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**BLACK BOOK**

AND

# DETECTIVE

A THRILLING  
PUBLICATION



Featuring  
A Tony Quinn Mystery Novel  
**THE DANGEROUS  
CORPSE**

She was beautiful — but dead  
By **G. WAYMAN JONES**

**MURDER STALKS  
THE BIG TOP**

A novelet of  
crime's carnival  
By **H. C. BUTLER**

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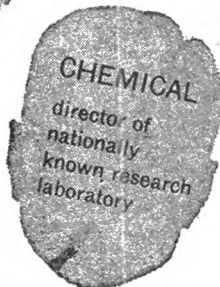
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# BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

SPRING, 1951



## ● A FULL-LENGTH NOVEL

- THE DANGEROUS CORPSE** G. Wayman Jones 9  
*Who killed the girl in the ramshackle room?*

## ● A COMPLETE NOVELET

- MURDER STALKS THE BIG TOP** H. C. Butler 84  
*Myra was a sexy number—and her number was up*

## ● SHORT STORIES

- THE UNARMED SNIPER** Len Zinberg 80  
*There's more than one way to skin a cat—or murder a man*
- THE PURSE** Harold Helfer 100  
*A church is no place to break the 8th Commandment*
- A LITTLE PSYCHOLOGY** Arnold Grant 103  
*Using your noodle may be dangerous—even deadly!*
- SEE YOU AT THE MORGUE** Russell Branch 107  
*—but don't tell them I sent you!*

## ● SPECIAL FEATURES

- THE CRIME QUIZ** The Old Sarge 83  
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*Before you reach for the DDT—read this!*
- THE READER WRITES** The Mailbag 102  
*Here's where you can speak your piece and no holds barred*
- MURDER BY EXPERTS** A Guide 105  
*What's new in murder and crime fiction?*
- WHAT'S YOUR ALIBI?** Various 106  
*Crooks are the craziest people—and this proves it!*

Also See "Off the Record" on Page 6



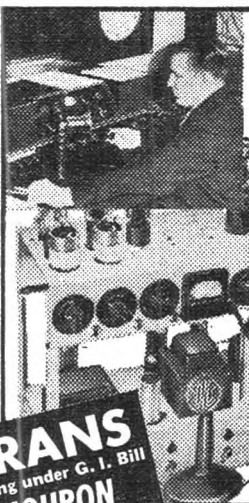


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"While learning, made \$5 to \$10 a week in spare time. Now have a profitable spare time shop."—L. ARNO, Pontiac, Mich.



"I accepted a position as Radio and Television Technician... was promoted to manager of Television Service and Installation."—L. HAUGER, San Bruno, California.



"Have my own shop. Am authorized serviceman for five manufacturers and do servicing for dealers."—P. MILLER, Maumee, O.



"Four years ago, a bookkeeper on a hand-to-mouth salary, am now a Radio Engineer ABC network."—N. H. WARD, Ridgefield, Park, New Jersey.



"When I enrolled, had no idea it would be so easy to learn. Have equipped my shop out of spare time earnings. am clearing about \$40 to \$60 a month."—J. D. KNIGHT, Denison, Tex.



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**The ABC's of SERVISING**

**How to Be a Success in RADIO-TELEVISION**



# OFF THE RECORD

## A DEPARTMENT WHERE READERS AND THE EDITOR MEET

**T**HE thing about detective stories that makes them so interesting is their unexpected quality. People accustomed to monotonous, day after day routine, in which nothing out of the ordinary ever happens, get welcome relief by turning to crime fiction in which the unusual, the unforeseen, and the baffling occur with unswerving regularity.

In *THE DANGEROUS CORPSE*, the Tony Quinn novel in this issue, for example, there are two unexpected twists right at the start which captured our imagination and transported us far from the routine of everyday life. First, there is the girl, flawlessly beautiful and carefully dressed—but dead!

### A Second Surprise

Then there is the strange circumstance of a girl of obvious means and refinement being in this verminous room on a depressing slum street. Why?

But unusual occurrences in crime are not confined to stories. We like this item, which we think is to the point. Some fifteen years back two detectives received word that an ex-convict they were after could be found in a certain tavern. When they reached the tavern, they were instantly spotted by the ex-con, William Webb, who pulled his gun and began firing. The two detectives pulled their guns and returned fire.

Enter the unusual:

The first shot by Detective Fred C. Tapscott ended the fight then and there. For it lodged—in the muzzle of the convict's gun!

In the entire history of police activity in this country, this is said to be the only instance where a bullet entered the muzzle of another man's gun.

Bullets have landed just about every other place, though—corset stays, wooden legs, and—

match this: just the other day Morris Maisus, Baltimore tavern keeper, considered himself very lucky to get hit in the mouth by a hold-up's bullet. All the bullet did was dent his upper plate!

Which leads us right up to the full-length Tony Quinn novel featured in our next issue—*THE KILLER WHO WASN'T*, by G. Wayman Jones.

This story is unusual in many ways, but particularly outstanding is the calm and dispassionate way in which George Emerson gets himself tabbed as a killer.

### Just a Friendly Murder

Emerson is with four of his "friends" when the killing occurs. One friend blithely takes a gun out of his pocket, shoots another in cold blood. Then all the survivors calmly tell George that he is the killer and ask him why he ever wanted to do such a rash thing. They actually seem to believe that George really did the shooting, though anyone who wasn't blind could see that wasn't the case at all.

The reason for the murder is soon obvious—millions of dollars are at stake. But though George knows who the killer is and exactly how the deed was committed, it's another thing to prove himself innocent. All of which gives the *Black Bat* one of the hottest crime cases in his career and—here goes that word again—one of the most *unusual*!

The *Black Bat* is up against not one, but three wily killers. The stakes are high and a minor item like one murder more or less won't stop them. The title again: *THE KILLER WHO WASN'T*. So get set for some fast action and some dizzy surprises.

There'll be many other frank, realistic stories of crime, mystery and clever detection in our next issue in addition to—*THE KILLER WHO WASN'T*.

# UNSUSPECTED POWER



## The Mysterious Influence In The Air You Breathe!

**T**HE SOUL OF THE UNIVERSE is in the air you breathe. Deposited in your blood—with each inhalation you take—is *the intelligence* that directs the course of the planets through the misty reaches of space, and the strange phenomenon of life itself.

What is it that causes your heart to beat, your lungs to expand and contract? What mind directs *the cells* of your being, each in their purpose—some to create bone, others tissue and hair? What *consciousness* pervades these vibratory *globules of life* and gives them awareness of their Cosmic function?

Are you one of the millions who have looked *beyond yourself* for some external Divine Power or agency? Have you searched in vain for some outer sign or word of Divine assurance when in doubt or in need? Now learn of the *unsuspected power* that exists in every simple breath—and that becomes *part of you*. The ancient Egyptians believed that the essence of life was borne on the wings of the air. The Bible pro-

claims that with the first breath man becomes not just an animated being—but a *"living soul."* Try *this experiment*, and prove a Vital Life Force exists in the air. When you are in pain or despondent take a deep breath. Hold it as long as comfortable—then notice the momentary relief.

### This Amazing Free Book

Would you seriously like to know how to draw upon this Intelligence of the Cosmic, with which the air is permeated? You can use it to awaken the creative powers of your mind, and for making life an experience of *achievement*. Use the coupon below for a free copy of the book, "The Mastery of Life." It tells how in the privacy of your home *you may learn* to use these simple, useful, *natural laws*.

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rule to get  
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became mistress  
to a man whom  
she hated!

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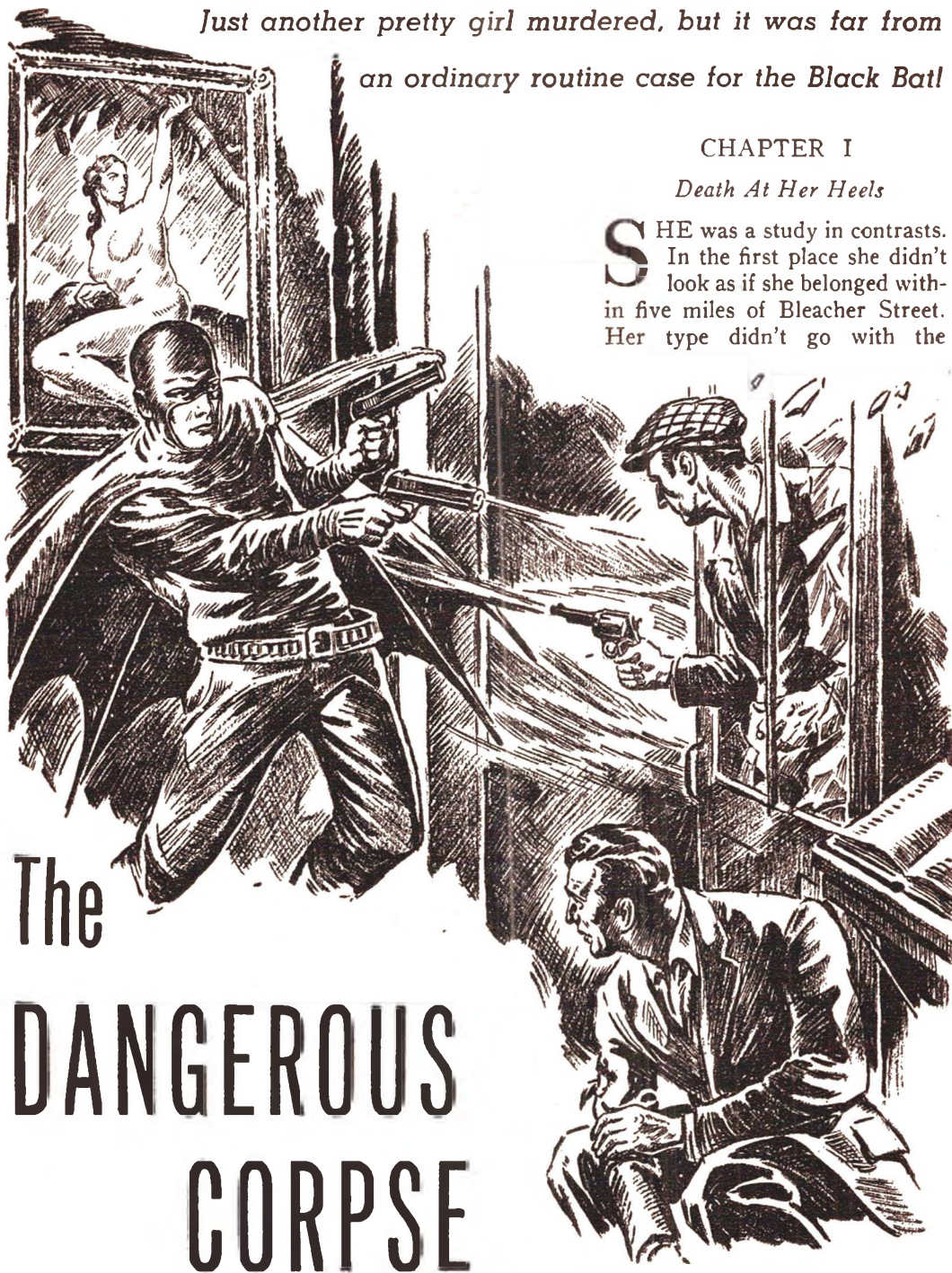
# A Tony Quinn Novel by G. WAYMAN JONES

*Just another pretty girl murdered, but it was far from  
an ordinary routine case for the Black Bat!*

## CHAPTER I

### *Death At Her Heels*

**S**HE was a study in contrasts. In the first place she didn't look as if she belonged within five miles of Bleacher Street. Her type didn't go with the



# The DANGEROUS CORPSE

# Tony Quinn and His Aides Face the Sinister

ramshackle buildings, the cheap stores, eating places and dives. In the second instance, while her dress was inexpensive, it was neat and clean. And her hair was carefully arranged, as if an expert hairdresser had handled it. Her skin was flawless, and she was strikingly beautiful.

As she passed a corner, two men whistled and made a few remarks. She never turned her head or paid them the slightest attention. They slunk away, as if they somehow recognized that they'd made a mistake.

She kept studying the store windows, until she saw what she looked for across the street. The window sign read:

MAURICE ROBARD  
SCULPTURE SUPPLIES

She crossed the street but hesitated a moment before she entered. She studied her reflection in the surprisingly clean window.

She saw a girl of no more than twenty-four. Her hair was auburn, her eyes a clear blue. She had a slightly tilted nose, lips that required only a dab of color. Her chin was rounded and there were not yet any crepe lines on her throat. Only one thing detracted from her fresh beauty. Fine lines were faintly visible around her eyes. There were deep blue pockets beneath them, as if she hadn't slept well in weeks. And the eyes themselves lacked the sparkle they must have once had, not too long ago.

She finally steeled herself, opened the shop door and walked in. The place was cluttered with old busts, a few mauled statues, sculptors' tools and equipment. A man, apparently Robard, the proprietor, parted a rather dirty curtain which separated the store from some sort of a back room workshop.

Robard was a small man with a full beard and happy crinkles near the corners of his eyes. He came forward, wiping his hands on a short apron which he wore around his middle.

"Yes, Mademoiselle?" He bowed slightly.

"I'm looking for someone," she said. "I'm sure he—well, dabbles in sculpting and I

thought he might have come in here looking for supplies."

"Assuredly I will help mademoiselle," Robard said, and bowed again, "if she will but tell me this man's name."

"I—I'm not sure of his name," she faltered. "You see, he may be using another one. But he is known as Whitey. Because his hair was very blond."

"A gentleman with very blond hair," Robard frowned. "There was one—"

"Oh, please!" she cried eagerly. "Whitey is just six feet tall, slender, about thirty-five. Handsome as—"

"No, no mademoiselle!" Robard waved his hands excitedly. "Do not get up your hopes. The one I refer to was short and fat and quite ugly—like a toad."

**H**ER look of hope vanished quickly, as if it had been magically wiped away.

"Oh! Then he can't be the man I'm looking for. He's quite an amateur, you see. He wouldn't be looking for the tools and equipment some professional might be seeking."

"I am sorry," Robard said. "Very sorry, for I can see this gentleman means much to you. If I could help, I would be most happy. But I cannot."

"I'm sorry too," she said. "Thank you, anyway. You've been kind."

"It was nothing. Good-by, Mademoiselle."

"*Au revoir*," she said smoothly and easily. It was clear that she hardly realized she had spoken French, and her pronunciation was perfect.

Robard watched her go, went to the window and looked out. She walked slowly down the street, with the steps of someone who had lost all hope. Robard wagged his head, rubbed his beard, then shrugged. He had work to do.

The girl walked several more blocks, then stepped into a doorway. She opened her purse, counted the few bits of silver left in it and took out a tissue-paper wrapped package.



# Challenge of International Dealers in Crime!

She removed the paper and a necklace glistened in the late afternoon sunlight. She sighed, headed for the pawnbroker's shop half a block further on and walked in. She was no stranger in these places. She went up to the wire cage and dropped the necklace on the small counter.

"I want all I can get on this," she said in

"It's worth than ten times that much," she told him. "But I know you can't get full value for it either. Four hundred is fair enough. I'd like it in bills no larger than twenties."

He nodded, laid a ticket before him and asked her name. She hesitated for only a moment. Then she said, "Beatrice Simmons."



**THE BLACK BAT**

a flat voice. "It's my own property. It hasn't been stolen."

The pawnbroker screwed his loupe over his right eye, squinted through it and then looked up.

"I can believe that, lady," he said. "If this had been stolen, the cops would have posted it long ago. It's a Tiffany creation, ain't it?"

"Yes," she said simply.

"Three hundred," the pawnbroker said. "So if you come back, it won't be so hard to redeem."

"I won't be back," she declared.

"Four hundred then?"

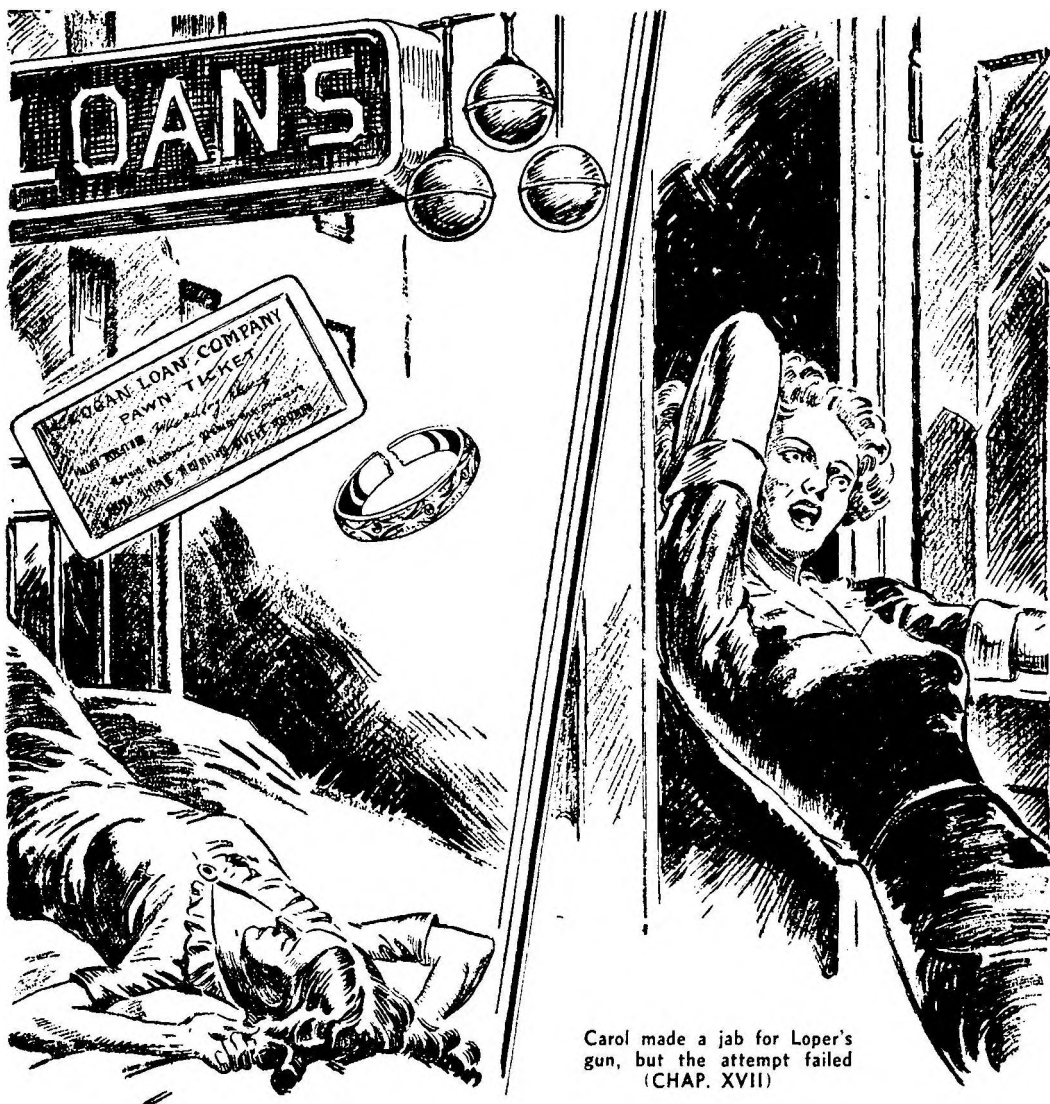
"I live at Two-three-three Glenrock Avenue."

The pawnbroker wrote down the information, tore off the stub from the ticket and slid it across the counter. Then he went to his safe, took out a metal cash box and counted out four hundred dollars in fives, tens and twenties.

She took the money, folded it carefully and put it in her purse.

"Thank you very much," she said and left the shop.

Like Robard, the dealer in sculptors' supplies, the pawnbroker was curious. After she walked away, he hurried to the window and watched her. She continued half a block,



Carol made a jab for Loper's gun, but the attempt failed (CHAP. XVII)

crossed the street in the middle of the block and climbed the concrete stairs to a brownstone front rooming house. She took a key from her handbag and unlocked the door.

The pawnbroker shrugged. Like the rest of them, she'd given a phony name and address. He checked the necklace again and then went through all the police notices for the last three months. There was nothing in any of them which even remotely concerned this necklace. The pawnbroker put it away in the safe.

Displaying that bauble in this neighbor-

hood was like inviting crooks to come in.

But the pawnbroker didn't see the girl come out of the rooming house again, less than five minutes later. She turned in the opposite direction and walked slowly away, as if she'd spent days upon days of doing the same thing. About a dozen blocks north she came to a lunch wagon sitting in the middle of a vacant lot and looking dwarfed and flimsy beside the tall buildings all around it.

She pushed back the sliding door, entered and sat down at a counter stool. The coun-



terman was over fifty, bald, red-faced and in his shirt sleeves. But he greeted her politely. Everyone did, it seemed.

"I'd like coffee and an egg sandwich, well done," she said listlessly. "And have you seen Whitey lately?"

"Whitey?" the counterman wrinkled his forehead. "Who do you mean, lady?"

"Oh, everybody calls him Whitey," she said. "I know he comes in here sometimes."

"Maybe. But a guy called Whitey is either pale as an ex-con or he's got white hair. I don't have any customers like that."

"I must have made a mistake," she said.

**T**HE counterman shrugged, turned around and started preparing the sandwich. When the egg was set on one side, he flipped it over.

Then he spoke without turning.



"You want me to salt and pepper it lady, or do you want to do that?"

There was no reply. He wheeled around. The girl was gone. On the counter lay a dollar bill. The counterman heaved a long sigh, dumped the egg in the garbage bucket and put the dollar in his pocket.

It was much later before the girl returned to that neighborhood and now her steps were tired, her whole body sagged with fatigue. She climbed the stairs again, let herself in and walked up two more flights. She fitted the same key to a rather battered door, entered the shabby room and snapped on the light. Then she came to an abrupt stop.

"Joe!" she half-shouted. "Joe!"

The man who'd been lying on the narrow bed, smoking cigarettes and scuffing them out on the wall, slung his legs to the floor. He was a brutal-looking man with a fat neck, jowls and mean little eyes.

"Hi-ya, babe," he said tonelessly. "Never expected I'd catch up with you again, huh? Makin' a sucker outa me the way you did. No dame does that, understand? No dame or anybody else plays me for a sucker."

She wasn't aware of the fact that her voice was raised. "Joe, I can explain!"

"Sure you can," he shouted. "All dames can explain. I thought you were kinda different, but you ain't. You're just smarter, that's all. Well this, baby, is the kiss-off."

"Joe." She backed away as he advanced toward her. "Joe, I wanted your help. I need it."

"Yeah," he growled. "Oh, sure."

She screamed again. "Joe, don't hurt me. Don't!"

Somewhere down the hall a door opened and a heavy male voice yelled:

"Shuddup!"

The big man paid no attention to him. He had maneuvered her into a corner and his thick arms were extended, the fingers hooked.

"I'm gonna teach you that nobody double-crosses me. Not for no reason whatever. When I get through with you, you'll know what I mean."

"Joe Keeley!" she screamed at the top of her voice. "Joe—no! Please!"

Another door opened down the hall and

this time a female voice, as strident as the girl's shouted:

"Get a divorce, willya, and let decent people sleep."

The girl suddenly dodged to one side and raced for the door. She had her hand on the knob when he reached her. He seized her arm, tore her hand away from the door. He sent her reeling backward. Suddenly she seemed to change. She came at him and clawed a crimson streak down the side of his face. He reached for her. His hands found her throat and the big fingers began squeezing. He was livid with rage.

The girl clawed at him again. She fastened a grasp on his hair and yanked hard. But those hands never relaxed their grip. Her arms weakened and dropped to her sides. Still holding her by the throat, the big man carried her a few steps and then hurled her onto the bed.

He scowled at her. "Maybe that'll teach you. Yeah—so you won't forget again. Now come on, snap out of it."

She didn't move. He bent over her and slapped her face lightly. The head turned to one side and stayed there. Something about her eyes made him gasp. He picked up one limp hand and pressed a finger against her wrist. There was no pulse. He placed an ear against her chest.

When he straightened up, there was horror on his face.

"Dead!" he gasped. "But I didn't mean to kill you. Honest, I didn't mean that."

He backed away. Once he stared at his hands. Then he wheeled and ran for the door. He got it open, dashed into the corridor. Someone was coming up the steps. He forced himself to slow down. He felt the sting of the scratches on his face and reached for a handkerchief. He dabbed at the shallow wounds.

The man who left the stairway and came along the hall was a drab-looking man. He merely glanced at the big fellow and kept on going. The killer started down the steps. By the time he reached the first landing he was running.

He left the house and picked up more speed when he hit the sidewalk. He turned the next corner and saw a blue uniform. He

skidded to a stop before the cop saw him and when they passed, the killer was ambling along, trying his best to muster a whistle he hoped sounded cheery. The cop paid no attention to him.

The killer came to an alley. He darted down it, his running steps making echoes which grew fainter and fainter until they passed out of existence. Until they were dead—but not as dead as the girl back in that cheap rooming house.

## CHAPTER II

### *Routine Case*



THE big police car swooped down on the scene, its siren wailing. The man beside the driver pinned a badge to his coat lapel. It read "INSPECTOR." He was a squat, hard-bitten man with a graying mustache and shrewd eyes. He sported a brand new gray fedora with a gay feather in the band, but the rest of his clothes looked as if they had been tailored by the Bethlehem Steel Company. His shoes were square-toed, comfortable, and needed a shine.

When he stepped out of the car, two uniformed men snapped salutes and threw their shoulders back a little.

"Good evening, Inspector McGrath," greeted one of them.

McGrath nodded. "Hello, Brady. What have we got?"

"Girl on the second floor. Strangled. Lieutenant Grogan is getting it all lined up, sir. Looks like one of them things."

"Uh-huh," McGrath grunted.

He climbed the steps wearily. It seemed to him that he had climbed at least a million steps just like these, and always on the same mission. On the second floor he found Lieutenant Grogan holding forth. With him was a drab-looking man, a stout woman in a pink negligee that had seen better days, and a red-necked man of about fifty-five who was in his undershirt and didn't seem to mind

being half-dressed.

Grogan also saluted. "She's upstairs, Inspector. Middle of the hall. There's a patrolman on duty. We're waiting for the M.E."

"Okay," McGrath said. "What's it about?"

The woman spoke before Lieutenant Grogan could open his mouth.

"I heard them fightin'!" she broke in eagerly. "Yeah, sure—like a couple wildcats. I yelled for 'em to cut it out. Gets so a decent person can't get a night's sleep around this old fleabag."

"What's your name?" McGrath demanded.

"Minnie Fay," the stout woman said, and hurried right on without taking a breath. "I heard the girl yellin' at him. Tellin' him not to hit her. Anyways it sounded like that."

"Who was the guy?" McGrath asked. "Do you know? Her husband, maybe?"

"She didn't have no husband far as I knew," the neighbor replied. "She yelled the name of Joe. I heard that much."

"Joe, huh?" McGrath sighed. "A big help." He turned to the red-faced, shirtless man. "Okay—who are you?"

"Me? Oh, I just happen to live two doors away from here. . . . Say, she wasn't a bad kid neither. Used to see her come and go. Wasn't here long, she wasn't. Maybe a week or ten days. Never had no boy friends. Didn't bring anybody home, if you know what I mean."

"I know," McGrath said wearily. "Well, what did you hear?"

"I heard her yell Joe, too."

"Did you see anybody?"

"Nope. I hollered for them to shut up. I didn't see nobody."

"You're a big help, too," McGrath grumbled and turned to the drab-looking little man. "How about you?"

The little fellow apparently was nervous. His slate-gray eyes shifted from side to side and he kept clenching and unclenching his hands. His prominent Adam's apple bobbed up and down.

"I—my name is—Benny. Benny Loper. I room here. I was coming home. I didn't

hear anything. Not a word."

"Then what are you doing here now?" McGrath demanded.

"Well, I—I think I passed the murderer in the hall," Loper said. "I'm pretty sure he came out of the room where the girl was found dead. Like I told the lieutenant, he was a big man. Nobody I'd like to tangle with. And he looked scared."

"Ever see him before?" McGrath demanded.

"No." Benny Loper shook his head. "No, I'm sure I didn't. But I'd know him if I saw him again."

Lieutenant Grogan thought it was about time he earned his pay. "I've got a full description, Inspector," he put in.

"Good," McGrath said. "When was the body found?"

Grogan consulted his notes. "Loper here says when he got home at nine-fifty that he saw this heavy-set man, but he hadn't got here in time to hear any yelling, so he went to his own room down the hall. He didn't hear any more until he heard the landlady yelling—that was at about eleven-fifteen when she had gone upstairs to install a new bulb in a hall socket. She had seen the girl's door ajar and looked in. The girl was lying across the bed."

"Okay," McGrath said. "Let's have a look."

**H**E trudged up the remaining flight, found the girl's room and walked in. He glanced at the body and gave it a quick double take. Even in death it was clear that this girl didn't belong in this dive. McGrath clucked his tongue in mild sympathy. Then he scanned the room.

Bureau drawers were opened and their contents flung on the floor. A chair was overturned and its bottom ripped out, leaving the springs protruding. Even a couple of cheap pictures had been wrenched off the walls and thrown to the floor.

McGrath walked around the bed. He stepped on something hard, moved his foot and bent down to pick up a pair of fine cutting pliers. He puckered his lips at the sight of them. Then he bent over the corpse and examined the girl's hands, without touching

them. On the middle finger of the left hand was a deep gouge, but no blood smeared the wound. The flesh was indented as if a much too tight ring had been worn there for years.

Thoughtfully McGrath rubbed the back of his neck, walked over to the cheap dresser and bent down to examine the clothing which had been carelessly scattered over the floor. He turned some of it over with the butt end of a pencil. There were labels on some of the garments. The names on the labels were those of expensive stores.

McGrath went over to the closet and opened the door. There was a suitcase on the floor, the gaudy labels on it proof that it had been checked on liners, and in famous hotels.

For a moment he stared through the window at the drab wall across the airshaft. Finally he walked back to the bed and stood looking down at the girl.

"I'm sorry, kid," he muttered softly. "You didn't belong here and I know it. Whoever you are, whatever brought you here, I'm going to find out. And I'm going to find the punk who killed you."

He walked away, threw open the door and squared his shoulders.

"Where's a telephone?" he bellowed.

The frantic landlady who had just put in an appearance, excitedly beckoned to him, motioning toward the wall phone down the hall. McGrath stalked to it and dialed a number he well knew, since it was the number of the special attorney on whom he had long since learned to depend in his most puzzled moments, even though that oracle was a blind man, and between the two of them there existed a sort of armed truce.

While the Inspector waited for an answer, he glanced around at the landlady who had followed him, and at the several partly opened doors through which heads appeared.

"Okay!" he bellowed again. "What do you think this is—a circus? You—landlady—go down to the next floor. Lieutenant Grogan wants to talk to you. Beat it!"

She scampered away. Over the wire a soft, silken voice spoke a greeting in McGrath's ear.



"Hello, Silk," the Inspector said. "This is McGrath. Let me speak to Quinn. It's important."

When Anthony Quinn, Special District Attorney, came on the wire, McGrath said: "Tony, I got a puzzler. Girl about twenty-three or so, a real beauty, got herself strangled in a flea trap on Bleacher Street. It looked routine at first, but there's a few angles I don't like. She's quality stuff, understand? She didn't belong here. Want to come down and—ah—sort of—ah—"

"Look around?" Quinn finished for him, and chuckled. "Of course, Mac. If you think it's unusual, it must be. I'll be down to look around, even though my eyes are in Silk's head. Let's have the address, and give me about fifteen minutes to get there."

McGrath completed his call, at once returned to the murder room, went inside and closed the door. As he entered the room he took off his hat and he couldn't remember the last time he had done that out of respect for an unknown, unidentified corpse. Again he examined the dead girl's hands. He saw then what he had not seen before—that there were several strands of dark brown hair between her clenched fingers, and blood on her finger tips.

He knew what that meant.

Kneeling beside the bed he took a knife from his pocket, spread a piece of paper on the floor and gently scraped the underside of the girl's fingernails. Then he carried the paper over to the dresser. By the light of a small lamp there he saw that he had collected fragments of skin.

Stalking to the door, McGrath bellowed for Lieutenant Grogan who came up the stairs on the run.

"This girl scratched the guy who killed her," McGrath said. "Snatched some hair out of his blasted head, too. The hair is dark brown. Go through this trap from top to bottom, see everybody in it and look for scratched faces. Snap it up."

GROGAN hurried away to carry out the order. McGrath returned to the dresser and carefully folded the particles of skin and the strands of hair into the paper. While he was doing this, he noticed that the soiled



McGRATH

dresser scarf was raised a trifle, as if something square was hidden beneath it. Looking under the scarf he found a pawn ticket. McGrath grunted in satisfaction. The killer had searched this room for something and this could well be what he had wanted.

The pawn ticket was dated this same day and had come from a pawnshop that was just down the street.

Leaving the room, a patrolman on duty outside told McGrath a couple of Homicide detectives had arrived. One of them, climbing the stairs, saluted McGrath.

"Collins, sir," he murmured. "Attached to Lieutenant Grogan's detail."

"New, aren't you?" McGrath asked.

"Yes, sir. I was transferred from the Hockshop detail a month ago."

"Hockshop detail, eh?" McGrath muttered. "Then you're just the man I want. Take this pawn ticket to the shop down the street, find out what was hocked, how much the girl I think pawned it got for it. Take possession of the object and all the records and let me know as soon as you've got the facts. And hurry it up!"

On his way down the stairs, Collins had to flatten himself against the wall to allow two men to pass. One of them who carried a white cane was obviously blind. The other

held the blind man's arm, guiding him.

"Good evening, Mr. Quinn," the detective said to the blind man. "I'm Collins—Homicide."

"Oh, how are you, Collins?" Quinn asked pleasantly. "Is Inspector McGrath upstairs?"

"Yes, sir, and waiting for you. I'm on my way to check a pawn ticket he found in the dead girl's room. I'll be right back."

He hurried down the stairs and the blind man and his escort continued their upward climb.

This Tony Quinn, whom the Homicide man had greeted so respectfully, was a well-built, rugged-looking individual, a pleasant-faced man who would have been regarded as handsome had it not been for the deeply pitted scars around his eyes, eyes that themselves were dead-looking, utterly blank.

The man with him, "Silk" Kirby, was the blind man's constant companion. Long ago he had come by his somewhat flamboyant nickname, because in those days he had been a highly successful confidence man, and the smoothness of his operations had entitled him to the name. Now all that was changed, due to his affection for and loyalty to Tony Quinn who had completely reformed him. In these days it was his proudest boast that he was Tony Quinn's eyes.

The patrolman on the third floor saluted at their approach and knocked on the door of the murder room, into which Inspector McGrath had again retreated. McGrath told him to enter. He did, and stepped aside so that Silk could guide Quinn into the room. McGrath came forward with outstretched hand. That was a trick the officer tried so constantly on this blind man whom he stubbornly insisted was not blind, that it had become an automatic gesture. And as usual Quinn gave no indication that he saw the hand.

"Tony." McGrath dropped his hand after a second, and flushed slightly as he saw Silk's lips part in a sardonic smile. "Maybe I called you in for nothing much. I don't know for sure. What I do know is that this is a cheap room in a cheap place, and I'd stake a year's salary that the girl lying across the bed there didn't belong here. She does

now, because she was strangled to death here."

"Who is she?" Quinn asked.

"You got me," McGrath said wearily. "She checked in under the name of Andrea Kane, but one gets you ten that's a phony."

"Silk," Quinn said, "put your eagle eye on it, will you?"

## CHAPTER III

### *League of The Black Bat*



**F**IRST, before entering upon his duties as blind man's eyes, Silk brought over a chair and helped Quinn into it. Then he went to the bedside and stood there, studying the dead girl. The corners of Silk's mouth slowly turned down. He was an admirer of beauty and a hater of those who destroyed it.

"Two people on the floor heard her fighting with some man in here," McGrath was saying. "It sounded like a family argument, some of them said. Another roomer here passed a man in the hall he didn't know, and gave us a good description of him. Chances are he was the killer. The people who heard the fight said the girl shouted the name of Joe."

"Joe!" Quinn grunted. "That's a fine clue, Mac. But it may help. What else?"

"I found a pawn ticket, dated today. I sent a detective to check."

"I know," Quinn interrupted. "I met him in the hall and he told me. Is that all?"

McGrath shrugged. "There's never too much in a killing of this kind, Tony. Usually the people in it are as low as the crime itself. But somehow that girl there doesn't seem to fit. I checked some of her clothes that had been in the bureau drawers—underthings, mostly. High-priced stuff. There's a suitcase in the closet that's traveled darn near around the world and stopped off at only the best places and sailed on only de luxe steamships."

"Interesting," Quinn observed musingly,

and turned his head. "Silk, how about it?"

Silk walked over and stood before Quinn. "She was a mighty pretty girl, sir," he said soberly. "Twenty-three or four. Her nails have a professional polish, and she never got her permanent from any cheap beauty parlor in this section of town. Her shoes are badly worn, as if she's done a lot of walking. She grabbed some strands of hair from somebody—short hairs, obviously a man's. She scratched him, too—there are bits of flesh under the nails of one hand. The nails on the other hand have been cleaned with a knife—by Inspector McGrath no doubt."

"Yes," McGrath said. "I did that. And I also noticed that the room has been thorough-ly searched. And—one more thing."

Silk nodded. "Yes," he put in. "I saw it. A ring has been cut off the third finger of her left hand, Mr. Quinn. A ring so tight it couldn't be removed except by cutting."

"You're pretty good, Silk," McGrath commended. "I also found this pair of jewelers pliers, made especially to cut off rings, to prove you're right. The pliers were on the floor beside the bed, Tony."

"Hm," Quinn mused. "I'd say that gives us a perfect case of premeditated murder by someone who knew this girl well, who knew all about the ring, how tight it was, and that to procure it, it had to be cut off. So he came prepared to do exactly that. We're progressing, Mac."

"Even so it wasn't robbery," McGrath insisted. "She's wearing a wrist-watch that's good for a few bucks, and there are almost four hundred dollars in her purse. It had been opened, the contents dumped out, but the killer didn't take the dough."

Quinn rubbed his chin. "You were right, Mac," he murmured. "There really are angles to this affair. Since the ring was cut off, and not by a robber, we've got to assume that the ring would have identified the girl, and that the killer wanted to make certain she wouldn't be identified. Probably that's why the room was searched—to double check against anything that might be found to give her a name or address."

"Well, we haven't got much," McGrath sighed. "I'll have this room gone over, of course, but I don't think we'll find anything.

Still, I don't see too much in it for you, Tony—aside from handing out aid and comfort to me. And do I need them! Still, as a special district attorney, you're supposed to handle only unusual stuff."

"This seems unusual," Quinn said slowly. "It also interests me, Mac. An obviously cultured girl, living in a place such as you and Silk describe this place to be. Just as obviously she had money enough to buy expensive things, to go to expensive places by expensive travel routes. There's an underlying current here, Mac, which hints at the idea that this could be an important crime. What do you think, Silk?"

"It's enough for me," Silk said bitterly, "that she was as pretty a girl as I've seen in a long time and some rat put fat fingers around her throat and took away her life."

McGRATH glanced at his watch.

"Collins," he said, "that new detective I sent to interview the pawnbroker whose shop is just down the street, should have been back by now. Unless the shop was closed and the owner lived in some other part of town."

"I'll have Silk look in at the shop on our way home, Mac," Quinn said. "There is nothing I can do right now until you assemble what clues you have. Also arrange for a picture of the dead girl, have her photographed as if she were still alive. And have that man who thinks he saw the killer . . . What was his name?"

"Loper," McGrath grunted. "Yes, I know. Have him check the Rogues' Gallery. Okay, and you have Silk call me back about the pawnshop, will you?"

Quinn nodded as Silk took his arm, led him out of the room, and down the stairs.

On the second floor the red-necked roomer and the woman in the faded negligee stood watching them. On the first floor when they opened the street door they found Loper sitting disconsolately on the stoop. He moved aside to let them pass.

Silk put Quinn into the big sedan which was parked at the curb, and got behind the wheel. He drove down the street and pulled up before the darkened pawnbroker's shop.

"I'll run in," he said. "Doesn't look like

anyone is there, but I'll try to get the owner's name and address so we can tell McGrath about when to expect his detective back."

"Do that," Quinn said.

Silk crossed the sidewalk, stepped up to the door and tried to peer inside. The place was in total darkness when he realized it should not be. For he knew that in any pawnbroker's shop there always was some sort of a light kept on in front of the vault, as a precaution against robbery. Silk returned to the car.

"I think you ought to have a look, sir," he told Quinn. "I can't see a thing inside there, but I can almost smell something wrong."

Quinn climbed out of the car and, using his white cane, tapped his way to the entrance. Silk kept a sharp look up and down the street.

"Nobody around, sir," he murmured.

Quinn nodded, stepped into the doorway and cupped his hands to the sides of his forehead to peer in. Now had there been anyone to see, they would have seen those eyes undergo a remarkable change. They became bright, alive and alert, so effective that with them Quinn could see through the darkness of that pawn shop as though it were brightly lighted. When he saw a pair of legs protruding from behind the counter he quickly reached for the door knob, twisted it. The door was not locked.

Silk, pulling a heavy automatic from a hip pocket holster, moved ahead of him as they entered. Safety off, he started prowling the shop until he located a light switch. The overhead light that came on revealed a macabre scene to Silk's eyes, one which Quinn already had seen, even in the total darkness.

Collins, the young detective, was huddled behind the counter. His service pistol was in his hand, but he had not had time to fire it. There was a bullet-hole just above his right eye.

The feet sticking out from behind the counter were those of the pawnbroker. He had been shot twice, near the heart. The vault door was ajar and its contents had been rifled. A page had been ripped out of

a daily ledger which lay on the desk behind the grilled window.

"We're in it now, Silk," Quinn said slowly. "The hunch has paid off. There certainly is much more to this than the murder of some unidentified girl in an obscure rooming house. Call McGrath."

Half an hour later, McGrath, after having each separate detail repeated to him several times, shook his head.

"Tony," he said, "whoever did this beat us hands down. Collins never had a chance. Somebody knew he was coming here, knew why, and was ready for him."

Quinn frowned. "There didn't seem to be any secret about where Collins was going, before he left the rooming house. Anyone with big enough ears could have heard him, have beaten it here through a rear exit and killed him. And still have had time to take mighty good care to destroy any trace of whatever that murdered girl pawned . . . Mac, I'd suggest you assign detectives to interview every merchant within a mile of that rooming house. According to Silk, the girl did a great deal of walking. Perhaps she was looking for something or someone, maybe asking questions. If we could get some idea of what she was after, we might find a much needed clue."

"Good idea," McGrath said. "I'll attend to it right away. Have men ready first thing in the morning when the stores open up."

"All right," Quinn said. "Silk, we'll start for home again and this time I hope we don't run across any more murders."

THE big car purred through the night, heading uptown for the quiet residential section where Quinn lived in the big old mansion that had been in his family for generations. Silk, busy with his own thought and his driving, was silent.

Quinn, eyes blank and staring again, clenched the crook of his white cane so hard that the blood drained out of his knuckles. He was wondering whether or not this murder case would call for the work of the Black Bat—that nameless, hooded man so feared by the underworld and all criminals. And he was wondering with good

reason—for Tony Quinn himself was the Black Bat, though few indeed were aware of this. All but that small handful believed that Quinn was totally blind, a man entirely incapable of the fast and savage activities of the Black Bat.

Not so many years ago Tony Quinn had been able to see, and there had been no deep scars around his eyes. Then he had been the duly elected district attorney of his great party, and had been building up a record which might some day have put him in the governor's chair.

But those ambitions were ruthlessly blasted one fatal day when gangsters, wishing to destroy certain evidence about to be presented in court, had tried to do so by hurling a powerful acid on it. Quinn, in his attempt to stop this, had been hit in the face by the corrosive liquid and had instantly gone blind. The most prominent and able surgeons on two continents had held out no slightest iota of hope that he would ever see again.

He resigned his post, giving all his time to a search for a cure for that eternal blackness—unavailing. Finally, Quinn himself had given up hope, resigning himself to a lifetime of companionship with Silk Kirby who some years before had become his loyal friend, and who now became his eyes.

It was at this low ebb in the fortunes of Tony Quinn that an unbelievably surprising turn had come. That had happened when a lovely golden-haired girl named Carol Baldwin had unexpectedly appeared at Tony Quinn's home with the strangest offer imaginable. Her father, she said, was a police sergeant in a far Midwestern city, where

he had been shot in a battle between criminals and officers of the law, and now lay dying. As his last gesture against the forces of evil, it was his dying request to give his eyes to Anthony Quinn, whose work he had long admired, in the hope that the fighting district attorney could resume his battles.

The offer, and the reasons behind it were so tempting that Quinn had gratefully accepted. With Silk and the girl he had journeyed west, and there a little known surgeon had performed the delicate—and successful—operation shortly before Sergeant Baldwin breathed his last.

When Quinn returned home with bandaged eyes, to wait and hope, Carol Baldwin came also, because not for a moment did she doubt that the surgery would be successful, and already had dedicated her life to fighting evil under the banner of the man who wore her father's eyes.

And she was right. For when the bandages finally were removed, Tony Quinn could see! What was more, he could see far better than any average person, for by some freak his sight could penetrate darkness as easily as daylight, even to distinguishing the most delicate pastel colors.

During the long and agonizing wait after the operation, Quinn gave deep thought to his future, in case he should ever see again, and he had formed his own plans for combating the underworld. As district attorney he had learned only too well how slowly justice creaks along, how police and courts are hamstrung by legalities and red tape, and how criminals could laugh at the slow

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process of the law. He wanted no more of that. If he should ever see again, he wanted to *fight* crime!

Once his sight was a miraculously accomplished fact, he had his plans all laid. He had decided to keep secret the fact that he could see—to live as a helpless blind man by day, and by night be an anonymous individual bent on preventing and punishing crime. His vow to himself and to the man who had made his sight possible was to fight crooks with their own brand of violence, battle them without thought of legal formalities, establish himself as someone they would fear and hate.

**I**N HIS forays it was necessary for him to wear a black hood which covered his head completely, for those well known scars around his eyes would quickly have given him away. From the hood, it was only a step to wearing all black clothing which permitted him practically to vanish in the dark.

In every possible way he fitted himself for his new rôle. He studied the scientific aspects of fighting crime, created a secret laboratory in his home where he could do his own analyses with the most effective modern implements procurable. By means of a tunnel secretly dug from the lab in the big house to a garden house at the far end of his grounds he was able to come and go as he pleased, without being seen.

From the start of the great experiment Silk Kirby was interested and enthused, and because of his intimate knowledge of the underworld he had now forsworn forever, he ably assisted Quinn in the new crusade.

Carol Baldwin, too, though a mere slip of a pretty girl, was a decided asset. She was a quick thinker, could handle a gun like a professional and had a natural flair for investigative work. It did not take her and Quinn himself long to realize that they had fallen in love, but both sternly put aside all hopes of marrying while Quinn's new and perilous existence was so crammed full of danger.

One other member completed the league when at last Tony Quinn was fully girded for action—a giant of a man named O'Leary, for whom Quinn had once done a favor, for-

gotten now by Quinn himself, but forever green in the memory of big O'Leary, who gloried in the nickname of "Butch." Butch was easy-going, slow-thinking, a devoted ally. And what he lacked in brains, he more than made up in loyalty and physical strength.

And so, with these three people to help him, Tony Quinn, the black-clad avenger who quickly earned the name of the "Black Bat" because of his distinctive appearance and ability to fight in the dark, had taken his stand against the underworld. For a long time now he had battled evil to a standstill. Long ago a price had been put on his head, but so far there had been none brave enough to claim it.

Soon after his first sortie against thieves, crooks of all varieties, murderers and gangsters, the gentry began considering him as a greater hazard to their professions than the police. Moreover, no holds were barred with him. He could trade bullets with them, use a knife, fists, or even feet if they fought that way. He cared as little for laws as they did, and no silken-voiced attorney could argue a case before this black-clad self-constituted judge and jury.

But by breaking laws when he found it necessary, the Black Bat also called the attention of the police to his unusual crusade. Most officers soon realized he was working on their side and gladly accepted his anonymous aid. But Inspector McGrath stubbornly regarded the Black Bat as no better than the criminals he fought, and he had made a vow that some day he would rip that hood from the head of the avenger and put him behind bars—even if he should turn out to be his best friend.

That, in fact, was exactly what the Inspector most greatly feared, but he would not allow even friendship to deter him. How McGrath had ever first acquired the idea that Tony Quinn was not blind, and actually was the Black Bat, he could not have told himself. But once fastened in his stubborn mind it was there to stay, and he worried it constantly, as a dog would worry a succulent bone. And that in the face of overwhelming expert opinion as to Quinn's blindness, and innumerable tests.

## CHAPTER IV

*Killer's Identity*

Quinn had come to accept McGrath as the chief hazard in his "profession", and indeed the constant brushes and narrow escapes added spice to what might otherwise have been the somewhat sordid life of a human bloodhound.

None of this, however, had affected the very real friendship between the two men, and if sometimes McGrath's heart was not exactly in his task of exposing his friend, that was an off day when his stubbornness was not on the job.

Now, it seemed, an unidentified corpse of a beautiful girl was about to bring the Black Bat into another fight, where the man who wore the black hood and the police inspector would inevitably clash once more. But it could not be avoided. For already Tony Quinn was beginning to realize that the murder of that girl in the rooming house could not be handled by ordinary methods. To solve the mystery would call for all the expertness and ingenuity of the Black Bat. Something was insistently telling Quinn that this whole matter not only was far more important than it appeared on the surface, but also would defy Inspector McGrath's police methods of solution.

He raised his head suddenly. "Silk," he said, "when we get home, get hold of Carol and Butch at once. I want them in the lab immediately."

"Yes, sir," Silk said eagerly. "The Black Bat is going to take a hand in this business then?"

"I don't know yet, Silk," Quinn told him thoughtfully. "But we've got to find out who that girl was—and we certainly want to know who tipped off a killer right in our faces, or slipped away from the rooming house himself and murdered that young detective and the pawnbroker."

### THE RIDDLE OF THE WOODS

**A cop is chasing a crook. The crook turns into some woods. How far can the crook run into the woods?**

*(Answer on page 54)*



SILK swung the car into a street lined with trees and houses set back from the road. It was more like a country town here than any city, and the people who owned the property were determined to keep it that way. Tony Quinn's big old home was at the end of the street. There was a driveway leading off the street and forming a blind alleyway ending at his garages and the rear of his property.

Silk stopped the car in front of the house, helped Quinn out and escorted him through the gate, along the walk and onto the porch. There he fitted a key into the door and Quinn, using his cane, entered. Even in the privacy of his own home, though, Tony Quinn maintained his pose of a totally blind man. For he well knew that if prying eyes ever saw him relax that act, he would soon be a dead man.

Silk closed the door when he had escorted Quinn into the house, and went straight to a telephone, where he made two calls.

"Carol and Butch are on their way, sir," he said, as he cradled the telephone.

"Good," Quinn said. "Sit down, Silk. Tell me what you think of this mess."

They walked on into the library where Quinn sat down in a worn leather chair before a cold fireplace. Silk carried over a straight-backed chair which he placed close by and sat down.

"We haven't very much to go on, sir," he commented. "Just a murder that seems, on the surface, like a rather sordid affair."

"But you don't believe it's as sordid as it looks," Quinn prompted.

"No, sir, I don't. Not after looking at that girl."

"I'm certain her killer was seen by that man Benny Loper, and that the argument preceding the crime was heard by two people," Quinn said positively. "So it still seems like just another murder resulting

from a fight between a man and a woman. The surroundings were tawdry and cheap, but the victim apparently wasn't. And the moment an investigation gets under way, a detective and a pawnbroker are killed simply to preserve the nature of some article pawned by the girl."

"And don't forget, sir," Silk put in eagerly, "that ring cut off her finger. The killer came provided with a special pair of pliers for just that purpose!"

"I know." Quinn put his back against the chair and his sightless eyes stared up at the ceiling. "But Silk, what if the ring was cut off her finger after she was dead by someone else? Someone other than her killer?"

"Is that possible?" Silk asked.

"Why not?" Quinn countered. "Quite some time elapsed between the moment Loper saw the killer hurrying away and when the landlady went to that floor to replace an electric light bulb and saw the door ajar. Wait a minute!"

"Yes, sir?" Silk said politely.

"If that door had been open when Loper passed by, he'd have noticed it. At least the chances are good he would have. And then, too, how did it happen an electric light bulb needed replacing at that particular time? Remind me to find out who reported the dark socket, Silk."

"I'll make a note of it," Silk promised. "And we might also try to find out who was in that rooming house just before Detective Collins told you he was going to the pawnshop—and who vanished for a time immediately afterwards. Of course someone could have used a telephone to tip off the actual killer of Collins and the pawnbroker. But things worked so fast, I think the man who overheard what Collins said slipped out and committed the two murders himself."

Quinn suddenly arose. "Draw the shades, Silk," he said peremptorily. "Carol and Butch should be in the lab by now."

Silk went around the room pulling down the shades. As the last one went into place Quinn again dropped his mantle of blindness and walked briskly toward one of the bookshelf-lined walls of the room. He touched a hidden control and a narrow door opened. He went through it and directly into a large

white-tiled laboratory equipped with everything needed for the scientific study of clues and crimes.

An enormous man sitting on an inadequate stool jumped to his feet. His build resembled that of a gorilla in thickness and muscles. His shoulders were wide, threatening to burst the seams of his coat, his hands were heavy and huge. He had no appreciable neck, his head sitting almost squarely on his shoulders. But for all his size he had a pleasant expression and he was ruggedly good-looking. He was Butch O'Leary.

QUINN welcomed him warmly.

"Carol ain't here yet," Butch said a little anxiously. "She'll be along any minute though, I guess. What have we got this time, Boss? Something big?"

"So far," Quinn told him, "it seems like nothing much. So far as motive is concerned at least. But three people have been murdered and I don't call that exactly minor league."

"Three, huh?" Butch said musingly. "Guys who knock off three people ain't fooling. It'll be big all right."

"I'll give you the details as soon as Carol arrives," Quinn told him. "And I've got a special assignment for you, Butch."

Then, through the trap-door set in the floor of the lab, appeared the head and shoulders of a lovely girl. Quinn hurried forward to help her out of the tunnel. When she stood erect she came about to his shoulders, but there was a lot of dynamite packed in that lithe young body of hers.

Usually she went into Tony Quinn's arms and was content to be held tightly by him for a few moments, but tonight she seemed alarmed.

"Tony," she said breathlessly, "I'm a little late, but I had to be careful. I think someone is watching your house!"

"Watching it?" Quinn frowned. "I wonder why?"

"I don't know, but as usual I was careful reaching the garden house and the two men I think were watching didn't spot me, but I saw them. They were crouched behind a hedge of the yard across the street."

"Hmm," Quinn grunted. "That's inter-

esting, at any rate. Thanks for the warning, Carol. Now sit down and I'll tell you and Butch what I know about this case. It isn't much, but we've got to make the best of what we have, and it may amount to much more than we now can guess."

They listened intently while he outlined the events of the evening, described the victim, the clues, the witnesses.

"Our only identification of the killer so far," he wound up, "is that he is a big man, must have a badly scratched face, and is named Joe. He'll be scared and bound to hole up somewhere, at least until those scratches heal over. Finding him won't be easy unless we accomplish it through identifying the dead girl . . . That's where you come in, Carol."

"Just how?" she asked.

"This girl didn't belong in that part of town. As McGrath described her, she was quality, and there was plenty to prove that. In the morning Silk will have some photos of her, air-brushed and treated so they won't look like the photo of a corpse. Take them around to swanky hotels, eating places. To travel agencies, steamship lines, beauty parlors. It will mean a lot of hoofing unless your luck is good, but there's no other way to tackle it to get her identification."

"All right, Tony," Carol said. "I'll call Silk in the morning."

"Now, your job," Quinn said, and turned to Butch, "is to go to the rooming house where the murder was committed. Pack a cheap bag, put a cheap nickel-plated revolver in it, a few burglar tools, and some cheap clothing. See the landlady early tomorrow morning and do your best to get the room in which the girl was killed. You probably won't, because McGrath may have it sealed, but I want anybody who may be curious to think you have a definite urge to rent that room."

"Okay," Butch said. "What if I don't get it?"

"Take any room the landlady gives you. Whenever you get a chance, start asking questions about the murder, but not the kind which might make someone tip off the police you're acting too suspiciously."

"Got it," Butch grunted.

"Keep in touch with Silk. If you can't reach him, call the private number to the lab and the tape recorder will pick up any message you leave. Don't take any chances. You're a crook, so act like one. If any one of the roomers seems to have a yen to talk to you, just listen and don't comment. I want you mildly suspected of being interested in the dead girl, just enough to arouse the curiosity of the killer or anyone connected with him."

"Suppose I stumble on the guy who did it?" Butch asked with a grin.

"Look, Butch, she was a beautiful girl. Unless I'm all wrong, a decidedly nice girl. And she was strangled to death. Do I have to tell you what to do if you find the man who choked her?"

Butch's grin grew wider. "Yeah—leave enough for the cops to pick up. That'll be a pleasure. I'll keep hoping I run into him. . . ."

**I**N THE morning, Silk brought the big car around to the front of the house and Tony Quinn tapped his way out to it. While he gave no indication of doing so, Silk kept looking around.

"I don't see any signs of the house being watched," he said to Quinn. "Could Carol have been wrong?"

"Uh-uh," Quinn said. "Not Carol. Though I wonder why that was done. Why should they be afraid of us when we haven't got a thing on the identity of the killer that's worth while?"

"I don't know," Silk said thoughtfully, "but it's beginning to look to me like anybody who investigates that murder too far gets a skull full of slugs. The murderer must have friends, at least."

There was, however, no sign of their being followed when Silk drove away. Soon Quinn was in his office and a message on the desk asked that he call Inspector McGrath at once. Quinn did, and McGrath told him he would be right over.

Within fifteen minutes the detective inspector walked in, accompanied by Benny Loper, the insignificant-looking roomer who claimed to have met the killer face to face.

"We've got something," McGrath ex-

ulted. "Benny here spent the whole night looking over Rogues' Gallery pictures. In fact, he went through them twice and the second time he picked out—this."

McGrath placed a photo and record card on Quinn's desk, certain of getting a reaction, but Quinn never even flicked an eyelid. Silk moved over and studied the card for a moment.

"The name is Joseph Keeley, sir," he said to the special district attorney. "He is a big fellow, not prepossessing. Lives at Two-two-five Cherry Street. Record is as follows: Arrest for suspicion of burglary—dismissed. Arrest for carrying concealed weapons—one year in prison. After he had served his term there were two more arrests, both for suspicion of armed robbery and both dismissed. Two years later an arrest on suspicion of homicide—dismissed. Three years later picked up in a street fight. Suspended. In the next two years, suspicion of car theft—dismissed. Then aggravated assault—six months. Last year, drunkenness and assault. Case dismissed."

Quinn put the tips of his fingers together. "Lucky fellow, isn't he? All those arrests and only two convictions, one of these minor . . . Mac, is that Mr. Loper with you?"

"Yes," McGrath said.

Quinn's apparently sightless eyes looked well to the left of the shy little man who kept rotating his hat nervously.

"Mr. Loper," Quinn said, "are you willing to swear this is the man you saw in the hallway of the rooming house last night?"

"It's him all right," Loper declared fervently. "Yes, sir, I ain't making no mistake about him. But you gotta give me protection. This guy may come back and knock me off. I'm just a little guy. He was big enough to bust me in half."

"You've nothing to worry about," Quinn said. "We'll find this man quickly enough, and its decidedly doubtful if he has any idea you've identified him . . . Tell me, Mr. Loper, did you remain in the rooming house from the time the police got there until Inspector McGrath finally took you to Headquarters for questioning?"

"Sure," Loper said promptly. "The In-

spector he says I shouldn't go away, so I didn't."

"Did you notice anyone leaving the house in the meantime?" Quinn persisted.

"Nobody left. Not by the front door, Mr. Quinn."

"How can you be so sure?" Quinn asked.

"Because I was sitting on the front steps smoking cigarettes. I'da seen anybody leave. Like I saw you leave."

"That's a good reason," Quinn said. "Now one more question. After this man you have now identified as one Joe Keeley passed you in the hallway, did you notice whether or not the door to the room where the girl was murdered was ajar? You thought he might have been coming from it."

"I didn't look," Loper said slowly. "But if the door was open I think I'da noticed."

"What about the hall light? The landlady said she had gone upstairs to replace a bulb when she found the girl dead. If the hall was dark, how did you happen to see this Keeley so well?"

"The lights were okay when I went to my room," Loper said. "None of 'em was out. I'll swear to that."

Quinn leaned back. "What do you know of the girl who was killed, Loper?" he asked unexpectedly.

"I never laid eyes on her," Loper said promptly. "I guess we just didn't happen to meet. But everybody else in the house who knew her says she was okay."

"All right," Quinn said. "That's all for now, Loper. You may go whenever you like. Just be sure to remain available in case we need you. And thanks for your help."

"You don't have to thank me," Loper mustered a half-hearted smile from somewhere. "I don't like seeing people bumped off, and them that does it oughta fry. That's how I feel."

"You'll do your share in helping to punish the man who is responsible," Quinn promised.

**L**OPER hesitated a moment, then turned and walked out of the room. McGrath sat down with a tired sigh.

"That little guy is okay," he said. "Me, I'm beat. Getting old, I guess. Can't take it,



staying up all night any more."

"What's being done about finding this Joe Keeley?" Quinn asked him.

"There's a general alarm out for him. The address on his record card is no good. He moved away months ago, but I've got several boys working over some of Keeley's pals. We'll get him."

"Nothing new on the identity of the girl?"

"Not a thing. I had those photos taken. They turned out good. You'd never know she was dead." McGrath expectantly placed two pictures on Quinn's desk. "In fact, she seems so alive I think I'll put her picture on a television show. As a routine missing person's case. How about that?"

"An excellent idea," Quinn said. "You found nothing at the pawnshop?"

McGrath wagged his head. "Nothing. Not a scrap, Tony."

"I see." Quinn swung half around in his big swivel chair. "What do you know about Benny Loper, Mac?"

"The little guy who just left? Not too much, Tony. He's lived in that rooming house for only about ten days. He's a dishwasher, but out of work. You want me to check?"

"Somebody in that house arranged the killing of Detective Collins and the pawnbroker," Quinn reminded. "Or did the actual murder himself. I want everybody in that house checked."

"It'll be done," McGrath promised. "But if that's all for right now, I'd like to go home and grab a few winks. I can sure use them."

"Of course," Quinn said.

McGrath yawned mightily. "One thing about this case," he said, "it's nothing for the Black Bat. But of course I realize you don't know much about him—never do, except when he mysteriously calls you up to offer his help. But this time, as a matter of fact, we don't even need him. Eh, Tony?"

Quinn shrugged. "We do seem to know the identity of the murderer," he admitted. "But what we think and what the Black Bat does are two different things, Mac. Still, I scarcely see any—"

A secretary broke in over the intercom as the Inspector was getting to his feet.

"I have an urgent call for Inspector Mc-

Grath from Headquarters, sir."

McGrath reached for the phone.

"Oh, no!" he groaned. "What now?"

## CHAPTER V

### *Command to Kill*



AFTER the first couple of words, McGrath lost that tired look.

"Okay," he said. "Nice work. Hemstitch that place so a weasel couldn't get out. Don't try to make the pinch. I'll be there as fast as I can travel."

McGrath hung up. "It's as good as over," he said to Quinn, highly elated. "One of Keeley's pals cracked. My boys got an address, went there and found out Keeley had returned home about thirty minutes after the murder. He stopped in a liquor store across the street and bought a bottle of rye. The man who sold it to him said he looked as if he needed the whole bottle. And—Keeley's face was badly scratched."

Quinn got up quickly. "I'm going with you, Mac. Take my arm, please. Silk, you stay here in case there are any fresh developments."

As Quinn's hand rested briefly on the photos of the dead girl, Silk knew what was expected of him. No matter if the murderer was on the verge of being snared or not, he was to get one of those photos into Carol Baldwin's hands as soon as possible.

McGrath and Quinn hurried to the street where a police car and driver were waiting. They had a fast, siren-punctured trip far over to the west side of town. The car finally pulled up before a small, ancient, and cheap hotel on a side street.

A detective walked up to the car. "Far as we know, Inspector," he informed, "Keeley is still in his room. Maybe sleeping off that booze he bought if he downed it fast enough."

"Keep the place covered," McGrath ordered. "Give me four men. I'm going in after him."

"Room Four-o-nine," the detective said laconically.

A startled desk clerk made no protest as the procession crossed the small lobby and commandeered one of the two rickety elevators. On the fourth floor McGrath led Quinn out into the hall and over against a wall.

"You'd better stay here, Tony," he said. "This guy we're after is a killer and he might decide to die by bullets rather than electricity."

"Good hunting," Quinn said calmly, backed against the wall.

McGrath, backed by his men, advanced on Room 409. All had their guns drawn when McGrath's fist pounded on the door.

"Come on out, Keeley!" he shouted. "This is the end of the line."

There was no answer, no sound. McGrath tried the locked door, then growled a command for one of his men to fetch a fire ax. This weapon cut through the flimsy door at a single blow. Carefully, McGrath approached, peered through the hole, then marched boldly through it, followed by his men.

They made a quick search of the place, but there was no trace of the man they were after. McGrath sent one of his detectives to bring up the desk clerk, then went himself to escort Tony Quinn into the room.

"I was sure we had him," McGrath told Quinn sourly. "There must have been a tip-off somewhere, and he didn't even leave a clue. There are fireplaces in some of the rooms in this old hotel. Keeley burned a lot of papers in the one in his room, even pounded the ashes down. All he left here are a few of his clothes, and half the bottle of whisky he bought last night."

Quinn frowned. "Mac, could there have been any kind of a leak?"

"No! Keeley's pal who squealed is still locked up and hasn't seen anybody. I don't get it, Tony, unless Keeley got an idea we'd maybe grab somebody who would talk, and just dusted out. He was no fool, Tony."

"Apparently not," Quinn said. "What's the condition of the room?"

"Upset. From the looks of the bed he either snoozed on top of the covers or lay

down there. Nothing else, as I told you, except the burned papers in the fireplace."

The desk clerk was brought into the room. McGrath turned to him, glowering.

"We want Joe Keeley for murder, understand?" he said threateningly. "That means you tell us the truth or you'll wind up in a cell. Now—when did he come in last night?"

"I—I wouldn't know," the desk clerk said hesitantly. "I work only from two A.M. until noon. Keeley was in his room when I came on duty."

"How do you know?" McGrath demanded.

"Because he got a phone call at ten minutes of three and about five minutes after that he came flying out. Said his brother was sick and he'd be gone a couple of days."

"He didn't have a brother," McGrath growled.

"Was Keeley carrying a bag?" Quinn asked the clerk.

"Yes, sir—a suitcase."

"And you say he left five minutes after he got a phone call?"

"That's right. He must have got dressed and packed pretty fast."

"You don't know who the phone call was from?"

"No, sir. Just a man. I handled the switchboard, but I'd never heard this voice before."

"All right," Quinn said. "You may go. Put a man on him, Mac."

**M**CGRATH issued the orders, then closed the door as the clerk left the room. Quinn blundered against a small table and McGrath led him to a chair. Quinn sat down, clasped his hands over the crook of his cane and seemed to be thinking. Finally he said:

"Mac—papers were burned in the fireplace. Now Keeley had no idea he'd been identified or he'd never have come here. So he received a phone call and in five minutes he was dressed, packed, had burned his papers and had got away. I don't believe it. Somebody else burned those papers and went through this room."

"Could be," McGrath grumbled. "There was plenty of stuff burned. Even the waste

basket is as empty as—"

McGrath suddenly bent down and thrust a hand into the wastebasket. He picked out a small piece of jaggedly torn paper adhering to the bottom of the basket.

"What's wrong, Mac?" Quinn asked.

"He forgot something," McGrath said stonily. "A bit of paper which looks like it was torn from a letter. You know, one of the shreds after the whole thing was ripped in pieces."

"Is there any writing on it?" Quinn asked.

"Yes," McGrath replied slowly. "A single line consisting of two words which must have been the end of a sentence. The lines above and below are only half there, because the tear went right through them."

"All right," Quinn said testily. "Those two words may be important. What do they say?"

McGrath pushed his new fedora to the back of his head.

"You really want to know, don't you? Sure—and you should know. Grab hold of yourself, Tony. These two words say—

kill Quinn!"

McGrath, eager now to get on the trail of the vanished Joe Keeley, sent Quinn back to his office in a squad car with a couple of detectives. Silk was waiting in the office, and Quinn gave him all the details of what had happened.

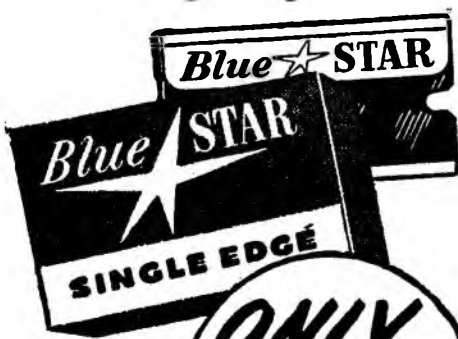
"I don't pretend to understand why someone should have written Keeley a letter telling him to kill me," the special district attorney wound up. "The thing doesn't make sense because so far as I know I'm no danger to any of these people involved. I'm as much in the dark now as to what all of it is about as I ever was."

"The way Keeley was tipped off to scrutiny indicates something," Silk commented. "Who knew he was going to be picked up? Only one of his old pals, who had squealed, but this pal was being held and not allowed to reach anybody."

Quinn frowned. "That rather insignificant little man named Benny Loper was the first person to identify Keeley. He knew that

[Turn page]

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identification would lead to Keeley being picked up. He could have warned him—but why? After all, if he didn't want Keeley caught, all he had to do was pass up that Rogues' Gallery picture."

"That's right," Silk agreed. "Also, why did he describe Keeley so perfectly. He could have thrown us off completely by saying the man he spotted in the hallway was short, fat and bald-headed. Instead he practically drew a picture of Keeley."

Quinn shook his head slowly from side to side. "Silk, I've said before, and I repeat that there's a lot more to this than appears on the surface. There are mysterious forces working against us to keep us from clearing up a murder mystery, and we don't even know why."

"There's only one reason," Silk said. "It can't be because we know Keeley is the killer and we're closing in on him. Ever since he was fingered by Benny Loper, he's been a goner. Somebody, of course, doesn't want that girl identified. Everything points to it. Her ring cut off by someone who came prepared to do just that. The pawnbroker murdered, and whatever the girl hocked is missing along with all records concerning the transaction. Find out who she is and we'll probably discover what's behind all this."

"Yes, Silk, I agree," Quinn said. "But it's going to be a job to identify her. Unless the pictures printed in the papers and broadcast over television are spotted by someone who knows her, we're sunk."

"Not quite," Silk declared complacently. "Not with Carol on the job. I gave her one of those photos and she's touring the town with it. Travel agencies, because the girl traveled so much, apparently. Beauty parlors, because she must have patronized them. Big hotels, expensive lingerie shops, all the places a girl of her type likely would go. There's a chance Carol may turn up something."

QUINN'S eyes, ordinarily staring and blind, were thoughtful instead, here in the privacy of his office, as he picked up Joe Keeley's record card and studied it.

"Hmm," he observed, "here's something, Silk. Joe Keeley was married, but separated

from his wife. Her address is noted here. I'm wondering if she might know a few facts. After all, Keeley and the dead girl were at least friends, if nothing more."

Silk nodded. "We can't pass up any chances, sir. Not with the little we've got to go on. Shall I try to find Mrs. Keeley and bring her to see you, sir?"

"We'll both go see her, Silk," Quinn said. "And right now."

Quinn canceled all his appointments for that afternoon, and Silk guided him out of the office and into the elevator. On the street, Quinn's big car was parked in front of the building. They got in and Silk headed for the address given as Mrs. Keeley's home.

It turned out to be a slum area where the woman ran a small rooming house. She opened the door to them herself, a heavy woman in her middle forties, with carelessly arranged hair, and wearing a dirty house dress.

Quinn carefully explained to her what he wanted, but obviously she was in a truculent mood.

"So Joe killed her, did he?" she said, a note of what might have been exultation in her voice. "Well, what else can you expect of a bum like him and a girl like that?"

"Did you know this girl?" Quinn asked.

"Of course I did. That is, I'd seen her once. Oh, she was pretty enough, but not Joe's type."

"Give me all the details," Quinn urged.

She shrugged. "Why should I? Once I liked Joe enough to marry him. If he two-timed me, that's still no reason why I should squeal on him. You asked me if I know where he is. I can answer that fast. I don't—and I haven't known for the past month."

"Now look," Silk butted in. "You've got nothing to lose by helping us—"

"I don't like cops," Mrs. Keeley said flatly. "Or even guys like you who are connected with them. I've said all I'm going to say. If you catch Joe, that's your business. I ain't going to weep—but I ain't helping you catch him, either."

Quinn tapped the floor with his cane impatiently. "Silk," he said, "go find a telephone and call for a police car. Mrs. Keeley,

I have the authority to make arrests. You are under arrest."

She gaped at him. "Pinched? What for? I ain't done anything. You can't lock me up."

Quinn shrugged. "I'm sorry you're going to make me prove that I can, Mrs. Keeley. Your husband is wanted for murder. Anyone who can help us, and refuses, is liable to criminal prosecution. It's the law, and I have to act accordingly."

She called Silk back after he'd taken a few steps toward the door. She sat down heavily and mopped her fat neck with her apron.

"Why should I take the rap for him?" she muttered. "What'd he ever do for me? Well, it's this way, see? Joe met this girl a couple months ago. Joe's no good, you understand? He's always been a cheap, chiseling crook. What do I owe him? Am I crazy or something? Look—this girl was real pretty."

Quinn broke in. "Silk, show Mrs. Keeley one of those photos."

Silk took a picture of the dead girl from his pocket. Mrs. Keeley looked at it, then she nodded.

"That's her. She's even prettier than I figured. Only saw her once, when I followed the two of them."

Quinn barely restrained a quick exclamation. "Tell me about following them," he urged.

"Well you see, with Joe leaving me and all, I figured I oughta protect myself. I was set to get a divorce and if he was seeing this girl, she would be my reason for wanting to break off with him. One afternoon, about a month ago, Joe came back. Just to pick up some of his things and tell me a fancy lie about having to go out of town."

"And when he left, you trailed him?" Quinn prodded gently.

"Sure I did. If they had a love nest, I wanted to know where it was. So Joe, he takes the subway uptown and gets off at a Hundred and Forty-eighth Street. He walks east and me right after him, but Joe he don't know that. He went up to this big house, a private house it was—"

"Have you the address?" Quinn asked quickly.

"Sure I have. Two-three-one-nine Wakefield Place. If that girl lived there, she wasn't broke, I'm telling you. Anyhow Joe, he walks right up to the door and pushes the bell. This girl comes out and Joe takes her two hands and then puts his arm around her and they both go in and the door closes. So what's a wife supposed to think about that, huh? Joe wasn't selling no Fuller brushes, if you know what I mean."

"All right, Mrs. Keeley," Quinn said. He wanted to get out of there now and fast. He had a definite lead, and clues in this case were apt either to vanish or be destroyed. "You've helped us perhaps, or at least shown your willingness to help. One more thing—don't tell anybody what you told us."

She nodded. "Sure, if you say so, mister. Say—you going to burn Joe?"

"That's up to the jury and the court," Quinn said. "Anyway we have to catch him first."

"I was just thinking," Mrs. Keeley said slowly. "Maybe it'd be a waste of good dough to go after a divorce now. I might not need one, huh?"

## CHAPTER VI

### *House of Mystery*



WITHIN moments after leaving Mrs. Keeley Silk was driving as fast as traffic conditions would allow toward Wakefield Place, far uptown.

"She's quite a character, sir," Silk commented as the car sped along.

"Yes, Silk," Quinn agreed, "and also she may have furnished us with the best chance yet to break this case. We know that Joe Keeley knew the girl before she came to that rooming house. We also know that Joe had never visited her there until the time he showed up and strangled her. So she may have run out on him, and he trailed her to that rooming house."

Silk wagged his head. "No matter what the facts indicate, sir, I won't admit that girl



wasn't on the level until there's absolute proof."

He swung into Wakefield Place before long and while Quinn stared straight ahead, in the way of a really blind man, Silk watched house numbers until he pulled up before a rather large two-story frame residence.

It was an old house but an unusually attractive one, and appeared to have been well kept up until recently. Now the grass had grown tall and wild, but the shrubs were still well pruned and not yet gone to seed. The curtains in the windows looked fresh, the yard wasn't littered and the house, set well back from the sidewalk, had an air of old-fashioned dignity. There was a driveway circling the place and an air of spaciousness, for the closest neighbor was about half a mile away.

"It's quite a place," Silk observed slowly.

"I'd say it is in keeping with the mystery girl," Quinn commented. "Let's see if anyone is home. I doubt it, but maybe we can—ah—find a window or a door slightly open."

Silk helped him out of the car and Quinn tapped his way up the path to the gate which Silk held open for him. They walked on to the rambling porch, climbed the steps, and Silk lifted the big brass knocker. It resounded hollowly behind the door. Nobody came to answer the summons.

"I'll see about finding an open door or window," Silk said.

He tried the door first, then walked along the porch to a large window looking into the living room. As was his custom, Silk carried a thin strip of celluloid which he often found useful. This slid between the window frames easily, located the catch, and worked it open.

Silk slid the window up, but didn't enter at once. He stood there, waiting and listening just in case their arrival had either been seen or anticipated. When nothing happened, he clambered through the window, made his way to the front door and unlocked it for Quinn.

"Nobody home, sir," he said. "I'd say the place hadn't been lived in for at least a month—maybe six or seven weeks."

Quinn closed the door, dropped his mask

of blindness and began an inspection tour of the place. He saw at a glance that the house had been cared for with loving hands. There were frilly hand-made scarfs on tables, curtains were carefully arranged to the last drape. Everything would have been spotless except for the dust which had accumulated during a brief period when nobody had lived here.

"Let's try the second floor," Quinn suggested. "And keep your eyes open for anything which might show that girl really did live here, Silk."

They climbed the staircase, entered a bedroom and Quinn instantly spotted an ash tray which hadn't been emptied. He bent over it, ran some of the ashes between his fingers.

"Pipe tobacco," he said. "Good stuff too, a circular cut blend. I'm sure the mystery girl didn't smoke a pipe, though, and I doubt that a punk like Joe Keeley would use tobacco of this quality. So another man was either here as a visitor or lived here."

Silk pulled open a dresser drawer. "Look here!" he cried. "There must have been a man living here all right! Pajamas, shorts, jerseys, shirts. Good quality—and laundry-marked by at least half a dozen laundries. I never saw so many code marks."

Quinn sat down slowly in a boudoir chair. "This mystery girl was living here," he said, "but a man also lived here, a man who presumably was her husband. And yet Joe Keeley came here to see her. I don't understand it, Silk."

Silk had kept busy opening more drawers. Without turning around, he said:

"Some things are beginning to make sense, sir. Look at this." He held up a squat, blue-black automatic. "It's fully loaded—and that's not all. There was another gun in the drawer of the night table between the beds. This nickel-plated novelty here, which looks like it shoots nothing less than a forty-five."

"Guns?" Quinn arose and went over beside Silk. "Two guns? Keep looking."

SILK slid open another drawer. It was full of women's apparel. Quinn studied the garments for a moment.

"Same quality and size as the stuff that



### SILK

girl was wearing and had in her cheap room," he discovered. "That much checks anyway."

He dug his hands beneath the carefully arranged garments and fished out a third gun—a long-barreled target pistol!

"What is this here anyhow?" Silk groaned. "An arsenal?"

"We've seen enough up here, Silk," Quinn said. "I think we'd better call McGrath and have some fingerprint men go over this house. Perhaps the man who has been living here has a record of some kind. It's worth a try. But first we'll check the rest of the place just to be certain there are no stray bodies hidden away here."

The other rooms hadn't been lived in much. Bureau, desk and other drawers were empty, and furnishings were so carefully arranged that it was clear they were rarely disturbed.

Quinn and Silk went downstairs and examined the dining room and the kitchen. In the pantry they found vast quantities of canned goods, and a fully loaded rifle was propped up beside the back door.

"This guy must have expected a war," Silk complained.

"Um," Quinn grunted. "He expected an

invasion, Silk. The kind that sneaks in. Look at the back door. It's wired, and I'm betting these wires lead to some kind of an alarm system."

Silk quickly traced the wire to a large bell. He hurried through the house to the front door and found another elaborate burglar alarm system. A study of each window showed that all of them were taped. He snapped a light switch and saw that no electricity was on.

"Everything wired," he reported to Quinn, "but somebody pulled the master switch so none of the alarms work now. We'd better have a look in the cellar."

They located the door and with open admiration examined the system of bolts and locks which sealed it shut. Whoever had lived here appeared to have anticipated grave danger and had taken every precaution to be warned if it approached.

They went down the cellar steps. Here it was gloomy, but Quinn's strange sight saw everything. He went over to a switchboard at the far end of the large basement.

"You're right," he told Silk, who joined him. "The main switch has been pulled. What in the world is this all about?"

"Maybe the laundry marks and finger-

prints will give us some idea," Silk suggested. "We'd better send for help."

Suddenly Quinn seized his arm and his voice dropped to a whisper:

"Don't move! Somebody else has just entered this house. Several people."

"I left the cellar door open," Silk groaned. "They'll know we're down here."

Suddenly there was a rush of footsteps on the cellar stairs. A gun flamed and a bullet smashed into the wall between Quinn and Silk. Quinn drew that mask of blindness over his features, but he ducked behind a row of barrels. Silk dived for cover behind a chimney base.

"They're over against that wall!" someone said in a harsh voice. "Let's get them!"

Slow steps began moving toward the section of cellar where Silk and Quinn were hiding. Quinn couldn't see the men yet, but he knew there were at least two of them and that upstairs there were more. Many more, judging by the sound of their scurrying feet.

Silk had a gun in his hand as he glanced over at Quinn who had no choice but to act the role of a blind man. Silk did notice that Quinn had a tight grip on the crook of his cane, however, and knew that cane could be a formidable weapon.

"Hey, look—all the cellar windows have solid storm blinds!" one of the men said. "Drop 'em. Just in case somebody decides to try and crawl through one of the windows."

A slim, sallow-featured man ran lightly to a window and flipped the hook which held up the solid wooden window blinds. He repeated this with two other windows and the basement became darker.

Silk didn't open fire. He could have, and probably have killed that slim man, but it would only give away his hiding place and he wanted both those men under his gun before he started shooting.

Finally the last window blind fell into place and the cellar was plunged into darkness. Silk thought he heard gentle steps that sounded like Tony Quinn's.

The same intruder spoke again. "Okay—use your flash if you have to, but be careful. These guys might have guns."

"Aw, we only got one of 'em to worry about," the slim man retorted. "Quinn's blind as a bat."

Silk smiled crookedly. They were closely approaching the truth when they spoke of Tony Quinn as a bat. He had an idea they might find out that bats can maneuver in darkness.

THE beam of a flash cut a swath through the gloom and centered on the switchboard. The slim man hurried over toward it, without using his flash. Reaching the board, he snapped on the flash again and threw the switch home. Silk rose quickly, his gun raised to administer a blow that would put one man out of circulation.

But Silk had paid too much attention to the slim man. While watching him, a heavier-set man had slipped up, had seen Silk rise, and leaped at him. He, too, held a gun and smashed it down against the back of Silk's neck. Silk toppled forward, hit the cement wall and slid to the floor.

"Okay," the big man grunted in satisfaction. "That takes care of this guy. We only got Quinn left. There's an overhead light in the middle of the cellar. I'll turn it on, then we'll smoke out Quinn and fix both these guys for good. Snap on your flash."

Both men moved toward the open overhead bulb in the middle of the cellar. The slim man reached up and turned the switch. For a second both blinked as the big bulb illuminated the entire basement. Then both smiled. Quinn, his white cane half raised, stood just beyond the bulb, but within easy cane-swinging distance of it.

"Well, well," the big man said, "if it ain't our big shot D.A."

"Who are you?" Quinn asked in a voice that was deceptively tremulous. "What's this all about?"

"We're a couple of guys who don't like cops or D.A.'s," the big man chortled. "We ain't going to hurt you—much. Just a slug through the head is all. Okay—let's get it over with."

As the slim man started to raise his gun, Quinn swung his cane. It hit the open bulb, smashed it with a loud plop and the basement went black again. The slim man fired at the

spot where he'd last seen Quinn standing, but the bullet only hit the further wall.

"I may be blind," Quinn said, "but I'm not as easy to take as that, boys. Now you're blind, too. Come and take me."

With a bellow of rage the big man charged toward the sound of the voice. He skimmed past Quinn, but only for a distance of two steps. The heavy cane connected with his face, lashing him across the eyes, drawing blood from the nose and stunning the man momentarily.

Before he could get his wits back, the cane had picked off his hat, then raised high and smashed down on the top of his skull. His knees folded and he went down in a heap.

The slim man heard the sound of that cane, guessed what it meant, and started toward the stairway. He almost reached it when suddenly someone grabbed his gun hand, turned the wrist once, and bone cracked. The slim thug emitted a yell of agony. He was whipped around, flung against a chimney and the cane went to work once more. It stabbed the man incessantly every time he tried to make a move.

"You should only take on a blind man when you can see," Quinn said, in a voice heavy with fury. "Put yourself in his world and you're no better off than he is!"

"Matt!" the slim man yelled. "Matt! Help!"

Quinn whipped the cane down, using the crook of it this time. It bounced off the slim man's head and his yelps ceased. He, too, slid to the floor and stayed there.

## CHAPTER VII

### *Another Visitor*



UPSTAIRS someone opened the door and descended a few steps. Quinn scooped up the gun he had knocked out of the slim man's hand, pointed it somewhat aimlessly up the staircase and opened fire. The footsteps which had been coming down, reversed themselves, and someone scurried back to safety. The door slammed shut and

muted but excited voices could be heard beyond it.

Quinn, for one of the few times in his career, cursed the blindness which was supposed to afflict him. He couldn't barge up there and fight them. All he could do was continue to act the part of a man without sight. He could keep them from destroying Silk and himself, perhaps, but nothing else.

The voices grew fainter. The steps moved toward the front door. Distantly Quinn heard it slam and the house became quiet. Then the silence was broken by groans from both the thugs he had caned into unconsciousness. Both were rapidly recovering.

For a moment Quinn considered taking a chance, abandoning his rôle of a blind man and making certain neither of these men could escape. But it was too risky. If one of them should be caught and later shouted that Tony Quinn who had downed him was not blind, such a capture would entail more risks for Quinn than it would be worth. He still held the gun and the cane and he stumbled toward the spot where Silk had fallen.

Silk was still out. The gun butt, viciously used, apparently had been a more effective weapon than the cane, for both thugs were on their feet and staggering around the cellar. Quinn fired two shots in their direction.

"Stay right where you are!" he warned. "I can aim at the sound of your steps. Don't make a single move!"

But they were so sure he was blind that they believed their chances of reaching the stairway before his bullets found them were good—and that was all they wanted now—to get away from this blind man who could handle two armed thugs as this D.A. had. They were no longer interested in trying to kill him.

Quinn fired one more shot as they scampered up the stairs, threw open the door with a bang and raced for the porch. Quinn hurried over to where Silk lay, raised his head, and saw that he was coming out of it. In a few moments Silk was holding his throbbing head between his hands while Quinn explained what had happened.

"There were several men who broke into the house," Quinn said. "Two came to the



cellar. I had to let them get clear or reveal that I wasn't blind, and they didn't seem worth risking that much for."

"Well they certainly knew we were down here and who we were," Silk groaned. "Who do you suppose told them? As far as I know that Mrs. Joe Keeley is the only one who knows we even heard of this place."

"Maybe she tipped our anxious killers," Quinn said. "But personally I believe we've been followed ever since we left that rooming house and the dead girl."

"But why didn't they try to take us before Mrs. Keeley told all she knew?" Silk asked.

"I wish I could answer that, Silk. All I can get out of it is that it seems when we're trying to land Keeley, nobody cares much. But when we get on the trail of that girl's identity, somebody cares a great deal. And it's possible that no one had any idea Mrs. Keeley had followed her husband here."

Silk walked over and sat down on the bottom step.

"I'll be okay in a minute," he assured Quinn. "Look—somebody told Keeley to get you. Remember that scrap of paper McGrath found. Maybe Keeley's responsible for all this business here."

"It could be," Quinn admitted. "I wonder what they were doing upstairs. They ran around like a pack of madmen for a few minutes. Now there's no sound at all."

"We'd better go see." Silk arose, ready to barge right into trouble again. "What about the two thugs who attacked us? Did you recognize either one of them?"

"No—they were just a garden variety of thug paid by the week to do somebody else's dirty work," Quinn told him. "But believe me, I'd know them again."

"From the way my head feels," Silk muttered, "the one who hit me must have been nine feet tall and had muscles like an ox. Let's go!"

**UPSTAIRS**, the house was completely empty. Every raider had disappeared, but they had left plenty of mementos of their hurried visit. Most of the damage had been done on the second floor. Every scrap of clothing belonging to both the dead girl and

the mystery man who also apparently lived here, as well as all personal articles, had been removed. Combs and brushes were gone, and all drawers and cabinets had been systematically emptied of other possessions.

"And I'll bet," Quinn groaned, "they took mighty good care to wipe every piece of furniture which could possibly hold fingerprints. But you'd better get McGrath anyway, Silk."

Silk headed for the phone on a nearby table. He listened a moment, then dropped the instrument back on its cradle.

"Dead line," he said. "I'll take the car and drive to one of the neighboring houses. Are you coming along, sir?"

"I'll stay here," Quinn said. "And, Silk, find out what you can about the people who lived here. I don't imagine our mysterious couple were especially neighborly, but you might ask a few questions."

Silk hurried away.

Leaving the front door open, Quinn sat down in a rocker on the porch and tried to think things out. He didn't have much to go on. Until the girl's identity was discovered, it was like working in the dark. Everything stopped with her. Joe Keeley suddenly seemed to assume only minor proportions even though he was practically a proven murderer, and a man who had been ordered to kill again.

Quinn wondered if he could have been mistaken in that girl. Was she some kind of crook? Had she been leading Joe Keeley on for some reason? It appeared that she must have been. Keeley would hardly have come here to visit her if he had known there was another man around. Unless, of course, the man was the girl's brother or other relative.

Suddenly Quinn became aware that a sleek limousine had stopped on the street in front of the house. At first he thought Silk had made exceptionally good time on his mission, but then he saw a uniformed chauffeur get out, open the door and stand stiffly erect while a gray-haired woman climbed out of the car.

Quinn arose quickly, stepped inside the house, but didn't close the door. He entered the living room and sat down in a chair

facing the door. After a moment or two he heard the woman cross the porch, hesitate, then walk in.

She saw Quinn in the chair with his white cane between his knees and stopped abruptly. It looked as if she were going to try and slip away again without even speaking.

"Who is it?" Quinn asked. "Someone just came in here. Who is it?"

The woman squinted at him, then seemed to be reassured. After all, she was facing a blind man. He couldn't tell who she was.

"I might ask who are you and what are you doing in my niece's home?" she said peremptorily.

Quinn moved restlessly. "My name is Tony Quinn. I'm attached to the district attorney's staff."

"District attorney?" she gasped. "Then I must have made a mistake! I'm sorry. This seems to be the wrong house. I don't come to visit my niece often, so—"

As the woman turned, she faced Silk who had walked across the porch and promptly blocked the doorway.

"I'm back, sir," he told Quinn without apparently noticing her.

"Ah—good, Silk," Quinn said. "I have a visitor. She walked in, but now thinks she made a mistake. Tell me what she's like."

Silk glanced at the woman. "Fifty-five or thereabouts, sir. Youthful figure, however, and quite attractive. Cultured, well-dressed."

The woman managed to smile. "I am Mrs. Vera Whitmore," she said. "I didn't exactly tell you the truth a moment ago, Mr. Quinn, and I beg your pardon for it. This is the house I meant to visit, but when you told me you were a district attorney I was so startled I—I needed time to think."

Quinn reached into his pocket and took out a leather case. He flipped this open and held it vaguely in the general direction of the woman.

"You may examine my badge of office if you like. This gentleman who just came in is Mr. Kirby, an assistant of mine. Please sit down, Mrs. Whitmore."

She began to grow nervous. "What's wrong, Mr. Quinn? Why are you here? Something has happened. It must have.

Please tell me why—"

"When did you see your niece last?" Quinn asked.

"Why—why not for some time. She went away three months ago. To Switzerland. I dropped by as I told her I would occasionally, to see if her home was being properly cared for."

"And your niece's husband?" Quinn asked.

"Husband? Why, she had no husband. Martha had never married. At least—at least I never heard of it."

"Silk," Quinn said, "show Mrs. Whitmore the picture."

Silk took the photo of the dead girl out of his pocket. Mrs. Whitmore looked at it, grabbed for the back of a chair and then slumped slowly to the floor in a dead faint. . . .

SILK had a glass of water ready when she came out of it. She drank it gratefully and murmured her thanks. But when she turned to Quinn then, her voice was no longer steady.

"Please tell me what has happened," she pleaded. "I must know."

"Was that a picture of your niece?" Quinn asked.

"It looked like her," Mrs. Whitmore answered. "Enough to—to affect me as it did. But now I—I'm not certain. Tell me what this is all about."

"The girl in that picture, Mrs. Whitmore," Quinn said, as gently as possible, "is dead. She was murdered."

Mrs. Whitmore blinked away a few sudden tears, then abruptly began to laugh—not hysterically, but in plain relief.

"When did this happen—this murder, I mean," she demanded.

"Last night," Quinn said. "Here—in town."

She sank back with a deep, heartfelt sigh. "Mr. Quinn," she said, "my niece telephoned me from Switzerland last evening about nine o'clock. So you can see she couldn't have been murdered here. May I see that photo again, please?"

Silk handed it to her. She really studied it this time. Then she looked up and began

opening her handbag.

"There is such a striking resemblance," she said, "that it is not strange I fainted. But that is not a picture of my niece. Not Martha Whitmore. I have a picture of Martha here, taken ten years ago, when she was only sixteen, but I'm sure you can see from it that she couldn't possibly be this girl who was murdered. My niece and I are very close. I've carried this picture of her ever since it was taken."

She took a wallet from her handbag, and extracted from it a snapshot of a slim girl, obviously in her teens. Mrs. Whitmore held this toward Quinn until she realized that he wasn't paying any attention to it because he couldn't see. Silk gently took the photo from her.

"She's right, sir," he told Quinn as he studied the picture. "There is a resemblance, quite an amazing one, but there's also a different chin line. This girl has a mole in the middle of her right cheek and the murdered girl did not have one—nor even a scar showing that a mole had been removed."

QUINN leaned back in his chair. "Well," he said, "I'm glad we were wrong, Mrs. Whitmore. But tell me—did your niece rent this house to anyone?"

"No, I'm certain she did not, Mr. Quinn. That is why she asked me to drop by whenever I could, to make sure the caretaker did his work."

"We have positive proof this dead girl—and an unknown man—lived here for some time," Quinn told her soberly. "That is why I felt so sure she must be your niece."

"Martha will call me again in a day or two," Mrs. Whitmore said. "She's on the move, trying to see all of Europe in one trip. But when she does reach me, I'll certainly ask her about her letting anyone use the house."

"Do that, and let me know," Quinn said. "Thanks very much for your cooperation. I'm sorry we frightened you, Mrs. Whitmore."

"It was my fault entirely. I shouldn't have been so silly." Mrs. Whitmore arose. "May I go now?"

"Of course." Quinn arose, too.

Silk went to the door with her and they watched her walk slowly back to her car. When it pulled away, Silk turned to Quinn.

"What do you think, sir?"

"I don't know, Silk. I caught a glimpse of the photo of her niece. It does look something like the dead girl, but not enough to fool a devoted aunt."

"That's what I thought."

"Then why did she faint?" Quinn asked. "That was no act. And until you returned, she was set to hightail away from here as fast as she could travel."

"You know something?" Silk murmured. "I'm thinking it's time for the Black Bat to move into this mess, sir."

"He's going to," Quinn vowed. "Tonight. Now—what about McGrath?"

"He'll be here shortly. They had to locate him. Somebody at a hospital had to be questioned and Mac was busy. I talked to the woman who let me use her phone. She had a few interesting facts about the people who lived here."

"It's about time we got facts," Quinn said.

"This house really does belong to a girl named Martha Whitmore. It's part of a huge estate she inherited some time ago, but she rarely came here. In fact, the neighbors don't know her. But they knew the mystery girl all right."

"Go on, Silk," Quinn urged.

"This girl moved in with a man she said was her husband, about three months ago. They were a nice, quiet, respectable couple—didn't go out at all, except to walk around the yard. This woman identified the picture of the girl all right. She was known as Mrs. Marlin—that's all. A month ago her husband went away, just disappeared. The girl stayed around a while, then she just walked out and wasn't seen again. That was three weeks ago."

Quinn's head suddenly tilted to one side.

"A siren," he said. "That will be Inspector McGrath, but what's he using a siren for? Something must have happened, Silk. Mac's really in a hurry."

"Let's hope he found Joe Keeley," Silk said. "That would be a big help."

## CHAPTER VIII

*Dying Man's Statement*

**E**VEN before the police car slid to the curb and stopped, McGrath had the door open. He jumped out and ran to the porch where Silk and Quinn were waiting.

"We got a break, Tony," he called out. "I think you ought to be in on it, but we have to move

fast. I'll tell you about it while we're driving to the hospital. . . . But what about this house?"

"The murdered girl and her husband lived here," Quinn said. "There were four loaded guns in the place when we got there, and windows are equipped with home-made but pretty elaborate burglar alarms. A number of men showed up, tried to kill Silk and me, but we fought them off. I want the house gone over."

"Okay," McGrath said. "You seem to have had a busy time. 'I brought along a couple of men who can take over now.'"

"Have them look for fingerprints—a man's" Quinn ordered. "And anything else which might give us a lead as to who this man was. Our visitors removed everything they figured might possibly identify him, but they were in a hurry and maybe they left something behind."

McGrath issued orders to the detectives who followed him to the porch. Then he led Quinn to the police car and helped him into the back seat. Silk sat beside the driver and the siren wailed a demand for a clear road.

"It's like this," McGrath explained, as the car roared away. "As you suggested, Tony, I sent men to check all the business places around the neighborhood where that girl was knocked off. We found a man who runs a diner and he identified a picture of the girl. She'd been in his place a short time before she was killed."

"Alone?" Quinn asked.

"Yes, alone. She ordered a sandwich and asked about some guy named Whitey."

"At least we have a name, Mac. Go ahead."

"The guy told her he never heard of anybody called Whitey and when he turned around to give her the sandwich, she was gone. Just slipped away."

"But what has all that to do with this hurry-up visit to a hospital, Mac?"

"Nothing. That's another lead. The girl's picture was printed in the newspaper this morning. It drew results—plenty of results. A man named Robard called up and said the girl had been in to see him the night she was killed. His place is half a dozen blocks away and we hadn't covered it in our routine check."

"I'm beginning to suspect what happened after that," Quinn said grimly.

"We told Robard to come to Headquarters right away and he promised he would. But when he didn't show up I sent somebody to bring him in. It seems that right after Robard telephoned us, some stickup men walked in and put a couple of slugs through him. They also ransacked the place. Robard is in the hospital and he's dying."

"They beat us again, Mac," Quinn groaned. "Every time we find a trail, they cover it up before we can move in."

"Not this time they didn't," McGrath said. "Robard must have looked dead and they figured he was. But he's talking, and he told me quite a story. But maybe you'd better talk to him—if he's still alive when we get there."

When Quinn finally sat down at Robard's bedside, the wounded man mustered a weak smile. He spoke in a faint but clear voice and a police stenographer began taking down every word. Robard seemed in a hurry to tell his story, before it should be too late.

"I do not know if the men who shot me were after my money or my life," he said. "They just walked in and opened fire without saying a word."

"You may have known something and they wanted to silence you," Quinn suggested. "Something about a murdered girl."

"Yes—I saw her picture in the newspapers," Robard said. "I am sure it was the same girl. She came into my place and asked

me if a man named Whitey had bought anything from me."

"The name of Whitey checks with information we already have, Mr. Robard," Quinn said. "So you can be sure the motive for the attack on you wasn't robbery."

"The girl—she was most unusual. She spoke a few words in French—spoke perfectly. She had lived in France, I am certain. She also said this Whitey she mentioned was a sculptor, but only as an amateur, and might have come to my place to buy supplies."

"Did she give any further description of him?" Quinn asked.

"But yes. She said he was blond, slim, six feet tall, about thirty-five years of age and handsome. Unfortunately I did not know any such man and I was unable to assist her."

"And that's all you know?" Quinn asked.

"Yes, I am sorry there's not more."

"Thank you, Mr. Robard. You've talked enough. Start concentrating on living now. You can make it if you try hard enough."

"I shall try," Robard smiled. "I shall try very hard."

He closed his eyes as if he were dead tired. McGrath signaled a doctor who had been hovering in the background. Before Quinn left the room, they were injecting plasma into the dying man's arm.

OUTSIDE, in the police car, Quinn's blank eyes stared straight ahead. "We have something, Mac," he commented, as the Inspector sat down beside him. "A name and a good description. We know this Whitey was an amateur sculptor and in the habit of eating in diners. It isn't much, but it's a lot more than we've had up to now."

"I'm calling the FBI Identification Division," McGrath said. "They'll take the description I give them, along with the nickname, and run it through their files. If they have a man called Whitey who answers that description, we'll soon know who he is."

"Have us driven back to that house where you met us, Mac," Quinn said. "I want to know if your men found anything. Also, my car is still parked there. After that, I suppose, all we can do is wait."

Silk turned around in the front seat. "One thing bothers me, sir. How did those thugs find out that Robard had called the police? How did they know where to find him?"

"I was thinking of that, too," Quinn said, and frowned. "Mac, was anybody at Headquarters when this call came in?"

"Not a soul, Tony, and there were no leaks. Because Robard talked directly to me and no one else knew what he said."

"Well," Quinn said thoughtfully, "after you drop us off, go back to the hospital, Mac, and see if Robard is in any condition to answer one question. Ask him if he told anybody at all about this girl having been to see him."

"Okay, Tony," McGrath agreed. "I'll do that on my way to Headquarters."

When they reached the mystery house, Silk went in with McGrath while Quinn transferred to his own car. Silk returned after a few moments and drove away.

"No luck," he said. "McGrath's fingerprint men dusted everything. If there were any prints, those visitors removed them. They couldn't find a thing which might help in identifying the man—or the girl."

"I didn't have much hope, Silk," Quinn confessed. "Drive me home. Maybe Butch has reported something, or Carol has located a trail. Besides, I want to change clothes. It will be dark soon, and at night I like dark clothing, a black hood, and direct methods."

"I was sure you'd come to it," Silk approved, and nodded happily. . . .

AT ABOUT eleven o'clock that night, Benny Loper, the undersized man who had so readily identified Joe Keeley, returned home to the cheap rooming house where the unidentified girl had met her death. Benny unlocked his door, stepped inside his room, and snapped the light switch. Nothing happened. The room stayed dark.

Loper grunted and tried the switch again. He felt the breeze of the door as it closed. Then he was picked up bodily, carried across the room and hurled into a chair.

He couldn't see the man who had seized him. The room was pitch dark and the intruder seemed nothing more than a part of the gloom. Loper tried to get up. A strong

hand pushed him back.

"Stay there," a voice snapped. "I want a talk with you and I want some truthful answers to a few questions."

"But—but I can't see you. I don't know who you are!"

"You don't have to see me, Loper. I'm the Black Bat."

"The Black Bat!" Loper repeated the name fearfully. "But I don't understand—"

him. Loper also seemed highly interested in a small table beside his bed.

"You were in this rooming house when a detective was sent to check on a pawn ticket found in the murdered girl's room," his accuser went on inexorably. "You knew where he was going and why because you heard him say so. You beat him there, killed the pawnbroker. Then killed the detective when he showed up."



CAROL

"You identified the killer of that girl who lived down the hall. You picked Joe Keeley's picture out of the Rogues' Gallery, but it took you a long time to do it. Now understand this—you, and only you, knew Keeley's identity. Somebody tipped him to get away before the police arrived. Only one person could have done that—you!"

"But—but I didn't, I swear I didn't!" Loper half sobbed. "I was only trying to help the police. Keeley means nothing to me."

"You tipped him off. It had to be you."

"No! I swear I didn't. I—I didn't even know where to find the man."

As he spoke, Loper was trying to look around. Now that his eyes were more accustomed to the darkness, he made out a grim form standing three yards in front of

"No—no—no!" Loper said over and over again.

"Every fact points squarely at you. The police suspect this, but they can't act only on suspicion. I can, because I'm not the police and I don't have a rule book which must be followed. You'll talk, Loper, or I'll smash the truth out of you."

LOPER wriggled further back in the chair, but he was changing somewhat. The frightened look on his face was being replaced by a sterner expression, one in which terror did not predominate. He kept glancing in the direction of the night table which he could dimly see.

"I'm waiting," the Black Bat said softly.



"Now see here," Loper protested in a steady voice. "I'm not afraid of you, because I've done nothing. But you—how do you know these things? As you said, it appears that only I would have been able to work fast enough to send Keeley away, and to reach the pawnbroker before the police did. I'll admit the circumstances indicate as much. But, in speaking of facts which indicate one man being responsible, let's apply the same thing to *you*."

"Exactly what do you mean by that?" the Black Bat asked.

"One man would know the facts which would indicate my guilt—only one man! And I don't mean Inspector McGrath. I mean Tony Quinn, who found me sitting on the front porch of this rooming house just before it became known that the pawnbroker had been murdered."

"What are you trying to say?" the Black Bat demanded.

"That Tony Quinn may be under that hood you're wearing. I think you are Quinn. More than a few people suspect that our fine Special District Attorney and the Black Bat are the same person, and that Quinn's blindness is a sham. Perhaps they're right."

"Suppose Quinn told me these things I know," the Black Bat parried.

"Then he should be forced out of office," declared Loper flatly. "The Black Bat is wanted for more kinds of crimes than you can count. There is a warrant out for his arrest. If Quinn works with him, then Tony Quinn isn't fit to occupy his position."

The Black Bat chuckled. "You're a shrewd little man, Mr. Loper. I might say a dangerous man, but this bluff of yours won't work. I am still asking you to tell the truth. In a moment I'll stop asking and begin persuading you."

"I told you I don't know where Joe Keeley is!" Loper said defiantly.

"Why did you tell him to run for it?" the Black Bat demanded.

Loper was a completely changed man now. There was no trace of the rather shy, retiring person he had been. And he spoke differently in the heat of this excitement. Here was no cheap mug, educated in bar-rooms and gutters, but a man who had

known the best life had to offer.

"What's the use of all this?" Loper said. "Why should I have warned him?"

"I'd like an answer to that also," the Black Bat said.

"You won't get it from me, Black Bat," snapped Loper. "I can't talk about something I know nothing about. And as for that threat of persuading me—it won't work either!"

## CHAPTER IX

### *The Black Bat's Way*



LOPER still kept trying to peer through the darkness and always in the direction of the night table. He wanted to reach it, but he didn't dare make such an obvious move.

The Black Bat stepped up to him and laid the cold muzzle of his automatic against Loper's cheek. The little man screamed, and moved so fast he fell off the chair. As he picked himself up off the floor, he reeled over to the night table and managed to pull the drawer half-open. He covered the sound of the moving drawer by shifting his feet around rapidly.

The Black Bat still stood somewhere in the middle of the room. The sound of his voice proved that.

"Now," he said, "you're going to talk and before this interview is over, I intend to know all about you. I want to know why you happened to rent a room in this cheap place a day or two after that girl, who later was murdered, checked in. Also, why you so readily identified her killer, and then promptly warned him to run for it before the police could act on your tip."

"Don't shoot!" Loper pleaded. "Please! I'll tell you everything I know. It isn't much. I'm not involved in this murder as much as you think I am. That's the absolute truth and—"

Casually he dipped his fingers into the night table drawer and closed his fingers

around the butt of a nickel-plated revolver. Gently, so that there would be no telltale scraping sound, he lifted the gun free of the drawer, started to bring it to a level. The next time the Black Bat spoke, he meant to hurl bullets in the direction of the hooded man's voice.

He said, smiling smugly to himself:

"I really saw Keeley leaving this floor after the girl was killed, though I didn't know—then—who he was. His face was scratched, his clothes were mussed. Of course he killed her. Or are you insinuating that I am the murderer?"

Loper waited for the answer his question must draw. His finger grew tighter on the trigger. There wasn't a sound. The room was deathly still.

"Answer me!" Loper cried.

And then suddenly he knew. While he had turned his attention to getting the gun, the Black Bat must have quietly opened the door and departed. But he couldn't have gone far. He must still be in the long, narrow corridor and a perfect target.

Loper sprinted across the room, yanked open the door. The hall lights were on and he blinked. Then he thought—if the hall lights were on, why hadn't he seen the door open? With a wild yell he looked down the hall, saw no signs of the man in black, and darted back into his room. The hooded man *had* to be there! This was all some sort of a trick, and Loper's fury was murderous.

He opened the door of the small closet, found nobody hiding there. He looked behind a heavy chair set in one corner and back of which a man might conceal himself. Nobody was there. He even looked under the bed. Then he cursed loudly and fluently.

Someone rapped on the door. Loper transferred the gun to his left hand, went to the door and kept the gun out of sight. For a second Loper was dumfounded to the point of muteness at the sight of the enormous man who filled the doorway.

Then the big man grinned. "Hello. I live across the hall. What's all the fuss, chum?"

[Turn page]



*oh-oh, Dry Scalp!*

"SAM'S nice, but he'd be a lot nicer if he did something about that Dry Scalp! His hair is dull and unruly—and he has loose dandruff, too! I've got just the ticket for him—'Vaseline' Hair Tonic!"



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"Get out!" Loper snarled. "Beat it."

The big man put the flat of his hand against the closing door and gave it a shove. Loper went hurtling backward. The big man was after him, moving with an amazing speed for all his size. Fingers that felt like a vise closed around Loper's wrist, and the gun he held was shaken from his hand. The big man pushed Loper aside, bent down and picked up the weapon. It looked like a toy in his fist.

"This is what I mean, chum," he said. "Guys who carry one of these babies always draw trouble, and me, I came here to get away from trouble."

"Who are you?" Loper demanded.

"Call me Butch," the big man said cheerfully. "Now listen, you want to argue with anybody and wave a gun all around, do it some place else. Them things go off now and then and make a lot of noise. The cops don't like that sort of thing and when they come into a dump like this, they go through it. I'm not exactly in favor of that, understand?"

"You're on the lam," Loper accused. "All right—I'm sorry. I couldn't help it. I had a prize catch and he slipped through my fingers. I could have chopped him down with a few slugs and you'd be cheering me right now."

"No kidding?" Butch grunted. "Who was this big shot?"

"The Black Bat!" Loper groaned. "I had him in this room. He didn't know I had the gun. In one more second I'd have shot him."

**B**UTCH bent his head, turned the nickel-plated revolver around and laughed.

"With this gat, you'd have shot him? Guess again, chum. There's no slugs in this pea shooter. Who are you trying to kid?"

"No bullets?" Loper yelled.

He hurried over to the night table, pulled the partly open drawer all the way out and in his nervousness spilled its contents on the floor. Six slugs rolled noisily over the uncarpeted room. Loper walked unsteadily to a chair and sat down slowly.

"He knew about the gun. Sure he did. He was in my room when I came in. He'd

unloaded the gun. He knew every move I made and, somehow, he could see in the dark what I was doing."

Butch threw the gun on the bed. "Next time you get a line on the Black Bat, don't try to handle him yourself. Call me, and I'll help. There's one guy I've been after for years. He busted a racket of mine that would have paid off in buckets of dough."

"Then you are hiding out," Loper said.

"Maybe. All I said was I didn't want any cops prowling around."

"When you came here," Loper said, "you asked for the room in which a girl was killed a couple of days ago. Why?"

"Look," Butch growled, "am I asking you a lot of questions? Let it alone, chum. I got my own troubles. See you around."

He turned his back on Loper, walked out and closed the door behind him. He went into his own room across the hall. Half a minute later Loper was knocking. Butch glanced at the door of his clothes closet to be certain it was tightly shut. Then he let Loper in.

"I want to apologize," the small man said. "I was plenty excited and nervous a while ago. Maybe we could do one another some good, eh? That is, if you're not averse to making a little dough."

"The stuff has its uses," Butch answered calmly. "But understand, I'm kind of hot these days."

"You probably know a lot of boys around town," Loper said. "Important men, high up. You could get hold of them and they'd tell you things. Am I right?"

"I got friends," Butch admitted cautiously.

"I knew it. I'll talk to you later. Maybe tomorrow. You can trust me, too. I'm on your side of the fence, if you know what I mean."

"Sure," Butch said. "I wouldn't doubt that. Any guy the Black Bat comes gunning for hasn't got a halo around his head."

Loper stepped out, closed the door and Butch listening, heard him re-enter his own room. Butch turned the key in the lock, pulled down the cracked shade over the only window, then opened the closet door.

"He fell," Butch chortled. "Everything

worked out like we wanted it to."

The man who emerged from the narrow confines of the clothes closet was dressed entirely in black. His hands were gloved, his head hooded.

The Black Bat went over to a chair and sat down.

"Loper," he said, "is no ordinary punk, Butch. In fact, I doubt he's a crook at all. I didn't expect him to tell me anything, but I wanted to get his reaction—and I certainly did."

"He's a smart boy," Butch said. He kept his voice down. "But he wants my help for something or other. I expect he'll search my room first chance he gets. I'm ready for that. He'll think I'm a high class burglar on the dodge."

"Good enough," the Black Bat said. "Your telephone message was recorded on the tape machine at the lab, Butch, so I was able to reach you here easily. And thanks also for dousing the hall lights before I came out of Loper's room, then switching them on again so quickly."

"That bothered him," Butch chortled. "He thinks you got wings."

"Not Loper. Butch, I faced him with a few facts and got nowhere. He simply reversed the situation and accused me of being Tony Quinn."

Butch looked startled. "Look! If he's been snooping and has found out anything, I better go in there and take care of him right now."

"No—he was just guessing. But it was canny guessing and shows how clever he really is. Getting back to the hall light again, did you find out how there happened to be no light on right after that girl was murdered?"

"Yeah," Butch said. "Seems the lights were okay after Keeley high-tailed out of the girl's room and Loper came in or Loper wouldn't have seen Keeley. It was Loper who yelled for the landlady to replace the bulb when he came out into the hall on his way to the bathroom later, and it was dark. Seems somebody swiped the bulb, which isn't exactly new in this dump."

"I see." The Black Bat nodded. "Loper—or someone—slipped into the mur-

dered girl's room. Perhaps he looted it, perhaps he found it already looted. But whoever the looter was, he wanted the killing discovered, so he left her room door ajar, and stole a light bulb, making it necessary for the landlady to come up to replace it. She would see the open door and investigate."

YOU and Silk didn't find out who that girl was?" Butch asked.

The Black Bat shrugged. "We thought we were on the verge of it, but like everything else in this case, the trail seems dead-end. Carol reported in early tonight that she was having no luck trying to get the girl identified from her photo, but we gave her a fresh lead."

"Maybe you ought to sort of brief me on what's happened," Butch suggested. "I'm working in the dark and I'd better not be if this Loper is as smart as you say he is."

"Of course," agreed his black-clad visitor. "The only significant thing that has happened was when Silk and I found out that our mystery girl had lived at a certain uptown address, and that Joe Keeley used to visit her there."

"You mean maybe there's a jealous husband mixed up in it?" blurted Butch.

"Well, hardly," the Black Bat said, with a faint smile. "The thing has grown too big for that. There was a man living in the same house with this girl, however, and who the neighbors said was her husband, but he seems to have vanished some time ago. She left soon after he disappeared, and my guess is that she had been searching for him ever since."

"Have you got anything on this guy?" Butch asked.

"A little. His nickname is Whitey, he's six feet tall, blond, good-looking, eats in diners and is an amateur sculptor. If you come across such a man, grab hold and don't let go."

"If I meet the guy, I'll know what to do," Butch promised.

"And that's about all," the Black Bat concluded, "except that a woman named Vera Whitmore showed up at that house and said it belonged to her niece, Martha, who hap-

pens to be in Switzerland. Mrs. Whitmore, I have learned, is socially prominent, lives with a brother, and is reputed to be wealthy. Her niece is worth a few millions, too."

"And that's all?"

"That's everything, Butch, except for a few minor mysteries. Like where Joe Keeley ran to, why he was given written orders to kill Tony Quinn, who Benny Loper really is, and what has happened to Whitey. It will all tie up somehow. Right now I'm going to pay Mrs. Vera Whitmore's home a little visit. I want a good look around her luxurious abode."

"Leave Benny Loper to me," Butch said.

"He's your's Butch. But handle him like this—after I've gone, leave your room for a while. Give Loper a chance to confirm that you're a wanted crook. Phone in when you get a chance, and report anything that's happened."

## CHAPTER X

### *Transatlantic Call*



**B**UTCH, at a sign from the Black Bat, went to the door and opened it a trifle. Then he signaled, and the man in black slithered into the hall, down the stairway like a wraith, and vanished.

Outside, parked on a side street, was a small coupé which seemed to have seen better days. But under the hood of that little old car was an engine capable of making high speeds, and the car was weighted to hold the road well.

Anyone who might have been looking casually in the direction of the car now would have seen only a flitting shadow whisk across the sidewalk. The Black Bat moved silently, so fast, in his clothing that matched the darkness, that he was almost invisible.

Once behind the wheel of the car he removed his hood and replaced it with a wide-brimmed black hat which covered his features well enough so he couldn't be readily recognized. At least the hat would draw no

attention to him while the hood would have been a dead giveaway.

He drove across town to a speedway where he picked up speed as he headed north. He soon passed the city limits and turned off toward an exclusive suburban section consisting mainly of large estates. He had already informed himself of the exact location of Mrs. Whitmore's home and now he parked the coupé about a quarter of a mile away, in the rear of the estate.

Vaulting a low hedge, he silently made his way toward the big garage where he stopped for five minutes, listening intently for any sound of watchdogs. He would have been aware of the slightest indication, for his hearing was abnormally acute, a condition developed when he had actually been blind and depended upon his ears more than others did. When he finally went on toward the house, he was certain there had been no alarm.

There were lights in one room on the ground floor and in several upstairs. He paused to take a quick look through a kitchen window. No servants seemed to be around. The back door was securely locked and he didn't want to tackle it. Anyway, there might be easier ways of entering the house.

Around to the side, he risked a look through the lighted window. The room was a small library or study. Nobody was in it. The window wasn't tightly closed, so he raised it slowly, until he could hoist himself up and over the sill.

Without making a sound, he stepped over to a leather-topped desk and glanced at a framed photo. It was a picture of the same small girl which Mrs. Whitmore had showed him—the same dress, the mole on the cheek—but this was a full shot of her, standing in front of some sort of a foreign store with empty windows, but from which a man was coming.

The Black Bat bent closer, studying the girl's hand. There was no ring on any of her fingers.

His eyes shifted to several letters on the desk, in an orderly stack. All were from Berne, Switzerland. The top letter told of the skiing and bobsledding and the beauty



## BUTCH

of the mountains. Another spoke of the friendly people, rattled on about the war jitters they were enduring. The letters were exactly the kind a well-bred, intelligent young woman might write home.

The Black Bat was turning to examine the contents of the desk drawers when the clamor of the telephone made him jump. He heard rapid footsteps upstairs. The Black Bat, seeing no place of concealment, sprinted for the wide open window.

He had barely landed in a crouch on the ground outside when he heard Vera Whitmore's voice speaking into the phone.

"Yes—yes," she said. "Of course it's . . . What? Please repeat that. The connection isn't very good. Yes, I'll wait."

There was a long pause. Then she said, in a voice filled with delight:

"Martha, darling! I'm so glad to hear from you! Are you quite all right? You haven't had any bad spills on those ski runs? I remember them so well. Yes, Owen is in excellent health. Oh, Martha, I almost forgot. A strange thing happened today. Do you remember that old house far uptown on Wakefield Place? The one that belonged to

your cousin, who willed it to you? Well, I went there today to look around and the police were there! It seems someone had literally taken the place over and actually lived there. Do you know anything about it?"

**I**T WAS easy for the Black Bat to hear every word for Mrs. Whitmore spoke as though she believed it necessary to shout in order to be heard all the way to Switzerland.

"Did you rent it—or give anyone permission to stay there?" she went on after a moment. "Yes, I was sure of that, and I told them so. And oh yes—the girl who had lived there looked so much like you, Martha, that I actually fainted when they showed me her picture. . . Yes—I'll tell them all you've said in the morning. And thank you so much for calling me, darling. I do worry, you know."

There was another minute of this and then Mrs. Whitmore hung up. At the same time someone else entered the room. The Black Bat took a chance on a quick look. A tall, gray-haired man wearing an expensive lounging robe and smoking a long, fat



and obviously costly cigar was walking slowly toward the desk.

"Owen," Mrs. Whitmore said, "that was Martha again."

"Oh?" The tall man raised his eyebrows. "Anything wrong?"

"Of course not," Mrs. Whitmore chided. "She merely wished to tell us she was fine and having a wonderful time. . . Owen, this room is actually cold. Oh—did you leave the window open as wide as that?"

"I'm sure I didn't," the tall man said quickly. "I'll close it. The nights are turning cold."

The Black Bat beat a hurried retreat to the shelter of a tall bush. He saw the man named Owen, obviously Mrs. Whitmore's brother, though naturally his name would not also be Whitmore, lower the window and draw the shade.

There wasn't much more to be done here. Mrs. Whitmore had apparently told an honest story about her niece. The phone call proved it. She seemed to be innocently involved in this affair, even if she had fainted at the sight of the murdered girl's picture.

The Black Bat glanced at his watch and saw that it was after eleven. He returned to where the car was parked, changed to the wide-brimmed hat and drove back to the city. There, at a quiet and secluded street corner he pulled into the curb and waited.

After a few moments Carol Baldwin came walking briskly down the street. She stopped apparently to look in a shop window for a moment, but actually, she was glancing up and down the deserted street before she made a bee-line for the coupé.

Carol got in beside the Black Bat. She leaned back and breathed a long sigh of fatigue.

"I've really hoofed it today, Tony," she said. "And got little for my pains. Nobody seems to recognize the girl in the picture though, two people thought, at first, they did."

"I was expecting that," the Black Bat told her. "We haven't got too far either. A few leads which threaten to fold up on us any minute. But when you called at dinner time, I asked you to check on the Whitmore family. How about that?"

"An old and respected family," Carol said. "At the moment it is represented by Mrs. Vera Whitmore and her brother, Owen Lansing, who live on the original estate. But they don't own it. Martha Whitmore does—Vera is the widow of Martha's uncle who ran through his share of the estate before he died. Martha now spends almost all of her time traveling. At the moment she is in Switzerland, according to all the information I could get."

"It checks," the Black Bat said wearily. "What about Martha's parents?"

"Her father died when she was little more than a baby. Her mother took her to Europe . . . Oh yes, Martha had a sister. She died in France during the Nazi occupation. The mother didn't live long after that and then Martha was on her own."

"In a conquered country," the Black Bat said musingly. "What a break for a girl like her!"

"Martha entered some convent over there, Tony, and she was well protected until the war ended. And that's all there is to the Whitmore family. Martha owns a vast estate, but leaves the actual management of it to her aunt and uncle by marriage whom she placed in legal control years ago."

"Well, suppose you keep on digging, Carol," the Black Bat said. "I felt, up until a short time ago, that the Whitmore family might be connected with this, but I'm not sure any more. In fact, I feel quite certain they are not. But don't stop hunting for that girl's identity."

"I'll start again as soon as I've had some sleep," Carol said. "There are still a couple of leads."

CAROL waited until the lone pedestrian on the street was far past the car. Then she got out and walked rapidly away. The Black Bat headed for home. He had to be even more careful than usual because he felt sure the house was being watched. Therefore he left the car on the street behind his home, crossed a yard, climbed a fence and came out behind the garden house at the rear of his own grounds. He entered this, after scanning the darkness for a moment. Opening the cleverly hidden trap-

door, he dropped down into the tunnel and made his way to the laboratory.

Usually Silk was there to greet him, but there were no signs of him tonight. The Black Bat went over to a steel locker, opened it and took out the light hued clothing usually worn by blind Tony Quinn. He changed into it, taking his time, and thinking over the various angles to this weird case.

Finally when he glanced in a full length mirror, the Black Bat had vanished. Tony Quinn, Special D.A., with his white cane, and the scar-pitted area around his eyes was reflected in the glass. Quinn walked to the hidden exit from the lab to the library, opened it just a little and listened.

It seemed odd that he could hear no sound from Silk. But perhaps he had retired. Silk always made certain he got plenty of sleep in case he was needed on some long and arduous assignment.

Quinn closed the door behind him. He didn't need lights, so left the room dark as he tapped his way toward the reception hall. Then as he suddenly realized that the whole house was dark, he sensed instantly something wrong. He paused to listen. There wasn't a sound to be heard.

He moved faster now, inspected the other downstairs rooms and then, as swiftly as a blind man could, he went up the stairs to the second floor. Silk, fully dressed, lay face down in the middle of the floor in his room. There was a smear of blood on the back of his head. He seemed to have been struck from behind, without a chance to defend himself.

Quinn threw caution away then. He knelt beside Silk, turned him over carefully and shuddered at the pallor of his face. But Silk's pulse was strong, his breathing even and good. He had just been knocked out, and would probably stay that way for some time.

Quinn glanced around the room. Nothing had been disturbed. This wasn't the work of burglars, or even of anyone pretending to be a burglar. Quinn tried to puzzle it out, but there was no answer. Finally he hurried back to the lab, purely on a hunch, and glanced at the recording machine by which phone calls from his aides could be

taped. The spool had moved. Someone had called in.

Quinn put the spool on the playback and Butch's voice came over. It said:

"I just phoned Silk and told him there is going to be trouble. Silk said for me to put it all on the machine in case anything happened to him. Right after you left my room, I went out and sure enough, Benny Loper frisked the place. But when I got back, he was on the hall telephone, speaking low and he had no idea I was nearby. He told somebody to get over to Tony Quinn's house fast, go in if they had to bust in, and see if Quinn was there. He said to search the place from top to bottom if he wasn't around. Silk figured this was a plan to prove you're the Black Bat. He told me to beat it to your office and start setting things up so it'll look like you been there all night. That's all for now. I'm in a hurry."

Quinn quickly erased the taped message in the machine. He went to the locker and took out one of the Black Bat's guns. But it was too bulky to be carried with the clothing he was wearing. He substituted for it a small .25 automatic. Silk, he felt reasonably sure, was all right and didn't require a doctor. There was no fracture that Quinn had been able to detect and Silk hadn't been in a state of shock.

Quinn did take time to dictate a message to Silk on the tape recorder, in case Silk recovered consciousness soon. It would reassure him and give him information he might require.

Then Quinn made his way through the tunnel, followed the same route he had taken only a short while ago. Reaching the parked car, he got in and drove toward the State Building where he maintained his offices as Special District Attorney. He fully realized that he was on a spot, knew that a scheme to kill the Black Bat's activities had been concocted without actually resorting to murder.

Perhaps Benny Loper would use his information as a blackmail threat. But it didn't matter much *what* he intended to do with his knowledge that Tony Quinn was not at home when the Black Bat was prowling. And that a blind man wouldn't be abroad for

hours at a time—alone.

Benny Loper, it seemed, was an even more dangerous enemy than Quinn had figured him out to be.

## CHAPTER XI

### *Underworld Tactics*



QUINN had to slip into the building and reach his office without being seen. It was after midnight, so was not too difficult a task. He had noticed, from the street, that his suite of rooms was ablaze with light.

He walked through the reception room, entered his own office and found Butch there. The big man was excited and worried. As Quinn rapidly explained what had happened, Butch's excitement turned to a cold rage.

"I'll beat it back to the house and make sure Silk is okay," he said when Quinn paused. "But when the right time comes, I'm taking Benny Loper apart, little by little. It'll be tough working with him after what's happened."

"But you'll do it," Quinn said. "Now get out of here. Thanks for lighting up the place, Butch, as if Silk had brought me here and left me alone. A blind man doesn't need lighted rooms, but nobody will think of that. I'm going to get busy now to establish the fact that I've been here for a long time."

"Look," Butch said, "I called Police Headquarters a couple of times. McGrath ain't there, but they're expecting him, and I said it was your office calling and for him to call back. I figured if he did before you got here, I wouldn't answer the phone. But at least McGrath will think you been trying to reach him since eleven o'clock."

"A swell idea, Butch," Quinn approved. "And from here on, boy, we're going to do some slapping around ourselves. We've been at the receiving end of trouble, so far, but that's going to change."

As Butch disappeared, Quinn hastily arranged his dictating machine so that it would

seem as if he had been working long and hard, recording legal documents and notes. Then he dialed Police Headquarters again.

"This is Quinn," he said. "Has Inspector McGrath come in yet?"

"No, sir," a desk officer replied. "I've been watching for him, to give him your message to call you the minute he came in."

"Have you seen anything of my man, Silk Kirby?"

"Why no, Mr. Quinn."

"All right," Quinn said. "Be sure to have the Inspector contact me."

Quinn actually went to work then, as if he had been there all evening. If anyone came to check on that, they would find plenty of evidence. Suddenly he stopped speaking into the dictaphone mouthpiece and his right hand dropped casually to a coat pocket where the small gun was hidden. Somebody had used a key in the lock of the outer door.

There were heavy steps across the reception room and they stopped in the doorway to Quinn's office. It was a man in overalls.

"Hello, Mr. Quinn," he said. "This is Paulson, the night building super."

"Well, come in," Quinn swung around toward his desk and his apparently blind eyes were turned somewhat to the left of where the super stood. "I've been cleaning up a lot of details. I suppose it's late."

"It's way after midnight," the super said with a chuckle. "That's why I dropped in. I saw the lights earlier, but when they stayed on I got to wondering if anything was wrong."

"Are you sure it's after midnight?" Quinn exclaimed. "Why, I told Silk to come back for me about eleven. I had no idea of the time."

"Maybe he forgot," the super said. "If he doesn't show up and you want me to, I'll be glad to drive you home, Mr. Quinn."

"Thanks," Quinn said. "But I'm sure he'll get here."

"I'll be around to run the elevator if you decide to go home without Silk," the super said. "I got plenty of work in the lobby."

Quinn went back to his dictaphone, but five minutes later Inspector McGrath called.

"Mac," Quinn said, "I'm worried. Silk was supposed to be here and pick me up

around eleven. The super of the building tells me it's way after twelve and Silk hasn't shown up. He doesn't answer the house phone either."

"I'll be right over, Tony," McGrath said. "I'll drive you home and we'll wake Silk up and kid the pants off him."

Ten minutes later McGrath hurried into the office. "No word from Silk yet?" he asked.

"No, and I called the house twice since I talked to you," Quinn said in a worried tone. "Something must have happened. Mac, this afternoon when Silk drove me home, he said he thought somebody was watching my house. I wonder if he was right and . . . Mac, let's get over there fast!"

**M**cGRATH handed Quinn his hat and white cane, took his arm and led him to the corridor. The building super was waiting beside one of the high speed elevators.

"It's about time you went home," the super chided Quinn. "A fine example you're setting for public employees, working all day and then most of the night."

"Mr. Paulson here dropped in to help me pass some time away, Mac," Quinn said. "If you hadn't called, he was going to drive me home."

Apparently McGrath was also bothered by Silk's absence. He used the siren on the police car until he was a mile away from the Quinn home. Then he cut this off, slowed the car and spoke to Quinn in a tight voice.

"If Silk said your place was being watched, it probably was. Tony, Silk might be hurt. Anyway, if those stakeouts are still around, I'm going to get them. You stay in the car. There might be some shooting."

He swung into the street. A man, standing in the shadows of a tree trunk, was suddenly illuminated by the headlights of the police car. He began walking slowly along the street, trying to act like some householder out for a breath of air. That lasted until he saw the siren on the otherwise unmarked police car. Then he suddenly whirled and started running. At the same time he reached for his hip pocket.

McGrath slammed on the brakes. "There's a guy—and he's running for it!" he cried to Quinn. "I'm going to stop him!"

McGrath leaped out of the car, gun in his fist. The running man looked around and McGrath saw then that he also held a gun. The thug was panicky by now. He half turned as he ran, and fired at McGrath.

The Detective Inspector slowed up, and stopped. He leveled his service pistol.

"Stop!" he yelled.

The man kept on going. McGrath squeezed the trigger slowly. The service pistol roared. The running man seemed to give a long leap but when he landed, his feet fell from under him. He rolled over twice and wound up in the gutter. McGrath started toward him. He heard brush crackle and caught a glimpse of a second man who had been hiding behind some hedges.

"This is the law!" McGrath shouted again. "Stop or you'll get what your pal got!"

The second man hadn't even reached a good head of steam in his efforts to escape. He came to a halt, raised his arms and docilely walked toward McGrath. The detective quickly searched him, took away a small gun, then held the man's arm while he went over to the curb and examined the first thug.

"Dead," McGrath muttered. "Well, I gave him a chance, even after he shot at me," He said to the other man, "Okay, my friend, let's go, and make up your mind now to do a lot of clear and fancy talking."

When they reached the car where Quinn still sat McGrath said:

"There were two of 'em, Tony. One ran for it, took a pot shot at me, and I drilled him. The other one had more sense. I've got him right here."

"Listen," that thug pleaded, "I didn't know what this was about! Matt, he asks me to stay with him while he cases a joint, but I don't know what for."

"Mac," Quinn asked, "is this man's face marked?"

McGrath tilted the prisoner's face toward the car lights. "Yes," he said. "Across the bridge of the nose and the cheeks. But how did you know?"

"I recognized his voice," Quinn said. "Re-

member how I was attacked in the cellar of that uptown house? This is one of the two men who tried to kill me. When I hit him across the face with my cane I knew I must have marked him."

"Well now," McGrath said to the crook, "so you know nothing about all this, huh? Who do you work for? You're not local talent. Come on—talk!"

The criminal shrugged. "So I been fingered by a blind man," he said mournfully. "So what? That kind of evidence don't stand up in court. I'm not saying a word. Not a word."

"Did I mention anything about court, my friend?" McGrath said softly. "Why should we waste time and money with you? Go on—beat it!"

The thug's jaw dropped a notch. "You mean, it's no pinch?"

"Beat it," McGrath growled, and shifted his gun from his left hand to his right.

The thug didn't move. "You're going to let me go so far and then give it to me in the back. Sure—that's your idea!"

"Are you going?" McGrath growled. "Or do you resist arrest?"

**T**HE crook studied McGrath's harsh face, glanced at Quinn who sat in the car, his blind eyes seeing nothing. The thug's bravado wilted.

"Look!" he pleaded. "I don't want to be killed! I'll admit I tried to nail Quinn yesterday and I'll admit I helped knock out that bald-headed guy in Quinn's house, but I didn't kill anybody. I don't deserve this."

"Mac," Quinn said, "we can finish this in my home. Silk might be hurt badly."

McGrath nodded, handcuffed the thug's wrists behind his back and threw him into the car. He drove to Quinn's house, reassured neighbors who had been awakened by the shooting, then used Quinn's key to enter the home. McGrath was not inside long. He barged out of the house to find Quinn tapping his way up the path.

"Silk is okay!" McGrath called. "Just a bang on the head. He's coming out of it now! I'll get our friend in the car and bring him in. Maybe this is a good night's work, after all."

Quinn stopped for only a moment. "Your prisoner won't run for it," he told the Inspector. "I had a talk with him—and he's going to tell us everything he knows. Bring him into the house. I'll go on ahead and see Silk."

Silk looked fairly fit when Quinn entered the house and found him in the library to which McGrath had brought him. Silk winked reassuringly at him.

"I'm okay," he assured. "I was coming out of it when Butch arrived and gave me the lowdown. So I just flopped again and let Mac think he brought me out of it."

"Good," Quinn said hastily. "Maybe you've already guessed it, Silk, but this was a scheme to tie me up with the Black Bat and I think I know who is responsible. The trick didn't work. Thanks to some quick thinking, Butch arranged things so it looked as if I'd been at the office all night."

"I backed that up," Silk said. "McGrath couldn't help himself. He was just curious enough to want to get to me first by himself while I was groggy, to see if I'd be off the beam enough to admit you were the Black Bat."

"Mac's okay, Silk," Quinn assured. "He can't help that prying nature and stubbornness of his. But the rest was a frame-up—a vicious attempt to get rid of the Black Bat and Tony Quinn in one full swoop... Ssh—here comes Mac now, with one of the two men who were watching this place."

McGrath led his prisoner into the house. Quinn tapped his way to the living room and they all followed him. There he sat down and spoke to the prisoner.

"I promised you'd be given a reasonable break if you told us the truth," he said. "Now is the time to do it."

The man answered him promptly, even eagerly.

"Matt—the guy who's dead out there—and me," he said, "we were told to watch you, Mr. Quinn. That's all we did—here."

"How about yesterday at the house up on Wakefield Place?"

"That was a rush job. We wasn't after you, in the first place. The guy we work for wanted us to take a lot of clothes out of that house and to wipe away any fingerprints

that might have been around anywheres."

"Whose prints?" McGrath interjected swiftly.

"I don't know—honest," the thug insisted earnestly. "We wasn't told much. But when we found Mr. Quinn and Mr. Kirby in the cellar we thought it would be the safest thing for us to take them, so we tried to, that's all."

"Who paid you to do all this?" Quinn asked.

The man was showing fear now. "They'll slit my throat," he mumbled, his eyes rolling. "But I have to talk. It's one thing or the other. Maybe I can get away from the mob, but I *know* I can't get away from you, Mr. Quinn."

"Sound reasoning," Quinn told him. "Now—name the man."

"It was—Andy Shale!"

"Shale?" McGrath half shouted. "What's he doing in this?"

"I don't know," the prisoner mumbled. "But I do know Andy Shale, and I know he told us we was on an important job."

Silk butted in. "Shale is a gambler, isn't he?"

"A big one," Quinn told him. "And an all around gangster to boot. But a careful type. Silk. He's built himself a nice thing out of his gaming houses and his rackets, but he's always bent over backward in order not to have any trouble with the law."

"Well, he's got his hands full of it now," McGrath vowed.

"Mac," Quinn said, "I heard a siren just before you brought in your prisoner. You sent for help, didn't you?"

"Not me," McGrath laughed. "Your neighbors took care of that. I've got a couple of boys guarding the body of that mug I shot, but haven't sent for any reinforcements."

"Others will arrive soon," Quinn said. "Have this man here taken to Headquarters and booked on an open charge under a phony name. I don't want the news of his arrest to leak out. Maybe Shale will think he got clear if he hears nothing more."

"Come on," McGrath told the prisoner.

"Take a full statement from him," Quinn suggested. "And I'll talk over our next step in the morning. Shale will still be around."

There's one man who can't afford to run out. He's got too much tied up here."

"Okay, Tony," McGrath said. "I'm beat myself, and I know you must be. To say nothing of how Silk must feel." He grinned at Silk. "That's a pretty good-sized egg on your skull, my lad."

"It feels like a football," Silk said, and grimaced.

QUINN suddenly thought of something. "Silk," he said abruptly, "watch the prisoner and take him into the hallway . . . Mac, I want to talk to you a minute."

"Sure thing," McGrath closed the door after Silk and the prisoner had passed through it.

"What's on your mind?" he asked Tony Quinn.

"Several things," the special district attorney told him. "First, is there any news of Joe Keeley?"

"None," said the Inspector. "He's either holed up good, or he got away."

Quinn shook his head slowly. "The whole thing begins with Keeley, Mac, and yet I don't think he's involved in everything that's happened. There's been too much."

"Just the same, Keeley killed that girl," McGrath said flatly.

"Yes, I agree, and we'll get him eventually—but there are others we want also . . . Now, about Robard, the man who ran that sculptors' supply place. Did you talk to him again after I left the hospital?"

"I did. Incidentally, the doctors think he'll pull through. As soon as he was strong enough to talk again I asked him if he had told anybody else he had recognized the girl, and meant to tell the police about it. He said he'd talked it over with a bartender friend of his in a café down the street from his store. A place where he goes to have a glass of wine every evening."

"Did you check the café?"

"That's what I was doing tonight when you kept calling me at Headquarters. I didn't have time enough to get far. The bar-keep swears he didn't pass on that information, but any of about twenty people at the bar could have heard Robard talking to him."



*Gambler's Records*

"Then that lead is gone," Quinn sighed. "I'm afraid it is. But we've had other reports about the girl. Not from anyone who knows who she is, but from counter-men in diners, from two other dealers in artists' supplies. She certainly was patrolling the town looking for this man Whitey, whoever he is."

"Did you check with the F.B.I.?"

"Yeah. They've got plenty of men nicknamed Whitey, but none of them seem to answer the description we have. Apparently this Whitey has no police record."

"He must have," Quinn said. "Otherwise why would Andy Shale go to all that trouble of having the fingerprints in the house on Wakefield Place wiped off so carefully?"

"That's right, Tony!" exclaimed McGrath. "I never thought! It couldn't have been to hide the identity of the girl. For all the good any of it's done us. We've taken and checked her prints as a routine measure. No luck at all."

"Well"—Quinn leaned back in his chair and passed a hand over his tired-looking face—"it will keep until morning. But . . . Oh yes, Mac! I'd suggest you send over a couple of men to guard my home."

"I was intending to do that, Tony. Good night—see you at the office around ten."

McGrath walked into the hall, took charge of his prisoner and marched him out of the house. Silk closed and locked the door. Then he and Quinn went back to the library.

"It's been an interesting evening, sir," Silk observed.

"And the evening isn't over," Quinn said grimly. "Andy Shale is going to have a visitor soon. Every time we've found a clue in this case, it's faded away leaving us nothing. But Andy Shale is more than a clue. He's a fresh angle and if he doesn't talk to the Black Bat tonight, he'll have a rough time with Tony Quinn in the morning."



PUTTING out all the lights on the first floor, Silk Kirby made his way upstairs and extinguished the lights there one by one, just as if he and Quinn were finally retiring for the night. Once the place was in darkness, however, Silk hurried to the secret lab where Tony

Quinn had converted himself to the black-clad, hooded marauder.

With the house now under the observation of McGrath's detectives, they had to be just as careful—or more so—as when Shale's men had been planted there. Quinn led the way, after they emerged from the tunnel to the garden house. His uncanny sight made their trip across darkened yards easy and noiseless. The coupé was parked on a back street with Butch waiting at the wheel.

"I figured you might need this heap," Butch said. "So I went back to the State Building and checked around the neighborhood until I found it. How'd things work out?"

"Nicely," the Black Bat told him. "Thanks, Butch, for your help. You can go back to the rooming house now. By this time Benny Loper must have checked your room thoroughly."

"Benny ain't going to do much of anything from here on," Butch promised. "Except wish he hadn't set up this whole thing."

"Don't work him over yet," the Black Bat urged. "Just accept him as a smart and dangerous enemy. It's through him we may learn something really important."

Butch padded off into the night while Silk got behind the wheel of the coupé and headed in the opposite direction, with the Black Bat beside him.

"Shale is no ordinary mug any more, Silk," the Black Bat said. "He's built himself up to a scale where his criminal activities are big business. I am beginning to think now that every move against us may

*(Answer to riddle on page 23)*

**Halfway. After the halfway mark, he's running out.**

have been planned or carried out by Shale."

"But why should a man as big as he is in the rackets be bothered with trying to cover up the identity of a girl who was killed by a cheap crook in a cheap rooming house?" Silk wanted to know.

"We're getting close to being able to answer that, Silk, but not yet. Now at least I've got several possibilities in my mind, and that's much more than I had a few hours ago."

Silk nodded. "Well, we do know two things now for sure. Joe Keeley killed the girl and Benny Loper killed the pawnbroker."

"Oh, no," the Black Bat contradicted. "Keeley killed the girl, yes. But I don't believe Loper killed the pawnbroker. Don't forget that the detective who was killed had seen Loper at the rooming house and if he spotted him coming into the pawnbroker's shop, he'd have been ready for trouble."

"That's true," Silk conceded.

"Also, there was shooting. I examined the only gun I could find in Loper's room, and it had not been fired. It was a small caliber gun and the ones used on the pawnbroker and the detective were heavier. Loper had no time to get rid of another gun, if he'd had one. But I do believe that Benny Loper sent the word out for somebody to move fast and get rid of the pawnbroker."

"Andy Shale, maybe?"

"Loper had to get in touch with some criminal organization whose members are willing to murder, and are right on tap all the time, ready with their guns to take on a murder job at a moment's notice. There were phones in the rooming house which Loper could have used. And as soon as he finished his call, he went out and sat conspicuously on the front steps so anyone going in or out would see him and alibi him."

"Which means you haven't got much on him," Silk said.

"We have nothing on him that would stick," Quinn growled. "But in my opinion he has an important say in the direction of these crimes, if he isn't the actual leader. I've told you before, Silk—Loper is no plain crook. He tries to act like one, but he forgets his rôle too often. He hasn't fooled me."

"If he's the head of a gang," Silk said, "wouldn't he be likely to have some kind of a police record?"

"He hasn't," the Black Bat said. "McGrath checked that. I'm more in favor of the idea that he isn't a gangster or even a crook, at all, but that he certainly has a highly important reason for having been so close to that crime in the rooming house."

"Well, finding out that Andy Shale is connected with it gives us some kind of a break," Silk observed. "Though Shale sure isn't a man who'll do much talking."

"I know," said the Black Bat. "But I've got an idea about Shale which I'm going to try and work out. I want to scare him enough so he'll take desperate chances to wipe me out. I'll explain why and all later, if the scheme looks as if it will work."

SILK suddenly pulled up to the curb of a tree-shaded street in the suburban section of town to which they had driven.

"That's Shale's place ahead, sir," Silk said. "It's on a par with the other exclusive homes around here. Shale lives like a gentleman. He never takes his gambling business home with him. No gambling in that fine house."

"There is going to be," the Black Bat remarked, as he removed his wide-brimmed hat and slipped on the close-fitting hood. "I'm going to gamble my life against the chance of really pinning something on Shale. Park here and be ready to move fast, Silk. I may come out in a much greater hurry than I go in."

Silk had one last word of advice. "Watch him, sir. I know about Shale. He's tricky and treacherous. He's got a big and efficient organization working for him, too. They're men who have so much tied up in his gambling empire that they'll go to any extreme to preserve it."

"That," the Black Bat chuckled beneath the hood, "is what I'll be banking on."

He got out of the car, moved a few feet to the hedge and vaulted it lightly. The darkness enveloped him, but he was cautious in making his way toward the gambler's home. Like the Whitmore residence, it was big and roomy but would not be left unguarded like the old-fashioned place on

Wakefield Place.

From a spot fifty feet behind the house, the Black Bat paused and studied the residence. A long back porch with a sloping roof seemed to offer the best means of entrance. The Black Bat slipped up to the porch, climbed onto the railing and heaved himself upward until he knelt on the roof. Cautiously then he crawled toward the easily reached windows.

Opening one of them was a simple matter for anyone as skilled as the Black Bat. He stepped across the sill into a bedroom, crossed the floor and opened the door. Downstairs a television set was playing softly. Nobody was on the move as the intruder crept down the stairway, gun in hand.

Two lighted rooms he passed were empty, but from sounds which appeared to emanate from the kitchen, three or four men were having a card game there. The Black Bat sidled up to the doorway of the dimly lighted room in which the television set was in use.

Andy Shale sat there alone, smoking a cigar and holding a highball while he watched a show. Shale was a man of medium height, with dark hair and eyes. Realizing that his mouth was sullen, he tried to conceal this with a thin mustache.

The Black Bat moved noiselessly up behind him and gently placed the muzzle of his gun against the gambler's neck.

"That's to let you know this is not a gag," he whispered. "Stay right where you are while I close the door. Keep your hands in plain sight. Don't put down the cigar or the glass."

The Black Bat backed up, closed the door softly, then moved toward the light from the TV screen. Shale suddenly saw who threatened him. He spoke in a hoarse voice.

"Is it okay to drink some of this highball? I—think I need it."

"I told you to sit perfectly quiet. If anyone comes, send him away. Is that clear?"

"Yes. I'm not taking any chances with you, Black Bat. Even though I can't figure out what you want with me."

"Where is Joe Keeley?" the Black Bat demanded.

"I never even heard of the guy," Shale answered promptly, "but I got plenty of

people working for me I don't know. What's it all about?"

"Why were you having Tony Quinn's house watched?"

"Me? Guess again, my friend. I'm not tangleing with Quinn. He's poison to a man in my position."

"Where is Whitey?" the Black Bat suddenly asked.

THIS time he struck pay dirt. Shale's eyes widened just a little and the corners of his mouth went down even more. He seemed to compose himself with considerable effort.

"If this is a guessing game," he said, "I lose it, because I don't know any of these people and I'm not having Quinn watched."

"You're lying," the Black Bat accused, "but I can't make you talk. Not here. I don't even have to try. Where are your books?"

"Books? What books?"

"The record books in which you make false entries of your net profits from half a dozen gambling joints. I want them."

Shale shrugged. "I don't keep books. People in my business never do any more—unless they want to court a prison rap. I'm not that dumb."

The Black Bat ordered Shale to stay just as he was, and proceeded to search the room. He knew there would be nothing there to interest him, but it would register with Shale that he meant to find those record books. Finally he gave up and walked back to stand directly behind Shale.

"You're finished, Shale," he whispered. "You can't run out because you have too many valuable interests, but you should have let other things alone. I can prove you're mixed up in murder. I'll also prove you're involved in other crimes and I'll back up my accusations with facts from your own records. I want Joe Keeley and I want Whitey. Tell me where they are and I'll make a deal. Otherwise—you're done."

"I told you I don't know Keeley and I never heard of anybody called Whitey," Shale insisted. "I can't talk about things I know nothing about. Not even under your threats."

"We seem to have a difference of opinion," the Black Bat said. "You may change your mind later. Good night, Shale. I'll see you again, and next time you'll be glad to talk."

The Black Bat raised his gun, brought it down sharply on Shale's skull, and made certain the gambler was out cold. Then he moved to one of the windows, raised it and slipped out. In a few moments he was back in the coupé with Silk.

"Shale's main gambling place is ten miles out on Route Nine," he said, as he gave Silk the go-ahead signal. "Head for there and move fast, because Shale will when he wakes up."

"He's sleeping?" Silk asked.

"Quietly. I fed him a steel-encased sleeping pill. Just as part of the pay-off for his having the same thing done to you, Silk. I knew Shale wouldn't talk, I never expected him to, but he thinks I'm getting together evidence which will break his gambling empire and put him away unless he does tell the truth."

"You'll have to show him that evidence," Silk said. "Men like Shale don't believe a thing unless it's set before them in black and white."

"Yes, I know. I told him just enough so he's sure I haven't the evidence yet, but that I'm on my way to getting it now. All his books and ledgers must be in his office—that's at the gambling place we're going to visit right now."

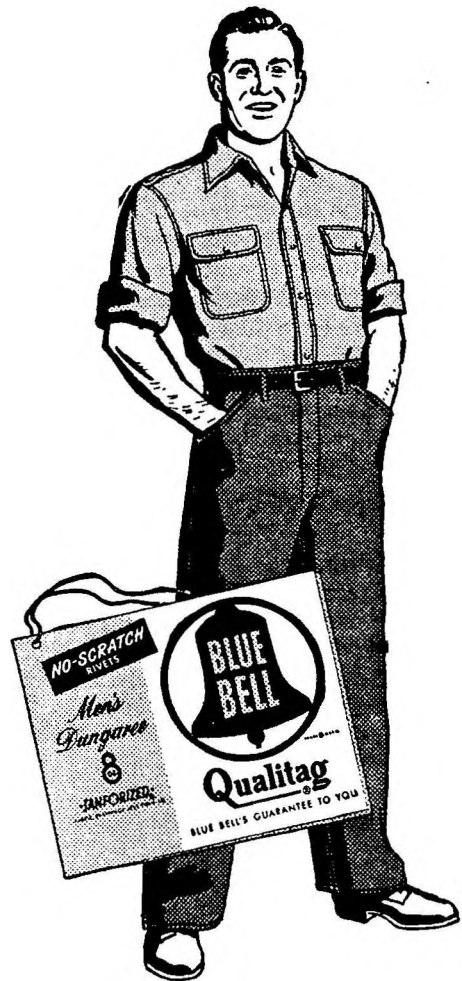
"But if he knows you're after something that will break him he's going to make mighty sure that you don't ever find it," Silk said.

"Of course he will. The only way is to trap me there and kill me. Nothing short of that, Silk. Now a man like Shale would keep professional killers on tap. But not many, because they're hardly reliable people to have around. So I expect him to send his regularly paid professionals to gun me out. Which is exactly what I want."

"First time I ever heard a man setting the stage for his own murder," Silk grunted. "I don't like it, and I don't see what good it will do."

[Turn page]

## How to buy better work clothes



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The Black Bat settled comfortably back in the seat.

"Silk," he said slowly, "we had a faked robbery of a pawnshop in which a young detective and the pawnbroker were shot down. Those two murders were not accomplished by amateurs. Then Robard, who runs that sculptors' supply store, was shot. If Shale is mixed up in this, as we strongly suspect, he used professional killers for those jobs."

Silk whistled sharply. "And he'll send the same men to stop you. Is that it?"

"Of course. Assassins of that type will be apt to use the same guns. They prize their weapons and usually take excellent care of them. We have the slugs which killed Detective Collins and the pawnbroker. We have those taken out of Robard. If we can find the guns which fired those bullets, we have definite, undeniable proof of who are the killers."

"It's a good idea," Silk agreed, "except for one thing. You're offering yourself as human bait."

"Yes, I am," the Black Bat said calmly. "But with one advantage. I know those men are coming. They'll arrive with the expectation of stalking me, but instead I'll be stalking them. I'll show you how it works when we get there."

## CHAPTER XIII

### *Human Bait*



IT WAS almost three in the morning when Silk rolled past Shale's main gambling establishment on Route Nine. It was closed for the night and darkened. Shale maintained a dining room, a good orchestra and allowed no rough play. He shut up shop at a decent hour and did his best to be sure that no neighbors would have reason to complain.

The ample parking space was deserted. Not even a night light showed anywhere in the building. Silk parked the coupé well

away from the building and accompanied the Black Bat to a position directly behind the place.

The Black Bat left Silk to cover him, went on alone, and attacked the kitchen door with implements he carried as part of a kit of burglar tools. Ordinarily he could have opened that door easily and without leaving a trace of his handiwork, but he deliberately botched the job. Then he retreated to where Silk was waiting.

"Shale won't dare risk letting me at his books," he murmured. "He may not be certain what I'm after, but a man in his line keeps plenty of things he'd hate to have me find. Just keep praying he sends those professional killers."

"That's like praying for death," Silk grunted. "The boys who work for him will be experts. And, may I ask, what's all this got to do with the murder of an unidentified girl in a cheap rooming house, by a cheap killer whom we already know?"

The Black Bat laughed softly under the hood. "There doesn't seem to be much of a connection, but everything stems from that murder, Silk. In my opinion, the corpse of that girl is a decidedly dangerous corpse. Her murderer is exactly as you describe him—cheap. But the girl wasn't, and the motive for concealing her identity must involve something important. That's what we're after."

"It's like chasing moonlight," Silk sighed. "There's nothing substantial to tracking down only a motive. Give me people, facts—not theories—and I can handle them. These killers, if we do capture them, won't be the kind who'll talk."

"You've forgotten one thing, Silk," the Black Bat said. "If they do come, and they are the same men who did commit these murders, then we have cop killers. They won't be treated tenderly, they won't stand a chance before a judge or jury. The only way they can dicker for a break is by turning over something even more valuable than their own lives, and they'll have only information to offer."

Silk wanted to comment, but the Black Bat's hand suddenly descended on his arm, tightening around it in a signal for silence.

They were well-protected by brush, but had a sweeping view of three sides of the gambling casino. A man had just slipped around the southwest corner of the building. Silk only saw him dimly, but the Black Bat's strange sight enabled him to see the man clearly—a thin-faced, undersized man who held a long-barreled gun in his hand. He was checking windows, and paid especial attention to the kitchen door. The Black Bat had left enough marks on it to indicate he had been there. The gunman spotted these quickly enough and made a rapid retreat.

In a few moments he was joined by three other men whom he summoned by blinking a flashlight. They approached the main door to the place and one of them had the keys with which to open it. They held a brief conference in whispers and two of them moved to cover the building from the east and west sides. They took up positions so their fire would stop anybody who tried to exit from any door or window.

The other two men got the door open and stepped inside. The door closed behind them.

"There it is, Silk," the Black Bat said softly. "A little worse than I'd hoped. We've got to nail those men planted outside. And it must be done quietly."

"You can move around in the dark better than I can," Silk whispered. "So you take the one on the far side and I'll handle the one nearest me. When I get him, I'll wave. You'll be able to see me through the darkness."

"All right. If, and when I get the other fellow, I'll look for your signal. Then I'll slip into the place. The most dangerous half of this quartette will think they're stalking me in there, but they'll be the ones in a trap. Don't show yourself at all. Remember, your not hooded, Silk."

**T**HE Black Bat slipped away, made a wide circle of the casino, and in the intense darkness his uncanny sight proved a priceless asset. With little effort he soon spotted the guard who had posted himself behind a big tree and concentrated all his attention on watching the gambling place.

The Black Bat drew one of his guns, reversed it and crept forward. He crouched for a moment, took a long breath, then started running across the cleared space to where the guard was standing.

The man heard him, but a breath of time too late. The Black Bat flung himself at the man, slashed down with the gun butt, and silenced the yell that was already welling up in the guard's throat. Another hefty blow and the man slid to the ground, with his back against the tree trunk. He remained like that, sitting against the tree.

The Black Bat sprinted for the front of the place and looked quickly toward the opposite side. Silk was standing erect far back in the shadows, and waving his arm. Only the Black Bat's strange sight could have seen him in that darkness.

The Black Bat moved up to the front door. Inside, the pair of killers would be methodically searching the place. He used his burglar tools with all the skill at his command this time. The bolt slipped back under the pressure of a very thin instrument, he pushed the door open and stepped inside fast, closing the door softly behind him.

He knew what he faced now—a pair of men whose profession was murder, who were masters of stealth and treachery. They would shoot instantly, but he couldn't reply with bullets, because he wanted them alive.

His eyes, penetrating the gloom, saw a row of telephone booths near the check room. Directly opposite them was the entrance to the dining room and he turned in there. Above, on the second floor, he heard boards squeak. The killers were searching the gambling room and the offices.

It wouldn't take them long to realize the Black Bat was not on the premises, then they would attempt to leave, in all probability by the front door.

The Black Bat sat down at one of the tables directly opposite the entrance. Placing both his guns on the table, he settled back and waited. To risk his life by going after them would be senseless when he could afford to wait for them to come to him.

Half an hour went by and the danger grew that one of the outside men would wake up and yell an alarm. The Black Bat heaved a



sigh, picked up his guns and was getting ready to start his manhunt when he heard them again, no longer trying to keep silent. They were hurrying down the stairs.

A flashlight beam preceded them as they headed straight for the phone booths. The Black Bat flattened himself against the wall just inside the dining room. One man stepped into a booth. The other posted himself outside it. The Black Bat heard the dialing, then the man in the booth spoke.

"Andy—there were marks on the kitchen door that looked like somebody busted in, but he ain't here now. We searched the place, every inch of it. Nothing was touched in the office . . . Yeah, we're sure. Okay—whatever you say. We'll park here in case he does show. Yeah, we got it—you want him dead . . . Yeah, we can take care of that, too."

He slammed the phone down. The Black Bat suddenly stepped into the doorway with both guns leveled. Instantly he started shooting. The killer outside the booth dropped the gun he held and clawed at his arm. The man inside the booth felt slugs smash into the wall just above his head, saw the glass booth windows shatter and felt slivers of glass cut into his face. He was trapped in that narrow compartment, and he knew it. He gave a wild yell and threw his gun out onto the floor.

The Black Bat stayed where he was, invisible to those men, but he could see every move they made.

"You—with the wounded arm," he called out in a steady voice, "turn around and face the wall. You—in the booth, make another call. This one to Crescent Nine-two-three-o-one. Let it ring until someone answers."

The man in the phone booth turned, fumbled in his pocket for a coin, dropped it in the slot and dialed the number. Then he reached beneath his coat and turned away from the instrument.

"There's no answer. What'll I do?"

The Black Bat silently took a step beyond the doorway.

"Let it ring," he ordered, and jumped to one side.

The killer whipped out a gun as the Black Bat spoke, sending two bullets whizzing

through the doorway. The Black Bat fired just once.

At the first shot the wounded man started running. The Black Bat sent a slug breezing past his head and he stopped fast. The killer in the phone booth was trying to hold himself up, and not succeeding too well. He suddenly pitched forward.

The Black Bat stepped into the booth. Inspector McGrath was shouting over the phone. He had heard the shots.

"Good evening, Inspector," the Black Bat said. "This is the Black Bat. I just had to shoot a man. In fact, I shot two men."

"What are you calling me for—to brag about it?" McGrath demanded.

"Well, not exactly. I merely wanted to tell you that this pair of professional killers likely murdered your Detective Collins in the pawnbroker's shop."

"Look!" McGrath cried. "If that's the truth, I'll agree not to do anything to you. Wait there! I'll be over as soon as I can make it."

"Thank you, Inspector," the Black Bat chuckled. "I'll be waiting. Come to Andy Shale's big gambling casino—the one just past the city limits. You know where it is. And come alone."

"Half an hour," McGrath said and hung up.

The Black Bat was humming softly as he stepped out of the booth. He ordered the wounded man to sit down on the floor and stay there. Then he examined the second assassin, saw that he was in no danger of dying, and went to one of the windows which looked out in the direction of where Silk would be waiting. The Black Bat took a small pencil light from his pocket and flashed a signal which would reassure Silk and inform him to keep both outside guards wrapped up for delivery to McGrath. . . .

IT WAS dawn when the doorbell at Tony Quinn's home began ringing insistently. Silk, in pajamas and robe, with his hair tousled and his eyes sleepy-looking, padded down the stairs and opened the door for Inspector McGrath.

"I've got to see Tony—at once," McGrath said. "It's important, Silk. We finally

got a good break."

"I'll get Mr. Quinn," Silk said. "Step in to the living room."

A few moments later Quinn, also wearing pajamas and robe and using his white cane, walked in. McGrath had been pacing the floor. Now he walked up to Quinn.

"We got the men who killed Detective Collins and the pawnbroker," he announced. "The same ones wounded Robard, the owner of that sculptors' supply place."

"How in the world did you accomplish that, Mac?" Quinn said.

"Maybe you really don't know," McGrath grumbled. "Me, I'm not asking questions this time. The Black Bat nailed those killers for us. Got them in Andy Shale's gambling casino a couple of hours ago."

"Did you see the Black Bat there?" Quinn marveled.

"I did. We had a nice little chat. You know, Tony, sometimes I think I'm all wrong about you being the Black Bat. This is one of the times. However, he had those gunmen all wrapped up. Both wounded but in no danger of dying. And two other punks who just went along to guard the outside of the place."

"But Mac, can you definitely tie those killers up with Shale? Just because they were found on his place—"

"The Black Bat overheard one of them phone Shale. The main thing is that we checked the guns of those two hoods. Ballistics prove the guns they carried killed Collins and the pawnbroker. And even better, Robard had recovered enough so that he identified the pair."

"Get Shale," Quinn ordered. "I'll prepare a warrant if you need one."

"Shale is already locked up. Those hoods haven't talked yet, but they've got a swell case of jitters. I think they're going to sing. Only one thing bothers me. What connection has all this with the murder of that unknown girl?"

"It will have plenty, Mac. Now here is what you are to do. Soon after nine this morning, bring Shale to my office. I also want Benny Loper there to see if he can identify Shale. Don't let them see one another until we're ready."

"Okay," McGrath agreed. "I think Shale knows where Joe Keeley is, too. The way that killer vanished shows he had help, and the kind Shale could provide."

"We'll check that also," Quinn promised. "Don't tell Loper why I want him at my office."

## CHAPTER XIV

### *Lethal Missile*



McGRATH hurried back to Headquarters. Quinn promptly phoned Carol Baldwin the moment he was alone.

"Get in touch with Butch," he said. "I'll tell you how to reach him in a second. Right after nine o'clock be outside my office building. I think Benny Loper will be coming out of it about then and in a big hurry. You and Butch trail him. Don't lose him whatever you do, because I'm going to try and arrange things so he'll go straight to Joe Keeley, the man who actually murdered that mystery girl."

"We'll be there," Carol promised.

"One more thing," Quinn went on. "After that's all over, start a new angle on the man named Whitey. Check with the passport division of the State Department's local office. Find out if anybody answering Whitey's description has gone abroad during the last few months. And show the picture of the dead girl around. Maybe someone will recognize it. Then see if you can prepare a list of all the property holdings of Martha Whitmore. She's said to be plenty wealthy so you may have quite a job. I'm especially hunting some isolated place she may own which could be used as a hideout."

"I'll find out all I can and call Silk as soon as I learn anything," Carol promised.

Quinn hung up, after explaining to her how she could get in touch with Butch. He went to the library and sat down in the worn, comfortable leather chair before the fireplace. He filled a pipe, tamped it well and applied flame. Silk pulled a chair close

and relaxed with a sigh.

"I don't know why," Silk said, "but I have an idea you've got something up your sleeve, sir, which may finish this case soon."

"I hope so," Quinn said. "However, there are three things which must be done before we can wind it up—we've got to find Joe Keeley, identify and locate Whitey, and satisfy ourselves as to just who this murdered girl was."

"I've changed my mind, sir," Silk said ruefully. "I don't think we are close to the solution."

"We may be, Silk. I'm sure it was Benny Loper who tipped off Keeley. Nobody else could have done that. And Loper probably told Keeley where to hide."

"Suppose Keeley did go where Loper told him to," Silk said. "Loper could have showed up and just knocked him off."

"I doubt it. One reason is that small scrap of paper we found in Keeley's room—that order to kill me. I'm positive Keeley never even saw that letter. It was a plant."

"But why?" Silk asked.

"Loper, or whoever is behind him, paid us the compliment of showing they're afraid of us, Silk. There were attempts on our lives, and if they had worked, the blame could have been put on Keeley. That was the whole idea."

"And so they'd be sure to keep him alive, at least until he was no longer of use to them. Is that it, sir?"

"Exactly. I'm hoping to throw a scare into Loper this morning, rattle him so badly he'll go straight to Keeley, maybe with the idea of killing him. But if not, at least to make him change his hiding place."

Silk looked at the mantel clock. "Well, it's about time I started breakfast. Perhaps tonight we can catch up on our sleep. . . ."

**S**HORTLY before ten o'clock that morning Benny Loper entered Tony Quinn's office. He looked even more ratty than he had at the rooming house. His clothes looked as if he had slept in them, his eyes were bloodshot, and he was nervous and jittery.

"Sit down, Mr. Loper," Quinn said. "I asked you to come here because there is someone I want you to look at."

"The big guy who killed that girl?" Loper asked. "Did you nail him?"

"We're not certain. However, if the man we have arrested didn't actually kill the girl himself, he must have been close by and the murderer was simply an agent of his."

"But I didn't see anybody except this guy Keeley," Loper protested.

"You may have seen this man," Quinn said. "At any rate it won't hurt to look at him . . . Silk, is Inspector McGrath here yet?"

"Yes, sir," Silk said. "With his prisoner. I had them wait in the next office."

"Bring them in now," Quinn said. "And, Loper, don't say anything, don't even show you recognize this man if you do. Is that clear?"

Loper nodded. "Yes, sir. I'll be careful."

Silk called in McGrath and Andy Shale. The gambler came through the door first. Though not seeming to do so, Quinn was watching him for any signs of recognition of Benny Loper. Shale merely glanced at the small man, then looked away. He wasn't so good an actor that he could have known Loper and not shown it. Not under the circumstances.

Shale walked before the front of Quinn's desk and at an order from McGrath stopped just the other side of it. Loper was rotating his greasy hat and looked as if he wanted to get out of there quickly.

Andy Shale's face and neck were growing redder with rage. Suddenly he raised his hand and smashed a fist down on the corner of Quinn's desk. As he did so, Loper made a wild grab for a heavy paper weight on the desk. He raised it and hurled the weight in Shale's direction, but the missile sailed almost straight at Tony Quinn's head.

The unexpectedness of the act, together with the almost lethal qualities of the paper weight, almost made Quinn duck. It took every ounce of will power he owned to keep from showing that he saw the weight hurtling at him. But during that fraction of a second between the time Loper threw the missile and the moment of the impact, Quinn's features remained impassive and he didn't move a muscle to protect himself.

The paper weight hit him alongside the

head. A glancing blow, but hard enough to knock him off the chair and onto the floor. In a flash Silk grabbed Loper while McGrath collared Shale.

Quinn picked himself off the floor, clawed blindly at the edge of the desk, and wiped blood off his temple.

"What—happened?" he asked thickly.

Loper screamed an explanation. "Honest. I didn't mean to hit you, Mr. Quinn! I thought that crook was going to pull a gun so I threw the paper weight at him. I—I missed. I—I'm sorry. Honest, I didn't mean to—"

"You idiot!" Silk growled. "You bone-headed fool!"

"Take it easy, Silk," Quinn said quietly. "Perhaps Loper did what he thought was best. I heard Shale hit the desk. Was he trying to get away?"

"All I did was hit the desk," Shale said. "I was so sore I had to hit something. Keeping me locked up all night, not even letting me talk to my lawyer. Asking me questions—questions—"

"Shut up!" McGrath snapped. "Sit down and stay in the chair."

"Honest—I'm sorry," Loper whimpered. "I'm awful sorry."

"Let it go," Quinn said and said down. "There's been little harm done. All right, Loper—you wait in the next room. See that he's comfortable, Silk."

Still meekly apologizing, Loper followed Silk to the next room. Silk pointed to a chair just inside the room and when he left Loper alone, he also left the door ajar. Loper would be able to hear every word said in the next office.

"Let's get this over with," Quinn said. "Shale, two men who have admitted working for you were caught last night in one of your gambling casinos. They carried guns which we can prove beyond any question fired the bullets which killed a police detective and a pawnbroker. Also, the same guns were used in an attempt to murder a man named Robard. He is alive and will get better, and he has identified these two men as the gunmen who shot him."

Shale squirmed uneasily. "I'm not responsible for what the boys do. Maybe it was

a private feud. I'm not crazy enough to order them to kill a cop. Or anybody else for that matter."

"All right," Quinn said. "We'll come back to that later. Here is something else. We want a man named Joe Keeley and we know he worked for you."

"That's a lie!" Shale shouted. "I never heard of him."

"Now Shale," Quinn said in a reproving voice, "we can back up that accusation. Keeley has been in contact with you during the last twenty-four hours."

"This is some kind of a trick!" Shale yelled. "It's not true! I tell you I don't know any Joe Keeley!"

"He phoned you, Shale," Quinn went on. "He's scared and broke and sick of hiding out. He wants help. You can get him out of town. Now—where is he?"

"I tell you I don't know," Shale insisted. "Somebody's been handing you a line."

Quinn leaned back in his chair. "All right, Shale," he said patiently. "One thing we have is time—and four of your men who are willing to talk. They know about Keeley. Sooner or later you'll tell us where he is and I've got an idea it won't take long. Think it over."

McGRATH seemed puzzled by this procedure, but he went along with the game. Silk drifted casually over to the door between the offices. He took a quick look in the next office, then coughed lustily.

Quinn knew by this prearranged signal that Benny Loper had departed in a great hurry. And outside Carol and Butch were waiting to take up his trail. Quinn stalled a little longer.

"Mac," he asked, "are any of your men with you?"

"Yes, two of 'em are in the waiting room. I wasn't taking chances with a guy like Shale."

"Turn Shale over to them. I'm sure he'll think better and faster in a cell. Then come back here, Mac."

McGrath put handcuffs on Shale, led him out and in a few moments returned.

"Tony," he said, "I don't get it. What's the idea? We've no proof that Joe Keeley

worked for Shale."

"That's true," Quinn smiled. "But Shale did admit he has so many men employed in his organization that he doesn't know them all. We've created some doubt in his mind. Maybe he'll talk. It was worth the chance."

"Not Shale," McGrath grumbled. "He's too smart. You've got to show him cold proof that Keeley contacted him and we don't have any."

"What have we lost, Mac? Not a thing—and we may have gained something. Who knows?"

McGrath shook his head. "There's more to this than shows on the surface, Tony. I'm not asking questions or doubting your motives, but don't tackle anything too big. Shale is a dangerous man."

"All I did," Quinn protested mildly, "was try a bluff."

"Another thing," McGrath said. "That guy Benny Loper heaved the paper weight at you, not at Shale. He meant to hit you with it and I'm wondering why."

Quinn shrugged. "I wouldn't know about that, Mac. What's your theory?"

"Loper wanted to see if you'd duck."

Quinn whistled and tapped his fingers against the edge of the desk.

"So that's it! You may be right, Mac. Last night someone raided my home. After knocking Silk out, they searched it. I wondered what the motive was, and perhaps you've just shown me. You did hint that it could have been a trick to show that I was not home while the Black Bat was prowling. If Loper suspects I'm the Black Bat and he was behind that attack last night, maybe he tried again. Throwing a heavy paper weight at me would be proof. If I could see, I'd certainly have ducked it. The darn thing could have killed me."

McGrath heaved a great sigh. "You're telling me. And that's exactly what did happen. He was trying to prove you could see—and it didn't work."

"Are you surprised, Mac?" Quinn asked softly.

"You know darned well I am. Tony, I don't think anyone with his sight could have avoided ducking that paper weight. There was plenty of steam behind it. Loper meant

it to do damage."

"Then you must also be convinced," Quinn said.

McGrath jammed on his hat. "Oh, I wish these things wouldn't happen. I'm confused. Okay, last night you were here in the office. Silk brought you and left you to do some overtime work. The night super swears you were here. If the raid on your house was meant to show that Tony Quinn wasn't home while the Black Bat was prowling, it fizzled."

"Then you do believe I'm blind and couldn't possibly be the Black Bat?" Quinn asked.

"As of right now—yes!" McGrath shouted. "But don't ask me the same question tomorrow because you might get a different answer. One thing I do know—Loper's going to be locked up and right now!"

Silk stepped forward. "I'm sorry, Inspector. Loper seems to have just walked out. I didn't know you wanted him held."

## CHAPTER XV

### *The Killer*



LOPER came furtively out of the State Building. Then his pace quickened. He looked behind him several times, finally ran to the corner and ducked into a doorway. There he waited and watched the building from which he had emerged. When he had assured himself that he was not being followed, he stepped out to the curb and hailed a taxi.

As he got in, Carol Baldwin opened the door of a car parked across the street and spoke to Butch who was at the wheel.

"Are you sure that's Loper, Butch?" she asked.

"I been practically living with the guy," Butch said, grinning. "It's him all right."

"You follow him part of the way," she said. "I'll drive my car and trail you. And just in case the chase takes us any distance, we'll keep changing places so neither your car nor mine will constantly be behind him."

He's suspicious already, and Tony says he's clever."

"I'm going to squeeze some of the smartness out of that rat in a little while," Butch said ominously. "Let's go!"

Butch pulled away from the curb in the wake of Loper's taxi. Carol hurried to her own car, parked fifty yards away, got in and trailed Butch. Loper was heading downtown. Now and then he twisted around to peer out of the rear window, but traffic was heavy and no one particular car appeared to be following him.

Nevertheless he continued to watch the cars and trucks intently. There was one small sedan that always stayed just short of a block behind him. Once it sneaked past a traffic light. Loper looked grim and determined. He turned around and leaned forward.

"Never mind the original order," he told the driver. "Here's five bucks. When I say stop, pull up short, then get going again right away."

The driver nodded. For three more blocks he maintained a casual rate of speed. The sedan Loper was suspicious of remained well behind them. Then at a point where the street widened, and traffic thinned out a little, Loper suddenly ordered the driver to stop.

When the cab swung toward the curb, Loper jumped out, darted across the sidewalk and ran for a drug store. He went inside and stood near the window, watching.

The cab he had left was moving again and the sedan he had noticed rolled methodically along behind it. Loper couldn't see who was at the wheel. He wasn't even certain the car had really been following him, but if there had been any danger, it was past now. He walked out of the store and raised his arm for another cab. As he settled himself in it, an inconspicuous sedan dropped back a trifle. Carol had never lost sight of the man she was following.

Three blocks further on, she rolled by an intersection and in the rear view mirror, she saw Butch pull out and begin trailing her. He hadn't been deceived either.

Loper now appeared confident that if he had been followed, he had broken the trail.

His cab stopped far downtown, close by the waterfront where there were mostly old loft buildings. Trucks were jockeying in and out, the streets were well-filled and Carol had no trouble keeping out of sight.

Loper paid his cab fare, stood on the corner for a moment, and lit a cigarette. Finally he walked away at a brisk pace. Carol trailed him on foot. At the same corner, Butch crossed the street and joined her. They saw Loper take keys from his pocket and unlock the door to a three-story, ramshackle old place with all windows heavily boarded and looking as if it hadn't been occupied for years.

"This is it," Carol said. "We're going in after him. If Tony is right, Joe Keeley must be hiding in there."

"Both of 'em rate a bust on the nose," Butch grunted. "And here's where they get it."

"That's your department," Carol told him. "I'm carrying a gun in my handbag and I'll use it if I must. We'd better hurry. If Loper is scared enough, he might simply walk up to Keeley and shoot him."

**B**UTCH stepped up to the door which Loper had opened. He realized the need for haste. There wasn't time to look for a quieter method of entering the place. They had to take a chance. Butch braced himself, put one shoulder against the ancient door and his neck muscles began to bulge.

There was a loud crack as old wood splintered. Butch readjusted his shoulder against a weak spot and shoved again. This time a section of the paneling broke. Butch worried part of it loose, took a quick look around to be sure nobody had noticed all this, then grabbed the jagged edge of the hole and wrenched a large piece of wood loose.

He reached through the hole, located the door lock and turned it. Shoving the door open, he entered. Carol drew the small gun from her handbag as she followed him.

They seemed to be in an old warehouse. There was a small office, into which Butch had burst his way and beyond this a huge empty space. They moved across it until Carol hesitated, turned back and examined

a document tacked to the office wall. She caught up with Butch as he reached the stairway.

Neither had any idea about what part of the warehouse Keeley would be using for a hideout, but there certainly was no place on the ground floor where he could successfully conceal himself.

The second floor seemed to be made up of many small rooms in which small lots of furniture had probably been stored at one time. The doors hung crookedly off rusted hinges. Dust was thick over everything.

Carol touched Butch's arm and they came to a stop. "He must be on the top floor," she whispered. "The dust between these storage rooms hasn't been disturbed."

Butch nodded and led the way to the final flight of stairs. They were halfway up them when they heard a man's voice shouting in sudden terror.

"Benny, you ain't going to kill me! Look, I didn't call *anybody*! I didn't phone Andy Shale. . . . Sure, I know of him. I worked in one of his places once as a bouncer, but I never saw Shale and he don't know me."

Butch started running up the stairs three at a time. On the landing, he paused. The third floor also consisted of rooms, but bigger ones. From one of these came yellow light. The flickering light of either a candle or an old-fashioned lamp.

They heard Benny Loper speak then. Apparently he hadn't heard Butch and Carol break into the place. He probably had been too busy with the task in hand, which was murder.

Loper now was facing Joe Keeley, who stood with his back against the wall. The killer's hands were half raised, his ugly face still bore traces of the scratches inflicted by the girl he had murdered. Loper had a snub-nosed gun in his fist.

"I never should have trusted you," Loper was saying. "I'd have been safer if you were dead and that's how it's going to be as of now."

He stepped back a couple of paces and started to level the gun on a line with Keeley's chest. Suddenly Butch burst into the room. Keeley gave a hoarse yell of alarm. Loper whirled about. Butch's big fist

smashed against Loper's shoulder, paralyzing his whole gun arm. The weapon clattered to the floor. Butch shoved him away, started winding up a haymaker.

But Keeley moved in then. Inspired by sheer terror of being caught, he propelled himself away from the wall and streaked for the door. Butch moved directly into his path. Keeley roared a challenge. They were both big men and Keeley knew how to take care of himself. He slashed at Butch's face with a fast punch, missed, and was rocked back on his heels by Butch who didn't miss.

Butch waded in, to finish it as fast as possible. Benny Loper, who had shrunk back toward the door, suddenly stepped through it. He turned to run and found himself faced by Carol and the small gun she held.

Loper came to a sudden stop. His eyes narrowed. He sensed that this girl would shoot, but he also knew that the battle in the room behind him was bound to end with Keeley on the floor and then that giant would come after him. Loper had nothing to lose.

He suddenly kicked his foot up and at the same time threw himself to one side. Carol fired. The bullet ripped into Loper's arm, high and near the shoulder, but the slug was small and he weathered it. He wound an arm around Carol's throat, bent her until she thought her spine would crack. She tried to maneuver the gun into position for another shot, but Loper saw to it that she couldn't. He pressed a knee against her back. The pressure increased.

**S**UDDENLY he tripped her. As she fell, he scooped up the gun that dropped from her hand. Butch came through the door at that moment and Loper fired. But he was in a hurry, with no time to aim. The bullet hit the door frame and Butch dodged back inside.

Loper was panicky now. He had seen Butch's face for the first time and recognized him.

"You're a spy for Shale!" he yelled. "I'll take care of him later."

Loper whirled and began running. He fired twice over his shoulder to keep Butch back. Then he disappeared down the steps.

Butch helped Carol to her feet. "Let the



rat go," he said. "We'll get him later. At least they both didn't get away."

Joe Keeley was groaning and recovering consciousness when Carol knelt beside him. Butch moved the oil lantern so the light fell on the mystery girl's murderer. Keeley opened his eyes and shuddered.

"You're Joe Keeley," Carol said, "and you murdered that girl in the rooming house. There's no use lying now."

"Okay," Keeley groaned. "I killed her, but I didn't mean to do it. Honest, I was only gonna teach her a lesson because she two-timed me."

"If that's the truth, you might get a break," Carol said. "But you'll have to prove it."

Keeley sat up, nursing his swelling jaw. He was regaining some of his usual belligerency.

"Why should I? You're no cop. Or if you are, you'll have to show me a badge."

Butch curled his right hand into a huge fist and brought it down before Keeley's eyes.

"That's a badge, you woman killer. Talk, or I'll work you over so you'll yell for the cops."

Keeley had felt the sting of that fist. He shivered.

"All right," he said. "I met Andrea Kane three weeks before I killed her. She took me for a sucker. Had me to her house. Told me I was her kind of guy, then ran out on me."

"She needed you to help her in some way," Carol said. "What was it she wanted?"

"Oh, there was some guy named Whitey Marlin who used to be Andy Shale's partner. He disappeared, and she figured I knew lots of Shale's boys and if they had snatched him or bumped him off, I could find that out."

"And did you?" Carol asked.

"All I know is I asked around and all I found out was that Whitey had quit the gang and the rackets and gone to France. He went there on business for the mob and he never showed up back here again."

"You're sure about that?" Carol insisted.

"Look—even Shale was trying to find Whitey. Everybody was looking for Whitey.

So I told her, and what happens then? She starts bawling. Well, I walked out. Next day I went back and she was gone."

"But you found her again in that cheap rooming house, didn't you?"

"Sure. It was easy. For three weeks she was walking around town asking for Whitey. It wasn't hard to pick up her trail. I found out she was living at that cheap dump, so I went there and got a room, and was ready for her."

"Go on, Keeley," Carol ordered.

"When she came in, I was there in her room, waiting. She started to yell, so I put the squeeze on her. All I wanted to do was show her I was no sucker. But I—I don't know what happened. All of a sudden she was dead."

"Where does Loper fit into this?" Carol asked.

"I—I met him in the hall as I was coming out of her room. I'd never seen the guy before. I planned to stay under cover in my room there until the heat died away. Then I got a telephone call in the middle of the night. From Loper. He'd found out who I was all right. He told me the cops were wise and would find me quick if I didn't take it on the lam."

"And then?"

"I got out of there. He'd told me where to meet him though I didn't have any idea why he wanted to help me, and I didn't ask. He showed up too—after a couple of hours. He said he'd been to my room in the hotel and had cleaned it up so the cops wouldn't be sure if I'd been there or not. Then he brought me here."

"Have you been here ever since?"

"Sure," Keeley said. "He bought a lot of food. It was a good hideout. Then a little while ago he busts in and says he's gonna kill me because I telephoned Shale. I didn't. I never moved outa this place. I was afraid to."

"You said the girl's name was Andrea Kane," Carol said. "Are you sure that was her real name?"

"It was a phony. Couple of times when I called her Andrea, she didn't even pay any attention. No dame is making a sucker outa me, understand? She made me walk for

days, spend a lot of dough, trying to find Whitey Martin. I don't know what kind of a gag it was, but I got sore."

"Did you search the girl's room after you killed her?" Carol asked.

"Search it? What for? Listen, when I found out she was dead, I scrambled as fast as I could."

CAROL moved away from Keeley and nodded grimly at Butch. Keeley got to his feet. Butch grabbed him by the shoulders and spun him around until he faced the further wall. Then Butch stepped back, wound up a punch and smashed it against Keeley's head.

"That," Butch said, "is for killing a girl."

Keeley was hurled across the room by the force of the blow. He hit the wall with a thud that reverberated through the empty warehouse. He slid to the floor, an inert, unconscious heap.

Butch massaged his fist. "That'll hold him," he said. "Right up to the time they start him moving toward the electric chair—and I never got more satisfaction out of slugging a man."

"He had it coming, Butch," Carol said, "but Loper got away from us, and there's no telling what he'll do. I winged him. I know he has a bullet in his shoulder, so he may run for cover. Tony has to know this whole story right away. You go to the lab as fast as you can get there. I'll phone his office and tell him you're waiting."

"Hey, listen," Butch said. "I'm not letting you go after Benny Loper alone."

"I'm not going after him," Carol told him. "As far as I can figure it out, Loper isn't much more important to this case than Keeley. The really important people are hiding behind a nice mask of respectability."

"I don't get it," Butch said, frowning heavily.

"Remember when we came through the small office downstairs in this building?" Carol asked him. "I stopped to look at an old warehouse license tacked to the wall. It was made out to the name of the Roger Whitmore estate."

"Yeah? So what?"

"Tony told me to check the Whitmore family, especially any isolated property which the estate owns. This warehouse is some of that property, but I'm sure it is not what Tony meant. I'm going to keep working on it, even if I have to interview all the Whitmore relations to get what I'm after."

## CHAPTER XVI

### *Behind the Crime*



HIGHLY elated, McGrath came to Tony Quinn's home that night.

"Well," he exulted, "we've got Joe Keeley all wrapped up with a confession that he killed that mystery girl. When the Black Bat called your office to tell you about Keeley, he meant what he said." McGrath beamed at his friend.

"He sounded as though he did," Quinn replied with a chuckle. "So finally, Mac, you've come to realize that I'm not the Black Bat. That's a load off my mind."

"Sure," McGrath said. "We even have a good idea now of what the Black Bat really looks like. Great big guy, this Keeley says. And accompanied by a girl who's a knock-out beauty. I always thought the Black Bat was built too big to be you, Tony, though black clothes are deceptive."

"You've a right to be pleased, Mac," Quinn said. "But we're far from having the real solution of this case. When Keeley killed that girl, he was only the trigger which set off the incidents which followed. Keeley had no part in them and I'm convinced he knows nothing about what will happen as a result of the girl's death."

McGrath's features became glummer. "Yes, I know what you mean, Tony. There are a lot of questions unanswered."

"Foremost of which is the identity of the dead girl. Even Keeley can't help us there. But we do know that she was searching for Whitey Marlin, and that's something. Tell me about Whitey, Mac."

"There's not so much to tell. Whitey used

to be Shale's partner in the gambling houses and the rackets. He was way up there in gangland. Then it seems he went to Europe on a business trip for the gang and—nobody ever heard of him after that."

"Do you think Shale would have killed him?"

"If Whitey doublecrossed him and he ever laid hands on him, he would. Whitey knew too much."

"I see," Quinn said musingly. "Well, besides all that we've lost Benny Loper who certainly was much more important in this business than he seemed to be. And Shale won't talk no matter how much pressure is put on him."

McGrath nodded. "That's true—and I'm wondering about it. We've got Shale good this time. The confessions of his hired killers are enough to put him away, although I wouldn't take any bets on it. Shale's lawyers are already getting busy."

"I offered him a deal," Quinn said. "He wouldn't fall for it. Something is keeping Shale's tongue from wagging. I can tell. I've been in this business long enough to recognize the symptoms."

"I agree with you, but unless we find out what's holding him back, we'll get nowhere. I'll keep digging, and I expect the Black Bat isn't finished with this, either. You know, Tony, it makes me laugh. All those times I'd sit down and talk to you just as if you were the Black Bat. I must have wasted a lot of wind."

Quinn laughed for a moment. Then he said, "Mac, did you check all homicide records, including accidental deaths, for any victim who resembled Whitey Marlin?"

"Sure I did, and nothing doing, Tony. We've got Whitey's prints on file. All victims of violent deaths are checked against our files. No, sir—if Whitey is dead, he's at the bottom of some nice quiet lake."

"I'm afraid of that, too," Quinn said. "What did Whitey look like?"

"Big fellow, good-looking. Blond, six feet maybe. Well-built."

"Which exactly fits the description of the man that mystery girl was seeking. Now why did *she* want to find Whitey? Mac, a few questions are being answered. I be-

lieve Whitey and that girl were married. Whitey was on the run. That explains why there were so many guns in that house on Wakefield Place, and it accounts for the elaborate home-made burglar alarms there."

"You're right!" McGrath exclaimed. "And it tells us why those punks busted into the house to steal all of Whitey's belongings and wipe away any prints he might have made, after he disappeared."

"Which means Andy Shale is in on it, but we can't tie him up. Those men were his. We know that much. Mac, if they knew Whitey Marlin was dead and safely disposed of, why would they care whether or not his prints and clothes were found?"

"That's easy. They don't want us to know they killed him."

"But Mac, if the corpse is hidden we can't make a move unless we find it."

"I don't know, Tony." McGrath got to his feet. "It's still got me dizzy. I'm going back and sweat Shale some more. His men, too. And let's hope the Black Bat hasn't dropped the whole thing."

McGRATH even slapped Silk on the back as he walked out. Silk walked into the library with a broad grin.

"Ever since McGrath is certain you're not the Black Bat," he remarked, "he's apparently trying to make up for the times when he accused you of everything in the law books."

"If this case were really ended, Silk," Quinn said soberly, "I think I could enjoy the joke more. Especially the part where McGrath believes Butch is the Black Bat. But we've got to get busy."

"I wouldn't know where to begin," Silk sighed.

"We've got to find Whitey Marlin, Silk. When we do, we'll know the truth. Carol should have called by now."

"She will," Silk assured him. "How can she get into any trouble just checking the property owned by the Whitmore estate?"

"I suppose you're right. Well, at least we've got the killer and we know why he murdered the girl. I'm also sure Benny Loper is the one who ransacked the girl's room after she was dead and that he snipped

that ring off her finger."

"But how did Loper happen to have a pair of jeweler's cutting pliers so handy?" asked Silk. "Did he intend to remove that ring even if Keeley hadn't murdered the girl?"

"I believe Loper intended to kill that girl himself," declared Quinn, "but the time just wasn't right. He saw Keeley leaving her room and on a hunch he looked into the room. She was dead, so he worked fast. Then, wanting to call attention to the crime, he stole a light bulb in the hall and yelled for the landlady to replace it, knowing she would look in the girl's room if the door was partly open."

Silk sat down slowly, trying to puzzle it out. "But sir, after that he *helped* Keeley. Why then should he have wanted Keeley caught? And he must have if he set the stage to reveal the murder, and then identified the killer himself."

"At first he did not want Keeley captured," explained Quinn. "Don't forget, if Loper meant to commit this crime himself, he would go a long way to keep any suspicion from himself."

"Which is what I can't understand. When we had a chance to land Keeley, Loper took him away, out of our hands."

"Things had changed by then, Silk," Quinn declared. "Loper was afraid of us, as I told you before. He wanted Keeley alive and kept in hiding until you and I could be killed and the blame pinned on Keeley. That's why Loper went to Keeley's room, burned a lot of unimportant papers and left that fragment of a fake letter indicating that Keeley was to kill me."

"Maybe." Silk was doubtful. "It sounds more as if he wanted Keeley known as the man who murdered you, all right, but at the same time he was trying to make it look like someone else had ordered Keeley to do it."

Quinn sat erect. "Silk, that's it! That's the elusive bit I was trying to fit into this. Of course. Keeley once worked for Shale, who was going to be involved. Wouldn't it look as if Shale had ordered Keeley to kill me? Loper was trying to throw the blame on him! If only I knew why. Shale had never seen Loper before this morning—I'd

swear to that. Just who is that undersized, vicious little man anyway?"

Quinn's question was punctuated by the ringing of the telephone. Silk went to answer it. Quinn was playing the part of a blind man to the hilt now. There was always that one small chance of someone peering into the house which must never be risked.

"I see," Silk was saying over the phone. "Now let me get this straight. You say the Whitmore estate owns a hunting lodge somewhere over the state line, but you don't know exactly where it is. Okay—I'll tell him. Well, yes, I suppose it's all right. Do you want me to ask? Uh-huh . . . All right, Carol. Report in after you've talked to the Whitmores."

Quinn jumped up. "Silk—Silk! Hold it!"

Silk put the phone down. "She hung up, sir. What's wrong?"

"Is she going to the Whitmore home?"

"Why, yes. Carol says she's heard from several sources about a hunting lodge over the state line, but she can't locate it. She is going to see Mrs. Whitmore and pretend she's in the market for a place like that."

"We can't stop her," Quinn said. "Not without tipping our hand. It's too late. All we can do is hope. A hunting lodge! Hmm—Roger Whitmore, head of the clan, was a well-known sportsman, I seem to recall—member of some exclusive hunt club. . . . Silk, look up the number of Arthur McMillan. He's a great hunter and fisherman. I'm sure he must have known Whitmore. Maybe he'll know about that hunting lodge."

SILK put the call through and Quinn got on the wire. He quickly got the information he wanted from his old friend. Whitmore's hunting lodge, McMillan said, was halfway up a mountainside, fifteen miles into the next state.

"That's about a forty-mile trip," Quinn said when he cradled the phone. "Silk, call Butch and have him drive over here right away. I'll meet him by the side gate. You'll have to try and help Carol."

"Do you mean the Whitmore bunch are mixed up in this?" Silk exclaimed.

"I think so—and if they are, they'll do anything to protect themselves. Including murder. You see, Silk, I'm pretty sure by now that the girl who was murdered in that cheap rooming house was Martha Whitmore!"

"But how could she be?" Silk argued. "Mrs. Whitmore showed us a picture of Martha, and you saw how different she was from the murdered girl."

"There were two Whitmore sisters," Quinn said. "One died in France. I think we were shown a picture of that sister. In fact, I can almost prove it. The ring snipped off the murdered girl's finger gave me that lead."

"Would you mind explaining?" Silk asked.

"It'll be brief. Silk, a ring which fits a finger so tightly that it has to be cut off, has either been on the finger for years, since the wearer was very young, or the wearer has put on so much weight the ring has stuck. We know the girl in question was not fat. Therefore the ring had been on the finger since before she stopped growing."

Silk nodded. "Yes, and the girl in the picture which Mrs. Whitmore showed us wasn't wearing a ring. If you're right, and the dead girl was Martha Whitmore, then her aunt lied!"

"And Carol is going there to see the aunt," Quinn groaned. "Look, we have to take chances. You go to Mrs. Whitmore's place now as fast as you can travel. Keep it under observation. If Carol comes out, well and good. Stop her from going in if you get there in time. Otherwise do nothing. I'll see you there as soon as I can."

Silk started to hurry out of the room. "Depend on me, sir. If Carol runs into any trouble and they take her away, I'll follow and report in on the telephone tape."

Quinn hooked his white cane over his arm, walked to the book-lined wall of the library and let himself into the lab. Five minutes later he was dressed in the regalia of the Black Bat. In less than five more minutes after that, the Black Bat, wearing his wide-brimmed hat, was seated beside Butch in the old car. The motor under its hood was souped up and Butch was taking

corners at sixty.

"Take it easy, Butch," the Black Bat said. "We don't want to be stopped. It might be somewhat embarrassing, especially now that Inspector McGrath is so sold on the idea that the Black Bat isn't Tony Quinn."

"I'm worried about Carol," Butch said.

"But if we're picked up, we'll never reach her. She's got a measure of safety in the fact that Silk is on watch. And maybe nothing will happen anyway."

"Okay." Butch slowed down. "I'll take it easier. . . Look, what makes you think this Whitey Marlin is up at this lodge anyway?"

"I don't know that he is, Butch. But the precautions he took in that house on Wakefield Place showed he was scared. Naturally, having been Shale's partner in crime, as well as business, he must have known a great deal. Perhaps enough to put Shale in prison or even the chair. So Shale would be gunning for him if Whitey ran out on him and Whitey would want a safe place to hide out."

"That makes sense," Butch admitted. "But if he was tied up with the dead girl, how come he hasn't showed? You'd think he'd either have tried to protect her by taking her with him, or he'd have come back to get revenge. They say Whitey wasn't such a bad guy, but that he was a holy terror when he got sore."

"Yes, I heard that about him too, Butch. Perhaps there's a reason why he didn't come back. My personal belief is that Whitey Marlin is dead and has been for some time."

Butch tramped on the brakes, turned the spotlight on a road sign and made a left turn onto a dirt road with a high crown and a million ruts. Now he was forced to proceed slowly, and they began a constant climb until the air became cool and crisp. There was a half moon, lighting up the mountain-side fairly well and soon they spotted the Whitmore hunting lodge deep in a valley between the mountains.

At the Black Bat's command, Butch pulled up. The Black Bat exchanged the hat for his tightly fitting hood. He got out of the car and closed the door with the least

possible amount of noise.

"If Whitey is alive and is in that lodge," he warned, "he'll be quite apt to start shooting. Stay under cover if you can and let me tackle the place alone first. You stand by to shoot if anybody opens up on me."

## CHAPTER XVII

### *Bullets in the Back*



**D**RAWING a gun, Butch followed in the Black Bat's tracks as they carefully approached the sprawling log-walled lodge. There were no signs of life. Behind the lodge was a four-car garage with a peaked roof and gable windows showing there was some kind of a second floor.

The Black Bat listened intently outside the door of the lodge, then he tried the latch. It was locked, but that didn't stop him for long. Burglar tools, applied with all the efficiency of a trained cracksmen, opened the lock easily. Gun in hand, the Black Bat stepped into the lodge.

It smelled musty, but there were traces of old tobacco smoke still lingering. The fireplaces were clean, there was no food in any of the rooms. The Black Bat called Butch inside.

"Nobody here," he said. "Use your flashlight and take a look at the place. It's been searched—and thoroughly."

Butch sprayed the room with light and saw the upset furniture. The Black Bat walked to a long table and bent down to examine an ash tray. There were ashes still in it and he picked up some tobacco which seemed to have fallen out of a pipe before flame touched it. The Black Bat rolled a little between his fingers.

"Look here, Butch," he said. "This is a circular cut of tobacco. They don't manufacture much of it in this country but they do in the British Isles. And it happens to be the same kind of tobacco I found in the house on Wakefield Place."

"Then Whitey must have been here," Butch said. "But he sure ain't here now."

"Someone else hunted him too, Butch. When they didn't find him, they looked for something else which he might have hidden. A letter perhaps, or some notes concerning his old criminal days. That is, if they ever did end. Let's take a look in the garage."

They left the lodge and hurried around to the back. There were no cars in the garage. The Black Bat looked for a stairway to the second floor and found none. Apparently those windows were only ornamental. He left Butch to check the drawers in the work benches, went to the side of the garage, and suddenly bent down far.

Behind the garage some marigolds which probably had been planted a long time ago seemed to have grown wild. But some of these plants had been knocked down, leveled by what seemed to have been auto tires. The trail had long since grown cold. Fresh grass and weeds had sprung up, but the marigolds were still there and flattened.

The Black Bat followed that trail for half a mile, noting that it wound crazily, always avoiding thick brush or trees. Then he found the car. It was a medium priced sedan of popular make and it had been abandoned there. Already the elements had gone to work on it. The windows were open and he pulled back the door beside the wheel.

Darkness meant nothing to him. He saw those stains on the back of the seat as easily as if they'd been illuminated by sunlight. Suddenly the Black Bat turned and ran toward the garage again.

Butch was outside, trying to figure where the Black Bat had gone. He followed the hooded figure into the garage. The Black Bat looked up at the ceiling, studying the rough boards which formed it.

"Butch," he said, "give me a leg up. I think part of the ceiling is a trap-door. The ladder to it may have been drawn up."

Butch cupped his hands, bent, and the Black Bat was hoisted up as if he were a small boy. The hooded man's hands gave a heave and the trap-door opened. Butch raised him higher, until he could scramble through the now wide open trap. Even before he saw what that attic contained, he

knew what was going to be there. After a few moments he came down, dropping into Butch's upraised arms.

"I found Whitey," he told Butch. "He's up there and he's been dead a long time. Several weeks. That's why he didn't come back for Martha and it's also why he didn't show up after she was murdered."

"What happened to him?" Butch asked.

"There are two bullet-holes in his back, the best I can make out. I think Shale's boys found him in town, shot him in the back, but he made it to his car which he drove here. It's parked half a mile away in the brush and well-hidden. Whitey knew he was badly wounded, but he was afraid to get help. Maybe he figured he could treat the wounds himself. At any rate this was the only place of refuge he knew. He got into the loft somehow and pulled the ladder up after him, just in case Shale's boys came here looking for him."

"And he died up there, all by himself," Butch grunted. "You know, he may have been a heel, but I feel sorry for the guy."

"He died slowly, Butch. I could tell that. And he wrote a letter to whoever found his body. In fact, he wrote two letters. One to his wife."

"You mean Martha Whitmore?"

"Yes, Butch. Let's head back to town. This is finished now. I'll tell you what was in the note on our way back."

**B**UTCH reached the highway soon and stepped on the gas. The Black Bat was slumped beside him. The eyes beneath the wide brimmed hat glittered in cold rage.

"Whitey," he said, as the car rolled on, "went to France on business for the gambling and crime ring. While he was there, he met Martha Whitmore. For some reason these two people, as unlike as humans can be, were attracted to one another. They were married, but they didn't return to this country right away. Then Whitey, from various letters sent by Martha's aunt by marriage, and her aunt's brother whom she had always called uncle, and by her attorneys, began to suspect all wasn't quite as serene on the home front as it appeared to be. Martha's Aunt Vera with her brother Owen

Lansing, had been methodically looting the estate for years. Martha had lived abroad since she was a girl and had left everything in their hands, with a power of attorney."

"So that's it," Butch snorted. "The same old angle—somebody wants a lot of dough without working for it."

"Whitey admitted in his last letter that he knew the chance he was taking in returning to this country. But to protect Martha's estate, he had to risk it. Shale had sent word that he considered Whitey's desertion a doublecross. Apparently Whitey gave up his life of crime when he married Martha."

"So when he got back, they were ready for him," Butch grunted.

"In a way, Butch. Whitey was no fool. He sent Martha home first and with her she brought a long, detailed outline of every crime Shale had ever committed. Martha concealed this in her home—with the knowledge of her Aunt Vera and Owen Lansing whom she still trusted because Whitey had not told her of his suspicions about them. He had just told her he wanted to live in the United States and that the documented information about the gang would protect him."

"Hey—that aunt and phony uncle were holding the papers over Shale's head. Sure, they made him try to have you knocked off. That's why Shale won't talk. He can't, without handing himself a stiff rap."

"Quite correct, Butch. Everything seems to be explained now. Even why the aunt came to the house on Wakefield Place, while we happened to be there. She wanted to see for herself if Whitey was hiding there. When she ran into me, as Tony Quinn, she tried to squirm out and when that didn't work, she told just part of the truth. I don't think she knew then that Martha was dead, but when Silk showed her Martha's picture, she knew all right. And in turn, she showed me a picture of Martha's dead sister, a picture she always carried around with her to show as Martha, if need be. And not Martha's double by any means."

"So Mrs. Whitmore and her brother were afraid to have Martha identified. The girl who had treated them as if she was their own niece, who'd probably supported them for years!" Butch was disgusted.



"Whitey guessed the truth," the Black Bat said. "If Martha should die unexpectedly, her estate would be his, but he realized then that Mrs. Whitmore and her brother were already forcing Shale to track down and kill him, Whitey. Even now I'll bet they don't know who died first, Martha or Whitey."

"Who did—Whitey?" Butch asked.

"Yes, Silk. He couldn't even get word to Martha. And she thought he was hiding out so as not to bring danger to her. That's why she was searching for him. And that's why everything which might identify her was removed from the Wakefield Place home after Joe Keeley had strangled her to death. It would spoil a mighty brutal plan to have her identified."

"But what about the letters from Martha—and that phone call from Switzerland you overheard one night?" Butch asked.

"That phone call explains several things, Butch. The letters were, of course, fakes. The phone call didn't come from Switzerland. It came from Benny Loper who had his suspicions the Black Bat might look over the Whitmore home and family and was on hand somewhere near. When I entered the house, I had to raise a window high and there wasn't time to close it when I left. So Mrs. Whitmore guessed I'd either been there or that I was still prowling around. She pretended Loper's call was from Europe."

"And that's when those mugs busted into your house, slugged Silk and looked around for Tony Quinn who wasn't there," Butch said grimly.

"That's right, Butch. Whoever talked to Mrs. Whitmore that night—and I'm betting it was Loper—laid a trap for me. He made Shale have my house watched and it was probably Shale's boys who invaded the place. They did exactly what Loper told them to do—because he was working for or with Mrs. Whitmore and Owen and they had evidence enough to hang Shale."

Butch growled deep in his throat. "I had Benny right in my mitt. If I'd known about him then, he wouldn't have got away."

"But he did—and he had a good look at Carol. She's gone to the Whitmore house,

Butch, and if Loper is there, he's bound to recognize her. Hang the risk of being stopped! Make this car roll. . . ."

CAROL BALDWIN walked up onto the porch of the Whitmore home and rang the bell. Mrs. Whitmore herself admitted her and Carol went at once into her prepared speech.

"Mrs. Whitmore, I'm in the real estate business, and I have a client who has plenty of money to spend. He wants a hunting lodge, isolated yet of the luxurious type. I have learned that Mr. Roger Whitmore left such a lodge when he died and I'm wondering if it has been sold yet or is for sale."

Someone was coming down the stairs. Carol looked over Mrs. Whitmore's shoulder at Mrs. Whitmore's brother, Owen Lansing, who walked briskly up to them.

"Who are you?" he demanded of Carol abruptly.

"She's a real estate agent," Vera Whitmore explained, "and has a client who's interested in the lodge."

Owen nodded. "I imagine the estate would be interested in selling that place, but it would take some time. You see, the heir lives in Europe and can't easily be reached."

"Oh, that's all right," Carol said. "But perhaps before we go too deeply into it, we'd better let my client look at the place to be sure he's interested. Would you tell me where it's located?"

"I suppose there's no harm in that," Owen said.

Then he backed away a little and a change came over his face. It grew harsher and his eyes became alive with suspicion. Carol didn't know what had happened, but she did realize that it was time to get out of there. She started to turn. That was when the muzzle of the gun touched the back of her neck.

"Maybe you'd answer some questions for us, for a change," Benny Loper's voice purred. "Owen, take that handbag away from her. She packs a nasty little gun in it sometimes, and I know just how well she can shoot. I'm carrying a hole in my shoulder, thanks to her."

Carol dropped the handbag on the floor.

She walked over to a chair, disregarding the gun, and sat down. Loper stood above her, smiling happily.

"Who sent you, sweetheart?" he purred.

"You guess," Carol retorted.

Loper raised the gun, but Vera Whitmore stopped him. "None of that here. Let me handle this." She walked over to Carol. "My dear young woman, you came to this house under obviously false pretenses. We want to know who sent you and for whom you work."

Carol stared at her fingertips without comment.

Vera Whitmore flushed a dull red. "You're going to tell us," she said. "Benny Loper is a particularly vicious little beast. He'd enjoy trying to make you talk. And, my dear, I'm quite certain who sent you anyway."

"Then why do you ask?" Carol said.

"It was Shale, wasn't it? Andy Shale! He also sent you and that giant Benny told us about, to get Joe Keeley."

"I tell you, Vera, Shale wouldn't have done it this way!" Loper broke in. "I think she's a detective of some kind."

"I don't," Vera Whitmore countered. "When they caught you with Joe Keeley, they didn't act like policemen. Not from what you told me. I believe she came here to study the house so that Shale could invade it later on."

Carol seized the chance. "Okay," she said harshly. "So what are you going to do about it? Plug me? Shale will have your heart if you do."

Loper brushed Vera aside. "Shale won't do anything, and you know why not. Listen, Vera, we've got to take care of this girl. Maybe that big fellow is around. If he gets

in here, nobody can stop him. He'll rip the place apart."

"Owen," Vera said, "what do you think should be done?"

Owen cleared his throat. "Well, I hate to see anything happen to a girl as lovely as she is, but there seems to be no help for it. However, I don't want any bloodshed here. I won't permit that. I say lock her up in the fur storage closet. It's as sturdy as a bank vault and also soundproof."

"Nonsense," Vera snapped. "She'll smother in there. It's also air tight."

"Can you think of a more effective and easier way of getting rid of her?" Owen asked almost pleasantly. "Benny can dispose of the body later on. If Shale manages to send word out of his cell and his men come here, we'll deny this girl ever showed up."

Carol repressed a shudder.

"Shale is already out," she said. "And he's sick and tired of fooling around with you. If he finds out you killed me, you'll wish you were the ones who suffocated in that fur storage closet."

Vera snapped her fingers. "My dear, we could kill any one of Shale's people and he wouldn't dare move against us. Do you understand? We hold every card."

"Nobody holds all the cards in a game with Andy Shale," Carol warned. "Because he plays them from the bottom of the deck, too."

"We'll see . . . Benny, you know what to do. Get it over with."

Benny nodded, jabbed the gun against Carol's side and forced her to walk up the stairs, along the second floor landing of the big house and then up to the attic. There he opened a heavy door to a small, solidly built closet.

"Step inside," he said. "We'll carry you out, later on. Much later."

Carol suddenly spun on one heel and made a jab for Loper's gun. At the same time she aimed a punch at his jaw. Both attempts failed. She was seized and hurled bodily into the fur closet. The door closed and she was engulfed by absolute darkness. Outside she heard Loper swing a sealing lever into place.

## BLACK BAT FANS

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## CHAPTER XVIII

*Blind Man's Bluff*

CHAROL got up from the floor, explored the small room and guessed she might live two or three hours if she conserved oxygen. There was no way to get out. She realized that and realized she would waste time and life-giving air by trying to claw her way out. All she could do was to sit down quietly, wait and hope—and pray—that somehow the Black Bat would find out what had happened. She didn't have too much hope.

Benny Loper, after locking her in the fur storage closet, went back to the first floor. Vera and Owen were waiting for him. Benny looked worried.

"I think we ought to work that girl over—make her talk," he said. "I'm not convinced she's working for Shale."

"Nonsense." Vera Whitmore shrugged. "You heard her speak. She's a typical gangster's woman."

"I'm in full agreement," Owen added. "But I wonder what Shale will do when she doesn't come back."

"What can he do?" Vera demanded. "We have all those details which Whitey gave to Martha, and she gave us to hide. With those papers we could have Shale put away for the rest of his life and break up a million-dollar crime combine."

"I've been thinking about that," Loper said. "Martha's fortune will be ours once we can prove Whitey is dead—and if he isn't, we'll make Shale kill him. You are the last legal heir, Vera, even if it is only by the grace of your being the widow of your graceless husband. And of course you'll be so glad to share with us. Then we can get the sad news from Europe that poor Martha died there, and has been buried there. That's all rigged, of course, and what you and Owen have allowed to remain of the Whitmore estate, after your years of looting it, is as good as yours—or, I should say *ours*. But

why should we be content with just that?"

"What do you mean?" Vera asked.

"As you said, Shale owns a million-dollar racket and we've got Shale in the palms of our hands. Why not move in?"

Owen exploded into loud laughter. "Benny," he said, "I always knew you took after the brainy side of our family. I'm proud to have you as a nephew."

Loper stared out of the window. "Just the same we won't make any plans for a while. That girl said Shale was free. Maybe he is, because they didn't have much on him. Not directly, and he owns a lot of smart lawyers. If he is loose, we might be in danger."

"How?" Vera demanded. "When we have those documents."

"It'll be okay so long as we keep on having them," Benny declared. "But suppose Shale comes here and gets them? Listen, we'd better get those papers in a safer place."

"You worry too much," Vera said. "They'll never find them unless they take the house apart brick by brick and board by board. I'm considerably more concerned about what has happened to Whitey Marlin. And I wonder why that girl was trying to find out where the hunting lodge was?"

"They just got wind of the place and figured Whitey might have chosen it as a hiding spot," Owen commented. "Benny, you really did search the lodge, didn't you?"

"Whitey's not there," Loper assured them. "I looked. I don't even think he's been there. He'll show up and when he does, we'll ring down his curtain."

They grew silent after that. More than an hour went by, then Loper went to the attic. He returned to report.

"I couldn't hear a thing from the storage closet," he said. "But I didn't open the door. Why prolong it? She'll be dead pretty soon."

Loper began pacing the floor. Vera smoked cigarettes chain fashion and Owen sipped a highball and remained silent. It was after nine when Loper suddenly cocked his head.

"Did you hear anything?" he asked.

Vera looked up. "No—not a thing."

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"Forget it," Owen said. "You're developing the jitters."

"Okay, maybe I am," Loper half shouted. "But I've seen what Shale can do. I know how dangerous Tony Quinn is, too, and there's always the Black Bat. If *he* ever gets suspicious, there is one man you won't be able to handle."

"Sit down," Vera derided. "We're in the clear. Nobody suspects us. Not even—"

"Quiet!" Loper hissed. "Listen—somebody's on the porch. I tell you I'm not wrong!"

**V**ERA dropped her voice to a whisper.

"Benny, go quietly upstairs. If anything happens, take those documents and get out the back way. Keep them with you and don't come near us until you're sure any suspicion has died down. Go on—hurry!"

Loper was halfway up the stairs when the wide window overlooking the porch caved in from the impact of Butch's enormous foot. Butch gave Vera and Owen no chance to go for guns. He crashed through the broken window and grabbed Owen as he

sped to get a gun from a table drawer. He raised the man high and flung him against the wall. Vera screamed and headed for the door. Butch seized her shoulder, spun her around.

"Okay," he snarled. "You know what I'm after. I got my orders. Where is that girl? And where is the stuff Whitey gave you? Talk, or I'll break your neck like I would a toothpick!"

Vera stood stone still. "Tell Shale I'll bargain with him," she said. "He can have the girl back. The documents are not in this house. You can't find them and we won't talk."

"We'll see," Butch roared. "The girl first—and she better not be dead if you want to keep on living!"

"She's in the attic, inside a fur storage vault. We locked her in there for safe-keeping."

Butch made no move to go after her. He pushed Vera into a chair and stood over her, scowling down until she thought it was only a matter of time before he would strangle her.

Upstairs Benny Loper waited just long enough to hear Butch make his demands in the name of Andy Shale. Then Loper quietly entered one of the rooms, stood on a chair in the corner, climbed from that to a table and reached up to the rafters ceiling. He maneuvered some sort of a device installed on the upper part of a beam. A moment later he had a fat envelope in his hands. He climbed down and started toward the door.

Suddenly his way was blocked. He looked along the barrel of an automatic, then raised his eyes to stare at the hooded man who held the gun.

"Drop that envelope on the floor, Loper," the Black Bat said. "Drop it, or I'll kill you."

Loper's half paralyzed fingers let go of the envelope. He stepped back a pace. The Black Bat moved forward a little and bent to pick up the envelope. Loper was waiting for that. His foot started to rise in a vicious kick. Suddenly *his* ankle was seized and too late he realized the Black Bat had anticipated just such a move.

Loper was dumped over backwards. The Black Bat bent down, gun upraised. Loper saw it coming. He screamed, a high-pitched yell of terror. Then the gun thudded against his forehead.

The Black Bat stuffed the envelope into a pocket, turned and ran from the room. He raced up the attic stairs, located the fur storage closet and with a prayer on his lips, tore open the door. Carol moaned as he picked her up. He carried her to a window, smashed the glass and let the cool, fresh air revive her.

After a few moments she could stand and walk.

"Hello," she managed to say.

"I'm sorry, Carol," the Black Bat said. "I was afraid this would happen, but I couldn't help it. All I could do was send Silk. He watched the house and knew you hadn't come out. He was going in with a gun just as I arrived."

"You got them? All of them? Vera and Owen and that terrible Benny Loper?"

"Yes, it's finished. I also got certain documents Whitey Marlin prepared, to hold

Shale in check. I'll explain things later. Butch told me how Loper thought you two worked for Shale, so I had Butch crash into the house. Loper, just as I hoped he would, went for the documents that were hidden here. . . . We'll have to hurry. I want Loper and the others all nicely tied up and ready for McGrath. . . ."

IT WAS daylight when Inspector McGrath walked into the library of Tony Quinn's home. It had been a large evening for McGrath. He was smoking a brand new cigar, a long panatela which gave off an expensive aroma quite unlike the smell of most of the cigars he smoked.

"You know what's happened?" McGrath exulted. "The Black Bat said he'd explain things to you and give you the papers Whitey Marlin prepared concerning Shale."

"Yes, Mac, he told me the whole story—how Whitey and Martha Whitmore were married and he became her heir to this estate on which Vera Whitmore and her brother Owen sponged. Martha turned those documents over to her Aunt Vera because she mistakenly trusted both Vera and Owen, and they held them over Shale's head. They enlisted the services of a nephew from out of town who wasn't averse to murder, if necessary, to gather in a fortune."

"That's it!" McGrath said. "But we've got the lot of them—Joe Keeley for the murder of Martha Whitmore, Shale and his gang who'll go up for long terms, if they escape the chair, Loper, Vera and Owen—they're all locked up. It's a clean sweep. But we need those documents."

Quinn fumbled in his pocket and took out the fat envelope. "It's all yours, Mac, and welcome. Silk read me the details."

McGrath opened the unsealed envelope, extracted the papers and scanned them. Then he folded them again and put them back. He placed the envelope on a table at his elbow.

"You know," he said, "I'm actually sorry for Whitey. I think he really did reform."

"I'm convinced of it," Quinn said.

"Martha Whitmore's body has been identified, of course," McGrath went on. "She'd grown up in Europe, you see, so nobody

knew her over here. That's why it wasn't hard to conceal her identity. Poor kid, with all that money she couldn't find happiness."

"What about Shale?" Quinn asked.

"He's singing his head off now that he knows he hasn't a chance. Every word he says ties Vera Whitmore and her brother Owen up in fancy knots."

Quinn sighed deeply. "All right, Mac. I'll begin preparing the case for indictment this morning. We'll move for a fast trial and I'll convict the lot of them with considerable pleasure."

"McGrath nodded in grim satisfaction. "Well, I've got work to do. And, Tony, again let me apologize for accusing you a hundred times of being the Black Bat. It won't happen again. Also, I'm on that guy's side. I wouldn't want anybody to know that, not even the Black Bat, because after all I'm a cop. But in this case he didn't make a fool of me. He helped us find the truth, and it's too bad we can't give him at least part of the credit."

Quinn smiled. "He'd be the last man to want it, Mac."

McGrath picked up the envelope and shoved it into his side coat pocket. "See you in a couple of hours," he said. "And thanks for everything."

McGrath walked to the door which Silk held open for him. McGrath grinned at Silk, walked out and approached his car parked at the curb.

Inside Quinn's house, Carol and Butch emerged from the hidden lab and with Quinn and Silk, they peered through the front windows. McGrath reached the car, took a long puff on his cigar and drew that envelope from his pocket.

Suddenly he gave a loud bellow. The envelope, which hadn't been sealed, now had its flap held firmly down. By a black sticker

cut out in the form of a bat in full flight. It was the brand of the Black Bat.

McGrath bit clear through his cigar, hurled the stub to the sidewalk and turned back toward the house. That seal hadn't been on the envelope when Quinn had handed it to him. It had been affixed after he had laid it on the table. Someone in Quinn's house had branded it!

Then McGrath paused, shoved his hat to the back of his head and started laughing. He wasn't sure if anyone was watching him from the house, but he bowed in that direction and gave a snappy salute. He was whistling gaily as he got into the car.

"Ah," Carol said softly, "age mellows a man. Ten years ago he'd have come storming back with a gun in his fist."

QUINN'S arm was around her.

"I couldn't resist it," he said. "Not having McGrath suspicious might make us all go stale. And I think he's happier about it, too."

"Sure he is," Silk said. "Until we go on the prowl again and pull a fancy one on him. I guess you're right, sir. We need to stay on our toes and Mac helps."

They all turned away from the window. Nobody spoke for a while. It was the breathing spell after hours of danger. But none of the quartette had any doubts but that they'd soon be in action again.

Somewhere plans were being made by greedy people, hatred filled souls, men were methodically planning some sort of revenge for some vast crime. Men who would take chances to get what they wanted, sacrifice lives, forget society and blast their way ahead.

And there would always be these four people, headed by the man in a black hood who would stop them. Or die trying.

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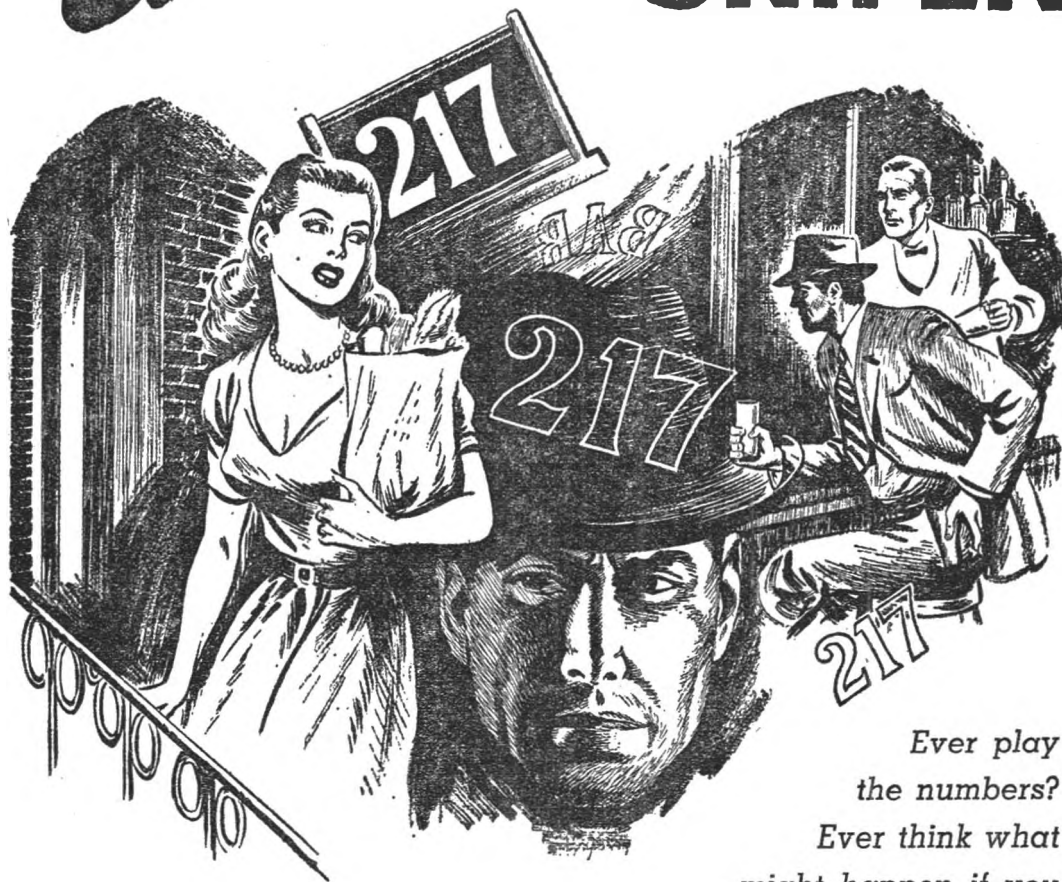
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## THE KILLER WHO WASN'T

by G. WAYMAN JONES

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# THE *Unarmed* SNIPER



*by* **LEN ZINBERG**

**T**HIS is a good bar up in that part of the Bronx where you wouldn't expect to find one. Outside it looks like any other old-fashioned saloon, but the inside is neat and modern, not too bright, and the juke box or television never blasts you off your bar stool. The bartender is a wiry young man, always in a spotless white jacket, who knows his business. He never gives you a sloppy drink.

*Ever play  
the numbers?  
Ever think what  
might happen if you  
won—and the banker skipped?*

I've heard he was a combat major during the war. I believe this at times. I've also heard he owns half the place, which I don't believe. I'm sure he owns the whole bar, and probably a couple of others in the neighborhood. He's the type that gets ahead, does everything with expert ease, cool efficiency. He's an operator, and while I don't like that type, I admire him.

Once when a character full of a few drinks too many tried to woo a girl friend with a



slap on the nose, this bartender simply leaned over the bar and dropped the joker with as neat a left hook as Louis ever threw. No words or warning, no bluff or wild punches—merely the one clean blow, then a nod to the porter to drag the body outside.

Not that the place is rough or noisy. Usually there's just enough customers to keep the bar from having that lonely look. I've been in there maybe a dozen afternoons and everytime I've seen this heavysset man who seems to be in his late forties, a bull necked, homely guy who looks like a copper. He always sits at the end of the bar nearest the window, drinking straight rye slowly, often glancing at the row of old brownstones that are mostly rooming-houses now—on the other side of the street.

The bartender keeps an eye on these houses too, sometimes he and the cop whisper and motion towards the houses. Promptly at four o'clock the bartender taps this fellow on the arm, motions toward the clock, and the guy nods, downs a fast one, and leaves. The barkeep always shows him the tab, the guy always has an embarrassing speech about being broke but he'll square it tomorrow—and when he's gone, the bartender will tear up the tab.

**Y**ESTERDAY was one of those sudden warm days and the heavysset guy unbuttoned his coat, exposing a standard police pistol in a black holster on his right hip. Later, when he stood up to leave, he dropped his cigarettes and when he bent over his coat fell away. He also carried a small automatic on his left hip.

At the door he stopped abruptly. Across the street a very pretty young woman came out of the best looking brownstone. She was really beautiful. The cop stared at her with dull eyes as she looked over at the bar, then started down the street. But there was nothing dull about the way the bartender's eyes were following her.

The big man lumbered out and I asked, "How come that guy sports two guns?"

"He's a detective," the bartender answered.

"I guessed that, but why two guns?"

"Well," the bartender said, looking me

over and apparently deciding how much he was going to tell me about this dick—if anything. "One gun—the automatic—is a special killing rod to knock off a certain guy. Never think so now, but this dick used to be full of gags, a happy man—for a cop. Now he's a lush. Only way he keeps his job is, the boys at the station feel sorry for him and cover him. Wife had left him and if something don't happen soon, he'll go batty."

"Girl trouble?" I asked politely.

"Not him." The bartender glanced down the bar to see if a beer drinker needed a refill. "No, that man was ruined by gambling—one play—and superstition. You play the numbers?"

"No."

He held up his slim hand, filled the beer drinker's glass just as the man turned to call for another, then returned and asked me, "What were you saying?"

"That I never play the numbers."

"Oh yeah. This is a pretty good neighborhood for numbers, most of the housewives play a dime or two-bits a day. Was a fellow called Ace who banked the numbers around here. Lived across the street, in that good house. One of these sharp dressed pretty boys, a big mouth punk who thinks he's slick, from seeing too many gangster movies.

"Ace made good money. Hickey—that's the dick—used to stop in here for a beer now and then. He knew Ace was banking numbers but it wasn't any of Hickey's official business. He was a good cop. One afternoon Hickey told me, 'Had a funny dream last night. Was driving in the country with the wife in my old struggle-buggy and we passed a big billboard. It was painted all black with nothing on it but a big white number—217. How do you figure that?'

"I said it was sure a strange dream. I remember we tried seeing if 217 was part of his badge number, driver's license, address, phone. This Ace overheard us, he was that kind of nosey punk, said to Hickey, 'Chum, that's a sign. Be smart, put some coin on 217 tomorrow.'

"Hickey was a solid man, didn't gamble or believe in dreams. He laughed Ace off. As it happened, 217 didn't come out the next

day anyway. About a week later Hickey said he had the same dream again, same number, only the sign was smaller, like one of these Burma shave signs.

"Early the following morning he dropped in on his way to the station, kind of excited. He had the dream again, only this time he was in a big new car and his wife was wearing a mink. And they passed *three* big billboards with 217 written on them in great gold letters. Ace always came in for a quickie before making the rounds of the storekeepers who picked up numbers for him. When he heard the dream he told Hickey, 'It's sure *the* sign now, begging you to bet.'

"Truth is, even I thought it was some kind of omen and I don't believe in that nonsense. Hickey thought it over, said, 'I ain't gambled in fifteen years, but if this isn't a sign, I never seen one. I'll play a buck with you, Ace.' "

**I**LLUSTRATING his point, the bartender winked, then went on with his story: "Ace winks at me and said, 'If you're going to play a hunch, play it all the way. Shoot the works.' So Hickey said he would and emptied his pockets. He had fifty-two dollars in bills and change, put it all on 217. Know what happened?"

"217 hit?" I said brightly.

"Right," the bartender said, starting to wash some shot glasses. "Only this Ace was a fool. Usually when a banker gets a big hit, he parcels it out to other bankers, to protect himself. Ace didn't."

"You mean fifty bucks is such a big bet?"

The bartender gave me a faintly annoyed look as he quickly dried and stacked the glasses. "Know what the odds are on a number hitting?"

"Have no idea."

"Five-forty to one. Ace owed Hickey over twenty-eight grand. Of course Ace didn't have anywheres near that big a bundle, so he skipped town. First Hickey was just plain mad, then he begins brooding, becomes a changed man. All he does now is sit here and watch the house across the street, waiting for Ace to return, kill him with that special gun. It'll look okay—a copper shooting a numbers guy—line of duty."

"But in actual cash, Hickey only lost fifty-two dollars," I said.

"That's one way of looking at it," the bartender agreed, slicing lemons and oranges for the night trade. "Another way is to keep thinking how close you came to twenty-eight grand, what you could do with it. Then you brood, get sore. And all you can do is drink and wait, and the hell with everything but getting even, killing the guy who took you."

I finished my drink, lit my pipe. Without exactly rushing me, he reached for the glass, looked at me. I nodded for another, asked, "How long has this Ace been gone?"

"About two years."

"Long time for a guy like Hickey to brood."

The bartender shrugged. "He can't forget it. Sometimes guys talk about it, keep reminding him he was gypped out of twenty-eight grand. They egg Hickey on. And Ace will be back."

"Why should he?"

He filled my shot glass exactly to the top, gave me a new ice and soda chaser, then as he opened a bottle of cherries, said, "Because he owns that house over there, at least it's in his wife Anna's name, and so is the coupla grand Ace has in the bank. Lug like Ace won't pass up that coin, what the house can be sold for. He writes her from different cities, but he's scared and she won't go to him. You see, she finally realizes what a stinker he was—is."

**T**HE bartender mopped the mahogany, then continued again:

"A beautiful young queen like Anna, with two years of college—I used to worship her! Then this Ace comes along. She must have been infatuated with his looks, flashy clothes, fast talk. Always the sweet kids that fall for the fourflushers. But now she knows and Ace won't divorce her unless she gives him all the dough, including the house. And then he'd probably doublecross her. I tell her not to worry about a thing. All we have to do is wait and Hickey will wait and then—"

His voice was almost a whisper and he was staring at the bottle of cherries without

seeing it. Suddenly he put the bottle under the bar, said sharply, "But all this is none of your business, is it mister?"

"Certainly isn't." I sipped my drink and he moved down the bar to talk to some new customers. I glanced over at the house, and the girl was returning, groceries in her arms. She was a fine built gal. I watched as she went up the steps of her house, opened the door, the neat sway to her hips. In the bar mirror I could see the bartender looking at her, a smile on his lean face.

I knew who was 'egging' Hickey on. And as I finished my drink I had to admit this

boy was a smooth operator. I mean the efficient way he was getting himself a pretty young widow with money in the bank and a good house—and with cute chicks hard to find and real estate so high these days too. And the touching way he firmly turned off Hickey's rye every day at four, so he'd at least report to the station house on time, keep his job as long as possible.

Even if you don't like him, you have to admire a guy who can shoot a man without ever touching the gun himself. Maybe it was worth twenty-eight thousand to have someone do your killing for you.

# THE CRIME QUIZ

*Here are ten questions on crime to test your knowledge and—possibly—add to your information. Count 10 points for each question answered correctly. A score of 80 or better wins you the rank of super sleuth. 50-70—armchair detective. 30-50—rookie. Those who score 20 or less are hereby sentenced to stand on their heads to read the answers given upsidedown below.*



1. Crime scientists can determine if a hair came from a man or a woman's head. Give one obvious difference between male and female head hairs.

2. What famous mystery story sleuth bears the same name as his author? Hint: There's a touch of royalty about the name.

3. What is the nearest Russian equivalent of the defunct Nazi Gestapo?



4. With what murder weapon are "lands" associated?

5. Can you name the fictional detective, whose caricature appears at the left?

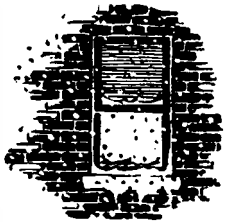
6. True or false? Quicklime will destroy a corpse.

7. What is the color of fingerprint powder?

8. What was the alphabetic initial referred to in Nathaniel Hawthorne's famous "The Scarlet Letter"?

9. How does embezzlement differ from theft?

10. The burglar who broke into a house left his footprint on the snow-covered sill of a window. By what means do police preserve such a footprint as evidence?



—The Old Sarge.

## ANSWERS

1. The most obvious difference is that of length. Any hair longer than six inches is almost certainly a woman's.
2. Elery Queen.
3. The NKVD, formerly known as the OGPU.
4. Guns. Lands are the smooth surfaces between the apical grooves that mark the inside of a gun barrel.
5. The Saint, created by Leslie Charteris.
6. False. Actually quicklime is a preservative, hardening body tissues.
7. White and black are most common, though recently "dragon's blood" has been found useful. This powder is obtained by grinding the resin of the rattan palm tree.
8. The letter "A", standing for "Addictress".
9. In embezzlement, a person appropriates for his own use money or valuables entrusted to his care.
10. Through the taking of a plastic mold, or moulage, of the print.

Circus people may have sawdust in their veins, but the stuff



# Murder Stalks the BIG TOP

## CHAPTER I

### *Death In the Sawdust*

SOMEHOW, you sense tragedy at the circus long before it happens. The kinkers start talking about a Death Show, and there's a lot of chatter about "someone getting it" before the performance is over. And before you know it something terrible *has* happened—like a tumble from the high wire or a slip inside the lions' cage.

Don't ask me how they always know it in advance. They just do. And that's why I stood in the wings watching rather breathlessly as Myra Dean did her butterfly act, because this particular performance had been labeled a Death Show by every trouser on the lot.

This Myra Dean was an exceedingly cute trick—blond and pretty and on the sexy side. She was the niece of Alan McCord, the owner of the McCord Shows, and she was a real trouser besides. She was up there now, right at the top of the tent, hanging by her teeth and spinning around like a butterfly in flight, without a net underneath. It made me feel sick inside.

Why I felt sick I don't know. Maybe it was because I like the kid, sort of. Only the rub was that I had no right to like her even sort of, because she was strictly a circus gal and would marry a trouser—and I wasn't a trouser. Not really. Not deep down.

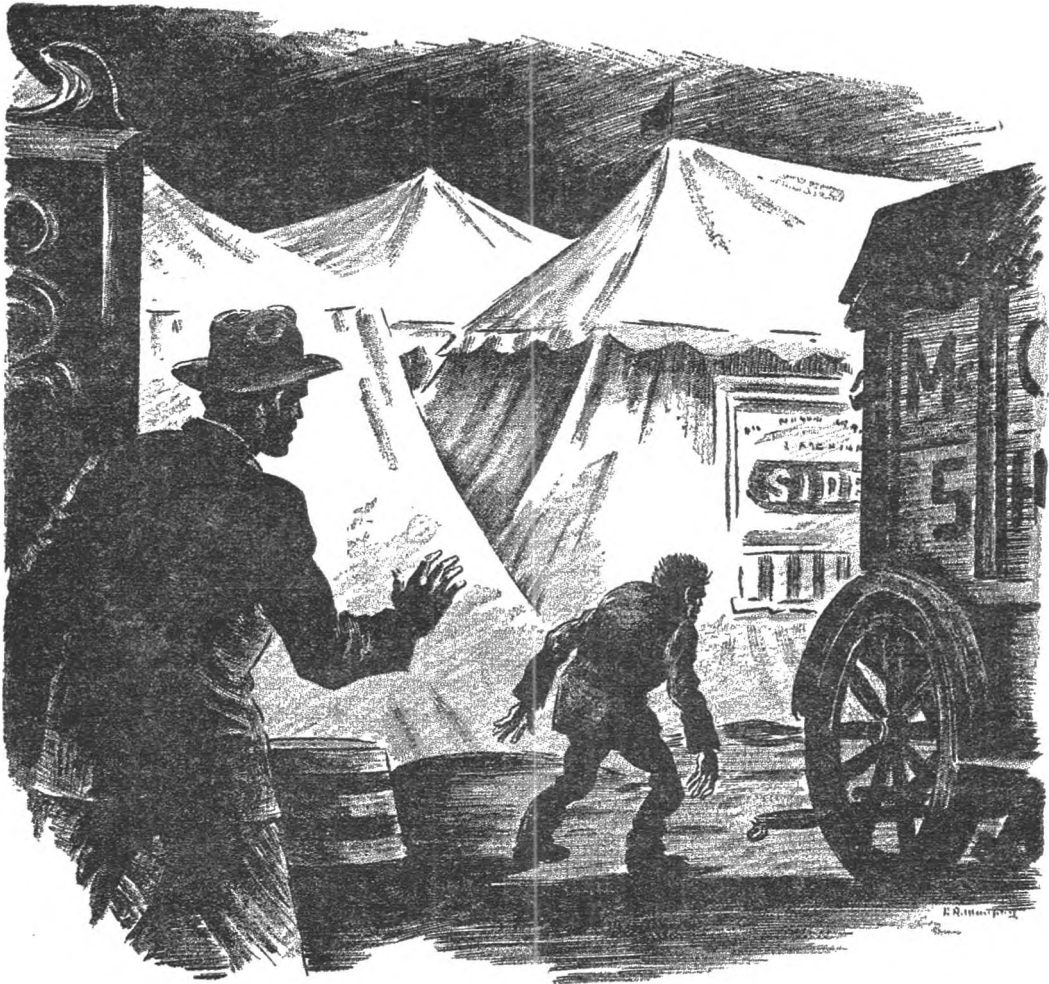
Sure, I was publicity man for the McCord Shows, but I didn't have sawdust in my veins like she had. My knowledge of publicity had merely been a handy method of obtaining employment with the circus when the people I really worked for—the Federal Bureau of Investigation—assigned me to investigate the McCord Shows.

YOU SEE, it was this way. We had nothing on the McCord Shows, exactly. But it had been unmistakably noticeable all through the early summer that crime of all types was following in the wake of the circus.

The show would move into a town on a Monday morning, maybe, and stay a week. While it was there, and for several weeks

**A Novelet by H. C. BUTLER**

that splatters FBI-man Ken Underwood is—wet, warm and red!



Cute and sexy Myra Dean already had died when Ken took the trail of The Cat

after it had left, there would be a rash of crime committed—burglary, arson, even murder. In the town, that is—not on the lot.

Actually, there was no discernible connection between the Big Top and the wave of crime in town. But when these violent crime outbursts followed consistently in the path of the circus, there was room for suspicion.

Local police noticed it first, and it wasn't long before they were asking the F.B.I. to help them out, thinking that if crime was actually oozing from beneath the Big Top

there was some kind of interstate angle to it. We were interested, naturally, but it was not until some gun punk in Chicago killed F.B.I.-man Tom Stokes while the circus was having its run there that we really became involved. The chief called me in and laid it right on the line.

"You were a publicity-and-public relations man before you joined us," he said. "We want you to use that experience to get a job with the McCord Shows. Everywhere the show plays, a crime wave breaks out. And I want you to find out why!"

That was it. The old boring-from-within technique, which is so old and yet so effective. I talked Alan McCord into giving me a job, and I traveled with the circus for several weeks without turning up even a worn-out clue.

Then the Big Top put on its Death Show.

Like I say, Myra Dean was high up in the arch of the big tent, with a spotlight aimed at her spinning form. She had been up only a minute, maybe less, and was really just getting started in what was a spectacular act. Then the thing happened.

I don't think I'll ever forget it. I can remember how I froze stiffly in my tracks, how the audience was hushed in unbelieving silence for a split-second, then let out a horrified scream. Myra's strong white teeth had slipped away from the mouthpiece and her wonderful body had dropped crazily through space. It hit the sawdust in the middle ring, bounced like a carelessly discarded rag doll, and lay deathly still.

For a few seconds I was paralyzed. Then my feet started churning automatically as I raced toward the middle ring. A couple of roustabouts had reached Myra's body by the time I got there, but they hadn't touched her.

I looked down at her, my eyes traveling over the crumpled body to the soft blondness of her hair, now flecked with sawdust. And there was no doubting it, no doubting it at all.

Myra had done her last stint for the McCord Shows.

I stood staring at her, not quite believing it. And then the stretcher men came, as if they had been waiting for their cue, and a few clowns came on to calm down the crowd. The windjammers started playing a fast tune and I could see that, in the old tradition, the show was going on.

A small group of performers and roustabouts had gathered in the middle ring now. They had somber faces, all of them. Tony Vanelli, who did a dangerous act on the high wire, said:

"A Death Show! We all knew this was a Death Show!"

I told him to shut up. That sort of talk wasn't going to help him or anyone else. I turned to a razorback.

"Bring down that trapeze stuff she was hanging from," I said. "I want to look it over."

The roustabout shrugged. "Don't think you'll find nothing wrong with that apparatus," he said. The mouthpiece didn't come off and fall with her, nothing like that. She just simply let loose up there."

"That's right," I told him. "She let loose. And Myra was too damned good a trouper to just let loose, unless something caused her to let loose. Bring it down!"

**T**HE ROUSTABOUT shrugged again and went to work on a series of pulleys that lowered the contraption to the sawdust. While it was being lowered, I kept my eyes on the stretcher men taking Myra's limp form away. I thought of Alan McCord, the semi-paralyzed owner of the show, and I thought what a tough blow it would be for him to take. He had been partially paralyzed for years as a result in his younger days of a fall from the high wire. Now he had lost his niece in a death tumble.

The contraption on which Myra had hung clumped to the sawdust, jarring me out of my reverie. I went immediately to the mouthpiece, looked it over carefully. There seemed to be nothing wrong with it. Then, quite unaccountably, I got an inspiration. I lifted the mouthpiece to my nose and smelled it.

The shock vibrated through me. For the odor of the mouthpiece was one which I had experienced not once but many times before. It was the bitter odor of almonds, that meant only one thing. Cyanide!

I got up slowly, looking at the crowd around me. Bozo, the clown, shook his head, his painted face sad.

"A terrible accident," he mumbled.

I looked at him a long time. Then I said: "You might as well get used to the idea, everyone. It wasn't an accident. It was murder!"

"Murder!" The word shot out like a bullet fired from a gun, coming from several voices at once.

I nodded.

"Murder," I said again. "Someone killed Myra Dean, just as surely as if she'd had

a bullet pumped into her heart. Someone coated the mouthpiece of this trapeze with cyanide—probably hydrocyanic acid—and in hanging by her teeth to the mouthpiece she absorbed enough of it into her system to kill her."

There was silence for a moment. Then Bozo spoke up.

"It doesn't seem possible. Could she have absorbed enough in the short time she was up there to cause death?"

I nodded again.

"Very easily. Hydrocyanic acid is extremely potent. A tiny drop in one eye will kill a man, the minutest quantity swallowed will bring death."

"But she would have tasted it—"

"Perhaps. But you know Myra—a trouper from the very core. Even if she sensed a bitterness, she would have tried to go on with the act. And, of course, she had no reason to even suspect such a thing as cyanide. There's only one good thing about it—Myra never knew she fell. She was dead when the poison hit her, and only then did she let loose of the mouthpiece and fall."

Bozo's clown-painted face wore a hopeless expression.

"But who in the world would want to kill Myra?" he asked at last.

I just looked at him.

"That's a question a lot of us would like to be able to answer," I said. "And I'm going to find out!"

## CHAPTER II

### *Knife from Nowhere*



I DID a lot of thinking as I headed for Alan McCord's tent at the back of the lot, where the owner had a combination office-and-living quarters. But the thinking didn't get me very far.

I had been with the show for more than three weeks and had seen criminal waves unleashed in several towns as the circus passed through. Obviously there was some connection, yet I

hadn't been able to find a trace of any undercover work.

Now Myra Dean had died—and this was different. This was the first time crime had actually come to the circus itself. She had been murdered at the top of the tent, in the middle of her act, in view of thousands of people—and, somehow, it seemed that there must be a connection between her death and whatever deviltry was inspiring crime in the wake of the circus.

It was a break in the case I couldn't afford to ignore, because it might lead me to bigger game.

When I walked into McCord's tent, it was like entering a funeral home. A heavy oppression hung over everything. Two roustabouts and a couple clowns were present, along with McCord himself, and I knew by their faces that they had told McCord the news.

McCord's face was ashen-gray. He was a chunky, squat man of about fifty, with hair that had once been black but was now fading to gray. His eyes were azure-blue and very sharp, and he sat in a wheelchair, his right hand resting on the wheel with which he guided it. I had never seen him out of the wheelchair at any time, nor would it have been possible for me to see him that way. Both legs had been paralyzed in a fall from the high wire in his trouper days, and he had never recovered their use.

He had had an interest in the circus at the time, and he'd taken over the reins and finally its ownership because he couldn't leave the spangles and the sawdust. But he sat there now, curiously alone and uncomfortable, his face drawn in heavy lines and his eyes staring.

"You've heard the news?" I asked, rather inadequately.

He looked at me for a long time, almost as if he didn't recognize me, and finally he nodded dully.

"Yes. I can't believe it. I can't believe Myra is—dead." He hesitated over the last word.

I made a motion with my head for the rest to leave. They filed out silently. I walked over and sat down on a nearby hassock.



"Look, McCord," I said. "I've only been with the show a few weeks, but I want to help. I kind of liked Myra. She was a great trouper, and I want to help."

He looked at me vacantly, and his hand ran over the wheel of the chair, as if smoothing it.

"What can you do? The girl's dead. There's nothing you can do."

"I can find out who murdered her," I said slowly.

For a moment it didn't seem to register. Then, quite suddenly, he looked up at me in surprise, his jaw sagging.

"Did you say *murdered*?"

I nodded.

"It's pretty obvious," I told him. "There was an unmistakable odor of hydrocyanic acid on the mouthpiece to which she was clinging. It looks like somebody deliberately coated that mouthpiece with poison to kill her."

It took him awhile to assimilate that. He seemed lost in a complete haze, as if half his mind were gone.

"If that's so," he said finally, "we'd better call the police." He looked at me sharply, turning his chair half around toward me. "Good God, man! Are you sure?"

"I'm positive!"

Just then a couple of razorbacks brought the trapeze apparatus into the tent, as I had ordered before I left the ring. I carried it over to McCord and let him smell the mouthpiece. He drew back as if startled.

"Hydrocyanic acid?" he asked. "Do you know that to be a fact?"

"I've smelled it before," I said vaguely.

He wasn't thinking too clearly, and that satisfied him. He waved his hand impatiently.

"Get the police right away," he said. "Right away!"

**D**ISPATCHING someone to call the police, I returned to the hassock to face McCord.

"Before they get here, let's go over a few things," I said. "Do you know of anyone in the show—it would have to be in the show—who would like to see Myra Dean dead?"

McCord ran his hand over the wheel,

stroking it almost with a caress. His face seemed ten years older.

"No one," he said. "All the kinkers liked her. She was a great trouper and they all respected her for it."

"Someone must have wanted her out of the way," I insisted. "Try to think. Did she have any arguments with anyone lately—even little unimportant arguments?"

He tried to think, but the turbulence of his mind wouldn't let him. He kept shaking his head like a weary old man—much older than he really was.

"I don't know. The kinkers all have their little quarrels. They're always jockeying for a good spot in the show, and bickering over this and that. But I don't know of anyone she ever had a serious quarrel with." He stopped suddenly, as if a thought had occurred to him.

"Yes?" I prompted.

He ran his hand over the wheel on the chair nervously.

"I just thought of something," he said uncertainly. "But I don't like to say it. I hate the thought of incriminating someone who might be innocent."

I got tough then.

"This is murder," I told him. "We've got to look at every possibility."

McCord seemed to shrink into the chair.

"All right, I'll tell you. She had a little spat—nothing much, though—with The Cat."

"The Cat!"

"Yeah. The little devil was making passes at her."

I thought that one over. The Cat, as we called him, was one of the roustabouts the show carried. He was a little, misshapen man, a hunchback, with an ugly warty face that reminded me of the Hunchback of Notre Dame. But he traveled around on his bandy legs with such speed and quickness that he earned himself the nickname, The Cat. I couldn't remember ever having heard his real name, because he was The Cat to everyone on the lot.

"Tell me about it," I said.

McCord's face set in weary lines. "Well, maybe you know the beginning of it. For some time The Cat has had a—well, a crush

on Myra."

"I heard that."

"Then you know how it was. I felt sorry for the poor guy, really. He apparently had fallen in love with her, but he's such an ugly, animal-like little guy that there wasn't any possibility of Myra getting interested in him. You know what I mean?"

I nodded, and he went on.

"Well, the other night after the performance, Myra was here with me talking over her contract, which was up for renewal. When we finished she cut across the lot toward her own tent, and who should fall right in step with her but The Cat. She told me afterward that she thought he'd been drinking. Anyway, he started telling her how crazy he was about her, and when they crossed a particularly dark spot on the grounds he made a few amorous passes. Myra told him off in no uncertain terms and ran to her tent. That was all."

I thought that one over a minute. "And you think The Cat might have killed her?"

McCord made a quick, impatient move with his hand.

"Don't get me wrong," he said. "You asked if she had had any arguments with anyone, so I told you about The Cat. Actually, if he loved her, I don't see why—"

"It's possible," I cut in. "Unrequited love can turn to hate almost without trying. He might have decided on the old business, that if he couldn't have her nobody else would. He might have figured that killing her would be better than seeing her every day and not being able to have her. Has The Cat caused any trouble before? Any kind of trouble?"

McCord shrugged, and he traced the circumference of the wheel with a pointed finger.

"Nothing much. He poses a problem sometimes. I think he's conscious of his deformity, and because of it he's liable to assert himself on various subjects in a more headstrong manner than other people. I think he tries to cover up a feeling of inferiority. He's been a little trouble around the lot, but nothing serious. And he is a good worker."

I stood up.

"I'm going to have a talk with The Cat," I said. "When the cops come, tell them anything they want to know. And you can also tell them I'm fussing around with the case."

I LEFT McCord sitting by himself, staring off into space, and headed for The Cat's tent. Most of the roustabouts that traveled with the show slept in a community tent, but The Cat had his own. It was a whim of his that McCord had catered to in order to keep peace. The Cat, apparently, liked to have his privacy.

I could see the light burning through the canvas as I approached. I walked right in through the doorway without bothering to announce myself. What I saw almost tore the heart out of me. The Cat was sitting on a stool in the corner of the tent, curled up like a big rubber ball—and crying!

He didn't even look up when I entered. I went over and put my hand on his shoulder, just above the lumpiness of his hunched back.

The feel of my hand startled him. He rubbed his eyes quickly and looked up. The homeliness of his face, lumpy and misshapen like his body, struck me as if I had never seen him before.

"Buck up, fellow," I told him softly. "Get a hold on yourself."

He wiped his eyes again, looking up at me. "You wanta talk to me?" he asked.

I just nodded. He wiped the back of his hand over his eyes, rose to his feet and waddled ducklike across the room.

"It was terrible," he said, his tones gruff and sand-paperish. "I can hardly believe it happened."

"You knew it was murder, didn't you?" I asked.

He looked at me out of hollow eyes. I turned away to light a cigarette. His face was gruesome. He looked at you out of beady black eyes, set too deep in his head. His nose was large, bulbous, and his mouth was twisted up slightly at one corner. On his right cheek was a warty lump, and a red blemish marked his forehead.

"I heard it was murder," he said slowly. "But how can you believe that?"

I told him about the doctored mouthpiece

on the trapeze apparatus.

"Someone wanted her out of the way," I said. "You wouldn't know who, would you?"

He just wagged his head heavily, like a huge dog. I decided to say what was in my mind, to get his reaction.

"You had an argument with Myra a few nights ago on the lot. You made a couple passes and she brushed you off. You remember?"

The expression on his lumpy face didn't change. In fact, he had no expression. His face was always the same, set in rigid, sad lines, as though it were resigned to its ugliness.

"I remember," he said in a dull voice. "So what?"

"You didn't kill her, did you?"

He looked at me out of those black marblelike eyes for a long time. His face flushed a little, but that was all.

"I didn't kill her, Ken," he said. "In case you don't know it, I loved her. Me, The Cat. Hunchbacked and crippled and homely as the devil himself, I loved her. You understand?"

I understood. There suddenly didn't seem to be any reason for suspecting him any longer. The Cat was broken up badly by Myra's death. He had lost something dear to him, and it seemed almost a sacrilege even to suspect that he could have killed the girl.

I turned and left the tent, leaving The Cat stand there, a misshapen little man with the heart torn out of him. When I got outside I dropped the mosquito netting into place, and one corner near the bottom didn't fall across the doorway. I stooped to put it in place—and that's what probably saved my life.

Just as I stooped I heard a whizzing sound and a dull thump where my head would have been had I remained standing a moment longer.

There was a telephone post near me, and when I looked up at the spot where my head might have been, I froze rigidly.

Quivering in the telephone post was a long-bladed, silvery knife!

### *Fat Lady's Testimony*



NATURALLY, I didn't waste any time getting out of there. With a handkerchief, I grabbed the knife and headed for my own tent. I ducked in through the entrance and sat down on my cot. Then, for the first time, I examined the knife.

It was a silvery-bladed affair, very lethal-looking, and was complete with an ornately carved bone handle. And carved into the handle were the initials, "J. K."

I'm no Einstein, but I didn't have to be to figure out who J.K. was. The weapon belonged to our knife-thrower, who did the usual knife-tossing act in the sideshow—a smooth and dapper lad named Johnny Knight.

And it looked offhand as if Johnny Knight had tried to pin my noggin to the telephone post!

It made me sore. For a moment I was all for going over and having a little confab with Johnny. But then I decided to let it wait. Maybe, if I could sit still a few minutes and think the thing out, I might be able to figure out what connection there was between Myra's death and the knife-throwing business—and why Johnny had wanted to kill me.

But my thinking apparatus wasn't working. I had a vague idea that all these goings-on at the circus were connected with the wave of crime always following in the show's wake, but that was as far as I got. Why anyone would want to kill Myra Dean was something I couldn't figure. And why Johnny Knight—if it were Johnny—had wanted to shiv me was something else that didn't make immediate sense.

I was deep in the middle of getting nowhere when a cop suddenly appeared at the door of my tent. He looked in, squinting in the light, and said:

"You Ken Underwood?"

I admitted it.

"The inspector wants to see you in McCord's tent," he said.

I went along peaceably, taking the knife with me. When I got to McCord's tent I found quite a gathering. There was McCord himself, The Cat, the roustabouts who had carried Myra Dean away after her fall, a couple uniformed policemen, and Inspector Kurt Stengle, Homicide Bureau.

It wasn't long before I found out that Inspector Stengle was one of the toughest and most sarcastic homicide dicks I had ever run into. He gave me a quick once-over as I came in, and his steel-gray eyes glistened.

"Underwood?" he snapped.

"In person," I said.

He jerked his head toward McCord. I noticed he was chewing a heavy wad of gum.

"McCord tells me you're looking into this case. Right?"

I nodded, and Stengle permitted a sneer to cut his lips.

"In every case there's somebody wants to play detective," he snapped.

I nodded again.

"When I was a kid I always played cops and robbers," I cracked. "I was always on the cops' side—although sometimes I wonder why."

"Wise guy, eh?" Stengle chewed his gum slowly. "Tell me what you know about this murder!"

I told him. I told him everything that had happened from the time Myra had fallen until the cop had come to get me in my tent. The only thing I didn't tell him was that I was an F.B.I. agent. I was saving that one for later.

When I was finished, Stengle turned to a cop.

"Get this Johnny Knight in here," he ordered. Then he wheeled on The Cat and started firing questions. Before long he had The Cat all confused, so I slipped in a word.

"I don't think The Cat did it," I said.

Stengle spun around like a top. A grin spread across his face.

"So you don't think so, eh? And who do you think you are—Sherlock Holmes?"

"Not me," I said. "I'm the guy who taught Sherlock to solve crimes."

He turned a little purple at that one, but just then the cop came back with Johnny Knight. Knight was a slim lad, with slick black hair and a tiny black mustache above even white teeth. Stengle pointed to the knife, which now lay on a table.

"Yours?" he asked.

Johnny looked surprised.

"Why, yes. It's the one I lost a week ago!"

"Oh, it is, eh?" Stengle's voice dripped acid. "So you're a good shiv tosser?"

"I earn my living by it," said Johnny easily.

Stengle told Knight how the knife on the table had been thrown at me, and Johnny paled a little.

"I told you I lost that knife a week ago," he repeated.

"Yeah, I know." Stengle grinned slowly.

"How many knives you got, anyway?"

"Two dozen."

"And they all got your initials on them?"

"That's right."

"And you deny throwing this knife at Underwood?"

Johnny tensed his jaw.

"I deny it, yes. As a matter of fact, if I had thrown the knife. I wouldn't have missed."

Stengle just stared a minute. I grinned and said. "There's something in that. Knight's one of the best tossers in the business."

"Shut up!" snapped Stengle. "When I need any help from you, I'll ask for it!"

**I** SHUT up. I would have liked to tell him I was one of J. Edgar's boys, but I wasn't ready to spring that one yet—even to the cops.

So a couple hours of questioning dragged on, and The Cat was jittery and Johnny Knight was smooth as oil and Alan McCord was worried, his face drawn in deep lines. The trapeze apparatus and the knife were dusted for fingerprints, but none were found. And when it was all over we were no closer to a solution of Myra Dean's death than we had been before.

Finally Stengle left, telling us all to stick around and leaving a couple token cops on

the lot to watch over us. When things were quiet again McCord wheeled his chair over to me.

"It's terrible," he said broodingly. "I almost feel as if we ought to close up the show."

I shook my head.

"It wouldn't be right, Alan," I said. "You know, the show must go on."

He nodded dully. "I guess you're right. I'll see you in the morning."

I went back to my tent, trying to figure it out. There were a lot of angles to the case, and none of them made much sense. I sat around awhile, trying to arouse a brain-storm, but I had gotten absolutely nowhere when an interruption occurred.

The mosquito netting on the canvas parted and a mammoth form moved into my tent.

It startled me plenty, until I realized who it was. The huge, rolling form belonged to Katrinka, the Fat Lady. She was billed as weighing six hundred pounds, and I believed every pound of it. She had elephantine proportions, and as she stood inside the tent taking up a good third of it, she looked at me out of tiny blue eyes imbedded in layers of fat.

"Hi, Katrinka," I said, trying to be casual about it. "Have a chair—" I stopped, realizing that was the wrong thing to say.

Katrinka laughed heartily. "Your furniture wouldn't hold me!" Then her round face grew suddenly solemn. "I want to talk to you, Ken. It's about—Myra."

I lit a cigarette, trying to act calm.

"What about her, Katrinka?"

"I—I think I know who killed her," she said.

I looked her over, all six hundred pounds of her.

"You're sure?"

She spread her hands in a huge gesture.

"I don't want to incriminate an innocent man, Ken. That's why I haven't told the police. I wanted to tell you about it first."

"Why me?"

Katrinka took a step forward, her face earnest.

"I don't know. I just have confidence in you. I know you won't jump to conclusions until you've thought it over awhile."

"Go ahead," I told her.

"Well, last night I couldn't get to sleep. I'm troubled with insomnia, you know. I guess there's too much of me to go to sleep all at one time."

I let that pass, and she went on.

"Anyway, about two in the morning I got up, slipped into a robe and slippers and went for a stroll around the lot. It was pitch dark, of course, and I was just walking around, not paying too much attention to where I was going. All at once I found myself near the entrance to the Big Top."

She stopped, breathing heavily, her hand on her huge breast.

"I—I wouldn't have gone into the Big Top, except for one thing. Through a slit in the tent I saw a light inside. Just a tiny light. But I thought it was kind of funny—a light in the Big Top at two in the morning."

"Very funny," I agreed.

Katrinka nodded, went on: "Anyway, I stepped inside the doorway to get a better look—and then I saw him."

"Who?" I demanded.

"The—The Cat!"

**M**Y EYEBROWS crawled up and played tag with my hair line at that one.

"Go on," I urged.

Katrinka caught her breath again and went on. "He had a small lantern in the middle ring," she said. "And he was crouched down working on something."

"You mean—"

"He had the trapeze apparatus that Myra does her spin on. He had it down in the sawdust, working over it."

My breath got caught crossways in my throat. The killer of Myra Dean had certainly doctored the apparatus with hydrocyanic acid sometime before the show, and here was Katrinka with very nearly complete evidence that The Cat had been tampering with it!

"What did you do?" I asked.

"I didn't do anything," she said. "I really didn't know what was going on. I know I thought it was an unusual hour for The Cat to be working, but I thought it might just be something he was working late on—"

"Are you sure it was The Cat, Katrinka?"

I asked.

Katrinka simply smiled. "Ken, you're smarter than that. Anyone could recognize The Cat. How could you miss him? He was waddling around on those bandy legs, stooped over like he always is. You can recognize The Cat as easy as you can recognize me!"

I nodded. She was right about that, of course. No one who knew The Cat could possibly mistake anybody else for him.

"Is that all, Katrinka?" I asked.

The Fat Lady nodded.

"I wanted to tell you first. If you think the police should know—"

"I'll think it over, Katrinka," I said. "You just keep mum awhile. And thanks."

She backed out of the tent, and I stood in the middle of it, rocked by this new knowledge. Here was something that very nearly wrapped the whole case up. Here was evidence—or at least a clue—that put the finger right on The Cat and no one else! It was beginning to look like The Cat was our man—and the thought, somehow, saddened me. To me, The Cat was such a forlorn and pitiful person, I hated to believe what Katrinka had said.

Yet I could see no reason why the Fat Lady should lie about such a thing, and if The Cat had tampered with Myra's trapeze during the night, he would certainly have some explaining to do.

At first I wanted to rush to The Cat's tent and confront him with the accusation, see what his reaction would be. But I held back. I decided that tomorrow was another day, and that maybe after I'd had a chance to think the thing through the evidence wouldn't look so condemning. I couldn't understand it, really. But I was secretly hoping The Cat hadn't done it.

I fell asleep worrying about it.

### Make Mine Marijuana



KURT STENGLE and his bird dogs were back on the lot the next day, but even though they had their noses to the ground all the time they failed to flush out a murderer. At one point in the proceedings I was tempted to tell Stengle about Katrinka's story, but I held off.

Stengle was such a hardboiled and unrelenting character that I decided to keep the news to myself until I could personally question The Cat.

That wasn't until nightfall. Stengle permitted us to put on our matinee and evening performances, under the close scrutiny of a squad of cops, but he left the lot early in the evening with a warning that he'd be back. He looked particularly frustrated when he departed.

After the night show ended, I decided it would be a good time to talk to The Cat, so I headed toward his tent. As I neared it I could see a light inside, but the light snapped off as I drew close. Then a furtive shadow came out of the tent, hesitated a moment, and set off across the lot.

There wasn't any doubt who the shadow belonged to. The waddling, monkeylike walk, the hunched character of the figure, meant only one thing. It was The Cat.

I hesitated only a second, then followed. I decided that if The Cat was on the prowl this late at night, I was going to go along to see what he was up to.

The Cat was a nimble person and he led me a merry chase. He cut diagonally across the back lot, scuttered between some tents, and headed for the main street on which the show was pitched. I followed him at a discreet distance, stepping into holes and stumbling over tent ropes.

Once The Cat hit the main street, the going was easier. The night was dark, with only a sliver of moon, just enough to make out the hunched-over figure of The Cat

#### Marijuana Facts:

Four out of every five users eventually commit a crime.

Especial vigilance is exercised in penitentiaries to keep the stuff out, but prisoners have been known to cultivate the weed in obscure parts of the prison grounds, or have it sent to them pasted inside of letter envelopes or on the backs of sheets of writing paper.

Recently, ultraviolet light has been used to detect this smuggling—and has almost completely cut it off.

some paces ahead of me. If he had looked around he might have discovered me, although I took advantage of trees and other obstacles as I trailed him.

But he didn't look around. He walked swiftly, determinedly, as if he knew where he was going and wanted to get there in the shortest time possible.

His destination soon became obvious. About two blocks from the site of the show was a huge, bulky warehouse standing like a black blot against the sky. The Cat headed for it like a homing pigeon.

It was on the opposite side of the street from us, and The Cat, tossing a quick glance up and down the street, ambled across with all the agility of a chimpanzee. There was some construction work in front of the warehouse and diggers had hollowed out a ditch in front of the looming building. A two-by-four had been left carelessly lying across the four-foot-wide trench.

This was no obstacle to The Cat. I saw him wobble his way across the two-by-four, his arms outstretched to balance himself. He made it in nothing flat, as if he were walking along a sidewalk.

I got across the same way, only much slower and more cautiously. And that was where I lost The Cat. I saw him disappear into the big main door of the dark warehouse, and by the time I got there he was somewhere inside.

The door was ajar, so I squeezed through into the black interior of the place. I had noticed there was no light in the big building, and I was more than ever sure of it as I stood in the pressing blackness of the place, trying to penetrate the gloom. I began to wonder if The Cat had eyes like his namesake too, so that he could see in the inkiness of the big building.

I stood there a long moment, just inside the doorway, breathing in the musty odor of the place and trying to decide what to do next. Gradually my eyes became accustomed to the darkness and I was able to make out shadowy forms, such as a desk in one corner of the room, a chair, and an old filing cabinet.

It was then I decided one thing definitely: despite the evidence of a desk and chair in

the particular room I found myself, I was sure the warehouse was unused. The place did not look like it had supported life for some time, and there was that empty staleness in the air that seems to go with vacant buildings.

One thing I always carry is a flashlight, but in this particular case I didn't dare use it. Instead, I groped into the building, feeling my way along the walls, inching forward toward—what?

**T**HE ANSWER came rather suddenly. All at once I found myself standing at the head of a staircase leading down into murky depths below. And drifting up the staircase, from out of the black bowels of the building, came the voices.

At first I couldn't make out what was being said, although I recognized two distinct male voices. I tiptoed part way down the stairs, straining my ears. As my head dropped below the flooring of the first story, I saw that the voices were coming from a tiny room in which there was a subdued light. A transom over the doorway to the room allowed the voices to escape, and they came to me plainly now.

"You're sure nobody followed you?" The voice asking the question was heavy and deep-toned.

"Nobody. I got away from the show in the darkness. Why would anyone follow me anyway? Nobody knows about this."

That voice I recognized. It belonged to The Cat!

"You brought the stuff?" the deep voice asked.

I heard The Cat chuckle.

"Did I ever come without it? You ask too many questions, Joe. You act like you're nervous."

There was a silence, then the deep-toned voice said, "Maybe I am. The cops are getting wise to the fact that everywhere the circus camps, there's trouble. The papers are beginning to scream."

I edged down the stairs, stopped halfway as The Cat replied.

"The cops are dumb. They'll never get wise to this."

"Maybe," conceded Gruff-voice. "Maybe

we can fool the local cops. But if the Feds ever get onto this—”

The Cat chuckled again. He sounded sinister as hell, and I felt a little sick inside.

“The Feds won’t get wise,” he said confidently. “Why should they? A crime wave hits each town the circus plays. It’s a local problem, and the Feds don’t mix in local crimes. How do they know that the petty burglaries and sluggings and murders are the result of kids being souped up with marijuana?”

“We flood the city with marijuana, the kids puff on it, go crazy and do something they shouldn’t. All the cops know is that all of a sudden there’s a wave of crime, but they don’t know what causes it. Even if they catch them, the kids won’t admit they been smoking the weed—”

“Listen!” the gruff-voiced man cut in sharply. “Didn’t the boss say never to speak the word ‘marijuana?’ You’re getting careless, and if the boss hears you—”

I stood there, almost transfixed, as the import of what I had overheard seeped in. Marijuana! The terrible locoweed that drove people crazy, that raised homicidal instincts and passions to a lunatic fever—that was the answer to the whole problem. Reefers—the marijuana-loaded ciggies—accounted for everything! It was that simple.

I could see now in all its bigness this immense racket. The marijuana-circus combination was ideal for the business of flooding the country with reefers. The way it worked was obvious. Someone in the circus—The Cat, perhaps—had connections with dope smugglers. The smugglers delivered marijuana cigarettes to their representative with the circus. And the circus, traveling all over the country, served as an ideal delivery setup. In each major town where the circus played, marijuana was delivered in huge quantities. Peddlers then went to work on the city’s addicts—mostly teen-age kids—and the result was a wave of marijuana-inspired crime.

And judging from the seriousness of the crime waves that had followed in the wake of the circus, marijuana was being dispensed in huge quantities.

This, definitely, was a case for the Feds,

and it was one I would be able to crack wide open, and quickly.

I patted the cold steel of a service gun in my pocket and started down the black stairway. But I never got where I was going. Without warning, something hard and solid came down on the back of my head. I felt the warehouse dance around me, and I pitched forward.

How deep the stairs were, I never knew. I simply went tumbling head over heels into horrible blackness, and I was unconscious when I hit bottom.

I CAME out of it slowly, with consciousness seeping into my brain reluctantly. Before my eyes opened I was aware of voices in the room and the fact that I was lying on a hard, lumpy cot.

The voices didn’t make sense at first. But my brain had cleared enough to make me cautious. I lay for a long time with my eyes closed, listening to the two voices in the room.

At last I became aware of one thing: the deep-toned voice was present, but not The Cat’s. The second voice now in the room was a strange one.

I decided to open my eyes just a slit and try to take in my surroundings. When I did a bright light closed them again with a jabbing pain. I had to try it a couple times, and finally I made out a few things around me.

The room was tiny, and almost bare of furniture except for the cot I was on, a round table, and two chairs. The chairs were occupied by men I had never seen before—a huge fat man who owned the deep-toned voice, and a thin, emaciated gent who owned the other one. They were sitting at the round table, playing cards.

Through slitted eyes, I took in the situation. The skinny fellow was sitting with his back to me, his chair tipped back on its rear legs. The fat man named Joe was facing me, but he seemed more interested in his cards than he was in my returning consciousness. In fact, the cot on which I lay was in shadows, since the one light in the room hung directly over the table and cast its yellow glow down on the card-players



like a spotlight at the circus.

"I sure whacked that guy one," the thin gent said with satisfaction. "He'll be out until the boss gets here."

Joe looked up at his partner out of roundish eyes.

"I hope The Cat hurries back with the boss," he said. "I don't mind telling you I don't like playing host to an F.B.I. man!"

That tipped me off to one thing, anyway. They had discovered my F.B.I. shield, and very likely had relieved me of my gun too. It made things difficult.

Yet I knew I would have to act fast. The Cat had apparently been sent to get the boss, whoever he might be, and if I was still flat on my back when he arrived I would probably be given a good dose of lead poison before I could even get up.

Weighing the situation, I decided an attempt to escape would be risky business but possible. The skinny guy, tipped back in his chair, offered me a chance. His chair was within inches of my foot, and if I could catch the chair rung with my toe and upset him—

Like I saw, it was risky. Because even if I did spill him I would then have to negotiate some ten feet to get at the fat boy, and he was probably armed. I lay still, thinking it over for a moment, calculating my chances. I decided that I had been in tighter situations in my life and had escaped, and if I was not to be a dead pigeon this time I would have to take a chance.

It was a long, nerve-racking business. Watching the fat man, I inched my toe closer to the skinny man's chair. A couple of times fat Joe looked up from his cards, and I had to freeze in my position. But he was apparently convinced I was out for a long time, because he paid little attention to me.

Then, just as he was in the act of studying a new hand dealt to him by Skinny, I felt my toe wrap around the rung of Skinny's chair. This, then, was the time for it—and it had to work.

With one tremendous pull, I yanked on the chair rung. At the same instant I leaped from the cot. Skinny's chair went over backward, sending him sprawling. And that's

when I got a break. I heard the back of his head thunk against the floor with a finality that was refreshing!

Joe was so startled at all this that he sat for a second, open-mouthed, not knowing what to do. Then he made a belated reach for his shoulder holster. He never touched it. I had hurled myself across the table and bowled him over backward like an upset bottle.

It was very short work. My fist found Joe's jaw and he went limp as a piece of wet newspaper. I grabbed his gun from his holster and was ready to do business if Skinny wanted to play it rough. But Skinny was having a pleasant snooze on the floor.

I didn't tarry around the warehouse very long, for it wouldn't be particularly healthy to be caught in the enemy's own bailiwick when the "boss" came back, especially since he might bring reinforcements too large for me to deal with. So I did the next best thing. I headed back for the circus, reasoning that since the circus was being used as a delivery base for marijuana, then the boss must be connected with the shows.

Then I began to think of the knife that had been thrown at my head, and the fact that a smooth and slippery character like Johnny Knight could very easily be the brains behind this whole horrible deal.

So I headed back to the circus with a determination to turn the place inside out, if necessary, to find the man behind the marijuana racket—and almost certain the killer of Myra Dean.

## CHAPTER V

### *Murder Again*



WHEN I got back on the lot, things started to happen fast. I was heading like a bloodhound for The Cat's tent, thinking he might be there, when something threw me right off the track.

It was a woman's shrill scream, cutting the silence of the sleeping circus. And following it, the sharp crack of a gun.

I made quick tracks to the tent from which the scream and gunfire noise had come, and my blood was running like a chilled stream as I bore down on it.

Because the tent belonged to Katrinka, the Fat Lady!

I got to the tent door in a couple of bounds, and froze in my tracks at the sight inside. A small lamp was set in one corner of the tent, which, except for the immediate area in which it was located, succeeded only in shrouding the tent in hazy shadows. And in those shadows I saw the huge form of Katrinka, lying on her specially built cot, with streams of blood running from two bullet holes in her forehead!

Somehow, even at a distance, I knew she was dead. And crouching beside the cot, examining his handiwork, was The Cat!

I should have shot The Cat in his tracks, but something stayed my trigger finger. Perhaps it was a desire to capture him alive, or an inborn sympathy I had for this hunch-backed creature who somehow didn't seem to belong to the human family. Anyway, I hesitated. And just then he turned swiftly to flee from the tent.

He was on me almost before he saw me. When he did, he stopped in surprise. I took advantage of the surprise factor. I shifted the gun in my hand and aimed the butt of it at his head, hoping to stun him. But The Cat was quick. His fist came up from nowhere, and he seemed to straighten up to an enormous height, and the blow sent me reeling crazily into a corner of the tent.

It didn't knock me out, but the inside of the tent grew hazy for a few seconds. Then, when my sight cleared, I saw double. There *were two Cats in the tent, grappling with each other!*

It didn't make sense. I blinked my eyes and tried again. Same thing. Two hunched-over men, both having identical faces, complete with lumps that made them both grotesque little gargoyles, were battling each other to the death on the tent floor!

And the gun, which the one Cat had dropped, was lying inches from them on the floor!

It was a brief, fierce battle. And finally,

while I was still lying stunned from the blow and the strange sight of two Cats in battle, one of them shoved free of the other. The winner then leaped to his feet and started to run from the tent.

Only he didn't run like The Cat had always run. He stood straight up, erect, like a normally built man, except that the hunch on his back seemed to be slipping out of place.

I brought the gun up and said, "You're covered, friend. Turn around!"

He stopped abruptly. For a few seconds he didn't move. Then he started to turn slowly, finally facing me, and I turned cold at the sight of him.

At first I thought half his face had been ripped away in the fight with the other Cat. Then I realized that it was a rubber mask, and that enough had been torn away to permit me to identify the man beneath.

It was Alan McCord!

Not the Alan McCord who was confined to a wheelchair with paralyzed legs, but an Alan McCord who had complete use of all his limbs and who was hampered in no way at all!

**S**LOWLY I let the breath ease out of me. "So it's you, McCord!" I said. "Not paralyzed, but perfectly able to walk. You—the killer of Myra Dean and now Katrinka!"

He looked at me out of cold blue eyes. "You can't prove a thing, Ken," he said steadily.

"With The Cat's help, I think we can," I told him.

"Such as—what?" His voice had a sneer to it.

I decided to bluff it through. "Such as the fact that you're the bigshot of the marijuana-dispensing outfit who has been using the circus to peddle your dope all over the country. And such as the fact that you killed both Myra Dean and Katrinka because they had found you out and you were afraid they'd tell!"

The bluff worked. Not on McCord but on The Cat. The real Cat had crawled to his feet and was standing hunched over and swaying on his bandy legs next to me. I

heard him suck in his breath through clenched teeth.

"You're right, Ken!" he said. "He is a marijuana dealer, just like you say. I know, because I worked for him. But I didn't know he killed Myra—the dirty murderer!"

I grinned as McCord went a little white.

"He was sure a pal of yours, all right," I said to The Cat. "He used you to work for him, but when he went on his murder missions he dressed up like you, so if anyone saw him the finger of suspicion would point at you. Yeah, he was your pal, all right!"

"The dirty—" The Cat stopped for words.

"The whole thing is pretty obvious now, McCord," I said. "You were using the circus to peddle your dope from town to town. In the wake of the circus there was always a wave of marijuana-inspired kids who committed crimes—some petty, some not. It was when one of the kids killed an F.B.I. agent that the Feds decided to move in. That was the beginning of the end for you. I'm Ken Underwood, Federal Bureau of Investigation, in case you're interested."

McCord got a little whiter at that one. I went on while I had him scared.

"You had The Cat working for you, delivering the goods to your agents in the various towns. But you weren't exactly loyal to him. When the occasion demanded that you kill Myra Dean, you did so by the ingenious method of poisoning the mouthpiece on her trapeze apparatus. But to forestall any possible suspicion, you dressed up like The Cat when you did the job.

"It was easy to imitate The Cat. All you had to do was hunch yourself over, imitate his walk, and fashion a rubber mask that would look like his face, at least from a distance. Katrinka saw you tampering with Myra's trapeze and thought you were The Cat."

McCord didn't say a word, but his lips tightened.

"I guess the reason you had to kill Myra Dean was the fact that she learned about the marijuana setup," I said. "Maybe by sheer accident, but she learned. She must have threatened to squeal, and you finished her off to protect your racket and your skin."

He still didn't answer, but I knew I had hit it on the nose. From there on, it was easy.

"You killed Katrinka for the same reason. She must have come to you, after she came to me, and told you about seeing The Cat tampering with Myra's trapeze. You must have felt that maybe she really suspected you, so you got rid of her too—assuming your disguise again before killing her."

McCord's thin lips parted slantingly.

"You seem to have the dope," he said. "I killed her because she *did* suspect me. She must have thought it over after she'd talked to you, because she came to me and actually accused me of having murdered Myra. Even tried to blackmail me."

"That about wraps it up," I said. "Except for one clue that made me suspect you."

McCord looked surprised. "Clue?"

"Sure," I nodded. "The clue was the fact that I was almost knifed as I left The Cat's tent after talking with you. It looked to me like you must have been the one who threw that knife, after stealing it from Johnny Knight in anticipation of using it in just such a situation."

McCord's lips twisted. "Why me?"

"It almost had to be you. Because I had just finished telling you that I was going to see The Cat, and it seemed logical that you were the one lying in wait for me when I left The Cat's tent. You were the only one who knew I would be there!"

McCord looked beaten. "Throwing that knife at you was a mistake, anyway," he muttered, half to himself.

"Yes, I guess it was. The fact is that murdering Myra was a mistake too. You were all right as long as you stuck to peddling marijuana, but when you got in so deep you had to commit murder to cover up—well, that was too much for you. You weren't so clever at murder, because you hadn't had any experience at it. You tried to make Myra's death look like an accident, and when that failed you got panicky.

"You didn't like the idea that I had discovered that Myra's death was murder, and when I told you I was going to look into the case, you got the jitters and tried to

finish me off too. Funny, the way you so often have to commit a second murder to cover up the first one."

McCord's shoulders sagged wearily and his face seemed to take on deeper lines.

"That's about all," I said. "Except that the F.B.I. will be sure to round up all marijuana-peddling agents and break up your combine from here on in. And with The Cat's testimony—and I know he's in the mood to testify against you—we'll see that you burn!"

The Cat started jumping up and down along side of me, creating an apelike fuss.

"I'll squeal!" he cried. "I'll squeal! The dirty double-crosser would have hung his dirty murders on me, if he could have! I'll squeal, for sure!"

He was doing such a jumping act that I glanced at him for a split-second. That was my mistake. McCord was at my throat in one wild leap, his fingers clutching for my windpipe. I staggered back, bringing the gun up and catching McCord under the chin with the barrel. He reeled backward on rubbery legs and collapsed.

I looked at him and he was out cold. I turned to The Cat.

"Did you know he could walk?" I asked.

The Cat nodded. His lumpy, grotesque face split into something vaguely resembling a grin.

"I knew. He regained use of his legs several years after he was paralyzed by his fall from the high wire. Use of his legs came back gradually, but by the time they did he was mixed up in the marijuana setup and decided to keep it a secret. He figured by playing the part of a paralyzed invalid, suspicion would be turned away from him.

I discovered he could walk, by mistake. He swore me to silence, and gave me a good job running marijuana for him. So I never talked."

The Cat's face took on a sheepish look, and he hung his big, ugly head almost like a bashful child.

"I shouldn't have teamed up with McCord. But he paid me good money. Will it go hard on me?"

I just looked at him, and that same pity I always had for him crept up on me again.

"You're in a jam," I told him. "But if you testify against McCord, things might not go too badly for you."

I called one of the cops in, then, and turned both The Cat and McCord over for safe-keeping. Then I called Inspector Stengle and had the pleasure of telling him the whole story.

Next I rang the F.B.I. and set the wheels in motion for a roundup of all known marijuana-connected crooks. Then, feeling weary, I took a walk around the lot.

I passed the Sideshow with its gaudy display and turned toward the mammoth Big Top. I stood in the doorway of the big tent for some time, flashing my flashlight around, taking in the myriad of trapeze apparatus near the top of the tent, the cage in the middle ring and the sawdust.

Unaccountably, something lumpy crept into my throat. The show was over for me. I would report back to headquarters tomorrow and probably be sent on a new assignment. The thought left a curious nostalgic feeling inside of me, and I wondered briefly about it.

Maybe, after all, I had a little sawdust in my blood too—just as Myra had.

## SIX-LEGGED LAWBREAKER

HISTORIANS estimate that upward of one thousand animal crimes have been tried in courts of law in Europe and the Americas since the end of the Roman Empire. France alone held ninety-two such between the years 1120 and 1740. The longest and most expensive of these was at St. Julian and started in 1445.

At the instigation of the troubled townsfolk, the municipality charged a troublesome species of insect with disturbing the peace, property damage and wilful mischief. The trial continued for forty-two years during which time the insects were variously ordered to "get out of town" and to "appear in court to be tried."

Since the proceedings were conducted in all seriousness, they were quite costly. At the end of forty-two years, St. Julian found that it was bankrupt, but the insects were still doing as they pleased.

Only then was the trial abandoned.—*Carter Critz.*

By **HAROLD HELFER**



# THE Purse

*rested in front of Antonio—all  
he had to do was take it!*

**T**HERE was something about this purse that seemed very special from the very beginning. For one thing, it was made out of smooth calfskin leather that was not only genuine and of the highest quality, but its dimensions, both in thickness and overall size, were somewhat larger than usual. Antonio was a connoisseur of purses, as you might say, and as soon as he saw this one, it had struck him right between the eyes. His vigil in front of the church was over. He turned and followed the woman into the edifice, casually walked behind her

down the aisle and, as unobtrusively as possible, occupied a place in a pew directly behind her.

Stealing purses in churches, Antonio had long since discovered, was the best business in the world. In the first place, churchgoers did not expect such a thing to happen. And, in the second place, even if a woman happened to keep her purse in her lap, when she got on her knees to pray she had to place the purse on the pew.

It was customary for bowed heads and downcast eyes to be accompanied by bent

knees, so that the act of removing the purse from the pew ahead of you was child's play. And to make things more perfect still, the kneeling position was just made for stealing something from a bench in front of you.

Of course, there were a few tricks to the trade. Antonio had learned that the on-the-knees prayer that was apt to last the longest was the one immediately following the sermon. The smart thing was to quickly remove the contents of the purse, then as quickly place the purse back where you got it. In that way, the woman didn't suspect her loss until sometime after her visit to the church and you were in the clear. The really important thing was to pick out a rewarding purse.

Antonio had been looking forward to this first of May for quite some time. This was the annual Feast of Saint Francis de Sales, when all the people in the province brought their smaller animals to the churches to be blessed. The larger creatures were attended to outside. There was always an overflowing crowd. Antonio had let quite a few promising purses go by before instinct and judgment told him that this was the prize one.

Now, taking in this elegant, obviously expensive purse from his directly-to-the-rear position, he congratulated himself for his selection all over again. In fact, he was filled with an excited anticipation he never had felt before. For not only was the purse so unusually promising-looking, but the woman to whom it belonged was obviously not of the peasantry. She wore a silklike, rather fancy dress and her face did not have the weather-beaten rawness about it that came from working in the field.

**Y**ES, Antonio could not help but feel good about everything. From the outside courtyard could be heard the braying of burros, the whinnying of horses and an occasional moo of a cow or the bleat of a goat, these being the larger animals who would not fit in the church. In their pews some people even sat with a pet hen or a dog or a cat or a rabbit or even a frog.

The quaintness of all this added to the pleasant scintillating feeling that was coursing through Antonio. Another thing which

tickled his fancy was the sermon. It seemed there had been some livestock thefts and the dominie was lecturing on the evils of stealing. These remarks, in light of Antonio's intentions, created, of course, a deliciously ironic situation. When the clergyman concluded with a vigorously emphatic, "Remember the commandment—thou shalt not take that which does not to you belong," Antonio felt himself grinning.

For Antonio had done quite well—very well indeed, in fact—since he had taken to stealing the contents of purses in churches. Today he was about to capitalize on what undoubtedly was to be his biggest prize to date. Emphasizing this fact all through the services was the way the woman had continued to clutch the purse throughout the services. That was the instinctive reaction of any person who had something rare in her possession, say, the accumulation of large-denomination pesos, or a diamond brooch or perhaps a cross full of rubies.

Now at last, with the end of the sermon, her grasp was broken. The congregation was on its knees. The clergyman was giving his benediction. "May God shine His countenance upon you and be gracious unto you," he was saying.

The beautiful leather purse now rested directly in front of Antonio, bigger than life and incredibly unguarded. All Antonio had to do to get it was to extend his hands in front of him only a matter of inches—which he proceeded to do, setting the purse on the floor by his side. Every face in the place conveniently inclined downward as the dominie droned on with, "May goodness descend upon this earth and evil disappear—" Antonio's eyes kept a sharp outlook to see that he continued to be unobserved as his fingers deftly felt for the purse's clasp.

**U**NOBTRUSIVELY craning his neck about him from his kneeling position, his heart pounding with excitement as the purse unsnapped, Antonio sent his fingers nimbly dipping into the leather bag. Then, as the priest was saying, "For the wages of sin are surely death—" it happened. Antonio experienced a sudden, intensely sharp stab of pain and immediately everything

seemed to whirl about him and grow intensely black.

Then someone screamed. There were exclamations and the people began fleeing to all the exits. Suddenly, there were only three persons left inside the church, a woman in a rather fancy dress, the clergyman and a man who lay stretched out on the floor by his pew—dead.

The woman, her face now the color of chalk, picked up something slithering from the floor nearby and put it inside a calfskin purse. "I am the Senorita Delotina," she

was saying to the priest. "I am with the circus. I cannot understand how it could possibly have got out of the purse. I suppose I should not have brought anything as deadly as the coral snake with me. But I use this snake in my act. I had this purse especially made for today's occasion—it has a small metal air vent in the bottom. I so wanted to have the snake blessed, in order that it would cause no harm. I cannot understand the workings of Providence. This poor man—he seems like such a nice fellow—"



# THE READER

## WRITES:

*Please address all correspondence to  
The Editor, BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE  
10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y.*

Dear Editor: I've just finished reading the latest issue of **BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE**, and would indeed feel very low if I didn't congratulate you on another topnotch Tony Quinn novel.

I don't think even you know what a superb magazine you have and what an exceptional character the Black Bat is. I can offer no suggestions, except this one: keep everything just as it is—it's perfect.—*Rex E. Ward, Box 2184, El Segundo, Calif.*

Dear Editor: Am always interested when I get to read the Black Bat, but one thing is irking me no end about him. Just why that big cape? Just what's the use of dressing in that cumbersome outfit to go gunning, and he has to run when in a too tight corner. Why not a good disguise and tight clothes? It would have plenty more horse sense.—*F. Thorpe, 1245 W. Superior St., Chicago, Ill.*

Dear Editor: I was glad to see a story by Carroll John Daly in your latest issue, although a little disappointed that it was not one of his Race Williams tales, which I think fascinating. I would rather read them than the stories of Erle Stanley Gardner, whose books flood the market.—*H. B. T., Washington, D.C.*

Dear Editor: I have been a reader of BBD for over four years, and each and every story is enjoyed and re-read many times. I agree with those readers of BBD who would like to see The Black Bat and the Phantom Detective do a story together.

I have a suggestion to make which would be relished by every new reader and many, if not most, of the older ones. I think that it would be nice for you to publish again the first Black Bat story, so that the new crop of postwar readers may learn the full account of how he came into existence.—*Robert Parrish, 616 Naples St., Corpus Christi, Texas.*

Dear Editor: I have just finished reading your latest issue, **THE BLACK BAT FIGHTS FOR LIFE**. It was one of the best yet. In answer to your question: should Tony and Carol marry? I say no. There are enough romance magazines on the market. Leave romance out and just stick to detective stories.—*Robert J. Peterson, Hillsdale, N. Y.*

Dear Editor: I want to thank you very sincerely for the great treat you have given me in the Fall issue of **BLACK BOOK**. I don't know which story was most enjoyable. Of course, the Black Bat always is the favorite and this in my opinion was the very best of all his good stories. **IN THE BAG**, by Carroll John Daly was a good second, and had a swell "kick" at the end. We take all your magazines out on our farm here and thoroughly enjoy them. Good luck!—*(Mrs.) Katie M. Palmer, Box 127, Winnipeg, Canada.*



# A LITTLE PSYCHOLOGY

*Don't let that long word scare you. You have no reason to fear it, unless like Mr. . . . . ., you've just committed a slight murder*

By  
**ARNOLD GRANT**

**Y**OUNG JOHNSON practically exploded when I asked him the question: "Why don't you try a little psychology?"

"Psychology!" he said. "What I'd like to try is a rubber hose! If you could see him sitting there, calm as you please, claiming he didn't do it, when everyone knows he did do it, and even her husband accuses him!"

"Wait a minute," I said. "Who's claiming he didn't do what? Whose husband?"

Johnson glared. "Don't tell me you don't know the case I'm talking about. The whole city knows about it. That's why the Chief is raising such a fuss."

I nodded. "All right, but I'd still like to have you tell me about it. Then maybe you'll see why I suggested trying a little psychology."

"It's like this," Johnson explained. "The husband is Edward Rogers, the real-estate man. The victim was his wife. He reported the murder. I took the call and went out to the Rogers'. Mrs. Rogers was lying on the floor of the living room, beaten over the head. I didn't need a doctor to tell me she was dead."

"How was she dressed when you found

her?" I inquired.

"She had on an old dressing-gown and her hair was in curl papers. Nobody could have called her a 'beautiful blonde', the way they like to do in these murder cases."

"Who was in the house when you arrived?" I asked.

"Her husband was there, and so was our prime suspect, a lawyer by the name of Stevens."

"I've heard of him," I said. "He's got a good reputation."

Johnson sneered. "He may have a good reputation, but he's got a very poor alibi."

"I'll want to hear all about that," I agreed, "but one thing at a time. What was Rogers' story?"

"Rogers' story doesn't matter," Johnson said. "It's Stevens' story I'm interested in breaking down."

"Tell me Rogers' first," I insisted.

"His is perfectly straightforward," Johnson continued. "He was at his office. His wife phoned. He was barely able to make out her words. She told him Stevens had come to see her and had beaten her and left her to die. She asked her husband to come right home. He says he did, and found her dead."

"Any confirmation of all that?"



"Yes," Johnson said. "His office switchboard reports a call for him at the time he says he received one."

"Was it from his wife?"

"The switchboard operator says she thinks it was. She knew Mrs. Rogers' voice. It was a woman, in any event."

"Any other women in Rogers' life?"

"None we've been able to find."

"How does Rogers account for Stevens having visited Mrs. Rogers in the first place?"

"He claims his wife has been having an affair with the lawyer. He says it's been going on for months."

"Any confirmation?"

JOHNSON appeared irritated. "Not yet. They seem to have kept it pretty quiet."

"Going on for months and nobody but Rogers knew about it! Doesn't that strike you as odd?"

"Stevens is a lawyer. He knows the angles."

"The law doesn't teach that sort of angle," I said, grinning. "However, let's hear Stevens' story."

"His is just what you might expect," Johnson went on. "He admits going to call on Mrs. Rogers, but claims that he arrived to find her dead and Rogers already there with her. His sketch of the background is that Mrs. Rogers was planning to divorce her husband, and that she'd asked him to call to discuss the legal details."

"And you don't like that story?"

Johnson shook his head vigorously. "Not a bit. It's too pat. It's the kind of story a lawyer would think up. And it doesn't answer the question of that phone call to Rogers' office."

"So what do you plan to do next?" I asked.

"What can I do, except pound away at Stevens and see if he won't break down?" Johnson said. "That's the trouble with these cases where there's practically no physical evidence to go on. You're faced with a couple of conflicting stories, and you've just got to break down the person you think is lying. Unless the coroner or the fingerprint men come up with something new, that's

the only thing I can do."

"Oh, I don't think so," I said. "As I suggested before, you could always try a little psychology."

"On which one of them?" Johnson asked sarcastically.

I laughed. "I meant on yourself. But perhaps it might be better if you tried some on Rogers first."

"On Rogers!"

I nodded. "You go tell him that the switchboard girl now remembers that phone call, but that what Mrs. Rogers said on the phone was that she had asked Stevens to come and see her about a divorce. And she wanted first to have a talk with her husband, to see if they couldn't patch things up."

"I'd be making a fool of myself," Johnson complained. "I won't do it. You're just guessing."

"All right," I said, "I admit that I'm guessing, but since your system doesn't seem to be working, why not try mine? There's nothing to be lost by it."

Johnson hesitated, then shrugged his shoulders wearily and left the room. In less than five minutes he was back, jubilant.

"Wait'll the Chief hears about this!" he exclaimed. "I've got a confession!" He turned a little red. "Of course, you deserve a lot of the credit."

"I don't need it," I said. "What happened?"

"Well, I took Rogers aside and told him your story about the switchboard girl. He didn't believe it, so I said I'd get the girl in to tell him, herself. That was just a bluff, but it worked. He broke down and confessed the whole thing."

"He admitted that there hadn't been any affair between his wife and Stevens. He and his wife just hadn't been getting along, and she was thinking of a divorce, just as you guessed. After she called Stevens, she asked her husband to come home and talk things over."

"The talk got a little rough, and one thing led to another, and finally he picked up a heavy lamp and hit her over the head with it. He hid the lamp and then, knowing that Stevens would be coming in, made up his story."

**F**INISHING his recital, Johnson stood staring down at the floor. "I guess I owe you a vote of thanks."

"Don't worry about it," I said.

He scratched his head. "I've been thinking, though. You said something about me trying a little psychology on myself. What'd you mean by that?"

I smiled. "I just meant that if, instead of trying to break down two conflicting stories, you'd taken the trouble to apply a bit of psychology to the facts, you'd have saved yourself a lot of time and effort."

"What facts?" Johnson asked.

"Specifically, the fact that when Mrs. Rogers was found dead she was wearing an old dressing-gown and had her hair done up in curl papers."

"What's that got to do with it? A lot of women go around like that."

"They do," I agreed, "but, according to the evidence you had, Mrs. Rogers was planning to greet either her husband or her lover. If you know anything about women, my boy, the fact that she had on an old dressing-gown, and had her hair in curl papers, proves beyond any doubt that it was her husband she was expecting."

## MURDER BY EXPERTS

### A Guide to the Best in Current Crime Fiction

Magazine	Featuring	The Setup
<b>POPULAR DETECTIVE</b> (May)	<b>KILLER IN HIS BED</b> <i>by Norman A. Daniels</i> <b>BLUES IN THE NIGHT</b> <i>by Stewart Sterling</i> <b>MOST MEN DON'T KILL</b> <i>by David Alexander</i>	He shared his honeymoon with a "murderess" It starts with a corpse on Pier 19 About a naked lady who was out of this world
<b>G-MEN DETECTIVE</b> (Spring)	<b>THE BRINK OF DEATH</b> <i>by C. K. M. Scanlon</i> <b>S. S. HOMICIDE</b> <i>by Stewart Sterling</i>	The inside of what happened to an FBI informer About a copper-haired beauty who gets men in trouble aplenty
<b>TOP DETECTIVE ANNUAL</b> (1951 Edition)	A 40,000 word novel—plus stories by Frederic Brown, Steve Fisher, Wyatt Blassingame, George Harmon Cox, Wilbur Peacock, and many others.	The year's best crime and mystery story anthology!
<b>5 DETECTIVE NOVELS</b> (Spring)	<b>MUST THIS MAN BURN</b> <i>by Frederick C. Poynton</i> <b>THE CASE OF THE BROKEN BROOM</b> <i>by G. T. Fleming-Roberts</i> <b>MURDER MUSIC</b> <i>by Robert Wallace</i> <b>THE SCARLET HERITAGE</b> <i>by Westmoreland Gray</i> <b>DEATH'S DOUBLE</b> <i>by John Hawkins</i>	Mike liked thrills—and the dame provided them! What is the mystery of the "crying grave"?  It's not healthy to witness a vice racket kill The slayer's victims were girls A police scandal shocks a great city!
<b>TRIPLE DETECTIVE</b> (Spring)	<b>DEATH OF A COUNTESS</b> <i>by Georges Simenon</i> <b>SOME BURIED CAESAR</b> <i>by Rex Stout</i> <b>THE BACKSTAGE MYSTERY</b> <i>by Octavus Roy Cohen</i>	These three great novels would have cost you \$6.00 in their original publisher's editions!

# WHAT'S YOUR ALIBI?

THE GOOFIEST alibi of 1951 probably hasn't been invented yet, but we hereby offer in nomination for the award, the following morsels of pure baloney—especially sliced for this department from America's newspapers.



**A MAN ADMITTED** to Seattle, Wash., police that he tried to take a car that wasn't his, but explained he had done so only because he wanted to drive back to Englewood, Colo., and report to his parole board.

**WHEN ARRESTED FOR** drunken driving, a Weehawken, N. J., man staunchly declared it wasn't so. He said if he acted peculiar at all it was because he'd just finished having twenty-five bottles of soda pop.

**A SANTA FE MAN ADMITTED** sending a woman a message reading, "You are going to be a widow before long, so make plans accordingly," but denied that he meant to threaten her. He said he was just giving her advice that she ought to take out more life insurance.

**CHARGED WITH HAVING** a razor as a weapon in his possession, a Memphis man explained to authorities that what had happened was that he'd had on two pairs of pants when he bought the razor, but was now wearing only one—and he was under the impression when he left home that the razor was in the trousers he wasn't wearing.

**A YOUNG MAN CONFESSED** in Columbus, O., that he had thrown a brick through a window, but that he'd had an excellent motive for his act: He was scheduled to report in two days in Florida for induction into the Army, was minus the train fare and calculated that if he got arrested the police would see that he got to Miami.

**IN SUPERIOR, WISC.,** a man admitted that he had walked away with the clippers from a barber shop, but stated that the dollar he had been charged for a tonsorial job seemed a pretty stiff price—unless it included the barber's clippers.

**SEIZED FOR THE ILLEGAL possession** of four boxes of morphine syringes, a Las Vegas, Nev., man informed the police he was trying to sell the stuff to pay his way through Bible school.

**ARRESTED FOR REPRESENTING** himself as an "FBI man," a Tampa, Fla., man stated well, by gosh, he was exactly that: He was an employee of Florida Builders, Inc.

**IN SAN FRANCISCO,** an eighteen year old youth whose car rolled four hundred feet down a hill out of control, finally ramming another car, told police he had just kissed his girl friend good night and could remember absolutely nothing afterwards.

**WHEN A NEW HAVEN, CONN.,** man was arrested on suspicion after he was caught on the roof of a nurses' dormitory, he explained he was merely "looking for a men's room."

**ARRESTED FOR STEALING** a one hundred pound sack of flour, a Knoxville, Tenn., man explained his possession of the sack with: "Somebody must have put it on my back."

By **RUSSELL**  
**BRANCH**



## SEE YOU AT THE MORGUE

*"Hey, bud. I know who I want to kill, but I don't know their names or addresses. Can you help a poor guy out?"*

**T**HINGS were pretty dead in the morgue that night. Even the clock was too bored to move. I sat and watched it and thought how much I hated working the graveyard shift. It meant working all alone in that musty old room, with all its drawers row after row.

I guess I jumped a little when the buzzer sounded off at the door. The staff members of the newspaper all know how to work the catch designed to keep them out, and anyway, it's usually the phone which brings me bad news.

This was a stranger, which was even more

unusual for that time of night. A big guy with a dirty old trench coat pulled up high around his ears and a dripping old felt pulled low in front. He looked like a bum, but then some of my best friends are newspapermen and I didn't think much of it then. All I thought was that it must be raining again, and here I'd left my own raincoat at home.

I smiled politely and said, "Yes, Mister?"

"I wanta see the back files, Mac."

"Sorry, they're not for public use."

A long silence. I couldn't see his face very well in the dimly-lit hall, but something about him made me glad I'd only opened the slot above the counter and not the lower part of the door.

"Come back in the morning and somebody can help you then. Or maybe you can find what you want in the public library. They keep bound files there, you know."

"The library's closed and I can't wait till morning. What's the harm of letting me take a quick look?" He gave me a chummy grin, but his hands were clenched over the edge of the ledge as if they wanted to tear it down.

I shrugged, wondering why all the rush. "No harm as far as I'm concerned. But I only work here, Mister. I don't make the rules."

**HIS EYES** studied me under the shapeless brim for another long moment. Then one hand suddenly left the ledge and disappeared under his trench coat. I don't know quite what I expected—but not what I got. It was a five-dollar bill.

Five bucks is five bucks in any man's language, and particularly in mine. I let him in and even offered to look up what he wanted. What did I have to lose, except five bucks?

He stood for a moment wiping his face with a grimy handkerchief and surveying the joint curiously. I asked him again what I could help him find.

"Never mind that, kid. Just fetch me the files for five months ago. I'll do the rest."

I got down the right one, and he grabbed it out of my hand and sat down at the long table with his back to my desk. Finally he located what he was looking for. He took

out a piece of paper and a stubby pencil and began to copy laboriously.

I began spending my easy five bucks, and the clock ticked on. Ten minutes to go. I hoped my friend would be through by then, because I didn't want trouble with him.

The phone went off like a fire alarm, and we both jumped. I could feel his eyes on me as I shoved it under my ear and reached for my pad.

"Morgue."

It was Pinky himself. Listening to him over the phone, it's like having a load of gravel dumped in your ear. "Get Joe Kumler down here, and shake the lead!"

I said "Yessir," into an already dead phone and started to get up. But my paid customer was blocking the way. In fact, he shoved me down.

"Who was that?"

I looked at him in surprise, wondering what he was so hot and bothered about. "Mr. McClure, the city editor."

"Yeah? What was that crack you made about a morgue?"

"That's just another name for a newspaper library. Like this one—where they file all the clippings and stuff." Then I began to lose my patience. "Look, Mister, I haven't got time to answer your questions now."

I shoved him out of the way and went down the aisle between the filing cases to the "K's". "Kumler, Joe—Gangster" was two fat envelopes and easy to find.

But my inquisitive friend was back again and blocking the end of the aisle. "What did he want, this guy on the phone?"

"Some folders," I said, and waved them under his nose. "Those folders, and if I don't get 'em down there in a hurry I'll lose my job. It's eight minutes to press time."

I tried to push past him again, but he grabbed my arm. "Take it easy, kid. Why all the rush?"

He was too big to sock, so I tried to reason. "I just told you. The bulldog goes to bed in eight minutes, and they must have a last-minute story. Please, Mister. I gotta run."

His hand just tightened around my arm.

"A big story, huh? What about?"

"Something about a gangster named—Ow!" I cried. His big hand had practically broken my wrist, and I had kicked out at him instinctively.

He let go, but now I was looking a gun in the face!

"Yeah, go on. What was that name?"

My voice was stuck in my throat. I could not say Joe Kumler to save my life, but it didn't matter. I was suddenly remembering some pictures I'd filed myself, and I knew I was looking at the man in person. And he knew I knew and that made it worse.

I tried to pretend I didn't see the gun, at least. "Let me go and I'll come right back. I gotta deliver these."

He didn't say anything, just stood there sizing up the situation. The phone jangled again and he whirled like a flash.

Some high voice that couldn't have belonged to me, said, "That's McClure again. He's wondering what happened."

The phone blew its top again.

Kumler poked his gun in my ribs. "Stall him off. Tell him you can't find 'em."

"You want me to lose my job?"

His only answer was a nasty chuckle, and another poke with the gun. "Answer that phone, kid, and don't try anything funny!"

It wasn't much choice, but the gun was closest. I picked up the phone like a hot potato. "I'm sorry, Mr. McClure. The stuff on Kumler seems to be lost."

The phone exploded just like I expected. I had held it away from me in self-defense, and we both heard the concussion. It ended with me getting fired in the most graphic terms.

But I had my reward, even so. Kumler scowled at me thoughtfully. "You did all right, kid. Maybe I'll even let you live—a little longer."

He thought some more, while I said my prayers.

"Where do you live?" he said finally.

Eagerly, I told him. I told him I lived all by myself in a cheap-rooming house, and I'd go straight home and never say a word.

He had to think that over, too, and I held my breath. Finally he put his gun back in his pocket, but he left his hand with it.

[Turn page]

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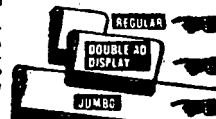
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"Come on, kid. We're going home."

"We're—going home?"

"You heard the man, didn't you? You just got fired."

WE DIDN'T meet anyone going down, because we used the fire escape. We didn't meet anyone on the street, because it was after midnight and raining, besides. We met one guy in the hall of my joint, but he was the drunk who lived above me.

Kumler sneered at my room, but made himself at home. He locked the door and put the key in his pocket. He tied me up with the cord from my lamp and my other belt and my best two ties. He trussed me up like a Christmas turkey and left me on the floor. Then he stretched out on my bed, with the gun under the pillow.

"Sweet dreams, kid. If you make one peep, it'll be your last."

I didn't have any dreams that night. I spent part of it trying to wriggle loose like it says in the books, until I gradually got numb. Numb and cold and stiff, while Kumler snored peacefully.

In the morning I was still there. Kumler told me I was a good boy and let me loose, after first making sure that the bathroom was safe. It was. It was a dark little closet with only an air vent opening to an inside shaft, and the only reason it was worth an extra five a week to me was because it made such an excellent darkroom.

McClure had told me to learn to use a camera, in a weak moment of advice. For all the good it had done me and would do me now.

When I came out again, my guest was reading the paper. Apparently he had swiped it from the door across the hall. He had also raided the closet where I hide my hotplate, and was eating the last of the doughnuts I'd saved for breakfast. The gun was in his lap.

I looked at it longingly, but he nailed me with a glance. "Sit down, kid, and relax. It looks like we're gonna be here for quite some time."

I sat and he went on reading. His lips moved and his dark face frowned. Apparently he didn't like what he was reading, be-

cause he finally tossed the paper at me with an impatient curse.

"Here, kid, read all about it. Of all the lousy, stinking luck!"

The paper was our own bulldog edition. They'd broken out the "Second Coming" type for the head. "KUMLER ESCAPES!" And they were telling *me*!

The story went on to tell how my notorious friend had feigned illness and had apparently tricked his hospital guard, leaving the guard's body in his bed to cover his absence. A nurse happened to see the "guard" leaving the room and became suspicious. Otherwise the escape might not have been discovered until morning.

I looked up and Kumler was still scowling at me. I went hastily back to my reading, for all the comfort it gave me:

"Convicted last May of a gangland killing, Kumler was to have been transferred this week for execution. At the time of his conviction he swore, 'I'll get every last member of this crooked jury if it's the last thing I ever do! Police accordingly are carefully guarding every person connected with his trial, since Kumler is thought to be still in the city.'"

How right they were! I knew now what he wanted with the back files from May, and what he had begun to copy so diligently. His death list: the names and addresses of all the jurors as they had been listed in the paper!

But he didn't have a chance now, so what was he waiting for? I looked at him again, and he read my thoughts.

"Maybe tonight I'll make my break," he said. "But you keep quiet, see, because I got nothing to lose."

I kept quiet. He took the paper back and read the funnies. Then he turned to the sports page. The day wore on, and my nerves gnawed on my empty stomach. Until finally I just didn't give a damn.

"Even in prison they feed you!" I said.

He looked at me and began to laugh. It wasn't that funny, but finally he stopped long enough to nod toward the closet. I got down the hotplate and fixed some coffee and a can of soup while he watched every move

I made. We ate in noisy silence.

**I**T MUST have been about four o'clock when the phone sounded off in the hall outside. I got up instinctively, but Kumler waved me back with a snarl.

"I usually answer it," I told him hopefully, but it didn't do any good.

The phone rang and rang, but nobody answered.

"It's probably for me," I told him. "The others on this floor all work day time."

"Shut up!" he said, and moved to the door.

I could hear them now, too—the weary footsteps of my landlady as she hoisted her two hundred pounds up the creaking stairs.

The phone stopped ringing and then she banged on my door. I thought Kumler was going to let her have it, then and there.

"Benson, Benson! You deaf or something?"

Kumler turned to look at me, and I thought my time had come. The landlady was still banging away.

"Wake up, Benson! It's the paper on the phone!"

Kumler shoved the key in the lock and warned me, "Answer it, kid, but no funny business!"

He was behind the door as I swung it open, and he stopped me from closing it behind me by holding the knob. Mrs. Herschel gave me a dirty look and moved away grumbling as I went to where the receiver was dangling.

It was old Tom, who'd lost one hand in a printing press and was supposed to earn his pension by running the morgue. Actually I do most of the work, and Tom was soundly worried.

"What's the matter, Benny? You're supposed to work tonight."

There was nothing I wanted to do more. I glanced over my shoulder, but my door was still open a crack and something was behind the crack. "I got fired last night, Tom. Pinky canned me himself."

Tom sounded astounded. "You mean that Kumler material? Hell, kid, I found it this morning right on your desk. Somebody

[Turn page]

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must have had it and sneaked it back. I told McClure it wasn't your fault."

This was my chance. This was where the hero always gets some clever message across. But I was scared witless. I just repeated stupidly, "Pinky fired me himself."

"And I suppose it's the first time?" Tom snorted. "He's already forgotten it. Don't be a chump, come on in."

I hesitated, until the door creaked impatiently across the hall. Then I said desperately, "McClure fired me and he can hire me back," and hung up the phone.

Kumler said, "You did all right," and rewarded me with a shove.

The phone rang again before he had the key out of the lock. He cursed bitterly.

"The landlady knows I'm up here now," I reminded him. "She'll think something's funny if I don't answer."

This time it was old Gravel-throat himself. I guess he was just humoring poor old Tom, but he didn't have to humor me. He told me profanely I was too sensitive to ever make a good newspaperman anyway, and if I wasn't down there in fifteen minutes I could consider myself fired for keeps.

It was too much, with him in my ear and Kumler at my back. I decided I wanted to do one thing to be proud of before I died. I yelled right back at him. "Listen, Pink-Ears. I've been wanting to do this and now is the time. You can take your lousy morgue job and file it for reference!"

That stopped him cold, so I carried on. "You give me a city-room job and I'll listen to reason. But that doesn't mean I like you or ever will. You're a cranky old buzzard and you've yelled at me once too often!"

I slammed down the phone, feeling like a new man. But Kumler fixed that in a hurry. He made me get down on the floor again and tied me up. "I'm just going out in the hall for a minute, so don't get any notions."

I thought of yelling, but decided against it. So far, I was still alive. And Kumler hadn't gone any farther than the phone. I could hear the dial clicking and then a low conversation.

He slipped back in, grinning with satisfaction. "Got in touch with some of the

boys and they're coming to get me. It ought to be dark pretty soon."

"That's swell," I said sincerely. "What about me?"

"What about you?" he said, looking down at me.

**T**HAT'S the way matters stood until the five-o'clock rush began outside. People going home from work—lucky people. And as soon as it was dark, his pals were coming.

I finally had one bright notion, but my hands were still tied. I put it humorously, and he laughed at me. He was in a good mood now, however, and he finally yielded to my pleas. He untied me and warned me not to fall in.

I shut the door with a prayer and eased the catch shut. Then I went to work with fumbling haste. Some of my negatives were still hanging from the drying clips over the tub. And there was the notebook I used for my record.

I rolled up one of the negatives in a tight little circle, wrapped a page from the notebook around it and twisted the ends like a candy wrapper. Then I lighted one end with a match and let it burn until the film began to smolder. I shoved that one into the air vent and began all over.

By the time I ran out of negatives, I had a dozen of those little smoke bombs smoldering into the air shaft. With any sort of luck, they should bring results. They always had when I was a kid, at least.

Minutes passed. Some of the foul, dense smoke was drifting back, and I had unhappy visions of smothering to death. I had fixed the door once so it sealed off light, and I hoped the smoke wouldn't get through.

But Kumler was getting restless, anyway. He rattled the knob. "Open up!"

"Just a minute," I said, and tried not to choke. Smoke filled the bathroom now.

Kumler rattled the door again. "Open up, damn you!"

I gasped and choked, wondering whether it wouldn't be better to open the door and get it over with. But then I thought I heard what my ears were straining for—the faint, far-off whine of a siren.

I wet my handkerchief at the faucet and

[Turn page]

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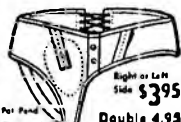
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counted the seconds.

The door rattled on its hinges, and Kumler yelled, "Come on out, kid, or I'll let you have it!"

I heard the siren again, this time for sure. It was loud and close, and another one was echoing it. But Kumler had heard it, too. I heard his muffled curse as he moved to the window. Then suddenly I knew as sure as fate what was coming next.

Desperately, I looked around that little bathroom. And then dove headfirst into the tub as the first bullet crashed through the door! The tub was still filled with hypo wash, but it kept the bullets away.

I hugged the bottom while he riddled the door. I knew he was crazy now, because the sirens had whined to a stop outside and he didn't have a chance. He emptied his gun before he finally ran for it.

I stayed in my own smoky hell as long as I could stand it. Then I staggered out, gulping in air. There was a lot of commotion throughout the building and the hall seemed to be filled with firemen. They were looking down at Kumler, who seemed to be out cold, and the biggest of the fire-eaters were rubbing his knuckles.

"Threaten me with a gun, will he! He must be crazy, whoever he is!"

"He's Kumler," I gasped, and they looked at me. "The fire's in there," I added, and moved toward the phone. But the fire boys were still gaping at me as I dialed the number of the office.

"City desk," the man growled over the wire.

"This is your new reporter, Benny Benson."

It took McClure three full seconds to regain his speech. I winked at Kumler, who had three big firemen sitting on his chest.

"Okay, Pink-Ears," I said. "I wanted to be loyal, but I guess the other papers will go for it."

"You're crazy as hell!" But then he added cautiously, "Go for what?"

"Exclusive, eyewitness capture of Joe Kumler, that's all! 'By now, Pinky."

There was a long silence. Then Pinky began talking, and talking fast. In fact he was yelling at me again, but it was the sweetest music I'd ever heard.

# A FRANK STATEMENT ON A "DELICATE" SUBJECT: CONSTIPATION

**FOREWORD:** *This is an outspoken attempt to discuss, with complete frankness, a condition that has become one of the world's most widespread human maladies...constipation. A delicate subject at best, it has been under medical and scientific scrutiny for years. We believe we owe it to those who suffer from it, to publish these pertinent facts.*

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The pace of modern living is blamed for many things. And those who blame it are often right.

Our lives have become so filled with daily problems, it is no wonder we long for the days of the cave-man, who ate his food raw, and "got plenty of roughage" in his diet.

Doctors know that the digestive system is strongly influenced by proper food, regularity and rest. They say: (a) Eat a balanced diet at regular hours; (b) Drink plenty of water daily; (c) Get at least 8 hours' sleep; (d) Take regular exercise; (e) Always obey the urge to eliminate waste; (f) Don't worry over problems you cannot immediately solve.

Few of us obey these rules.

Hence: *Constipation!*

## More Than One Type of Constipation

Actually, there are several types of constipation. Two basic types are common:

1. The organic type, requiring medical care.
2. The "functional" type, requiring wise mechanical correction.

The second type, in which the intestines fail to do their work properly, can often be justly blamed on the nerve-racking life we lead.

The end of each day leaves us so tense, so nervously exhausted, that every muscle feels tight—**INCLUDING THE INTESTINAL MUSCLES. IN FACT, IT HAS BEEN SAID, THE WHOLE HUMAN DIGESTIVE SYSTEM CAN BE ALMOST LITERALLY "TIED IN A KNOT" BY SHEER NERVOUS TENSION.**

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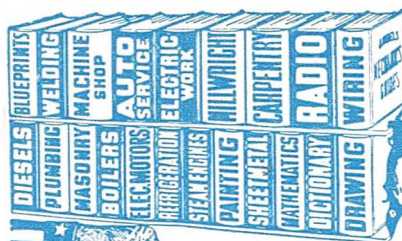
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