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THE LYING KILLER
A COMPLETE BLACK BAT NOVEL

BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE

SEPT. 1949

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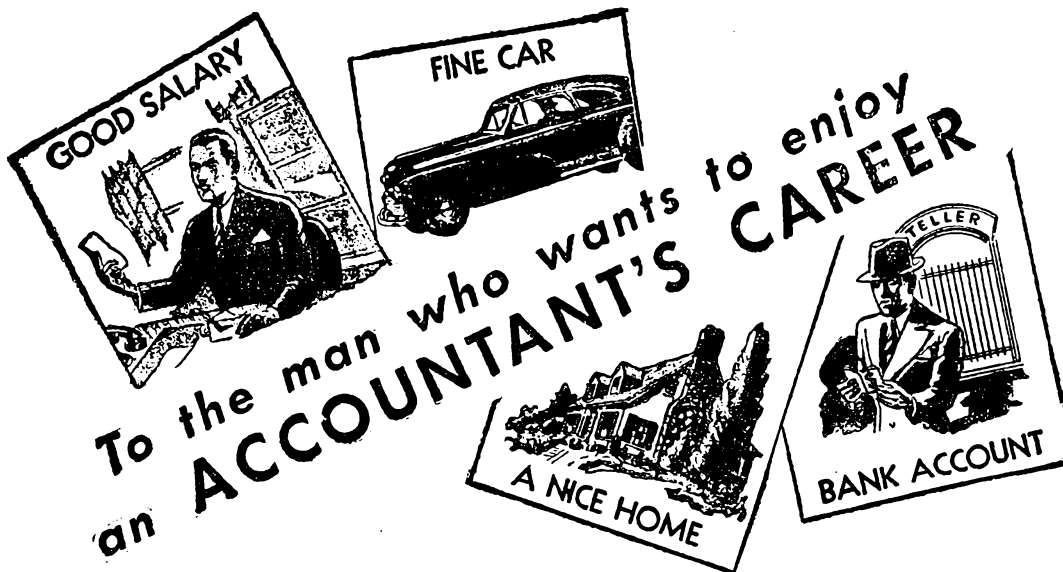
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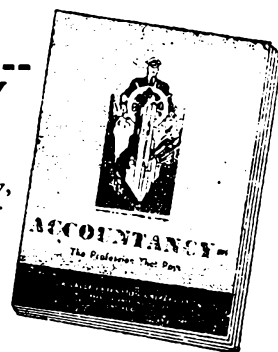
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BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE

Vol. XXV, No. 1

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

September, 1948

A COMPLETE BLACK BAT NOVEL



The Lying Killer

By G. Wayman Jones

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OFF THE RECORD

A DEPARTMENT WHERE READERS AND THE EDITOR MEET

MURDER followed murder in quick succession. First there was one body, then there were two, then three, and soon there would be a fourth. . .

Tony Quinn, the famous "blind" Assistant District Attorney, had already been called upstate by the Governor. He wanted Quinn to prosecute at a murder trial that was too hot for any local attorney to handle. The defendant in the case was a man who was as genuinely hated as any mortal man could be. He was extremely wealthy, very powerful—and he was locked up for two murders! The third and fourth murders were yet to come.

Tony Quinn undertook the assignment and with lovely Carol Baldwin to help him, he went to work. When the third murder was committed he assumed the identity of the Black Bat. This is the kind of action that followed:

Well after midnight, the Black Bat emerged from the side door of his hotel. He wore a dark blue suit and a wide-brimmed black hat. A pair of dark glasses helped some too, but he felt as if a glaring light shone on him. Promptly, he drove out to the house where Mrs. Ventres, the third victim, had been poisoned.

The Discolored Spoon

There had been little chance of completely searching the place before, so he proceeded to do so now. The bottle of poison and the glass were, of course, gone. The Black Bat became especially interested in the silver drawer of the dining room buffet. He examined each teaspoon carefully and found one that was discolored. He confiscated the spoon for later examination. Then he noticed the telephone.

Wondering, suddenly, what Carol had to report regarding Mrs. Ventres' activities immediately prior to the poisoning, the Black Bat picked up the phone and called the hotel where Carol had registered under an assumed name.

At once, he detected a note of worry in her voice.

"How's everything?" he asked her.

"Good enough," she replied cagily, and then after a moment's hesitation, "Why don't you drop over and see me? There's something I'd like to discuss with you as soon as possible. Tell you what—I'll even put a light in my window."

Something had happened, the Black Bat knew. Carol's tone told him that. He knew nothing about her hotel, not even the location of her room. She'd meant something by saying she'd put a light in her window. Perhaps it was to tip him off how to enter.

The Black Bat lost no time in going to her. He circled the block where her hotel was situated and soon saw what she meant. In one of the third floor rooms, a bridge lamp had been moved so that it shone directly out the window, illuminating the fire escape just outside.

Dead Man's Feet

Soon the Black Bat was standing below the fire escape. Pulling down its weighted ladder, he swarmed up. He reached the landing outside the brightly lighted window and called Carol's name.

There was no answer, and his worries increased. Then he heard the faint splashing of the shower. He could look across the room and see the closed bathroom door, and he felt a trifle easier. He reached through the window, twisted the floor lamp so its full light wouldn't fall on him, and prepared to clamber through into the room.

It was then that he saw the two feet protruding from the edge of the sitting room divan. They were the feet of a dead man.

The Black Bat climbed into the room and quickly shut off the light. His eyes needed no adjusting to the darkness. They saw quite clearly and, as he came around the divan, he exhaled sharply.

The feet belonged to a wizened-faced, slim

(Continued on page 8)

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OFF THE RECORD

(Continued from page 6)

little man who wore a knife in his heart. The knife had been driven to the hilt through his back.

The Black Bat was aware that the shower had suddenly ceased. Carol opened the door a moment later. She didn't scream when she saw the body.

"It's the man who has been following me," she said softly. . . .

That's the sort of exciting situations you'll find many of in the dramatic new Black Bat novel that will headline our next issue—CITY OF HATE, by G. Wayman Jones.

A Web of Terror

Trouble comes thick and fast when the Black Bat and Carol try to find out why the little, wizened-faced man was killed. Had he been stabbed to death by someone who feared he was about to talk? Or was he a killer himself. Was the wealthy man whom everyone hated behind it all?

The Black Bat's two other helpers, Butch O'Leary and Silk Kirby, are both soon caught in a web of tightening terror along with Tony Quinn and Carol Baldwin. CITY OF HATE is a novel packed with action, thrills—and chills! It's one of the finest Black Bat stories we have ever published!

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LETTERS FROM READERS

I UR first letter this time is a hot blast from the Lone Star State. How many of you readers agree with what it has to say?

Write in and give us your opinion. Here is the letter:

I read every detective book I can buy and **BLACK BOOK** is the best.

I think it would be a good idea to let Tony marry Carol and put her in the kitchen cooking. She is the most helpless female I have ever read of or heard of. Please ask Mr. Jones to let her use that gun with results instead of the whole bunch getting her out of trouble. Any third-rate woman in Texas could be more help than Carol.

A portrait of the Black Bat on the cover would be swell.—*Bess Hall, R. N., Beaumont, Texas.*

And here's a reader who has an idea that concerns one of our companion magazines, **THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE**, as well as **BLACK BOOK**. What do you other readers think of this plan?

I have been reading **BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE** and **THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE** for a long time now. Why not put both the Black Bat and the Phantom together in the same stories sometimes? At least once or twice a year. That would give us readers a new thrill to see them together. It would also give readers the chance to know both the Phantom and the Black Bat.—*Vernon Jerrold, St. Louis, Mo.*

I wonder if you can help me out. Years ago I used to read some very funny stories about a little pickpocket who, though he occasionally lifted wallets, always did it for a good cause and had a heart of gold. I can't remember who wrote those stories, but the pickpocket's name was Thubway Tham. I can't remember the name of the magazine either. I wonder if there are any more of these stories around?—*Elton J. Champion, Niagara Falls, N. Y.*

Other readers have written us, too, inquiring about Thubway Tham stories. They will all be happy to know that we have contacted Mr. Johnston McCulley, the creator of Thubway Tham, and he has brought the clever little pickpocket back for us in a new series of stories.

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(Concluded on page 145)

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SAY! I GO FOR THIS BLADE! NEVER ENJOYED A MORE REFRESHING SHAVE

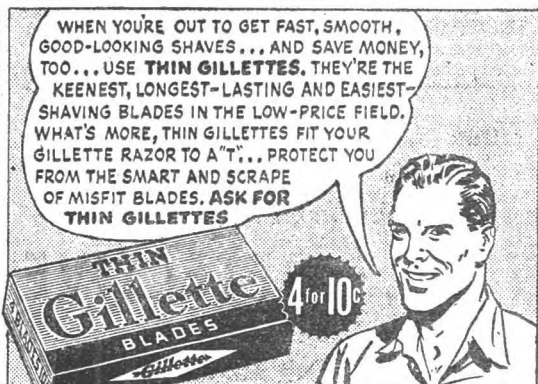
THIN GILLETES ARE MIGHTY POPULAR ON THE CAMPUS. THEY'RE REALLY KEEN AND LONG LASTING



SHUCKS, YOU LADS CAN CAMP THERE ANY TIME

GREAT! YOU'LL BE SEEING A LOT OF US

I HOPE SO... YOU'RE MY IDEA OF A HANDSOME MAN



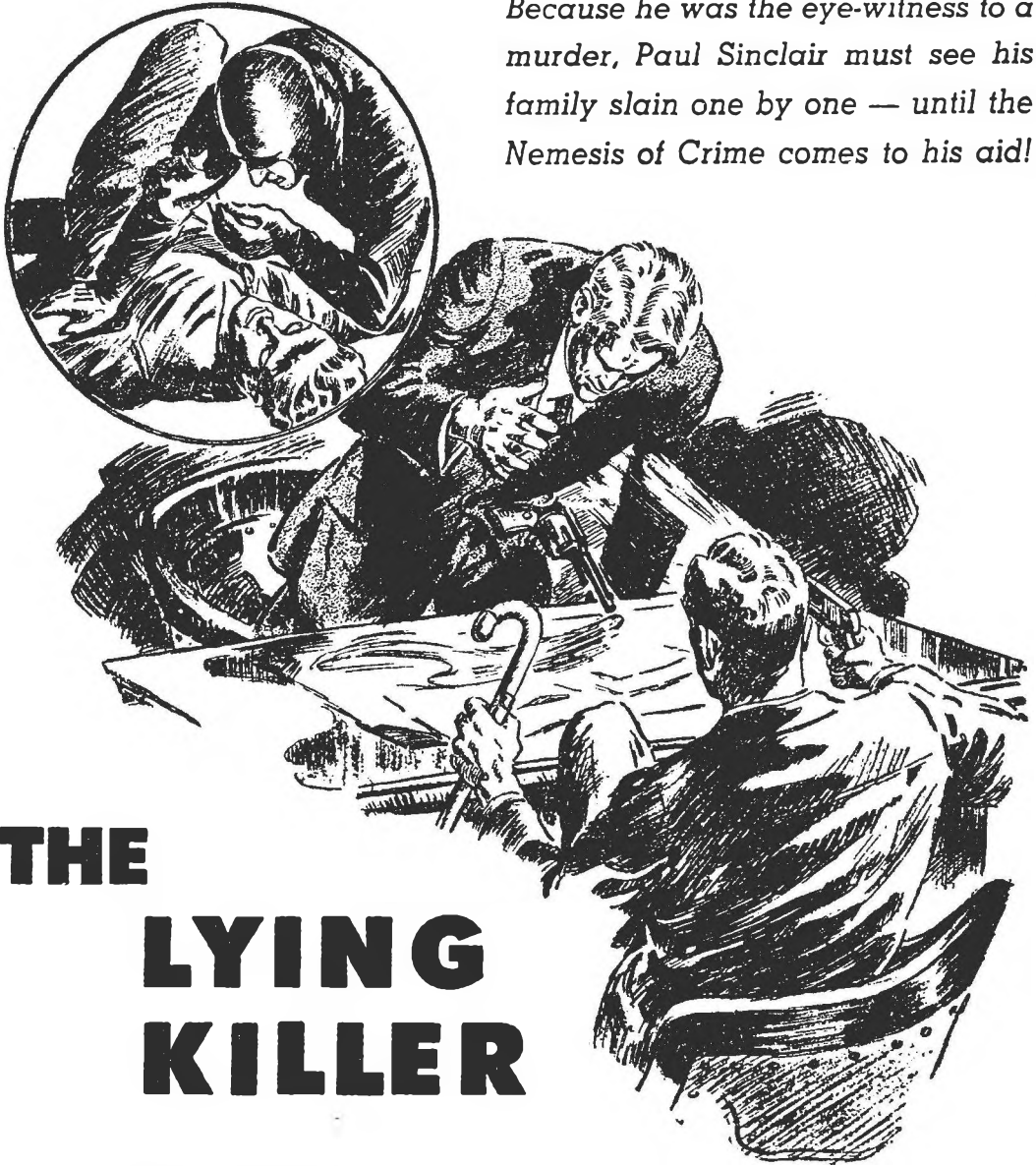
WHEN YOU'RE OUT TO GET FAST, SMOOTH, GOOD-LOOKING SHAVES... AND SAVE MONEY, TOO... USE THIN GILLETES. THEY'RE THE KEENEST, LONGEST-LASTING AND EASIEST-SHAVING BLADES IN THE LOW-PRICE FIELD. WHAT'S MORE, THIN GILLETES FIT YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR TO A "T"... PROTECT YOU FROM THE SMART AND SCRAPE OF MISFIT BLADES. ASK FOR THIN GILLETES



4 for 10c

A BLACK BAT NOVEL BY **G. WAYMAN JONES**

Because he was the eye-witness to a murder, Paul Sinclair must see his family slain one by one — until the Nemesis of Crime comes to his aid!



THE LYING KILLER

CHAPTER I

Midnight Kill

PAUL SINCLAIR took his wife's arm and walked with her behind their two children, Arthur and Susan. At that moment, after a good dinner and a wonderful musical comedy, Paul Sinclair thought he was about the happiest man on earth.

Susan was twenty, Arthur eighteen, and except for occasional squabbles, they were devoted to one another. His wife,

Margaret, was only two years younger—he was forty-seven—but she didn't look or act it. All in all, Paul Sinclair had no complaint with life.

Their car was in a parking space. When they reached it, Paul Sinclair hesitated. He said, "How'd you folks like a soda or a sandwich before going home? I'll treat, but I won't be there. I can't recall whether or not I locked the

Tony Quinn Pits Himself Against the Mysterious

office safe when we closed up this afternoon. It's worried me all evening and, just to make sure I'll get a decent night's sleep, I'm going back to the office and check."

Margaret Sinclair patted her husband's hand. "You go right ahead, Paul. We'll be across the street in that luncheonette. I know how you fret about those things."

"Thanks," Paul said. "I do worry too much. There isn't anything of terrific value in the safe, but if Mr. Waring ever finds out it isn't locked—well, you know how he is. I won't be gone very long."

"Take your time, Pop," Arthur said with a grin. "I'm old enough to handle two women now."

Paul laughed. He left the parking lot and turned into a cross street. His office was only four blocks away. He could probably make it—and back—before their soda straws were wet.

He whistled softly and cheerfully, had a definite glow from what he thought was an expansive evening and he walked in rapid time to the frisky tune he whistled. He turned another corner. Now there were only three blocks straight ahead to where the towering gray building rose into the night sky.

Paul Sinclair crossed one street, glanced up it and saw the comforting uniform of a patrolman halfway along the block. He moved leisurely, swinging his night stick. Not that Paul was afraid, but the sight of the cop gave him reassurance. The street was as empty by night as it was crowded by day. There'd been a lot of holdups lately. Paul grinned to himself. A stickup man would get exactly twenty dollars and some coins. Why, he told himself, he could almost afford being held up for that amount.

HE COVERED one more block when he heard the shot. It came from directly ahead of him. He didn't move out into the middle of the sidewalk. He'd been keeping close to the shadows of the building for no apparent reason and now he stayed there.

Paul halted and gazed down the street. He vaguely made out two men. One was beginning to crumple; he wobbled two or three steps, sank to his knees and

then put his hands flat against the sidewalk as if he was trying to hold himself up.

Even this didn't help much. His elbows became as rubbery as his knees had been. There were only inches between his head and the sidewalk, but he fell as if he'd dropped twenty stories and he didn't move after that.

In paralyzed horror, Paul watched all this, frozen in his tracks by the eerie scene. His eyes shifted to the man who still stood on his feet. This man had a glittering object in his hand. Now he moved it toward his hip pocket and Paul saw that it was a nickel-plated revolver.

Paul remembered the policeman and opened his mouth to shout for help. But nothing came out. Sheer horror was still with him. He took a couple of stiff steps and then stopped again. The gunman was kneeling beside his victim, methodically searching the dead man's pockets. At least Paul assumed the man was dead for he didn't move. The gunman stood erect, looked up and down, and then to Paul's amazement and sudden terror he began walking toward him.

Paul flattened himself against the building wall. It was all shadows here. He couldn't be seen except from a distance of ten or fifteen feet. But if the gunman stayed on this side of the street he'd pass by closer than that. Paul suddenly realized what would happen if the murderer saw him. No killer could afford to let an eye-witness live.

That realization gave Paul the strength and courage he needed. True, it was the courage of someone trapped—someone desperate—but it was still the type of bravery that make men die gamely in battle even when they're scared to their boot-tips.

Paul knew he had to take the offensive, before the killer could get his gun out. Paul breathed deeply, wished he had some sort of a weapon and suddenly charged from his gloomy hiding place straight at the murderer.

The man with the gun came to an abrupt stop, then turned and started running. Paul was already traveling at full speed and seeing the killer turn tail gave him even more confidence. He'd never played serious football in his life,

Chieftain of a Hijacking Combine of Criminals!

but he went into a long flying tackle now. His arms wound around the killer's legs and brought him down with a thump.

Now Paul found his voice. He began shouting. He never did know what words he used. Words weren't necessary anyway. The way he felt, he knew the frantic terror in him would ring through his shouts.

to the Y.M.C.A. again. He almost laughed out loud. The Y wouldn't do any good if he failed in this battle.

The gunman stepped back suddenly and kicked out. Paul groaned and doubled up in pain. Every ounce of strength seemed to flow out of him and at the same time his courage dwindled. With horrified eyes he saw the man reach for the gun, produce it and step further back



THE BLACK BAT

The gunman struggled, tried to reach his hip pocket. Paul swarmed all over him, but the gunman was bigger, better versed in rough and tough fighting and was even more desperate than Paul. In a matter of less than a minute, he had freed himself.

Paul jumped to his feet also and moved in with fists swinging. He landed a punch or two, but they were the kind of blows an ordinary man would strike, aimed properly perhaps, but without the necessary steam to put a man away.

Paul took a glancing punch alongside the cheek. He was getting winded already. Through his mind flashed the insane thought that he'd better start going

to level the weapon. He was sneering in hate, primed for the kill.

There was a shot. Paul wondered why the explosion sounded so far away. Why he didn't feel any pain. No one in the least familiar with pointing a gun could have missed at that range.

PAUL heard a series of gruff curses. He straightened a bit. The gunman was turning to run for it. Paul turned his head. The patrolman he'd seen on the side street was coming up fast, gun in hand. The killer picked up speed. He was going to get away. Paul started swearing. He hadn't cursed in years to any appreciable extent but he did now.

The cop came to a stop, crooked one arm and rested the gun barrel against it. The cop shouted. "You—stop or I'll cut you down."

For an answer the gunman turned as he ran and snapped a bullet. It missed by yards. The cop took a long breath, held it and looked down the sights of his service pistol. Paul held his breath too. Automatically his eyes riveted on the back of the running gunman.

The cop fired. Just once. The gunman gave a scream, veered to the left and began staggering. The cop didn't move. He was sighting the gun once more. But the killer had reached the building wall and was clawing at it with one hand, trying to hold himself up. His other hand did its best to raise the gun and failed. He sank down.

The cop motioned Paul to follow and they walked warily toward the crumpled form. The cop stopped a dozen yards away. He glanced at Paul.

"I've got him covered and I'll blow his head off if he stirs. Go up to him and take that gun out of his hand. I think he's unconscious, but you never can tell so keep out of my line of fire."

"Y-yes," Paul gulped. "Sure. Of course."

He moved slowly toward the man, glanced at the patrolman and received an encouraging nod. Paul bent, seized the nickel-plated revolver by its muzzle and pulled it free of an unresisting grasp. He straightened with a sigh of relief that could have been heard two full blocks.

The patrolman came in then, knelt and turned the man over. He was an ugly looking type with a bent nose, a face that had long ago become unnaturally lined from liquor and bad living.

"Well, well," the cop said. "I made no mistake in cutting him down. That's Ollie Tate. I'm half sorry I didn't put one through his head."

"Isn't he—d—dead?" Paul gasped.

"Uh-uh. Winged, but low so he lost a lot of blood. These Police Positives back a nasty wallop, my friend. Now suppose you tell me what happened. I know there's a dead man back up the street, but that's all."

Paul wetted his lips. "My name is Paul Sinclair. I live at Eleven-Ninety-Eight Woodbridge Road. I work in the Coring Building, for Dennis Waring. He's in cotton goods—"

"Save that for later." The patrolman was fixing handcuffs around the gunman's wrists. "All I want to know is about the shooting."

"I—I'm coming to that. I was on my way to the office, because I thought maybe I forgot to lock the safe this afternoon at quitting time. I saw these two men in the middle of the sidewalk. Then there was a shot."

"I heard it, but shots always sound like backfiring when they happen in these canyons," the patrolman said with a nod. "Go ahead."

"One of the men, that one back there, staggered away and then fell. After he was down, this—this fellow at our feet—started searching the other man. I think he took something out of his pockets."

"I see. I'm going to search Ollie. You're a witness to that. Keep your eyes on me."

The patrolman took from Ollie Tate's inner pocket, a fat wad of bills, all tens and twenties. He straightened up and flipped the bills between his fingers.

"Must be three or four hundred bucks here. So it was a stickup. Ollie is noted for that. This time we've got him, with an eye-witness."

"Eye-witness?" Paul asked mechanically.

The cop laughed. "Sure, that's you. There was nobody else on the street. You saw the crime committed, saw the victim frisked and the money taken. You grabbed Ollie and yelled for help. He was about to plug you when I came around the corner. Mr. Sinclair, the D.A. never had a better case nor a better guy to strap in the chair. Ollie is poison. You're lucky he didn't finish you off."

"Y-yes. Yes, I guess I am," Paul said. "Now I've really got to get back to my family. They'll wonder what happened to me."

THE cop shook his head. "They'll have to keep on wondering, my friend, because you're helping the law right now. Say—come to think of it, you're a hero. They'll be mighty proud of you. Tackling an armed killer the way you did. Yes, sir, a hero!"

Paul gulped. "I don't feel like one. I'm still scared."

The cop laughed. "All heroes are, my friend. Now take these keys. There's a call-box right around that corner. The

big brass key will open it. Push the arrow over to where it says phone, then push down the lever. They'll answer you at Headquarters. Give them the facts and tell them I need a meat wagon and an ambulance."

Paul took the keys and scampered toward the corner. With some degree of reverence he slowed as he half circled the dead man sprawled out on the sidewalk.

Fifteen minutes later the street was no longer deserted. Paul was the center of attraction. News photographers took a dozen flashlight pictures of him, policemen in gold braid and in plain clothes, questioned him, his hand was shaken half a dozen times and there were pats on the back.

Paul glowed. Maybe Margaret, Susan and Arthur would be sore at being stood up that way, but he'd certainly have a story to tell them. In the middle of it, Ollie Tate began to groan. An ambulance rolled up, and he was shoved inside and whisked away.

Paul suddenly thought of his original mission, lost in this maze of gun shots, fighting and murder. He excused himself and hurried to the office building. He rode the night elevator to the twenty-second floor and let himself into the office.

The safe door was closed, the combination turned. Paul felt a little better. He hated to think he'd make such a silly mistake as to leave the safe door unlocked.

CHAPTER II

Murder Picture

S EVEN weeks later Paul Sinclair was no longer a hero. He was just an office cashier, working faithfully for a tolerant and kindly boss. True, in a day or two, he'd have to testify at the murder trial of Ollie Tate and he'd be famous again, for a few days. Paul Sinclair liked the attention publicity gave him, but he wasn't fooled by it. He knew how fleeting it would be.

Ollie Tate, meanwhile, was led out of his cell at City Prison, handcuffed to a medium-sized, stocky man with a bristling mustache, and walked across the bridge to the Criminal Courts Building.

Tate had a cigarette clamped in the corner of his mouth and a contemptuous



A big paw covered Carol's mouth and a heavy fist lashed out (CHAP. VII)

glare for anybody who looked his way. He glanced at the detective to whom he was chained.

"Where we goin'?" he demanded.

The detective grinned. "You mean eventually? I'll be retired and you'll go to the chair. You'll reach your destination fifteen years before I do."

"Where we goin' now, stupid?" Tate snarled.

The detective lost his smile. "One more crack and I'll plaster that ugly mug of yours. I'm Captain McGrath and you'll address me as such. You're on your way to the office of a Special D.A. Why he should bother with a crumb like you is beyond me, but he wants to see you."

"Which D.A.?" Tate asked, a trifle more respect in his voice.

"Tony Quinn. What difference does it make? A kid out of college could put you in the chair."

"Yeah. Yeah, I don't think. Quinn, huh? He's the blind man, ain't he?"

"He's blind," McGrath winced a little as he uttered the words. "But he also happens to be about the smartest guy on the D.A.'s staff, which you'll find out when your trial opens the day after tomorrow."

Tate didn't say anything. He just looked a little surlier. Captain McGrath marched him through the door labeled with Tony Quinn's name, across the reception room where nobody even bothered to look up. Tate was somehow disappointed.

Then Ollie Tate stood in front of a desk facing a man who might have been handsome without the scars around his eyes.

Those eyes were blank and staring, the eyes of a totally blind man. They seemed to look nowhere.

"Good morning, Captain," Quinn said. "What have we here?"

"Ollie Tate, Mr. Quinn. You wanted to see him."

"Oh, yes. Seat him, Captain. Mr. Tate, the court appointed a public defender as your counsel. He approached me recently and asked that you be allowed to plead to second degree murder."

Tate half arose from the chair into which McGrath had thrust him. "I ain't pleadin', you hear?"

"I hear perfectly well," Quinn said. "Also, I hadn't the slightest intention of allowing you to plead. However, I prom-

ised Edward Karlton, your appointed attorney, that I would at least see you."

Tate gave a short, harsh laugh. "See me? Why, you blind bat, you can't see a thing."

Quinn allowed a soft smile to spread across his face. "In this instance," he said gently, "I'm rather glad I'm blind. I've an idea that being able to see a man like you is no blessing, Tate. But I had you brought here for a purpose. Do you want to talk?"

"I ain't sayin' a word," Ollie Tate snarled.

Quinn sighed. "Very well. Of course you realize we have sufficient evidence to draw you a death sentence. And for once in my life I don't mind being the means of sending a man to the chair. Tate, you're common scum. I've had you investigated and you haven't a friend among even people of your own type. You're a social leper among lepers. All right, Captain, he doesn't want to talk. You may take him back."

"Wait a minute," Tate howled. "I ain't been proved guilty yet. I got my rights. Sure I'll talk. I'm innocent. I didn't kill that guy."

"Tell me all about it," Tony Quinn urged.

"Well, I was takin' a walk. I see this guy comin' along. All of a sudden there's a shot and the guy falls. So I run up to him. Anybody would have done that. I bent over him, lookin' to see was he croaked. Then this other guy piles into me. I figure him for the killer and I put up a fight. He was gettin' the best of me so I started to get out of there. Then the cop plugged me. I'm innocent, I tell you."

QUINN rested his head against the high leather back of his chair and laughed. "Tate, you'll at least make the trial pleasant by amusing the jurors. What about the gun? You had it in your hand. A bullet from that gun killed Steve Humphries."

"The gun was on the sidewalk," Tate declared. "Naturally I bent down and picked it up."

Captain McGrath closed his eyes slowly.

"Tony," he said, "this guy lies as easily as he kills."

"I ain't a killer," Tate howled.

"What about the five hundred dollars a witness saw you take off the dead man

and which was found in your pockets? Can you explain where you got that money?"

"I didn't take anythin' off the guy. I won the dough in a crap game. I don't know who else was in the game. They were strangers—"

Quinn said, "I've had enough. Take him back, Captain. And leave the door open. This office certainly needs an airing out."

McGrath yanked Tate to his feet and piloted him swiftly from the room. Quinn shook his head slowly in despair over such men as Ollie Tate. Then he spoke in a loud voice.

"Silk, will you bring Mr. Sinclair in now?"

From a door to an adjoining office, which had been ajar, came a slim man of about fifty. He was almost entirely bald and he moved lithely with a strange grace.

He was sharp-featured with bright blue eyes, and a rather thin mouth and a definitely pointed chin.

Silk Kirby was Tony Quinn's aide. He served as butler, cook, chauffeur. He was Tony Quinn's eyes.

But most of all he was Tony Quinn's friend.

Silk said, "Yes, sir. I'll have him in a second."

He disappeared, to return in a moment with Paul Sinclair in tow. Sinclair was mopping his face with a handkerchief as he sat down.

Quinn said, "You saw Tate, Mr. Sinclair. There is absolutely no doubt in your mind, but that he is the killer?"

"None, Mr. Quinn. I actually saw him shoot down that man, rob the body and then he fought with me. He was going to kill me. There was plenty of light. I couldn't make a mistake, and there was no one else on the street."

"Good." Quinn nodded. "You'll have to be in court day after tomorrow. We'll start picking a jury at ten. That shouldn't take very long. Perhaps the trial will start at two in the afternoon, but you'd better be on hand in the morning."

"I'll be there," Sinclair promised. "And glad of the opportunity. Really, I've never laid eyes on such a creature as this Tate. To my mind he personifies every type of evil that I have ever heard of."

"He's evil all right. The man has a long record. He's as dangerous as a case

of cholera running loose. But he's finished, Mr. Sinclair. I'm going to send him to the chair."

Paul shivered. "I agree he deserves it. Bank on me, Mr. Quinn. I'll be at hand."

Quinn smiled.

"Thank you. Silk, will you have Mr. Sinclair returned to his office? Take him there in my car."

When they were gone, Tony Quinn leaned back, his eyes ceilingward. A remarkable thing happened to those dead looking eyes.

Suddenly they were alive and sparkling. They were sharp and keen—the eyes of a man who could really see.

Once Quinn had actually been blind. In trying to defend certain evidence from crooks bent on its destruction, he'd stepped into the path of a bottle of acid flung at the evidence. His eyes had instantly gone blind. At that time Tony Quinn had been the elected District Attorney, one of the best to ever fill that office.

He was well on his way to the governorship and, perhaps, even further when fate blacked out his sight.

It had been returned through the help of a girl named Carol Baldwin and a surgeon who submitted Quinn to an operation which since has cured many sightless people. Parts of the corneas from the eyes of Carol Baldwin's father had been planted in Tony Quinn's eyes and he saw again. He saw through the charity and wisdom of Police Sergeant Baldwin who died of a criminal's bullet, because Sergeant Baldwin believed that, with sight, Tony Quinn could again become the fighter against crime that he had been.

HOWEVER, Quinn did re-enter the everlasting battle but on a different basis. He kept the recovery of his sight a strict secret, shared by only three others. As blind Tony Quinn he couldn't be suspected of being the Black Bat, a hooded crime fighter who believed in fighting crooks with their own weapons and without too much recourse to the slow processes of the law.

From the start his activities had been very successful. Now the hooded man who was always clad in jet black, had become a name in the underworld which commanded respect and fear.

Tony Quinn sat there, thinking back, and happy in the satisfaction that he was

doing good. Now, as a Special District Attorney, he could fight crime in two separate capacities. Tony Quinn fought with the weapons of the law. The Black Bat fought with any weapons and used any reasonable means to get his man. It was a perfect set-up.

The case of Ollie Tate, murderer, was strictly routine, just one of those nasty cases which are settled fast, but which leave a bad taste in the mouths of all concerned. Ollie Tate had been on his way to the electric chair for years. The world would be a better place without him.

In a way, Tate was a pathetic creature. He didn't have a friend, not even in the underworld where he was considered concentrated poison. His life of violence had netted him nothing. He was just someone with a finish that had been predictable almost since his early youth.

Silk Kirby returned after taking Paul Sinclair back to work. For the rest of the afternoon Quinn was busy with routine. At five-thirty he called it a day. On Silk's arm, carrying a heavy white-painted cane, Quinn walked out of the building, down the wide steps and to a sedan parked at the curb.

He was hailed by everyone who worked in the Criminal Courts building, from judges to clean-up women. Quinn answered them gaily, called them by name and radiated cheerfulness.

His home was the last one down a dead-end street. It consisted of a large house, set on a fairly large piece of ground for a city residence. There was a neat fence around it, a side street which only he used to reach the garage. Tony Quinn was independently wealthy. Not that he cared very much, except for the times when money helped him battle criminals.

At eight o'clock he finished dinner, picked up his white cane and tapped his way through the house to the library. A large room with all four walls lined with books. There he sat down in a worn, comfortable leather chair in front of the fireplace, and slowly stoked his pipe. Every move he made was that of a blind man. Tony Quinn never took chances. If the fact that he could see ever became public property, it would be only a short time before the underworld realized or guessed that he was the Black Bat.

Such knowledge in their hands would be an automatic death warrant for Tony Quinn.

The phone rang about ten-thirty. Silk answered it and then carried the instrument to the table beside Quinn's chair. He plugged it into a wall socket.

"Mr. Sinclair is calling, sir."

Quinn picked up the phone. Sinclair's voice was tired and sad. He said, "Mr. Quinn, is it possible to get that case postponed?"

"Only if your reasons are very urgent," Quinn said. "What's wrong?"

"My son Arthur was—killed tonight. A hit-and-run driver. The funeral will be the day after my appearance at the trial. My wife and daughter need me, Mr. Quinn. I'm sorry."

"I'll postpone the case, of course," Quinn said. "You have my deepest sympathies, Mr. Sinclair. Is there anything I can do—such as helping to find the driver of the car?"

"Not now. Thanks just the same. I'm not thinking of retribution. Not yet. Good-by, sir."

Quinn hung up slowly. "Poor fellow," he said. "Silk, his son was killed tonight. By another one of those rotten hit-and-run drivers."

"Hit-and-run," Silk said slowly. "You know, sir, if Sinclair was a witness against anybody but a friendless punk like Ollie Tate, I'd say his son's death was suspicious."

FOR a moment Quinn's face clouded. Then it cleared. He relighted his pipe and shook his head. "Don't start making a mystery out of it, Silk. This is one time we haven't a thing to worry about on that score. There isn't a person who cares one way or another if Tate dies. Matter-of-fact, his only visitor has been Ed Karlton who was appointed by the court to act as Tate's attorney."

Silk chuckled as he moved about the room straightening things that didn't need straightening. "I was merely offering a conjecture, sir. We're lucky it couldn't happen."

Later Silk sat down near Quinn and read the evening papers aloud. Quinn was happy, and serene—a trifle bored, perhaps, because nothing had happened to involve the activities of the Black Bat, but contented too because that meant no exceptional cases of crime had been staged.

The tap on the window brought both men rigid. Silk arose quickly, as if he hadn't heard the faint tapping. He walked casually toward a table and opened a drawer. A gun disappeared under his belt and he pulled his coat over the butt.

The tapping came again. This time they couldn't deny it. Silk stepped squarely between the window and Tony Quinn.

He couldn't see who was outside. Quinn said, "Silk, that's Paul Sinclair out there. Apparently he wants to come in without being seen. Signal him to go to the rear door. Hurry! Something has happened."

Silk never questioned the fact that Quinn had been able to distinguish Sinclair outside the window. For Silk knew of Tony Quinn's secret—that with the return of his eyesight, some strange freak of nature had attempted to recompense him for those many months of total blindness. Tony Quinn could see in darkness as well as in daylight. It was an asset of vast importance for when he worked as the Black Bat, he had a decided advantage. Sinclair had been quite invisible to ordinary eyes outside the window, but Quinn had seen him perfectly.

Silk came into the room alone and hastily pulled down every window shade. Then he went back to fetch Sinclair. The murder witness looked fifteen years older.

His shoulders were stooped, his face lined with sadness and care. He sat down rather unsteadily on the edge of a chair.

Quinn said, "What's wrong, Mr. Sinclair? What is it?"

SINCLAIR found his voice. "Arthur—my son—he wasn't accidentally killed tonight. He was—murdered."

"Yes," Quinn urged. "Tell me how you know."

"He was at a dance—a graduation dance. He was getting out of high school soon. He went off by himself, nobody knows why. They found his body two miles down the road. It's a lonely road, leading to a golf clubhouse where the dance was being held."

"Go on," Quinn urged. He half knew what was coming.

"The police said it was an accident. I and my family accepted their word.



McGRATH

Then, just a little while ago, someone rang my doorbell. My wife found nobody on the porch, but there was a big envelope in the mailbasket. It had this in it."

He thrust a large glossy photograph toward Quinn.

Quinn never made a move and Silk gently took it from the anguished man's hand.

He studied it and his face went harsh and grim.

Silk said, "It's a photograph, sir, a picture taken either through the windshield of a car or with the camera poked out of the window. I can't tell which. It's a flash picture. It shows a young man running in the middle of the road. He is looking over one shoulder and, by his expression, it's quite clear he knows he is about to be run down by the car from which this photo was taken."

"That's Arthur. My—son." Sinclair rocked slowly from side to side.

Silk turned the photo over.

"There's a message on the back of it, sir. It says:

"'This is how your son died, Paul Sinclair. Would you like your daughter to die the same way? And then your wife? And then, perhaps, yourself. That is what will happen if you testify that Ollie Tate is a murderer. Don't do it. Save yourself more sorrow. And stay away from the police.'"

CHAPTER III

Threat of Murder

His face filled with concern, Silk brought Paul Sinclair a glass of brandy and waited until the man drank it. Sinclair seemed a little better.

"There was a phone call, too, from a man," he said. "I never heard the voice before. He told me my son had

been killed as a lesson to me. That if I testified against Ollie Tate, Susan would die. Then Margaret. He said I had to go to the police and tell them I'd been wrong. That Tate wasn't the murderer. That I really didn't see him shoot that man. That I—I wanted to be a hero and that's why I accused him."

"Anything else?" Quinn asked ominously.

"I wasn't to—see you, Mr. Quinn. Susan would be killed if I did. But I had to come. I trust you. I know you'll help me."

Quinn said, "I'll do all I can, Mr. Sinclair. Don't ever let it be said that you haven't courage. Men like you deserve medals, though you never get them. Tell me: is this going to make any difference in testifying against Tate?"

Sinclair raised his head. "No, sir. Not one bit. I figure it this way. If they killed Arthur, you'll get them and make them pay. And Tate must be part of the gang so I'll make him pay."

"Good," Quinn said. "You and your family are going to be protected. None of you may realize it, but someone will be around."

Sinclair dry-washed his hands. "I don't know how to explain this to my family. I didn't allow them to see the photograph. I'm afraid of what would happen if they knew they were threatened. My wife isn't too well. The doctor said, only a month ago, that she was to undergo no excitement."

"That complicates matters," Quinn said. "But we'll send her away secretly if it becomes necessary."

"I'll appreciate anything you can do," Sinclair. "I'll appreciate it very much, Mr. Quinn. I told you I was no hero."

Sinclair stretched out his hand. Quinn

paid no attention to it and Sinclair dropped his arm and flushed in embarrassment. He'd forgotten that Tony Quinn was a blind man.

Quinn said, "Silk will show you out the back way. Go straight home and stay there."

When Silk returned to the library, the window shades were still drawn and Tony Quinn was talking on the phone.

Quinn said, "Carol? I need you. Notify Butch also. Get to the lab as quickly as possible. This time we've really got ourselves a job."

Quinn went back to his leather chair and sat down. His apparently sightless eyes were riveted on book-lined wall. His brain was humming at top speed. He wasn't quite certain how he'd use Carol Baldwin and Butch Leary, but they—with Silk—comprised the Black Bat's little band. And the Black Bat was not going to sit by while a man's daughter and wife were murdered.

Carol Baldwin was the girl whose father had given his eyes to Tony Quinn. Carol was young, blonde and lovely. She'd joined the Black Bat and had become extremely valuable. She possessed remarkable courage, had a natural knack for finding clues and following trails. And Tony Quinn was deeply in love with her.

Carol knew of his feeling toward her and she was as much in love with him, but both realized somewhat bitterly, that marriage was out of the question. As the Black Bat, Quinn was constantly in danger and anyone closely associated with him would have to share that danger.

Silk did—and willingly. Silk was an odd person. For many years he'd been a slick confidence man. The smoothness with which he had parted suckers from their money had earned him the nickname of "Silk" and he'd retained it even after he had met Tony Quinn and become honest.

Silk's clever style was one asset. His devotion and integrity were others.

At times, Silk proved himself to be of the utmost value to the Black Bat's operations though often he had to content himself with being only the liaison man between the Black Bat and the other two members of his little group.

"Butch" O'Leary was the third member. How he'd come by that name was a mystery—unless it had been dubbed on

him because of his size. Butch was a giant, well proportioned and amazingly strong. In a fight, Butch could handle himself like a General Sherman tank. There wasn't an iota of fear in his make-up. He wasn't smooth, or as quick thinking as Silk, but Butch had his points and he served the Black Bat very well indeed.

HALF an hour after making the call, Tony Quinn arose. He thrust his white cane under one arm and without any pretence of being blind, walked straight toward one book-lined wall. He reached behind a row of books, touched a hidden control and a narrow door slid open. He went through this into a large, white-tiled laboratory.

Here he maintained every scientific device to help in his ceaseless battle against criminals. Police lab technicians would have blinked in awe at the array of instruments and the complete library on the scientific aspects of criminology.

From the outside, the well hidden lab could be reached by a tunnel which led from the garden house at the rear of the estate, to a trap door set in the floor of the lab. It was a convenient way for Carol and Butch to contact Tony Quinn and an utmost necessity for the comings and goings of the Black Bat.

Carol and Butch were there. Carol went into Quinn's arms to be held for a moment and lightly kissed. Butch, his enormous form covering a chair so completely that it seemed he was sitting on air, grinned his huge grin of anticipation. Action meant just that to Butch. He was perpetually ready to start.

Quinn and Carol sat down on a divan facing Butch. Quinn quickly gave them all the facts. Carol listened with a little frown across her forehead growing deeper and deeper.

"But Tony," she argued. "You said that this Ollie Tate didn't have a friend. That crooks hated him for his slimy ways as much as anyone. Who would murder Sinclair's son to help Tate?"

"I wish I knew," Quinn said. "It's one of the things we must determine quickly. The murderer has already struck and he'll hardly hesitate to strike again. Sinclair's family must be protected."

"You tell me where Sinclair lives," Butch said. "I'll amble over that way and if anybody comes to hurt his family—well, you know what'll happen."

Quinn shook his head. "It won't be done openly. The killer showed cleverness in the way he killed Sinclair's son and took a picture of him just before the car ran him down. It was a horrible photograph. I almost wished I'd been really blind when I saw it."

"Then what can we do to help?" Carol asked.

"Someone is protecting Tate, trying to make Sinclair switch his testimony. If Sinclair does, Tate has a good chance of going free or, at least, being spared execution. There must be some reason why this mystery man is trying to save him. And—he must be in communication with Tate."

"Yes, Tony?" Carol urged.

Quinn went on. "It so happens that Tate has had no visitors and made no phone calls. I'm quite certain of that. So the one person in touch with him has been a public defender. He's a lawyer named Ed Karlton. I know little about him."

"What of all the prison guards?" Butch put in. "What about other guys locked up in cells next door to Tate?"

Quinn managed a smile. "You're improving, Butch. That's a good thought. I'll have McGrath check them. Carol, Ed Karlton is your job. Go to work on him. Learn everything you can about the man."

"What do I do?" Butch asked.

"Exactly what you're hoping I'll say. Go to Sinclair's home and see that nothing happens. We can't call in the police. The murderer has threatened to strike if Sinclair notifies anyone."

"Poor little guy," Carol said. "I saw his picture in the papers at the time of the murder. He doesn't look like a hero."

"He defied the orders written on the back of that photo," Quinn said. "He came to see me and that takes remarkable courage, especially in the face of what happened to his son. Now get going, both of you. I'm not sitting back either. There are things to be done which I can accomplish better as Tony Quinn, but the Black Bat is taking an active hand in this too. Good luck—and don't waste any time. Especially you, Butch. Your job is the most important."

CAROL and Butch hurried away through the tunnel. Quinn returned to the house proper. He studied the photograph intently and guessed that it

had been taken with a Graphlex camera. This was no blown-up shot, but an original print.

The message on the reverse side was written in crudely blocked letters. The lettering was well disguised and the chances of this photo being covered with fingerprints was remote. Yet Quinn carefully set it aside for later investigation.

Silk brought the car around and drove Quinn to the City Jail. There Quinn had Ollie Tate brought into a visitor's room and handcuffed to a chair. When the guard withdrew, Quinn began to talk. There were things he had to know. Tate wouldn't explain them—knowingly—but those blank eyes of Tony Quinn's had the ability to watch Tate's reactions.

Quinn said, "Well, Tate, in a matter of hours now, you're going to trial for murder. The results are unquestioned. You'll go to the chair. I've been over this case from its beginning to the end. You haven't a whisper of a chance. Psychiatrists who have examined you, state that you're quite capable of knowing the difference between right and wrong."

"I never tried to plead insanity," Tate muttered.

"The examinations were ordered anyway, so the jury can get some idea of what goes on in that scheming, foul, little brain of yours. Do you want to know what the psychiatrists have decided?"

"What's the difference?" Tate said, without as much insolence as during the previous interview. "I didn't kill nobody. This is a bum rap."

"The doctors are going to tell the jury that you are a dangerous man, a man with neither conscience nor scruples, the type who would kill without the slightest hesitation. Just as you murdered that man you robbed."

Tate had fine beads of sweat over his forehead now. The corners of his mouth were twitching. A slow light of horror grew in his eyes.

Quinn went on relentlessly. "I'll have you sentenced to the chair within three days. I'll block every attempt you make for any postponement of execution. I can see that you'll be dead within weeks and I intend to do it."

Tate had become jittery now. He was frightened and breathing hard while a vein in his temple throbbed. He looked as desperate as a rat in a corner, unable to fight back. He was badly scared.

Quinn said, "I talked to your attorney again. He still insists that you deserve a break. Suppose I consent to a plea?"

The vein ceased throbbing. Tate's set jaws relaxed. He started to smile and some of the terror went out of his eyes.

He said, "I'm not coppin' a plea. I didn't kill nobody."

"Perhaps," Quinn said, "your relatives might make you listen to reason. How about that?"

"I ain't got nobody," Tate insisted. "No relatives, and they couldn't make me change my mind if I did have any. Look, I'm sick of this—"

"What of your friends on the outside?" Quinn went on.

"Friends?" Tate laughed. "What friends? You see anybody goin' to bat for me since I been in here?"

"No. But you must have friends, Tate."

Tate was smiling broadly now. "Yeah. Yeah, everybody's got friends. So you want me to take a plea, Quinn. I'm not doin' it."

"These friends on the outside," Quinn went on. "They can be of great service."

Tate, certain he spoke to a blind man, made no attempt to hide his reactions. The man actually knew someone was helping him. He read between the lines of Quinn's conversation, was certain he recognized doubt in Quinn's mind. Tate was thoroughly at ease now. And Quinn knew what he'd come to find out.

Ollie Tate had expected all along that help would come in some form or another. While he'd received no word of it, and betrayed his fear when Quinn built up the case against him, he felt sure now that strings were being pulled, that he'd be safe from here on.

QUINN called the guard and had Tate taken back to his cell. The killer glanced over his shoulder as he went through the door, and sneered openly. Silk joined Quinn and at his request led him to Captain McGrath's office.

McGrath listened carefully. "But Tony," he argued, "it's a matter of record that the only person Tate has seen since he was locked up in jail is his attorney, and he happens to be one appointed by the court. Tate has never seen him before, so far as I know."

"Yes, I realize that," Quinn said. "But Sinclair has been getting threats just the same. There's nothing I want the police

to take any action on. Not yet. But I led Tate into a little trap. I scared the wits out of him and then pretended I was willing to accept a plea. He acted as if he'd expected that all along—even to the point of not taking up my offer because he believes he is going scot free."

"That guy?" McGrath shrugged. "We've never had a tighter case against any killer."

Quinn nodded. "Quite true, so long as our one and only witness is still on our side. How about guards and turnkeys? Are they all perfectly reliable?"

"I'd bank on it, Tony. You couldn't bribe any of those men. Nor scare 'em either."

"Then what of other prisoners, in cells close enough so that Tate could have talked to them?"

McGrath shook his head. "No. We keep murderers segregated. No one has been close enough to Tate to communicate with him."

Quinn arose and leaned lightly on his white cane. "Thanks, Mac. Keep an eye on Tate."

McGrath rubbed his chin. "Tony, is there more to this than you're telling? Something—maybe—the Black Bat is working on?"

Quinn chuckled. "I've told you a hundred times that I'm not the Black Bat, Mac."

"Sure, you told me, and every time I started believing you something happened and, well—doggone it, Tony, I'd bet my shirt you're the Black Bat."

McGrath honestly believed that too, and more than once he'd been on the verge of trapping the black-hooded figure. He'd tried every trick in the book to trip up Tony Quinn into giving even the slightest indication that he wasn't blind.

None of his tricks had ever worked, but McGrath was persistent and a mixture of hatred and admiration for the Black Bat rankled in his heart. He'd sworn many times that some day he'd rip off that black hood and lock up its wearer.

Quinn took Silk's arm and they walked out, both laughing softly. Outside, in the car, Quinn became grimly serious.

Quinn said, "Tate knows steps are being taken to free him. He's been expecting it, but as days went by he grew less sure. But tonight, from what I said, he guessed things were progressing."

"If he is in touch with some friends, he should have known and not been required to guess, sir," Silk offered.

"That's true, but Tate must have set the wheels in motion. No word was sent back. Not unless Tate is the best actor I ever met. We've partly eliminated Attorney Kariton as a suspect because he would have told Tate—given him hope."

Silk frowned. "All of which doesn't remove the menace hanging over the heads of Paul Sinclair, his wife and daughter. It doesn't solve the problem of who killed Arthur Sinclair and sent that ghastly photo to his father."

"No, Silk, it doesn't. Perhaps Carol will have something interesting to report. Or Butch. We'd better go back to the house in case either of them have reported in or tried to reach us by phone."

CHAPTER IV

Hate of an Ex-convict



BUTCH O'LEARY, after two hours of lurking behind bushes in Paul Sinclair's small yard, was growing impatient. Nothing at all had happened. Sinclair, his wife and daughter were all in the house. Now and then they received phone calls and Butch watched through a window. He saw nothing but fresh sorrow as some friend phoned to express condolences over Arthur Sinclair's death.

Paul Sinclair was agitated, hardly able to sit in one place more than a few moments. Yet, if he'd been approached again, he'd have been frantic. Then Butch crouched lower. A car had stopped directly in front of the house. Because of that fact, Butch wasn't unduly worried. If this were a killer, he would come creeping up, not announce his arrival by parking in front of the house.

The man who walked up the path to the front porch was white-haired, well built and expensively dressed. He had a smooth, pinkish face shining in good health and contentment. He was even smiling slightly, but the smile was wiped away when Paul Sinclair opened the door a crack and then threw it wide as he recognized his visitor.

Sinclair said, "Why, Mr. Waring!"

The man named Waring put feeling into his voice. "Paul, I came to offer my sympathies over Arthur's death and to see if there isn't something I can do to help."

"Come in, please, Mr. Waring," Sinclair invited. He stepped away from the door, turned and shouted to his wife and daughter in one of the further rooms. "It's Mr. Waring."

Butch grumbled under his breath. At least he knew the man's name if nothing else, and he was impressed with the fact that Paul Sinclair respected and trusted him. Butch decided Waring was nothing to worry about. He returned to his refuge behind a half grown lilac bush from where he could watch three sides of the house.

An hour went by. Finally Waring departed and drove away. The telephone rang a couple of more times and Butch was getting stiff from his cramped position.

Then he heard the snap of a dry branch crushed underfoot. The sound came from the rear of the garage. Butch slowly spread himself flat, bared his teeth and waited in high expectation. No one with honest intentions would come skulking this way. Butch clenched big fingers into mighty fists. It promised to be an interesting evening after all.

He spotted the man a few moments later. Just a shadowy form darting from the side of the garage to a tree trunk closer to the house. The man stayed there a few moments, then moved forward again. He was getting closer to where Butch waited.

Butch raised himself to his knees very slowly and without making a sound. One thing he knew—this stealthy visitor was never going to reach the house. The man came still closer. Once he patted his hip pocket as if to make certain he carried a gun there and it was ready. He passed through a faint beam of light from a window and Butch had his first good look at him.

The man was about forty-five, slender of build, none too well dressed, and he had the furtive mannerisms of a criminal on the march. Butch waited until he'd passed the lilac bush. Then Butch rose to his feet, took several long strides and reached out.

One hand covered three-quarters of the man's face. The other gripped him

around the neck, choking off even the feeblest of attempted cries. Still holding him this way, Butch lifted the man off his feet and carried him, like a rag doll, to the back of the garage.

There he shoved him against the wall, pinning him in place by the throat grip. With his other hand he searched the man and extracted a cheap nickel plated revolver from one pocket and a glass flask of whisky from the other. Butch let go of the man's throat.

"You'll speak low," he warned in a hoarse whisper. "Let out one loud peep and I'll bust your wind-pipe. Now start talking."

The man massaged his throat. "A flat-foot." He spat the words with venom only a law-hater could possess. "A dirty flatfoot."

BUTCH made no denial. He doubled up one fist and held it in front of the man's eyes. "See that? I can whack you one so you'll never wake up again. Now, who are you and what are you doing here?"

"As if you didn't know, copper. I figured Sinclair would be scared, but not this scared. Listen, all I wanted to do was talk to him."

"With a roscoe in your pocket?" Butch derided. "What were you going to talk about?"

The man cocked his head to one side slightly. "Say, what sort of a dick are you? You were put here to watch for me and they must have told you why."

Butch drew the fist back a foot. "You're doing the talking, remember? What's your name?"

The man wetted his lips. "Look—I know when I'm finished. I know what being caught with a gun on me means, but honest, I was only going to scare Paul Sinclair. I'll tell you everything if you let me have a drink. Just one swallow. I—I need it. My nerves are all shot."

Butch handed him the bottle of whisky. "Go ahead," he invited. "Sometimes the stuff loosens a man's tongue and, chum, it better loosen yours or I'll do it. Go ahead—drink!"

"Thanks." The man removed the cork, tilted the bottle and took a long swallow. He took the bottle from his lips and sprayed a mouthful of whisky into Butch's face.

Butch howled once and made a grab

Leaping from the coupe, the
Black Bat fired a single shot
and the gunman dropped to the
ground (CHAP. VIII)



for the man, but he did so blindly for the cheap whisky burned his eyes and temporarily blinded him. The man was agile and set to run for it. He ducked down, avoided Butch's grabbing hands and slid under one of the bigger man's arms. Then he sprinted away in the darkness.

The bottle of whisky lay at Butch's feet. He mopped the alcohol out of his eyes, cursed fervently and went looking for the man who had been his prisoner. It was a hopeless search. Butch returned to the back of the garage, eyed the whisky bottle for a moment and then picked it up by its neck. He wrapped his hat around it, not trusting the alcohol soaked handkerchief.

There was nothing to do now but return to his hiding place. He couldn't leave the house unguarded. He crouched down behind the lilac bush and bitterly berated himself for being such a fool.

An hour went by before he saw a shabby looking coupe roll slowly past the house. It was a car which the Black Bat frequently used. Butch crawled away, wriggled through a hedge and hurried to the sidewalk some distance down the street from Sinclair's home.

Silk was in the coupe. Butch joined him and quickly sketched the events which had happened.

"You should have known better than to let him take a drink," Silk grumbled. "That's an old trick. But you have the bottle intact, which is good, because a bottle is one thing fingerprints register well on. Tony Quinn ought to hear about this, so I'll take your place on guard here. You use the coupe and go to the lab. Come back as soon as you can."

"Okay." Butch slide behind the wheel after Silk stepped out of the car. "Keep your eyes open. That punk may come back."

Butch O'Leary drove the coupe to town, rolled past Tony Quinn's house and turned into the dead end street beside it. There he parked the coupe, looked around and darted through the garden gate toward a small garden house. He entered this, raised a trap door and dropped into a tunnel. His size made it necessary that he double himself up, but he edged his way along it and in a moment he emerged into the laboratory where Quinn and Carol were seated.

"I'm a prize chump," he said. "Sometimes I wonder why you ever bother with

me. I caught a guy prowling Sinclair's house. I took this gun away from him and then I got soft-hearted and let him have a drink from a bottle of whisky he was carrying. He blew the whisky in my eyes and got away."

QUINN arose. "We all stumble now and then, Butch. Did you determine who he was?"

"No, sir. But I had a good look at him. If I ever see him again, I'll know him. But his friends won't—when I get through with him."

"Is that the bottle of whisky you're carrying in your hat?"

"Yes, sir. The guy wasn't wearing any gloves and I figure maybe his prints are on it. He admitted he was going to scare Sinclair, but I don't know why."

"Scare him? With a gun in his pocket? Very well, Butch. Did anything else happen?"

"Just a man named Waring showed up. Sinclair knew him pretty well."

"He should," Carol put in. "Paul Sinclair works for Dennis Waring."

"I figured something like that," Butch said. "Sinclair was glad to see him but respectful too."

Quinn carefully wrapped the bottle in a piece of cloth. "Butch, go back to Sinclair's. Stay there until you hear from me and there's no need to tell you that Sinclair is in danger. Give Silk this bottle and instruct him to take it at once to the Identification Bureau at Headquarters. I want any prints developed and checked. That's all, Butch. And better luck next time you take a prisoner."

"Next time," Butch vowed, "I konk him first. Thanks for not being sore. I'll get this to Silk fast."

After Butch O'Leary had gone, Quinn sat down beside Carol again. "Butch may have saved the day in preserving the bottle," he said. "Now you were telling me about Attorney Karlton."

"Yes, Tony. He isn't married, lives in a moderately priced hotel and doesn't have much money. He rents office space, his clients are as limited as that of any young attorney trying to make the grade. He comes of a good family and a nice home. His college record was excellent. I found nothing wrong with him at all."

"He's still the only man to come in direct contact with Tate," Quinn said. "Carol, I'm certain that warning to Sin-

clair is sincere. It must be—when one murder has already been committed. The time is short. The killer will have to strike again, and soon. The Sinclairs must not be left unprotected for a moment."

"Is there anything I can do?" Carol asked.

"There is. Tomorrow, join Butch in watching the Sinclair home. If any member of the family goes out, follow that person. Take whatever measures you think wise if anything happens."

"Even to calling the police?"

"Yes. We can't bring them in on it now because so long as the murderer believes Sinclair is carrying out orders, he won't strike. One provision was that Sinclair stay away from the police."

"I'll be there early," Carol promised. "And either Butch or I will keep reporting in."

After Carol left, Tony Quinn returned to the house proper and sat down again in his chair before the fireplace. He was still there, puffing on his pipe and trying to organize the facts of the case when Silk returned.

Silk had a police record card in his hand. He said, "There were prints on the bottle all right. Good ones—and from the fingertips of an ex-convict named Robert Amboy. He was released from prison yesterday, on parole, after serving four years of a six-year-term for larceny."

"I don't recall the case or the man," Quinn frowned.

"His record will tell all you need to know," Silk exclaimed. "Amboy and Sinclair used to be partners. In the same sort of business that Waring is in. Waring's the man for whom Sinclair now works."

"Go on, Silk."

"Sinclair and Amboy seemed to be doing quite well. Then, all of a sudden, things crashed. There was an audit and it was found that Amboy had helped himself to a lot of money that wasn't his. Spent it too, so there was no getting it back. The firm went into bankruptcy."

"Sinclair testified against Amboy?" Quinn asked.

"Yes, sir. It was his evidence that sent Amboy away. Sinclair refused to grant him a break. Not that I blame him."

"Which complicates matters," Quinn said. "Amboy could be handling this

solely as a campaign for revenge and pinning the blame on someone connected with Ollie Tate. Or, Amboy has merely blundered into the mess. That's something for us to find out."

CHAPTER V

Figure in Black



IT WAS after two in the morning when a figure all in black, faded into the darkness of the area behind Sinclair's garage. The Black Bat moved ahead rapidly and silently. His strange sight penetrated the darkness as though it never existed. He avoided a lawn mower which might have tripped a man with ordinary sight.

Sinclair's house was blanketed in darkness too, and as silent as its neighbors. The Black Bat stopped to listen. Butch should be somewhere on the premises. The Black Bat whistled in a low key, a peculiar signal which should have made Butch stand erect to be spotted in the gloom.

No one moved. The Black Bat reached a gloved hand toward his shoulder holster and drew a heavy automatic. He surveyed the yard and judged where Butch would have been concealed to cover most of the premises.

In less than two minutes he found Butch, fallen flat behind the lilac bush. Butch's hat had been knocked off and the back of his head was matted with blood. Fresh blood, as the Black Bat quickly determined. Butch was in no danger. He'd been viciously sapped from behind by a blow which could have killed a smaller and less powerful man, but Butch was breathing without effort and would likely have no more than a severe headache from this.

The Black Bat had no time to minister to his aide. He raced toward the house, reached the front door and tried it. The door was locked. He moved along the porch to a window and found one open about half an inch. It showed signs of having been forced.

The Black Bat raised the window slowly, using only one hand while the other held the automatic in readiness. He raised one leg, to throw it over the win-

drowsill when the clamor of a telephone startled him.

Now, without further hesitation, he scrambled through the window. Upstairs he heard a light switch click and bare feet padded across the floor. The telephone rang again. The Black Bat veered in that direction. Somewhere behind him he heard a very faint squeak. Ordinary ears might not have detected it, but the Black Bat had developed an acute sense of hearing during the months he had been really blind.

He didn't make the mistake of merely turning to face an aggressor. The squeak meant an opening door and any attacker would be in a position to act fast by now. The Black Bat gave a sideways leap instead. Something whizzed past him and hit the wall with a sharp clang which was intensified as the object clattered against the bare floor.

The Black Bat darted for the kitchen door. It was still swinging slightly. He went through it, gun ready for quick action. The back door was wide open. The Black Bat crossed the kitchen in four bounds. Out in the yard again, he heard rapidly diminishing footsteps.

Pursuit was out of the question. Behind him, in the house, he heard Sinclair's voice answering the phone. The Black Bat went back. Sinclair was seated in a corner of the living room, still saying, "Hello! Hello!"

The Black Bat said, "There's no one on the wire, Mr. Sinclair."

Sinclair almost dropped the phone. A weak light illuminated the hallway and Sinclair saw the ominous form all in black. He ran his tongue around his lips and shrank away as if he feared death was only a matter of seconds now.

The Black Bat spoke softly. "There's nothing to be afraid of. I'm the Black Bat."

Sinclair swallowed hard and replaced the phone. He arose slowly, still frightened but game enough. Upstairs a woman's voice wanted to know who had called.

"Tell her there was no one on the wire when you got here and that you're going to sit up awhile," the Black Bat whispered.

SINCLAIR did a fair job of it. Well enough to convince his wife things were normal. The Black Bat closed the living room door.

"You had a visitor before I arrived," he said. "I think he dialed a number which would make your own phone ring, let it ring, and hoped to draw you here so he could kill you."

Sinclair said, "Yes, he meant to kill me. I'm in a great deal of trouble, but I trust you. Some say you're as bad as the criminals you pursue, but I've never believed it."

The Black Bat bowed slightly. "Thank you, Mr. Sinclair. It happens that I know all about your trouble: how your son died, how you received a photograph and a warning. In fact, there's little about this I don't know."

"But how did you learn it?" Sinclair gasped.

"I have ways of finding out when crime is on a rampage. Besides, I had a little discussion with Tony Quinn tonight. I came here to talk to you about the case. Luckily I arrived in time."

"They're going to kill my wife and my daughter, maybe me, unless I change my testimony about the murder I witnessed. But I won't do it. I won't. Not unless—unless things get so bad I can't refuse. That scoundrel the police locked up means nothing to me. My family does and I lost my son already."

"I know," the Black Bat sympathized.

"I don't want to be the means of letting Tate go free. You've got to believe me. But what can I do, if the rest of my family is in terrible danger? I can't eat or sleep. I haven't told them because they're suffering enough now with Arthur dead."

"Sit down," the Black Bat suggested. "And just listen for a few moments. Nothing is going to happen to you or your family if I can help it."

"But see here!" Sinclair cried. "If there was someone in the house to kill me when I came down to answer the phone and that person saw you, he'll know I've gone to the authorities. I was warned not to."

"He couldn't have seen me," the Black Bat assured Sinclair. "He won't really know who I was. Now listen to me, Mr. Sinclair. From now on you and your family will be under constant surveillance. By people you'll probably never notice unless something happens. That much I can do. But I need your cooperation. Whoever awakened you by ringing the phone wasn't your only visitor tonight."

Sinclair unbuttoned his lounging robe as if it suddenly became much too warm. "You mean there were—others?"

"One other. Someone you know. An ex-convict named Robert Amboy."

Sinclair sat down now, limply, as if half the life had gone out of him.

"Bob Amboy!" he muttered. "So he meant what he said."

"I don't know what he said or threatened, but he came here with a gun and was stopped. I want to know all about Amboy."

Sinclair looked up at the weird figure in black. "Yes, of course. Bob and I ran a wholesale cotton goods business. We were doing fine at it. Then, very suddenly, there wasn't enough money to pay the bills. I found out that Bob had stolen so much we were bankrupt."

"You were instrumental in sending him to prison then?"

"Yes. I gave him a chance to make good. He refused. He'd lost everything at gambling. So he said. I had him arrested."

"How could you, if you and he were partners? A partner cannot be accused of stealing the firm's money. Not if it is a true partnership."

"We were incorporated," Sinclair groaned. "I found out all about that. Partnership, corporation—what difference does it make? He stole the money and he went to prison for it. He swore he'd make me be sorry for the day I filed a complaint against him. I—say, maybe this Tate has nothing to do with all this. Maybe Amboy is behind it. Maybe he killed Arthur and sent me that horrible photo."

BUT it was plain the Black Bat did not wholly accept this theory.

"It's possible," the Black Bat said. "I'm not losing sight of the fact and I intend to find Amboy tonight. If I do, he'll talk or wish he had. Now, after your firm failed, you went to work for Dennis Waring. Is that correct?"

"Yes. He gave me a good job because I knew the business. I'm hoping to work my way into the firm. Waring encourages me in every way. He's been very nice about all this trouble and the way it's taken me out of the office."

"I know he visited you tonight," the Black Bat said. "But I've spent enough time here. If Amboy was the man who tried to ambush you, he'll be on the move

and I want to catch up with him. Besides, your wife will be worried in a few moments."

The Black Bat opened the door, crossed the hallway and entered the dining room. There he bent and picked up a knife, a slim, long handled blade of a type meant for throwing. He examined the wall which it had struck. There was only a faint indentation in the wallpaper. A noise made him turn. Sinclair had followed him.

"What-what's that?" Sinclair whispered, so that his wife upstairs would hear him. The dining room was too badly lighted for Sinclair to distinguish what it was the Black Bat held in his hand.

"A knife. Meant for you, but thrown at me instead. Did Amboy know anything about knife throwing?"

Sinclair shook his head. "I don't think so. I never saw him throw a knife or heard him say he could."

"Good," the Black Bat commented dryly. "Because the man who threw this didn't know much about it either. Good night, Mr. Sinclair. Lock this window and check all the others before you go back to bed."

"I'll do it now." Sinclair turned and lowered the window and locked it. When he looked again for the Black Bat, there was no one in the room. He heard the back door whisper shut and then there was nothing but silence. Sinclair shivered, drew the robe close around him and went upstairs.

Outside, in the yard, Butch was sitting up and rubbing his head gingerly. He saw someone standing near him and made a lunge which missed. There was a laugh he instantly recognized. Butch stood up, looking more ungainly and embarrassed than ever.

"What happened to me?" he asked the figure in black.

"Don't you know, Butch?"

"I never heard a thing. Just the swish, my hat got brushed off and something hit me. It must have been the upper half of the Chrysler Building by the way my head feels. Boss, did you get the guy?"

"No. He very nearly got me. At least, I think that's what he meant to do. How do you feel? Well enough to stick it out?"

"I'm okay. Gosh, I'm fumbling this assignment all over the place. Maybe you shouldn't trust me here alone."

"Anyone could have been victimized as you were, Butch. There's nothing to worry about. In fact I know you'll be a better guard than ever now, because you'll be ready if anyone comes again. I've got to go. In the morning Carol will be here. Good night, Butch, and better luck."

Butch wagged his massive head. "Luck just ain't on my side tonight. But I'll do the best I can."

The Black Bat faded into the gloom. A few seconds later he crouched in a yard several doors away and waited for the shabby looking coupe to roll by with Silk at the wheel. When it did, the Black Bat darted out and was inside the coupe almost faster than the eye could follow.

"Head back to town, the lower end. Bob Amboy gave an address there as his permanent residence for parole purposes. I want to get him—fast."

The coupe leaped forward. When it reached the highway leading to the city, Silk opened it up. The coupe may have looked shabby, but there was a vast amount of power under the old hood.

The Black Bat told Silk what had happened. "It was almost too coincidental, this killer lying in wait for Sinclair just as I arrived. Things like that rarely happen and I'm suspicious of it."

"Just what do you mean?" Silk asked.

THERE was a grim note in the Black Bat's voice when he answered the question.

"I think this prowler spotted Butch and realized Sinclair must have told someone of his trouble and enlisted help. The prowler wasn't sure who it could be so he decided to wait and see if anyone else showed up. When I climbed through the window, he threw a knife at me. If he'd known how to throw a knife, I'd either be dead or badly wounded right now. I think he became panicky and used the knife to delay me so he'd have a few extra seconds to effect a getaway."

"You didn't see him at all, sir?"

"Not even his shadow. But I imagine he identified me, Silk, and was afraid to make a further attack. Sinclair seems to think Bob Amboy is the man behind this."

"Do you, sir?" Silk slowed down as he neared one of the great bridges.

"I don't know." The Black Bat stripped off the tight fitting hood and re-

placed it with a broad-brimmed black hat which would attract little attention in traffic. The hood went into a well concealed pocket of his somber clothes. He adjusted the hat brim to hide the tell-tale scars around his eyes and then leaned back into the shadows that filled the coupe.

"Amboy has a good motive," Silk observed.

"And he exhibited his intentions," the Black Bat admitted. "But again we have this amazing coincidence, Amboy appearing at this time, when Ollie Tate needs help. If Amboy is behind it, why should he kill Sinclair's son and warn Sinclair his wife and daughter will also die unless he changes his testimony against Tate?"

"Because he knows about the Tate case and figures if Sinclair is murdered, the blame will be hung on some of Tate's friends."

"Perhaps, Silk. But I'm not convinced. However, if we can land Amboy we may put a stop to the whole thing provided he is using Tate as a false motive for killing Sinclair. At least we'll learn something."

"Amboy could easily know all about the Tate case from Attorney Karlton," Silk persisted. "Somehow I think the two of them are in this together. Look—it's very plain. Amboy gets Sinclair. Maybe not Sinclair himself, but his family, which is a worse way of taking vengeance on a man than killing him himself. Karlton figures Sinclair will welch on his testimony, Tate will go free and Karlton's rep as a shady criminal lawyer goes up. That's what Karlton wants."

"Yes, I thought of that too. We can't be sure, Silk. We're not sure of anything yet. There's an utter lack of evidence and too many suspects with too many motives."

They were silent then, until the Black Bat replaced the wide-brimmed hat with his hood. Silk looked around this pre-dawn deserted neighborhood, saw no one and slid the coupe to the curb. The Black Bat was out of it and streaking toward an alley before the car stopped.

He crossed through a dirty, littered yard toward the back of the rooming house where Amboy was supposed to live. He reached the rear door and examined the lock. It was old-fashioned, easy to open with one of the finely tempered tools from a compact burglar kit.

The Black Bat swung the door open, listened a moment and then crept toward the front hall. There he found a letter box with Amboy's name on it. The card was handwritten, fresh and new.

It gave the number of Amboy's room and the Black Bat went up the stairs as softly as a cat. He reached the fourth floor corridor, located the room and tried the knob gently. The door was locked and there was no key in the lock. Again the burglar tools did their work. The Black Bat stepped into the room.

At once his nostrils twitched from the sharp and sweet aroma of an orange. He found the half eaten fruit on a battered table. The peelings were heaped on a piece of paper. The bed had been slept on but not in. The spread covering it bore the indentation of a human form.

The Black Bat found a cheap suitcase in the closet. It had been partly unpacked. Apparently Amboy owned only one suit and hat and these were missing. Bureau drawers revealed nothing of interest. Amboy had taken up quarters here and it looked as if he meant to obey the Parole Board edicts about an established residence.

There was nothing further to be done on these premises. The Black Bat couldn't await Amboy's return. It would be morning very soon and bats fly by night.

Just at dawn the Black Bat flitted through the garden gateway to Quinn's estate and disappeared into the small garden house. Silk followed him shortly and found the Black Bat, still in regalia, bending over an enlarging glass. Beneath it was the knife which had been thrown at him in Sinclair's home. And beside the apparatus rested Robert Amboy's police record card with his picture and fingerprints.

The Black Bat straightened and uttered a weary sigh. Silk said, "I'll put some coffee on, sir. Then you'd better try to get an hour's sleep at least—before going to the office."

The Black Bat nodded. "A good idea, Silk. Incidentally, there were some prints on this knife. Most of them smudged, but one thumb print is as vivid as a picture."

"Amboy's, sir?"

"Yes, Amboy's. Not the slightest question about it. Also I happen to know that Amboy peeled and ate an orange earlier tonight. You know how the acid and odor of an orange peel adheres to the fingers. You can detect the faint odor of it on the knife handle."

"Then it's as good as settled," Silk declared happily. "Find Amboy and you stop the threat against Sinclair's family."

"If it was only as easy as that," the Black Bat sighed. "Go get the coffee, Silk. I've some thinking to do. Call me when the coffee is ready."

CHAPTER VI

Hostage by Preference



T EIGHT the following morning, Carol and Butch were parked in a very average looking sedan on the street behind the Sinclair residence. From that point they could watch the house easily and spot any car which stopped or started from in front of the place.

At eight-thirty they saw a cab roll up.

[Turn page]

HEADACHE

UPSET
STOMACH

JUMPY
NERVES

RELIEF!

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Paul Sinclair emerged from the house and entered the cab. Neither Carol nor Butch stirred. The menace was directed at Margaret and Susan Sinclair. Butch and Carol grew more alert than ever with only the two women in the house.

Now and then Butch dozed. At eleven o'clock he left the sedan and went to a drug store half a dozen blocks away. There he phoned Tony Quinn's office, got Silk on the wire and reported that everything was under control. Silk reiterated previous warnings to exert the utmost care.

Butch bought half a dozen sandwiches, a dozen doughnuts, and four containers of coffee and hiked back to the car. Carol ate one sandwich and one doughnut. Butch ate the rest and still felt famished. He was sipping the last container of coffee when Carol nudged him to attention.

Susan Sinclair had emerged from the rear door with her mother. Susan was dressed for the street, her mother wore an apron. Susan smiled a trifle wanly and moved toward the garage. She was going to take the family car, which Carol had expected all along, in that Sinclair had used a cab to go to work in.

Susan was about Carol's height and build. She was also a blonde. They didn't resemble one another in looks, though Susan was an undeniably pretty girl. Yet, seen from the back, they could be mistaken for one another.

Carol said, "Butch, that girl doesn't know the danger she's in. Sinclair refused to tell his family. But we can't let her go off alone like that. And we can't leave Mrs. Sinclair unguarded. I'll trail Susan. You stay and watch the house."

Butch nodded unhappily. Watching houses was not exactly his idea of fun, especially since he had a raging headache and a sore scalp from the blow he'd taken the night before—plus an extremely strong yen to come in physical grips with whoever had been responsible for his headache.

Yet he saw the wisdom of Carol's suggestion. Carol quickly drove around the block and when Susan passed the corner, Carol began to shadow her. It led straight to the city and then uptown. Carol clung to the trail, finding it difficult at times but by skillful driving she managed never to let Susan's car out of her sight.

Susan turned off one of the avenues, crossed town for two blocks and then pulled up before a large funeral home. Even before she got there, Carol had a good idea of her destination. Susan was going to attend to some detail about her brother's burial. Undoubtedly her father would join her here shortly.

Carol stepped on it, pulled ahead of Susan and was parked almost at the same time as Susan. Through Carol's mind filtered the thought that the murderer would know what funeral home was to direct Arthur Sinclair's services. One or more members of the family was bound to come here and if a trap was to be set, this might be a perfect spot for it.

Carol had also been apprised, via Butch, that Bob Amboy was on the loose and probably actively trying to rig up a murder plot against Sinclair or his family.

Susan Sinclair got out of her car and found Carol standing there smiling at her. Susan frowned slightly.

Carol said, "I'm from your father's office. You don't remember me, but I've seen you, Miss Sinclair."

"Oh?" Susan still frowned.

"You were to meet your father here?" Carol went on. "He was quite certain he agreed to, but wasn't sure. You understand—all this happening."

"He was to meet me here," Susan said. "Isn't he coming?"

"Of course. But he'll be a bit late. There's a tea shop just around the corner and he wants you to wait there for him. He sent me to tell you."

SUSAN glanced at the imposing facade of the funeral home. "Very well," she acquiesced. "I could wait here as easily as not, but if he wants me at the tea room, I'll go there."

Carol smiled. "He's certain that will be best. I'll tell him where you are."

Susan walked slowly down the street and Carol waited until she turned the corner. Carol was certain this by-play had not been watched from the funeral home nor from any of the other buildings in the neighborhood. She opened her purse, took out a vanity and glanced at her image in the mirror. She replaced the vanity, sliding it down beside a compact little automatic and Carol deftly pushed the safety to the off position.

Then she walked into the funeral

home. Maybe Susan was known here and she'd never get away with this, but if a trap was set, she might spring it. The circumstances were perfect for a murderer to strike. If nothing happened, very little was lost.

Carol rang for the elevator. It came to floor level and the door opened. A man in a black suit and tie peered out at her with a question in his eyes.

Carol said, "My name is Susan Sinclair. I'm to meet my father here."

"Step in, Miss Sinclair," the man said. "Your father is upstairs and expecting you."

Carol gulped. It wasn't going to be easy to explain to Paul Sinclair why she had adopted his daughter's identity, but she had to go through with it now.

The elevator door closed softly, the mechanism whirled and the car whispered its way upwards. Apparently it went all the way to the top floor. The door opened. Carol stepped out and stared at rows of caskets. There were no lights on here. It was merely the show room.

Instantly she sensed danger, but it came much too fast. The elevator operator had stepped softly out behind her. Now a big paw covered her mouth, shutting off the scream that rose to her lips. Another man came out of the gloom. He was grinning broadly as he swung a haymaker at Carol's chin, which the elevator operator held posed as such a tempting target.

Carol slumped in the man's grasp and with all her weight suddenly leaning against him, he stumbled and Carol landed on the floor. Her purse lay beneath her.

The man who had swung the fist, muttered an imprecation. "Come on, you dummy. Grab her feet. We'll use the service elevator, take her down fast and get her into the car out back. Let's go, before somebody starts ringing for your elevator."

When Carol opened her eyes again, she saw that she was in a neatly furnished living room and lying on a divan. Memory returned with a rush and she quickly closed her eyes again. She could smell cigarette smoke and then someone spoke. Not to her.

She risked slitting her eyes and, turning her head a trifle, she saw two men playing cards at a table in the center of the room. Then she became aware of the

fact that her ankles and her wrists were taped. One of the card players glanced her way and Carol promptly closed her eyes. After a moment or two she looked around again. She lay facing two windows that overlooked the street. She was apparently on the ground floor of some residential neighborhood. The building across the street was of fairly good type.

She heard a rumbling whistle and then another of different tone and she knew she must be close to the waterfront. She had no idea which one, but it didn't seem to matter. She was quite helpless. If she stirred, she'd probably get slugged again.

She wondered if either of those men was Robert Amboy and decided against it. They were too calm, too deadly. A man just out of prison would show nervousness. Both were in their late twenties, hard looking characters and probably capable of killing her without a twinge of conscience. Carol decided the longer she remained unconscious, the less trouble she'd have.

THERE was only one hope in her mind. If Susan wondered why her father didn't appear at the tea shop, she'd probably hunt him up and tell him about the strange girl who'd sent her there. If Paul Sinclair became suspicious at that act, he might notify Tony Quinn. It was a rather forlorn hope because even if Quinn did guess what had happened, the chances of finding her were slim indeed.

The afternoon wore away. She couldn't fake being unconscious any longer. One of the men raised her and let her sip a little water and then went back to his card game. She was asked no questions, told nothing.

There were evening shadows across the windows when a phone rang somewhere in the house. One of the men arose and went to answer it. The other man hitched his chair around to face and watch Carol.

The first man was gone a few moments. When he returned, he was red-faced and angry. He stalked over to stand beside the divan and looked down at Carol.

"What are you—a female cop?" he demanded.

She didn't answer him. He drew back his hand as if to administer a slap, but

thought better of it. He turned to his companion.

"We muffed this one good," he said. "The girl ain't Susan Sinclair. Susan happens to be home. We got us a ringer and also some orders about what to do with her. But not right now. It can wait. Sure, there's no hurry at all."

The meaning in his eyes was murder!

CHAPTER VII

Mistaken Identities



LATE that same afternoon Silk pulled up in front of Paul Sinclair's home. He got out of the car, ran around to open the door and gave his arm to blind Tony Quinn.

Sinclair was waiting on the porch to greet him. Quinn hung the white cane on his arm

and let Sinclair lead him into the house. Mrs. Sinclair was there and she politely acknowledged an introduction to Quinn. Susan didn't seem to be around.

Dennis Waring sat beside Mrs. Sinclair and when he arose to shake hands with Quinn, his handclasp was warm and friendly. He murmured a few complimentary phrases concerning Quinn's work and then sat down again.

Quinn said, "Is Attorney Karlton here yet?"

"No, sir," Silk answered.

"He phoned. He'll be a trifle late," Sinclair explained. "I'm sure he'll come."

Quinn smiled, but there was no mirth in his voice. "He'd better. We'll go ahead without him. You've told your wife and daughter about the whole affair, as I suggested you should, Mr. Sinclair?"

"Yes, sir. I also told Mr. Waring. I work for him, you know. He'd like to help."

"If there is anything I can do, Mr. Quinn," Waring said fervently.

"Perhaps there will be," Quinn answered. "We may need all the help we can get. The facts are these. Someone wants Ollie Tate freed. Someone who will go to any ends to make this come true. We know he murdered Arthur Sinclair. We know he has threatened

the lives of Susan, Margaret and Paul Sinclair. He's about due to strike again and that is why I thought the people involved should know the whole truth."

"I agree," Waring said. "I can see why you kept it a secret, but now—well, Paul told me about Bob Amboy also. Personally I think he is the man behind it and he is merely using Paul's involvement with Tate to throw suspicion off himself."

"We have no such evidence," Quinn said. "Without it we can assume nothing. The trial is to open tomorrow. Out of deference to the Sinclair family, because of the death of their son, I agreed to postpone the case. I have not done so. I'm afraid I shall have to renege on that promise."

Mrs. Sinclair was quiet and composed. "Whatever you say, Mr. Quinn. We're sure you know best."

"I have my reasons," Quinn told them. "The longer it takes to dispose of this trial and send Tate to the chair, the greater the opportunity and necessity for the murderer to strike. Once Sinclair's testimony convicts Tate, all need for further intimidation will be gone."

Waring emphatically agreed. "I can see your point," he said. "And it's a good one. But I have a suggestion. Susan and Mrs. Sinclair should be spirited away—hidden somewhere and guarded until after the trial is over."

Paul Sinclair shook his head. "You forget, Mr. Waring, that there is Arthur's funeral."

"I'm sorry, Paul," Waring said. "I'm so concerned with saving the living that I did forget the dead. I won't make any more fool suggestions."

"It isn't a fool suggestion," Quinn broke in. "The funeral isn't until day after tomorrow—the day after the trial, and I'll put Sinclair on the stand at once. We can't take chances. If Amboy is behind this, then of course Tate's predicament is only an excuse and has nothing to do with the threats except that Amboy is using the situation to remove suspicion from himself. So the threat may remain even after the trial."

"What do you suggest?" Sinclair asked.

"That your wife and daughter be sequestered somewhere. That the funeral be held privately and under guard. That immediately afterwards your family should again go into hiding. Until we



SILK

have located Amboy or definitely proven he is not the man."

THE doorbell rang then and Sinclair soon returned with Attorney Karlton. The court-appointed public defender was young, recently out of college and he looked as though he'd probably been one of the star football players of whatever school he attended. He was dark-haired, dark-eyed. He acknowledged the introductions and sat down close by Quinn.

Karlton said, "Isn't this somewhat unusual, Quinn? Bringing the defense attorney into the home of your star witness?"

"The whole affair is unusual," Quinn said. "Did you know that someone is trying to intimidate Sinclair to change his testimony about Tate?"

"Why, I don't believe it," Karlton said quickly. "Really, there must be some mistake!"

"Whoever is behind this has already murdered Mr. Sinclair's son, Arthur," Quinn went on. "We have proof of that. And Sinclair has been indirectly approached to switch his evidence."

Karlton looked extremely ill-at-ease. He fiddled with his hat, gazed at the floor a moment and then looked up.

"Now see here," he said half angrily,

"Tate is my client. I'm not proud of him. He's a born rat, but he is entitled to the services of an attorney. I'm not the best criminal lawyer in the business by a long shot. If Tate has friends—which I strongly doubt—why haven't they provided him with a battery of high powered attorneys?"

"Because the identity of Tate's protector would then have to be told," Quinn argued. "Even a firm of shysters would insist on that. Your point isn't well made, Karlton."

"But take it from this angle then," Karlton argued. "Not a soul has visited Tate. He hasn't so much as a second cousin and if he did have a score of relatives I doubt any of them would acknowledge him. Yes, I represent him, but only because I was appointed by the court. If he came to me with half the money in the world, I wouldn't accept his case."

Quinn asked, "Have you noticed any change in Tate's behavior lately?"

Karlton lighted a cigarette before he answered that. "Yes, I have." He inhaled deeply. "I saw him today and he seemed downright cheerful. Up to then he didn't have much hope and he treated me as if I represented Mr. Quinn. That's changed. Now he's telling me how to handle the defense."

Waring said, "Excuse me for butting in, Mr. Quinn, but I should think if you determined who has talked with Tate, you'd get a lead to the murderer. Tate knows what is going on and is encouraged by it."

Quinn shook his head. "Nobody has talked to Tate. He hasn't had a single visitor and he is isolated from other prisoners."

Paul Sinclair suddenly cast frightened eyes in Attorney Karlton's direction. "But—Mr. Karlton sees Tate daily," he said, and stiffened as if he expected Karlton to attack him.

Karlton laughed uneasily. "Be reasonable, Mr. Sinclair. Why would I resort to murder to help a client like Tate? In fact he isn't even a client except by order of the court. How do I stand to profit? The man hasn't a dime. My bill will be paid by the state and it will be in the same amount whether I win the case or not. And precious little at that."

Sinclair flushed. "I guess you're right. I'm sorry I said what I did."

The doorbell again interrupted them and Sinclair went to answer it. This time he brought back a sealed envelope.

Sinclair said, "This came by messenger. The writing on the envelope resembles that which appeared on the back of the photo sent me by the murderer. I—I'm almost afraid to open it."

"Read it," Quinn said.

Sinclair ripped open the envelope. He unfolded a single sheet of paper, read it and turned deathly pale.

"It's another threat. It says Susan is being held and will be killed."

"Susan is upstairs," Mrs. Sinclair cried. "Or she was."

MRS. SINCLAIR darted from the room and ran up the stairs. Nobody moved until she returned and with her was Susan, somewhat befuddled about the whole thing.

Quinn asked, "Susan is here? I know someone returned with Mrs. Sinclair."

"Yes," Mrs. Sinclair said. "She's been in her room since she returned from town this afternoon."

Quinn said, "Susan, a message was just received indicating that you are now being held prisoner. We know that's a mistake of course, but there must be some reason for it. Did anything unusual happen today?"

Susan's pretty face clouded. "Why, yes. I meant to tell Dad but, well, he has enough to think about. I was to meet him at the undertakers. I drove to town, parked and when I got out of the car, a girl stopped me. She said Dad had sent her from the office and I wasn't to go in, but meet him at a tea shop around the corner instead. I went to the tea shop, remained there a full hour and then I returned to the funeral home. Dad was there, waiting for me."

The muscles at the sides of Quinn's jaws tightened, but he gave no other indication that he'd suddenly seen the truth behind this. Carol had stepped in to save Susan and been mistaken for Sinclair's daughter. They were holding Carol in the belief that she was Susan.

Quinn turned his head slightly. His blank looking eyes noticed that Silk had also recognized the true facts.

Quinn said, "Silk, will you go to the car and see if my briefcase is there? I can't recall if I had it."

Silk said, "Yes, sir, at once," and hurried out of the house.

He'd look up Butch who should be posted somewhere close by the premises. If Butch hadn't heard from Carol, then the grim chain of menace was complete. Quinn gripped the crook of his cane very tightly and forced himself to remain calm. Inside him he wanted to rush out of here and begin hunting clues which might lead to Carol's captors.

Quinn said, "There's been some sort of a mistake. We're very fortunate that Susan is safe and I think we should take immediate steps to insure continued protection. I'll furnish the guard, Mr. Sinclair, but I'd rather you suggested the place."

Sinclair hesitated. "Why, yes, I think there is such a place. It's—"

Quinn broke in hastily. "Not now. Keep in mind the fact that we can trust no one. Not Mr. Karlton, nor even Mr. Waring."

"I ought to resent that," Karlton managed a grin. "But under the circumstances I don't."

"Quinn is quite right," Waring agreed. "Karlton, can I drop you off somewhere?"

Before they left, Silk returned. He stepped up to Quinn's chair. "I'm sorry, sir. The briefcase is missing."

Quinn inhaled slowly. "Thank you, Silk."

So Carol was gone! It was she who had been taken hostage in Susan's place. There was much to be done and time was limited. Quinn fought the desire to leave abruptly. He waited until Karlton and Waring left. Then Sinclair outlined his plans. A distant relative owned a mountain lodge. It was very likely not being used at this season of the year and could be reached quickly enough.

Quinn said, "Silk, will you bring in the guard I posted here?"

"We've been guarded all this time?" Sinclair gasped.

"Naturally. This man is efficient and powerful enough to take good care of your family. He isn't a police officer because I hesitated in bringing the police into the case because of that threat. See that your family leaves as quickly as possible and, as for yourself, be most careful."

"But won't Paul be with us?" Mrs. Sinclair asked. "After all, he is in the most danger."

"On the contrary, he is perfectly safe," Quinn explained. "Because he is needed to offset his own testimony. If he is killed, we can convict Tate by the evidence your husband gave in signed statements and in sworn testimony before the indicting jury. Paul's life is as precious to this killer as Tate's must be."

CHAPTER VIII

The Black Bat's Vengeance



JUST AS SOON as they had driven away from the house, Silk dropped his feigned calmness.

"They've got Carol and they think she's Susan, sir," he cried. "How in the world are we ever going to find her?"

"I'm not sure,"

Quinn said, "but we're starting right now. You heard me ask Sinclair the address of that funeral home. Go there. Whatever happened to Carol began at the funeral home. She either knew something or had a strong hunch Susan was due to be snatched. The last place Carol was seen was at the funeral home when she took pains to send Susan away."

When Silk parked in front of the building, Tony Quinn's apparently sightless eyes swept the vicinity and saw no one suspicious. He acted his part of a blind man, though it delayed matters cruelly. Soon he was seated in the office of the manager.

Quinn opened a leather case and showed his badge of office. He said, "I'm investigating a rather strange case—one which cannot be made public at this moment, so I won't be able to answer your questions. Someone visited this building about noontime—and vanished immediately afterwards. We have reason to believe a crime was committed and someone connected with this establishment was part of it."

"Great heavens," the manager exploded. "You must be wrong, Mr. Quinn. Not a thing has happened here. Not a thing."

"That you are aware of," Quinn countered. "The crime was planned, but not over a period of more than two or three days at the most. Now, did you take on any new employees during that time?"

"But look," the manager said, "unfavorable publicity wouldn't do us any good at all—"

"Not one word of this will ever reach anyone," Quinn promised. "You did have a new employee then?"

"Yes. Our elevator operator was hit by a car. Leg broken. A man walked in looking for work and we gave him the job. He disappeared this afternoon. Left us in an awful predicament."

"Who was he? Do you know, for sure?"

The manager went over to a filing cabinet and returned with a small book. He opened it, studied an entry and nodded. "His name is Ben Linley. His address is Twenty-Two-Fifty-Six Waverly Place. He's thirty-four, five feet nine, weighs one sixty-five."

"Do you always take such a careful description of your employees?"

The manager nodded. "Yes. All this came directly off his chauffeur's license. Sometimes we have to press even our elevator operators into service as flower car or limousine drivers and we insist all employees have a chauffeur's license."

"And this Ben Linley had one," Quinn mused. "A man looking for any type of a job wouldn't be apt to be supplied with such a license, but a man assigned to get a job at a funeral parlor would

be bound to own one. When was he missed, and under what circumstances?"

"At one-thirty we started looking for him. The elevator he was supposed to operate was on the top floor—where we store a lot of caskets and supplies. He must have used the back service elevator and left the other car upstairs."

"I'd like to go up there," Quinn said. "Right now."

When he stepped from the elevator, Quinn's remarkable sight swept through the gloom of the upper floor and almost at once he spotted Carol's purse which had been wedged between a couple of small packing cases. Silk retrieved it at an opportune moment and they got out of there as quickly as possible.

In the car once more Silk produced the purse and opened it. He checked the gun inside. "She had no chance to use it, sir. I imagine she was struck down, or seized, and her purse wasn't noticed. If it had been, they'd have guessed she wasn't Susan."

"Carol would have gotten rid of it if possible," Quinn said. "Take me home, Silk. Quickly. Put this car away and stand by with the coupe. The Black Bat is moving in now."

IT REQUIRED but a few moments to reach the house, enter it and hurry to the secret lab. There Quinn changed into the somber regalia of the Black Bat. It was already dusk. By the time he was prepared to swing into action, he'd have complete darkness on his side. There was only a single clue—the identity of the missing elevator operator.

Quinn was thinking things out as he dressed. The operator would, quite probably, be of none too great intelligence. He'd left a wide open trail. Perhaps by reason of not thinking he'd ever get involved, or because he was compelled to prove his identity in order to get the job and had promptly forgotten a record of him might be kept.

Silk was in the coupe when the Black Bat flitted from the garden gate to the curb. The Black Bat wore his wide-brimmed hat, but the hood was in a pocket and he was geared for trouble. Silk drove to Waverly Place, found the right number and dropped the Black Bat off. Silk had his instructions. He parked, checked the time and then walked briskly toward the house.

It was a rooming house and an un-

prepossessing landlady answered the doorbell. Silk said, "I'm looking for Ben Linley. I'm an old pal of his. So I just go right in, huh?"

"You wait in the parlor," the landlady scoffed. "Think I want strangers roaming all around my place? How do I know Linley ever saw you before? Go in there and sit down."

Silk obeyed, until the landlady waddled up the stairs. Then Silk quietly slipped out of the place, returned to the car and began circling the block slowly.

Linley followed the landlady downstairs. He was quite typical of the lower part of the underworld. He had a weak chin, watery eyes and a thin, cruel mouth. He walked into the parlor and came to a stop.

"Where is the guy?" he bellowed.

The landlady came into the room also. "Why, he's gone. He was right in that chair. You know, Mr. Linley, I was suspicious of him right away. He looked like a crook and that's what he was. Something is probably missing. That's all he came for, to steal. Help me see if he took anything."

Linley scowled and walked out. He returned to his third floor room, still scowling. He didn't like the idea of a visitor who asked for him by name and then couldn't wait one minute.

Linley pushed open the door. His room was dark and it startled him because he knew he'd left the lights on. He reached for the switch and out of the darkness came a gloved hand. It closed about his wrist, gave an expert twist and Linley went catapulting into the middle of the room.

The door closed and there was only intense darkness. Even the window shade had been drawn.

"Hey, what is this?" Linley moved backwards very carefully. He knew where the furniture was placed. If he could reach the bureau and get the gun in the top drawer—

There was no reply. He kept talking, saying anything to hold the attention of the man he knew was in the room. His back touched the corner of the bureau. Linley smiled thinly, twisted around and slowly pulled the drawer out. His hand reached into it, fumbling for the gun.

The Black Bat said, "I removed the gun, Linley. Go over and sit down on the bed."

"Now see here!" Linley protested.

A gloved fist cut off any more words. Linley was half dazed by the blow and hardly was aware of being practically lifted off his feet and carried to the bed. He was flung down on it, bounded up again and started slashing the air with his fists.

Then he stopped that and sat down very abruptly. That cool round object pressing against his throat was a gun barrel. He knew what they felt like.

THE same quiet voice said, "I'm the Black Bat, Linley. I came here to see you because you know something. I'll ask you about it just once. I want an immediate reply. If I don't get it, you'll be found here with a black sticker cut-out resembling a bat, plastered to the middle of your forehead. Right over the bullet wound."

Linley shrank back. He never doubted the identity of this man. He'd heard—and never believed—that the Black Bat could see in the dark. Now he did believe it. He also knew that the Black Bat's victims were usually found trademarked with one of those stickers so no one else would get blamed for the kill. In fact, Linley knew of two people who had been found that way and he suddenly acquired a decided aversion to being added to the list.

"Wh-what do you want to know?"

"You helped kidnap a girl this afternoon. Who paid you to snatch her and where is she right now?"

Linley made one more weak attempt at innocence. "I don't know what you're talking—"

The flat of the automatic collided with his cheek. It sent him falling sideways onto the bed and he was quickly jerked into a sitting position again.

"My next act will be to put a bullet through you. I can find out what I want to know, Linley, but you can save me a little time. Answer that question."

"It was—was Joe McCulty. He gave me fifty bucks. We grabbed the girl. Joe put me out of the car. That's all I know."

"Where did he make you leave the car?"

"At Tenth and Green Street. Near the river front."

"He turned down that street?"

"Yeah. I got out after he turned down."

The Black Bat said, "This had better

be the truth, Linley. Because if it isn't I'm coming back and you won't like that."

"It is the truth. I wouldn't lie to you. I know I'd never get away with it. If Joe told me it was to be a snatch, I'd have had nothing to do with it."

"I can imagine," the Black Bat said dryly. "You'll stay here—just in case I want to come back."

"Yeah, I promise. I'll be here. Sure, I'll be here."

"That is one of the few truthful things you have ever said," the Black Bat commented. He raised the automatic and brought it down in a blow calculated to keep Linley from waking up and phoning an alarm for at least an hour or thereabouts.

Moments later the Black Bat was in the coupe and directing Silk to the address Linley had given.

He said, "They always make mistakes, Silk. This time they foresaw that Susan or Mrs. Sinclair was bound to visit the funeral parlor and a trap could be set for either one. But they selected a weakling to spring it."

The address was in an extremely interesting neighborhood. It was a short block ending in a high brick wall. Beyond the wall was the riverfront section. Any car turning in here could have gone no further than that wall. Therefore, if Carol had been transferred to one of the houses along this block, she'd probably still be there. Transporting an unwilling prisoner is too great a risk for any crooks readily to take.

The Black Bat said, "It's your inning, Silk. I see it this way. Carol is here, somewhere. If we start prowling all the houses it may take us hours and we may raise an alarm. Therefore we've got to make those kidnapers take Carol away."

"But how, sir?"

"There is a bar on the corner. As we both know, this particular section is a favorite hangout for upper bracket crooks. There are bound to be some in the bar. Or employees will readily take an alarm and broadcast it. Tilt your hat over your eyes, drift in and talk out of the side of your mouth. Mention to the barkeep that the whole neighborhood is swarming with cops, that a much wanted killer is hiding out on the last Green Street block and the cops are going to seal it off and make a house-to-house search."

SILK was already altering his usually impeccable appearance as much as possible. "Yes, sir."

"Insinuate that you live on the next block and they'd already been there. Then get out of the place. If nothing happens after a few minutes, we'll phone Captain McGrath and egg him into staging a raid in the vicinity. If Carol is here, the crooks who have her know they'll risk too much sitting out a house-to-house search and they'll leave in a hurry. That's what I'm banking on."

Silk parked the car, got out and hurried down the street. He was gone about eight minutes and returned at a fast clip. He was grinning broadly when he clambered back into the coupe.

"I started something, sir. The barkeep left half a dozen thirsty customers and made for the telephone. Then he started whispering to other guys and they got out fast too. Things ought to happen."

Suddenly a car rolled slowly out of a driveway, turned toward the corner and passed the coupe. Silk reached under his coat for a gun, but the Black Bat's hand rested on his arm.

"No," he said. "That won't be it. Two men in the car and both in the front. If Carol was there too, one would be in back with her. Take it easy."

Ten minutes went by. Several men furtively scampered out of the neighborhood. Then, far down the block, a large sedan pulled out of a driveway. The Black Bat tensed and Silk began pulling away from the curb. One man was behind the wheel of the sedan, a second man was in back.

Silk was a past master at the art of shadowing a car. He stayed well back but kept gauging traffic lights so that he'd never be left too far behind and the car he followed was never out of sight completely.

It rolled uptown. Passing beneath street lights, Silk saw that there were really two figures in back. One seemed to be sleeping on the shoulder of the other. The sedan turned west and entered an artery leading to one of the river bridges.

Silk followed, paying the toll. The Black Bat's hat successfully shielded his features. Silk picked up the trail again. On the other side of the bridge, the sedan appeared to be traveling somewhat aimlessly, as if its driver sought some quiet road.

It turned down one finally, kept going for three or four miles until they were in what looked like quiet, dark countryside. Silk was far behind now, traveling without lights and the Black Bat was calmly checking his automatic.

"When shall we take them?" Silk asked.

"Not until they stop, or look as if they might get away from us. If there is even a chance they'll shoot her the instant we attack. Just keep trailing them."

Suddenly the sedan pulled off the road and came to a stop. The left hand rear door opened and a man got out. He reached back into the car and lifted out a limp form. He carried it down the road about fifty yards, placed the figure at the side of the road and then hurried back to the car.

The Black Bat said, "Silk, step on it. They're going to use the technique that appeared to work successfully with Sinclair's son."

The coupe leaped forward. The almost unbelievable power under that shabby hood sent it streaking ahead. The Black Bat had the door partly open, automatic thrust out and ready.

The sedan was rolling slowly. In the path of it Carol was trying to get to her feet. She was bathed in the headlights of the sedan, but seemed too groggy to realize what was happening.

The coupe, under Silk's skilful handling, nosed out and started to pass the sedan. The Black Bat's automatic was steady. It blazed twice, so fast that both shots seemed to be one. The man at the wheel of the sedan fell forward. The sedan slowed, but didn't stop. A dead man's foot still depressed the floor pedal.

FROM the back of the car came answering fire. A slug ripped through the coupe. The Black Bat paid no attention to it. He gave calm orders. Silk sent the coupe rocketing ahead of the sedan. Carol was twenty yards away now. Silk gave the wheel a yank. The coupe's tires screeched and the little car whirled around and darted squarely at the side of the sedan.

Metal crashed. The back door of the sedan erupted a howling, cursing killer with a gun in his fist—a gun raised to kill. It blazed just once. The Black Bat popped into view and a single shot from his automatic answered. The would-be murderer doubled up. He kept running

for a few steps and then did a nose dive for the pavement. He stayed there, still curled up, still gripping his smoking gun.

The Black Bat hurried to Carol's side. She was swaying dizzily but managed a half-hearted smile when she saw the figure all in black. There was more screeching of metal as Silk maneuvered to extricate the coupe from the wreckage. He managed it and pulled up alongside Carol and the Black Bat.

The Black Bat helped her into the coupe, looked intently up and down the deserted road and then hurried over to the sedan. He got the front door open. The man at the wheel was dead. The Black Bat pulled him back and affixed a sticker to his forehead. It was a cut-out silhouette of a bat in full flight.

Next he hurried to the man who lay huddled in the middle of the road. He too had died instantly. Another sticker was attached to his head and then the Black Bat leaped aboard the coupe as Silk slowly drove by.

CHAPTER IX

Time Limit



ONCE she was safely back in the laboratory, Carol rapidly came out of it by drinking strong coffee which Silk hastily prepared. The Black Bat regalia off, Tony Quinn watched her carefully.

He said, "You were drugged, Carol—not heavily because they wanted you to be on your feet when they ran you down. Think you can tell me about it now?"

She smiled over the rim of the coffee cup. "I'm feeling better. They gave me a drink of water and it must have been loaded. I started passing out. I should have known, but I was too thirsty to hesitate."

"How long before they carried you out was that?"

"Why, it's rather hazy, but I think it couldn't have been more than fifteen or twenty minutes. The stuff took effect at once."

Quinn nodded. "That's what delayed them. They were afraid simply to tie

and gag you in case they were stopped. Drugged, they would have tried to pass you off as sleeping or intoxicated. Now, just what happened?"

Carol put the cup down slowly. "Susan seemed to be heading for trouble so I stepped in to absorb some of it. Only I underestimated just how fast it would come. Next, I woke up in some house. There were two men there. The same two you left in the road back there."

"I'm sorry I had to shoot to kill," Quinn said. "But the sedan was bearing down on you. And the man in back almost got the drop on me. Who were they? Any idea?"

"No. They said no more than half a dozen words to me. But they knew I wasn't Susan."

"That's interesting. When did they find out?"

"I'm not sure, Tony. They tied me up and whiled away the time playing cards. It was getting dark when a phone rang somewhere in the house. One of the men answered it, came right back and asked me who I really was. He seemed to be very angry. I knew then that they intended to kill me."

Quinn said, "We'll go back to that house where you were held later on. It looks as if someone saw Susan and knew a mistake had been made. Well, Attorney Karlton saw her and so did Dennis Waring. But that isn't conclusive. We still have this man Amboy to contend with and having been a one-time partner of Sinclair's he certainly knew Susan. So he might have tipped them off by either seeing Susan free—or seeing you as her proxy."

Carol's eyes were closing. "I know there must be a lot to do, but I'm so sleepy."

Quinn arranged a pillow back of her head and she stretched out on the leather divan.

Quinn said, "We won't need you tonight. You're right about there being a great deal to do. Whatever is to happen will take place tonight. Tomorrow Tate goes on trial and I'm putting Sinclair on the stand immediately following the Medical Examiner's testimony."

"Susan and her mother? Are they all right, Tony?"

"They were as they started out for a hiding place. Butch is with them and Butch happens to be mad enough to

punch first and ask questions afterwards. They're in good hands. Sinclair is in no danger. He's no good to the murderer dead."

"What time is it, Tony?" Carol asked sleepily.

"Almost ten. Doesn't leave us many hours for what we have to do."

"Who is trying to get Tate free? Have you any idea, Tony?"

"No. Not yet. By morning we must have the truth. Once Sinclair testifies, they're sunk and know it. So they'll act swiftly too. You'll be all right here, Carol. Silk and I are going to work. If we need you, one of us will phone."

"I'll be here." Carol's eyes were already closed. "I feel as if I'd like to stay here for a month. Tony, be careful. Please—for my sake!"

HE BENT down and kissed her. She sighed contentedly and fell asleep. Quinn moved fast then. Once more clad in black, he hurried out of the lab, through the tunnel and to the street where Silk was already waiting in the now worse-than-ever battered coupe.

"Back to the place where Carol was held," the Black Bat said. "We can't afford to miss up on anything. I especially want to determine if the phone call tipped those two crooks to Carol's identity or, if someone came there and had a look at her. If we find no trace of anyone else and the tip came by phone, Waring or Karlton is responsible. No one else saw Susan at the Sinclair house. Butch was watching and would have known."

"Unless," Silk pointed out, "Susan and her mother were seen leaving for the hideaway."

"True, Silk. If that happened, we may be badly off because Susan and the others would be followed. We've got slightly more than twelve hours to finish this up. So has the murderer, which isn't exactly beneficial to us."

They reached the house where Carol had been held and both entered by a rear door which the Black Bat opened with a picklock. Silk had little to do for they didn't dare turn on any lights. The Black Bat operated perfectly without them.

They discovered the front room where Carol had been a prisoner. It revealed nothing of significance. The Black Bat searched for the phone, found it in an

adjoining room and went over this very carefully. The phone was on a small desk.

From beneath his clothing, the Black Bat brought out a small fingerprinting set. He dusted the phone and found a number of useless prints. He dusted the top of the desk, found more, but none compared to the copy of Amboy's prints which he had brought along.

Then he noticed a piece of plain paper with some crude doodling on it. A pencil lay alongside. He pumped the tiny bellows and threw black dust over the surface of the paper, tilted it and blew the excess dust away. There were several good prints.

The Black Bat studied them through a small enlarging glass. Then he picked up the paper and sniffed of it. He caught the very faint odor of orange oil.

"Find anything, sir?" Silk asked from the darkness.

"Yes. Amboy's fingerprints on a piece of paper. By the looks of things he was here and saw Carol, knew she wasn't Susan and ordered her murdered."

"Then we'd better start hunting Amboy," Silk suggested.

"Perhaps," the Black Bat answered slowly. "I'm not completely convinced. There is something here to make me doubt what my eyes see. We're going back to the house where I'll change clothes. Then I want you to get out the big car and drive me to the office."

"But, sir," Silk protested, "time is getting shorter. Susan Sinclair and her mother are probably all right and out of danger until after Sinclair testifies, but if Amboy is behind it, that won't make any difference."

"What do you mean, Silk?"

"Even if Tate is convicted and sent to the chair Amboy will keep on trying. He's after revenge. Tate means nothing to him. He'll get to those two women sooner or later and make it look as if Tate's friends killed them to get back at Sinclair for testifying."

"But Tate has no friends," the Black Bat said slowly.

"So far as we know he hasn't," Silk objected. "That's why I'm so certain Amboy is back of it."

The Black Bat spoke in a slow, thoughtful voice. "So far, we know that Tate hasn't any friends. That's what you said, Silk, and it's true. But are we certain? Has a clever killer successfully

masked this whole case in a series of circumstances which point away from the truth?"

"I don't know what you mean, sir."

FOR a few seconds, the Black Bat hesitated. Then he spoke:

"I'm not sure myself, Silk. And the time is short, as you mentioned. His name is Robert Amboy. Oh, he exists all

A young man murdered, the lives of two women threatened. A pair of gunmen desperate enough to shoot it out with me. What makes Tate so important? The efforts in his behalf are as if he was an important gangster with a horde of pals. And he isn't. He's a plain punk."

Silk leaned against the edge of the desk. He stared unblinkingly into the darkness.



CAROL

right. We know that. But he has been almost too active, and in the resulting confusion we missed something. Up until the time Sinclair was threatened and his son murdered, the case against Ollie Tate looked like a very ordinary one. A cheap hoodlum finally pulled one crime too many and got caught at it. His arrest wasn't sensational. Nothing about the whole business was. Silk, tell me what you know about Tate's arrest."

"What I know? Why, very little. Sinclair saw him kill a man and steal five hundred dollars from the corpse. A cop discovered the stolen money in Tate's pocket after some gunplay. That's all there was to it. Tate got shot, was patched up and goes on trial tomorrow."

"Yes," the Black Bat said. "That's all anyone knows. That's all the case consists of. Strong evidence against Tate, but meagre stuff for something as involved as this case has turned out to be.

"I don't exactly understand you, sir," he said, after a moment. "Tate is of no importance. It does seem very odd that all these things should have happened to save him. I thought of that and believed Amboy was behind it."

"A man was paid fifty dollars to help snatch Susan and got Carol instead," the Black Bat went on. "Two fast shootings, dangerous crooks tried to kill Carol even after they knew she wasn't Susan. How were they involved? Merely as paid assassins? Perhaps. But then where is Amboy getting the money for this? He went to prison broke and he certainly didn't amass any fortune there. All this takes a lot of money or a certain hold over the crooks who've so far been active in the case."

"You mean Amboy isn't the man at all? That there is some hidden reason which makes saving Tate's life important to someone else?"

"Exactly. As I told you, we've been deliberately confused. We've hardly been allowed to think straight and, in the mad rush to protect Sinclair's family, we forgot one man."

"There is only Karlton and—and Waring, sir."

"I don't mean suspects. I mean a very important man who took an extremely brief part in all this. I mean Steve Humphries."

"Steve Humphries," Silk repeated slowly. "I don't recall anyone of that name?"

"And I'll wager few of us have. Steve Humphries, Silk, started all this off. He happens to be the man Sinclair saw Tate murder."

"But it was just a robbery—a plain stickup!" Silk protested.

"Was it? Are we certain? Who told us so? What proof have we? Silk, I may be making a serious mistake, but I intend to follow a new lead. Oh, I won't neglect Amboy, wherever he is, and I won't be able to spend much time on the new angle. Yet it has to be followed. Let's get back to the house so I can change clothes."

"But I thought you were going to continue working on the case, sir."

"I am. As Tony Quinn, operating in the full light and power of the law. This is one time when a Special D.A. may have more success than the Black Bat. Come on, Silk. We have about eleven hours before Sinclair goes on the witness stand."

CHAPTER X

Trail to Murder



AROL was still in a drugged sleep when they reached the lab and Quinn didn't disturb her. He left the lab, masked his eyes with the blank look of the blind and used the white cane to tap his way through the house. Silk had Tony Quinn's car waiting at the curb.

Soon after Quinn was in his office at the Criminal Courts Building and after the door was locked, he had Silk bring the file on Ollie Tate. The record was quite complete, giving a few details

about Tate's victim.

Steve Humphries, it seemed, had been a small storekeeper selling all sorts of cheap things. Not a very successful one, either, but that was almost as far as the report went. Humphries had been married and his address was given as a cheap section.

Quinn snapped off the desk light, tamped and lighted his pipe, leaned back and pulled slowly. He wanted to be certain in his own mind that he'd waste no precious time. First he concentrated on Amboy, a man who possessed a good motive for seeking revenge against Paul Sinclair, a man who first struck at Sinclair's son.

Quinn thought back on that phase of the case. Arthur Sinclair had been eighteen years old, just getting out of High School. Amboy had served four years in prison so Arthur must have been fourteen when Amboy was put away.

From the meager facts Quinn knew, Arthur's body had been found two miles from the clubhouse where he'd been attending a dance. He thought of the macabre photo sent to Paul Sinclair showing Arthur just before he was killed. As Quinn recalled the photo, the boy looked very frightened, but there had been no visible marks on him. Had he been forcibly taken from the dance then? Or had he gone willingly? And would he have gone with a man he knew might be a potential enemy of his father?

Quinn picked up a pencil and noted down the question. It was the first he must solve. Then he thought about Ollie Tate, the friendless character who was being defended so boldly through intimidation. No one had talked to him except his attorney. Tate had betrayed the fact that he expected help and it apparently had not come until Quinn began dickering for a plea. Then Tate seemed to suddenly realize certain forces were at work in his behalf. Tate knew all this without being approached.

That question had to be answered also, but it was going to be a tough one. Quinn was puffing furiously now, sending clouds of smoke drifting lazily in the still air around the desk.

No one had paid the slightest attention to the original victim in the case. Steve Humphries was just the man who died by Tate's hand in a cheap street holdup, a man from whose body Tate had stolen five hundred dollars. Five hun-

dred to the penny. Except for that sum, Humphries only had a few coins in his pockets. Men rarely carry even sums like that unless for special reason. Would a small time merchant like Humphries have that much cash? And it had all been in tens and twenties. A store-keeper's take runs to bills of all denominations and he rarely carries home the day's receipts. Night depositories, or even hiding places in the store made that risk unnecessary.

Humphries required an investigation too. Quinn felt, for the first time since he'd actively entered the case, that he had something to go on. He felt secure in the belief that Sinclair's family was well hidden now, protected by Butch and that Sinclair was probably on his way home.

True, Robert Amboy seemed to be in the thick of things. Almost he appeared too much involved, scattering his fingerprints in too many places. A man who has spent four years among criminals without being reformed, usually learns things. And fingerprints are one of the first items taught in those colleges behind grey walls and steel bars.

Quinn's pipe made a crackling sound. He dumped the ashes and stowed the hot pipe in his pocket. He pushed the chair back and arose. Silk was instantly at his side.

Quinn said, "Take me to the country club where Arthur Sinclair attended a dance just before he was murdered. That's where we'll begin."

THE big, smoothly powered car whisked them uptown. Shortly after eleven o'clock they pulled into the parking space beside the club. It was the scene of another dance. A parking space attendant came over.

Quinn said, "You—beside the car—do you work here?"

The attendant made a wry face. "Mister, what do you think I wear this uniform for?"

"I'm sorry. I'm blind. I only knew you were close by from the sound of your steps on the gravel. You do work here then?"

"Sure. I'm the parking space attendant and the doorman. I'm sorry I called you, mister. I didn't know you were blind."

"It's all right. Perhaps you can help me. Do you recall the night when a

young man named Arthur Sinclair was here and later in the evening he was found dead about two miles away?"

The attendant's eyes narrowed in suspicion. "Maybe I do and maybe I don't, mister. People come and go."

Quinn reached into his pocket, removed his leather badge case and opened it. He held the glittering badge somewhat uncertainly in the attendant's direction. The attendant took Quinn's wrist, brought the badge close and looked keenly at it.

"District Attorney, huh? That changes things, mister. Yeah, I remember the kid being here. I wondered when somebody was going to ask me about him."

"It appeared to be just another hit-and-run accident," Quinn said. "But certain developments have taken place which cause us to question the death. What I want to know, particularly, is how the boy happened to leave the dance and how he was found two miles away. Did you see him leave?"

"I saw him. It was like this. Around ten o'clock a car pulls up to the door where I'm acting as flunky because nobody is parking cars any more. Everybody is already here. You see, those graduation dances usually get going early. So the driver calls me over and asks me do I know Paul Sinclair. It happened I did. He asks me to go get him, as it's very important."

"Pay dirt," Quinn said to Silk. "We struck something rich. Go on, please."

"I called young Sinclair and he begins to talk with the man in the car. Just then two parties arrived so I had to get their cars parked. All I saw was the car drive off and I didn't notice young Sinclair anywhere around. He either got into that car and went off with the driver or—he went back inside."

"What did the man in the car look like?"

"I couldn't see. We had the big neon sign out and it was fairly dark. Besides, this guy didn't have his dash lights on. I couldn't pick him out in a line-up of one man."

"The car? What make and year?"

"I didn't pay any attention. The whole incident didn't interest me at the time. I wish it had. The Sinclair boy was a nice kid."

"Thank you," Quinn said. "Thanks very much. All right, Silk, back to town. We've another visit to make and if you

skip any traffic lights, I promise to square things. The hours are slipping away."

Under Quinn's directions Silk drove to a frowsy business section far downtown. Quinn consulted some notes and had Silk stop in front of a rather gaudy looking store. The window sign stated it dealt in anything up to a dollar.

Quinn said, "That's Humphries' old place. Under a new owner by the looks of things, but that is to be expected. Humphries has been dead a long time now. See if you can locate an emergency card telling where the owner lives in case of fire or burglary."

Silk discovered a small aluminum case tacked to the door. Inside it was all the details they required. The new owner lived in one of the tenements directly above the store. On Silk's arm, tapping his way with the white cane, Quinn entered the building.

Silk's insistent pounding on the door awakened the owner. He wasn't very cooperative until he saw the badge.

"Sure," he said, "I took over Humphries' store. Why not? He owed me back rent so I claimed the stock as payment and got it. His widow didn't care anyway."

"Humphries didn't do a very good business there?" Quinn asked.

QUIETLY the sharp-eyed elderly owner laughed. "I'm doing all right. I won't take any world cruises on what I make, but it's a living. Humphries gambled away his profits."

"The murderer took five hundred dollars off Humphries," Quinn said. "He must have had a pretty good night at cards or dice."

"Not that night," the owner said. "He worked later than usual. Sometimes he did that, cleaning up the place. Funny thing though, when I took over the store, I took his books too. His profits never ran to more than fifty or sixty dollars a week, sometimes not even that much. But lately he'd been trying to build up the business by buying a lot of fresh stock. And paying cash for it."

"That's interesting." Quinn's blind eyes looked somewhat to the right of the store owner. "You were going to tell us something about the night of the murder and how Humphries worked late."

"Yes, that's just what he did. I know

because I came home late and he was still open. So, like I always did, I dropped in to see if he had any spare cash to apply on the rent. He didn't have. I told him I'd have him kicked out and he didn't seem to care very much."

"But he is supposed to have had five hundred dollars," Quinn insisted. "Could he have obtained that sum at a gambling place after he left the store?"

"If he did, it was on a single pass of the dice. He was killed around eleven-thirty and he left the store no more than half an hour before that."

"Tell me about his wife," Quinn suggested.

The owner wrinkled his nose. "Her? Truthfully I haven't seen her in months, but she's nobody I'd care to know. Flashy kind, dresses like a kid and she's at least fifty according to my wife. My wife's a good judge of ages—in other people. I usually take eight years off her guess and darned if she isn't right about every time. Which makes Mrs. Humphries forty-two."

Quinn chuckled. "She didn't take any part in the procedure of your taking the business?"

"I phoned her and she said go ahead and take it. What did she care?"

"Then perhaps she is well off financially. Tell me, just what did Humphries sell in the store?"

"Anything he thought he could make a profit on. Clothes, shoes—mostly seconds. Variety stuff. I did find a fairly good stock of women's merchandise though. Expect he bought it at a bankruptcy sale. Hosiery, slips—things like that. Fine quality."

"Thank you very much," Quinn said. "You've thrown considerable light on the affair. Humphries, by the way, didn't seem to run with any gangs? Suspicious looking men didn't seem to hang around his store?"

"Him—run with a gang? No sir! Humphries was a scarey sort. Oh, I won't say he wouldn't turn a dishonest dollar or two, but not if it meant taking any risks. He just wasn't the type."

On the way down the stairs, Silk spoke softly. "I don't see what you're driving at, sir. Getting such a complete line on Humphries."

"But he started the whole affair," Quinn answered with a laugh. "By getting himself killed. We'll examine Humphries even closer, by talking to his



BUTCH

widow. That's where we're going right now."

CHAPTER XI

Murderer on a Rampage



WHEN Silk returned to the car after awakening the superintendent of the tenement house, he got behind the wheel of the sedan and said, "Mrs. Humphries did live there at the time of her husband's death, but moved away a week later. The super heard she bought a little place almost at the city line. I've got the address if you want to go there."

"I most certainly do," Quinn said. "And as fast as possible, too. Silk, don't you think it rather odd that she bought a house. That takes a lot of money these days. Humphries left little or nothing—not even his store, which was merely absorbed for non-payment of rent."

"Insurance, perhaps?" Silk suggested.

Quinn shook his head. "From what I know of Humphries, he wasn't the type. Putting money into insurance which he'd

never enjoy doesn't conform to his particular type of character. We'll soon find out."

It was a long drive to the new address and Quinn had time to do some thinking. Very slowly certain segments of the puzzle were falling into place. He was still far from the solution but at least he wasn't blundering around in a maze of suspects, intimidations and false trails any longer. The new and pertinent facts pointed out that Humphries wasn't likely to have had five hundred dollars the night he was killed, at least not when he left the store. There simply hadn't been time for him to win such a sum at gambling before he was murdered.

His business netted him barely enough for a living and yet he was a confirmed and steady gambler, which required money. Now his widow had invested in a house. Perhaps she had possessed money of her own, though Quinn doubted that strongly. Humphries would have gone through it long ago. As his heir, she might have realized something from the store, but she hadn't even been interested enough to attend to it.

Silk pulled up before a cute little bungalow. It hardly seemed a part of the great city, but in this development most of the places were of similar type. There

were lights in the windows, so Quinn accompanied Silk to the door.

The woman who opened the door only to the extent permitted by a brass burglar chain, was about what Quinn expected. Her hair was bleached until it looked unreal, her cheeks were heavily rouged and her mouth recreated in lipstick in a sad attempt to make it look smaller, and she wore a bright red robe and crimson colored slippers with huge pom-poms. Her eyes were slightly blood-shot and she wafted the aroma of gin rather generously.

Mrs. Humphries looked at the badge. "From the D.A.'s office, huh? What's the matter, ain't you satisfied Stevie is dead or something?"

"We'd like to talk to you," Quinn said. "Tomorrow your husband's murderer goes on trial. It won't last long and then my office will have five hundred dollars of which your husband was robbed. Do you want to claim it? Five hundred is a lot of money."

She closed the door, drew the burglar chain free and let them in. Quinn stumbled against a chair in the tiny hall. She glared at him as she put it back squarely against the wall.

"What's the matter with you, mister? Are you drunk?"

Silk bristled, but Quinn laughed it off. "I'm blind, madam. I'm sorry I brushed against your chair."

She pursed those incredibly red lips of hers. "Blind, huh? From the D.A.'s office, huh? That makes you Tony Quinn. How about it? Am I right?"

"Absolutely. Silk, will you help me into a chair. And you left the front door open, Silk. I can feel the draft."

Mrs. Humphries went back to close it. Quinn pulled Silk's head down and whispered to him. "I'm going to send you out to the car, but only pretend to go. Hide somewhere and see what happens after I leave."

MRS. HUMPHRIES returned and sat down opposite Quinn. She said, "Well, what about the five hundred bucks? It's my dough. I want it."

"And it is yours," Quinn told her. "Right after the trial ends. We had a little trouble finding you. This is a new place you have here, isn't it? New houses have a certain odor. I can tell."

She primped a little, basking in Quinn's praise. "I do okay," she said.

"Stevie left me a little money and I had some of my own. I still want that five hundred though."

"Where did Steve get so much money?" Quinn asked bluntly.

She wasn't expecting the question and it startled her. She hesitated, searching her mind for a suitable answer.

Quinn said, "Silk, I'm afraid Mrs. Humphries doesn't like to talk with too many people about. Why don't you wait for me in the car?"

"Yes, sir," Silk said. He walked out of the room and in a moment they heard the door close.

Quinn settled back in his chair. "Now you may feel free to talk. Without witnesses you can answer my questions freely. If you incriminate yourself, I can't do a thing about it. No one else is here to testify to anything you will say."

She had a little trouble digesting the meaning of his words and then she turned angry eyes at him. "What's the idea?" she flared. "Are you sayin' I'm crooked or something? Listen here, nobody is telling me—"

"Please!" Quinn held up his hand. "There are just the two of us. Who was your husband blackmailing, Mrs. Humphries?"

She jumped to her feet. "Get out of my house. Beat it or I'll throw you out."

"Whom have you blackmailed since your husband's death, Mrs. Humphries," Quinn went on unperturbed.

She sat down again, heavily. She was certain the man who faced her was blind and she made no attempt to mask the emotions that now were flashing across her face.

"What's the big idea, Quinn? Stevie wasn't a crook. I don't know what you're talking about."

"Steve left you little or nothing and yet you bought this house," Quinn said. "Of course, some kind people may have helped you out, but you can prove that by telling me their names and letting me check."

"I had my own money. I didn't chisel anyone for it. And I don't like being called a crook. Blackmail? Huh! Now who'd I put the bee on for the kind of dough it took to buy this place? Quinn, you ain't just blind. You're just plain crazy."

Quinn laughed. "There are two schools of thought on that, Mrs. Humphries.

The facts are these. If Steve had five hundred dollars on him when he died, I want to know where it came from. Because he didn't have it when he left the store that night. As a member of the District Attorney's staff, it is my duty to investigate all crimes and I think more than the crime of murder happened that night."

"Can't you let the dead rest?" she exclaimed and her nervousness was growing. "Coming here and saying Steve was a blackmailer and saying I'm one too. Go ahead and prove it. I got nothing to fear."

"Good, Mrs. Humphries. I sincerely hope you haven't. I'll give you the chance to convince me of that too. About the five hundred dollars—it's yours."

"Well, that's something anyway." Mrs. Humphries relaxed a bit.

"The moment you show me where your husband got that five hundred, the cash will be turned over to you. Good night, Mrs. Humphries. I'd appreciate it if you'd show me to the door. Just so I won't bang up any more of your furniture."

She ran a bright red tongue around her lips. Quinn had meant to worry her and he'd succeeded. She took his arm and piloted him to the front steps. There he told her he could manage by himself, and using the cane, tapped his way down the little walk to the street and the car parked in a dark spot.

QUINN opened the door, got in and sank back against the cushions to wait for Silk. It would be a ticklish business, his getting out of the small house without being caught by Mrs. Humphries, but Silk didn't bear that nickname without reason.

When he appeared it was from around the back of the house and he moved fast. He started the car and pulled away. Then he glanced at Quinn.

"You're certainly digging deep to-night, sir. I parked myself in the kitchen. If I smell of gin, it's because the place was littered with empty bottles of the stuff. Anyway, the moment you left, Mrs. Humphries went to the telephone. She started to dial a number, hung up and went to the buffet in the dining room. She fumbled in a drawer, found a piece of paper and put it back after she read it. Then she returned to the phone, dialed the number this time and

asked for a man named Johnson."

"Names are like Mrs. Humphries' appearance," Quinn commented. "They can be altered. Go on."

"Somebody told her, after a little while, that Johnson wasn't in. She wanted to know when he'd return and received no suitable answer because, when she hung up, she used an extremely unladylike word."

"And the number she called, Silk?"

Silk grimaced. "You anticipate everything." He reached into his pocket and handed him a slip of paper. In a woman's handwriting was a phone number.

Quinn said, "Stop at the next place with a phone, go in and find out the address of this number. And Silk, what did Mrs. Humphries do after that?"

"Fixed herself a drink. By fixing, I mean she removed the cork from the bottle. That's all but it sufficed."

Silk entered a drug store, emerged after a couple of minutes and pointed the nose of the car toward the overcast of bright lights from midtown.

"It's the Hotel Elite, sir," Silk said. "I know the place. Not too good, not too bad. A perfect hideout, if that is what Mr. Johnson requires."

The hotel was exactly as Silk described it, but the night manager wasn't taking any chances by crossing a District Attorney. He said:

"This Mr. Johnson checked in a week or so ago. Mysterious sort of chap. Never saw him myself and he doesn't sleep in the room. I'd say he rented it merely to receive phone calls."

"He wasn't on hand to receive one a few minutes ago," Quinn said.

The manager nodded. "That's right. But a funny thing happened. The operator buzzed me. This call came in and she rang Johnson's room. There was no answer, but two or three minutes later the phone in the room was picked up and a call made."

"To where?" Quinn asked quickly.

"Why, I don't know. There'll be a record of it."

"Good," Quinn said. "Find the record and in the meantime give my assistant a passkey. We'll go to Mr. Johnson's room. Call there when you locate the phone slip."

They rode the elevator to the seventh floor. Silk eased a gun out of his shoulder holster as they approached the room. He knocked, listened a moment and then

inserted the key. He threw the door wide.

Quinn said, "Go ahead, Silk. There's nobody in the room."

Silk turned on the lights for his own benefit. Quinn didn't need them. It was an ordinary hotel room. The one closet contained nothing but a few wire hangers. The bureau drawers were empty and the medicine-cabinet in the bathroom contained only a comb, a brush, some shaving equipment and a small mirror.

"Close the room door," Quinn told Silk, "and stand by it. I don't want to be interrupted. Oh yes—pull down the window shade also."

Quinn dropped his pose of a blind man now. He studied the comb intently and removed several strands of black hair. He took more off the brush. Then he picked up the hand mirror and tipped it slightly until the light fell across its surface.

HE CARRIED the mirror into the room, sat down at the small desk there and fished out his kit of fingerprint materials and Robert Amboy's record card. He dusted the mirror carefully and a thumb print stood out like a red flare.

Quinn studied it, compared it with the thumb print of Amboy's right hand as impressed on the record card and grunted. "Silk, it's Amboy again. His print on this mirror."

"I thought we'd find him mixed up in this," Silk said. "He has some connection with Humphries' widow, but when Humphries was killed, Amboy was in prison so you can't tie that one on him."

"I'd much prefer not to," Quinn frowned. "This mixes me up. Rips all my theories into shreds unless—"

"Unless what?" Silk asked.

Quinn carefully brought the mirror toward his nostrils and sniffed gently. A very serene smile crossed his face.

"Unless this thumb print bore traces of orange oil—which it does. And in a sufficient quantity so that I can detect the odor. I'm pretty good at that, Silk. When I was blind, that was one of the senses which became over-developed."

"So Amboy's fingers smelled of orange," Silk objected. "Why not? You said he'd been eating an orange earlier in the evening. I'd say it was just a good break because the oil probably

made his prints clearer."

The phone rang. Silk answered it and made a note. He returned to Quinn's side. Silk said, "Whoever was in this room and did not answer Mrs. Humphries' call certainly wanted to talk to her because he called the number of her house right back."

Quinn hastily wrapped the mirror in a hotel hand towel and tucked it into his pocket. "We've got to move fast, Silk. Very fast. Back to Mrs. Humphries' home. This time you are to use the siren on my car and bless the hunch that made me have it put on."

Silk used the siren plentifully. He reached Mrs. Humphries' home in half the time it took to travel the same distance a short time before. He and Quinn walked quickly to the door and knocked. There was no answer. Quinn exhaled sharply.

"Draw your gun," he instructed. "Then kick in a window. Step on it, Silk."

Silk obeyed, knocked away the shattered pieces of glass and climbed through. He hurried to the door, opened it and led Quinn inside. There Quinn stopped pretending to be blind. He rushed through the house.

Silk heard him call and hurried to the bedroom.

Mrs. Humphries lay across the bed. The glaring color of her cheeks and lips was even more intensified now. There was an added color too. Her throat was black and blue. Quinn closed fingers around her wrist.

"Dead," he said slowly. "We were too late. She's been strangled."

"Amboy did that, sir," Silk said. "She called him and said you'd been here asking a lot of questions. He came here and killed her so she'd never be able to answer any of them."

"But what could she possibly know about Amboy that would make her dangerous to him?" Quinn asked. "There's one thing of which we are certain. She trusted the man who killed her. There isn't much evidence of a struggle."

Silk said, "I'll bet that if we went over this place, we'd find Amboy's fingerprints here."

Quinn nodded. "I'd make the same bet, with unheard-of odds. But we haven't time to check now. Our murderer has gone on a rampage. The first thing I want to determine is the safety

of Susan and Mrs. Sinclair. Take me home, Silk."

CHAPTER XII

Killer's Inning



QUINN sat down at the phone the moment he reached his home. He began dialing and spoke to Silk at the same time. "See how Carol is, Silk," he said. "Hello, let me speak to the night manager."

Quinn glanced over his shoulder and went on talking to Silk:

"I'm calling the hotel which Mrs. Humphries phoned and we visited. I've got an idea which may be interesting." Quinn turned back to the phone.

"This is Quinn of the D.A.'s office," he said. "I want some information. What did this Mr. Johnson look like? I see. Yes, I expected that. Now, as I recall, the telephone box in Johnson's room was attached to the north wall. Who lives in the room on the other side of that same wall? Yes, I'll hold the line."

Silk was hesitating, torn between curiosity and a desire to go see about Carol. Quinn said, "Nobody saw Johnson except when he checked in and then he kept his face covered pretty well."

The manager came back on the wire. Soon afterwards Quinn hung up. "Well, Silk, it was an idea that worked out. Doesn't give us very much to go on, but it helps. Here is the way I see it. This mystery man named Johnson checked in at that hotel and was never seen again. At around the same time another man checked into the room beside Johnson's. When Johnson's phone rang, this other man could hear it. So Mrs. Humphries called a number given to her in case the police became nosey. She made the call, the man in the next room heard it. He entered the room and, because nobody except Mrs. Humphries had that number, he knew it was she. So he called her back."

"And then went out and strangled her," Silk said. "Who was he?"

"That's the rub." Quinn shrugged. "Just some guy about thirty. A hired stooge. You know, there have been almost too many of these stooges sprin-

kled through the case. Our murderer must have some sort of a tie-in. Now will you go see about Carol?"

Silk returned in a few moments. "She's fine, sir. The effects of the drug have completely worn off. Oh yes, she says the phone was ringing here every ten minutes for the last hour or so."

It rang again, three minutes later and Captain McGrath, in an impatient voice, said he was coming right over. Quinn drank some coffee and had a little food while he waited.

McGrath was sore and didn't care who knew it. He glared at Silk, who let him in, stalked to the library and dragged a chair over beside the fireplace.

McGrath said, "I've been trying to raise you for hours. Where have you been?"

Quinn's apparently sightless eyes were blank, and staring to the detective's left.

"Working," Quinn said. "On the Tate matter. Got somewhere, too."

"Yeah. Got somewhere is right. Tony, my office received word that two men were found shot to death on a lonesome road over in Jersey. Does that interest you?"

"Jersey is not in my jurisdiction," Quinn answered with a smile. "And I've got enough to handle with the Tate case."

"But each of these two dead men had been branded. With Black Bat stickers. Which means you killed them. Oh, I'm not saying they didn't deserve to get rubbed out. One died with a gun in his fist and it had been fired. We all know the Black Bat doesn't kill unless he has to. But you were missing here, Tony, and that means I've finally tied you in with the Black Bat."

"But you haven't," Quinn said mildly. "As a matter of fact, I've been to see several people during the last few hours and all of them will swear to it. Furthermore, I've a brand new murder for you. The Black Bat didn't do this one."

"Murder? Here in town? Where? Who was it? Who did it?"

"One question at a time, Mac. It's Steve Humphries' widow. I think he was mixed up in a blackmail racket and she simply carried it on after he was dead. So now she is dead too. She telephoned a hotel room where I have proof Bob Amboy left his fingerprints. Silk found them and says they compare with

the prints on Amboy's record card. Of course, Silk is no expert, but I helped him in my blind, stumbling way."

"I bet," McGrath grumbled. "Okay, let's have the address so I can get going. If Amboy did it, that doesn't help much. I've had an alarm out for him for hours."

QUINN gave him the address. McGrath arose. He said:

"About those two men whom the Black Bat killed. Happens they had records too. Nice long ones. They were specialists in hijacking. But of course you wouldn't know anything about that. Not much you wouldn't."

"I didn't," Quinn protested. "Hijackers, eh? The Black Bat must be looking into such activities. Is there much of it going on, Mac?"

"Hijacking? Tony, it's never been so popular among crooks. Stuff is in big demand and they have no trouble selling anything they swipe. See you later. And next time stay home. Don't bother to dig up any murders. I get enough of them without your help."

Soon after McGrath departed, Quinn entered the secret lab. Carol was looking and feeling much better and somewhat impatient to rejoin the campaign against those who were trying to force Paul Sinclair to change his testimony.

"At the moment we're at a loss," Quinn told her. "Things haven't grouped themselves together and anyway, so long as the Sinclairs are safe, the rest can wait. Didn't Butch report in over the private wire?"

"No, Tony. I've been expecting him to, but there hasn't been a single call."

"That's odd. They must have reached their destination a long time ago. It's far from town, but a phone call would span the distance in seconds. I'm getting worried."

There was a signal board in the lab, consisting of small bulbs of various colors. One of these glowed now, in a message from Silk that Tony Quinn was about to have more visitors. Quinn hurried back into the house.

He quickly took his usual chair in front of the fireplace and calmly filled a pipe with tobacco. He was puffing on it when Silk escorted Paul Sinclair and Dennis Waring into the library.

Waring looked worried and drawn, but Sinclair was shaking and deathly pale. Waring got him a chair and Sinclair sat

down as if he was a hundred years old.

Quinn said, "I recognize your footsteps, Mr. Sinclair, but who is with you?"

"Waring," Sinclair's employer said. "Dennis Waring. I'd better tell this. Things have turned out all wrong, Quinn. Oh, I don't say your plan wasn't a good one, but it backfired."

"Susan and Margaret Sinclair?" Quinn put the pipe down. "They are not safe then?"

"They've been taken," Waring began.

Sinclair broke in. "Let me tell him, Mr. Waring. Quinn, that private detective you hired isn't to blame. It simply was not his fault. The crooks who are trying to save Tate simply anticipated every move we made."

"Tell it from the beginning," Quinn suggested.

"Yes, of course," Sinclair said. "We drove for quite a long time. We reached the lodge. It belongs to an uncle of mine and I presume those crooks knew about it and figured that's where we'd take the women. At any rate when we pulled up, your private detective was suspicious, as if he sensed something was going to happen. He told us to stay in the car and he entered the house alone. Then we heard a door slam and there was an awful lot of banging. I got out of the car myself and hurried to the house as fast as I could."

Quinn sighed deeply. "And all of a sudden you heard the car start. They had been waiting for you to leave the women alone, go on, Mr. Sinclair."

"Yes, that's what happened. I found the private detective locked in a room. He told me he'd seen something in there, entered and the door was slammed and locked on him. What he saw was merely a man's suit, my uncle's suit of clothes, swinging from a ceiling light fixture. We rushed out, naturally. We found my car a quarter of a mile away. All four tires were flat."

"And that delayed your reporting the snatch," Quinn said. "What did you do then?"

"The private detective pumped the tires up. We drove to the nearest phone and I called Mr. Waring. You see, they'd put something in the gasoline too and the car motor became jammed."

"What happened to the private detective?" Quinn asked.

WARING said, "I went out there and picked them up. The detective insisted on getting off long before we reached town. He said he'd report to you directly. Say, could he be a spy?"

"No, nothing like that," Quinn said. "I trust him implicitly. Well, Mr. Sinclair, this throws us off balance. What do you intend to do?"

"As they demand. They've got Susan and Margaret. They'll kill them if I don't obey. Please, I've got to save them. The only way is my changing my testimony."

"What do you think, Mr. Waring?" Quinn asked.

"We'll be gambling two lives against one. Two good lives against one that isn't even worth much. Paul asked my advice. I told him there was but a single solution. Do as they demand."

"Has there been a formal demand yet?" Quinn asked.

"No, but they don't have to tell me," Sinclair said frantically. "I know what they expect. If I swear I saw Tate kill that man, Susan and Margaret will die. Mr. Quinn, I'd rather Tate went free. It's an awful thing to say, but that's how I feel."

Waring broke in, saying, "I've given this a great deal of thought, Mr. Quinn. Of course the time is too short to do anything. If you postpone the trial, those men will carry out their threats. Tate has to go free. But can he—even if Paul here swears he didn't actually see the murder? After all, there must be other evidence. The arresting policeman came upon the scene very promptly."

"He did, and caught Tate," Quinn admitted. "But he saw nothing. Humphries was dead by then. The only witness is Mr. Sinclair. In a murder case the kind of circumstantial evidence we have against Tate simply will not convict him. He has a story. It sounds silly to us, who know the truth, but a jury wouldn't consider it silly and I can't keep Tate from telling it. If Mr. Sinclair goes on the stand and says he lied about seeing Tate actually do the shooting, that he lied so he'd be some sort of a hero, my case is gone."

"I'll—do as they say," Sinclair looked at the floor. "I have no other choice. I've lost my son because of this. I don't want to lose my wife and daughter too."

Waring said, "Let him obey. Let Tate go free. Then, when Paul's family is

safe, you can get Tate back."

"No," Quinn said. "This scheme is too thoroughly planned for that. You see, once Tate is found not guilty of Humphries' murder he can never be tried for the crime again. If we go through with this, Tate will be a free man. Very well, Mr. Sinclair. I know how you feel and what we are all up against. We cannot win every battle and in this one the hostages are too important."

"You—won't—have me arrested or anything like that?"

"I may be compelled to," Quinn said. "You'll be committing an act of perjury and the court may order your arrest. However, that can be fixed later. Our main objective is to free your family. Once that is accomplished, we can begin picking up the loose ends."

Sinclair covered his eyes. "I wish I'd never gone toward the office that night. Things were so perfect. But—well, it did happen."

"Why were you going back to the office that night?" Quinn asked. "I never did know."

Sinclair answered impatiently. "What does it matter? I thought I'd forgotten to lock the safe door. I went back to find out."

"Was it locked?" Quinn asked.

"Yes. That is what makes this so ironical. There never was any need for me to get mixed up in it. I'm going home. I need rest—if I can ever find any. And when this is finished with, I'll spend my entire life hunting down Bob Amboy. He's smart. I don't think you and the police are stupid because you haven't found him, Mr. Quinn. But he did this to me and he's going to pay for it."

Quinn said, "I think you'd better take him home, Mr. Waring. Stay with him awhile. It will be morning very soon now. We don't want him to go to pieces in court and make the judge and jury realize he is being compelled to perjure himself."

"It puts you in an awkward position too," Waring said.

"For the first time in my career, I'm aiding and abetting a criminal," Quinn admitted. "But I'm quite willing if it saves Sinclair's family. I need rest too. This has been an awful strain on all of us."

SILK quietly escorted them out. He turned and sat down slowly.

"So we're whipped," he said. "We finally have to knuckle under and for a punk like Tate."

Quinn looked stern and uncompromising. "We're not backed into a corner quite yet, Silk. Not quite yet. Go see if Butch has returned."

Silk drew all the window shades, entered the secret lab and came back with both Butch and Carol. Butch was too excited to look sheepish. He talked as he strode across the room.

"I'm an awful bonehead, but I found something," he said. "They fooled me nice. Boy, they took me like Silk used to take suckers at county fairs. Got away clean too!"

Quinn said, "We're in a hurry, Butch. You went back to that lodge, didn't you?"

Butch nodded. "I didn't want Sinclair or Waring to know. That's why I rode with them until we reached a garage. I dropped off, hired a car and drove back. Because in that room where they locked me, I found some blood stains."

Quinn's eyes were bright and flashing. "Go ahead, Butch."

"I really searched that place. I found a dead man. He was in the woodshed, buried under a lot of kindling."

"Who was he, Butch?"

Butch said, "I knew him all right. The last time I saw him he blew a lot of whiskey into my eyes."

"Amboy!" Silk breathed softly.

"That's him. Somebody had buried a knife smack in his heart. He's been dead a long time too. Way I see it, the guys who snatched the Sinclair women had the body in their car and were afraid to carry it around so they had time to hide it while they waited for us to show."

"Tell me, Butch," Quinn said. "Did you happen to notice the smell of oranges when you uncovered the corpse?"

"Now how'd you know that?" Butch blurted. "Yes, one hand was sticky with orange juice. But how did you know?"

"Silk will tell you later," Quinn said. "Silk, fetch a telephone wire tapping set. Then I have a job for all three of you. Carol, you'll drive your own car. Butch, you'll get a chance to make up for what has happened to you in this case. Silk, arm yourself with a brace of guns."

"But you'll be alone, sir," Silk argued. "Aren't you coming with us?"

"No. Not this time. My part of the

job must be done without direct assistance. Now listen carefully, all of you. If we muff this, the Sinclair women will be murdered. The killer of several people will go free and—quite possibly I'll be dead too."

CHAPTER XIII

The Bargain



DENNIS WARING heard the car stop in front of his large and imposing home. He pulled back a curtain and saw Tony Quinn emerge from the cab, uncertainly hold out a bill to the driver and then turn to head for the house. The cab driver called out directions just in time to save Quinn from colliding with a gate post.

Quinn's cane waved in front of him until he found the gate. He went through and slowly made his way to the porch. Waring had the door open and was at the porch steps before Quinn reached the top. He took Quinn's arm.

"What on earth is the matter?" Waring asked. "You—alone at this hour of the morning! It's almost dawn."

"I know. But it was vitally necessary that I see you, Mr. Waring. Can we be alone?"

"Quite alone. There's no one else in the house. Easy now, we're at the door. There—that's better. A good clear way ahead of us. To the study, eh, Mr. Quinn?"

"Fine. Excellent. How was Paul Sinclair when you left him?"

Waring shook his head. "Not too good. Poor fellow. Honestly, I think it's almost as painful to him that he must perjure himself as it is to endure the anxiety over his wife and daughter."

"For a man like Sinclair, it's probably true." Quinn eased himself into a chair which Waring held into position. "Thanks very much, Mr. Waring. Shall I begin now?"

"Of course." Waring waved his hand. "What can I do to help you?"

Quinn smiled wanly. "I'm going to relate to you, exactly what has happened. From the very beginning. I want to convince you, Mr. Waring, that your aid is most essential."

"Of course. Yet, how can I do anything? We're all stopped in our tracks. Naturally I'd help Sinclair in any possible way."

"That's good," Quinn said. "I'm glad to hear you say so."

"But you know I've felt that way all along. You're acting very strangely, Mr. Quinn."

"Perhaps I am. Blind people can get on one's nerves, I imagine. If you are very sincere about this, Mr. Waring, tell me where Susan and Margaret Sinclair are being held."

"What?" Waring shouted and half arose. "What in the world do you mean?"

"You had them kidnaped and held as hostage. You are Ollie Tate's outside help. You engineered the whole thing. I happen to know the entire truth, Waring. Unfortunately, I can't do a thing about it."

Waring laughed nervously. "Of course this is some sort of a joke. Rather perverted humor, but then how can you be serious?"

As he spoke, Waring suddenly picked up a heavy cigarette lighter and drew back his hand as if to throw it. Quinn never moved a muscle. Waring quietly put the lighter down. Then he opened a desk drawer, very slowly. From it he took a long barreled revolver.

Quinn spoke as if he saw none of this. His voice was as free from any tinge of fear as a real blind man's voice would have been.

"Waring, you deal in cotton goods. You distribute over a wide area and, I presume, you add other items to your sales list from time to time—all depending upon how successful your hijacking gang is in procuring stolen merchandise."

Waring put an elbow on his desk, steadied that arm with his other hand and coolly drew a bead on Quinn's head.

He said, "This is preposterous, Mr. Quinn, but if you wish to keep talking, I can do nothing but listen."

Quinn wondered if there were any telltale beads of sweat appearing on his forehead. Those blind eyes of his were staring straight into the maw of death. The gun barrel looked very big and ominous.

Quinn said, "Of course, you fully realize that in coming here I was quite aware that I am risking my life. My friend Silk is waiting for me at a certain place. He will phone here a bit later. If he receives no answer, he will call in the police. Silk doesn't know all the answers, but he will act. I'm telling you all this so you will hear me through without resorting to some sort of violence. It would be very easy for I couldn't resist."

WARING slowly lowered the gun. His eyes were filled with suspicion but he judged that, if Quinn were not blind, he'd have shrunk back at the sight of the gun trained on him. Waring placed the gun back in the drawer, making no noise in doing so.

"Tell me," he said. "Whatever made you suspect I know where Susan and Margaret Sinclair are being held."

"We'll begin with the fact that you're a crook and you control a certain number of criminals," Quinn said. "Tate wasn't one of them though you reached him through these hired hijackers of yours. The loot you distribute through channels set up by your legal business. But somehow, Steve Humphries found out about you. Possibly when he pur-

[Turn page]

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chased certain products from your firm and discovered they'd been stolen.

"At any rate Humphries was a man not particularly hindered by moral considerations. He saw a chance to make some easy money, and he did—by black-mailing you. It added up to that. Humphries maintained a poor business, was too lazy to pay much attention to it. He was a gambler and, lately, had money enough to gamble quite a lot. Not money he earned honestly, but cash you paid him."

"Then I suppose," Waring said, "I killed Humphries."

"Not anything quite as crude as that. Humphries had to go, but you hired Tate to do the job and paid him five hundred dollars in tens and twenties. You had Humphries come to your office that night and fingered him for Tate. When Humphries left, Tate followed and shot him. Tate did not rob Humphries. The five hundred dollars Sinclair thought Tate took from the body, was really in Tate's pocket all the time. Blood money, but his. He didn't steal it from a corpse."

"I'm burning with interest, Quinn," Waring said.

"I can well imagine. Tate was, unfortunately for you, arrested and would be easily convicted through the testimony of your most trusted employee. I mean by that—an employee who works for the lawful end of your business and hasn't the remotest idea you're a fence. As a matter of fact, I think you hired Paul Sinclair because he lent dignity to your office. He was known to be absolutely reliable and any firm he was connected with would have to be just as honest, so far as Sinclair could know."

"Paul is a good man and I'd hate to lose him," Waring said. "Quinn, did it ever occur to you that if I am the murderer, you are talking yourself into a grave?"

"I'm quite aware of the fact. I'm willing to risk it—even though every chance is against me, if Susan and her mother are permitted to go free unharmed. Shall I go on now?"

"By all means," Waring said easily.

"So Tate was locked up. Sinclair would testify him straight into the chair, but Tate, being hired by you, expected your protection. He was so certain of getting it that he never worried much until toward the end when I deliberately egged him into becoming afraid. Then

I hinted there were certain forces at work in his favor and he brightened at once.

"Attorney Karlton was the only man who came into touch with Tate and this placed him in the position of being a very strong suspect, until I realized whoever was behind this didn't have to be in contact with Tate."

Waring said, "Mr. Quinn, what about Bob Amboy? Why, the man has every reason to seek revenge against Sinclair and has, in fact, actually tried to get at him."

"Very true. And Amboy has presumably taken a part in every phase of the case. I believe, when we run this down, we shall find that you were instrumental in securing Amboy's release from prison. You had weeks to do it and he would provide you with a neat suspect, someone who could be nicely framed.

"At any rate you began your campaign by luring Arthur Sinclair from the dance. Now, there I found a clue. Arthur knew Amboy and would hardly have gone off with an enemy of his father. Arthur did not know Karlton at all so he'd have hesitated to go away with him. But, if the boss of Arthur's father came along with some sort of a story, Arthur would accept it. So he went with you and you ran him down. You took a photo of him just before he was hit and sent it to Sinclair.

"You planned to seize Susan, but that fell through when your men kidnaped another girl by mistake. Then we agreed to send Susan and her mother away to a secret place. You knew that Sinclair had only one spot to send them—the lodge owned by his uncle. You sent your men on ahead."

QUINN paused, fumbled for a cigarette and made no motion to stop when Waring hastily drew out and aimed the gun. Quinn put the cigarette between his lips, lighted it and leaned back again.

He said, "Now, Mr. Waring, are you convinced that I know the truth?"

"What are you driving at, Quinn?"

"I'm in a strange position. I can force Sinclair to testify, put him on the stand and trick him into telling the truth whether his family is killed because of it or not. Therefore I want to be certain, beyond the slightest doubt, that if I permit Tate to go free, Susan and

Margaret Sinclair will go free."

"I rather believe they will," Waring said.

"You'd lie, Mr. Waring. Here is my proposition. You know where the two women are being held. You can communicate with the men who guard them. Phone these men. Have both Susan and Margaret put on the wire and let me talk to them. If I am convinced they are alive and well, I'll go into court in a couple of hours and publicly drop the murder case against Tate. Sinclair won't have to testify."

Waring moved uneasily in his chair. "I think you're bluffing, Quinn. I think Amboy is the man you want."

"Amboy is dead. He's been dead a long time. You, with or without your men, took him from his rooming house. You murdered him but placed his fingerprints on such objects as a mirror in a hotel room to which we'd traced someone connected with the case. On a piece of paper which was planted in the house where your men held the wrong girl a prisoner. But you weren't up to your usual standard of intelligence there, Waring. When you took Amboy, he was eating an orange. He'd peeled it with the fingers of his right hand, juice had run down those fingers and the oil from the peel covered the tips also. Every time you took his fingerprints to show Amboy was alive and active, some of the oil also got impressed on the surface you were forging with a dead man's prints."

"Orange oil?" Waring gaped. "What in the world do you mean?"

"The various fingerprints we found must have been made at different times. With long elapsed periods between each. If Amboy had really made those prints and actually been at each place, the orange oil would have worn off his fingers or been washed off. When I found it in every case, I knew the prints had all been taken at one time."

"That was a careless slip," Waring admitted. "Mind you, I'm not saying I did it."

"When are you going to break down?" Quinn said wearily. "Waring, get on that phone or I will. And if I do, I'll call the police. Maybe I'm wrong, sacrificing my own life to save the Sinclair women. This whole thing has upset me so I can't think straight. After all, I'm more valuable than they.

I'll also see you pay for the crime—"

Waring said, "I'll phone, Quinn. I'll let you talk to those women. They are quite safe. Does that satisfy you?"

"Perfectly," Quinn nodded. "Only hurry, because Silk is going to call here soon and if I don't give him a certain code word, he'll go to the police."

Waring picked up the phone and dialed. He had to wait a few moments before there was an answer and he spoke to Quinn.

"Naturally I can't permit you to leave here now, Quinn," he said. "Not unless we come to some agreement."

"Naturally," Quinn said.

Waring spoke into the phone. "Bring both women to the phone. I want them to talk to someone. No, everything is going fine—better than I'd hoped for, as a matter of fact. Do as I say. We're in the clear, I tell you."

SLOWLY Quinn arose, held out both hands and approached the desk. Waring hastily slid the gun into a drawer, took one of Quinn's hands and guided it to the phone. Quinn heard Susan's voice and then Mrs. Sinclair's. He asked them questions, about how they were dressed, What the interior of their home looked like.

"There is nothing to worry about," he told Mrs. Sinclair. "You don't know who this is and I can't tell you, but you'll be free very soon. Don't take any chances. Do nothing to make trouble. Paul is looking forward to seeing you in a matter of a few hours."

Quinn hung up, groped his way back to the chair and sat down. "Now I'll tell you the rest of it, Waring. While we wait for Silk's call."

"Just one moment," Waring dropped all pretence of innocence now. "I'm giving the orders, Quinn. You will tell Silk everything is fine. You'll stay here with me until just before court opens. Then I'll go with you and stand at your side while you squash the case against Tate. When he walks out a free man, I'll phone my aides and have the women released."

"And after that?" Quinn asked.

"I hate to contemplate unpleasantness," Waring said. "Now talk all you like."

"Thank you. Getting rid of Humphries didn't finish the blackmailing. He had told his wife about the whole

thing. Perhaps she guessed her husband had been deliberately murdered. Perhaps she was stupid enough to think he was the victim of a stickup man. No matter what, she proceeded to renew the blackmail.

"It accounts for her sudden prosperity which made the few assets from her husband's store hardly worth bothering with. It accounts for how she was able to buy a house and stock it with plenty of gin. It accounts for the fact that after I interviewed her, she made a phone call to a prearranged number which you gave her just in case my activities took me in her direction."

Waring laughed. "I thought that was quite clever. She phoned a Mr. Johnson who never existed."

"Yes, I discovered that," Quinn said. "The man you had posted to listen for a call to that room, which could only come from Mrs. Humphries, told you. You sent him to see her with instructions that resulted in her death. I don't say you murdered her, Waring, because at the time you were with Sinclair, posing as his devout friend."

Waring was getting more and more nervous. Suddenly he reached for the phone.

"I think this is all some trick," he said. "You wouldn't come here and throw yourself at me unless you had some sort of an out. I'm going to phone the boys and have them take those women somewhere else. I can almost smell a trick."

"I wouldn't," Quinn said. He was sitting very erect now, the blankness had left his eyes and hope had left his heart. Up to this moment things had gone fairly well. Now he had to show his whole hand.

"You've nothing to say about it," Waring shouted. "It is a trick. That's why you're trying to stop me."

"Waring," Quinn said, "there was another set of fingerprints from Amboy's fingers on the knife you threw at me in Sinclair's house."

"Knife—I threw—" Waring blinked owlishly. "I threw a knife at you?"

"Yes. Though you didn't know it was I. You were going to throw a terrific scare into Sinclair. Perhaps you meant to actually kidnap his daughter that night, but I got there just in time. I came through a window. You were in the kitchen. You threw the knife be-

cause you didn't dare attack me directly. And you knew very little about knife throwing."

Waring drew back his lips in a snarl. "I threw a knife at—the Black Bat."

THE jangling of the phone made Waring jump. He automatically reached for it. Quinn stopped him.

"That will be Silk," he said. "He would phone only if Susan and Margaret Sinclair had been rescued. When you called the hideout, your line was tapped, the number you dialed traced and certain friends of mine went into fast action. The women must have been held close by."

"You can't be!" Waring yelled. "The Black Bat! You can't possibly be!"

"I am," Quinn said. "You are the first man I ever told that to and in this case I couldn't help myself. I had to stop you from carrying out the threat to have the Sinclair women moved. There was no other way to make you forget that impulse."

"But you're blind. You can't see. It's ridiculous. I don't believe it."

Quinn said, "You are wearing a red and white striped tie, brown shoes, a light brown suit. You have a large diamond ring on your left hand. Your desk is of mahogany, your chair is padded with black leather. There is a picture of you on the wall behind the desk."

"Yes—yes, you can see! You must be able to see to know that. Quinn, I've got you. I've got you cold. The police want the Black Bat. And you're him. They'll lock you up, disbar you. Why—why I can make things worse for you than if I put a bullet through your heart."

"I admit it," Quinn replied. "But the Sinclair women are free. Paul Sinclair will testify in less than two hours. Tate will know he is doomed and Tate will sing. That is his hold on you. If you don't come through for him, he has no other revenge. He'll try to dicker. He'll name you, tell the whole story. So—you're finished too."

Waring dropped his right hand to the edge of the desk. His left was already out of sight. The drawer was being opened inch by inch.

Waring said, "I'll kill Sinclair. That will prevent the trial from opening. Tate will keep his mouth shut until the last

possible moment and by then I'll be far away. I'm not licked yet, Black Bat."

"You were finished the moment the hostages were released," Quinn told him. "Finished, am I?" Waring shrieked. "You sit there and tell me I'm done. Okay, maybe I am, but so are you!"

He brought up the revolver. It flamed. Quinn dodged in the chair and the bullet missed. As he sat up straight again, a gun appeared in his hand. He fired once, while Waring was drawing another bead. Waring suddenly came to an abrupt stop. Everything about him stopped, his heart and his brain included. A bluish hole in the center of his forehead was turning crimson. Then he dropped. Somehow he fell into the chair, toppled forward and lay across the desk, resting against one cheek.

Quinn arose slowly, put the gun away and took from his pocket a small box containing a supply of stickers. He affixed one on Waring's forehead. Then he went over the whole room, wiping everything he might have touched. This done, he quietly departed via the rear door and waited in the yard until Silk drove by.

CHAPTER XIV

Courtroom Scene



FROWNING in a puzzled way, Captain McGrath eased himself into a chair beside Tony Quinn who sat at the District Attorney's table. Court was almost ready to resume after a morning spent in picking a jury. That had gone rapidly.

McGrath said, "You know, it strikes me as very odd that all this happened without the Black Bat horning in. Those Sinclair ladies were snatched and then mysteriously freed. Sinclair can now go on the stand and put Tate into the chair where he belongs. We received an anonymous tip where to find Amboy, who I know darned well was behind the snatch of those women, the murder of Mrs. Humphries and the killing of Arthur Sinclair. But the Black Bat never showed his hand once."

Quinn smiled thoughtfully. "But didn't you say there were two hijackers

found dead with Black Bat stickers on their foreheads?"

"That's something else," McGrath grumbled. "Had nothing to do with Tate or the Sinclair snatch. I don't get it. I know the Black Bat was mixed up in this. I know I stayed out of it at your express orders, but somebody always spots the Black Bat before he winds up a case."

"What are you driving at, Mac?"

"Is the Black Bat getting leery of me? Could it be that I'm a little too close to the man who works under that black hood? Or am I crazy? Tony, I'd have sworn it was you. Now I don't know. It's always like this. I develop doubts and then something happens and I'm right back where I was before."

"Nothing is going to happen," Quinn said. "Hold it, Mac. I just heard the doorknob of Chambers being turned. The judge is coming in."

"That's another thing," McGrath went on. "Nobody but a genuinely blind man could have such acute hearing. Maybe I'll apologize for riding you as the Black Bat, Tony. I'm the kind of a guy who admits it when he's been wrong."

"Fine," Quinn said. "Stand up or the judge will haul you before the bench for contempt."

The trial began. Quinn put a medical examiner's assistant on the stand and established that Humphries was legally dead and the cause of his death.

Ollie Tate, seated between two guards, didn't look too chipper. He kept glancing around nervously. Quinn called Paul Sinclair's name. Sinclair went to the witness stand, was sworn and told a simple, straightforward story. It pinned Ollie Tate into the electric chair.

Suddenly Tate was on his feet, fighting off the restraining holds of the guards.

"I gotta talk!" he screeched. "I gotta tell the truth. Sure I killed Humphries. It wasn't no stickup. I was paid to kill him. The guy who paid me said he'd protect me and he didn't. So I'm goin' to talk."

"Let him speak," the judge ordered brusquely.

Tate didn't even hear the permission. "The guy who paid me and ratted is named Dennis Waring. He runs a hijacking business and Humphries was blackmailin' him. I know everybody who belongs to Waring's gang. I'll name

them all. I want a deal. But deal or no deal, Waring ain't leavin' me to take the rap alone."

Quinn turned to McGrath. "What are you waiting for? Go get Waring before this news reaches him."

McGrath jumped to his feet and battled a path through the excited crowd. Court was adjourned.

Silk sat down beside Quinn and spoke in a low voice.

"Butch enjoyed himself, sir. There were three men guarding Susan and Margaret Sinclair. That is, when it began, there were three men. When Butch finished there were only one and a half. They were not what you might call—intact, when it was over, sir."

"Nice work," Quinn said. "Waring is dead. I killed him. Had to. He shot first. Though I wonder what would have happened if he hadn't."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"I was compelled to tell him I was the Black Bat—and prove it. The question is, would I have permitted him to live if he hadn't tried to shoot me. I'm glad I don't know the answer, Silk."

"Then McGrath is going to find only a dead man?"

QUINN grinned. "He was just telling me how the Black Bat never showed in this case and that maybe I wasn't the Black Bat after all. Naturally McGrath means that in something which involved Tony Quinn so deeply, the

Black Bat should have taken a hand. That is, if Tony Quinn is the Black Bat. When Mac left, he was fairly certain he'd been wrong about me. When he returns—"

Half an hour went by before McGrath entered the courtroom again. He was white around the jowls. His mustache bristled. He sat down beside Quinn.

"I take it all back. Waring is dead, with a Black Bat sticker on his face. I take it all back about doubting you. You killed him. Oh, he shot at you first. They always do. But you killed him and some day I'm going to put you behind bars. Some day I'm going to—"

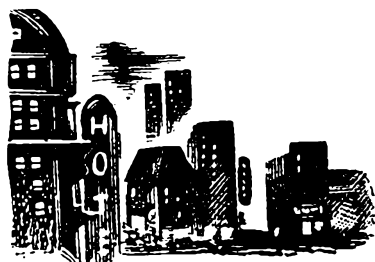
"Sh-h, Mac," Quinn said gently. "Court is about to convene and you have to tell the judge that Waring is dead. Calm down. You know how this particular judge hates excited people."

"I'm as calm as the next man." McGrath arose with everyone else. "I never get nervous. Okay, I'll tell the judge. Then I'm going to tell you something."

"Mac," Quinn said softly. "Mac, I'll enjoy your proving I'm the Black Bat."

McGrath let out a bellow of rage, stumbled against a chair and overturned it. He grew beet red and then he put both arms rigidly by his sides and faced the judge.

Ollie Tate heard McGrath's report and Ollie Tate sat down slowly. He began to curse in a low, unsteady voice. Then he thought of what he was headed for. He stopped cursing.



CORRUPT POLITICS WALKS HAND IN HAND WITH MURDER

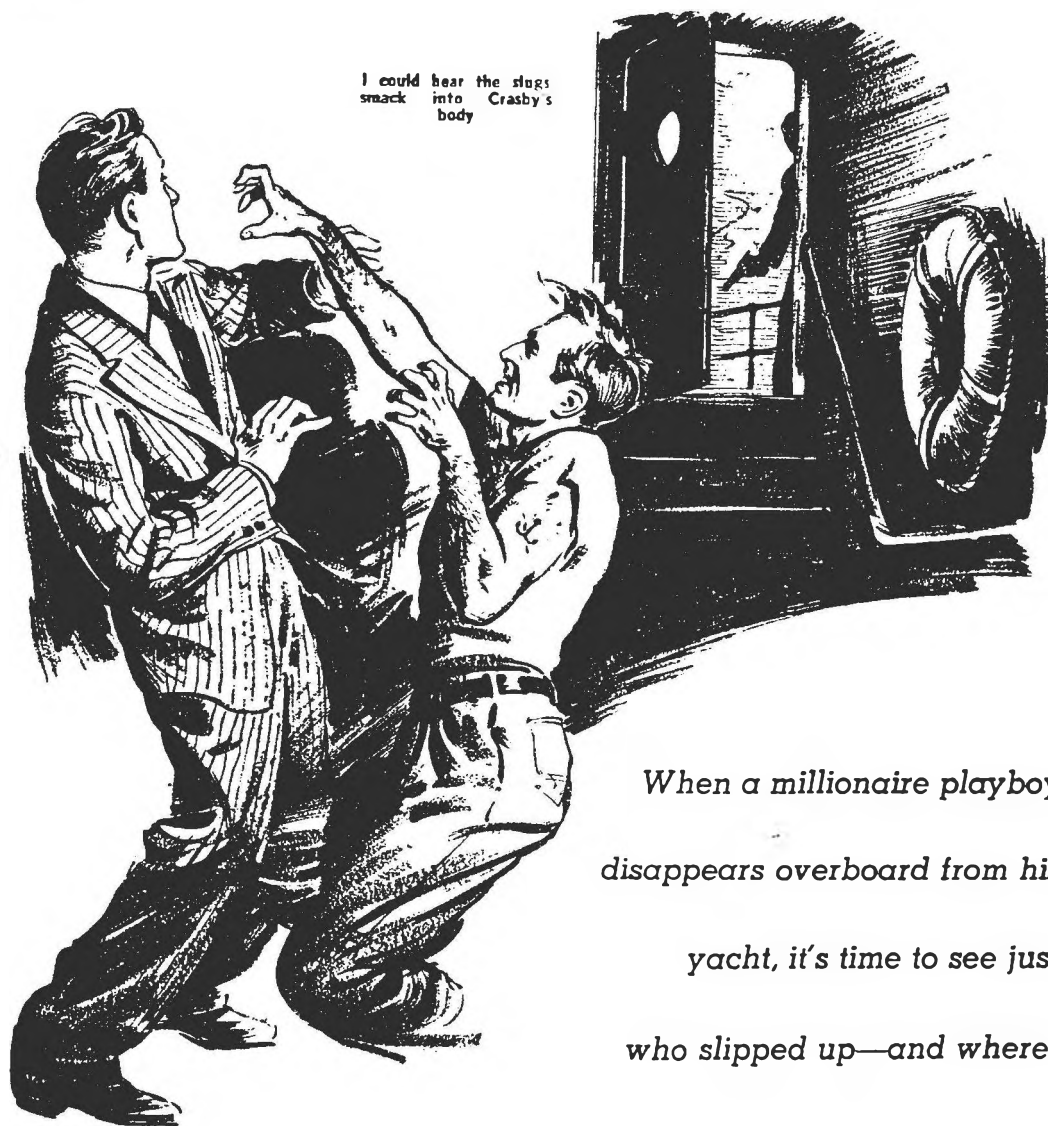
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BIG TARGET



*When a millionaire playboy
disappears overboard from his
yacht, it's time to see just
who slipped up—and where!*

HOMICIDE," I said, when I picked up the phone. "Sergeant Evans speaking."

There was a second's hesitation and then a raspy, half-whispered voice came over the line. Man or woman, I couldn't tell. The person talking didn't want me to know, either; that was obvious.

"I'm not giving my name," the voice

said, "but I think you might be interested in the Lance Hall case. It might look like an accident or suicide, but it's not. It's murder."

I blinked at that one. The last I'd heard, Lance Hall had been alive and almost disgustingly healthy. Hall was one of the biggest shots in our town, with plenty of bucks, a big yacht named the

B y R O G E R F U L L E R

Serpentine and a curvaceous bit of fluff named Thyra Madison whom he was going to marry in the Fall.

I pressed the button that signaled the Headquarters switchboard man to put a tracer on the incoming call, but I could have spared myself the effort. There was a click at the other end of the line and the wire went dead. A few years in police business—about fifteen—have taught me to save my breath instead of yelling into a dead phone, so I hung up. A couple of seconds later, my switchboard man called to tell me that the phone call I'd just had came from the Argonaut Yacht Club, Seaside 2-1337.

I called back and listened to the bell signal drone in my ear for awhile. The voice that finally said hello was a heavy masculine one.

"This is Homicide," I said. "Did somebody there just phone Headquarters?"

"There's nobody here but me right now," the heavy-set voice said. "I'm Andrew, the attendant here. I just walked in. Homicide? What's happened?"

"Is Mr. Hall about the club anywhere?" I asked, in turn. "Mr. Lance Hall?"

"I—I just saw the *Serpentine* come in," the other end said. "Mr. Hall's been out on a trip. If you call the office, they could tell you better than I can whether Mr. Hall's here. Seaside 2-1330."

I thanked the guy and dialed the new number. A girl's voice answered as soon as the first buzz sounded. I told her who I was and asked for Mr. Hall.

"Mr. Hall?" she asked, and she sounded scared. "Mr. Lance Hall?"

"Please," I told her.

"He—he—wait a minute, please," she gasped.

I waited, checking the time with my wrist watch. It was seventeen minutes past ten, a. m. A man got on the wire after a couple of seconds' delay. He sounded flustered, to say the least.

"This is Commodore Atkins," he said, without preliminaries. "You say this is Headquarters?"

"Homicide," I told him.

"Maybe somebody from the police had better come down here," the Commodore said. "There's been a—an accident."

"Something happen to Mr. Hall?" I asked.

"Yes," the Commodore said. "He—it sounds incredible, but Lance was swept overboard in last night's storm. His

yacht just came in. The Coast Guard is here, but I suppose it's a police matter, too."

"I'll be right down," I told Commodore Atkins. "Please keep everybody who was aboard the yacht there until I talk to them."

When I hung up I found myself agreeing with the Commodore that Lance Hall's falling overboard really did sound incredible. He'd spent all his life on boats, and unless he was fried, I couldn't see him going into the drink in last night's storm. It had been a fairly severe storm, all right, striking just about midnight, but it had been no hurricane. Lance Hall had been a Bermuda racer, he'd sailed to Hawaii and other distant points, before he gave up sail for power, and he'd run through some pretty heavy weather. But, at that, there's always the first time a man makes a careless step, over-confident of his ability to walk a rail with half a load on.

I checked with the Captain of the Bureau and told him about the phone call I'd had.

"Take a look, Evans," Captain Logan told me. "You know boats and that yachting crowd, though heaven knows how you do it on your pay. Let me know if you need anybody to help you."

I could see the big yacht, *Serpentine*, at her mooring when I drove down the twisting driveway that led to the Argonaut Club. She was an easy boat to identify, running between eighty and ninety feet. I'd passed her in the Bay a good many times, and even though I'm strictly a sail man, I'd have been less than human if I hadn't felt a touch of envy for Hall.

THE Captain's crack about my knowing the yachting crowd wasn't strictly the truth. I sail an Indian Landing, myself, and the little club I belong to is several hundred degrees removed from Argonaut. But there's a camaraderie among boatmen that links us all together, no matter how loosely. With my club burgee flying, I could get mooring and hospitality from any yacht club in the country, whether the mighty Argonaut or the Canoe Club at Casey's Creek.

I walked into the main lounge of the Argonaut Club to find quite a group assembled. There was a young Coast Guard lieutenant and a C.P.O. taking notes from the men and women who were

seated in a tight circle over near the windows. All around the wide, sprawling room there were club members who were trying very hard not to look as though they were trying to listen in, which they all were.

I recognized most of the people in the circle. There was that beautiful bit of fluff I mentioned, Thyra Madison, but she wasn't so beautiful right now. While I looked at her, walking toward the group, I saw her raise her face from the handkerchief she was holding to her eyes and it was distorted, swollen, twisted all out of shape by her tears.

Cynical Sergeant Evans, they call me, and my first thought was that she had a right to be tearful. She'd been within a couple of months of being Mrs. Lance Hall, with all those millions, and now she was just Thyra Madison, a pretty girl, certainly, but without any dough, as far as I'd heard. Automatically, I wondered if Lance Hall had changed his insurance to provide for his fiancée, as he would have if he'd lived long enough to marry the gal. Police work gets you thinking like that, after awhile.

Sitting on the arm of Thyra's chair, with her hand on the girl's shoulder, was Mrs. Alice Benson. She looked taut and strained but she wasn't crying. Griffin Benson, Alice's husband, sat opposite Thyra. Griff Benson was Lance Hall's best friend and I liked him. Griff went in for small boats, too, Comets and Stars, and we'd raced against each other from time to time. At a regatta he was just another guy, in spite of his money, which was almost as heavy as Hall's.

Sitting beside Griff was a girl I recognized as Lance Hall's secretary. I'd seen her with Lance a good many times—you'd be surprised how a detective sergeant gets around, at times—and I knew her name was Turgeon or Spurgeon or something like that. She was young and fairly pretty, in spite of her glasses, and I remembered there'd been a lot of talk, at one time, about the possibility of Lance marrying her, instead of one of the debts that were always throwing themselves at his head. But Lance had played the field, and quite an extensive field it was, until he had met Thyra and after that all other bets were off.

Beyond the secretary were two men I didn't know but who obviously were crewmen from the *Serpentine*. One was wearing a dark blue rayon gabardine uni-

form with braid on his sleeves and a yachting cap dangling from one hand. He was a thin, hawk-nosed person with a tanned skin and eye wrinkles that showed he'd seen a lot of sun and wind. I tagged him as Hall's skipper and I proved myself right a few minutes later.

The other fellow had on dungarees and a T-shirt, both immaculate. He was a big guy, even sitting down, with a build like Lance Hall's had been, wide in the shoulder and narrow in the hips. He was either a youngster or one of those guys who never look their age until they collapse with a roar. I pegged him as a deck hand aboard the yacht and I found out later that I was right again.

I introduced myself to the Coast Guard lieutenant and drew him over to one side, along with the C.P.O. Both were nice chaps, up against something they'd never had to deal with before, probably, and glad to have a regular copper on the scene.

"I don't know who takes this over," the lieutenant told me. "It happened in the Bay and that's our territory, but there's no body, yet, and this was his home port and—"

"Sure," I said. "We won't have any trouble about jurisdiction. Can you give me the story?"

The C.P.O. looked down at his notes and began reciting. That chief certainly was an A-one note-taker. I thought at the time that the Department certainly could use a guy like that, considering some of the scrawls that patrolmen turned in as reports.

"The yacht *Serpentine*," he told me, "DeLancey Hall, master; James Allen, Captain, spoke Coast Guard Cutter YP-313, today at 0317. Position—"

"Never mind the latitude and longitude, please," I broke in. "About where was it?"

"Off Crimson Point," the lieutenant offered. I nodded and the C.P.O. started up again.

"The yacht blinkered the cutter, asking assistance, and the cutter put over a small boat. On boarding the *Serpentine* it was learned that the master, DeLancey Hall, was missing, presumably swept overboard. Hall, according to information supplied by the persons aboard, was last seen at 2315—quarter past eleven—when he went on deck to make sure that certain fittings on the sun deck aft were secured against storm

damage. He took with him the deck hand, Jupiter Crasby. The yacht was running short-handed, Captain Allen explained, because Mr. Hall preferred to do some of the work himself and his friend, Mr. Griffin Benson, also was a competent hand."

I knew that was Lance Hall's habit, taking guests out on his big boat for week-end trips and then working them half to death. A big fellow himself, he could work the average man overboard and never get up a sweat. I guess he got a kick out of that, somehow.

"Crasby says Hall sent him below for some gear with which to fix a running light that apparently had a loose connection. Crasby says that when he got back on deck, Hall was not there. It was raining hard by then and Crasby says he assumed the owner had gone below. Crasby says he repaired the running light and went below himself, to his own quarters forward, using a forward hatch. Captain Allen was at the wheel, the others in the main saloon, playing cards.

"When Hall failed to return to the saloon after about an hour, the other people aboard—Miss Thyra Madison, Mrs. Griffin Benson, Benson, and Miss Ann Turgeon—went to Hall's stateroom, which was empty. The party then searched the yacht, splitting up for this purpose, and upon failing to find Hall, notified Captain Allen. Allen put the yacht about and conducted a search of the area but found no trace of the owner before contacting the cutter. That's all we have, so far."

"A swell job," I said. "If it's okay with you, I'll take over the questioning."

IT WAS okay with them, all right. I went back to the group huddled near the windows. I took Allen, the skipper, first.

"Pretty rough out there, Captain?" I asked him.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Rough enough," he said. "Nothing to worry about, with a craft like the *Serpentine*. She's built for ocean travel and she had almost too much beam."

"Rolling much, were you?" I asked him.

He started to shrug again when Alice Benson, Griff's wife, broke into the conversation.

"We were rolling horribly," she said,

with a little shudder. "It's no wonder that poor Lance fell overboard."

There was something wrong right there. The Coast Guardsman's report had said that the *Serpentine* had been heading for her home port, up the Bay, and that course would have taken her almost due northwest. The storm had come out of the southeast. That meant the yacht had a following sea and a craft the size of the *Serpentine* just doesn't "roll horribly" in a following sea. She might lunge a little, but she wouldn't roll unless she fell away so she'd be caught in the trough.

Now, Alice Benson was no landlubber who'd call any motion of a boat "horrible." She'd crewed for her husband, I knew, and in pretty brisk weather. I made a mental note and went on.

This time I chose Griff Benson. Griff looked pretty well shaken up, which, I suppose, was natural, seeing he'd just lost his best friend. There was something else in his expression, though, a wariness, a caution, a weighing of my questions before he gave me my answers.

Here's his story:

"We were all playing five-and-ten poker in the saloon when Lance felt the wind rising and said he was going out to check the aft sun deck and the running lights. He said he couldn't depend on his crew to get things done right about the boat, but that was his way. He said a lot of things he didn't mean in just the way they sounded."

I gave a hinge at Allen and Crasby. Both of them were scowling at Griff, and no wonder. No boatman likes to be called incompetent, even if the one who does the calling tries to take the edge off his remarks.

"Lance," Benson continued, "came back to the saloon a few minutes later. He was pretty sore. The sun deck furniture hadn't been stowed, it seemed, and there was a faulty running light. I offered to help him fix the things but he said he'd be darned if he'd pay a crew to do things and then have to do them himself. He went to the bridge and came back through the saloon with Crasby. Er—remember I'm just telling this as I saw it, but Crasby seemed to be burned up about being called out of his quarters, into the rain."

"Not me," the deck hand put in, quickly. "I wasn't really sore. Maybe I was a little peeved because Mr. Hall wouldn't

let me get a slicker, but that's all."

Griff hunched his shoulders. "Anyway," he said, "the poker game more or less broke up. My wife and I went to our stateroom and the others wandered around the yacht for awhile. We started to play again, dealing Lance out, until Thyra—Miss Madison—got worried. Then we split up to search the yacht for Lance. When we couldn't find him, we notified the skipper and you know the rest."

I thought over what he'd told me.

"The way I get it," I said, "after Hall went on deck with Crasby, you all left the saloon. Any of you go on deck?"

There was a silence as one looked at the other. Everybody shook their heads.

"Think hard," I warned. "It might be important."

More head shakes.

"What did each of you do when you left the saloon, just after Hall went above deck with Crasby?" I asked.

Thyra Madison, it developed between sobs, had gone to her stateroom to change her dress. She had been wearing clothes suitable for a stiff breeze but with the battening of the portholes, due to the storm, the saloon had become too hot for the dress she was wearing. She'd changed and come right back.

Griff and Alice Benson had gone to their stateroom to do some packing, preparatory to docking at Argonaut late that night. Ann Turgeon had gone to the galley to start fixing a late snack for her boss' guests.

"I was on the bridge all the time," Captain Allen said. He had a hard, steely voice. "And I might as well tell you, because you'd probably find out anyway. This was to be my last trip on the *Serpentine*. I told Mr. Hall last week that I was going to look for another berth. We didn't get along too well, to be honest."

"That goes for me, too," said Crasby, the deck hand. "Hall knew I was quitting and he was riding me and the skipper all through that trip. Those riding lights really didn't need fixing right away, and I had secured that furniture right after dinner. He just called me out of my bunk for meanness."

"That's not true!" the secretary, Miss Turgeon, flared. "Lance Hall never did a mean thing in his life!"

"No?" asked Crasby with cool insolence. "Ask anybody that ever worked

for him."

"I worked for him!" Ann Turgeon snapped.

Crasby's grin was insulting. "I mean a man," he said deliberately.

"Now, wait a minute!" Griff Benson said hotly. "You can't—"

"Take it easy, folks," I broke in. "Crasby, you can keep your lip buttoned, and oblige me. We won't get anywhere by throwing nasty cracks around."

"Why all this investigation, Sergeant?" Benson asked. "It's obviously an out-and-out accident."

"Perhaps," I said. "We dumb coppers have to go into all the angles, even in the most open-and-shut cases. Besides, I'm puzzled at how Lance Hall, as good a boatman as he is, went overboard in a comparatively mild storm such as last night's."

GRIFF looked down at his hands gripped tightly in his lap. "You've been around the water enough to know how things like that happen," he said in a low voice. "A pitch of the boat at just the wrong time, a gust of wind, a slippery spot on the deck, one drink too many, perhaps."

"He'd been drinking pretty heavily, then?" I asked.

Griff's voice wasn't much more than a mutter. "He was pretty well potted."

"That's not true!" Ann Turgeon broke in again. "Lance had one cocktail before dinner. He passed up highballs that the others had during the poker game. How can you say he was intoxicated, Mr. Benson?"

Benson's eyes darted from the secretary, to the sobbing Thyra, to his wife.

"He looked pretty tight to me," he said sulkily. "Maybe he was sneaking drinks all along. He was in and out of the saloon enough, you know."

Ann's voice trembled with anger. "No more than the rest of us were," she said. "You *know* he wasn't drunk. You—you seem awfully anxious to make sure the police think this was an accident. Maybe it was something else."

"What do you mean?" Thyra Madison asked wonderingly. She had stopped crying but her face was still a wreck. "What else could it be? Who in the world would want to kill Lance?"

There was a stunned silence after that question and the people in the group looked at one another with what seemed

to be dawning suspicion. There was a tension that settled over that bunch like a stretched canvas. You could fairly feel the mistrust spreading among the group.

I noticed several exchanges of glances. There was the look that passed between Griff Benson and his wife Alice, and the one that Captain Allen gave Ann Turgeon. But the glaring look that Thyra Madison gave Crasby, the deck hand, was the most bitter of all.

"Okay," I said, when that minute of silence stretched out into what seemed to be a long, long time. "I'm afraid I'll have to ask you people to stay here at the Argonaut, while we do a little looking around. Strictly routine, you know, but it would be best to have you all together when we need you."

There was quite a bit of protest over that. Griff Benson reminded me that he had a job that needed doing in town. Thyra Madison went into her sobbing act—if it was an act—again. Alice Benson was resigned but not too happy over the set-up. Allen and Crasby just shrugged and said okay, they'd live on the yacht, as they had been.

The Coast Guard found Lance Hall's body late that afternoon, not far from Crimson Point. There was a lump on the back of his head that could have been the result of a fall on the wet deck of the *Serpentine* or it could have been something else.

"What was he wearing?" I asked, over the phone, when the Coast Guard base called me at the Argonaut Club.

"Rubber-soled tennis shoes," they told me, "dark trousers, white shirt."

"Uh-huh," I told myself, "and that convinces me he didn't slip. If he'd had on leather-soled shoes, he might have hit a skid on the wet deck, but never with tennis shoes. Not Lance Hall."

So, in my own mind, I had a good hunch that this was murder. There was little or nothing to base it on outside of that phone call and my conviction that Lance was too good a yachtsman to go into the drink, unless, as Griff Benson had said, he was looped up.

Headquarters sent me a couple of men and we went to work in earnest. First thing, we found out that Seaside 2-1337 was the phone in the men's locker room. That meant, almost certainly, that a man had made the call. A woman could have slipped into the place—Andrew, the attendant, said he'd just come on duty and

the place ordinarily was pretty deserted at that time of day—but she'd be taking an awful chance. There was a phone in the ladies' lounge, too, and I figured that a woman would have used that one. Unless, of course, some gal wanted me to think that it was a man and was willing to run the risk.

Police work, you know, is comprised ninety-five per cent of detail work, drudgery. In the Lance Hall case, we got our fill of that, all right. The records of all those people had to be checked to the most minute degree in our search for a possible motive.

If Lance Hall had been murdered—and I was pretty sure he had been—the question was why? I wasn't convinced of Crasby's sterling character, not by a long shot, but if he was telling the truth, the killer could have slugged Lance and tossed him overboard during the few minutes the deck hand was below looking for tools with which to fix the faulty running light.

During that time, everybody aboard the boat, with the exception of Allen, would have had an opportunity to do the job. And we couldn't overlook Allen, for that matter. Alice Benson, who knew her boating, had said the *Serpentine* was rolling heavily, and it could very well have been if *an unattended wheel let the yacht swing into the trough of the waves!* If Allen had seen Lance on deck, skipped off the bridge by the outer companionway and slugged him, the yacht would have been almost sure to swing off course and wallow.

But the others had looked at Alice Benson in surprise when she had said the yacht was "rolling horribly." Even Griff, I had noticed, seemed shocked by the girl's announcement. There was something between the Bensons that wasn't right. Both of them would bear watching. They had only each other to back up their alibis about going to their stateroom to pack.

Nobody had seen Thyra Madison go to her stateroom, either, ostensibly to change her dress. The Turgeon girl admitted, perhaps a little grudgingly, that Thyra had on a different outfit when she returned to the saloon, but it didn't take very long to change a dress.

The secretary herself wasn't too well protected by her story. Nobody had been with her in the galley when she was fixing that late snack.

CRASBY, of course, was out on the longest limb. He'd been the last man seen with Hall and he'd admitted that he thought Hall was "picking on him," riding him. I'd never known Hall very well, personally, but I knew enough about him to know he was a big, bluff man, given to blunt words on occasion. Could be that he bawled out Crasby, up there on the rain-swept, dark deck until the hand lost his temper and belted him one, then tossed him overboard in panic when he realized he'd hit Lance harder than he'd meant to. After all, we had only Crasby's word that Lance had sent him below for tools.

I talked to this one and that one, totting up my bits of information, most of it worthless, and then I went aboard the *Serpentine*. Living space at the Argonaut Club, it had developed, was at a premium despite the club's size—blame the housing shortage, I guess—and the Bensons, Thyra and Miss Turgeon had all decided to stay aboard the yacht rather than camp out in the club lounge. The yacht was completely stocked, and it certainly was no hardship for any of them to keep to their staterooms.

I went over the big boat inch by inch. The sun deck furniture that had taken Lance up on deck was neatly stacked and covered with tarpaulins now. The running lights worked perfectly.

"It was this wire here," Crasby told me, pointing to the cable that led to the port running light. "The thing was frayed, but it wasn't broken. Once in a while, when we hit a big one and pounded fairly hard, it would blink off for a second. It needed fixing, sure, but Captain Allen and I were going to wait till we came in to work on it."

The patch the deck hand told me he'd made, and it was a fresh patch, was about amidships, behind the bridge and running along the outer bulkhead of the main saloon. It was a workmanlike piece of repairing, all right.

"What tools did you use?" I asked Crasby.

"Wire cutters, pliers, knife, tape," he said. "Nothing to it. It wasn't the job that made me sore, it was Hall calling me up on deck in that weather and not waiting for me to get my slicker. Besides, he'd been needling me right along."

"Uh-huh," I said. "How about the furniture on the aft sun deck?"

"I'm telling you the truth," the deck hand said earnestly. "I stowed that stuff right after dinner, covered it and lashed down what needed lashing. When Hall brought me up on deck the stuff was all scattered around again. I think he did it himself, just to give him something more to gripe about."

I couldn't see that, although I didn't say anything. Lance Hall might have been hard on his men, as Allen and Crasby seemed to think, but I couldn't see him indulging in anything as petty as that. Either Crasby was lying about stowing the furniture, or somebody had deliberately disarranged the stuff to get Lance up on deck.

"Show me just where you and Hall were standing when he told you to get the tools," I asked Crasby. He moved over to a position near the rail. "Now, how did you go down to where the tools are kept?"

I followed Crasby along the port side to a companionway near the stern. We went down to the lower deck, moved along a corridor, past the main saloon, past the master's suite and then down another companionway to a locker near the big diesel that powered the boat.

The locker was filled with tools arranged neatly in rows, every tool in its place. I picked out the pliers, knife, tape and cutters that the deck hand said he had used. I cast an approving eye over the array of hammers, wrenches, drills and what-not. Hall might have grumbled about not being able to trust his crew to do their jobs right, but this tool locker certainly was shipshape.

I started to turn away and then I gave the lineup of tools another look.

"Lost a wrench?" I asked Crasby. I pointed to an empty space in the rack that held a fine set of graduated wrenches. The missing wrench had come from a space right next to the biggest one of the set, a ponderous affair.

Crasby stared and lost his youngster look for a second. "That wrench was there the last time I looked," he said.

"Was it there last night?"

He stumbled around a while and then admitted that he couldn't be sure. He'd been in a hurry to grab the tools he needed and get the wet job over with. Because everything was in its place, he'd been able to reach in and lay his hands on what he required without snapping on the locker light, depending only on

the dim light of the companionway outside.

"Crasby," I told the deck hand, "you're in a spot. That wrench probably was what was used on Lance Hall last night. You admit you didn't like him, thought he was riding you. You were alone with him. You had plenty of opportunity to kill him, and a wrench that the killer probably used was right here, where you could put your hand on it in the dark. You knew he was up on deck, in the dark, waiting for you to bring up those wire-mending tools. You could have gotten those tools, all right, and then reached for the big wrench. You could have—"

"Listen!" the deck hand broke in, "I'm not getting framed for this! I didn't do it, I tell you!"

"Who did?" I snapped.

"I—I don't know."

"You made the phone call to Headquarters, didn't you?" I rapped out. "You slipped into the locker room at the Club and called Homicide."

"I—yes," said Jupiter Crasby.

"Why?" I asked. "Why did you do that?"

"Because—because I was scared, that's why," the deck hand faltered. "I was plenty scared. I thought—maybe—well, I wanted the cops on this job, that's all. I was afraid there was going to be another accident and this time it might happen to me."

"You'd better talk, Crasby," I told him. "You know who did the killing and you're afraid the killer knows you know. The only way we can protect you now is to get the name of the person who knocked off Lance Hall."

HE STOOD there, breathing heavily, perspiration running down his face. If he had ever entertained any ideas about a spot of blackmail, after he got over his initial scare, I think he was losing them now.

"You can burn only once," I reminded Crasby. "The killer won't get anything worse by knocking you off, too."

"Okay," Crasby said, hoarsely. "Okay, I'll tell you. It was—"

That's when the light in the companionway behind us went out. It worked on a switch at the head of the ladder and this far down in the boat, with no portholes, it left the space as black as night when it went off.

There were two streaking flares of bright light at the head of the companionway and I could hear the slugs smack into the big body of the man beside me. He gave a grunt and turned toward me, clawing blindly, then dragged me down to the floor with him. Tangled in his arms, I didn't have a chance to even get my gun out before running feet on the deck above us told me the killer had gotten away.

I shoved Crasby away, got to my feet and scrambled up the companionway to the corridor. There was nobody in sight, but I could hear loud voices forward, coming closer.

The first one to appear was Griff Benson, with his wife just behind him, looking wide-eyed past his arm. Then came Captain Allen, Thyra Madison and, last of all, the secretary, Ann Turgeon.

"What happened?" Griff yelled. "We heard shots."

I didn't say anything. I turned back and snapped on the light switch to the locker compartment below. When I got down to Crasby's side again, I knew he would never tell me who had killed Lance Hall. Not in this world, he wouldn't. A big target like Jupiter Crasby would be easy to hit, even for an amateur gunsnel.

Yes sir, Crasby had made a big target. Lance Hall had made somebody a big target, too.

And I was due to catch merry hell from the Captain, the Commissioner and about everybody else at Headquarters, I knew. The tops don't like to have witnesses knocked off that way, especially when said witnesses are standing next to Detective Sergeants who should be protecting them.

There was a lot of commotion, of course. Thyra Madison had hysterics. Alice Benson began doing a little screaming of her own when she looked down the companionway and saw Crasby's body. Griff Benson tried to comfort his wife, but I was aware again of that strangeness between the two. Captain Allen began asking a lot of questions until I shut him up, but brusquely. I was sore, mad as a smoked hornet. I'd been made a monkey of by a killer I had right under my nose. Whoever knocked off Lance Hall had killed Jupiter Crasby and whoever that was was right on the yacht *Serpentine*.

The boat was crowded with cops after

that, all hunting for the gun. It was a diver for the harbor police who finally found it close to the side of the yacht, and it didn't do us any good at all. The serial numbers were filed away and there were no prints, of course. Later, the lab might bring out those serial numbers, but it was an old gun that looked as though it had changed hands plenty without benefit of registration. I didn't put much faith in the gun.

We had a pretty complete dossier on everybody aboard the *Serpentine* by that time. Griff Benson's folder surprised me when I found it contained the notation that Griff wasn't as heavy with money as I'd always thought him. He had plenty, it seemed, but it was all tied up in half a dozen different things that left him with only a small income. And Griff had borrowed heavily from Lance, both with and without collateral. They might have been the best of friends, but word had it that Lance nagged Griff recently for a return of some of that moolah.

Alice Benson had been one of the also-rans in the Lance Hall Matrimonial Sweepstakes before she married Griff. Some of Alice's "dear friends" had volunteered the information that Alice never had been out of love with Lance, and that she'd married Griff on the rebound from Lance's jilting. They said she had embarrassed Lance on more than one occasion by making it pretty obvious that whereas she wouldn't dream of cheating at bridge, she might have a broader view of cheating in other directions.

Thyra Madison had come out of California some five years before. There wasn't much known about her except that she was beautiful, well-bred and well-liked by everybody who knew her. She and Lance had been very much in love . . . And, it developed, she wouldn't get a nickel's worth of Lance Hall's insurance!

There had been no quarrel between Lance and his fiancée during the trip that ended in murder. Thyra obviously knew how to handle the big man perfectly, toning down his fits of temper, acting as a buffer between his blunt ways and the sensitivities of those about him. And, if it meant anything, Thyra claimed to be a descendant of President Madison, which must have set all right with Lance, him being such a stickler for family.

Ann Turgeon admitted, tacitly, that she'd been in love with her boss, Hall, for years. She denied, however, that she'd ever entertained any hopes of marrying him and insisted that their relations had been purely Platonic. She kept pretty much to herself in private life, didn't have many friends and didn't go out much.

Captain Allen's record wasn't as good as it might have been. He'd lost a couple of good jobs through drinking and he'd wrecked one yacht in the Great Lakes while he was stiff, nearly losing his ticket on that account. He swore Lance knew about his record before hiring him and insisted, also, that he was off the booze and had been for several years. He was quitting Lance, he said, because Hall was too tough a man to work for, and because he had a better offer.

There wasn't much we could find out about Jupiter Crasby. The fellow was a floater. He'd worked mostly on the water but he'd also been a miner of sorts, a gandy dancer and a taxi driver. He'd served a stretch in California when he was picked up in a raid on a gambling barge where he was working as a strong-arm man.

AND there you are," grunted Captain Logan of Homicide, when we went over the records. "You've got plenty of motives. Alice Benson—woman scorned. Griff Benson—dough, plus Hall's pressure for repayment of the loan, plus the fact that he might have found out there was something going on between his wife and Lance. Miss Madison—I don't see anything there, unless she thought she'd get that insurance money. Lance might have told her he was changing his policies and put it off. I don't give that much weight, though. Why kill a guy when you can marry into the money in a couple of weeks and get it legal?"

"Allen," somebody put in, "could be lying about Lance knowing about his record. Allen could have been scared that Hall would ruin whatever new reputation he had built up and put him back on the beach."

"Could be," Logan nodded, "but it's weak. And as for Crasby—if that dope had just told us right off, he might be alive today and this thing would be all cleared up."

I sat there, listening with half an ear, bothered by a couple of things that were

buzzing through my brain. I couldn't get them clear in my mind and somehow they were awfully important. Something to do with tennis shoes and a pair of wide shoulders. And California.

Ever have a name on the tip of your tongue and can't quite get it? That was the way it was with me and these ideas. I'd almost have something and then the thought would skip away and I'd have to start my brain crawling after it again.

"They were both big targets," I said out loud. The other men in the room looked at me as though I'd gone nuts.

But I had it then, or a fingernail grip on it, anyway. I started to feel excitement rising inside me.

"Sure," I said. "They were both big targets. How was Hall dressed when they picked him up? Tennis shoes, dark trousers, white shirt. How was Crasby dressed when you saw him? Tennis shoes, dungarees—dark—and a T-shirt that was white."

"What are you getting at?" the Captain growled.

"Listen," I said. "Hall was bumped off on the deck of a yacht that was running through a midnight storm. He was on deck, alone, fussing with a light cable and waiting for Crasby to bring the tools up from below."

I stood up and actually stabbed my finger at the Captain.

"How's this for a hunch?" I asked. "The killer thought it was Crasby working on that cable!"

There were some grunts from the people around me.

"Sure," I said. "The killer knew Hall had ordered Crasby up on deck to repair the running light cable and stow away the sun deck furniture. The killer waited awhile after Crasby and Hall had gone above and then got that wrench, crept up on deck, saw the big target fussing with the cable and let 'er go. Wouldn't the killer be expected to find a deck hand, rather than the owner, up there, in the rain?"

I looked around the circle of faces. They were beginning to show some interest, and I continued.

"Two big men dressed alike, or near enough alike in that darkness—it would be a natural mistake. Crasby, remember, went below for the tools and passed the master's suite on his way to the tool locker. The killer caught a glimpse of Crasby, took him for Hall going to his

rooms, and made for the deck and what was supposed to be Crasby. After the wrench landed, it was too late. The killer couldn't tell everybody that it was all a mistake, that it was Crasby who was supposed to be killed. The killer had to get rid of Hall."

"But who—" the Captain began.

"Wait a minute," I said. "Suppose Crasby was the one slated to be killed. Who would want to kill a deck hand and why? But our Jupiter had led a varied life. He'd been all over and he'd seen a lot. He served time in California. California! Does that ring a bell?"

"Miss Madison hails from California," somebody said, "but what does that prove?"

"Miss Madison," I said, "claims to be a descendant of a president. Lance Hall was nuts about family. He wouldn't marry a girl without a spreading family tree, all good, without one rotten limb. Now suppose—"

"Suppose that family was the bunk," the Captain interrupted. "Suppose Miss Madison made it up as she went along. Suppose she had a California background that wasn't so hot. And suppose Crasby had known her, recognized her, met up with her by accident or design and put the screws to her with a little blackmail."

"Exactly," I said. "When Hall was killed, Crasby must have guessed that he was the one intended to go over the side. That's why he called me at Headquarters; that and maybe with the purpose of applying a little more pressure to Thyra, getting more dough by threatening to tell the cops what he knew and what he suspected."

I SETTLED back in my chair. I felt pretty good, for a change.

"And it was raining cats and dogs when Lance Hall was killed," I said. "The killer couldn't help but get wet. And only one person aboard the *Serpentine* changed her clothes during that lull in the poker party—Thyra Madison, or whatever her name is."

"Let's go, boys, the Captain said. . . .

Well, it turned out the way I theorized it, after Thyra finally broke down. She'd been a B-girl on the gambling barge Crasby worked on. She had another name then. She hit it lucky one night in Las Vegas and cleaned up at craps, decided to make a new start, came

East, took on her new name. She was an intelligent gal and she made her way. She met Lance Hall and decided he was for her.

Then, when everything seemed to be turning out just dandy, who should show up as a deck hand for her fiancée but Jupiter Crasby. Jupiter didn't waste any time putting the bee on her for dough. He had clippings, including photographs, that would have ruined Thyra. She paid but Crasby got more and more demanding. She decided to kill him and she waited for her chance.

She heard Hall order Crasby to stow the deck furniture against the approaching storm. She waited until Crasby had done the job, then disarranged the furniture again. It was she who told Hall his orders hadn't been carried out and she watched Crasby go on deck with Hall. She saw Crasby near the master's bedroom and thought it was Hall, come below to get into something dry, leaving Crasby above. She'd already stashed the wrench, and she slipped up on deck, banged the big target across the back of the head and slid him over the rail. She said she didn't know her mistake until the last second when, horrified, she watched her fiancée, the man who spelled security for her, plunge down into the water. Then she went below, changed into dry clothes and walked back to the saloon.

Thyra had to play out her hand, wrecked as it was. She watched Crasby like a hawk, knowing he suspected. When Crasby and I went below to the tool locker, she got her gun and followed us, crouched at the head of the companionway. She heard Crasby start to spill, snapped off the lights and shot him.

About the Bensons, Griff Benson had a suspicion that his wife was carrying on with Lance and he knew, too, that Lance didn't love Alice and never had. When Lance turned up missing, Griff was afraid Alice had something to do with his disappearance. He tried to protect her by the story of Lance drinking heavily.

By the same token, Alice knew of her husband's difficulties with Lance. She thought Griff might have had something to do with Hall going overboard, and that's why she sounded off about the yacht "rolling horribly," to make an accident more logical.

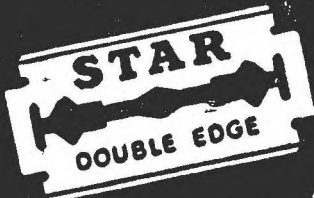
The others, Allen and Miss Turgeon, didn't have anything to do with it at all, even if they did make pretty fair suspects there for awhile.

Thyra Madison, or whatever her name really is? She's still awaiting trial. She'll probably ask for a jury trial. With that beautiful face, she just might get off with something less than first degree murder, too.

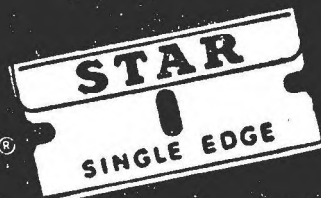
Next Issue: I AM THE LAW, a Novelet by Carroll John Daly

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a . n o v e l e t



I CAN'T STAND BLOOD

Harold Lyons of the Abandonment Bureau—that's me—is a timid soul who deplores violence and doesn't carry a rod, but when the chips are down I've got to take my chances!

by **JULES ARCHER**

CHAPTER I: *Bullet From the Roofs*

NICKY planted her undeniably interesting body between me and the door. "Seven women waiting outside," she said firmly. "Take your hat off, chief. I'm not paid to do your job!"

Without looking down I pointed to the pool of blood on the floor. I felt deeply sick. The last woman in my office had rushed directly to me from a fracas

with her husband—two days after a reconciliation I had warned her against. She had sat opposite me sobbing out her story, bleeding badly from the mouth.

"Nicky," I said faintly. "You know I can't stand blood. You are the Abandonment Bureau until tomorrow. Don't work later than midnight if you can help it."

"I quit!" Nicky stormed. She was al-



I brought the side of my hand
down upon the back of his neck

ways doing that.

"Okay, send those women away. Tell them we can't help them. If they're going to be evicted, or can't afford milk for their kids, tell 'em to write their Congressmen—"

"Oh, shut up!" She scowled. A good kid, Nicky. She knows why I've stuck to this mean job so long. It's got her, too. She took off my hat and scratched my bald head soothingly.

"Be a brave guy, Harold," she coaxed. "I'll mop up the—the floor. Don't run out on me, please! I'm working with three hands now. Those women have been waiting to see you for hours!"

"Get the mop," I sighed, letting her push me back into my worn swivel chair. I swallowed hard and fixed my eyes firmly on the ceiling as Nicky rushed outside.

Sometimes I wish I could be as hard-boiled as I look. Beats me why I'm not. It's a thankless job.

When I catch up with the muckers who abandon their wives and children, do the wives want them thrown in the clink? Shucks, no! They want to kiss and make up. Then bingo, they're back bawling on my shoulder a few days later, with black eyes and bloody noses.

Should have quit long ago, I guess. Twenty years, and the city pays me all of \$3,060 a year. Me with eight kids. But at that, it's better than gun stuff, anyhow.

I'm about the only guy in the D.A.'s office who doesn't pack a heater. Nobody but Nicky knows why. The D.A.'s boys razz me enough as it is. Dorothy Dix Lyons, they call me, of the Lonely Hearts Bureau.

YOU might wonder how a wizened shrimp like me, fifty-five years old, and muscles like oysters, can pull in some of the rough customers I go after. Easy. The average hard guy wants to punch your face in. I don't give him a chance. I'm fast and I'm first and I wear pointed shoes. If he looks like trouble, I throw him a swift, unexpected kick in the shins. Then when he yells and bends, I clip him with an expert rabbit punch. I've only lost two men I went after; only been knocked cold myself once.

"Mrs. Canfield," Nicky said, coming in with a mop and a very white-faced brunette. The woman was young and not pretty—not by glamour girl standards—

but she had tiger-bright eyes set above pale cheeks that glowed strangely. She was the kind of woman who would look fascinating in a torn coat. And that was what she wore.

"Sit down, please." I studied the card Nicky had filled out on her case. Same old story. Everything fine until the baby came. Then needing a job that paid more money, the Canfields had come east from Ohio. Arthur Canfield had landed a job at the Club Luigi—I frowned at that—and two months later he had walked out on Christine Canfield and their child.

"Your husband still working at the Club Luigi?"

"Yes."

"Have you asked him for money?"

"He won't give me any until I consent to a divorce. I can't. My religion prohibits it."

"Why did your husband leave you?"

Christine Canfield's lips trembled, then tightened. "I can't tell you," she said in a low, tense voice.

Ordinarily I'd have exploded. But there was something about the woman that made me sit on my temper. Something that chilled me, without any logical reason. Perhaps that glow in her face did it.

"Look, Mrs. Canfield," I said patiently. "I can't help you unless I have all the facts. When you came into my office, you parked your pride outside. Now what was it?"

She raised her tawny, over-large eyes slowly. They were filled with brooding and terror. I squirmed uneasily, waiting for an answer to my question. Nicky's typewriter chattered on noisily, inexorably in the stillness.

Christine Canfield stood up. She shook her head with an almost inaudible sigh. "I can't tell you that, Mr. Lyons—"

Pnowwee! Like that it sounded. There was a silvery splash of glass. I stared incredulously at an ugly gap in the woodwork two inches from Christine Canfield's white face. Then I tumbled off my chair and tackled her on my way to the floor.

"Get down, Nicky!" I yelled across the room.

My advice was belated. Nicky's chair was empty, and an abundance of trembling curves were silhouetted behind a waste basket. "My stars!" she quavered. "They can't do that!"

Keeping low, I bent carefully over

Mrs. Canfield. "Are you all—Nicky, she's fainted. Quick, crawl out and get some iodine!"

"Iodine? You mean smelling salts!"

"I mean iodine! That flying glass cut her cheek. Hurry up, Nicky, you know I can't stand blood!"

I still say Nicky had no right to throw that paperweight. . . .

It was dark when I came down the pigeon-speckled steps of the County Courthouse. My legs were still wobbly. I couldn't help looking apprehensively over my shoulder at the row of grim slum tenements facing my third-floor office. From one of those roofs or top story windows a gun had been fired at Christine Canfield. The cops, of course, had not unearthed a single clue. In that shady neighborhood, "n o b o d y knew nothin'," as a matter of routine.

Feeling a dozen mysterious eyes burning a hole in the back of my neck, I hurried across the street toward Dugan's place. The bright lights and white, gleaming counter were reassuring. I let out a sigh and slid onto a red leather stool.

"Two hamburgers and coffee," I ordered glumly, thinking of the meal I was passing up at home. Mom would be putting Junie and Pete to bed about this time. Jane and Evvy would be getting dinner ready, and Ruthie would be getting the other three kids washed.

"Well, if it isn't Dorothy Dix!"

THE man beside me lowered his newspaper and grinned. It was Toohey, of Homicide, a fat old guy with a red, grainy face that had been one-hundred-proof for years. He nudged me with a battering ram elbow and leered. "Boys tell me somebody fired a shot at you in the Lonely Hearts Bureau. Whatchoo been up to with that harem of yours, you sly old dog? Heh-heh-heh!"

"Go butter your nose," I growled. "That shot wasn't aimed at me. If you overgrown Boy Scouts weren't so busy faking your swindle sheets, you'd find out who fired it and why."

"Why worry? No corpses—yet. Heh-heh!"

I hated to ask the big slob for information, but I swallowed my pride and said, "Toohey, you get around the night spots. What's the set-up at Luigi's?"

"Luigi Torrio?" His beady eyes swung toward me in their bags of fat.

"Got a slice of the pinball racket and the numbers. The night club's legitimate. Don't give us no trouble—and we don't give him none. Why?"

"Know a guy who works for him named Arthur Canfield?"

"Nope. But if he works for Luigi, Harold my boy, take it easy. Luigi's very fond of his lads. I wouldn't try to get rough. This guy skip out on this woman?"

"Uh-huh." I reached for my hamburgers.

"Better see Luigi first." Toohey's stool groaned in relief as he slid off. "Tell him I sent you. Luigi's a soft-hearted mug. Play hearts and flowers and he'll make your boy pay up. Well, so long, Dorothy Dix. Keep out of the boudoirs! Heh-heh-heh!"

I nearly choked on a mouthful of hamburger as a mammoth paw crashed against my spine. Chuckling and picking his teeth, the big ape ambled toward the door. Then reaching for a bottle of ketchup, he slid it down the counter toward me.

"Smear some blood on those horses you're eating," he said with a grin. "Make 'em trot down easier. Heh!"

I shuddered.

Luigi's was one of those inscrutable walk-down clubs on West Fifty-Second Street. The sidewalk in front was monopolized by a red-and-white striped canopy. An iron fence railed off the stone steps, then spread out to connect with the upward stairs of adjoining brown-stone fronts. There was a billboard propped against the rail.

Angelica, it said, would thrill you nightly with her songs of sunny Sicily. The photograph revealed a peroxide blonde with olive features, a sensual mouth and gleaming shoulders. She wore a spangled evening gown at low tide.

I knocked on the oak-paneled door. It opened slightly after a while. An eye peered out. "Not open yet," growled the eye.

"I want to see Luigi." I took the precaution of bracing my shoe over the threshold. "Sergeant Toohey sent me."

"Wait a minute." He almost mangled my foot in the door. I waited for a lot of minutes. I was almost going to knock again when the door re-opened. The eye turned out to belong to a surly face. He jerked his head for me to enter.

I followed him past the bar with up-

turned stools reflected in the long mirror, down three steps into a darkened room crowded with tables. I brushed against something tall and steely. Suddenly there was a loud, metallic crash.

I hit the floor fast. In fact, I'm not ashamed to say I hugged it. Every muscle in my body knotted into a figure eight. Twice in one day was too much for a peace-loving guy like me. I lay there, weighing the pros and cons of retiring on a pension of half-pay.

Then I was seized by the shoulders and jerked roughly to my feet. The eye glared into my white face.

"You hurt yourself on that microphone?" he rasped.

Butterflies of relief fluttered inside of me. "Not much," I said, and tried to sound tough.

We turned past the dim shape of a piano. My guide touched the wall and a knobless door yielded inward. I followed him up a carpeted flight of stairs that zig-zagged up to a circular foyer. As we climbed, a little black-and-white fox terrier came hopping down the steps. There was something peculiar about its gait. Then I noticed its right foot was missing.

"Too bad about the hound," I said. "What did it—an auto?"

"Nope," said the guy in front as he stopped in front of a walnut-stained door at the head of the stairs. "Owner got mad one day and cut it off. The rotten mutt kept scratching at the door."

I didn't know whether he was kidding, trying to scarce me off, or *what* to make of that crack. I just swallowed and but-toned my lip. He knocked sharply, opened the door and motioned me inside.

CHAPTER II

Fourth Floor Shambles



GIRL sat behind a curved desk that was whiter than her hair. The room was quite a layout—French blinds, tapestry curtains and a thick-piled green rug almost shoe-deep. Indirect lighting and soundproof walls made you forget this was blaring West Fifty-

second Street.

"I'm Angelica Sabatina," the girl said, "Mr. Torrio's assistant. He isn't in yet. Anything I can do for you?"

I exposed my bald head. At a nod from her, the guy with the scowl backed out, his hip pocket clanking against the doorknob. Angelica and I looked each other over. The picture hadn't done her justice. She didn't have to sing.

"I'm looking for Arthur Canfield."

"Canfield?" Her soft lips pursed, and Angelica rolled gold-flecked eyes thoughtfully. "Nobody here by that name."

"Luigi might know," I said casually. Sinking into a satin-upholstered chair, I crossed my legs. "I'll just wait."

A look of annoyance flittered across her highly made-up face. Then she shrugged, and her expression indicated that as far as she was concerned, I had evaporated. Ignoring me, she opened a desk drawer and removed a white cardboard box. Lifting the cover, she stared inside, her lips soft and relaxed.

I couldn't resist craning, and my lips pursed in a silent whistle. Inside the box were orchids, not one, but a dozen. Angelica bent over them and inhaled. Then she replaced the lid with a sigh, and put the box back in the drawer. Luigi, I reflected, was quite a boy to work for.

Angelica settled back in her chair with a copy of *Exciting Love*, and I passed the time wondering idly why Christine Canfield had been terrified of telling me why her husband had left her.

The third time I glanced impatiently at my watch, the door opened. I didn't have to be told this was Luigi Torrio. He wore a smooth, double-breasted dark suit sparkled by a white handkerchief and a carnation in his buttonhole. A sea-wave colored tie sat neatly against his blue pin-striped shirt.

"Hello, *bellissima*," said Luigi tenderly before he saw me. Then his warm black eyes looked me over and shot a question at Angelica.

"A flatfoot," Angelica said. "Looking for a guy named Canfield. Sergeant Toohey sent him."

Luigi extended an open cigarette case toward me. A huge fire opal ring sparkled on his middle finger. I shook my head and he lighted one himself. Luigi was a good-looking man in his late forties, slender, with a neck that looked shrunken under the skin. He slipped

easily into a chair opposite me and blew a smoke-ring.

"What do you want to see this man for?" he asked, with just enough Italian mayonnaise in his speech to flavor it.

Hearts and flowers, Toohey had said. So I showed my hand. "I'm Lyons of the Abandonment Bureau. Arthur Canfield took a runout powder on his wife and kid. They still gotta eat. There won't be any trouble if he signs over part of his weekly paycheck."

Luigi stuck a finger into Angelica's desk and part of it turned into a small bar. He poured a whisky.

"Ran out on his wife and kid, eh?" He drained the glass and smacked his narrow lips. "*E inaudito!* That's very bad."

"I already told him we don't know the guy," Angelica said, watching Luigi. I think she was holding her breath.

"*Non è vero!*" he told her sharply. "Angelica, always I back my boys to the limit. But such a thing! No, he must do as this man says, or he does not work for Luigi Torrio!"

"What is this woman to you?" Angelica sulked. "This business does not concern us!"

Luigi frowned and raised his hand in a signal that he wanted to hear no more. "Mr. Lyons, I will see to it myself that this man does what is right. He is not here now. When would you like him to sign your papers?"

"Four o'clock tomorrow," I said, "at his wife's apartment."

"*Posso assicurarnela,*" said Luigi.

"You might also check his gun. See if it matches this." And I handed him the flattened bullet I had dug out of the paneling in my office, "Tell him he's very lucky he missed. Otherwise he'd be seeing Sergeant Toohey, not me."

"So?" Luigi pursed his thin lips and juggled the bullet thoughtfully in his hand. "I should hate to think—he seems like such a nice young fellow. Still, I will find out for you."

"Much obliged."

THE door closed softly behind me. I stared into the face of the surly guy who had showed me up. Wordlessly he shepherded me down the staircase, through the club and out the front door. His pocket clanged again as it hit the closing metal knob.

The cold night air made me realize I

was perspiring.

I phoned Christine Canfield in the morning. "Your husband will be at the apartment at four. I'll try to get there first. If he shows up before I do, let him in, but don't talk. Give him a magazine to read. Remember, leave the talking to me."

"All right," she said.

Nicky reminded me at three-thirty. For the fourth time I explained to a perplexed Mrs. McCarthy that she couldn't claim abandonment if she owned property in her own name. Then I grabbed for my hat.

"My assistant will explain it again," I said with a sigh. "Hold the fort, Nicky. Back as soon as I can."

"What do you want me to tell that piano-tuner," Nicky asked as I was halfway out the door, "if he phones back while you're out?"

"Tell him he'd better get over to my place and do the job over. I played Chopin last night and it came out Chopsticks!"

I headed for the Seventh Avenue subway, walking fast. I didn't want to be late. Despite the warning I had given Christine Canfield, I knew what usually happened when an estranged wife and husband got together to make a settlement. It was bad enough when I was there to hold them apart. Ordinarily I made them meet in my office, but Mrs. Canfield had no one to look after the baby. She had had to pay her landlady three bucks to do it the day she had come in to see me.

Getting out at Intervale Avenue, I hurried along a run-down shopping center until I hit Simpson Street. It was 3:56. Somehow I thought of the tragic look in Christine Canfield's tawny eyes and my pace quickened. Call it premonition, if you like.

The apartment house looked as though it would collapse wearily if the house on either side had moved away. The front door was open. I climbed four flights in a dingy hallway. Then I struck a match to examine the doorbells. I found the right one and pressed it. The bell rang with a tinny sound.

A sharp explosion sounded close to my eardrums. Dishes rattled on a shelf, an acrid smell wafted through the door. Then came a second explosion. My legs collapsed limply under me like coiling rope. The floor tiles felt cold against my

hot cheek. A third explosion ripped out. A fourth. I heard two doors open behind me in the hallway.

"Get back inside, you fools!" I croaked from the floor without moving. "Do you want to get shot?"

The doors closed quickly. What the devil am I doing here, I asked myself in dumb wonder. The thing for me to do was to get down those stairs fast and phone the police. This was now a job for guys with guns. But something made me stay where I was. The way that fat slob Toohey had called me Dorothy Dix still rankled.

"Hey, Lyons!" grated a harsh voice. I looked up in fright. Somebody was speaking to me through the key-hole of the closed door.

"Y-yeah?"

"Stay put for five minutes, see? Or you'll get one, too!"

I didn't need a ouija board to figure out what he meant. I glanced at my watch. 4:01. I had no intention of moving a muscle before 4:06. After all, I had a wife and eight kids depending on me. Besides, I can't stand blood. Especially mine.

The landlady came gasping up the steps at 4:04. I waved her to the floor and put my finger to my lips. She got down quickly and I felt her arm dancing on my leg.

"Wh-what's happened?" she said in a trembling whisper.

I didn't answer. At 4:06 on the dot I raised my voice from somewhere out of my shoes. "Hey, you inside!" I called. There was no answer, no sound. "Hey, you inside!"

With a long sigh I rose and dusted myself off. I coughed and the landlady coughed.

"What a mess!" I said. "Don't you ever wash these floors? Got a key to this door?"

"Here." Her hand was shaking so much that she stabbed me with it. I put it in the lock and turned the knob. The open door framed a scene that still gives me nightmares. The landlady screamed.

CHRISTINE Canfield lay sprawled on a faded blue carpet in a moth-eaten living room. Her knees were half-folded under her, her arms at her sides, her fists tight-clenched. More spectacular in death than life, her tiger-like eyes stared tragically at the cracked ceiling.

The carpet was a wet scarlet beneath her body.

The landlady screamed again and crossed herself. I felt the lurch in my stomach churning. Then I saw the crib in a far corner of the room. The baby in it lay still—far too still. Crossing the room apprehensively, I saw the charred round hole in the blanket. I lifted the blanket gingerly. The white night-dress was crimson beneath the motionless chin.

Through red-clotted vision I saw into the kitchen. Threadbare curtains flapped dismally before an open window leading on to a rusted fire-escape. For a moment I thought my mind was going when I sensed a red eye winking at me—a satanic red eye. I turned my head and saw something fiery glittering up from the foot of a battered easy chair. I scooped it up and put it into my pocket.

Dizzy and flushed, I started for the door. The passageway was blocked with gaping white faces. I brushed past the whimpering landlady and elbowed my way savagely into the hall. Before I could get down more than one flight, I was sick. I remember thinking irrelevantly, as I leaned over the bannister, that the joint needed a thorough cleaning anyhow.

There was a pay-phone on the ground floor. I dialed the police, then stumbled into the fresh air. A few minutes later, still dazed, I found myself in a bar and grill, with my foot up on the rail. I never drink, but I ordered a double Scotch. My eyes must have flickered as the burning stuff went down. Ugh!

Digging into my pocket to pay for the drink, my fingers touched a cold metal lump. Remembering, I took it out.

It was an enormous fire opal ring.

When I phoned Nicky to tell her I wouldn't be back, I hung up quickly. I was in no mood to listen to her outraged howl about running the Bureau single-handed. There was some complicated thinking to do.

Taking the subway downtown, I tried to shut out the faces around me and concentrate. What was there about the obvious murder of his wife and child by Arthur Canfield that bothered me? I tried to organize my scattered thoughts.

Was it a mere coincidence that the first shot was fired a second after I rang the doorbell? If my ring was the signal for the shots, what was the meaning of

it? Why did the murderer waste precious seconds of his getaway to warn me not to move, when I obviously couldn't have gotten inside in time to stop him?

There was something even more psychologically disturbing. Why hadn't Christine Canfield screamed? Why hadn't I heard a cry from the baby? Why had I heard no sound of scuffling, or any sound in fact, from behind that door, except those four terrible shots? Had Christine Canfield been paralyzed with fright? Had the baby been shot in its sleep? Had Arthur Canfield knocked his wife unconscious before he killed her?

My mind was whirling helplessly. I was made even more uneasy by recalling the fire opal. The man on the other side of the door could have been no one else but Canfield. He knew my name. He was there at the expected time. He had a strong motive for killing his wife—her refusal to grant a divorce, and forcing him to support her and the child through the Abandonment Bureau. There was also the mysterious reason why he had left his wife, one so terrible that Christine Canfield dared not tell it to me.

Also the ring I had found on the floor of that room of death was the ring I had seen on the finger of Luigi Torrio.

CHAPTER III

Punctured Alibi



THE man with the surly face showed me up to the same circular foyer. But this time he knocked on a different door. There was a loud buzzing noise and the door automatically unlatched.

"*Ebbene*, Mr. Lyons!" Luigi Torrio said cordially.

He sat at his desk in shirt sleeves and suspenders, with bulky account books open before him. The three-legged pooch lay on a pillow beneath an end-table. Across the room, a gleaming gold and white room, Angelica reclined on a wide lounge. She was wearing the low-cut whistle number of the photograph.

"Everything went all right, *spero*? Mr. Canfield has signed your papers?"

I tried to match the caliber of that voice with the words spoken to me through the door of the Canfield apartment. It was hard to judge. I tossed the fire opal ring on Luigi's desk.

"Yours?"

"*Santo Cielo*—my ring!" Luigi's black eyes snapped with delight. He held it up fondly, admiring its wine-like sparkle. "I was very unhappy. I thought I should never see it again. Where did you find it, Mr. Lyons?"

"Where did you lose it?"

"Where? *Mio Dio*, how should I know? Washing my hands somewhere, perhaps. When did I lose it, Angelica?"

"Two days ago, I think," said the girl on the wide lounge. "You are too careless, Luigi."

"And where did you find it, Mr. Lyons?"

"In the apartment of Mrs. Canfield."

I waited to see his reaction. His thin mouth tightened in what was apparently surprise. "*Come!*" he exclaimed. "I do not understand! What was it doing there?"

"I thought you might be able to tell me that."

Angelica was on her feet, breathing hard. Her olive skin was pale as she walked slowly to Luigi's desk.

"Yes, Luigi," she said tautly. "I would be very interested to know what you were doing in this woman's apartment. Perhaps that might explain why you were so interested in her welfare."

"Angelica, don't be a fool!" The thin Italian got up and gripped her bare arms. "You ought to know there is no other woman for me! I do not even know this Mrs. Canfield, *giuro!*"

"I do not believe you!"

"Wait a minute," I said wearily, as the two of them glared at each other. "There's something more important. Mr. Torrio, where were you this afternoon between three and four o'clock?"

"I—" He scowled and closed his mouth. Then he snapped, "What business is that of yours?"

"It's *your* business, Mr. Torrio, but you'd better know your business. The police are going to ask you that question. Mrs. Canfield and her baby were murdered this afternoon."

I said it quietly, but I couldn't have rocked him more with a bomb. His mouth fell open. If it wasn't genuine astonishment, it was a pretty good imi-

tation. Angelica stared at me. The fire opal flashed accusingly from the desk where Luigi had dropped it.

"He was with me all afternoon," Angelica breathed. She moved closer to him and he held her.

"And where were you, Miss Sabatina?"

"At the studio of my singing teacher. Professor Correlli."

"Singing lessons? I thought you were a professional singer."

"She is studying for opera," Luigi said. "Every afternoon she goes for her lessons."

"And you went with her today?"

He hesitated a moment, looked at Angelica and said, "Yes."

"What is Professor Correlli's address and phone number?"

Luigi's worried eyes sought Angelica's. Her slender fingers curled tightly as her slow voice answered:

"Twelve Park Road. Meredith one-four eight nine oh."

I PICKED up the phone on Luigi's desk and dialed the number. A woman answered in a husky Negro voice.

"Professor Correlli, please."

"Ain't in right now," the woman said.

"What time did Miss Sabatina and Mr. Torrio come today?"

"Wasn't no Mr. Torrio here. Miss Sabatina, she come like always about one o'clock. She ain't here now—left about half an hour ago." I glanced at my wrist-watch. 6:10.

"Thank you." I hung up. Luigi's dark face was ashen.

"I think you made a mistake, Miss Sabatina," I said. "You were there all afternoon, but Mr. Torrio wasn't with you."

"Don't answer any more questions, Luigi!" Angelica's wide, gold-flecked eyes flashed a warning at him. "I'll get Mr. Jacobs." She started to dial a number but Luigi put his hand over hers.

"I don't need a lawyer, Angelica. I didn't kill that woman. *Il diavolo*, I tell you I don't even know her!" Then he turned to me and his fine nostrils dilated. "I will not tell you where I was this afternoon, Mr. Lyons. But is there anything else you would like to know?"

"Did you check that spent bullet I gave you with Canfield's gun? I'd like it back, by the way."

He took it from his pocket and gave it

to me. "Yes. It did not come from his gun."

"That's too bad for you in a way," I said dryly. "Undoubtedly the man who fired it at Christine Canfield while she was in my office was the man who finally killed her. Unless the same man used different guns. Wouldn't fit *your* gun, would it?"

He smiled wryly. "I do not carry a gun, Mr. Lyons."

"Where is Arthur Canfield?"

"I do not know. I saw him this morning, and told him he must go to his wife's apartment this afternoon to sign your papers."

"What did he say?"

"He did not want to go there. I told him he must do this or he could not work for me. Finally he said he would go. This was about eleven o'clock. I have not seen him since."

"What sort of work does Canfield do for you, Mr. Torrio?"

"Oh, a little of this and that." He smiled in a tired way and shrugged. "Anything that might come up."

"I see. When do you expect him?"

"About eight, usually."

"Got his home address?"

Luigi consulted the small green file on his desk. "He lives at Twenty-two Bedford Street. There is no phone."

"If he shows up," I said, "and I doubt it, I suggest that you phone the police, Mr. Torrio." I picked up the fire opal ring and pocketed it. "I'll hang on to this for a while, if you don't mind. I think Miss Sabatina's right, Mr. Torrio. I'd phone for your lawyer, if I were you. Myron T. Jacobs, is it?"

"Yes."

"Well, I won't bother you any longer." I stopped at the door and turned. "Very fond of opera myself, Miss Sabatina. Like to hear you sometime. Do you sing Puccini's *Aida*?"

"Not very well yet," Angelica said in a low voice.

"Ah, but she will be a great singer some day," Luigi declared warmly. "You must come into the Club some evening to hear her, Mr. Lyons. You will be my guest, of course."

"That's very kind, Mr. Torrio. Well, good-by."

In the morning I told Nicky about the murder. She heard me out gravely, then thrust a folded newspaper under my nose. It was on Page Three, with a lurid

photograph of Christine Canfield's corpse next to another showing the baby in its crib. I scanned the paragraphs quickly. The police were looking for Arthur Canfield and an unidentified man who had been found lying outside the door of the apartment at the time of the murder.

"Hey, Nicky! That's me! The guy outside the apartment."

"They finally figured that out," Nicky answered with a grin. "Homicide's been up to see you twice this morning."

"Lieutenant Foner?"

"He sent up Sergeant Toohey. The good Sergeant is suspicious, Harold." Nicky was smiling like a mischievous kid. "I think he's got you pegged as the killer. Or *particeps criminis*, anyhow."

"Why, that big fat slob— Oh, hullo, Toohey!"

THE door shut behind Sergeant Toohey. He shot me a dirty look and squeezed his bulk into a wooden arm-chair facing me.

"Well, spill it, Dorothy Dix," he growled. "Let's have everything you know about the case."

"He just confessed, Sergeant," Nicky said brightly from her desk as she slit open the morning mail. "He did it to see if you Homicide boys could really solve a crime."

"Heh-heh, very funny," said Toohey, but he wasn't amused. "Come on, Lyons, give."

I told him all the facts I knew, and gave him Luigi's fire opal. He didn't seem to be paying much attention while I related what had happened on my second visit to Luigi's. In fact, he was frowning and biting his fat lips.

"You positive you heard *four* shots?" he barked.

"I think I can count up to four, Toohey!"

"I wouldn't bet on that. The medical examiner only found *two* bullets—one in the woman and one in the kid."

"How about the walls?"

"No more bullets any place."

"That's funny." I tossed the slug I had taken back from Luigi into his lap. "That look like one of the murder bullets? I dug it out of the wall that day somebody took a shot at Christine Canfield in my office."

He examined it closely. Then he shook his head. "Nope. The bullets in the

bodies were soft lead slugs from a gun with slow velocity. I'd guess a thirty-eight Smith and Wesson Special. But they didn't kill Mrs. Canfield or her kid."

"Huh?" I sat bolt upright, unable to believe my ears. "I don't get you, Toohey."

"The woman and the baby were both *stabbed* to death!"

"What!"

"Yeah, fifteen minutes before the bullets were fired into the stab wounds. The medical examiner thinks the weapon that stabbed her was some kind of serrated stiletto."

The room spun. The more this strange case unfolded, the less sense it made. My brain literally reeled trying to piece the bits together. I had heard four shots. Yet there was only one bullet in each body. The woman and child hadn't been shot to death—they were already stabbed when shot. And neither bullet matched the one fired at Christine Canfield the day before her death.

"Beats me," I confessed. "They pull in Arthur Canfield yet?"

"Canfield has disappeared," Toohey growled. "Didn't show up at Luigi's last night, and didn't go home to his place on Bedford Street. What was the break-up with his wife all about, Lyons?"

"I don't know. I asked Mrs. Canfield, but she—"

"Chief! Chief!"

From the tone of Nicky's voice I expected the walls to crumble any minute. She stood up at her desk, her mouth shaping a large O. The paper in her hand trembled.

"This—this was in the mail," she whispered breathlessly. As though in a dream she walked slowly to my desk and laid the letter in front of Toohey and me. It was typewritten. It read:

Mr. Lyons, I didn't kill my wife, although I had every reason to. She was unfaithful, which is why I left her. The man who did it is Luigi Torrio. If you find his stiletto, you will find the weapon that murdered my wife and child.

The signature had been typewritten.

I picked up the letter but Toohey snatched it out of my hand. "Holy smokes!" he said. "Wait till the Lieutenant sees *this*!"

"Hey!" I yelled on principle. "That's *my* letter!"

"Don't obstruct justice!" said the big glory hound, glowering at me. I could

see visions of promotion dancing in his piggish eyes. He tucked the letter in his coat pocket and shook his head dolefully. "Too bad about Luigi. King for a day."

"What are you talking about?"

"Didn't you read about it? Until yesterday Luigi only had a fair slice of the pinball territory. But yesterday his boys invaded Tiny Hannegan's places, smashed all the machines and beat up the store owners. About fifty joints. They say Luigi personally directed the raids, but we can't prove it. We don't have to now—with this." He patted his coat pocket affectionately.

"Don't forget the credit line," Nicky reminded him caustically. "Courtesy of the Abandonment Bureau."

Toohy waddled to the door. A smile covered his face from jowl to jowl.

"Well, thanks for the little chat, Dorothy Dix. I won't keep your abandoned ladies waiting any longer—I know you girls have a lot to talk over with each other. Heh-heh-heh!"

"Heh-heh!" I said sourly.

CHAPTER IV

Missing Killer



HOMICIDE certainly didn't waste any time, I'll say that for them. When I went out to lunch, the afternoon papers front-page the story of Luigi Torrio's arrest on a charge of first-degree murder. When arrested he had been wearing an under-arm holster which

sheathed a stiletto—a serrated stiletto. A little later it was identified as the weapon that murdered Mrs. Canfield and her child.

The report stated that Luigi had made no attempt to deny that the stiletto was his. In a voluntary statement he admitted that although he had never used it, carrying it merely for protection, it had never been out of his possession. He emphatically denied the murder charge, however, insisting that he had never seen Mrs. Canfield or even heard of her until the day before her murder. He also admitted ownership of the fire opal ring, but denied any knowledge of how it got into Christine Canfield's apartment.

I sat in Dugan's place, chewing my thumb reflectively as my coffee grew colder in front of me. I felt as helpless as a man who's been given a valuable automobile in unassembled pieces. All I had to do was to put the pieces together properly and I'd have something. But tantalizingly, none of the pieces seemed to fit. Or was it just that I was too dumb?

If Luigi had killed Christine Canfield, as all the evidence seemed to bear out, where did Arthur Canfield fit into the picture? If it had been he behind the closed door of the apartment, why did he fire four shots into the dead bodies of his wife and child? The fact that they were dead explained why I had heard no sounds of struggle or screams. Death by stiletto also explained why Christine Canfield had uttered no sound when it was plunged into her heart. Swiftly drawn and swiftly plunged, it would enable the murderer to kill silently, without rousing the neighbors.

Somehow I knew those shots were fired for *my* benefit; when I pressed the doorbell. But why four, when only two bullets were found? Shooting at dead targets, he could scarcely have missed, especially at close range. All I could gather from this strange episode was that Canfield, for some mysterious reason, wanted me to know that he was in there shooting at his wife. That would also account for his speaking to me through the door.

Then there was the letter he had written to me that morning from his hiding place—if it was he who had written it. He accused his wife of betraying him with Luigi Torrio. Was this the dread secret Christine Canfield did not dare to tell me? But she surely must have realized I would have heard it from her husband when I saw him. Furthermore—was it true?

The fire opal ring on the floor seemed to bear out that it was, despite Luigi's denials that he even knew her. But if it were true, what was the motive for murder? That she might expose him to her husband? But Arthur Canfield already knew, and had left his wife. And why was the child murdered? What possible gain could that poor infant's dead body be to anyone?

I thought of Luigi's curious hesitance about revealing his whereabouts at the time of the murder, how he had eagerly

accepted Angelica's suggestion that he had been with her at the singing teacher's place. No doubt if I hadn't phoned to check immediately, the alibi would have been arranged as soon as I left.

And who had shot at Christine Canfield the day before she was murdered? According to Luigi, the bullet did not come from Arthur Canfield's gun. And according to Sergeant Toohey, it did not match either of the bullets in the bodies.

Hanged if I could figure the thing out. But one thing I felt pretty certain about—I wouldn't have changed places with Luigi Torrio for a million bucks. Luigi seemed a funny fellow in many respects, but I couldn't get over him being dumb enough to carry around a stiletto that had just been used in murder.

With a heavy sigh I paid my check and trudged back to the office. Nicky had just put the phone down when I walked in.

"That piano-tuner just called up," she said. "He was over at your house this morning and re-tuned the piano. He said if you play Chopin now, it ought to come out Tchaikowsky or better!"

SOMETHING inside me, a memory, responded like a plucked piano wire. I stood stock still, not daring to move for fear of jarring the unexploded bomb that had just fallen into my brain. I must have looked ghastly because Nicky came running.

"Harold, what's wrong?"

"*Sh-h-h!* Keep quiet for a minute. Nicky!" I stood there and thought deeply. What Nicky had said reminded me of an obscure, curious fact, a trivial fact, to be sure, but one that opened up an entire new field of conjecture that my mind was now racing madly along. I closed my eyes and stood still as I asked myself questions and answered them.

My lips must have been moving because Nicky forced me into my swivel chair with a look of alarm in her chestnut eyes. "W-wait a minute, chief, take it easy. I'll get you a glass of water!"

She raced out of the office. Suddenly I had the answer.

That's it, I gloated, that must be it! I don't understand it all, but the pattern is there.

I *had* to be right! I reached eagerly for a Manhattan phone directory. Dialing a number, I asked for Myron T. Jacobs.

We had a short but earnest talk. I had difficulty in persuading him to answer the one important question in my mind. As it was confidential information, he objected. But when I pointed out that it might mean the difference between life and death for his client, Luigi Torrio, he answered me reluctantly—the very answer I had desperately hoped to hear!

I put the phone down with a thrill of triumph and dashed for the door, just in time to spill a glass of water over Nicky.

"W-why, you—you've got me all wet!" she spluttered furiously, shaking herself like a dripping duck.

"That's what I've been—all wet!" I shouted as I shot out into the hall. "Hold the fort, Nicky!"

I was traveling too fast to hear what she said.

Disregarding the obvious fact that \$3,060 a year doesn't go very far in feeding two big mouths and eight small ones, I recklessly hailed a taxi. Jumping in, I said:

"Twelve Park Road and make it snappy."

I was too deep in thought to notice that the driver's idea of snappy consisted of turning corners on two wheels. Uppermost in my mind was the realization that I was being an impulsive fool. I should have gone to Sergeant Toohey—no, to Lieutenant Foner, told them what I had figured out, and let them go in for the kill. But then I realized they'd only have laughed at me and told me to stick to the "Lonely Hearts Bureau." They had an airtight case and they weren't going looking for birds in the bush.

A gun would have been handy at a time like this, but if I had had one, I'd have emptied the chambers. For a guy who couldn't stand blood, I thought apprehensively, I might be heading straight into buckets of it. Mine. Well, at least there'd be a widow's pension.

The cab pulled up with a screech. I paid what it said on the meter, added a dime, and ignored the dirty look. Then I walked up the brownstone front. A black nameplate at the side of the door bore the name:

PROFESSOR ANTON CORRELLI
Music Lessons By Appointment

A short, stocky Negress in a maid's uniform answered the doorbell. At her

heels trotted the little black-and-white fox terrier I had seen at Luigi's.

"I want to see Professor Correlli," I said.

"He ain't in," the maid said suspiciously. "Anyhow, he full booked up. Can't take no more pupils."

"I think he'll see me. Tell him Angelica Sabatina sent me. That's her pooch, isn't it?"

Her eyes widened in amazement.

"Wait a minute, mister, I'll tell him," she said. "What's your name?"

"Ferguson. Richard Ferguson."

The glass door closed, and she disappeared inside the inner, curtained door. I toyed with the idea of getting out of there quick before she returned. Those castanets clacking weren't coming from Professor Correlli's music studio. They were my teeth.

The maid reappeared. "The Professor will see you," she said slowly, her eyes big as milk bottle caps. "This way."

WE WENT a few steps down the hallway into a partly opened door on the left. The maid motioned for me to wait in the small foyer which had two moquette-upholstered chairs and an oval mirror. I waited for something like five minutes. Then footsteps approached on the opposite side of the inner door. My heart kept time with the spring of my watch. The door opened.

"Won't you come in, please?" said Professor Correlli. He was an oddly youthful old man with a pointed Van Dyke beard and a sweeping mustache. A pince-nez with a broad black ribbon gave him a somewhat abstracted air. I followed him into a large, tastefully-furnished studio room with a very high ceiling. There was a baby grand standing on a tapestry rug.

"You say Miss Sabatina sent you?" he asked, lifting his head and glancing at me through the bottom rims of his pince-nez.

"Yes. She heard me play the piano, and suggested that you would probably be able to do as much for my playing as you were able to do for her singing. So I—"

"I'm very sorry, Mr. Ferguson," Professor Correlli said severely. "But my time is fully taken. Perhaps if you would leave your address, when I am free to take on another pupil—"

"Professor Correlli, you *must* help

me! If I can improve just the least bit, I have the opportunity of a job with a symphony orchestra. It will only take a few lessons with you. Just listen to how well I can play now! Here's Beethoven's 'Moonlight Sonata.'"

Before he could protest I was seated at the piano, my hands rippling over the keys. I played as well as I could, with only a few discords. These made me flinch—but Professor Correlli didn't bat an eyelash. I finished with a flourish and stood up.

"See?" I sighed. "Please, Professor!"

"That was very good—very good indeed. I have rarely heard Beethoven played better. But I am sorry, you will have to excuse me. Try me again in a month or two, perhaps."

"Very well," I said mournfully. "By the way, where's Miss Sabatina? Isn't this her usual time for singing lessons?"

"Miss Sabatina?" He looked at me thoughtfully and rubbed his beard with a forefinger. "Ah, she was ill today."

"What a voice! You must teach her to sing Puccini's *Aida*!"

"Of course. Well, good day, Mr. Ferguson."

I let him shunt me gently toward the door. Then I turned and pulled the pin out of my psychological hand grenade. My voice was dry and cracked as I said:

"That wasn't Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata I played for you, Professor."

His eyes narrowed. "Oh, it wasn't?"

"No, it was Paderewski's 'Minuet in G.' Odd you didn't notice the difference for I wasn't playing it that badly. And apparently both you and Miss Sabatina are quite content to let Puccini have the credit for *Aida*. It wasn't Puccini, Professor. It was Verdi. It strikes me most peculiar that a singer taking opera lessons wouldn't know that. Or her singing teacher, either."

"You're a very misleading man, Mr. Ferguson," Professor Correlli said smoothly, taking careful steps backward. "I don't think your name is Ferguson, either."

"It isn't," I agreed with a bland expression that belied the twitching of my heart. "It's Lyons, Assistant District Attorney Harold Lyons, of the Abandonment Bureau. And I don't think your name is Professor Correlli, either. As a matter of fact, I don't think there is any Professor Correlli!"

"Really?" His face was like a brood-

ing storm. "Who do you think I am, then?"

"If you'd come out from under that phony beard and mustache, and drop those glasses, I think I'd be looking at a man who's hiding from the police, Arthur Canfield!"

CHAPTER V

Rabbit Punch



II WAS expecting trouble, but the sight of a .38 in his clenched grip turned my spine into something for Admiral Byrd to explore. Toohey had called it right—a .38 Smith & Wesson Special! Or so it looked from where I was quivering, and that was too close.

"You're a pretty clever guy, Lyons," Arthur Canfield said through his teeth. Maybe a little too clever. How did you know?"

"It's a long story, Canfield. Mind if I sit down?" The gun followed me across the room as I made for a plush Queen Anne chair. I *had* to sit down. My legs had the quakes.

"I'm listening," Canfield grated.

"Well, the thing began to dawn on me at lunch today." I was going to string this out as long as I could before I had to look at blood where I liked to see it least. And somebody, I prayed, might come for a music lesson. "My assistant said something that reminded me of a little trap I set for Angelica Sabatina when I first met her."

"Trap? What trap?"

"I thought it was screwy for a night club singer to be taking opera lessons, so on an impulse I asked her if she sang Puccini's *Aida*. So far as she was concerned, Puccini wrote *Aida*. Then I thought, what kind of a music teacher has she got?"

"Go on!"

"Luigi wouldn't tell me where he was the day your wife and kid were murdered. I found out why later. But Angelica rushed to his defense, or so it looked, by giving him the alibi that he was here with her all afternoon. I phoned, and the maid said that Angelica had been here, all right, but no Mr. Torrio."

"Bright boy! Of course he wasn't! He was the killer!"

"Instead of giving Luigi an alibi, that made it look worse for him by exploding an alibi he had claimed, the maid's answer told me something else. Angelica was spending all her afternoons at a place where Luigi had never been. And if Angelica didn't know Puccini from Verdi, what was she doing there?"

"They got you in the wrong department, Lyons," Arthur Canfield said grimly, re-gripping the .38. "You oughta be in Homicide."

"I'm glad you said *in* it, not *for* it. Well, there was only one answer that made sense. Professor Correlli's studio was a lovers' rendezvous. It was the perfect excuse that let Angelica get away from Luigi every afternoon. There was a maid to answer the phone and door, in case Luigi ever took it into his head to check up. Professor Correlli was always out, or if it was somebody who wanted music lessons, he was always booked up. The next question in my mind was—who was her boy friend?"

"How did you find *that* out?" The steely glint in his eyes narrowed curiously. His revolver canted a fraction. My look must have warned him. The gun poked up firmly. Moving my eyes away from it, I noticed a vase of flowers on the mantel.

"Well," I sighed, "there was a faint clue in Angelica's attitude when I first went to Luigi to get him to make you sign those papers for your wife. She tried to pretend you didn't work there. Then when Luigi came in, and agreed you ought to support your wife and kid, Angelica argued against it."

"That doesn't prove anything!"

"No, but *those* do." I pointed to the dozen orchids in the mantel vase. "When I first saw Angelica, she had those in her desk. They came from *you*, Canfield, not Luigi. I should have known, since otherwise she'd have had them out, not hidden!"

"Get to the point, bub!" He was getting impatient.

"The real clue that led me to the truth was your strange behavior behind the closed door of your wife's apartment. You wanted me to believe that I had heard the actual murder, and that the murderer was a man!"

"You're crazy! It was Luigi in there—"

"He didn't kill your wife and kid, and neither did you, Canfield, because they were already dead when you reached the apartment a little before four o'clock. You didn't know they'd been *stabbed*—you thought they'd been shot. You knew the one person who could have done it, someone who wanted your wife to give you a divorce, who was afraid that I might be able to reconcile you and your wife."

FASCINATED by my story, Canfield glared at me with bulging eyes.

"You're crazy, I tell you!" He was furious.

"To cover the crime of that person whom you love desperately, you acted on the spur of the moment. You fired a shot into the dead body of your wife, and one into the dead child, then two out the open kitchen window. You thought that would account for four bullets found in the bodies, because you didn't know that the death wounds were made by a stiletto. Then you disguised your voice and let me hear it through the door. Afterward you beat it."

"Very plausible," he mocked. But his face was pale beneath the disguise he still wore. "And how do you account for Luigi's ring on the floor, and his having the murder weapon?"

"Easy. Who could be close enough to Luigi to get his ring and make him think he had lost it? Or to exchange weapons in his stiletto sheath, then replace the weapon after it had been used for murder, without his being aware of it? Only one person could enjoy that proximity and trust—Angelica!"

"You're a liar!" Canfield screamed.

"Before I came here I phoned Luigi's lawyer, Myron T. Jacobs, and asked him to tell me the beneficiary of Luigi's will. As I suspected, it was Angelica."

"You're trying to frame her, you snoop."

"She had a wonderful motive for killing your wife and kid. She freed you to marry her, with not even the kid as a financial or emotional hindrance. She put Luigi in a spot so hot he was sure to burn for her crime. And, as icing on the cake, she would inherit all his dough. Nice girl!"

"My wife put you up to all this, you meddling rat!"

"Your wife!" Scared or not, I couldn't choke back my contempt. "You dirty

bum, your wife wouldn't even tell me why you left her! Because when Angelica couldn't bully her into giving you a divorce, your girl friend threatened to kill your kid if Christine breathed a word of what was going on between you two. Angelica knew what would happen to her if Luigi found out about her double-cross."

"You can't prove a thing."

"I can prove that Angelica took a shot at Christine when your wife came to my office. It was only a reminder to your wife not to spill anything about you two. But when I showed up later that day, and got Luigi to agree he'd have you meet your wife in her apartment, Angelica decided it was time for the stiletto."

"You're not going to pin any murder rap on *her*," Arthur Canfield snarled. "If anybody burns for what she did, I burn. But nobody has to burn if you ain't around to point a finger." His eyes became iron slits. "So I got nothin' to lose, pal." His finger tightened slowly on the trigger.

"Wait a minute—don't you want to hear the end?" I demanded desperately. My mind raced beneath the words as I hurried on. "You saw Angelica after the murder. She told you not to worry because she had Luigi framed for it. You could hide out here."

I didn't care whether my words made any sense. Was he still squeezing that trigger? Think of something—think—*think!*

"And since you'd be here all the time, you'd better make Professor Correlli come to life. Last night you mailed me the letter accusing Luigi of an affair with your wife, and tipping the police to the murder stiletto—"

I broke off suddenly and grinned in huge relief.

"My gosh, Sergeant, I thought you'd never get here!" I sighed and pointed dramatically at Arthur Canfield. "There's your man!"

That trick had whiskers, but it worked. Canfield spun around and aimed his gun at the door. Before he could swing his arm back, I lunged from the chair. My pointed shoe swung fiercely at his shin. He doubled up with a cry of pain. I brought the stiff side of my hand down on the back of his neck, like a guillotine. He went down. And out. The gun clanked to the floor. I pounced on it.

Holding it as steadily as I could—about as steady as a tuning fork—I backed toward the door.

SOMETHING tickled my ribs. I drew in a sharp breath.

"Wouldn't you like to stay and hear me sing *Aida*?" Angelica Sabatina said sourly, pushing aside the screen next to the piano. "*Verdi's Aida*?"

There wasn't much I could do. The .38 I held was pointed at the inert figure of Arthur Canfield on the floor. The trim revolver in Angelica's dainty hand was pointed at me.

"Do I have to shoot you in the wrist to make you drop that gun?" Angelica inquired. "Or in the heart?"

I dropped the gun. With two corpses to her credit, Angelica certainly wasn't going to be coy about adding a third. Besides, I couldn't have squeezed the trigger to save my life—and that's exactly what it amounted to. I did a little quiet praying.

"You've figured out enough to send me to the chair, Lyons," the girl with the white hair said tensely. "But if you never get a chance to tell what you know, the law will be quite satisfied to hang Luigi. So I think I'd better—"

I can guess, but I can never know for sure what the end of that sentence would have been. There was the click of a door opening at the other end of the room. Glaring in the doorway, fully dressed and with a suitcase in hand, was the colored maid.

"Miz Sabatina, I done quit!" she squealed hysterically. "I didn't mind workin' for you, and tellin' a little lie now and then like sayin' you's here when you wasn't, but I didn't know you was a *murder* woman! I heard everythin' that man said—"

"Stay put, you fool!" Angelica snarled. "Or I'll drill a hole through that skull of yours!"

She made a threatening gesture with the gun toward the maid.

That was her big mistake.

It might seem a pretty mean thing to do to a lady, but what kind of a lady would cut off her dog's leg, or stab a child in the heart? My right foot rejected all qualms. It flashed out and caught Angelica where it had caught Canfield. Hard.

She let out an agonized scream. But before I could get in the rabbit punch, she had squeezed the trigger. Two explosions deafened me. Then my hand cracked down on her neck. Angelica dropped the gun and spilled on her face. There was a frantic whoop and gasp from across the room as the maid sprinted for the door.

"Send the cops!" I yelled after her.

I must have looked pretty tough when the cops showed up five minutes later. I was leaning against the wall, a rod in each hand. I let one cop take them away from me. I told him who I was, and who the man and woman on the floor were.

"You hurt bad?" the cop asked anxiously.

I looked down. For the first time I noticed my coat sleeve was red and damp, and there was a spreading stain on my shirt at the waist. My stomach started to bubble, and I saw red flashes. Then I noticed the cop's face. It was pale as death.

"I'll be all right," he swallowed with a sickly grin. "I know it's plain silly, but I just can't stand seein' blood—"

"It's just a matter," I said blandly, "of getting used to it."

I think that's when everything red went black.



In our gala next issue: CITY OF HATE, a Tony Quinn novel by G. Wayman Jones—I AM THE LAW, a Detective Satan Hall novelet by Carroll John Daly—plus stories and features by Johnston McCulley, Robert Wallace, Norman A. Daniels, Arthur J. Burks and other favorite writers!

FORGER'S NEMESIS

By ROBERT WALLACE

THE funeral services over William Marsh Rice were well under way that September morning in the year 1900. The fashionable mansion on upper Madison Avenue in New York City was jammed with frockcoated, silk-hatted financiers, railroad presidents and the merely curious, come to pay their last respects to the eighty-four-year-old millionaire recluse.

The minister, book in hand, was intoning the solemn service. The mourners stood with bowed, respectful heads, but their eyes probed the shiny, expensive coffin and the shriveled corpse that lay in state within.

How much money had old Rice left?

they wondered. Five million? Six million? Seven million? The old skinflint had never spent a dime unnecessarily, they remembered. For years he had lived alone in the great stone house, his only companion his valet, Charles Jones. That was Jones over there, wiping his eyes as though he had been weeping. Rice must have left him a pretty piece of change for all those years of service. After all, there were no known heirs. The old man had outlived them all.

Rice's Lawyer Seems Nervous

Standing next to Jones, fiddling nervously with his huge gold watch as if to



There was a commotion at the outer door

*"The Thief
Who Is
Too Clever
Always
Gets Caught,"
Said Dave
Carvalho
and
He Proved
It, Too!*

*The fascinating and inspiring
career of a handwriting expert
who knew all his p's and q's!*

hurry the minister's longwinded remarks, was Daniel A. Bird,* old Rice's lawyer. The Wall Street men buzzed to each other under cover of the drone of sound that flowed from the minister. If anybody knew how much Rice had left, it would be Bird. He had drawn the will and would manage the estate.

Funny thing, though. Bird had wanted to cremate Rice's body—only the crematorium had said there'd be a twenty-four hour delay to get the ovens ready, so Bird had decided to bury his client instead. A listener shook his head disapprovingly.

"I may be old-fashioned," he whispered, "but I don't hold with these new-fangled cremation ideas. From the earth we come, and to the earth we ought to —"

"Ssh! The minister's ended. They're going to close the coffin."

Coffin Is Fastened

The undertaker motioned to his assistants. They moved to the ebony box. With solemn gestures they began to screw the lid into position. Outside, in the morning sun, the sleek black horses pawed the asphalt nervously. The great hearse and a long trail of carriages moved into position. The helmeted policemen shooed the pressing crowd away from the front steps.

Inside, the pallbearers walked forward with paced tread. The lawyer shoved his watch with finality into his black vest pocket. Jones, the valet, folded his handkerchief into neat squares. In moments the procession would commence.

There was a slight commotion at the outer door. All heads moved toward the center of disturbance. Two men stalked up the long aisle, heels tapping loudly on the oaken floor. One was tall and

*Note: The lawyer's last name is fictitious, for reasons that will appear later.



DAVID CARVALHO

thin, the other short and paunchy. Daniel Bird, the lawyer, stared at them in surprise. With automatic gesture he again pulled out his watch but he didn't look at it.

The tall man came briskly up, nodded to the lawyer. "Hello, Bird," he said. "Sorry we've got to stop the funeral."

Bird put his watch back into his pocket. "The D. A.," he breathed. "What are you doing here? What's wrong?"

The District Attorney shook his head. "I don't know yet. But our friend, the Coroner," he jerked his head toward the paunchy man, "has a court order. He wants to perform an autopsy on Rice."

* * * * *

"We want you to handle the Rice affair, Dave. It's right down your alley." The District Attorney lounged in the overstuffed chair, sipping appreciatively the liqueur he was holding.

"You'll have to tell me more about it." David N. Carvalho set his own glass down on the table, leaned forward. He was a darkish, handsome looking man with a slight tuft of black beard and a

A TRUE STORY OF THE WAR ON CRIME

small, carefully tended mustache. The long fingers he displayed on the table were sensitively artistic, yet vibrant like steel wires. His dark eyes glowed with interest.

Carvalho Was Famous

Wherever law-enforcement officers met, whether in London, Paris, Brussels or New York, the name of David Carvalho was mentioned with an admiration tinged with awe. Member of a famous Portuguese-Jewish family that had emigrated to America, his father, Solomon N. Carvalho, the well-known photographer who had accompanied Fremont on his perilous expedition across the trackless Rockies, David had devoted himself unremittingly to criminology and the detection of forgeries. He hunted down criminals by means of their pen tracks as an expert woodsman follows his quarry by a bit of trampled grass, a broken twig. Judges listened respectfully to his testimony and opposing counsel trembled when he took the stand.

The District Attorney took another sip. "The autopsy's disclosed that Rice did not die a natural death. There was a congested condition in his lungs that was abnormal. It's my feeling, Dave, that he was murdered! The *how* we don't know yet; but by *whom* we want you to find out."

Carvalho's eyes began to sparkle in a way that the D. A. knew quite well. "Ah!" he breathed. "There's either a will or a mysterious package with an address on it."

"There's a will," the D. A. admitted. "And some checks. Let me give you the whole story."

Bank Turns Down Check

He drank the last drops in his glass, lighted a cigarette. "When Rice died, there seemed no reason to believe it anything but a natural death. After all, he was eighty-four and the attending doctor called it acute indigestion. But the morning of the funeral I got a call from the president of the Fifth Avenue Trust Company, Rice's bank.

"On the afternoon of the day before Rice's valet, Jones, had presented a check for twenty-five thousand dollars, made out to the order of Daniel A. Bird

and signed by Rice. The paying teller knew both Jones and Bird, and Rice's signature looked okay. But there was a small discrepancy. On the face of the check was written *Danel A. Bird*; on the back the endorsement read *Daniel*.

"It wasn't anything important. But the rules of the bank called for a check-up in a case like that. The teller phoned the Rice home. A doctor answered. William Marsh Rice had died three hours before."

"A-ha!" said Carvalho. "I'm beginning to smell what's coming."

"Not too fast, Dave," commented the D. A. "We only suspect; we don't know. But you know the law. The moment a man dies, his bank account is supposed to be tied up until the Surrogate orders its release. Now Bird, as a lawyer, certainly knows that, and he knew Rice was dead at the time he sent the valet, Jones, to cash that check. The doctor who was called in testifies that he phoned Bird as soon as he wrote the death certificate."

Prosecutor Has No Proof

"So you think the check was forged after Bird heard of his client's death?"

"Thinking is one thing, Dave; proving is another. The bank officers swear the signature is a dead ringer for Rice's."

Carvalho's eyes glittered. This was the kind of stuff he liked. "Let me have that check. And get me authentic samples of Rice's handwriting. Half a dozen of them."

"I knew you'd want them, so I've already ordered them. Also, there's a will."

"Aha! I suppose the will left everything to Bird."

"Not quite. Out of a six million dollar estate some two hundred thousand went to an Institute in Texas."

"Very decent of Bird," said Carvalho with a little smile. "I want that will, too."

"Naturally." The D. A. rose. "It's your baby, Dave. And I don't mind telling you it's going to be a tough one to crack. Bird's a clever lad, and those signatures certainly look okay."

Carvalho rose, too. "Leave the signatures to me," he said. Then, thoughtfully: "You *might* get to work on the valet—what's his name—Jones?"

The D. A. grinned. "The boys have

him in the back room now."

But Jones didn't crack. Not yet. And Bird stoutly insisted on his rights. What was more natural than that his client should leave most of his estate to him? He had been his personal lawyer for many years, and there were no legal heirs. The old man had told him time and again he would leave everything to him, etc., etc. As for the curious congestion in the lungs, he would get medical experts to prove such a thing might happen naturally. Could the D. A. prove it was murder?

No, the D. A. couldn't prove it. Not yet.

Meanwhile, during all this fuss and fury, David Carvalho was quietly at work. Three other checks showed up which Bird had tried to cash after Rice's death. Carvalho examined them carefully, and also the signature on the will. Then he compared them with known authentic signatures. Even to his trained eye the suspected signature seemed exactly similar to one which the dead man had signed in the presence of unimpeachable witnesses.

Signatures Tally Closely

The D. A. made a little gesture of dismay.

"Then it's all over," he groaned. "Our case is shot to pieces."

"By no means," Carvalho smiled. "I would have been very much surprised if the suspected signatures hadn't tallied exactly with at least one authentic signature."

The D. A. stared. "What do you mean?"

"Give me a week and I'll prove conclusively that the will and the checks are forgeries."

"But you just told me—"

"What I told you will be part of my proof. By the way, has the valet cracked yet?"

"No."

"Keep working on him. Good-by."

Carvalho Summons D.A.

It was a week to the day that the D. A. received a phone call from Carvalho. "Can you come right over to my house now?"

"You mean you've solved the case?"

"Come and see for yourself."

When the D. A. arrived Carvalho

smilingly ushered him into a little room that had been fitted up as a combination scientific laboratory and photographic studio. Microscopes, chemical retorts and physical apparatus alternated with huge portrait cameras and developing tanks.

"Well?" demanded the D. A. impatiently. "Did Bird forge the will and the checks?"

"I can prove," said Carvalho, "that Rice never wrote those signatures. *Who* wrote them is another matter. Look on the wall."

Writing Is Enlarged

Fastened by light tape, one over the other, were five transparencies. Each was a highly magnified photograph of Rice's signature.

The D. A. was frankly puzzled. "The signatures fit exactly over one another. But doesn't that prove that Rice really wrote them?"

"Quite the contrary," Carvalho assured him. "If they *didn't* fit, I'd have been stumped. For let me tell you, those signatures are wonderful jobs. It's the very fact that they fit so beautifully that convinces me they're all forgeries."

"I don't get it."

"Neither did the forger. Let me explain by showing you five other signatures of old Rice that are known to be authentic." Within a minute Carvalho had deftly pinned the enlarged transparencies into position. Then he stepped back.

"What do you notice?" he asked.

"Well, I'll be blistered!" the D. A. exploded. "They don't fit. The capital R sticks out in different directions one under the other, while the end e has a different size and slant each time."

Carvalho Explains His Findings

"You've got the idea," approved Carvalho. "No man signs his name exactly the same way twice. And especially when he's a very old man like Rice. According to the mathematical laws of chance it's a trillion to one shot that any five signatures by the same man written even the same day would exactly coincide in every stroke and measurement. That's an elementary principle this particular forger forgot."

"But how did he do it, then?"

Carvalho beamed. "That's simple. He

got hold of a real signature of Rice, and traced it onto the will and the four checks he was trying to cash." A tiny smile played around David Carvalho's lips. "My grandfather used to quote an ancient Jewish saying in cases like this. Freely translated it goes: The thief who is too clever always gets caught."

The D. A. picked up his hat. "Thanks to you, Dave, now I can break this case." He was half way to the door when he wheeled. "Hey, wait a minute. You didn't say *who* did the forgeries."

"I didn't. But the field is pretty narrow. If you should pick up that valet who refused to talk before, and tell him what you know now—"

The D. A.'s face went grim. "This time he'll talk, Dave."

Jones Makes Confession

Confronted with Carvalho's proof of the forgeries, Jones did talk. He went further. He confessed that he was the actual killer of Rice. Bird, the lawyer, had prepared the will and checks in advance. Then, while Bird stood by, Jones had pressed a sponge saturated with chloroform against the senile old man's

nose and mouth until he had died.

Both Jones and Bird were arrested. Jones turned state's evidence against the lawyer. Armed with charts, transparencies and an easy lecturing manner David Carvalho proved conclusively the forgeries. Since the checks were made out to Bird's order and he had admittedly drawn the will, the jury didn't doubt but that the lawyer was the forger. The valet's testimony connected him with the murder. It took the jury but a few minutes to return with a first-degree murder verdict.

But now the D. A. made a mistake. He released Jones, the confessed killer. As a result a lot of people, and some pretty important ones among them, felt that Bird had been made the goat. Though the verdict stood up on appeal, they were able to convince the Governor that there was some reasonable doubt about the actual killing, and after six years of constant agitation, Governor Dix finally pardoned him. Bird went west and started life afresh in a place that didn't know him.

But David Carvalho, detector extraordinary of forgeries, had won himself new laurels.



THE CRIME QUIZ

HOW much do you know about crime? The following questions will not only test your knowledge, but will add to your information on many interesting crime topics. Give yourself 20 points for each question you answer correctly. A score of 60 is good. 80 ranks you as an amateur detective. If you are 100 per cent correct—you're a super-sleuth! The answers are on Page 101, if you must look!

1. If a man planning a murder shoots at his intended victim, but misses, is he guilty of any crime?
2. Why are modern revolvers known as "double-action" revolvers?
3. Are bloodstains always a reddish-brown color?
4. Name three ways in which ink may be erased.
5. What is an "accessory before the fact"?



"It ain't exactly safe right now, copper," a voice behind him parred

The MURDER Obsession

By WAYLAND RICE

Paul Roberts sets out to trace missing person Edith Barrington—and intends to find her, dead or alive!

HE WAS a flinty-eyed man of about forty, conservatively dressed and showing too much self-importance for Detective Sergeant Paul Roberts to welcome him enthusiastically.

The man sat down on the edge of an oak chair as if he was afraid of being contaminated. "My name is Alban Camp," he said. "I am the cashier at the Security Trust Company. My residence is at Twenty - Three Ninety - Eight Waverly Boulevard. I have an aunt named Edith

Barrington, fifty-eight. She has disappeared."

Just like that, as if he were filling out a form for a loan and had already decided to reject it. Sergeant Roberts thought it was a good thing he didn't owe the Security Trust Company any dough.

"How do you know she disappeared?" Roberts asked.

Camp's thin face never changed. His voice remained flat. "My aunt mentioned nothing about going away. Yet, for one

week she has not been at home. I've contacted some relatives, but they have not heard from her."

"A week," Roberts said. "Why did you wait that long? Or haven't you heard that trails grow cold? Well, give me a description of her."

Camp did, in great detail. Roberts made notes and then leaned back in his swivel chair. "I'll send out an alarm at once. I'd like a picture of her. And say—was she ill? Were her finances shaky?"

"There is no picture," Camp declared in that bookkeeping voice of his. "She was in sound health. Her finances are rather good. She is worth, Sergeant, in the vicinity of five hundred thousand dollars. In cash or extremely good bonds."

Roberts cracked a half smile. "You ought to know. I only asked to find out if there was a motive for suicide."

Camp got up. "I find I don't approve of you, Sergeant. However, one cannot select a certain detective. I shall expect a full report very soon."

"You may never get a thing," Roberts chuckled. "Some people vanish but the case is never closed on them. As for not liking me, you've got a lot of company there. Also, I agree that it would be nice if someone in trouble could pick the detective he likes. It would work both ways and, Mr. Camp, I wouldn't pick you. Be at home around seven. I want to look the house over."

Camp deposited his derby on his head with precise motions, made an almost military about-turn and marched out. He didn't slam the door, although Sergeant Roberts was braced for that. Roberts grinned to himself and started the ball rolling on an alarm for Edith Barrington.

AT SEVEN he rang the bell of Camp's suburban home. It was a medium-sized place and about as decorative as Camp's precise mind. Roberts decided he'd hate to be the gardener here. He thought that even the trees had to bow to Camp's will and display their leaves in mathematical precision.

Camp let him in. Roberts went to the room of the missing woman and in five minutes had learned a great deal about her. She was, he believed, a direct opposite of Camp. Things were arranged for convenience and included a lot of the gew-gaws that some elderly women go for. Camp followed on Roberts' heels.

The detective stopped at the door of the

bedroom suite. "Look," he said, "you don't have to watch me every second. I'm not going to steal stuff. It's my job to send people to prison for stealing, and I don't indulge in the pastime myself."

Camp snorted, said nothing and followed him downstairs. Roberts dropped into a deep chair that looked as if he was the first person ever to use it. He glanced around the room for signs of a bar, or even a bottle, and gave it up. If there'd been gallons of stuff, Camp wouldn't have given him a thimbleful.

"Well?" Camp asked.

Roberts laughed. "You cover a lot of ground in that one word. Here is what I've found. If your aunt left town by train, she didn't make a reservation. She didn't go by plane unless she used a phony name. I know her car is still in the garage, so she didn't leave in her own auto. She either walked, Mr. Camp, or she didn't leave town at all."

"What do you mean by that?" Camp demanded.

"That she's dead. Maybe a suicide, maybe murdered."

"I resent that," Camp screeched. "You are insinuating that I killed her."

"Hmm," Roberts' smile never faded. "The man doth protest too much. Mind if I look around the premises?"

"I most certainly do mind. You are to get out of here." Camp rose and started toward the door.

"I'll look anyway," Roberts said. "You can come or stay here, as you wish. I frankly don't give a hoot what you do."

The detective brushed past Camp, amused by the banker's sputtering, and went through the house. He emerged by way of the back door, took a flashlight from his pocket and sprayed the area. The flash steadied on a section of ground which showed signs of recent digging.

"Well," Roberts said. "Now who is digging a garden in the winter time?"

"I worked on it," Camp said a trifle nervously. "I like to soften the earth long before springtime. Is that any of your affair?"

Roberts shrugged. "It happens that a lot of missing people never show up because they are buried. Camp, I'm going to have that whole section dug up. If you don't like it, see the chief. Anyway, we'll soften the earth twice as much. And if we find your aunt sleeping there, we'll soften you."

Roberts returned to the house and tele-

phoned Headquarters for four men armed with picks and shovels. He arranged floodlights when they arrived and set them to work. Camp said nothing, but kept biting his lip. Four hours later Roberts gave it up. Nothing had been buried in the garden.

Camp showed him the door finally and delivered one last blast. "I hope you are quite satisfied, Sergeant. I am not. I intend to see the president of my bank tomorrow and he happens to be Milton Sawyer—Chairman of the Police Commission."

"Good night," Roberts said, feeling none too good. Milton Sawyer didn't like him. In fact, Sawyer had been trying to build a fire under Roberts' gold badge for quite some time. Camp was going to supply a portion of mighty good fuel.

Roberts went back to his office and spent an hour studying reports which had come in. He was satisfied with one thing. If Edith Barrington had left town, she'd done so like a sneak thief. And the way he pictured her, Edith Barrington simply wasn't the type.

In the morning, Roberts was at the Security Trust Company as its doors opened and wangled an interview with Milton Sawyer before Camp showed up.

Sawyer was sixty, portly, jowled and had a crabbed disposition. He tapped his fingertips together. "So you want to know about Alban Camp, eh, Sergeant? I have this to say. Alban is a personal friend. In this bank he handles millions of dollars and has never taken a dime. If you think he would dispose of his aunt to get her fortune, you're crazy. He could get as much a lot easier right here at the bank."

Roberts looked straight at the banker. "Sure he could. But he wouldn't get away with it. He might get away with murder. Anyway, I haven't accused him."

"You did last night when you dug up his garden. Of all the silly insinuations—"

"It was part of my job." Roberts got up slowly. "I'd dig the place up again if I thought it necessary. Because I intend to find Edith Barrington, dead or alive."

He walked out, feeling that he'd left his sergeant's badge on the banker's desk. Roberts really didn't care. That's what he told himself, but he never believed it.

He drove to Camp's home again, found it unoccupied and methodically picked the back door lock. He prowled the place for an hour but found nothing significant. Most of the missing woman's clothes and

possessions were still there. If she'd gone on an extended trip, she'd have taken them along.

Roberts examined the cellar last. As he snapped on the lights he felt one of those sudden waves of warm elation that come just before the big pinch. One whole section of the cellar had been ripped up and re-cemented. Efforts had been made to conceal this fact by sprinkling furnace ashes around, but Roberts wasn't being fooled. He used the phone and called for more men.

By mid-afternoon a hole as big as a well had been cut through the cellar floor. And all for nothing. Roberts groaned. This was going to set Camp on fire, and the flames would be made good use of by Milton Sawyer. Things did not look so well.

TWO DAYS later Roberts wondered where so many cars and trucks came from and why all of them wanted to cross the busy intersection of Park and White Avenues. It had been years since he'd done traffic duty, and his arms were tired after an hour of it. Also he didn't like to be in uniform again, and the chromium-plated badge on his chest didn't look so nice as the gold one in a leather case either.

Roberts wondered if any sergeant had ever been busted so fast and so thoroughly. Sure, some of the boys had sympathized with him, but when Sawyer got on the war path, everyone moved out of the way. Then came the traffic assignment. Once Alban Camp drove past in his aunt's big Chrysler. He didn't even glance at Roberts, but the ex-sergeant knew that Camp had come to taunt him.

At four o'clock Roberts went off duty. At four-thirty, without lunch or dinner under his belt, he was parked not too far from Camp's home. He was still there at eight that night. At last Camp drove out, using his own cheap coupe this time. Roberts tailed him. It was a cinch, until Camp hit the busier center streets. Then he began meandering around so much that Roberts figured the man was trying to throw off a tail.

Camp finally pulled up at the curb in one of the fashionable apartment sections of town. He got out and hurried into one of the buildings. Roberts sat tight. In about three minutes Camp emerged again, cautiously this time.

Now, secure in the belief he hadn't been

followed, he went to the place which was his real destination. Roberts did some fast work on this. He learned that Camp had gone to the fancy apartment of one Vickie Parker, a luscious blonde with more curves than the Pennsylvania Railroad. A doll who didn't work and dressed as if she owned a department store.

Roberts wasn't fool enough to go in. Instead he did some prowling around Headquarters. Without access to the detective bureau, things were a trifle tough, but he did learn that Vickie Parker was the ex-flame of a man named Ray Pelcher, at present pestering the parole board for a release from prison. Roberts knew a lot about Pelcher and none of it was good.

At eleven-thirty he was back near Vickie's apartment in time to see Camp leave rather furtively. Roberts let him go, took the elevator to the eighth floor and rang the bell of Vickie's apartment. It opened, but with a burglar chain in place as a precaution.

"Hello, Vickie," Roberts said. "How about inviting me in?"

"Scram, you tramp," she said stridently. "I don't know you."

"But Ray Pelcher does." Roberts put on his best sneer. "He's getting out pretty soon and you know, Vickie, he wouldn't like it if he knew you were two-timing him with a crumb like Alban Camp."

The burglar chain came off the door in a flash. Roberts was soon seated in a comfortable chair with a tall glass half full of excellent whisky in his hand. Vickie sat across from him, one leg on the divan, the other on the floor. That way she showed off a healthy expanse of nylon. Her greenish eyes were sultry, her heavily carmined lips slightly parted.

"I seem to know you from someplace, but I'm not sure," she said. "But get this. If you squawk to Ray, I'll tell him you propositioned me and when I turned you down, you hatched up this fool idea of me having a banker for a boy friend."

"I never said he was a banker," Roberts grinned. "But you did—and he happens to be one. What's the pitch, Vickie? Maybe you owe the bank some money."

Vickie was studying him intently. Suddenly she jumped up and hurried into another room. She returned with a newspaper which she thrust in front of Roberts' nose.

"I thought you looked familiar," she said. "So you're just a busted cop with a grudge against Mr. Camp. Brother,

you've only been cracked. Tomorrow the big bust comes."

Roberts stared gloomily at his own picture and the story of his demotion. Vickie had him and knew it. She wasn't above gloating. In fact, she enjoyed it.

"You came here saying my ex-boy friend sent you. You tried to pump me. You never said you were a cop. And I'm letting Mr. Camp know the whole story because this time, big boy, you're all wet. Camp came here on business and he can prove it. Now, are you getting out or do I have to call a cop?"

Roberts picked up his hat. "I'll go," he said. "It's stuffy in here anyway."

He walked the streets half the night and was glad he'd never married. This affair would have been hard to explain to a wife. One thing he figured out. If Vickie told Camp of his visit, Camp would make more trouble. That was as certain as morning. But if Vickie didn't tell him, and nothing developed, then Vickie would show she was afraid that Ray Pelcher might find out. In a way, Roberts' visit to her should decide, one way or another, if Vickie was taking Camp for a ride.

Roberts did wonder what Milton Sawyer of the Police Commission would say if he knew his trusted bank cashier was seeing a girl like Vickie. Roberts was half tempted to expose the whole thing and then decided against it on the theory that his motives were to find a missing woman and not take revenge on a pipsqueak like Camp.

FOUR days went by and nothing happened. On the fifth night Camp visited Vickie again, but didn't stay. Roberts hadn't been called on the carpet, so he knew that Vickie had kept her over-painted mouth shut about his visit. After that fifth evening, Camp stayed strictly away from Vickie, and Roberts decided she had told him something which kept them apart.

By day, Roberts directed traffic and cursed his luck. By night, he watched Camp and, if he could sandwich in any time between, ran down fruitless clues in connection with Edith Barrington's disappearance. The affair had died away in the newspapers. Not being connected with the official investigation of the case, Roberts had little idea how it was progressing, but he'd have bet it led the Detective Bureau nowhere.

To Roberts the whole thing had become

an obsession. He felt sure that Edith Barrington was dead and that Alban Camp had murdered her. Yet Camp hadn't even made any attempt to start probate court proceedings which would, after seven years, present him with her substantial estate. The insurance companies involved weren't interested because no claim had been made.

Then Roberts had himself an idea. He had friends in various police departments all over the state and he contacted all those he knew he could trust.

At last the word came, as it was bound to. The body of a woman had been found in a river some eighty miles from Roberts' city. It lay in the morgue, unidentified, and in general answered the description of Edith Barrington. As much as a corpse buffeted by river currents for three months could resemble anything.

Roberts drove to Alban Camp's house and rang the bell. Camp opened the door and, seeing who his visitor was, started to close it again. Roberts put a big hand on the panel and pushed back both door and Camp.

"Mr. Camp, I didn't come here to make any more trouble for you," he said. "I've had enough of that. But when I began work on this case, I naturally wanted to see it through. We've come to the end of it."

"What do you mean?" Camp frowned.

"We've found the body of your aunt."

Camp wetted his lips. "You — are — sure?" he asked.

"Of course not. That's why I came. You must make the identification. It won't be pleasant, and you may refuse if you like."

Camp didn't refuse, not even when he learned there was a long auto trip involved. He even offered to use his aunt's car because it was faster and better riding. Camp didn't say much during the ride, and Roberts didn't ply him with questions. Roberts was too busy wondering just what he'd do if Camp identified the corpse as that of his aunt. Prove the dead woman couldn't be Edith Barrington?

Camp settled all his problems for him. He stood by while a morgue attendant rolled out the slab and uncovered the corpse. Then very quietly Camp fainted. He did it as efficiently as he did everything else. He grabbed the side of a table first and let himself go down slowly.

Roberts helped carry him out. When Camp awoke, he rejected a drink of whisky because he never drank liquor.

He did accept a cigarette which he smoked in short, nervous puffs.

"Well, that's that," Roberts said.

"What do you mean?" Camp demanded.

"The body I saw was definitely not that of my Aunt Edith. I fainted because those things sort of—get me in the stomach."

Roberts' last hope faded. "You're a bit woozy," he said. "I'll bring the car around. I'm sorry I brought you all this way for nothing, Mr. Camp."

Camp bared his teeth. "It was my fault. I should have known better than to let a moron talk me into it. Go ahead, fetch the car."

Roberts went outside, climbed behind the wheel and then hesitated. He decided to look the car over. There was nothing. No bloodstains, no torn fabric. Not a thing, except a timeable in the glove compartment. Just an ordinary timetable for the railroad which ran through town.

But one train had been marked in pencil to indicate the time of its departure from Wilmont, a town some twenty-eight miles from Roberts' city. Why should this be marked, he asked himself? It was too short a distance for a trip by train when there were two autos in the family. Roberts shrugged and put the timetable back, collected Camp and drove home.

Then he did traffic duty for a week and wasted more time watching Camp's place. The cashier didn't even leave the house nights. If he contacted Vickie, it was by phone only, and she never came to see him.

Then it happened. Roberts arrived one evening to take up his post at seven o'clock. He knew Camp was in the house for he'd seen him pass the windows several times. At eight, Camp's coupe crawled out of the driveway and headed north. Automatically Roberts trailed it.

He spent three hours following the car, which appeared to be headed for that same upstate city where Camp had gone to try and identify a corpse. The coupe moved along sedately, obeyed all rules and if the driver knew he was being trailed, he gave no indication of it. Roberts had an eerie feeling that there was something wrong, and yet, what could there be?

At a few minutes before midnight, Camp's car made a U-turn and headed for home. As it passed by, Roberts saw Camp's hard-crowned hat, tilted down over his face a bit. He couldn't see the face, but there was no reason to suspect

this was anyone but Camp.

Going back the ride was just as uninteresting. The car turned into Camp's driveway, entered the garage, and that was all. Roberts, parked a block away, thought it all over. Camp had taken a drive of at least a hundred and twenty miles, all to no purpose. Why? Merely for the ride? But it wasn't a very pleasant night for a drive. There was some fog and it was cold and raw.

Roberts left his car, entered the yard next to Camp's place and at the rear of the house, he cut into Camp's property. In a moment he was inside the garage. He looked the coupe over carefully and found nothing, except a cigarette butt crushed out on the floor. The tip of it was covered with lipstick. It meant little. Camp could have had Vickie or any other girl out in the car at some time or other.

Roberts picked up the butt and rubbed shreds of tobacco between his fingers. It was moist. This cigarette had been recently smoked. He carefully put it into an envelope and stowed it away for future reference. Then he walked over and put his hand on the radiator of the limousine which Edith Barrington had left behind when she vanished. The radiator was warm.

He opened the limousine door quietly and squinted at the speedometer. He recalled that it had been exactly on the fifty mark when the trip to the morgue had been completed. Roberts had watched it to check mileage. Now it had gone past the hundred mark by eight miles. The limousine had been driven, therefore, approximately fifty-eight miles.

Which may have meant nothing except for Roberts' obsession that anything was important if it appeared to be tied up with this job. He slipped out of the garage, reached the street and resumed his vigil. Nothing further happened and when it was midnight, he called it off. Instead of driving straight home he went by way of Vickie Parker's apartment.

It was dark; but while he watched from a nearby corner, a cab pulled up and Vickie got out. Roberts stopped the hack two blocks away, showed his badge and questioned the driver.

"I picked up the doll in front of the Majestic Theater," he told Roberts. "Just her, and we came right to this address. What's she done, copper? Boy, whatever it was, I wish I was her partner. She's a dish, that one."

"A dish of poison," Roberts said disgustedly. The address from which she had hailed the cab was a mile away from Camp's house. Roberts went home, to the hotel room where he'd lived for nine years. He removed his coat, vest and shoes, lay down on the bed and stared at the ceiling.

HE WENT over the case from the time Camp had walked into his office at Headquarters. Nowhere was there the slightest reason to tie Camp into this as a murderer. Edith Barrington might not even be dead. Then doubts crept into Roberts' mind.

He wondered why Camp's yard had been dug up and why a whole section of a cemented cellar had been torn away only to be re-cemented. There'd been no pipes to repair under the cement floor. Nothing but dirt.

Even Camp's own actions had not involved him. He'd refused to identify a corpse as that of his aunt even though such identification, if it stuck, would have brought him into a fortune. But more than anything else, was Camp's utter lack of nerves.

Alban Camp didn't act like a murderer. He wasn't afraid of Roberts or anyone else, and he'd answered questions with a disarming frankness that indicated he had told the truth. There was also Camp's reputation to consider. As cashier of a bank it was excellent, and so far Roberts had discovered only one blot—his knowing Vickie Parker.

Roberts was more and more convinced that Vickie was part of the scheme, whatever it was. And it was obvious that Vickie wouldn't be two-timing Ray Pelcher unless there was enough in it to compensate for the risk. She knew Pelcher and what he was capable of. There'd be quick death for someone if Pelcher learned about Vickie. And Pelcher would be getting out of prison any day now.

This whole affair seemed to have reached a head. There were too many unexplained activities, and while they didn't add up in Roberts' mind, he knew they would when he was supplied with that one missing link in the chain of evidence.

He decided to start things rolling at once. There was a chance Vickie might break down, especially if she'd just accomplished some part of the scheme and was still in a nervous reaction from it.

Roberts went out into the night and back to Vickie's apartment. He rang the buzzer.

The answer came so swiftly that he knew Vickie expected someone else. He was even more convinced of that when he saw her glittering smile turn into a frown. And the welcoming light in her sultry eyes changed to something like fear. She was holding it back, but it was there. He wondered if Pelcher had been sprung and she was expecting him.

"The shamus again." She didn't open the door any wider. "I thought somebody had run over you at the corner of Park and White by now. I'll have to speak to some of my friends about it."

Roberts gave her a wide grin. "I'm not on traffic duty now, Vickie. But off duty or on, I carry a badge and—this is a pinch. Let me in or I'll bust through and drag you out. I'll have the wagon back right up to the front door—"

Vickie let him in quickly. When she closed the door, she put her back against it and let the latch snick slowly into place. Then she walked over and sat down on the divan. He knew she'd pushed the night latch to the "off" position.

"That was a sweet little ride you took me on tonight, Vickie," Roberts said. "And it worked perfectly, too. You, wearing one of Camp's coats and one of his derbies, drew me away from the house for hours so Camp could take out the limousine and do whatever dirty work was at hand."

VICKIE let out a long breath of relief. "Brother," she said, "you certainly get nightmares. I haven't seen Camp since the night he was here. I don't even know where the guy lives and—get this—I don't know how to drive a car. So what are you aiming at, copper? A bust back to civilian life?"

"Maybe." Roberts smiled.

Vickie pointed a finger at him. "You're getting out—now." Her voice rose higher. "I'm sick of being pestered by you. Having a detective watching me is bad enough, but a traffic cop— Listen, if you're not out of here in two minutes, I'm calling Headquarters."

Roberts pointed toward the phone. "I'd bring it to you, only the wire won't reach. Calling Headquarters is a good idea. Go ahead and save me the trouble."

Her extended hand dropped slowly. "What do you want?" she demanded.

Roberts studied her for a moment and

wondered why men like Camp couldn't see the hardness which lay beneath the layers of powder and rouge. Without them, Vickie wouldn't be worth a second glance, and yet Camp was probably making a fool of himself over this synthetic beauty.

"Well," she asked, "are you going to sit there and stare at me all night?"

"Not quite, Vickie. You talked about my coming here a moment ago as if it had something to do with Camp. That's why I followed it up. But I didn't come to see you about Camp. All I'm after is the stuff Ray Pelcher hid away before they sent him up. None of it has come to light, so he must have stashed it somewhere."

She got white lines around the corners of her mouth at that one and she didn't reply. Roberts arose. "Suppose we take a little ride, Vickie. When Pelcher comes here, it might not be safe."

Then Roberts realized that she was staring past him. The voice behind his back was purring in its smoothness.

"It ain't exactly safe right now, copper. For you. Don't move. Keep 'em up just like that. Vickie, take his gun away from him, but don't get in front of the rod I'm using."

"Sure, Ray," she cried eagerly. "Sure. This monkey was going to take me downtown. He said I knew about where—"

"Shut up," Pelcher snapped, "and get that gun. Lay it on the table, baby, and then move toward me. Take this valise I'm holding and hang onto it while I fix the wagon of one copper who thinks he's smart."

Pelcher stepped forward, catlike, but Roberts could see the man's shadow on the further wall, could see him raise his gun to use it as a club. Pelcher wouldn't dare shoot here unless there was no other way out. Roberts saw the gun coming down and when he judged it to be within an inch of his skull, he let himself go limp.

The full force of the blow was lost. Roberts still had his wits, but he didn't act it. He let himself fall slowly forward and then rolled on the floor where he lay very quiet.

Pelcher stepped closer and stuck out an inquisitive foot. Roberts grabbed it, gave the ankle a powerful twist and Pelcher came plunging down. The gun flew out of his hand, but as he fell, one elbow hit Roberts on the throat.

For a moment the ex-sergeant thought his neck was broken; then air hissed

through the swelling membranes again, and he tried to fight back. Pelcher was astride him by now, holding him down by sheer weight. His hands clasped around Roberts' already badly abused throat. The fingers began to squeeze.

Pelcher said, without looking up, "Vickie, take that stuff and put it in a safe place. A very safe place, you understand? Then come back here and we'll figure out how to get rid of this stiff. It shouldn't be very hard. Go on, beat it."

Vickie was grateful for the opportunity but, womanlike, she paused at the door. "Ray," she called back, "don't get any blood on that rug, you hear?"

Pelcher was bent over Roberts and his fingers were really beginning to squeeze. His dull eyes were wicked, his jaw was slack and he was breathing hard.

Pelcher, Roberts decided, must have lost some of his old fighting instinct in prison, for six years ago Pelcher would have never made the mistake of pinning a man down and trying to choke him while his victim's hands were free.

RAISING both hands, Roberts pried one of Pelcher's fingers loose, bent it backward and kept bending until the bone cracked. Then he went to work on the other hand. Pelcher took the first one with only a yowl and some relaxation of the pressure on Roberts' throat, but the second one weakened him.

Roberts twisted once, sent Pelcher rolling onto the floor and got to his feet. He swayed dizzily, but by the time Pelcher got up and came at him, he was ready. With a finger broken on each hand, Pelcher was going to try to finish off his opponent with a punch. Roberts was half tempted to let him smash a blow home. It would hurt Pelcher far more than his victim.

But there wasn't time. Roberts ducked the swing, plastered one against Pelcher's cheek bone, another to the pit of his stomach and then put him away with a hard right to the jaw.

He cuffed the unconscious man to a radiator and hoped he'd still be there later. Then Roberts rushed out, found his car and drove it straight to Camp's home. He left the car a short distance away, sneaked up to a lighted window and looked in.

Camp, his face as pale as death, sat across from Vickie. The cigarette between his lips danced madly. Vickie was busily

using a file on her long, gaudily reddened nails. She talked as she worked, but didn't look up.

Roberts went to the back door and let himself in. He'd picked that cheap lock once before and now he did it in half the time. He moved silently toward the living room and stood in the doorway until Vickie finished with her nails. She had a piece of newspaper in her lap and this she quickly folded, arose and started for the fireplace.

"Vickie, put that newspaper down," Roberts said.

With a yell Vickie hurled it at the blazing fire. Roberts brushed her to one side, reached in and rescued the paper before it got burning well. He stamped the fire out, glanced at Vickie and Camp and then opened the paper. Inside it were soft, gray bits of damp cement.

"Pelcher is tucked away and it's your turn next," Roberts went on. "Camp, how did you ever get mixed up with a doll like this? She's poison clear through."

Camp gulped. "It's—it's a business deal. That's all. Ju-just a business deal. I—I don't know what this is all about."

Roberts grasped Vickie's right wrist and held it firmly. He looked at Camp. "Vickie's boy friend got out of prison today. I knew he'd go for a lot of stuff he had hidden before he was sent up. I also knew that once he had it, he'd come to see Vickie, so I waited for him. We had an—well—an argument. He told Vickie to take the valise of loot and hide it. What did she do with it, Camp?"

"I—I'm sure I don't know. I haven't the faintest idea. You've got to believe me, Sergeant."

"Maybe I do and maybe I don't," Roberts said. "And don't call me 'sergeant.' Not you, of all people. Well, I'll tell you what Vickie did with the stuff. She buried it. Cemented it down. She was cleaning bits of cement from under her fingernails just now. So all we have to do is look around for some freshly cemented spot and start digging. Eh, Camp?"

Camp's tongue ran around his lips, and he slumped back into the chair. He bit his lower lip, until the blood came, and suddenly he started screaming.

"Get out of my house. Get out and take that woman with you. She's brought me nothing but trouble. Get out, I tell you."

Roberts didn't move. He said, "We may have to dig so deep for the valise that we'll find something else, Camp. Perhaps a

corpse. One you can recognize this time because she hasn't been dead very long."

"She's not here, I tell you," Camp screamed. "She isn't. I don't know what happened to her."

"Then whom did you meet at the railroad station in Wilmont tonight, while Vickie posed as you and took me for a nice long ride? People on that train will remember. It was your aunt, who was never missing at all and never knew she'd been reported missing. Whom you smuggled out of town and then smuggled in again, only on the way back she died. You buried her in the cellar—a place that had already been searched. You wanted it dug up so nobody would ever look there again and you could kill your aunt and plant her body there."

Camp didn't answer. His eyes had rolled up until only the whites showed. He was unconscious.

Roberts turned to Vickie. "You know," he said, "about fifteen years in the can and you'll look like an old hag. What'll you do then, Vickie?"

"I'm ready to make a deal," she said.

SEVERAL hours later, after Vickie and Camp had been taken away and Pelcher had been removed from Vickie's apartment, Roberts stood in the cellar of the house and watched policemen exhume the body of Edith Barrington. Roberts shook his head sorrowfully.

"I should have tumbled in time to save her," he berated himself. "I should have known she wasn't dead at all, but was living alone in a small Maine village where no one knew about the disappearance of an Edith Barrington.

"Forget it, Roberts," the Chief of Police said. "You did a remarkable job of this in spite of all the barriers that were thrown in your path."

"But I should have sorted out the clues and gotten the answer," Roberts said. "The timetable on which Wilmont was

marked. The station to which Camp took his aunt the night she disappeared and where he picked her up earlier tonight. The fact that Vickie led me on a chase while Camp went after his aunt. The fact that the limousine speedometer told me it must have been Wilmont he drove it to.

"I took too many chances. What if Pelcher didn't go after his loot the moment he got out? What if he hadn't gone to Vickie's place? Where'd I have been then? Everything depended on Vickie's getting the loot and taking it away to hide. She'd think of only one spot—where Camp had hidden his aunt's body. If it was safe enough to be a secret grave, it was safe enough to hide Pelcher's money. At least Vickie thought that way, which I hoped and prayed—and knew—she would."

The chief lit his stub of a cigar. "Sergeant," he said, "—and it is sergeant because I can promote a man in the field subject to later confirmation—Sergeant, was Pelcher mixed up in this kill?"

"I don't think so. It was Camp's idea. He wanted Vickie. If he was playing around with her, he'd have taken bank funds sooner or later, and killing his aunt was safer, or so he thought. He hoped that Vickie would be willing to bide her time and wait until he came into his aunt's fortune. Maybe she would have. Half a million bucks is a lot of money, but I think she intended using Camp as a rainy-day-friend after Pelcher went back to the jug, or went broke, or maybe got killed."

"Where are you going now?" the chief asked. "Look, we'll need you at Headquarters."

"I'll be there," Roberts promised. "Right now I've got an errand to do. I want to see Milton Sawyer of the Police Commission and make him eat a few words, well before breakfast. Maybe I'll be busted back to a traffic cop by the time I get back, but it'll be worth it, Chief."



Answers to Questions on Page 92

1. Yes. He is guilty of the crime of attempted murder.
2. Because the pulling of the trigger both cocks the hammer and revolves the cylinder to present a fresh cartridge under the hammer.
3. No, they may be black, blue, green, or other colors. It depends on where they are found. Blood will often absorb chemicals from wallpaper, which causes a change in its color. Sometimes paint dyes affect blood found on a painted surface. Exposure to sunlight may fade bloodstains.
4. It may be erased with a knife, rubber, or ink eradicator.
5. An accessory before the fact is any person who helps, advises, or in any way lends aid before the commission of a crime.

DEATH NEEDS A KEY



The girl pushed Burton aside, but even as he felt his gun roared a second time

CHAPTER I

Girl With a Gun

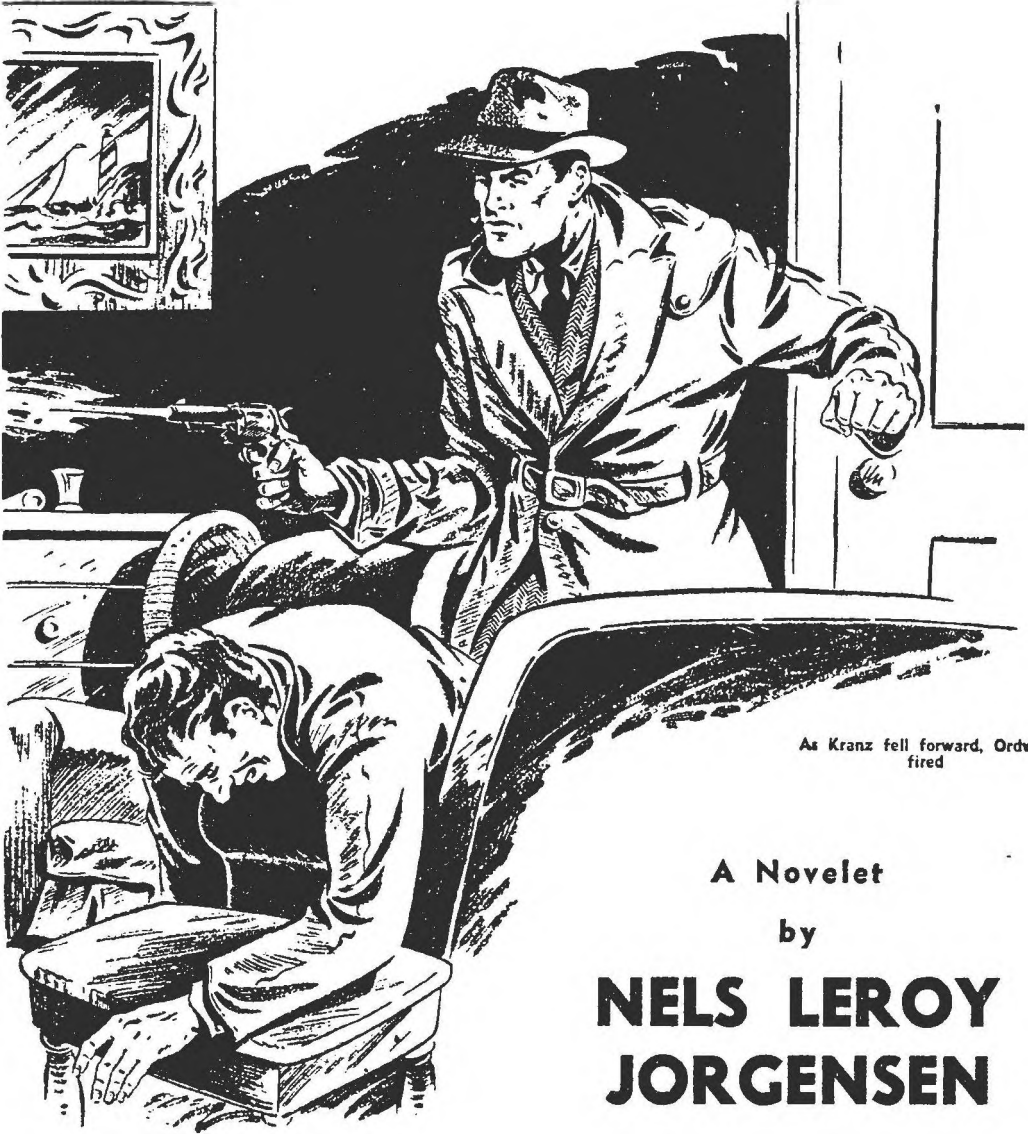
THE APARTMENT buzzer announced a visitor. Had it been his own apartment, Burton might have been warned, but he was occupying Bromilow's apartment. Bromilow had left New York for Florida the week before. Bromilow was all right. He was a friend, but at the same time he was addicted to strange acquaintances.

"Black" Burton, gambler, had found it wise to be wary.

There was a downstairs annunciator for the flat. Why hadn't this visitor made use of it? Why had he rung the bell outside the door? Any one of Bromilow's friends, Burton reminded himself, intimate enough to come straight to the apartment door, should have been aware that Bromilow had gone to Florida.

Burton had just finished shaving. It

When Black Burton Hides a Murder Suspect, He



As Kranz fell forward, Ordway
fired

A Novelet
by
**NELS LEROY
JORGENSEN**

was early evening and he had hurried, after his arrival, to get his travel clothes off and bathe. Now Burton wrapped a robe about his tall, lean figure slipped his feet into slippers, and made his way to the apartment door, regretting that his man, Han Soy, was not with him. But Han Soy had not known of Burton's return and probably was somewhere in Chinatown, with one of his numerous relatives.

When he opened the door, a gun met

him, just at his belt line.

Burton frowned at the girl holding it, but the gun remained where it was. Above its menace he looked into a pair of very blue eyes that were fringed with unusually long and curling lashes. Over them, a helmeted hat of green was pulled down to half conceal hair of the shade to which immortal Titian has lent his name. A breathless voice said:

"I know what I'm doing, Black Burton! Get back inside!"

Unlocks the Door of a Scandalous Conspiracy!

He nodded, expressionless, and backed into the apartment. The girl followed him, swung the door shut and prodded him into the big room. Burton turned then and murmured:

"You're Fleur Carmody! Why all this?"

She was a friend of his wife and she looked desperate. She was also beautiful. Now repressed excitement lent her a new loveliness.

She said, "Too bad you're not dressed for company!"

He looked bemused. Before Burton's wife had become estranged, he had known Fleur Carmody well. She had been the secretary of Colonel Brock Burnett, the man who had invited him to New York for a conference. Colonel Burnett was an advisory member of the New York State Athletic Commission.

At the table Burton paused to light a cigarette. Then through the smoke he said:

"I never can get accustomed to a beautiful woman with a gun in her hand. A man might know what he was doing. But a woman gets excited at some little thing, and might—"

BURTON'S disquisition ended there. The girl had been watching Burton's eyes, those expressionless eyes of a gambler. That was a mistake. Burton's eyes never revealed the thoughts behind them. Suddenly his cigarette was on the thick carpet, dropped there, apparently, by clumsiness.

The ruse succeeded. Involuntarily, her gaze followed the swift trail of smoke and spark. At the same instant his right hand shot out, clamping down hard over the wrist holding the gun. His cool voice murmured:

"Of course you can pull the trigger if you like. But it'd be much wiser not to. Your wrist is not thick."

There was no argument against the strength of those slender but powerful hands. The lovely blue eyes brimmed with tears of rage and vexation, and the gun thumped to the floor.

Without looking at it Burton kicked it away. Releasing the girl's wrist, he pulled the dressing gown more closely about his tall frame, stepped back. He recovered his cigarette from the floor, and murmured:

"You'd better tell me about it, Fleur."

She had been staring at him. Now she

dropped limply into a chair, her fingers clasped, working. The bronze glow from a corner bridge lamp dusted gold on the burnished copper of her hair.

Burton sat down too, a big man with sleek black hair like polished ebony, enigmatic eyes. He was known as a gambler, but known also as a gambler who worked with the police. Married to a woman who preferred a social life to the restless one he led, he lived always alone. The police liked him, and he was especially friendly with Ned Dalton, of the New York Homicide Bureau. Just now, at Dalton's request, he was on the city to look into charges of interference by gambling interests in professional sports. There had been rumors of crookedness in ice hockey, professional football, and the prize ring.

Black Burton waited for the girl to speak but she remained silent.

"You were Colonel Burnett's confidential secretary, as well as Vivian's friend," he said, at last. He saw that tears stood in her eyes, but against her will. He kept on. "I was going to see the Colonel tonight, on business having to do with his duties as head of the Council for the State Athletic Commission. But through your job you'd know I'd been asked, because of the gambling interests involved."

Her eyes looked frightened, aghast. "The Colonel!" she at last managed to say. "You'll never see the Colonel. Never again—alive!"

"You mean he's died since noon today?"

"I mean—" She moistened her lips. "I mean he—he's been murdered!"

Burton's expression didn't change.

"Maybe I'm beginning to understand," he said. He shot a glance at the gun he had kicked away.

"No, no. That's just it, don't you see? Like you, they'll believe I killed him. I knew you'd think that. But I knew I had to hide myself until the murderer is found, if he ever is. And I knew that with you, and for the reason you came here, I'd be safer than anywhere. Only a few of us know where you are and why. I intended to force you to hide me, make you promise. I want to get in touch with Carter."

"Carter McCormack?"

"Yes. He must know a way. If he didn't do the killing himself. He'd never let me be blamed."

"You'd be surprised what a man'd do to avoid the chair," Burton interposed drily. "McCormack, he's the one who owns a night spot, isn't he? Where there's gambling and all that? It's known as the *Rive Chateau*?" When she nodded, he went on, "And he's got a partner. Wait a minute! Am I wrong, or is McCormack half owner, too, of the light-heavyweight contender, Tiger Morley?"

"Yes." She added quickly, "Oh I understand! I think you came in to investigate for Lieutenant Dalton on the Tiger Morley case, the gambling end of it. Do you think Carter killed Colonel Burnett?"

"It's fairly simple," Burton said. "Unless you're so head over heels in love with Carter, that you did the job yourself, circumstantial evidence points that way. McCormack's a pretty fair gambler and he's been playing square, so I've heard. But he's in things. Tell me about the Colonel."

EVEN Burton was astonished then, by her answer: "Colonel Burnett discharged me at five o'clock this afternoon."

But his eyes showed nothing. "Since I can't see the Colonel tonight," he murmured, "I suppose there's plenty of time ahead of us. Unless they think to look for you here. I don't think they will, until they start making guesses about me. Now you can tell me your story if you like." He added: "Dalton might guess."

"Dalton? Who's Dalton?"

"A lieutenant on Homicide. Most of the time one of my best friends. I'm here because he asked me to come. Go on."

"You knew about Carter McCormack—and me?"

"About you, no. Is he a nice gent?"

"Nice enough so that I chose to be discharged by Colonel Burnett late this afternoon rather than give him up. He's aces."

"Go on. He does own the *Rive Chateau*, though, doesn't he? With a partner? And Burnett didn't like the idea of a night club and gambling house owner who's fight promoter on the side trotting around places with his confidential secretary. Understandable. Next?"

"I have to tell you that McCormack had a quarrel with Colonel Burnett today, too. It's best for you to know."

"It's helpful. What about? Tiger Morley?"

"I'm not sure, but I think so. Afterward, though, the Colonel pointed out to me that he was responsible to the public and the state, and must be above suspicion. He couldn't afford to have his secretary tied in with a man of McCormack's reputation—a gambler, night club owner, promotions. He was justified in his attitude. Of course I understood."

"What about the McCormack quarrel. Yours came afterward. What did he and McCormack fight about?"

"I didn't hear all of it. The dispute had something to do with Ordway. The Colonel had told Carter that he was barring Tiger Morley, Carter's light-heavyweight contender, from competition for a year. This came as a result of his investigation into a boxing decision. It was charged the fight was faked."

Burton nodded. "There was something crooked about that boxing match. What else? Did you quarrel with the Colonel?"

"No. I simply accepted my dismissal. I think more of Carter than my job."

"Let's hope he's worth it! Go on. Murder?"

Reaching down inside her dress she drew up a thin but strong mesh-silk cord. On the end of the cord was a small, intricately designed steel key.

"This is the key to the Colonel's private safe deposit box," the girl said. "He had two. But this one is located in Hoboken, across the river." As Burton gave a start, she rushed on: "Oh, yes, there was a reason for that. In New Jersey an authorized party can enter safe deposit vaults at almost any hour. New York is more rigid. Sometimes Burnett wanted to get at things in this vault in a hurry. Also, as his secretary, I could be sent across to Jersey in an emergency and I was allowed entrance."

"I get it," Burton nodded, eyes on the key. "But where does it take us from there?"

"When I got home, after my dismissal, I realized that I still had the key around my neck. And just about then he telephoned. He apologized and asked me if I'd mind very much, considering the circumstances, in returning and bringing the key to him."

The girl paused. A taut white streak showed about the corners of her pretty mouth.

In snaky tones she said, "When I got there the door was open. The servant, I thought, had stepped out for a moment as he often did. I went in. I found him, dying. He fought hard but he was almost gone when I reached him. It was too late. His last dying effort was to grab for me. His fingertips tore my stockings and smeared the cloth."

She looked down and gestured. "These are clean nylons," she said. "The Colonel was fighting so wildly not to die that he was out of his mind, I think. I—I had to return home and change my stockings. I was afraid."

Burton's face was impassive. "Where are the old stockings?" he asked.

"I burned them. I thought as clearly as I could and understood what it all would mean. But his nails were long. The police, when they get there, will be sure to discover some trace of the stockings. I didn't stop—I got out as fast as I could."

He nodded. "You did a good job, maybe, in spite of everything. You kept your head and it's good you came to me. The servant would know about the earlier quarrel, the McCormack matter, and the police, don't doubt it, will find evidence of a woman's visit. Anything else they'll have against you personally? There's enough as it is!"

"They'll maybe want to know," Fleur Carmody said slowly, thoughtfully, "what reason the Colonel had for drawing such a big check to my order, when they get around to it. It was for my month's salary in advance, when he—fired me."

"There'll have to be an explanation for that, and if Dalton gets the case he'll dig it out. But who did kill him? I'm a gambler and no detective, even if I do know police. And why did he call you about that safe deposit key? Especially tonight?"

"I don't know. And I've no idea who killed him. I'm sure Carter didn't. Colonel Burnett had another key at his home but that's 'way out on Long Island. Maybe it was necessary for him to get into that safe box tonight?"

Burton's fingers played with a match box.

"Now that I think of it," he said, "perhaps I can reason that out. Tonight I was to confer with him on drawing the net about Tiger Morley and that camp still tighter through the gambling

end. He intimated over the 'phone that I'd be surprised at what he'd uncovered. All his most effective evidence would be in that safe deposit box, of course. It would look pretty bad, too, if the nature of the proof got out. Bad for McCormack and his partners."

"Partner or partners? Ordway, you mean?"

"Vincent Ordway. What about him?"

She paused to moisten her lips. She was calmer now. Some of the panic had left her eyes.

CHAPTER II

Murder Means Trouble



AN ABRUPT sound came. Burton froze. Then both at once understood what it was. Bromilow had had a muted connection attached to his telephone and now it was ringing persistently.

Burton jerked to his feet, lifted the receiver and said, "Yes?" He heard a voice at the other end of the wire.

"That you, Burton?" the voice said.

His answer was yes, and then he added, "It's you, Ned?" The man downstairs was Lieutenant Ned Dalton, of the Homicide Bureau.

There was a pause, and then Dalton's voice came again: "Am I surprising you, Burton?"

"Not much," Burton answered. "You'd know I was in town and why. It's your job. I wanted to see you, later."

The wire buzzed and made a little droning sound. "That's all, Burton? All you got to say?"

Burton frowned. "If it's anything else—quit the palaver! I like games but not over the telephone. I want to see you, intended to, but I've got business." The girl stared.

Dalton's voice came, saying, "What business?"

"It may involve you later," Burton said patiently, "but right now it concerns Colonel Brock Burnett. It's confidential. Why the call—here?"

There was something like a sigh from the distant end of the wire. "Okay. Only—if it's news to you, you won't see Colonel Burnett. Not alive, and not to—"

night. But if you'd like to see his corpse, and if you're ready, meet me at his flat."

"I'll dress. I was showering. What do you mean?"

Wearily the detective's voice came: "I mentioned 'if it's news to you.' Seen Burnett's secretary? Friend of your wife?"

Burton evaded the question. "You're being mysterious, Ned. Burnett's met with an accident, I gather?"

"Murder never is an accident. That's why it's called murder!"

"So that's it. He's been killed. Why? Who?"

Dalton's voice sounded nettled. "I don't take in half what you've been trying to get across, Burton. But I'll take your word when you say you're not dressed yet. If you were to meet Colonel Burnett tonight you know where his apartment is. I'll be waitin' for you there." The connection clicked off.

Burton turned to find the girl facing him. He knew she had understood.

"The police may be trying to tie me up with you, knowing you're my wife's friend," he said. "You stay here. I'm going to see what I can see at Burnett's place."

He was already flinging off his robe. When he emerged again into the living room, he was adjusting the recalcitrant buckle of a shoulder holster under his left armpit.

"Then they—they're after me!" Her voice sounded deeper, more throaty. She was getting scared again.

"They inquired about you." Burton pulled on his coat, snatched a battered Borsalino from the top of the bookcase, turned at the foyer. "Open up to no one but me. Understand?"

"I understand. But—"

He cut her short. "Better let me have it all once again. Carter McCormack owns this *Rive Chateau*, and his partner is Vincent Ordway. What about Ordway?"

"Why, Vincent Ordway is more or less in society. I understood. He's a wildish younger son, with good connections. He bought the managership of the light-heavyweight contender, Tiger Morley, and then Carter cut in with him on that, too. It's known, of course, that there is gambling at *Rive Chateau*."

"Which furnishes plenty of reason for your recently deceased boss to demand that you cut loose from McCor-

mack. You know Ordway well?"

She looked faintly puzzled. "Why not? He's Carter's friend and partner. If you mean has he ever made passes at me, the answer is no. I think I'd trust him implicitly."

Burton smiled. "All right, but keep any trust you've got to yourself, especially while you've got the Colonel's deposit box key around your neck. Is the box in both of your names, by the way?"

"Yes." She hesitated. "Almost. As a matter of fact, since you ask, it is in my name alone. The Colonel asked me if I'd mind. He didn't want his business papers confused with the papers and data of the Boxing Commission."

"Then," Burton said slowly, "there won't be any legal complications about getting into that box."

SHE shook her head but her eyes were still uncomprehending. "Not that box." She touched the ribbon of silver at her throat. "This box doesn't contain the papers he wanted regularly. This key opens a box in Hoboken, across the river. In Jersey a lock box may be opened at any time provided one has the authority. New York laws are more stringent. This box contains the Colonel's work as a commissioner, and he knew he could always get the papers in a hurry."

"And he was going to use them tonight?"

"Yes. That's why he sent for me. Why—"

Burton jerked down the brim of his hat. Grasping the door knob he turned only to say: "Don't move from here till I get back! I'm beginning to understand."

Colonel Burnett had made his home in an old house in Greenwich Village. The street it faced was not a thoroughfare but a mews. When Burton dismissed his taxi at the mews entrance and walked in he had to pass a uniformed policeman at the old outer gateway, then traverse cobbles. Another uniformed man on guard outside the door of the two-storied brick house recognized him at once and passed him inside. In the narrow hallway he ran into Lieutenant Dalton, of the Homicide department.

Dalton had begun by pounding pavements on the force and he had worked himself out of harness and into a lieu-

tenancy in his days on the Chinatown squad. He was a big shouldered, heavy man with graying, grizzled hair and steady, calm blue eyes. He grasped Burton's hand, the eyes narrowing,

"So you're just another of the innocents, eh?" he said quietly.

Burton snapped impatiently: "I've told you I don't even understand, Ned. I came into town to confer on business with the Colonel and you seem to have learned about it already. You know all I know. Now start telling me things."

With a quizzical, enigmatic glance, the New York detective shrugged, then gripped Burton's arm and led him toward the rear of the small, comfortably furnished house, into a library, a place of quiet and discreet shadows. A good oil painting hung above an old fireplace in the Colonial pattern, but there was no fire. Dalton stopped and gestured toward the floor where several telltale blotches stained the glossy boards, behind a big oversized desk. Those blotches were still damp.

"We removed the body," he said. "Nothing to find on it anyhow. He was wearing a dressing gown, over dinner clothes. He'd been shot just under the left ear, from close range, so it wasn't pretty."

"Tell me the rest," Burton said.

Dalton inhaled. "Suppose you tell me something. About this girl now. This Carmody girl."

Burton faced his friend carefully. "All right, if I must. I'll tell you you've still got your old one-track mind, Ned, from the days on the beat. That's first. Then I'll tell you that I know the Colonel had a homicide case bothering him when he asked me to call. Or asked you to ask me. It wasn't merely a task of barring Tiger Morley, suspending him, penalizing managers. There was murder in the thing somewhere. A murder that came a long time before this one. And I got dealt in because I'm a gambler."

Dalton's eyes were thoughtful. "You wouldn't be naming what murder, would you, Burton?"

"I can do some guessing," Burton returned. "I wasn't in New York and so had no connection with it. But the New York police never did account for the murder of Judge Hathaway, one of the biggest boxing officials of this state, a few months ago."

Dalton reddened. "Under cover we've

been investigatin' that one," he said. "But this thing here? You wouldn't have any ideas we could use? That girl, maybe?"

Burton shook his head. "I'm here to listen just now, Ned. Tell me what you know. Burnett was shot from close by, I gather?"

"Yes. But no powder burns. It wasn't suicide."

"Then it might mean that the murderer was close enough to him all right, but that he couldn't get closer. It doesn't mean necessarily that the killer was someone intimate."

"Thinkin' back to the dame again? Okay. Let's go on that way. Anyhow he came close to his killer."

Burton found himself asking. "Servants?"

"They had all been out since six o'clock." There was something ghoulish, Burton thought, in Dalton's grim smile. "He was killed a lot later than six o'clock. Which indicates that his killer knew the habits of this household pretty well. Right?"

"Go on from there," the gambler said grimly.

EYES gleaming with anticipation Dalton drew an envelope from his pocket. Carefully he put his stubby fingers inside, while Burton watched out of masklike eyes. He saw Dalton bring to light several pieces of silken string, one longer than the others. No one had to advertise that they had unraveled from the remnant of a woman's gunmetal silk stocking. Dalton was saying:

"Before he conked off, the Colonel evidently had the chance to make a grab for his killer's hosiery. This thread comes from no man's stocking, nor sock, Burton, and we both know it. The thread is too long. Some of them were twisted in the fingernails." Dalton sighed. "Ah, he didn't want to die, the Colonel didn't. But even while dying, he gave us our clue, and it'll be no trouble at all to prove who wore this hosiery, by finding out when and where she bought it." He thrust the envelope back in his pocket. "And now, Burton, I'm asking you—where is this dame?"

"I suppose you mean Burnett's secretary? And that you're asking me because she and my wife were fairly good friends?"

"Go on from there. She was fired this

afternoon. She returned here because she knew from experience that the house would be empty except for him. Why did he fire her?"

It was a rhetorical question, one which could never trap Burton. Dalton continued:

"Never mind, we can guess. Burnett fired her because she was playin' around with Carter McCormack, who owns half interest in the *Rive Chateau* and the gambling rooms that go with it, as well as having a part interest in Tiger Morley, light-heavy championship contender. McCormack and his partner are high-grade gamblers, but their place is allowed to run wide open because they've got a clever lawyer who's wise enough to prove to the courts that it's a private club." Dalton snorted. His eyes narrowed. "It's my belief the Colonel had something on 'em."

"What, for instance?"

Lieutenant Dalton didn't answer that. "What were you and the Colonel going to talk about?" he countered.

Burton smiled. "I've already told you I surmise Burnett had some kind of homicide evidence, but he never got a chance to tell what it was."

"Wasn't it you who mentioned Judge Hathaway a minute ago?"

Burton nodded. "Perhaps. And now I think you're on the right track. Figure with what you know. Let's dwell on Hathaway. You surely don't expect me to believe, Ned, that you think this girl was involved in that—that she came back here tonight and killed the Colonel because she heard something about it?"

"Maybe I'm figuring along that line." Dalton stroked his jaw. "I know McCormack was here, and that he and the Colonel probably had words. That much we've established, even if we don't know what it was all about. Afterwards this girl quarrels with the Colonel, and she gets fired and leaves here. Okay. Then we find him dead, with shreds of her silk stockings snagged in his finger nails. Did she kill him out of anger, spite, revenge—or for her boy friend?" Dalton sighed. "Ah, well, we'll turn her up."

"What about checking up on McCormack?"

Dalton snorted. "He's been checked up plenty. He hasn't been out of his place since four this afternoon."

"And Vincent Ordway? His partner?"

"How could he have done it? He was here today, but much earlier. Except for his partnership with McCormack, in that joint, we haven't a thing on him." Dalton turned suddenly to the door and muttered:

"Speaking of Ordway!"

In the doorway stood a man, slightly above medium height, impeccably groomed, with hair that glinted bright under the reflected lights. Ordway had black eyes, a sharp spiked moustache that lent him a rakish air, and an assured carriage.

"Good evening, Ordway," Dalton said.

CHAPTER III

Gambling Club



RDWAY, placing hat and gloves and stick on the table, showed quiet concern.

"You are Lieutenant Dalton, I believe," he said.

"Ordway, this is Mr. Burton," the policeman snapped. "You've maybe heard of him?"

Ordway bowed to the gambler and then turned back to the Homicide man. "McCormack wanted to see you but there's been a game going on for the last two hours and he can't quit. He's too far ahead. So I came instead. Tell me: was it really murder?"

Dalton stared at him. "What would you be thinking, Mr. Ordway?"

"You misunderstand!" Ordway shook his handsome head quickly. "It's Mac who's worried, not I. About the girl."

"What have you heard?" Dalton countered.

"Why, under the circumstances, she might have become involved in this mess. I came to find out."

"But you wouldn't know where she can be located, by any chance?" Dalton asked.

"Of course not! And Mac doesn't know where she is, either. But there's a lawyer outside in my car, if he's needed. Mr. Sullivan. If this girl is in a jam, I want to reach her right away."

Dalton said grimly, "A lawyer wouldn't do a murder suspect much good, Ordway. But we want her—bad!"

Ordway frowned. "Listen, Dalton," he

said. "Lay off the girl for awhile, can't you? Probably she's hiding because she's just scared. If I could talk with her first, it's possible that I can find out what's got her so scared and persuade her to surrender to you. If she knew she had some protection from a lawyer, maybe that would help. How about forgetting her for the next twenty-four hours, so as to give me a chance to do my stuff?" Eagerness and sincerity were in his voice. But Dalton only shrugged.

"We don't play games with wanted criminals, Ordway," he said. "You should know that. Maybe you're right. Maybe she knows something she's afraid to spill, but that's not my affair."

Ordway sighed and shrugged. Burton lighted a cigarette and mused softly, "About the time of the murder, Mr. Ordway, where was your partner?"

Ordway gave a start. "Not here, at any rate. I know he had an appointment with the Colonel, but that was earlier in the day."

"The appointment concerned the penalty and suspension of your fighter, the light-heavyweight you own, didn't it?" Burton went on. "Tiger Morley?"

"I guess so."

Burton snapped: "Tiger Morley was to be barred from the ring for quite a time, for that fake fight. There was gambling back of it, of course. But it never seemed to me that the Colonel's ruling was of such vital importance that it would have caused a murder."

Ordway looked horrified. "But you can't be working on that theory, Burton! Gosh, Mac didn't kill the Colonel!"

"Somebody did."

Ordway considered that, then shrugged.

"True enough," he said. "I have my own ideas, which I can't repeat. All I know is that Fleur is in a spot. If you have any idea where she is, Burton, take me to her. Mac is watched and she's being searched for. I'm reasonably free to move and I'm the logical man to help her. Dalton, here, is your friend. Ask him to give you a free rein, if you know where she is, so I can get to Fleur, and talk with her. I'm sure I can help her out of this mess. I promised Mac. It's my job."

"What would you talk to her about?"

"I need to get some information from her," Ordway answered. "I can't tell you what that information is, but if she

speaks frankly to me, I'm sure I can clear her. I can clear up everything, maybe. She's in a tough situation."

"I know it. McCormack's alibi is airtight?"

"Airtight. Even Lieutenant Dalton doesn't think Mac is really involved in the murder angle." Dalton stirred angrily.

FOR a moment Black Burton stared at Ordway, then turned to Dalton and announced that he was leaving. Dalton regarded him suspiciously.

Burton said quietly: "I can help you, Ned, and I have my own reasons for wanting to go. But if you put a tail on me, I'm through! Good night."

Having uttered this ultimatum, Burton left the house.

Ordway overtook Burton on the sidewalk. With Ordway was the tall, thin attorney, David Sullivan. Ordway touched Burton's arm and offered:

"We're just going back to the *Rive Chateau*," he said. "Why not come along and have a chat with McCormack, Burton?"

Burton was tempted to refuse, but he knew he must not seem to be in too much of a hurry to get back to the flat. Already Dalton suspected him. His best policy was to divert attention from that apartment.

He nodded and climbed into a shining black limousine with Ordway and the lawyer. Ordway leaned forward and spoke to the chauffeur, a waiting, hunched-over individual with huge shoulders below a visored cap.

"Home, Kranz," Ordway said, and they started. Once away from the curb, Ordway offered his silver cigarette case to Burton, who refused, then leaned back, ignoring Sullivan. The limousine sped downtown, a shining ghost of smooth speed.

"A beautiful car," Burton murmured. "You and McCormack have more than one interest, I've gathered."

Ordway blew out rich smoke. "I'll say! I've followed that guy's lead. It's been right. Mac was born for these rackets. Me, I'm what is commonly known as a—a socialite, I suppose."

There was a faint contempt in the voice. Obviously Ordway took no pride in his social standing.

"Gambling, society, night clubs—more thrill in your present life, I suppose,"

Burton mused.

Ordway replied with a short laugh. "If you like to put it that way. But I'm not kiddin' anybody. Sure, there's a thrill. But with me it's necessity. My name? Blue Book, the Register? All that isn't of much benefit to a man, if he hasn't got the money to keep up with it. I'm not in my present business exactly for the thrills, nor for my health. I imagine you understand; you gamble."

"Some," the world-renowned gambler admitted mildly. He had known in advance that Ordway had thrown a small piece of capital into the venture with McCormack, along with his name. McCormack had done the rest. They seemed to have prospered that way.

They had until they became involved in the mess over that last Tiger Morley fight. Until the word had leaked out that bribery was involved, that crooked work lay in the Morley stables.

The scandal caused by Morley's last fight must have hit both McCormack and Ordway hard. Morley had been on the way to big money, perhaps the crown. It had meant big money for the pugilist's owners to cash in on.

Ordway was murmuring, while the car purred on: "I'd give a lot to talk with that Carmody dame!"

Burton murmured: "I know her. She's probably able to take care of herself. She'll turn up pretty soon."

"She'll turn up just about in time to get an indictment for murder against her!" Ordway exploded. "And Mac'll blame me for not having located her and protected her."

Sullivan put in, "If we could find her, I think I could guarantee she wouldn't be behind bars long."

Burton shot him a sharp look. "In that case do you realize you'd have to present a first-class alternate suspect to the police? And from what I can see, there's only McCormack."

Ordway uttered a growl. The car drew in toward a curb, moving slowly under the ornate lights of the *Rive Chateau*.

"I know Mac," Ordway said. "If worst comes to worst, he won't let her take the rap. Okay, Kranz!"

Kranz snapped off ignition and seemed to open the door in the same movement. As Burton got out of the car, he looked at Kranz curiously. All that Burton could see under the low-visored cap was that Kranz had a broken nose—badly

smashed. On the way indoors he remarked to Ordway:

"That chauffeur of yours. He'd make a good bodyguard, I'd gamble."

Ordway threw open the door with a low laugh. A tall man in uniform touched his cap.

"You're tellin' me!" said Ordway. "I picked Kranz. A man needs somebody like him in a spot like this one."

THE *Rive Chateau* was all its reputation had intimated. Alight with music and life, the club embodied the hectic, pulsing excitement of New York life after dark. The entrance was flamboyantly decorated. But underneath the good cheer that obtained within, Burton could sense that all was well under control. Quiet, unobtrusive men stood at strategic spots, neither eating nor drinking nor playing.

Ordway pushed into what was designated as the taproom. This was paneled in dark oak with hunting prints on the walls, and lots of polished brass. It opened into the *salles de jeux*.

At their arrival, a man detached himself from the farther end of the long bar and approached them. He was a tall, slender man with nervous movements, blank eyes and a hard jaw. Ordway grasped his elbow in a familiar gesture.

"Mac," he said, "I've brought Black Burton down to shake hands with you. I guess you two have heard of one another?"

McCormack shook hands coolly, and allowed a conventional smile of welcome to light his handsome features.

He said, "Glad to see you, Burton. Sure I know who you are." Then to Ordway: "Let's drink and you can give me the dope."

They ordered. Ordway then told about his visit with the police at Burnett's flat, mentioning the ideas the police entertained. Sullivan, the lawyer, listened and when Ordway had finished, he said:

"That girl might help. Any ideas, Mr. McCormack?"

McCormack's stare was blank. "None," he said. "Except she didn't do any killing. Here's how!"

They all drank. As Burton set down his glass, there was a look as hard to read as McCormack's in his eyes.

"I don't think she did it, either." He thought of Fleur Carmody waiting, a scared, innocent girl whom the police

and gangs were chasing for murder. "But if she didn't do it, whom are we going to look for?"

McCormack shrugged. "A lot of fight men didn't like Burnett. We all know that."

"Yes, but we really ought to locate her." Ordway's voice again had taken on a complaining note. "We could keep her under cover, if that suits her ideas. But we should know her story, and maybe hire a first-rate private dick to investigate." That sounded reasonable.

McCormack nodded and Sullivan put in: "It's my idea too. They'll have to arrest her but I'll see they don't hold her long. If necessary, we can push dough into the paw of some stumble-bum in these gutters around here to take her rap—for a few days, I mean. At least she'd be free."

Burton drank up and made no comment. When he offered to buy another round and they all refused, he had an impression that Ordway had brought him here for McCormack's inspection and that they had really hoped for little from him. Now he got an idea that all three were anxious for him to leave so they could talk among themselves.

He shook hands and went out. Kranz and the big limousine were still waiting outside. The big driver offered to drive him but Burton shook his head.

"No, thanks. I was wondering if I wouldn't stroll around for an hour or so before going home."

Around the next corner and out of the driver's observation, he found a taxi, entered, and gave the driver the address of Bromilow's apartment building. He'd started from there.

CHAPTER IV

Ace in Reserve



LEUR CARMODY cautiously swung open the foyer door when she was assured of Burton's identity. Most of the lights of the apartment had been turned out. The girl had laid aside her hat; otherwise she was as he had left her. Her eyes questioned him.

"No visitors, I presume?" he asked

her. "No scares?"

She shook her head. "Nothing. I rummaged and found something to eat in the icebox. It was all I wanted. Twice the 'phone rang. It may have been the same party both times, but I didn't answer."

Burton nodded. He went past her. "I didn't need my gun but I'm going to keep wearing it." From the inner room he pursued: "Sorry, but I can't suggest you turn in yet. Before morning we may have visitors."

"You mean the police are still looking for me?" she asked.

"You're quite popular."

"You saw Carter? And Ordway?"

"I met Ordway and he took me to the *Rive Chateau*. Yes, McCormack was there, and so was a lawyer by the name of Sullivan. When I left the club, I grabbed a taxicab—one of the fleet of cabs that Ordway owns. He always keeps a couple parked at a stand just around the corner from the club. He finds them useful, sometimes. The drivers spy on the movements of his clientele."

"Spies?" repeated the girl in surprise. "Why should Ordway do that?"

"I don't know." Burton was talking through the open doorway now. He had changed his shirt and was once more buckling on the shoulder holster with its heavy gun. He put on his coat, came out of the bedroom, and continued:

"Spying seems to be a peculiarity of Ordway. I left the cab standing in front of a club I know in Gramercy Park, slipped out by another door, and came up here. I think I lost the shadow. I don't like the idea of being tailed."

The girl's eyes had widened with apprehension and suspicion.

"I can't understand such actions on the part of Vincent Ordway," she said. "What does it mean? What's going to happen?"

Burton smiled. "Perhaps we'll discover that soon enough. Now about that key which you keep suspended around your neck: is that box which you held with the Colonel, located in the same bank where Burnett also had his own private box?"

"No." Her fingers touched the cord. "He got separate boxes purposely. This deposit box is in Jersey. Burnett's private box is here in Manhattan. Why do you ask?"

"Why?" He looked at her. "Why?"

The police will be watching the Colonel's box, of course! Know what is in yours?"

"Almost everything!"

"Comprehensive!" Burton shot at her: "And the bribery-gambling evidence on that Tiger Morley case is there?"

"Yes. Other things too. Colonel Burnett was investigating other persons beside Tiger Morley."

"To be sure. McCormack? Ordway?"

"Among others, yes."

Before Burton could speak again, he heard a sound. He motioned to the girl for silence. White-faced, she stood there motionless, staring at him.

Crossing the thick-napped rug to her side, he said in low tones: "They've figured it out! Those people in the hall outside are your pals. Tell them I haven't got back yet. Somehow they've trailed me here but they've had time to figure things out. Bluff them, Fleur. Make it good."

She responded as he had known she would. The stealthy sound at the corridor door persisted. Burton nodded to Fleur, turned and sped swiftly and silently into the next room. Closing the door to the merest crack, he listened and watched. He saw the girl move lightly into the foyer, and heard her say in well-simulated agitation:

"Who—who is there?"

A growl answered. There came the sound of a lock clicking, movement, and then he heard her exclaim: "Vincent, what on earth does this mean?"

Ordway came in and cast a swift look around. "Burton due back soon?" he demanded. His voice was sharp.

BURTON could see past the crack in the door jamb. Ordway had not come alone. With him was Kranz, looking bigger, burlier and more formidable than before. The lumpish nose looked positively deformed. Kranz closed the door softly with his shoulder and his hand dropped to a side pocket.

The girl's voice was strangely controlled. "Burton? No, he's out. He won't like it if he comes and finds you men here. You'd better go."

Ordway laughed softly. "Just what I needed to know! All right, Fleur, we won't keep you long. We dropped in because I figured out where you must be. We found out Burton was using this place and all of us want to help you. It

was silly for you to run out on your friends and not let us know. But I've still got brains, even if Mac does seem to be letting his stray. Now, whether you like it or not, you're going to be helped!"

"How can you help me?"

"They're about to pin a murder on you and you've got no way of proving your innocence, either in court or to the police. But I've managed, I think, to stall off the men of Dalton's Homicide Bureau for awhile. In the meantime I'm getting you out of the country."

"The country? But I don't want to run away!"

"Would you rather sit in the chair?" Ordway's voice was a snarl. "With Mac's evidence, mine, you're done!"

"What evidence?"

Ordway gave a harsh laugh. "From me—they got all they need. As for Mac, he won't be able to help himself. That is, if you don't want to play ball."

There was a silence and then the girl's voice came curiously still. "What is it you want of me?"

A quick movement followed. Through the door crack Burton could see that Ordway now held in his fingers the string from which hung suspended the safe deposit vault key about which they had talked. Ordway did not, surprisingly, attempt to jerk it from her neck. When he spoke his voice had changed, lost all its suavity, its detachment.

"What do I want of you?" he was saying. "I want all the contents of that safe deposit box in Jersey, the one across the river that Burnett assigned to you, which this key will open. Everything that's in it. Evidence!"

"Why?" the girl cried. "Does all this mean it was you who killed Colonel Burnett? Killed him because he was suspending your fighter—because he was investigating corrupt gambling interests?"

Ordway's comment was a sharp laugh. "Burnett didn't know all he thought he did, at that. He had evidence which would have thrown, not Mac but me, out of the ring game for good. But what he didn't have the chance to do was correlate everything he had. A good D.A. might do that if he ever got a chance, the chance he's certain to get if the Colonel's reports are analyzed and the contents of this box of yours show up. I've got to get the stuff from the box first thing in the morning."

Ordway's voice took on a purring, jeering quality as the girl recoiled from him.

"Don't you remember that one of the official judges was killed—murdered—just before Morley's last fight? That was because I had to get my own man in there and I'd staked more than I could hope to earn in five years on that brawl. I *had* to win!"

The girl was staring at him in fascinated horror. She backed away slowly. "You mean—you—it was you who killed Judge Hathaway?"

A short gruesome chuckle came from the thick lips of the man Kranz. "It was just a party, lady! The boss takes too much credit. We was both there."

Ordway broke in sharply. "That's enough! The idea is that those papers Burnett had collected will prove all this. I don't want either the D.A. or that guy Burton to see them. That stuff is dynamite! Now, Fleur, you understand. Give me that key and we forget the whole thing. I've just told you this so you'll be sure I'm not fooling. I haven't got time to fool around."

SLOWLY the girl took another step backward. Both Kranz and Ordway followed her. Ordway's hand was out, reaching for the cord at her neck.

He said, "Of course you'll have to get the documents out for me, yourself. But the cops don't know about this box in Jersey and so we're fairly safe. Kranz and I will be with you while you're in the bank. After the job is done, you're free. Free to run to any place you please. I'll see you have plenty of dough. But tomorrow morning—"

A cold incisive voice cut in. "I doubt if either of you men is going to care much about tomorrow morning, Ordway!" Burton walked in, hands in his pockets. He added: "I guessed you'd figured out where the girl was. You figured I'd stay away from her. But I came back."

Ordway and Kranz whirled. Fleur's lips parted on a shrill cry.

Kranz, with a thick oath, fired. Ordway started to dodge behind the body-guard, stirred by some instinct of self-preservation. As for the girl, she flung herself flat just as Burton's .38 streaked from its shoulder holster and blasted across the room with crimson flame.

Kranz cursed hoarsely. He brought up his gun once more, smashed out a shot.

It was just a second too late. Burton's lead caught him at the base of the throat.

As Kranz went weaving forward, gushing blood, Burton faced his other foe. Ordway uttered a vicious, strangled cry as he brought his gun to bear.

With a wild cry, the girl pushed Burton aside just as Ordway fired. This probably saved Burton's life.

But even as he fell, Burton's automatic thundered a second time and Vincent Ordway went to his knees. His gun went bouncing away. He followed it to the carpet.

Then of a sudden the apartment was awesomely quiet. Echoes of mad gunfire still hammered back and forth from wall to wall, deafening to those alive to hear it. It was strange that the telephone should ring just then. Both Burton and the girl stared at it.

Burton said, "Before I returned, I tipped off the police, told them to follow Ordway," he informed her. "I knew Ordway would eventually come here. He had to come here."

Burton went over and lifted the phone. She heard him say: "And about time, too, Ned. Everything all right, I think. I've got your girl for you, in this flat, and I've got a brace of rats. One of 'em, I think, will live to talk, since he's got no choice but that or the chair. I've also got, or will have, as soon as I can use a safe deposit vault key, the rest of the evidence. Yes, Ordway. . . . Ned, if any of us had used any brains to begin with, we'd have planted this girl as a decoy at the start. That's all we needed. . . . Right! Come along. And better phone for an ambulance."

Burton laid down the phone and turned to the slim, white-faced girl who had behaved so bravely all through the scene just ended. She was in his arms and sobbing quietly.

He told her: "It's all over now. You saved my life. Gamblers seem to have a low mortality rate. Mac'll be here soon. Then you can go along just as you did before this all began. I don't think," Burton said, "you'll need that key at once, but it may come in handy later. Sometimes it's handy to hold an ace when the police start to ask questions."

Her shining eyes, fixed on him, were all the reward he needed. But Black Burton didn't need rewards. If he had, he reflected grimly to himself, he'd have stuck to straight gambling.



IDEA FOR MURDER

By ROBERT SIDNEY BOWEN

There were two things Jimmy Bevans wanted all his life—to own a Caddy roadster, and to see Harvey Jones dead!

I GUESS I've wanted to see Harvey Jones dead most all of my life, but it wasn't until ten days ago I got the idea definitely to do something about it. As kids he was from the right side of the tracks and I was from the side not so nice. He always had a pocketful of spending money, and I seldom had a dime. More times than I can add up I got the dirty end of the stick, all because of Harvey Jones.

He had a brother, Paul, two years

older than us, who fought most of his battles for him. And that usually left me with a couple of black eyes, or a bloody nose, and hating Paul almost as much as I hated Harvey. As time passed on, though, Paul went away to school and Harvey started going around with a crowd I couldn't touch. But I didn't forget him, and every now and then our roads seemed to cross, and I got the dirty end as usual. Simple enough. His family had the dough and Harvey got

whatever he wanted. Me, I got whatever I could beg, borrow, or steal.

The day the news came to our town that Harvey's father and mother had been lost at sea on their yacht was a red letter one for me. Now Harvey would go live with some relative and I'd probably never see his snippy good looking face again. But it didn't work out that way. An aunt came to live with him, and Harvey went right on doing as he pleased when, where, and how.

Eventually came Pearl Harbor. I turned twenty-two the day before the Japs pulled that fast one on us, and I had a job jerking sodas in Stiver's drug store. Yes, and I went right on jerking sodas, too. Me, I'm no sucker for a uniform, and hero medals, and a couple of missing arms or legs. Let the other guys fall for that stuff. Not me, Jimmy Bevans. No sir! And Harvey Jones didn't go tearing for any recruiting office, either. Even though his brother Paul signed up with the Marines.

However, they had that thing called the Draft, and on the same day in late Forty-Two Harvey and I got our notices to report for medical examination and possible induction.

THAT day topped all the others. The crowning dirty deal for me. Know what? They slapped me into the infantry quick as a wink, but the medics decided that sweet little Harvey had a bad ticker and flat feet. So they sent him back home with a nice little 4-F card to carry around. Had I had a gun as he went grinning out the door I think I would have let him have it right in the back, so help me.

Well, Old Man Whiskers could stick me into a uniform, but he wasn't going to make me do any fighting. And I'm telling you, he didn't. I've got brains, and I can use them when I have to. Right!

I swung the lead, cut corners, fumbled this and that right up to V-J Day, and didn't leave the good old U.S.A. for five minutes. Sure, I spent plenty of time in the klink and got shifted from one camp to another, each one a little bit tougher. But I played it smart and always just missed getting busted out cold, or a real long stretch in a permanent army pen.

Eventually, though, the big day. And it was a three way big day for me. I got my discharge, I cleaned up twenty-eight

hundred bucks in a crap game, and I ran into a guy who had been in Paul Jones' Marine outfit who told me that Paul had caught it on Kwajalein Island. A beautiful day for me and, as I had no place special to go, I hopped a train for Los Angeles to see what that town had to offer.

Well, maybe I'd still be there instead of where I am if I hadn't met up with a guy in a gin tavern. We got talking and after a few he told me that he was in a mild jam that made Mexico look pretty good to him, only he was short on cash. He had a brand new sports model Cadillac with only a hundred miles on it, that he would sell for just what he'd paid. That was three thousand bucks, and was I interested, or did I know anybody?

All my life I had wanted to own a Caddy, and with more than enough dough needed in my pocket I was plenty interested. So we went to his place and two hours later the Caddy was mine. I got the original bill of sale, and then we went to the Motor Vehicle office to report the sale and register it in my name. Sure, I wasn't taking any chances on buying something that was hot.

The next day I got me a couple of insurance policies on the car, and then I packed my bag and headed by easy stages for the old home town. No special reason. I didn't have any folks there. I guess I just wanted to see the place, and maybe find out what my slick Caddy could get me in the way of amusement.

Well, I got back just ten days ago. The day I definitely decided that I was finally going to see Harvey Jones dead, but good. I had been in town a couple of hours and was parked in front of Stiver's drug store, looking over the new crop that had grown up since I'd left town, when who but Harvey Jones came swinging along. He didn't look a bit changed. Still good looking, still very smug and superior, and still a crumb!

When he saw the Caddy the I-must-have-it lights in his eyes were like Christmas trees. And when he saw me lounging behind the wheel his eyes almost popped out of their sockets. He stopped short, blinked a couple of times, and then came over with that blasted half smile, half smirk on his face.

"Well, well, Jimmy!" he greeted me. "Who are you driving for? Didn't know you were back in town."

It was my big moment and I made him

wait while I touched off another cigarette with the fancy dash lighter.

"Nobody but myself," I told him. "Nice job, eh?"

He blinked some more. "Yours?" he said as though that was an impossibility. "How'd you get it? Steal it? Why, I've had an order in for one of these for over a year."

"And another year at least before you'll get delivery in a jerkwater town like this," I slapped at him. Then because it just popped out, I added, "Look, want a ride?"

FOR a second he started to shake his head, but checked it in time. That beautiful Caddy was just too much for greedy little Harvey Jones. Instead he nodded and opened the door on his side.

"All right," he said, as though I'd begged him. "I might even buy it from you."

I let that crack go with a yah-yah chuckle and waited for him to settle himself. Then I touched the starter and pulled us away from the curb and into traffic. Brother, I felt wonderful! I could almost hear the envy pop out all over Harvey Jones. I didn't try to make any conversation. I just let him see what that baby could do, in a nonchalant sort of way. Every now and then I waved to somebody I knew.

And I didn't make it any just-around-the-block trip, either. I slid us out past the outskirts of town into open country. I stepped on it and we took the steepest of grades as though they were billiard table flat. I took him up into the mountains. Yes sir, I gave Harvey Jones a beautiful demonstration of what that Caddy could do because I knew that sooner or later he was going to pop the question. And I knew exactly the answer I was going to slap right back into his smug face. We were on our way back on the Gorge Road when he finally did pop it.

"How much do you want for this, Bevans?"

I took my eyes off the road long enough to look at him and laugh.

"You haven't got that kind of dough," I told him.

He stiffened a little and went red.

"Maybe I have," he said tight lipped.

"How much did you pay for it?"

"Plenty," I said, and let it go at that.

He let a quarter of a mile of road slide

by under the wheels before he spoke again.

"This model lists around three thousand," he said. "I'll give you thirty-five hundred. What do you say?"

"Don't make me laugh," I jeered at him.

"All right, thirty-seven-fifty," he came right back.

"Come out of the basement!" I laughed.

For once Harvey Jones wasn't getting what he wanted and he didn't like it at all. Me, I liked it swell. At that moment he could have gone up to a million and I would have still given him the back of my hand. Then the moment of feeling that way was gone, and Harvey Jones spoke again.

"I want this car," he said tight lipped. "I want it bad. Name your price."

I opened my mouth to horse laugh, but I didn't. Suddenly a hundred and one thoughts popped into my head. It was like turning the page of a book, and there it all was in black and white. So clear, so concise, and so *simple*.

"For five grand I might think it over," I said casually.

"A deal!" Harvey Jones jumped on it. "I'll write you out a check, now!"

I didn't reply for a couple of moments. The thoughts I was thinking were scaring me a little. Then I threw off the crazy scare feeling and shook my head.

"Not so fast," I said. "I only said I *might* think it over."

"Well, *do* that!" he cried. "And sell me the car."

I let him wait some more. We were tooling along a stretch of the Gorge Road that dropped off sharp on the right for some four hundred feet, and the flimsy guard rail wasn't enough to hold back a kid on a bicycle. I stopped thinking and spoke to Harvey Jones.

"I'll still think it over," I said. "In case I decide to let you have it you might meet me in front of Stiver's tomorrow, same time as today. But no check. Cash. Only don't count on it. Don't count on it at all, because there happens to be another guy interested."

Well, he pumped me to find out who the other guy was, but I didn't tell him because there wasn't any other guy. And all the way back he tried to get me to close the deal then and there. But I held out and made it pretty clear that I wasn't

going to do a thing about it except think over his offer—maybe. That way I knew he'd keep his boasting yap shut until the car was definitely his.

THAT night was strictly a tough one for me. I didn't get a wink of sleep. I went over every item of my little plan in detail again and again, but I wasn't able to spot a single flaw. It was just plain foolproof—provided a guy had brains and a good sense of timing. Well, I knew I had both, and by the time I tooled the Caddy into the curb in front of Stiver's I was just as calm and nonchalant as any guy who didn't have a care or a worry in the world.

Harvey Jones hardly let me park before he was in the front seat beside me.

"So you're going to sell it to me?" he cried.

I shifted gears and pulled away from the curb.

"Maybe," I said when we were in traffic. "You've got the dough?"

"Right here," he said, and pulled out a wallet stuffed with the green to prove it.

I gave it a casual glance, hesitated, and then went on driving along with a little frown on my face. I could tell that Harvey Jones was just about bursting to press home the deal, but he was a little afraid he might over-step it. So, instead, he didn't say a thing, just held the five grand where I could see it. I didn't say anything either until we were out of town and headed for Medford at the other end of the Gorge Road. There I pulled over, parked and nodded at Harvey Jones.

"Okay, sold," I said with a half reluctant sigh. "I've got the original bill of sale and the registration right here in my pocket. That's five grand even?"

As I spoke the last I put out my hand. Harvey Jones eagerly shoved the money into it.

"Of course," he said. "Count it."

I did, and then shoved the wad into my pocket.

"Okay, we'll go down to the Motor Vehicle office and report the sale so you can get your plates," I said. "First, though, I want to go to Medford to see a guy for a couple of minutes. It won't take long."

Jones scowled and wiggled impatiently.

"Do it some other time," he said petulantly. "I want to be sure to get my

plates today."

"You will, you will," I soothed him. "There's plenty of time. Here, you can drive if you want."

He had been itching to drive the Caddy.

"All right," he consented. "Move over."

I did that, grinning to myself. The only delicate thing in the whole plan hadn't come off at all. Just showing him the bill of sale and the California registration had been enough. He was so anxious to get behind the wheel he didn't bother to take them, or have me sign the sales side of the registration. I slipped them back into my pocket and went on grinning to myself.

Some ten minutes later we were rolling along the Gorge Road at about forty. I was tempted to tell Jones to ease down a little, but I didn't dare. Forty on that road was safe enough—ordinarily. So I just held my tongue, and inch by inch got set for what was to come.

Without appearing to do so I moved my right hand to the door handle on my side. And I eased my left foot toward Harvey Jones' side. And I lightly rested my left hand on my left knee. And I fixed both eyes on the road ahead.

A half mile more and we came around a turn that led into a fairly straight stretch. I looked ahead and glanced back over my shoulder. There wasn't another car in sight. It was the time and the place. I steeled myself for a split second and then went into action. Up went my left hand to grab the wheel and wrench it to the left. In the same instant I banged down my left foot on Harvey Jones' right foot which was pressing on the accelerator. By then I had the door on my side open, and was diving out.

I had figured that the swerve to the left would help open the door as I jumped out. It did, and almost too much. I went out of that Caddy like a shot from a cannon. I was in mid air when I heard Harvey Jones' blood chilling scream, and the crunching crash of the Caddy as it zoomed through that flimsy guard rail and went over the edge of that four hundred foot drop. Then I didn't hear anything more. That is, not clearly. The ground had come up and pounded me in the face, and lots of other places. I seemed to fall off into nothing and a billion thorny branches had all wrapped themselves about me, holding

me pinned to the side of that steep slope.

MAYBE three minutes of dancing stars and exploding comets and then I started sliding back to normal. I twisted my head and looked down into the gorge expecting to see the Caddy a twisted heap of smoke and flame. It was a twisted heap all right, but it had not caught on fire. Of course that meant I had to go down to make sure. I went down, saw beyond all doubt that the crushed body behind the wheel was stone dead, and then climbed painfully back up that steep, thorn bush covered slope.

Just as I reached the road a car came along with an old guy driving and a woman just as old sitting beside him. The old guy braked the car to such a fast stop his tires smoked.

"Hey, an accident?" he cried piling out.

I nodded, tried to look twice as bad as I felt, and added the touch of wiping some thorn bush scratches with my handkerchief.

"My friend's dead down there behind the wheel," I said with a jerk of my head toward the gorge. "Tire went and he couldn't hold it. Somehow I got thrown clear before it went over. Get to the nearest phone, will you, and phone to the State Patrol!"

"Sure, sure, but you better come with us," the old guy said. "You don't look so—"

"I'm all right," I cut him off. "Just scratched and shaken up a bit. No, the Patrol boys would want me to remain here. You just go and phone it in, will you?"

"Sure, sure thing," the old guy said, and scrambled back into his heap.

As he went spinning on down the road I sat down, fished out a cigarette and lighted up. It was the nicest cigarette I ever tasted. I felt wonderful. Sure, I felt rocky in the places where the ground had smacked me. But that would pass and I was sitting right on top of the world. Yes sir, sitting right up on top, and waiting for the State Patrol car to come along so that I could go through with the other half of it—as planned. Twenty minutes later I saw the State Patrol car boiling down the road toward me.

That night I had a wonderful sleep in my hotel room and a whole lot of beauti-

ful dreams to go along with it. Of course the State Patrol boys had taken me to the hospital for a make-sure check, but the medics had said that I could go to my own hotel room if I wanted to. I did of course. That is, after answering six million questions the State Patrol boys shot at me—and completely satisfying them that the accident had just been one of those things. In short, the left front tire going and Harvey Jones unable to hold it on the road.

As a matter of fact, the cops ended up by agreeing that I was certainly one lucky guy, even though my nice new car was a complete wash-out. But that was where I had a nice silent laugh to myself. The cops didn't know it, but I was a very lucky guy all around. Not lucky—smart. I mentioned that I picked up a couple of car insurance policies before I left Los Angeles, didn't I? Well, one was a liability policy that covered me for plenty in case a person injured by my car sued me, or I killed somebody and his relatives sued me. The other was a collision or upset policy with the fifty dollar deductible clause. In short, if my car was cracked up I paid the first fifty bucks, and the insurance company paid the balance.

It was beautiful all around. I had settled the score with Harvey Jones but good, and five thousand bucks of his money that nobody knew about was in my pocket. I was protected in case his aunt sued me because of his death. And as the Caddy was a complete loss the insurance company would have to make good the full three thousand, less the fifty dollars I had to absorb, because not enough time had elapsed to take it off the company's new car listing.

All the entire deal had cost me was the price of the insurance policies, plus the fifty bucks deductible, plus the bumps and scratches I had received. Sure! Why shouldn't I have had a wonderful sleep that night!

WELL, three days after Harvey Jones had dumped himself and my Caddy over the edge of the Gorge Road everything was still wonderful with me. True, the insurance company wasn't being very nice about things. I mean, they sent a special representative from the Chicago home office, and he spent hours and hours going over every nut and bolt and what-not on the busted-up car. But

eventually he agreed that it was a complete loss, that he'd report same to the home office, and that the check would be along shortly.

So I was just hanging around waiting for the check before I drifted on. Harvey Jones was six feet under and I'd even gone to the funeral. His aunt had closed up the house that same day and gone someplace. And as far as I knew she hadn't filed any suit claim with my insurance company.

Well, late in the afternoon of the third day I was in Joe's Tavern having a quiet beer and keeping to myself. Presently the door opened and a guy with a funny looking face came in. It was like one side of it had been shoved up an inch, and the other side shoved down an inch. As he slipped into one of the booths and signaled Joe I saw the discharge button on his jacket lapel. Some ex-service guy who had got smacked up but good.

Joe served him and when Joe came behind the bar again I had a refill. But as I started to take a sip I got a funny feeling. The back of my neck sort of tingled. It was like somebody was watching my every move. And when I looked into the mirror behind the bar I saw that somebody was. The guy in the booth with the twisted face. Catching his eyes in the mirror sent crazy cold shivers down my spine. His eyes were like a couple of glazed oysters, and just as expressionless, too.

But they didn't leave my reflection in the mirror for an instant. At least, every time I glanced up those oyster eyes met mine. After another beer I began to get sore, but I didn't do anything about it. Maybe I was just jumpy having to wait for that insurance check. When I got the chance I asked Joe if he knew the guy, but Joe said he'd never seen him in the place before.

Well, I stood those oyster eyes for one more beer, then I left Joe's and went along the street into another spot. Five minutes later the same guy came in, took a booth, ordered, and then fixed those blasted expressionless eyes on me. It was just a coincidence, I tried to convince myself. But that didn't do any good. I began to sweat a little, and a clammy coldness settled just under my heart.

I finally decided I'd check the coincidence angle and make sure. I left that place and went to a third one. In five minutes, the same thing. He came in and

started the routine all over again. I didn't sit at the bar and take it any more. I turned and walked over to his booth.

"Something you want of me, buddy?" I asked evenly.

Those oyster eyes close gave me the creeps. They also gave me the half feeling that I knew the guy. I'd seen him around a lot at sometime or other.

"That's right," he said, and his voice was just as flat as his eyes.

"Yeah?" I echoed. "Well, who are you, and what do you want?"

"You can't guess, Bevans?" he countered, with hardly a muscle of his face moving.

That he knew my name gave me a jolt, but I shook my head.

"No," I said. "What?"

He made me wait, and it was hard not to take my eyes off his face and go my way.

"Five thousand dollars, Bevans," he suddenly said. "And your dirty little life!"

If the roof had dropped in I wouldn't have been more startled. I gaped at the guy, and then caught hold of myself.

"What are you raving about?" I demanded. "Are you nuts?"

There was a faint quiver at the corners of his mouth that might have been meant for a smile. He shook his head slowly.

"No, Bevans," he said. "I'm not nuts, and I'm talking about the five thousand dollars Harvey drew out of his account the day he was murdered in your car!"

FOR a terrible instant the room spun around. I gripped hold of the booth table hard and stared at that twisted face with the oyster eyes. It was impossible, and yet it had to be true.

"Paul Jones!" I managed with an effort. "But I met a guy in your outfit who said you got it on Kwajalein!"

The corners of his mouth quivered again and a funny light seemed to brighten up his face.

"Almost, but not quite," he said in that flat voice. "I was lucky and managed to pull through. That makes it unlucky for you, doesn't it, Bevans?"

I was getting a little icy inside, but I only let anger show in my face.

"What do you mean, unlucky?" I snapped. "And just take it easy on that murder stuff, see?"

"No, I don't see," Paul Jones came right back. "You killed Harvey just as

sure as you're standing there. And, Bevans—you're not going to get away with it. I was in a private hospital in Southern France when I received my Aunt's cable about Harvey. I couldn't get here by plane until after the funeral, and my Aunt had closed up the house. But—you were still in town."

The way he spoke the last was like pebbles sliding down a tin roof. I knew I was crazy to let it get me, but it did a little. I glanced around and saw that we were the only two customers. The bar-keep was busy polishing glasses. I looked back at Paul Jones, and gave it to him straight.

"Certainly I'm in town," I said. "And what's more I'm going to stay in town. I don't know what you've heard, but I'm telling it to you just as I told it to the cops. Harvey wanted to drive the car. He had one like it on order. I let him, and on the Gorge Road the left front tire let go and he couldn't hold it. I got thrown clear, but darn near got my neck broken at that. The State Patrol, the local cops, and the insurance companies have checked. And they all know it was that way."

"You're a liar, Bevans," he said when I was through. "I know *that*, even though the police don't. And what about the five thousand dollars Harvey drew out of the bank? He was going to buy your car, wasn't he?"

"The devil he was!" I snapped. "It wasn't for sale to anybody. And I don't know anything about any five thousand. Now look Paul, you can think any darn thing you like, but you start making any trouble and I'll sue you for every cent your family's got left."

The corners of his mouth quivered again, and it was as though tiny blue white lights had been touched off in his eyes.

"I'm all the Jones family there is left, Bevans," he said. "I *am* going to make trouble for you. No, not the police. Not yet, anyway. It's just between you and me. I know you murdered Harvey because you've hated him all your life—and would like nothing better than the chance to do it, and get away with it. Well, you have, but you're not going to get away with it. Little by little, I'm going to get you. I don't think you've ever had a conscience in your life before. You're going to have one now. So far, it's just the missing money Harvey drew

from his account. But there are other things, and I'm going to dig them out! I'll be seeing you again, Bevans."

With that he got up, tossed a bill down on the booth table and walked out of the place. I watched the door close on him, laughed, and went back to the bar. I had another drink, but it didn't taste good at all. I paid up and went out for some air and a walk.

I told myself that it was just seeing Paul Jones come back from the dead that made me jumpy, with a sort of slipping feeling. It was silly to try and kid myself, though. I was worried. I could laugh off Paul Jones coming up with that missing five grand item, even if he went to the cops with it. Harvey Jones had always been a big spender. Besides, nobody had seen him give the money to me. But—was there anything *else* Paul might be able to come up with?

I tangled with that question the rest of the day and most of the next. I checked back in my mind over every single thing, but I couldn't think of a thing Paul might grab onto. I was in the clear, but definitely. All I had to do was hold my horses until the insurance check arrived. Then I could slip quietly out of town, and leave Oyster Eyes Paul Jones to bark up any tree he wanted to.

SO I just took it easy and made like everything was all right with me and the world. I saw Paul Jones maybe a couple of hundred times. Every time I poked my head out of the hotel he was standing there across the street. He followed me everywhere I went. Into restaurants, into taverns, to the movies—everywhere.

I knew he was trying to give me the silent, watchful treatment, and after the first day I didn't mind at all. I was completely in the clear. It had gone off perfectly because I had planned it to go off perfectly. The State Patrol boys, the local cops, the insurance agents, and the few friends I had in town all believed my story. So the blazes with Paul Jones and his screwy notions. But if only that darn insurance check had arrived!

And then on the night of the eighth day after Harvey Jones' death, my hotel room phone rang. My first thought was that it was the clerk downstairs calling to tell me he had a registered letter from Chicago with my name on it. My thought was wrong. I recognized Paul Jones'

voice before the third word.

"One more item, Bevans," he said. "I thought you might like to know that I bought the car for junk. I wanted to look it over, myself. The left front tire, Bevans. It's slashed through in only one place. Not a blow-out. It was cut through by hitting a knife edge rock or something. Not cut once by the rim, as it surely would have been had it been a blow out. Good night, Bevans. I'll keep in touch with you."

Cold clammy sweat covered my face as he hung up on me. The hotel room spun a little, and my brains were all in a scrambled confusion for two or three minutes. Then I snapped out of it and got a hold on myself. Of course it was just some more of Paul Jones' screwy treatment to force me to come apart at the seams. All four tires had been crumpled flat and off the rims, when I had gone down into the gorge to make sure Harvey was dead. And heck, that insurance company man from the Chicago office had certainly been thorough enough in his inspection of the wreck. Sure, Paul Jones was lying through his teeth, and I was a fool to let it get me.

But supposing the insurance man had made an honest slip, sincerely believing that the tire had let go? Paul Jones said he'd bought the car for junk. He had it now. Just supposing—I didn't sleep good that night. I didn't sleep at all. I tossed all night long, trying to remember back exactly how that left front tire had looked. But I couldn't remember—*exactly!*

By morning I was fagged out to a fare-thee-well. I didn't eat much breakfast. Couldn't seem to get it down my throat. A dozen times during the day I headed for Western Union to send a hurry-up-with-that-check wire to Chicago, but I checked myself each time. I didn't dare, frankly, for fear it might make them just a little suspicious. And an insurance company that is stuck with a claim will leap on anything with all fours.

I tell you, it was real agony living through that day. A couple of times I almost talked myself into skipping the insurance check and getting out of town fast. I had Harvey's five thousand, and three or four hundred of my own dough. But I talked myself out of it. To blow before the insurance check arrived might be the worst possible thing I could do.

Stick it out, and just keep the old brains sharp. If the tire business was true, Paul Jones would have gone straight to the cops. Sure he would have! Easy, Bevans. It won't be long, now.

And then that night my room phone rang again. That was last night to be exact, and something inside of me screamed to let it go on ringing. But I couldn't resist. I answered, and it was Paul Jones at the other end.

"Another little item, Bevans," he said in that scratchy flat voice, "but I'm going to let you wonder about this one. By the way, what insurance company issued your policies? I think they should know about *this* item."

I didn't say anything. I couldn't. My tongue had gone sort of stiff, and I couldn't move it. Paul Jones' laugh at the other end was like a file across all my teeth. "Never mind, I can find out easily enough," he said. "You'll hear from them shortly. And from others, too. See you around, Bevans."

He hung up on me again, and my first impulse was to yank the phone off the wall and hurl it out the nearest window. I was shivering like a leaf, and that made me even madder. I knew it was just bluff. I knew I was safe as could be, and that Paul Jones hadn't found out a thing that could change the picture. Only I couldn't convince myself of it. I was tired, and on edge, and I stumbled every time I tried to think clearly.

I SAT there by the phone maybe half an hour, and then I made a decision. I wasn't going to hang around town any longer. I'd wire the insurance company that I was coming to Chicago on business, and would pick up the check at their office. And I'd grab a plane for Chicago first thing in the morning. Right. The devil with hanging around and seeing Paul Jones with his plastic surgery face and oyster eyes every time I turned around.

It still wasn't late enough for Western Union to be closed so I went downstairs to the lobby. And it was then I saw Paul Jones over by the phone booths. I made like I hadn't spotted him and went over to the cigar stand for a pack of cigarettes. And, funny, that moment was just like the one when Harvey Jones had told me to name my price for the Caddy—and I had checked laughing in his face.

It was all suddenly clear, and easy and simple. Maybe Paul Jones didn't have a thing on me, or maybe he had a little. Anyway, it was no use waiting it out to see. I just couldn't afford to lose. And why should I run the risk when there was such an easy way to clean up the whole thing once and for all? I began to feel better and better by the second as I punched one of the cigarettes out of the pack and lighted up.

I took a couple of puffs and then wandered out of the hotel and down the street to where I'd parked the car I'd hired for the remainder of my stay in town. I slid in behind the wheel, stuck in the ignition key, and stepped on the starter. All the time, though, I kept one eye over my shoulder. I saw Paul Jones come out of the hotel and hurry to another car parked up the street. That made me feel tops. I was afraid he didn't have any car.

Throwing away my cigarette I pulled out into the street and slipped the car into high. In the rear view mirror I saw Paul Jones pull out and drop into line a half block back. I drove at normal speed and went up this street and down that one. His car with dimmed lights remained right with me. That was what I wanted, and so I started to get fancy, to give him the idea I was making sure I wasn't being followed. But I was very careful not to lose him.

Little by little I worked out toward the foothills on the south side of town. There was a bright moon but I kept my lights on—for Paul Jones' sake. He had switched his off, but every now and then I caught the dark moving silhouette of his car sliding along behind mine.

An hour later I parked on a little used road that wound up through the foothills. It was close to an old zinc mine that hadn't been used since I was a kid. A thousand times, I guess, I had gone out there with some of my gang and we'd played cops and robbers in the old tunnels. There was one we liked best. It was fairly short, and twisted into an underground room where explosives and such were once stored. It was dark as the inside of your hat going in, but once in the room there was plenty of light from a small air shaft up to the surface of the hill. It was perfect for the idea I had in mind. In that twisting tunnel you could be two feet from a guy and he'd not know it. And there were plenty of

rocks around you could use. . . .

Well, I parked a little off the road, as though trying to hide the car. Then after a look to make sure Jones' car was creeping up the road, lights out, a quarter mile or so back, I got out and went up the path to the entrance of that explosive-storehouse tunnel. In the moonlight it looked just as it had looked hundreds and hundreds of times before. Even the heavy iron door with its slide bolt on the outside hadn't put on any more rust. Many is the time I had slammed that heavy door shut just to hear the crashing clang it made. It was almost like coming back home, and I grinned as I rapped my knuckles on that old steel door and stepped inside the tunnel. Who would ever look for a corpse in that old tunnel?

AND that's where I am, now. In the old underground store-room for explosives. It's five minutes of five in the morning, and something has gone wrong. My idea to finish off Paul Jones safely hasn't worked out. I waited hours just inside the mouth of the tunnel, but he didn't come. Did he miss my parked car? Or did he get wise at the last minute and realize that I really hadn't tried to shake him off? Is he out there someplace now—just waiting?

An hour ago I came back in here to carefully figure out everything. But the old brains are kind of jumpy and it's been tough concentrating. Enough late moon and early morning light is coming down the air shaft so I've been putting down in my little black book the whole works. A guy once told me that was the best thing to do when you found yourself in the middle of something. Get it all down in black and white so's you can study it, and check and recheck. That way you get the idea for the best next move. You spot where you slipped up, and you can figure just how you should backtrack.

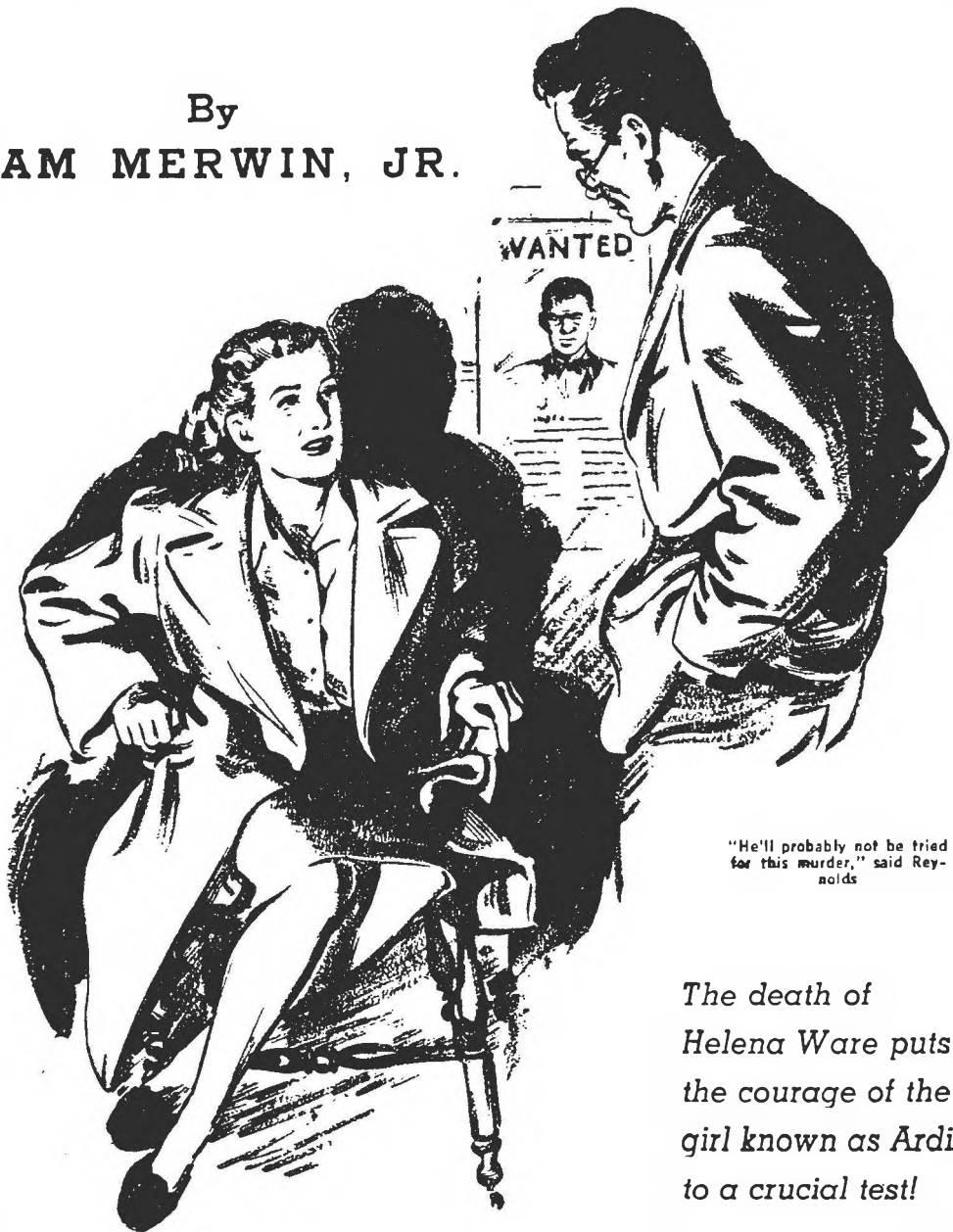
But I can't spot a single place where I've slipped up. Everything was perfect. Except Paul Jones not sneaking into the tunnel after me. He used to come here as a kid, too, so he knows all about it.

Oh God, have I been a dumb fool! The steel door. I never even gave it a thought. And there's no other way out of here. . . .

But even before I looked, I knew that the steel door had been locked!

THE WIDOWER

By
SAM MERWIN, JR.



"He'll probably not be tried
for this murder," said Rey-
nolds

*The death of
Helena Ware puts
the courage of the
girl known as Ardis
to a crucial test!*

SHE sat in a wicker chair at one end of the broad summer hotel verandah, waiting for Marcus Ware to come back from his wife's funeral. There were young people about, crossing the verandah in tennis or riding clothes, in swim or sun suits, gaily intent upon their vacation affairs. Even those elders who ventured out in the midday sun were uniformly tanned and clad in dark glasses and bright

sports raiment of uniformly lurid lines.

The girl in the rocker seemed set apart. She was mature for her twenty-two years—mature in manner and looks and poise as is so often a girl who has been reared in a motherless house of males. She was comely, perhaps more than comely, fine boned, smoothly fleshed, with long red-brown hair and long shapely legs concealed, now, by gray flannel slacks.

Her comparative isolation caused her no regret. She wanted to think about poor Helena Ware and, with a faint frown, Marcus Ware, her widower. Marc would be back from the funeral soon. It might happen that Marc, free, would be difficult—although she was not certain that "difficult" was the right word. Nor was she sure what her own reaction would be if he were—difficult.

So much had happened since her quarrel with Alan, her fiance, and her haphazard decision to come to the Inn—she had selected it at random from a magazine resort section. In two weeks she had met Marc and his plump, rather handsome and worried wife, had let Marc flirt with her, had stood incredulous by an alien bed and watched poor Helen die.

She stared out across the lake, unseeing, as she sought to orient herself emotionally. At thirty-eight Marc was not really too old for her. There was charm in the gray hair at his temples—there was much that was charming about Marcus Ware, charming and a little helpless and definitely appealing.

He would have money, of course, for poor Helena had been quite rich. But the girl in the wicker chair dismissed this factor. Having never wanted for money she had a tendency to take its possession for granted in others. Marc's pull was not money. He treated her like a woman—like something glamorous and altogether desirable. She had reached an age when she demanded such treatment.

Why not? she wondered. After all, she was a woman.

Sudden memory of poor Helena dying, less than three days ago, sent a pang of conscience flaring through her. She didn't suppose she should be thinking of Marc as she was so soon after. But it had been her first close contact with mortal illness. Dying, Helena Ware had simply not seemed real. She might have been a doll who was also rather a nuisance. Dead, Helena Ware was a distasteful thought, to be dismissed from memory as rapidly as possible.

QUICKLY she turned her thoughts back to Marc, tingling a little at the prospects of the immediate future. So deep was her reverie that, when she heard his deep, pleasant, cultured voice behind her, she thought at first she must have slipped into a dream. He was speaking to someone called Ardis and Ardis was not

her name.

Suddenly she realized that, to Marc, Ardis was her name. She snapped herself fully awake.

"I'm sorry, Ardis," he said, looking down at her. His tired, handsome, sensitive face had an expression of concern. "I didn't mean to startle you. Were you asleep?"

"Just thinking—and waiting for you," she said, giving him a slow quarter-smile of welcome. "How was it?"

"Dreadful," he replied, dropping into a chair beside hers. He grimaced. "Barbaric survivals, funerals. When it's my time to go, I hope I'm at sea. Then they can drop me overboard with a cannon-ball tied to my ankles."

"I want to be cremated," said the girl promptly. "Like you, with a minimum of fuss."

"It really went off very well," he said thoughtfully. "Helena would have loved it if she could have—but that's absurd." He shook his head, rueful at his own fancy. "The local pastor sounded off a little. He gave us the history of funerals from the time of the Druids till now. Took two hours."

"So long?" she said with a shudder. "Brrrr! Got a cigarette, Marc?"

He handed her one, looked directly into her hazel eyes. "I want to thank you again, Ardis, for what you've given both of us; myself and poor Helena."

"I did what I could," the girl said grimly, "but the patient died. Marc, this place is positively gruesome. After what happened it's got me down. Why don't we go out tonight and have a few drinks and try to get some of this out of our minds—if only for a few hours?"

"I appreciate your suggestion," said Marc. "But do you think it would be exactly discreet—so soon?" He looked around to see if anyone had been watching them, got to his feet. "We'll see," he added, bent to touch an index finger to the back of her hand. "You know I want to, Ardis."

Looking after him, the girl again frowned. Instinctively, because of her youth and masculine bringing up, she hated hypocrisy. She felt a stir of doubt within her, stifled it quickly.

She contemplated her cigarette briefly and blankly, snuffed it out in the standing ashtray at her elbow, then rose and shook back her long hair. It was time for a swim if she were to work one in before lunch.

Like most second-class hotels, Wilsham Inn or its owners were damnably fussy about mealtime promptness—though the meals were nothing to rave about.

She was walking back to the hotel, still in her swimming suit and terry cloth robe, when she met the plump little man with the brilliantly sun-burnished Friar Tuck bald head. He stopped, smiled at her and addressed her by the name she was using at the Inn so that Alan wouldn't be able to track her down and prolong their row in the name of devotion.

"Miss Rains," he said abruptly in a high, dry pleasant voice. "Just got back from the trip. Heard about Mrs. Ware. Startled me. Didn't think there was a chance of anything happening or I'd never have left."

It was Dr. Bailey, the regular Inn summer physician. An excellent practitioner, he had departed on a vacation trip to Canada less than two days before Helena Ware was stricken. The girl greeted him pleasantly and said frankly that it was a shame he had been absent when it happened.

"Unpleasant trip," he said vehemently. "Mosquitoes all the time—swarms of 'em. Never hit Canada again, come summer. Hear you helped take care of Mrs. Ware. She must've gone mighty quick. Infection, hey?"

"Just a finger cut," said the girl. "She sickened so fast. It simply ran away from us and the town doctor. It was horrible."

"Rugged, all right, when you're not used to it," said Dr. Bailey. "That sulfa can raise the devil with the kidneys. Tricky stuff. Take an alkaline with it—a dose of salts, anything—you're a gone goose if you don't get to a stomach pump in a hurry. Crystals in kidneys. Hurts, too."

"Please!" said the girl.

THE good doctor's bluff acceptance of the gruesome made her shudder. He patted her terry cloth shoulder and said, his cheer undimmed, that he would see her later. She murmured something reasonably polite and went on up to her room to dress for lunch.

She was in the act of spearing a limp bit of lettuce remotely related to her lobster salad when a clear vision of the medicines mentioned by Dr. Bailey came vividly to the forefront of her mind. She dropped her fork with a clatter and stared at the "massive Tudor" beams of the far

wall, checking her memory.

Certainly there had been sulfathiazole in powder form, scores of papers of the yellow stuff, in the bathroom cabinet of the Ware suite. And certainly poor Helena had taken a good deal of it—nine or twelve papers a day, she couldn't remember which.

And there *had* been a dose of epsom salts, administered by her own hand. It was this realization that caused her to drop her fork. It seemed absurd, even a little vulgar. Marc had suggested she give them to Helena when she first began to go a little crazy. Not until now had it occurred to the girl that poor Helena took a turn for the worse within the twenty-four hours that followed.

She herself had killed poor Helena if what Dr. Bailey told her was true—and there seemed no earthly reason to doubt it. Suddenly the agonized face of the dying woman became shockingly clear in her mind's eye. A trifle unsteadily she rose from the table and fled to her third-floor room.

There, slowly, the innate philosophy and fatalism of a normally resilient young woman came to her rescue. After all, it has been Dr. Bailey's fault for going away on a fishing trip, though she supposed he had a right to some vacation, what with his winter practice in Boston and summers at the Inn. And the salts had been Marc's idea, not hers.

For a moment Marcus' handsome face seemed to take on sinister outlines. Certainly he was younger than poor Helena, as much as ten years probably. But they had both accepted the discrepancy so charmingly that it had not seemed to matter. Actually love had ceased between them some years before. Had it not she would never have permitted the brief flirtation to happen.

She wondered—she could not help but wonder—if Marc could have ordered her to give poor Helena the lethal dose deliberately. The question wrote itself on the wall across from her bed, blanking out the inevitable picture of the wolf overlooking the snowbound village at night.

She sat up on the bed then and pushed her long, near-red hair back from her broad, smooth forehead, shook herself back to reality. The idea was ridiculous. For him to have done so meant he had deliberately made her an accomplice to Helena's murder!

She shuddered at the thought, then

lifted herself off the bed, squinted a little into the mercury-dotted mirror above her golden oak dresser as she carefully donned lipstick. Then, not quite knowing what to do with herself, she went downstairs.

For awhile she played croquet on the west lawn with a friendly middle aged trio. Later, bored by the amiable inanities of her companions, she sought the cool darkness of the almost-deserted bar and had a rum collins. She was just sipping her second when one of the Inn attendants appeared at her elbow and handed her a note.

It was from Marc and it read:

Ardis, my dear,

As always, you are absolutely right. Meet me in the parking lot at seven. We shall dine at the Poplars. Until then I am counting the minutes.
Marc

She stared at the note and wondered what she should do until a faint scuff beside her made her aware that the boy was still standing there. She smiled at him, said there was no answer and dug a quarter out of her handbag. He went briskly away, whistling softly to himself.

The fading sound of his whistle, slightly off pitch, by its very homeliness drove from her mind the panicky thoughts which had engulfed her in waves since her meeting with Dr. Bailey. She was being a fool female, she decided, giving way to unreasonable and vaporous imaginings. She finished her drink quickly and went back upstairs to change for a swim. . . .

MARC smiled faintly, approvingly, as she got into the light blue convertible a few minutes after seven. His eyes spoke the message before he did.

"You look very beautiful this evening, Ardis," he said. "So very alive."

The choice of words was unfortunate. She was unable to restrain a quick shudder as she settled back against the cushions. Concern showed on his well-modeled face as they sped down the tarred high-crown road from the Inn.

"Are you cold?" he asked. "It does get chilly here in August when the sun goes down."

"Footsteps on my grave," she said and could cheerfully have bitten off her tongue. She asked for a cigarette quickly. He pulled his case from his pocket and she lighted two, handed him one. They drove awhile in silence.

"You're quite right, of course," he said finally, taking a difficult curve master-

fully. "The dead must bury their dead. If I seemed a bit—well, hypocritical this morning, Ardis, blame it on that damned minister." He sighed. "Poor dear Helena."

"Poor Marc," she said softly. He was, she thought, the first person she had ever met whose personality, whose very aura, seemed to weave itself completely around her when she was in his company.

Away from him the web vanished like something pleasant merely dreamt. But with him she found it hard to explain. It was not his intelligence. His intellect was not great, his talk far from brilliant. She, who was accustomed to brilliant men and had a fair share of wit herself, could not avoid sensing his basic mediocrity.

Yet the spell was there, tying her to him as tightly as if it were tangible. Perhaps, she thought with a trace of panic, it *was* tangible. Would that be so terrible? She studied his profile, the almost too clean line of his chin, the classic juncture of nose and forehead.

Would it be terrible to be tied to this man instead of to—say, Alan? Marc was considerate, kindly, almost worshipful. Alan afforded her a rough affectionate companionship which bespoke her as an equal fully expected to take care of herself in all but the direct emergencies. It was delightful to be considered a woman for a change, something rare and special, not merely a fellow adult who could offer moments of physical gratification.

The Poplars might have been any of thousands of roadhouses dotted across the country. A sprawling white-painted structure which featured a sunken dance floor, its features were excellent and costly food and a small mediocre orchestra of vacationing collegians.

"We can't leave things like this, can we?" he asked her over the coffee, his eyes deep in hers. Neither of them had been especially hungry despite the quality of the food. The girl fingered a spoon.

"Perhaps you were right this noon," she said. "Perhaps it is too soon. Perhaps we should wait a little before we—well, before we take any irremediable steps. This thing has been an emotional shock to both of us—Helena's dying, I mean. Perhaps we're both a little punch drunk."

"Darling," he said. It was the first time he had called her that. "You must know I've been punch drunk since I first saw you. Your walk when you came into the dining room that first night, the way you carried your head, the—well, just you."

"Perhaps you should put it to music," she said. But the curve of her lips, the softness of her eyes, denied the flipness of her remark. He winced, then shook his head.

"After all," she went on, "we have all the time in the world, and we don't really know each other very well."

"The sharing of crisis is the quickest key to the gate of friendship," he told her softly. "But friendship is not the goal—not mine with you at any rate. I don't want anything or anyone to hang over us." He paused, passed a well tailored hand across his high, rather narrow forehead.

"Nor do I," she said gravely. "But everything has happened so terribly fast." As she spoke it occurred to her that now it was she who was holding back, Marc who was pressing. Their roles had been reversed since his return from the funeral.

"I know." He sighed. "But life, death rather, can be terribly swift. When we leave here it will be for good. I for one shall not return. Wilsham is deceptive in its appearance of safety. I wouldn't want anything to happen to you, Ardis. I'm beginning to believe the place is jinxed!"

"That's asinine," she said.

"Not so silly. It's crawling with infection." His brow clouded. "Why only last summer I cut myself on a rusty nail at the beach and nearly lost a leg before I got it licked."

"I didn't know," she said, staring at the tablecloth.

MARC frowned again, picked up a knife and fork and began to fiddle with them.

"Dr. Bailey finally pulled me through," he went on. "If only he had been here when Helena was stricken! But I thought I knew how to handle infection. That's why I didn't send for a specialist."

The sequence went tumbling through her head like a kaleidoscopic technical movie. Last summer Marc had had an infection. This summer Helena. Marc was alive, Helena dead. She looked at him inquiringly.

"And you took sulfathiazole?" she asked idly.

He nodded and she felt her palms begin to sweat.

"Hate that sulfa," he said. "But it is wonderful for infection. Bailey gave me a program when he left. I hadn't quite recovered when he went away on his annual trip. Perhaps I was lucky. . . ."

"Perhaps," she said. She shuddered again. "Marc, I don't want to be a wet blanket but I'm absolutely wrung." She smiled at him a little crookedly, added, "After all, we do have all the time in the world."

He drove her back to the Inn, kissed her but once when they reached the crowded obscurity of the parking lot. She forced herself to respond but was grateful when he released her. There was, she discovered to her inner disgust, a certain not unpleasant excitement in kissing a man who might have murdered his wife.

She thought it out lying in bed. If Marc *had* killed poor Helena he had made her an accomplice, even the instrument of the crime. She, Alice Runyan, daughter of a judge and engaged to marry an attorney, could be haled into court, perhaps even sent to prison. There would be all sorts of repercussions if Marc were exposed, repercussions more unpleasant and damaging for those who loved her than for herself.

She, Alice Runyan! Only then did it occur to her that, here at Wilsham Inn, she was known as Ardis Rains, merely another vacationer. She had been careful to cover her tracks when she had decided to seek a little time of solitude. With the awareness of her alias came an idea.

She could disappear, of course, simply vanish into the security of the existence she had so summarily fled. She had written her home as New York City on the Inn register. Actually she lived in a small prosperous city many hundreds of miles further west. She could simply go home and be safe.

But Helena Ware had been kind to her. And Alice Runyan's judicial background made the thought of leaving a criminal—a murderer—at large distasteful. So far had her suspicion gone!

It would be extremely difficult to prove. In such a case foreknowledge as well as motive and opportunity would have to be shown. If only Dr. Bailey hadn't spoken to her the day before—if only Marc had not discussed his infected leg at dinner. If only—Resolutely she forced herself to shut off that idle line of thought.

Dawn was breaking before she had decided upon her course of action. Feeling thoroughly frightened, yet determined to see it through if it were at all possible, she got up and studied train and plane schedules. If she got the eight o'clock out of Wilsham Center it would bring her in to

Grand Central in time to get the afternoon plane home from La Guardia Field.

She packed carefully as was her custom. She took a leisurely bath, for there was time to kill, put on her make-up with deliberation and donned her dusty green traveling suit. Then, satisfied with her appearance, she went to the telephone and called Marc's room. She rehearsed her story in detail as she waited for his sleepy voice to answer.

"Marc, dear," she said as he came rapidly awake on recognition of her voice. "I've just had some very bad news. My brother Tony is stuck somewhere up in the North Woods miles from everywhere. He's come down with some sort of an infected arm. . . .

"Yes, I know I've never talked about him—what chance have we had to talk? I'm going to have to get up there somehow and help him. . . .

"It does seem as if we were haunted by infection, doesn't it?" She listened to his protestations of sympathy. Then came the crucial moment. If he said no, all she could do was disappear and try to forget the whole ghastly business. But if he said yes—

"Marc, last night you said something about a schedule or something that Dr. Bailey made up for you last year when you had your bad leg. I wonder if I could lift it. . . .

"Yes," she said patiently. "I've tried Dr. Bailey but he's out on an emergency case or something. At any rate he isn't in the hotel and I've got to get the eight o'clock to New York and there isn't time to wait. Does it prescribe an exact course of treatment—what to take and what not to take and all that?"

SHE waited and her hand trembled so violently that the old-fashioned receiver bumped against her ear. Then she nodded. "You're sweet, Marc. I'd love to have you drive me to the train. I'll be down in five minutes for the schedule. . . ."

He was unshaven, in his robe, when she entered. He looked a little old, a little worn around the edges, as he took both her hands in his.

"I'm so dreadfully sorry, Ardis," he said.

"It's not very nice," she replied gravely. "It's sweet of you to be so—so helpful. Have you got the thing?"

"Oh, of course—here," He pulled a double-folded piece of paper from the

pocket of his robe. "If you'll excuse me, while I shave," he said.

She helped herself to a cigarette and sat down on a chair and read the directions Dr. Bailey had written out for Marc the year before after he had cut his leg on a rusty nail. She had been right about his lack of intelligence. He certainly should have destroyed it—or perhaps he had kept it for a reason. Everything was there—dosage, water feeding, strict warning about alkalines, especially epsom salts.

The reading finished, she listened carefully. Through the bathroom door came the sounds of a shower running full blast. She looked about her for a place to put the paper. She was not going to take the eight o'clock train. Confronted by this categorical proof, she couldn't. . . .

It was mid-afternoon when the county attorney came back into his office, in which she had been sitting ever since the State Police officer had driven her there after she had had the cab driver take her to the police instead of the railroad station.

His name was Reynolds and he did not look much like her father or Alan or the other dignified men of law whom she had known. He resembled, rather, an English instructor she had had in college. His hair was straight and took unkindly to the discipline of brush and comb. He peered at her over the top of bifocal glasses, thrusting both hands into the side pockets of his tweed jacket.

"It's a good thing you came to us, young lady," he said. "We found the prescription and instructions just where you said we'd find them—in a copy of 'The Red Flamingo' on the table in the living room of Mr. Ware's suite. Dr. Bailey remembered writing it all right."

"Did Marc—Mr. Ware—" she asked, her mouth dry as dust.

"Oh, he talked after that," said Reynolds quietly. "He had to." A pause. "It was clever of you to discover that piece of paper."

"What—what did he say?" She had to know more about it.

"He was quite unkind to you, I'm afraid," said Reynolds. "Tried to blame you for the whole idea. He wasn't very gallant about it."

"Oh, dear!" She could feel the blood drain from her face.

"Please don't let it upset you, Miss Runyan." Reynolds' voice and manner were solicitous. "I have already talked to your

father, the judge. He and your fiance should be here within the hour. Since you came to us as you did, I believe we can keep your name out of it—your real name, of course."

"But I don't understand," said the girl. "I mean, as a witness, you'll have to put me on the stand when Marc—Mr. Ware is tried."

"Mr. Ware will probably not be tried for this murder," said Reynolds.

"Not be tried—for *this* murder?" She went silent as the attorney's implication sank home. Her eyes, upon his face, were wide with horror.

"That's right," said Reynolds quietly. "Mr. Ware, it seems, has been married four times, each time to some lady of means. Each of them has—died suddenly. He has not always been known as Mr. Ware. As a matter of fact we have been looking for him, quietly, you understand, for a couple of years now. The brother of his first wife finally had her body exhumed. It was badly decomposed but it was full of arsenic."

"How ghastly!" said the girl. She thought, for a moment, she was going to faint.

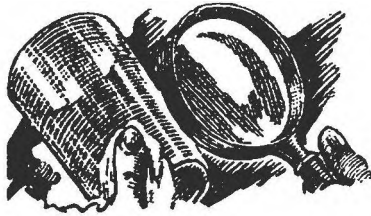
Then she rallied. Attorney Reynolds offered her a drink of brandy which she accepted gratefully.

"So you see," he went on, "it is not likely that we shall need any more than your signed statement and a knowledge of your whereabouts. We'll do our best to keep your name—your real name that is—out of it. Your father is too distinguished a jurist to be hurt by such—shall we say—ill luck?"

"I see," she said. "Yes, of course. Thank you very much." She was going to be all right after all. She had done the right thing. She didn't permit herself to think about Marc just then. It had been a very close thing.

"Perhaps," said Reynolds, "you can give me your statement right now."

"Of course," she repeated. "Then, if we're through in time, could you have someone drive me to the airport? I'd like to meet the plane."



Clues to Good Reading!

THE next issue of **BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE** will be another gala 148-page number—packed with the best in new crime fiction! In addition to *CITY OF HATE*, the Black Bat novel by G. Wayman Jones, and a smashing novelet by Carrol John Daly, there will be stories by Johnston McCulley, Norman A. Daniels, Arthur J. Burks and many others. There will also be another true story by Robert Wallace about the further exploits of Dave Carvalho. Look forward to the next **BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE**—truly tops!

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The thing spilled him, and he blacked out

WHO'S THAT KNOCKING?

By HAL WHITE

Eddie Nixon, alias Art Stoddard, believes that crime does pay!

IT WOULD have taken much more than copybook maxims and ancient adages to convince Eddie Nixon, alias Art Stoddard—alias half the telephone book—that crime didn't pay. Eddie had proved to his own recurring satisfaction that it did. And tonight, as he shut the rooming house door behind him and started across the hallway toward the stairs, his hand lifted to pat what he liked to call "the wages of sin" in his breast pocket.

This evening's wages crinkled pleasantly under his fingers, beneath the cloth of his modish, dark topcoat, and he smirked complacently. Movie houses were Eddie's meat, and this upper Broadway cinema, his first job in Manhattan, had yielded a juicy haul.

He had his foot on the lower step of the narrow, dimly-lighted stairway when he saw the man up there. Halted in the shadows, halfway down the flight, the fellow was watching him intently.

Eddie cursed between his teeth, but his patting, tell-tale hand moved on calmly, converting the suspicious gesture into a search in his pockets for cigarettes. He drew out a pack, selected one, returned the pack to his pocket. Fingers delving for matches, he stood aside, spoke with sardonic courtesy.

"After you, sir."

The one-way traffic stood a moment longer, then resumed its descent. It carried toothbrush and soapbox, and a towel was flung soggly over one bony, bathrobed old shoulder. The robe was gray. So was the hair. So were the eyes which glared from under jutting gray brows.

The man descended to floor level, and looked Eddie up and down with manifest disapproval. Eddie stared back, amused contempt in his eyes.

"New roomer?" It was an indictment. Eddie nodded. "That's right."

"Second floor, rear?"

"Right again," Eddie agreed, and

added, smiling, "You get around, don't you, mister?"

THE old man snorted. His eyes continued their fierce probing, but they couldn't see through to the packaged bills nor to the heavy automatic in its shoulder holster.

Eddie lighted his cigarette, let smoke drift into the old man's face. The reaction he got was unexpected.

"You smoke too many of those infernal things," snapped the bathrobed one. "That's why you have heart trouble."

"Heart—?" Eddie stared. Then he got it. So the guy had noticed! Eddie thought fast, covered quickly. "Oh, that!" His fingers flicked the breast pocket again. "Little palpitation now and then. That's all."

Eddie's smile stayed, but anger at the other's meddling, and at his own incaution, seethed in him. He turned toward the stairs, but his inquisitor wasn't through with him.

"Name?" he snapped.

Eddie boiled. He opened his mouth to ask the fellow who the heck he thought he was, the FBI? But caution held him, and he answered quietly. "The name," he said, "is Stoddard. Art Stoddard."

"Stoddard, eh? Hmmm. Well, Stoddard—if that's your name—just keep it in mind that this is a decent house. No drinking, no raising Cain is—"

"The landlady explained all that," Eddie cut in coldly.

"And now you hear the same warning from Mr. Henry Hawkins, your neighbor below stairs. Don't forget it." The old man turned, stalked with the dignity of a togaed Roman to a door at the left rear, and disappeared therein. Eddie saluted Mr. Henry Hawkins with a thumb to his nose, and ambled upstairs.

In his room, he sailed his hat onto the bed, and, removing his topcoat, looked around approvingly. He had rented the room the day before—and mighty lucky, with the housing situation what it was, to find a place so suited to his needs.

The building was a brownstone front on the upper west side. Respectable. Not at all the sort of place to invite police suspicion. But, if worst did come to worst, Eddie had an emergency exit to his hideout, in the form of a window opening on a nice dark alley. An easy drop for an agile young fellow. Not that he'd need it, though, for he had

never made a cleaner getaway than tonight.

He turned on his portable radio, sat down on the bed edge to count his winnings. They added up to a neat figure. Thinking of neat figures reminded him that he'd have to find some to spend this dough with—after the heat was off. Maybe he would run down to Florida for a while, until the cold weather was over. He lay back on the bed, dozed briefly, came out of it when the radio spoke the name of the movie house he had robbed. He caught most of the announcement.

"—held up earlier in the evening by a masked gunman who escaped in the traffic with heavy Saturday receipts. According to Miss Ethel Roberts, cashier, the bandit was young, slim, well-dressed in dark topcoat and blue fedora."

Eddie smirked. Nice going, sister. Only about a million such in New York.

"Miss Roberts said," the report went on, "that the eye-and-nose mask failed to conceal a thin mouth and a small cut, probably a razor nick, with a thread of dried blood, on the bandit's chin."

THE newscaster went on to other matters, and Eddie shut off the radio, crossed hastily to the washstand. The mirror confirmed the report, and Eddie frowned as he rinsed off the red. Careless. Little things like that could trap a man. He dried his chin, and observed with reassurance that now the tiny cut showed hardly at all.

He turned away from the glass, then paused, listening. With his own radio off, he could hear the one in the room below. The words were inaudible, but voice and intonation were unmistakable. Nosy old Hawkins was tuned to that same news broadcast!

Abruptly, in the middle of a sentence, the radio down there switched off. Eddie opened his door slightly, and cocked an ear. A minute of silence, then footsteps and the sound of the outer door. The old man? Going for the cops? Not likely, Eddie thought, but there was suddenly a national convention of butterflies in his stomach.

He went to the window, raised the sash and leaned out. The window below his—Hawkins' window—was dark. He'd gone to bed. Sure he had. Or had he? If he'd gone out, he would have doused his light just the same, wouldn't he?

Well, anyway, if the cops did come, they wouldn't know Eddie had been forewarned, and probably they wouldn't bother to surround the house. They would come in the front door, and Eddie would go out the back.

Or maybe he had better scram right now—but fast, while there was still time. He didn't know what was going on, that was the devil of it. And fear of the unknown had his nerve ends twittering like bedtime sparrows in a hedge. Stay or go? He compromised by leaving his exit window open, and locking his door.

He sat down, but almost at once the urgent ringing of the doorbell brought him up again as though he had been hoisted by the hair of his head. A moment, and the strident voice of the landlady called up the stairs.

"Mr. Franchini—oh, Mr. Franchini!"

"Yo-o," came the answering howl.

"Telegram for yuh."

Eddie released his held breath. See, Nixon? You're buildin' yourself a fine case of the gallopin' heebie-jeebies—for no reason a-tall. Relax, Eddie. Relax.

Knuckles riffled on his door. Eddie slid silently to the window, but a drawling voice outside the door halted him. "Got the right time, buddy? My watch has stopped."

Eddie didn't answer. This might be a ruse. He waited, his heart pounding. The knocking was not repeated, and soon Eddie heard the closing of a door down the hall. So it hadn't been a trick, after all. Heck, Eddie, relax.

He took out the automatic and inspected it. If it came to a pinch, he might have to use it. He returned it to leather, then snatched at it, testing the speed of his draw. The gun caught on his coat, and slipped out of his fingers. It hit the floor with a sharp thump.

Cursing his nervousness, Eddie picked it up. When he discovered that somehow the safety catch had been released, he felt icicles along his spine. The gun might have gone off, and brought the whole house on him—and the cops!

HIS wrist watch ticked off an interval. Then steps in the hallway. Shuffling steps, somehow sinister in their deliberate advance. Eddie's fingers tensed on the gun, but he stood poised for a fast take-off.

The steps came near, and nearer. They passed, and Eddie heard the bolt of the

bathroom door. Then the rush of running water, and, through it, a man's voice singing softly: "*Oh, give me land, lots of land, under starry skies above, Don't fence me in—*"

Angrily, Eddie slapped the gun into its holster, and cursing silently, sank down on the bed edge. Just about one more of these false alarms and he'd blow his top entirely. He sat there for what seemed a long time. The house was alive with whispery movement, but nothing happened, and Eddie's nerves kept winding up tighter and tighter.

Then it came—a peremptory knock on the door, harsh and demanding. Eddie didn't linger. He dashed to the window and legged out. He hung by his hands from the sill, and let go.

But he hadn't counted on a lurking garbage can down there, and the thing spilled him. He hit his head on something, and blacked out.

When Eddie recovered consciousness he was lying on a davenport, and the landlady and a bunch of roomers were standing around. Also present were a couple of radio cops.

"He's comin' out of it, Bill," said one cop. And then, to Eddie, "Feel able to take a little ride now, mister?"

Eddie sat up, and his denial was instinctive. "You guys got nothing on me."

"Nothin'—much," said the second cop. "Only these here innocent little trifles." He showed Eddie's gun and the packet of money. Then he turned as a big police sergeant came thrusting through the group.

"What makes, Willie?" asked the sergeant.

"Look, sarge," said the cop, "what jumped out of a window for no good reason at all—and with this stuff on him."

Wearily Eddie defended his action. "You came knocking on my door. Why shouldn't I—?"

"Us? Knockin' on your door?" Willie grinned. "Not a cop near you, mister—not till you tangled with that garbage can, and somebody called the station."

Eddie stared. "Then what—who?"

"It was me," said a rasping voice, and the prisoner's dazed eyes met Hawkins' glare once more. "I waited as long as I could stand it—and then I went up to ask you when in tarnation you were going to drop that other shoe."

"You let me go, Craddock!"
Tham demanded. "Thith it's
an outrage!"

*A famous character
returns in this,
the first of a
new series!*



THUBWAY THAM'S DEED OF MERCY

by Johnston McCulley

WEARILY "Thubway Tham"—the little pickpocket who lisped and seldom followed his nefarious profession except in the subway—yawned as he descended the rickety stairs in the lodging house conducted by Mr. "Nosey" Moore, retired burglar.

Tham was finding that this morning it was difficult for him to cast aside all symptoms of slumber and become acutely alert. A pickpocket has to be acutely alert at all times, if he knows what is good for him.

In the case of Thubway Tham, this

was doubly true. Detective Craddock, who had been outwitted by Tham many times and thus had earned the merry laughter of some of his comrades on the Force, as well as the caustic criticism of his superiors, had finally turned into a man of iron.

"Tham," he had said recently, "you're a common crook. You're the best dip in town. I like you personally, Tham. I know you lift wallets right and left, but that at times you do some good with a part of the money they hold. But people don't like to have their wallets lifted. Tham, and also there are laws against it."

"What ith the cauth of thith out-burtht, Craddock?" Tham had asked.

"My boy, I am telling you that friendship ceases here and now! I'm going to catch you with the goods and send you to the Big House for a long stretch. And I'm not foolin'!"

Tham had appreciated Craddock's grim determination to the extent of curbing his usual activities for a couple of weeks. It had been a matter of comment at Headquarters that there had been fewer reports of subway pocket-picking than there were usually.

But now Thubway Tham found himself to be a creature of necessity. He never had been noted for putting aside a few dollars for the proverbial rainy day. He did not have more than a couple of dollars cash money, and his rent was due tomorrow.

Nosey Moore, though a friendly man at most moments, had an iron-clad rule which said rent must be paid promptly and in advance. Knowing the quality of his tenants as he did, Mr. Moore could not honestly be expected to rule otherwise.

SO, THAM had decided the time had come to return to his work regardless of the threat of Detective Craddock. He would have to risk the consequences. For he had to have rent money and grub money and a little additional for cigarettes and newspapers. He was an assiduous reader of the sports pages.

When Tham reached the bottom of the stairs, he found Nosey Moore sitting behind his battered desk with a fat cigar in his mouth and an expression of gloom on his face.

"Mornin', Tham, he greeted.

Tham answered, "Mornin', Nothey. What are you lookin' tho glum about?

Did you looth mony latht night in the poker game?"

"I split about even," Nosey reported. "Tham, you know Eddie Smead, who lives in the little back room on the third floor?"

"Of courth I know Eddie Thmead. What about him?"

"Tham, he just sits in his room and coughs and coughs. I found out last night that he hasn't been out for three days, and in all that time hasn't had any food except one bottle of milk and a few crackers."

"My goodneth, what ith the matter?" Tham asked.

"He's broke, Tham—down to a few pennies. Because he's sick, I've been lettin' the rent go—it's up to ten dollars now. But he'll die, Tham, unless somethin' is done. He needs a doctor, and medicine. He should go West to the desert country, or some place like that."

"I thuppoth tho," Tham agreed.

"He's been a good man, Tham. First rate con man in his day. He was always willin' to help another right guy who was in trouble. Always liberal, Eddie was. And now he needs help, Tham."

"I thertainly with I could do thome-thin'," Tham said. "But you know how it ith with me, Nothey. Craddock ith after me, and I have to be careful. But I've got to do thome work today. My own rent ith due tomorrow, ath you know. And I'm down to a couple of dollarth. How about thome of the otherth?"

"What others?" Nosey asked him. "All the money gents are gone. The cops landed Gus and Bert and they have given all their dough to their mouth-pieces. And there's nobody in the place now with more'n ten bucks, far as I can figure. I'm willin' to help some myself, Tham, but I can't do it all."

"Ain't there any plath Eddie Thmead can be thent?"

"With his record, Tham? The charity organizations would say it served him right. Others wouldn't take him on account of his bad condition. I'd hate to see him die in the street, you might say. For a couple of hundred dollars, he could be sent west and have a few dollars left for expenses."

"I don't thee what can be done about it," Tham said.

"You can get money, Tham. There's no better dip in the world than you. One good haul, and you'd save, or at least

prolong, Eddie's life. You're his only hope. There's no first class burglar in the house now, no con man worth the name—"

"I'll do what I can," Tham interrupted. He hauled two dollar bills out of his pocket. "You take one of theth and get Eddie some milk and eggth."

"You'll need those two bucks for breakfast and subway fares," Nosey reminded him. "I'll buy Eddie a little grub, and get him some cough medicine, too—maybe call a doctor. You try to corral enough to do him some good, Tham."

"If I hadn't bought thith new raincoat, I'd have dough," Tham complained.

Tham's ordinary attire was very ordinary. But recently, in an unguarded moment, he had laid plenty of cash down for an extra-special raincoat which made the clothes beneath it look like mere rags. It had been a wild dissipation for Tham.

"I mutht have been crathy to thpend tho much for a raincoat," Tham declared. "I could have given you thome coin for Eddie. But thith coat—when I thaw it in the window it theemed to thay to me that if I bought it, it would return a profit. Thilly, huh? But that ith the way I felt."

"You'll need it today," Nosey informed him. "It's been drizzlin' since daylight, and now it's startin' to rain in earnest. Good luck to you, Tham."

Tham buttoned the new raincoat at the throat and thrust his hands into the pockets. "Thankth, Nothey," he replied, and started for the street.

After a frugal breakfast at the little restaurant he generally patronized, Tham put on his new raincoat again and went forth to meet a steady downpour. His plans were perfected. He would take the subway to Times Square, ascend to the street and fuss around for a time, and then descend into the subway again and begin his work.

It should be a good day. During a heavy rain, taxicabs were hard to pick up and more people than usual used the subways. Those people were burdened with umbrellas and dripping raincoats, were uncomfortable, jammed together in the cars, grew nervous and got their minds into a state of chaos, during which state they were not so likely to notice the clever fingers of a dip.

In front of the restaurant, as he stood

beneath the awning preparing to dart toward the nearest subway entrance, he encountered Detective Craddock. The sudden gloom which enshrouded Tham became deeper than the general gloom of the day.

"So!" Craddock said. "Who'd you kill to get that fancy raincoat? Looks like about eighty bucks."

"I bought thith coat, Craddock, and have the thaeth thlip to prove it!" Tham snapped at him.

CRADDOCK STARED hard at Tham for a moment or two before he answered.

"Maybe you bought it—but where did you get the money? That's the great mystery of the moment, Tham. But of course it's no great mystery to me. You must have lifted a fat leather, Tham. Where are you going on such a rainy day?"

"Jutht gettin' thome freth air," Tham told him.

"Thinking of taking a little ride in the subway?"

"Ath a matter of fact, yeth! Ith there any law aginht that? How do you ecthpect the thubway to make a livin' unleth people uth it?"

"And how do I expect you to make a living unless you use it?" Craddock asked, grinning. "Tham, I need fresh air, too. I think I'll walk along with you."

"I do not care for your company at prethent, Craddock," Tham replied, loftily. "I have thome theriouth thinkin' to do."

"I'll toddle along behind you, then, to keep you out of trouble. A man doing deep thinking is apt to get careless and stumble off a curb, or something."

Tham bent his head against the driving rain and went to the nearest subway entrance. He descended to the platform and caught an uptown local, and saw that Craddock had entered the same car.

At the Times Square station, Tham got off the train and ascended the stairs to the dripping street, his new raincoat buttoned up to his chin again. He crossed the street and entered a tobacco shop and bought cigarettes. Craddock continued to tail. He had meant what he had said.

Inwardly, Tham moaned and growled and succumbed to mental lamentations.

For Craddock to tail him at such a time! He was in desperate need of money. He needed it for himself, and he wanted to help Eddie Smead. Tham was always ready to aid anyone who was ill or in hard luck.

The day was ideal for Tham's work. The subway platforms and trains were jammed. Men of means who seldom rode the subway were riding it today. Well-filled wallets were waiting to be lifted.

Tham roamed around for a time beneath the awnings and watched the throng battling against the rain. Then he went back into the subway and caught an express train for downtown. It irked him considerably to see that Craddock had got into the same car.

Tham ignored him. He clung to a strap and looked around for prospective victims. He saw a couple, but they left the train at Pennsylvania Station. Tham would not have dared work on them anyhow, with Craddock only a few feet away, watching him and grinning.

As the train neared Chalmers street, Tham got nearer the door during the movement of persons jammed in the aisle. He waited until almost the last moment after the train had stopped, then got quickly through a door about to close. On the platform, he glanced back, to see Craddock behind him. It seemed that today Craddock was determined not to be dodged.

Tham went up to the street with Craddock on his heels.

"Strange part of our city for you to be in, Tham," Craddock suggested.

"Oh, I think not!" Tham replied. "I think I'll walk over to Thity Hall, Craddock, and maybe thee the mayor."

"Is he a friend of yours, Tham?"

"I have never met him perthonally," Tham explained, "but I'm a thitithen, and he will litthen to me. I am goin' to find out, Craddock, if a thitithen can't go about hith buthineth without cops petherin' him."

"Be sure you tell His Honor what your business is," Craddock warned. "You'd better be wary of prowling around City Hall, too. A lot of cops around there, Tham."

Tham battled the rainstorm again, and Craddock tailed at a short distance. In vain did Tham try to dodge him. In one door of a corner drug store and quickly out another on the side street—and there was Craddock grinning and ready to pick

up the trail. A sudden dart across the street just before the traffic signal changed—but there was Craddock hitting the curb behind him and not having a stream of heavy traffic between pursuer and pursued.

THAM began to feel baffled. He had to shake off Craddock, he told himself, and lift a leather or two. He thought of poor Eddie Smead again, to whom a few dollars would mean relief



THUBWAY THAM

from misery and perhaps longer life. He thought of his personal needs. And there was also the eternal itch to outwit Craddock and make a fool of him.

Tham entered a drug store and partook of a sandwich and cup of coffee. Craddock bought a pack of cigarettes and loitered at the cigar stand, like a cat at a mouse hole, Tham thought. Out in the street again, Tham sauntered for a block or so and then started back toward the subway.

A block from the subway entrance, Craddock was still trailing. There was a sudden bustle as people emerged from an office building, and Tham tried to dodge through the crowd and lose himself. He thrust his way through a jam in a doorway and got into the lobby of a big building and flattened himself against a wall. He saw Craddock pass the entrance and go on down the street

craning his neck and looking ahead.

Tham emerged after a short interval and shadowed the detective instead of the detective shadowing him. He had the advantage now. He dodged out of sight whenever he thought Craddock might turn and look back. But Craddock was hurrying to the subway. He thought no doubt that Tham had rushed there to catch a train.

Tham hurried into the subway also. He went down the steps carefully behind a couple of men who seemed out of place there. One was a prosperous-looking man with hair grayed at the temples. He was the fat and sleek type, a type Tham despised. It was apparent that he was much pleased with himself and his accomplishments.

His companion was younger, and seemed to be swallowing the sleek man's words with relish. He smiled and "yessed" until it made Tham sick.

"Take it when you can get it," the prosperous-looking man was saying. "Don't have any sympathy for suckers. Look at the Government! The Government affairs are in a mess. I decided to get mine while the getting was good."

"Excellent idea," the yesser agreed.

"I've gambled in grain and foodstuffs, sure. Why not? What do I care if the price of food skyrockets? Every man for himself, I say."

"Certainly," the other man agreed.

"Always be mentally alert and prepared to take advantage of others," the sleek man continued. "I've made a fortune gambling in food. If the other fellow gets it in the neck, it's his own fault. Every man for himself!"

"Yes, sir."

As they stopped at the bottom of the stairs with Tham on their heels—Tham in reality was hiding his small body behind them in case Craddock was on the platform and watching for him. The sleek man took out a wallet and opened it. Tham had a glimpse of currency as the sleek man fished out a card.

"Here," he said, giving the card to the younger man. "You may be just the sort of assistant I need for a certain project. This has the address of my private uptown office. Drop in and see me tomorrow afternoon about five."

"Thank you, Mr. Spencer. Be glad to

do that."

"Now we must battle our way into a subway train, I suppose. Confounded nuisance my limousine is up for repairs and a man can't get a taxi quickly in this rain. I'm overdue up Times Square way now. Subway is the only answer. It's quick, but I hate to ride in it. Smelly cars, smelly people—terrible!"

Tham felt his rage rising. He loved the subway. He came to a swift determination to relieve this sleek gentleman of his wallet. Ready to kick around the underdog, was he? Tham had a fleeting thought of Eddie Smead starving, coughing, for want of a few dollars.

HIS eyes narrowed and glistened as he saw his sleek prospective victim slip the wallet into the outer left hand pocket of his raincoat. A fool should know better than that, Tham thought. It was an invitation to every dip in the land.

Tham noticed, too, that the sleek one's expensive raincoat did not have diagonally-slitted pockets like Tham's own, but straight pockets without flaps—an English model, no less!

The pair started to move on with Tham close behind them.

"Express coming in, Mr. Spencer," the younger man said. "We can just make it."

They quickened their stride and got ahead of Tham. Others were hurrying to board the uptown express while some were pushing and elbowing to get out of it. Tham saw the cars were jammed.

Then Tham saw Craddock. The detective was on the platform watching. Tham dodged behind a post and watched Craddock. Passengers got out, and there was a sudden rush and jam of those on the platform to get in.

Tham waited until he thought it was the proper instant. He darted forward through the scattering crowd and got through the end door of a car and upon the platform there. From the corner of his eye, he saw Craddock rushing to another door in the car behind, the one nearest him.

The train started and roared through the tube. Craddock had made the train, no doubt. But if he was in the car behind he would have much difficulty get-

ting into this one and within touch of Thubway Tham.

Working carefully so as not to disturb people too much and attract unwanted attention, Tham neared Mr. Spencer and the young man. It took considerable time as the express rushed on through the bore.

Tho, Mithter Thpenter, you gamble in food! Tham was thinking bitterly. "And you hate the thubway, do you, Mithter Thpenter? And you have a nithe fat wallet thuffed with money you ath good ath thtrole."

He had overheard the man Spencer say he was going to Times Square, so Tham had plenty of time. Yet he got behind his prospective victim as quickly as he could. There was a slim chance he might lift that fat leather and dart out the door at Pennsylvania Station, leaving Craddock prisoner on the train as it sped on.

But he found this impossible. As the train slowed for the stop at Pennsylvania, the crowd in the aisle began surging, and Tham suddenly found several persons between himself and Mr. Spencer. He clung to his strap and fought to retain his footing, and there was no opportunity for his clever fingers to do their work.

The train started on for the short run to Times Square. Tham got into position again with some difficulty. If he could press against Mr. Spencer in that jam, his deft fingers would do their work swiftly. He would get the wallet and put it into his own right-hand raincoat pocket. His fingers would extract the currency, and at the earliest opportunity he would drop the empty wallet—ditch the leather—so incriminating evidence would not be found on his person if some alert law officer made a sudden and unexpected grab. A wallet is easily identified, but currency of ordinary denominations is not.

Tham flexed his fingers in the pocket of his new raincoat, then withdrew his hands. The train was commencing to slow down for the Times Square stop. As the doors slid open at the station and the crowd surged forward to get out upon the platform, Tham pressed against Mr. Spencer, who was wedged between

[Turn page]

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his companion and a jittery fat woman who was afraid the train would start on before she could leave it.

Tham generally waited until his victim started to move, for a man thrusting his way through a crowd does not feel the touch of an alien hand as quickly as one standing quietly. The aisle movement began again, and Tham crowded on Mr. Spencer's heels. They were in the doorway when Tham did his work.

THAM got the wallet easily enough and thrust it into his right-hand raincoat pocket and clutched it there. He elbowed his way past his victim and others and got on the platform. And as he glanced around swiftly his eyes encountered those of Detective Craddock—and Tham realized that Craddock had witnessed his criminal act!

He did not have time to extract the currency and ditch the leather. Craddock would pounce upon him. Tham pretended he had not seen the detective, and started along the platform as swiftly as he could travel without actually running, making for the nearest stairs.

Fear clutched at Tham. Was this the end? Would Craddock triumph and have him sent to the big house up the river? Tham felt he would soon die if compelled to suffer incarceration. And he would have failed in his attempt to aid poor Eddie Smead! Why must it happen this time?"

"Tham! Stop! I want you!"

That was Craddock's voice coming from behind him, a roaring voice filled with determination. Tham pretended he did not hear. He reached the bottom of the stairs, where there was a jam of people, and he was compelled to stop for an instant. He bumped against a metal trash can that stood against the wall, bumped for an instant against the wall, shuffled his feet, and then went on.

Craddock grabbed him as Tham came to the upper open air. Craddock thrust him aside, gripping Tham's arms and thus holding both his hands in the pockets of his raincoat, and slammed Tham back against the wall of the building.

"Got you!" Craddock said. "Knew I would some day, Tham. This is curtains

for you, old boy. Since you've never been convicted before, you'll probably get a short sentence. But you'll have a taste of prison life, Tham, and I've an idea that may make you reform. You're not the type to stand it, Tham."

"What ith all thith thermon?" Tham demanded. "Let go of my armth, Craddock!"

"Oh, no, boy! I saw you get that wallet and thrust it into your raincoat pocket. And you haven't taken your hand out of that pocket since, for I've had my eyes on you. That wallet is still in your pocket, Tham, clutched in your hand. I've got you with the goods!"

"Craddock, you thilly ath!"

"We'll see who's the silly ass, Tham."

Seeing the minor disturbance, an uniformed policeman had stopped beside them. He recognized Craddock as a Headquarters man.

"Need help, Craddock?" he asked.

"Not to handle this small fry—but I need a witness," Craddock replied. "You hear what I was saying?"

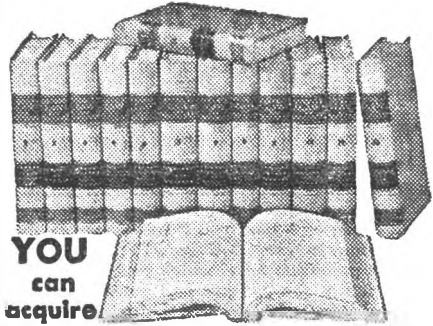
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"You let me go, Craddock!" Tham demanded. "Thith ith an outrage!"

"So it's an outrage to search a dip seen in the act of theft?" Craddock said. "How quaint! Lift your hands out of your pockets."

Tham's face was an inscrutable mask as he complied with the order. With his back against the wall of the building, he took his hands out of his pockets and raised them high. With an expression of gloating in his face, Craddock's hand dived into the right-hand pocket of Tham's new raincoat.

The expression on Craddock's face changed swiftly. It was that of a man baffled at first, and then of a man enraged. He had found Tham's two raincoat pockets empty.

"Nothin' in my pocket but my fitht," Tham was muttering.

CRADDOCK tried to fight back his anger. He had watched Tham from the subway car behind the one in which Tham was riding. He had made sure Tham did not leave the train at Pennsylvania Station. At Times Square, Craddock had popped out of his car quickly to watch, and had seen Tham take that wallet. He knew Tham had not taken his hand out of his pocket. But the wallet was not there.

Craddock ran his hand into the pocket again—and again his face changed.

"What's this. No bottom in the pocket," Craddock said.

"There ith tho!" Tham replied with indignation. "Thith ith a new coat and it thet me back many buckth. That ith a thlit pocket, you thilly ath! If it ith rainin', you can put your hand through the thlit at the top of the pocket, and get into the pocket of your other coat underneath, and get out thomethin, without takin' your hand out and gettin' it wet."

"Unbutton your coat!" Craddock

snapped. His rage was increasing, and he had a suspicion that the patrolman was laughing at him, though not outwardly.

Tham unbuttoned his coat, opened it and spread it wide. Craddock's swift hands searched him well. Craddock found a dollar bill and a little small change, and that was all.

"You had that wallet," Craddock accused. "I saw you get it and put it into your pocket, and you didn't take your hand out of the pocket. You didn't slip it through the slit and put it into the pocket of your suit coat, either."

"Maybe your eyeth are bad," Tham suggested. "If you are done, Craddock, I'd like to button my coat again. Thith drithel ith gettin' me wet. I may catch a cold and get pneumonia and be thick for a long time, or even die."

"Button up!" Craddock said, and he meant both coat and lips. "I'm not done with you, Tham! I'm going to tail you till I catch you right! Don't forget it!"

Craddock glared at him, glared at the policeman, and turned to stalk up the street.

"You'd better move on, too," the policeman told Tham. "I don't like dips on my beat. But I'm glad you put one over on Craddock."

Tham had been watching Craddock, known to him to be a tricky customer. But as Tham moved on he saw Craddock still striding up the street through the crowd. Tham went around the corner and at a cigar stand bought cigarettes he

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did not need, and watched a time longer. Then he went down another flight of stairs and so came to the platform of the subway station again, though to a different part of it.

Watching carefully, he went along the long platforms until he reached the one where he had left the uptown express. He waited until a train came in and a crowd made for the stairs, and joined the crowd. When he came to the bottom of the stairs, where stood the trash can against the wall, Tham stopped, bent over against the wall, and pretended to be fastening a shoe lace. His right hand darted out and got something which he slipped into his raincoat pocket. As he walked back along the platform, his fingers worked at a wallet, extracted currency and stuffing it through the slit and into the pocket of his suit coat.

Tham walked briskly back along the platform. As he passed another trash can, he tossed the empty wallet into it without stopping, his movement that of a man disposing of a chewing gum wrapper or an empty cigarette package.

Not until he was far from Times Square did his breathing return to normal. At the lodging house of Nosey Moore, he went up the stairs to where Nosey sat behind his desk perusing a newspaper.

"Wet out, Tham?" Nosey asked.

"Yeth." Tham winked. Nosey arose and stretched, opened the door of a little room behind him, and beckoned Tham inside. After Tham had entered, Nosey locked the door.

Tham examined the contents of his coat pocket. The loot was a few dollars less than five hundred.

"Tham, you did it!" Nosey said. "I had a doctor for Eddie Smead, and he says Eddie has to have quick attention."

"You give Eddie Thmead thith four hundred," Tham said. "That'll take him wetht where he can get over hith thick-neth. Take out fifty more for yourthelf for rent, Nothey, and the retht will do me for thome time. Eathy come, eathy go."

"You got it!" Nosey repeated. "And you didn't have to pawn your fancy coat to do it."

"Pawn thith coat?" Tham said. "Thith ith a lucky coat. I'm goin' to keep thith

coat ath long ath two threadth of it hang together."

He lighted a cigarette, left the room with Nosey, and ascended the rickety stairs to his own room. He felt the glow of a man who has done a good deed. He chuckled a little as he remembered how he had dropped the wallet through the slit in his raincoat and down between that and his suit coat, and had kicked the wallet behind the trash can, to be retrieved later.

OFF THE RECORD

(Concluded from page 9)

without hesitation that it is the best detective book I have ever read. I think it would be a good idea to publish a portrait of the Black Bat on the cover. Being a veteran, I also agree with T. P. Malone of Phoenix, Arizona, that G. Wayman Jones should write a story about the cheap racketeers who prey on veterans. Keep the good stories coming our way!—John F. Chisholm, New Glasgow, N. S., Canada.

Thanks, everyone, for all the fine letters. We'll be back next issue with many, many more. Why not plan now to have yours among those we publish in this column? Write and tell us your opinion of the stories in this issue, or if you have any ideas as to how BLACK BOOK could be improved, send them along too.

Address all letters and postcards to The Editor, BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. See you all next issue, and until then—happy reading!

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