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By G. WAYMAN JONES

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BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE

Vol. 16, No. 3

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March, 1943

A Complete Book-Length Novel



MILLIONS FOR A MURDERER

Featuring Tony Quinn, Nemesis of Crime

By G. WAYMAN JONES

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and to Keep a Precious Secret War Weapon from the Hands of the
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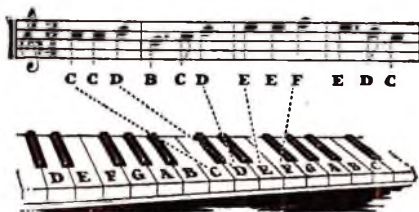


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OFF THE RECORD

A DEPARTMENT WHERE READERS AND THE EDITOR MEET

THE Black Bat has had many strange things happen to him in his exciting career as America's number one crime fighter. And since our country's entrance into war, with the Black Bat pitting himself against saboteurs and Nazi spies hungry to wreck America's giant war industry, those strange events have multiplied.

But in all his adventures, nothing stranger had ever happened to Tony Quinn than the night he found himself in his own study, listening to an evil-faced little man who said his name was Freytag and who blandly admitted he had just landed from a German submarine to blow up American war plants!

So begins CAPTAINS OF DEATH, the new Black Bat novel by G. Wayman Jones, complete in our next issue.

Freytag had come to Tony Quinn, whom of course he never suspected to be the Black Bat, with an amazing proposition. In return for protection, he would turn over his confederates, one by one, as the time schedule for each man's job came up.

Fear of the Hot Seat

It wasn't conscience, or a weakening of the Nazi philosophy of murder that bothered Freytag. It was fear for his own skin. Somewhere in his diseased mind had been planted an overwhelming terror of the electric chair.

The thought of himself sitting with shaven head and slit trouser leg, elec-

trodes clamped to his skin, waiting for the surge of current to cook his blood and burn out his mind, sent the bloody little Nazi into convulsions of fear.

It was all right to machine-gun refugees, to bayonet helpless women and children—he bragged to Tony Quinn of his exploits in Poland—but when it came to himself he was yellower than butter. Reading of the electrocution of the first saboteurs landed on Long Island by submarine, Freytag decided, with typical Nazi loyalty, to purchase his own safety at the cost of his comrades' lives.

So he made a bargain with Tony Quinn. Listening behind the door, Silk, Quinn's loyal aide, felt cold sweat crawl on his face.

Grimly Accurate!

Quinn, his soul disgusted, would have given anything to crush Freytag like a venomous insect. But he thought of the other saboteurs armed with forged credentials, with weapons and explosives, loose in New York. He thought of the lives he might save, of the factories and shipyards he might rescue from destruction, and he agreed.

Carol Baldwin and Butch knew an equal sense of horror. But they had to accept Freytag in Quinn's home, had to stand for his bullying and bragging, had to wait on him hand and foot. For Freytag's information was grimly accurate.

(Continued on page 10)



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OFF THE RECORD

(Continued from page 8)

That first night, Silk, posing as the agent Gebhart Daimler, top man on Freytag's schedule, went to an appointed rendezvous to meet the master saboteur.

Doctor Mars

This mysterious personage was known only as Doctor Mars and was never seen, even by his own men. Although Silk's disguise was good, it was shattered by the untimely arrival of the real Daimler. Trapped, Silk was slated for quick death. If it weren't that the Black Bat had seen the real Daimler arrive, had seen him accidentally catch a glimpse of Doctor Mars' face and been killed for it by his own superior—but why tell you more and spoil the exciting time ahead of you as you unravel the threads of this new and absorbing puzzle?

The second night, Carol and Butch follow Freytag's second tip to stumble on a cache of smuggled diamonds and a warehouse full of explosives where they faced the pleasant choice of being shot or blown skyhigh as Carol dangled a lighted cigarette over a nest of powder.

You'll thrill and chill at CAPTAINS OF DEATH and you'll share

(Turn to page 12)

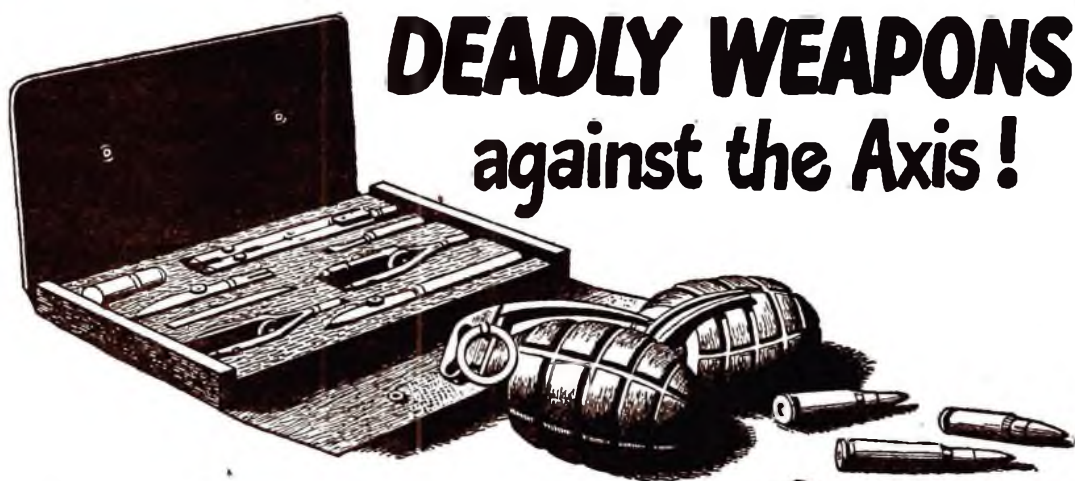
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OFF THE RECORD

(Continued from page 10)

our friends' desire to step on the Nazi insects who deal out pain and death so callously to others. Author Jones has packed his latest complete book-length Black Bat novel with a healthy sock. Coming in the March issue!

Our Letter Box

We've received a bulging mail bag full of letters this trip, which doesn't annoy your old editor a bit. Fact, I like to see that old spirit out there, whether it's to tell us you like the Bat, give us ideas for stories you'd like to see, or even to try to catch author Jones in a boner. Let's start with a letter from Aline Chappelle of Los Angeles, California. She says:

I noticed a letter in the September issue in which Daniel Curwood of Trenton, N. J. says the Black Bat is too fantastic and that it isn't possible to even imagine someone seeing in the dark.

I wish to come to the defense of the Bat and tell Mr. Curwood how wrong he is. There was a true story in the newspapers which told of a boy who can not only see in the dark, but who can see through fog.

Well, Aline says a lot more, but most of it's so complimentary that you'd think we were bragging if we printed it. Anyway, she likes the Black Bat and she tells Danny Curwood to turn his imagination loose. How about it, Danny?

Next, here's a letter from Pvt. Jesse L. Green who is working for Uncle Sam right now and your Uncle Sam says we can't tell you where he is, which is okay with us. You know, or you should, from reading the Black Bat, that there are eyes and ears which could take such information and piece it together and get some sort of idea where our troops are and how many and so on. So if any of you know where a soldier friend is right now, mum's the word!

Anyway, Pvt. Jesse first ran onto BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE when he was sick and had time to read in the hospital. He says:

I sure like your magazine. Please get in
(Continued on page 112)

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WELL



No.2
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UNDER BULB



No.3
SQUEEZE CROWN
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TUBE, SPREAD
EVENLY, PUT PLATE
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Black Bat
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The Black Bat saw that Marley Weston seemed to be in command of the situation. (CHAPTER VI)

MILLIONS FOR A MURDERER

By G. WAYMAN JONES

*Tony Quinn Battles to Prove an Escaped Convict's Innocence—
and to Keep a Precious Secret War Weapon from the Hands of
the Foe—when Homicide, Espionage and Intrigue Join Forces!*

CHAPTER I

Whim of a Dead Man

EVERY little creaking sound touched Matt Hanlon's raw nerves. The ancient frame chemical building seemed to groan and complain at the dampness of the drizzling night.

"I'm a fool to take it seriously," whispered Hanlon. "I should have too much sense to be waiting here in the darkness for an escaped murderer to come back. I suppose the thing he

found in this room five years ago must have touched old Jared, and yet—"

A slow, creaking footstep in the corridor outside the door cut off his whispered soliloquy. Because he did appear to be a fool, sitting here without a light, at a desk where murder had been committed five years before, Matt Hanlon flicked on the bulb convenient to his hand.

He knew the step to be that of Barnaby, the old watchman. He could not reasonably explain to old Barnaby why he was sitting in darkness. The watchman rapped lightly. Hanlon

pretended to busy himself with some papers as he told old Barnaby to come in.

The ancient office door was solid, lacking a transom. Barnaby would not know the light had just been turned on.

"Excuse me, Mr. Hanlon," said Barnaby, rubbing his gray stubbled chin. "I nearly always use the stairs, but my rheumatic knee's troublin' me, sir. I'll take the elevator and send it back up."

"Sure thing, Barnaby," said Hanlon. "And, Barnaby, you needn't make the upper floors again until I leave. I'll let you know. I'm arranging a few things, for perhaps the last time."

Old Barnaby nodded sadly.

"Yes, sir, I understand. I'll not be makin' the rounds any more after this week. Mr. Wright, rest his soul, provided handsomely for me, but after twenty years I'll be missin' this place. On rainy nights like this, the old plant seems to talk to me. Sometimes I hear—"

Hanlon glanced quickly toward the skeleton shape of the fire-escape outside the open window.

"Yes, Barnaby, I suppose it does," he said, to cut him off. "Go right ahead and use the elevator."

"Thankee, sir." Old Barnaby backed out, closing the door.

Hanlon heard the creaking sound of the old-fashioned operating cables on the elevator. The platform lift had served for at least a quarter of a century, for both freight and passengers.

MATT HANLON again flicked out the desk light. The open window became a square of unrelieved blackness. Rain dripped dismally on the fire-escape outside.

Then abruptly all little sounds were lost in a grinding crash. Hanlon came to his feet with a quick, nervous oath. Then he was suddenly sick. The seconds of splintering sound outside ended in a jarring smash that shook

all of the ancient chemical building.

When Hanlon got the door open, he saw and breathed the fine, dry dust that rose like smoke in the old elevator shaft. A broken steel cable still twisted and writhed like a beheaded snake.

Hanlon skipped three stairs at a time descending from the fourth floor. He was guided by the light bulbs at the turns. The faint illumination of the bulb on the bottom floor showed enough to shrink Hanlon's stomach muscles.

"After twenty years he'd be missin' this place, muttered Hanlon thickly. "But not now, Barnaby."

It was useless to feel for old Barnaby's pulse. His neck was twisted grotesquely in death. Jared Wright had provided a pension the watchman would not be needing.

Matt Hanlon started toward the first floor phone, but halted suddenly. It came to him with a jar that the fall of the elevator had not been an accident!

"And that means I was expected to be the first to use it to come down," he mumbled grimly. "Old Barnaby just died in my place and—"

He was already on the stairs, climbing swiftly. That elevator had been fixed to fall after he had ascended less than an hour before.

"If it is murder, then the killer is still in the building, and that means he may be after the record," thought Hanlon. "Old Jared Wright may not have been as queer as it seems."

He was on the turn of the stairs at the third floor before sense and caution really functioned. The thought of the death he had just escaped, of the danger possibly still lurking above, sent him to the dark wall, listening.

He realized that he was unarmed, although he had been obeying instructions to wait in a murder room that had been closed for five years for the coming of the man who had been convicted of committing that



Butch's rush carried the man back as Carol came from the car with an automatic. (CHAP. VII)

murder, five years previously.

The instructions, which amounted to an apparently insane request to meet a man sentenced and serving a life term for murder, were on the dictaphone record Matt Hanlon had left in the machine upstairs.

And that record was perhaps the strangest bequest ever made by a dying man. For the record told that Jared Wright, sole head of the Wright-Jones Chemical Company, had left to Matt Hanlon the sum of one hundred thousand dollars, and the custody of one Harvey Lansing, life term, who had been convicted of killing Jared Wright's partner, Thaddeus Jones, five years before.

Moreover, that fantastic dictaphone record fixed tonight as the time, and the office where Thaddeus Jones was murdered as the place where Matt Hanlon was to meet and take charge of Harvey Lansing, life convict. Yet there had been no word of Lansing having escaped.

Because he had memorized every word of that record, Hanlon considered its possible truth now, as he crouched, listening. What had appeared incredible began to take shape as possible fact. For Hanlon still breathed the fine, dry dust that had heralded the death of another man in his place.

UNTIL this time, Matt Hanlon, chemist and for three years secretary to the late Jared Wright, had felt he was making a fool of himself to even go through the motions of obeying the dead man's whim.

Hardworking and always law-abiding, Hanlon had not even considered the possibility that Jared Wright's conditional bequest of a hundred thousand dollars was to be taken seriously. What amounted to considerable fortune to Matt Hanlon had been bequeathed free and clear, in a legal document. The condition was separate.

That he would himself become a

criminal, personally responsible for the freedom of a fugitive convict, or that he was walking into deadly danger had not until now really penetrated Matt Hanlon's straight thinking mind.

He remained frozen to the dark wall for a long minute. The virtual command and the warning on that dictaphone record in the machine upstairs were repeated in his mind.

"You will shelter Harvey Lansing by every means at your command. His appearance has been arranged. I have set aside on deposit virtually the total amount of my fortune, six millions in cash, to be paid to the man who produces the absolute convicting evidence that was lacking following the murder of Thaddeus Jones.

"Lansing's conviction, as you well know, was obtained on purely circumstantial evidence. It is my belief that one of five men knows the truth of the murder. I have notified each of those five men of the opportunity to claim the six millions provided. Aside from my attorney, Lester Shott, and yourself, no other person has been or will be informed of this unusual reward for the successful reopening of a murder case.

"In due time you will be contacted by the five men to whom I refer. I warn you to be cautious. While I have no evidence other than my intuition, I am convinced that one of the world's most vital chemical secrets was and is involved in the death of Thaddeus Jones. I leave to you this grave responsibility because of my confidence in you, and further because of your relationship with my ward, Marley Weston."

Matt Hanlon's wide lips were a grim line as the name of Marley Weston came into his mind. Perhaps for her sake, if for no other reason, he must go through with this as Jared Wright desired, if there was possible truth in Jared Wright's recorded words.

There was this much sudden truth.

A gun cracked twice from the stairs above. Slugs gouged the wall close to Hanlon's head. They buzzed away viciously.

Hanlon dropped, flattening himself, swearing under his breath. Why had he not taken the dead watchman's gun before he started up?

He could hear a scuffling movement. The gunman was moving downward with cautious steps. If Hanlon moved, he was trapped by the light at the turn. A few more steps and the determined killer could not miss him.

the man's skull had been cracked, a dry, bitter voice spoke.

"Lift your hands and come up where I can see you better! I don't want to shoot, but I will!"

Matt Hanlon felt as if he ascended the final steps of the stairs in an unreal dream. Under the light at the top appeared a grayish, bony face. The man standing there held an automatic leveled upon Hanlon.

In that moment all of what had appeared impossible in Jared Wright's strange bequest to Matt Hanlon be-



THE BLACK BAT

Hanlon poised, prepared to jump desperately past the lighted space. The stalking killer took his next steps more quickly than he had intended. His gun exploded again, but the slug went wild, for Hanlon had glimpsed a fast moving, shadowy figure above the gunman. He heard the crunch as of metal upon bone. The killer came on down, rolling over and over.

EVEN as the gunman landed at Hanlon's feet, and he saw that

came fact. Hanlon had never seen Harvey Lansing, convicted of the murder of Thaddeus Jones. But he had been shown numerous newspaper photographs of him. And the tall man standing there, holding the gun steadily upon him, was Harvey Lansing. His hair was a thick, white shock that had been closely trimmed.

"You are Matthew Hanlon?"

The convict spoke calmly, though his weapon showed the bright, new stain of blood on its barrel as he held

it pointed with a steady hand.

"Yes, I'm Hanlon," said Matt. "I didn't—well, I was waiting for you, but I didn't believe—Say, Lansing! I guess I don't know what I believe yet, except it seems I owe you my life, and—"

"That was luck, Hanlon," interrupted Lansing. "I'm glad I came on the scene when I did, but I'm sorry, too. I'm afraid I killed that fellow. I had to hit hard and fast."

"Yes—yes," Hanlon nodded. "All right. It's all crazy, but somehow you're here and Jared Wright said I was to help you. But just a few moments ago old Barnaby, the watchman, was killed in the elevator shaft and this fellow you downed started shooting at me. I'll have to think about whether I'll go through with helping you, or—"

"Shut up, Hanlon!" The convict's voice was suddenly cold steel. "If there's any question, forget it! We'll go out the way I came in, by the fire-escape! You walk ahead!"

"But, Lansing, wait!" protested Hanlon. "There's Barnaby to look after, and this other dead man. I can't just walk out, or make up my mind like that."

Lansing's gun jabbed into Hanlon's ribs.

"You can't help the dead, Hanlon," he said evenly. "By this time all the law in the state is looking for me. I haven't a chance if I'm taken back. Don't make me regret I saved your life."

Hanlon walked ahead into the darkened office where Thaddeus Jones had been murdered five years before.

"It seems I have no choice, Lansing," he said. "You say we'll go out, but where? I hadn't honestly believed you would escape. I have made no plans."

"I'll make the plans, Hanlon," said this self-confident fugitive. "In fact, my plan was made before my escape was arranged. I want you to drive me directly to the home of Tony Quinn.

After that, we will see."

"Tony Quinn?" Hanlon was instantly on guard. "But Lansing, surely you're not thinking of making everything worse! I know he was the district attorney who sent you up, but Jared Wright had some other idea—"

"Jared Wright's ideas are mine now," interrupted Lansing. "You will help me carry them out, Hanlon. I'll be safe enough with you in your car going to Tony Quinn's Riverside place."

HANLON had never been more confused. He could think of but one reason for an escaped convict to want to see the man who had sent him to prison five years before. It appeared as if he, Hanlon, were about to be forced to be party to even a greater crime than he had feared.

"But, Lansing," he tried again. "Tony Quinn is blind now, and helpless. Besides, he is probably well-guarded. You wouldn't want vengeance on a blind man?"

"Hanlon, when a man has been in prison five years or has lost his eyes, then he really learns to see," said Lansing. "You have no choice. We are going to see Tony Quinn."

CHAPTER II

Death Ends a Quest



SEPARATED in their occurrence by something more than one hundred miles, two weird events were still closely associated in that night of rainy darkness.

In one, Matt Hanlon, his clean-cut, young face haggard and anxious, drove his coupé cautiously along Manhattan's Riverside Drive. He was headed for the rather old-fashioned but extensive home of Tony Quinn, former district attorney.

Quinn, long before blinded by the fiendish hand of a mobster, had become a supposed recluse, a mysterious figure. His constant companion was known as "Silk" Kirby, but it was known to few, aside from Quinn, that he once had been a thief and confidence man.

It was strongly suspected, with good reason, that blind Tony Quinn was also the most feared man-hunter and foe of criminals, known as the Black Bat. But proof of that was decidedly lacking.

Matt Hanlon in making this call on Quinn had figured every angle of possible prevention of revenge being taken upon Tony Quinn by the man at his side, Harvey Lansing, escaped life-terminer. But his chances to do anything about it seemed slight. The grayish, bony-faced Harvey Lansing kept an automatic pressed into Matt Hanlon's side as the coupé worked northward in the rain.

Almost coincident with this time, the other event was taking place near the easternmost tip of Long Island. It could seem to have no possible connection with Harvey Lansing's dubious visit to Tony Quinn, or to strange bequests made by the late Jared Wright, who had been head of the Wright-Jones Chemical Company—but it did.

Due to the drizzling rain there was only a slight shine of lights in the sky marking the oyster and fishing town of Greenport. A few miles away, not far from the rocky eastern headland of the famous Shelter Island, a bright light flared on and off.

This light was aboard a broad-decked oyster boat. But the flashes showed that a diver's outfit, with the derrick and pumps, had been set up. Some four men slouched about the deck, watching a man who had just come up from the water and was having his diver's helmet removed.

A smoothly shaved, red-cheeked and rotund man who wore eye-glasses that glistened with rain, appeared to

be in command. He waved his short arms continually.

"Well? Well?" His voice was impatient. "You hit it?"

"Can't say for sure yet, Mr. Spencer," grunted the diver. "I come onto a burned hulk, but that's a deep hole. Take some time to dig into it and get at the motor. I'll try to open a door next time down."

Most persons in the wholesale drug business of New York would have identified Thurman Spencer, the rotund man, as one of the wealthiest druggists in the trade. That he should be out here mysteriously in the rain of a dark night directing a diving operation was remarkable.

As for the three other men on the oyster boat's flat deck, they had the appearance of strong-arm, holdover thugs from the once prosperous racketeering era before the war. Accenting that idea, two of the men held slim-snouted machine-guns of the latest type.

The diver's helmet was screwed into place again and he started down, slowly. One of the men watching him was careful about using the needed light, switching it off as soon as the diver was ready to descend.

CAUTION with the intermittent light, however, proved to be wasted. The pilot of a nearly silent speed-boat was smart. His fast craft was bearing directly down upon the anchored oyster boat without lights showing.

A brilliant, spreading beam suddenly leaped to life. Its illumination bathed all of the weird diving scene while the diver was just partly over the side of the larger boat.

With the light came an immediate chattering, like a riveting machine pounding steel. No tracer bullets were needed to show the effect of the belching chopper on the speed-boat.

The descending diver threw out his thickly clad arms and sprawled over the rail, hanging there. One of the

strong-arm boys with a machine-gun attempted to get it into action, but he lay down instead, the unexploded chopper under his body.

Chunky Thurman Spencer, the well-known wholesale druggist, jumped up and down like a monkey on a stick.

"Well, get them! Curse it! Stop them!"

Mr. Spencer seemed oblivious to danger and made no effort to remove himself from the path of streaming death.

A second man with a machine-gun managed to stutter some of its slugs toward the speeding boat and its light. Apparently he missed. He, too, fell upon his chopper and lay quite still.

The third man had a thought for the recklessness of Mr. Spencer. It cost him his life, but saved the druggist. He shouted as he jumped forward and knocked Spencer from his feet and down into the open cockpit of the oyster raking deck.

"They're wantin' to blast you, Boss!" were the thug's words.

They were his last, for he took slugs that probably would have removed Thurman Spencer. He coughed twice and joined his two companions in death.

The shooting speed-boat circled the anchored oyster craft. A sharp voice rang out through the rain.

"That cleaned 'em! We go aboard?"

"No time for that!" The reply carried command. "The shooting will have the Greenport police sending out a boat! Swing up there and cut loose their anchor chain so the outfit will drift away on the tide!"

"But they'll pick it up!" The first speaker argued.

"That will be their headache!" spoke the commanding voice. "And possibly when they find Thurman Spencer it will give the others something to think about! But get that oyster boat away from the spot!"

Perhaps five minutes later the old

oyster boat with its cargo of corpses, the diver hanging over the side, and the still surviving but stunned Thurman Spencer in the oyster cockpit, was free and losing itself in the black, rainy darkness, drifting toward Montauk Point across the inlet open to the sweep of the Atlantic.

Boats were moving out from Greenport when the fast speed-boat faded on its silenced motor. It disappeared, going in the direction of Sag Harbor, the old whaling town on the mainland.

Drifting without a light by which it might be picked up, the old oyster boat was moving on the ebb tide for the open Atlantic. The rotund Spencer climbed out of the cockpit, feeling his way about.

IT APPEARED that his nerves were good. He found death all around him by the touch of his hands. His only reaction was to swear low, hard oaths. A bump on the head was his only injury.

Spencer could see lights of boats moving in search of the shooting scene. Because of that he showed no light and made no effort to start up the motor of the oyster boat. Instead, he cleared and shoved over a small rowboat.

"I'll be lucky if I don't get lost at sea," Spencer thought grimly, as he started rowing, heading the boat against the ebb tide. "If I only knew which of the others dropped that map where I found it, then stole it from my pocket again when I had only memorized it, I'd know who's in that killer boat—and undoubtedly which one murdered Thaddeus Jones."

He headed for the nearest land. And his next muttered words proved that Spencer might be none too patriotic an American.

"Even if I should be carried out to sea," he mumbled, "and be picked up by a Nazi sub, it might not be so bad, seeing what I may have to offer. We may have to deal with the Nazis sooner or later, at that . . . If I only

knew which one killed Jones—"

He barely missed the light of a searching boat, and for a moment his thoughts were all of escape.

"This business of Harvey Lansing's escape crowds us some," he went on musing then. "Possibly Lansing may have some information concerning that stuff that's sunk out there. I'll have to make another try at reaching that wreck!"

Spencer was fortunate in seeing a shore light. He headed for it. A little later he reached a highway and caught a late bus headed in the general direction of New York City.

The only impression the tragedy seemed to have made was expressed in a grim smile of wonder as to what the police would think when they finally picked up the boatload of corpses. . . .

It was a fishermen's boat, coming in, that connected with the drifting oyster boat. Perhaps an hour later Greenport police were contacting New York City and otherwise attempting to identify three dead men and an unconscious diver who was badly wounded.

The strange gun battle off the point of Shelter Island promised to remain a complete mystery, unless the wounded diver could be revived and would talk.

Nearing New York City in his own car, which he had parked at Riverhead, Thurman Spencer, the wealthy druggist was grim-lipped. He took

a small dictaphone record from an inside pocket, saw that it was well-protected by a tissue paper wrapping and returned it to place.

"If I could only know which one of the four was in that speed-boat, I would know better how to play my hand," was Spencer's repeated worry. "It's a sure thing that whoever engineered that attack and the murders now knows I am smart, and I will be especially marked."

Parking a short time later, Thurman Spencer went into a public phone booth. He looked up an address and a telephone number. The name was that of Tony Quinn, former district attorney, now generally believed to be blind, though questions about that had even reached Thurman Spencer. He dialed and waited. He could hear the repeated buzzing of the phone in the home of Tony Quinn.

BUT after five minutes, when Spencer had received no reply, he gave it up, impatiently.

"It would be my luck for Tony Quinn to be out of town just now," he growled, hanging up. "I'll get him later. The smartest move now will be to hook up with Quinn, if he is half as clever as they say he is in solving crimes."

The fact of the matter was, had Spencer been able to guess it, that Tony Quinn would have been intensely interested in a communication

[Turn page]



from Thurman Spencer at this time. But no one in the Quinn residence was answering any phone calls at the moment, although Quinn and several other persons were in the library of his Riverside home.

The phone went unanswered because the life of a pretty girl appeared to depend at the moment upon no one in the room making any move except by the order of the man who held an automatic pressed to the girl's spine!

CHAPTER III

The Blind Can See



ANTHONY QUINN, former district attorney, sat stony-faced and calm before the huge fireplace in his library. His eyes stared apparently at nothing and he did not so much as turn his head toward the strange little group near him.

Close up, Tony Quinn's eyes seemed to be covered by a gray film. His manner, with his cane held between his knees, was that of a blind man, whose senses other than sight must inform him of all that is going on. Now he seemed to be aware of what was going on in only the vague way of one who does not see.

The phone on the nearby library table rang insistently. But the tall, thin, quick-moving man standing beside Tony Quinn only flicked his eyes toward it. Then he looked back at the blue-eyed, blond girl who stood on the fireplace rug.

A dry, bitter voice spoke above the phone's clamor.

"Let it ring. We have other business. When a man has been convicted once for murder, he is not likely to hesitate at any means to keep his freedom." His eyes bored into

the blind man's. "All right, Mr. Quinn. So you don't know this girl or this ugly mug we ran onto prowling in your grounds?"

The "ugly mug" referred to stood beside the girl with two knuckle-scarred hands lifted. His ears and other marks were those of a former pugilist. Tony Quinn may have shown no recognition of him, but in fact he was "Butch" O'Leary, the strong-arm division of Tony Quinn's own crime fighting force.

At the words of the man holding the gun in the girl's back, Butch O'Leary growled:

"Brother, when I separate you from that rod, I'll bend your ears clear back to your heels"

The man with the gun, bony-faced, hard-eyed Harvey Lansing, only smiled grimly.

"Sure, but this gun happens to be a great equalizer until I know where I stand," he said. "This young fellow with me is Matthew Hanlon, Mr. Quinn. Whatever happens, he is not responsible for my escape or my coming here like this, although he has been left one hundred thousand dollars with which to help hide me out from the law."

Matt Hanlon's usually mild brown eyes were as hard as agate now. He stood as helpless as the others, as long as Harvey Lansing kept that automatic touching the girl's back.

But Hanlon was forthright in all that he did. He proved it.

"That is only partly true, Mr. Quinn," he said. "Because of a murder tonight, and because Harvey Lansing saved my life from a killer, I probably would have come with him and helped him without pressure. I don't believe Lansing would kill that girl. She was just unlucky to be caught in your grounds with her friend."

The quick, bright-eyed man beside Tony Quinn was "Silk" Kirby. The one-time thief and former confidence man, after his first encounter with

blind Tony Quinn, had become his chief lieutenant. He was now one of the most dangerous of men—but only to those of the underworld to which he had once belonged, for now he was thoroughly upon the side of the law.

In reply to Matt Hanlon, Lansing said harshly.

"Don't take any chance on my using this gun. You know now who I am, Mr. Quinn. I simply saw these two intruders, and had the chance to use the girl as a cover-up to talk to you, knowing you as everyone does. I am here to make a peculiar request, perhaps the oddest ever made by a fugitive convicted of murder and serving five years of torment—upon the man responsible for those five years."

SINCE Tony Quinn had become the Black Bat, and had applied his special and unique powers to exacting justice where it was needed, he had never experienced a more extraordinary situation than that which now confronted him. For this girl who was held up at gun point was not, as her convict captor believed, a mere chance stroller in Tony Quinn's grounds. She was Carol Baldwin, another of Quinn's own assistants, and one who held his deepest affections.

This, Tony Quinn had not announced, nor did he intend to do so. He would let it go as Harvey Lansing and Matt Hanlon apparently believed—that the girl and "Butch" O'Leary who had been captured with her, had been mere intruders in the grounds. In reality, they had been leaving Quinn's home by a secret tunnel when they had unexpectedly been trapped.

And, standing near Quinn, Silk Kirby, deadly and quick, had never been more tempted. Handy in his sleeve was a weapon that he sometimes used, and to anyone who knew him it was plain that he was on the verge of using it now, taking a long chance against the gun in Harvey Lansing's hand. But no chance was too great

for Silk to take where Carol Baldwin was concerned.

Tony Quinn saw, and sensed that. Without turning his head he spoke quietly:

"I am sure, Lansing, you would not harm a girl you do not know and has caused you no trouble," he said. "I would suggest you turn your gun upon me. You may even bring the girl over here, and make sure I am under your weapon. Then we can permit these two people who seem to have blundered into trouble to go their way. It's I you want, isn't it, Lansing?"

In cool phrases Tony Quinn calmly denied knowing Carol Baldwin, though she meant more to him than any other on earth. Oddly enough, he meant it, too, when he said he did not believe the escaped convict would kill the girl, for some keen inner instinct told him that. Yet there was the long chance that he might hurt her, and Carol meant so much to Quinn.

Not only for herself, which was something that had grown up in the years of his knowing her, but there was for her a deep sense of gratitude that could never be repaid. No matter how dear Carol was to him he could never forget that, but for her, he would still be sightless, after a man in court, in furious anger, had sought to ruin certain evidence in the hands of the then district attorney and instead had tossed acid into the eyes of Tony Quinn which, for longer than he liked to remember, had totally blinded him.

Carol Baldwin had given him back his sight—though only three people knew that to be a fact. And now, though Tony Quinn's eyes seemed to be vacant and sightless, he had, in fact, amazing vision. For Carol had come out of an obscure town in the West to give it to him. Her policeman father, dying, had willed his eyes to Tony Quinn, and an obscure surgeon in that same Western country

had performed the marvelous operation that was nothing short of a miracle.

Since that time, Tony Quinn had been gifted with extra faculties. When he had been blind he had learned by hearing and sense of touch to do without his eyes. Amazingly restored, his sight had become owl-like. His vision was as clear and as sharp in the darkness as in the light.

Many times this uncanny vision had been a life-saver, since because of it he had been able to balk criminals who had become killers.

RIGHT now Tony Quinn was really watching Silk Kirby as closely as he was Harvey Lansing. He feared the loyal, quick-tempered Silk might act upon impulse. And something deep inside Tony Quinn told him there was much to be gained by keeping Harvey Lansing in this position for a short time.

Again the phone rang sharply. Silk Kirby twitched nervously. Only Tony Quinn's quick gesture downward with one hand restrained an outbreak.

"It is customary to expect an escaped convict to visit the man who sent him to prison for but one reason, Lansing," said Tony. "So turn the gun on me and permit this young woman to go free. If I recall, you have a niece who was almost the same as a daughter to you. If this should happen to her—"

"Wait!" said Lansing coldly. "I hold the winning hand now. I will state my reason for coming here. I am asking the man who prosecuted me to help me find the real murderer of Thaddeus Jones. I did not kill him, but I have reason to believe that one of five men it is possible to name is that killer."

Silk Kirby swore and Tony Quinn silenced him with a lifted hand. He was about to make the strangest statement ever uttered by a former prosecutor.

"Lansing," he said, "if I had fully believed you killed Thaddeus Jones, you would have got the chair."

Then, to Matt Hanlon's amazement, Tony Quinn repeated almost the identical words spoken by Harvey Lansing earlier.

"Lansing, when a man loses his sight, then he really sees," he said. "You are unmolested now because I want it that way and not because you have a gun in a woman's back. You have asked me for a favor. Can you think of some condition to attach to my granting your request?"

"Yes, Tony Quinn, I can think of one," said Lansing quietly. "If I am not proved innocent within thirty days, with your help, I will voluntarily surrender to the police. You have my word. I came in as I did, not because I wasn't sure in my own mind about you, but because I did not know what others here might do."

"It's a deal, Lansing," said Tony Quinn quietly. "Now I suggest that this girl and the man with her be permitted to go. I will try and see that they do not talk."

The gray, bony face of Harvey Lansing lost its hardness for the first time. Something like a quizzical gleam of humor came into his sunken, dark eyes. He looked at the scowling Silk Kirby.

"Here, catch," he said quietly, removing the automatic from Carol Baldwin's back and tossing it expertly toward Silk Kirby. "It isn't loaded."

Still staring straight ahead, Tony Quinn chuckled.

"You know, I was sure of that, too, Lansing," he said.

"Why you double-crossin', bluffin' mug!" roared Butch O'Leary, jerking down his hands and swinging a snappy left at Lansing's chin.

Harvey Lansing proved he had several sides to his character. O'Leary's knuckles raked his bony jaw, staggering him, but he did not lift his hands.

Blood welled from his cut chin, but Lansing still smiled a little.

"I had that coming, stranger," he said. "I'm sorry circumstances caused me to pick out your girl friend."

BUTCH O'LEARY'S roar of anger was suddenly silenced. Tony Quinn had no desire at this moment to have either of his queer, uninvited guests know the true identity of Carol and Butch.

"Silk," he rapped, "stop that and have the young woman and the man removed! You may give each of them some suitable recompense for the inconvenience they have been caused. And warn them that worse things sometimes happen to prowlers in my grounds."

When Tony Quinn dismissed Carol and Butch like that in the presence of strangers, it was understood they were to establish radio contact with him soon, or be in their car waiting Tony's call. Carol's eyes were approvingly bright as she left the room with Butch and Silk.

Silk Kirby was just returning when for the third time the phone started ringing.

"Answer it, Silk," directed Quinn, and turned his attention to his strange caller. "Lansing," he said, "I've never before harbored a fugitive. We will have to work this thing out." He glanced at the other man. "Perhaps, Matt Hanlon, you can give me something more of a picture of what has happened, and how you came into this. I already know, though you may not be aware I do, that you were secretary to Jared Wright."

Before Hanlon or Lansing could reply, Silk Kirby spoke, his hand covering the phone.

"There is a Mr. Spencer, a Thurman Spencer, on the line, sir. He says that, if possible, he must see you tonight. And he said to tell you that he believes he might supply some new evidence in a murder case you prose-



"Get back, you yellow dogs!" cried the Black Bat. "You're not leaving helpless men and women to die!"
(CHAPTER XIV)

cuted five years ago, the case of Thaddeus Jones."

Tony Quinn was studying the gray face of Lansing as Silk Kirby made the announcement. And while Lansing, taut and strained, only whispered to himself, Quinn read the words on his lips.

"Thurman Spencer—one of the five. They know—if they find me it is kill or be killed—"

Tony Quinn tried to recall whether or not Thurman Spencer had entered into the Thaddeus Jones' murder trial in any way.

He was sure he had not. He nodded to Silk Kirby.

"Tell Mr. Spencer I will see him," said Tony. "But inform him that I have been called downtown for the next hour and it will be more convenient for me to meet him there, if he will suggest a place."

SILK KIRBY spoke over the phone and turned back to Quinn.

"He says it is strangely opportune, as he wished to see you tonight, but not until after he has attended an important meeting which may require an hour of his time, sir. He says he will then meet you in his office in the Grayflex Building—the Thurman Spencer Drugs, Inc."

Tony Quinn nodded. He was still staring stonily at the fireplace. But both Lansing and Matt Hanlon started at his next words.

"Lansing, you said you suspect that one of five men killed Thaddeus Jones. Besides Thurman Spencer, who are the other four?"

Lansing's dark eyes stared at Tony Quinn.

He was convinced he had not spoken aloud.

"Yes, Thurman Spencer is one, Mr. Quinn," he said slowly. "I have a queer hunch. If you see Spencer, he will supply the names of the other four. I will write them down now, and we will investigate later to see if they check."

CHAPTER IV

Five Men Afraid



ARVEY LANSING, escaped convict, wrote five names on a slip of paper, folded it, and handed it to Tony Quinn who placed it in his pocket. But Lansing knew little of the processes of

Quinn's remarkable brain.

"Lansing," said Quinn abruptly. "If there are five men you suspect, undoubtedly they have in some way been closely associated. And if so, with the news of your escape being broadcast, it might be that those five men would wish to have a conference. The call of Thurman Spencer gives me an idea."

"The five were associated," stated Lansing. "But so far as I know only before the murder of Thaddeus Jones. All are rich men, and he was seeking their backing in a chemical experiment. I have reason to believe that secret chemical was of immense value and that it was stolen from the brain of John Weston, my sister's husband. But with the murder of Thaddeus Jones there was another episode that undoubtedly caused John Weston to become insane."

Matt Hanlon uttered a sharp exclamation.

"Perhaps that checks with the strange idea of Jared Wright in making one of the most curious wills on record," he said quickly. "I am here, and Lansing is here because Jared Wright arranged that that should be so before he died. He also notified five men, unknown to me, that six millions in cash, his entire fortune, would go to the man who produced real and factual evidence as to the identity of the real murderer of Thaddeus Jones."

"Six million smackers?" Silk Kirby almost whistled the words. "Then

if Lansing here can be proved innocent, we would take in six million bucks, and—"

Tony Quinn smiled a little. Sometimes Silk Kirby's memories of his old grifting days overcame his judgment.

"I'm afraid we're not in on this, Silk," he said. "But my idea of a moment ago still may be good. Five men were associated in planning to finance Thaddeus Jones when he was murdered. That was not brought out at the trial, Lansing."

"Jared Wright did not want it brought out then," said Lansing. "You'll recall I was Wright's secretary at the time I was accused of killing Thaddeus Jones. Jones was found dead at his desk with a bullet in his head. I was picked up unconscious, at the bottom of the fire escape leading down from his office, with a broken leg. I had the murder gun, and there were some papers from Jones' files in my pockets."

Tony Quinn nodded, the old case running through his mind.

"The murder gun was old, unregistered, and could not be traced," he said. "The circumstances were dead against you, Lansing, but then, as now, I sometimes acted upon a sense of things rather than upon cold evidence. I suggested murder in the second rather than the first degree."

Lansing nodded, and said, "and that is one of the reasons I am here tonight, Quinn. But what was your idea?"

Tony spoke quickly to Silk Kirby. He directed him to a huge volume, a recent business listing covering New York City. Maintaining his pose of blindness he had Silk read the list until he came to the name of Thurman Spencer.

Silk mentioned a number of enterprises in which Thurman Spencer was interested. Tony selected one, the only business that might have possible connection with recent developments in the war chemical industry.

ONE minute later, Silk Kirby was reading from another book. He came to a corporation known as Chemical Latex, Incorporated.

"It's directors, Silk?" said Tony.

Silk started to read:

Thurman Spencer, Reeve Gardner,
Andrew Severn, Charles—

Tony Quinn was on his feet. He gestured to Silk Kirby.

"Have the big car ready in five minutes, Silk! Lansing and you, Hanlon, will go with me! I might leave you here, but perhaps there is no safer place for an escaped convict than in the private car of the former district attorney!"

"Unless we should happen to encounter Captain McGrath, sir," said Silk Kirby. "McGrath would be tickled pink to catch you harboring a fugitive. He—"

"It's a good idea," interrupted Lansing. "And in case anything happens, tonight or at any time, I will swear that I came to you and that you were returning me to the police."

The phone rang again. Silk Kirby was already on his way to get the big car so Matt Hanlon answered, and handed the instrument to Quinn.

A voice crackled in the instrument. Tony replied, "Yes, Commissioner Warner. I'll be on guard." Then, "On a boat at Greenport, Commissioner? Three dead men with records and a wounded diver. The diver has talked. Yes?"

When he hung up, Tony faced around. Silk Kirby was coming in to conduct him to the car. Tony smiled.

"Lansing, don't tell me you're twins?" he said. "There has been some kind of a gun battle down near Montauk Point and if you were not here you could have had something to do with it. Three known mobsters were left dead on an oyster boat. A diver was wounded, but is talking in a delirium."

"A diver?" Lansing's gray face was a sudden, hard mask. "Yes, and

what does that have to do with me?"

"The diver keeps saying his boss was afraid he would be killed when he got the radio news that you had escaped, Lansing," said Tony. "That was Police Commissioner Warner on the phone. He told me that the diver keeps saying over and over again, that Lansing, the convict, killed his boss. All of this seems to have happened about two hours or more ago. You couldn't have made it, Lansing, unless you were twins, and you wouldn't know anything about a diver hunting something on a dark night—"

"Of course I couldn't have been there," cut in Lansing, "but strangely enough I might be linked with it at that. Not the shooting, Quinn. But the diving part of it. Quinn, John Weston, my dead sister's husband is, as I told you, in a mental hospital as the result of shock in the burning and the sinking of a fishing cruiser somewhere near Shelter Island. And that cruiser was burned and sunk two days after Thaddeus Jones was murdered."

Matt Hanlon stared at Lansing and nodded.

"That's right, Lansing," he said. "Of course, you know Marley Weston and I are engaged to be married. So through Marley and Jared Wright I learned all about John Weston's accident, his rescue from the sea and his deranged mind as the result. And that hooks up perhaps with what has happened tonight. The fishing cruiser was owned by Thaddeus Jones."

"And," supplied Lansing, "it was on that cruiser that John Weston and Thaddeus Jones were believed to have been testing out some new chemical secret. But it has been believed that John Weston himself caused the explosion and fire on the cruiser with some of his experiments, for he was alone on it at the time."

TONY QUINN had not at first believed he would become deeply involved in anything more serious than a personal effort to right a possi-

ble wrong done an innocent man. Suddenly a wider picture of crime was appearing in his astute brain.

With his hand upon Silk Kirby's arm, they were moving out to the driveway to get into the big, closed limousine. Naturally he desired to maintain his pose of blindness before Lansing and Hanlon, as he did at all times with all except his three intimate associates.

It was clear to him now that the unexpected tragedies, the swift happenings of tonight, were not the result of coincidence. The strange appearance before him of Harvey Lansing and Matt Hanlon, the effort, of which he had been told, to murder Hanlon, and then this apparent mob murder battle more than a hundred miles away on an oyster boat, together with the unexpected call from Thurman Spencer must be all a part of the same vast pattern.

"Where to, sir?" said Silk Kirby as the big car moved.

"The plant of the Chemical Latex Corporation, Silk," directed Tony. "It's only a short jump, as it happens, on a back street beyond the Triboro Bridge in the Bronx. If we are lucky, I may be able to attend a sudden conference of some five men who are perhaps in deadly fear, afraid of their lives. But unless my idea is far off, they would not want to meet Harvey Lansing."

Another car came booming up Riverside Drive before they were fairly started. Its tires made screaming noises as it turned toward Tony Quinn's private driveway. The car's upper part flashed white.

Silk Kirby sent the big limousine to one side under the trees just in time to miss the swing of the police car's slicing lights.

"Ten bucks to two bits, sir, that's our unshakable friend, Captain McGrath," said Silky Kirby wryly. "Now what would that egg be wanting at this time of night? I'll bet it isn't good."



SILK

Tony Quinn, in the front seat beside Silk, chuckled.

"I'm surprised, Silk," he said. "You have a suspicious mind. No doubt the zealous Captain McGrath has come with good intentions, and a bodyguard for a blind man he believes menaced by an escaped convict."

"Captain McGrath never had any good intentions, and he's come snooping as usual to see if it might not be about time for the Black Bat to fly again, sir," argued Silk. "We wouldn't want to be trailed where we're going, sir, and we won't be."

This conversation could not be heard by Matt Hanlon and Harvey Lansing. They were in the rear seat of the big closed car. It was darkened inside.

Tony Quinn flicked on an ultra-short-wave radio under the car's panel. Before making a contact he spoke again to Silk Kirby.

"You told Carol and Butch to stay tuned in for orders?"

"Yes, sir, they will be expecting to hear from you," said Silk. "The same as always."

WHENEVER circumstances brought it about, Carol Baldwin and tough Butch O'Leary always stayed close to Tony Quinn's own radio, planted in Carol's car. Carol, who had left Tony Quinn's place without a word or gesture that would have tipped off her true position or that of Butch O'Leary would be, Quinn knew, listening to it now, and its scrambler attachment made the two-way communications possible, without cut-ins from the police.

Tony Quinn spoke, low, quickly, as soon as he had established contact with Carol.

"Carol, dear, I have an immediate assignment for you, and it may be dangerous. I wish you to ascertain if Marley Weston is at her home near New Rochelle. If so, you are to get in touch with her and remain with her, then report in the car radio hourly until further instructions. I am convinced Marley Weston is in extreme peril at this moment, so be careful."

"Right, Tony," came the girl's eager voice. "But darling, I heard enough

to know that you're going into danger. You'll take care of yourself, too?"

Tony smiled in the darkness. "Some day—"

Well, his personal affairs might wait a long time. The way of justice was a long and menacing road and always must come first.

"Butch will go to the Sun-Air Sanitarium, not far from New Rochelle," Quinn told Carol. "Marley Weston lives where she does because John Weston, her father, is in the sanitarium. I want Butch to go directly to Dr. Kroo, at Sun-Air, and tell him that I sent him for a job as special guard for John Weston. I will call Dr. Kroo and tell him that Butch is coming. Butch must watch not only for outsiders, but for some of those who may be employed at the sanitarium."

Tony Quinn was well acquainted with Dr. Alo Kroo's Sun-Air Sanitarium. The institution had a good reputation in spite of the fact that some would call its cures for mental and nervous ills unorthodox. There had been some trouble years before, but Dr. Alo Kroo, who claimed to be a Korean, had fully cleared himself with Tony Quinn who had then been district attorney.

Since that time, the strange, dark, little doctor with the queer name had been on Tony Quinn's list of friends. This was just one more instance of the fact that one of the reasons for Tony's wide success in his career as the Black Bat was his intimate association with a great variety of persons.

Many of them were leading citizens, high up. Many more, and much more valuable to a man who made the hunting down of criminals his vocation as well as his avocation, were persons choosing to travel along the border line of the law.

The big limousine was like a moving shadow in the rain as it came down Riverside Drive. Silk Kirby turned across town, taking the Central Park drive at Sixty-ninth street to reach the Triboro bridge, on the way

to the Bronx.

Across the park, Tony Quinn had the car stopped near a drugstore. With directions to Matt Hanlon and Harvey Lansing not to move, Quinn went with Silk Kirby to the drugstore.

Silk guided the staring Tony Quinn to a phone booth. Whispers went along the fountain counter. Even there men recognized him for the blind ex-district attorney was a marked figure wherever he went.

QUINN took several minutes trying to get the Sun-Air Sanitarium. Then he failed to reach Dr. Alo Kroo.

"Sorry, sir," said an attendant. "But Dr. Kroo is with others. We have had some trouble. Dr. Kroo is helping search for a missing patient."

And at those words that inner sense which was always functioning with Tony Quinn struck a warning.

It had started! Here was the third event of the night which might be linked with the "arranged" escape of Harvey Lansing. He must know if John Weston were the missing patient.

"An attendant will not be authorized to talk," thought Quinn, but immediately he said:

"That is why I am calling Dr. Kroo. I have heard from John Weston, your patient who escaped. I will call back."

The little trick worked. The attendant gulped excitedly. Then the trick turned sour, working the wrong way.

"You've heard from John Weston?" the attendant barked. "That's a lie! You couldn't—"

Tony's ear rang with the sharp slap of a blow and the crash of the phone at the other end. The line went dead.

Tony's lips moved as he turned toward Silk Kirby waiting outside the booth.

"Get back to the car, Silk. Pick up Carol and keep her on the radio until I make my way back."

CHAPTER V

Vanished Car Wheels

UDGING it might be well to wait for a space before trying to dial back on Sun-Air Sanitarium, Tony Quinn employed the time by putting in a call to the local police at New Rochelle.

"This is Tony Quinn," he said, and asked his questions.

"Yes," he was told. "We have just received a report from Dr. Kroo at Sun-Air of the escape of a patient, John Weston," came the reply. "We were told the patient is not dangerous, but it is believed by Dr. Kroo that he had outside assistance."

"Exactly how long has it been since Dr. Kroo called you?" asked Quinn.

"Within the past two minutes."

"Thanks," said Tony Quinn, but as he hung up he was making a bet with himself that the New Rochelle police had been called immediately after he had been cut off so abruptly when he had called the Sun-Air.

"An attendant was smacked down for saying I couldn't have heard from John Weston, although he has escaped," Quinn was thinking grimly, just informed of the escape in spite of me being told that Dr. Kroo was out looking for the fugitive."

He dialed the Sun-Air once more. This time it was the suave voice of Dr. Alo Kroo himself who replied.

"You, Mr. Quinn?" There seemed to be pleased relief in the little Korean doctor's voice. "That makes me so glad at this very time, for we have something that will be quickly to make trouble. For which I have call your residence, but you are out. John Weston was taken right away under our eyes, Mr. Quinn, and one of my men has been killed by those men who came in."

Tony Quinn had another bit of guessing to do now. The police report of the escape had just been made. Nothing had been said of a murder. Tony could be sure of that, or the police would have informed him instantly.

He had to play this one close. Dr. Alo Kroo seemed to be putting himself on a bad spot through the coincidence of Tony Quinn calling Sun-Air at the wrong moment.

"That is bad, Dr. Kroo," said Tony quietly. "I was calling to warn you that Harvey Lansing, the brother-in-law of John Weston, might make an effort to reach him."

"That is it, Mr. Quinn," said Dr. Kroo quickly. "One of my men who knew this Harvey Lansing says he was of sureness that he saw him in the car that took John Weston away."

"I'll call you later, Dr. Kroo," stated Tony. "I sent you a man named O'Leary to help guard John Weston. Have him call me."

Tony Quinn tapped his way slowly from the drugstore, returning alone to his big car. Here was one for the book.

Harvey Lansing seemed to be a remarkable fellow indeed.

"He is reported as killing men a hundred miles away on an oyster boat," muttered Tony. "And at the same time he is with Matt Hanlon at the chemical plant where a watchman was killed. He is in my car, and he is seen with those who have aided John Weston to escape from Sun-Air."

Silk Kirby met Tony and aided him into the car. The gray, bony face of Harvey Lansing showed clearly to Tony in the darkness.

"Either something has happened, sir, or Carol and Butch are away from their car," stated Silk Kirby as the limousine moved again. "I have received no reply."

Tony nodded. "Step on it, Silk," he said. "We'll keep on calling. By this time Carol probably has reached Mar-

ley Weston's home. And Butch may have arrived at the sanitarium."

He told Silk of John Weston's reported escape, but decided to keep this information from Harvey Lansing for the present. It appeared more important than ever now that the Black Bat arrive at his original destination . . .

IF IT'S squat, ugly appearance had not repelled visitors, the unholy smells arising from the plant of the Chemical Latex Corporation would have kept away anyone with a good nose. The air and the rain appeared to be filled with a thick, greasy fog that had all of the sickening smell of burning rubber.

Evidently there were no secret processes at hand considered worth an extra guard when Tony Quinn and his party arrived. An old gateway to the factory, which clung like a many-legged bug to the hillside, proved the place to be an old factory converted to a new usage.

"Looks like a dead-end, sir," commented Silk Kirby as they drew near. "You'd think a war plant would have armed guards all over the place. But I don't see anyone, and there are no lights showing."

"Keep your eye peeled, Silk," cautioned Quinn. "I can see an upper room with indirect lighting, but it's blacked out just now. And at least two men have watched us pass through the gate without moving to prevent it."

Silk whistled softly. He was watching the narrow driveway between narrow brick walls. The car passed over a rough spot that appeared to have the gleam of frosted glass rather than the dullness of concrete. As far as Silk could see, they were not being observed.

Tony Quinn opened a speaker and talked directly to Harvey Lansing and Matt Hanlon.

"Lansing, you and Hanlon will wait a few minutes until Silk Kirby guides

me to the offices of the chemical plant," he said. "Then you must stay with Silk until you hear from me. Lansing, do not leave the car under any circumstances. I may have news and action for you when I return."

"But if Thurman Spencer is with the others, Mr. Quinn, I want to see him," Lansing said harshly. "I'm not asking a blind man to take this end of it. I wanted only your advice, and help that way. I'll not be kept inactive."

Tony Quinn appeared to have felt his way around to the side door of the car with his cane. The door was open and he lifted the cane but slightly.

It wasn't the cane, but Tony's snapping fist that caught Harvey Lansing at just the right spot at the base of the jaw. A more complete anaesthetic could not have been administered.

Matt Hanlon's youthful face was a mask of amazement.

"This business of giving aid to a fugitive convict promises to become complicated," Quinn said quietly. "Hanlon, stick with Silk Kirby and see that Lansing does not leave the car before I return."

Then Tony Quinn went into the darkness with Silk Kirby guiding him. Away from the car and out of sight, Tony brought a black cape from under his coat and hooked it over his shoulders.

"Go back now, but take your time, Silk," he directed.

As he moved toward the buildings where windows were blacked out to all other eyes than his own, Tony Quinn appeared to be a monster bird of the night, the cape taking the form of a black bat's wings. No longer was he Tony Quinn, for he had been metamorphosed into the Black Bat.

He was close to the building where second-floor windows showed his piercing vision the blacked-out lights. In the black drizzle the Black Bat was a formless invisible shape. Yet he knew that one other figure was moving close to him.

THE Bat heard a voice muttering low oaths. Someone had followed, but had been unable to keep him in sight. The Bat paused. The grumbling man came on without showing a light.

That man would never know how another man could see clearly enough to land a knockout squarely upon the point of his chin, but it happened in the twinkling of an eye.

With this shadow removed, the Black Bat ascended to the low roof of a shed under the blacked-out windows. A minute later he was studying the faces of five men seated around a long table.

At this same moment, Silk Kirby reached the car. According to his usual procedure he at once moved it back toward the entrance gateway, prepared for any quick getaway. Men must be watching the car, for the Black Bat had said they were, but Silk could see none of them. It gave him an eerie feeling.

He kept an automatic handy, but wished heartily that Tony Quinn had not gone on alone. Still he was used to obeying and that had been the Black Bat's wish.

In the rear seat Harvey Lansing was still out cold. Matt Hanlon suddenly voiced an exclamation as the heavy limousine was stopped—for with that came two dull explosions.

"The rear wheels went into a bad hole, Mr. Kirby! I could feel them sink! It won't be easy to get out!"

Ten seconds later Silk Kirby was swearing to himself. Then he was out in the rain, and he was standing on firm concrete. The rear wheels had not dropped into a hole but—

"Holy Petel!" exclaimed Silk. "Hanlon, look out here!"

Matt Hanlon, feeling utterly useless thus far, since the beginning of the strange ride with Harvey Lansing, stared with unbelief. Silk Kirby pointed a flashlight at the car's rear wheels.

All of the rubber tires were gone.



McGRATH

Even the metal rims of the wheels were disappearing. The costly limousine was settling on its fenders and bumpers. The flashlight showed the strip of road that had gleamed like dull, frosted glass set into the concrete. It extended beyond the length of the big car, with Kirby standing just beyond it.

"Great glory!" exclaimed Matt Hanlon. "Even sulphuric acid couldn't eat off the wheels that fast!"

"And that's why there are no guards in sight," grated Silk Kirby.

His automatic was in his hand as he sprang toward the front of the car to switch off the lights. In a fleeting glimpse, Silk saw Lansing had slumped from the rear seat to the floor of the car. If he had not known he was there, Silk would have thought the rear section was empty. Then the car lights blinked off as a figure loomed in the front seat.

An exploding blow with some metal weapon caught Silk between the eyes. The mystery of the missing wheels and the unexpected attack did not concern Silk Kirby for several minutes thereafter.

In the meantime, Matt Hanlon, who

had started to follow Silk Kirby to the front of the car, heard the side rear door open on the opposite side. He turned at the sound, and the muzzle of a gun was pushed into his stomach.

"Just keep walking, chum, the way you're turned!" came a harsh order.

EVEN as the voice spoke, Hanlon heard the blow that felled Silk Kirby. And two more men, faces concealed by the darkness, came around the car.

"Okay, where's the other mug?" Matt Hanlon's captor exclaimed as his companions appeared. "There were three of 'em!"

"Three of 'em?" replied one man. "Humph! I saw only these two guys get out when the wheels hit the spot!"

Hanlon also knew that Lansing was lying on the car floor in the rear. The thugs had missed seeing him. But apparently they had seen Tony Quinn before he started for the offices. Hanlon's captor swore venomously.

"It's a dollar to a thin dime that missin' one's the one the boss wants the most!" he said. "Say! Ain't you Matt Hanlon, old Jared Wright's secretary?"

He did not wait for Hanlon to reply. He flicked a little light into his face.

"Sure you are. And you were in the old chemical building when Buggy was knocked off! Maybe you're the one who done it! Okay, pal! You're the guy that's sweet on the Weston dame, and we can use you! Get going!"

"How about that mug who was driving?" said one of the other men, referring to Silk Kirby.

Hanlon's captor laughed harshly.

"He ain't on the list, so he might as well go with the car," was the reply. "Okay, get over to the switch and drop 'er!"

Something in the way he said it more than what he said caused sickness to clutch at Matt Hanlon's stomach.

"Wait! You can't do that! Why, that's Silk Kirby and he's—"

Matt Hanlon choked off his speech. Perhaps he would make Silk Kirby's fate more certain by pointing out he was associated with the famous Tony Quinn.

"Never heard of him" snapped Hanlon's captor. "Swing it, Joker!"

Matt Hanlon could dimly see one man touch some sort of a lever in the brick wall nearby. Before his horrified eyes, all of Tony Quinn's costly limousine settled flatter on the ground and started to sink.

Cold sweat came out on Hanlon's forehead. The big car was disappearing, dropping out of sight!

Being a chemist, Hanlon thought he knew all of the elements that might most quickly destroy metal. But whatever chemical was in the pit under the limousine gave forth no odor that Hanlon could identify.

Hanlon tried to speak again, but could not. Because of the rainy darkness he could not distinguish Silk Kirby's body. But the swift disintegration of the car and all of its parts made it positive that human flesh and bone must have been dissolved.

The light was flicked again as Hanlon was pushed along toward the brick wall near the car, and a door opened. He had one glimpse of the chemical trap set here across the roadway.

First there was a narrow slot into which the car wheels had dropped and been covered by the destroying chemical. Then a wider space had been opened which had permitted all of the limousine to sink into the chemical pit.

As Matt Hanlon was pushed forward and the door closed behind him and his captors, he had a numbed feeling in mind and body. For he was convinced that Silk Kirby's body had been annihilated with the car.

Unfortunately for Hanlon's desperate state of mind he could not know that even as what appeared to be dull glass was sliding back to drop the

car, Harvey Lansing had come from the rear door. He had been conscious, listening, timing his action to rescue Silk Kirby.

Silk Kirby was out cold. Lansing could just make out the movement of the glasslike section of the roadway. His quick action took Silk from the sliding plate just before the limousine settled into a pit of quick disintegration.

CHAPTER VII

Five Men Afraid



THE Black Bat could read fear in the faces of five men around the long table inside the office of the Chemical Latex Corporation. Because of their prominence and since he once had been district attorney, he was able to identify the five men.

Thurman Spencer who earlier had phoned Tony Quinn appeared to be acting as chairman and apparently had assumed leadership. At least he occupied the head of the table. His pale eyes blinked weakly behind thick eye-glasses. Red-cheeked and rotund, he appeared to be as naive as a man could be.

The Bat's knowledge of the wealthy druggist, or rather Tony Quinn's knowledge, brought to mind no act or report that would cause suspicion of any crime to fall upon Spencer which was all the more reason that the Bat was sorely puzzled now. For he was not only aware of the reputation of Thurman Spencer, but what he knew applied equally to his four companions at the table.

They were representative business men, he knew. And each was engaged in individual enterprise separate from this Chemical Latex Corporation.

"It would seem that they have mere-

ly financed a synthetic rubber experiment," mused the Bat after he had listened for a time. "Yet here in the night, knowing that Harvey Lansing has escaped, they are gathered for secret conference. And Lansing believes that one of these five men knows who really murdered Thaddeus Jones—or is himself the killer."

The Bat concentrated a moment upon Thurman Spencer. The red-cheeked druggist was studying the faces of his companions. The Bat could read fear in his furtive watching of the others.

Suddenly, just as what appeared to be general discussion of synthetic rubber samples on the table was coming to an end, the Black Bat heard two faint, plopping explosions. As there was a steady beat of the rain and the explosions could not have been shots, the startled fright of the men in the room at these slight sounds was a revelation.

"I am looking at a murderer!" the Bat thought tensely. "And four of those men in there know *they* are looking at a murderer! Yet each man, looking at the other four, does not know which is the killer—except the man who is actually guilty."

Many a time the Black Bat had envisioned such a situation. But never had he expected to see it in real life.

He had been so surprised at the very apparent fear of the men as he had heard the explosions that he'd had no time to consider the cause of the explosions themselves. They could so easily have been caused by a truck backfiring on the road.

He could see his own car with Silk Kirby at the wheel, although the lamps were dim in the rain. But even as he was glancing at the car, he heard one man in the room say, his voice muffled:

"Lansing?"

From the Bat's vantage point it was impossible to determine which man had spoken. Again the Black Bat glanced at Thurman Spencer, wonder-

ing why the man had phoned Tony Quinn to meet him later at the Graflex Building over in Manhattan.

But there were others also to consider. The Black Bat realized that as he saw one of the five men, a man he had himself identified as Charles Blake, a well-known attorney, jump nervously to his feet. The fellow's Adam's apple bobbed in his skinny throat.

"Why don't we come out with it, Spencer?" he all but shouted. "Why don't we tell the truth—that we came here tonight because we are afraid of Harvey Lansing? One of us here murdered Thaddeus Jones, and we all know that. But we have all bitten on the same bait. Our chance for an immense fortune is so great that we have each willingly consorted ourselves with a murderer!"

THEN, coldly and distinctly, Thurman Spencer spoke. His accusing voice belied his apple-cheeked appearance.

"And if one of the four of you had succeeded in murdering me tonight, as only the man who tried it knows, the split at the end would have been less," he said. "Possibly the murderer among us was that man, for only the murderer of Thaddeus Jones, the same man who framed Harvey Lansing, could have known where I was and what I was doing a few hours ago."

The Black Bat thought he had heard everything in the line of crime, first as district attorney, and later as the ruthless nemesis of killers. But here was a new one—men accusing each other, with none a defender.

The man who replied, quickly and heavily, was huge, with big-knuckled hands and hairy ears. He was Frank Brand, one of the city's best known building contractors.

"You say, Spencer, that only the murderer could have known where you were and what you were doing?" Brand demanded. "Doesn't that ap-

ply the other way around? Perhaps you are the murderer, and some other person has come onto the secret thing you are doing?"

"I had thought of that," said Spencer. "But only the murderer has a map of where I went tonight. I found it in this office. Then it was stolen from me when I had partly memorized it."

Charles Blake's beady eyes darted toward the windows.

"A map of what?" he demanded.

"Only the murderer knows that," said Spencer. "But it is of something important about which he may tell us later. Or possibly he means to keep us in line with it, or even use it to extort more than his split."

The Black Bat decided the time had come for him to smoke a killer into the open. And yet he hesitated. He had imagined that perhaps the sudden and unexpected appearance of Harvey Lansing might turn the trick, but there seemed to be a static wait. For what?

The decision was taken from the Black Bat, for at the instant of his hesitation the sudden vanishing of his own car lights in the rain a hundred yards away brought premonition of trouble. Yet there was no immediate sound to justify concern for Silk Kirby and the others he had left in the car.

The real break came from another direction. The Bat's penetrating eyes picked out a figure crawling along the low shed roof toward the windows of the office. At the same time there was a commotion inside the building.

A girl screamed out frantic words.

"Get out of my way! I'll shoot if I have to, but I must talk to Mr. Gardner and Mr. Severn! They took my father away, I tell you!"

The Reeve Gardner, of whom the unknown girl spoke was a steel-maker, on the chemical side. He owned a plant of his own in Brooklyn, known by reputation to the Black Bat. He was said to have many war contracts.



BUTCH

Andrew Severn, too—the Bat knew of him. He was the head of an electrical manufacturing company, credited with improved plating processes for war work. These were the other two of the five men in the midnight office who had not previously claimed the Bat's attention.

EVEN as the Black Bat heard the girl scream inside the offices, he checked off the five directors of Chemical Latex Corporation. He set them in the indices of his mind:

Thurman Spencer—wealthy druggist, who had claimed an attempt had been made to murder him tonight, and who had sought an interview with Tony Quinn, later.

Charles Blake—patent attorney. Nervous, beady-eyed, a man who had forced discussion of Harvey Lansing.

Frank Brand—contractor, pugnacious. He had questioned Spencer's claim of a murder attempt.

Reeve Gardner—steel-maker, as solemn as a mortician, and a man who kept rubbing his hands together with

the unctuous air of a man in that profession. He owned a plant said to have many war contracts.

Andrew Severn—head of an electrical company. A deep, marring scar ran from his left temple to his chin, and his hands showed the stains of chemical work in past years.

But there was time for no more than a brief summary, for again the girl was crying out.

"You had him taken away tonight, I know—I know! I have a friend at the Sun-Air Sanitarium! He phoned me that Dr. Kroo called a number just after it happened and wanted to speak to Mr. Gardner or Mr. Severn! I found this was the number he called. And here you are!"

The girl had burst into the room now, her eyes defiant. She was small and dark, with a voice that was vibrant, a girl pulsing with life—and with anger now. The Black Bat would not have called her a pretty girl. But Marley Weston was unquestionably a girl to whom men unconsciously turned.

Just now Marley Weston appeared to be in command of the situation. She gripped a small automatic in her white hand. The Bat noted with approval that it did not waver, so she was not likely to shoot by chance.

Ahead of the girl walked two men, covered by her small gun. She waved these men, evidently guards, to one side. Her gun then weaved slowly, pointing at the men around the table. The guards cautiously refrained from action that might cause shooting.

"She come from a car and was climbin' in a window," one of them tried to explain. "We saw she was Miss Weston, and you said she was not to be harmed, Mr. Spencer, so . . . Well, she had the gun on us before we thought of her bein' armed."

The Bat noted those words. So Thurman Spencer has said that Marley Weston was not to be hurt. Then Spencer must be much more than a law-abiding druggist. Peaceful citizens seldom found it necessary to issue orders concerning the welfare of other persons where violence might be involved.

The Bat wished he knew why Spencer had been so anxious to talk to him tonight, but it was too late for that now. Facing the static tableau in that room, the Bat's brain worked at lightning speed.

In ten seconds he covered this:

Out at Greenport, Long Island, a wounded diver was babbling about Harvey Lansing having killed his "boss."

Thurman Spencer had openly accused one of his companions of an attempt to kill him tonight, and moreover Spencer had intimated that only the murderer of Thaddeus Jones could have known where he had been tonight, because of a map he had found and which had been stolen back from him.

Matt Hanlon had told an old story about how John Weston had escaped from a sunken cruiser owned by Thaddeus Jones.

UNRELATED things to some minds, but taken together enough to make the Bat judge that Spencer might be interesting. He might even be the killer—according to Frank Brand, the contractor.

As usual, in such tense situations, the Bat's chances for thought were lightning-brief. Now they were ended with necessity for swift action. Events inside the office even caused him to forget seeing a shadowy figure creeping along the roof near him.

"Perhaps my father is crazy—then so am I" cried Marley Weston. "Crazy enough to shoot if I don't get an answer. Where was my father taken? Every one of you have visited him in the Sun-Air! I've seen you! What did you want of him? Where is he? Mr. Severn, you answer, or it will be you first!"

The girl's gun centered upon Andrew Severn. When the two guards still hesitated about making a move the Bat judged the time had come for him to take a hand. When he spoke his voice carried with eerie sound through the slightly opened window.

"Go easy, Marley Weston! The Black Bat speaks! Let the murderer among these men tell about your father! Let him speak now, and quickly!"

The shock of the Bat's weird voice, apparently coming from nowhere, whipped all eyes around.

"The Black Bat! *He* knows!"

The words jumped from the tongue of Thurman Spencer as the druggist's pale eyes blinked. The Bat drove in a warning.

"Harvey Lansing is here! Only the Black Bat can prevent him exacting vengeance! I command the killer to speak!"

It was too bad, in that dramatic second that the Bat could not know what had been happening to his vanished limousine, to Silk Kirby, Matt Hanlon and Harvey Lansing. But someone else knew. For a hard voice cut off the Bat's speech.

"Hold it! The girl won't shoot! If the Black Bat appears or attacks, this one dies!" And as if to emphasize the "this one"—a man was gun-prodded into the room.

"Matt — Matt, darling! Mary Weston cried out in anguish. "How did you come here?"

Matt Hanlon, white-faced, apparently on edge for an attempt to break up things, stood in a doorway. And just behind him was a big, red-headed man who held a machine-gun to Hanlon's ribs.

What might have happened then was left for the Bat to guess. What did happen was that lights in the room suddenly went out. But that removed nothing from the Black Bat's night vision, though the others in the room were instantly in confusion.

Thurman Spencer and his four companions were springing away from the table. The Bat saw them groping. Two men went to their hands and knees, crawling, evidently expecting the guns to sing a tune.

The crawling men were Frank Brand, the big contractor, and Reeve Gardner, the solemn steel-maker, who would never have been suspected of losing his dignity.

The Bat chuckled, jerking up the window sash. He must have been outlined against such light as there was outside in the rain, for someone cried out with fear:

"Look! He's there! The Black Bat! In the window!"

WITH his black cape spread, Tony Quinn must have greatly resembled that swift bird of the night, the bat. But being seen carried extreme danger, and he was well aware of that.

The Bat dropped, prepared to roll on into the room. And then it was that guns cracked loose. Before the Bat could gain his feet or get into position for action, he heard a man scream, a scream that carried a death agony.

A wild slug clipped the Bat's hair over one ear. It dizzied him and he realized he was about to pass out. But, covered by the shooting, he managed as a last conscious impulse to unhook his cape in the darkness and flatten it under his shirt. Then his senses faded.

He had a vague sensation of being lifted by steel-strong fingers, gripping his collar. Then the figures in that room disappeared in the blackness of the Bat's unconsciousness. . . .

CHAPTER VII

Girl Made of Glass



BUTCH" O'LEARY, ex-pugilist, quite naturally was a fighting man. More to the point, he was always for the underdog. And he loved a scrap, even if he had to start it himself.

But one that presented itself to him now appeared made to order for Tony Quinn's tough assistant. An old man with a white beard was being beaten by two other men. Or at least that was the kaleidoscopic view Butch O'Leary had of the scene as a closed car whirled past him.

The car was coming fast out of Inverness Road, one of the swanky shore districts of New Rochelle, and passed the small car in which Butch was at the wheel. Carol Baldwin, her blue eyes troubled, had been working over the short-wave radio which had somehow gone out of order, and did not see what upset Butch until she heard his sharp exclamation.

"Why, the smelly rats! Sockin' an old man like that! I'll fix their wagon, I will!"

"No! Butch, no!"

Carol's protest was in vain. Although at the last moment she had seen the undoubted act of brutal vio-

lence in the big car that had whirled past directly under a road light, Carol was calmer than Butch.

"We must get to the Sun-Air Sanitarium, Butch, as Tony instructed!" she cried. "Since we can't find Marley Weston, we must see her father!"

She gave it up. Butch had spun the little car. He was seeing red, which included the red tail-lights of the big car that had passed.

"Tony Quinn wouldn't have the likes of a man around that would pass up them kind of rats!" raged Butch. "Time enough for me to go and take on that job guardin' John Weston after I look into what's goin' on in that car!"

Only a few minutes before, Carol had just missed seeing Marley Weston. What she could not guess was that if she had succeeded, she might have prevented a murder. But that murder had been long premeditated.

Learning that Miss Weston had left her home because of something she had heard about her father, Carol had decided to go on to the Sun-Air Sanitarium with Butch O'Leary. She had heard a great deal of the little Korean who claimed to cure mental cases by hypnotism, this Dr. Alo Kroo, and was a little curious to see him.

But now Butch had another idea. He was driving recklessly in pursuit of the car in which he had seen an old man being beaten. But he was not driving swiftly enough, apparently, for he missed overtaking the other car before it hit the Boston Post Road and headed northward.

Butch, with his experience as aid to the Black Bat, should have been warned by the ease with which the big car slid away from him. But Butch was stubborn.

"Tony won't like us not following instructions, Butch," Carol protested. "And I can't call him, with the short-wave broken. I don't understand it. The regular radio is working."

Carol had the regular radio tuned

in. And it was at that moment that a music program was interrupted.

"We interrupt to bring a bulletin from the police. All citizens of New Rochelle and vicinity are warned to be on the lookout for an escaped maniac. John Weston, deranged inventor, has been reported seized and taken away from the Sun-Air Sanitarium—"

"Sure as Tophet! That's him in that car ahead!"

BUTCH was jubilant. He sent the coupé dancing dangerously ahead. Carol had to agree that he might be correct, for they could have come upon a mob that had seized John Weston.

When they picked up the big car again it was leading easily when it crossed the river and the line into Connecticut at Port Chester. Leading up the hill, its red lights suddenly whipped to one side and were gone.

"Butch, shouldn't we get help?" pleaded Carol. "The men in that car will be armed!"

"Help? Me? I'll break 'em in pieces!"

Sometimes Butch had more nerve than sense. But he would try to do just what he had said. He whirled from the Boston Post Road into a side lane that went up, curved, then descended among the rocks toward the Long Island Sound.

Butch had been too intent upon gaining speed to be watchful. He shot the coupé around a high shoulder of rock, hoping for a glimpse of the fleeing tail lights, and the coupé suddenly veered, reared over a small log rolled into the lane, and made a few grasshopper jumps going over the shoulder of the road. Even with the quickness of it, big Butch O'Leary had grabbed Carol.

His thick body was between the girl and the windshield when the final impact of the coupé in the ditch threw them from the seat. Although stunned, his head cut, Butch roared

and pushed Carol from him.

Two men, waiting with rods in their hands, had been too casually confident of what would happen. They came down over the road shoulder, evidently expecting to find someone killed or at least unconscious.

Instead, a cyclone that roared and slammed into their guns with reckless disregard for his life, struck the wreckers. One man went down with a lower jaw that would require many weeks to repair, his gun exploding in the air.

came from the big, closed car they had been pursuing, but which had turned back. Then Carol could see a short, broad figure with black hair.

Butch saw him, too. He swore heavily and put up his hands. The soft-spoken, black-haired man held a rapid-fire pistol of foreign make in his hand. There was no beating such a weapon.

Two other men came from the car. The leader was polite, too polite. He gave Carol the creeps.

"Too bad," he said again. "Now it



CAROL

Butch's rush caught and carried the other man back. Carol was coming from the car then, her own small automatic in her hand. Butch lifted the gunman with a stomach punch and Carol started to cover the other man who was getting to his feet.

"Too bad! Too bad! I wouldn't want to hurt such fighting ones! And one who is beautiful! You will please to stop and uplift the hands!"

Butch and Carol whirled as light suddenly blinded their eyes. This

is that I must take you along with us quickly. You will please to come on."

Butch's growl was caused, among other things, by the resemblance of the man to a Japanese. He had been hoping for days that something might happen to put a Jap into his hands. Something had happened, but it was working the wrong way.

Carol was quick.

"I suppose you're Dr. Alo Kroo?" she said. "There has been some mistake, I think."

WHITE teeth gleamed at her from the broad, yellow face.

"You honor me, miss, but I am Dr. Tito, not Dr. Kroo," said their captor. "You will please to get into our car quickly. You think with correctness. There has been a slight mistake, but it is you who has made it."

"Dr. Tito?" Carol still tried. "From the Sun-Air Sanitarium? Then we are all right."

"Not from the Sun-Air Sanitarium." Dr. Tito smiled. "But I so hope it will be your pleasure to find you are all right. We must go at once before the police arrive."

Being on a side road, the wrecking of the coupé had so far drawn no attention. Carol gave up. Under Dr. Tito's foreign gun, she got into the big car and silenced Butch's opinion of the Japs, the war, Asia and the yellow sons in particular.

Carol saw that the old man with the matted gray beard *had* been beaten. Blood smeared his chin. His eyes were stony and staring. But there was something, just for an instant, that gave Carol an idea that the old man was not as numbed in brain as he appeared.

She was convinced that old John Weston—she was sure that was who this old man was—had given her one quick, intelligent glance, then had deliberately brought that stony stare back into his eyes. If she had not been so long experienced with Tony Quinn's trick of blindness, she might have missed this.

They were driven away, and at last taken from the big car on an old wharf. A houseboat of a modern type lay alongside the wharf. A small launch was attached, apparently prepared to tow the houseboat from its moorings.

While Carol was observant, Butch O'Leary was only waiting a chance to get into action. Commanded to walk ahead of John Weston and Dr. Tito, whose smile infuriated him, Butch was tense.

He planned, just as he reached the gangway to board the houseboat, to show this Jap or whatever he might be a trick or two. And it seemed that the grinning Dr. Tito must have read Butch's mind.

Butch heard nothing, saw nothing. There was no blow. Dr. Tito's hand simply shot forward, gripped Butch's neck at the base of the brain, and it seemed to Butch he was stepping onto a houseboat, then falling a long way into a black well. . . .

When Butch awoke, he felt as if he must be close to the hinges of Hades. His whole body burned. When he looked with opening eyes, he was sure he couldn't still be on earth. But he could hear, he could recognize voices. Someone was saying:

"Come now, Weston. You can do better than that. You see my hands move. Please to watch closely. See, you do understand. No? I am so sorry."

Butch discovered that he was lying bound on the floor of a room that appeared to be all of some shiny substance like glass and yet was not. He was firmly bound. The voice he heard was that of Dr. Tito.

"If you will please to look, Weston, you will see how beautiful she is, this girl," Dr. Tito was going on. "Like your own daughter, Weston. Suppose she were your own daughter? No? So sorry then that it must be."

Butch closed his eyes and opened them again. Carol Baldwin was still there before him, sitting in a big, transparent chair. Butch thought he must have been hit on the head and left punch-drunk. For what he saw could not possibly be real.

CAROL appeared to have turned into glass. She was a shiny, shapely figure with a beautiful face. It could be none other than Carol, but even the dress she was wearing shimmered in the light of the big room.

But it was her face that struck Butch O'Leary with the greatest horror that had ever come to him. It glistened like her dress, her arms and her stockinged legs. Even her yellow hair was shining in the same way.

Carol's pretty face was undoubtedly of glass. Just to make it more certain, Dr. Tito stepped over and tapped the girl's cheek with a small metal rod. It rang with the tinkle of glass striking Carol's cheek.

Butch might have shouted, but his throat was too tight. He watched Dr. Tito turn. He saw old John Weston sitting rigidly quiet in another chair with a man beside him, a white man.

"You are shamming, Weston," said Dr. Tito. "You know well enough what will happen. The temperature of this room now is at ninety-eight. We will lower it gradually. When it touches sixty, you know what this stuff will do."

Butch could see John Weston's stony eyes, as if he had not heard. Dr. Tito continued.

"At sixty degrees, the girl becomes permanently an image and once it has cooled to that point, what is now most beautiful will become her coffin," said Dr. Tito. "You made this stuff, Weston, you know what it will do. The girl will live a long time, but she never can be broken from the crystal statue that has become a part of her. Weston, do you hear me?"

Butch tried to shout, but his tongue was too dry. Old John Weston did not move even his eyes. He appeared to be in a trance.

Again the little metal rod struck Carol Baldwin's glassy cheek and rang with the impact. Butch O'Leary yelled then. But a few seconds later a gag closed his mouth and he could do nothing but watch with horror, realizing that Carol was being turned into a glass image, her blue eyes magnified by the stuff that had been so placed as not to touch the eyeballs.

Butch knew when the room began to cool. He understood now. Carol

had been encased in some new kind of plastic that hardened as it grew colder.

Still John Weston had given no sign of life. Dr. Tito tried again.

"You can save this girl, Weston," said Dr. Tito. "Stop pretending you're not hearing me. First it will be this girl. Then it will be your own daughter you will see placed in a permanent glass coffin to die. Nothing, nothing ever can break this stuff off once it has cooled to sixty degrees. You know that, Weston, for you are its inventor."

Butch O'Leary never would come nearer going insane than he did during the next half hour. And all that time John Weston remained stony-eyed. Because this strange room had been overheated, it brought a chill to Butch as it cooled.

Time and again it seemed to him that the temperature must already have gone far below sixty degrees. Still John Weston did not move or speak.

There was no movement from Carol Baldwin either. There could not be, shrouded in crystal plastic as she was.

Butch tried to keep his eyes closed, but he could not. The chilliness of the room struck all the way to his heart.

CHAPTER VIII

The Dead Can't Talk



siren.

A hand slapped Tony's face. The bitter, slow voice of Harvey Lansing spoke in the darkness.

UINN awoke with cold rain on his face. He had been out but a few minutes. Still much appeared to have transpired, for the first recognizable sound to greet his ears was the dying wail of a police

"Quinn! Quinn! Come out of it! You okay? Don't speak loudly!"

"I'm all right, Lansing," said Tony. "I suppose I have you to thank for being here, wherever I am, and not dead. Who is with you, if anyone?"

Lansing would have been amazed to know that Tony Quinn could see him as clearly as if in a bright light. Also Tony knew that Silk Kirby was bending over him anxiously. He could see the lights of cars and other light coming from the windows of the Chemical Latex office.

"Mr. Kirby is with me," Lansing told him. "I saw someone or something like a black bat going into that window as the shooting started. They yelled about the Black Bat. Then I found you just inside the window where I guess the Black Bat or someone had knocked you out, Mr. Quinn. I had to get you out."

QUINN'S brain clicked all right then. And the first thing he recalled was hearing a man's death scream with the first shots, before he had passed out himself.

"Who was killed, or were you there long enough to find out?" he demanded.

"I had to get you off that roof too quickly to see," said Lansing. "Mr. Kirby and I had some trouble getting away from your car before it dissolved."

"Did I hear you right—that my car dissolved?" asked Quinn, wondering just what had happened.

"Yes sir—that's exactly what happened," put in Silk Kirby. "Only Lansing hasn't told you I got bopped on the head, and that he carried me away and saved my life. He jumped over the bad spot, whatever it was, and grabbed me. But the hoods grabbed off Matt Hanlon, and then two minutes later they show up with him in that office just before the shooting started."

Another police car arrived. More voices were roaring. One had an out-

standing note of hardness. There never was any mistaking the tone of Captain McGrath, of the Homicide Bureau.

"All right, then!" came from McGrath. "You say the Black Bat killed him! Then where's the Black Bat? It looks as if there was other shooting here—plenty!"

Other voices mumbled lower. Tony Quinn got to his feet and found he was intact. They were at one side of the chemical rubber plant and not far from the highway and Tony Quinn's first thought was that Silk Kirby had disposed of his Black Bat cape quickly.

"We'll have to act fast," Quinn said, alert. "Lansing, one of those five men up there is dead. I have to ask you to be honest with me about that before we go on. Did you shoot him?"

"I did not shoot, for the simple reason that I had no gun," replied the fugitive convict. "The way I see it, Mr. Quinn, all five of those men are guilty of some great wrong. What's more, they know that one among them is the murderer of Thaddeus Jones."

"There was only my gun and it has not been fired, Tony," said Silk Kirby. "Now what do we do before that snooper, McGrath, comes onto us?"

"Simple enough, Silk," said Tony Quinn. "First off—I want to know more about my car being dissolved. Cars and tires don't grow on bushes these days. But for the present, you and Lansing get away from here on foot. Stay off the road, for there are more cars coming."

"And you, sir?" said Silk.

"Commissioner Warner is just getting out of that car over there, Silk," said Quinn who could hear what the others could not. "Now get going. As soon as you can get one take a taxi straight for the house, and smuggle Lansing through the private tunnel in case there are any policemen around. I'll take care of myself."

TONY QUINN crossed the rainy yard quickly. Commissioner Warner was nearing the door of the factory below the offices when Quinn appeared and touched the commissioner's arm, after stumbling blindly.

Two men with Commissioner Warner stared. Tony chuckled.

"Sorry," said Quinn, his hand still groping, "but I thought I heard the voice of Commissioner Warner."

"Tony Quinn!" exclaimed the commissioner. "Am I glad to see you! After I called you about Lansing's escape we have been unable to locate you."

"Get the men away," warned Quinn in a low tone. "I have a special job on hand, Commissioner."

A minute later Commissioner Warner was a troubled man. Quinn had said nothing of Harvey Lansing, but he had told of coming here in his car to meet Thurman Spencer, and of his car being strangely dissolved, according to Silk Kirby who had now gone looking for a taxi.

"You mean your car was actually *dissolved*, Tony?" said Commissioner Warner, incredulous. "Is that on the level? Or is this just some more Black Bat stuff?"

Commissioner Warner suspected that Tony Quinn was the Black Bat, but he never said so openly. And he was the one man whom Quinn never worried about.

"On the level, the car disappeared and Silk Kirby almost went with it," he said. "Besides that, Matt Hanlon, secretary to the late Jared Wright, is in the hands of mobsters. This whole set-up is crazy, Commissioner. But if you want to pin a murder on the guilty man, we may have to work along some with the Black Bat for a while."

"Okay, Tony," agreed Commissioner Warner heartily. "Anything you say. You can—ah—get in touch with him as soon as you like. And about this Marley Weston and her father missing from the Sun-Air Sani-

tarium? I have word the Weston girl is up in the offices here, but like the others, she refuses to tell what's happened, or why she is here."

Tony had to think fast to straighten this out.

"You have no report of Matt Hanlon being up there?" he said.

"None," said Commissioner Warner. "The buzz on the murder just came in and I hopped right into the car. I don't know yet who was killed? Captain McGrath is in charge, so I suppose he's hunting for the Black Bat."

Tony Quinn smiled a little.

"Which lets me out of his suspicious mind this time, Commissioner, seeing that you picked me up and brought me out here," said Tony. "Suppose we go on up."

With his hand on Warner's arm, Quinn started into the building. He asked a question.

"Any more from that wounded diver at Greenport?"

"Yes, I'd almost forgotten that, Tony," said Commissioner Warner. "The diver is dead. He was conscious for only a few seconds. But he said that Thurman Spencer, the druggist, was killed on that oyster boat by Harvey Lansing."

Tony Quinn was thinking then that Spencer was surely behind the mob that had taken Matt Hanlon. He recalled one of the plant guards saying the Weston girl was not to be harmed.

"I suspect that a straight talk with Thurman Spencer will be interesting," said Quinn as they ascended the stairs.

CAPTAIN McGRATH was at the top of the stairs, his red face burning. He stared at Tony Quinn beside Commissioner Warner. Quinn's apparently sightless eyes looked right through him and showed no signs of life.

"It's the Black Bat again, Chief, or at least I thought so," groaned McGrath. "Hello, Quinn. Did you come out with the commissioner?"

"I picked Tony up at his residence, Captain McGrath," lied Warner cheerfully. "He is interested in what's happened here, seeing that Harvey Lansing may be looking for vengeance."

McGrath scratched his head.

"Who is the dead man, Captain McGrath, if I may inquire?" said Tony quietly.

"Him?" said McGrath. "Well, he's one of a bunch that was meeting up here. They all say they saw the Black Bat and heard him speak. They think he is after one of their new ideas of making rubber. Anyway, the man killed was a druggist, Thurman Spencer."

Tony Quinn seldom swore out loud. He didn't now. He took it out in thinking.

Thurman Spencer might have been the murderer of Thaddeus Jones. But this had another angle now. Undoubtedly the apple-cheeked druggist had been hiring mobsters, for three men had been rubbed out on the oyster boat at Greenport.

Tony Quinn had a new experience within the minute. Four well-known business men, directors of the Chemical Latex Corporation, told their stories one after another.

"The Black Bat and his mob did the shooting," declared Charles Blake, the beady-eyed patent attorney. "They got to the lights in some way. Spencer was shot when he tried to take a formula from the table in the darkness. It was a new idea we had hopes for and when the light came on it was gone. The Black Bat has it."

Tony Quinn seemed not to see the darting eyes of Captain McGrath watching him. But Quinn's only open explanation for his presence was truthful enough. He had said he had come there to see Thurman Spencer—and he had.

Frank Brand, the contractor, was next to tell the same story. Reeve Gardner and Andrew Severn added their evidence.

Quinn noticed that the dark eyes of vivid Marley Weston were closely upon him. It was as if the girl were only waiting for an opportunity to speak to him alone. And it was the burly contractor, Brand, who unexpectedly supplied a reason for Marley Weston having been at this meeting.

He said that the girl had come there as a secretary.

Still, Tony Quinn wondered what had become of her gun, and what was keeping her mouth closed about what really had happened. He also wondered if it might not now be intended to make the Weston girl believe that the murdered Spencer was the man behind the mob which presumably had seized and was still holding Matt Hanlon. For Quinn was convinced it was because of Hanlon that Marley Weston had been kept silent.

Tony Quinn was able to make a quiet study of the four directors. And he was able to determine that their fear was still there. It was possible that Thurman Spencer had been the murderer among them, and yet it was evident that no man was convinced of this. There might be two killers now, one the murderer of Spencer.

THROUGH Commissioner Warner, Tony Quinn was able to get service on a telephone. But Silk Kirby and Harvey Lansing had not yet arrived at the Quinn residence.

He called through to the New Rochelle police.

"No word on John Weston," was the report. "But say, if you're Tony Quinn, how come there's a car registered in your name wrecked and burned awhile ago on the river road across the Connecticut line from Port Chester?" He gave a license number.

Quick sickness hit Tony. He gripped himself for the next question.

"Anyone hurt?" he said. "Yes, I have that license number."

"No one hurt apparently, Mr. Quinn," was the reply. "Only there

was a girl's hat found in the car, a small hat with a red feather. I guess she was out joy riding and they beat it after their car smashed up."

"Carol?" muttered Quinn as he hung up. "No. You and Butch wouldn't leave the car unless forced to do so. And you wouldn't leave a hat you had just bought."

He tried to decide what would be the next best move among the four men who were afraid—afraid of the murderer among them? The murderer himself fearing the others? He wondered.

That was taken out of his hands by Marley Weston. She came up beside him in the darkness by the phone.

"I want you to take me to my uncle, Harvey Lansing," she whispered. "Yes, I know that he went to you."

CHAPTER IX

The Four Left



PLAYING his avenger rôle of the Black Bat, Tony Quinn had encountered many odd situations. But none had ever been stranger or breathed more menace than this in which he now found

himself.

Marley Weston had been informed by Harvey Lansing that he had intended to seek the aid of Tony Quinn. The girl knew no more than that. It was evident she had not suspected Lansing's presence at the Chemical Latex plant, and certainly not that Tony Quinn might be the Black Bat.

The four men who were afraid, directors of the Chemical Latex, had cleared themselves temporarily with the police. Tony Quinn let it ride that way, though he more than surmised there was something of vaster importance involved than he had at first supposed.

Again he summarized the people.

Charles Blake—patent attorney. A leading citizen. He was perhaps the least wealthy of the four men. Still he rated around a million.

Frank Brand—the contractor. He was reputed to have an annual income of half a million.

Reeve Gardner—sole owner of a war contract steel plant. Worth millions.

Andrew Severn — another multimillionaire. Reaping huge war profits from his electrical company.

These four men would not be playing a game for peanuts.

Tony Quinn had a quick conversation with Commissioner Warner. He jolted Warner, which was unusual.

"If the Black Bat has luck," he said calmly, "we might discover that one or perhaps two of these rubber plant directors are murderers. I would go so far as to advise, Commissioner, that an order be given to take Harvey Lansing alive, if he is found. He may have some important information. In the meantime, suppose we forget the little matter of my dissolved limousine. It may hook up with a secret war weapon that will startle the world."

"But these men—Brand, Severn, Blake and Gardner—they are big shots, Tony," protested Commissioner Warner. "We have to go slow and easy with them. Why would one of them kill Thurman Spencer?"

"When I have the answer to that, we may have possession of an amazing war secret," said Tony Quinn. "And we may also have the real murderer of Thaddeus Jones. I never was fully convinced of Harvey Lansing's guilt."

"But you prosecuted him, Tony."

"I had my eyes then," Quinn smiled. "But I could not see so well, Warner. The evidence was not wholly conclusive. Tonight's events have much to do with Lansing's escape, be sure of that."

Commissioner Warner nodded. He

knew when it was best to give Tony Quinn a free hand.

"Funny, the Black Bat should be accused of stealing a valuable rubber idea," said Warner musingly.

"Even funnier that these men should be dabbling in rubber, with so many government agencies at work on big synthetic stuff," said Quinn. "Commissioner, it is my idea rubber has little to do with this chemical plant. Someone—Harvey Lansing—stole a chemical formula when Thaddeus Jones was murdered. That formula had something to do with John Weston who promptly escapes—or is taken—from Sun-Air Sanitarium as soon as it is known that Harvey Lansing is at large."

WARNER'S shrewd eyes studied Tony Quinn.

"And what the devil would have been so important about a formula for rubber five years ago when the world was glutted with rubber and the war still around the corner?" demanded Warner.

"That's my point exactly, Commissioner. The formula stolen from Thaddeus Jones had no more to do with rubber than has this so-called Chemical Latex plant, if I'm guessing straight."

This brought about the odd situation. Tony Quinn returned to Marley Weston. Nothing had been said to the police about Matt Hanlon, except what Tony had told Commissioner Warner.

Tony smiled at Marley Weston, his eyes turned away.

"I know Matt Hanlon is a prisoner," he said. "You came here looking for your father. We will start from there."

"Mr. Brand told me to keep quiet," the girl said. "He was afraid I might make it worse for Matt—Mr. Hanlon—and my father."

"Brand admitted that much?"

"Yes, but he blamed Thurman Spencer," explained Marley. "He thought

Spencer had a mob for some reason of his own, then that he was hooked up with the Black Bat. Mr. Brand was afraid they were trying to steal some secrets of their new rubber."

"Do you believe that, Marley?"

"No, Mr. Quinn!" the girl cried out. "I think it is an idea first stolen from my father by Thaddeus Jones before he died. Then Jones was murdered and the formula taken. My father never tried rubber making."

"Would he have been trying some disintegrating chemical, some destroying element, Marley?"

"Why, yes," the girl said slowly. "He had something that destroyed his whole laboratory one night when a jar broke. That's how he happened to be working with Thaddeus Jones on his boat."

"You mean his laboratory was burned, Marley?"

"That's the queer part of it," said the girl. "He had a small concrete and steel building set off to itself. In the morning the building was gone. There was only a hole left in the ground. There was no mark of fire."

"That might be a secret war weapon," said Tony Quinn.

"No, my father said such chemicals were too common, and they could not be applied in quantity or in a form for attack upon any number of men or machines," insisted the girl.

Marley Weston's luminous dark eyes studied Tony Quinn. She believed him blind. He liked her kind. This was another side of life he had come to see since he had become "blind."

Marley Weston had taken a gun and started out to find her father. For all of his legal education, Quinn liked people who had the spirit to exact justice in their own way, even if they occasionally fractured the law.

A few minutes later Quinn accepted an invitation to ride back to Manhattan in the car with the four directors and the girl.

Tony Quinn sat beside Brand. The

big contractor appeared anxious to cultivate the blind ex-district attorney. Perhaps it was because he had heard that Quinn had been present to see Thurman Spencer.

Little conversation was carried on, however. The men seemed fearful of saying too much. They were like deadly animals placed together in a cage. None could be sure which of the others might strike next or who would be the victim.

DOWNTOWN, the directors left the car, one by one. Each man appeared anxious to be away from the others.

Charles Blake's beady black eyes studied Tony Quinn just before he left. The nervous little patent attorney touched Quinn's arm.

ever Gardner might know, Quinn was convinced that not even torture could tear it from him.

Gardner left the car at a corner.

"Good night," he said curtly. "I hope they get a line on Spencer's murderer."

Tony Quinn noticed that Andrew Severn turned his head, staring after Gardner. Suddenly the ugly scar showed clearly on the electrical man's cheek and on his upper lip as a kind of silent, sneering grin. Of all these men, Quinn would have said Severn was the least afraid.

Even big, bluff Frank Brand appeared to be covering some inner terror. Charles Blake's beady eyes had shown both hate and fear when he had left. Reeve Gardner's twisting fingers had been evidence of taut nerves.

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"I'd like a talk with you soon," he said. "I may give you a ring later tonight."

Quinn nodded, without speaking. He was studying Blake without the man knowing it. He judged Blake could be deadly if he were aroused. Small as he was, he appeared sinister enough now, but Tony Quinn knew that fear can make a man as dangerous as having a natural urge to kill.

Reeve Gardner, the steel-maker, still had all an undertaker's dignity. But his solemnity might be assumed. His hands were strong, with long fingers. He kept twining them together as his somber eyes stared straight ahead. Of all the directors, Reeve Gardner talked the least. Yet he impressed Quinn as a man who would not deviate from a straight line to gain any objective.

Once Quinn caught Gardner's eyes turned toward him. For a fleeting few seconds the somberness was replaced by a mocking smile that also showed on Gardner's thin lips. What-

Andrew Severn was completely relaxed, except for that look of contempt, heightened by his scarred cheek and lip, as he had looked after Reeve Gardner.

Severn left the car at the next corner and Tony Quinn had an idea that Severn might intend to pick up Gardner's trail.

Then Marley Weston followed instructions given her by Tony Quinn. Only Frank Brand and the driver of the hired car was left with them.

"Will you want me for some more typing soon, Mr. Quinn?" asked the girl.

"Surely, Miss Weston," Quinn said heartily. "I'll phone your place in New Rochelle."

"Then you know where I live?" asked Marley.

"Well, yes," said Brand. "You see, Miss Weston, we have been rather keeping tabs on your father. Naturally Dr. Kroo, at Sun-Air, informed us of your place of residence."

Brand then was preparing to leave

the car. He turned to the blind man.

"Aren't you afraid Harvey Lansing will come looking for you, Mr. Quinn?" he said suddenly. "Seeing that you convicted him. May I suggest you accept my hospitality? I have an apartment on Forty-second Street near the river which I use sometimes when in town. It might be convenient for you."

Tony Quinn acted on a hunch. "Thanks, Brand, that's a good idea. Suppose I get in touch with my man, Silk Kirby, and drop in there when I finish some other business?"

"Fine! Fine!" approved Frank Brand. "Here's the key. I'll phone the night man there about it."

WHEN Frank Brand strode away, Tony Quinn had the key to an odd apartment. He rather thought it would come in useful.

Once more he was confronted by the ominous question of intention. First tonight had been Thurman Spencer wishing to see him. A little while ago Charles Blake, the attorney, had made a bid for a talk. Now Frank Brand desired to become more intimate with the former district attorney.

Had Thurman Spencer known he was threatened with death, or had he been the killer of Thaddeus Jones, seeking to draw a red herring across his trail?

These others? Were Blake and Brand innocent of the original crime, and seeking advice and help? Or was one of them the murderer?

If not, that left Gardner and Seavern. Of the men afraid, they had been silent. Perhaps he would hear from them later, thought Quinn. But now he had one immediate objective.

Tony Quinn had never felt more like an imposter than when Marley Weston held his arm gently, guiding him from the car at a downtown corner near the Graflex Building. She thought of him as blind. Perhaps the infirmity of her father had given her

great kindness as well as the nerve to go after what she wanted with a gun.

Quinn called his home from a public booth.

He got Silk Kirby immediately—and another surprise.

"Glad you buzzed, sir," said Silk. "Well, Harvey Lansing is even all around, and he's gone. When we stepped out of the taxi and it left, he handed me one on the button. I came to myself sitting against a wall. And he's taken my gun."

Tony Quinn repressed a bitter oath. Then he smiled grimly.

"All right, Silk," he said. "Only I'm afraid Lansing is out for blood and the Sun-Air Sanitarium may be his next stop. I have reasons for not tipping off Dr. Kroo by phone. The Sun-Air will be our next stop after a little business on hand down here. You get out to the Sun-Air, keep under cover, but look out for Lansing. I'll join you there later near the north gate."

"Right, sir," said Silk. "I've been using the radio, but can't raise Carol or Butch."

Silk's language was fervent when Quinn told him of the car wreck.

"This gets bigger all the time, sir," said Silk. "If anything has happened to Carol, we'll have to start taking things apart in a big way."

Quinn refrained from telling Marley Weston of Lansing's disappearance. The girl had had about enough trouble for one night. He left her in a private booth of an all-night restaurant on Lexington Avenue.

"I'll return within half an hour," he promised. "On no account leave here. If you are annoyed or approached by anyone, do not hesitate to call for help and draw the police if necessary."

"I can take care of myself," said the girl. "But Mr. Quinn, are you sure you can get where you are going?"

He nodded, smiling, but again unhappy that he must deceive her about his sight.

CHAPTER X

Strange Secret

EACHING the twelfth floor of the Graflex Building, with its hundreds of offices, was simple enough. The night elevator man was solicitous for the apparent blind man.

Tony Quinn jingled a bunch of keys, and informed the operator cheerfully that he could see with his ears. This was literally true. And that ability was to stand between him and death in a short time.

Keys supplied by the versatile, one-time crooked Silk Kirby made the lock of Thurman Spencer's private office simple enough. Inside the office, Tony gave one glance at voluminous files, then turned to Thurman Spencer's desk.

Spencer had been a cautious man. Nothing Tony could find appeared to have any connection with the happenings of the night. Not until he came upon a small memo book.

One penciled note said:

Call Dr. Kroo at noon.

"So Thurman Spencer had some business with Dr. Alo Kroo," mused Quinn, tucking the book into his pocket.

Then he came upon what appeared to be a crudely drawn map. It might have been an attempt to imitate a private map of fiction, only this map had some known names. A spot was marked close to what appeared to be the headland of Shelter Island, near Greenport. Tony placed the map with the memo book.

In a drawer he forced open, Tony came upon a wrapped dictaphone cylinder. Curious now, recalling what Matt Hanlon had said, he placed the cylinder on the nearby machine.

A cracked, old voice spoke:

"I, Jared Wright, believing my partner to have been murdered by someone other than Harvey Lansing, now in prison, offer six million dollars, my entire cash fortune, as a reward to any person who furnishes proof of my belief. You, Thurman Spencer, should know the name of the murderer. You were among the last to be closely associated with Thaddeus Jones. If you find a way to bring that murderer to conviction, you will find further substantiation of this recorded will by applying to Lester Shott, my personal attorney—"

Tony Quinn stopped the record. He had come upon an even more amazing situation than he had believed possible to exist. Matt Hanlon had been correctly informed by Jared Wright's strange will.

"Wright was smart," muttered Quinn. "Perhaps too smart. Each of those five men had such a record. Four still have theirs. Each may believe he is the only one of the directors offered six millions for the head of the killer. It makes for a sweet situation. It—"

He bent suddenly forward, apparently busying himself with the machine. His ears, trained during his blindness, heard the ticking of a watch behind him. It was accompanied by the low, quiet breathing of someone who was standing motionless.

It flashed upon Tony Quinn that any one of the four men with whom he had ridden might have had him trailed. Charles Blake had inquired if he were going home. Brand had arranged to let him stay at his apartment.

QUINN turned on the machine again, letting the words of the late Jared Wright sound in the office, as if he had heard nothing. Then he turned slowly, groping as any blind man might for a pen or a pencil on the desk.

He could but hope that the intruder

had arrived since his expert opening of the desk, and would still believe him blind. And the trick worked.

Not one, but two men catfooted into view, with guns in their hands. Quinn could see the shadowy figures of two more men just outside the door of the inner office. He was bitter at himself for not having taken one precaution. There was a dim light burning in front of the office safe, and he had left it that way. Otherwise he could have worked as well in the darkness, and would now have had the four visitors at a disadvantage.

Feeling about for paper, he pretended for several seconds to be taking down notes from the record of Jared Wright's offer of six millions' reward. One of the men moved closer, softly, flipping his hand as though to say:

"Stay put. He's helpless. I'll take him."

With the hard-faced thug almost to the desk, Tony Quinn turned casually back to the dictaphone. But his right hand was below the level of the desk.

The explosion of Quinn's automatic must have been the biggest surprise four hired hoods had ever heard. Their sharp oaths and their quick movement were too late, however. For Quinn's shot smashed out the light before the safe. The office was plunged into darkness as he dropped to the floor. He rolled without sound toward the nearest steel filing cases.

"Stop him! You fool! He heard us! Listen, Quinn! You ain't gonna be hurt!"

Quinn came up noiselessly behind the steel filing cases. Then he spoke.

"Don't shoot! We are equal now in the darkness! Shooting will bring you trouble! I have a phone back here and it is open, except for my thumb on the bar! A shot will bring police!"

"Stokes, find the lights!" shouted one man. "Listen, Quinn! You come with us, and you'll be okay. If there's shooting, the cops will be some time getting here."

Tony Quinn realized this was true. He had no more wish to tangle with the police now than had these hoods. He heard a man shuffling toward the wall switch.

"Don't touch that light," he said quietly. "Why didn't your boss, Charles Blake, call for me himself?"

One man gave a short, ugly laugh. Quinn was watching this man, moving nearer to the filing cases. The man who had started toward the light switch had stopped.

Now he spoke.

"We don't fall for names, Quinn," he said. "Do you come easy or the hard way?"

The man who had laughed was groping along the filing cases. He was unable to see Tony Quinn, but he stood out clearly before Quinn's uncanny vision. The man was playing for time, apparently believing he could pull a sneak attack.

Quinn waited until he had come just close enough.

"I suppose I'll have to come along, being helpless," he said.

HE SPRANG as he spoke. The hood, all set for the first blow at Quinn's head, uttered a strangled groan as Quinn's automatic slashed across his chin.

The hood, completely out, started to fall. There was a rush of the other three men, but Quinn stopped that abruptly. He slammed a shot into one man's leg, throwing him.

"Hold it!" commanded Quinn. "I have your pal in front of me to take any slugs! I can hear every move you make, all three of you, and I'm shooting to kill the next time!"

Proof that a wounded rat or a cornered one is the most dangerous was suddenly supplied. The man with the broken leg, cursing on the floor, rolled and took a chance.

His gun cracked. The slug spun off the steel filing case and staggered Tony Quinn as the flattened lead clipped his skull behind one ear. Half

stunned, he was compelled to let the gun man have it straight this time.

Two other guns smashed slugs into the filing cabinet. Quinn was forced to drop the man he had clipped and duck for cover. He was stunned, but he still had all the advantage of sight.

Tony Quinn had been in many tight spots. But the squeeze of this one was partly decision what to do rather than of danger. Too late now perhaps. He judged it might have been wiser to have been captured as Tony

Quinn did not want to take on the job of explaining his presence here to Captain McGrath.

"To be regretted," he said grimly to himself, and let go two more smashing shots from his automatic.

He shot low, but with a deadly certainty that the two men still shooting would have no stomach left for further combat after they hit the floor. One fell screaming. The other groaned.

Both were clutching at shattered



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Quinn, and taken to whatever boss commanded these hoodlums.

It was clear now that Thurman Spencer might have had his mob, but that seemed to be a habit among the Chemical Latex directors.

Gliding to one side, as the hoods still seemed to believe they were protected by the darkness, Tony Quinn's hand was forced. From the street some twelve stories down he heard the wail of a police siren.

The shooting had been heard, either outside or by the elevator operator.

knee-caps. Gunmen or not, no man with a smashed knee-cap has the nerve to continue using a rod efficiently. As one man did let go three or four wild shots in the darkness, Tony Quinn was removing the record of Jared Wright from the machine and fading toward the door.

He was given a break of luck here. He opened the corridor door cautiously. At the moment a hood was pulling a body into a dark corner. The hood had his back to the doorway.

Quinn saw that the dead man had

been the elevator operator. He evidently had been slugged. The slugging had been ruthless. Quinn's keen eyes saw that the man's left temple had been crushed in, and he was as dead as he ever would be.

Tony Quinn saw then that it was the big red-headed man who had held Matt Hanlon under a gun who now was seeking to dispose of the elevator operator's body. In another two minutes police would be pouring into the building.

Quinn reached under his coat for the black cape and mask he had retrieved from Silk. He made a lightning change, turning his coat inside out. With his dark trousers and black snap-brim hat, and with his cane hooked in one trousers leg, he was once more the dread Black Bat.

AS BLIND Tony Quinn he was known to the entire department, as well as to Captain McGrath. He wanted to avoid being recognized. But it appeared impossible for him, as Quinn, to leave the building without being trapped on the stairway, there having been but one elevator in service.

The big, red-headed man had the operator's body in the shadows now. Quinn crossed the corridor with a gliding movement just as the hood turned. The red-headed man was in for a surprise.

Perhaps the hood had believed his four companions would have an easy time with a lone blind man to overcome. He was unprepared for the flying automatic that ripped straight at his face.

The gun had been picked up by Quinn where one of the hoods inside had dropped it. He wanted no identification of his own weapon. He was sure that no one of the hoods still alive would convict himself by admitting an effort had been made to kidnap Tony Quinn.

The flying weapon cracked across the red-headed man's forehead. Bone

crunched, and the hood fell on his back. Quinn turned quickly, placing a little Black Bat sticker on the glass of the office door. He pasted another Black Bat on the fallen hood's cheek.

The door of the elevator, only a short distance away, was open, for the hoods apparently had planned a quick getaway with Tony Quinn. But it was Quinn who used it alone now. Quinn—as the Black Bat, who had found a connection between the murdered Thurman Spencer and a spot on Long Island Sound, indicated by the crudely drawn map. There was also evidence that Spencer had been in communication with Dr. Kroo, at Sun-Air.

Yet who had murdered Spencer in the chemical plant?

Frank Brand, with his bluff heartiness, his friendly surface, in spite of the fear that might possess him?

Charles Blake, with his nervous way, and snaky little eyes?

Reeve Gardner, with his mortician dignity, yet with mockery in his somber eyes?

Or Andrew Severn, with his scarred, sneering smile?

Any of those four men might have had these hoods trail Tony Quinn to Thurman Spencer's office. The only witness to Quinn's entrance there, who might have talked, was the elevator operator, casually slugged to death.

"Tony Quinn comes up and the Black Bat goes down," gritted Quinn grimly.

He heard the buzzer sounding loudly in the elevator cage and saw the indicators on two other elevators start to move. He was convinced the police would also be pounding up the stairs.

Quinn sent the cage racing toward the twentieth floor. The police would be delayed, probably having marked where the lone elevator was stopped at the twelfth floor when shooting had caused an alarm.

He had but one slim chance. The

roof of the Graflex Building offered no means of escape, as it jutted high above the nearest neighbors. He stopped the cage at the sixteenth floor.

Indicators of the two other moving cages showed them still six floors below. One indicator stopped moving at the twelfth floor as Quinn watched it. The other cage came racing on up.

Quinn reasoned the most likely action of the police who could scarcely have arrived in great force. Coming upon the hood and the operator in the corridor, they would find the other thugs in Thurman Spencer's office.

It was logical that only the police in the elevator were on their way up at this moment. Tony Quinn darted to the stairway. He went back down instead of up.

CHAPTER XI

Coffin of Glass



T WAS by his extra sense of reasoning that Tony Quinn had escaped many tight spots in the past. He followed that now. He had to take a chance.

Listening at each floor he went all the way down to the twelfth floor by the stairway without encountering opposition. And he was crouched, like an ominous, shadowy bird of the night at the end of the twelfth floor corridor when four policemen came up the stairway.

From the doorway of Thurman Spencer's office roared the voice of Captain McGrath.

"You didn't see him? It's the Black Bat again, and he's left a slaughterhouse this time! We've got to nail him! There isn't one of these mugs he's mowed down on the record! They're a brand new mob!"

The Black Bat was a shadow as he

crossed the corridor. He almost made the stairway, which he had to gamble was clear of McGrath's men, when McGrath himself saw him, and roared again.

"There he is! Get him! But shoot for his legs! I wanta talk to that mug myself! I don't want him dead!"

Guns cracked and slugs sang off the stairs. But no man was faster on his feet than the Bat when he was on the loose.

The Bat chuckled with satisfaction over one thing. Captain McGrath had often suspected that Tony Quinn was the Bat, but never had he been sure, or able to get proof. His words proved he was not sure now.

The Bat had been in McGrath's hair for a long time. Often he set the homicide man wild, but as often he had helped the captain in jams with criminals. Recalling such times may have had something to do with McGrath's not wanting the Black Bat killed.

At the third floor, the Bat had the closest call of his career. Two policemen, evidently the only men left on guard on the first floor, heard the shooting above them. They left their places, racing up the stairs.

The Bat had a glimpse of the two men coming up just in time to flatten to the wall in a dark spot on the second floor. The two policemen hit the stairs for the third floor.

Seconds later there were confused yells. The Bat laughed grimly as he reached the first floor and saw only a few early morning citizens gathered curiously around the building entrance. They were cautious citizens, too. For when they saw a figure with black wings that seemed to float toward them, saw a gun waving, the doorway was emptied instantly.

The Bat had managed to duck around the nearest corner unpursued when he heard the yells of policemen from Lexington Avenue.

As he slipped along the dimmed-out cross street he was hoping that the

colliding lawmen had not wounded each other on the stairway. Cars were wailing from all directions as once more Blind Tony Quinn reached the restaurant where he had left Marley Weston in a private booth.

He entered, cautiously touching tables and the wall, as any blind man would. And he had his cane for it had been hooked under his Black Bat clothes, which now were hidden under his ordinary tweeds.

Marley Weston made a great fuss over his slight head wound, which was bleeding some.

"We have no time for that," Quinn insisted. "I think the time has come for a quick and unexpected visit to the Sun-Air Sanitarium. We'll take a taxi, and I'll drop you off at your home."

The girl's dark eyes showed determination. Before she spoke, Tony Quinn knew she was going with him to Sun-Air. He approved of her fighting spirit more than ever.

IT WAS while they were on their way, when the first pale streaks of dawn lighted Long Island Sound that activity around the Sun-Air Sanitarium was already apparent. And the coming sun brought two widely separated events that were closely associated in everything but distance.

The usually jaunty Silk Kirby, nursing a bruised jaw, felt more like some stalking Indian than a reformed grifter and confidence man of the old school. He was creeping through tangled brush on the hillside above the long, rambling building that housed the Sun-Air Sanitarium.

Silk was keeping another man in view. Harvey Lansing, escaped convict, had avoided the front entrance approach to Sun-Air. He was down nearer the building, evidently only awaiting the opportunity to pounce upon some outside guard and gain forceful admission.

With the coming of daylight, Silk had watched other early arrivals at

Sun-Air. Three men had arrived separately in cars. They had dismissed their drivers and walked to the front gates of Dr. Kroo's institution.

Silk Kirby would have given a great deal for contact with Tony Quinn at this moment, but naturally he had no means of knowing what had happened to Quinn, or of the new headache the Black Bat had handed Captain McGrath. However, Silk wished mightily he could tell the Black Bat what he had seen. For the three men who had arrived separately, and apparently without each other's knowledge, were directors of Chemical Latex Corporation.

They were Charles Blake, the patent attorney; Andrew Severn, the electrical millionaire, and Reeve Gardner, holder of millions in steel contracts. Only Frank Brand, the contractor member of the directorate, was missing.

Silk had spotted Harvey Lansing just as daylight came. It had been a good hunch that the fugitive convict would seek Dr. Alo Kroo, concerning the reported escape of John Weston. But it was a dangerous place for Lansing, for aside from other angles local police were still spotted about the grounds.

Silk Kirby was wary himself, for this time he intended to get the jump on Lansing and put him away for safekeeping until he could contact the Black Bat.

Silk was light and quick. He was hidden within a few yards of Harvey Lansing. The fugitive was near a doorway leading into the grounds where evidently he hoped to ambush some unlucky guard and force his way into the presence of Dr. Kroo.

As for the other event on Long Island Sound, Silk Kirby was entirely unaware of it, or that it was connected in a strange way with the Sun-Air Sanitarium. Dr. Alo Kroo himself furnished the human element of that connection, made over a short-wave transmitter. This machine was in an

extensive laboratory, which certainly could not be a part of the equipment for the cure of mental cases.

Crouched before the machine, Dr. Kroo was a strange figure. His broad Oriental cheek-bones were offset by a thin, hooked nose. His eyes were like polished jet set slantwise. He was light and small, weighing scarcely more than one hundred pounds.

DR. KROO'S small size fooled many persons. But just now Dr. Kroo was proving that venomous anger can reside in a body of small stature, and that it can be exhibited in soft tones.

"You are pleased to be a fool, Tito," he was saying. "If this girl were his daughter, it would be so different. He is crazy now like the fox who knows you cannot force from him the secret of his mind. But wait no longer, Tito. Dispose of this young woman and the man efficiently. That is of all now."

Dr. Kroo broke the contact. He acted with impatience, but composed his yellow features to calmness as though to confront visitors. That he had just given what apparently amounted to a command to murder did not seem greatly to perturb him.

That order might have easily been carried out. Moving slowly along the calm Sound, towed by a small launch, an elaborate houseboat was safe from close observance. Quick action—and two persons could have been left, perhaps permanently, at the bottom of the Sound.

One of those thus lightly condemned to die was already despairing. Strangely encased in a transparent plastic that promised to be her crystal coffin, Carol Baldwin could see and read lips, but she could neither hear nor speak.

Hours had passed since Carol had been so consigned to a living death. And now she thoroughly understood that gray-bearded John Weston held her life in his hands, or rather in his

apparently insane mind. For hours John Weston had been seated before her, staring stonily at nothing.

Yellow-faced Dr. Tito had tried every trick to make him speak. And all the while Carol had been held motionless and now was practically paralyzed. She understood, from reading lips, that when the temperature dropped below sixty, her gay shining dress of armor which now permitted her to breathe and see, would become fixed on her body and could not be broken.

That meant death in its most horrible form. She would be practically buried alive, yet conscious and seeing. Thus far she had but one faint hope, and that was faint indeed now, that in some unknown manner the Black Bat would arrive in time to rescue her.

She saw Dr. Tito speak, repeating what had been said over and over again.

"This is to make it the last time, John Weston," said Dr. Tito. "Ten times it is we have cooled the room to seventy and ten times we have raised the temperature again. It is this time will be all, for I have had the command what is to be."

John Weston gave no sign that he heard. A hard-mouthed white man stood sleepy guard beside him, weary with the continued effort to break the old chemist, if indeed John Weston were conscious of what was being done.

Carol knew, by a queer thermometer, when the heat increased or dropped. That was no less than the ugly, battle-scarred face of Butch O'Leary, fighting assistant to Tony Quinn.

When the room cooled, Butch O'Leary's face turned gray. When the heat increased, Butch's features reddened to his ears, and sweat broke out.

HAVING passed through the first stages of fear, Carol was now more or less resigned to what might happen. She had reached the point

of a numbed sensation that threatened to rob her of consciousness.

She had understood from the first that if John Weston consented to part with some secret formula that it was promised her life would be saved. Considering everything, though, Carol did not believe John Weston could save her. She realized that she, to say nothing of Butch O'Leary, was too much of a threat to the killers in this puzzling game to be allowed to live, even if Weston spoke.

She suspected that John Weston also realized this. For she had not forgotten that the old chemist had given her one keenly intelligent glance when they had first met, thereafter veiling his eyes and mind.

Carol's despair was showing in her own eyes. And Butch O'Leary, that punching fighter who knew no fear, could read it.

Butch was bound and on the floor of a long, boat cabin that had gleaming plastic walls. Although he knew they were on a houseboat, only the faintest movement could be felt. Nor could he guess the time. For the coming of daylight after hours of the torturing attempt to break John Weston's will could not be noted within the cabin, which lacked windows.

Countless machines and retorts showed the room to be a floating laboratory. No more could be guessed.

CHAPTER XII

Carol's Luck Bad



ONCE more Butch O'Leary could feel the temperature being lowered. He had fought well-tied cords until his flesh was raw, and still he could not break them.

Butch understood perfectly that if the plastic finally set upon Carol that no power could break

it without death to the girl. He had taken hope from the continuation of the threat and the repeated attempts to make John Weston believe each time would be the last. But something in Dr. Tito's voice this time told him this was the real McCoy.

He had seen Dr. Tito talking over a short-wave radio at the far end of the laboratory before he had made his announcement. The man had turned from it with a scowl on his yellow face, but apparently with direct instructions that must be carried out.

Butch shifted his eyes to John Weston. For one moment Dr. Tito had turned toward Carol Baldwin. The white man guard beside Weston dozed, nodded.

And in that moment like the breaking of the sun through a cloud, intelligence gleamed in John Weston's eyes. He was old, and he appeared feeble. But the gun in the hand of his one white guard had dropped over the man's knee, and without sound, old Weston slashed one gaunt arm back.

It struck the white guard across the mouth. The gun jolted from his hand. Old Weston scooped it up. The cursing guard swung for him, but Weston ducked and backed away, the gun coming up.

Dr. Tito turned quickly, his white teeth showing a snarl.

"So it was you were shamming, as I knew it to be," he growled. "Put down the gun, Weston, or you will be so sorry."

He stepped confidently toward the old chemist. The gun's safety catch made a metallic click.

"Don't come closer, Tito!" old Weston warned fiercely. "There are others up forward ready to kill, I know—but you won't kill me, Tito. Notice, I am not aiming the gun at you. I couldn't stop all of your ruffians, but I can hit that retort I'm aiming at and blow this boat and all of you to Kingdom Come. Your big mistake was in thinking for the past year that I've

been out of my mind—in everything except where my work was concerned—and that only at intervals was I sane enough to work at my chemistry here and in the Sun-Air laboratory.”

John Weston laughed harshly. Dr. Tito stood frozen.

“But I have been sane every minute, Tito,” Weston assured. “I have been kept from all news, but the guards sometimes talk. So I have known about the war, and that you yellow sons would like to know about some formulas of mine. Well—you’ll learn about one of them now. There’s an explosive and destroying element in that jar that would send this boat up in a blast of fire. I was smart enough to play insane as much as I did for the explicit purpose of planting that explosive stuff—for a time it should be needed.”

“Don’t believe that guff!” the white guard growled. “Get him!”

“For God’s sake don’t, Amero! It’s likely to be true.” Dr. Tito was hurried, alarmed. “Old Weston has all he claims—and more. If he says he planted explosive in that retort, he did. But we have not yet from him that which is most valuable.”

“You haven’t,” chuckled old Weston, while Butch was listening tensely, and Carol could read every word that passed the old man’s lips. “You’ll never have it. It may be one of my acids, or my explosives. Or it might be one of many plastics. I known my acid-resisting plastic has been passed on by you and Dr. Kroo to others. I know that you now are obeying Dr. Kroo’s command to murder this girl and this man. But whatever you do, Tito, you never will have the greatest secret of all! Now stand back! I am sending these two to safety. Dr. Kroo is your master, Tito. He will not like what he hears of this.”

“Weston, you are the fool!” raged Dr. Tito. “You can be enormously wealthy. We will make for you—”

“That’s enough, Tito! Stay where you are, that’s all!”

DR. TITO’S black eyes shifted without his head moving. Evidently he feared some of his other men might burst in. Then he tried a bit of Oriental bluff.

“You have not wisdom, so you have not the courage to kill others like that, Weston,” he said, taking one slow step.

“No?”

Old Weston’s voice was hard. The gun in his hand cracked loudly. It chipped a bit from the laboratory table within an inch of a goose-necked retort.

Dr. Tito halted as if frozen. Butch O’Leary saw tough faces appear in an opening door.

“Go back and wait!” commanded Dr. Tito. “Everything is all right! So, Weston, what is it you will do?”

“Order Amero to cut loose the man on the floor,” said old Weston. “I stay here until these two have gone. My word is good. I will not destroy my own work unless it is to save this girl. My work is too valuable to the world.”

Butch caught the significance of this. John Weston had been sane while he had been in Sun-Air, though doubtless held a prisoner. Perhaps he had even found it best to feign insanity when his daughter, Marley, had visited him, wanting no one to know he was sane.

What was more, it seemed that Weston had been enabled to perfect some secret war weapon in the laboratories furnished him, but he had gambled shrewdly against the time when his virtual masters should demand the formula. Now he was ready to destroy all his work to save Carol and Butch O’Leary.

Dr. Tito nodded grimly. He spoke to Amero, the white guard.

“Cut the man loose,” he said. “Weston has the crazy honor to keep his word.”

Even as Dr. Tito spoke, Butch could read trickery in the yellow man’s voice. The Korean, or Jap, or whatever he was, had something up his

sleeve. But Butch was unable to warn John Weston, his own mouth being taped.

Butch was tense, his flesh cold as the huge guard, Amero, came to him with a sharp-pointed knife. It would be so easy for that knife to slip between his ribs.

Dr. Tito was motionless, except for his eyes. Butch saw him shift his gaze from Weston to the retort of explosive, then to the girl encased in the crystal plastic. Dr. Tito's short fingers curved and there was a slight shift of his feet.

Having been a pugilist, Butch understood this movement. Dr. Tito was getting set to strike. He was waiting for the split second when old Weston would swing his eyes toward Butch, perhaps to direct him what to do, once he was unbound.

Butch's inability to give warning to Weston was infuriating. But his chance came because the guard, Amero, was none too smart. Amero slit the cords holding Butch's arms with one slash. Butch's hands were numb and helpless for the moment, but his feet were free, and he also shifted for action.

Old Weston did glance at him, as Dr. Tito expected. Dr. Tito jumped from his toes in a headlong *ju jitsu* dive. Old Weston was caught off guard, but he did his best to plant a bullet in the flying yellow man.

The slug missed. Dr. Tito's spread hands hit old Weston's knees and the chemist groaned and fell. No doubt the agony of fire went along his nerves as Dr. Tito slipped a hand to an ankle hold.

ALL that turned Amero around to look, for he had not had warning.

Butch let out a muffled roar that nearly blew the tape from his mouth. One of his heels almost removed Amero's nose. The other heel cooled the guard with an unethical kick in his stomach.

Dr. Tito was just taking the gun

from the helpless old chemist when Butch's feet got him in the back. Butch landed with all his weight, driving the yellow man to the floor.

Still Butch was unable to pick up the gun because for long hours his hands had been as if paralyzed. He kicked the weapon away under a table. Old Weston got to his feet.

"Good work," he said, his bearded face twisted with the pain of Dr. Tito's attack. "Waste no time. Take the girl as she is. There's a rowboat trailing the houseboat. Cut it loose. You have to crack that plastic off easily and quickly. It's getting cooler in here, but it's warm enough in the sun outside. Go, and don't talk."

Old Weston made a quick movement. He had the gun Butch had kicked away. Men started streaming into the cabin up beyond the table with the deadly explosive retort.

"But you, Weston?" Butch roared, ripping the tape from his mouth. "I can't leave you here! You will—"

"Fool! You want the girl to die? The heat's been turned off in here! You have only seconds to get her into the sun!"

Saving Carol had to come ahead of everything else. Butch saw old Weston drop. One man started shooting. The chemist pounded a shot into the man's forehead, right between the eyes.

Then old Weston had Dr. Tito, limp in one arm, pulling him up as a shield and holding the gun to Tito's ear.

"Go quickly with the girl!" he cried at Butch. "Half a minute more and she will die horribly! Into the sun with her as she is! None of this here must be permitted to remain, nor any who know of it!"

Butch had no choice. A great thrill went through the tough pugilist as he saw the heroic old chemist standing there, braced, holding a gun at Dr. Tito's head, perhaps ready to destroy himself with all else on the houseboat.

"When you get out, Weston, call Tony Quinn," Butch said quickly.

A sob was in his throat as he caught up Carol's light figure. He could see her blue eyes, and she was trying to smile, not having heard nor understood what John Weston had said, since she had been unable to see his lips.

Butch kicked open a door at the after end of the cabin. He sprang out into the sun, his numbed arms barely able to support Carol's glasslike figure. But the morning sun was full and warm out here.

A shot rang out behind him in the cabin. Butch spoke, although Carol's ears were of unhearing crystal.

"He said the sun will save you, Carol! That crazy old man! I can't leave him there!"

Carol must have read his lips, for her eyes seemed to approve. Butch made sure of one thing in seconds as strength came to his hands. He placed Carol in the towed rowboat and jerked its rope free.

At least she would stay in that life-saving sun.

As Butch heard another shot he slammed into the cabin door which had closed. He groaned, backed off and hit it with all of his weight. The door had automatically locked inside.

PERHAPS it was well for Butch that the door was heavy and it held. There was a sudden mushy explosion inside the cabin.

Perhaps old John Weston had been compelled to smash the jar of annihila-

tion. Or it might have been some other explosive. Whatever it was, part of the houseboat's side burst through.

Butch was hurled from his feet. As he scrambled up, searing blue fire whipped over him like a sheet.

He could but shield his face and dive deep, going off the houseboat stern.

He reached the rowboat containing Carol as another explosion rocked the Sound. What had been the big houseboat was a column of bluish smoke. Butch saw the small launch that had been towing the houseboat making away, its propeller leaving a churning white wake.

"Them mugs don't want to answer too many questions," muttered Butch. "Poor old John Weston! That guy had nerve. If it could only have been some other way!"

The crystal plastic was pliable, Butch found. He removed it from Carol's face and head with no more damage than pulling a few of the girl's yellow hairs.

Sobbing, Carol was able to help get at more of the stuff when her hands were freed.

Under the white heat of the sun, Butch rowed toward the rocky north shore of Long Island, along which the houseboat had been drifting. He saw launches putting out, making for the lingering blue haze. But before any boats could reach it, the haze was gone.

[Turn page]



Apparently John Weston had been as good as his word. He had taken everything pertaining to his secret with him. There seemed no possible hope that the old chemist could still be alive.

CHAPTER XIII

Dr. Kroo's Inferno



CAROL BALDWIN, white and still shaky, advised Butch O'Leary that they must get in touch with Tony Quinn at once. Landing, they went to a filling station phone, and called Quinn's residence. When a voice replied, Carol slowly replaced the receiver. She knew Captain McGrath's voice at its hardest.

"Tony's in a jam somewhere, Butch," she told the fighter. "I have an idea we should get back to Sun-Air Sanitarium. At least, if we can't find Tony, we should have Dr. Kroo held, or I will make an effort to see him. The way it happened, he may not know the houseboat is gone, with Dr. Tito."

Butch hired a motorboat a few minutes later to recross to the Connecticut shore. He compelled Carol to lie down and rest during the long crossing toward New Rochelle. The brave girl was utterly exhausted in body and spirit from the night's torturous experience.

Butch had a quaint idea for him. He thought it was about time Carol quit this kind of life. Constantly in danger herself, the girl was also continually torn with anxiety for Tony Quinn.

"I guess I'll tip Tony off to the way Carol feels about him," muttered Butch, as if Tony Quinn would not know that.

Carol Baldwin was resilient. She amazed Butch with her revived energy

when they arrived at a point on the hill above Sun-Air Sanitarium in a hired car.

"We'll hike over from here, Butch," suggested Carol. "I've an idea I would like to come upon Dr. Kroo quietly. I have some things to say."

"I'll not be one foot away from you while you're saying them," vowed Butch, and Carol nodded.

It was mid-morning now. It seemed incredible so much could have happened in the past two hours or so. Carol walked with Butch in a little lane along the hill above the spacious Sun-Air grounds.

A tired driver appeared to be sleeping in a big car that was parked under the trees in the lane. Carol and Butch could see the long stone building of the sanitarium. Carol put her hand on her lips as they were passing the car.

"Hold it, fellow! Just where are you going? That way is closed!"

Carol whirled. Three hard-faced men had materialized from the trees near the car. They surveyed Carol and Butch with unfriendly eyes.

"This is the way we're goin', pal!" growled Butch. "We don't care much for talk!"

Butch had been taking a lot. He was belligerent. And he got what he invited, suddenly.

"Take the dumb egg!" snapped one man. "An' keep it quiet!"

Keeping Butch quiet would have been like putting a black tornado into a bottle. Before Carol could interfere, three tough eggs were finding that Butch O'Leary seemed to be armed front, sides and back with punching fists.

But Butch was outweighed and outnumbered. A kick paralyzed one of his ankles. As he was going down, a gun materialized and bounced off his skull. Carol, unarmed, had caught up a rock.

"Hold it, young lady!" The voice was heavy but calm. "Joe, leave him there!"

BUTCH was sprawled unconscious. Carol turned to see a man and a girl. She identified the girl instantly as Marley Weston, and that probably was her undoing.

"Miss Weston?" she exclaimed. "What are you doing here?"

Dark-eyed, vivid Marley Weston stared at Carol. She had never met her, and she appeared to be making a nervous sign for Carol to be cautious. It was too late. Hard hands pinned Carol's arms to her side.

"What's the orders, Mr. Brand?" said the man holding Carol.

"We can't leave her here to give an alarm or give directions! Put her in the car! We'll get out while we can! Come on, Miss Weston!"

Carol knew now this must be something that could mean only more bad luck. She had never met Frank Brand, the contractor, and of course, knew nothing of the affair of the Thurman Spencer murder at the Chemical Latex plant.

"Then you are tricking me, Mr. Brand!" Marley Weston cried out angrily. "You said you would take me to Matt Hanlon, and everything would be all right! Why, I'll—"

Marley Weston suddenly screamed shrilly. She fought like her weight in wildcats as Frank Brand and one of his men got her into the car. The car went roaring away, leaving Butch O'Leary still out cold.

There was a crackling of brush nearby. The big car was just vanishing in the lane when none other than Silk Kirby, his face scratched by bushes, barged into the lane.

"Great dominoes!" exclaimed Silk, as he saw Butch O'Leary lying beside the road. "Now how did he come here, and where's Carol?"

Two minutes later Silk had revived Butch. It was a profane and raging Butch who told what had happened.

"Right out of the hands of them other devils, and it's bad luck again for Carol!" rumbled Butch. "We can't catch that car, Silk, but I can take Dr.

Alo Kroo to pieces!"

"All morning I've been lying out in the bush being chewed on by gnats, and then this has to happen," complained Silk Kirby. "But Butch, you've got to hold off. I think Tony must already be in the sanitarium."

"We have to rescue Carol," insisted Butch stubbornly. "We have to head off the rats before they get away."

"I'm afraid they've already got away for the moment," Silk said ruefully. "The nearest place we can get a phone is the sanitarium. Anyhow, putting the police onto that car might be the worse thing we could do. I must get to Tony. That was Frank Brand's car, and I saw him do a sneak act and get into a basement window of the sanitarium. Then Marley Weston came walking around the building unexpectedly, and after they had talked, the girl went with Brand."

Butch scratched his head. Being uninformed on many angles of the pattern of murder, he had but the one thought. Stubbornly he insisted he was going after Carol Baldwin, no matter what else happened.

"Wait, Butch!" insisted Silk. "We can't hurry that now. But you may be able to help me. Harvey Lansing is on the loose. He's been lying in wait around here for hours. I think he has an idea that Dr. Alo Kroo framed the supposed escape of John Weston. He'll get the truth out of Dr. Kroo if he has to beat him up. It's bad business for Lansing now."

SILK himself believed that Harvey Lansing had something there—that John Weston's escape was too much of a coincidence at this time. But the fugitive from a life sentence was plainly risking the chance of being put back in the Big House on this chance of seeing Weston—or Dr. Kroo.

Silk was always able to handle Butch. The big fellow went into the trees with him, but he was still cursing.

Silk admonished caution as they came down toward the Sun-Air building. He had last seen Harvey Lansing in the shrubbery near one of the rear doors, but now the fugitive had shifted his position.

"Curse it, Butch! If he had been up where I was he would have seen Frank Brand and Marley Weston! Perhaps it's just as well he didn't, or he might have gone into the hands of the police, heading for Weston's daughter."

"I wish to Hades he had," grunted Butch. "Before he started all this mess. You don't know what Carol's been through. She can't stand much more. Silk, I'm going in there."

Just then bushes near the building moved. Silk's hand steadied Butch. They saw the gray, bony face of Harvey Lansing appear, then vanish.

The rear door near Lansing opened. Silk drew in a quick breath. He knew Dr. Alo Kroo by sight, and it was the yellow-faced little doctor with the broad cheeks and queerly hooked nose who stepped out. The furtiveness of Dr. Kroo's movements suggested that he had suspected unwanted visitors, for he scanned every nearby place of concealment.

Dr. Kroo walked over to the corner of the building. Silk told Butch the yellow man was looking at the window through which Frank Brand had entered and left the sanitarium.

Dr. Kroo straightened, glanced around, then started back toward the door he had left. Silk drew in a sharp breath and Butch swore with satisfaction. For suddenly gaunt Harvey Lansing towered over small Dr. Kroo. Dr. Kroo might have opened his mouth to call for help. Anyway, Lansing's bony knuckles smashed at the little doctor's face.

"Well I'll be jiggered!"

The exclamation jumped from Silk Kirby's lips. Lansing's swinging blow failed to land. Dr. Kroo scarcely appeared to move, and the manner of his hold could not be detected. All that

Silk and Butch could see was that tall Harvey Lansing seemed to flip into the the air of his own volition. He went over Dr. Kroo's head, landing flat on his back.

Dr. Kroo pounced upon him, like some small, vicious animal of prey. Swift passes with his hand and Lansing lay still, his face turned upward.

Dr. Kroo arose and walked rapidly toward the doorway. Silk could see a couple of local policemen still spotted down at the main gateway, but here no one had interfered.

"Come on, Butch," Silk said. "We must get Lansing out of this if we can. Dr. Kroo may be going to call the police. If he is, we must give Lansing all the break we can, which probably won't be much."

IN MOMENTS they had the bony form of Lansing between them, carrying him into the trees that lined the grounds above the house. It seemed to Silk that the ground heaved under his feet. Butch and he were hurled to their knees by the terrific impact.

It was in fact sheer concussion of the blasted air.

"Now what the devil next?" ejaculated Silk. "Butch, that's in the sanitarium! And I'm sure Tony is in there, for he sent me out here and he was with Marley Weston downtown! Come on!"

Even the tough, hardened Butch paused and gasped as they reached open ground. Silk Kirby showed evidence of being sick. One whole wing of the sanitarium had been blasted out.

Figures of women and men writhed helplessly on the ground where the wall had fallen.

Other figures lay there, unmoving.

And Silk Kirby saw that the explosion had been in the wall of the basement window.

There Frank Brand had made his sneak entrance and exit.

CHAPTER XIV

Murder in the Mass

NOT more than a minute or so before the explosion in Sun-Air, Tony Quinn had been admitted at the sanitarium's front entrance. In his appearance was no hint of the masked man in black who had taken part in the mad attack in Thurman Spencer's office. He had walked up from a hired car with Marley Weston and had instructed her to stay outside until he had first talked with Dr. Kroo about John Weston.

Quinn had an idea that in the light of the past and what he knew he might surprise some admissions from Dr. Kroo. Especially he had the club of knowing that the disappearance of John Weston was an inside job, as must also be the killing of one of the guards.

Moreover, Quinn desired to connect up Dr. Kroo's association with the dead Thurman Spencer. At the moment he did not know that three other directors of Chemical Latex had entered the sanitarium ahead of him and were still somewhere in the building, for he had had no opportunity to get in touch with Silk Kirby.

When the attendant who admitted Quinn went looking for Dr. Kroo, the supposed blind man stepped quietly into Kroo's empty office. It so happened he was standing at a rear window at the time of the fantastic encounter between big Harvey Lansing and the comparatively midget doctor, and witnessed it.

It was over so quickly and Dr. Kroo was walking toward the building before Quinn had time to intervene. Then he saw Silk Kirby and Butch O'Leary rush Lansing away into the trees.

"Now how did Butch come to be

here?" wondered Quinn, taking hope for Carol's safety. "That means Carol is somewhere about. I didn't really know how hard I could be hit, until this time I feared I would never see her again.

Tony Quinn realized now that he had been fighting an inner sickness ever since learning of the wrecked car. Now he felt like singing. The moment, however, was scarcely auspicious for he could hear Dr. Kroo coming toward his private office. On a hunch, Tony Quinn stepped into the window alcove where he was concealed. Dr. Kroo came in briskly, and the attendant who had admitted Quinn returned.

"Mr. Quinn is here, Dr. Kroo," he said.

"Tony Quinn?" Dr. Kroo's tone said that an interview with Tony Quinn was about the last thing he desired at this moment. "Well, where is he?"

"I think he went into the reception room."

Dr. Kroo hesitated, then nodded.

"Tell him I will see him in a few minutes. Marden, there is a new patient lying out near the furnace house door. He has had some kind of a seizure and will be unconscious for some time. Take Carey and bring him in. Put him in violent solitary."

It was plain to Quinn now that Dr. Kroo was in this up to his slanted eyes. He did not intend to give an alarm to the police. Perhaps he intended to deal with Lansing by his own methods.

"And I'm beginning to wonder whether Dr. Kroo draws the line in his treatments this side of death," Quinn thought grimly.

Suddenly he wondered if he were right, for Dr. Kroo was calling a number, the local police.

"The police?" said Dr. Kroo. "I have to report that John Weston who has made the escape last night, has returned mysteriously. He was found in the grounds and he is all so very

well. So sorry to have troubled, but thank you so much."

DR. KROO glanced at his wrist-watch as he put down the phone. In his soft voice he uttered an Oriental oath of satisfaction. Tony Quinn had heard that oath before and knew it to be strictly Japanese!

Hidden and watching Dr. Kroo, Quinn thought he never had seen a more cunning smile than was upon Kroo's broad face. The little doctor was talking to himself, rubbing his hand.

"Now, my Tito, that will leave all clear," he said sibilantly. "They think I am the so much fool to play for such a little pay, when we are ready to take all in our own way. In a little while all will be so well."

The phone rang sharply. Dr. Kroo said:

"Speaking—Yes?"

A voice mumbled and Quinn could see from Dr. Kroo's face that it was as if someone had stuck a keen knife into the yellow man's flesh and it was being slowly turned.

"That fool of fools! That great blunderer among men! It can't be! Dead? It is sure you say, Mathers! The houseboat blew up and burned with Tito and John Weston? Do not return here! Let no one know, if you can so understand!"

The attendant who had been sent to bring in the supposed new patient—Harvey Lansing, of course—rushed into the office.

"Dr. Kroo!" he exclaimed. "The man has recovered or he has been taken away! There is the print of his body in the grass, and there are heavy footprints where he may have been lifted!"

"All this it cannot so have happened this way!" The usually cold, calm Dr. Kroo had become a raging fury.

Tony Quinn would have stepped in to view at this moment. He judged now would be the time to confront Dr. Alo Kroo with evidence of his

own words, of incriminating conversation, but his heart was heavy.

"John Weston dead?" he whispered. "That will be bitter knowledge for that little girl of his."

He saw Dr. Kroo glance again at his watch. His next words were almost a scream, directed at the attendant.

"There is Tony Quinn here! And the others! Conduct Quinn to the annex near the locked doors. Do it quickly! Tell him to wait for me there. It is important that he be there within the next three minutes. Make sure Quinn does not so go wandering about. He is look for too much of something everywhere all the time."

Quinn waited then, permitting Dr. Kroo to pass through the doorway leading to the spot from which Harvey Lansing had been removed.

Whether Dr. Kroo reached the door or not, Quinn had no means of knowing. For at that instant what seemed the blow of a giant's hand smashed the barred window against the inner frame of which he had been pressed in the alcove.

The wall cracked open. Quinn was hurled to the floor, dazed by the shock, partly stunned.

Screams like those that might have come from a burning Hades brought him fully to his senses. He pulled himself to his feet, staring through the broken window at an inferno of death and screaming horror.

At least a score of inmates, women and men were dead or dying. They had been hurled outside through a blasted wall from which snakelike tongues of flame writhed and twisted under a swiftly rising black pall of smoke.

THE door to the inside corridor had burst open and cries of terror came ringing through the building. Many patients who were locked in safety rooms screaming their insane fear.

Black, greasy smoke curled from the corridor through the top of the

door and into the office where Quinn had staggered to his feet. He saw half a dozen cowardly attendants hastening toward that door and safety.

Never had he made a quicker transformation. His hands whipped his ribbed black cape from beneath his suit and into place on his shoulders. He had time only for this and to adjust his mask. Then he was no longer blind Tony Quinn.

The first fleeing attendants, leaving patients maddened by fear to die in their locked rooms, started into the office. They saw what must have seemed like an ominous black bird of the night swoop toward them from the darkened corner where the window had been blown in.

"Get back, you yellow dogs! Don't move another step this way! You're leaving helpless men and women to die! Go back and stay until the last one is safe, or the Black Bat will see that not one of you leaves this building alive!"

A bulky, flat-nosed guard with a holstered gun halted with the others. Then he cursed, dragging his weapon.

"No Black Bat or anything else will stop me!" he roared. "Get out of my way!"

His gun never left the holster. Perhaps the thin scream of a woman in mortal agony that the Black Bat heard then, filled him with cold ruthlessness. But he also realized that if one man were allowed to break through, the others might be harder to hold.

The Bat moved directly in the face of the guard drawing his gun. But the Bat's movement was quicker than the guard's hand. The Bat's automatic cracked across the guard's wrist while his left hand traveled inches to snap the guard's head back. Another guard who had tried for his gun, changed his mind then.

Other guards were coming. They went back in a wave under the black smoke filling the ceiling of the high corridor. With the gliding, sinister figure with the wings of a bat coming

upon them, an unwavering and a blue steel automatic seeming to point at the eyes of each man, the guards had abrupt changes of heart.

Back along the corridor and up broad stairs where the smoke was thicker and laced by flashes of fire, the Black Bat drove the strangest band of rescuers that ever went into a burning inferno.

His automatic talked then for the first time. It's slug went to the mark clipped the shoe heel of a guard making a dash for a window, and sent him to the floor. The guard got up slowly, limping, and joined the others for rescue work.

"Start unlocking the doors!" ordered the Bat. "Wrap your jackets around your heads!"

They obeyed, but one man cried out:

"We'll all die for a bunch of crazies! Whoever you are, you'll die, too! There's more of that stuff will let go!"

Almost as the words left the man's terrified lips another explosion rocked the sanitarium. Weird, fear-filled cries were drowned by the blast. But this explosion opened a wall somewhere higher up. The draught drew the smoke from this corridor where hideous faces were showing in squares at the doors, and where frantic fists hammered at unyielding panels.

DRIVEN by the Black Bat, the guards worked like madmen themselves to reach and unlock as many doors as possible. Men and women rushed into the corridor, gibbering and panicky. The Bat herded the first of them by him, started them toward the only safe exits behind him.

All he could do now was hope that the police outside and the guards would be sufficient to cope with the insane creatures. He kept close upon the guards, seeing that no door was missed.

The smoke thickened. It was pouring through this wing. One guard

ahead reached a closed emergency door blocking the corridor.

"We can't get to those in there!" he cried. "That's right next to the place where crazy John Weston made his funny plastics! His chemicals set it off! He made plastics you could wrap around your neck, and some you couldn't dent with a bullet! He had all sorts of combustibles in the annex!"

And Dr. Kroo had tried to get Tony Quinn to the annex!

"Open the door!" commanded the Bat, furiously angry as he thought of how narrowly he had missed being tricked to his death.

"We'll never get out, never!" pleaded the guard. "It's nothing but plain perdition in there!"

"Open the door or it will be out here!" The Bat's voice was like a cutting chisel of cold steel. "Here! Stand by me! Give me the key!"

THE Bat swung the door open. Seven or eight guards had turned back to stand beside him. Not all had yellow souls. Inhuman cries for help came from behind what appeared to be a rising sheet of flame.

The opening of the door created a new draught that drove the fire back.

"Come with me on your own, or go back!"

The Black Bat's voice was a clear challenge as he sprang across a burned section of floor to a spot where the blaze was being sucked away. He was half blinded by smoke, but he was conscious that four or five of the guards had followed.

Because it was a special section, where a score of patients were locked behind the one big door, the single room doors were unlocked. Many had been overcome by the smoke. The Black Bat pocketed his gun and set the pace by lifting an unconscious man in his arms.

The guards followed his lead. Outside the emergency door, still other guards had hesitated. They sprang

in now and helped. Trip after trip was made, until it seemed the walls were ready to cave.

Suddenly the Bat found himself in a cross corridor that seemed to have an outside exit door. It was clear of smoke here. The Bat saw a small figure, plainly not that of a patient, and could have stopped him, but instead he quickly drew back.

Another figure came through the door and followed the first. And then through the swirling smoke the Bat saw that the first man was Charles Blake, the patent attorney with the beady eyes, and that the man for whom he paused to wait was Andrew Severn, of the scarred cheek and lip.

Blake's delicate hands fluttered nervously. His little eyes seemed to bore into Severn, the electrical genius. Severn's teeth were bared in a sneering smile, like that the Bat had seen when Severn apparently had trailed either Charles Blake or Reeve Gardner the night before. The Bat could see that the two men were talking, but he was not near enough to catch their words.

"So you want to leave Gardner to die in the fire, Blake?" was what Severn was saying, and his teeth were even more bared by his scarred smile as he spoke.

"Me?" The little eyes of the patent attorney were snaky now. "You think I slugged him?"

"Who else?" Severn's snarling smile was gloating. He had a gun in his hand. "That means you're the murderer, Blake! Right now I can get rid of you, walk out, and that will remove you and Gardner. It will leave only Frank Brand and myself. We can split two ways."

Charles Blake was as quick as his eyes. A gun appeared from his sleeve, countering Severn's weapon. It was an even chance then.

"Suppose we call it a draw, Severn," said Blake, laughing nervously. "If you didn't slug Gardner in there, I know I didn't. That means that Dr.

Kroo meant for the lot of us to get caught in the explosion."

Red blood came slowly back into Severn's livid scar, and he nodded.

"Perhaps you're right, Blake," he said. "Kroo meant to wipe out all of us."

The nervous little attorney and the electrical man with the sneering, scarred smile walked out together. The Bat permitted them to depart, making no attempt to stop them, though he did not understand their presence here.

"Angles are adding up," he muttered. "But the pattern of death is many-sided."

CHAPTER XV

Weird Rescue



UNDOUBTEDLY it was some inner sense that sent the Bat to the door of the room from which he had seen Severn and Blake emerge, though he had not been near enough to the two

men who had come from that room to hear anything they said.

There was no fire in that room, and the Bat was now cut off by the fire from the guards who had been forcibly driven to do the rescue work. But already smoke was seeping through a wall ventilator. It was evident enough the fire would burst through into this room within a short time.

Andrew Severn and Charles Blake had left a man stretched unconscious on the floor. A bloody welt across the right temple showed where the victim had been struck down by some heavy object.

The man of course, as the Bat had already heard the other men say, was Reeve Gardner. Even unconscious, the steel millionaire still had the calm dignity of a mortician on his long

face. It seemed, too, that he had been struck what had been meant to be a death blow when the fire had come.

The Bat was ready to admit—partially—that what he had heard said might be true, that Gardner had been struck down like this because Dr. Kroo might have desired the death of all three directors in the place; Blake, Severn and Gardner. Yet he was not wholly convinced that Blake or Severn had not struck the blow that had laid Gardner out.

And there was still another director to be taken into account—bluff and hearty Frank Brand, so far unaccounted for in the sanitarium, as far as the Black Bat's knowledge went. Had the Bat known that Brand had been there, and that the man had made a sneak entrance into the basement, then taken a hurried departure, he might have suspected that Brand at least had a hand in this effort to rid the world of Reeve Gardner, steel manufacturer.

Two inside doors led from the room in which Gardner now lay. The Bat opened one of these and instead of being greeted by a blast of flame, he was chilled by cold, salt air coming from a dimly lighted passageway.

"That's an odd one," he mused. "That passage opens on the Sound or I don't know the smell of tide flats."

He could now hear the screaming of sirens. When he reached the corridor door quickly, local firemen were entering, drawing a line of hose. With them came a captain of the local police whom the Black Bat knew well in his person of Tony Quinn.

He judged he had accomplished all rescue work for which there had been time. There would be stories told by the guards of the Black Bat and he reflected ruefully that if the smart Dr. Kroo or others involved learned of the presence of the Bat that one more crime, and this one of mass murder, would be chalked up to the Black Bat. The injustice rankled, but there was nothing to be done about it.

He swung around and lifted Reeve Gardner in his arms. The cold air tunnel afforded at least temporary refuge. It might even be a way out, though the Sound was at least a quarter of a mile from the Sun-Air Sanitarium.

Dim light bulbs were spaced wide apart in the passageway. The Bat wondered how many of Dr. Alo Kroo's patients might have come in the front gateway and departed through the tunnel. He judged Gardner himself might have been in this tunnel, otherwise he would not have been found in that room, left to die by fire.

ANYHOW the Bat decided it was best to go out this way. There might be some way for him to work around and return as Tony Quinn to learn just what was being said about the Black Bat—though undoubtedly he would be accused of having shot two guards, and blown up the sanitarium, being therefore responsible for John Weston having died in the fire.

"And Dr. Kroo called the police just before the explosion, to make sure they would believe Weston had come back," he thought. "When he made that phone call, he did not expect to learn almost immediately that Weston had died somewhere else."

He was thinking of this, and of how Silk and Butch had rescued Harvey Lansing as he hurried around a sharp turn in the passageway. For easier movement he had already discarded his winged cape and his mask after he had placed Gardner on the ground, at a safe distance from the building.

There was no light here, but that was not what started him groping like a blind man—blind Tony Quinn. It was because three strange hoods were facing him, one with a light, rapid-fire pistol of foreign make.

The Bat's hooked cane had come from under his clothes. His movements were slow, uncertain. He could see the hoods distinctly. To them he

was but a shadowy figure.

"It's one of the loonies got away from the fire," grumbled one hood, a flashlight leaping to life in his hand to search Tony Quinn's face. "Aw, let him go. He's as blind as a bat."

"Blind as a bat?" another exclaimed. "Couldn't be the Black Bat, huh?"

The rapid-fire gun came up, pointed at Tony Quinn's heart. His eyes were turned toward the light, white and glassy, as he tapped with his cane and walked right up to the gun until its touch stopped him.

He halted, his head twisting, as if his ears might serve as eyes.

"Where am I? I smell the sea. Is there a way out? I was trapped by the fire."

The hood with the gun considered.

"You one of the loonies?" he asked.

Something clicked in Tony's mind then. He thought of Matt Hanlon still a prisoner, and of the several hoods he had encountered. Their boss he did not as yet know. He came to a decision. Perhaps there was a way to reach their main hide-out.

"I am Tony Quinn, the former district attorney," he said. "Will you show me a way out? I am blind, you know."

"Will we show you a way out?" exclaimed the lead. "The boss has been wanting to see you. You bet we'll show you out. Put your hand on my arm."

Tony Quinn walked ahead with his fixed, lifeless eyes . . .

At the outset of the fire following the explosion, Silk Kirby and Butch O'Leary had dropped the unconscious Harvey Lansing. The jolt had aroused the fugitive convict who had reeled to his feet, cursing. He saw Silk Kirby and grinned.

"Like a game of tag, huh?" he said. "Quinn tags me. I tag you out. That little yellow son tags me, and where am I? Oh—"

LANSING'S clearing vision showed him the writhing bodies

of men and women, and other bodies that lay quite still. Fire was mushrooming from the blasted wall of the sanitarium, flames reaching for some of the living victims.

"Well, why do we wait?" growled Lansing and, regardless of the threat of police, he started into the open toward the injured.

"I'd advise you to stay hidden, Lansing," said Silk Kirby. "Butch and I will do all we can. The coppers might be too interested in picking you up."

Lansing gave this no heed. Silk and Butch O'Leary were beside him as he reached the first of the victims. The fire rolled smoke over them, seared their faces with heat.

Lansing picked up a woman first and carried her up the hill to safety. Silk and Butch brought out living victims. They returned in response to continued cries.

By the time the first fire sirens sounded, they were three smoke-blackened, unidentifiable automatons, walking into the scorching heat and bringing out as many of the threatened patients as they could find. Firemen arrived and joined them, with two local policemen.

Silk Kirby noted with satisfaction that by this time Harvey Lansing might have been mistaken for a mulatto. His clothes were burned, his hair singed, and his face was like a minstrel mask.

Suddenly Silk saw Lansing pause at the edge of the fire, then dart to one side. Some firemen were dragging a long hose to throw a stream into the roaring ruins. Then Silk saw that little Dr. Kroo was standing in an ell of the sanitarium walls and that the little yellow doctor was keeping himself safe. Undoubtedly he would have a plausible report of the fire ready.

Lansing went along the wall, keeping so close that he was concealed by gray smoke. Silk touched Butch's arm.

"Whatever Lansing does now, he is on his own," said Silk. "I never saw a con on the loose more determined to walk into a jam. Somehow I have a faint idea that Lansing may yet commit a murder, even if he didn't kill Thaddeus Jones, but was framed."

Lansing was taking no chances this time on the clever ju jitsu tactics of Dr. Kroo. Lansing glided through the smoke to within a few yards of the sanitarium head.

"I'm dumb," groaned Silk. "I forgot that Lansing has my gun. We'll have to stop this."

But before he could move, Lansing barged out of the smoke, the automatic centered upon Dr. Kroo. Because Kroo had concealed himself from the view of firemen and others, he was luckless now.

Silk could not hear Lansing's words, but he saw Dr. Kroo lift his hands. Then Lansing struck ruthlessly with the gun. He blanked out all ju jitsu or other ideas that Dr. Kroo might have had as the gun crashed on the yellow forehead between the slanted eyes.

Lansing slipped the gun inside his coat. He picked up the midget figure of Dr. Kroo and went back into the smoke.

"Hey, Silk!" gulped Butch O'Leary. "You s'pose he's gonna throw him into the fire?"

"It might be a good idea," Silk said sourly. "But I don't think so. Look, here he comes."

HARVEY LANSING, wanted by the law everywhere, came walking from a welter of smoke and fire with Dr. Kroo lying limp over one shoulder, as if he had just rescued him. He walked past a policeman and some firemen who were busy pulling bodies from further danger of burning.

Lansing's blackened face turned toward Silk and Butch. His white teeth showed oddly in his smoked features. He jerked his head for Silk and Butch

to come along with him.

"That's what I call nerve!" mumbled Silk admiringly. "Right under their noses, and every copper in the state looking for him."

Silk and Butch turned to follow Lansing, but paused as three guards came toward the fire talking.

"All right then, he was the Black Bat!" exclaimed one. "But he ain't afraid of the devil himself! I guess we marched all right when he turned on the heat!"

"And he never got out of that annex!" put in another guard. "The fire cut him off just as he drove us out with the last of the crazies! Anyway, even if that was his finish, he was some guy!"

"Go on, Butch!" snapped Silk. "Stick by Lansing! I'll be along in a minute!"

Silk confronted the three guards and swiftly had their story of the incredible Black Bat who had driven the guards ruthlessly, shooting down two who had tried to escape and leave their patients to die behind locked doors.

"You're sure there was no way out for the Black Bat when he was cut off by fire?" demanded Silk, swallowing hard.

"There might be one chance for him," spoke up a guard. "He disappeared toward the rooms where an old tunnel connects up with the Sound. I've never been through it. Only Dr. Kroo and some of his friends know where the tunnel comes out."

Silk was tempted to make one break into the burning wing. But just then a wall caved inward with a crash. If the Black Bat or any other man were still in this section, no possible hope for rescue remained.

Silk went up the hill, trailing Butch and Lansing on hollow legs that threatened to collapse. He knew the Black Bat's proclivity for taking death chances. Perhaps the chances this time had been too great.

Back under the trees Lansing was

slapping Dr. Kroo to consciousness. He had found a sheltered spot in a ravine, some distance from the burned building.

"What do you mean to do, Lansing?" asked Kirby.

"Make a yellow rat squeal, if he really framed up the report to the police on the escape of John Weston," stated Lansing, his flat hand hitting Dr. Kroo's cheek. "I never liked the slant-eyed heathen. They're at war with us. Weston had many discoveries, chiefly among the different plastics. I have a hunch Dr. Kroo may have been after the secret that might have done the most for the yellow sons before they're finished."

Silk Kirby shook his head. He knew the Oriental mind.

"You could kill him, but he won't talk, Lansing," he predicted.

Dr. Kroo's slanted eyes opened to burning slits.

"Where's John Weston?" demanded Lansing, his gun suddenly in Dr. Kroo's throat. "I'm not fooling, Kroo. You'll tell me all about what has happened and who has been paying you, or you'll die the hard, slow way."

Unexpectedly Dr. Kroo spoke to Silk Kirby. His soft voice was almost mocking.

"Why should I not tell?" he said. "John Weston is so very dead. I am so sorry."

"So sorry!" Lansing words were like metal grinding. "I'll make you so sorry, you yellow son! Who paid you to kill him?"

WHEN the gun cracked, for the first stunned seconds Silk Kirby thought Lansing had blasted Dr. Kroo's throat. For the slug ripped through the Jap's neck just under his jawbone. A jet of blood pumped two inches from a severed artery.

But Lansing was rearing to his feet, cursing, whirling upon Silk and Butch, his gun bearing toward them.

"Why did you do that—?"

Lansing bit off his own words of astonished rage when he saw that neither Butch nor Silk held a gun.

The narrow ravine where they were had steep sides. Lansing had picked this spot as safe for the purpose of making Dr. Kroo talk. Now the apparent safety of the secluded spot was only for some others, for Dr. Kroo's eyes already were glazing and he never would talk.

"Someone was trailing us, and shot him from up there!" cried Silk, pointing to the rim of the ravine above. "Whoever did it should be the murderer you want, Lansing! I'll be right with you!"

Butch and Lansing were already scrambling up the steep bank. Silk waited long enough to go through Dr. Kroo's pockets. There was more than five thousand dollars in the dead man's wallet.

"All set to lam at any time," muttered Silk, digging out a notebook.

Then Silk whistled, glancing at notations in the little book, evidently put there by a smart little criminal who meant to be sure that if anything happened to him some evidence against others would be left.

Received \$1,500 from Andrew Severn, Frank Brand, July 6, 1942. Account John Weston case.

At least two Chemical Latex directors had been paying Dr. Alo Kroo for something in connection with John Weston! It might have to do with the old chemist's disappearance, was Silk's thought, as he pocketed the book.

"If Tony's all right he'll make more of this than the police," decided Silk.

He heard Lansing and Butch crashing about in the bushes above him. From the sanitarium still came the roaring of the fire fighting. No doubt the single shot up here on the hill would not have been heard.

Silk counted Dr. Kroo's five thousand again. And the one-time crook and confidence man proved that he had

become a hero. For it did not even take will power for him to return the wallet with the five thousand intact.

Getting to his feet he started climbing from the ravine. It was certain that someone had followed Lansing when he had snatched Dr. Kroo and that someone had not wanted Dr. Kroo to talk.

The note in the little book named Frank Brand and Andrew Severn as having paid \$1,500 in the "John Weston case." Frank Brand had been in the basement before the explosion.

Dr. Kroo had said that John Weston was dead. But Frank Brand would scarcely return to kill old Weston, after kidnaping Marley Weston and Carol Baldwin. That left Andrew Severn to be considered. And Silk had seen Severn arrive here also.

Lansing and Butch were swearing jointly. Lansing had picked up a .38 shell in the brush at the top of the ravine. From there the killer could have run across the open space and mingled with the growing crowd about the fire without being noticed.

SILK KIRBY came to a decision. "Come on, both of you," he said. "Lansing, you look all right with your face black and your hair burned that way. We'll pass easily now as having helped at the fire. We're getting back to Manhattan and some chance to make contact with Tony Quinn, if he got away all right."

It was smart, Silk Kirby decided, to register Harvey Lansing in at a small obscure hotel in the Bronx just as he was. Lansing admitted he had to have some rest. At the same hotel Silk and Butch stopped long enough to remove all traces of having been at the fire. Later, he let Butch from the taxi with directions to enter Tony Quinn's house by the tunnel.

It was well Silk had taken these precautions. As he walked up to Tony Quinn's front door, it was opened before he used his key. The hard eyes of Captain McGrath bored into Silk's.

"I've been expecting you alone, Kirby," said McGrath. "I'm not happy about the Black Bat dying in that New Rochelle fire, even if he did commit two murders as his last acts. And—well, with the Black Bat thoroughly dead this time, you wouldn't be expecting Tony Quinn to return, would you, Kirby?"

Silk restrained an impulse to smack out some of McGrath's teeth.

"I have just been talking with Tony," lied Silk. "He went out on a friend's boat fishing an hour or so ago, and I'm to meet him this evening at one of the docks. So I wouldn't waste the day, McGrath. Anyway, I'm having a sleep. I'll be seeing you."

McGrath uttered a barked negation.

"Tony Quinn will never come back now, if the Black Bat is dead, and you know it," he growled.

"And the next time you get into this house, you bring a warrant and a riot squad or I'll forget I'm on the side of the law!" rapped Silk. "When Tony Quinn comes back, I'll call you."

Captain McGrath plodded down to his car with a scowl on his face.

"Blamed if I wanted the Black Bat killed, and I hope Tony Quinn's okay somewhere," he was muttering.

In the house, Silk Kirby started a weary round of calling phone numbers. He got no results. Tony Quinn and the Black Bat really appeared to have vanished this time.

CHAPTER XVI

Tanked Annihilation



KIRBY would have been amazed to know how close he had come to the truth. He had told Captain McGrath that Tony Quinn had gone out on a boat, with a friend, fishing.

Tony was on a boat. He was not

with a friend. But he was fishing. The fish he sought, however, would have legs instead of fins, but would be as murderous as any shark.

The three men to whom Tony had virtually surrendered himself to "go fishing" for a murderer, took him from the Sun-Air tunnel to a small wharf and a launch. The launch landed off the Bronx.

"Better put on the tape," one of the hoods said here. "He might let out a yell."

"I can't see," said Quinn quietly. "Taping would make breathing difficult. I give you my word I will go along peaceably. Perhaps I am as anxious to meet your boss as he is to see me."

They entered a parked car. Tony Quinn identified the back streets leading toward the East Bronx not far from the Triboro bridge. He knew when they took a back road around a hill that the Chemical Latex Corporation plant was just on the other side of the ridge.

To his surprise, the car was parked under some trees on the side of the hill. He was conducted toward what appeared to be a tangle of vines and bushes.

One man pushed ahead. A door camouflaged with green brush was set into the hill. Once more Quinn was walking along an underground tunnel. From its direction, he guessed it extended directly under the hill to the Chemical Latex plant.

He was armed with one small automatic, fastened inside his right thigh. His heavier .38 had been disposed of before the hoods had given him a casual once-over.

The vaulted underground space they entered had a sickening smell of synthetic rubber chemicals. The tunnel opened into a space of considerable size, and Tony Quinn's keen senses told him this room probably was under the latex plant and the yard.

First he saw a long, vatlike tank

composed of some sort of transparent plastic. It was set into the ceiling. Wheels rumbling told that cars and trucks moved up there, probably on the road above the room.

Quinn recalled the glazed portion of the chemical plant roadway where his car had disappeared, and realized the reason for that then. That tank in the ceiling would be the guardian of the plant, fitted beneath the road with some dissolving chemicals in it, and contrived to operate against unwanted visitors.

"I never like bein' down here with that stuff that'll eat rubber and steel," one of the hoods complained. "That plastic tank up there might burst. The stuff inside it won't faze it, but you could break the tank with a crack of your fist. It's one of a lot of plastics they're makin' in the underground part of this plant, and—"

"Shut up, you fool!" snapped another hood. "It's only when we open the pit to nip off the wheels of a car that it's dangerous."

Tony Quinn was not thinking so much then of the tank as he was of another cut-off statement—"It's one of a lot of plastics they're makin' in the underground part of this plant—"

THAT meant this whole Chemical Latex Corporation factory might be simply the cover-up for the real experiments that were being conducted. The hood had mentioned plastics. Marley Weston had mentioned that her father was interested in plastics for war.

Also, John Weston had invented some form of destructive acid. But it could not be made practical as a war weapon. Quinn could understand that, because it could not be showered upon an enemy in sufficient amounts. It could not be used in aerial bombs, because it would eat them before they could be dropped—that is, if only this certain kind of brittle plastic would resist the terrific acid, which apparently had devoured Tony

Quinn's limousine.

But the plastic itself . . . was developing it the great secret?

Whatever it was, for once Tony Quinn agreed with a hood. He did not feel so good about being in here with the tank, either.

He felt even more uncomfortable when another of the hoods snapped on a flashlight and shot the ray into a black-shadowed place near the wall and not far from the deadly tank. And the voice he heard then brought real fear to him.

"Mr. Quinn! They got you! What happened? My father—"

There was a quick slap of a hand. Quinn's knuckles itched, but he looked blindly past the bound figure of pretty Marley Weston and appeared not to notice that a man had slapped her to silence.

Then, even though he was a prisoner, Tony Quinn felt good inside. He had taken a chance on finding Matt Hanlon, hoping to get directly at the boss of murder. He had found him, but, more important, he had also found Carol Baldwin, a prisoner, but safe! Her blue eyes were shining, even as her hand was pressed against her teeth to avert open recognition of the one man who meant everything in her life.

Matt Hanlon was there, tightly secured. He showed the strain of being a prisoner for many hours. There was grim despair in his eyes and upon his broad mouth as he saw Tony Quinn. But Hanlon kept his head and did not speak.

"Get over there and make yourself at home," invited one of the three hoods who had conducted Quinn to the place. "You may have a little wait, but I've an idea the boss will want to see you as soon as we find him."

Tony Quinn nodded, feeling with his cane. Then he heard one of three other tough mugs already on guard let out a low growl.

"Just what is this, Ordy? What's

the idea you guys buttin' in on our part of the show?"

"Take a little run, and a long jump, and find out for yourself!" snapped back one of the trio with Tony Quinn.

Quinn got the furtive movement of hands, the quick, hard staring of three pairs of eyes into three other pairs of eyes. It was not an act. Thugs they were, all of them. But there was an indication of deep hostility between the three on guard and the others who had brought him in. At other times during the past hectic night, Quinn had guessed there might be something like this.

"Not unlikely that at first five men, then later four men with deadly suspicion of each other, and bound together by fear of a murder or, in a single case, in fear of being revealed as a murderer, would employ different hoods to look out for their peculiar, individual interests," was the thought in Tony Quinn's mind.

He moved uncertainly, tapping with his cane. In a flash all of the place was fixed in his mind. There were but three electric bulbs, and all of these were strung upon the one line of double wires not two feet above his head.

NOW that he had come upon Carol Baldwin, Marley Weston whom he had not before known had been snatched, and Matt Hanlon, Tony had to make a new split-second decision. It was based upon the presence of the two girls and Hanlon.

Had he been alone, or had only Matt Hanlon been here, it might have been worth risking all that could happen to find out which of the four living directors the hoods, who had brought him here, regarded as their boss. But it would be chancing too much with the girls involved, and with that brief clash of words and eyes and tempers which proved that here were at least two sets of killers under different commands.

Quinn was still tapping his way,

apparently by chance moving toward Matt Hanlon. He heard one of the men with him muttering. Perhaps no one but Quinn heard the words.

"I only hope you eggs are down here when the tank breaks," were the thug's words. "Why didn't they get out when Spencer got his?"

Quinn took it this might mean the three men on guard had been originally employed by Thurman Spencer, the dead director. Why were they still on the job? It might be they were waiting to collect for whatever crime they had already committed.

Quinn especially disliked the muttered words concerning that plastic tank of unrevealed destruction. He noted how it was set on a planked platform, and that the floor of the small space in which the prisoners were confined was below the level of its base.

"Well, Quinn, you may be blind, but you can find your way to the floor, can't you?"

One of the trio who had brought him in was impatient. At that moment Tony Quinn was seeming to see nothing, but he was looking at Carol Baldwin. That clever girl formed silent words with her lips, making a name.

"Frank Brand."

That informed Quinn that Brand must be responsible at least for Carol being here. Then as the ex-district attorney felt for a place with his cane and bent as if to sit down, Carol added more silent words which he read on her lips.

"Careful, Tony. Brand brought Marley Weston, too."

The impatient hood beside Tony Quinn caught his arm roughly to push him to the floor. Quinn had been waiting for that split second. In the past there had been times he had found that surprise and attack are the only possible elements to beat off death. Now he had become convinced that the girls and Matt Hanlon, as well as himself, would not be left alive as

witnesses. That being the case he had to strike with unexpected suddenness.

His one hope was that he might count upon the enmity between the killers to help him. His own lips moved silently.

"Roll away, Carol—take Marley—"

And, with the hood's rough hand still grasping his arm, he dropped his cane and snapped a vicious right hook to the thug's unprotected chin. That clean, knockdown punch brought an exclamation from one of the other mob.

"Ha! Dumb head! Let a blind guy—"

The surprise had to be broadened fast. Quinn's steel muscles shot him erect and into a jump. Before the other two men who had brought him here could think of their rods, his fingers wrapped around one of the insulated wires on which the three lights were strung.

THERE was a crackling snap, then black, inky darkness. Tony Quinn was down, moving with the speed and silence of a leaping cat. His light automatic against his thigh was only a .32, but he counted on heavier slugs getting in their work.

"Hey! Hold everything, you mugs! That—"

This cry came from one of the guards close to Carol. Only Quinn's owl-like vision could see Carol rolling back, pulling Marley Weston over and guiding her. Quinn's .32 talked straight then, the kind of speech that expressed his long-held conviction that a kidnaper is the lowest breed of rat.

The hood closest to Carol and Marley screamed as the slug took him. Quinn was ten feet to one side before the surprised thugs had their rods into play.

Lead furrowed the dirt floor from which Quinn had fired that first shot. But there was the one thing he had hoped for.

He saw one of the remaining two

guards shoot deliberately at the gun blaze of one of the other men.

The mobster's target twisted on his heels and went over. The first hood knocked down by Tony Quinn was getting to his feet.

And one of the guards was running away along the wall where a door appeared.

This hood evidently imagined he was unseen and unheard. That left three men on their feet. One was a guard. The other two were Quinn's captors.

"Look, Quinn!" rapped out one of them. "Drop your gun or I'm letting the girl have it! I've got my gun in her throat!"

Quinn did not reply. The bluffing hood was not aware that Tony Quinn could see Carol and Marley rolling away from the gunfire.

It was then that the hood at the doorway shouted.

"Now you rats, take it! One slug and you're all finished!"

His rod cracked before Tony Quinn could shoot. Quinn heard the splintering impact of a slug as if it had pounded into a plate-glass window. He whirled and saw the spidery cracks made by the bullet in the side of the tank of annihilating acid, and a stream the color of blue vitriol shooting out.

He pivoted as the tank breaker laughed harshly and turned a key in the big lock of the door behind him. Without compunction he cut the vengeful hood down, realizing that the stream of destroying acid was spreading across the floor toward the bound prisoners, and that Carol and Marley had unluckily rolled toward the tank.

Tony Quinn snapped a shot that cut down another man who had been scurrying around, trying to find the girls with his feet in the darkness. He sprang toward Carol and Marley, groaning over his helplessness to carry both girls out, and seeing the acid that had devoured his limousine, rubber and steel, spreading swiftly

like thin molasses toward them.

He risked crying out then to Matt Hanlon.

"Roll, Hanlon! Toward the door, away from my voice! The acid is spreading!"

One of the hoods fired at the sound of his voice, although this one of the only two surviving was also moving, as he thought, away from the tank. Quinn felt the slug gouge deeply into his thigh muscles, but it luckily missed the bone.

HE MADE a long side jump, then was between the girls, with the dampness of the terrible, blue death already within inches of Carol's bright blond head.

He found a way then that averted leaving either girl for the moment. It was the best he could do, seeing their arms were tightly bound behind them and their ankles were taped together.

His steel fingers slipped under the tape between the two pairs of ankles and he whispered:

"Sorry, Carol."

He could but drag them along the soft dirt of the floor toward the door in which the dead thug responsible for the tank breaking had turned the key.

The blue acid had no odor that Tony could detect, but he could see it spreading like a lake of death. It seemed to have the heavy consistency of mercury.

It broke and rolled over the dirt in globules, with the stream still spurt- ing from the cracked side of the plas- tic tank.

Matt Hanlon was ahead of him as he neared the door. At that instant one of the two surviving thugs emit- ted a scream of agony. Quinn was at the door, letting go his hold on the girls' taped ankles and seizing the knob of the heavy lock, but the chill- ing horror of the hood's continuing scream compelled his eyes in that di- rection.

CHAPTER XVII

Blue Death



DURING all his long career of fighting crime, Tony Quinn had never witnessed a more awful thing. The hood was down on his hands and knees, his mouth open, his face lifted, the scream in his throat like that of some trapped and tortured animal.

Quinn was grateful for that enveloping darkness then that prevented Carol and Marley from seeing what was happening. The hood evidently had stepped into the terrible acid, and both of his feet had disappeared.

He had fallen then, of course, and now his hands and arms were letting him into the annihilating fluid face downward. Tony put a mercy shot into the man's brain, the least he could do.

As he again turned to the door, it was jerked open. The beam of a strong flashlight illuminated the scene. Marley Weston screamed then, as never before had Tony ever heard a girl cry out.

She was turning her face away, quivering. No doubt she'd had one glimpse of the unlucky hood's disap- pearing body. It was as if the man was dissolving and sinking into the ground.

Tony Quinn could have turned his gun upon the holder of the flashlight. But there was the one surviving thug now running toward the door, guided by that spray of light.

A heavy voice rang out.

"Stop, you! What is this? No one was to be harmed!"

The terror-stricken, fleeing hood may not have consciously lifted his gun to shoot. But a weapon exploded first alongside the flashlight and the hood dropped cold.

Then Tony Quinn was looking at Reeve Gardner, the electrical man, who had been saved from death at Sun-Air sanitarium.

"Great heavens! Tony Quinn! How did this happen! Here, Quinn, the stairs are this way! Help with one of the girls! My Lord! That acid! I ordered it taken away when Spencer was killed!"

It was simple enough to get Carol and Marley to the stairway, with the help of Reeve Gardner. Gardner produced a knife and started freeing the girls and Matt Hanlon.

Quinn had one more look into the room of the blue death. Then he pretended to grope about, closing that door. For in there the bodies of six mobsters would never be claimed by the police as evidence.

Even as Reeve Gardner continued his protest, Tony Quinn thought that perhaps this all might have been planned. There were six killers, employed by one or more of the Chemical Latex directors who would never talk. Their bodies never would be found. For they had literally returned to the earth from which they had come.

"Or chemicals to chemicals," whispered Tony Quinn.

Reeve Gardner, a welted bruise across his forehead where he had been knocked out and left to burn at Sun-Air, talked as he guided Tony Quinn gently up the stairs and into an office.

"We were up here when I heard shooting," he said. "Lord, but I'm glad I was in time down there. I wanted to get rid of the thugs hired by Thurman Spencer when Spencer was killed. Now there seems to be all kinds of a mixup. My own life was saved by someone earlier today. It's crazy, but some guards at Sun-Air Sanitarium said that the Black Bat was there, and they think he carried me out after someone knocked me out and left me to die."

with his usual cool dignity.

"I was at Sun-Air myself just before the fire," said Quinn quietly. "I had a talk with Dr. Kroo and was walking down toward the shore, feeling my way, when I was seized and taken into a boat by three of the men who died down below. That acid is terrible. You wouldn't be planning that as a war weapon?"

"War weapon?" Marley Weston, white-faced and angry, cried out. "Don't believe anything you are told, Mr. Quinn! These men were all murderers. I'm sure my father is dead, and they killed him."

A deep voice, filled with surprise, spoke from the office doorway. Big Frank Brand was staring at the group inside.

"What has happened?" asked Brand. "You found the girls and brought them out, Gardner. I was on my way to do that, after having to appear rough in bringing Marley Weston here for her own safety. This other girl is a stranger, but she was about to give an alarm that might have cost Miss Weston her life, and I had to appear in the temporary role of kidnaper to avert another murder at the Sun-Air Sanitarium."

Carol Baldwin had not identified herself. Tony Quinn gave no sign that he knew her. He was a blind man, apparently dazed by all that had happened. And in a way he was dazed. For either Frank Brand was sincere or he was a better actor than any contractor should have been.

"You brought them to New York City by force and that would be a federal offense," Quinn said quietly. "I suppose the thugs who helped you are dead down below?"

"No," said Brand, his broad forehead wrinkled. "The men who helped me were some boys from one of my construction jobs. I have a guard friend at Sun-Air. He called me there for a reason. I saw Marley Weston, as I said, and I had reason to believe she was in deadly danger."

THE steel man was perspiring in a manner wholly out of keeping

"The three dead guards downstairs are your construction men, Brand?" asked Quinn.

Carol Baldwin spoke up spiritedly, but taking unexpected sides.

"No, those men came in and seized us from another office where Mr. Brand had left us alone up here," said Carol. "Mr. Brand's man had gone away and we had been left unguarded."

"Thanks for a kindly word," said Brand. "It happened that way. In all of this, I command no thugs. Thurman Spencer had employed some, and they're still working for someone I cannot name because I am not sure. That same unknown man among us already had employed hoods, bringing them here on the excuse our experiments with rubber must be closely guarded. It seems to me the one man may be bossing both gangs, perhaps hoping for a feud that may remove many of them before a final payoff."

"But you knew Matt Hanlon was a prisoner," said Quinn, seeing the logic of Brand's statement. "And at least six men who have such a feud are dead down below, which may bear out your belief, Brand."

"I was planning to have Hanlon released," declared Brand.

Reeve Gardner, his long face solemn, his dignity unshaken, except for a continual twisting together of his long fingers, glanced at Quinn who had decided that holding Frank Brand for kidnapping would solve nothing.

"I don't see why Brand should chance an abduction, when we are under grave suspicion," said Gardner slowly. "We should get rid of all those mobsters—also some who are among the regular plant guards."

"I think the mere fact that Brand took the girls in a car by daylight and brought them directly here is in his favor," said Tony Quinn. "In the meantime, have you heard anything more of what happened at Sun-Air? I left there just in time to be seized and I missed what happened after the

fire. Also I would like to know—why have *I* so suddenly become important?

GARDNER answered both questions.

"I was knocked out, then rescued from the fire," he said. "I was waiting for Dr. Kroo and only he knew I was in the room where he had asked me to wait. I believe either Kroo or one of his men laid me out. Firemen were coming into the hall outside when I was carried out of the way of the fire."

Quinn's keen perception noted something. Gardner knew firemen were coming in when he, as the Black Bat, had rescued him.

"We have word that Dr. Alo Kroo was found shot to death after he had been apparently rescued from the sanitarium," said Gardner. "A fireman remembered seeing a tall man carrying Kroo from the fire. Kroo was shot through the throat when he was found. Five thousand dollars were found in his pocket, so it was not robbery."

Quinn's instant thought was of Harvey Lansing. He was convinced the tall Lansing had been Dr. Kroo's rescuer and possibly his killer later. That made it tough going for Lansing, even if Dr. Kroo had fully deserved to die.

Matt Hanlon was shifting from one foot to the other. He felt he had been playing a dummy hand all the way in this series of crimes.

Frank Brand was glancing sympathetically at Marley Weston.

"Miss Weston," he said hesitantly, but as if he must speak, "sometimes it is better for a man whose life has been blanked out in his mind to be through with suffering. Please believe we sympathize and will do everything we can for you. Your father—"

"Don't pretend!" cried the girl. "You're not fooling me! My father is dead, and you are one who helped to kill him! I want to go now!"

Tony Quinn watched Frank Brand turn away. It was incredible, but he

could have sworn he saw dampness on Brand's leathery cheeks under his eyes. Well, killers had been known to cry over their crimes.

"I think we should all go now," Quinn said quietly. "If you will call a taxicab, I will take care of Miss Weston, this other girl and Mr. Hanlon. I wish to talk with them."

"I'll call a taxi," offered Frank Brand.

"If there is anything I can do—" ventured Reeve Gardner.

"I will see that Miss Weston is taken home and guarded," said Quinn. "For the present I should report to the police about the trouble downstairs. But I'm inclined to believe Mr. Brand. Until I find out more, it will rest as it is."

CHAPTER XVIII

Secret Weapon



MARLEY WESTON was in Carol's charge as they rode down town. When they were all finally preparing to separate, Tony Quinn had Carol to one side. She was gripping his hands.

"Tony, darling, haven't we been through enough?" she pleaded. "Can't we forget all this?"

"In this case we have but a few more steps to go," Quinn said quietly. "I want you to look after Marley Weston. Don't let her out of your sight. I am leaving you downtown at a safe place where I can keep in touch with you. I may need you again in a few hours."

Matt Hanlon rode on with Tony Quinn. Quinn was bone weary. But he used up his reserve for good purpose.

"Hanlon," he said, "it may be you can get into this game within a short time. I'm keeping you at my place

until we clear up some things. Is there any reason to believe that Thurman Spencer, more than any of the others, might have been the murderer of Thaddeus Jones?"

Hanlon was slow-spoken. He had not offered much. He now handed Tony Quinn a surprise.

"I would like to find Charles Blake, the attorney," said Hanlon. "He's the man who was boss of the men guarding me, and then the two girls. I overheard them talking when they thought I was sleeping."

Quinn recalled seeing Charles Blake fleeing from the room in which Reeve Gardner had apparently been left to die at Sun-Air. But Andrew Severn, the steel man, had also come from that room.

Because of the tunnel beyond the room, either man might have knocked Gardner out. But then Gardner himself had slipped a little when he had known about firemen coming into the place. The guilty man was not yet apparent.

Tony Quinn kept up his rôle of a blind man. But he stopped the hackman short of his own residence. He had seen a white police car farther up the street. Then, still feigning blindness and as though acting by instinct, he led Matt Hanlon into the grounds. Five minutes later, Hanlon was ordered to remain in a bedroom and sleep.

With his cane Tony Quinn tapped his way slowly into the library. Silk Kirby swore roundly, trying to cover up what he felt to be a womanish emotion. Commissioner Warner was seated in the library and he also uttered an oath, but it was one of satisfaction.

Warner gripped Quinn's hand. His forehead was sweating.

"Man!" growled Warner. "The report seemed straight that our mutual friend, the Black Bat, was burned to death at Sun-Air. Believe it or not, Captain McGrath is all broken up over it."

Before Silk Kirby or Warner could

say more, the phone rang. Silk answered it.

"The same man has been calling every five minutes for an hour or more, sir," said Silk. "He won't talk to anyone but you, he says."

"Yes, this is Tony Quinn," the ex-district attorney said. "What's that?"

A strange light came over his face, and he was holding the receiver tightly to his ear, listening. Then he turned to the others.

"If you don't mind, Commissioner, I have some private business," he said. "If you will take a turn outside with Silk, I may have something big—bigger than you could guess. Give me five minutes."

TONY QUINN was seated, staring into the cold fireplace when Commissioner Warner and Silk Kirby returned.

"Commissioner," Tony Quinn said, "I have a great favor to ask of you. In a few days I may require a detail of soldiers in uniform for a special job highly important to the government. It may be a week or more, but the time will come. When it does, this whole pattern of murder may be cracked wide open."

"I could even get the Navy for a job like that," promised Warner.

When the commissioner had gone, Silk Kirby told what he had encountered.

"Andrew Severn and Frank Brand apparently paid Dr. Kroo fifteen hundred in the John Weston case," mused Quinn aloud. "That may be good, or it might be a red herring. Anyway, Silk, John Weston escaped from a burned houseboat. He called me because Butch O'Leary had requested him to. You will take charge of Lansing, Carol and the others. John Weston is alive and we go on from there. But we may have to wait for the next move of the Latex directors."

Tony Quinn slept through the day and night. But only after he had made contacts that acted as a sedative.

First he called Carol Baldwin. He smiled over what he told her. Perhaps grief-stricken Marley Weston could also sleep now. He instructed Carol to stay with the girl, if it took a week or a month for him to finish what he had in mind.

"But I think the show-down is coming soon," he promised.

He sent Silk Kirby to make sure that Harvey Lansing stayed under cover. Then he called the New Rochelle police. His inquiry concerned the five thousand dollars in cash found on Dr. Alo Kroo.

Asking about the character of bills in that money, he noted down some numbers. He requested New Rochelle to hold the money until they received further notice.

He gave these notes and numbers to Matt Hanlon a little later.

"Check with all of the banks in the neighborhoods I have noted down," he directed. "I will get you special authority from Commissioner Warner. Whatever you learn, keep your head and watch out for possible trouble. Come back here openly."

When Hanlon was gone, Quinn stretched wearily. He judged that all of them were sitting upon an explosive bomb due to let go at any time. But there was nothing to be done about it now but wait for his chance to stop it.

During a full, slow week that passed after that, Tony Quinn rode with Silk Kirby down Long Island. They interviewed several waterfront boatmen. They took one launch ride around the eastern headland of Shelter Island, the famous tourist resort.

"Never a calmer or more peaceful bay," observed Quinn. "But Silk, under that quiet water is something that may revolutionize all of today's warfare. Out of that may come victory for the Allied Nations, and I don't know yet how narrowly it missed being put into the hands of the Axis murderers."

Back in his home, Quinn put a small

record on a machine and ran it off slowly. It was the peculiar will of the late Jared White, as evidently sent personally to Thurman Spencer, the druggist director of Chemical Latex who later was murdered.

Commissioner Warner frankly admitted he had got nowhere on Thurman Spencer's murder. At New Rochelle the local police were still fumbling with the mass murder by explosion at the Sun-Air Sanitarium, and the side killing of Dr. Alo Kroo. But no progress was being made anywhere.

IT WAS the beginning of the second week after the explosion when the big news broke. A new war weapon had been uncovered. Perhaps not exactly a weapon that would kill, but nevertheless a force that might mean overturning all the balance of power left to the Axis.

Newspapers screamed it:—

NEW WIN-THE-WAR DISCOVERY!
STEEL ARMOR SUBSTITUTE
FOUND
GUN-PROOF PLASTIC FOR PLANES

And the story, in brief, read:

Seeking new rubber substitutes, the Chemical Latex Corporation chemists announce the discovery of a new plastic of almost incredible value.

Lighter than aluminum, produced at one-tenth the cost of either aluminum or light steel armor, the new plastic has been Government-tested. It has been found fire resistant for plane motors and cylinders. In sheet form, lightening plane weight by more than half, this plastic cannot be pierced by the highest caliber machine-gun bullets.

The Chemical Latex Corporation, a Bronx concern, is being hailed as making the greatest single contribution to the war. Its directors and stockholders are expected to realize millions from the hundreds of millions in contracts that will be rushed as soon as the proper Government action has been taken.

Tony Quinn's face was a hard mask as he listened to Silk Kirby swearing over the story.

"And we're no nearer to the real murderer of Thaddeus Jones than before," said Silk. "I'll have to have

Harvey Lansing tied up when he reads this."

Quinn straightened, a hard smile on his broad, firm mouth.

"That's an idea, Silk," he said. "The next few hours are vital. They are of grave importance not only to several individuals, but to a nation as a whole. Harvey Lansing's own future depends upon his remaining passive. Silk, you are assigned to a difficult job, but it is the best way now. As soon as I call Commissioner Warner, you make sure that Harvey Lansing is taken by the police without trouble."

Silk stared at Tony. "Y—yes, sir," he gulped.

Quinn got Commissioner Warner on the phone. When he had explained the Harvey Lansing angle, he added several other angles.

"We're ready for you to bring on the soldiers, Commissioner," he said. "Have them drive to Greenport and board a wrecking scow waiting at the oyster wharf. Matt Hanlon will be there to direct the rest of the work. The scow is to go to a point in Gardiner Bay, off Shelter Island, which is marked on a map. This map has figured all along, from the time of the murder of Thurman Spencer, if not all the way back to the Thaddeus Jones murder five years ago. You have wired Washington?"

"Washington has given an emergency okay, Tony," said Commissioner Warner. "And then what?"

"I hear the Black Bat may fly tonight, Commissioner," said Quinn. "Without doubt there'll be a hurried conference of four men of whom you know. Put two of your best tailing detectives on each of those four men at their offices as soon as they get into action. Don't permit any one of the four out of sight, and they must not know they are tailed."

"Some job, Tony, but it can be done," said Warner.

"Then, when the conference is called, likely at the Chemical Latex Corporation for tonight, the Black

Bat may wish to be safe from being resurrected by Captain McGrath," said Quinn. "Send other men there, without him, and the Black Bat will have the place already wired. I will get in touch with the Black Bat and call you again. . . . But wait, Commissioner. There is one other long chance that must be taken."

COMMISSIONER WARNER listened as Tony Quinn explained. "If that misses, Tony, you know what it means to me," he said.

"It will not miss, Commissioner," promised Tony Quinn.

It was because of this telephone conversation that in the early afternoon editions of the papers appeared a headline reading:

**LANSING ESCAPED CONVICT
KILLED BY POLICE**

Tony Quinn waited until these editions had hit the streets. At once he got busy again. He sent four identical telegrams. Each was signed "Longshoreman." Each suggested the "Longshoreman" had information of value to the recipient, and that the sender would appear personally to collect for that information.

In Tony Quinn's hard smile was cold calculation when Silk Kirby returned. Silk's reaction to the headlines announcing Harvey Lansing's death at the hands of the police was a violent outburst at first, but Quinn cooled him down with the truth.

"And now, Silk," he announced, "we are due for a jump in a plane to Greenport, then a ride in a torpedo boat chaser that will probably turn us green."

"Just what is this all about, sir?" asked Silk.

"That remains to be determined," stated Tony Quinn, fingering a bank report he had received from Matt Hanlon only an hour before. "What we do know is that one murderer is about to be forced to match his wits against three other men who fear him to the point of being ready to kill.

CHAPTER XIX

Out of the Depths



FLOOD-LIGHTS spotted the smooth bay off Shelter Island headland. In the cabin of a fast black cruiser a man stood in the darkness, eyes fixed upon the circle of bright illumination.

A word, and the pilot sent the black cruiser nearer. The skeleton derricks of a wrecking scow showed under the flood-lights. Cables creaked and groaned. Flat metal boxes were being lifted from the sea and piled on the deck of the scow.

As the black cruiser approached the scow, two men crouched beside a concealed rapid-fire gun on the foredeck. The man beside the pilot in the wheel-house spoke.

"Wait until we are dead on the scow, then turn over full speed ahead, and we'll start the works," he commanded.

"Aye, sir," replied the pilot. "But I don't like the looks of that job."

"I'll worry about that," said the man directing him.

Only a narrow gap of water separated the cruiser and the scow. Then new lights leaped out on the barge. A gunner tongued fire across the prow of the cruiser. A megaphoned voice broke on the night.

"Sheer off, and keep going! You're too close! This is a United States Army order!"

The man in the wheel-house swore fervently. For in the new lights at least a score of deadly machine-guns appeared, manned by uniformed soldiers.

"And that ends that," said the man in the wheel-house. "Sheer off. Get me back to the island field and my plane."

He swore under his breath as a Coast Guard torpedo boat shattered the night with its song of power. The streaking craft made its own rough water and heeled the black cruiser far over as it passed close by.

"Curse Tony Quinn!" swore the man in the wheel-house. "I'm sure now he is the Black Bat! And here's where the whole game gets a new deal! We'll see who holds the black ace in the end!"

In the flying torpedo boat chaser, Tony Quinn clutched his stomach. He was convinced his ribs were being torn out. Silk Kirby, strapped to the seat beside him, had turned green and didn't care whether he lived or died.

The chaser's searchlight sliced its beam across the cruiser suddenly as it was close by. It had remained on but ten seconds, when Tony Quinn touched the arm of the man handling it and nodded.

The searchlight flicked off.

As the cruiser and torpedo boat disappeared, flood-lights on the scow remained on. The derrick cables continued to creak dismally in the night. A score of soldiers grinned beside their machine-guns and stretched out for a night's rest. . . .

Less than two hours later Tony Quinn remarked to Kirby:

"I think it might be well for us to park the car here, Silk. You know what to do. I don't think there will be anyone in the mood to shoot the Black Bat, but you will be covered."

"Here's hoping it's okay," said Silk. "I'm to impersonate the Black Bat and the Bat will do the talking over the hidden microphone connection. It leaves you as Tony Quinn, in company with the police, at the very moment they may see the Black Bat in action, then escaping."

"You have the plan down pat," stated Quinn.

HE AND Silk Kirby left their car parked outside the Chemical Plastic Corporation plant. Since its

sudden national prominence, the plant had been quickly enclosed with high barbed wire. Tony Quinn was sure this was electrified.

Guards paced before the gates with guns over their shoulders. But these were no longer hired hoods. They wore regulation Government uniforms.

"We're in no position to explain to them," said Quinn. "We'll have to take a chance. Here goes for the fence."

"Please, Lady Luck!" muttered Silk.

Back in the darkness, Quinn removed his outer raincoat. He found a pool and soaked it. Then he pushed it forward on a wooden pole.

The wet coat contacted two wires. There was a blue flash.

"Come on, Silk, called Quinn in a low voice. "We cross before they find where the short blew the fuse and fix it, or we'll be roasted."

Silk Kirby never had moved faster than he did now as he slipped between the wires held apart by Tony Quinn with rubber gloves. Quinn followed him and they slipped ahead. There were lights in the plant office.

"Our own men are fixed inside, Silk," whispered Quinn. "We take the southeast door into the plant. You have the winged cape and the mask. And don't forget that four desperate men are watching a fortune snatched from their hands, with the additional fear of being implicated in more than one murder. Don't shoot unless it is forced upon you. Then hit them low and depend on the plastic."

Silk was sweating and it was not hot.

Two men admitted them silently at Tony Quinn's word. They had only been recently hired. Neither had the mark of being an FBI man. That was why they were the best to be had for this job.

From there on, Tony Quinn and Silk Kirby were on their own in the semi-darkness of the upper floor leading to the offices. . . .

Four men with fear in their eyes faced each other around the long table where Thurman Spencer had died so quickly. One man of the four knew himself to be a murderer. But none of the other three was sure which man among them was a killer.

They were business men, millionaires, these directors of the company that had just announced one of the greatest discoveries of the war—fire-proof, gun-proof plastic that would take the place of millions of tons of steel in planes and tanks and motors.

Yet each man was sure that the other three were armed. And each man knew that he had a gun in his own pocket. Three men had perhaps the greater fear, for they were aware that one of their number had murdered ruthlessly, not only Thaddeus Jones, but others.

Frank Brand, the millionaire contractor who had called them together had fear, but even so his eyes were coldly upon the others. All had arrived but a few minutes before.

"I called this meeting because I assume that each of us probably received the same telegram this afternoon," said Brand, and unfolded a yellow sheet. "My message says that our plastic will within a short time be proved to have been stolen. It seems that it is claimed that the discoverer of this durable, fire-proof, gun-proof material tested and buried sheets of it somewhere in Gardiner Bay more than five years ago, before Thaddeus Jones was murdered, and the formula fell into our hands."

Charles Blake, small and nervous, roved his beady eyes over the others. His small hands were tightly clenched.

"I have a message to the same effect," he said. "It occurs to me this may be simply blackmail. My message is signed, 'Longshoreman,' and says he will call later to collect for the information. It is too fantastic. Why should Thaddeus Jones have buried samples of the tested

plastic? We were financing the whole experiment, or we had promised to furnish money for manufacture if it proved out."

ANDREW SEVERN cursed with open anger.

"You fool!" he accused. "The plastic was buried for the exact reason we have at hand! Let's stop kidding ourselves! We have a formula that, by his own statement was stolen by a murderer. That formula was mailed to each of us with a typed and unsigned letter specifying how it was obtained, and what we were letting ourselves in for if we undertook to go ahead with developing it."

Reeve Gardner rubbed the welt across his temple which he had acquired when he had been knocked out. He produced one of the telegrams.

"Isn't it too bad Thurman Spencer was killed?" he said slowly. "A diving diver told of having been shot on a boat while he was trying to find something for Spencer. That would make it appear conclusive that Spencer was the murderer, and that by a map he said he found he learned of the sunken plastic, but kept it to himself, perhaps thinking to have a club over the rest of us all the way. And then—"

Reeve Gardner surveyed the others man by man and his right hand slipped into his coat pocket.

"Then someone at this table either knew of the buried plastic and trailed Thurman Spencer, or simply was trailing Spencer and tried to kill him," said Gardner. "The job was finished here in the darkness of this room."

In the tenseness of the moment, none of the four men had observed the silent opening and closing of a door at the far end of the office. They had made sure, too, that all doors were securely locked. But few locks ever barred Silk Kirby.

The figure that entered was scarcely more than a drifting black shadow.

A winged cape spread like the flying webs of a bat. A black mask obscured the face. As swiftly and noiselessly as any black bat, the figure sought a corner and roosted there among the other shadows.

Silk Kirby, as the Black Bat, could hear the exchange at the long table. While Silk played the Black Bat rôle, Tony Quinn was so situated that he heard the explanation of how the murderer among five men had cleverly mailed the stolen Thaddeus Jones formula to the whole group. For a microphone connected Silk Kirby with Tony Quinn.

As Reeve Gardner spoke, Andrew Severn's left hand moved from below the edge of the table. An automatic covered Reeve Gardner.

"Just to be on the safe side, take your hand out of your pocket, empty, Gardner," said Severn's chilled voice. "Someone tried to finish you off at Sun-Air. I appreciate your fear, but I'm looking after my own neck. That goes for the rest of you, too. All hands on the table, and empty!"

"You?" gulped Charles Blake, his beady eyes venomous. "You were the last man in that room at Sun-Air with Gardner, Severn! The murderer has to be one of us! I didn't knock out Gardner! He was not even there when I came from the tunnel, but you were there, Severn!"

TONY QUINN knew Blake's accusation to be an open bluff. But for all of his brave speech, Charles Blake's nervous hands were laid flat on the table before him.

"We'll not go backward!" said Severn, the gun balanced in his hand. "We have to plan how to beat this plan to blackmail us, for that is probably all that it is. John Weston is surely dead. Thurman Spencer was the one who suggested that we pay Dr. Alo Kroo to keep us informed if Weston had a chance to regain his reason. Then one of us probably paid Dr. Kroo directly to make sure that

Weston would not interfere by pulling that escape and the asylum fire."

Severn saw that all other hands were flat upon the table. He dropped his automatic into his pocket and placed his own hands there.

"We're acting like scared kids!" boomed Frank Brand. "John Weston is dead, whoever paid! Today Harvey Lansing was killed by the police! That removes practically every threat!"

CHAPTER XX

Battle of Murderers



LISTENING, 'Tony Quinn was just beyond the partition with a tiny microphone attached to a wire leading into the office. Quinn was waiting for just one thing. But it appeared that might be long in coming.

There was a strange, low hissing, like the darting of a bat's wings. It was the signal to Silk Kirby.

The four men heard that hissing, and it turned their faces. A sepulchral voice spoke at the same instant that the winged figure of the Black Bat appeared to float along the wall toward the table.

The four men's hands remained upon the table. They could see the hard mouth of the Black Bat below his mask. The lips did not seem to move as speech came.

The Black Bat's hands were raised. Held at waist level, two automatics just about had the situation in hand.

"Before you go farther, I am asking now from any or all of you the truth about the murder of Thaddeus Jones!" said the Bat's eerie voice. "Which of you will say that Harvey Lansing is innocent, and that one of you is guilty?"

There was silence. The scar on An-

drew Severn's face grew white like a new moon. Then Reeve Gardner suddenly spoke.

"You don't need one of us to say that," said Gardner. "However you gained entrance, you heard it told how the formula was mailed, and heard our own words about one of us being a murderer. That murderer could have been Thurman Spencer who is dead. That will do Harvey Lansing no good now, for he has been killed."

The Black Bat hovered along the wall, moving a little. The voice came again.

"Yes, you were heard. You are also trying to make it appear that no one of you knew about that buried plastic which will prove your great discovery was stolen. One of you knows that plastic was buried, and where, and that tonight it is being brought to the surface."

Charles Blake's legal knowledge stood him in stead then.

"If someone has produced a similar plastic, only John Weston could disprove our claim to this discovery," he stated. "In truth, we have several formulas that may once have belonged to John Weston. Our acid with which we have guarded our plant roadway is one that Weston might claim, if he were alive. Also the plastic that contains this acid was evolved by the same man who discovered the acid.

"But Weston, like others, experimented with many forms of plastic. Some were elastic and might have become a rubber substitute, and some would become impervious at certain low temperatures, while this other was made to withstand both heavy gunfire and even the heat of thermite. So again I say, only the testimony of the living John Weston could prove anything conclusively."

The Black Bat's voice was an ironic chuckle.

"John Weston is alive," spoke his weird voice. "How otherwise would a detachment of soldiers have known where to find plastic sunk in Gardi-

ner's Bay some five years ago? But one of you surely knows the plastic is being brought up, for he visited the scene tonight. John Weston fooled those Dr. Kroo trusted, and dropped through a trap-door when he blew up a houseboat on which he was being held. He was wearing a special life preserver suit he had invented, and he came ashore."

FRANK BRAND half rose from his chair, but sank back.

"John Weston was on a houseboat?" he repeated. "Then that was why Dr. Kroo was wrecking the laboratory he had built under Sun-Air. Yes, Black Bat, you may be correct. That might be true."

"Certainly it is true," came the Black Bat's voice. "Dr. Kroo was being paid a huge sum by one of you to insure John Weston's death. Dr. Kroo and a Dr. Tito were Japs. They were bringing Weston back to complete sanity, for his troubles *had* made his mind wander at times. They saw the bigger fortune. While taking your money, they were preparing to steal the impregnable plastic for their own nation."

"John Weston alive?" The words came jerkily from Reeve Gardner. "That finishes it. Black Bat, now I know why one of us flew from the city tonight and returned just before this meeting. *He* is the murderer with whom we have been associating! He knew all the time where that plastic had been sunk in the sea."

Gardner lifted a hand, rubbing the welt on his temple. And Frank Brand came all the way out of his chair this time.

"Sit down, Brand!" The Bat's voice was imperative. "Any one of you has death coming to him. Who was responsible for that annihilating acid here? And why, Brand, were you under Sun-Air, and why did you make a getaway just before the mass murder explosion?"

"I was there because—"

Reeve Gardner chopped off Brand's explanation.

"Hold it, Bat! Don't shoot! I'm not holding back any longer! Our game's finished! Frank Brand, you flew to Gardiner's Bay tonight! I saw you with a map you put in your topcoat pocket as you came in! The Black Bat can find it there! You murdered Thaddeus Jones, and then Thurman Spencer, and if you were at Sun-Air you knocked me out!"

Frank Brand's rugged face was

saw his map and copied it. I have that copy. Brand, you are lucky in having driven only a short way into the country tonight, where you were trailed.

"Reeve Gardner, you were conscious at Sun-Air—you bumped your own head. If you had not been conscious, you would not have known firemen were coming into the corridor. For I, the Black Bat carried you into the safety tunnel and you know that."

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working. In the face of the Black Bat's menacing guns, his hand started for his coat.

"Hold it, Brand!" The Black Bat's voice was all steel now. "The murderer himself has spoken! Only Reeve Gardner visited the scow where they are working to lift steel boxes from the sea! He was seen, and only he had the map, or he would not have known the spot!"

"Reeve Gardner killed Thurman Spencer because Spencer in some way

Reeve Gardner was cursing. This time his hand went to his pocket, and stayed there.

"That can't be proved!" he shouted. "I came into this with a murderer, and I have committed no other crime! Look in Brand's topcoat pocket, I tell you!"

"Hold it, Gardner!" commanded the Bat's voice. "You framed Harvey Lansing, and Lansing is not dead! That was only a police trick, so the jig is up for you! Five thousand

dollars drawn by you from your own bank was found upon Dr. Kroo, even though the doctor had a red herring note of payments by others on him. You were a fool to pay Dr. Kroo in new hundred-dollar bills, which were serially numbered.

"And the map you placed in Frank Brand's pocket was attached to the John Weston plastic formula when Thaddeus Jones was murdered. There was but the one map, that one made by Jones and Weston when they sunk the plastic as a means of precaution after they had discovered its tremendous value."

GARDNER'S face was a mask of fury. His gun whipped from his pocket, but big Frank Brand was quicker. The contractor made a draw from a holster on his belt that could have been envied by a Western gunman. The slug knocked Gardner down.

Reeve Gardner's gun cracked, but the slug went wild.

"The Black Bat!" Gardner screamed. "Yes, you saved me — I know who you are—"

He toppled from his chair and lay still.

"All this is finished!" Again the Bat's voice was eerie, and the lips under the mask were motionless. "Everything must be turned over to John Weston and his daughter, Marley, before the rest of you may consider yourselves safe from the Black Bat. You must now answer to the law for your acts that have been the cause of deaths.

"Old Jared Wright was smart. Reeve Gardner saw what he thought were steel boxes of the plastic tonight. He planned then to claim all that one man could get out of this by framing Frank Brand for the murder, as he once framed Harvey Lansing. He believed he could save himself and collect six millions reward, which each of you knows, by a record he owns, was offered by Jared Wright to

free Harvey Lansing.

"I have killed no one," Frank Brand said heavily, "but I have been engaged in a murderous enterprise. I will pay what I must. I am glad the plastic goes to John Weston and that Harvey Lansing is alive and will be free. I went to Sun-Air before the explosion to see that John Weston's secret laboratory there had been destroyed. I had one of the guards in my pay."

"The Black Bat believes you, Brand," said the voice, and the winged, shadowy figure was drifting toward one of the windows. "I saw Dr. Kroo when he was waiting for that explosion.

"And now, as a final word, only the confessions made here tonight restore John Weston's plastic to him. You see, the plastic was sunk by Thaddeus Jones and John Weston five years ago. The hurricane across Long Island in the following year shifted the bottom of Gardiner's Bay and the plastic never could have been found.

"Tonight, Reeve Gardner watched soldiers on a scow guarding steel boxes that contain nothing of value. Your own words and actions have convicted Reeve Gardner and restored the great discovery to its rightful owner. Cooperation in clearing all this up may lighten punishment you cannot evade."

NOT one of the three men moved as the Black Bat drifted to a window and passed through to a roof. For there was a pounding at the door. Commissioner Warner and half a dozen detectives came into the office.

Beside Commissioner Warner walked Tony Quinn, tapping his way along with his cane. Quinn smiled a little.

"It seems you have arrived too late again to trap the Black Bat, Commissioner," he said. "It is fortunate you have all the evidence on the dictaphone records we have had planted here for days. Old Jared Wright would like it that way."

"There's that six millions for evidence of the murderer," said Commissioner Warner. "You produced the evidence, Tony."

"Harvey Lansing served six-million

dollars' worth of his life for a murder he did not commit," said Tony Quinn. "I'm sure Jared Wright would approve the payment to him for all those years in prison."



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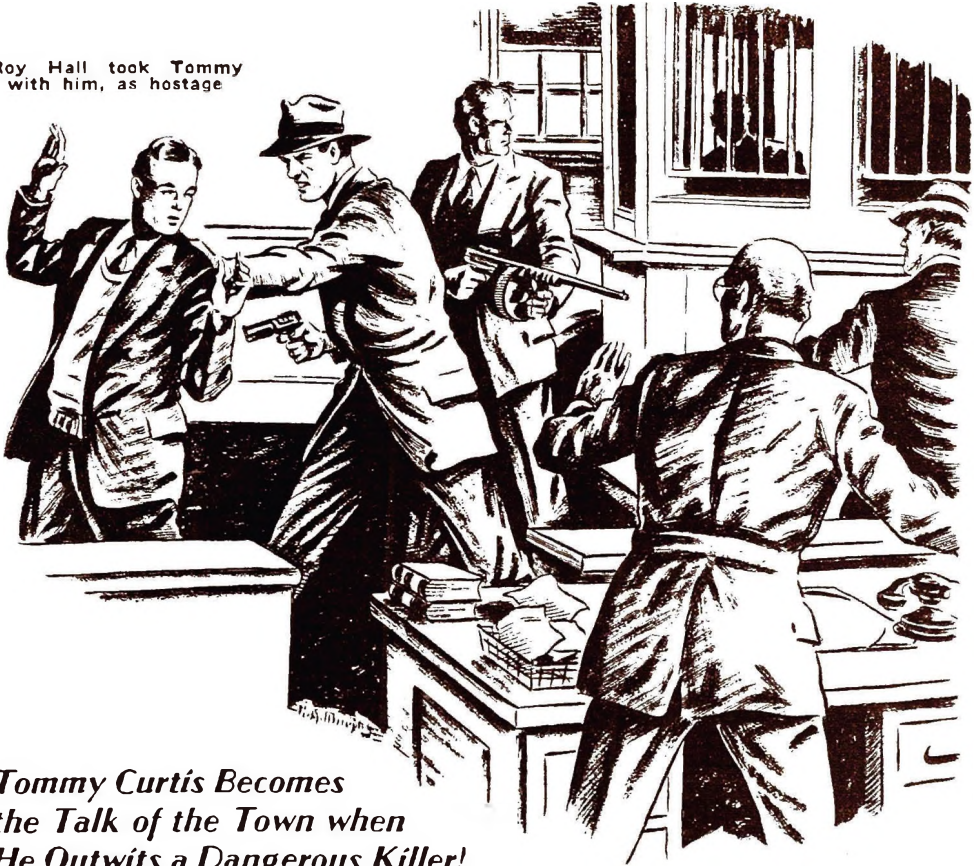


3. TWO EDGES double blade life. Marks indicated above identify edges, enabling you to give both equal use and get extra shaves



4. CLEAN BLADE is razor by loosening handle, then rinsing in hot water and shaking. Wiping the blade is likely to damage the edges

Roy Hall took Tommy
with him, as hostage



*Tommy Curtis Becomes
the Talk of the Town when
He Outwits a Dangerous Killer!*

A TIP FOR THE WAITRESS

By JOE ARCHIBALD

TOMMY CURTIS was the only customer in the little tavern to recognize the tall wiry man who had just come in. He was the only one who knew the reason for Roy Hall's careful scrutiny of the faces in the place.

Tommy hoped he could get out of there without being remembered—but a man like Hall has to have a good memory. He started to rise from his chair, the hollows under his knees damp and cold, but just then Hall's eyes hit him square and made him settle down again.

Hall walked over, sat down, and grinned at Tommy. There was a grim warning in his greenish eyes.

"I've seen you before," Roy Hall said. His voice was hoarse and a muscle in his face twitched. At the moment the man was more dangerous than he had ever been. "Yeah, the guy that went for a ride with us after I knocked off the Westwood bank."

Tommy Curtis did not say anything. He couldn't even if he'd wanted to. For almost a year now since that fatal day, he had not been able to utter a syllable. He had lost all power of speech.

It had been nice walking to the bank that morning, talking to people he knew and listening to the birds in the branches of the great elms overhead.

Tommy guessed that he had been the luckiest guy in the world that morning. It was his first day as assistant cashier in the Westwood Trust Company and the night before, he and Joan had celebrated in a dine and dance place out on the turnpike and Joan had named the day she would marry him.

It was an hour after lunch when it happened. Two men had come into the bank and one of them had walked up to Teller Sam Bell and told him to hand over all the money he had in the cage. The other man had taken a position in the middle of the lobby and covered everybody outside the cages with a machine-gun. He kept pivoting slowly on his heels and warning everyone to stay where they were.

CURTIS always wished afterward that he had made some kind of attempt at resistance. He would have been much better off had he died a hero than the way he was now. But at the time every nerve in his body was paralyzed and he had sat frozen to his chair.

Hall had turned away from the cage, stuffing over ten thousand dollars into a brief case. Then he started firing orders at his partner and he looked straight at Tommy while he spoke.

"Get goin', Mitch. I'm takin' brown-eyes with us in case the rubes feel like shooting," he had said. "Get out there and cover. You!" he ordered Tommy. "Come over here, kid!"

And Hall had gone out of the bank, using Tommy Curtis as hostage, as a shield to protect himself. Just before he pushed Tommy in the car he said:

"Behave yourself an' you won't get hurt. I eat squirts like you right up."

Six weeks after they threw him out of the car, eight miles from Westwood, Tommy left the hospital lacking the power of articulate speech.

The doctors had said it was aphasia. Some damage to the brain that had to do with speech. They had mentioned the name of a brain specialist that might help him.

You did not ask a girl like Joan to keep a promise to a mute. You did not stay around to see another man sitting in your chair in the bank and you couldn't stay to see pity in the eyes of everyone you met. So Tommy Curtis left Westwood one night on a bus.

He'd read in the papers how Roy Hall had taken over where tough guys like Barrow and Chapman and Floyd had left off. Hall was wanted for murder and robbery in two states and was considered by the authorities to be the number one gangster of the country.

Since the Westwood robbery, there had been no signs of him. But the cops said he would lift his ugly head again when he needed money.

And here he was, right in front of Tommy now! It certainly was a small world.

"Okay," Hall was saying. "Keep your lip buttoned, kid. An' listen to me. I've been travelin' fast and I'm stoppin' here for a drink and a couple of sandwiches. There's a pal outside standing near the car and if anything goes wrong in here, he goes to work at his trade."

Tommy Curtis nodded. A waitress stopped at the table and lifted Tommy's coffee cup and asked if he wanted anything else. Tommy shook his head.

Hall spoke up then.

"Four ham and cheese sandwiches to go out, sister," he said softly. "I'm in a hurry. Get me two beers while they're bein' made."

He eyed Tommy Curtis coldly, began to grin.

"You're goin' to ride with me for a couple of miles, kid. You think I'll leave you here to tell 'em who I am? These dumb rubes! Every cop in the state will be after me, see? I can't

afford to take no chances because it means the chair, pal. So keep your lip buttoned like a nice kid or I'll eat you alive."

Curtis' hate for this man had grown with every hour since the day he left the Westwood hospital. The gangster had robbed him of everything a man needs to make life worth living. His job, his girl, his ability to talk to his fellow men.

HE WOULD have yelled out the man's name then and there, if he had been able to, and would have been satisfied to take the consequences. Could he pass a note to someone? No, Hall wouldn't let him get away with that.

Would he be able to turn the table over and try to get to Hall before the man could get his gun? But then a hail of bullets would come into the little tavern and some of these plain folk would get killed. . . . There seemed to be a dead end whichever way he looked at it.

"You'll walk out in front of me when we go out," Roy Hall said, his eyes getting more dangerous the longer he had to wait for his order. "You make one move or open your mouth and I'll fill you full of lead!"

Tommy only had a few moments. There was a basket of pretzels on the table in front of him. He took one and started nibbling on it. After a second or two he put it down on the table and helped himself to another.

Hall could not see what he was doing because a big menu card was stacked between the bowl of pretzels and the salt and pepper shakers which were on his side of the table. Tommy munched on the second pretzel. If Hall thought about it all he probably figured that Curtis was nervous and let it go at that. And he wouldn't be so very wrong, Tommy thought!

The money Tommy Curtis had saved in Westwood had not gone very far. He had visited a couple of specialists but they had not been able to

do a thing for him. One of them told him of a great doctor in a Detroit hospital who might be able to cure him. But the examination alone would cost over a thousand dollars. He couldn't consider it now.

Then he looked for work. But, handicapped as he was, he found it impossible to land a job. When his money gave out he turned to whatever work he could get. He washed dishes and scrubbed floors. He worked on a farm for a while. He went from one place to another.

Now, in Hindale, he got another break. He was to start picking apples in the morning. They needed lots of men and weren't very particular as long as a man could pick apples. . . .

The waitress passed by. Hall jerked around angrily.

"Hurry that up, will you, sister? What kind of service ya got here, anyway?"

Tommy Curtis picked up another pretzel. It was the seventh. Just as the waitress brought Hall's order, Tommy placed the partly-eaten seventh pretzel alongside the six others.

"All right, kid," Hall said. "Come on. Remember what I said."

"Sure, you eat guys like me," Tommy thought.

He put ten cents down on the table and got up from his chair. As he walked out he could hear Hall's measured steps behind him. His hand would not be far from his gun. Tommy stopped to pay his check. He could see through the door to the waiting car outside. A man leaned against the mud-guard.

"Keep goin'," Hall said behind him. "Walk right out and climb in, pal."

The juke box suddenly burst forth in a blare of tinny music as if in escort to the parade. Tommy prayed for the success of his little plan. Behind him was a killer worth over twenty-five hundred dollars to the man who could take him . . .

"All right, Mitch," Hall said when they got outside. "This baby rides

again. With him around we couldn't lay over and take a breather. He's the baby we tossed out of the car the day we knocked off the bank in Westwood. Step on it!"

TOMMY sat in the back seat with Hall. The killer had his hand close to a shoulder holster under his coat. He was taking no chances.

"You scared him so he can't talk!" Mitch howled with glee as he shifted into high.

"Sure, I told him I'd eat him up. Watch that speedometer and don't go

Look, we've got to rest pretty soon or I'll fall asleep. Give me another sandwich. And we got to stop and rest up somewhere soon. We can't pull a job right when we're dyin' on our feet."

"We rest when we empty this tank," Hall said. "When you can't drive no more, I'll take over. Nice day, isn't it, kid?"

Tommy's silence got on Hall's nerves.

"Speak up or I'll slap you around!" "Lay off," cautioned Mitch. "It would look nice for somebody seein'



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over forty because the cops chase you everywhere if you don't take it easy on the gas. I hope the next boiler we lift has a full tank."

The sedan came out onto the main road a mile out of the town. A state patrol car passed them on the other side of the road.

"The dumb bunny," Hall said with contempt as he relaxed his gun hand. "How much distance you figure we'll get out of this heap, Mitch?"

"Maybe a hundred more miles, Roy.

you doin' that. They would figure—"

"Yeah," Hall snapped. "But he gives me the creeps."

Tommy kept his eyes glued to the rear view mirror as they rolled ahead on the smooth macadam. A car appeared around that last bend. He watched and suddenly he was aware that the car was not coming any closer but keeping the same distance away all the time.

"A car trailing us, Roy," said Mitch.

"I'm watchin'. It isn't going to overtake us. Every car you see don't have a cop in it. Keep goin' like you were."

Six more miles. The car behind kept its distance. Hall was nodding, his chin on his chest. But Tommy knew he was not asleep. Roy Hall had more than the usual five senses and they had carried him along this far.

Up ahead came a sudden clanging sound. A man appeared out into the middle of the road, holding a stop sign in his hand.

"Slow down," Hall clipped. "It's a crossing. I hear the train comin'."

The sedan's brakes squealed and tire treads bit into the macadam. Tommy Curtis knew he would get the answer in a few seconds. The car behind kept coming and Mitch began to yell.

"That guy's got no brakes, Roy. He's—"

Hall swung his head around to look a second before the car smashed into theirs. He was thrown to the floor and before he could recover Tommy, who had braced himself for the impact, had leaped on him, hammering away for all he was worth.

The killer managed to get his gun out of its holster but Tommy's teeth sank deep into his wrist. Tommy was too busy to see what was going on elsewhere when all of a sudden a gun went off and he looked up in time to see Mitch tumble from the driver's seat out to the road. Voices barked.

"**A**LL RIGHT, Hall," a big man said. "Get out of there. This is where you finish. There's three guns trained on your carcass and we want to use them bad."

"No, don't shoot," the gangster choked out. "I haven't a chance. I'll come out, coppers."

Tommy half fell from the running board and a man caught him. There was blood on Tommy's lips, but a look of triumph on his face withal.

A man wearing a badge said, "It was you left that message, kid?"

Tommy nodded. He pointed to his mouth and shook his head.

"He can't talk," the officer said. "Maybe he bit his tongue when he fought with Hall."

"No, Bill. The waitress told me he's dumb. Not in the head—in the tongue."

"I don't get it," Roy Hall said when he was riding back to Hindale with the cuffs on. "This punk didn't say a word or make a false move back there."

"That's what you think, Hall," the officer grinned. "We'll show you something that'll kill you."

Tommy Curtis wished he could talk. He wished he could tell Roy Hall himself.

They took Hall into the tavern and marched him to the little table in the corner. Tommy pointed to the partly-eaten pretzels on the white tablecloth. Lined up in a row, they spelled R-O-Y H-A-L-L.

The killer stared at the evidence before his eyes.

"Sure," the officer said, "the waitress found them when she picked up her tip. You know something, killer? You can bite any letter of the alphabet out of a pretzel. Well, she sent us after you in a hurry."

Tommy nonchalantly picked up a pretzel and began eating it. Only Hall could know the mockery contained in that gesture. He who had threatened to "eat up" Tommy Curtis was now seeing R-O-Y H-A-L-L being digested with gusto.

"You'll get about three thousand bucks for him, kid," the officer said to Tommy. "I'd give the waitress a nice tip."

Sure. Three thousand! That big specialist would do more than just examine a guy for that kind of money. Tommy Curtis knew another prayer was going to be answered before very long. He was sure of it. Joan had told him she would wait forever.



THE SINEWS OF VICTORY

A Tribute to America's Heroes of Production

By MAJOR GENERAL E. B. GREGORY

Quartermaster General, United States Army



Photo U. S. Army Signal Corps
MAJOR GENERAL GREGORY

THE production side of this war will be won by Americans who do the small things well, whether it is making a rivet for a tank or sewing a sleeve in an Army uniform.

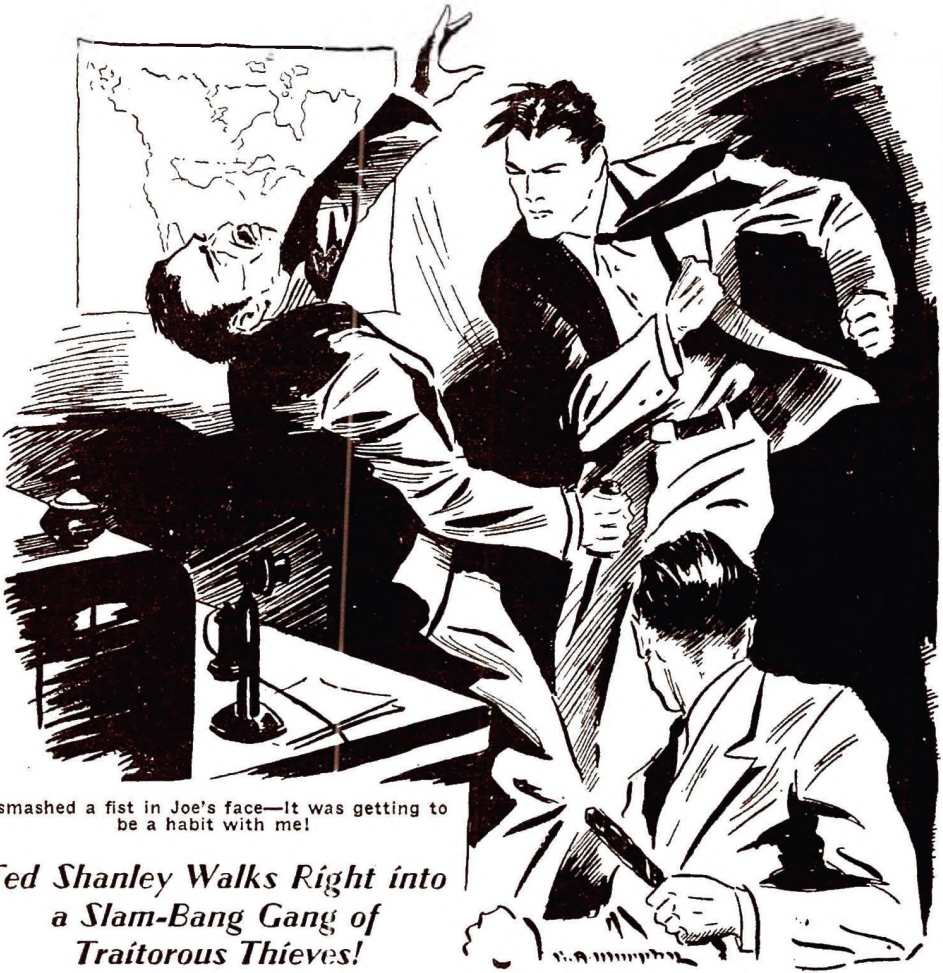
The casual onlooker is too apt to think of war production just in terms of big tanks, giant bombers, long-range guns and fighting ships.

These are vitally necessary. But in this war, as in every war, the men who fight are human beings. They must have food, clothing and shelter before they can be expected to fly their planes, fire their guns or sail their ships.

Throughout America today, there are millions of workers turning out clothing and tents, growing and processing food-stuffs, building barracks, raising horses and mules—all absolute necessities to the Army, all direct contributions to ultimate victory.

When historians write down the heroes of production in this war, they will spotlight those who served faithfully in the production of necessities that keep our fighting men and equipment in operation. The heroes will be the men and women who did their duty at every place in the production line.





I smashed a fist in Joe's face—it was getting to be a habit with me!

*Ted Shanley Walks Right into
a Slam-Bang Gang of
Traitorous Thieves!*

BLUE COUPÉ

By C. S. MONTANYE

IT ALWAYS happens that way. You either look for something and it's like searching for a haystack in a nest of needles. Or you don't look and there it is. Just like the blue coupé that stopped at the traffic light at Fourth and Congress.

I had to give the markers a double gander to make sure they said UL 52, Conn. I was right the first time. I took a half dozen steps away from the curb, pulled open the right front door and climbed in.

"How about a date for the movies tonight, sister?" I said, and grinned at the amazed blue eyes that focused on me.

The gal could have won any beauty contest, anywhere at any time. She was that attractive! And scared. The blue eyes began to lose their startled look and take on a gleam of fear. I've seen it hundreds of times in the eyes of the lugs in the morning line-up at headquarters, in the rats I'd cornered, and all the real tough hombres who had been gathered in, sooner or later.

"What do you want?" the girl demanded shakily. "Who are you?"

Cars were honking behind us. Pat Gowan, the fat traffic copper at the crossing, blew his whistle and waved an arm for the blue coupé to come on.

"Don't look now," I told the dame, "but I think we're blocking traffic clear down to Center Avenue."

She gave a little gasp and started the car. I grinned at Pat as we passed. He probably had word to pick up UL 52, Conn., but let us sail by with a scowl and a shake of his finger at my charming chauffeur.

"You'd better turn around and roll back to headquarters," I told her. "This is a stolen car you're driving—in case you don't know it."

But she did know it. Her eyes told me so. She gasped again and the warm glow in her cheeks faded, leaving them pale.

"You're a policeman?"

I REACHED for my badge, just so there wouldn't be any misunderstanding.

"Shanley's the name, Ted Shanley, in case you call and want anything in a hurry. Look, pull left at the next block and we'll go back so you can tell it to the chief."

Her arched brows drew together. Gosh, she was pretty. The more I looked at her the more I saw that. Hair like brown autumn leaves, the cutest little nose I'd ever seen, and sort of puckered up lips, red as the bricks in the courthouse.

"Can't—can't we talk this over?" she pleaded. "Let me drive just a few blocks farther. It's really very important."

"What?"

I wanted to be gruff and tough, but I couldn't. I guess I gave her a sappy grin. "Okay, sister. Keep moving and talk as you go along. How does it happen a nice gal like you is riding around in a stolen heap?"

"I didn't know it was stolen."

"Start at the beginning. What's your name?"

"Evelyn Lee."

"Well, Miss Lee, let's have the facts. Make 'em short and snappy. I haven't been doing well lately and picking up this cradle is going to help a lot. Give."

By that time we were beyond Woodrow Wilson Park on a four-lane traffic boulevard. Before she spoke again I noticed something. She kept look-

ing from the highway to the rear-view mirror. She'd been doing that for the last quarter mile.

I took a peek and discovered that what attracted her attention was the long, low, gray sedan that hung a couple of hundred yards to the rear of us.

Evelyn's smooth cheeks grew flushed again.

"There's a car following us!" she said suddenly.

"Swell. Friends of yours?"

She shook her brown head. I took a longer look in the mirror. There seemed to be three guys in the car. Two in the front and one in the back. And they sat like still stone figures, or wax dummies.

"Whippany Road is on the other side of the bridge." I talked fast. "Let's stop and find out what these lugs want."

"No, no! I mean, I'd rather not. I'm afraid."

"With the Law beside you? I'm flattered. Come, Miss Lee, do as I say and never mind being frightened. I'll take care of the scare end."

We rattled over the bridge, and she kept the car going at the same gait. I saw she had no intention of stopping, so I stuck a foot out on the brake and put on some pressure.

The gray sedan was right behind. Evelyn choked on an exclamation as I gave the wheel a pull to the right and cut the ignition.

As the blue coupé stopped, the gray sedan rolled on. Some distance away it braked down and went into reverse. Then it began to back up toward us.

"You don't know what you're doing, Mr. Shanley!" Her eyes were wide and alarmed. "These men are dangerous killers!"

"I thought you didn't know 'em!"

"Please! Before it's too late! Before they get here! I'll take you to headquarters—anywhere!"

I ended that line by removing the keys from the ignition lock and dropping them into my pocket. Then I opened the door about an inch and waited.

The gray car stopped a couple of feet away. I'd never seen the three men riding in it before, but

their type was familiar. You can see it any afternoon at the race track, any evening in those jolly places where wheels spin and dice rattle. Dead pan, carefully groomed playboys, with shifty glances and tight-lipped mouths.

The one in the back seat got out and came over. He put his foot on the running board and rested an arm on the sill of the driver's window. He owned a couple of eyes as cold as a dead fish's, and a slit for a mouth. The boy who had done the driving climbed down and came around the coupé, stopping about three or four feet from the door I had inched open.

"Miss Lee, I believe?" The party at the window looked Evelyn over. "We tried to get you to stop back there, but I guess you didn't notice the signals. You must be kind of tired, doing all that driving. Step out and join us."

Evelyn looked at me. I divided a glance between Tight Mouth and the mustachioed baby standing near my door. I also gave the scenery a quick stare. This was prowl car number five's district, but there wasn't a sign of Nolan and Smitty. They were probably at the other end of the park, cruising comfortably south.

"Don't let them take me!" Evelyn cried, as I pushed open the door and got out. The guy waiting there jerked a gun and squeezed the trigger. The lead whistled close to my felt hat. I reached for my own canon. He fired again, before I got my shooter all the way out. That shot missed, too.

He flung himself at me so quickly I didn't have time to aim. He knocked the gun out of my hand and slugged me with a left. That was the kind of stuff I enjoyed. Street brawling, knock-'em-down-and-drag-'em-out bouts were my specialty.

I took his left and let him have a bunch of knuckles under his chin. I put a world of power into the punch and I knew it wouldn't fail to click.

It didn't!

But instead of tipping over backwards, he fell forward. He cracked into me, and before I could grab him, I heard Evelyn Lee scream. Pounding footsteps sounded behind me. I

wanted to sidestep and let the enemy steam past, but the guy leaning on me spoiled that notion.

I got partially around in time to glimpse the butt of an uplifted automatic. I could see it coming down. I watched, fascinated and the next second the beautiful morning sunshine turned to night, quickly and abruptly.

WHEN I came out of ether I was stretched on a lovely piece of soft shoulder. It belonged to the road and the voice that spoke above me belonged to no one but Mike Nolan.

"Drunk, it is, at this hour and him on duty, too."

That was better than smelling salts or ice cold water. I sat up, wincing at the pain that went through my head. I ran fingers over the onion on the back of it. The look I gave Nolan could have been dry-cleaned.

"Why aren't you around when you're needed?"

"What happened?" Smitty asked, coming up.

"Nothing outside of abduction and near-murder."

"And," Mike put in brightly, "a stolen car! UL fifty-two, Conn." He whipped a book from his pocket, checked and nodded. "Got it right here. Nine o'clock alarm this morning. Phoned in by some guy named Lee."

"Lee? Say that again."

"Lee," Nolan obliged. "Paul Lee. Westleigh Apartments, Wendover Drive. Know him?"

"I will before long," I promised. The ache began to fade. I remembered the dead-panned lug with the peashooter, who had two chances to blow me up and missed. I felt a lot better. Tossing the keys to the blue coupé over to Smitty, I directed, "Take this car back to headquarters. Have it checked for prints around the left hand window and door handle. Mike can drop me off at Wendover Drive."

"Police business, could it be?"

"C'mon, dope, get going. You've given me a turn-up on something that might begin to *sizzle* any time. Wendover Drive and *don't* cruise."

THE Westleigh Apartments was one of those expensive buildings, tossed together in a hurry when that part of the town grew popular over night. A smart outfit, with doormen, oriental rugs in the lobby, orange lights and all the trimmings. All it needed was a floor show.

I spotted the switchboard, tucked away in a compartment of its own and made conversation with the blond operator.

"Tell me about Paul Lee." I let her have a flash at the badge. Her eyes began to pop. "Is he home now or if not where is he?"

"Mr. Lee? I—I'll ring his suite. I—I'm not sure if he's gone to Bridgton yet."

"Bridgton?" That was the big manufacturing city twelve miles north.

"Yes, Mr. Lee's with the Hebble Lock and Chain Company." She swung a cord and poked the jack in a little hole in the switchboard. She kept a finger with a purple-tinted nail on a button. Nothing happened. She shook her head and tried again.

"I'll ask Eddie," she said. "He'll know."

Eddie was the elevator operator. "No, I ain't taken Mr. Lee down this morning," he said. "He's still in his apartment."

"Get me a pass-key, sister."

The girl at the switchboard frowned.

"I don't know if I should. You may be a fly cop or—"

"Get me the key and save that comedy for your boy friends. Do you want a summons for obstructing the law? Move, honey!"

That brought her around. Key in hand, I stepped into Eddie's cage and went up to the second floor. Paul Lee's apartment was on the south side of the building, overlooking the gardens.

I opened the door and went in. Before I crossed the foyer and reached the living room I had that instinctive feeling something was not cooking, but boiled dry. Lee, I had to assume it was Paul Lee, lay in the middle of the living room floor, his head crushed in!

He wore green silk pajamas, and when alive, he must have been a nice

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looking guy. Cold, he wasn't so good. Neither was the room. That resembled the remains of a hurricane.

Every drawer in a desk hung open. Papers, letters and other stuff were scattered all over the Chinese carpet. A closet had had a going over. The place looked like a public park after a Sunday of picnicking.

The killer must have come in from a broad balcony outside. The French doors were open, and I could see iron stairs leading down to the garden below.

I didn't touch anything—the body, the papers or the bloodstained, brass poker that had been used to kill Lee. What I wanted was a telephone. I found two. One, the house phone connected with the switchboard below. The other was a private wire.

I got the chief and sprayed him with the killing. That done, I called the Department of Motor Vehicles. When the gray car had backed up to the blue coupé, I mentally had photographed its plates.

"The car's registered in the name of Mrs. Orville Slater," the clerk at the Bureau told me, after a long wait.

He gave me Mrs. Slater's address. I'd hardly rung off before the phone buzzed again. I figured it was probably the chief. Instead, when I said "hello" a voice, spiced with a foreign accent said:

"Mr. Lee?"

"That's right. Who's this?"

"Lutz. We've been waiting for you."

"Sorry, I've been delayed. Another thing, what was that address again?"

I must have said something that made Lutz suspicious. Abruptly, I heard a click and then Central's voice chiming in with a "Numbah, puleeze."

"Lutz?" I thought out loud.

Who was he? Where'd he fit in? Things were happening so fast I had trouble keeping up with them. Mostly, I worried about the good looking dame with the blue eyes, the cute nose and the brick-red mouth. I certainly had muffed that angle plenty.

A few minutes later Inspector McBurney and the M. E. nosed in. I handed out enough information to make conversation and ducked out.

Mrs. Slater happened to be in her

rooms at the midtown apartment-hotel where the gray car was registered from. She was middle-aged, well up-holstered, and she wore false teeth and real diamonds.

Yes, the car was hers. No, she hadn't used it that morning. She hadn't been out in it for almost a week on account of her arthritis. Where did she keep it? At the River Street garage. Who drove it? Somebody named Howard Brooks.

What did Brooks look like? Just an ordinary young man with brown hair and eyes, about six feet tall, twenty-five or six. Where did he live? She'd have to look the number up for me.

The quiz program ended, I hopped directly down to River Street. As I walked into the big garage on the corner the first thing I saw was the gray car! Its hood was still hot.

Around front, in an office as big as a telephone booth, a guy sorted bills. Not the kind you spend—those you try and collect on.

"Who took Mrs. Slater's car out this morning?"

"Who wants to know?"

I shoved my badge in his face.

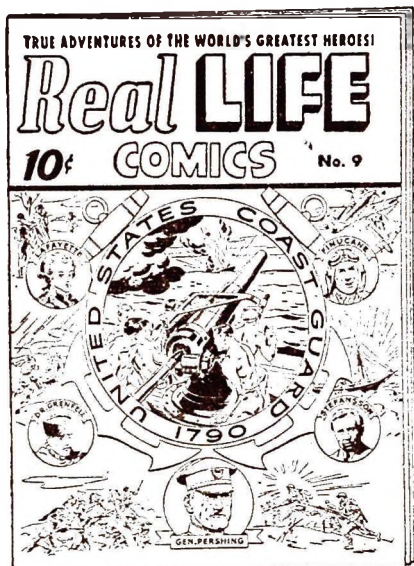
"I do. Chirp."

"Brooks. Why? Anything wrong?"

I let it go at that and bought a ride

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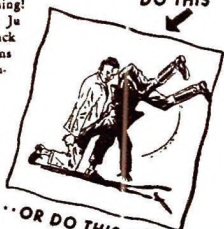
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in a taxi. The address Mrs. Slater had given me was at the extreme end of town. Settling back on the cab's worn upholstery, I inhaled a couple of cigarettes and tried to piece it together. But it didn't make much sense.

Paul Lee had reported a stolen car. A swell looking doll, maybe his sister or wife, had been driving it. Three tough gunnies had muscled into the picture next. They'd made a prize monkey out of me, aired with the dame and then Lee turned up, dead as a her-ring.

Finally, to make it even all around, somebody labeled Lutz had stuck in a phone call. It looked like one of those jig-saw puzzles with a lot of pieces missing.

I paid off the hackie and let him go. Brooks' address matched a small bungalow, wedged in beside a whole row of similar dwellings. They were the kind that rent for thirty bucks a month. A lot of defense workers in the Bridgton factories lived in 'em. This one had a hunk of front lawn, a clothes line in the back and an ash pile on one side. It needed paint, too.

Nobody answered the bell for a few minutes. Finally, as I was about to turn away and go next door for information, I heard the latch click. A sleepy-looking kid about sixteen stared out at me. He was scared, but tried not to show it.

"Don't be nervous, sonny. I'm not the truant officer. I just want to see Howard Brooks for a minute or two."

"He ain't here no more."

"Where did he go?" I pushed past the boy and walked in. There was no rug on the hall floor, but plenty of smell. Most of it was tobacco and liquor. "Where'll I find him?"

The kid was on a spot. He looked from me to the rear of the hall. You could almost see his mind work.

"Wait in here." He opened the door of the front room. "I'll find out."

THE room was a dusty, cheaply furnished parlor. I stepped into it, whirling around as I heard steps on the uncarpeted floor. The door the kid had pulled shut opened and two men came in.

They were very familiar. One was the Dead Pan who had leaned against the blue coupé, talking to Evelyn Lee.

And the other was the same mug with a thin mustache I had clipped on the button a couple of seconds before I'd been knocked cold out there on Whippany Road!

"Johnny says you're looking for Howard Brooks," Dead Pan murmured, lining me up with the nose of the blue-steeled gun in his mitt. "Sorry, Brooks is busy right now. Anything I can do?"

"I stopped around for information. Ever since I met you this morning I've been sort of wondering about Miss Lee."

"Worried?"

"Yeah."

"Well, that's too bad. I wouldn't want to see any wrinkles in that ugly face of yours. Clean him, Joe."

Warily, Joe stepped in and frisked me. He took my service gun and backed away hastily.

Dead Pan prodded me in the back. "Turn around and walk down the hall."

Joe skipped on ahead and opened the door at the rear. The shades were down and the lights were on. The first thing I saw was Evelyn Lee tied to a chair. She looked as pretty as ever but agitated.

Her blue eyes were wide and her hair mussed up. She didn't greet me because she had a gag in her mouth. And though her red lips couldn't move, her eyes spoke volumes when Dead Pan urged me inside and shut the door.

Three other guys in the room looked me over curiously. I recognized one as the third occupant of the gray sedan. The other two I'd never seen before.

"There's the rib, so you can cut out worrying," Dead Pan went on in the same silky tone. "Stubborn dame. She won't believe her brother's dead. Maybe you've got some influence with her. How would you like to ask her some questions?"

"What kind of questions?"

Dead Pan smiled thinly. "Ask her what became of a certain envelope filled with plans and tracings. She'll know what you mean."

"Plans and tracings?"

"Copies of the blueprints of a certain gun-part the Hebble works up in [Turn page]

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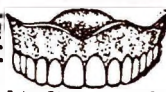
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Bridgton are starting to manufacture for the Government. Her brother had a good job up there and was double-crossing his Uncle Sam and the company. We happen to know Lee had made arrangements to sell secrets to a party named Lutz."

I looked at Evelyn. Her eyes were like two bonfires. She squirmed in her bonds, choked behind her gag.

"Naturally," Dead Pan went on, "being patriotic citizens, we couldn't stand by and see Lee get away with stuff like that. So—"

"So you decided you'd kill Lee, hijack the plans and cash in on them yourselves. Lutz telephoned while I was up in Lee's apartment a while ago. You'd better get in touch with him. He sounded upset."

Dead Pan shoved me into a chair near a desk, and told Joe to keep an eye on me. My pal Joe fingered a knife this time—nice quiet little gadget. After he took care of me, Dead Pan went over to Evelyn, untied her gag and threw it aside.

"For the last time, what did you do with that envelope? You're a pretty fancy doll and I don't like to get rough, but I've gone as far as I can. You'll talk or I'll burn it out of you!"

"You wouldn't dare!" she cried brokenly.

"No?" Dead Pan spoke over his shoulder. "Get a candle, Howard. Light it. She doesn't believe me. I'll have to put on a demonstration."

Evelyn's eyes met mine—wide and horrified. I thought fast. The odds were five-to-one. A gun would have balanced things somewhat, but my pet peashooter was in Joe's pocket and that didn't help.

WHILE the wheels in my brain revolved, Brooks went to the desk and got a piece of candle. He lit it, blew out the match and handed the candle to Dead Pan.

Diagonally across from me, and a few feet from Evelyn's chair, was a window. The cracked shade was down, but some light came in where it gaped on one side.

The bulge fascinated me. It supplied a half-inch glimpse of the beautiful world outside. I jerked my eyes away from the shade and what had begun to make an impression upon me,

as Dead Pan walked up to Evelyn Lee.

"Slap that gag back in place!" he ordered curtly.

The others in the room began to obey. Joe's interested gaze wandered from me to the chair. Joe didn't want to miss a trick. He wanted to see everything that was happening. It was the psychological second you read about in books and see on the screen. I braced myself in the chair and lashed out with a foot.

My big shoe caught Joe in the pit of the stomach. I grabbed the knife out of his hand as he doubled up with pain, and I smashed a fist into his face. It was getting to be a habit with me. He fell backward against one of the others who was about to sling a mean black-jack, and knocked him flat for good.

I jumped for Dead Pan, and Howard Brooks fired at me from the other side of the room. But I beat the shot to Dead Pan. I got my left arm around his neck, hugger-mugger style, cracking him on the crown with the knife handle. Then I grabbed his gun.

I used him as a shield for the lead Howard and the other gunman began to hurl. I was scared to death the girl was going to be a target. I covered her the best I could, firing back.

I got Brooks in the shoulder and felt Dead Pan twitch as he stopped a pair of slugs. He shouted something incoherent. I tossed him aside and fired twice at the party who was left on his feet, fighting.

My shots went wild, but I jumped him and smacked him against the plaster wall. The room was full of smoke and curses.

The guy I tangled with certainly knew how to brawl. He matched my best pokes with some expert belts of his own. He almost tore my ear off when I got one hand jammed against his windpipe. He used his knees, his teeth. I knocked a few of them out, before I had him on the floor, rolled out flat like a rug.

Bouncing his head off the dirty boards took all the fight out of him. I was reaching to pick up his gun when Joe got to it first and lighted on me. Joe had gotten over his agony and was ready to begin again. His automatic

[Turn page]



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exploded with a bang so close to my left ear, it deafened me. I tried to shake him off before he could fire again.

I felt like Atlas with the world on my shoulders. It took a lot of strength to get up, to rise and hoist the clinging Joe at the same time.

I had the feeling there were only minutes left for me to live, because Joe had the cold, blue-steel nose of the gun tucked in the hollow of my neck, below the place where my tie went under my collar. It was a vulnerable spot. One shot, angled down, from there, meant good-bye and good luck.

But something must have happened to the automatic, because nothing happened to me!

I lunged backward to the wall, with Joe the bumper between me and the plaster. The crash of our contact made the bungalow shake, and I had the fantastic impression it had shaken open the door, too. Anyway, the door did open and the men I'd noticed through the shade came in.

They were not my playmates from Headquarters. None of McBurney's finest. These strangers were FBI boys who moved in and took over neatly, quickly and effectively.

Forty minutes later I borrowed a squad car—yes, the neighbors had called the police—and rolled Evelyn Lee back to the better part of town.

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She was ashen, but happy about one thing.

"I was so sure Paul had turned traitor! You see, I heard everything the other night when I was at the Westleigh. He thought I was asleep when he talked to Lutz."

"You couldn't know then your brother was purposely bargaining with an enemy agent to trap him?"

Evelyn shook her brown head.

"So when I learned Paul had the plans and tracings in an envelope and the envelope was in the glove compartment of the blue coupé, I had the brilliant idea of saving him from disgrace. I jumped into the car and—well, you know what happened."

I nodded, looked at her. She sure was attractive. Even more so than she had been that morning, when I had first given her a gander. I wanted to cheer her up, but I didn't know how. After all, I'm just a dumb detective with big feet, who loves to fight.

"They've got Lutz, they've got the guy who killed your brother, and the chapter's ended. You'll go home and get to bed. When you wake up you'll feel a lot better. Then, sometime in the future, I'm going to give you a buzz on the phone and ask you a very important question."

"What are you going to ask me?" Her blue eyes held mine.

I grinned and patted her arm.

"I'm going to say, 'How about a movie to-night, sister? Something with a lot of crime and excitement in it.' What are you going to say?"

The red lips curved in a faint smile. "Call up and find out," she answered.



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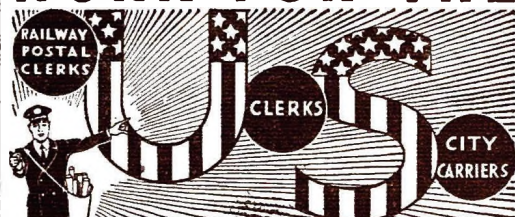
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OFF THE RECORD

(Continued from page 12)

touch with me soon as I would like to get the December issue with THE SEVENTH COLUMN. Also please send me subscription rates on the magazine for a year. Keep up the good work.

You'll note that Pvt. Green says December, but actually THE SEVENTH COLUMN appeared in January, since the magazine comes out every other month and there was no December issue. Anyway, thanks for the kind words.

Here's another soldier, Pvt. Edward P. Noonan and we aren't going to tell you where he is, either. He says, after tossing a couple of compliments our way:

Where on God's green earth are there any 50 MM machine guns? And if there are, could they be carried around in trunks? Now I'm not trying to be smart, but that's too much to swallow. I've never heard of there being such a gun, especially one that can be moved around so easily—and not one, but a "few"! Don't get me wrong, your mag is O.K. as far as I'm concerned—keep up the good work—but what are you trying to do—confuse people? I wonder if you'd reply to me direct instead of in the magazine?

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Well, Pvt. Noonan, I'd sure like to write you direct, but because of my limited time answering you here is about the only practical way to do it. Sorry, pal.

About your machine gun gripe—I'm no expert, nor at the moment in a position to make direct observation as you are—so I'm passing this right on to author Jones. It's his baby anyway. I understand that Tommy guns use a regular .45 pistol slug—maybe that's what he meant. Anyway, we'll see what he has to say about this, and report on it later.

We have space for one more, from Mrs. Charles Grimm of Los Angeles, who writes:

I have yet to read a dull Bat story, but I have a complaint. You don't publish the Bat often enough. It seems like three months between issues. Please, couldn't we have more of the Black Bat?

Well, now, Mrs. Grimm, we take that as a most sincere compliment. Wanting more of a thing is proof enough you enjoyed it!

Thanks, all of you, for your swell letters. Keep 'em coming. Just address THE EDITOR, BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE, 10 East 40th Street, New York, N. Y.

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—THE EDITOR.

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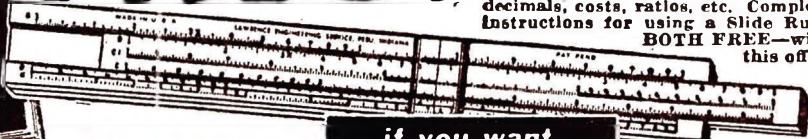
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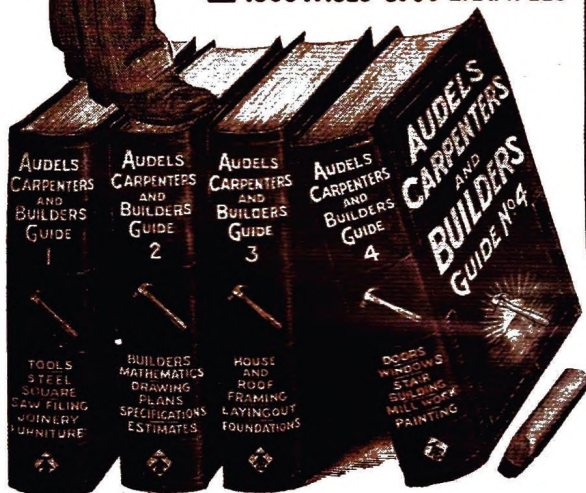
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