruso snickered nervously.

"That's what you think—but you ain't. You're in a spot. It took me to find it out."

"What d'ye mean?"

"Look. You had this thing all figured out. You framed that stickup, with me wearin' Nick's sweater and

cap, so the job could be blamed on him—"

Malenti's face went stark, staring white. He turned Moran's revolver on Causo.

"Why, you dirty, doublecrossin'—"

"Wait a minute. You don't need to be afraid of what this cop hears. He won't be around long enough to tell anybody. But, instead of you doin' the framin', you were the one who was framed, Bugs. At the very time I was stickin' up that gas station, *the police had Nick Petrelli at headquarters!* They were waitin' for what happened. When you called, and tipped them off about Nick bein' the killer, they had a dictaphone recording of it made, and you never did know how to disguise your voice, Bugs. You didn't get that job pinned on Nick. You pinned it on yourself!"

Moran listened to this in absolute amazement, and in spite of his astonishment, he was happier than he had ever been in his life. Caruso was telling the truth. There couldn't be any doubt of it. Nick was innocent, and there was nothing to break Mom's heart after all. But the thing he couldn't figure out was why he had been sent to arrest Nick, when the police knew Nick couldn't have done it.

At the same time, Moran knew he was in a tough spot. True, there were policemen waiting outside, but he could be knocked off before they came in. Both Bugs and Caruso had the hot seat waiting for them. Another killing could add nothing to their punishment—

Moran looked at Mom Petrelli, smiled. "It good news for you, anyway, sweetheart," he said, "knowing Nick's not in a jam."

"I know that all the time," she said.

Bugs spun around, glaring.

"What's that you said?" he snarled "You knew it."

Mom opened a tap and filled a stein with foaming beer.

"Listen to me, Bugs," she said in her throaty voice. "You hear only half the story. I tella you the rest. Listen close, because maybe you don't like it so much."

"Let it go," said the gang leader, shuffling his feet nervously.

"Nine year ago, Bugs," Mom said, "you belong to the Mafia—the Black Hand. You try to get money from my old Nick. He won't give. You kill him—"

Malenti surged against the bar, his eyes glaring.

"Yes, you do," Mom went on. "Nobody know it. Nobody can prove it. But I know. And because of that you hate me and my Nicolino. I hear lots of things around this place. So, I find out what you gonna do—and I send Nicky to the district attorney the night of that stickup. They know-a he ain't got nothing to do with it. They know you have!"

Malenti relaxed.

"That's what you think. All right, Nick didn't have anything to do with it. But the evidence they got ain't enough. If you and Moran went on the stand it might be—but you won't, because I'm going to kill you right here. Then, what have they got?"

Moran grinned. "Sure, you can knock us off," he said, "but you can't get away. There's a squad car in front and back, and you haven't got a chance. It's the chair for you, Malenti, and every decent person in Arlington will give three cheers for that."

BUGS seemed to crouch a little. His face went gray, and his eyes narrowed. All of a sudden he had shriveled.

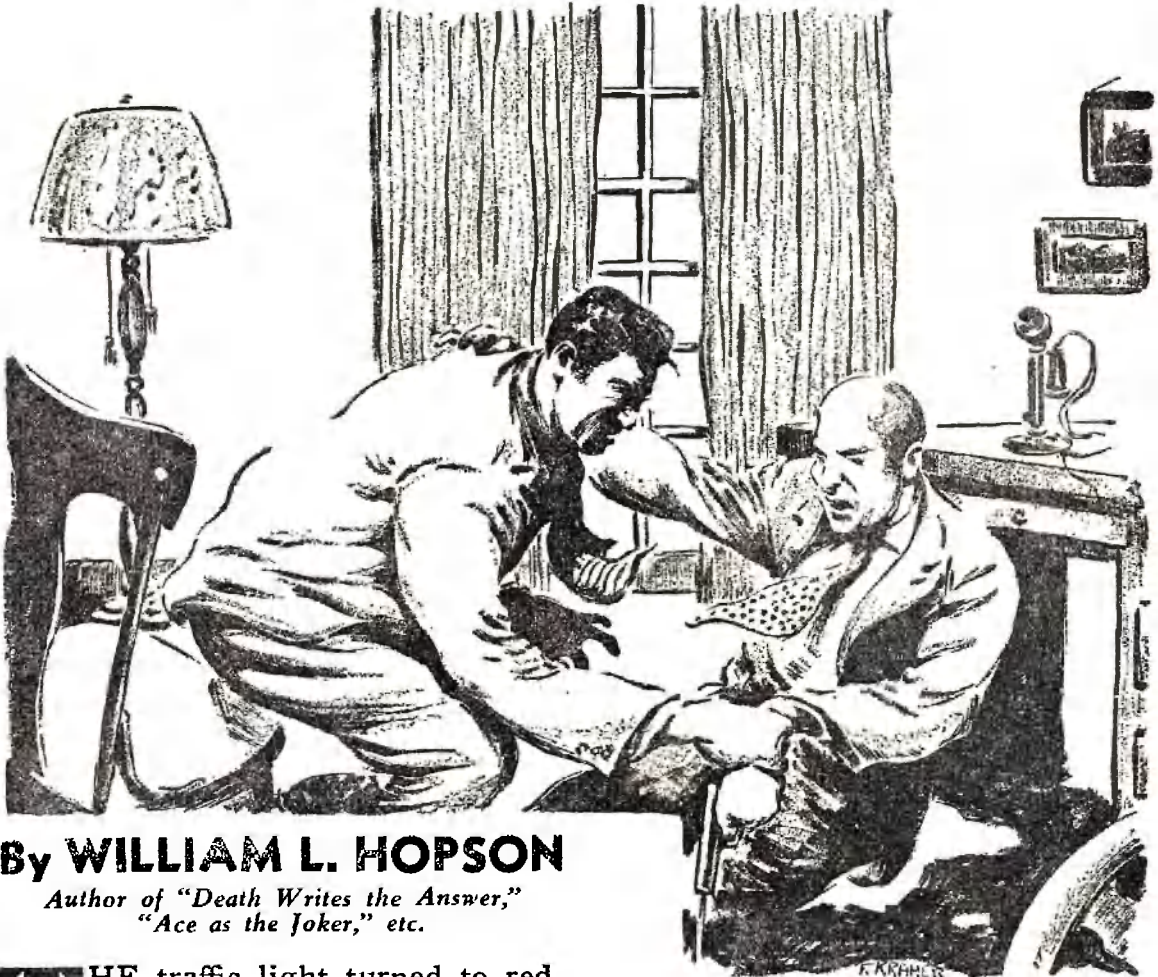
"Okay," he said in a reedy voice. "Maybe I'm washed up. It had to come sooner or later. But neither of you two'll ever see me fry. I'm gonna nail you to the cross with bullets—"

He half lifted his gun. Moran thought it was all over, and tightened his body against the impact of the slugs. He couldn't possibly cover the distance between him and the killer before the trigger was squeezed.

But Mom reached across the bar and smashed the stein of beer into Bugs Malenti's face. He went down, screaming and clawing—cut by broken glass, and smeared with blood and beer. Moran hit Caruso once on the chin—just once, and the slouch-shouldered man went down and out.

The two—the old lady and the de-
(Concluded on page 113)

EYES OF THE MAGNATE



By **WILLIAM L. HOPSON**

Author of "Death Writes the Answer,"
"Ace as the Joker," etc.

THE traffic light turned to red. With an exclamation of impatience I halted and fumbled for a cigarette. Over my cupped hands I noticed the green eyes of the girl dressed in yellow. She was staring at something to my left. I looked in that direction, but saw no reason for the fear mirrored in her eyes. Just the usual noon-day scene of any busy street corner.

At the policeman's whistle I stepped from the curb. The girl lurched against me. I got a whiff of orange blossoms and a quavering, "Pardon, please."

I turned to her, smiling. But she had wheeled about and was fighting

I forced the gun out of his hand

her way back to the sidewalk. I shrugged indifferently, inhaled deeply, and shoved my hand into the pocket of my light topcoat. My fingers closed around an object that had not been there thirty seconds before. My steps lengthened then, a usual after dinner stroll became almost a run.

As the door of my office clicked behind me, I drew from my pocket a handkerchief through which I could feel the two soft globular items wrapped in it. I unfolded the red stained linen. In the palm of my hand I held—*two glassy human eyes!*

For a moment I was frozen into im-

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mobility. With a shudder I placed the handkerchief on the desk and sank into a chair. Shaking, I drew a bottle of Scotch from the top drawer. I didn't bother with a glass. The bottle gurgled and some of the chill left me.

With a trembling finger I touched my grisly presents. They were human eyes all right—dull black, blood-shot. Icy fingers seemed to flutter up my spine. I tilted the bottle to my lips again. There was no doubt in my mind that those spare parts had been shoved into my pocket when the girl in yellow had jostled me at the corner. But why?

I was lighting a cigarette when the door was thrown open. I looked up and into the maw of a .45 Colt held steadily in the fist of a huge pock-marked individual.

"All right, chump," he growled. "Where's them glims? Ah, here—"

He stepped forward, scooped up the handkerchief with the eyes and thrust the gruesome objects into his pocket. Keeping the gun leveled at my head he backed to the door.

"You ain't seen nothin', see?" he said, as he fumbled for the doorknob behind him with his left hand. "No callin' the Law."

"I've been asleep all day, Pal," I assured him.

He grinned. The door closed behind him as he went out. I reached for the phone, dialed 6226, Police Headquarters. Before my ring was answered I had an idea. The receiver fell back on the hook. It was on a spot. I couldn't call the police!

The Law would be certain this was a publicity gag. That phony jewel theft of my client, Colla Colano, the actress, while giving us plenty of newsprint space had left me in that state approaching "bad standing" with the local finest. What was it the detective-sergeant had said?"

"So help me, one more phony caper from you, and as sure as your name's Jerry Jerome I'll put you away."

I TRIED hard to get this situation out of my mind. But why would a keen-looking girl present a stranger with two human eyes? I shivered a

bit and tried to lose myself in the work piled on my desk.

When I left the office it was dark enough for the work of two characters who were loafing near the street door. One on each side of me they closed in, shoved their guns into my ribs. The one on my left was the chap who had snatched the peepers from my desk.

"Walk straight out to that car, Buddy," he ordered.

At the car my pock-marked escort got into the back seat with me. The other lug, a little round-shouldered hood, slid under the wheel. Pock-mark jammed a cigarette into the corner of his mouth, shoved the pack to me. Keeping to the quieter streets we traveled at a moderate speed out of town.

"Where are we going?" I asked.

"Guess?" cracked Pock-Mark.

The driver laughed.

"Wait," I pleaded. "Am I being taken—Is this a ride?"

"Take it easy, Buddy," said Pock-Mark. "It ain't gonna hurt you. But you know too much for the Chief. It'll soon be over."

"Now, look—" I began.

"Shut up!" barked the hood.

Shrugging, I settled back on the cushions, and with the back of a trembling hand smeared away the cold sweat on my forehead. Pock-Mark now drew his hand from his pocket, grasping a .45. The car slowed, turned off the main road into a narrow tree-lined lane. Pock-Mark lurched against me; then put both hands on the seat to straighten himself. I decided it was time to act. I acted.

My left fist crashed against Pock-Mark's jaw. He reeled away, bringing up his gun hand. I knocked aside the gun, smashed my right into his mouth. The gun roared, sending up a geyser of flame. The car swerved suddenly. We crashed. Glass splintered and showered over us. I was thrown heavily into Pock-Mark. Whirling darkness, star-shot, closed around me. . . .

When I opened my eyes it was very quiet. Except for the lonely croaking of a frog far off on the right there was no sound.

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Stiffly, I pulled myself erect. In the moonlight I saw Pock-Mark sprawled on the floor. The little driver was slumped over the wheel. My head ached and I tenderly felt the large lump over my right eye. Pock-mark groaned weakly.

I grasped the handle of the door nearest me and shoved. It was jammed. I wheeled about and began to crawl over Pock-Mark to the other door. As my hand touched his chest I felt something hard. A gun! I reached into his pocket and found, not a gun, but a bottle. A wide mouthed cylindrical bottle. I started to drop it, hesitated, drew the cork, sniffed. An antiseptic. I put the bottle into my pocket and crawled out of the car.

The few drivers abroad that night were not picking up hitch-hikers. My shoes were new and tight. Before I walked to the end of the car line my feet were as sore as my throbbing head.

(Continued on page 102)



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(Continued from page 101)

The street car I was riding didn't pass Police Headquarters, and my feet were too stiff and painful to walk the three blocks from my hotel where I left the car. In my room I put through a call to Headquarters and asked for Sergeant Cahill.

"This is Jerry Jerome, Mike," I said pleasantly. "If you're not too busy you might run out to the first lane beyond the city limits on Route Twenty-five. You'll find a wrecked car, two men in it. Then come to me for details."

"Is this another one of your phonies, Jerome?" Cahill barked. "So help me if it is I'll see that—"

"Listen, Flattie," I interrupted. "As a taxpayer I don't want any back wash from the public servants. I'm reporting an auto wreck, the aftermath of more serious crimes such as kidnapping, attempted murder, et cetera. Now, get busy."

I HOPE Nellie, the switchboard girl, wasn't listening in. No nice girl should ever hear the sulphurous blast that Cahill stormed at me before he slammed the receiver. I laughed as I walked away from the phone.

I removed my coat, dabbed some iodine on my head, and was soaking my aching feet when the phone rang. It was Nellie.

"Mr. Jerome," she whispered, "a City detective and our own little sun ray are on their way up to see you. I never saw a man as mad as the city dick."

"Thanks, Nellie. Thanks a million." I hung up. Outside a bellow sounded like a bull elephant in pain. It was Cahill. I locked the door, got my socks and shoes, sat on the bed while I hustled into them. The door actually bulged when it was struck.

"Open this door!" roared Cahill. "You're in there. Open up!"

"Wait a minute, Mouthy," I called, as I struggled into my coat.

"I'll teach you," Cahill was telling the world. "A wreck, eh? A little glass sprinkled about. A scraped tree, and some tire marks. Another of your tricks for some publicity-seekin' so-

and-so. Open this door!"

I hesitated only a moment longer. I leaped to the window. From the fire escape I glanced back into the room as the door was whipped open. The house dick had used his pass-key. Cahill, his honest square face a red-purple picture of rage, stormed into the room. I sprinted to the street. Cahill's threats followed me, blistering the night air.

At the Luray Hotel, over on the South Side, I registered as Joseph Sanders and was assigned to a two-by-four cell on the third floor. Alone in my room I began to undress. As I hung my coat over the back of a chair I felt the bottle of antiseptic I'd taken from Pock-Mark. Curious, I got a tumbler and pulled the bottle from my pocket. The bottle tipped up and a fluid gushed into the glass. *Plop! Plop!* Two tiny splashes.

I leaned closer. The eyes! When I straightened up, the face that stared back at me from the cracked mirror of the dresser was dress-shirt white, except for a touch of green about the mouth. I returned the eyes to the bottle, placed the bottle in my pocket and started for the door. Cahill would have to believe this. But would he? What would the peepers prove? Absolutely nothing. Any good press agent could score for a pair if he needed them badly enough.

I turned out the light, crawled into bed. But I didn't sleep. Mentally I cursed myself for trying to work this thing out alone. But right along with the horror and fear that kept me wide-eyed and sleepless I felt a thrill of danger, quite new and strangely, quite pleasant.

When I left the hotel the next day it was nearly noon. After a quick light lunch I went to the office of the *Tribune*. Lin Rish, police reporter and old friend of mine, was busy at the moment.

I sat down to wait. I picked up an early edition of the paper. The front pages were devoted to the latest lack of news about the disappearance of Bart Benton. The reward offered for his return by George Morse, Benton's partner, was a honey—ten grand.

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But the story that held my interest was a short bit about Tim Locke, brother of "Happy" Locke, our leading underworld character. Tim had been freed largely because he had gone blind in prison, and was to be sent by his brother to a specialist in New York. There was a little filler that I read twice. It told of a New York doctor's theory relative to transplanting human eyes.

Lin Rish was glad to see me, but he could give me no information about the two hoods who had tangled with me. My descriptions fitted no local hot shots known to him.

"You'll be the death of me, Jerry," said Rish, laughing, as he ushered me out. "Someday you're going to be in a real jam and— Well, remember the chap who shouted 'Wolf.' Take those eyes back to the medical school where you bought them."

THOUGH angry, I didn't answer. If Rish wouldn't take me seriously what chance was there of me convincing the Law that I was in a tight spot and needed help? I walked dejectedly to the street. A sudden whiff of orange blossoms snapped me back to reality. The girl-in-yellow had just passed! Only now she was dressed in blue. I followed as she hurried down the thoroughfare.

At the corner she entered a tan roadster that moved off as the door shut behind her. A passing taxi gained a fare as I swung aboard.

"Keep that fancy heap in sight," I ordered the driver.

"Okay," he grunted.

As we left the heavy downtown traffic for the quieter suburban streets, my driver dropped farther behind. Near the city line, the car ahead suddenly pulled into the curb before a large brick house, set in the middle of a large, well-kept lawn. An iron spike fence enclosed the property. The girl entered the high gates as we cruised slowly past. At the corner I left the cab. The tan car roared by as I was paying the driver. Seated at the wheel was—Pock-Mark.

(Continued on page 104)



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(Continued from page 103)

I sprang back into the cab. "Get after that car!" I shouted.

Pock-Mark was losing no time. We breathed his dust for five or ten miles out of town. Then he turned off the highway at the Dollar Sign, a high class roadhouse known as the headquarters of the gambling and spending brotherhood. But we continued on. At the next curve of the road I had the cab headed back to town. Slowly we drove past the Dollar Sign. The tan car was parked at the rear of the joint.

A half mile from the roadhouse I left the cab. I wrapped the bottle of antiseptic in some rags from the tool chest, wrote a short note to Sergeant Cahill.

"Get along, little cabbie," I said to the driver, grinning. "If I don't contact you by morning see that Cahill gets this note and package."

"Okay, Chief," he agreed, pocketing the double-sawbuck I gave him.

Then I cut into the woods and headed back to the roadhouse. I had a hunch that the answer of the enigma of the pickled eyes was hidden somewhere within the sinister confines of that dive.

For several hours I lay concealed in elder bushes on a slight rise in the rear of the Dollar Sign. Just before dark Pock-Mark and another character came out of the back door and entered a small out-building. In a little while I saw them lugging several odd shaped boxes to the car. There was something vaguely familiar about the shape of those boxes. I had seen boxes like them before. As the car drove off I got the mental flash. Those boxes, with the tent-shaped cones were the crates in which large bottles of acid were shipped.

Acid? I felt cold all over as the unpleasant answer formed in my mind.

The sun slid down behind the hill on which I lay. Lights, green, blue and yellow, from the roadhouse fought against the approaching darkness with indifferent success. Huge neon signs in red and blue spent themselves recklessly upon the night from all sides of the Dollar Sign. Cars began to pull up at the front of the joint. Night

life was getting under way. So was I.

I cautiously made my way to the shed, found the door locked. With a fist-sized stone I smashed the padlock. The door closed behind me with a moan of protest from the rusted hinges. A foul acrid odor assailed my nose.

The flame from my cigarette lighter threw weird leaping shadows around the almost empty shed. It was empty except for several sheets of copper, stacked neatly in one corner. I had expected to find copper, but not like this. I advanced to examine the stacked sheets. As I bent over something shone dully from the dirt floor. I scraped aside the dirt and exposed a diamond stickpin. I dropped it into my pocket, and, hearing the squeak of the hinges, whirled around. A beam of light stabbed me in the face.

"Get 'em up!"

I knew that voice—Pock-Mark. My hands went slowly overhead. Pock-Mark let the ray of light play about the shed. Then he crossed to me.

"Welcome home, Pal." He laughed. "We've been worried about you."

HE patted me down in a quick frisk, then herded me ahead of him into the roadhouse. At a closed door at the end of the hall Pock-Mark knocked lightly.

"Come in," a voice invited.

I opened the door and stepped into a brightly lighted office. A man sat on each side of the wide desk. Behind the desk sat a ruddy-faced fellow about middle age. It was Happy Locke. Spread open before him was a newspaper. He raised his brows, but said nothing.

"This was messin' around in the shed, Chief. He's the lug that got the glims," drawled Pock-Mark.

Happy Locke smiled, revealing a set of even white teeth.

"What were you doing in the shed?" he asked. His voice was soft, pleasant.

"Looking for the body of the man from whom you've taken the eyes you mean to have grafted into the head of your convict brother," I snapped.

Happy Locke threw back his head and laughed. His laughter roared out

and smothered the sneering chuckles of the others. He continued to laugh, and the amused grins of the others were turned on me. I felt my face flame as red as that of a school kid giving the wrong answer on Parent-Teacher Day.

"I suppose that copper in the shed isn't a dismantled tank?" I shouted. "I suppose I didn't smell muriatic? I suppose a body wesn't recently destroyed there?"

There was no laughter now.

"Did he have them on him?" Locke asked Pock-Mark.

"No."

"What did you do with the eyes?" Locke asked me.

"They're in a safe place." I grinned.

Happy Locke leaned back in his chair. He nodded slightly, and his teeth flashed in a smile.

"All right, Pock," he said. "Take him out and make him talk."

As Pock-Mark marched me out Locke ordered another of the hoods to tag along. The backdoor opened outward. I turned the knob, opened the door, leaped through and slammed the door in Pock-Mark's face. A bullet smashed through the door. As I raced toward the wood, a gun roared once—twice, and again. A slug sang through the night at the level of my ear.

I bent lower and added the last ounce of speed. I plunged into a tangle of elders and Spanish bayonet. Glancing back, I saw two men stumbling up the slope after me. Heedless of the sting of briars and nettles I tore deeper into the wood. I made a wide half circle and struck the highway a mile from the Dollar Sign.

It would be dangerous thumbing a ride, since Locke's playmates would be patrolling the roads looking for me. But I decided to risk it. Two cars sped past ignoring my frantic waving. The third picked me up.

I parted from my Good Samaritan downtown. At a drugstore I bought a flashlight, and got an address from the phone book. Then I was set.

For the second time that night I was guilty of illegal entry. I flashed
(Continued on page 106)

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(Continued from page 105)

my light around the offices of Benten and Morse. A picture of Benten, much better than the newspaper prints, stood on the desk. I peered at it closely before putting it into my shirt.

When I had drawn the shades on all the windows, hung a rug over the frosted glass on the door, and stuffed paper into the crack under it I snapped on the lights. Then I went to work on the books of the firm. I'm not a C. P. A., but once sure of my ground I checked it all the way.

With a grip of satisfaction I climbed out through the window I had broken to get in, and crept noiselessly down the fire escape. I hunted up a cab and gave terse orders to be driven to Headquarters. Then I changed my mind. Man! If I could clean this up myself wouldn't Cahill look foolish when I called him in at the kill?

"To your office," I instructed the cabbie.

AT the Red Cab Company offices I found the driver to whom I had intrusted the eyes. I got the package and the note to Cahill from him; put the bottle in my pocket and tore up the note. I might have a lot of driving to do, so I inquired for the nearest Drive-It-Yourself.

While walking the few blocks to the garage I tried to fit together the pieces of the puzzle I now held. Part of it was clear. The eyes were those of Bart Benten. George Morse, his partner, had been dipping deeply into the firm's till. It followed that Morse must be in some manner responsible for Benten's death. Why? To prevent discovery of the thefts, or more likely, to forestall arrest if Benton had learned of the leak in the cash box.

But why destroy the body? There was only one reason. If Benton were killed and his body found, his heirs would demand an accounting of his estate. But if he disappeared it would be seven years before the courts declared him legally dead. Morse would have a free hand, if that were the case.

Why had the eyes been removed from the body? How did Happy

Locke fit in? Why had the eyes been given to me? Who was the girl-in-yellow?

I decided to answer the last question first. I drove rapidly to the neighborhood of the house I'd seen the girl enter that afternoon. At a gasoline station a few blocks from the house I bought some oil and gas. To the over-alled youngster who served me I put a question.

"That big house is Bert Bente's," he answered, "the missing millionaire."

"That green-eyed girl I saw going in the house. Who is she?" I asked.

"That's Sheila Kerby, Bente's secretary," he replied. "Boy! She's got what it takes, eh? She comes in here for gas."

I shoved him a bill and didn't bother with the change. The green-eyed charmer Bente's secretary? Why, that didn't make sense. Or did it? I mopped the sweat from my forehead. Of course. Bente's secretary was George Morse's flame and she was in cahoots with the thieving partner.

Suppose I was right; was figuring it right all along the line? I could prove Morse a thief, yes. So what? I couldn't—the hell I couldn't! Like a gleaming light in the dark the answer to my grief cut through the fog of questions. I threw back my head and laughed. I had them cold now.

I pulled into the curb, dashed into a small store. After I looked up George Morse's address and phone number, I twisted the dial. At a shrilled, "G. Morse," I muttered, "Wrong number," and hung up. He was home; and I needed to know that for my next move. I dialed headquarters, asked for Sergeant Cahill.

"This is Jerry Jerome," I began. Cahill began to whoop it up. "Shut up, you peanut-brained yokel!" I snapped. "I'm levelling—all the way. This is big stuff. Get Happy Locke and his pals under the key. Pick up Sheila Kerby, Bente's secretary, then—"

"Wait a minute," Cahill roared. "If you're levelling—and the Fates help you if you ain't—I can get the Locke pack. They're subject to a

(Continued on page 108)

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(Continued from page 107)

pinch any time. But the Kirby dame — Nothin' doin'. I don't go out on that limb on your screwy say-so."

"Okay," I rapped, "don't. But when you've got Happy and his mob safe bring Locke to George Morse's apartments in the Cunningham on Market Street. Tell Locke you're holding him for the Benten killing, and then button up. Get it?"

"No, I don't," Cahill barked. "Benten ain't dead—or is he?"

"Do as I say, Mike, and come next Promotion Day your wife will be Mrs. Lieutenant Cahill."

I heard the deep breath he inhaled then. He began to outline the dire consequences to follow if I were wild-goose-chasing him again. I hung up, sighing.

HURRYING I lost no time in getting to the Cunningham. George Morse had the whole second floor. The clerk called his apartment, then turned from the phone.

"Mr. Morse will see no one this evening," he apologized. "I'm sorry."

"So Morse thinks," I snapped, taking a card from my case. On the back of it I scrawled:

"The AYES have it," says Benten.

"Have this delivered to Mr. Morse," I said, handing the hotel clerk the card. He shrugged and motioned over a uniformed boy who put the card on a tray and disappeared into the elevator.

In two minutes Morse phoned that he'd see me. I didn't wait for the elevator. I raced up the stairs, knuckled sharply on the door. Morse, a bald head, red face, and barrel belly stuffed into a gray suit, opened the door.

"Come in," he invited, his voice high and tinny. He glanced at my card in his fat stubby fingers. "Please explain this."

I glanced around the well-furnished room, crossed to a wide chair, flopped down and grinned up at Morse who stood before me.

"What'll you pay for a pair of slightly used eyes?" I asked.

"Are you mad?" he squeaked. "Who are you? What do you want?"

I held up three fingers, crossed my

legs. "Number one," I drawled, turning down a finger. "I'm very sane. Number two, none of your damn' business. Number three, I want to get rid of a pair of eyes—Benten's."

Morse's retreated farther into the folds of fat around them. He smiled crookedly, then shrugged.

"Please leave," he shrilled.

I sprang up, grabbed him by the shoulders, swung him around and slammed him into the chair. I clamped my left hand on his flabby throat and leaned over him.

"Listen, Morse —" I began, when from the side of my eye I caught a glimpse of motion. I looked up—into a mirror. Covering me with a small automatic in a trembling hand, Sheila Kerby stood in a doorway. I released Morse, straightened up and faced the girl.

"This is he, George," she said, walking toward us. "He is the man in whose pocket I put the eyes when—"

"Shut up, you fool!" screamed Morse.

Careful to keep out of the line of fire, Morse moved to the side of Sheila Kerby. He transferred the gun from her trembling hand to the quivering fat of his own paw.

"Now, you meddling idiot," he shrieked at me. "You'll never repeat what you just heard. I'll call it self-defense." The dimples at his knuckles widened as he tensed for the shot. He hesitated, took a step back. "Where are they?" he shrilled.

I had been close to death before. It took a moment for me to get control of my parched vocal machinery.

"Morse, the Law will be here any minute," I warned. "Happy Locke is under arrest. Don't make it worse for yourself by—"

An authoritative knock on the door interrupted me. Morse's eyes widened. He turned to Sheila Kerby, who sat tense and white-faced in a chair at his right. As I sprang forward, swinging from the hip, Morse turned to me. My fist buried itself in the fatness that was his jaw. He spun back and I grasped his hand and forced the gun to fly out of it. I hit him again to quiet him. With a groan he fell, heavily.

I wheeled around in time to stamp
(Continued on page 110)

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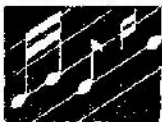
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(Continued from page 109)

my foot on the gun, bruising the clutching fingers of Sheila Kerby as I did so. I picked her up, shoved her into a chair and pocketed the rod. Then I opened the door.

Happy Locke, handcuffed and scowling, was hustled in. Mike Cahill lumbered in after him. He looked at the weeping Sheila, then at the unconscious Morse. His lips tightened into a narrow line. He cocked one scarred eyebrow, opened his mouth, then noisily clamped it shut.

"Make yourselves at home, gentlemen," I invited, grinning.

WHILE Cahill prodded Locke to a chair and settled himself on the table, I gathered up Morse, who was coming around, and dumped him into a chair close to Happy Locke. Then I sat down beside Sergeant Mike Cahill.

There they were: Sheila Kerby, nervously twisting a handkerchief; Happy Locke, sullen and alert; George Morse, moaning a little and dabbing at the thin trickle of blood that oozed over his chins. If Cahill had any doubts about backing my play he didn't show them.

Rapidly I sketched the picture while four pairs of wondering eyes centered on me. I painted it all in black. I told them about Morse's plundering of the company funds, and how I could *prove* it by the records; Sheila Kerby's part in giving me the eyes, her acknowledgment of it; Locke's demountable copper tub for acid baths; the acid soaked floor of the shed; the diamond pin that I *knew* to be Bente's.

When I finished I pointed to Sheila. "I can promise nothing," I said quietly. "But to talk now might be the detour into the Big House from the road to the chair."

She sprang to her feet, her eyes feral with fear—or hate—or both. Her hands balled into tiny fists.

Morse gulped, ran a fat finger around his wilted collar. "Suppose I talk? Will you promise—?" Morse began.

"Quiet, damn you!" roared Locke. "Stand pat. They can't prove a thing."

It won't hold up in court."

Cahill's heavy hand smashed into Locke's mouth. Locke slumped back, his dazzling smile permanently damaged.

"Talk," Cahill hissed, clamping Morse by the shoulders.

Morse nodded in my direction. "He's right. I did use the company's money. I used it to pay the huge debts I ran up at Locke's gambling tables. When Benten learned about it he gave me twenty-four hours to make good. This was all Locke's scheme. I was to pay him twenty thousand over a period of two years. He had Benten kidnapped and—ah—disposed of the body."

"The eyes," I snapped. "Why were they kept?"

"I insisted that I be given proof of Benten's death and proof that the body would not turn up. Locke promised proof. The eyes were his idea of proof. Proof and also an effective warning for me to play fair—I suppose."

Morse's head fell forward. He slurred.

"Why did Sheila give them to me?" I demanded.

"Don't say any more, Georgie," Sheila cried. "Don't!"

Locke called me, Morse went on, ignoring the girl, "and told me the proof was ready. I sent Sheila. On the way back to my office, Sheila became panic-stricken when a traffic officer walked toward her. She put the eyes in the pocket of a man near her—you. Locke had a man of his trail her. He saw the foolish thing she had done and followed you. And you know the rest."

Morse closed his eyes and leaned back in the chair. His face was no longer red; it was a streaked purple.

"So that's it," I snapped at Locke. "You sent Pock-Mark back for me; and after I was taken care of properly he would have made delivery of the eyes, eh?"

"Yeah?" Locke sneered. "Prove it. These yaps sang, but I won't. Suppose I was sucker enough to admit bumping Benten? Ever hear of a corpus delicti, Smart Boy?" He snorted contemptuously.

(Concluded on page 112)



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(Concluded from page 111)

Mike Cahill, a puzzled frown pulling his heavy brows together, looked at me. Bunching his fists he started for Locke.

"Wait, Mike," I said.

I produced the picture of Bert Benten, stood it on the table. The bottle containing the eyes I placed beside the picture. I tossed the pin up and caught it in my hand, fingering it while I carried on. Touching the picture I laid a finger on the eyes.

"Here's the pay-off, Locke," I warned. "Courtroom pay dirt, too. J. Edgar's bright boys have recently proved that there is as marked a difference between the markings of the human eye as on the fingers. It has been said that photographing eyes will take the place of fingerprinting. In time it will. Okay! Here's a fine picture of Benten. Enlarged photos will bring out the eyes in microscopic detail. Here," I touched the bottle, "are eyes for comparison. Get it? The establishment of a corpus delicti—which after all means nothing more than the establishment of a crime."

I paused. Locke was not sneering now. He leaned forward, breathing heavily. I leaned closer to him; held out the pin. It flashed fire. I touched the picture, my finger on the stickpin in Benten's tie.

"The only way," I continued, "to identify a diamond is by micro-photos. I found the pin at your joint. It will be compared with the one in the picture. All this with Morse's confession, your record and reputation, any tidbits your pals may produce under the light hands of the boys at Headquarters builds up the State's case. You'll beat it? You'll fry, rat!"

After Cahill subdued the raging Locke with a neat right hook I phoned the order for the Hurry Buggy. As I turned from the phone I grinned at the doubting sergeant.

"Now you can apologize, you big ape, for those earlier harsh words."

Cahill smiled crookedly, and drew a folded paper from his pocket. Handing it to me he observed drily:

"I won't be needin' this now."

I laughed as I took the warrant charging one Gerald J. Jerome, press agent, of Obstructing Justice and Disorderly Conduct, and tore it up.

MOM PETRELLI'S BOY

(Concluded from page 98)

tective—grinned at each other. Then the doors burst open, and the squad-car men charged in.

When they had taken the handcuffed criminals away. Detective Joe Moran and Mom Petrelli sat down—and looked at each other—and laughed—and laughed—

"Everything is pretty well cleared up," said Moran, "all except one thing. Bugs was caught from the start. There never was any doubt of that. The only thing that had to be done was make him give himself away—and that was inevitable. But, why wasn't I tipped off? Why was I left in the dark right to the finish? That wasn't right. That wasn't fair."

"But, we hadda do it," said Mom.

"Why?"

"Looka. I know you since you are little boy, Joe. You are Irish. You show the feelings too much. If you know, you show your hand. You tip Bugs off. This way, you don't know, and he can see that you don't know."

"But what about you?"

Mom threw back her shoulders and looked at him proudly.

"Once, longa time ago, I sing at La Scala in Milan. I am an actress, Joe—and if I can't fool that Bugs Malenti, then I am no good at all. To get even for my Nick and Nicolino, I can play any part!"

Moran rose.

"Don't go," said Mom. "In couple minutes, Captain Dunn bring Nicky over. Then we have spaghetti, no—and celebrate that Bugs no longer is here."

Moran sat down.

"Mom," he said, "I thought I was trying to take care of you. It looks as though I better get you to take care of me!"

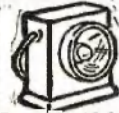
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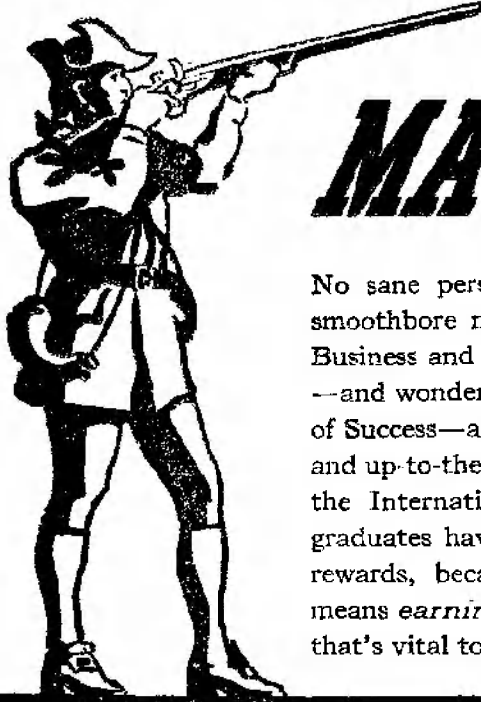
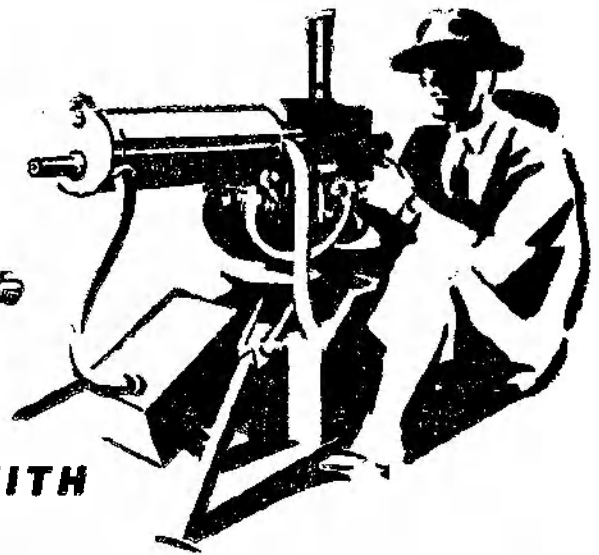
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