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Vol. 16, No. 2

CONTENTS

January, 1943

A Complete Book-Length Novel



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Featuring Tony Quinn, Nemesis of Crime

By G. WAYMAN JONES

The Black Bat, Masked Foe of the Underworld, Plays a Grim Game of Life and Death to Save America from Treachery when He Pits Himself Against the Slimy Hirelings of the Axis!..... 15

OTHER GRIPPING STORIES

THE CHINESE BOX.....C. K. M. Scanlon 6
A Boastful Crook's Clever Scheme Boomerangs

THE COLOR OF MURDER.....Samuel J. Bailey 84
Young Larkin Proves That He's of True Police Mettle

AIR RAID.....Ray Cummings 95
A Screaming Siren Saves a Man from Murder

AND

OFF THE RECORD.....A Department 100

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THE CHINESE BOX

By C. K. M. SCANLON

*A Boastful Crook's Clever
Scheme Boomerangs
when Mystery Stalks a
Night Club!*



LOGAN MARSHALL

MARSHALL was nursing his second drink at a ringside table in the Glow Worm Club before Bryan Cleborn appeared. Marshall knew a sense of relief. During the hour he had waited he had begun to wonder whether Cleborn would show up at all.

Cleborn was alone, minus the dazzling blondes he had been parading around. He saw Marshall, lifted his eyebrows in a characteristic gesture and came over to the table.

"Hello," he said. "Can't I go anywhere without seeing you? You're not trailing me, are you?"

"How'd you guess?" Marshall said. He laughed with just the right amount of amusement.

Inside him was a tiny worm of fiercer laughter. If Cleborn only knew how right he was! But how would this rich idler know that the well-groomed and well-heeled Marshall was not another rich idler spending his life in night clubs by choice, but rather a very businesslike crook who spent his time where he did because his best customers were there?

Logan Marshall had been patiently cultivating Cleborn for weeks, studying him. Sooner or later, he knew, that cultivation would bear fruit.

A waiter came up, hung poised at Cleborn's elbow.

"Telephone for you, sir. Booth Number Seven."

"See you later, Marshall," Cleborn said.

Marshall got up a few seconds behind Cleborn. Carrying his drink, he wandered aimlessly in the direction of the phone booths. He saw Cleborn go into one and shut the door. With unobtrusive speed, Marshall slid into Booth Six.

Through the insulated wall he heard the faint murmur of Cleborn's voice, but could not distinguish words. He drained the rest of his drink, letting the ice cube drop into his mouth. Then he placed the rim of the glass firmly against the wall and pressed his ear to the bottom. At once he could hear Cleborn's words.

"—not enough!" Cleborn was saying. There was anger in his smooth, controlled tones. "Listen, Spinner. I want twenty thousand by seven o'clock tomorrow evening and I don't want any argument about it. What? All right, see that you do. I'll be waiting."

There was a click as Cleborn hung

(Continued on page 8)

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THE CHINESE BOX

(Continued from page 6)

up. Marshall removed the glass and brought it back to drinking position. The ice cube was freezing his tongue and he dropped it back in the glass. After a moment he opened the door cautiously and looked out. Cleborn was disappearing in the direction of the tables.

SO CLEBORN was getting twenty thousand dollars tomorrow night! This was the break Marshall had been waiting for. There had been something a little strange about that phone conversation, about the way in which Cleborn had issued his commands. But Marshall was not worried about Cleborn's morals. If one of his blondes was making trouble and had to be bought off, that was Cleborn's worry. Marshall was interested only in knowing when and where that money would be. He had no doubt of his ability to handle Cleborn.

After a moment or two he circled around and came back from the direction of the men's room. Cleborn was back at the table and he scarcely seemed to notice Marshall's absence or return. He left earlier than usual.

Marshall made his preparations carefully next day. Not that there was much to do. It was so beautifully simple. He knew where Cleborn lived; he had been a guest at the luxurious penthouse once or twice. All he had to do was get there before seven, watch to be sure Cleborn's visitor arrived, wait until he left, and then go upstairs and collect. It was quick, painless, fool-proof.

The day dragged. He went out and tried to busy himself, but his mind was on the coming evening and impatience drove him home again. When he got back, he found the afternoon mail had brought him a small package. There was no return address on it. Wondering who had sent it to him, Marshall tore off the paper.

There was a jade box inside, a small flat Chinese box scarcely larger than a cigarette case. Its green surface

was carved into the most intricate and beautiful designs he had ever seen. It looked expensive.

He tried to open it but strangely enough it would not open. There was no lock that he could see, and a seam down one side clearly indicated an opening, but it refused to yield to all his pulling and tugging.

"Must be some hidden catch or spring," Marshall puzzled.

He began to hunt through the intricate carvings of the surface. Where Chinese dragons were carved on the larger sides he pressed the eyes experimentally, hunted in the crevices of the carving, explored the tiny mouths with their tusks and forked tongues of jade. Nothing happened.

Absorbed in this, he discovered with a start that it was six-thirty, time to go. He slipped the box into a pocket and his flat .32 automatic into another.

At a quarter to seven he was strolling past Cleborn's apartment house, on the opposite side of the street. His weeks of shadowing proved their value now. He knew by sight most of the people who belonged there. At four minutes to seven, a stranger to Marshall alighted from a cab, clutching a brief-case, and went upstairs. At thirteen minutes past seven, he emerged, hailed a cab and departed.

Marshall threw away his cigarette and crossed over. He gave his name to the doorman and waited while the flunky phoned up. There was a moment's hesitation.

"Mr. Cleborn says to go right up, sir."

There was a private elevator which opened directly into Cleborn's penthouse apartment. His living room was glassed in like a greenhouse. One set of windows looked out on a garden terrace, the other on a drop of twenty stories to the first ledge below, giving unbroken light from all directions.

Cleborn wore a brown tweed suit.

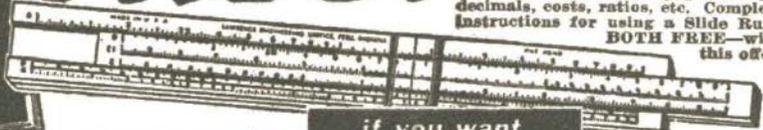
(Continued on page 10)

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THE CHINESE BOX

(Continued from page 8)

A traveling case stood on the floor with a topcoat thrown carelessly over it.

"Glad you dropped in Marshall," Cleborn said. "Gives me a chance to say good-by. Drink?"

"Scotch. You're going out of town?"

"One of those business things." He mixed the drinks with a tinkling sound, handed a glass to Marshall. "Sit down. I've got a few minutes before my train."

MARSHALL sat down. He was not nervous, but he welcomed a drink at a time like this. Not that he anticipated any trouble. Cleborn wasn't the type. He would fold up at sight of the persuader in Marshall's pocket.

Still, that drink didn't taste right. Could he be nervous after all?

A peculiar numbness was stealing through his legs. Cleborn was watching him, smiling. The man's face blurred, momentarily became double.

Then Marshall knew. His drink had been doped!

He drove his hand for his gun. How slowly it moved! It seemed agonizing hours before his fingers closed on the butt. Then it was a struggle to lift it out of the pocket. Before it cleared the cloth he knew he would not be able to press the trigger. Strange. His muscles refused to obey, yet apart from that momentary blur and double vision, his sight was clear enough and his brain was not fogged at all.

Cleborn still smiled. Now he stepped forward and took the gun from Marshall's lax fingers.

"So you see," he said, "you G-men are not so smart after all."

G-men! Did Cleborn think he was a G-man? Marshall would have laughed if his face had not been frozen immobile. He tried to speak, found that he could not manipulate his

(Continued on page 12)

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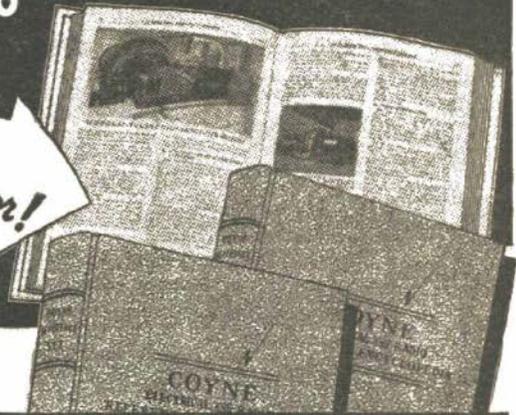
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THE CHINESE BOX

(Continued from page 10)

tongue or lips. "You cannot talk," Cleborn said, watching his struggles. "But you can hear. Listen then."

He stood in front of the helpless man, smiling down at him as he talked.

"Weeks ago I knew you were a G-man. You were clever enough to discover my—ah—shall I say 'international connections?' You probably were able to discover something about the job I have been working on here as well. But you have not been clever enough to stop it. Tonight I finish that job and I leave."

He gestured towards the suitcase.

"Tonight also, I regret to say, I must kill you and so remove any possibility of your making a further nuisance of yourself."

HE WALKED to the window and stared out.

"We will wait until dark. Then I will slide you out of the window here, where there is quite a drop. I don't think you will survive it, Mr. Marshall. I am sorry. As a matter of fact, I had planned quite a different end for you. Too bad you were not home today.

"Yesterday I mailed you a lovely little Chinese box. It must be waiting for you at home now. In that box was a time mechanism and enough high explosive to demolish you and your entire apartment quite effectively. It was set for eight o'clock. Too bad it will be wasted."

A time bomb! That innocent little box in his side pocket! Marshall's staring eyes took in the face of the clock opposite. It was three minutes to eight!

"Darkness is coming," Cleborn said. "It won't be long now."

Marshall strove to speak, strained to burst the bonds of this silent paralysis that gripped him. But why? Why should he warn Cleborn?

Either way, there was no way out for him. If he warned Cleborn, the

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spy might be able to stop the time mechanism in the remaining minute or two. But that would be no help to Marshall! In a few moments he would slide over the window sill to hurtle twenty stories onto the ledge below. Why speak indeed?

He was finished, he knew. And in his philosophy there were no regrets. How better to go than to take this spy along with him?

CLEBORN must have seen some hint of a smile in his eyes. The spy halted his pacing to stare down into the helpless man's face.

"What are you thinking, Marshall? That there is still hope? Believe me, there is not. The drug will not wear off in time for you to save yourself. And now I am almost glad the box did not get you. For I would rather do this myself and be sure—"

He broke off. From Marshall's pocket had come a clear and unmistakable click.

Marshall saw his eyes widen, saw frenzied realization burst upon him. The spy's hands flew out as though warding off a blow. An agonized cry broke from him.

"No—no!"

That was all Marshall saw or heard as the world dissolved in blinding red flame and darkness closed swiftly upon them.

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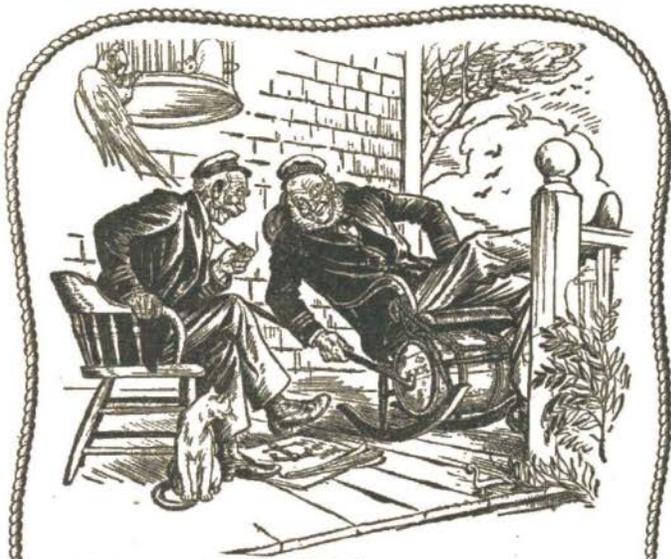
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McGrath put up a terrific battle (Chap. XI)

THE SEVENTH COLUMN

By G. WAYMAN JONES

*Tony Quinn, Mysterious Masked Nemesis of Crime,
Pits Himself Against the Slimy Hirelings of the Axis!*

CHAPTER I

Murder Pageant

THE garden estate of Paul Anderson was softly lighted. In accordance with dimout regulations, all illumination was masked. Yet the crowd had no difficulty in moving about.

There was a crowd—more than four hundred people—all of whom had purchased a thousand-dollar War

Bond as an admission fee. Servants moved about efficiently, and private and city detectives were posted at convenient places.

There was a reason for their presence because several million dollars' worth of jewels was on display. Diamond tiaras, chokers, bracelets, rings, all shimmered like living things in the shaded lights.

The accent of the party was on patriotism. A famous orchestra was in the pit before the garden stage.

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The Black Bat Plays a Grim Game of Life

There were many uniforms present. Among them was white-haired Vice Admiral Norbert Cooper, retired. Retired from active service, that is.

Each day he was at the Naval H.Q., poring over maps of enemy bases, harbors and cities. Cooper's forty years of service with the Navy had taken him to every portion of the world, and he knew those places depicted on the maps. He could have roamed the areas almost blindfolded.

The host, Paul Anderson, was a shipping executive with a talent for getting the most work out of his men under the most satisfactory conditions. His yards had suffered no strikes, no delays. Ships were sliding down the ways in such profusion as to make Hitler and his satellites gnash their teeth in anger.

At the moment, Paul Anderson wasn't about to greet his guests and everyone assumed that he was busy back stage, getting things ready for the show that was to follow a concert now in progress.

A limousine, emblazoned with the city seal, pulled up at the entrance. Patrolmen and detectives saluted the slim, soldiery figure that emerged. Police Commissioner Warner nodded a greeting, then turned to help another man from the car.

This second man was a striking figure, except for his face. He had broad shoulders, the build of a fighter, and was immaculately clad in evening clothes. He carried a cane and his eyes were blank, expressionless. He accepted Commissioner Warner's proffered arm gratefully and stepped to the sidewalk.

"Well, Tony," Warner said, "it certainly looks and sounds like quite a shindig. Got your bond? They wouldn't let Secretary Morgenthau in here without one."

Tony Quinn patted his inner pocket and grinned. It was a pleasant smile that lighted up his face, but it also

served to emphasize the horrible-looking scars which were deeply etched into the flesh around his lifeless eyes. Tony Quinn was blind. The scars came from acid thrown at him during his service as District Attorney.

THE two men walked slowly down a path, showed their bonds at the admission gate, and proceeded to mingle with the guests. Everyone knew Tony Quinn. A few shook their heads sympathetically, but most greeted him with genuine sincerity and paid no attention to the eyes which could not see or the scars which dominated his features so prominently.

"Where is Anderson?" Warner asked. "We should pay our respects to the host."

"Sorry, sir," a servant replied. "Mr. Anderson is busy back stage. We're going to have quite a show, you know."

"I wish I could see it," Tony Quinn said ruefully. "I'm depending on you, Commissioner, for the loan of your eyes."

The servant ladled out two silver goblets of punch. "I can tell you a great deal now, sir. I've had a hand in arranging the performance. First, there is a tableau of all the conquered nations, bowed under the lash of the dictators. That's what it says on the program, anyway."

"H'm!" Warner said. "Not a very pleasant beginning."

The servant laughed. "Ah—but you should see what it builds up to. These people who represent the conquered nations, rise up. In the end there's a gibbet, sir. A regular scaffold. The last scene shows old Hitler come flying down at the end of a rope. It's a dummy, of course, but say, wouldn't it be some party if the old devil was really at the end of that rope?"

"It would," Tony Quinn chuckled.

and Death to Save America from Treachery!

"A very lovely party, my friend. Thanks for the information and the refreshments. Commissioner, I'd like to stand well back, if you don't mind. I can hear the sounds, visualize what goes on better than when I'm planked down with a lot of people all around me."

Warner took his arm. "I see the very spot. Right between two big evergreens. A regular box seat, Tony. Come along. They're getting ready to start. Stage lights are turned on."

in your voice, Commissioner, that are not pleasant. This would be a field day for a gang of clever crooks."

"You're right, Tony," Warner grunted. "I am worried. We're neck deep in this war now. Only a small fraction of our people cling to old habits and beliefs. But among this small fraction are crooks. Lately, they've seemed to become more active."

"So I've been given to understand," Quinn said. "You know, I've always



THE BLACK BAT

They took up positions rather far back. Warner surveyed the crowd and noticed with satisfaction that all the lights on the estate were not extinguished.

"Tony," he said softly, "if your eyes had the ability to see, you'd be half blinded by the jewels that are here tonight. Hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth. Why, they're almost brighter than the illumination."

"And they have you worried stiff," Quinn said. "I can hear certain notes

been interested in crime. Silk reads me every newspaper story concerned with it. You're having quite a personal battle here in the city. Crime flourishes in wartime, with dimouts, blackouts and police forces short of man power."

Warner said, "That's very true, but crime doesn't usually function quite as perfectly as it has the last month or two. Not during any war in the past. Known criminals now travel around well heeled with money. The

race tracks are full of them, and they make crazy, lavish bets. Easy come, easy go stuff, but it shows they're prospering beyond all reason."

QUINN whistled softly. "Say, I didn't know it was as bad as that."

"It's worse than any newspaper reporter has ever dreamed," Warner said confidentially. "For instance, drug peddlers were deprived of their stock in trade because of the war and the difficulty of importing the real stuff that has the bang addicts want. Lately, our Narcotic Squad has found the peddlers loaded with drugs—all potent, evil stuff. They're selling at cheaper rates than ever."

"Interesting, if bad, news," Quinn commented. "What else?"

"The whole thing is organized, Tony. I feel confident of it. Jobs are bigger, the hauls better and, apparently, the crooks enjoy a larger split. We can't account for their heavily-lined pockets in any other way. To make matters even worse, we haven't been able to reach first base in running down anything definite. I . . . Oh, hello, Admiral. I was hoping I'd meet you tonight."

Vice Admiral Cooper shook hands with Warner. He spoke to Quinn and took his hand too, thrust out rather vaguely.

"Nice to find you here, Quinn," he said. "Nicer to see you have the courage to come out and face people. A lot of men who went through what you did, would be too disgusted with life to venture out of their own homes."

Quinn chuckled. "I'm afraid you have us blind people all wrong, sir. We don't give up. Not by a long shot. Lots of us are busy doing defense work—handling details a man blessed with sight couldn't do as well as someone who lives in eternal darkness. We're not asking for sympathy, sir."

"And you won't get it from me,"

Cooper laughed. "Well, I must be moving on. The show starts in a moment. I hope you enjoy it."

Cooper strode away. The orchestra started a fanfare of music and the curtain went up on the first tableau. Warner described it, but he kept looking about continually, watching to see that his detectives were on guard. Anything could happen at an affair of this kind, and Warner had a grim premonition.

The show rolled along smoothly. Noted professional actors were doing their parts well. Between scenes, the crowd chatted amiably and the orchestra played. Then the last curtain rose.

On the stage, actors threw off the fetters symbolic of their enslavement. In the center of the stage was a gibbet, a real thing too. Its rope was hoisted somewhere above the drapes decorating the top of the stage.

Suddenly that rope moved. A figure came hurtling down, a blood-curdling scream pealing from its lips. The rope stiffened. The figure bounced up once and then it started to spin. Spotlights were upon the scene and as the face flashed by, the audience first gasped, and then women began screaming.

Tony Quinn had to control himself. He saw what had happened. Those apparently lifeless eyes of his could really see—far better than Commissioner Warner's.

Warner waited only a second or two after the grisly incident. He rushed away, leaving Quinn alone. Then every light on the estate and in the huge mansion adjoining it, winked out. A jet-black darkness fell over everything.

The women screamed louder and oftener. Men began to curse and mill about. Pandemonium reigned supreme.

TONY QUINN saw something else. Something no other person on the estate noticed. In darkness, his eyes functioned as well as they did in



Frosty closed a small switch, and there was an ear-shattering roar as the explosives in the vault let go. (Chap. IV)

broad daylight. Even soft pastel-shaded colors were perfectly visible to him.

Ten seconds after the lights went out, he saw men move adroitly through the crowd. Harsh-faced men who held guns in one hand and nippers in the other. The confusion of voices and the knocking over of chairs made words quite inaudible. Women who screamed that their necklaces had been yanked off, their bracelets nipped away from their wrists, were unheard in the babel.

Unheard to everyone but Tony Quinn and he was helpless to move. He was supposed to be totally blind and keeping up that pretense meant more to him than stopping those unknown men from getting their hands on the jewels.

He heard a man shout. Quinn turned his head. A strange, bluish-white light bounced crazily along at the extreme end of the estate. Suddenly that light disappeared. The shout was cut off abruptly, too. Quinn was engrossed in trying to see around the plentiful fir trees to find out what this by-play was all about. He didn't notice a man who approached him—a man with a gun in his fist.

The weapon jabbed Quinn's middle and he twisted his head back, startled.

"Just relax, buddy," the gunman warned. "Stretch your arms way up and let's see how much dough you carry in your pockets."

Quinn returned to acting his part of a blind man. "I don't understand. What's going on? I'm blind. I can't see anything. I . . ."

"Shut up or you'll be dead," the gunman warned. "Reach, I said."

Quinn raised his arms high. The gunman started to go through his pockets, found a well-filled wallet and gave a grunt of satisfaction. Then he spotted a wrist watch on Quinn's wrist. A very special watch without a crystal. The figures were of raised platinum so that Quinn could let his fingers rest on them and know the

time. That watch impressed many persons with the fact of his total blindness and besides, it was worth a great deal of money.

The gunman reached into his pocket and drew out the nippers with which every crook seemed to be provided. Unbuckling that watch would have been a simple matter, but the destructive impulses of this gunman's nature required him to cut it off.

He started to slip the nippers beneath the gold strap. Quinn's hands came down. One struck the gunman's wrist and the automatic fell to the ground. The other hand closed around the crook's throat. Quinn's fingers moved skilfully, seeking a vulnerable nerve. He pressed hard. The crook gave a strangled gasp and went limp.

Quinn looked around. The confusion was still paramount. A few flashlights winked briefly, but the detectives who carried them were quickly disposed of by the invasion of crooks.

Quinn hoisted the unconscious man over one shoulder, turned and sped rapidly toward a side street bordering the estate. A street seldom used by anything like heavy traffic. Pitfalls which would have tripped a man equipped with ordinary sight were plainly visible to Tony's uncanny eyes. He avoided a fallen chair, veered around a pile of stage props and finally reached the street.

It was bordered by thick shrubs. He slid the gunman beneath one of these, bent over him and used his fist once—very effectively. That gunman wouldn't move again for at least an hour.

This done, he raced back to his original position, assumed the role of a blind man again and began to wander about, cane outstretched, his voice pleading for assistance.

The lights came on shortly. Then it began all over again when the frightened audience saw the grisly figure hanging from that gibbet. Quinn was close enough to recognize the

contorted features. Paul Anderson had played his last role of host. He'd been hanged on his own gibbet.

Someone had the presence of mind to rush backstage and drop the curtain. Someone else began clamoring for a physician. Gradually, the excitement died away. Grim-faced detectives moved about.

CHAPTER II

The Man in Black



COMMISSIONER WARNER found Tony Quinn shortly after. Warner had beads of sweat on his face. His shirt front was soiled, his tie undone.

"It happened as I feared it would," he groaned. "Not even the presence of all those detectives stopped them. Tony, the most colossal job of robbery has been committed. It's backed up with murder."

"Murder?" Quinn said. "Good heavens, Commissioner! Who was killed? And why?"

"Paul Anderson. It was done so skilfully, Tony, that I'm alarmed. For the first time in my life I'm afraid. The crooks killed Anderson only for one reason—to create confusion that would cover up the robbery."

"Was he . . . hanging from that gibbet?" Quinn asked. "I heard someone half screaming something like that."

"That's it. Originally a dummy, fashioned in the likeness of Hitler, was supposed to hang from that rope. It was the finale of the stage show. A dummy had been propped up on staging high above the platform. At the proper moment a stage hand pulled a light rope and the dummy was to have dropped down. But when the stage hand followed instructions, it was Paul Anderson who was up there

on the staging, with the rope around his neck."

"Ghastly!" Quinn cried. "It's horrible, Commissioner. And you say that was done to create such confusion that the crooks could mingle with the guests and rob them?"

"Yes. The women—men, too—all screamed at the sight of Anderson's body hanging from the rope. He screamed, too—rather late. I haven't had time to complete my investigation, but I think Anderson was knocked unconscious before they placed him on the staging. The sudden drop awoke him, an instant before his neck was broken. Tony, practically every woman was stripped of her jewels. Men were struck with revolver butts and robbed. It's amazing that no more than two deaths resulted."

"Two?" Quinn gasped. "Was there someone besides Anderson?"

"Unfortunately, yes. Admiral Cooper's body was discovered behind a clump of bushes. Seems he must have tangled with one of the crooks and in the mêlée his neck was also broken. Sorry I can't take you home. I'll have one of my men . . . here comes Captain McGrath now. I'll have him take you home. McGrath looks red-faced enough to resemble a boiled lobster."

Captain McGrath saluted, and then eyed Tony Quinn with open malevolence.

Warner didn't notice this.

He said, "Captain, take Mr. Quinn home. Use my car out front. If you don't want to leave, detail another man to accompany him."

"I'll do it myself," McGrath snapped. "I want to talk to Quinn, anyway. Come on . . . here's my arm."

Quinn took it and walked beside McGrath. The detective captain moved fast, and several times Quinn stumbled and almost fell. McGrath just glared and kept going until he reached the path leading out of the

estate. It was thickly lined with bushes.

Very deliberately, Captain McGrath disengaged Tony Quinn's arm and stepped rapidly to one side. He was pressed flat against the bushes.

"Come over here, Mr. Quinn," he said. "I think I just saw one of those thugs . . ."

QUINN blundered in the general direction of the spot where McGrath stood. He could have gone straight to him, but Quinn knew that McGrath could have wished for nothing better than that. Therefore, Quinn bungled into the bushes, gave a startled cry and fell down.

McGrath helped him up with a muttered apology and practically dragged him to the street. Radio cars and three emergency trucks were pulled up haphazardly. A cordon had been thrown around the estate, but McGrath and Quinn were passed through without any trouble.

McGrath helped Quinn get into an official limousine and the detective captain manned the wheel himself. He pulled away with screeching tires, which act emphasized the anger that burned within him.

McGrath uttered not a word during the two-mile trip across town, but when he reached the quiet, darkened street where Tony Quinn lived, McGrath pulled up to the curb.

Quinn, his blank eyes staring straight ahead, fumbled for the door latch and moved it.

"Thank you very much, Captain."

"Now wait a minute," McGrath snapped. "This ain't your house and you know it."

Quinn seemed startled. "But, Captain, when you stopped, I naturally thought . . ."

"Yeah . . . you naturally thought. We're a couple of blocks from your house, Quinn, but I stopped here because I've got something on my mind."

"Really, Captain. Isn't that a bit odd? Unless it happens to concern

what occurred at Anderson's party. I can't see how a detective could possibly think of anything else at a time like this."

"Yeah, it's the party all right, but mostly it's you. Listen, Quinn, I'm through stalling. What I saw tonight, washed you and me up—for good."

Quinn held his breath. Perhaps McGrath had witnessed the brief fight with that gunman. But McGrath's next few words indicated that he suspected no such thing.

"Two men were murdered at that party," McGrath went on belligerently. "Two swell guys—important men. Nearly fifty women were robbed of jewels worth a fortune. You know that, don't you?"

"I didn't have the details," Quinn protested feebly.

"Well, you got them now. So here is what I'm driving at: I never did think you were blind. You, Tony Quinn, are the Black Bat. You're the guy who goes around in a hood and a cape. You're the man crooks are more afraid of than every cop in the United States, and I'll even include the F.B.I. You fight those rats with their own weapons, and they don't like it."

"Captain," Quinn said very patiently, "you have accused me of being the Black Bat many, many times. You even tricked me into having expert eye doctors come upon me suddenly and submit me to the most exacting scrutiny. They told you I was blind, that I'd never see again—and still you're not satisfied."

"And I never will be, until I corner the Black Bat, rip off that hood he wears and show him up for you, Quinn. I thought I was hot about doing that before. Sure, the Black Bat has helped me many times. I'm grateful. Maybe before, if I did trap the Black Bat, I might have reneged on my promise to throw him into a cell, but now—so help me—it won't be a cell. I'll put a bullet right between your eyes."

A WORRIED frown showed on Quinn's face as he turned toward McGrath. "Really, Captain," he said, "I've never heard you speak this way before. I can't comprehend what has caused you to turn against me like this. Of course, I'm not the Black Bat, but I often enjoyed your little game of trying to prove I was."

"So you want to know what made me change, do you? Okay! You didn't have to ask because that's why I stopped here. Just to tell you. I think you *are* the Black Bat. I think you can see as well as I do—even better. I think the presence of the Black

At the curb again, Quinn opened the door of the car and got out, fumbling with his cane. He turned back to face the car.

"Good night, Captain, and thank you for the ride home. I hope this time you will really go to work on me and satisfy yourself that I am not the Black Bat."

Quinn turned and walked slowly to the gate. His hand found the latch, opened the gate and he tapped his way along to the porch. Lights were turned on and Silk Kirby hurried down the steps to meet him and offer his assistance.

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Bat at that party would have prevented bloodshed, even sent those thugs running for their lives. See what I'm getting at?"

Quinn nodded somberly. "Yes, I do. If I am the Black Bat and stood there without interfering with those murderers and thieves, I do deserve to merit your hatred. I agree—the Black Bat *might* have done a great deal of damage to those crooks, perhaps saved a life or two. If I am the Black Bat, then I do warrant your hatred. But I'm not the Black Bat. Now please drive me home."

"Okay." McGrath pulled away from the curb. "I just wanted to lay my cards on the table. Let me warn you—from this minute on, I'll do everything I can to prove you see with those eyes—prove you are the Black Bat and that you're a coward."

Silk was thin, of medium height. He had small, somewhat shifty eyes and a loyalty for Tony Quinn that knew no bounds.

"That was Captain McGrath," he said. "What's eating him, sir?"

"He thinks," Quinn answered, "that I'm the Black Bat, and he is highly agitated over that fact. Seems McGrath believes the Black Bat should not have stood aside and allowed two murders and a great number of robberies to take place."

"At the Anderson affair?" Silk asked. "I heard a radio broadcast about it. Are we . . . in it, sir?"

"Right up to our chins," Quinn answered. "I don't reject invitations like that. After you close the door, stay on guard and watch for McGrath. He's really peeved this time, and I'd put nothing past him."

Inside the house, Quinn dropped his pose as a blind man and sped to a telephone. He dialed a number and a booming voice answered.

"Butch," Quinn said, "listen carefully. Drive your car to the street that bounds the east side of the Anderson estate. Stop at the third telephone pole. Choke the engine so your car will stall right there. You'll find a number of policemen and detectives around. Put on a good act. When you get the chance, slip into the bushes and you'll find a man—unconscious. Load him into the car, bring him to my place here. Blindfold him, stuff his ears and keep blowing cigarette smoke into his face. He must not see, hear or smell. I don't want him to have the slightest inkling of where he is. Not even if he still appears to be unconscious."

"Right," Butch O'Leary said and hung up.

SIGHING, Tony Quinn leaned back in his chair. He made one more phone call and asked Carol Baldwin to come over via a secret route. Silk helped him off with his evening clothes, assisted him in donning a pair of tweed trousers, a sport shirt open at the throat and a smoking jacket.

Quinn tapped his cane as he moved across the study floor. The curtains were raised. Curiosity-filled eyes might be observing him so he retained his pose as a blind man. That pose meant the difference between life and death to him.

For Tony Quinn was the Black Bat, that mysterious figure which roamed the underworld at times, or merged with the shadows surrounding the most lavish estate—or turned up inexplicably at some meeting place of crooks.

The hooded and caped figure was spoken of in whispers and with a note of dread. The figure could, on occasion actually seem as if it were in full flight, with webbed wings bear-

ing down on a fresh victim.

Gangland feared the Black Bat because he fought them with their own kind of stealth and violence. He paid no more attention to laws than they did, and he possessed an uncanny ability to appear at the wrong place at exactly the right time.

Tony Quinn had once really been blind. For many months he lived in darkness. It all began the day he had been prosecuting a dangerous criminal and in a struggle to destroy evidence with acid, a corrosive substance had been hurled into his face by crooks. Tony Quinn had gone instantly blind.

He was possessed of independent means which enabled him to travel around the world searching for a surgeon who would attempt an operation to restore his sight. That surgeon was not found until one night, when he'd given up all hope, Carol Baldwin had come to him.

Carol Baldwin with her steady blue eyes, her light-colored hair and the face of a goddess. She had led Tony Quinn to a small midwestern town where her father lay dying as a result of a gangster's bullet. He sacrificed portions of his eyes so that they might be grafted to Tony Quinn's sightless orbs. This was done successfully. And Tony Quinn had seen again—seen with the eyes of a dead man.

They were uncanny eyes, too, because they could penetrate darkness. During his months of complete blindness, Quinn's other faculties had increased to recompense him for the loss of his sight. His touch became extremely sensitive, his hearing wonderfully acute.

All this had enabled him to operate against criminals with methods they'd never encountered before. He had become the Black Bat and Carol Baldwin was one of his three aides.

Silk Kirby had come into his life before he'd gone blind. Silk was an ex-confidence man with a smooth persuasive tongue, a complete knowledge

of crooks and the ability to disguise himself fairly well.

The third member of the exclusive little band was hulking Butch O'Leary. His real name was Jack, but that had been long since lost. Butch fitted him far better for he was huge, powerful and faithful.

The Black Bat and his band were ready to go into operation now. Tony Quinn, staring blankly into his fireplace, realized he might find the toughest assignment of his career waiting. The manner by which the robbery and the murders at Paul Anderson's party had been carried off indicated the cleverness of these crooks—of the men who directed every move they made.

And to complicate matters, Captain McGrath was on the warpath and McGrath could be aggressive and sometimes obnoxious. This, Tony Quinn felt, would be one of those times.

CHAPTER III

Crash Delivery



POLICE COMMISSIONER WARNER appeared about an hour later. Quinn was in his study. Butch hadn't returned yet, and Tony Quinn was somewhat worried.

Carol waited in the secret laboratory while Silk admitted the Police Commissioner and took his hat and coat.

Warner sat down, lit a cigar and said nothing for a moment or two. Quinn opened the conversation.

"You are certainly worried, Commissioner. I don't have to see to know that."

"Yes, Tony, I am. I can't figure this case out. It was done so skillfully and plotted so perfectly. Listen—someone lured Paul Anderson off the estate. He was knocked uncon-

scious and tied up. He was taken back stage while no one was around, propped on the rafters in place of the dummy, and then allowed to drop and be hanged instead of the effigy which was meant to dangle before the audience."

"Sounds like an inside job," Quinn frowned. "Someone knew the layout and every detail of the pageant."

"But who, connected with a man like Anderson, would pull a job of that kind?" Warner objected. "Let me go on. Every one of my men had a certain position which he was to maintain. The crooks came quietly and unobtrusively. They got my men out of the way before they could start opposing them. They swept down on the audience just as the figure dropped to the gibbet and as every light went out. They mingled with the guests and apparently each crook had a certain objective which he accomplished."

"You have no reason to believe the robbery was only an attempt to shield or motivate the murder of Anderson?" Quinn asked.

"Hardly. Every attention was placed on the robbery and in connection with a haul that runs into the thousands, murder becomes incidental to big shot crooks."

"Nor to motivate the murder of Admiral Cooper?"

"Tony," Warner said sharply, "do you know something?"

Quinn shook his head negatively. "Nothing. I only surmise these things and mull over them. The way you asked me that leads me to believe there is something suspicious about Cooper's death."

"Suspicious is a mild word," Warner said. "Just as the lights went out, I happened to be looking due north. I saw a gleaming mark—like an X—floating all by itself through the darkness. Then it disappeared. I've tried to account for this without any luck at all. Then, too, Cooper had a broken neck. That came about by his fall, I

think. However, his right arm was also broken, and someone removed his dress coat and took it away."

"Removed his coat?" Quinn gasped. "Good heavens, why? Did he carry confidential papers in his coat pocket?"

"I've checked and he did not. Positively not. There was nothing in that coat worth stealing except for the small gold content of his medals—peanuts compared to the loot from the other persons present. Tony, I came to ask you a question."

"I'm eagerly listening, Commissioner."

"You are blind, but your hearing is better than anyone's I know. Did you hear any sounds which might become a clue? A voice—words—orders, anything?"

"Nothing," Quinn sighed. "The confusion began and within seconds turned into a bedlam. There were no single sounds standing out above the din."

WARNER closed his eyes in resignation. "I'm not too disappointed," he said. "I talked to Captain McGrath a short time ago. You probably know what it was about."

"Indeed I do. McGrath, as usual, believes me to be the Black Bat. Silly premise, but he sticks to it. I'll say that for him."

"McGrath maintains that if you are the Black Bat, you violated the least bit of confidence he might give you, Tony. He claims you should have pitched in and landed at least one or two of the crooks."

"If I were the Black Bat," Quinn answered regretfully, "I would have tried to do exactly that."

Warner arose. "You know what I think about that, Tony. Sometimes I do believe you might be the Black Bat, and then I think of that acid—your eyes—the examinations you've had and I know how wrong I must be. However, very often I come to you for advice and give you certain

information. The Black Bat has more than once taken advantage of such information. If that is coincidence, I like it and I shall continue to ask your advice."

"Thank you, Commissioner. If I can't pass such dope along to the Black Bat, I can keep thinking it over in my mind and sometimes I make sense out of what seems to be confusion. I'll give this case some thought, too. Anyway that I can help. . . ."

"I know." Warner started for the door. "Only, this time, I haven't much to offer. Perhaps I'll see you later and if McGrath makes too much trouble, let me know. Good night, Tony—and thanks very much."

Silk waited at the door until Warner's car pulled away. Then he made his way into the study and began straightening up a table beside Quinn's chair.

"I don't like it, sir. Warner is getting too suspicious and McGrath is ready to try any kind of a trick. Remember, sir, that if McGrath does catch you, it means prison. The Black Bat hasn't exactly followed the routine and stupidity of the law, sir."

Quinn laughed, "We'll worry about that when the proper time comes. Have you heard from Butch?"

"Yes, sir. He's in the lab now—with a prisoner. I talked to him over the independent phone system. He had a bit of trouble getting the man, sir. So many officers about."

"Draw the shades, Silk. Then stand by in case McGrath comes snooping around."

After the shades were drawn, Quinn arose, thrust his cane under one arm and walked with resolute steps toward a wall lined with bookshelves. These parted when he touched a hidden control and he passed through a small door and into a large, well equipped laboratory.

Carol Baldwin met him, but she only took both his hands and held them tightly. She said nothing and indicated, with a nod of her pretty

head, the crook whom Quinn had overpowered at the Anderson party.

Butch had the man seated in a chair. His face was swathed in bandages held by adhesive. Butch kept blowing cigarette smoke into his nostrils.

"Don't worry about him," Butch said. "I got his ears plugged with chewing gum. But say, there ought to be some other way to keep him from using his smeller. My mouth is on fire from smoking so many cigarettes."

QUINN grinned. "It's essential that he doesn't detect the odor of chemicals in this lab. I'll take care of that. Carol, you and Butch move well back out of the prisoner's range of vision. Put out all lights except a spot which is to be focussed on his face."

While the lighting arrangements were being made, Quinn stepped to a steel locker and withdrew a black hood. He put this over his head. A cape covered his smoking jacket and he knew the lighting effects would prevent his trousers from being seen.

Then he wadded a bit of cotton, grasped it with forceps and touched it to a yellow liquid contained in a glass-stoppered bottle. He stepped up to the prisoner and lightly daubed his nostrils with the chemical.

"That," he said, "will neutralize any odors. Ready, Butch—and you, Carol? Keep out of sight now."

Quinn used the same forceps to remove most of the chewing gum wadded into the crook's ears. He unwrapped the gauze from his face and then stepped back while the prisoner adjusted his eyes to the brilliant spot that blazed into them.

He said nothing and Quinn sized him up, saw a ratty-faced crook with sallow cheeks and cold, malevolent eyes. So far as a civilized human being was concerned, this man was no



Quinn's arm tightened around the crook's throat. He pressed hard. The crook gave a strangled gasp and went limp. (Chap 1)

prize. He was a total stranger to the Black Bat, who knew almost every crook worthy of attention in this city.

"Well?" the Black Bat asked in a rasping voice.

The effects were startling. The crook squirmed, found himself too securely tied and then gave a whining cry before he spoke.

"You don't have to tie me up, boss. I know I didn't do so hot, but I was stripping a fat leather off some blind guy when I was slugged. Anybody could get into a mess like that."

"But not get out of it," the Black Bat said, and held his breath.

This thug was under the impression that he was now in the presence of someone he called "Boss." Ordinarily, a crook of this type wouldn't talk even under an old-fashioned rubber hose treatment, but right now he might open up.

"Just give me one more chance," the crook begged. "Accidents happen to us all. I'm ready to carry out any of the other jobs. Just don't send me away."

"Do you know what happens when I send you away?"

"No. None of us do. But I got an idea it ain't much fun. I'm on the level, honest. Just tell me what you want done and I'll go out and finish the job off right."

"Ah, yes," the Black Bat said softly. "But we do not brook failure. Suppose I do give you another chance. What job would you pick?"

"The hardest one," the crook promised. "I'd do it alone if you said so. Just give me a crack at the Leyden-Smith thing. I'll show you I can crack a safe—and get away with it, too. Of course, it won't be so easy alone. A joint like that has lots of guards around and they'll shoot."

"You'd blunder into the first fusillade." The Black Bat carried on the deception. "No, I don't think you'd do for a job of that kind. Perhaps you have other ideas?"

The crook bowed his head. "I get it. You don't have to draw pictures. I'm at the bottom of the heap. Okay . . . I'll start dishing out the dream stuff. But I'll work back up. You'll see I'm worth a seventy-percent cut. I'll work hard. I don't care how hard or what chances I have to take. A guy can't make a living any more, unless he works for you."

"Ah, yes. Such faith and enterprise must be rewarded. As you say, it is the bottom of the pile until you prove yourself worthy. I . . ."

SUDDENLY the crook tried to pull away from the chair to which he was tied. "There's something screwy," he screamed. "You don't talk like . . . him. You don't talk like any of the boys. Where am I? What's the idea of this light. Why don't you show yourself?"

There was no answer. The crook began to sweat profusely and kept trying to break his bonds. Then a very soft voice whispered in his ear and two hands encircled his throat.

"You're quite right, my cheating, murderous little rat," the Black Bat said. "I'm not your boss. I have no further use for you, because I recognize the type to which you belong. You'd never talk or lead me one step further toward the outfit for whom you work. Therefore, it's time for us to part."

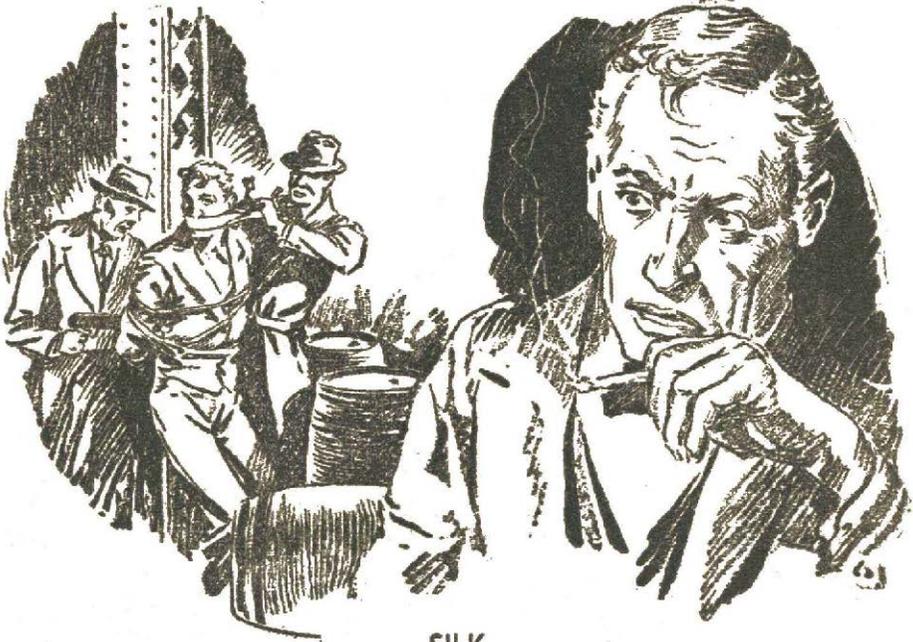
"Who—who are you?" the crook gulped. "Don't choke me! Don't kill me!"

"I'm not going to choke or kill you," the Black Bat answered. "Neither is necessary. And just to launch you into some pleasant dreams, I'm the Black Bat."

"The Black Bat?"

The crook's scream was cut off as powerful fingers squeezed certain nerves. He wilted forward, sagging against the ropes. The Black Bat stripped off his regalia and called Carol and Butch over.

"He'll be unconscious for some time.



SILK

Butch, put him back in the car and take him to Captain McGrath's home. Dump him through a window at"—Quinn consulted his watch—"exactly eleven-fifty. Then get away—fast."

Butch grinned broadly, untied the man from the chair and hoisted him over one shoulder. He moved toward a trapdoor, dropped into a tunnel which led beneath the house and the estate to a small garden house far at the rear. From there, Butch could make his way through the darkness to where he'd parked the car.

This secret tunnel enabled the Black Bat to come and go as he wished and gave his aides ready access to the house. Quinn sat down on a leather davenport beside Carol. He looked at her warmly and then took both her hands in his own.

"Darling, do you recognize the possibilities in this case? In what our crooked prisoner had to say?"

Carol nodded. "An unusual band of crooks. That lug was wide awake and in full possession of his senses when he started to talk. Therefore, the surroundings at the headquarters

of the gang cannot be much different than they were here. Pitch darkness, a spot light and a leader who remains in the background. Only the difference between your voice and his gave the thing away."

"As astute as ever," Quinn chuckled. "You're right, of course. Yet somehow, Carol, I have a feeling there is more than just plain robbery behind this. Two men died tonight. One was a shipping expert, almost indispensable to our war effort. The other was an admiral who knew every port, every shipyard and every enemy ship builder in the world. Why should only these two have been murdered?"

"Tony," Carol cautioned, "don't let spy scares run off with your cool judgment. I know what happened at the party. Anderson might have been the most convenient person to kill and throw the audience into a turmoil. There was method in that. The screams and cries of horror drowned out the further yells as jewels were hacked off women's wrists and throats. The purpose of the murder was to cover up the crime."

"All right, I'll grant that. But there's also Cooper."

"Who," Carol reminded him, "was an old sea dog with more fight than sense in his makeup. He might have tackled one of the crooks and met more than his match."

TONY QUINN laughed grimly. "You're a pretty good ego destroyer, Carol," he said. "Figure these two things out now. The weird bluish-white light which bobbed across the estate and the theft of Admiral Cooper's dress coat."

"I wish I could answer that as easily," Carol said. "While Commissioner Warner talked to you, I listened through the microphone receiver and heard him. There's no logical reason why Admiral Cooper's coat should have been stolen—yet. The bluish-white light is also unexplainable right now."

"Well, at least our prisoner did spill some dirt before he got wise to me. Did you ever hear of the Leyden-Smith plant, Carol?"

"Never," she replied.

"Then I'll tell you. It's not a large firm, but it specializes in making highly sensitive instruments for the Army and Navy. Instruments made of precious metals and held as strict military secrets. Apparently the gang intends to raid this factory. A defense plant, the destruction of which would be a feather in the cap of any spy."

"There you go again," Carol cautioned. "You're so intent in making a spy case of this that you overlook other possibilities. With your own lips you said the plant manufactured their goods from precious metals. Crooks have a peculiar tendency to go after precious metals, my dear."

"All right," Quinn grunted. "Maybe it is just another bunch of clever crooks, but that rat mentioned a seventy-percent cut. Did you ever hear of a mob boss handing over seventy percent of the take to some heel like

that? No—never."

"Why don't you visit this Leyden-Smith firm and find out?" Carol asked.

"Oh, I'm going to do that all right. Somehow, I have a hunch the job is set for the very near future. Possibly even tonight. Meanwhile, you have work to do. Scout around and see what you can pick up about Paul Anderson and Admiral Cooper. Whom they were seen with last—where they went before the party. Get going now before you demand the privilege of watching the factory with me."

Carol picked up her purse and gloves. "I'm on my way. But, Tony, just why did you have Butch deliver that crook to Captain McGrath's house at a certain moment?"

Quinn said, "I need an alibi. McGrath is out for blood this time. I know he'll be home at eleven-fifty. McGrath is a creature of habit. Even when he is working hard on a case, he always goes home for a few minutes just before midnight and drinks his wife's coffee. He can't stand any other kind."

After Carol departed, Quinn returned to his study and told Silk what had happened. At precisely eleven-fifty, he phoned Captain McGrath's home and got him on the wire.

"Good evening, Captain," he said. "I called to see if you had tracked down the Black Bat yet."

"No, but when I do, you'll know about it. Don't worry—when a cell door slams in your face, you'll realize the Black Bat is finished. Is that all you wanted?"

"Why, no, Captain. During our ride tonight, I—" A crash interrupted him.

"Hang on!" McGrath cried. "Holy Nellie, I think there's an . . ."

Quinn grinned and quietly hung up. Ten minutes later the phone buzzed and Butch was on the wire.

"I did it okay, sir. Tossed the guy right through McGrath's window."

"Fine work," Quinn commented. "I was talking to McGrath when it hap-

pened. What was that horrible crash I heard?"

"Well, you see, it's like this. I didn't like that guy at all. Could have wrung his neck and enjoyed it. Now, I don't care about McGrath much either, so I kinda forgot that McGrath's living room window was closed. I just heaved the guy through the glass. Anything else, sir?"

"Come down here," Quinn laughed. "Perhaps you'll have a chance to chuck a few more crooks through plate-glass windows."

CHAPTER IV

Criminal Raid



BUTCH returned and with Silk also present in the secret laboratory, Tony Quinn issued orders.

"The gang we're trying to break up has diversified talents. They range all the way from ped-

dling narcotics to robbery and murder. Perhaps we'll discover kidnaping and blackmail thrown in."

"It's going to be hard getting at them through all those angles," Silk said somberly.

"You're quite right," Quinn agreed. "We'll have to adopt a policy of whitening them down and at the same time try to discover who has organized them. Who would be willing to hand over seventy percent of the profits to the men who do the work?"

"Show me a couple of rats like the one I heaved through McGrath's window, and I'll get some results," Butch promised. "Either that, or McGrath will be handed more guys to pinch. I forgot to tell you—I put a note on that punk. It said he was one of the mob who stuck up the Anderson party."

"Good!" Quinn nodded. "I hope my phone call, synchronized with your

delivery of the prisoner, will make McGrath's doubts return. He's just sore enough to handicap me every time I make a move. Now let's get busy."

Silk and Butch brightened perceptibly. They were always ready to move into battle.

Quinn said, "Silk, one of the most vicious forms of crime is the distribution of narcotics, so I'll give you an assignment to put a stop to it. There is a certain low dive known as the Anchor and Hull. A cheap night club fashioned like the hold of a ship. It is frequented by men and women who are addicts. A place where these crooks who peddle the stuff could flourish. You are to give them some competition."

"You mean sell those snow birds the real stuff?" Silk gasped.

"Oh, no," Quinn answered. "We violate the law very often, but we don't peddle poison. You are a salesman deluxe. You take orders only and at a price so low the addicts are bound to flock your way. Such competition will be investigated by this mob and . . . well, you may discover something about them. If you live."

Silk snorted, "I'll live all right. Better get started at once, sir. Places like the Anchor and Hull do their best business about this time of night."

Silk disappeared, spent twenty minutes in his room and materially altered his appearance. Silk was no master of disguise, but during his days as a confidence man he had developed two personalities which he actually lived when he used them.

One was a stuffed-shirt type, calculated to lure unwary visitors to a big city. The other was a direct opposite, being that of a tanned, cheaply dressed person obviously fresh from the country. For this particular job, Silk selected the former disguise.

Meanwhile Quinn and Butch made other plans.

"Silk may be a bit impetuous about

this, Butch," Quinn said. "Therefore, I think you'd better follow him and make sure things go right. He is not to know of your presence and you must not interfere, unless the going gets difficult and dangerous for Silk. Then—bring me back someone who looks as though he might talk if subjected to the proper persuasion."

"Right," Butch said. "I'll slip out of the tunnel and pick up Silk's trail when he leaves. You going to be busy, too?"

"I hope so," Quinn replied. "From the way our recent prisoner talked, an attack will be made on the Leyden-Smith Company very soon. Perhaps tonight. I'm going there. The three of us ought to be able to do something to put a crimp in the plans of this gang."

AFTER Butch departed, Quinn donned the costume of the Black Bat. He wished that Carol had returned, but obviously she was having difficulty in checking on Paul Anderson's movements just before his death.

The more he thought of the case, the stronger became his hunch that something besides plain out-and-out robbery lay behind it. The Black Bat raveled over the idea that perhaps this gang was organized and directed by Nazi agents.

He shook his head at the thought, however. Even American crooks would reject Nazi leadership as something lower than their own gutter-deep methods. Yet the murder of Anderson and Cooper, both important to the war effort, and the intended robbery of the Leyden-Smith firm smacked of something an enemy agent might think up.

Offsetting this theory, however, was the obvious fact that the profits from the garden party robbery were tremendous. Other men present were quite necessary to winning the war, and no attempt had been made on their lives.

The projected Leyden-Smith job

didn't actually bolster the theory of spy intrigue. That firm really did have a vast amount of precious metal on hand—a lure for any band of crooks.

The Black Bat entered the tunnel and made his way to the garden house. His uncanny eyes penetrated the darkness, saw that the side street was clear and he hurried to where a coupe was parked. He climbed in, removed the black hood and replaced it with a wide-brimmed hat.

The hood was a dead giveaway and might be seen. The hat covered his features well enough, especially the tell-tale scars around his eyes—scars with which every police officer in the city was familiar.

The Black Bat was on dangerous ground now. With Captain McGrath hot on his trail, impelled by a sullen hatred for the black-robed figure, the Black Bat might find himself trapped. From now on, every move must be made with great care.

The Leyden-Smith plant wasn't big. Just a two-story frame building located on the outskirts with a large cleared space all around it. About eighty men were employed in the place.

It was studded with spotlights which illuminated every approach, and the Black Bat, hidden in the darkness, saw uniformed guards moving slowly about.

The firm showed no reluctance about paying many men to keep their store of precious metals safe. The Black Bat counted six guards on the sides of the building he was able to keep in view.

He lay prone, watching the place. Nothing might happen tonight. If it didn't, the Black Bat intended to see that the head of the firm knew about the intended raid.

Those darkness-piercing eyes of his fell upon one guard who stood at the near corner of the building. There was something wrong with the picture he presented. Nothing that regis-

tered on the Black Bat's brain, but still he had a feeling that it existed.

The uniform fitted the man perfectly. He acted just like a guard who was utterly bored by his assignment and yet . . . things were not quite right.

The Black Bat suddenly realized what it was. The uniform was trim, made of dark-blue cloth with a Sam Browne belt and holstered gun.

The Sam Browne belt was hooked over the left shoulder, instead of the right. A trifling detail, but it loomed big in the Black Bat's mind. It meant that this man was unaccustomed to wearing a belt of this type.

IT HAD occurred to the Black Bat that looting a modern vault would take time, during which the burglars must have some kind of protection. What if the real guards had been quietly disposed of and members of the gang had taken their places?

The Black Bat crawled a little closer until he was sheltered behind a small shed. The man with the improperly fitted Sam Browne belt stood no more than fifteen yards away. Apparently his job was to guard a small door, for he remained at his post while the other guards kept roaming about the yard.

The Black Bat quietly drew one of his automatics, placed it on the ground and found a fairly long stick of wood. Using this, he pushed the gun into the open where an overhead light would shine on it. The blue-black finish of the weapon reflected that light quite brilliantly.

The Black Bat wanted to draw this guard within striking distance, and nothing intrigues a crook quite so much as a modern, efficient-looking gun. A heap of gold wouldn't have attracted a crook more than this automatic.

The guard kept turning his head, watching the lighted area and the darkness beyond it. The Black Bat saw him give a start, hesitate, and



McGRATH

then move rapidly toward the gun. When he was sure that his eyes were not playing tricks, he actually sprinted toward the weapon.

As he bent down, the Black Bat took four long strides toward him. His hands fastened around the guard's throat and squeezed. There wasn't the least bit of a struggle, not a whimper of sound. He carried the man behind the shed and searched him.

Now he was satisfied that this guard was an imposter. He carried a smaller gun in a shoulder holster besides the heavier weapon strapped on his hip. No real guard would do such a thing.

The Black Bat waited for an opportune moment and then dashed across the lighted area, reached the small door, and breathed a great deal easier when he discovered that it was unlocked. A moment later, he stood just inside a large workroom.

Now his acute hearing served him very well. He could detect the rumble of several voices and the click of metal against metal. It came from the front of the building, and he made his way in that direction.

Moving carefully, and yet with all the speed he dared risk, he reached

a door half of which was made of white glass. Light shone through this.

At any moment the guard he'd disposed of, might be found. Things would happen fast then. The gun he'd used to lure the guard with was in his hand now.

He wrapped fingers around the doorknob tightly and turned it. The spring clicked just a trifle and made his blood run cold. But those inside were too intent on their task to notice it.

Finally he managed to open the door a crack. He saw a large vault of the most modern design. Two men were kneeling in front of it applying electric drills to the surface. Another was preparing a fuse while a fourth held a thin vial of colorless fluid.

Before the Black Bat could swing into action, the drillers finished their work and the man with the vial, began filling the drill holes. The fuse was attached. A fifth man, coarse-featured and yet striking in appearance, gave quiet orders.

Someone said, "Okay, Frosty," and the Black Bat knew where that crook had gotten his nickname. His hair was an odd white color, like frost in the early autumn.

THE crooks moved away from the vault and Frosty spoke. "When she blows, work fast. This is bound to make a lot of noise and the boys outside may not be able to stall the cops very long. Get the bags set now and as soon as the smoke clears away, dig into the safe and clean her out. Remember we might find a quarter, or even a half million dollars' worth of stuff in there."

The Black Bat looked around, found the wires which led into the office and snipped them with a small instrument he carried. The room was immediately plunged into darkness although lights outside the building still burned.

The Black Bat stepped through the

door, both guns ready. The crooks couldn't see him, but he was able to distinguish each one and he looked them over rapidly. They were certainly tough-looking mugs, but they didn't look like enemy agents posing as thieves.

"Stand as you are," the Black Bat ordered. "Don't make a sound and above all, do not try to use those guns you carry."

"What's the idea?" Frosty demanded. He backed up a little until he stood very close to the vault. "Who are you?"

The Black Bat didn't answer. He looked beyond the group and saw a partially open door leading into one of the private offices. There were six or eight men lying on the floor, all securely bound and dressed in uniforms. These were the real guards.

Frosty started edging away from the big vault. He'd drawn a gun, depending upon the darkness to keep this interloper from seeing the act.

But the Black Bat noticed it and he realized the danger this young, white-haired crook presented. The rest of the men were frozen by fear, but Frosty, while cautious, displayed none of this terror.

The Black Bat moved too, until his form came between a window and the men in the room. Weak light filtered through that window, picked up his form and hurled it in a gigantic shadow on the further wall. The outlines of a huge, birdlike creature poised as if to leap into full flight.

"The Black Bat!" someone yelled.

Frosty didn't speak. He acted with cool deliberation. He was close enough to the vault to reach a small switch on a table. He pressed this. The explosives had already been completely wired.

There was an ear-shattering roar. The Black Bat was hurled into a corner so violently that all the breath left him. Frosty, who had leaped just as he pressed the switch, was thrown to the floor, but he'd managed to get

within a few feet of the door.

He arose, stumbled toward it and disappeared. The Black Bat pumped two bullets at him, but other things happened to spoil his aim.

From two or three places in the office, columns of fire were leaping up. Through the door left open by Frosty in his mad flight, the Black Bat could see more flames rising.

That explosion had set off some kind of incendiary system to destroy the entire plant by flames. In little short of a few minutes, every exit would be blocked.

The Black Bat could have pursued Frosty and either captured him or brought him down with a bullet, but there were the helpless guards in the next office to consider. Three of Frosty's thugs who'd been knocked unconscious by the explosion would be burned alive unless the Black Bat helped them.

STRIDING across the room, shielding his eyes against the brilliant white light of the fire, the Black Bat saw that it was caused by some incendiary device. Its color and fury indicated this.

He picked up a chair and smashed a window. Through it, he saw the fake guards running madly toward cars which pulled up by pre-arrangement. Turning, he rushed back to where one of the crooks was sitting up, dazed but trying desperately to get to his feet.

"The guards," the Black Bat thundered. "In the next office. Cut them loose. Get them out."

"Not me," the crook screeched. "I'm getting away from here."

A bullet whined past his ear, almost burning the flesh and he changed his mind. The Black Bat yanked him to his feet and gestured. The crook tottered toward the next office.

The other two men were still unconscious. The Black Bat seized them, one by one, and hurled them through the shattered window. Then

he rushed into the next room.

The crook he'd sent there was trying to untie the ropes. The Black Bat brought out a knife and rapidly cut them. Busy with this, fighting against time and the rapid advance of the flames, he had no chance to watch this crook.

The man sidled toward the door, suddenly began running and did a nose dive through the broken window. The other two men had been revived either by the fall or the fresh air or a combination of both. All three ran madly into the night.

The Black Bat worked furiously. One by one the guards were freed and told to make their escape through the window. When the last one vanished, the Black Bat covered his face once more and approached the vault.

The door had been successfully blown open by the explosive and it hung by one hinge. The Black Bat opened it, looked inside and saw carefully protected papers. Vital documents probably, connected with the sort of work this plant had been doing.

He scooped these out, pushed the door shut and dragged over several steel filing cabinets to shove against the door and hold it shut against the ravages of the flames.

Then he moved toward the window. The crackle of burning wood prevented him from hearing the bang of the gun, but the impact of a bullet against the window frame was plain enough. Frosty must be hidden out there, waiting for the Black Bat to come out.

The Black Bat whirled, started moving fast toward the rear of the building and met a solid wall of flame. He could see beyond it a bit and noticed that the fire was travelling his way. He drew a long breath, covered his face with the cape and raced straight into the flames.

Twice he stumbled because even his acute eyesight did him no good now. Somehow, he managed to retain his

balance and soon he felt cooler air circulating about him. He was close to the small door through which he'd entered the place.

The flames were creeping toward it. In the distance he could hear the wail of fire sirens. They meant both danger and safety to him. Danger because if firemen caught him, he'd be done. Safety because the sirens were bound to frighten away Frosty, who might have slipped around to cover this rear door.

The Black Bat darted outside, sprinted across the clearing and reached the spot where he'd parked the car. Half a minute later he was rolling away from the blazing factory.

CHAPTER V

Men with Motives



WILLIAM LEYDEN, owner of the factory which was now being rapidly reduced to ashes, drove into his garage and walked slowly toward his big house. His head was bowed.

That fire meant catastrophe to him. It would take many weeks to rebuild and outfit the plant. His orders were rush government jobs which were bound to be turned over to another firm.

A servant opened the door before he reached it. Leyden looked up and shook his head wanly.

"Pretty bad, Michael. The place is in ruins. Couldn't get near what was left of the office, but I saw the safe and it seemed to be intact."

"Thank heavens for that, sir. Mr. Spence is on the phone. I heard you coming so I told him to wait."

Leyden entered his study, closed the door and picked up the phone.

"Hello, Carl," he said. "I've just re-

turned from the plant. It's gutted. Or perhaps you know this and called me to offer condolences accompanied by crocodile tears."

"I don't understand," Carl Spence said suavely. "You're naturally very upset, Bill."

"Not too upset to know you'll get the orders I took away from you by bidding low and forgetting about profits. The government needs the articles I manufacture. Needs them fast and you're the only other person who can fill the order."

"But Bill," Carl Spence protested not too strongly, "you can't blame me if I take those orders, can you?"

"No. In fact, I'll suggest you get them. This is no time for personal animosities. Neither I nor the War Department cares very much where the goods come from so long as they are made fast enough. Gear up, Carl. You'll get the word to roll tomorrow."

Leyden dropped the phone on its cradle, covered his face with both hands and sat there, utterly dejected. He felt someone touch his shoulder, looked up and saw that all the lights in the room had been extinguished but the one on his desk. That threw only feeble illumination.

He started from his chair and at the same moment reached for anything on his desk which might serve as a weapon. All Leyden saw was a weird figure in black that seemed to sprout wings as it stood there.

"Take it easy, Mr. Leyden," the figure said. "I'm the Black Bat and I'm here to get your help, not harm you."

Leyden sat down again slowly. "What do you want? How can I help you?"

"By giving me a little information. First of all, however, I'll erase a few of your greatest worries. I took these papers out of the safe just after the fire started."

The Black Bat laid heavy envelopes, all sealed, on Leyden's desk. The manufacturer seized them and gave a



BUTCH

cry of joy. He slit the seals, studied the papers for a moment and then swept them all into a corner.

"I didn't even peek, you see," the Black Bat laughed softly. "Whatever secrets those papers hold are yours, not mine. I have no interest in them."

L EYDEN looked up suspiciously. "But . . . how did you get into my safe?" he demanded. "And my house?"

"Both were extremely simple. A band of crooks invaded your factory. They blew the safe door open, but I forced them to leave before they could lay their hands on either the documents or your store of precious metals. I entered your house by simply forcing a window. Your servants do not know of my presence, and I'd rather they didn't, if you don't mind."

"Crooks . . . blew my safe open . . . precious metals. Say, how do you know all this? What's your game?"

"Quite the same as yours, Mr. Leyden. I'm trying to help win this war.

Perhaps the robbery at your plant was not the work of fifth columnists and the crooks were only after the metal. I'm not sure about that, but on the surface it looks like a plain robbery without the flourishes of spy involvements. It makes little difference, because those crooks would hardly have worried if your papers were burned."

"But the fire," Leyden said hoarsely. "It spread so rapidly. I can't understand it."

"Neither can I," the Black Bat sat down. "That's one reason I came to see you. Were there inflammable substances in the factory? Chemicals, for instance, which might have been set afire by an explosion or a concussion?"

"I don't know," Leyden admitted slowly. "We did keep a lot of highly dangerous chemicals on hand. I'm not a chemist, so I can't be sure those substances would act as you hinted. Why do you ask?"

"I was present when your safe was blown open. The explosion set off a number of fires all of which seemed

to be deliberately prepared at strategic places in the factory. I want to know if those fires could have been set off accidentally, or if they were incendiary. I must find out whether or not the crooks involved are being paid by spies."

"I can't tell you," Leyden grunted. "But I will try to find out. The destruction of my factory is a serious blow to me, but not necessarily to the War Department. Another firm can take up where I left off and produce the goods I held contracts for."

The Black Bat nodded. "I assumed as much from the one-sided phone conversation you just held with a Mr. Carl Spence. Who is he?"

"Just a rival. I never had much trouble with him. We bid for the same jobs, but Spence was always after the highest profits, so I had no trouble underbidding him. Trouble with Spence is his desire for money, that's all."

"Would he go so far as to burn down your plant to land the government contracts on his own figure?"

Leyden stroked his chin for a moment. "I really don't know why I should be answering your questions. I've heard there is some doubt as to the Black Bat's exact position. What are you—a crook turned patriotic? Or do you just run down thieves and take their profits away from them?"

"Neither," the Black Bat snapped. "I have no financial interest in tracking down criminals. I only take a hand where the police have failed or are stymied by rules and regulations."

"And what is your interest in this particular case?" Leyden demanded. "Why don't you transfer your attentions to the band of men who held up the Anderson party tonight?"

"Were you there?" the Black Bat asked quickly.

BILL LEYDEN nodded. "I was," he said. "My wallet was stolen—more than two hundred in it. And I witnessed a superb example of po-

lice inefficiency. Yes—that was it. Gross carelessness. You're right, Black Bat, in believing the police need help. They do—desperately. Therefore, I'll talk all right. I'll trust you."

"Good. Now about Spence again. Would he destroy your plant to get that contract?"

"I can only answer that in one way," Leyden said. "Spence spent about a year in prison for cheating. Some political trick got him paroled, and a man like Spence rarely changes his stripes."

The Black Bat moved quietly back until he was almost invisible. "Remember," he said, "that I have no definite proof your plant was burned down by an arsonist. I'm going after that proof if it exists, however, and then we'll look into Spence's past and present activities."

"Are you going back to the plant?" Leyden queried excitedly. "Are you— Hey, what happened? Where are you?"

Leyden jumped out of his chair and rushed toward the far end of the room. A window was open full length.

There was no sign of the Black Bat.

He walked slowly back to his desk and sat down. He reached for the phone on a sudden impulse to call the F.B.I. and voice his own and the Black Bat's suspicions. But he didn't. Somehow he possessed a rather good idea that the Black Bat worked best alone.

The Black Bat, meanwhile, drove quickly to the ruins of Leyden's factory. The firemen had finished their work and the last truck was rolling away. A few persons, drawn by curiosity, were leaving the vicinity now that things had quieted down.

The Black Bat parked his car, replaced the broad brimmed hat with his hood and drew the cape closely around him. As he approached the factory, he saw that the northwest

corner of it was hardly touched by the fire.

Elsewhere, walls had caved in, the roof was almost gone and inside was nothing but rubble.

He made sure no one was around, and then entered the ruins, made his way past the office where he'd been so close to death and saw that the big vault had been opened and its contents of precious metal taken to some safer spot. The Black Bat felt a slight glow of pride. At least Frosty and his gang hadn't got what they came for.

The Black Bat began inspecting what was left of the walls, looking for traces of incendiaries. The fact that the flames had broken out in several places and been synchronized with the explosion that had blasted the door off the vault, lent more than a probability that someone had set the stage.

Against that theory was Leyden's admission of certain dangerous chemicals in the factory. Perhaps they were a type which might explode if shocked hard enough.

The gutted part of the factory revealed nothing. The fire had done its work too completely, so the Black Bat moved slowly toward the corner which was more or less intact.

The intense darkness didn't impede him. He avoided dangerous pitfalls, deep puddles of water from the fire hoses and beams that hung down as if ready to drop if they were brushed against.

THE corner of the building contained a number of work benches. Assembly lines, he judged. There was considerable confusion of course, but on the whole, things seemed to be fairly intact. He recalled that some of the jets of flame had shot from the floor, some from the walls. Therefore, he began to study this section very carefully.

The floor gave no clue so he tackled the walls, saw a wooden cupboard nailed above one bench and reached

toward it. At that instant, his acute hearing probably saved his life. Someone, moving most cautiously, brushed against debris. An ordinary man would never have heard the sound, but the Black Bat did.

He instantly ducked and drew a gun. Now he could see the approaching figure, and the man's appearance confused even the uncanny eyes of the Black Bat.

Where a white face should have been, was nothing but a blob of shadow. The head seemed to have the dimensions of a pumpkin. There were no signs of ears, a nose, or even a chin. The contours were perfectly smooth.

The Black Bat moved until he stood just to one side of the wooden cupboard above the bench. He wanted the intruder to come just a little closer before he went into action.

If that had happened, the Black Bat might have made a capture, but the intruder suddenly snapped on a flashlight and the ray slit through darkness to land squarely on the Black Bat.

Without the slightest hesitation the intruder raised a gun and fired twice. The Black Bat dodged aside, but an instant later he realized the bullets had not been fired at him, but at the wooden cupboard. Both slugs smashed into it.

There was a mild explosion and then a searing white light shot out. The Black Bat was looking straight at the spot when that light began. It was so brilliant, so hot, that he was really blinded. Those highly sensitive eyes of his were blacked out.

Another shot crashed and the bullet hit the wall just beside his head. The Black Bat quickly called to his mind a picture of the area. He knew one of the benches to his left might provide a shield, so he deftly moved toward it. The brilliant light was still burning, his eyes refused to function and he knew just how bad a predicament this was.

Apparently, the intruder wasn't bothered by the light because he kept moving forward. Perhaps he wore dark glasses to filter out the intensity of the light.

At any rate, he was coming closer and closer.

The Black Bat's gun blazed twice. He heard the intruder grunt in surprise and dodge aside. Then the slow, steady forward movement began again.

The Black Bat closed his eyes tightly until the fire had died away. Opening them again, everything was just as black. He couldn't see a thing, only hear—and what his ears picked up was ominous.

The intruder was closer than ever. The Black Bat stood perfectly still, waiting for the attack. He had an idea it would not be made by gun fire. Not unless he suddenly got the upper hand.

Then he heard a rushing sound. The Black Bat blindly made a wide sweep with his gun, missed, and let go of the weapon.

HE fought now with all the strange accuracy of a blind man. He knew where his opponent was every moment, but he did not know how he was armed. Perhaps a knife would come slicing toward him, or strong hands encircle his throat.

The Black Bat lanced out with both arms. His right wrist was gripped suddenly. There was a tremendous tug that hurtled him forward. His right toe struck his opponent's foot and he came to an abrupt stop. He started to soar upward and his arm felt as if it were being pulled out of its socket.

He fell with a terrific crash, but he'd gone limp before the impact and bounded up again in a flash. He could see slightly now, enough to make out the dim form just to his left.

The Black Bat reached for a second gun. As he drew it, the intruder fired once, but the Black Bat had noticed

the gun coming up and sidestepped fast enough to become a difficult target.

Positions were reversed now. The Black Bat could see through the darkness while the killer was handicapped by it.

The sudden flame had gone out and except for a faint reddish glow marking the spot where the wooden box had been, there was no indication that such a fire had ever existed.

The killer's flashlight would have only served to make a target of himself. He wisely kept it dark.

The Black Bat maneuvered forward a bit, taking care not to make a sound. Trigger finger tensed, gun poised, he was prepared to blast the intruder on sight.

Something clattered farther away. The Black Bat began running, but he was too late. The intruder had luckily found a clear avenue of escape and quietly retreated until he was near the caved-in walls. The Black Bat had a glimpse of him running madly away. In a moment the roar of a car motor indicated that the man had made good his escape.

The Black Bat stuffed his gun away, located the automatic he'd dropped, and then went quickly to where the wooden locker had been. There was nothing left of it, but on the floor he found several bits of fused substance. He pried these loose, dropped them into his pocket and decided to get away from the scene himself.

He drove home by a round-about route, making absolutely certain he was not followed. He entered the house through the tunnel and discovered Carol waiting for him in the lab.

"I hope your luck was better than mine." He stripped off the hood and grimaced in disgust. "I nearly had my hands on the man responsible for destroying the Leyden-Smith factory."

"Didn't you see his face?" Carol asked. "That might be enough."

"It was covered, darling. Seemed

to be a stocking cap pulled right down over the face, with slits cut for the eyes. Whoever he was, the man hid his identity rather well. But I did manage to get something."

Tony Quinn removed the cape and walked toward a lab bench. He placed the fused substance he'd pried from the factory floor, into a glass beaker and poured acid on it. The stuff fumed and hissed until the substance was dissolved.

WORKING fast, Tony Quinn placed the solution through an analysis. It didn't take very long. He

gated the ruins in the morning and this murderer wanted to be quite sure they'd testify that the explosion at the safe started the fire. That seems to be the big reason for the killer's return."

"There's a second reason," Carol said.

"Yes. I visited William Leyden tonight and told him I was going back to the scene of the fire. He was the only man who knew I wanted to conduct an investigation."

"Leyden?" Carol opened her purse and took out a small notebook. She flipped the pages for a moment. "Ley-



CAROL

leaned back and nodded at Carol.

"The fire was incendiary, all right. Thermite, set off by some kind of a sensitive bomb which reacted to the blowing open of the vault. That's the only answer and it offers two possibilities."

"Yes, Tony . . . what?"

"The man who came to the factory might have risked going there to make certain every bomb had exploded. Fire marshals were bound to investi-

den—yes, that's it. William Leyden was at Anderson's party tonight. He was one of three or four people who last saw Anderson."

Quinn whistled. "Who else, Carol?"

She consulted the notebook again. "Let's see—Carl Spence talked to Anderson near the left wing of the stage. Then Leyden met Anderson as he entered the wing. A fellow named Uchin—he seems to be a Hindu or something and wears a turban—was

the second to the last man to see Anderson. Some stage hands saw the Hindu give a fantastic salute and remembered him well. Anderson talked to him for a couple of minutes, and then went to one of the makeshift dressing rooms back stage."

"Which is an ideal place to have knocked him cold and prepared things for the hanging. Go on, Carol."

"The stage hands and the cast were finished getting ready and most of them were busy at a punch bowl and buffet lunch set up for them about a hundred yards from the stage. One of these hands saw Anderson speaking to a man named Julian Butler. That was just outside the dressing room door. So far as I could find out, this Julian Butler was the last man to see Anderson alive."

"Julian Butler," Quinn frowned. "You've heard of him, Carol? You must have."

She nodded. "He certainly was in the news before Pearl Harbor. Isolationist, wasn't he? Preaching that we should mind our own business, that the Japs had no intentions of attacking us."

"That's right—and they made a considerable fool of him, Carol. Since then, he's shut up, but very noticeably he has not come out for our war effort. He was so doggone aggressive before that maybe he was being paid by enemy interests. That's only a possibility, but this whole case is built on nothing but possibilities so far."

Carol's pretty face grew very serious. "Are we fighting a bunch of fifth columnists, Tony? Or active spies and saboteurs?"

Quinn thought that over for a moment. "I don't know. It's extremely clear that a gang of crooks is operating. The holdup at Anderson's party was neatly done. Anderson and Admiral Cooper were murdered, yes—but Commissioner Warner may be right in saying their deaths were motivated."

"How?" Carol asked.

"Well, the crooks needed a means of horrifying the crowd. Immobilizing them and creating a reason for the screams of the women as they were being robbed. Anderson could have been chosen to hang from that gibbet because he was known to every person in the audience, and thus the horror would be enhanced."

"And Admiral Cooper?"

Quinn shrugged. "Cooper was an old sea dog, a born fighter. He could be expected to attack and not take a robbery meekly. Therefore, he was killed. Just a second, darling. I want to see if either Silk or Butch phoned."

Quinn slid back a panel. Inside were a series of small electric light bulbs. None were illuminated. He closed the panel.

"If any of the phones rang, one of those lights would have flashed on and stayed lit. There were no calls, and I don't like it, Carol. Silk may have run into something too big for him to handle, and Butch might have blundered into the same mess."

CHAPTER VI

Salesman of Poison



SILK, in his disguise, walked boldly into the Anchor and Hull. He turned over his hat to a check-room girl and looked around. The entrance to the dance floor was blocked by a huge rusty anchor. Silk walked around this and while he waited for a headwaiter to approach, studied the rest of the place.

It was fashioned like the interior of a cargo vessel, with beamed hull and heavy timbers rising quite high. Illumination was indirect and very low. Most of the people who came here didn't want to be noticed.

An orchestra was blaring away. Dancers packed the floor, but even though the dancing seemed to be so popular, no more than a third of the patrons danced.

Silk was led to a corner table, which suited him well enough. He ordered a drink and glanced at the other patrons within range of his vision. There were addicts here. Plenty of them and easily picked out. Their eyes were a bit too bright, their laughter too ribald.

About four tables away, a huge man avariciously cleaned up the last of his dessert. While one waiter cleared the table, another brought a new tray. The man was starting on his second full-course dinner. That meant marijuana and its strange habit of making addicts develop an enormous appetite.

Silk sipped his drink and considered the situation. Certainly drugs were being used in this place and arrangements made to buy more. Not that the management was in on it. They merely allowed the procedure to take place and profited by the money spent here. This club had been raided many times.

Silk knew all about the difficulty in getting real drugs. The supply had been abruptly shut off by the war, and dope peddlers couldn't carry anything like a heavy stock. Therefore, a new supply had been received.

"How? With all known shipping taken over, with ports of entry closely guarded and even remote seashores patrolled by wardens, it seemed an impossibility.

Silk shrugged. The only way to answer his own questions was by starting an investigation. He picked out a table where two men sat, hunched over their drinks. Silk arose and walked over. He pulled up a chair without waiting for an invitation.

He talked fast, and Silk had a persuasive tongue. "Nix on the glares," he said. "I can furnish you with something good."

"We don't know what you're talking about," one man snarled, "and we ain't interested. Scram!"

"You get plenty of stuff," Silk went on. "Sure—but how much do you pay? I can furnish it at half the figure. I represent certain parties who own a big cache of the stuff and want to get rid of it. Now are you boys interested?"

At the mention of half price, both men leaned forward eagerly. Silk made a theoretical sale in five minutes. He learned that drugs were being dispensed in almost any amount, but the price was high and sometimes the stuff seemed hard to get.

At least he had something to report now. And developing this clue of a great drug supply, might lead to dividends. Especially if the same gang of crooks was behind it.

Silk spent two hours in the place, knowing that with every second his danger grew greater. He approached a number of tables and that oily tongue of his worked overtime. When he finally returned to his own table, two men were sitting there.

THEY were sleek men with greasy hair and obnoxious manners. One amused himself by burning holes in the table cover with a cigarette, and no waiter in the vicinity made a move to stop him. The other idly picked his teeth and frowned at Silk.

"Sit down, pal," one said. "You been doing a pretty good business in here."

"Cops?" Silk asked with considerable nervousness.

"Naw! A cop can't get within half a mile of this place before we know about it. How about a drink? No? What are you stewing about, pal? We wouldn't do any more than bust your legs."

"Now wait a minute," Silk said frantically. "I didn't know there was a monopoly on selling stuff around here. We figured there'd be no competition because the stuff is so hard

to get these days."

"Who," the tooth-picker asked, "are we?"

"I'm not saying." Silk licked his lips. "I—I've got to go now. See you boys later, huh?"

"Glue yourself down!" one man snapped. "We got things to talk about. The way you have been taking orders, you must have a pretty good supply. How about selling it to us?"

"I couldn't make a deal like that," Silk protested. "They'd slit my throat. I'll tell them, though. I'll come back and talk it over again."

"No! We'll talk now. Just get up and walk between us. We're going places. And, pal, what you feel digging into your ribs ain't my finger. Move!"

They led Silk along the wall of the club, heading for a door at the rear. A tuxedoed man stood guard there, but at a nod from Silk's companions, he opened the door and promptly closed it again after they passed through.

Silk found himself in a fairly wide hallway, lighted even more dimly than the club itself. He glanced at the men on either side of him and shuddered. This wasn't what he meant to have happen.

"I—I'll talk it over with anybody you say," he managed.

"Sure you will—and tell us who you work for, too," one man grunted. "Then we'll go get your stuff. Maybe we'll pay off in folding money, or maybe it'll be in hot lead. It all depends on how you act."

They neared the end of the hallway. Silk wondered if he should take a chance on bolting for a door which he saw. The idea was good, but very impractical, especially with that gun jammed against his side.

When they were within two yards of the corner, someone gave a wild howl and a huge figure lumbered into view from a side door. The man had his hat pulled down, and he was obviously very drunk. He saw the three,

gave another yowl and swept down on them.

"Put that drunk out of business," one of Silk's captors ordered the other.

The crook with destructive impulses figured this wobbly-kneed hulk of a man would offer no more trouble than that tablecloth back in the club. He drew a gun, took it by the muzzle and raised the weapon high.

Suddenly the drunk's right hand shot out and gripped his wrist. The crook gave a yell of pain. The gun fell to the floor. So did the crook, half a second later. His jaw was distinctly lopsided.

SWEARING savagely, the crook with Silk removed the gun from Silk's ribs and leaped forward. Silk's right foot moved, too. The crook tripped, stumbled and started running under his own momentum.

He had no chance to use the gun. It was knocked out of his hand, and then he was lifted from the floor by the throat, allowed to kick until unconsciousness swept over him, and then dropped like an empty sack.

Silk, meanwhile, reached the door, slid back a couple of bolts and darted into a dismal alley behind the club. He heard footsteps pounding down the steps behind him.

The big hulk of a man came barging out and for the first time Silk had a good look at him.

"Butch, you idiot!" he snapped.

"Hey, didn't I do pretty good?" Butch dragged Silk into a dark corner. "Those babies deserved to be pushed around."

"Yes—yes, I know that," Silk said, "but my idea was to make them take me to someone in charge of this racket. It's the only way we can get a good lead on them. Now you come along and spoil it."

"Gosh," Butch groaned, "am I getting dumb!"

"You've been dumb since the day you were born," Silk said tartly. "But

perhaps it has worked out for the best. I was in a pretty bad spot. Now they'll have to meet me under my own circumstances. How did you get here anyway?"

"The boss sent me. He said I was to guard you. I saw them two punks sit down at your table, and I figured they were up to something. I dusted out of the place, came back here and just walked in."

"Just walked in," Silk sighed. "Butch, this place is guarded like the United States Mint."

"Oh, yeah," Butch answered. "There was a guy at the back door. I tossed him into an ash can over there. I think his jaw is busted—I hope."

Someone came out of the rear door and looked around. Silk and Butch crouched. Silk put his lips against the big man's ear.

"I'm registered at the Hotel Superior, a dump about five blocks from here. Room three four nine. You stay right where you are. I'm going to let those monkeys trail me. And, Butch, if you interfere again . . ."

"Not even if they were slitting your throat," Butch swore solemnly. "So help me."

Silk grinned because he knew just what would happen if Butch ever saw anyone even draw a knife on him. Silk slipped away, clinging to the darkness. Several men were in the alley now, all quietly searching. Silk deliberately allowed the buttons on his coat to scrape against a cement wall. Then he reached a gate, went through it and walked rapidly away.

Two blocks from the club he crossed the street and managed to look unobtrusively in the direction from which he'd come. The two men who followed didn't disappear in a doorway quite fast enough. Silk smiled and kept going.

He entered the frowsy lobby of a cheap hotel, dawdled at a drinking fountain, and then approached the desk to get his key, calling out the number in a fairly loud voice. He

walked upstairs to his room, let himself in and immediately pulled the curtains.

He opened a light traveling bag, took out two guns and proceeded to push one deep beneath the cushions of a chair. The other he slipped beneath the pillow on the bed.

"Now let them come," he muttered. "This set-up is more to my liking."

TEN minutes went by and then someone knocked loudly on his door.

"Air Raid Warden," a voice answered Silk's question. "We're enforcing the dim-out, and there's light leaking from your window."

"You're crazy," Silk answered. "The curtains are down."

"Well you got to let us see," the voice insisted. "Or else we'll call a cop."

Silk grinned. This was just a modern version of an old trick. Yet he wanted to let them in. He unlocked the door, opened it a crack and was flung back when two men pushed the door open.

They were the same two who'd accosted him in the club, a little the worse for wear from Butch's violent methods. Both held guns, and Silk promptly raised his hands high.

A third man swaggered in. He wore his hat far on the back of his head as if he was proud of the frosty-colored hair that showed.

"Is this him?" he demanded.

The other two men nodded violently. "Sure is, Frosty," one said. "Ain't no mistake about that. We'd have had him right, too, except for that crazy drunk who busted in on us."

"Keep him covered," Frosty warned. "I don't like the set-up. In the first place a drunk couldn't have polished off two guys as fast on the draw as you. And then there's Matty to think about. He was guarding the back door and hasn't been seen since."

Silk slowly retreated and finally sat

down in the chair. There was a gun within easy reach, but he didn't dare reach for it. Not now. Frosty seemed a little too suspicious—a little too smart.

Frosty began searching the room and he knew just how to go about it. He found the gun under the pillow in two minutes. Holding this as if he was ready to start shooting, he stepped up to Silk and gestured that he was to rise.

"I don't like the way you sat down so fast," Frosty grunted. "Watch him, boys. Ah-ha! Like I figured. Another roscoe under the cushion. Nice going, pal. Now break down and tell me all about it."

"I haven't much to say," Silk half whined. "Sure I carry a couple of guns. Got to in my business—just like you boys carry 'em. Tell you what—I'll take one of you to see the guy I work for. Maybe you can make a deal."

"Sure—only when we go to see your boss, we'll go alone," Frosty snapped. "Boys, go through that suitcase and look for a black robe and a hood."

"Black robe and hood?" Silk gasped.

"Sure, that's it. Looking you over carefully, pal, you're about right for size. Listen, I'm not stupid. The Black Bat is operating against us. I saw him tonight. He busted up one swell job. Now you suddenly show up and try to crawl into another one of our rackets."

"I don't know anything about . . . the Black Bat," Silk quavered. "Gosh, I'm just as scared of him as you are."

"Who says I'm afraid of him?" Frosty roared belligerently. "All I'm trying to find out is whether or not you are the Black Bat or work for him. You're no drug peddler. Why? Because except for the supply we have, there isn't enough stuff to go around in the whole country."

"Nothing in the bag," one of the crooks reported.

FROSTY stepped closer to Silk and jabbed him in the middle with the gun. He grunted, reached out and ripped open Silk's vest. It was heavily padded to lend the appearance of extra weight.

"Well, well," Frosty gloated. "Nice going. This mug is disguised. I bet he's even got stuff on his face. Get over toward the bed. Move, or I'll let you have it right here."

The other two men seemed to know exactly what Frosty had in mind. They stripped the bed of its coverings. Silk was forced to lie on the bare springs and he was quickly tied there with strips torn from the bed sheet.

Frosty put his gun away, took a knife from his pocket and touched a button on it. A wicked-looking blade sprang out.

"So," Frosty declared, "it's the show-down. Want to talk now or take a little treatment first?"

"What—what are you going to do?" Silk asked, and this time his fear was genuine.

"Well, it all depends," Frosty said judiciously. "One thing, though—I'm going to mark you up so I'll recognize you again. After that, it depends on what you tell me. Talk now if you like."

"I haven't anything to say," Silk bit his lip. "If you think I'm connected with the Black Bat, you ought to go see a doctor. A brain specialist."

"Oh," Frosty drawled, "so you're a gag-man too. Well, no use wasting time. Gag him, boys!"

A chunk of cloth was wadded into Silk's mouth and a gag applied. It was tied with considerable glee and strength. Frosty grinned down at him.

"When you want to talk, just blink your eyes. That shouldn't take much more than a couple of minutes. I . . ."

There was a soft knock at the door. Frosty signaled his men and they quietly took up positions to attack.

Frosty threw a blanket over Silk, walked to the door and kept one hand behind his back. It held a gun. He opened the door and relaxed.

Another man—of the same breed as the two greasy-haired crooks—whispered something to Frosty. Then he turned and hurried away. Frosty closed the door.

"Boys," he said, "we're being cheated out of a little fun. A certain party wants to talk with this guy personally. That let's us out. You two beat it. I'll stay here until within a minute of the time this certain party is slated to arrive. Meet you at the next corner."

Silk, half smothered under the blanket, was able to hear most of this. He grimly tested the makeshift ropes and found them firm. There was a sinking sensation in his stomach.

Here he was, tied up and helpless. His trick to lure the leader of the mob to his side had worked like a charm, but what good did that do now? His only hope lay in Butch—whom he had berated for butting in before. Chances of help from that source were slim indeed.

Vaguely, he heard the door open and close. A very short time elapsed and this act was repeated, followed shortly by the sound of light footsteps crossing the floor and the snap of electric light switches as they were turned off.

The blanket was removed. Silk couldn't see a thing, but he knew someone stood over him. The gag was untied. Silk licked his lips and mumbled thanks.

"You must speak," a voice said, and it was so soft that Silk had difficulty in hearing it. "Who sent you?"

"Nobody," Silk groaned. "I happen to have a lot of drugs on hand and wanted to get rid of the stuff. If I horned in, I'll go somewhere else. Just give me a chance."

"Not truth. One chance more. Who is Bat? You know."

"Honest," Silk pleaded, "that's all

wrong. The Black Bat would mow me down as fast as he would you."

"Then you die," the invisible man said. "At once!"

He began moving closer to the bed until he was bent over Silk. Dimly Silk saw the outlines of a dagger. He drew a long breath, ready to yell madly, but he knew how long that cry would last. Not more than half a second.

CHAPTER VII

The Faceless Man



HIDING behind the Anchor and Hull, Butch saw Frosty emerge. He also heard the noise which Silk deliberately made to draw attention to himself. Frosty and the two men Butch had

worked on, walked over to within a few feet of the spot where he was concealed.

"I don't like this," Frosty said. "That guy was up to something more than just trying to undersell us. Look—there he goes now. You two tail him. Phone back as soon as he's located and wait until I come."

"Why don't you come now, Frosty?" one of the men muttered.

"Because I said this set-up has an odor. I can't figure it out, but I know a certain party who can. I'll see him first. Now get going."

In a few moments the rear courtyard was silent again. Frosty didn't place a fresh guard at the door, so Butch made his way to the street very easily. He had an advantage on the men who followed Silk. He knew where Silk was going.

Butch hurried to the vicinity of the hotel and stepped into a doorway. He watched Silk swing into the lobby, saw the two crooks trailing him and decided that like Frosty, he

needed some advice which was more expert than any he could think of.

Butch entered a drug store telephone booth and called Tony Quinn's home. He received an immediate answer, indicating that Quinn had been staying close to the phone because he was worried about Silk.

"We ran into some trouble," Butch said. "Nothing I couldn't handle, only Silk is letting those rats follow him. He's at the Hotel Superior. I'm just around the corner."

"Good," Quinn said. "Anything else?"

"Only that a mug they called Frosty is going to see somebody he takes orders from. Then Frosty plans to come and see Silk. Maybe he'll bring the big shot with him."

"That would be too good to be true," Quinn answered. "Butch, listen carefully now. Don't butt in unless it becomes very essential. Watch the place. See who enters with Frosty. I'll meet you on the corner in fifteen minutes. See if you can find some way for me to enter the hotel without my being seen."

Butch hung up and hurried back to the place where he could keep an eye on the hotel. It was early morning now, the streets were silent and the dimout made them strangely dark. In a few moments, Frosty arrived and he seemed to be in a big hurry.

Butch began to fidget and worry. Perhaps Frosty would go to work on Silk at once, maybe kill him. Yet orders were orders and Butch waited.

Another man came down the street. He was running, but slowed up and straightened his clothes before he turned into the hotel lobby. He came out in a couple of minutes, and he was followed by the two crooks whom Butch had punched. Things were happening all right.

To Butch, the passing minutes seemed like weeks. If he only knew what was happening in Silk's room. If the Black Bat would only arrive.

Then Butch drew back into the

shadows again. Frosty came out and with him was a man in shirt sleeves, obviously the hotel clerk or some employee who stayed in the lobby all night.

Frosty kept gesturing and leading the man away from the door. The strange silence of the sleeping city made voices carry well. Butch heard Frosty say something about a stolen car, and then Frosty laughed and stopped walking. He indicated that his car was parked at the next corner, that he'd made a mistake.

MEANWHILE, Butch saw a man whose face was completely shielded hurry into the hotel. Two minutes later, the Black Bat arrived. He came in the cheap coupe and wore black clothing and the wide-brimmed hat. Butch went over to the car.

"Frosty and two of his gorillas came out. Frosty took a guy out of the hotel and tricked him into walking down the street. Another guy whose face I couldn't see, went in."

The Black Bat looked up and down the street, signaled that Butch was to follow and raced toward the rear of the hotel. Butch caught up with him and pointed toward the one lighted window of the hotel. It was on the third floor.

"Silk said he had a room on the third floor. That must be it, so I did like you said and took a look around. The hotel is an old dump and that's a fire escape leading up to the window of a room right beside the one where I think Silk is."

The Black Bat nodded. In a moment he was swarming up the fire escape with Butch right behind him. They came to the window, found it open a few inches and the Black Bat peered inside. His eyes easily probed darkness.

"The room is occupied," he whispered, "but we have to go through it. Can't afford to waste a second. There is a man in bed and asleep. I'll throw the cover over his head

and you keep him quiet."

Butch nodded. The Black Bat slid the window wide, stepped in and made his way to the bed. He carefully raised the covers and suddenly threw them down. Butch pinned the astonished, half-asleep hotel guest to the bed and slid a big hand over his mouth.

The Black Bat proceeded to the door, listened a moment and then opened it. Butch was having a bit of trouble with his man. He had no connection with this business and Butch hated to slug him, but there seemed to be little else he could do.

Butch yanked the blanket down, clapped his hand over the man's mouth again and poised one fist. But Butch didn't figure on what a frightened, desperate man might do. The hotel guest dug his teeth into the fleshy part of Butch's big hand.

Butch jerked his hand away and the man in bed got out one loud yell. The Black Bat whirled, startled by the cry. When he turned around again to look into the hall, a door opened.

He saw a man of medium height, with his features covered by a stocking cap pulled right down to his chin, suddenly bolt out of Silk's room and rush madly down the hall.

The Black Bat drew a gun with amazing speed. It roared and he saw the man give a lurch and emit a weird sort of cry. Then he turned the corner and an elevator door slammed shut.

The Black Bat didn't follow him. He knew what a pistol shot would do in a hotel of this kind. He darted for Silk's room. Butch came up behind him, muttering apologies for letting the guest cry out. The Black Bat found the door unlocked, stepped into the room and motioned that Butch was to hide elsewhere.

A muffled groan came from the bed. The Black Bat hurried toward it, pulling a knife from his pocket as he did so. In a moment he had Silk loose.

INSIDE, guests were milling about. An authoritative voice began asking questions, and the Black Bat knew the police were already here.

"Are you all right, Silk?" he whispered.

"Just a bit shaky in the knees," Silk answered.

"Good. I'm hiding in your clothes closet. You were mussed up pretty badly. When I'm hidden, call for help. Hide those slashed ropes first. Say someone entered your room and robbed you. There were a couple of them and they argued about the spoils until one drew a gun and fired. Say they beat it toward the roof. Is that clear?"

Silk nodded, watched the Black Bat disappear into the clothes closet, and then he began to cry weakly for help. The door burst open. Two patrolmen entered. Silk carried on his act perfectly.

"They fought between themselves," he explained. "One had a gun and took a shot at his pal. Both of 'em headed for the stairway. I heard 'em going toward the roof."

"Come on." One cop gestured toward his companion. Then he paused a moment and addressed the gaping crowd of guests. "All of you get back in your rooms. That gunman may be loose around here, and I don't want anybody hurt."

The crowd faded like magic. In a moment the corridor was clear and Silk opened the clothes closet door. The Black Bat darted toward the room through which he'd gained entrance. Silk followed and when they reached the room, Butch was there.

"I didn't know where else to go," he said.

"Down the fire escape," the Black Bat said curtly. "Make it fast now. We've got to be away before those cops reach the roof or any more show up."

They slipped down the fire escape as fast and noiselessly as possible.

At a quiet word of command, Butch joined a few people who stood outside the hotel where radio cars were pulling up. The Black Bat and Silk fled like two shadows and a moment later the coupe pulled away.

Carol anxiously waited for them in the lab and shortly after they arrived, Butch put in an appearance. The Black Bat peeled off his dark costume and donned the smoking jacket he always wore. He tamped tobacco into a pipe, applied a match and sat down.

"The cops searched all around and then they tried to find Silk," Butch said. "Last I knew, they gave the whole thing up as some kind of a gag, except they got Silk's suitcase and some of his clothes."

"Nothing to worry about," Silk said. "I made sure not one item in that suitcase could be traced."

"I wasn't worried about it," Tony Quinn said. "I know how thorough you are in those things, Silk. Now tell me what happened."

"Not very much," Silk said ruefully. "At least, so far as my getting information was concerned. They reacted as you figured. The moment I began taking orders for drugs, some of the gang grabbed me. Butch got me out of that mess. I guess I wasn't very grateful, Butch. I'm sorry. You probably saved my life."

Butch just grinned and Silk went on talking.

"I let them trail me to the hotel. Certainly we drew out the leader, but I never saw him. He made sure of that. Or maybe you saw him, sir?"

QUINN shook his head. "No more than I did at the scene of the fire. His face was covered. But I winged him. Saw him reel a bit, heard him cry out, and I noticed a faint smear of blood against the corridor wall of the hotel."

"Then all you have to do is watch for a man who has been shot," Carol said.

Quinn grinned at her. "I'm afraid

it won't be as easy as that, although I'll make a stab at it. The wound must have been slight, because it didn't stop him. Now, Silk, did the leader talk to you?"

"Yes, sir. He had a peculiar voice, too. Kept it very low of course, almost a whisper. Had an accent too, but I couldn't figure it out."

"German? Italian?" Quinn asked quickly. "Or Jap?"

"I couldn't say, sir."

"What words did he use. Repeat them if you can remember. Give them the same inflection he did."

"I can repeat them all right," Silk answered. "Every one, because he didn't say much. There was no inflection. He said—and these are his very words: 'You must speak. Who sent you? Not truth. One chance more. Who is Bat?'"

"Didn't he say 'Black Bat', Silk?"

"No, sir—just 'Bat'. There was a little more. He said, 'You know. Then you die—at once.' Believe me, sir, I thought he was telling the truth until I heard the guy in the next room start to yell. That scared him and he took off."

"Those words," Quinn said insistently. "You are quite positive there were no more, no less. You didn't change any of them? Their sequence or substitute other words for those he used?"

"I'll take my oath on it, sir. Why? Do those words mean anything to you?"

"A great deal, Silk. More than you think, but I'm not prepared to elaborate on that statement right now. At least, we have proved something. There is a definite connection between the gang that robbed and burned the Leyden-Smith factory and the mob responsible for selling so much dope around town. The man called 'Frosty' was mixed up in both enterprises."

"All of which means, what?" Carol asked. "Do you think these men are enemy agents, Tony?"

Quinn frowned and sucked on his pipe for a moment. "I don't know," he admitted. "The obvious fact is that the two murders were helpful to the Axis and the destruction of Leyden's plant was something they would delight in."

"Then it seems quite apparent we are fighting spies," Carol argued.

"Except for one thing. I'm sure American crooks robbed the Anderson party guests. I'm equally certain American crooks blasted open Leyden's factory safe, and Silk saw no indication that the men who captured him were anything but Americans."

"Except maybe the leader," Silk nodded.

"Which doesn't mean a thing. Men who wish to keep their identities hidden will resort to a monotone when speaking—use an arrangement of words they'd never use in normal life and do about anything else to shield their identities. Do you see what I'm driving at, Carol? You, Butch—and you, Silk?"

"I think so," Carol answered slowly, and with some doubt.

TONY QUINN smiled and continued.

"It's this. Crooks are low creatures. They'd do just about anything so long as their pockets were lined. Anything, I mean, which doesn't require much work. We'll grant they are low, but—the Axis Powers and those who represent them are even lower. There's something even below the pig-sty which drug salesmen, murderers, and other crooks occupy. There you'll find Hitler, Himmler, Tojo and the Mikado. Mussolini will be grovelling in the same mud. No, American crooks wouldn't stoop to aid the Axis. Not even if they were well paid for it. I can't believe that."

Carol yawned and touched fingers to her lips. "Well, it won't make much difference because we'll get them anyhow. I think we should rest now. Heaven knows what those ban-

aits will be up to tomorrow."

"Just a moment," Quinn said. "This won't take long. We can't simply sit and wait for them to strike. We must attack first and I think I know a way. It entails considerable danger and it looks as though you'll be the star performer in the show, Butch."

The big man was all smiles. "Just tell me," he urged. "Just show me how I can lay my hooks on a couple of those rats."

"You're going to be arrested, Butch. You'll bail yourself out as soon as possible. We'll arrange an address which you can give to the cops. They'll go there and find something that will lend considerable publicity to your name. A phony name, of course.

"To all appearances you will be a person almost indispensable to Frosty, his gang and the leader who operates behind the scenes. They'll contact you and . . . you'll be one of them, Butch. We'll start a little fifth column of our own. Report here in the morning, about nine, and we'll iron out the wrinkles. Not later, though, because I have to be at my office to take care of another angle."

CHAPTER VIII

Dangerous Mission



NEXT morning, Butch and Carol left Tony Quinn's hidden laboratory together. The Black Bat had carefully outlined his plans and they seemed to be fool proof. Butch paid no heed to the danger in which they might involve him.

They separated and Butch went to his rooms. There he packed a cheap bag, hired a taxi and switched cabs twice. He wound up in a poor section of the city where he rented a room in a boarding house that looked

seedy enough for his purposes.

From the bag he took out a number of newspaper clippings. They'd been supplied by Silk, part of whose job was a study of all crime stories that appeared in the papers.

These clips concerned half a dozen robberies in which explosives were involved. Robberies that had never been solved. Butch hid these, but not too carefully. They were meant to be found.

He glanced at his watch and realized he had to hurry. Leaving the boarding house, he walked rapidly north until he reached a rather busy section of the city.

At a corner he saw Carol. She stood at a bus stop and a large handbag swung carelessly from her left hand. Butch grinned tightly, parked himself, and waited until he saw a patrolman round a corner.

Then Butch walked swiftly up to Carol, made a grab for her purse and began running. Carol screamed and the cry of "Stop thief" went up from the pedestrians. None tried to stop this man mountain, however, until the patrolman saw him.

The cop made a lunge. Butch could have flung the man free as if he were a five-year-old tot, but instead Butch went down, struggling without too much application of strength. Handcuffs circled his wrists, and he was yanked up.

"Got you," the cop gloated. "Takes a pretty fast guy to get away from Patrolman Cassidy. Now where is the lady who owns this purse?"

Nobody seemed to know. The cop shrugged and hauled Butch toward a taxi. He turned to face the crowd.

"If anybody sees the lady, tell her to come to Precinct Twenty-three. I got her handbag."

He piled into the cab and in a few moments Butch faced a desk lieutenant.

"The charge is snatching a handbag," the patrolman said. "Yep, yanked it right out of a lady's hand

and started running. But I nailed him. Big guy too, ain't he?"

"Where is the complainant?" the lieutenant asked.

"Oh, her. She ducked out. Too much excitement I guess, but she'll be around later and make the charge. Anyway, I saw this Tarzan guy snatch it and run."

Butch had maintained a discreet silence all this time. Now he spoke angrily.

"They tell me cops are dumb, but I never figured they were quite as bad as this guy. I didn't swipe no purse. Do I look like a guy who'd snatch a handbag?"

The desk lieutenant looked him over for a moment. "Yes," he said judiciously. "Now you were saying something about dumb cops."

"Sure. That purse he just put on your desk. It's mine. I bought and paid for it. If you look hard enough, you'll maybe see the store tag on it. What's more, I got the receipt right here in my pocket."

BUTCH tossed over a receipt and it was authentic enough. He and Carol had made sure of that. The patrolman colored badly. The lieutenant sighed and leaned back.

"All right, this seems to be okay, but why were you running, Mister?"

"I was chasing a guy I thought had robbed the lady. Everybody was running. Then this big palooka in blue comes along and knocks me down. I think I'll sue . . ."

The lieutenant pulled the blotter toward him. "We'll hold you for a while," he said. "Then if you sue, you'll have a good case."

Butch leaned both elbows on the desk and grinned. "I didn't murder anybody, so I'm entitled to bail. How much, Lieutenant?"

"Three hundred dollars. Let's see you raise that."

Butch grinned more widely than ever, took out a fat wallet and extracted a sheaf of bills. He calmly

peeled off six fifties and handed them over. The lieutenant grabbed the wallet, examined an address card inside, and then passed it back. He began making out a receipt.

"All right, you can go as soon as I finish with this. Be here in the morning, understand? Otherwise, it will cost you three hundred bucks."

Butch nodded, gave the arresting officer a derisive smirk and walked out. The desk lieutenant didn't seem entirely satisfied with things. He called the detective bureau.

"Have one of the boys check on James Trent, 1105 Nicholas Avenue. He tells a pretty good yarn, but there's something funny about him. Let me know."

A detective proceeded to the address immediately. He opened Butch's newly rented room with a pass key and ten minutes later he was frantically telephoning.

"Lieutenant? Hey, that guy is really something. I found a .45 rod, some T.N.T. and a lot of fuses in his room. Also, a bunch of newspaper clips about half a dozen big robberies. In all of 'em T.N.T. was used to blast open safes. Yeah, I'll stick around. Sure I—is he a big lug, with a face like a gorilla and no neck? He's heading this way. I'll take him."

The detective hung up, transferred a gun to his side coat pocket and casually started to breeze out of the rooming house.

Butch was just turning into the short walk to the door. He took one look and swung around. The next corner was only about a dozen of Butch's long steps away, and he got around it before the detective could extricate the gun from his pocket.

Butch kept running. Now the dangerous part of the scheme was ready to take place. The cop spotted him again, just as Butch turned another corner. A bullet chipped a nick off the building where Butch had been half a second before.

There was a hardware store near by.

Butch knew all about it. Tony Quinn's copious records on crime revealed that it was used as a mail and gun drop by crooks who were being sought by the law. Butch darted inside, kept on going until he reached the back room and there he ducked behind several big cases.

The hardware dealer began moving toward him, fussing with the stock as he did so.

"Are you hot, pal?" he asked in a hoarse whisper.

"Brother," Butch said, "they'll call out the fire department any minute. Did you hear a shot? That bullet had my name on it, only somebody couldn't spell so good."

TWO uniformed patrolmen came into the store and asked questions. The dealer told a convincing story of seeing a big man running madly down the street. When the police had gone, he came into the back room.

"Where you from?" he asked.

Butch grinned. "Say, you're not a bad guy. Must have been luck that made me run in here. Where am I from? No place in particular. I just float around. My name is Jim Trent. How come you stalled those cops for me?"

The hardware dealer smiled. Not a warm smile, but one of cold calculation.

"You're not heeled, or you'd have pulled a gun on me. Now get this—I am. There's a .38 in my pocket. If you're okay, you got nothing to worry about. Make yourself at home. You won't find any back door so just stay put."

Butch did, for several hours, but he knew his plan was working. The storekeeper came into the back room with a newspaper.

"Relax," he said. "You're on the level all right. Say, this newspaper tells about a lot of jobs you pulled. The one in Tulsa was a lulu. You can handle explosives, can't you?"

"So they tell me." Butch studied his finger-nails intently. "So they tell me. I was afraid the cops would find out. Got into a jam this morning, greased my way out, but the cops got to my rooms before I did. You're a right guy. Show me something good, and I'll split."

The hardware dealer nodded. "I'll show you plenty of good stuff and you won't have to split. Guys like you work alone most of the time, but I can get you in with the biggest mob this country has ever seen. Smartest, too. We got a boss who knows everything, and the pay-off is you get eighty percent of the take with each job all lined up."

"Eighty percent?" Butch gasped. "Hey, there's a catch to it."

"Look, my friend, this man who bosses us has about a hundred men working for him. He gets the jobs, the boys do the work and from each job he collects twenty percent. Why can't he afford to be generous? I'll send you to him if you like."

Butch didn't display any eagerness. He seemed to be thinking the matter over. Finally he agreed, with just the right amount of doubt in his voice.

Things happened fast after that. A car pulled up in front, a man got out, looked around and gave a signal. Butch crossed the sidewalk swiftly, got into the car and was driven away.

THE man who had covered his escape grinned at him. He was a wizen-faced runt.

"I hear you're pretty hot, two ways, pal. The cops are after you and you pulled some fancy stuff all around the country."

"Yeah," Butch said disconsolately, "and the horses pulled some fast stunts on me, too—only they were too slow. This morning, I stepped low enough to grab a purse. Me, who works on bank vaults mostly."

"Yeah, so all the newspapers said. Well, you got nothing to worry about

any more, pal. Wait until you meet Frosty."

"Is he the big shot?" Butch asked.

"Well no. Not exactly. You see, there's another party. Nobody ever gets to see him, not even Frosty. He wears a mask or something, they tell me. But he's good. Boy, wait'll you find out. He especially likes guys who are handy with soup."

BUTCH grinned as the car pulled into an alley between two big buildings. He got out, passed through a narrow door and followed his escort up two flights of steps. They were admitted and Butch looked around in amazement.

This was a hideout deluxe. There were gambling tables, pool tables, a small bar. Direct wires to race tracks and several slot machines. About a dozen men eyed Butch, but there was no unfriendliness in their eyes. Just the eternal suspicion which any crook harbors for any man he hasn't known for years.

Butch waved his hand to them and went into a small office. Frosty sat behind a cheap desk. Butch recognized him instantly. Frosty ordered the escort to close the door. Then he offered his hand.

"Hello, Trent, glad to have you with us. It was a piece of good luck when you ducked into that hardware store. Lucky for you, good for us. We need men like you."

"I'm open for suggestions," Butch answered readily.

"Great. Now I've already checked on you. Everything is swell. Some day you can tell me about that Tulsa job and a few others. Right now I'm calling a meeting of the boys to introduce you. By tomorrow maybe, we'll have something on the fire and if you need dough—just ask."

Butch thought of the three hundred dollars he'd turned over as bail. Tony Quinn's money. He asked Frosty for three hundred and got it in a minute. Butch hoped they wouldn't search

him and find the fat wallet.

He was led to a larger room, equipped with folding chairs arranged in rows like a miniature theater. There was a tiny rostrum, and Butch took a seat on it. The room began to fill up and everyone had a curious glance for him. Butch returned these with scowls.

This was exactly what Tony Quinn would have ordered for the occasion. An entire gang of crooks, all working for the same man. All assembled in the same room. Butch would soon know if these men were adherents of the Axis or if the jobs they pulled

pace and put one hand behind his back. He crossed two fingers, but no one saw that.

"Glad to meet you, boys," Butch said. "Sure I want to work with you. It'll be swell. The more cops we knock over, the more dough we steal, the better for us. You know we're not like regular people."

They cheered on that one. Not too loud, but whole-heartedly enough. Butch went on, reaching the climax of his reason for coming here and risking his life.

"Guys like us are always on the lam. If it ain't a German, it's a cop-

*"Prove My Innocence—
or Carol Baldwin Dies!"*

That's the dread ultimatum delivered to the Black Bat at gun's point by Harvey Lansing, escaped convict killer, in



MILLIONS FOR A MURDERER

Complete Book-Length Mystery by G. WAYMAN JONES

Featuring Tony Quinn at His Sleuthing Best

COMING NEXT ISSUE

resulted in more or less accidental killings and burnings.

Frosty made a short speech and indicated that Butch was to arise. Frosty went on, with one hand on Butch's big shoulder.

"Boys, this is Jim Trent. Probably the best guy on soup in the country. You all read about the jobs he pulled. You know how he fooled the cops. Now he's one of us and when he gets working, we'll all share in bigger profits. Okay, Trent, say a few words to the boys."

Butch arose, stepped forward a

per, a sheriff or a trooper. Sometimes I think the day Hitler gets over here, the better it'll be for us. Why, he opens all the prisons every time he takes over a country. He lets guys out. Guys like you and me. I say we ought to . . ."

HE STOPPED. Some of the men were on their feet. Frosty had a grim expression on his face. Butch sensed the storm that was about to break, and delivered the necessary bolt of lightning. He raised one hand in the salute that makes any de-

cent person grow grey with hatred.

"Heil Hitler!" he roared.

His crossed fingers grew white as he pressed them together, and he hoped what he'd said would never reflect on him.

Then pandemonium broke loose. The crooks swarmed toward the platform, cursing him. A few swung chairs, others were reaching for guns. Frosty jumped up.

"You crazy jerk!" he rasped. "You can't come around here heiling a punk like Hitler. We're Americans—real Americans. Maybe we live in the shadows and maybe we hate cops, but we hate Hitler and his gang a lot worse. Some of us enlisted—those without records. The rest of us wish we could, and you, you rat, start running down the best country in the world."

Butch backed up a little. Those chairs might start hurtling at him any moment. One thing he knew now—these crooks were not at work for the Axis. That was as clear as the hate written on their faces.

"Frosty," someone yelled, "you ain't going to let a skunk like him work with us?"

"No," Frosty answered. "Not on your life. We aren't fussy about a man's reputation, but when he starts heiling the devil, it's time to draw a line. Okay, Jumbo—walk off this platform. We've got a little room downstairs. You won't like it, I hope."

"Now wait a minute," Butch implored. "Hold everything, boys, will you? I didn't mean that. It's just because . . . well the cops have been on my tail so long. I kind of lost my head. You're right about Hitler. Anybody who cottons to him ain't fit to live."

"Then why did you start saluting him?" half a dozen voices yelled.

"Listen, boys," Butch implored. "I been hiding out for months. Part of the time I was holed up in a spot where a lot of Nazi sympathizers lived. They talked that stuff into me

for days and days, until I almost believed it myself. Now I know I'm wrong—I never believed it anyhow. You got to take my word for it."

"Oh, sure," Frosty grimaced, "we'll take your word, pal. Come on, let's go."

They weren't even off the platform when there was a loud click, a buzzing sound and a voice spoke over some hidden loudspeaker.

"Frosty . . . the new man. Bring him to me."

Butch licked his lips. The owner of that voice might want to rid the earth of a crook who heiled the biggest crook in history.

Things were happening a bit too fast for Butch. But there was nothing he could do. He followed Frosty through the scowling gang and wondered what would happen next.

CHAPTER IX

Stolen Fingerprints



TONY QUINN arrived at his city office at mid-morning. Silk drove him there and helped him across the sidewalk, into the elevator and then to the office. Quinn's law clerk and secretary

greeted him warmly.

Silk read the mail to him and then Tony made several phone calls. Carol called in to say the job had operated perfectly and with luck Butch would soon be in a position to find out whether or not this strange gang was dominated by the Axis.

Commissioner Warner dropped in an hour later. Quinn turned his apparently sightless eyes in the general direction of the Commissioner.

"Glad to have you here. Anything new on the gang which has been turning your department inside out?"

"Nothing, Tony. But I've given the

case considerable thought, and I've come to a rather startling conclusion. So startling I decided to find out what you thought of the matter."

"I'm all ears—if not eyes," Quinn answered.

"This gang pulled off a few jobs when they first started," Warner said. "Nothing terribly big, but the last two really were something. Two men were murdered, both victims being rather essential to the war. Then a defense factory was gutted by a strange fire. It has been proved this fire was caused by thermite."

Quinn tapped fingertips against the top of his desk. "You're trying to suggest that this gang is actually composed of enemy agents?"

"No. Not that. Some of the men were seen. One was delivered to Captain McGrath via the Black Bat. Oh, yes, he's operating on the case and, believe me, I'm grateful. We need all the help we can get."

"You were saying," Quinn said calmly. "About a spy ring . . ."

"Oh, yes. No, the men are not enemy agents. That is, not born that way, but crooks have a habit of doing anything for money, and I'm wondering if it's possible that . . . well, they've been sold out. That they are committing what seems to be highly skilled jobs of thievery which are only a mask for the real motives of attack. Motives that concern our national defense."

"You may have something there," Quinn admitted. "What about the man who was turned over to Captain McGrath?"

"A minor character who knows very little. Admits there is a leader of the mob, but can't identify him. Seems nobody has ever seen the man. And Tony—just a warning—McGrath is like a roaring bull. He's talked about landing the Black Bat before, but this time he really means it. I tried to pound some sense into his skull, but you can't reason with a man in his mental state."

Quinn laughed. "McGrath furnishes one of the glowing highlights of my rather monotonous existence. I wouldn't have him change for the world. About your theory—it makes sense. If you get anything more definite, I'd like to know the facts."

"You will," Warner arose. "I don't think you are the Black Bat. Mind you, I said 'think'. But even if you aren't, your advice often helps. I'll see you soon."

TEN minutes after Warner left, two men were announced and shown in. William Leyden and Carl Spence had no words for one another, but they shook hands with Quinn cordially.

Then two more came. Julian Butler, the super-isolationist, was tall, rangy and looked something like the blue-nosed, joy-killer depicted in Anti-prohibitionist crusades. His handclasp was weak and clammy.

The fourth was Mr. Uchin, a Hindu with a turban on his head. He bowed gracefully and gave a salute symbolic of his race. He did not shake hands.

Quinn's blank eyes managed to study Carl Spence, and he saw a pudgy, rather harsh-faced man who looked as if he'd steal his grandmother's gold back teeth. He kept dry-washing his hands as if a few pieces of silver were between them.

Quinn leaned back. "Gentlemen, you probably wonder why on earth a blind lawyer summoned you to his office. Frankly, it has nothing to do with legal matters. I head a committee which is trying to get war jobs for blind people. Jobs that men and women without eyes can do better than normal persons. Yes, that's true. We who are not gifted with sight develop a sense of touch that is amazing."

"But what do you want us to do?" Carl Spence asked, and he might as well have voiced his real interest. If there were profits involved, he'd help. If not, he was no longer interested.

Quinn said, "I phoned all of you last night. Amazing that I couldn't reach even one of you, isn't it? I called at—let's see—about ten-thirty."

"I was still at Paul Anderson's tragic party," Spence said. He looked at Leyden. "You left long before I did, Bill."

Leyden shrugged. "I was at home. You must have got the wrong number, Quinn."

Butler maintained a discreet silence. Uchin smiled blandly.

"This is almost like a third degree, gentlemen. I see no reason why I should tell where I was, except that my little jaunt was rather baffling. Someone called me by phone and said that several countrymen of mine, survivors of a torpedo attack, were staying at a cheap hotel and wanted me to come down. I did go there, but found no Hindus. Only a swarm of policemen who were searching for a robber."

Quinn laughed. "I'm sorry. I did not mean to require answers. In fact, I didn't even ask a question and where you gentlemen were is of no interest to me. Now, you men are well known and form a cosmopolitan group. Your part in this undertaking would help blind people all over the country—help our efforts to defeat Hitler and his satellites, too."

"I'm for it," Leyden said briskly.

"Me, too!" Spence glared at Leyden because he answered first.

Uchin, the Hindu, was quite agreeable, but Julian Butler just scowled and remained silent.

"How about you, Mr. Butler?" Quinn asked. "We all know you were against our entering the war, but I'm afraid the Japs rather solved that problem for us. I purposely selected you, because your interest would show where you really stood, and the publicity it would get will certainly help the cause I represent."

"I'll have nothing to do with it," Butler declared. "It's enough that healthy, young men are being killed

by the thousands. I won't help to bring blind people into it. That's final, and I'll be going now."

He arose and walked toward the door. There was some confusion outside, and Quinn bit his lip in annoyance. He heard Captain McGrath's voice plainly and a second later the red-faced detective burst into the room.

McGRATH stopped short and a grin spread across his face. "Well, well. Mr. Leyden, Mr. Spence, Mr. Butler and Mr. Uchin. A regular nice little knitting bee, isn't it? Four men brought here by Tony Quinn. Four men who were among the last persons to see and talk to Paul Anderson. This is no coincidence."

"Captain," Quinn said sharply. "Oh, I know it's you. Your voice is a dead giveaway. Would you mind waiting outside just until I finish my business?"

"Yes," McGrath roared. "It so happens I would mind. You called these men together so you could question them, find out what they knew about the murder of Paul Anderson."

Julian Butler seemed to take a much deeper interest in things now. He stepped up to McGrath.

"What are you talking about, Captain? I didn't realize that we four did see Anderson shortly before he was murdered. It never occurred to me. Why should Quinn want to question us? He hasn't been District Attorney for a long time now."

"You bet he hasn't," McGrath answered. "Want to know the real reason why he questioned you? Because he's the Black Bat, that's why!"

There were gasps of astonishment. Quinn just smiled and leaned back, wholly at ease.

"Gentlemen," he said. "Captain McGrath has a phobia about that issue. But it is obvious that the Black Bat has the faculty of sight. I have not—as any number of doctors will

testify. Even those whom McGrath sent to examine me. I'm afraid the Captain is a bit upset to make his accusations in public."

"Upset?" McGrath roared. "How would you feel if the Black Bat, that great defender of justice, stood aside and allowed two important men to be murdered? That's what he did. Quinn was at the party and he made no move—"

Uchin coughed politely and spoke. "Captain, this must be a mistake. All of us know that Mr. Quinn is blind. And, if you will not speak for a moment, I can tell you he called us here to ask our help in a very worthy enterprise."

Uchin went on to explain, and McGrath began to turn purple. Julian Butler slowly edged his way up toward Quinn's desk. He took a cigar from his pocket, snipped the end carefully and not too much. Butler was a frugal soul. He fumbled for a match.

"Have you a light, Quinn?" he asked.

Tony Quinn reached out, passed his hand across the surface of his desk and encountered a metal desk lighter. He snapped it on and held the flame vaguely in Butler's direction. Butler puffed and thanked him.

Quinn arose and saw Silk moving toward the next room. Silk was finding it difficult to keep from saying too much to McGrath. Picking up his cane, Quinn tapped his way toward the main entrance of the office.

McGrath, somewhat flustered, seemed about to make an apology, thought better of it and departed.

QUINN turned around. The other four men were standing behind him.

"I'm sorry, gentlemen," he said. "Captain McGrath is very upset. Really, his accusations in the past have been most amusing, but this time it embarrasses me. Perhaps we can

all talk this matter over later."

"If you let a stupid dolt like McGrath confuse you, Quinn," Spence said, "I don't believe you're the man to head any committee. I'm very busy today so I don't mind the postponement."

He walked out and Leyden followed him. Julian Butler, puffing on his cigar, stretched one hand toward Quinn who paid no attention to it at all.

Butler grunted in exasperation of his own forgetfulness and went. Uchin bowed again and saluted even though he knew Quinn could not see him.

"Whenever you wish me to call and discuss the work," he said, "I shall be very willing to come. Thank you for including me on the committee."

Tony nodded and after they were all gone, he walked slowly back to his desk. Silk entered and slammed the door behind him with considerable venom.

"I think you let McGrath get away with too much, sir. He ought to be slapped down. Why, if it weren't for you, he'd still be a copper on a beat."

"I know, Silk. McGrath did make things difficult. I don't exactly hold any feeling of animosity toward him, but if I get the chance, I'll see to it that he is repaid in kind. What do you think of those four?"

Silk shook his head. "I can't figure them out. The Hindu seems to be the best-natured one. Leyden isn't so bad, but Spence has a dollar sign where his heart should be and Butler—the man gives me the creeps. I—what's wrong, sir?"

Quinn's blank eyes suddenly came to life and he looked carefully over his desk.

Then he glanced at the floor for a moment.

"My desk lighter," he said slowly. "It's gone. I gave Butler a light, so I know it was here a moment ago. One of those men stole it, Silk. Not

CHAPTER X

Special Delivery

McGrath. He was never close enough to the desk, but when I walked to the door, Leyden, Spence, Butler and Uchin were behind me. Any one of them at all could have lifted the lighter."

Silk groaned. "Of all times that I had to pick to leave the room. Still, I don't understand it, sir. Why should they want to steal a desk lighter?"

"Fingerprints, Silk. They all saw me give Butler the light. One of them wanted my prints and got them. It means that when I'm operating as the Black Bat, I must be more careful than ever. It shows something else too."

"Yes sir?" Silk asked hopefully.

"That one of the men present here is connected with the gang. My hunch was right. Perhaps he is only a stooge and not the leader, but we know he must be very important. The fingerman, possibly, and what an assortment of suspects we have."

SILK nodded gravely. "They're an odd bunch all right."

"Odd, yes—but think of them as individuals, Silk. Leyden, whose plant was burned down by incendiary devices strewn all around it. Devices he might have placed himself for all we know. Spence, who worships the dollar and wanted Leyden's contract. Julian Butler who hates war and thinks we should let Hitler take over the world."

"What about the Hindu?" Silk asked. "He's the only one who seems normal."

"And innocent. Almost too innocent, Silk. He's in the running, too, and well out in front. Get a line on him, Silk. Start on it right away. Find out when he came to this country and why. If he ever visited the Japanese consulate offices. Let me know as soon as you dig up anything significant."

"Yes, sir." Silk grabbed his hat. "I'll be coming back to take you home, sir."



FOLLOWING

Frosty, Butch descended a flight of stairs, passed along a corridor and both of them stopped in front of a door. Frosty knocked and received a command to allow Butch to enter. Frosty opened the door and gave Butch a shove.

The big man stumbled into a room illuminated only by the light from the hallway. When the door closed, he was in jet blackness. Butch fumbled around, found a chair and sat down. He gave a start of surprise when a voice spoke almost in his ear.

"Very happy you come," the voice said. "Expert on dynamite, yes?"

"Yeah, I know something about it." Butch was tense, wondering if he dared to reach out and seize this man he couldn't see. "I guess I shot my mouth off a little too much upstairs though. The boys won't like me from now on, so I might as well quit."

"No. There is no reason for that. You are very important to us, yes. Perhaps though, you had better stay away from them. Arrangements will be made for your security. Not very good for you, but must be. We are finished now."

Butch still fought the urge to tackle this man, see his face and then trust to luck on getting clear. He was just about ready to start these proceedings when the lights in the room were turned on. Butch was the only man there.

The door opened and Frosty came in, scowling. He gestured that Butch was to follow him.

"Now get this," he said, as they walked down the corridor, "none of us care about your company. However, it seems you are needed, so you

stay. I had a little talk with the boss just now—after he left you alone in that room. He says you're to be practically a prisoner, so none of the boys can get to you. That means being locked up, but you'll be well paid for it. Turn into this room."

Butch entered a small room and the door slammed shut. Butch tried to open it, but he couldn't. He banged on the panels, and Frosty growled a command for him to be quiet.

"Listen, you dope," Butch shouted. "I don't mind staying here, but get me something to read. Some newspapers that tell about me. Magazines, too—and a drink."

Frosty promised to bring them and, ten minutes later, three scowling gorillas opened the door and handed Butch newspapers, magazines, club soda and a bottle of liquor. None spoke a word of greeting.

Butch grinned at them. "Jailors, huh? Now ain't that something—to have three mugs like you lock me up. What if I decided to walk out of here?"

"You'd get the flat of three guns against your head," one of the men snarled. "We got orders not to shoot, but nobody said we couldn't knock you silly."

Butch smiled happily. He looked around the room and made certain there were no peep holes through which he might be observed. Then he hastily opened one of the newspapers, took a pencil from his pocket and laboriously wrote a message. He folded the newspaper and tucked it into his pocket.

A glance at his watch indicated it was probably dusk outside. A little early for his plans to be put into effect so he made himself comfortable and read the newspaper stories about Jim Trent and his exploits. Finally, he poured the whiskey down the sink, disposed of most of the club soda and then he kicked the door for ten minutes, until someone asked him what he wanted.

"Another bottle," Butch roared. "I get one or else."

He put an ear against the door and heard Frosty speak.

"Get him some more. We can't use him tonight, and if he passes out, so much the better. Only watch that guy. He looks like a sap, but something tells me he'd be hard to handle."

BUTCH was ready to give an exhibition that would prove Frosty's hunch as sound truth. He waited until the door was open, and then took three quick steps forward.

There were only two thugs in the corridor now. Butch seized each by the neck, raised them off the floor and brought their heads together. Neither reached for a gun. There hadn't been time.

Butch dropped them inside the room, dusted off his hands as if they were tainted, and then he strode briskly toward the room where he'd met the unseen leader of this group.

The room was empty so Butch kept going. He climbed a flight of steps, found the exit, and left without being noticed.

Several times Butch stopped short and looked behind him to be absolutely certain he was not followed. Finally he drew the newspaper from his pocket, started walking fast and, as he passed by a rubbish basket on a rather quiet corner, he nonchalantly dropped the paper into it.

As he rounded the next corner, he saw Carol get out of her car and approach the basket. In a moment, she had retrieved the newspaper and Butch felt better. The Black Bat would now know what results he had achieved.

Butch turned his steps back to the gang's headquarters. He was fairly certain that no punishment would be administered, because of his break for freedom. He was too genuinely needed by the gang leader.

Two men were standing outside of the place when he drew near. They

saw him coming and both deliberately turned their backs on him. Butch paid no attention, opened the door and almost bumped into Frosty. Butch braced himself for a verbal tirade.

"Been out?" Frosty asked in mild reproach. "You were supposed to stay put, mister."

Butch grimaced. "I didn't join this mob to be locked up like a convict. If you and the boys can't stand me around, then just say so and I'll get out fast."

"Now, take it easy." Frosty linked his arm under Butch's and led him to a comfortable room. They both sat down and Frosty continued to talk. "The boss was just looking after your welfare. He figured some of the boys might lose their heads and, pal—we need you in our business."

"Then I won't be locked up again?" Butch asked hopefully.

"No. I spoke to the boys, and they realize you maybe shot your mouth off without thinking. They'll come around pretty soon and be okay. Wait and see. Meantime, the place is yours."

"Swell, but when do I go to work? I need dough and I need it fast."

Frosty smiled knowingly. "It won't be long now. Maybe tomorrow. We got a sweet job lined up. Nothing like it has been pulled for years, and the cops are going to eat more aspirins than they ever saw before in their lives."

"Yeah?" said Butch. "Tell me more."

Frosty shook his head. "We don't detail cases until they're ready to be sprung. That way nobody can talk if the cops pick them up. And listen, pal, if you get into trouble, we send you away until the heat dies down. We got a place in the country—like a regular hotel. All you do is loaf, play cards, or fish if you want to. This mob takes care of its boys."

SEEMINGLY delighted at the information, Butch recalled the ratty-faced crook he'd hauled out of

the hedge at Paul Anderson's estate. That man had also spoken of being "sent away." But his tones had indicated great fear. Frosty outlined something that anybody would enjoy.

"Another thing," Frosty went on, "the boss likes you. Says you're probably the most important guy around here, outside of me. So he wants you to drop in on him tonight. In three hours you go to 2792 Weyland Avenue. It's a private house. Of course, you keep this under your hat, especially the address."

"Sure," Butch answered. "I wouldn't spill it to a soul. Say, maybe I'm going to like this outfit. Sounds all right. At first, I didn't care much about working for a guy who wouldn't talk to me, except in a dark room, but now he wants to show himself. Fine."

Frosty arose. "I've got a lot of things to do. Just make yourself at home and remember—you can go out any time you want to."

"Thanks," Butch said. "I need some smokes, so I may take a little walk, but I'll be at the boss's place on time, don't worry."

That was a promise Butch didn't intend to keep. He wouldn't be there, but a man in a black hood and cape was bound to show up. All Butch had to do now was get word through to Carol. Perhaps the whole gang might be broken up by morning.

Butch strolled out. Nobody paid any attention to him. He sauntered to the corner, bought a newspaper and then ducked into a doorway. There he proceeded to write down the address, the time and all the facts about the mysterious leader of the gang.

Ten minutes later, he casually dropped the newspaper into the same waste can and saw Carol heading toward it. Butch felt pretty good. In plenty of the Black Bat's investigations, Butch did nothing more than muscle work, but this time he had a chance to use his brains. Things were going along splendidly, he figured.

That's what Butch kept thinking

until a car slid to the curb, and he saw Frosty beckon to him. Butch's heart sank as he approached. There was nothing else to do.

That message had to reach the Black Bat even if he was forced to submit to torture.

"Get in," Frosty said. "There's a job on. We been looking for you."

Butch got in, and instantly two guns were buried against his ribs. Frosty's smile turned to a sneer.

"Well, sucker," he snarled, "what are you—a copper?"

Butch licked his lips. "A copper? Frosty, you've gone off your top. What's this all about?"

"You must have taken us for a bunch of fools," Frosty answered. "You

passes this dope to, but it won't matter, because somebody is going to visit that address tonight and somebody is going to get a neat surprise."

BUTCH emitted another groan and wondered what his chances were of absorbing a couple of bullets and staying conscious long enough to knock Frosty, his pal, and the driver cold.

"Want to know what's going to happen to this friend of yours?" Frosty fished in his pocket and drew out a piece of paper. Butch didn't see him signal the other crook. "Look at this, Tarzan, and you'll see a picture of the set-up."

Butch bent his head. The second



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slugged a couple of the boys because you had to get out. You had to report to somebody. That's what I figured, so I let you go out again. Only this time you were trailed. You were watched throwing that newspaper away, and we saw a cute-looking doll go over and get the newspaper."

"If you do anything to her—" Butch forgot himself for a moment, realized it, and gave a long sigh of resignation.

"So you admit it," Frosty said softly. "That's good, because it will save you a lot of pain. You wrote another report, didn't you? About that address I gave you. Nice going, because that's just what I wanted you to do. The girl will be allowed to report, too. Maybe we can't find out who she

crook brought down a blackjack that connected with the back of Butch's big neck. It was a paralyzing blow that made him fall forward limply. Two more smashes with the blackjack, and Butch quietly collapsed on the floor.

Frosty threw a blanket over him, leaned back and lit a cigarette.

"Well, that's that. In a little while, we'll know who this big bozo worked for, and I'll lay odds it's the Black Bat."

The other crook seemed a bit nervous about the whole affair. "I ain't so anxious to tangle with that guy, Frosty. He ain't human. Better send up all the boys you can spare."

Frosty grinned. "We don't have to send anybody up. The boss will

take care of the Black Bat. When I reported that the Black Bat was horn-ing in, the boss promised me there wouldn't be any danger and the boss keeps his word. We'll go back now, tie this man mountain up and wait until the boys bring in the girl. Between the two of them we'll soon know the truth about all this."

The other crook shook his head. "I hope so. Say, Frosty, why do you suppose this guy started to praise Hitler and salute him? That's a funny angle. You don't think the Black Bat is a Nazi, do you?"

Frosty pursed his lips and whistled softly. "I forgot all about that. It is odd. Can't see any reason for it, but things will iron themselves out. We did our part and just in time too. There's going to be a big job tonight."

"How big?" the second crook asked eagerly.

"Plenty, but it's just a warmer-upper for what's coming pretty soon. This job tonight will give us experience for the biggest haul in history. When that's over with, we quit for a while and enjoy the dough we've made."

CHAPTER XI

Peril in the Dark



USHING to a tele-
phone booth as soon
as she had the first
newspaper which
Butch discarded,
Carol called Tony
Quinn.

"Butch seemed
unworried," she told
Quinn, when she got
the connection. "He wasn't followed,
I'm sure of that. His message indi-
cates that he talked up Hitler and al-
most got himself mobbed. Those men
may be crooks, but they're not fifth
columnists, Tony."

"I was sure they weren't," Quinn
answered. "What else does Butch
say?"

"He got away with his pose as an
expert on explosives, and he met the
leader of the gang. A man who talked
to him in a dark room. Butch was
unable to see anything of him. Their
conversation had mainly to do with
Butch's experience. Then they locked
him up—for his own protection,
Butch was told. He got out—doesn't
say how—but as soon as there is any-
thing definite on any plans, he'll let
us know."

"Good work," Quinn said. "You'd
better go back and wait again, Carol.
We must pick up Butch's information
the moment he can get it to us."

Carol hung up, hurried back to
where her car was parked and got in.
She waited a much shorter time than
she hoped for. Butch dropped his
newspaper and hurried away.

The girl waited until he was out of
sight and then went over to the rub-
bish can. As she walked toward the
same drug store to phone, she read
Butch's message and realized how im-
portant it was.

In the privacy of the booth she con-
tacted Tony Quinn.

"Things are ready to break, Tony.
Butch has been invited to the resi-
dence of the gang leader. It's at 2792
Weyland Avenue. The leader is due
to be there about eleven tonight. It's
your big chance, Tony."

"It sounds too good to be true,"
Quinn replied. "It's odd they should
have given Butch such information,
especially after he walked out on them
the first time."

"Tony, do you think it's a trap?"

"I don't know, Carol. If it is, they
probably followed Butch and can be
on your trail right now. You'd better
look around before you leave that
phone booth."

"What a minute," Carol said curtly.
"Tony, I think you're right. Three
men just walked into the store. One
is standing by the tobacco counter
near the door. Another is drinking a
soda, and the third is looking over a
magazine rack near me. There's only

one phone booth, so he isn't listening. I selected the store for that reason."

"You're not positive they're after you?" Quinn asked.

"No. I couldn't swear to it. None of them seems to be watching me."

"Listen," Quinn said. "Move your purse so that the metal clasp hits the door window. Not too hard. If those men are really after you, all their attention will be on you, and they'll jump at any sound you make. Try it."

Carol tapped the glass door and all three men instantly turned their eyes her way. Then they turned away again. The druggist and the soda clerk hadn't heard that noise, but the three crooks did because they were so intent on being ready.

"They're after me all right," Carol said. "Tony—what am I going to do?"

"Hang up, dial police headquarters and tell them there's a holdup at the drug store. When the police arrive, just walk out, but as soon as you're clear, move fast. Good luck, Carol. I'd come there to help you if I could."

CAROL depressed the hook, dropped another coin into the slot and dialed the operator. She reported a holdup, cut the connection and pretended to be still talking. Very gently, she moved the door open.

Within two minutes she heard the first wail of a siren and a radio car slid up in front of the door. Others were coming, with strident wails. The three crooks looked at one another and moved in a body toward a side door.

The moment they disappeared, Carol emerged from the telephone booth and walked hastily to the front door. Cops blocked her way, and blue uniforms had never looked so good to her.

While the druggist made frantic denials of having called for help, Carol managed to glance out the window. Her car was parked close by, and she saw a man standing near it. She slipped out of the drug store as two

more radio cars pulled up.

She crossed the street quickly, saw a taxi coming down and signaled it. She was inside in a flash and she handed the driver a five-dollar bill.

"There's an old boy friend of mine pestering me. I want to lose him. This is yours if you get away from here quickly."

The driver took the bill. "Lady, for five bucks I'd lose your husband. Hang on."

Carol didn't breathe freely again until she was pressed in a subway car and roaring downtown. She walked to Tony Quinn's house and as she neared it, her heart really sank. A man was standing across the street, half hidden by the shadows and intently watching the place.

Then she smiled weakly. It was Captain McGrath. Carol knew how to keep from being seen and very soon she was in the secret lab with Tony Quinn.

He was busy at a small desk in the lab. There were many newspaper clippings before him and all were concerned with F.B.I. raids on spy nests.

"Thank heavens, you got away from them," he said earnestly. "No further word from Butch, of course?"

"No, Tony. I'm afraid he's been taken. What are we going to do?"

"Butch described the address where the gang is living. They'll leave at once of course, but they'll be in a hurry and may furnish some clues. Meantime, I'm going to visit the house on Weyland Avenue."

"But Tony, it's bound to be a trap."

"I know, but I'm going anyhow. I've checked on the person who lives there, Carol. In fact, I visited the house last night. William Leyden owns that house."

"Leyden!" Carol cried. "Then you've got something, Tony. Something definite. How will Leyden ever explain this?"

"We'll see," Quinn answered. "By the way, did you notice my friend McGrath lurking outside? He's been

there since I got home. For once, McGrath is really getting into my hair."

TONY QUINN opened a locker and began drawing very light-weight, black trousers over his regular tweeds. Then he donned a black shirt, changed to black crepe-soled shoes and carefully tucked his cape and hood under a dark coat. Two heavy automatics went into especially made pockets that were more like holsters.

"Stay here," he told Carol. "Silk knows I'm going out, and he'll stand by the phone. If I need him, I'll call. Then it's up to you to take over, because if Butch manages to call, someone must be here. Wish me luck, darling. I think I'm going to need it."

When the Black Bat emerged from the tunnel into the garden house, he put on the wide-brimmed hat and waited until he saw Silk in one of the back windows, signaling that McGrath was still out in front.

The Black Bat reached his car and drove away. At no time did McGrath see him. He proceeded straight to the vicinity of Weyland Avenue, parked, and made sure the section was deserted.

The dimout helped, too. Some of the street lamps were out while the others burned bulbs of much lower wattage than usual.

The Weyland Avenue house was darkened and apparently even the servant or two which Leyden employed, were out for the night. That seemed significant to the Black Bat.

He approached the same window through which he'd gained entrance before. It was locked. For five minutes, the Black Bat sat hunched in the darkness while his sensitive ears listened for the slightest sound. Then he went to work.

First of all, he drew his silk gloves tighter, took a small bit of tempered steel from his pocket and got the window latch open in less than a minute. He raised the window and listened again.

Finally, he hoisted himself up and over the sill. He stood in the room, his eyes penetrating the darkness and seeing that no one lurked there, waiting to spring some kind of trap.

Gun in hand, the Black Bat moved across the room and reached the hallway. Now he did hear a sound—like running water. It came from upstairs. The attraction of the noise was impelling, but he searched the first floor, before he went to the second.

In front of a closed door, the Black Bat stopped to listen again. The running water came from that room. He carefully examined the door to see that it wasn't wired to some lethal device, and then he turned the knob gently.

Flinging the door wide, he stepped quickly to one side. Nothing happened. He peered into the room and saw that all windows were heavily curtained. There was a large sink in one corner, and a steady stream of water from a faucet flowed into it, making the noise that Tony had heard.

The Black Bat realized at once what this room was. Leyden must be an amateur photographer. The room was equipped with every kind of device for developing and printing pictures.

Walking over to the sink, Tony looked down at a deep basin used for washing prints. Two or three pictures were floating around in the water, and he could make out what they represented easily. They were photographs of large buildings. Perhaps factories. War plants!

The Black Bat looked around for something to fish them out with, but found no photographer's tongs or anything else. He drew off a glove, pulled up his sleeve and reached into the water for the pictures. He got them out and laid them on a small table. They were pictures of war factories all right—important ones, too.

UNCONSCIOUSLY, the Black Bat reached for a handy towel and dried his hand. He replaced the

glove and was starting to blot the prints when he heard a telephone jangle. It startled him, and the bell kept ringing insistently.

The Black Bat hurried to the next room wondering if this was all part of some trick. He examined the phone scrupulously and decided to answer it. He was never so grateful for a hunch before. Carol was on the wire. She recognized his guarded voice instantly.

"Tony, right after you left, a police car picked up McGrath. Silk managed to follow them in the sedan. He phoned that McGrath seemed to be headed toward the house where you are now. I took a chance and called."

"Thanks," the Black Bat said and hung up.

He started down the steps, stopped dead and under his black hood he turned pale. He began to understand just what kind of trap this was. Nothing spectacular — just devilishly clever.

The pictures had been purposely placed, the water left running to draw his attention. As the crooks planned, he gave no thought to removing a glove and getting those prints out of the water. It was the most natural thing in the world to do.

But his fingerprints were on them, embossed in the wet, soft surface of the prints. And someone had made certain to get a set of Tony Quinn's prints by stealing his desk lighter.

He heard soft footsteps on the porch. That would be Captain McGrath, and he'd most likely come alone. McGrath's greatest ambition was to capture the Black Bat without help.

The Black Bat raced back to the dark room, applied the blotters to the prints again until they were fairly dry. Then he drew a knife and carefully cut off the white edges. He knew that he had not touched the prints except by those edges.

The strips of paper went into his pocket, but escape seemed to be cut

off. McGrath apparently knew just where to go for he came straight up the stairs.

The detective would have a gun in his hand and be very likely to open fire. The Black Bat could have cut him down in a second, but although McGrath's hatred had grown to an alarming intensity in this case, the Black Bat still liked him. He would never have shot down an officer, anyway, no matter how serious the predicament.

But something had to be done—and fast. The Black Bat quietly moved toward the door, stood against the wall, so he'd be hidden when the door opened, and waited. Sweat was running down his face. This was one of the closest calls of his career, and it showed up with startling clarity the type of man he fought.

The leader of Frosty's gang knew that if he set this trap and sprung it by using manpower, they might get the Black Bat, but at a terrific toll.

So he merely arranged matters to let the police handle it all. If the Black Bat got away from McGrath, the fingerprints would remain and McGrath would have his man.

The detective captain pushed open the door which the Black Bat had purposely left ajar. He snapped on a flashlight, and the beam roamed over the room. McGrath grunted in exasperation, took a step forward and suddenly the gun and flash were both knocked from his hand.

HE WAS husky, knew how to fight, and put up a terrific battle. Once he wriggled free of the Black Bat's grip and fled to a corner of the room.

The Black Bat moved on him relentlessly. McGrath deserved a mild beating. He'd asked for it in Tony Quinn's office when he made that accusation before the four suspects.

"So I finally got you," McGrath growled. "Just the two of us—in one room. I've been waiting for this a

long time. I'll tear that hood off your head, and I'll throw you into a cell. A lot of people are going to be surprised, but not me. No, sir! Me and Tony Quinn are old friends, aren't we, Quinn?"

The Black Bat made no answer. He just kept edging forward, keeping himself between McGrath and the door. McGrath couldn't see him, but the detective was quite visible to the Black Bat's eyes.

McGrath suddenly lashed out with both fists. He thought the Black Bat's silence meant that he was drawing closer and was ready to strike. McGrath reached into his hip pocket and pulled out a blackjack. He held this ready and waited.

Suddenly there was a swishing sound. McGrath tried to jump out of the way, but he started that maneuver much too late. Two arms encircled his legs and he came down to the floor with a thud that shook the house. Then a sledge hammer collided with his chin, and McGrath went to sleep.

Someone was calling his name, water rolled between his lips, and McGrath gave a violent twist. Then he realized the lights were on and that the driver of the police car was the only other person in the room.

McGrath got to his feet and reeled over toward the sink. He saw the pictures on the table near by and gave a whoop of delight. He tilted a desk lamp until the ray shone on the surface of those pictures at a sharp angle.

"There they are," he cried. "Fingerprints. The Black Bat left his prints. He got away from me, but it won't happen again."

McGrath very carefully wrapped the prints in a piece of paper. He handled the pictures as though they were the most precious articles on the face of the earth.

When he reached his office at Police Headquarters, Commissioner Warner was waiting for him.

"I got him this time," McGrath said. "The Black Bat! I got him cold."

"Explain yourself, Captain," Warner snapped.

But even the Commissioner's sharp attitude had no effect on McGrath now.

"This is what happened," he said. "I know the Black Bat is Tony Quinn. I've spent all my spare time watching his house. Oh, he's a sly one all right, but he didn't get up quite early enough this morning. While I was watching Quinn's house, a little while ago, the Inspector sent over a car and driver. Seems somebody phoned in and said the Black Bat would be at a certain address. If I missed him, maybe I'd find his fingerprints on some pictures just printed there. Well, he knocked me out, but the pictures were there. Give me ten minutes, and I'll check these prints with a set I've got from Tony Quinn's fingers. They'll be the same."

"Captain," Warner said very sharply, "you're letting this thing run away with you. If those are fingerprints, as you say, let the regular fingerprint men check them and go through our files. You might be wrong, and Quinn would have an awfully good case against you."

"All right," McGrath answered, and pushed a buzzer on the desk.

He turned the pictures over to a fingerprint man who came in answer to the buzzer. Then McGrath sat down and seemed to be purring like a kitten full of cream.

"Commissioner, no disrespect meant, but I'll prove you're wrong this time. You've always defended Quinn. Will you do that if those prints check?"

"No. How could I? The Black Bat has violated a dozen laws a dozen different times. Now that you've cooled off a bit, tell me just when this argument with the Black Bat occurred."

"At just about ten-fifty," McGrath grunted. "I looked at my watch before I went into the house. Between ten-fifty and ten fifty-five, if you want to be very exact."

Warner nodded his head several times. "I was afraid of that. Captain, at ten fifty-five Tony Quinn phoned my office. It was Quinn. He had a suggestion to make about this gang which is causing so much trouble. Now how could he be at home, talking to me on the telephone, and be fighting with you at the same time?"

"It was a trick," McGrath answered confidently. "He's full of 'em. Remember, I was knocked cold. He could have used the phone in that house and just said he was home. You'd believe anything that guy told you, but a judge and jury won't. This time I've really got him."

Warner flushed slightly. "Well, for your sake, I hope so, Captain. While you spend time trying to prove a blind man isn't blind and, moreover, is the Black Bat, more and more crimes are being committed."

Warner waited until the fingerprint man returned. He looked at McGrath rather queerly.

"There were some perfect prints on one of those pictures, Captain. I lifted them, classified them and ran through our records. The picture and description of the man who left those prints is on that card."

"Ah," McGrath picked up the card. "This is it. The moment I've been waiting for—I—hey, what is this? If you're pulling a gag on me—"

"It's no gag," the fingerprint man insisted.

"Now just a moment." Commissioner Warner stepped between the two men. "Why not let me in on this? Whose are these fingerprints? Whose description is on the card?"

"M-mine!" McGrath gulped. "It's my own card. I can't understand it. I never touched those pictures. I never went near them until I was ready to take them. Before that, I was unconscious."

"Captain,"—Warner stifled a grin—"you used the wrong tense in your last statement. You are *still* unconscious."

CHAPTER XII

The Black Bat's Inning

LEAVING Leyden's house through the same window he'd used to get in, the Black Bat reached his car—and suddenly reached for a gun. Then he relaxed, because the man who stood be-

side the car was Silk. A nervous, worried Silk who gave a whoop of delight when he saw his boss.

"I couldn't help worrying, sir. In another minute I'd have gone in there myself. That McGrath—"

"I fixed him," the Black Bat chuckled. "Knocked him out—nothing else to do. He knew, somehow, that I would probably leave fingerprints, and he came for them. Luckily, I guessed the plot because I was expecting something like that to happen ever since my desk lighter was stolen."

"You should have given McGrath a real beating," Silk grunted.

"I did worse than that. I've hurt his pride. While McGrath was unconscious, I put his own prints where he believed mine would be. I'd love to see his face when he finds out the truth."

"So would I," Silk laughed. "What next, sir? May I remind you that Butch is still missing?"

"I'm going after him now. You come along, too. There's nothing to worry about so far as McGrath is concerned. While he was unconscious, I also phoned Commissioner Warner and pretended to be at home. McGrath won't figure that out for hours. You follow me in the other car."

The Black Bat, minus hood and cape, drove sedately through town, always careful that his face was covered by the big hat. When he reached the vicinity of the gang's hideout, he

parked on a side street. Silk pulled up behind him and came forward for instructions.

The Black Bat said, "Our one and only chance of finding Butch is through some clue left at this hideout of the gang. Most of them lived here, according to Butch. He'll be gone, and so will the gang. When Carol made her escape, they realized the game was up. We'll go through this alley. Follow me, Silk."

They came to the side door of the building which Frosty had used. The door was half open. Inside, the Black Bat saw tables and chairs flung aside as if occupants had left in a mad frenzy of speed. Gun ready, he began searching the place.

Upstairs, he and Silk found a number of small rooms, used as sleeping quarters. There was no sign of Butch. The Black Bat, using no lights, inspected the various rooms and called Silk to his side.

"You can't see this," he explained, "but in almost every one of these rooms are old shoes and some rubber boots. Old trousers and sweat shirts, too. The shoes, boots, and trousers are smeared with fresh earth. See if you can find some envelopes. I want to take samples."

While Silk busied himself finding these, the Black Bat entered a bathroom and opened the medicine cabinet. He took down a bottle of medicine bearing a doctor's name and the name of a drug store in the slum area.

The label indicated that the bottle could not be refilled without a new prescription, indicating that the medicine contained a drug. He sniffed of it and recognized the dark-brown syrupy fluid as cough medicine.

SILK found some envelopes, and they spent a few moments scraping dirt and mud from the shoes. This done, they left in a hurry and the Black Bat led Silk to the neighborhood where that drug store was located. He gave Silk the bottle.

"Go into the store," he ordered. "Say this bottle was found on a drug addict and that you're a narcotic agent investigating the affair. Demand to see the prescription blank and get the patient's name and address. Do this as fast as possible. Every moment may mean that Butch is that much nearer to death."

Silk carried out the orders and returned in five minutes. "It was a cinch, sir. Scared the daylights out of the druggist. That prescription was given to a man named Bittner who has a room in a hotel in the next block. Room two two seven."

"That's where we're going, then," the Black Bat said. "If Bittner isn't there, we've got to find out who his associates are and start tracking them down. One good thing about this mob—it's so big, all of the members can't operate at the same time."

The Black Bat and Silk used a side entrance to the hotel and made their way to the second floor.

The Black Bat donned his hood and cape, pressed an ear against the door and heard the regular breathing of a sleeping man. He gestured to Silk for silence and motioned him to stay in the corridor and watch.

There was a key in the door. The Black Bat forced it out and held his breath when it rattled on the floor, but the occupant of the room didn't awaken. With a small tool, the Black Bat slid the bolt back, opened the door and stepped inside. He turned on a bedlamp that threw shadows all over the room.

The sleeper stirred, folded an arm across his eyes for a moment, and then suddenly sat bolt upright. A scream welled to his lips and it was only silenced by the sight of an automatic in the gloved hand of the black-robed figure.

"Talk softly," the Black Bat ordered. "Keep your hands where I can see them. Bittner I've finally caught up with you."

"But I—I ain't done nothing," Bitt-

ner protested shrilly. "Honest, I'm innocent."

"I wonder what of. Not very much, Bittner. You have just one chance to live. Refuse to answer my questions, and they'll find you dead—with a Black Bat emblem stuck between your eyes. Unless I select that spot for a bullet, of course."

"Wh-what do you want to know?"

"Where can I find Frosty? The truth now. Lying won't do, because I know too much. You have about thirty seconds, Bittner."

"He-he hangs out at 65 Waverly Place. Honest, that's the truth."

The Black Bat knew it was, because he'd just come from that address.

"And if he isn't there, where else would he be found? Mugs like Frosty have more than one address."

"He'll slit my throat for telling."

free. Then we'll trail him. Can't take chances with the word of a crook. Butch's life is at stake."

Silk hurried to a spot where he could watch the hotel entrance, while the Black Bat maintained a vigil at the side door. He heard Silk whistle once. The Black Bat raced to where his car was parked, pulled away and picked up Silk's tail light in a moment.

Apparently, Bittner hired a taxi and paid the driver well, because the cab rolled fast across town. Bittner was either too sure of himself or too frightened to see whether or not he was being followed. The trail was quite simple. Bittner had described the hideout well—all except the address. It was far from White Avenue.

The Black Bat stopped to talk with Silk for only a second.

The Black Bat faces his most formidable foes in next issue's exciting complete book-length novel,
MILLIONS FOR A MURDERER



Bittner whined, "but I got to. Otherwise you'd kill me. Only don't tell Frosty. He's bad, that guy. There's another spot where some of the boys hole up. I never been there, but I got orders if things get hot to reach the spot fast. It's a private house at the end of White Avenue. So help me, that's the truth."

"If it isn't," the Black Bat said, "I'll be back. Lie down. I'm going to tie you up, so Frosty won't get any announcement of my little visit."

WORKING fast, the Black Bat bound Bittner to the bed, gagged him and then hurried out. He told Silk about it as they ran toward the cars.

"I doubt Bittner told the whole truth," he added. "It was much easier to lie, and I could see him scare when I said I'd be back. Bittner can reach his clothes at the foot of the bed if he tries hard enough. Probably he carries a knife and can cut himself

"I'm going inside. If I don't come out in ten minutes, call the police and say somebody just screamed bloody murder in the house. Keep out of sight."

The Black Bat studied the house for a moment. It lay at the extreme end of what seemed to be a small estate. A high stone wall separated this estate from the one next door, and the wall ran flush with the side of the house. The Black Bat scurried for the opposite side, blended well with the trees and shrubs, and approached the rear door.

There was a man seated on the porch and he had a gun in his hand. He was on the alert, too. Apparently Bittner had given the alarm. That meant Frosty would leave as soon as possible, and he wasn't likely to leave Butch behind—alive.

The Black Bat sprinted across a small clearing, flattened himself against the side of the house and stepped to the corner. The thug on

guard fumbled in his pocket for a cigarette and the Black Bat tensed. When the crook applied flame, the light would temporarily blind him and that would be the moment for attack.

As the match flared, the Black Bat rounded the corner and swept silently down on the man. The guard started to lift his gun, but the Black Bat was on him before he pulled trigger. An automatic butt flashed down and the crook slumped.

The Black Bat hit him again, a scientifically placed blow directly behind the ear. That thug wouldn't wake up for an hour or more. Then he crossed the small rear porch, tried the door and stepped into a kitchen, a huge room equipped with enough cooking utensils to operate a restaurant.

Voices, muffled quite a bit, reached Quinn's ears. He located them as coming from the cellar. With both guns in his hands now, the Black Bat passed through a dining room and his eyes penetrated the darkness to see the lavish oriental paintings on the walls, the built-in cupboards filled with fragile pottery and dishes.

A lavish Oriental rug covered the floor and it was very thick, making his progress absolutely soundless.

LOCATING the cellar door was easy. Everyone seemed to be down there, except for another guard posted in front. The Black Bat saw him through a window. He opened the cellar door a bit and listened.

Frosty was speaking. "Take off the gag and we'll see if he'll talk. This is the last chance. We've got to get away from here. Bittner is sure it was the Black Bat who came to see him. By giving a phony address, he stalled him off, but he'll maybe find us. Anyway, we're sure now that this big guy works for the Black Bat."

A low moan reached the Black Bat's ears and under the hood, his face tightened into harsh lines. That was Butch and when he was only able to

moan, he was hurt badly.

Frosty began growling questions, but there was no answer. The Black Bat had to act now if he hoped to save Butch's life. Invading that cellar which could accommodate a large number of crooks, was risky, but essential.

He started down the steps, paused and saw that electric light wires were loosely hooked up within reach. He gently seized these wires, held them firmly against the muzzle of his gun and fired two quick shots.

The wires were broken by the bullets and the cellar plunged into darkness. The Black Bat went down the steps fast. He saw Frosty and about eight of his men through the darkness.

Frosty had a knife in his hand. He gave this to one of the men standing beside a table upon which Butch was tied. The crook raised the blade high, poised just above Butch's heart.

The Black Bat fired once. The knife fell harmlessly to the floor and the murderous thug dropped on top of it. He hadn't uttered a sound. The Black Bat's bullet had been aimed for his head and hadn't missed.

The Black Bat surged through the startled crooks, pushing them aside until he reached the table. He turned this over, sprawling Butch on the floor, but out of the way of any bullets which Frosty might send in that direction.

Cool air swept through the cellar. The Black Bat whirled in time to see several men rush through a door. Frosty had been the first to get out.

Both of the Black Bat's guns barked and slugs ripped into the wall near the door.

"The first man who makes another move, gets it," he warned. "Stand as you are."

Those who were left, obeyed the warning. They sensed that the Black Bat could see them while he himself, was quite invisible. Arms shot ceilingward and guns clanged on the cement floor.

There was a wine cellar to the left. The Black Bat ordered all the men to go to it. In a moment, he had them locked inside.

Then he hurried to the spot where Butch lay. The big man looked up at him with a weak grin. The Black Bat cut him free and helped Butch to his feet.

"I'm okay," Butch said, and swayed a bit. "Just lemme take a crack at those buzzards, huh? Just five minutes in the wine cellar with 'em. Please."

"They'd make mince meat out of you," the Black Bat said. "Butch, you took a lot to protect me. I won't forget it. Now go upstairs and wait. But be careful. They may not have warned the guard at the front door."

But the guard was gone. Silk arrived at the front door, and the Black Bat let him in. He motioned that Butch was to be taken care of, and Silk helped the big man outside to where the car was parked.

The Black Bat examined the house for a moment or two and stared in amazement at the rich furnishings. All were of Oriental style. Then he picked up the phone and dialed Headquarters. Captain McGrath was not there, so he phoned his home and McGrath answered.

"Now hang onto your temper, Captain. This is the Black Bat."

"Why you—you—"

"Captain, be careful. Remember your age and the condition of your blood vessels. Now listen to me. Listen, will you, and stop shouting. Get a squad and come to the address I'll give you. Locked in the wine cellar you'll find several of the gang which has been preying on our city and your nerves. That's just to show you I don't hold any hard feelings. Good-by, Captain, and happy fingerprinting to you. Oh, yes, the address."

The Black Bat gave that information and beat a hasty retreat from the house and the vicinity. McGrath would send radio cars in a hurry.

CHAPTER XIII

The Coiled Serpent



IT WAS early morning when Carol finished attending to the bruises and wounds on Butch's puffed face. Silk was somewhere inside the house, prepared to warn Tony Quinn if McGrath put in

an appearance.

Quinn sat at the desk, mulling over more newspaper clippings of spy raids.

Carol helped Butch into a more comfortable position on the davenport, then walked over and sat down beside Quinn.

"The men who did that to Butch aren't human, Tony. They don't deserve to live. And what burns me up is that we're still as far from landing them as ever."

Quinn smiled at her. "Do you really think so, Carol? I'm glad to say you're wrong. I know who leads that gang, but I doubt that any member of the outfit shares such knowledge with me. But there is someone else, who works on the outside and fingers all the jobs. He is the first lieutenant of the snake behind all this."

"A snake probably coiled to strike again," Carol said. "If you know who he is, why not round him up before someone else is tortured or murdered?"

"For one good reason, darling. I don't know where to find him and I'm sure the only person who does is this outside man. He is one of four suspects. Leyden, Julian Butler, Carl Spence, or the Hindu, Uchin. We've something against all of them, except Uchin."

"For instance?" Carol prodded.

"Well, Leyden's house was used as a trap for me. Perhaps he doesn't know it, and he was lured away.

Spence had a motive for burning down Leyden's factory and of the four, Spence is the money-grabber. Then we have Julian Butler, a profound and bitter isolationist who even at this late date refuses to acknowledge we're fighting a just war. Perhaps he is in the pay of some enemy group, because we must not lose sight of the fact that all this may be the work of the enemy. Then, too, Butler asked me for a light from my desk lighter and was in the best position to know that my fingerprints were on it."

"And whoever has the lighter, set the trap to snare the prints of the Black Bat," Carol said.

"Yes. Things didn't go exactly according to plan, so this man merely arranged that Captain McGrath would get the prints. Perhaps he was afraid to face me or even take a chance on returning to Leyden's home later on to get the prints."

"And Uchin plays innocent?"

"Yes. There is one thing however. Uchin poses as a Hindu. He isn't. His features and coloring aren't those of a true gentleman from India. I'd say Uchin was Eurasian. What's he doing in this country, anyway?"

"I can tell you that," Carol said. "He is here to sell a lot of jewelry. He has been planning to open a very exclusive store on Carmody Square. Maybe he has already opened it."

"Carmody Square," Quinn muttered, and reached for a street directory. He studied this for a few moments and then yawned.

"We'd better get some sleep. Butch can stay here for the night and Silk will look in on him from time to time. You'd better show up in the morning, Carol, just in case Butch needs attention."

BUTCH'S powers of recovery were amazing, however, and the next morning, he had peeled off most of the bandages, eaten a breakfast that would have stumped three ordinary men and smoked cigarettes chain-

fashion while he mentally belabored Frosty and his gang.

Silk entered with several newspapers. He was in a high degree of excitement.

"The papers just came, sir. They're full of a story about a new job the gang pulled. They tunneled beneath the Gilchrest jewelry store and blew out the bottom of the safe. Escaped with thousands in stones and gold."

Quinn jumped up. "Get Commissioner Warner on the wire quickly, Silk. This is what I've been waiting for."

Half an hour later, Quinn was riding in Commissioner Warner's car. Warner was exceptionally worried.

"Well, they really pulled a neat trick this time, Tony. You should see that jewelry store. They drilled a hole through the bottom of the safe. Had plenty of time to do it. Must have taken them days. Then they shoved explosives into the safe and let them go. They blasted the safe so that it bulges. Some of the stones must have been destroyed, but even the pieces are worth a lot."

"It's fortunate no one was injured," Quinn commented. "Was it a large tunnel, Commissioner? Oh, I know I seem like a fool to visit the scene of crimes, but you never can tell when a blind man will find something missed by those gifted with sight. I'd like to see the tunnel. See it, that is, through my hands."

Warner arranged it and Quinn's apparently sightless eyes took in all details. The tunnel started across the street in the cellar of an abandoned building, passed beneath gas mains and electric light conduits so skillfully that the engineer responsible certainly must have used a map.

Quinn ground his shoe sole into the soft dirt, walked a few steps and purposely banged an ankle against a stone. He raised that foot and caressed the ankle while he grimaced in pain.

The dirt, packed against the heel,

fell into his hand. He transferred it to his pocket and remained with Warner until he was ready to leave. The Commissioner's car deposited him in front of his office building, and Silk was waiting there to assist him.

Silk nodded a respectful greeting to Commissioner Warner, took Quinn's arm and piloted him across the sidewalk. As they walked to the elevators, Silk spoke in a low voice:

"You've got a visitor, sir. It's Uchin, turban and all. He went in just a few minutes ago."

"So?" Quinn looked surprised. "I'll be glad to see him. Meanwhile, I want you to find out what happened to Leyden. If you can, that is. Be careful he doesn't find out you're on his trail."

Silk escorted Quinn to the office, and then went off on his mission. Uchin shook hands with Quinn and politely led him to his desk.

"I have come to see if there is anything I can do in connection with the blind people's war program. You remember—you asked me to help."

"Things haven't completely shaped up yet," Quinn said, smiling. "I'm very grateful, however, especially since I've heard how busy you are. With a new store and all."

"I am not too busy to aid in any kind of defense work," Uchin said stoutly. "My own country is threatened by the Japanese. Your nation and mine must fight them and helping here is as effective as my help back home would be."

QUINN picked up a pencil and tapped it against his desk. The pencil slipped out of his hand, landed on the floor, and he and Uchin bent down to pick it up at the same time. Somehow, Quinn lost his balance. Both hands darted out, found Uchin's shoulders and half pulled him out of the chair.

They both laughed and Uchin recovered the pencil. Quinn was sure of one thing. Uchin had no wound in

his side. The professed Hindu would have at least grunted in pain if he had.

After a few more minutes of polite conversation, Uchin departed and Quinn went to work, but it was difficult to keep his mind on the job. He was more than glad when Silk came to take him home.

There, in the privacy of the lab, he used his chemical equipment again. First, he analyzed the portions of dirt taken from the shoes, boots and trouser legs of Frosty's men. Then he compared this with an analysis of the dirt he'd picked up at the tunnel under that jewelry store.

"I was afraid this might happen," he told Silk, Carol and Butch. "Dirt from various sections, even in a city like this, shows certain characteristics all its own. Frosty's men dug the tunnel under that jewelry store all right, but they have been digging somewhere else too. They have another coup ready to pull and this may be the big one Frosty talked about. The one that is to pay off enough for them to retire."

"Can't you tell from the analysis, what part of the city is involved?" Carol asked.

"Hardly, my dear. Silk, what about Leyden?"

"I talked to one of his servants, sir. I gathered that Leyden spent the night at his club. A stag affair. The servants were given the night off. I checked at Leyden's club, and he really was there."

"Someone knew that," Quinn mused, "and used his knowledge to set the trap for me. Spence would be most apt to know all of Leyden's habits. They're in the same line and Spence probably listens to everything he can hear about Leyden."

"Tony," Carol said, "last night you tantalized us by saying you knew what was behind all this. Why not break down and tell us?"

"If what you know would help me lay hands on Frosty," Butch said, "I sure want to hear it."

"All right, I'll tell you." Quinn turned his chair around. "These crimes are not committed wholly for profit. Frosty and his men are not aware of it, however. Butch's experience with them proves it, otherwise they would have hailed him as one of their own kind when he praised Hitler."

"You mean it's sabotage? Spy stuff?" Butch asked.

"Yes, just that. Right after Pearl Harbor, F.B.I. agents rounded up all the Japanese in this country and interned them. They missed one man, though—a very dangerous man who was caught on this side of the Pacific when the war began. His name is Kuto."

"Tony, how in the world did you find this out?" Carol asked.

Quinn smiled. "It really began with the murder of Vice Admiral Cooper. You will recall that his arm was broken. So was his neck. That combination indicates one thing—ju-jitsu at which Kuto is very proficient. In fact, he is a professional wrestler. I didn't pay much attention to this clue at first, but then I met Mr. Kuto in the ruins of Leyden's factory. He tried to attack me in the same way, and then matters clicked."

"But what's his angle?" Silk asked.

"And why was Admiral Cooper's coat stolen?" Carol demanded. "And what was that strange light flitting across the estate before Cooper died?"

TONY lighted his pipe and smiled. "I'll answer your last question first, Carol. The light was caused by the mark of a luminous pencil daubed across Cooper's back. It marked him as a victim for the murderer when the lights went out. Later, the coat was stolen so no one would suspect that Cooper had been so marked."

"Who in the world did that?" Carol persisted.

"One of the four men we suspect. He really set the stage and murdered Paul Anderson, too. Now, as to your

question about angles, Silk, that is very easy to answer. Kuto is a trained saboteur. He wants to do as much damage as possible, but he happens to be in a rather bad position.

"A Jap can't go abroad freely. Therefore, Kuto has to work through others, so he selected Frosty's gang and even caused Frosty to augment it, I imagine. Kuto has little financial interest in the jobs, and that explains why he treats the crooks so lavishly. What Kuto has established is really a sort of seventh column composed of men who don't realize his motives or the damage they are doing."

"A Jap," Butch growled. "Now I don't know whether I'd like to bust his neck or Frosty's."

"Maybe you'll have a chance to do both," Quinn said. "I suspected a Jap was involved after Silk reported his very brief conversation with the leader of the gang. During his accented speeches, the unknown never used the letter 'I'. Japs can't pronounce it. He very deliberately avoided using words which included that letter, even though they would have been much easier to use.

"That set me thinking. My clippings on spy round-ups did the rest. Kuto was never located, so he is the man who wears a stocking cap pulled all the way down over his head. He's the man who directs Frosty's moves and keeps hidden even from his own gang."

Butch rubbed his hands. "Swell. Now all we got to do is nail him. Frosty won't be far away, and I'll make it a double-header—or maybe I ought to call it necker because, so help me, I'm going to get them."

"There is only one way to do it," Quinn said. "Through his front man. This latest robbery did not involve any destruction which handicapped our defense work, but Frosty boasted there was one big job all set. That one will do damage. The greatest possible amount that Kuto can arrange.

"We've got to act tonight, because

Kuto must realize he's nearly at the end of his rope. Now gather around, my friends, and we'll plot and plan. If there's a miss, many people may die. Here, and on the various battle-fronts. Kuto is out to cripple us, if he can, and do it in a manner that won't even be suspected as sabotage."

CHAPTER XIV

Tunnel Trap



COMMISSIONER Warner's car was parked in the driveway beside his home. He came out and got into it. His foot touched the starter and froze there. A pleasant voice spoke softly in his ear.

"Please drive away, Commissioner. There isn't a moment to lose, and I need your help."

"The Black Bat," Warner sighed. "You need my help? Good heavens, man, I need yours."

"Yes, I know. Things are coming to a head. Find some quiet spot where we can't be seen—and hurry."

Warner drove down a blind street and stopped at the far end where there were no houses. He twisted around and saw the Black Bat's almost invisible form in the back seat. The Black Bat talked rapidly.

"Tonight—at ten—there is to be a meeting of many of the United Nations' best fighting officers at the Army and Navy Building. Men who are going to plan a second front, an all-out air attack and ways to cripple Japan and Germany. The newspapers all carry stories about the meeting—and someone intends to see that these men are all killed."

Warner gasped. "Who is responsible? Tell me, quickly."

"I know the man, Commissioner. His name is Kuto, a Jap spy trapped in this country. He is using a gang of

crooks to carry out his work. Crooks who haven't the vaguest idea of what they are really doing."

"Kuto! We're looking for him, but without luck so far. Do you know where he is?"

"No. That's why we must work together and bring him into the open. There is another man who fronts for Kuto and is equally dangerous. I have nothing on him, but there may be a way to force his hand, too, and at the same time smoke out Kuto.

"You recall that burglary last night—in which a tunnel was dug under a safe? Kuto's gang plans another raid like that tonight, only what the crooks don't know is that the tunnel they've been digging, doesn't lead to a jewelry store, but beneath the Army and Navy Building where all these vitally important leaders are going to meet for a conference."

Warner turned pale. "They'll blow up the whole building? Is that what you mean?"

"Exactly. All the crooks involved will surely be killed, but that won't injure Kuto's conscience very much. Now here is what you must do. It's most important, so don't slip anywhere along the line."

Carl Spence was busy in the study of his home. Seated at a desk he was figuring profits—a task that always pleased his money-grabbing soul. He kept no servants and answered the doorbell himself. A burly man rang the bell now. He showed a police badge.

"You're wanted, Mr. Spence. Now wait—not for any crime, just for some questioning. I don't know what about, but you'll have to come along."

"Something to do with my government contracts?" Spence asked. "Yes, it must be. I'll come."

A police car drove Spence straight to the Army and Navy Building on Carmody Square. He was escorted inside and told to wait. There were three other men in the room and Spence knew them all.

WILLIAM LEYDEN gave him a quizzical glance. Julian Butler muttered a greeting, and Uchin, the Hindu, became quite affable.

"We all wonder why we were brought here, but now that you have arrived, Mr. Spence, I think I know the answer. All of us were asked to serve on Mr. Quinn's committee. Undoubtedly, we shall direct some important and perhaps secretive work. Therefore, the government authorities wish to question us."

"Maybe," Julian Butler growled, "but I'm a busy man. This is unconstitutional, keeping us here like this. I tried to leave a few moments ago, but was shoved back."

Leyden gave a snicker. "You're a hot one to talk about the constitution, when you practically invite world bandits over here and burn it up on us. Pipe down, Butler. It's bad enough to have you here, but I'm not required to listen to that greasy tongue of yours."

Five minutes later, Commissioner Warner entered. "Gentlemen, I'm sorry this was handled so secretly. I'm also sorry that you will have to remain for another hour or two. War conditions call upon us to make many sacrifices. Consider this as one."

"Why not tell us what it's all about?" Spence asked irately. "Why must we waste time here?"

"It concerns your work as directors of a new committee organized by Tony Quinn. You must remain because the men who wish to question and advise you are busy with a more important meeting. This is the Army and Navy Building. As you may have read, a large number of United Nations' leaders are assembled here. Their meeting was to have taken place two hours later, but the time was advanced."

"And we have to wait until that meeting is over?" Spence asked nervously. "That won't be until eleven or after."

"I'm sorry," Warner said. "Please be patient."

"May I phone?" Uchin asked. "I had another engagement which I must cancel."

"There are phone booths in the corridor," Warner nodded. "Help yourself."

Uchin bowed and walked slowly out of the room. He stepped into a phone booth far down the hall, deposited a coin, and then noticed two men moving toward him. Uchin hung up in a hurry, came out of the booth and headed toward the exit.

He reached the steps to the street, glanced at his watch and began running. He hailed a cab, running into the middle of the dimmed out street and dodging other vehicles. The cab rolled east and made a left turn. Two cars pulled away at the same time. Carol was in one and Butch was at the wheel of the other.

Uchin glanced out of the rear window several times, but had no realization that he was being followed. Carol and Butch took turns in keeping fairly close so that Uchin never saw the same car behind him continually. He switched cabs just to make certain, but Carol and Butch clung to the trail until Uchin finally pulled up a few yards from the house where Butch had been held prisoner.

He paid off the driver, looked around and didn't see Butch watching from behind the shelter of a thick bush across the street. Uchin walked briskly into the estate next door, veered left and approached the thick, solid wall between the estates. A second later, he had vanished from sight.

"Where'd he go?" Butch whispered to Carol who had joined him.

"Through the wall," Carol said. "They told me something about the big house where you were held. It used to belong to a prominent Japanese importer who has been interned. Kuto must be living there and has a secret means of leaving the place. Look, a section of the wall is opening. Butch, that's Kuto with his hat

pulled down and coat collar lifted."

"I'm gonna . . ." Butch started to move forward, but Carol seized his arm.

"Don't be a fool, Butch. The only way we can discover where the tunnel under the Army and Navy Building originates is by following him. Get back to your car. Hurry!"

NEAR Carmody Square, a cheap coupe was pulled up to the curb and the driver appeared to be asleep, with his hat tilted down over his face. Carol drove alongside that car and stopped.

"Tobacco store on street behind Army and Navy Building. They just went in."

The cheap coupe rolled away fast and the eyes of the Black Bat sparkled dangerously. The street behind the Army and Navy Building was quite dark and rather isolated after business hours. A small tobacco store was the only place lighted up.

The Black Bat drew on his hood, affixed the cape into place and made his way to the store. No one saw him—he made sure of that. A middle-aged man behind the counter looked up and gave a startled cry. Then he raised both hands and began shivering violently.

The Black Bat used a gun butt on him, and then searched for the entrance to the cellar. He found it, descended a flight of rickety steps and looked around.

The cellar was pitch dark, but he saw everything in it, and there were no signs that anyone used this as a base for the tunnel that must reach well beneath the Army and Navy Building.

There were boxes piled up in one corner. He examined these and was certain they did not form a shield. He bent down and studied the concrete floor. It had been recently swept, but not all of it. The path of the broom led toward an old-fashioned furnace in the center of the cellar.

He found particles of fresh earth and knew he was on the right track.

In some way, that furnace must swing back, but how? He examined it carefully and knew that each wasted second placed the lives of many important men closer and closer to the brink of death. Kuto would act fast now.

There was a sharp click. The whole furnace moved aside on a rotating platform. A man's head appeared and then his whole body. It was Uchin.

He stepped into the cellar, turned and reached for the control which would send the furnace back into place. It began to move.

An arm encircled his throat and he was lifted off the floor and held like that until his struggles grew weaker and weaker. Finally, the Black Bat let him drop and slashed a mighty blow to the fake Hindu's chin. He dumped him in a corner, walked briskly toward the furnace which had swung into place again. Through the inky darkness, he had seen just how this trick furnace was manipulated.

Suddenly, the beam of a flashlight cut away the darkness and centered on him. The Black Bat reached for his guns.

"Don't do that unless you want to die quick," a voice snarled.

"Captain McGrath!" the Black Bat gasped. "Captain, this is no time to argue our differences. You can help me now that you're here."

"Sure!" McGrath moved across the floor. "I'll help you into a cell. Foxy, aren't you? Well, I knew something was up. Heard Commissioner Warner give orders that the four men who were gathered in your office were to be taken down to this section of town. I guessed you'd show up, Quinn. So I took up a post on top of a building, used night glasses and I saw you go into the tobacco store. Now stick out your hands and find out what cuffs feel like."

"McGrath, you idiot," the Black Bat said softly, "there is a tunnel beneath

this furnace. Right now, it is full of crooks who think they are going to blast open a jewelry store which Uchin, the man lying at your feet, opened a couple of days ago. Started it simply to provide the crooks with an objective very close to the Army and Navy Building."

"Yeah?" McGrath grunted. "If they want to blast it, okay, I've got you, and that's all I care about. I can round up the crooks later on."

THE Black Bat was desperate.

"But they're not ordinary crooks," he pleaded. "Can't you understand, McGrath? Their real leader is a Jap who wants to blow up the Army and Navy Building. The tunnel which those crooks think leads to Uchin's jewelry store, goes beneath the building. They'll be provided with some kind of explosive so powerful it will blow the whole building and everyone in it to bits."

McGrath laughed. "That's some story. I could think of a better one."

"McGrath," the Black Bat snapped, "if you don't put down that gun and cooperate, you'll be finished. I'd dare you to shoot. I'd even go for my own guns and kill you, if I thought I could make it. I can't because you're too good a shot."

"Come on," McGrath said. "Walk toward me and keep your hands where I can see them."

The Black Bat turned slowly and deliberately. "Shoot if you want to," he said. "I'm going to make this furnace move off its base. Then, perhaps, you'll believe me."

"If you do, I'll put a bullet—" McGrath stopped talking and stared, because the Black Bat had risked everything to touch the hidden control. The furnace moved around without making a sound.

"Don't speak except in a whisper," the Black Bat said. "Now do you see I wasn't lying? McGrath—I'm going into that tunnel and stop those crooks. If you can arrest me afterwards,

that'll be a feather in your cap."

"It's a deal," McGrath grunted softly. "Go ahead."

The Black Bat descended a ladder, signaled that McGrath must not use his flash and both of them moved forward quietly. They could hear voices after a while and the tunnel made a sudden turn to the right. The Black Bat put his head close to McGrath's ear.

"Stay here. Flatten yourself against the wall and don't do anything unless those crooks start coming this way. Then shoot. Look for a short, stocky man who will be wearing a stocking cap pulled down to cover his whole head. That will be Kuto. Plug him if you can."

"But I can't see an inch in this darkness," McGrath whispered.

"Whatever you do, don't use the flash," the Black Bat warned. "Stay here and make no sound."

The Black Bat crept forward, bent double in the tunnel. Fifty feet further on he could see flickering lights and the voices were plainer. He drew both guns.

"Frosty," he called out. "Frosty, are you there?"

"Yeah, who is it? And stop yelling, you fool," Frosty called back.

"Frosty, this is the Black Bat. Your leader is masked because he is a Jap spy. The explosives you are using will kill you and every man with you. They'll blow up the Army and Navy Building—not a jewelry store. That was just opened by one of the spy's men as an excuse. The tunnel veers away from it and you are directly beneath the Army and Navy Building."

"Pay no attention," a hissing voice urged. "He is trying to bluff us. Hurry, get the explosive ready. It will only create a hole in the floor of the jewelry store."

"Take off his hood," the Black Bat called out. "Take it off and see for yourself. Listen to how he talks. He's excited now and not careful. That's the voice of a Jap."

"The explosives," Kuto howled. "Move aside. Let me at them."

"Stop him," the Black Bat called out. "He doesn't care if he dies in the blast. That's another Jap trait. Hold him, Frosty."

FROSTY'S voice was filled with doubt, but from the way Kuto began cursing, he must have been prevented from reaching the explosive.

"I don't get this," Frosty said.

Did you arrange to burn the factory down? A factory which produced essential needs for airplane assembly lines? Kuto took care of it. He's been using you."

"Hang onto that guy," Frosty snapped. "Black Bat, if you're right about this, how do we make out? We didn't kill anybody. We're not working with Jap spies."

"You'll pay the penalty for your crimes, Frosty, but remember that



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"Since when does the Black Bat help guys like me?"

"Whatever you may be, Frosty, you and the men with you are Americans. Remember the robbery at Anderson's garden party? Anderson was murdered—an important man to the war effort of this country. Admiral Cooper was killed, and he was important, too. Did you kill them? No, Kuto murdered Cooper and Uchin took care of Anderson.

"Remember Leyden's factory job? How the blasting of the safe started many fires which destroyed the plant?

you're all Americans. It makes no difference what happens to me or you or the men with you. All that matters is the saving of many lives, of documents and records kept in the building above us. I'm not lying, Frosty. You know that."

"Pull off the hood," Frosty roared.

There was the sound of a violent struggle, and then a series of searing curses. Someone fired a shot. A man screamed. Another voice rose eerily on a note of terror and pain.

McGrath heard this and moved forward. He bumped into the Black Bat,

who gently pushed him against the wall of the tunnel.

"Now do you see I spoke the truth, Captain? The gang responsible for the latest crime wave is trapped in this tunnel. They're all yours. Kuto, the Jap, is here, too, but I don't think you'll find much of him left. That won't be murder, Captain. For once, Frosty and his men have seen the light. If Kuto is dead, he was killed in self-defense."

McGrath reached out and his hand encountered the folds of the Black Bat's cape. McGrath still nursed his hatred for this marauder. He backed away very slowly, turned and began running. He reached the ladder, swarmed up it and found the furnace open. He closed it hastily.

THERE were feet pounding on the floor overhead. Lights were turned on and Commissioner Warner and a number of detectives hurried down. McGrath found his breath finally.

"I got 'em all—every last one," he gloated. "The whole mob of crooks we been after—and listen to this: the Black Bat is down there, too! In a tunnel. The only exit is through the furnace which swings back.

"He's trapped and we'll haul him out. Commissioner, there's only one thing I ask. Let me take off the hood that covers his face. Let me show you how right I've been when I've insisted that Tony Quinn is the Black Bat."

Uchin, still unconscious, was taken away. The tunnel was opened. Frosty and his men filed out, hands high. They were lined up. McGrath smiled grimly, drew his gun and dropped into the tunnel. He was gone about ten minutes and looked glum when he came back up the ladder.

"There's something wrong," he said. "All I found was the Black Bat's cape down there, fastened to the edge of a rock. He must have slipped by me. He got away, but he's Tony Quinn.

I've proved it. He can't do this to me!"

"Captain," Warner said sharply, "I'm more interested in what happened to the Japanese spy whom Frosty told me about."

"Oh, him! He's dead. I'll bet you'll have to use a derrick to cart him out. There's so much lead in his hide."

Frosty began to grin broadly. McGrath whirled and started running toward the steps.

"I'll beat Quinn to his house. I'll show him up. He put one over on me, but I'll turn the tables. I'll—"

"Did you call me, Captain?" a quiet voice asked. "Silk, please take me down the stairs. Captain McGrath is shouting my name. Perhaps he can tell me about Uchin. I can't understand this. Uchin was taken out of here in handcuffs. You did tell me that, Silk?"

"Yes, sir. They took him away," Silk said. "Easy now—these steps are shaky. Two more—that's it. Now you're in the cellar. Commissioner Warner is here, too."

"But Captain McGrath. He's here. I heard him call my name. Captain, where are you?"

McGrath edged toward the steps, turned and fled up them. One look at Commissioner Warner's face told him he had better leave. At the top he bumped into Julian Butler, Leyden and Carl Spence, who were being escorted into the cellar. McGrath apologized gruffly and kept on going.

Commissioner Warner ordered Frosty and his gang taken away. Then he explained in detail what had happened.

"The Black Bat deserves all credit for this, gentlemen. Who, or what he is, I don't know. Captain McGrath's ravings do not mean a thing. The Black Bat prevented one of the greatest crimes I've ever heard of. Yes, he visited me and I helped him. It was no time to arrest the man. His motives were patriotic, and this is a time to work with anyone who helps defeat

men like Kuto and Uchin."

Julian Butler moved forward. "Do you mean to tell me that a Jap spy tricked a gang of American crooks into aiding him? That he intended to blow up the Army and Navy Building, kill scores of people without warning?"

Warner eyed Butler sharply. "Did you ever hear of a Jap giving anyone

a warning?"

Butler flushed a bit and walked over beside Tony Quinn. "Mr. Quinn, if I can assist your committee, call on me. I've been a fool. Like a lot of other people, I couldn't see the light because it blinded me. Most others who felt as I did, woke up in time. Now I'm awake, too. Let's get our meeting started—now."



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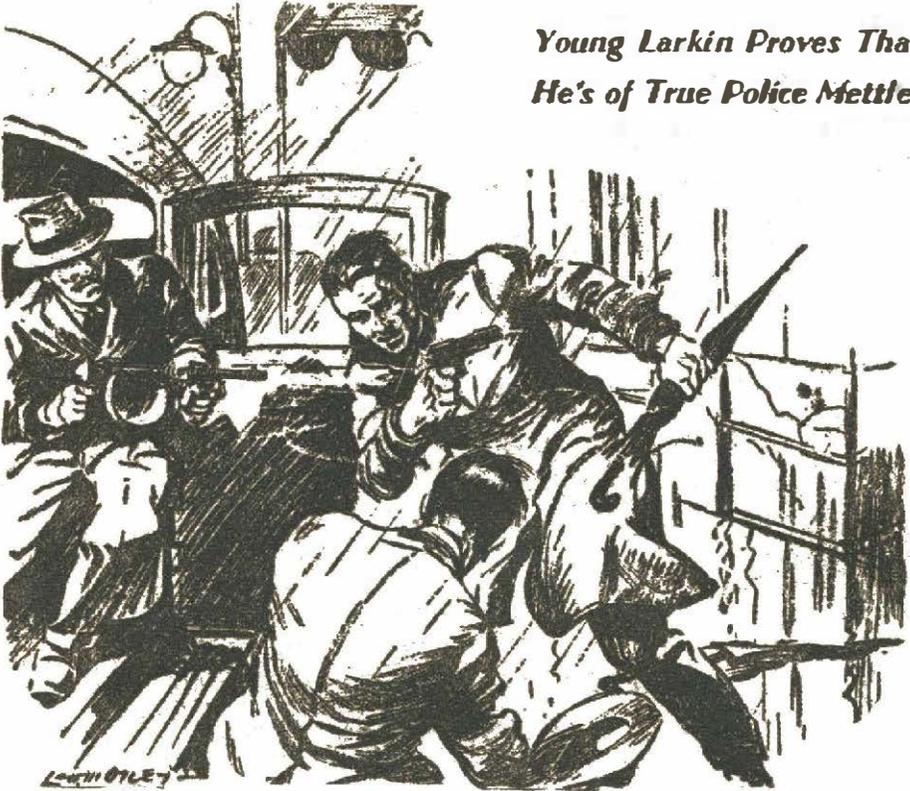


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*Young Larkin Proves That
He's of True Police Mettle!*



The gunman in the truck cab yanked out a machine-gun and slashed at Larkin

THE COLOR OF MURDER

By SAMUEL J. BAILEY

TED LARKIN had the accelerator pedal pushed tight against the floor. The old Freeland Six was tearing through the night, eating up the gentle bends of River Road with groaning shackles and lurching pistons. The invisible wind tore the ribbon from his companion's hair and whipped the strands out straight.

"I should never have let you take that last drink," she moaned, fright staining her cheeks. "We'll be a drip of smoking gravy on the river bank if you don't slow down."

The scream of the pursuing siren bit through the damp river air. Ted Larkin's jaw jutted grimly. A city cop, itching for a chase. Well, he'd

give it to him. Those blasted city cops! They were awful high and mighty with their flashy roadsters and their snappy uniforms. Larkin shot a quiet jeer at himself as he thought how hard he had worked to become one of them. He hated their insides now.

"There!" cried Felice Donovan. "They're on your tail! You'll have to slow down now!"

"Oh, yeah?" gritted Larkin. "They got to catch me first."

"You'll get a speeding ticket. That's—"

"They can clap me in the clink," growled Larkin. "That's how I feel."

"Oh, Ted!" she wailed. "That last drink—"

"Cold sober, I'd feel the same," he assured Felice.

It didn't take long for the powerful R. C. M. P. car to draw alongside. Larkin's Freeland Six was of a less speedy vintage. Larkin deliberately thumbed his nose at the officer. The officer made a movement for his gun and Larkin shrugged, easing up on the accelerator.

A couple of moments later Ted Larkin stepped from the car and said: "So what?"

The police officer eyed him. "You're plastered."

"Don't turn on the lecture juice," Larkin warned him. "Write a ticket and beat it."

The officer put back his book.

"I think I'll take you in," he said. "You're in no condition to drive. Has your girl friend got a license?"

"You leave my girl friend out of this!" yelled Larkin, swinging suddenly with his right.

He caught the officer with his hand half in his pocket. The officer staggered back, almost getting clipped by a big limousine which was slowing down beside them.

A MAN in evening clothes got out of the limousine. He approached just as the policeman was about to take a swing at Larkin.

"Just a minute, officer," he ordered peremptorily. "I know this boy."

The officer stared. "Why, Inspector Donovan. Good evening, sir. I don't believe you saw him—"

"I saw the whole thing," Inspector Donovan cut in shortly. "It's all right."

The policeman rubbed his jaw doubtfully. "It isn't broken, at least," he mumbled.

"How long you been on the force?" asked Donovan.

"Two years."

"How long did you work to get on the force before that?"

"Two more years."

"Exactly. It was a tough schedule.

You made the grade and you're wearing the uniform and you're proud of it, right?"

The officer snapped to attention. "That's right, sir."

"Very well. You can understand maybe how young Larkin feels. He worked like the devil to make the force and when everything was all set, he fell down on one little thing. One little thing! It doesn't seem important but it was enough to keep him off the force. I told him about it only this afternoon, and I—I guess that's why he's running a little wild tonight."

The uniformed man swallowed hard. "I see, sir." He turned to Larkin. "It's okay, fella, about the sock. I—I know how you must feel."

He got into the R.C.M.P. car and drove off.

Inspector Donovan didn't speak right away. Ted Larkin shuffled uncomfortably, looking down at the road, drawing designs with his toe. Diagonally across the river from where they stood, the big neon sign of the Freeland Motor Company winked through the mist.

Felice got out of the car and walked over and stood beside Ted. She was slim and pretty in her long, summery dress. She held his arm. "Father, please don't blame Ted too much."

"Don't worry," growled Donovan. "I'm not."

"I'm sober now, Inspector," averred Larkin. "I can drive all right. I—I'll drive very slowly."

"See that you do," ordered Donovan grimly, eying Felice's slim figure meaningly. "Keep both hands on the wheel."

Larkin took Felice's arm and guided her toward the car.

"Just a minute," snapped Donovan. Larkin turned. "Since you're not going to make the cops, maybe you're thinking of getting a job? At least until you're inducted into the army?"

Ted Larkin swallowed. "Y—yes—sir."

"Come over here. Meet a friend of mine."

Larkin followed him. The interior light of the sedan flashed on, revealing a stout man who wheezed as he leaned forward to shake Larkin's hand.

"This is Dr. Gleason," explained Donovan. "Doctor, young Larkin has just been turned down for the force. He needs work to get his mind off things. If you run across anything—"

Gleason nodded, eying Larkin carefully.

"Looks like a bright young fellow. Give me a ring in the morning, son. Midville Two-eight two hundred. I'll see what I can do."

"Thanks," said Larkin. He didn't sound too enthusiastic. He looked at Inspector Donovan. "There—there's no chance at all? I mean, the cops?"

"I told you how things stood this afternoon," returned Donovan, impatiently.

"Y-yes, sir."

LARKIN turned blindly, fumbled with the door of his old Freeland Six. He threw himself behind the wheel and slapped the car viciously into gear. He was cold sober now. There were scalding tears in his eyes. Felice moved over, tried to comfort him. He pushed her away and drove straight down the River Road, eyes glued to the beams of light that sprayed out front.

The next morning, Larkin dialed Midville 2-8200. He wasn't keen about any job except a cop job. But that was out now, and there was nothing else to do.

Dr. Gleason's wheezing voice came over the wire. Larkin explained who he was. "Oh, yes. I remember you. Let me see. Oh, yes. A lodge brother of mine was saying he needed an honest young fellow to break into his business. Auto accessories. Want to give it a try?"

Larkin hesitated. "I—I suppose so," he said. For the life of him, he

couldn't get any enthusiasm into his voice.

"The name is Grimby. Number Eight, East Park Street. Tell him I sent you."

Larkin stopped in a lunch wagon for a cup of coffee, then went to the place. It was a narrow store choked with gears and bearings, and with a few shiny accessories still left over for sale. A long black counter ran down one wall which was covered with wrenches, gaskets, radiator hose and a hundred small stock items. "Genuine Freeland Motor Parts" were advertised on big gaudy posters.

"You're Ted Larkin?" Grimby, the proprietor said. He frowned, gazing at the cash register. "You say Doc Gleason sent you? Well, I guess you're okay. Tell you what—go down cellar with a bucket of soapy water and wash the grease off the concrete floor. Then I'll see what else you can do."

There was a heavy feeling in Ted Larkin's stomach as he plodded down the stairs. He felt as if he were going to the scaffold. He wasn't watching and he stepped in a blob of heavy black grease and fell with a body-racking thud. He was too shaken to swear. He picked himself up groggily, staring around at the grease splashed all over the floor. There were a dozen or so opened drums of thick, black grease and most of them were half empty.

At five o'clock that afternoon, after a day of grueling toil, cleaning and polishing and mopping, Grimby called Larkin into his office. Larkin noticed the pharmacy school diploma on the wall. Apparently Nicholas Grimby had once been a druggist.

"You'll have to work tonight, Ted," Grimby said. "We're short of heavy black grease. You take the truck and go to the warehouse and they'll give you a load."

"I got a date," said Larkin. "With my girl. She'll be waiting at a certain corner and I've got no way of getting in touch with her."

"You'll have to stand her up," replied Grimby, squinting over his spectacles at Larkin. "Seems to me you young fellows are gettin' mighty independent about jobs these days. Even if the army is ahead of you. You have to eat until then."

Larkin swallowed hard and said nothing.

Grimby gave him the address of the warehouse. It was an abandoned factory about fourteen miles out of town on the River Road. It would take all evening to get there and load and get back. Larkin's heart sank as he pictured Pelice standing on a corner waiting for him. There was no way of getting in touch with her. She had been shopping and would eat out and then stop at that corner later, confident that he wouldn't miss the date.

TED LARKIN'S thoughts were black as he gripped the wheel of the truck and guided it along River Road back toward town. Darkness had set in. He had already picked up the twelve drums of heavy black grease. They were lying in the truck right now.

The warehouse had been closed but the drums had been waiting on a dark platform for him. A man had been there, watching them, but Larkin had not had a good look at him in the darkness. The drums had been heavy and Larkin had sweated, loading them onto the truck.

He was bowling along at a thirty-mile clip. He came to the intersection where Hillside Lane came down the hill to meet River Road. There was a traffic light but no cars waiting, so Larkin drove straight through.

Five minutes later an R.C.M.P. car pulled up alongside him, waved him over. It was the same police officer who had stopped him the previous night. The officer got out and looked Larkin over.

"Oh, it's you."

"Yeah," said Larkin, "it's me. What's the beef?"

"You know you went through that red light?"

Larkin's hands gripped the wheel tighter, his jaw clamped hard. If he didn't watch his step now, he would boll over and murder that bluecoat. He said nothing.

"I say, you know you went—" the policeman broke off suddenly, looking queer. Then he nodded. "So *that's* the little thing that kept you off the cops. You're color-blind!"

Larkin nodded miserably, looking straight ahead.

The officer's lips pursed grimly. "How the devil do you manage to drive?"

Larkin's throat felt dry. His voice rasped. "I—I watch the *other* cars."

The cop nodded. "And when there aren't any other cars, you take a chance?"

"Yeah." Larkin licked his lips. "If I can't see which is the top and which is the bottom light."

The officer waved him on. "G'wan," he growled huskily. "Beat it out of here before I bust loose."

Larkin slapped the truck into gear. The load strained heavily at the clutch as he forced the motor to accelerate.

The R.C.M.P. car passed him and disappeared in the distance, tailing a speeder.

A few minutes later, at a spot called Brewer Point, where River Road skirted the very edge of the water, with only a wooden fence at the crest of a steep, high embankment, a fast truck whizzed up alongside Larkin and crowded him over. He had either to step on the brakes or crash the fence. If he had hit that fence with that heavy load, he would have crashed through into the river. Especially since it had been raining.

The anger that had been piling up inside Ted Larkin since the previous afternoon when he'd been turned down, was now at a boiling pitch. He climbed slowly from the truck as one man trotted back from the speed-

truck, while the other leaned out of the cab. They were tough-looking hoods. He couldn't for the life of him have told why he had that umbrella that had been on the cab seat beside him, but was glad even of that when one of them drew a gun. It might come in handy.

"Okay, buddy, turn your truck around and back it up to ours. Roll those drums of grease into our truck."

"What's this?" demanded Larkin. "Hi-jacking a few dollars worth of auto grease? You guys nuts?"

One of the men laughed shortly. The other one gave him a dirty look.

"Get going," he growled. "Turn your truck around." He menaced Larkin with the gun.

The gun pointing at Larkin's stomach was the one little thing he needed to make him boil over. He didn't care whether hot lead spouted from its muzzle or not. He just reached over the gun, swinging at the hood's shadowy face. The hood pulled the trigger and a slug whipped out at Larkin, caught him on a rib, glanced to one side and ploughed a furrow of bloody skin under his coat. The shock of the blow to his rib took the wind out of him, but he had already landed the punch.

THE other gunman in the cab yanked out a machine-gun and slashed at Larkin. The barrel hit him a glancing blow on the side of his head, under his ear, and sent him reeling back into the cab of the truck. That made Larkin thoroughly mad. He let out a bellow and hurled himself at the second gunman, tearing the gun from his hand and lashing out at him with hammering fists. The hood folded up with a grunt as Larkin scored on his jaw.

Larkin whirled, caught the first gunman as he raised the machine-gun, not to fire, but for a well-aimed blow on Larkin's head. Larkin tapped him fast in the stomach with captured gun and umbrella, doubled him painfully

and then caught his down-streaking face with a quick, slashing uppercut. The gunman tumbled from the truck, staggered back against the fence, toppled over into the river.

Larkin swayed groggily toward the fence. He heard a step behind him but turned too late. The second gunman had recovered sufficiently to club his hide-out gun, sneak up and plant a well-directed blow on Larkin's head. He went down for the count—and more.

By the time he came out of it, the moon had risen and he was alone, except for his truck. It was empty. The men had hi-jacked the drums of grease!

* * * * *

"You mean you're not going to call the cops?"

Larkin stared incredulously at Grimby the next morning. Grimby shook his head slowly, squinting over his spectacles at Larkin, an odd look in his eye.

"I don't want any trouble with nobody," said Grimby. "I'll make up the loss. It was only grease."

He didn't say this any too convincingly. Larkin got the idea that he was more concerned than he let on.

Larkin shook his head. It hurt him badly.

"The first day on the job and I have to get into trouble."

Grimby picked up the phone and dialed. Larkin stood there, listening to the dry clicking of the instrument. His head was so sensitive this morning that the sounds seemed like blows on an anvil.

Grimby spoke into the mouthpiece without preface.

"Two hoods held up the truck at Brewer Point. Larkin battled it out and threw one of them into the river but they got away with the load . . . Yeah. Well, what would you R-x? . . . Sure. Okay.

He hung up and peered at Larkin over his spectacles.

"That was my partner. We appre-

ciate how you battled those two hoods. From now on your salary is doubled."

"Thanks," said Ted Larkin.

He held his head. It felt as if it were spinning around on his neck. He knew he didn't sound as grateful as possibly he should. That was because there was only one thing in the world he wanted to be—a cop. He'd have worked gladly for nothing if they'd let him join the force.

"Now instead of picking up grease at that warehouse, it'll be safer if you go direct to the bulk station," Grimby was saying. "You won't be able to find it without help. So listen carefully. We've made secret arrangements to fool those hi-jackers, see? You listenin'?"

Larkin nodded, eying Grimby intently.

Grimby blinked. "Tonight you drive the truck to that spot where they hi-jacked you. Get there at nine o'clock. That's Brewer Point. Wait there until a sedan with a green tail-light goes by. That sedan will lead you to the bulk station. A green tail-light will be easy to spot and follow, because tail-lights are red and . . . What are you staring at?"

LARKIN shook his head dumbly. "N-nothing."

"You acted like you'd seen a ghost when I mentioned green tail-light."

"It—it's just my head," faltered Larkin. "I'll be all right in a little while."

"Okay," snapped Grimby. "Remember now—keep this under your hat."

"I will," said Larkin.

The first chance he got during the day he called Felice.

"I—I'm in a jam," he began.

"You're darn right, you are," she told him. "I waited on that corner for two hours—"

"I couldn't help it. My new boss sent me out on a run up the river."

"Did you have a nice time in the moonlight?" Her voice was sarcastic.

"Listen, Felice," he pleaded. "I got conked in the moonlight."

"You what?"

"Don't say anything to your father. He'll be thinking I'm an awful dope. I'll tell you all about it. In the meantime, can you pick up my old jalopy and meet me at Brewer Point at nine p.m.? I've got to have somebody to pick a green light out of a million red ones and there's no way to fake it."

"Well," she said, her voice softening, "you certainly get into the most peculiar jams of any boy I ever knew."

"Will you do it?"

"I suppose I'll have to," she said reluctantly.

"You're swell!" he cried.

"But if you stand me up at Brewer's Point," she warned, "it'll be positively the last time!"

Larkin had not been waiting long before a car pulled up behind the truck. The next moment, Felice hopped into the truck cab, dressed in a trim sport suit. Larkin explained what had happened.

"There may be danger," he ended, "so you can't come with me. You'll have to drive back to town as soon as you spot the green tail-light. Give me the license number so I won't go wrong as I follow it."

Felice wrinkled her nose. "There's something fishy about all this. Do you smell it?"

Larkin shrugged. "I smell a lot of things. Hi-jacking grease drums, doubling my salary, and so forth. But I don't care much. A job is a job."

As he spoke, an R.C.M.P. car flashed by, going in the opposite direction, its white roof glistening. Felice put her hand on Larkin's forearm.

"I know how it is," she said, a catch in her throat. "So long as it can't be a cop job, you just don't give a good hot darn, eh?"

Larkin didn't say anything. Felice jumped.

"There it is! A green tail-light.

Doesn't it look odd?"

The black coupé had passed, heading the way the truck pointed. Larkin blinked. "It looks like any other tail-light to me," he said, and repeated the license number, memorizing it.

"Yes, that's it. That black coupé."

"Okay. Hop out and take my buggy home."

She had the door open and was half-way out of the cab when a shadow materialized beside the truck. A big hand pushed her back inside, slammed the door. A man hopped on the running board, stuck a gun through the open window.

"What're you up to with the dame, buddy?" he demanded. "Weren't you supposed to be alone?"

"She was just—" began Larkin.

"Never mind that now," broke in the gunman, brandishing his weapon. "You were up to some kind of monkey business, sending her off in that other car. So now we all ride together. Hop after that green tail-light."

LARKIN had no choice but to throw into gear and send the big truck careening down the road. The green tail-light had slowed, apparently to let him catch up. He felt Felice trembling at his side as he guided the truck along the winding River Road. He cursed his folly in allowing her to come out here, getting her into danger. He could have picked up some bum along the road to spot the green light.

Savagely he ground his teeth. He was beginning to boil up again inside. Everything was going wrong. Everything was wrong. If it wasn't for this eye affliction, he would be weighing in right now and getting measured for a blue uniform with brass buttons.

About three miles farther on, at a point where the road veered away from the river, the green tail-light dropped off the road, disappearing from sight. Larkin stepped on the gas, came to a narrow road which

dropped away from the main highway, curving precipitously down the steep slope toward the river.

There were no lights on this side road and the heavy truck slewed around in muddy ruts. A few hundred yards beyond, it curved sharply and came to an end at the river, beside a low dock building, nestling beneath the huge gasoline tanks of a typical bulk filling station, supplied by river barge.

Larkin pulled up alongside the car whose tail-light was now out. He climbed stiffly from the truck, keeping a wary eye out. He was filled with a kind of seething rage that comes from facing something over which a man has no control.

He felt the gun prod his back and almost whirled on his captor and the devil with slugs. He didn't have the right to carry a Police Positive and so he didn't care a hoot about a hood's gun. If it hadn't been for Felice, he would have taken his chances with slugs right there.

The gunman forced Larkin and the girl to climb the five plank steps to the wharf, then traverse about half its length and enter a door. Their feet sounded loud on the planking. The water slapped hollowly at the piles. There was no sign of the man who had driven the coupé.

Out on the river, Larkin caught the low *phut-phut* of a power boat. Far across the river, the huge neon sign of the Freeland Motor Company loomed hazily in the gathering mist. There were no other signs of life.

Inside the building were huge valves controlling the flow of gasoline. Over in one corner were a dozen or so half-empty drums of heavy black grease.

A man stood facing them, just under the bank of valves. It was Grimby. He had his hands thrust deep in coat pockets, a snap-brim felt drawn over his eyes which glittered beadily. There was an air of murderous intent to the set of his lips. He

had lost the mien of an auto parts dealer.

"Come over here," he ordered Larkin and Felice.

The gunman prodded Larkin whose back crawled with the feel of the naked weapon. If only Felice weren't here—

Larkin had his eyes on Grimby. He almost stumbled on some old valves and fittings piled on the floor, a few feet from Grimby.

Grimby spoke to the gunman. "You think this junk'll be heavy enough, Quaine?"

The gunman called Quaine, eyed the pile of old valves, then sized up Larkin and Felice. His eyes lingered regretfully on Felice.

"There'll be enough weight to hold 'em until the fish finish 'em," he said.

Felice shrank, face blanching.

GRIMBY eyed Larkin.

"You thought you were smart, getting yourself hired to us, so you could run the truck and work a hi-jack. Handing me a line about battling them and heaving one of them into the river. You doublecrossing rat! We got a nice soft river bottom picked out for you and your girl friend stooge."

"What in blazes you getting at?" demanded Larkin. "I'm on the up-and-up."

"Yeah?" sneered Grimby. "It's funny you run into hi-jackers the first night out. We never had any trouble with hi-jackers in this racket before."

"What racket?" cried Larkin. "I tell you I don't know what you're driving at! And this girl is Inspector Donovan's daughter. You're crazy if you think she's mixed into—"

Larkin broke off, staring at the violent change that had taken place in Grimby's expression. There was a tense silence. Finally Grimby nodded.

"So that's it. Inspector Donovan, eh? It's worse than I thought.

Quaine, this guy's a police stooge."

"You're crazy!" shouted Larkin.

Grimby's eyes narrowed with deadly intent.

"You blasted spy! It's a good thing we brought you here. Quaine, truss them up and tie the junk to them. The boat'll be here soon."

"Drop that gun!" barked a voice from the doorway.

Grimby's eyes bulged. The gunman whirled, raised his arms, dropping the gun. Felice gasped with relief at sight of the blue uniform. Larkin recognized the R.C.M.P. policeman who had stopped him the night before. The big bluecoat loomed large in the doorway, service pistol leveled.

"I never expected to find this kind of a set-up," he told Larkin, "when I followed you down that crazy hill. I saw you parked down the road a while ago and I thought I'd tail you through, in case you got into trouble with traffic lights. But this is—"

The twinkle died from his eye as a gun barked loud in Larkin's ear. The bluecoat twisted a little to one side, his fingers relaxed, his knees bent and he buckled up, hitting the floor just a hair after his Police Positive bounced on the rough planking.

Larkin had seen a lightning movement out of the tail of his eye. He knew that Grimby had plucked an automatic from a shoulder holster and fired point-blank at the cop. Larkin didn't need Felice's scream to apprise him of the fact that the bluecoat was badly wounded, and that something must be done for him at once.

Larkin was drawing in a deep, rasping breath even as the Police Positive bounced on the planking. Something tore loose inside him and knotted into a stout clog which rose in his chest and choked him. He heard a pulsating in his head. For a moment he did not identify it as the loudening *phut-phut* of a power boat. The way his blood pounded he was oblivious to everything but the hand on the

planking, outstretched toward the Police Positive that rightly belonged in those fingers!

A wild, inarticulate oath tore from Larkin's lips. He whirled and smashed his doubled fist full into Grimby's mouth. Grimby staggered back against the valves, hitting his head against the one marked "No. 3." The automatic in his hand belched fire.

Larkin ignored the flaming gun in the wobbling fingers of the groggy Grimby. He leaped across the room, scooped up the Police Positive. The butt of the gun was still warm. It belonged in *his* hand now. His shoulders had a peculiar hunch to them, his eyes a queer, strained look as he aimed the Police Positive. He had a peculiar feeling he had done what any cop should have done. He had leaped astride a fallen comrade and was guarding him with leveled gun.

"Get down!" he was barking at Felice. "Flat on the floor!"

AS HE spoke, the building shook. A boat had bumped into the wharf. Feet pounded. Shots rang out and tongues of flame spat through the night, lanced through the doorway from outside.

Quaine had tried to recapture his gun. But Larkin stopped him with a slug in his arm. Grimby rallied, aimed at Larkin. Larkin let him have a slug in his gun wrist.

Then Larkin leaped to one side, flattened against the wall, as three men came pounding across the dock, in the moonlight, guns drawn. Larkin fired over their heads.

"Drop the rods!" he yelled hoarsely.

The men began to fire. Larkin picked them off, one at a time, ignored the hot lead that tugged at his clothing. A slug ploughed past his ear, nicking it. Another pierced his left shoulder. He gritted his teeth and dropped the third gunman.

Then he stepped out on the dock and ran toward the boat. A shadowy

figure leaped into the water. Another loomed on the deck-house, flames spitting from the submachine-gun under his arm.

Larkin's slug caught him in the stomach. He threw up his arms and spun, bouncing from the deck-house to the gunwale, then into the water.

The headlights of a powerful limousine cut across the dock, picked out Larkin's figure.

"Larkin!" cried a commanding voice. "That you, Larkin?"

Larkin moved slowly along the dock to meet the burly figure of Inspector Donovan, flanked by his chauffeur and a fat man—Dr. Gleason.

"Where's Felice?" cried Donovan. "She isn't—"

"Here I am, Dad!" cried Felice, stumbling from the building. "I—I'm all right."

"You sure?" Donovan looked worried.

"Dad! How did you happen to get here?"

"Dr. Gleason and I were at the opera when I got a call from your maid who was frightened because you'd gone on some mysterious errand in Ted's old car. Knowing the kind of outfit Ted was working for, I was worried too. The old Freeland Six wasn't hard to spot by short-wave and we were coming out to Brewer Point to pick up the trail when we spotted the empty R.C.M.P. car up on the road. We stopped to check it and heard shots."

Larkin was frowning. "Inspector, what was it you said about knowing what I was mixed in?" Something inside him seethed. He still had the hot Police Positive in his hand.

Inspector Donovan looked him over carefully. "Where's the officer on duty in that R.C.M.P. car?" he demanded, ignoring Larkin's question.

Larkin pointed. "He's hurt. Grimby shot him. Grimby's inside with a slug in his wrist," he added pointedly. "Grimby's my ex-boss."

As he spoke, Grimby appeared in

the doorway, the headlights slanted across his seething face. Larkin eyed Dr. Gleason who was already busy working over the wounded policeman.

"Much obliged for the job. The phony job."

"Just a minute," cut in Inspector Donovan, as Gleason started to protest. "I want to get one thing at a time. You say, Grimby shot the officer. Then what?"

"Then Ted mowed the rest of them down," put in Felice. There was a warm light in her eye, though her face was pale.

Donovan nodded slowly, still eyeing Larkin calculatingly. Then he moved over and peered into the boat. He came back, a satisfied expression

sold in the city, but we had nothing but suspicions. What we needed was to work an undercover man quietly and carefully into the organization. But it would have to be done so innocently that they'd never suspect. I decided you were it."

"Me!" cried Larkin. "Why I didn't know anything about it!"

Donovan smiled. "Exactly. You didn't know anything about it. That was Requirement Number One. You wouldn't have to do any fancy acting and maybe give yourself away."

Larkin frowned. "You mean you were going to wise me up later?"

"Yes. You were an ideal candidate for the undercover job for two reasons. First, you had been turned

When the Black Finger Points, It Always Means Curtains for Somebody in THE BLACK FINGER, Douglas Newton's Baffling Mystery Novel in the January

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on his face. He raised his voice.

"Come over here, Grimby."

GRIMBY eased the wounded man to the planks—he would do until an ambulance arrived—and advanced slowly toward the group.

"Ted," Inspector Donovan said, "we've been working with the F.B.I. to get a line on a million-dollar leak of spare parts from the Freeland Motor Company plant across the river. It's worked by a systematic daily theft of bearings, carburetors, and so on, via what we called the dinner-pail brigade."

"You mean," asked Larkin, "that certain workmen would slip parts into their dinner pails and take them out with them every night?"

"Exactly. The parts were being

down by the cops, and you were on the verge of becoming a cop-hater. The criminal brains would see that. Secondly, you were recommended for a job by me, and that is the last thing in the world they would expect me to do, if I suspected them and wanted to place an undercover man in their organization. Of course, they had no idea you were friendly with Felice."

Larkin frowned, looking from Donovan to Dr. Gleason. Gleason's breathing was slightly accelerated, but he stood his ground, appearing unmoved by the implications of Donovan's words.

"I suspected something," Larkin said, "when Grimby, who was an ex-druggist, asked his partner over the phone to 'R-x' something. That's druggist lingo. And then, I counted

some of the dial-clicks and the last three numbers were two-o-o—the same as Doc Gleason's phone."

"Ridiculous!" cried Dr. Gleason, drawing himself up pompously. "Absurd deduction! It could have been any one of a hundred phone numbers."

"Our plan was working smoothly," went on Donovan, apparently ignoring Gleason's remark, "and they put you into one of their main distributing stations for the stolen parts. But that little hi-jacking party last night evidently pulled by some of their men who turned against them when they didn't get a big enough split, threw our plans off."

"Yeah," said Larkin. "Grimby got suspicious and he called Doc Gleason and they arranged to dump me into the river, thinking I was with those hi-jackers who grabbed the drums of grease in which the stolen auto parts were packed and shipped across the river."

"You can't tie me in with this!" Gleason exploded. "Just because Grimby belongs to my lodge, doesn't make me his crime partner. I acted in good faith—"

"You lie!" yelled Grimby, holding his bleeding wrist. "You and your smart talk about being solid with In-

spector Donovan and that nobody would ever think of suspecting me. Why, you dope, I bet Donovan was onto you all the time!"

Gleason lunged at Grimby. Donovan pushed them apart. He shook his head.

His voice was pained.

"Thanks, Grimby," he said quietly. "I was waiting for you to speak up. Dr. Gleason, you're under arrest! Thanks for taking care of our blue-coat friend—but of course you didn't know . . . Put the bracelets on him, Officer! *Officer!*"

Larkin's mouth sagged. "You—you mean me?"

"Why not?" growled Donovan. "After what you did tonight, clearing up this mess, if we can't get you a cop's badge, color or no color, I—I'll . . . I'm going to the commissioner in the morning and I'm taking the local F.B.I. chief with me. If influence can do it, it'll be done."

"Boy-o-boy!" cried Larkin, his face lighting, the tired look going away. "Boy-o-boy!" He beamed at Felice.

"Why," continued Donovan, "you're a born cop. You can't tell the difference between red and green, between danger and safety. That's what we need in cops!"

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Red put a hand on Luke's shoulder, let his fingers slip around his partner's throat

AIR RAID

By RAY CUMMINGS

A Screaming Siren May Be a Harbinger of Violent Death, but This Time It Saves a Man from Murder!

IT was quite by accident that Red O'Conner spotted Luke, although Luke had once before hung around this little town, in between jobs when he wasn't planning anything. Red wasn't after Luke particularly. That would come later. Red had just arrived in town after a lot of trouble raising the money to get here.

He'd taken a room at the little local hotel. In the morning he'd see what could be done about renting or buying an old flivver. Then he'd drive out to see Annie. It was nine o'clock now—a raw winter evening. Red had left the hotel with the idea of going to a movie. It would be the first movie

he'd seen in three years—except those they showed in the Pen.

The air was raw with fog, the pavement slippery with slush. Luke was coming out of a delicatessen store with a paper bag under his arm. Red recognized him at once—the same bent, shifty-looking figure, the same black overcoat, with a greenish, greasy look to it now, with its skimpy collar turned up about Luke's stringy throat and an old cap pulled over his sandy grey hair.

He looked pretty much like a down and outer. But he wasn't—not by a long sight he wasn't—not Luke Luckner. You could bet on that. Especially not now, after three years with some-

thing close to sixteen grand, half of it Red's share of the cache which Luke had made away with.

He didn't see Red, sloshed along the street, away from the little business section. Red followed him quietly. At the end of the street, where the stores frayed out, Luke turned into a dingy section of small shabby houses, most of them with "Rooms for Rent" signs in the lower windows.

Halfway down the block, Luke went up a dingy stoop and vanished. Red was there a moment later. The front door was unlocked. From the lower hallway, he caught a glimpse of Luke disappearing into a room on the second floor.

FOR a minute or two Red waited, his heart pounding. Then he knocked on the door. There was only silence. Red turned the knob slowly, found that the door was locked and thumped again.

Luke's voice was audible, muffled by the door.

"Coming, Mrs. Megan."

The door was opened a little with Luke's habitual cautiousness, and his voice mumbled.

"Yes, Mrs. Megan, sure I got the rent—"

Red shoved his foot into the crack and pushed. The dim light of the inner hallway shone on Red's tall slim figure. Luke recognized him all right. Over Luke's thin face, an expression of startled terror crept. But he wiped it away as he tried to smile.

"Why—" he gasped. "Why, Red—why, come in."

"Thanks," Red said grimly.

The nearest wall was beside the bed. Luke backed against it.

"Come in, Red. S-sit down. Make yourself comfortable. I'm just getting something to eat—we'll share it. How are you?"

It was good to see Luke frightened. Red put a hand on Luke's shoulder, let his fingers slip around his partner's throat. Luke broke away, backed to

the kitchen. Red followed, stood in the doorway, surveying the small kitchen—a board table, a couple of wooden chairs, a sink and a big gas stove. The food Luke had just bought was spread around. A pot with water starting to boil was on the stove.

"Just—just goin' to boil some potatoes," Luke was stammering. "Sit down, Red. So you're out at last. I hadn't kept track. That's swell. Say, what's the matter with you—can't you talk? How are you, Red?"

"Fine," Red said. He sat down. "Pull that blind down, will you, Luke?"

Behind Luke, over near the stove, the room's single small window was closed. But the shade was up.

"Why sure," Luke said. He drew the shade. His hand was shaking, but he was smiling as he turned back to the stove and put some potatoes into the pot of boiling water.

"Just habit, eh, Red? We're both in the clear, ain't we? No reason why people shouldn't see us here together, is there?" A new apprehension came into his sniveling voice. "You—you didn't tell 'em anything, did you, Red? About me, I mean—bein' in that last job we pulled?"

Always worried about his own hide, that was Luke Luckner.

"No," Red said.

"No. Of course you wouldn't. That's your style, like me, square an' on the level. How did you find me, Red? I'm jus' hangin' out here—nothin' much doin' lately. I was wondering—"

"I got out Monday," Red said. "Spent a couple of days borrowing money to come up here."

"Borrowing money? Why, Red, you've got plenty, haven't you? That place where we left the sixteen grand—I took my half, yours is waitin' for you. Couldn't you get to it?"

IT was good to see Luke squirm. The rat had guilt written all over him. Whatever vague possibility had

been in Red's mind that something else had happened to the money, was gone now.

"I sent Annie after the money," Red said calmly. "Sent her two months ago."

"Annie? Oh, yes, I remember. That little stenographer down in New York that you was sweet on. How is she, Red? You an' she was goin' to get married, I thought."

"Yes, we were."

Luke was putting some sliced cold meat on the table. He was afraid to look at Red.

"An' your—trouble—that was just a postponement, eh? So now you're out an' gonna be married? That's fine, Red. An' she's got your eight grand waitin' for you? That's a swell little stake for a young married couple. What'd you come up here for, Red?"

The tortured Luke was holding his breath for the answer.

"Because Annie's up here," Red said. "Lives on her mother's farm, over in Cayuga County."

Red and Annie had had it all planned. Annie's father had died, and her mother, who was pretty badly off with T.B., needed her up there on the farm. What Red knew about farming you could write in large letters on a dime. But from what Annie said, the forty stony acres weren't much good anyhow. It would all have been so simple—with Red's eight grand.

Annie's mother could keep on living there in comfort—the farm was pretty high up in the hills, about the best spot you could get for T.B. Annie and Red would be with her. Red might do a little with the forty acres, and with care the eight grand could be stretched for years. It had all seemed just the right layout—no reason in the world why Red would have to get in bad with the law again ever.

All just right—except that Luke had made away with the eight grand, so Annie was trying to take care of her sick mother and trying at the same time to get a job.

"Oh, she's up here?" Luke was saying. "Well, that's fine, Red." He was relieved because he thought that maybe somehow Red didn't yet know about the eight grand.

"She didn't get the money," Red said.

"Didn't get it!"

"Because it wasn't there." Red could feel a wave of heat rising within him, a queer flush that went into his fingers and made them twitch and went up into his head so that the figure of the sniveling Luke was suddenly blurred.

"Wasn't there? Why—why, how queer. It was there when I took my share. I left it there." Luke was on his feet. He put down the cup he was carrying and backed away from the table toward the wall. "Not there, Red? You mean Annie didn't get it?"

"No, she didn't get it."

"Why—you didn't tell anybody we had money parked there? You wouldn't be that foolish, Red?"

LUKE'S eyes, like a trapped animal were roving the room. There was a big kitchen knife on the table, between him and Red. His gaze went to it, but Red contemptuously reached for it and shoved it aside.

"W-what'd you do that for, Red? You—you don't expect us to have any trouble, do you? My God, do you think I took that money?"

It had come. Somehow, because Red was a little frightened about this thing—the strength of that hot turgid flush within him—he realized that he had been stalling so as not to face what he wanted to do to Luke. His blue eyes glittered, met Luke's terrified gaze.

"Yes," he said. "That's exactly what I think."

"But I didn't, Red. I swear it! Listen, I'm pushed myself for money. Look at this dump here."

"You better talk fast—" Red strove to hold his voice calm. But it seemed all wrong. It seemed that he ought to grab Luke by the throat. The

vision of the dingy little kitchen was blurring before him. But then he could hear Annie's pleading voice, Annie, up there in the visitors' room at the Pen.

"An' when you get out, Red—never again any violence. Your temper—don't ever again let it get started. Even when the other fellow's wrong, you settle it by words, Red, just words." And he had promised. He could seem to hear her now as she had said, so frightened, "Because some day, Red—that would lead you to killing—"

"You took it," Red heard himself saying. "You sniveling rat, I can see it on your face. You took it!"

"I didn't. Red, listen—"

"An' now you're going to give it back to me."

"Red, listen—you want me to lend you some money? I would if I could, honest I would. But I'm just about broke. A lotta things been goin' wrong with me."

"Did you tell anybody where we had that money cached?"

"No. No, of course, I didn't. I'm not such a fool."

"Well then, only you an' Annie and I knew about it. And she went there—an' it was gone."

Luke was completely terrified now. He was backed against the wall by the stove.

"Red, don't let yourself get so excited. Let's talk this over."

"That's what I'm doing. By God, you better tell me now what you did with the money. An' you'll pay it back all right. For me, maybe, I wouldn't care so much, but for Annie an' her mother with T.B., that's different. How much money you got? An' where is it?"

"Honest, Red, I'm telling you—"

"Where is it?"

"Red, don't be a fool." Then Luke evidently tried to subdue his terror. "What's the idea, anyhow? I tell you I'd lend you some money if I had any. If that—that girl went for your eight

grand—how do you know she didn't tell somebody about the cache?"

"She didn't."

"Well then, how do you know she didn't get the money? How do you know she ain't lying about—"

HE never finished the sentence. The kitchen blurred before Red as he leapt to his feet with the wave of heat in him suddenly a raging fire in the midst of which the figure of the half-crouching Luke was the only thing clear.

"Red—take it easy, Red!" Luke tried to parry the blow. But the force of Red's fist drove through his guard, caught him on the chin. He went down. As he fell, his flailing hand hit the handle of the pot in which the potatoes were boiling—just a glancing tip. The big pot slued around, jiggled. Some of the boiling water slopped over. The gas flame under the pot was extinguished.

But Red was only vaguely aware of that. Panting, he staggered back, stood gazing down at the fallen Luke. He was out all right, completely out.

For a moment Red felt the hot fire of his anger still raging in him. Better finish him up now—why not? He deserved it. In the close air of the little kitchen Red suddenly was aware of the pungent smell of gas.

Then he realized what had happened. Under that pot of water the raw gas was on full. In this small room, with the window and door closed, that gas would finish Luke up before he recovered consciousness. And Luke's own hand had done it.

Red didn't stop to reason the thing out. For another few seconds, he stood grimly staring. Then he seized his hat and darted from the kitchen, closing its door after him.

The upper hall of the lodging house was dim and silent. Like a shadow, Red went down the stairs and out the front door. In the dim shabby street he darted behind a line of snow-cov-

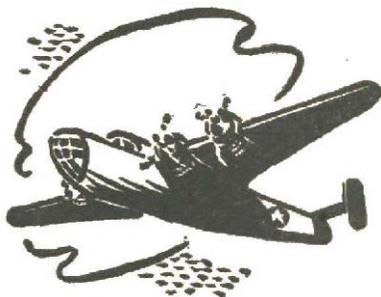
(Continued on page 104)

AMERICA'S SUPREME TASK

A Message to the Home Front

By

LT. GEN. BREHON
SOMERVELL



THIS WAR is going to be won by fighting men—by men on blazing deserts, on northern wastes; by men fighting in the air and on scattered seas. Wherever the enemy is, our fighting men will attack and attack until victory is won.

The supreme task of all behind the battle lines is to provide the guns, the tanks, the planes, the ships, the equipment to make our fighting men strong and irresistible. They can fight and win, if we are certain that no second is lost in producing and sending them the weapons and the supplies so urgently needed now and until the final shot is fired that destroys the Axis.

A long, hard struggle faces us. Some few still talk despairingly of the need for greater sacrifices, of the little things that we must forego, of changes in the everyday habits of life of the civilian population.

Those at home, in factories, in fields, in the thousands of jobs the national effort requires, are demonstrat-

ing every day through selfless service their willingness and determination to concentrate all energies on winning the war.

The spirit of America is one of our greatest assets. It stems from an abiding faith in our way of life which we shall preserve and expand. This spirit is an asset which the whip-driven Axis powers do not possess, and never can. Only free men and women can own such a precious treasure.

You on the home front and we in the Army are a team. Our goal is victory. Let us not delude ourselves. We haven't had too much success so far. Let us not indulge in the luxury of wishful thinking. Our foe is strong and resourceful. This is no Saturday afternoon football game. It is a grim and deadly business.

Sweat, fortitude, unflinching devotion to daily tasks, no matter how trivial they may seem—these are the ingredients of victory.

Our fighting men are on the march in far-flung regions of the world, striking with unexampled courage at the enemy. They won't fail you.

Give 'em firepower!



A stylized, cursive signature of Lt. Gen. Brehon Somervell, written in black ink.

LT. GEN. BREHON SOMERVELL,
*Services of Supply,
Commanding.*



OFF THE RECORD

A DEPARTMENT WHERE READERS
AND THE EDITOR MEET

IN the black night waters off Long Island's eastern tip, a diver slid silently over the rail of a blacked out boat. Before he could touch the water a fast motor boat cut in swiftly, a searchlight blazed and machine guns poured forth a hail of death.

The diver crumpled over the rail. His companions went down like stones—all but one who escaped with murder in his heart. This man was Thurman Spencer, a millionaire drug manufacturer who had the strange habit of employing gunmen and hiring divers to operate in pitchy darkness.

Another Thread of Mystery

A hundred miles away, another thread of this weave was spinning itself out. Harvey Lansing, escaped murderer, stood in Tony Quinn's library with a gun muzzle jammed in Carol Baldwin's back. His ultimatum: Tony Quinn must help Lansing prove his innocence or the girl dies.

Secretly, Tony and Carol were in love. But it was not this consideration which made the Black Bat listen to Lansing's story. Before his temporary blindness, Tony Quinn had been a brilliant district attorney. It was he who had convicted Harvey Lansing.

Even then, however, Tony had been troubled by the purely circumstantial nature of the evidence against Lansing and had accepted a second degree murder charge which meant jail instead of the electric chair. Then came blindness. And as Lansing said, "When a man loses his eyes he really begins to see."

Lansing had been convicted of the murder of a chemist employed by the Chemical Latex Corporation. One of

five men, he insisted, was the real murderer. They were all directors of the Chemical Latex Corporation. And one of them was Thurman Spencer, the strange drug manufacturer who hired gangsters to protect him and divers to do secret work in the night.

The Bat Takes the Trail

The Black Bat took up the trail of these elusive directors of death. That trail led him into places where murder brushed their faces time and again with clammy hands. To Tony, playing his role of blind man, it nearly brought death by gunfire and once by a horrible, dissolving acid which ate human flesh, metal and rubber as a fire eats paper.

To Carol Baldwin it nearly brought a lingering horrible death as she was sealed in a shining plastic cast which when hard could never be removed without causing her death.

There's excitement in every page of **MILLIONS FOR A MURDERER** in the next issue of **BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE**. This new Black Bat adventure by G. Wyman Jones packs a punch you'll remember long after you've finished reading it! Be on hand to enjoy it.

Our Letter Box

We had many unusually interesting letters this trip, but first of all here's a letter from a young girl which we are privileged to print. She says:

I believe I was the first one in my family to read your book. I got your first and every one after that. I believe in Tony Quinn because it is almost my life. I became blind too after reading your third

(Continued on page 102)



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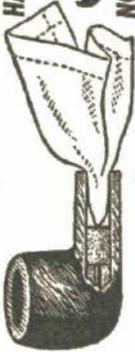
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OFF THE RECORD (Continued from page 100)

book and my brother read the rest to me. Now I can see again.

But Tony gave me hope to see. The doctor said I would be blind for life but I said if some people had hope, so would I.

I hope Tony Quinn stays well. I hope you can read this for I do not write very well yet.

That letter is from Mary Mort of Manchester, Pa., and we're proud to know her. Here we've been admiring a character like Tony Quinn who had the courage to fight his way back from blindness, thinking he was something almost superhuman, while all the time in real life a girl has been fighting the same battle quietly and alone and winning! We're glad that Tony Quinn set an example and gave her the courage to win her fight. We're proud that we played some small part ourselves.

Now here's a letter of a different color from Theodore Stoe of Lancaster, Pa. He says:

In the September issue on page 82, column 2, line 19, Tony Quinn gave his Black Bat identity away or in plain words told them that he could see. If Captain McGrath is always so suspicious of Tony Quinn being the Black Bat, why didn't he notice Tony's statement and comment upon it? He would then know Tony's secret and also know who the Black Bat is.

The Black Bat is the best book I have ever read and I hope to be able to continue reading them. I am only one of the many readers who must have noticed it.

Author Jones's face must be red for at least one other sharp-eyed reader spotted the same thing. K. D. Pfoor of Silver Springs, Md., wrote pretty much the same letter.

Well, you know, we're kind of tickled about the whole thing. It just proves what a keen bunch of readers we've got. You'll admit that it's quite a job for Tony Quinn to keep his two personalities separate and not make a mistake when he is forced to switch back and forth all the time. And it's quite likely that even as shrewd a customer as Tony might make a slip—once. It's just as lucky that Captain McGrath was so interested in what Tony was telling him that he didn't notice the slip.

You know, any detective story is sort of a contest between writer and

reader. The writer tries to keep you guessing as long as he can, you try to outguess him as quickly as you can. Any time you find something like this, that's score one for you. Shoot it in to us and make Mr. Jones blush. Just address The Editor, **BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE**, 10 East 40th Street, New York. We'll print as many as we can find space for.

Finally, here's a letter from a boy doing his bit for Uncle Sam—Private Morris Cohen:

For the past year, I've been reading **BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE** and have really enjoyed the stories about Tony Quinn. One reason is that they are fast moving and never drag.

I've missed a few of the back numbers and I wonder if I can possibly get any of them? If you have a list you could send me I could pick out the ones I didn't read and try to get them. I would be very much obliged.

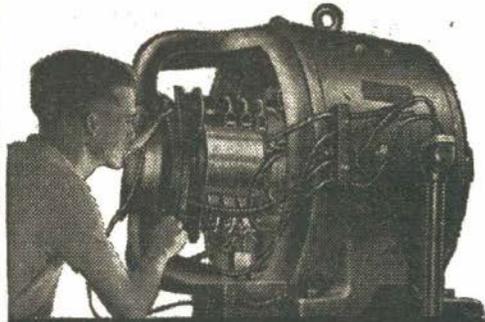
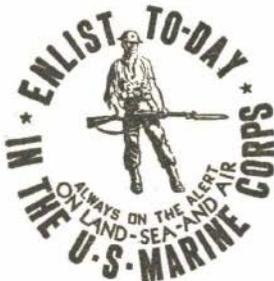
Sorry, Private Cohen, but we can't do a thing for you on back numbers. We're cooperating with the government to conserve paper and we no longer keep stocks of back numbers or extensive files.

However, there'll be plenty of good Tony Quinn stories coming out all the time—we hope they'll be getting better and better. So watch your news stands for the next issue with **MIL-LIONS FOR A MURDERER**.

That's about all the space we have. See you in the next issue. And meanwhile keep right on buying your War Stamps and Bonds!

—THE EDITOR.

P. S.: Everybody—listen to "The Army Hour," official program of the War Department, on the air every Sunday afternoon from 3:30 to 4:30 P.M., Eastern war time. It's a grand program and gives you vital information regarding our armed forces and civilian defenders. It will help you in your own job of helping America win the war.



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AIR RAID

(Continued from page 98)

ered ashcans and crouched, peering to be sure he had not been seen.

Suddenly the silent village was aroused by a scream—the distant wailing of an electric siren—a long wailing scream—a little silence, then another blast, another and another.

Air raid—the All-out Alert! It meant approaching enemy bombers with a raid expected in five to ten minutes!

Confused, Red crouched motionless. Up in the Pen he had read about this sort of thing. Then he realized that around him the quiet village was bursting into action. Windows were going up, people peering out. Some were shouting. Down at the corner, two or three automobiles went swiftly by. Then pedestrians went there—men running, shouting.

RED found himself on his feet, out by the curb. Within him was a weird desire to run. That terrifying siren sounded as though it was urging everybody to run and do something. But everybody was doing what he shouldn't do. Everybody was in a panic. Or was it just excitement? From a nearby lighted window, a woman was yelling:

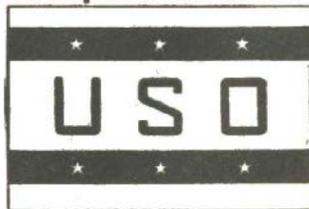
"Where's the 'planes? I don't see any 'planes."

"Put your light out an' shut up," Red called.

Some of the window lights were going out now. An overcoated figure with a white arm-band was coming at a run. A man's voice was shouting.

"Put out your lights! Get away

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from the windows! Stay inside. Keep calm, everybody."

An automobile with half a dozen people in it slued up to the curb. The man with the arm-band ran at it, hustled the people out. They ran for the nearest house, thumped on the door until somebody let them in. The headlights of the abandoned automobile were on full. Red turned them off. He found the man with the arm-band beside him.

"That's the stuff, thanks," the fellow said. "This street light—I forgot my screwdriver. You better take shelter somewhere."

"Yes," Red said. He found himself following the young man, who dashed across the pavement and pounded on one of the basement windows of Luke's lodging house.

"Mrs. Megan! Oh Mrs. Megan. Lemme in. This is Arthur. Where is that woman? I remember leaving my screwdriver here this afternoon—"

[Turn page]

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"You, Arthur? I done everything you tol' me. Where's the planes? It's an air-raid, isn't it?"

"Yes, I guess so. Forgot my screwdriver—"

"Oh. It's on my cedar chest in the cellar. Arthur, where's the 'planes—them Germans—I always knew we'd have a real raid. Will we, Arthur? What am I supposed to—"

Her excited voice receded as Arthur shoved her back into the house. The ignored Red stood by the grating door in the areaway under the stoop. The screaming air-raid siren had stopped now. It made the voices more audible. A man passing called to someone else:

"I guess it's all over—"

"The heck it is. The siren isn't supposed to keep on."

An auto came past. Arthur reappeared.

"Hey, you! Pull up!" he shouted.

"Just goin' to Crosby street—we live there," somebody called.

"Pull up here!"

The car's glaring headlights dimmed, but it kept on. Then Red found himself dashing across the sidewalk again with Arthur.

"Listen, what can I do?" Red demanded. "Everybody ought to do something."

IT SEEMED suddenly as though everything that Red had ever done was unimportant now. A lot of things in life had appeared important. Now you realized that they weren't—not with things like this happening.

"This street light," Arthur was saying. "My job to put it out—forgot my screwdriver—"

The street light, up on its metal pole, was glaring above them like a beacon of death. Red saw that the rest of the street was dark. He stood beside Arthur as the young fellow stooped at the metal base of the pole. Arthur's hand shook with his haste.

The screwdriver slipped.

"That screw?" Red murmured. "Lemme do it?"

"I got it." The screw came loose. A foot-square metal plate like a door swung out. Arthur reached in and pulled a switch. The light was extinguished.

"You think it's the real thing?" Red murmured.

"Dunno. Maybe — defense plant over at the crossroads. Or maybe they'd be just heading in an' down toward New York."

"Well, I don't hear—"

Then they both heard it—the faint distant drone of planes. The sky was black. Red felt Arthur pulling at him.

"Come on—shouldn't stay here."

They crouched, breathless, by the open grating door under the stoop of Mrs. Megan's. Suddenly everything was silent. There was just the faint drone of the planes.

"You think we're in the best place?" Red muttered.

"Guess so. I want to see if anybody comes along the street—get 'em

[Turn page]

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inside. What the heck—if a bomb hits this little house we won't have to worry. The house an' us—we jus' won't be here."

"The planes are getting fainter."

"Yes. Maybe they're ours."

They crouched in the cold darkness, silent for a moment. And suddenly Red was thinking of Luke. Luke was up almost over their heads. Maybe he was dead by now.

The drone of the planes was gone. "My job," Arthur was murmuring. "See, I got charge of half a dozen of these little houses. Buckets o' sand up near the roofs—if an incendiary should drop—"

"Yeh. I'll help."

"The planes are gone," Arthur said out of another silence. "Maybe this is just another false alarm—or maybe our planes chased 'em off."

"Yeh. Hope so. Won't they sound an All Clear?"

"Nothing to do but wait for it."

THAT would be funny—if Luke were the only one who died in this affair. Funny everything was so unimportant, one man's life, or another's, when the life of a nation was at stake. But suddenly, to the tense Red, Luke didn't seem unimportant. If he died, Red at least would know what killed him.

Red O'Conner would be a murderer. Nobody would know it except Red. But *he'd* know it, always. He'd never be able to get away from it—and it seemed even more horrible than he had ever imagined it could be. This air raid—and the only death in it—not by an enemy bomb, but by Red O'Conner.

"If they dropped any eggs around here—most likely they'd aim at the plant," Arthur was saying. "I work over there—airplane wings—an' we're starting precision tools in an adjacent building."

Red felt trapped here in the dark basement doorway. If he could only get out and get up to Luke—maybe there was some way he could think of an excuse.

The silence of the little village was abruptly broken. The siren sounded again—a long, continuous blast this time.

"All clear," Arthur said. "Well, that's that."

From inside the house Mrs. Megan called.

"You, Arthur—you out there? Is it all right now?"

Then there was a woman's voice that seemed from upstairs.

"Mrs. Megan—oh, Mrs. Megan—"

It sounded urgent, frightened. Numbed with horror, Red wanted to run. As though he could run away from his guilt. He couldn't. He'd have to live with it the rest of his life.

"Mrs. Megan—is Arthur down there? He better come up. That new lodger—I can smell gas up here."

There it was, discovered already. Every instinct in Red made him want to run, but, fascinated with horror, he found himself following Arthur upstairs. Excited people were in the

[Turn page]

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hall and the doorways, all talking of the raid—had the enemy planes really been somewhere near here? Or was it just another scare? Nobody paid any attention to Red.

"I thought I smelt gas," a woman was saying. "I don't know—all that excitement, you forget everything."

Silent, his heart pounding, Red stood against the wall in the upper hall. Arthur was thumping on Luke's door. No answer—of course he wouldn't get any answer. Then Arthur shoved the door open. With several of the others, Red crowded forward. You could smell the gas now. Not very much, but a little—

THEN Red was in Luke's hallway. Why couldn't he run? There would be Luke's dead face—horrible—most horrible of all to the man who killed him.

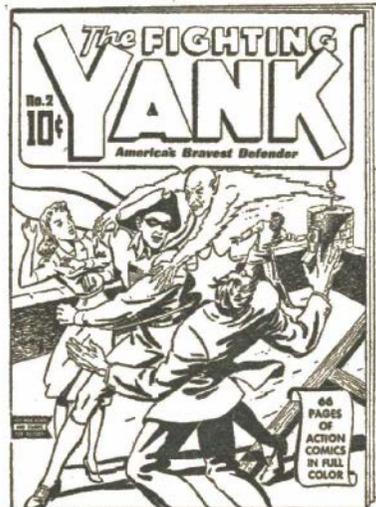
"Sure was gas here," somebody said. "You can—"

A startled shout from Arthur checked him. Then Red was at Luke's kitchen door. And Arthur was bend-

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ing down to where on the floor Luke was up on one elbow—not dead—just recovering consciousness, and looking confused by the people.

“What happened? Good Lord—looks like he fell!”

“Is he sick? Maybe he’s drunk.”

“I’m all right,” Luke was gasping. “That siren just now—was that an air-raid? What happened? I—I fell—hit my head, I guess I’m all right. What happened?”

Arthur lifted him up, sat him on a chair, where he wobbled dizzily.

“One of these gas burners is on,” somebody said. Mrs. Megan was at the door.

“I shut off the gas down at the meter like you tol’ me, Arthur. I did it when the first alarm sounded, right away—an’ I haven’t turned it on yet.”

“Lucky you did,” somebody said. “This fellow lying here—there was sure gas here—looks like he got a pretty good dose of it even so.”

In all the babble, Red stood silent, ignored. That air raid hadn’t killed anybody. It had done just the reverse. It had saved a life—and it had saved

[Turn page]

SOMEBODY BLABBED



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Luke was coughing, still choked from the gas and dizzy from the wallop Red had given him. Then his gaze fell on Red, clung for a minute. But Luke, with the old instinct, didn't give any sign of recognition. His gaze shifted to Mrs. Megan.

"I'm all right," he said. "What the heck is all this rumpus? Can't these people get out of here?"

"I got your rent, Mrs. Megan. Wasn't stallin' this afternoon—matter o' fact I owe a lot of money I can't pay—things go right, mebbe I will some day. Here's your rent, Mrs. Megan."

"Oh, nonsense, I don't want it now, Mr. Blainey," the abashed Mrs. Megan said. "I'm sorry you hurt yourself—didn't mean what I said this afternoon."

Red retreated with some of the other tenants. Then he found young Arthur beside him.

"You're a stranger here?" Arthur said.

"Yeah. Just came up from New York. My girl lives over Cayuga way. I'm lookin' for a job," he added suddenly.

"Ought to be easy," Arthur said. "What can you do?"

"Well—I can take a car apart an' put it together, an' there wouldn't be nothin' left over either. I was thinkin'



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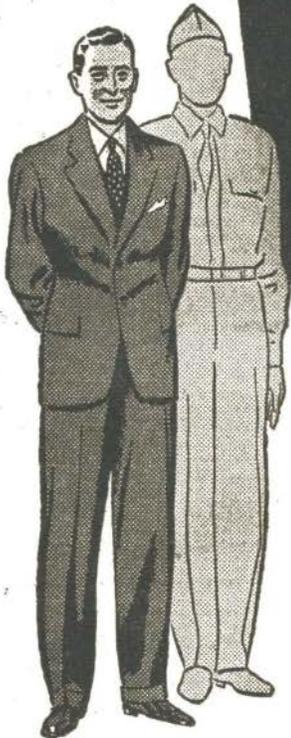
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