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SUMMER
ISSUE



1945

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NOVEL
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ON THE LOOSE**

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By G. WAYMAN JONES

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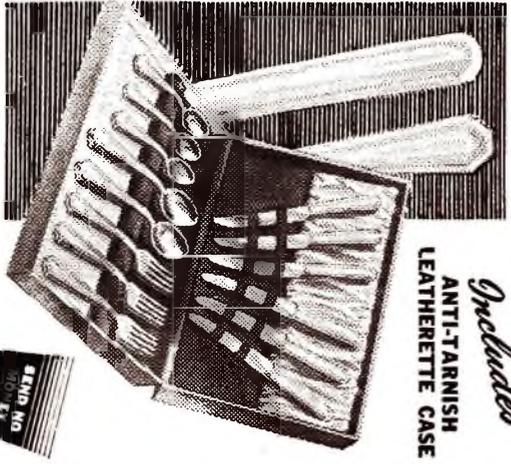
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TO OUR READERS: Our new format conserves critical materials—but you will find that there has been **NO REDUCTION** in the amount of reading matter per issue.

BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE

Vol. 20, No. 1 **EVERY STORY BRAND NEW** Summer Issue

A Black Bat Mystery Novel



MURDER ON THE LOOSE

Featuring Tony Quinn,
Nemesis of Crime

By **G. WAYMAN JONES**

While the sinister plans for a monumental haul are being engineered by a vicious crew of jewel thieves, Tony Quinn flashes into rapid-fire action to check their evil crimes! Follow the Black Bat and his aides as they battle a grim conspiracy of plunder and death 11

AN EXCITING NOVELET

THE HILLS LURE DEATH.....H. Wolff Salz 62
County Prosecutor Johnny Stuart finds himself playing a dual role when he tackles a gruesome and puzzling mountain mystery!

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MURDER STRIKES OUT.....John Gunderson 44
House Detective Duffy solves a murder too easily

DEATH PAYS EXTRA.....J. Lane Linklater 51
Raney proves a Headquarters man is never too old to fight crime

MONEY TO BURN.....David X. Manners 59
"Ace" Bolton figured all the angles, but—

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A department where readers and the editor meet

BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE. Published quarterly by Better Publications, Inc., at 4600 Diversey Ave., Chicago, 38, Ill. N. L. Pines, President. Editorial and executive offices, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. Entered as second-class matter November 14, 1933, at the Post Office at Chicago, Ill., under Act of March 3, 1879. Copyright, 1945, by Better Publications, Inc. Subscription (12 issues), \$1.20; single copies, \$0.10. Foreign and Canadian postage extra. Names of all characters used in stories and semi-fiction articles are fictitious. If the name of any living person or existing institution is used, it is a coincidence. Manuscripts must be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope and are submitted at the author's risk. In corresponding with this publication, please include your postal zone number, if any.

August, 1945, issue
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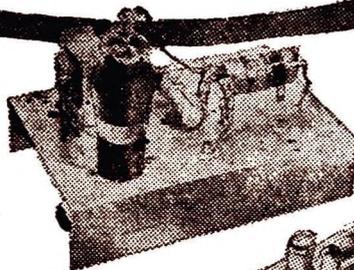
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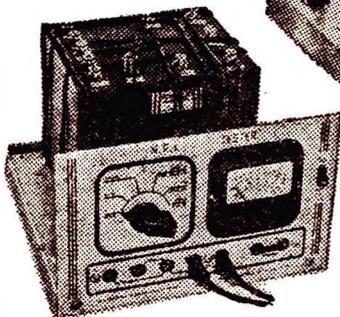
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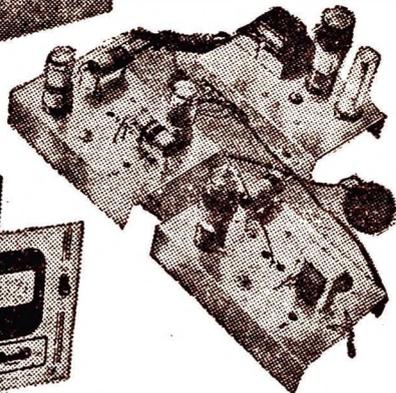
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OFF THE RECORD

A DEPARTMENT WHERE READERS
AND THE EDITOR MEET

GET ready for thrills, readers! In our next issue we present one of the most exciting Black Bat novels we've ever given you — **MURDER AMONG THE DYING**—a mystery that will hold you breathless from start to finish! G. Wayman Jones is at his writing best in this grand yarn.

The story begins when Special District Attorney Tony Quinn goes to his office at 11:30 P.M. to keep a strange appointment. Quinn's office is on the sixteenth floor of a city-owned building.

Quinn is accompanied by his bodyguard, Silk Kirby, who takes the famous Black Bat up in the elevator. Arrived at his office, Quinn notes with wonder that the person who wrote him an anonymous note, arranging the appointment, has not appeared.

The Black Bat decides to wait a few moments. Then—suddenly Silk Kirby sees a body hurtle through the air just outside the window, evidently from the eighteenth floor above!

Later, down in the courtyard, Quinn and Silk find the body of a well-dressed man, every bone in his frame broken. There are no marks of identification anywhere upon his person. On the way out, as the police arrive, Silk notices that the number of Quinn's office room on the directory in the lobby has been changed from 1620 to 1820. This proves that the victim has been lured to his death. In short, it's no accident, but deliberate murder!

A Close Call

Silk drives Quinn back to his palatial home and grounds. The car drives up to the garage. Silk holds Quinn's coat over the apparently blind man's shoulders. There is the sharp bark of a rifle from out of the darkness and a bullet pierces the crown of the special district attorney's hat. Close—too close for comfort!

Entering the house, Quinn and Silk find the outer rooms completely ransacked—as if a cyclone has roared through the place.

His heart thumping wildly, Tony Quinn rushes for the bookcase and the hidden control, that leads, as we all know, to the secret, white-tiled laboratory. Fortunately, the room where so many crimes have been solved is untouched.

"If our intruder ever found this place," Quinn said, mopping his brow, "it would be all up with us. Right here is plenty of proof that I'm not blind and that I am the Black Bat!"

As the case progresses, Quinn finds the whole affair barren of clues, motives and identities. The special district attorney feels that the best way to get the mysterious murderer to strike again is to expose himself to personal danger.

That's the start of a case in which the Black Bat, Silk Kirby, Butch O'Leary and Carol Baldwin face some of the toughest problems in their sleuthing lives!

Moments of Peril

Later, we find Special District Attorney Tony Quinn sitting alone at his desk. It is early in the morning, before the office staff has arrived. A slim man, with shabby clothes, comes sidling into the office. Quinn can see at a glance that the man is hopped to the gills. The man claims to be a killer—says that he has just done in his nagging wife and has come to sign a confession.

Now, Tony Quinn knows the man has no such intent—that he has come to the office to strangle him. There is a gun in the desk drawer, but Tony Quinn can't use it. How can he, an apparently blind man, try to overpower his assailant, when he isn't even supposed to see him? Nor can he shoot him down in cold blood and then say it was a lucky shot. Either as the blind district attorney or the Black Bat, he has never done that.

Hands fully extended now, the vicious snowbird begins edging around the corner of the desk. His lips are parted in an evil, leering grin, showing yellow stumps of teeth.

And still Quinn is looking right at the man, powerless to do anything. If he does try defending himself, he will expose the fact that he is the Black Bat and how his self-appointed mentor, Captain McGrath, will chortle in triumph!

We're not going to tell you how Tony Quinn gets out of this tough spot, for we don't want to give away a surprise that will astonish you mightily when you read the yarn. Just let us warn you that this is only one of several dramatic attempts on Tony Quinn's life that will make your heart palpitate.

Does our friend Captain McGrath get hoodwinked again? Furthermore, is the man who calls himself Attorney Bulkley a friend or a foe of the Black Bat? And who sets the trap on Bulkley's estate that almost does away with Tony Quinn? The answers to these and

(Concluded on page 8)



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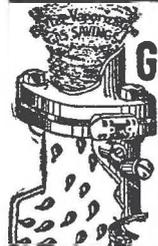
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OFF THE RECORD

(Concluded from page 6)

other questions are in MURDER AMONG THE DYING—a smash-packed novel that will make you grip the sides of your chair tightly!

You'll discover next issue, too, the startling significance of the strange title—MURDER AMONG THE DYING.

If you're a Tony Quinn fan—and who isn't?—you'll find this novel tops. And along with it, next issue will bring you a number of splendid shorter stories sure to please.

LETTERS FROM READERS

THANKS to our readers, our postman keeps busy bringing us scores of comments, suggestions and opinions that help us improve this magazine every issue. Naturally we cannot hope to print more than the slightest fraction of the letters received—so we try to pick those of general interest. For example, here's one from a lad who is probably our youngest reader:

I have only read a few issues of BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE. The only thing wrong is that Carol Baldwin needs a bigger part. I am only eleven years old so if my writing is not very good, you know why. I like reading very much.—Harold Riley, Oakdale, Calif.

We think your writing is swell, Harold, and your composition splendid! Thank you—and write us again, sometime, won't you?

Here's some more pleasant praise from the City of Brotherly Love:

I have been reading the BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE ever since G. Wayman Jones first wrote it. I like it very much. In fact, it compares with my other favorite, *The Phantom Detective*. I've also been reading some of the letters. I don't quite agree with Mr. Smith of Texas. Let G. Wayman Jones keep Captain McGrath where he is. I like to see Tony Quinn make a chump out of him. Speaking of Carol, Butch and Silk. I think they're tops. Quinn couldn't do without them.—Beannie Price, Philadelphia, Penna.

Thanks, old top! If you get a kick out of the Captain, we know you're pleased with our magazine and that's what we like to hear.

Just one more short note, from a lady who finds our magazine a help in her war work:

I have been reading your magazine for several years and enjoy it very much. The last issue was very good and I enjoyed "The Skeleton's Secret." I am a housewife and also work in the shipyard, but still find time to read your book. You mentioned a long time ago about starting a club. If you ever do, I shall become a member.—H. Johnson, Richmond, Calif.

Thanks to you, Mrs. Johnson. Everybody—keep those letters and postcards streaming in! Please address them to The Editor, BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. I'll be waiting to hear from you.

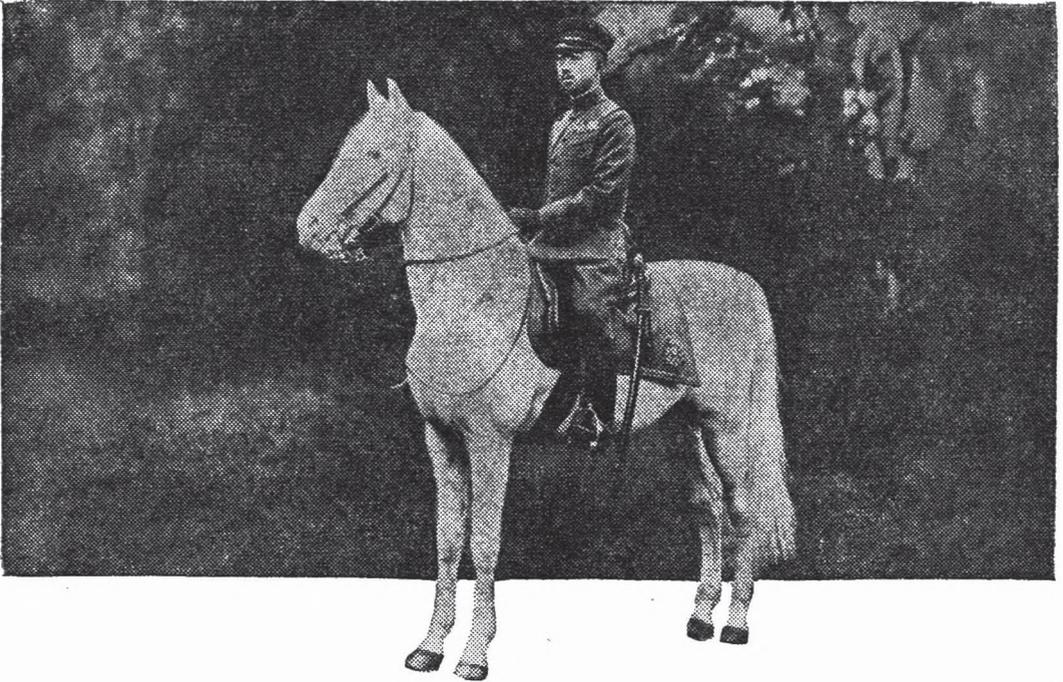
Happy reading to all!

—THE EDITOR.

Stories of the F.B.I. in Action in
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LET'S GET THE ADMIRAL HIS HORSE!



Official U. S. Navy Photo

Admiral Halsey has his eye on a fine white horse called Shirayuki.

Some time ago, at a press conference, he expressed the hope that one day soon he could ride it.

The chap now in Shirayuki's saddle is Japan's Emperor—Hirohito.

He is the ruler of as arrogant, treacherous, and vicious a bunch of would-be despots as this earth has ever seen.

The kind of arrogance shown by Tojo—who was going to dictate peace from the White

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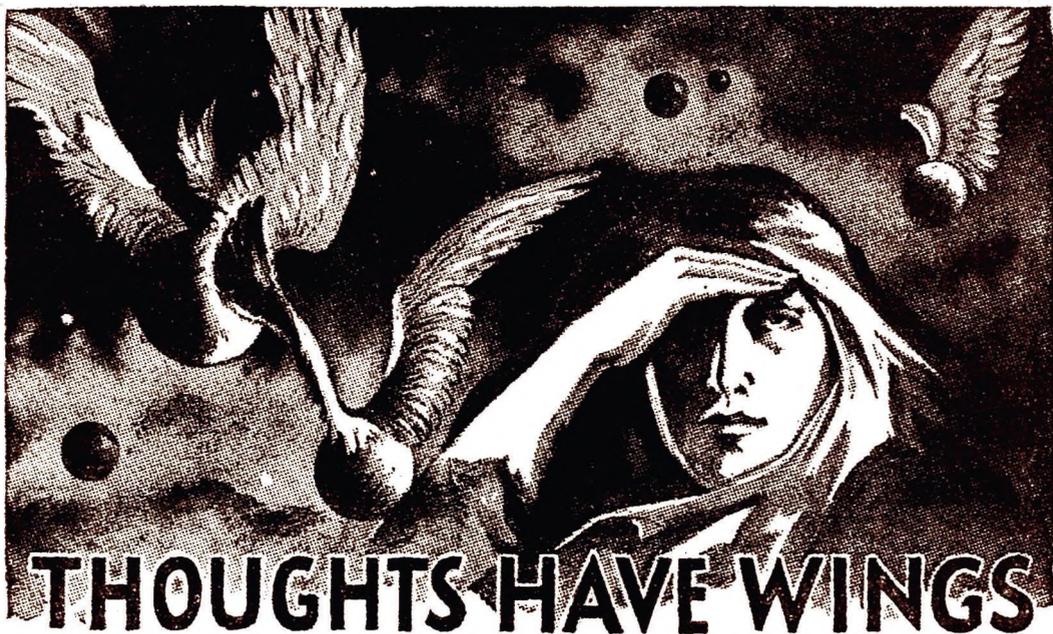
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TRY IT SOME TIME. Concentrate intently upon another person seated in a room with you, without his noticing it. Observe him gradually become restless and finally turn and look in your direction. Simple—yet it is a *positive demonstration* that thought generates a mental energy which can be projected from your mind to the consciousness of another. Do you realize how much of your success and happiness in life depend upon your influencing others? Is it not important to you to have others understand your point of view—to be receptive to your proposals?

Demonstrable Facts

How many times have you wished there were some way you could impress another favorably—get across to him or her your ideas? That thoughts can be transmitted, received, and understood by others is now scientifically demonstrable. The tales of miraculous accomplishments of mind by the ancients are now known to be fact—not fable. The method whereby these things can be *intentionally*, not accidentally, accomplished has been a secret long cherished by the Rosicrucians—one of the schools of ancient wisdom existing throughout the world. To thousands everywhere, for centuries, the Rosicrucians have

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Scribe M. R. A., The Rosicrucians, AMORC,
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Kindly send me a free copy of the book, "The Mastery of Life." I am interested in learning how I may receive instructions about the full use of my natural powers.

Name.....

Address..... State.....



The Black Bat had the knife in his hand when a flashlight was centered on him (Chapter VII)

MURDER ON THE LOOSE

By G. WAYMAN JONES

While the sinister plans for a monumental haul are being engineered by a vicious crew of jewel thieves, Tony Quinn flashes into rapid-fire action to check their evil crimes!

CHAPTER I

Under Cover

MR. FRANKLIN P. ANKRUM wasn't fair, but she was fat, and considerably more than forty. She was also exasperated as she dropped the letter on the table.

"French" she exclaimed. "It's written in French and I can't read it. Just like Evelyn to do that. Whenever she writes something

important—like an invitation to a party—she writes in French to show me she has traveled. Myra, if this keeps on, I shall be compelled to discharge you and hire a French maid instead."

Myra, blond, and trim in a maid's black uniform, held back the smile that quirked at the corners of her lips.

"If you don't mind, Madam," she said, instead of smiling, "perhaps I can read the letter."

"You?" Mrs. Ankrum exclaimed. "But you

AN EXCITING COMPLETE BLACK BAT NOVEL

The Black Bat and His Aides Battle a

aren't French. Well, read it. Yes, of course you may read it."

Myra read the note aloud with as much ease as if it had been written in English. It was an invitation to attend a bazaar which was to be held four days from then.

Mrs. Ankrum beamed. "Excellent, Myra! So in addition to your other accomplishments, you also can read French."

"I once worked for French people and they taught me, Madam," Myra murmured. "Perhaps you will wish to answer the letter in French. I could write it, so you would only have to copy it."

Mrs. Ankrum's eyes widened in pleasure. "Myra, that's an excellent suggestion! Tell her I will most certainly attend her bazaar."

Myra took a long, quiet breath. "And will you wear the Red Emblem, Madam?"

Mrs. Ankrum faced her neat little maid. "Why do you ask?" she demanded abruptly. "The Red Emblem is one of the largest rubies in the world. It's worth a king's ransom—if there are any kings left. A congressman's ransom, at any rate. I never wear it except to the most important affairs. I certainly shall not be wearing it to any bazaar. What is your interest in this jewel, Myra?"

"Please, Madam," the maid said sincerely, "it is only that I hope some day to see it. I love beautiful things too. You do not suspect I might wish to steal it?"

Mrs. Ankrum shook her head. "I suspect everyone of wanting to steal it—there have been so many robberies lately. But you, Myra? Of course not. I'm sure you are too loyal to me. Anyhow maids are difficult to get and you're a most unusual one. I'm so well satisfied with you that I think I shall raise your wages."

MYRA was a most unusual maid. In the first place, her real name was not Myra, but Carol Baldwin. She was a college graduate and she worked in the organization of a mysterious figure known as the Black Bat. It was at his suggestion that she had obtained this job. Mrs. Ankrum was not the only person aware of the many thefts which had been occurring of late.

As Myra, the domestic, Carol Baldwin used little make-up and was quiet, and efficient. She was so prim and self-effacing that full attention would have had to be drawn to her for it to be realized that she was a girl who could create gasps in a blackout. Who could make movie test men blink in admiration, and who was not as fragile as she seemed.

Promptly at six-thirty, her day's work was done. She left the Ankrum apartment in this huge New York structure, took the servant's elevator to the ground floor and exited to a

side street. Turning left, she walked rapidly to an avenue where there was a bus stop. By hurrying a trifle she might have made the bus now pulling up, but she didn't hurry. Neither did a hulking man who ambled casually over to the bus stop and leaned against a light pole.

He was an amazing person, built like a General Sherman tank, and his head seemed to be jammed down against his shoulders without the usual support of a neck. His arms were long and his hands resembled miniature footballs when the fingers were curled. Hands that could smash through a door or break a man's neck with one wrench.

Carol purchased a newspaper at a nearby stand, took up a position at the curb and opened the paper. She started talking in a low voice. The big man nonchalantly chewed a match stick and seemed to be paying no attention at all, but he heard Carol saying:

"Mrs. Ankrum isn't wearing the Red Emblem this week. She is afraid because of the burglaries. I'll keep my eyes and ears open when I reach that new home of mine tonight, and try to phone at the usual time. Stick around. If things go wrong, you appear as my boy friend, name of Hank Leonard. And if you have to go as far as hugging me to make it look real, put the brakes on those muscles, Butch."

The big man's features never even twitched. He stared casually across the street and when the bus came, he got on it after Carol—but he got off again a few blocks further on. Carol rode for twenty minutes before she finally alighted at a rather desolate stop for this great city.

There were no skyscrapers here. Once the section had been occupied by wealthy families who had built great brick houses. Now they had long since moved away and the houses were conducted as boarding or rooming houses by landladies who insisted the rent be paid every week without fail.

The last house down the dead-end street was the largest of them all. It contained thirty rooms, and almost that many maids, chauffeurs and gardeners lived in it. Carol had a small but comfortable room on the top floor.

She ate her meals there too, and they were meals that some of the employers of these servants couldn't serve—or did not. The cost of living here included dinner whether it was eaten or not. It invariably was, to the chatter of some thirty feminine voices.

Carol greeted several girls she knew and stopped to talk with a too slender, too heavily made-up girl who had initiated Carol into this particular boarding house. Her name was Linda, and she worked in the same

Grim Conspiracy of Plunder and Death!

house in which Carol's employer had an apartment. Carol had a strong idea that more than sheer coincidence had been responsible for Linda's having brought her to this boarding house.

The landlady greeted Carol with a warm smile. That is, if two thin, uncompromising lips like Mrs. Carter's could be said to smile warmly.

Mrs. Carter was lean and tall. She affected out-dated dresses with high necks and long, sweeping skirts. Her scrawny hair was piled on top of her head so that sometimes she looked like an animated mop. Her eyes were

"T." At the head of the table sat the landlady, supervising everything.

On her left was the enormously fat, squat man known as Jacques. His exact status in this weird household was not exactly clear to Carol, but she had noticed that the landlady took orders from him on occasion. On Mrs. Carter's right was a vacant chair, sometimes occupied by a hatchet-faced young man who said he was the landlady's son. His name was Compton—his first name, that is. His last, of course, was Carter. He was absent about as often as he put in an appearance. Carol didn't like him, but concerning



THE BLACK BAT

sharp, cold, forbidding, and they did not smile when her lips did.

Carol went to her room and changed to another dress. She smoked a cigarette, then carefully examined her trunk and suitcase. Both were locked, but both had been unlocked during her absence. These people here that the Black Bat had his eye on were taking no chances, but Carol was not worried, because the Black Bat had warned her not to take along any clothing or accessories of the sort a servant would not be likely to own or use.

PROMPTLY at eight, she went down to dinner. There was a huge dining room, with a table that once had been used for banquets. It was in the shape of a large

Jacques she felt something more than dislike. The feeling she had for him was akin to fear.

He seemed to be all chins and cheeks. His eyes were covered by a pair of thick glasses so that they were constantly obscured, but Carol had an idea those eyes would be hard and uncompromising. She knew well enough that they missed little.

A buzz of conversation filled the room when Carol entered. Talking was highly encouraged and Carol thought she knew why. One of the girls, for instance, was now embarked upon a description of a diamond necklace the lady who employed her was going to wear to some smart affair tonight, and everyone was listening.

"Two insurance company detectives

brought it," the girl was prattling. "They'll come after it tomorrow, and while I couldn't see, I think they came in an armored car. You should see the necklace! It sparkles like a hundred little fires. Mrs. Collier will be a knockout tonight."

The chatter went on and on. Carol listened to all she could, but took little part in it herself.

After dinner, Carol sat on the porch for a short time, and after a while she was called inside. The fat man had sent for her. He told her that Mrs. Carter had obtained some newsreels from Europe and they would be shown on the movie-sound machine in just a few minutes.

"Most interesting films," he told Carol, speaking in his characteristic clipped tones. "We have also a cartoon or two and a fashion film. We try to interest you girls—make you feel at home."

"You do," Carol said enthusiastically. "I can't wait to see the films!"

She wondered if the fat man's eyes were narrowed in suspicion, or if they were wide in blissful innocence. She wished those glasses were not so thick.

He followed her when she went into the dining room where the films were to be shown. The big table had been dismantled and stowed along one wall. Chairs were lined up, and a movie screen and sound projector were in place. Mrs. Carter's hatchet-faced son had materialized from somewhere and was inserting the film into the machine. His grin in Carol's direction was distinctly wolfish.

The fat man stood at the door, as if engaged in counting the boarders as they entered. Every boarder was expected to be present when, once a week, there was always something like this. Entertainment which couldn't be passed up. Everyone did attend. And invariably after such entertainment, the newspapers the next morning would carry stories about a fresh robbery. Sometimes it concerned the families for whom the servants who lived in this boarding house worked; sometimes not. Carol wondered if there were any other places of this type in the city.

She selected a chair as close to the door as possible. When the lights went out, she was determined to take a chance and slip away. There was a phone call to be made. A decidedly important one, considering what that foolish maid had said about a diamond necklace.

Under cover of the sound effects of an anti-aircraft barrage of the film, Carol managed to reach the front door and leave the house. She was quite certain no one had seen her. There was a drug-store two blocks away and she hurried toward it. With luck she might put through her phone call and return without being missed.

She glanced inside the drug-store before

entering. There were a number of people there, but none who seemed suspicious. Carol entered and walked straight to one of the phone booths, opened her purse, and extracted both a coin and a small mirror. She propped the mirror up so that while she faced the phone, she could also observe the store entrance.

In a moment, after she had dropped her coin in the box, she heard the familiar voice of Silk Kirby, the Black Bat's personal servant, on the wire. Carol talked fast.

"Tonight Mrs. Harmon Collier's maid told how Mrs. Collier is wearing her diamond necklace to some affair at the Plaza," she told Silk. "In the morning it goes back to the safe deposit vaults and . . . hold it, Silk!"

IN THE tiny mirror Carol saw the hulk of Jacques. He was at the candy counter buying chocolates, but he was observing her too. He had followed her here! They were suspicious of her then. Carol quickly dropped the mirror into her purse.

"The fat man trailed me," she said into the phone. "I'll tell him I called my boy friend. Send Butch to the boarding house at nine-thirty to make it good. Butch's name should be Hank Leonard. Wish me luck, Silk. I'll need it if they ever get wise to me."

She hung up, stepped from the phone booth and walked briskly toward the door. Then, as if seeing the fat man for the first time, she stopped short and looked surprised and embarrassed.

"I—had a call to make," she said slowly.

The fat man smiled at her, though the movement of his lips was more suggestive of a leer. She mentally swore at those thick glasses again. They seemed to hide the man's soul—if he had one.

"So I see." He smirked at her. "But there is a telephone in the house. We strive to keep our guests comfortable and provide all conveniences. Did you not like the movie show, perhaps?"

"I want to get back for the rest of it," Carol replied. "I just had to call my boy friend, and I didn't use the phone at the house because . . . Well, some of the girls listen when I talk to him. I like privacy."

"Ah—so." The fat man seemed to be jeering at her. "Of course. He is a nice young man, this friend of yours?"

Carol nodded eagerly. "He's a war plant worker. Big fellow. You'll be surprised when you see him. He's coming to see me at nine-thirty tonight. I hope it's all right?"

The fat man took her arm, just below the elbow. His strong grip surprised Carol. She could have sworn he was as flabby as a chunk of blubber.

"There is a front parlor in the boarding house," he told her. "It is no crime for a pretty girl to have a sweetheart. Invite him to dinner some night. I'm sure Mrs. Carter will be glad to have him."



Jacques started weaving as he approached the Black Bat again (Chapter IX)

Carol felt a little more certain of herself. Butch would show up to alibi the phone call. But it was lucky she had used the mirror, and had spotted the fat man in time to warn Silk. Somehow she had an uncomfortable idea that the fat fingers now holding her arm could also grip her throat and never let go until she stopped breathing—forever. If this man should get the slightest proof that she was a spy in their midst, he would take drastic action.

Suddenly Carol found herself dead afraid of him. He seemed hardly human, and the way he appeared to know everything that went on was uncanny.

CHAPTER II

Lesson in Violence



JACQUES, the fat man, was appraising "Butch" O'Leary an hour later. Carol hadn't come down from her room yet. Butch sat uneasily on the edge of a chair that threatened to collapse from under him because of his weight. It gave off a constant series of groans and squeaks.

The fat man had his head cocked to one side.

"Big fellow," he said. "Too big to fight. To fight well, I mean."

A statement like that was tantamount to waving a red flag in front of Butch. He rose and looked down at the fat man who, beside him, was almost diminutive.

"What's the idea?" Butch demanded. "I can fight. Good, too."

The fat man smirked and backed away a little.

"You are too big for good fighting," he repeated. "Too tall and clumsy. Here now—suppose we have a little sport. All in good fun. I'll bet you a cigar you can't push me into that corner."

Butch's arms opened wide and he moved forward. Fast, for a man of his bulk. He started closing those arms to encircle the fat man and jar him back against the wall. But inexplicably the ceiling took the place of the floor. The four walls spun like a merry-go-round gone wild and then Butch crashed down on his face.

He looked up when his wits stopped churning and registered sheer amazement. Not a hair of the fat man's head had been moved. He just stood there, grinning.

"Judo," he said. "The bigger an enemy is, the better it works. But I took advantage of you. You ought to know Judo, so this time I will promise not to use it. Attack me again, my friend. This time I will show you how to disable a man efficiently."

Butch got to his feet. Much more interested than angry, he accepted the challenge. Another rush carried him close to the fat man, and then Butch was jarred clear to his insteps. The fat man had thrust out his right hand, palm upraised, and Butch had run full tilt into it. Butch sat down without regard for dignity.

The fat man stepped closer.

"You see," he calmly explained, "it is done only with the heel of the hand. But there is much preparation first. The heel must be developed until it is like steel. You start when very young, methodically striking the heel against the edge of a board until you can crack the board with one blow. The heel hardens to the consistency of steel. It has no give, and even a tightly compressed fist has give."

"Hank!" cried a girl's horrified voice.

Butch grinned up at Carol who had stepped into the room.

"It's okay, Myra." Butch used her assumed name, just as she had used the one she had given him. "My pal here has been showing me a few tricks. Believe me, he knows 'em."

"Let me help you up."

The fat man extended his hand and jerked Butch to his feet. All two hundred and fifty-five pounds of him. Then the fat man faced Carol, smiled, and bowed slightly.

"Your friend is a good fighter," he said, "but he lacks a few tricks. Do you mind if I intrude and tell him some things about defending himself? I'm sure you will also be interested."

The fat man stayed there talking until almost midnight, until Butch finally arose and yawned. Jacques had given Carol and Butch not the slightest opportunity to talk privately. Not one sign had passed between them, for they were aware how closely those glass-veiled eyes were watching them. He even followed them to the porch, but turned his back discreetly for just a moment, to give them a chance to say good-by.

Butch enveloped Carol in a clumsy hug. She had time to whisper to him two significant words—"Warn Tony!" Then the fat man was beside them again.

She was certain, though, that he hadn't overheard her.

Carol went to her room shortly after Butch departed. Jacques stood at the foot of the stairs as she ascended. Carol hummed gaily, but she was not feeling gay. When she closed and locked the door of her room, she sat down near the window and began to worry.

If the Black Bat tried to forestall the inevitable attempt to steal Mrs. Collier's diamond necklace, Jacques would immediately suspect that she had telephoned the tip-off. By morning the fat man would know whether the robbery attempt had been successful or not, and if it failed, she would have little chance of escaping his wrath and that of his friends.

FROM the window she saw Jacques walking briskly across the back yard. He was heading for the next house, some two hundred yards to the rear. He lived there alone, so far as Carol had been able to determine. Her suspicions about that house listed it as headquarters for the slickest gang of jewel thieves on record. Jacques might be the head of them. He was ruthless and clever enough. Whether or not her suspicions about him were correct was among the things Carol hoped to discover here.

She didn't go to sleep. There were too many things on her mind. Earlier in the evening she had seen a panel truck drive out of Jacques' garage, and she knew by now that every time there was to be a robbery, that the same panel body truck went out. Somehow it was connected with the series of mysterious thefts which had the police and the insurance companies on edge.

The boarding house had long ago quieted down. Everyone was asleep, or supposed to be. Carol was certain that she alone suspected this super boarding house of concealing the criminal gang members she was certain it did. That was why the landlady could manage to provide really excellent quarters and meals of such high type and stay above water financially.

The place was merely subsidized by someone who profited from it as a cover.

At two in the morning, when all lights were out, Carol opened her door and crept down the hallway to the staircase. She was in time to hear the front door cautiously opened with a key. Then footsteps tiptoed across the floor and Carol heard Mrs. Carter's voice, and her startled gasp before a door closed on whatever followed that cry of surprise or horror—or both.

Carol had to take a chance. She went downstairs, her padded slippers making no noise whatsoever. When she reached the dining room, she saw light beneath and to the hinged side of the butler's pantry door. Edging up to the fairly wide crack where the door was hinged, she applied an eye to the crack and could look into the kitchen.

Mrs. Carter's son who had the impossible name of Compton, was there and clearly excited. Mrs. Carter was there also, but seemed far more worried than excited.

"We'd better get Jacques over here right away," she said. "He told me to call him if everything wasn't exactly right. You're sure the man was dead?"

"I stuck a knife into his chest right up to the hilt!" young Compton Carter said, with a curious mixture of pride and terror. "He let out a grunt or something, then started to fall down. I grabbed him so he wouldn't make any noise."

Mrs. Carter walked quickly to the rear door and snapped on a switch. Carol knew it controlled a light above the back porch, one that was never used. Now she knew

why. It was a signal to attract the attention of Jacques in his own house which was within easy sight of the back porch.

Carol shivered. Murder had been done! Clearly it wasn't the Black Bat who had fallen victim, for the killer would have boasted about that, since members of the underworld had long vied with one another for such a privilege. But murder—killing anybody—showed just how far these jewel thieves would go. More, one killing would inevitably lead to others. The Black Bat's hunch was turning out right, as his hunches, backed by logic and deduction, usually did.

Jacques arrived promptly, puffing a bit, which indicated that he had been running. Compton quickly told him what had happened.

"I got in, just like the map showed," the young man said. "It was easy. I waited until all the lights went out, then I gave them time to go to sleep. But something happened so the man didn't sleep. Anyway, not so soundly. I got the necklace—"

"Show it to me," Jacques ordered. "At once."

Compton reached into a pocket and extracted a shimmering strand of gems. Jacques held them at eye level, slowly rotated the necklace, then nodded heavily.

"Good! This is what you went after. Now! Did you kill the man or only wound him?"

"But I didn't tell you I—I used my knife. How did you know I did?"

"Idiot!" Jacques said smoothly. "There is blood on your shirt. Go ahead—talk."

COMPTON CARTER obeyed, speaking hurriedly.

"Well, the safe was easy and I was just hauling the necklace out when this man tiptoed into the room and jumped me. My knife was stuck in my belt. I just yanked it out and jabbed the fella with it. He's dead all right."

"And then you ran?" Jacques asked quickly.

"I went out the door, just as the plans called for. Nobody saw me enter or leave. It's in the bag, Jacques. Not a thing to worry about."

"Perhaps." Jacques frowned. "So far, I approve of what happened. Until now you have been a novice, but now your hands are bloodied. You will be a better man for that. What I wish to know is this. Did the appearance of that man of the house come so that you might assume he was ready and waiting for you? In short, was it a trap?"

"No," Compton Carter derided. "That bozo was half asleep and blinking like an owl. That's why it was so easy to stick him. Wasn't anyone else around and I bet his wife doesn't even know yet he's dead."

Mrs. Carter faced Jacques. "Why did you ask if it could have been a trap?"

Jacques was studying the necklace again.

Lair of the Black Bat

"Well, I have been suspicious. That blond—the new one on the third floor—she seems just a bit too intelligent for her job. I'm probably wrong though. She slipped out tonight when the movies were on, and I followed her. She telephoned. Her boy friend came later, but if Compton had been trapped tonight, I would have known that she was a spy."

"You sent my son, when you thought it might be a trap?" Mrs. Carter said in a low, rasping voice.

JACQUES tucked the diamond necklace into his side pocket.

"Why not?" he demanded. "He wanted to join us. If he had been caught, they'd have found no police record. He'd have got off lightly, while any of the other men we use—well, they'd have been given the limit. If your son had been caught, we would have had him defended and paid him well."

"Sure you would!" Compton sided with Jacques. "Say—how about my cut, anyhow?"

"In due time." Jacques patted his pocket and smiled. "You know the routine. First, the necklace will be turned over to a certain party who will have it examined. If it is genuine, the gewgaw will be sold. You will receive the usual percentage paid to a tyro. Now remove your shirt. Quickly! I must get back."

"My shirt?" young Carter asked dully.

"It is bloody—as I told you. If I leave it here, your mother will burn it, perhaps, but that would do you little good. The police are plenty active in this business, and now that there has been a murder, they'll start hunting us harder than ever. The only way to destroy evidence of this kind is to apply acid to it. Turn it into a liquid and flush it away. Take off the shirt."

Carol quickly backed away from the door and made her way upstairs again, considerably shaken. But at least she knew several things that until now had been a complete mystery. Interesting items for the Black Bat. She also realized that the Black Bat had not acted on the information she had provided because he had sensed it might reflect on her.

This neglect had caused a murder, but that was something neither she nor the Black Bat could have predicted. If the life of Compton's victim had been spared by setting a trap, Carol's life might have paid the piper. She hadn't the slightest doubt but that Jacques had killed before and would do it again without the least hesitation.

Carol's next move was obvious. She had to see the Black Bat, but it would have to wait until morning. She went to bed, but sleep was a long time in coming. This was a house of murder and crime—not exactly a place conducive to restful slumber.



IN THE morning Carol left the house with several other girls and took a bus to the apartment house where she was employed. She didn't enter though. Instead, she telephoned up to Mrs. Ankrum, asked for three hours off, and got the permission easily. The scarcity of servants would have made Mrs. Ankrum

accede to almost any reasonable request.

Carol hailed a taxi and was driven to one of the best parts of the city. She paid off the driver four blocks from her destination and walked the rest of the way. When she reached one large house, with well-landscaped grounds and shrubbery surrounded by a neat fence, she didn't even glance at it. But she knew well the plaque that was on the gate, inscribed with the owner's name—Tony Quinn.

Carol turned the corner at the end of the street before the impressive place, and headed down another street—a blind street. She gave one quick look over her shoulder, made certain she was not under observation and ducked through a garden gate she reached. She began running toward a small garden house, entered it, and stopped a moment to regain her breath.

Then she opened a skillfully hidden trapdoor, dropped down into a tunnel and closed the door on top of her. In a few seconds she was ascending a ladder which led into a large, white-tiled laboratory. Someone moved rapidly toward the exit into the laboratory to help her. A firm hand gripped hers and she was hoisted up.

The man who greeted her could not have been called handsome. Not by a long degree. His features were too rugged for that, and around the eyes were deep scars. But he had a warm smile and friendly eyes.

This was Tony Quinn, lawyer, once district attorney, now appointed as a special district attorney, and—the Black Bat, a mystery man who took the law into his own hands and was well-known to police and crooks alike.

He led Carol over to a large leather divan and sat down beside her. Butch O'Leary, the big fellow who had pretended to be her boy friend at the boarding house, was smothering a straight-backed chair and smiling in welcome.

A third man stood near a small door that led into the house proper. He was the "Silk" Kirby to whom Carol had telephoned, a middle-aged man, almost bald, and of medium

stature. Once Silk Kirby had tantalized police all over the nation as one of the best confidence men who had ever mulcted a ripe sucker.

That was before he had fallen from grace in his "profession" enough to come to rob Tony Quinn, during a lean period. But after a long talk with his intended victim, he had remained to work for Quinn as his personal servant. Now he was the Black Bat's loyal friend and confidante, a vast aid to him in his endeavors, because Silk Kirby was still as smooth as his nickname.

"Things happened last night," Tony Quinn said. "Unfortunate things, but when Silk told me that fat man had followed you to the drug-store, Carol, I was afraid to interfere. Now those crooks have added murder to their list."

"Compton Carter killed that man!" Carol said eagerly. "I overheard him bragging about it to his mother and Jacques. And, Tony, our fat man isn't the boss of this outfit. He took the necklace Compton stole and said it would have to be turned over to a certain party for appraisal before Compton could get his cut."

"I thought there would be some one higher-up than your friend Jacques behind all this," Quinn said. "The gang is too well-set, and works with too much cooperation not to have a clever leader. Any idea who it might be?"

"Not an iota. I doubt if anyone else at the boarding house knows, besides Jacques—and of course I couldn't read his mind."

"Equally of course," said Quinn, "we can't come out into the open, seize him and work him over. Wouldn't do much good anyway, from what Butch has told me of the man."

Butch leaned forward, his huge hands clasped tightly.

"That boy," he said "is dangerous. Me—I don't scare easy, but the fat man has got something. He set me back on my ear plenty fast. He's nobody I'd want to meet on a dark night."

"His kind become fragile once they are hurt," Silk spoke up.

BUTCH looked at Silk.

"Yeah," he agreed. "Only the idea is to hurt 'em before you get knocked for a loop yourself."

Quinn chuckled. "We'll take good care of Jacques in due time. Right now I have a few things to report. Nothing definite. As you know, this matter came before me in my capacity as special D.A. In the last thirty days there have been eleven hold-ups, as well as robberies in houses and other thefts where very valuable gems have been stolen. The police have made little headway, but thanks to the help of the three of you, we're beginning to get a start. Now that Carol has brought proof of a highly competent



Mason started when he saw the black automatic pointed at him (Chapter VI)

leader's existence, we have progressed even further."

"I'm glad I could help," Carol said. "But I don't see how that is so important, Tony."

"But it is. We have learned that all the families who have been robbed employed servants. Almost invariably those servants live in boarding houses much like the one where you are staying, Carol. Places that give too much for too little. They are run with one purpose in mind—to have a place where willing ears can listen to the gossip of these servants. News about parties at which valuables will be worn. Talk about the location of the safe in the house, or other spots used to secrete gems. Information about habits of the families, about doors and exits. Little by little the servants reveal—quite unknowingly—just what these crooks want to find out."

"It has certainly paid off," Silk opined.

Quinn nodded. "Indeed it has, but I'm still a bit suspicious. This mob of crooks must have a terrific overhead. The profits have been good, but not quite good enough to cover all their outlay and still pay them for their trouble. I believe the entire thing has been leading up to some big and decidedly important job. So far, not a glimpse of the thieves has been caught by their victims. They go about their work in an extremely businesslike fashion, which makes it all the more difficult to run them down. No trace of their loot has appeared on any market, either, which shows how cautious they are."

"If we could only find the man who runs the outfit!" Carol said, musingly.

"We're making a little headway," Quinn told her. "Butch and Silk have worked hard. I've taken advantage of my office to investigate certain factors. We have three fair suspects for the position of leader. The boarding houses, for instance—we know of three of them, so far—are all owned by one man who is the lessor. He is a real estate operator named Thomas Shirley, a cagey individual whose chief distinction is his love of money. Then there is an employment agency run by a William Jenks. From this agency many of the servants were supplied to those families which have been robbed. Jenks has no record, he has been in business for a long time, but has suffered badly of late because of the shortage of servants. He might have seen a way to recoup his fortune.

"Next, we have Sam Mason. Sam is a private detective who specializes in tracking down stolen jewels. His work is mainly done for insurance companies. They ask him no questions and he volunteers no information as to how he gets back the stolen stuff, but he does it, and capably too. One of these three men could conceivably be the leader of this gang of jewel thieves."

"My money is on Sam Mason, that pri-

vate detective," Silk said. "In the old days I knew men like him and I know how they work. They're in on the job before it actually happens. The crook just turns the loot over to them, and after the insurance company has paid the claim, they move in to restore the property and get a fancy reward. The private detective calls it a fee. He splits with the crook, so of course he's as much of a thief as the actual one."

"True," Quinn admitted. "But Sam Mason's reputation is good. Of course it would be if he is as clever as the leader of this pack of wolves has shown himself to be. Carol do you think it's safe where you are? Murder has been done, and more will be done to conceal the first one if it becomes necessary."

Carol smiled. "I think I'm safe so far."

"Good. Now for some plans. We've got to make these crooks operate our way. Next time, I hope, you won't be suspected, Carol. Then I can move in as the Black Bat. Any of the other girls been doing any more talking?"

"Ann has," Carol said. "She works for the Paul Hampton's and she's been building up the rings Mrs. Hampton owns. They must be something from the way Ann talks. Mrs. Hampton wore them to the opera last week, but nothing happened. Maybe next time it will be different."

"Keep your ears open," Quinn advised. "The moment Ann says anything about when and where Mrs. Hampton's rings will be worn again, let me know. That's all for now. I think you'd best get back on the job."

"Tony," Carol said with a light frown, "there's one more thing. Perhaps it means nothing. But every time there is a burglary, Jacques goes out earlier in the evening and he always drives a station wagon. Maybe he makes contact with the leader and they discuss plans. But why use a car as conspicuous as a station wagon? He has a dark sedan in the same garage."

QUINN looked over at Kirby.

"Your job, Silk. Next time Carol warns us, you trail Jacques. He may even lead you straight to the man we want, although I doubt it. At any rate you may be able to determine the method of contact. They wouldn't use the telephone or a messenger."

Carol left immediately and soon after Butch departed. Tony Quinn picked up a cane. He walked toward the secret door which led into the library of his home. As he neared it, an amazing change came over him. His warm, friendly eyes suddenly became stony and fixed. The eyes of a totally blind man.

Indeed, everyone except Quinn's own little group believed him to be hopelessly blind. At one time he had been too, as the result

of something that had happened when he had been an up and coming young D.A. pursuing crooks into their various holes and rapidly cleaning up this great city.

He'd been trying the case of an important criminal, basing his evidence on certain documents. In the middle of the trial, members of this crook's gang had tried to destroy the evidence by hurling a powerful acid upon it. Quinn had interfered and the acid had struck him in the face. He had been blinded almost instantly, and those deep scars around his eyes still remained as a silent witness of the tragedy.

He gave up his position as D.A., traveled all over Europe before the war, and to all clinics in this country. He was independently wealthy, willing to spend every cent he owned in order to see again, but money could not cure his blindness. At last, believing that he would never see again, Quinn settled down to the life of a blind man, living more or less a hermit's existence in his own home, with the reformed Silk Kirby as almost his only contact with the outside world.

It was at a time when things were at their lowest ebb for Tony Quinn that Carol Baldwin appeared. She came with a strange offer. Her father, a police officer in a small mid-Western town, was dying, the victim of gangster bullets.

He had followed the career of District Attorney Quinn and, knowing he had no chance to live, he wanted to give his eyes to Quinn. There was a little-known surgeon in Carol's home town, she said, who believed he could successfully perform the operation of replacing Quinn's dead corneas with Sergeant Baldwin's healthy ones.

Quinn went West and submitted to the operation and, soon after, Carol's father died. Quinn's sight returned, but he kept that a secret, because a new plan to fight crime and criminals had come to him. He knew the red tape that handicapped a public official in fighting crooks, and believed a free and independent investigator could make more headway. And that was when the Black Bat had come into being.

Attired in a close-fitting hood, made necessary because of the scars around his eyes which might easily identify him, somber clothing and crepe-soled shoes, the Black

Bat made his entrance as a crime investigator. His previous experience was a great asset, and his was augmented by certain physical traits he had acquired as a blind man.

His sense of touch had become highly acute, and his hearing was exceptionally good—Nature's compensation for his blinded eyes. When his sight returned, he did not lose the extra-sensorial aids he had developed.

Also, the operation produced some rather astounding and unlooked-for results. Tony Quinn could see in jet blackness as easily as he could in broad daylight. His uncanny eyes, penetrating darkness, could distinguish even pastel shades. Such a phenomenon was decidedly useful to him as a crime fighter.

Carol Baldwin had come East with Quinn and Silk Kirby, to join the Black Bat's organization. She had devoted her life to fighting criminals like those who had been responsible for her father's death.

Now no one except Carol, Silk, and Butch knew that Tony Quinn could see, or that he led a double life as a blind man and as the determined fighter known as the Black Bat.

Carol had proved to be a capable ally, and she and Tony Quinn had fallen in love. But neither of them ever mentioned that, knowing they could never marry while there was so much work for the Black Bat to do, and that always all their lives were in peril.

Butch O'Leary was a splendid ally, also. Tony Quinn had once befriended Butch who thereafter had devoted himself to his benefactor so loyally that he had been allowed to become a member of the little band. Butch while not the brightest of individuals, was faithful, and his enormous strength often became a valuable asset.

Only one outsider suspected that Quinn was the Black Bat—a detective captain named McGrath—and he seemed to spend all the time he could spare in an effort to prove it. With stubborn determination he clung to his opinion that the Black Bat was a crook himself, one who deserved nothing short of a prison cell, and he had vowed to accomplish that himself.

In plain terms he had announced that some day he would arrest the Black Bat, whom he was sure would turn out to be Tony Quinn. Even repeated examinations by the most noted experts who invariably declared Quinn hopelessly blind, had no effect on Captain McGrath.

In the case of another police official—Commissioner Warner, popular head of the force—it was different. Warner may at times have suspected Quinn of being the Black Bat, but he made no attempt to prove his suspicions true. He realized that the Black Bat was a most valuable ally of the police, and Commissioner Warner was not a man to examine such a gift too closely.



The Black Bat
At His Sleuthing Best

IN

MURDER
AMONG THE
DYING

Next Issue's Exciting Novel

CHAPTER IV

Mysterious Journey

SILK drove Tony Quinn's car up to the entrance of the building where Quinn maintained an office in his capacity as Special District Attorney. Silk got out and helped the apparently blind Quinn alight. He held Quinn's arm and led him up the stairs while Quinn's cane tapped ahead of him, feeling out the way.

There was a visitor in the outer office. Captain McGrath, chunky, plainly dressed and a man of quiet efficiency, arose abruptly, walked directly in front of Quinn and extended his hand. It was just one of his ineffectual tricks to try and make Quinn reveal that he was not blind.

Silk had no time to steer Quinn out of the way and the blind man walked straight into McGrath, who backed up.

"Sorry," McGrath apologized. "I always keep forgetting you can't see. Or maybe I think you can. Right now I'm not worrying about that. Got a few minutes, Quinn? I want to talk to you about those jewel thieves."

Quinn invited him into the private office. McGrath sat down, crossed his legs and popped a cigar into his mouth.

"Strikes me a bit funny that the Black Bat hasn't come into this mess," he said. "You think it's because maybe he doesn't believe these thefts are important enough?"

Quinn smiled. His eyes, looking well to McGrath's left, were dead, staring orbs.

"I don't know, Captain. I don't happen to be a confidante of the Black Bat. Now, what did you want to see me about? Has anything new turned up?"

"No—and we've got to make something happen. There was a murder last night we're sure was committed by the same gang. So far we haven't the slightest trace of any of them. Sam Mason, the insurance detective, suggests we set a trap."

Quinn made a steeple of his hands. "It's dangerous, Captain. Last night these crooks showed their willingness to murder. They'll do it again. What is Mason's plan?"

"There's a family named Hampton. Paul Hampton's a wealthy engineer. His wife is attending some affair tonight, wearing seventy thousand dollars worth of rings. Enough to attract the gang. Now Mason suggests we have the newspapers print a story about those rings and make a casual mention about Mrs. Hampton wearing them tonight. If the crooks strike, we'll be plenty ready."

Quinn shook his head slowly. "It won't work," he said positively. "Such open advertising will scare the crooks off. Besides, you need the cooperation of Mr. and Mrs. Hampton and they aren't apt to risk their necks."

"Mason has already talked to them and they're glad to help," McGrath said. "We'll cover them from the moment they get the jewelry until it's back in the safe deposit vaults. The insurance company told Mason Mrs. Hampton intends to wear the jewelry tonight, and asked him to be on guard."

"It's your problem," Quinn shrugged. "Quite probably nothing will happen anyway. Is Mason intending to be with you?"

"Well—no. He did plan to, but says he's got something else to handle tonight. If I didn't know Mason well, I'd think he was deliberately trying to avoid being on the scene. But I'm going through with it. If we can land one of those crooks we'll make him talk."

"Good hunting, Captain," Quinn offered. "I still think it won't work."

The moment the door closed on McGrath, Silk placed an envelope on Quinn's desk.

"This is funny," he said. "I was opening the morning's mail and found this. It's addressed in a woman's hand, but inside the envelope there was only this blank piece of paper."

Quinn's eyes became alive again. He studied the blank paper, then the envelope.

"Odd!" he murmured. "Protect this paper, and envelope, Silk, until we can check for possible fingerprints."

Quinn put the envelope on the desk and lightly passed his fingertips across the sealed flap, still in place because Silk had used a letter opener. Sensitivity of touch told Quinn that the flap had been tampered with.

"It's been steamed open, then resealed," he said. "Application of additional glue has made the flap bulge slightly in spots. It was no error that we got blank paper instead of a letter. Someone wanted to tell us something and was circumvented. Well, eventually we'll probably find out what it's all about."

"What do you think of McGrath's scheme, sir?" Silk asked, as he put the envelope and paper away.

"I don't like it, Silk. Besides, McGrath is trying to kill a couple of birds with one trap. He took me into his confidence in hope the Black Bat would be on hand. He may be, at that, but well in the distance. Incidentally, the maid who works for the Paul Hamptons is the one who has been talking about Mrs. Hampton's rings. Remember Carol mentioning their names—and the maid, Ann?"

"Yes, sir. Maybe those crooks won't need newspaper publicity to make 'em act."

"Your job is to watch the house where that fat man lives," Quinn said, "and if he drives the station wagon out, trail him, see if he

meets anyone. The station wagon must have some connection with the thefts—and last night's murder—because it is driven out every time a job is pulled. I want to know why."

A RUSH of normal business started then and Quinn went to work. At six o'clock Silk drove him home. Quinn made certain that the house was not under observation, then went straight to his hidden laboratory. There he studied the mysterious envelope and its blank enclosure. He proved now that the envelope had been opened. There were no prints on the paper though, except Silk's. The handwriting on the envelope was neat, slanted considerably, and obviously that of a woman.

He put it aside and pondered McGrath's trap for tonight. The Hamptons' maid would talk more at dinner. Jacques would hear her and set the wheels in motion for another robbery or holdup—unless the crooks read the item McGrath and Private Detective Sam Mason were having printed. Then they might smell a rat.

It seemed to Quinn that Mason was a trifle too eager. And he had taken pains to inform McGrath he wouldn't be on deck if anything happened. It sounded as if he meant to try to establish a fool-proof alibi.

Carol managed to phone after dinner and told Silk, in a few words, that the Hamptons' maid had talked about the rings. Silk relayed this information to Quinn who was seated in a well-worn leather chair before the fireplace in the library.

"Things stand just as they were," Quinn said. "Try to trail Jacques. Butch, as Carol's boy friend, is going to call on her and keep tabs there. I'll be going out—as the Black Bat, Silk. McGrath or not, I can't let those crooks get away with anything else. Not without a fight."

"Good," Silk approved. "Incidentally, sir, you haven't seen the evening papers. That is, I haven't read them to you as I always do. There is a most interesting little story."

"About the Hamptons and the diamond rings?"

"That's there too, but there is another. Some visiting royalty here now from one of the liberated countries, is going to throw a big party for a lot of important people two nights from now. The paper gives a partial list of those expected to attend and it sounds like the Social Register."

"And Tiffany's, no doubt," Quinn frowned. "Those crooks don't need talkative maids to get information. Every woman who attends that affair is bound to wear her best jewelry. It should make a haul large enough to tempt any band of crooks. I'm afraid it's what this particular gang has been waiting for. We'll have to make some countering plans, Silk. Find out all you can about it."

"Yes, sir. I think I'd better be on my way now."

"Darken the whole house before you leave," Quinn instructed. "Then if McGrath takes a notion to pop over, he'll think we're out. I don't need the lights anyway. And, Silk—phone me here as soon as possible, whether you find out anything or not."

Silk went to his room where he proceeded to don a disguise. Silk was no expert at this, but when he had been a confidence man, he had mastered two disguises. Both were simple, but effective. Selecting one of them now, he donned a gray wig, and added false eyebrows to make his own shaggier. A bit of cream rubbed into the face gave him a ruddy complexion. That was all, but combined with clothing typical of a movie mogul, or other financier, it made Silk another person.

After darkening the house, in obedience to Quinn's instructions, he slipped out to the garage, changed license plates on one of the cars and drove away. When he reached the vicinity of the boarding house where Carol was staying and near which Jacques lived, he pulled up in an advantageous spot and doused the car lights.

More than an hour went by. He saw Carol returning to the boarding house with two other girls. Then the station wagon slid out of the driveway and Silk trailed it. He stayed far back, because Jacques would be naturally suspicious, but Silk was a past master at this

[Turn page]

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business. He was certain Jacques had no idea he was being followed.

The fat man kept up a good pace until he reached a more populous portion of the city where he headed toward an exclusive residential section. Finally he pulled up in front of one of the few remaining private dwellings in this downtown area. Silk took careful note of the place, memorizing its illuminated number on the porch.

Jacques then whirled away to cross town. This time he came to a stop in front of a big apartment building where he stayed for about fifteen minutes. His third stop was before the sumptuous entrance of a large residential hotel.

SILK noted each stop, but was distinctly puzzled. Jacques never got out of the station wagon, didn't sound his horn—just sat behind the wheel and smoked cigarettes, the butts of which he snapped high into the air.

He drove through the city's largest park, but didn't stop. Far across town he did—in the middle of a dark, quiet block. Several other cars were parked on either side of the street, but they seemed to be unoccupied.

As the fat man drove away and headed for home, Silk had an idea that he had been neatly taken on a wild goose chase. Certainly Jacques hadn't delivered any message, nor had he come into even the slightest contact with anyone. And he drove straight home as if in a hurry to get there.

Silk watched him drive into the garage, and a few minutes later lights in his house were turned on. Silk sighed and gave up. As he drove away he was hoping he would be in time to tell the Black Bat of Jacques' strange actions. But the Black Bat had already departed on whatever mysterious errand demanded his attention.

CHAPTER V

Vanished Girl



CAROL, meanwhile, bided her time until after Jacques returned. At dinner, the maid employed by the Hamptons' had spoken her piece about the valuable rings. Jacques had gone home early. Mrs. Carter seemed unusually curt with her boarders, and her thin-faced son was nowhere about.

Carol watched Jacques drive off. She wanted to get into his house and examine it, and some time she hoped to get a chance to examine the station wagon he drove on these trips. But it was still early and Mrs. Carter bustled

about, making frequent trips through the house as if to keep all her boarders under observation.

Carol did openly leave the house, walk to the drug-store and make a phone call to Tony Quinn. He agreed that an examination of Jacques' premises might prove interesting, but he warned her to be careful. Carol had made sure she hadn't been followed, but Mrs. Carter was standing in the doorway when she returned.

"My boy friend has been transferred to another shift," Carol said brightly. "I hope you don't mind if he calls on me about eleven o'clock. I'll send him home early."

"If you don't disturb the other girls, I have no objections," Mrs. Carter said over her shoulder, as she walked toward the kitchen.

Carol returned to her room. She saw Jacques come back, waited twenty minutes, then she slipped downstairs.

Mrs. Carter seemed to have gone out. Carol knew exactly what she had to do. She turned on the rear porch light—the one used to signal Jacques. Then she hurried through the back door, ran lightly in the direction of the fat man's house and concealed herself behind a tree.

Soon Jacques emerged, walking fast. He passed within a dozen yards of where Carol was hidden. She waited until he entered the boarding house, then she hurried toward his garage. It was locked, but the doors were equipped with ordinary tumbler locks. Carol opened her purse and took out several keys which Tony Quinn had manufactured in his laboratory. There were few locks they couldn't open and the one to Jacques' garage was not among these few.

Carol stepped in, closed the door behind her and went to the station wagon. She discovered that the windows were covered by curtains hanging inside the vehicle, but the front door was easily opened. Yet even from this point she couldn't see in back. A solid metal wall had been built there, cutting off the back of the wagon from the driver's seat.

She couldn't afford to spend much more time in the garage, for there might be more interesting things in the house. But Carol did notice one significant thing. There were two horn buttons on the wheel. One was coated with bright chrome and the other had been painted a dull brown.

This was interesting because of its uniqueness. She rapidly drew a good sketch of the interior of the place in her small notebook, ripped off the page and added a couple of notes. She inserted the paper in an envelope, addressed it to Tony Quinn, then slipped out of the garage, taking pains to lock up after her.

She glanced toward Mrs. Carter's boarding house, but the ungainly bulk of the fat man was nowhere in sight. Greatly relieved,

she moved toward the back of his house, but decided against trying to effect an entrance there. If he returned, he would be sure to notice anything wrong, for he always came in the back way.

Carol hurried around to the front of the house which had been built close to the deserted street. She saw a mail-box a few steps from the house. Carol hesitated. She knew she was going to plunge into considerable danger, and already she possessed some meager information about the station wagon which might benefit the Black Bat. Was it worth while taking the chance of waiting to see whether she could get more information before mailing her notes?

Gripping the envelope addressed to Quinn, she hurried to the mail-box, affixed a stamp on the letter and posted it. She felt better after that was done. If she found anything else in Jacques' house, she could write another note or relay the information to Butch when he came to see "Myra."

Carol ran up on the front porch of Jacques' house. Again those keys which Tony Quinn had furnished served their purpose. She had the front door open in less than three minutes. There was a weak hall light illuminating the entrance. She closed the door quietly and stood there, listening, centering her attention upon the slightest squeak or pad of feet. She heard none and ventured further into the place.

IT WAS dark deeper along the hallway and she used a tiny flashlight which threw a yellow, weak ray. Aided by this, she began to examine each room. They were just ordinary rooms, expensively furnished, tidy and neat. There was not time to rummage in desks or bureau drawers.

She proceeded to the second floor, made her way to the extreme rear and looked over at Mrs. Carter's house. The porch light had gone out, but if Jacques had been moving back, she would surely have seen him.

There was one closed door upstairs. Carol turned the knob firmly, threw the door wide and stepped aside in the event of some attack from within. Nothing happened. She stepped into the room, turned her flashlight on—and gasped.

She saw a work-bench equipped with jeweler's tools. There was a small blast furnace for reducing metals, probably gold. Any large, modern jewel manufacturing plant might have been envious of such a place.

Carol moved closer to the work-bench. If she could find some of the gems recently stolen, she would have evidence enough on Jacques to warrant his arrest—unless the Black Bat wanted to handle the fat man in his own way.

She had picked up a red-plush case when the room started to swirl crazily. She grasped at the edge of the bench for support. Her

flashlight hit the floor and darkness filled the room. But that darkness was sunlight compared to the gloom which enveloped Carol. She had hardly felt the blow on the head. It had been struck with scientific precision.

Promptly at eleven o'clock Butch O'Leary climbed the stairs of Carol's boarding house and rang the bell. He waited a few minutes when there was no answer. Then he rang it again. This time he drew results. Mrs. Carter, swathed in a voluminous bathrobe, opened the door.

"I guess my girl got sick of waiting," Butch said, and smiled at the landlady amiably. "I told her, though, I couldn't make it until eleven o'clock."

"If you are referring to Myra," Mrs. Carter said frigidly, "she moved out early this evening. She didn't say where she was going—didn't even give me any reason for leaving, but she's gone. Irresponsible—that's what she was, and you're well rid of her if you never see her again."

The door was slammed in Butch's face. For an instant he was tempted to tear it down and conduct a search of the place, but he realized that would do no good. Anyway, it was possible that Carol had seen trouble materializing and had made tracks for safety.

Butch turned slowly away, walked down the steps and onto the street. He headed back toward the bus stop. But he was wary. The Black Bat had taught him many tricks. He sauntered along the silent street like a puzzled, woebegone man, but his slow place was intentional. If anyone followed him, his shadow would be compelled to move just as slowly, and that meant ducking for cover, allowing Butch to extend his distance, then taking up the chase again.

There was someone behind him. Butch heard nothing, but he did spot a fitting shadow just beyond one of the street lights. Butch had purposely turned around at this point because he knew that anyone passing close to that light would leave a shadow.

Butch didn't even consider capturing the man after him. Not now, because all this meant that Carol had been taken prisoner. The Black Bat must be warned. Such pleasures as wringing a crook's neck would have to wait.

Butch reached the busstop, lit a cigarette and waited. The bus came along five minutes later. By that time four other people were waiting, but Butch was fairly sure none of these was the man who had followed him. When the bus pulled up, Butch was the first aboard. He dropped his coin in the fare slot and moved briskly toward the center of the bus.

There was a middle door exit, operated when a passenger stepped on a treadle. Butch saw a man dart from the shadows and hurry toward the bus. He got aboard last and as he fumbled for his fare, Butch

stepped on the treadle, opened the exit door by this means, and the door closed automatically behind him.

As it did the bus lurched off. The shadow was still aboard, and that bus wouldn't stop again for half a dozen blocks.

Butch cut through a yard, heading for another street where there was more life. He spotted a taxi and hailed it. Inside it, he relaxed. He had thrown that trailer off. He was positive of it, but that did not alleviate the ache in his heart.

CAROL was on a spot and Butch felt like a deserter, running away like this. Yet orders were orders and he had been explicitly warned to do just this in case something happened.

It took a full hour for Butch to reach Tony Quinn's neighborhood. After leaving the taxi and seeing it drive off he took particular pains to be sure he was not observed. Then he went through the garden gate and in a few moments he was in the lab, frantically pushing a button which would warn Silk or Quinn that he had bad news for them.

Silk answered the summons and one look at Butch creased Silk's features into lines of worry.

"Carol?" he asked.

Butch nodded. "I don't know what happened, but that hatchet-faced landlady told me Carol had checked out. I was followed from the house, but I gave whoever it was the slip. What do you think we ought to do?"

"I know what I'd like to do," Silk said softly. "Go back and tear the joint down. But we can't—not until the Black Bat gets back. Somehow they must have got wise to her. All we can hope is that they haven't killed her. If she is being held for whatever information they think she has, Carol will be all right for a short time. She knows how to stall. Did you see that fat man, Butch?"

"Jacques? No! Look, Silk, take a tip from me. Jacques is fat and he looks like a bundle of suet, but don't get him wrong. He's plain poison. He knows more dirty tricks than a Jap and he's plenty smart. You know I don't scare easy, but I'm telling you I'd give Jacques a wide berth."

Silk whistled in amazement. "That's the first time I ever heard you admit being afraid of anything, Butch. Jacques must really be something."

"I met him," Butch explained seriously. "I know what I'm talking about. Jacques is a lug who'd rather kill than eat. . . . When will the Black Bat get back? He's got to know about this."

Silk looked at his watch. "It's after midnight. The party Mrs. Hampton attended was slated to break about half an hour ago.

If nothing happened the Black Bat should be here within a few minutes, but we can't depend upon it. Remember he's working alone. McGrath is on the job, too, and he'll have half an eye out for the Hamptons and an eye and a half out for the Black Bat. We've got to be patient, Butch. I'll bring in a pot of coffee."

CHAPTER VI

Phantom Killer



THE Black Bat minus his customary tight-fitting hood, sat behind the wheel of a cheap, dilapidated-looking coupé. It was parked close to the house where Mr. and Mrs. Paul Hampton were attending a party. Instead of the hood, the Black Bat wore a wide-brimmed hat, well turned down to hide the tell-tale scars around his eyes. The Black Bat disliked exposing himself this way, but circumstances demanded it.

A couple of times he noticed Captain McGrath emerge from the house. The police officer had men strategically planted around the section, although the Black Bat was half inclined to believe the crooks would make no attempt to get Mrs. Hampton's diamond rings. McGrath had advertised the party and the rings almost too well. Yet those rings represented an irresistible temptation to clever thieves. The stones were so large they could be cut and still be sizeable.

Finally the party broke up. The Black Bat knew the Hamptons' car and when it rolled off, closely followed by Captain McGrath and several detectives in another sedan, the Black Bat trailed along.

Naturally, he could not actually follow the Hamptons. McGrath's presence made that impossible, so the Black Bat contented himself with driving along an avenue paralleling the one on which the Hamptons drove. At each corner he slowed considerably until he saw Hamptons' car slide by the same cross street. Then the Black Bat speeded up, reached the next corner and repeated the process. The traffic lights on both avenues were coordinated and he had no trouble.

They were well uptown and not more than a dozen blocks from the Hampton home when their car failed to appear at the next intersection. The Black Bat turned up that side street, stepped on it and reached the corner, to park as close as he dared to the avenue. He got out, blended well with the shadows, and took a quick look around the corner.

The Hampton car was nosed in to the curb. Behind it was McGrath's police car

with all doors wide open. Four men were fanning out as if in pursuit of someone, and lying in the road beside the Hampton car was a woman. The Black Bat could see the knife sticking out of her back. It was directly above the heart and there could be little question but that she was dead.

The Black Bat had a good look at Paul Hampton as the man talked to Captain McGrath. Hampton was about forty-five, tall, and athletically built. His hair was turning gray. At the moment he was overcome by grief. His shoulders drooped and his arms hung listlessly.

There was no time to study the scene further, for McGrath's men were approaching the spot from which the Black Bat watched.

and got it open without difficulty.

The Hampton apartment was nicely furnished. Not too expensively, but with excellent taste. He prowled through it, found Mrs. Hampton's bedroom and was somewhat surprised when he saw it was provided with three locks. One was a regulation door lock and the other two were heavy bolts. Besides these, there was also a stout burglar chain.

He came upon a diary which apparently the woman now dead had kept. It was just an ordinary diary and the latest entry consisted of a few words about the party she was to attend. There was premonition in the words she had written wondering if it was foolish for her to wear those gems after all the bur-



CAROL

He sprinted to his car, backed up as fast as possible and quickly headed into an alley. Not a moment too soon, for almost at once a detective hurried past. Radio cars also were converging on the scene.

The Black Bat had to take a chance. He pulled out of the alley, drove to the corner and turned into the avenue. No one attempted to stop him and he was soon safely away. Apparently the police were not searching for anyone in a car. The murderer, or murderers, must have made an escape on foot.

The Black Bat parked close by the service entrance to the apartment house where Paul Hampton lived. He entered the building, donned the black hood, and took the self-service elevator to Hampton's floor. In a moment he was working on the door lock

glaries and hold-ups which had taken place.

Hampton returned about an hour later and as he reached for the light switch, the Black Bat spoke from the darkness.

"Please don't turn on the lights, Mr. Hampton. And don't be afraid. This is the Black Bat."

Hampton's hand dropped from the light switch. He peered through the semi-gloom before kicking the door shut. Enough light filtered into the room so that he had a fair view of the eerie figure in black seated in one of the comfortable chairs in the living room.

"The Black Bat!" Hampton said hoarsely. "What do you want with me?"

"Information," the Black Bat answered. "Mr. Hampton, I want to help you find the man who murdered your wife."

"How did you know that?" Hampton

asked. "It happened only a little while ago."
 "Sit down," the Black Bat said gently. "I was there, Mr. Hampton. Oh, not just when it happened, but only minutes afterward. I'd like the whole story—from your lips. Naturally, I can't go to the police, so I thought I'd come here."

Hampton sat down. "I hope you can help me," he said forlornly. "If anyone can, you're the man. McGrath says it was that band of jewel thieves and I agree with him. My wife and I worked with Captain McGrath to set a little trap. She was willing, and while I worried about it, I was talked into it. The fact that my wife would wear her rings was publicized. We were extremely well guarded at the party. On the way home I thought the thing had fizzled out, unless the crooks made an attempt to get the diamonds after we returned home. But McGrath was going to provide guards for the apartment too."

"Tell me just what happened," the Black Bat urged. "Did you see the man who knifed your wife?"

"No! No, I did not. He must have been in the back of the car although McGrath's men examined it before we drove off. Anyway, I was driving along when something hit me on the back of the neck. It was a terrific blow, delivered by a man of abnormal strength. I passed out, I guess, but as I did I somehow managed to turn the car into the curb, and I did hear my wife start to scream. It must have been cut off when the killer drove a knife into her back.

"Somehow I got the car door open and fell out. My wife didn't die instantly. It was one of those rare cases where a person lives a few seconds after the heart is pierced. She got out too, before she collapsed. It was horrible. The police car was fairly close behind us although it had stopped for a red light. Captain McGrath told me he didn't dare go through it in case the crooks were watching and would guess it was a police car. McGrath and his men did the best they could. But the killer, whoever he was, got away clean. I never saw him."

"Did McGrath or any of his men?"

"He said not. They were almost a block behind us when it happened. There were several places where the killer could have gone. At any rate he disappeared. The diamonds, of course, had been wrenched from my wife's fingers. . . . Black Bat, I'm not going to stop until I see the murderer of my wife behind bars! I'm going to do all in my power to circumvent any further attacks of this kind by those crooks. I'm an engineer by profession. I know how to plan, and I won't rest until that gang has been broken to bits! I know your reputation and I appreciate your offers to help. I'll do anything you suggest."

"Later," the Black Bat said slowly. "I haven't any real clues yet. These men are clever, you see. Incidentally, I looked over

your apartment. Not from curiosity, but to make certain I was alone. I noticed your wife had a dread of crooks. Her bedroom door was secured like a bank vault."

Hampton put a hand to his forehead and slowly massaged it as he spoke.

"She did that recently, after this crime wave started. Betty was deathly afraid of burglars. She must have had some sort of feeling about what was to happen. And I laughed at her! I was the big know-it-all. I—"

Hampton looked up. The chair which the Black Bat had occupied was empty. He turned on lights. The Black Bat had quietly slipped away.

Meanwhile, he had reached his car. He had one more stop to make. It was some distance away and in another apartment house much like that in which Paul Hampton lived.

When the Black Bat arrived there, the corridors were deserted and silent. He stopped in front of a door on which was a brass plate bearing the name of Sam Mason—private detective who seemed to have too much luck in recovering stolen gems which had been insured.

THE Black Bat rang the bell. Mason came to the door and gave a startled exclamation, partly because of the weird figure he faced and partly because of the black automatic pointed at his chest. Mason was short, lithe, and had bright bluish-green eyes. He was fully dressed, even wearing a hat. He backed up a few steps and raised his hands.

"Sorry about the gun," the Black Bat apologized, "but I am a man who is wanted by the police and you're a detective."

Mason managed a weak grin. "I promise not to try and take you, Black Bat. As if I could! You're here about the murder of Mrs. Paul Hampton, aren't you? I heard about it over the radio just a minute or so ago. I also know what you want with me. Somehow you have learned that I helped engineer the trap Captain McGrath wanted to spring. I swear I had no idea it would backfire this way!"

"And why didn't you accompany the party?" The Black Bat closed the door behind him, but his gun remained steady. "As a detective working for insurance companies, you should have tried to help spring your own trap."

Mason looked worried. "I don't expect you or anyone else to believe this, Black Bat. I'm almost inclined to think I was framed. I meant, all along, to help protect the Hamptons. But I received a letter asking me to be at the corner of Woodruff Avenue and State Street at precisely eleven-thirty. There were two one-hundred-dollar bills enclosed and a promise of more if I would take the case that would be offered me. The letter

CHAPTER VII

Murder Over His Shoulder

also stated that if no one showed up, I was to be there again tomorrow night. I thought McGrath could handle things, and a two-hundred-dollar fee isn't to be sneered at. You don't believe me, do you?"

"Let me see that letter," the Black Bat ordered, and when Mason reached for his pocket, the Black Bat's gun rested lightly against the middle button of his vest.

Mason handed over the letter. The Black Bat glanced at the handwriting on the envelope and almost whistled in surprise. It matched the oddly slanted writing on the strange envelope he had received. The one which enclosed nothing but a blank sheet of paper.

The letter itself was just as Mason had described it and was, of course, unsigned. The Black Bat tucked it into his pocket.

"Frankly, Mr. Mason," he said, "I do believe you, but I'll keep the letter. If you get into trouble and need it I shall know about it and see that the letter is returned to you. There is nothing else? No clues, however meager, as to the identity of the gang?"

"If I had some clues, don't you think I'd tell you?" Mason exclaimed. "What profit would there be for me to cover up for a killer?"

Mason's eyes glowed with a desperate light. His thin body twisted with agitation as if it were made of bone and nerves and nothing else.

"You haven't always been exactly friendly with the law," the Black Bat observed. "The police in the past have known you to keep a buttoned lip when you could have talked. I ask you again. Do you have any clues?"

"Not one." Mason shrugged. "Look, I know crooks. It's my living to know them and do business with them. Certainly I circumvent the law sometimes and the cops don't like me especially, but I have to produce stolen gems. If I don't, I have no job. Sure, I know who committed a number of robberies, but I consider my dealings with crooks highly confidential. If I betrayed one of them, I'd never make another contact."

"I understand," the Black Bat said. "Have you ever been contacted about any of the jewels stolen lately—presumably by this gang?"

"No, and somebody in this gang has killed two people so far. He, or others, will kill more. If they contact me, I'll turn them in. The consequences won't matter because I believe this gang to be the most dangerous I've ever known about. Murder breeds more murder and if I associate with them, sooner or later I'll be on the receiving end."

"A wise deduction," the Black Bat said. "Turn around now. Keep your hands up."

When Mason obeyed, the Black Bat made his exit. He was soon driving the coupé back to Tony Quinn's house—and the agony of discovering that Carol was in danger.



BEFORE the Black Bat could remove his outfit, Silk was telling him about Carol. The Bat said nothing for a few moments, but betrayed his nervousness by pacing up and down the lab. Then he yanked off the hood.

"Carol's danger is extremely grave!" he said then. "That jewel thief gang again exhibited their ruthlessness tonight by killing Mrs. Paul Hampton. Yet we must reason things out and have faith. Butch, you and I are going to the Carter boarding house. Silk, you stay here in case Carol finds an opportunity to get in touch with us. And, Silk, did you trail that station wagon?"

Silk took a notebook from his pocket and related the odd route taken by Jacques. The Black Bat noted down the addresses and seemed puzzled.

"Jacques made the rounds of the homes of every man we suspect," he said. "Tom Shirley, the real estate dealer, lives in the private dwelling where Jacques made his first stop. William Jenks, who runs the employment agency, lives at that hotel, and Sam Mason resides in the apartment house where Jacques also stopped. The side street on which he made his last stop doesn't seem to fit in with anyone so far involved. Didn't he get out of the station wagon, blow the horn, blink the lights, Silk? Give some sort of a signal?"

"No, sir—he did nothing but park. I don't understand it, sir."

"Neither do I," the Black Bat said musingly. "Jacques had a purpose, of course. He knew that Mrs. Hampton would wear her diamonds and he was tipping off someone—perhaps the head of the gang, who could then issue orders for the robbery. Jacques and this leader know that Shirley, Jenks and Mason are under suspicion. Jacques drove to each address so they'd share that suspicion."

"Then one of them must be the big shot," Butch broke in. "The other visits were made just to cover up the real one."

"Unless all three visits were blind ones and Jacques somehow transacted his business on that dark side street," the Black Bat said. "We really haven't progressed far enough to be sure of anything. I'd like a look at that station wagon. Maybe I'll get the chance. Ready, Butch?"

Butch drove the coupé to the neighborhood of Mrs. Carter's boarding house. It was totally dark. When Butch parked at a

safe distance from the place, the Black Bat gave him his orders.

"Bang on the door. Ring the bell—make a lot of noise. When Mrs. Carter answers, insist on seeing Carol. Create all the disturbance you can without getting loud enough to bring the police. That will keep her and anyone else who may be on guard so busy I'll be able to effect an entrance through the rear. Make it last about five minutes, then stalk off. Watch out for a tail. Now get started."

The Black Bat in his somber clothing seemed to vanish in the darkness when he was a dozen yards from the car. His eyes penetrated the gloom easily and obstructions which would have tripped a man with normal sight were visible to him, so he could avoid them.

As he reached the back of the house he heard Butch demanding to see Carol, pretending to believe she wouldn't see him because of a spat they'd had. Mrs. Carter's voice was low and venomous as she tried to shoo Butch away.

The cellar door offered excellent possibilities for the Black Bat, since it was equipped with a cheap lock. Hurriedly he opened the lock, stepped into a musty cellar and looked around with his uncanny eyes that swept away the blackness. The cellar was littered with old furniture, empty barrels and packing cases. He had started across the floor when he came to an abrupt stop, hearing a metallic squeak from the opposite side of the cellar.

Gun ready, the Black Bat moved forward silently. This might be the headquarters of the gang—some hidden room off the cellar. But his hopes of finding Carol there were quickly blasted. The noise came from an old bed against the further wall. On it lay a man securely trussed up and gagged. From descriptions furnished by Carol, the Black Bat knew the man was Compton Carter, the landlady's son.

IF THAT gag hadn't been in place, Carter would have screamed in terror, for it shone starkly clear in his eyes. This was a stroke of good luck for the Black Bat. Compton Carter had been made a prisoner for some reason and he would be sure to talk. He was an active member of the gang—a killer, in fact. Weak too, judging by the cut of his chin and the fear in his eyes. Faced with the prospects of the electric chair he probably would talk.

The Black Bat changed his mind about searching the house now. Chances of Carol being there were slim anyway, for there were too many boarders in the place. Compton offered the best possibilities. The Black Bat bent over the man.

"They're going to kill you," he said softly. "You know too much. Your life isn't worth a dime, but I'll help you. I'm going to take

you out of here. I don't trust you enough to remove the gag or the ropes now. I will later. Don't try to struggle."

The Black Bat hoisted young Carter and draped him over one shoulder. Then he quietly made his way back to the cellar entrance. Above, he heard the front door slam and Mrs. Carter's footsteps clicked across the floor. Butch must have departed.

The Black Bat opened the cellar door and peered out into the darkness. He saw or heard nothing. Silently he climbed the steps to the back yard and started running lightly toward the small garage. His burden gave a convulsive series of kicks.

"Cut it out," the Black Bat warned, "or I'll tap you on the chin."

The movement stopped. The Black Bat cut through two yards and saw the coupé in the distance. He also saw a uniformed patrolman ambling slowly along. The Black Bat crouched quickly, hoping the darkness was intense enough to shield him. He slipped his prisoner off his shoulder and laid him on the ground.

Then the Black Bat gasped. His prisoner was dead! There was a large haft of a knife protruding from his back. Those convulsive struggles had been caused when the knife had been driven home.

The Black Bat stood up and peered toward the Carter House. Someone had been hiding behind the back porch or around the corner of the house, where he could see what was going on and still not be seen even by a man with the Black Bat's strange vision.

Of course the knife had been thrown—and by an expert. If anyone had tried to slip up close enough to deliver this fatal thrust, the Black Bat would have heard him.

The Black Bat studied the handle of the knife. There might be fingerprints. With gloved hands he worked the blade out of the wound.

He had forgotten the patrolman until suddenly a flashlight cut the darkness and centered on him, half-crouched, with the knife in his hand. Turning swiftly, the Black Bat raced away. A gun cracked twice, but he evaded the ray of the flash and darkness protected him.

The cop was running in his direction. The Black Bat dropped flat in a little gully. He could see the patrolman who was not using his flash now, probably afraid it would only make a target of himself. He passed close by where the Black Bat was hiding. As soon as the officer was some distance from the gully, the Black Bat arose and sprinted for the coupé.

Butch had the motor turning over and as the Black Bat climbed aboard, the car started moving. The Black Bat quickly exchanged his hood for the large black hat.

"Step on it, Butch," he said. "I found young Carter in the cellar, alive, but tied up and a prisoner. I carried him out, but on



SILK

the way to the coupé someone threw a knife. Young Carter is dead, but what's worse, that cop saw me as I extracted the knife from Carter's body. He must have believed I'd just killed him. He recognized me, without doubt. McGrath will go into a frenzy now. He'll probably get to the house as fast as he can, to speed things up."

When they reached Tony Quinn's home, Butch did not head down the street in front of it. He took the street behind the house. The Black Bat got out, climbed a wall, and ran for the garden house. He was stripping off his regalia as he raced along the tunnel.

The lab was empty. He quickly donned the familiar trousers and gray tweed coat of blind Tony Quinn. Seizing his cane, he approached the secret door, his eyes dead and staring. He opened the door a crack and heard voices at the front door. Silk and Captain McGrath! The detective had lost no time after the patrolman had phoned in the news of Carter's death.

QUINN hastily seated himself in his accustomed chair in front of the fireplace.

"Silk!" he called. "I'm not asleep. I came downstairs half an hour ago."

Silk made a move to usher McGrath into the room, but the detective barged past him.

"Sorry, sir," Silk murmured to Quinn. "Captain McGrath seems to be exceptionally excited tonight. I thought you had retired and I refused to awaken you."

"It's all right, Silk. Now, Captain—what are you excited about?"

McGrath eyed Quinn closely, then shrugged disgustedly. Quinn certainly looked like a placid blind man.

"You know I think you're the Black Bat and that you can see," McGrath said. "I've always thought so and no number of eye doctors can convince me otherwise. Perhaps I'm a fool. I think not. The Black Bat, Quinn, has helped the police many times. Unquestionably, we should be grateful to him. Some are, but in my opinion, the Black Bat is just as much of a law-breaker as any of the criminals he tracks down."

"Which you have remarked time and again," Quinn said wearily. "I'm tired, Captain. Come to the point and stop making ridiculous accusations."

"They may not be so ridiculous. As I was saying, the Black Bat has killed men, but it was always in self-defense. So much I concede, but tonight you—that is, the Black Bat—was seen stabbing a man to death! A cold-blooded, deliberate murder. Why he did it, I don't know, but an honest patrolman saw the crime committed."

"The Black Bat has never killed indiscriminately," Quinn said slowly. "However, what he does is no concern of mine. Shall I repeat that I am not—"

"No! I've heard it too often." McGrath's voice had an edge in it. "I've always said I'd bring the Black Bat in some day. I will! But now that I know he's a murderer I'll shoot to kill when I see him. I shall issue instructions to every police officer to shoot on sight. When I take the hood off the Black Bat, he

will be dead. I just wanted to warn you."

"Why me?" Quinn retorted irritably. "Look here, Captain, you may hunt down the Black Bat all you wish, but there happens to be something else which requires detective work too. The murdering gang of jewel thieves. Tomorrow I want you to come to my office and bring Tom Shirley, William Jenks and Sam Mason with you, Nine-thirty. Is that understood?"

McGrath relaxed somewhat. "Yes. But that warning still goes. I think—"

"Good night, Captain," Quinn said flatly.

McGrath glared, then stalked out. After he had driven away, Silk returned to Quinn and found him worried.

"Up to now," Quinn said, "McGrath has been an interesting nuisance. But he's turned dangerous—with reason too. And Carol is still missing. We're progressing backward, Silk."

CHAPTER VIII

Contact Man



QUINN was up early the next morning, at work in the lab. He compared the handwriting on the envelope which had contained a blank sheet of paper with the writing on the letter which Sam Mason had received. They were identical, as he had known they would be.

His envelope could mean several things.

Someone had written something of importance and the letter had been replaced with the blank sheet of paper. Or the letter had contained valuables, extracted by a crook. Or it might be the work of a crank. District Attorneys sometimes received such things.

Now, however, the letter was tied up with Mason's and both somehow were mysteriously connected with the jewel thieves.

Silk entered the lab, much excited. He extended a letter to Quinn.

"It just came in the first mail, sir. That's Carol's writing! Maybe it's a tip where she is."

Quinn hastily slit the seal and extracted the note and sketch. He studied both before looking up at Silk.

"Carol wrote this before she was taken prisoner," he said then. "She had an idea something might happen to her. Carol saw Jacques' station wagon. It's a peculiar vehicle. You can't see into the back of it and there are two horn buttons. This doesn't help us find Carol, but through her work, we may have a clue. How about the morning papers? If she is being held for the ransom of my exit from the case there might be an ad. Certainly they couldn't communicate

with the Black Bat in any other way."

Silk hurried to get the papers. Two of them did carry personals which read:

B. B. Contact Mason at once. Patient growing weaker. Don't fail.

Quinn frowned. "So Sam Mason is in on it. We're going to the office now. Mason will be there with Captain McGrath and those other two men at nine. Wait for about an hour after he leaves, then phone him. Say you are the Black Bat and get the facts. Frankly, Silk, I'm more worried than I've been in years. That ad may even be the work of Captain McGrath. In his present state of mind, he's capable of it and we can't afford to take any chances. We've got to remember that Carol's predicament is serious. Silk, if they've killed her, so help me, Captain McGrath is going to find out that the Black Bat is a killer! Now get the car out."

Captain McGrath and the men involved in the case were waiting when Quinn arrived at his office. Paul Hampton also was there, and after Quinn had been told who he was, Hampton explained why he had come.

"I'm working with Sam Mason," he told Quinn. "It was my wife who was murdered last night. I want to help find the men who killed her. Naturally, I can't join the police, but I can work with a private detective—and I'm working on a scheme to outwit those crooks. You'll know all about it when I have it detailed."

"Very good," Quinn said. "However, if you do wish to inform me of such a scheme, please arrange to do it privately. You see, Mr. Hampton, I have half an idea that the man who directed the murder of your wife is here now."

There were gasps of astonishment and Tom Shirley, the real estate man, grew ruddier than normal. He had a shock of hair that stood up straight, like the quills of a bristling porcupine. At the moment he was decidedly the porcupine type.

Sam Mason's expression didn't change at all. William Jenks, the employment agency man, laughed a trifle too loudly.

Quinn's apparently blind eyes sized up these men closely.

"Yes, gentlemen," he went on. "I make no personal accusation, mind you. Yet Mason, for instance, is in a position to run a gang of jewel thieves and be smart about it, with his vast experience. Mr. Shirley, you own several places which are operated as rooming houses. Actually they are run for one reason. The boarders are servants of people owning precious gems—wealthy people. The servants know when the gems will be worn, where they are hidden, and when they arrive and leave the house. You own these places—all of them that we have so far discovered."

"But I own fifty places that are leased as boarding houses," Shirley protested. "This is

preposterous!"

"No, it isn't," Quinn told him quickly. "Coincidence cannot be so strong as to make you the sole owner of the three or four places of which we know. I will concede this, though—those places may have been leased from you and run by the crooks to throw suspicion upon you and confuse the issue."

"Where do I come in?" William Jenks was still chuckling. "Wait—I can guess. The servants who talk too much all come from my agency."

"Quite right," Quinn nodded. "Servants employed by nine victims of this gang came from your agency. Now here again, a deliberate attempt to throw suspicion on you may have been made. Incidentally, how is your business doing right now?"

JENKS lost his grin, and scowled instead. "None of your business, Mr. Quinn. You sound as if I were on trial. I refuse to be intimidated."

"It's nothing like that," Quinn said. "But you are suspected. Tell me—just why do you keep running your employment agency when help is so hard to get? You pay big rent for your offices, too big for the fees you take in. Is it a charity organization?"

"Well, I—" Jenks lost his bluster. "Oh, what's the use trying to kid a man like you? You have the whole Police Department to run down things like this. Banks will open their books to you. All right—I do lose money. I haven't made a dime since the war began. But before that, I had worked up an excellent business and I want to hold it intact. I've been putting plenty of money into it. I'll put more."

"That's all I wanted to know," Quinn said. "And I believe you, Mr. Jenks . . . Mr. Shirley, you are not like Jenks. You are making so much money some people think of you as a profiteer. What about that?"

Shirley glowered and spoke angrily. "I work for what I get. I'm not a thief. I saw a shortage of real estate coming so I invested heavily. It's paying dividends, but that doesn't make me out a jewel thief or a killer."

"It certainly does not," Quinn agreed. "However, gentlemen, you now realize why all of you have had a certain measure of suspicion directed your way. I've had you investigated. I even know what you were doing last night when Mrs. Hampton was murdered. Jenks, you and Shirley have air-tight alibis for that time."

The two men glanced at one another and seemed greatly relieved until Quinn spoke again.

"Which doesn't mean much. The man who heads this gang of thieves and killers would be certain to have an air-tight alibi. He doesn't perform the robberies himself. He merely directs some capable crooks and takes most of the profits. Now consider Sam

Mason. He has no alibi at all. Captain McGrath told me what happened to you last night, Mason. Interesting."

Mason shrugged. "It fixes me all right, but you need more evidence than that, Quinn. I'm warning you—I know my rights and I've got backing. The insurance companies believe in me and they'll battle for me. I rate aces with them. Mr. Hampton can tell you that. Why, I've already taken him to several companies, told the officials I thought his plan to catch the crooks was good, and they accepted my word for it."

"What plan?" Quinn asked.

Mason grinned. "We're not talking yet, eh, Hampton? The fewer people who know about it, the better. But I'm saying this much—those crooks won't lay their hands on the cheapest bauble that will be flashing around the party for the Duchess—"

"Shut up, Mason!" Hampton broke in. "We agreed secrecy was our best bet. Don't ruin everything."

"I'm sorry," Mason said. "I was a little het up, I guess. Quinn had me rattled—making me out the leader of those rotten jewel thieves and killers."

"That's all, gentlemen," Quinn said. "I want you to know where you stand. And let me repeat, the real crook may be throwing suspicion on you because he knows you are open to it, and that the more people who are suspected, the more confusing the issue becomes. Silk, please show these gentlemen out. And thanks to all of you for coming to see me."

Captain McGrath didn't go with them. Instead, he hunched his chair closer to Quinn's desk.

"What was the idea of that?" he demanded. "If one of them is the man we're after, he'll be doubly careful now."

"I agree, Captain. He'll be so careful he may give himself away. Because, you see, this business has been petty so far—"

"Petty?" McGrath roared. "Listen! Those rings stolen from Mrs. Hampton last night were worth seventy thousand dollars. Do you call that petty?"

"Peanuts," Quinn declared placidly, "compared to what those crooks are really after. Captain, you don't look far enough into the future. Tomorrow night there is to be a grand party in honor of two foreign dignitaries. Everyone who can wangle an invitation will be there, all dressed up in their finery. That includes gems—real ones, not the paste imitations they wear to theaters and the opera most of the time. There should be a million dollars worth of gems at the affair. Tantalizing for a crook like the man who is now operating."

MCGRATH blinked. "Good night! I never thought of that. That's what Mason had started to tell us about when Hampton interrupted him. Well, I'll arrange a guard

that will stay close enough to the party to tell us how many times each diamond shimmers. And to do that I'd better be on my way right now."

"And will you forget about the Black Bat until this is over with, Captain," Quinn said. "Trying to handle two things at once makes a man serve each poorly."

"Yeah," McGrath's cold cigar bobbed up and down, his eyebrows arched, and his eyes grew dark. "Yeah—I'll handle only one thing. But if it comes to a choice, I'll take the Black Bat. The murderer who wears a black hood and pretends he's such a little helper to the Police Department. By the way, are you planning to attend that party?"

"I will probably be there," Quinn said. "I have an invitation."

"Then I'll be there too, and my invitation was extended to me a long time ago—on a badge."

McGrath slammed the door after him.

"He may be a difficult problem," Silk said, and sighed deeply.

"He already is," Quinn groaned. "I used to like having him prowling around. It lent spice to our little game, but now he's gunning for us, Silk. I'll have to think of something. You phone Mason shortly in answer to the ads."

Silk went out. He returned about an hour later, showing none of the excitement he felt. He waited patiently until Quinn had disposed of routine matters, then closed and locked the door of the private office.

"Mason received a letter and some money this morning," he said. "The money was a retainer. The letter informed him that he was the go-between with you and Carol on the ends. Those killers know Carol works for the Black Bat. Or strongly suspects it. Mason was sent a sealed envelope to deliver to the Black Bat. He suggested a certain spot in Central Park, but I overruled him. I told him to get into his car at eight tonight and start driving at random. That the Black Bat would stop him somewhere. That's the safest way."

"And the best." Quinn leaned back in his chair and cocked both feet on the edge of the desk. "Butch will have to do it, in the Black Bat's hood. Mason may have told McGrath about this and if so, Mac will be right on our necks. Find Butch and give him his instructions."

"Yes, sir."

Silk arose and headed for the door. Quinn stopped him with a word.

"Silk, another thing. I want you to practice imitating my voice. Get the inflections and the tone. Try it out on Butch. Perhaps this is all nonsense, but if I do need my voice in a place where I can't be, then you'll become most useful."

"Yes, sir," Silk answered vaguely. "I'll do my best, sir."

His tones bore a fair resemblance to Quinn's.

CHAPTER IX

Crimson Magic



SOON after dark that night the forces of the Black Bat were at work. Butch had gone off to meet Sam Mason—but only after Tony Quinn had made certain that neither Mason nor McGrath were setting a trap.

Silk and the Black Bat were on their way to Mrs. Carter's boarding house. As usual, the Black Bat

wore his wide-brimmed hat, and he had taken great pains to make sure before they left that McGrath had not been hanging around the house.

"We're going to give our killer some rope," the Black Bat explained. "Enough to hang him if he accepts it. Tonight, Silk, you and I are planning a crime. I found out today, that certain social affairs will be attended by certain women who will wear jewels. If our plans work one of those women will be held up or her home robbed."

"I don't get it," Silk admitted. "But suppose you do set this trap, and the woman who is to be robbed is killed?"

"She won't be. First of all, I shall try to make certain it won't be a stick-up, but rather a breaking and entering job while the woman and her family are asleep. No burglar is going to go out of his way to commit murder. It's safe enough. . . . You'd better bounce across the sidewalk half-way down the next block and drive the car into that empty lot. Behind the tree, where it won't be seen."

Silk obeyed, and in a moment the car was well concealed from the street. The Black Bat got out.

"Come along, Silk. You and I are going to tackle the fat man. Jacques!"

"Jacques?" Silk gulped. "He's dangerous. Even Butch is afraid of him."

"But we're not. I want to test a couple of things and he is necessary to my plans. In fact, Silk, I intend to hand Mr. Jacques a knife and encourage him to kill me."

"You—what?" Silk gasped.

"You'll see. But from under cover, Silk. He must not lay eyes on you. Take along that coil of wire, the gag and the blindfold. We're going to need them—I hope."

The Black Bat and Silk made their way to Jacques' residence near Mrs. Carter's house. Silk hid behind the garage while the Black Bat glided to the back door, invisible in the gloom. He gained admission to the house without much trouble and after passing

through the kitchen, he stopped in the middle of the dining room to listen.

He had a faint hope that Carol might be here, and if so he could do two things at once. But no sound reached him to bolster such hopes.

He examined the first floor and found nothing, then crept up the staircase as noiselessly as a ghost. He saw the same closed door which Carol had spotted and approached it warily.

Now his sensitive ears picked up a faint hissing, like that made by a Bunsen burner in his laboratory. He rested a black gloved hand on the doorknob, drew a gun, and began slowly to twist the knob.

its holster. Jacques lowered his half-raised hands and his pudgy form seemed to stiffen. The Black Bat sat down and crossed his legs like a man wholly at ease because his enemy looked too flabby to be dangerous.

"You are going to take me to where that young lady is being held," the Black Bat said. "Oddly enough, she doesn't work for me, but you'll hardly believe that."

Jacques curled his flat lips. "Then why are you so interested in her?"

"Because she probably knows something that would interest me. Like the identity of the man you work for. Anyway you probably intend to kill her and I can't permit that."



BUTCH

There was no sound at all as he swung the door open. Jacques was bent over his work-bench, intent upon his task. The hissing came from a small blast furnace which was in operation.

"Would those be Mrs. Hampton's diamonds?" the Black Bat asked casually.

Jacques didn't whirl around to face this unexpected danger. He laid down a pair of forceps, removed a jeweler's loupe from his right eye and replaced his glasses before he arose. Then he turned slowly. Fat jowls were placid, eyes were obscured behind the thick glasses.

"Ah—so," he said smugly. "The Black Bat! You have received a certain message already, but you refuse to abide by our conditions. It will not be healthy for the young lady."

The Black Bat stuffed his gun back into

JACQUES shrugged and nonchallantly picked up a small bar of metal. He seemed to be examining it minutely, and spoke without looking up.

"Black Bat," he said slowly, "you are outside the law. I have never believed that you don't profit from your work. You could profit tremendously if you worked with me. Take this little bar. It is pure gold and yet it represents a small fraction of the profits. There are diamonds and rubies, sapphires and pearls. I am a jewel expert. I know how to alter the appearance of stones so they can be resold without much depreciation of value. Together we might—"

Suddenly he flung the small, heavy bar of metal. And if his intended victim hadn't been sure he was about to become a target, the gold bar could have injured him seri-

ously. As it was, the bar whizzed harmlessly through the air because the Black Bat had flung himself sideways out of the chair to the floor.

With a bellow of rage, Jacques charged. The Black Bat's legs came up. As Jacques bent to seize the intruder's throat, the Black Bat kicked him neatly under the chin. Jacques went reeling back, squealing with pain. But he came on again—in a wild charge. Jacques knew how to fight, and he possessed tremendous energy. He lacked only one thing—restraint. He forgot to keep a cool head, and the Black Bat didn't.

Jacques ducked under the Black Bat's swing and seized a wrist with both hands. He arched himself to throw the Black Bat against the wall with a judo twist. Instead, the side of the Black Bat's hand came down against Jacques' neck—a crippling blow against nerve centers that sent Jacques to his knees.

The Black Bat stepped back and waited. He wanted Jacques to absorb more punishment than this. The fat man shook his head, growled in rage, and started weaving as he approached the Black Bat again. He was like an animal coming in for the final attempt to disable his foe. If he failed, everything would be ended, so Jacques was cautious. His fat jowls were quivering and his mighty shoulders were tensed.

Then the Black Bat confused Jacques by doing the unexpected. He started a charge, so swiftly that Jacques had no opportunity to straighten up for defense. All he could do was try and wrap massive arms around this black-clad fighter. But it was too late for that. The Black Bat's fists lashed out, battering Jacques' face and head until he staggered backward. Another well-aimed punch, and he sat down hard.

The Black Bat bent over him, and in his gloved hand was a heavy, long-bladed knife. "All right, Jacques," he said sternly, "talk! Where is that girl? Talk—or this knife will make you."

Jacques massaged his jaw before he answered defiantly.

"You wouldn't use a knife. Not the Black Bat! I know you are too civilized to resort to torture. I am not afraid of you!"

The Black Bat straightened up and carelessly placed the knife on Jacques' workbench. He picked up his chair and sat down again. Jacques arose warily, as if expecting the Black Bat to charge him again. When he didn't Jacques quietly placed himself between the Black Bat and the knife, so tantalizingly near on the workbench.

"All right," the Black Bat said. "I can make you talk. I am not a torturer—but I can have you thrown into a cell on charges of being an accessory to murder. I know you are the right-hand man of someone who directs these crimes. You establish places where servants of wealthy people congregate

and talk. You listen and determine certain facts. These you transmit to the head of the outfit and he passes on the news to professional thieves. The loot is turned over to you and altered into salable products in this room. Are you satisfied now that I could have you jailed?"

"First," Jacques said, "you have to close the cell door on me. Words do not place a man in prison. The fact is, you will never talk about this!"

Covertly—Jacques thought—his right hand slipped around and seized the knife. Holding it high, he charged at the Black Bat. But the Black Bat was prepared. Leaping to his feet he raised the chair and parried the knife thrust with it. All in one smooth motion. Before Jacques could get the knife into position for another thrust, the Black Bat dropped the chair, closed in and delivered two hard blows to the chin. Jacques didn't sit down this time. He fell down and lay quiet.

THE Black Bat went to the window, raised it, and whistled softly. Silk came out of the shadows and in a few minutes he was busy tying and gagging Jacques. He removed the knife from the fat man's limp hand.

"It must have been rather dangerous for you, sir." He looked up at the Black Bat.

"No. I wanted to see whether or not Jacques would throw the knife. He did not, which is proof he doesn't know how. It eliminates him as the murderer of Compton Carter, something I had to find out. Compton was probably killed by Jacques' superior. Tie him firmly and make sure he can't work the gag loose. Then stow him in that supply closet and leave him there. He's going to be stiff by tomorrow night, but the wages of crime do not include comfort."

The Black Bat and Silk made their way to the garage, after Jacques had been disposed of. The Black Bat got into the station wagon.

"I thought this is what we'd find," he said, as he finished his swift examination of it. "Jacques couldn't openly approach the leader of the gang. Therefore he had to get word to him about prospective jobs through this means. Crimson magic! In the back of the truck is equipment generating infra-red light. There is a steady beam which can be interrupted by pressing this second horn button. To send signals, the beam is broken in that manner. The beam is invisible except to a photo-electric cell through a lens fitted with the proper filter.

"Somewhere along the route over which you followed Jacques, this other receiver was ready to take the signal. We're going over that route tonight. When we reach the first stop, you are to do exactly as Jacques did. I'll be crouched down out of sight, but I'll send the signals. This means is so unique

that they'll hardly have a code established. Just good old Morse."

For the next hour and a half Silk drove to the various spots, stopped, and the Black Bat compressed the second horn button to interrupt the beam of invisible light and send a message. They operated in front of the residence of Tom Shirley, William Jenks, Sam Mason, and finally on that quiet side street where there were always several cars parked.

This completed, Silk drove the station wagon back to Jacques' garage. While Silk entered the house to check on Jacques, the Black Bat slipped over to Mrs. Carter's house.

The angular woman was hustling about the lighted kitchen. The back door was not locked so the Black Bat stepped into the kitchen. Mrs. Carter whirled to face him. She shrank back, then spoke in a low, venomous tone.

"The Black Bat. You murdered my son! Killed him without giving him a chance! I hope you die the same way!"

"I did not kill your son," the Black Bat interrupted. "I found him in the cellar here, tied up and gagged. I carried him out. Outside someone threw a knife. Perhaps at me, perhaps with the idea of killing him. He died—rather justly because your son killed a man with a knife too. I want to know why he was a prisoner in his mother's house."

"I didn't know he was there," she said slowly. "And you're lying. You did kill him! Why should any of the others? He was helping them."

"Perhaps, Mrs. Carter. However, your son was not a man of strong character. A murderer never is. He might have worried about his crime, seen the face of his victim too much. Perhaps he weakened, and they thought he might talk. That's why he was made a prisoner. I'm sure of only one thing—that I did not kill him. He was murdered by someone else. Not by Jacques, because that fat man isn't a knife thrower. Perhaps it was the man who controls Jacques. You know him, of course."

"I know nothing," she answered tartly. "I only run a respectable boarding house."

The Black Bat nodded. "When I finally prove who killed your son you will talk, because you loved him no matter what he turned out to be. I wanted to tell you this—to let you think it over. I don't believe you know the identity of the man who operates this criminal organization. He is much too careful to permit that."

The Black Bat was backing toward the door when his eye fell upon an open cook book. Some notes were written on the margin of the exposed pages and the handwriting was identical with that on the mysterious envelope he had received, and the same hand had written the anonymous note to Sam Mason. The Black Bat tore out one page of the cook book.

"A tempting dish," he said. "I'll take this along. Are those your notes, Mrs. Carter?"

"Of course they are. I hope you poison yourself on that recipe! I hope—"

But she was talking to herself. The Black Bat had stepped through the door and disappeared.

CHAPTER X

Clues in Color



THE laboratory, the Black Bat and Silk found Butch waiting restlessly.

"I trailed Mason to a quiet spot, then I put on one of your hoods," he told the Black Bat. "I stopped him and he gave me this envelope. There's something heavy in it."

The Black Bat opened the envelope, removed a letter and a metal vanity case.

"Carol's," he said. "Included as proof they have her a prisoner. The letter instructs me to drop out of this case and stay out. It says that the first time I show up, Carol will die. The letter was written by Carol, but it contains no hints as to where she is being held. The crooks would see to that. She adds that it is at her own suggestion that the vanity case is included and that on the surface of the cake of powder she was impressed the print of her thumb, as definite proof."

The Black Bat opened the vanity case. If he had any hopes that it might contain a clue, they quickly faded. There was nothing in the case but the solid cake of powder.

"Odd," he said slowly. "Carol would have sent us a message if she possibly could and she is ingenious about things like this. Yet there seems to be nothing. Certainly her thumbprint can't tell us where she is, though she did rather emphasize it. We'll have a look."

The Black Bat carefully dusted the top of the powder cake with a chemical which would bring out any prints. None appeared. He rubbed his chin and frowned. Carol's message meant something. She wanted him to look for that print, yet there was none.

"Perhaps it's on the back of the cake," he muttered.

With a pair of forceps, he carefully lifted the cake from the vanity case. The back of the cake was smeared with a substance that looked much like bloody soot.

"Now what does she mean by this?" he demanded.

"Looks to me like the whole business was dropped on a dirty floor," Silk offered hopefully.

"No," the Black Bat said. "This stuff was

deliberately smeared onto the cake. Boys, I'm going to be busy for a time. Silk, you'd better go into the house and stand guard. Butch, catch a few winks if you like. I may be two or three hours at this job."

Then the Black Bat went to work. In this lab he had everything needed for the most careful analysis. He scraped the dark sooty substance from the back of the cake and dissolved some of it in a solution. He proceeded then to put it through a qualitative analysis.

Much sooner than he had expected, the Black Bat was finished. He called Silk and Butch to the laboratory.

"Carol did smear that soot on the under side of the powder cake," he explained. "We would never have looked for it, had she not made certain we would by telling us of a non-existent thumb-print. She realized that I'd be puzzled and put the black substance through an analysis. Well, I did. The soot is from some chimney, I believe. It contains more strange elements than I've encountered for a long time. There is strontium in it and copper and iron. Cobalt and chromium and several other metals.

"At first, I couldn't make much sense out of it, then I recalled that each one of these metals is used to create a different color in rockets and other fireworks. So where many of them are found in one sample of residue that indicates some kind of a plant where either fireworks or signaling munitions are made.

"Silk, start calling up manufacturers of fireworks. See if anyone connected with that business knows of an abandoned fireworks plant either in town or not far away."

"Can't I do anything?" Butch asked.

"Take a couple of submachine-guns out of the arsenal, check them and bring extra ammunition," the Black Bat told him. "If we do find an abandoned fireworks factory, Carol will be there. I think she somehow contrived to gather a sample of soot from a testing chimney, where fireworks are shot off experimentally."

"Oh, boy!" Butch rubbed his hands. "You and Silk take the tommies. Let me whack the lugs who are holding her with my bare hands. I promise my mitts will do as much damage as the bullets."

Silk came back from the telephone.

"There is such a factory," he said. "Just one. The firm had to expand when they went out of the fireworks business and into munitions. They couldn't enlarge their quarters so they moved the whole thing. The three-story building they abandoned is on the outskirts of town. Near the river. I've got the address."

"Get out one of the big cars," the Black Bat ordered. "Switch marker plates. We're going after Carol now!"

It was more than an hour later when three men cautiously approached the old fireworks

factory. There were no buildings close to it. Safety regulations provided for that. It gave every indication of being deserted. Windows and doors were boarded up and it looked like some vast tomb.

ALONE, the Black Bat went forward through the night and examined the building. He found a small door which was not sealed, but he was afraid to try and gain entrance by it. Even a skeleton key or the tools he carried with which to open locks made some slight noise, and if Carol was in here her guards might hear it. This was a ticklish business, because those guards would have orders to dispose of Carol the instant anything happened.

The Black Bat found a hatch leading into a storage cellar, beside the rear loading platform. He tackled the padlock, and in a few moments had it open. He had his gun in his hand as he slipped through. Butch and Silk, armed with tommy-guns would come quickly if he signaled, but at the moment stealth was the important thing.

The cellar led under the building and to an elevator shaft. Down this shaft came voices. Those of at least three men—and Carol's. The Black Bat's heart pounded like a hammer. She was alive! And unhurt, judging by the conversation.

But to rescue her would be difficult. The elevator ropes could be climbed noiselessly and easily. An attack could be made upon her guards, but there were problems. The conversation above indicated them definitely.

Carol was talking.

"But even if you three men don't kill me—if this boss of yours does—you'll still be accessories and get the chair. All for nothing too. I'm a plain housemaid. I don't know a thing about the Black Bat except that I wish he was right here now."

"Wouldn't do you any good," one of the men said. "And how many times do we have to explain? We been tellin' you for the last four hours that if the Black Bat puts his oar in, the boss is comin' here to send a bullet through your head. We told you how he telephones every thirty minutes. If we don't answer, he'll know somethin' is wrong and make his getaway."

"Let him," Carol said. "When he phones again, don't answer. He'll run for it. You can let me go and I'll never say a word."

"Look," the same man sighed patiently. "The boss has his hands on all the stuff we've been swipin' for him. We haven't got our cut yet and we don't work for the love of it. We want what's comin' to us. Now shut up, will you? Or talk about somethin' else."

Quietly the Black Bat withdrew and returned to Silk and Butch. He talked to them in whispers.

"Carol is in there and safe—so far. She's

Set-up for Crime

guarded by three men who won't kill her. They are part of this gang of professional thieves and burglars, but they are not murderers. What makes things bad is that the leader telephones every thirty minutes. If there is no answer, he'll run for it. Or else come here to murder Carol. We could trap him, possibly, but the evidence against him wouldn't be strong. We couldn't testify against him and I've got to prove that he, and not I, stabbed Compton Carter."

"So what do we do?" Butch asked.

"It's your party, Butch. I'll help you slip into the place and show you where Carol is being held. Hide in the building. If things go wrong, free her. If things remain serene, just don't do anything until midnight tomorrow."

Butch blinked. "I'm going to be awful hungry by that time, but okay. I'll take the tommy-gun in case things get too hot. At midnight I grab the bozos."

Shortly afterwards the Black Bat emerged from the building alone and relocked the hatch.

Then he joined Silk.

They made one stop at an outlying drug-store where Silk telephoned Captain McGrath, told him he was the Black Bat and ordered him to arrest Mrs. Carter and hold her. He hung up before McGrath could deliver a blistering condemnation of the man whom he believed to be a cold-blooded, sinister killer.



NEXT day was a busy one. Silk Kirby made a swift visit to Jacques' house and determined the prisoner was safe, with gag and blindfold intact. He checked on the fireworks factory by driving near it. All seemed serene, and it would not have been if Butch had been spotted or gone into action. There would have

been visible scars about.

McGrath came to Quinn's office with the news that he had arrested Mrs. Carter at the behest of the Black Bat, but that she claimed it was all a mistake and she knew nothing.

"Hold her," Quinn ordered. "We know those boarding houses are part and parcel of this scheme. Perhaps the Black Bat will get in touch with you and tell you how to make Mrs. Carter talk. We can hold her for twenty-four hours . . . What about those suspects?"

"All under observation," McGrath answered. "Personally, I think you're wrong, but I do admit there is enough evidence

[Turn page]

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to make them suspicious. Also, I might add the Black Bat hasn't been so active since I warned you I'd shoot him on sight."

"Perhaps he heard you," Quinn grinned. "The man seems to be everywhere, according to your version of his activities . . . Now about the party tonight. You have taken steps to see that it is well protected?"

"Like Fort Knox. Mason called this morning and insisted that the scheme he's worked out with the insurance companies is a honey, but he wouldn't tell me what it is. Says I'll find out tonight."

"Let's make certain Mason's scheme isn't too deep, Captain—so good that it works in reverse," Quinn said. "A haul at that party would net more than a million dollars in gems. Those crooks will take any risks for a chance at loot like that. I'll see you there—early—so you can look around and tell me what you see."

As McGrath departed to make all arrangements, Quinn was satisfied that things were working out smoothly. The leader of the crooks would not try to contact Jacques. He always left the contacting up to the fat man and, so far as the leader knew, Jacques was on the job and had furnished him with a profitable tip last night.

Quinn studied the newspaper accounts of the latest robbery. A Mrs. Warlock's home had been skillfully entered and a string of valuable pearls stolen. It was obviously the work of the same gang which worked with such smooth efficiency.

Quinn had expected that holdup. He was gratified about it.

"Because," as he told Silk, "I now know who is behind this. Without realizing it, the leader gave himself away last night. Now let's go home and get dressed. I look forward to an exciting evening. . . ."

The affair in honor of the foreign dignitaries was lavish. Given in the home and on the grounds of a large estate, more than two hundred guests, among them the wealthiest and most important people in the country could be easily accommodated.

Silk drove up in Tony Quinn's big car, parked, and got out. He opened the door and helped blind Tony Quinn, in evening dress, to alight.

Quinn was warmly greeted on all sides as he entered on Silk's arm. Captain McGrath was there. He took Quinn aside.

"Something happened all right, sir," he said. "I prophesy that we'll have no trouble at this shindig because the ringleader of those crooks is locked up. What do you think of that?"

Quinn looked amazed. "If that's true, Captain, you deserve a promotion and a medal. Tell me about it."

"Well, ever since you listed Mason, Shirley and Jenks as suspects, I've had them watched. Early this evening, Shirley barged out of his place with two bags and made a bee-line for

the airport. My boys picked him up. He told me his sister was dying in Seattle, and that he had to reach her quickly. He showed me a telegram containing the news. I called the telegraph office and they had no record of such a wire. Then I phoned his sister and she told me she had sent no wire and that she was feeling fine. Shirley insisted a man in a messenger's uniform delivered the wire, but my boys didn't see him go in or out. Shirley was trying a getaway and lied when I nabbed him."

"Good work," Quinn said. "Still, if he hasn't confessed, we can't be absolutely certain. Anyway, even if he is the man we're after, he would have had time to make arrangements with his gang. They may tackle the job without him. They may not even know he's been arrested."

"I thought of that," McGrath grumbled. "But they won't get away with a thing. Sam Mason is here, of course. Paul Hampton is with him and Hampton has a private detective's badge. They told me about their scheme."

"Ah yes, the foolproof method of protecting the jewelry. What is it, Captain?"

McGRATH'S frown showed that he was uneasy.

"Well," he said, "Hampton and Mason figure this way. All the jobs have been pulled after a party. Therefore Mason is having an armored truck come here for the jewelry and has arranged with the women to turn their stuff over to him and some insurance company detectives before they leave. A bank is going to allow the armored truck to transfer the stuff to their vaults."

"Did you double-check everything?" Quinn asked. "Remember, Mason is on our list of suspects too."

"I called every insurance company involved and they backed him up. I phoned the armored truck company and they told me everything was okay. Maybe I won't land those crooks tonight, but they won't get any loot. All the jewelry owners agreed to the scheme because they've been scared stiff with so many robberies and stickups going on."

"I shall breathe much easier then." Quinn smiled. "By the way were those three suspected men all accounted for last night?"

"They were. They are so scared of being implicated they didn't budge out of their homes. Incidentally, I went to the funeral of Mrs. Hampton this afternoon. Just on the chance the killer might show up. But Hampton identified everyone present. Anything else for now, Quinn?"

"No. You have things in hand. I can enjoy the party now. If nothing happens, then I think you will be able to feel certain that Shirley was behind it and the thing fizzled with his arrest."

Before McGrath left, Silk appeared with an elderly man in tow. A man who, like Quinn,

carried a cane and had the staring eyes of a blind man.

"It's Mr. Claremont," Silk said to Quinn. "He wanted to talk with you."

"Mark!" Quinn said happily.

He clasped hands with the blind man, their arms guided by Silk. McGrath walked off.

"We'll probably be in the way here, Mark," Quinn said. "Suppose we retire to some comfortable nook and have a long chat. Frankly I came here only because I heard you'd be present."

"Nice of you to say that," Mark Claremont beamed. "Silk will find a quiet place for us."

Silk did. An upstairs room. Silk had a servant bring drinks and informed the man that he, Silk, would be in attendance on the two blind men from then on.

Quinn and Claremont talked of law cases—Claremont was also an attorney. They talked politics and the war. Downstairs, the entertainment was in full swing, spilling out into the large gardens. Neither paid much attention to it. They talked on and on, until at last the end of the evening's festivities downstairs was in sight.

Suddenly Quinn, while still talking, arose quietly. Claremont was answering Quinn's rather involved question as Quinn donned black clothing and the hood of the Black Bat. Just as quietly, Silk slipped into the chair which Quinn had occupied. Silk carried on the conversation in an excellent imitation of Quinn's voice.

The Black Bat slipped out of the room, made his way to the rear of the house and reached the garden by descending a trellis.

By moving to the outskirts of the grounds, he avoided being seen. As he approached the front of the house he saw a heavily armored truck swing around. Four men got out. Two held submachine-guns and took up positions. Two more were inside the truck. The first pair stopped at Captain McGrath's order and produced papers that seemed to satisfy the police official. Then they entered the house.

When shortly they emerged, they were carrying large boxes which were carefully passed to the men inside the truck. The Black Bat looked for McGrath, but he had disappeared.

It was going to be difficult, for McGrath's men would have orders to open fire on the Black Bat at sight. McGrath himself might forget about a possible robbery and concentrate on capturing the Black Bat.

THE Black Bat reached for his gun—and froze. A flashlight beam centered squarely on him. "Don't make a move!" McGrath's chilly voice whispered. "I figured you'd show up, so I've been prowling around watching for you all night. Slow now—reach."

"McGrath, you're an idiot!" the Black Bat whispered back. "Those men with the armored car are crooks. They're getting every

last bracelet and ring. The stuff is being handed to them! If you let them get away, you'll be broken to a patrolman."

McGrath laughed shortly. "You'll have to think of something better than that. I checked on that armored car and those men. Everything is in order. Are you getting your hands up or do I put a slug through you?"

The Black Bat slowly raised his arms. McGrath moved forward in the most triumphant moment of his life. The steel door of the armored car slammed shut and the Black Bat groaned. Tires grated, and the truck started moving off.

"All right," the Black Bat said, "you've got me, McGrath, but a million dollars in jewelry you are supposed to protect is on its way in the hands of crooks! Go ahead, take off my hood. See who is beneath it and arrest me for murder. But you won't convict me! It will be the last arrest you ever make!"

CHAPTER XII

Flaming Cocktails



McGRATH'S gun slanted downward a trifle. He was not as sure of himself as he had been a moment before. But he was just as determined to yank off the Black Bat's hood.

He reached for it. A gloved hand shot out and closed around his wrist. The gun didn't go off. It simply dropped into the grass. McGrath was swung around like a top. When things stopped whirling for him, he looked down the muzzle of his own weapon.

"I've never lied to you," the Black Bat said softly. "I've never doublecrossed you. I didn't kill young Carter. I know who did. McGrath, I'm giving you back your gun, butt first. Is that evidence enough that I need your help? The armored car is almost out of the driveway now. We haven't a moment to loose. If I'm wrong, you have me at the mercy of your gun. But for heaven's sake, man, act!"

"All right," McGrath said. "I'll take a chance. I've got a fast car. We can overtake the truck easy."

"Drive the car around to the garages in back," Quinn said. "We'll need more than guns to stop that traveling tank. Pick me up there—and you might send word to your men that I'm not to be molested. Step on it, Mac! If we slip, we're both done."

"You are, anyhow," McGrath growled, but he hurried away.

The Black Bat hastened to the garage. He came out of it clutching four quart bottles and a gallon can. He hopped into the car beside McGrath.

"Step on it!" he ordered. "I'll fix these cocktails for the men in the truck. This is going to be dangerous, Mac. They'll shoot the moment they know we're after them."

McGrath was racing the car down the driveway. He turned into the street after the armored car and sent the gas pedal to the floorboard. He jerked his head toward two machine-guns in back of the car.

"What good are machine-guns?" Quinn asked. "That truck is armor-plated. The guns will come in handy, though, when the crooks spill out. And they will, unless they get in a lucky shot somehow."

McGrath drove faster than he had ever driven before. They topped a hill and, half-way down it, the headlights of a car heading in their direction swept across the armored truck which was rolling at a good clip.

Quinn was pouring gasoline from the gallon can he had taken from the garage into the four bottles. Without a word he reached over, raised McGrath's coat and yanked out his shirt-tail. He ripped several strips from it, drowning McGrath's objections with harsh urging for him to make better time. He shoved strips of cloth into each bottle and loosely fitted a cork into the neck of each.

They were getting closer to the armored car now.

"Pass them!" the Black Bat ordered. "Don't try to cut in front. Just keep going."

McGrath nodded and swung the wheel a trifle. At that moment, guns began to flame. The windshield cracked in a dozen places. Slugs whined alongside the police car, smashed into the hood and into the highway near the the tires. McGrath kept going, though he knew that at this speed one bullet could send them on a journey to oblivion.

Heedless of the whipping bullet, the Black Bat calmly lit a match and touched it to the wick of the first bottle. He leaned out of the car and hurled the bottle. It hit the road just ahead of the truck. Two more bottles splattered the truck and the fourth covered it with flame that seemed to extend little crimson fingers down the sides and creep into the firing slits.

The shooting stopped—so did the truck. It veered off the road, nearly turned over, and crashed against a tree. The rear door opened and men popped out. The Black Bat held one of the submachine-guns in his arms now and he pulled the trigger.

It was over in a few moments. He lined up the crooks and placed them under McGrath's gun. Then he climbed into the police car and told McGrath he would send detectives.

They arrived in short order, took over and McGrath drove back to the estate, in time to witness the end of the affair. Detectives indicated one of the large rooms and when McGrath burst in, Mason and Paul Hampton were facing the Black Bat, across a large

desk. On that desk lay a large knife.

"Mason," the Black Bat said, "you've been an unknowing stooge. Hampton used you as he used everyone else. He thought up this slick scheme and had you propose it to the insurance company. But Hampton owned that armored truck. The other hold-ups were performed more for effect than profit, all leading up to this big event. Certainly the men on the truck had their papers in order. They'd built things up to this."

HAMPTON said nothing, but he was pale and once he looked down at the desk.

"But—but Hampton's own wife was killed by those crooks!" Mason protested. "It doesn't seem possible that—"

"It is. He wanted his wife to die. He murdered her. There were no crooks that night—besides Hampton. He's handy with a knife. Mrs. Hampton wasn't in on this business. But she was getting wise and Hampton had to kill her. She even wrote Tony Quinn a letter explaining about her husband, but Hampton found it where she had hidden it until she could get a chance to mail it.

"Naturally he couldn't simply destroy it, but he did have another woman—Mrs. Carter—address a fresh envelope in which he placed a blank sheet of paper. Mrs. Hampton probably didn't look at the handwriting when she took her letter from its hiding place to post it. The anonymous letter you got, Mason, fixing things so you had no alibi, was also written by Mrs. Carter."

Hampton clenched his fists in rage. "You're absurd!" he thundered. "I loved my wife."

"You did, when she had a lot of money—before you went through it. Then you bought her those diamonds—with money you got from the gems you'd already stolen. Those rings would be a motive for an attack upon her."

"Prove it!" Hampton raged.

"Of course," the Black Bat agreed. "Last night the home of a Mrs. Warlock was robbed. You ordered your professional thieves to do the job after you got what you thought was a message from Jacques. But I sent it. I was in that station wagon, for it might interest you to know that Jacques and Mrs. Carter are prisoners. I visited the neighborhood of each suspect, and signaled with infra-red who was to be robbed. A different person for each suspect.

"Those I named for Mason, Shirley, and Jenks were unmolested. The one I flashed on that quiet street where you were hidden concerned Mrs. Warlock. When she was robbed I knew you were responsible, for it had to be someone in that group of suspects which included you—though you did not know it.

"You tried to confuse things by making suspects of the other men you drew into your

scheme, even compelling Shirley to make an attempt to take a sudden trip when you had one of your men deliver a forged telegram to him. You played safe by making use of professional crooks who, if arrested, could take it without talking. Young Carter was different, so—"

Hampton suddenly scooped up the knife, seizing it by the point of the blade. His arm went back in a flash, before McGrath could raise his gun. The knife flew from Hampton's fingers—and landed squarely in the middle of the desk. McGrath's gun exploded and Hampton screamed wildly as he headed for a window. He stopped short, and gently slid to the floor.

He tried to get up. He was like a punch-drunk fighter who refuses to give in to unconsciousness.

Finally, he gave up the struggle and went limp where he lay.

"Thanks, Mac," the Black Bat said. "That squares everything. I knew Hampton killed Carter by throwing a knife into his back. I knew he would look for a chance to pick up this knife I purposely left on the desk. I wanted him to show that he was a knife thrower—but he didn't know that particular knife was weighted so that nobody could throw it.

"You'll find that Hampton's wife was so afraid of him that she had several locks put on her bedroom door. She lived in constant terror, but didn't dare come to the police . . . Mason, give McGrath a hand with Hampton. Hurry—if you want him for the chair. And Mac, if you tell Mrs. Carter that it was Hampton who killed her son, and not the Black Bat, she'll talk her head off."

McGrath and Mason were so busy with Hampton that they did not notice it when the Black Bat faded out of the scene. . . .

WHEN an ambulance arrived, there was a look of satisfaction on Captain McGrath's face as he watched Hampton being packed into it. It had been a good night. Then he thought of the Black Bat and Tony Quinn. A servant told him that Quinn, Silk and Mark Claremont were in one of the upstairs rooms.

McGrath went there, smiling at the thought that Quinn would not be there. Or even if he was, Claremont would admit Quinn had been gone for a while. McGrath felt that he would have a right to gloat.

He opened the door. Quinn looked up blankly. Claremont stopped talking. McGrath asked questions, and Claremont laughed.

"Why, of course Tony has been here all the time. Every moment. Why?"

"Yes," Quinn said, "why? Isn't everything all right downstairs? I stopped worrying when I knew you had things under control."

"Everything is fine," McGrath growled. "Except me. I think I'm going slightly batty."

He exited in a hurry. The other two men, guided by Silk, went downstairs and heard the story. Then Silk and Quinn drove home. Carol was there, with Butch.

"It was a cinch." Butch grinned. "I took those three bozos easy. They didn't even want to fight. The cops got 'em by now."

Quinn took Carol's hands in his own. "I hated to leave you with them, Carol, but there was nothing else to do. Hampton would have suspected if we had freed you." Quinn looked over at Butch. "Nice work. As a reward you may go to Jacques' house and prepare him for the police. Silk will show you where he is."

"Boy!" Butch rubbed his hands. "Boy, have I been looking forward to this!"



MURDER STRIKES OUT

By
JOHN GUNDERSON

House Detective Duffy Solves a Murder Too Easily—and Then the Trouble Really Begins!

SO IT wasn't the big leagues. I hadn't been such a hot pitcher anyway. Oh, good enough, mind you, but not good enough to make passes at hot shots like Musial or Walker or Weintraub. Even if the leg hadn't gone back on me, those guys probably would have blasted me back to the bush leagues.

It's not sour grapes either. The thing that annoyed the devil out of me was the Army doctor looking at the leg and clucking sympathetically.

"I can walk as good as you," I told him, hot.

"Sure. On the level sidewalk. But what would you do if you had to run over broken ground, jump stone walls, slide into shell holes. Huh?"

I didn't argue. I couldn't tell him that's why I wasn't in baseball anymore—because I couldn't slide and run. Well, it wasn't comfortable, that's all I'll say.

So I got a nice comfortable 4F and a job as house detective in this Broadway hostel. The place wasn't good and it wasn't bad. Second rate, catering mostly to chicks from the chorus and actors with a six-week spot and a slight rush of cash to the head. Second rate. Like me.

The job was about as exciting as warming the bench at a soft ball game between Girl's High and the Ladies' Auxiliary Sewing Circle. Either I sat in the lobby and looked over the crowd coming and going, wondering if I could spot a crook if I saw one, or I walked around after closing hours and tried the doors of the shops that lined the main corridor.

I was doing that when Sid Carrick, the night clerk, gave me the sign. I ambled over to the desk.

"Dan, the filly in Four thirteen has left



"Kick your gat over here, Duffy," he said

her phone off the hook. Hop up and tell her to cut it out. Mister Bell frowns on that sort of thing."

It was something to do, anyway. Broke the routine of trying doors. This Sid Carrick—what makes hotel clerks and head waiters so polished, aloof and superior? Nice enough guy, I suppose, but I wished he'd relax just once so I could tell if he was human. The chorus kids worked for a living and so did he.

I didn't discuss it with him. I went up to Room 413 and knocked. Nobody home. That was funny. Do you take a phone off the hook and go out?

I got out my pass key and opened the door. It was dark in there and I could hear the steady hum of the phone. I snapped on the light and closed the door behind me. Then I started to get the creeps. Don't know why. I'm not psychic or anything like that. But I was green on the job and there's something about an empty room—a strange one—that makes you lower your voice and look over your shoulder.

■ HERE was a little sound somewhere. I swallowed a lump in my throat and touched the automatic I had a license to pack. The heavy solid steel was comforting. I tapped on the closet door with my shoe.

"All right," I said. "Come out and keep your hands high."

There was a little muffled mew in there, like a lost kitten. I turned the knob, swung the door wide and stepped to a side. There was no danger.

It was the chambermaid, trussed up like a Christmas package, with a gag holding back all the words welling up in her. They came out in a flood as soon as I got the gag off.

"I'll kill him!" she said. "Just let me get me hands on the murdering spalpeen!"

"Who, Mrs. Casey?"

She licked parched lips and worked the muscles of her face to get the kinks out.

"The dirty crook!" she fumed. "He lives here, Danny. I've seen his ugly face before. He took me keys, that's what he did!"

"Who is he? What's his name?"

"Faith, and I didn't ask him for an introduction when he put a gun in me face. I don't know his name, but I've seen him here before!"

"That's a big help," I said, crossing the room and cradling the phone. "How long were you in there? And who took off the receiver?"

"Ten minutes, no more. And that was me. I knocked it off into the chair when he was backin' me towards the closet. He never noticed."

I looked around the room. Bureau drawers were partly shut, with corners of pink unmentionables sticking out. I pulled open a couple of drawers and saw the stuff inside

all tumbled about. Without being a married man, I knew that no dame would leave her clothes in that mess.

"A two bit sneak crook, Mrs. Casey," I said. "He's got your keys and he'll clean out a few rooms and lam before we can catch up with him. Unless—" I started for the phone and stopped. There was a scream out in the hall. A delicate female scream.

I popped out in the hall with Mrs. Casey behind me. The showgirl in Room 411—a dish if I ever saw one—was just bursting out of her room. She was tall and dark, with big eyes and soft red lips—not tough like you hear. Just a good kid working for a living and with more looks than most.

"You're the house detective?" she cried, spotting me. "I've been robbed! A hundred dollars—all I had saved!"

"I was afraid of that," I muttered, loping toward her.

A latch clicked down the hall. A man's head popped out, saw us and popped right back. The door slammed.

"Oh, boy!" I thought. "Ten minutes, Mrs. Casey said she was in the closet. He didn't have time to get very far. What a break!"

I legged it down the corridor as fast as the bum leg would take me. The door was locked of course. I discovered that after nearly dashing out my brains against it. I snatched my pass keys, fumbled and dropped them. Inside I heard a window slam up and the ringing stamp of feet on the metal fire-escape.

I said a few words under my breath before I got the key in the door, with the two women hopping around excitedly in back of me and screaming "Hurry!"

The door slammed open, at last, and I dived into the room to see the curtains blowing back from the open window. I climbed out on the platform and took a quick gander up and down. Four stories up, the monkey was scrambling for the sky.

"Hey, you up there!" I yelled. "Stop! I see you!"

He stopped. Then there was a little red lick of flame and something that sounded like a cannon went off and boomed back and forth deafeningly in that narrow canyon. Something else spanged on the metal and there was a duo of screeches from the feminine contingent inside the room.

For one full second I just stood there and goggled. He was shooting at me! At me! Holy cats!

Then he was running again, climbing swiftly toward the roof. And suddenly my courage came back in a rush. He was more scared of me than I was of him. I went after him as fast as I could go. And to give me courage, I hauled out my own Betsy and cut loose and gave the echoes a terrible pasting.

I didn't hit a thing, but it felt wonderful

and it must have scared the monkey nearly to death. When I topped the edge of the roof I saw that the whole place was fairly well lighted from the reflection of the Broadway signs which were on again since the dim-out was lifted. And in this mixed glow of neons and flashers I saw the crook scuttling like a cockroach along one edge of the roof.

I squeezed off another shot, knowing darn well I couldn't hit him. Then it wasn't so funny. He turned around and shot at me again. I don't know how close he came, but it was too close.

HHE PUT a hand on the cornice and jumped over. As he disappeared I realized there must be another roof just below or he wouldn't jump, so I dashed over and sure enough he was racing across the adjoining roof which was only a couple of feet lower than ours. I hauled myself over and slid down, favoring the leg. On a level I could run pretty good and I gained on him when he got to the other side and started up an iron ladder to the next roof, which was ten feet higher.

He made it and when I got to the top of the ladder he was legging it across and ducking behind a brick chimney so I couldn't see to shoot. The building beyond was another hotel, a bigger one and I realized that if he got onto that and to the stairs I'd have a swell chance of losing him for good.

I loped around that chimney like Seabiscuit coming into the home stretch and there he was, standing on the cornice like he was getting up courage for something. Sure enough. There was was a six foot alley he had to jump.

"You're stuck," I said. "Come peaceful and I guarantee you'll be treated as a prisoner of war. Throw down the Roscoe."

He threw part of it anyway. A piece of lead that came out of the front end. It smacked on the bricks with a very unpleasant sound.

I ducked around the corner of the chimney, nearly tripping over a loose brick that had fallen down. I didn't want to shoot and kill the guy, besides I didn't think I could hit him with my cannon. Heck, I could throw better than shoot. Holy cats, why not?

I picked up the chunk of brick and stepped out. He was getting ready to jump. I wound up and tossed it, not too hard. It hit him "thump" in the back. He gave a scream, waved his arms wildly, and fell off!

I guess I'll hear that scream nights for a long time to come. I got sick all over, and for some time I couldn't move. Sure he'd been shooting at me and all, but you don't enjoy killing a man. Somehow I hadn't thought of what the toss might do.

When the cops got there I had pulled myself together and was down in the alley to

show them the bloody smear that was left. A plainclothes cop with as much authority as an Army sergeant introduced himself as Lieutenant Strawn of Homicide.

"Nice work, Duffy," he said. "It's the sort of thing that saves the taxpayers' shekels. The public should be very grateful to you for this."

I shuddered.

"Thanks, Inspector," I said. "I guess you mean well."

"Don't be squeamish," Strawn said. "This was Slippery Ellis and the only thing that would ever cure him of being a crook was the cure he just got. Here." He turned to a harness bull and took the stuff the cop had been collecting from the corpse's pockets. "Look. Jewelry, pocketbooks, fountain pens, cash. How many rooms did he get into?"

"Three I know of," I said. "Don't think he had time for more."

"Let's go look," Strawn said.

A check up showed no more complaints at the desk.

"Guess that's all," Strawn said. "I'll take the names of the people who've been robbed and they can get their junk back at Headquarters by identifying it."

The showgirl with the big eyes and the red lips tagged me as I was standing in the lobby and trying to get over the jitters.

"I want to thank you," she said, giving me a hundred octane smile. "The policeman says I'll get my money back. Terrible about the poor man, isn't it?" She was less disturbed than I was. Who said the woman is the weaker sex? "You're wonderful, Mister Duffy. My name is Estelle Adams."

After all, I can take a hint. I hauled my shattered nerve ends together and managed a shaky grin.

"Let's have supper together," I said. "And if you're not working tonight, maybe we could go out—? After all, if I'm a hero I could take a night off?"

She linked her arm in mine.

"We've both had a trying experience," she said firmly. "We're entitled to an evening off. . . ."

An uncouth bellhop woke me next morning by pounding crudely on my door. I'd been dreaming of black eyes and soft red lips, and that goodnight kiss.

"Ain't you interested in the papers, Dan?" the kid asked. "You're a hero."

Darned if I wasn't. The tabs had a picture of the corpse in the alley and one of me and a headline:

ALERT DETECTIVE KILLS CROOK IN ROOFTOP GUN BATTLE

And a lot more. I didn't feel so sorry for Slippery Ellis this morning. I felt more like a hero. Selfish, we humans, aren't we?

I WENT down to the coffee shop and ordered ham and eggs. Overnight I'd become a celebrity. The waitress gave me a smile and a good morning and the portion she handed me was certainly one the paying guests didn't get.

I was enjoying breakfast when Tom Radcliffe, the hotel manager, slid onto the next stool. I said hello, then did a double take. His face was a beautiful pale green color.

"Don't you feel well?" I asked.

"Coffee," Tom said to the waitress. When she'd gone, he looked at me and shuddered. "Neither will you, in a minute. So finish your breakfast before I spoil it."

"What are you talking about?"

"Murder," he groaned.

"Murder? Tom, the guy fell off the roof. I admit I heaved a brick. They said it was all right."

"Not him. Another one."

"Another?" I pushed my plate away.

"Who? Where?"

"Laura Lester."

He didn't have to say any more. Laura Lester was one of the better known dancing stars on Broadway. She had the best suite on the top floor of the hotel.

"While we were congratulating ourselves that Ellis had only broken into three rooms," Tom said bitterly, "Laura Lester was lying up there with her skull caved in. Her maid came in and found her this morning. Called the cops before she even called me."

I got up. My appetite had vanished.

"I'll go up," I said.

Radcliffe buried his nose in his coffee cup as though he wanted to crawl in and pull the cup in after him.

There was a mob scene in the corridor outside Lester's room. Guests in all kinds of dress and undress were milling around, trying—with the nauseating morbidity of the average human—to get a squint at the corpse. A couple of bellhops were holding them back.

Inside, the maid was having hysterics on the couch. The place looked as if a cyclone and earthquake had played a friendly game of tag in it. Chairs and tables had been overturned, drawers pulled out and the contents scattered, the bed torn apart.

Laura Lester was half on the mattress, half on the floor. She wasn't pretty any more. Her hair had been a shining, glorious gold. Now it was matted and heavy with blood. A messy, rotten way to die.

There were loud voices in the hall and Lieutenant Strawn and his mob shoved in. The Homicide man stopped with his legs apart and stared down at the dead girl.

"Oh, fine," he said softly. "Just fine." He switched baleful eyes to me. "What are you trying to do, Duffy, have me pounding a beat again?"

"I—"

"How did you manage to overlook a little thing like a murder?"

Radcliffe appeared behind the cop.

"I can tell you that, Lieutenant," he said. Strawn whirled on him.

"Let's hear it."

"Miss Lester's maid sleeps out. She got in this morning and found the body. If Ellis killed Miss Lester last night, there'd be nobody to report this—nobody at all."

"Wait a minute," I said. "There's something screwy here. I tell you Ellis wouldn't have had time to get up here. Mrs. Casey said she was in that closet not more than ten minutes."

"How would she have any idea of time, cooped up that way?" Strawn exploded. He whirled on the maid. "What's missing from here?"

"Jewels!" the girl sobbed. "All Miss Lester's jewels."

The veins stood out on Strawn's neck and his face turned slowly the color of a tomato.

"What is this?" he roared. "There were no jewels on Ellis' body!"

"The girl's right," Radcliffe said. "Laura Lester had jewelry valued at forty thousand dollars which were in our safe until last night. She took them out, she said, to wear at a dinner party."

Strawn wheeled, snapped orders. Three bluecoats started to search the room. Another went out to study the fire-escape and the roof where Ellis had fled. I could have gone along and helped him, knowing the route, but I stayed where I was, thinking.

Strawn turned to the girl again.

"How come you don't sleep here?"

"That was the arrangement," the maid sniffed. "Miss Lester liked privacy. I left last night about eight, after I helped her dress. She had this dinner party and her manager, Mr. Halloway, was calling for her. That's all I know until I came in this m-morning and f-found her like that?" She started to cry again.

"Did anyone besides Halloway know about the jewelry?" Strawn demanded. "Duffy, for instance?"

I JUMPED. Was he tagging me, now?

"I do not know," the girl said. "Miss Lester might have told her friends. I think no one else in the hotel knew."

The fingerprint boys arrived and took over and I went out and back to my own room. I wasn't a hero any more. I'd caught a sneak thief and there was a murder under my nose, all night long, that I didn't even know about.

Strawn was sore, but he'd be even sorer if he knew what I was thinking. I was pretty darn sure Ellis couldn't have killed Laura Lester. I believed Mrs. Casey when she said she hadn't been in that closet more than ten minutes. If she was going to be

wrong, she'd have been wrong the other way. Ten minutes in there would seem like an hour. She wouldn't call time short. And in ten minutes Ellis wouldn't have had time to go up to the top floor, kill Lester, wreck her room, then get back down to the fourth floor and steal some cheap junk and a little cash. It didn't make sense. Besides, where was the forty grand worth of jewels he got from Lester?

Tom Radcliffe came in.

"If I had the strength I'd fire you," he said. "But why kid myself, it wasn't your fault. It's a lousy break for all of us, kid."

"Even Strawn," I said. "What'd they find?"

"Ellis' prints all over Lester's room," Radcliffe said. "No doubt he was there. And a cop found one of Lester's earrings on the roof. That sews it up, Danny boy."

Seemed like it, didn't it? But that earring, which was supposed to be the clincher, was the thing which shouted PHONY to me in capital letters.

If Ellis had the jewels on him when he was on the roof, why weren't they on him when he squashed in the air shaft. Don't tell me some accomplice was waiting for him below and cleaned him out before I got there? It didn't make sense. Nobody could tell he was going to the roof or that he was going to fall off, or where he was going to fall off.

"Nope," I said to myself. "I may be a broken down baseball pitcher and not a master-mind sleuth like Lieutenant Strawn, but if that earring isn't a plant, I'll eat it."

I went back up to Lester's room. The meat wagon had come and gone, the photographers and fingerprint men had done their stuff and the chambermaids were trying to straighten up. Strawn was still there, talking to a guy in his forties wearing a gray moustache and a green shirt.

He gave me an absent-minded look.

"Mr. Halloway, this is Dan Duffy, the house detective. Halloway is—was—uh—his Miss Lester's manager."

"I'm so shocked and sick about this I don't know what to say, Lieutenant," Halloway said. "But I'll try to answer questions."

"Good. About this dinner party last night. What happened?"

"Nothing. It was cancelled. There was some misunderstanding concerning the arrangements and it was postponed. Miss Lester said she was just as pleased because she had a severe headache. So she decided to stay home. I brought her directly here after the performance, talked for a few minutes and then left."

"What time was that?"

"Just before twelve."

"And then what did you do?"

"I went home."

"Anybody to verify that?"

"Why—my man—my valet, I guess. He let me in at about a quarter past twelve."

"Was your relationship with Miss Lester strictly business?"

Halloway hesitated.

"There was the business relationship, of course," he said. "There was also a friendly understanding outside of business, because I've been managing her affairs for years and we had become good friends."

"I see." Strawn looked him over carefully. "You succeed in controlling your emotions with unusual success, Mr. Halloway."

"I would no more think, Lieutenant Strawn," the manager said, "of revealing my emotions in public than I would of revealing myself undressed."

He turned and marched out with his back as straight and stiff as a post.

"You made him mad," I said.

Strawn turned as though he'd forgotten me.

"You still here, Duffy? Do me a favor, will you? Go through this hotel thoroughly and make sure there are no more corpses in the rooms, will you?"

"Insults roll off me," I said. "What were you grilling Halloway for anyway? Radcliffe tells me you've got Ellis tagged for this."

"Tagged? There's no doubt about it. The room is lousy with his prints."

"And have you found the rocks?" This crack hit home!

STRAWN frowned. "No. They must be in the hotel some place. He found time to hide them, but he didn't have time to get outside with them."

"All in ten minutes," I murmured.

"Ten minutes!" Strawn snarled. "Will you quit harping on that? Maybe your chambermaid took a siesta in the closet!"

"Bunk," I said.

Which wasn't the snappiest comeback in the world. But it was the best I could do under the circumstances.

There was something else Strawn seemed to be overlooking. Why should Ellis be so careless about leaving his prints prominently displayed in the same room with a corpus delicti? Nobody could be that dumb. Nope, it smelled phony a mile away.

I went downstairs and draped myself carelessly over the desk. Sid Carrick lifted an eyebrow and brushed off the top as though it were dirty.

"Who else knew about Laura Lester's jewelry?" I asked him. "Could anybody else have spotted it here when she was checking it in and out?"

"Only about half of New York," Carrick said. "Anybody who was in the lobby at the time might have seen it. Who? Your guess is as good as mine. What are you worrying about, anyway? The cops say Ellis did it

and Ellis is dead. That closes the case, doesn't it?"

"Yeah," I sighed. "Except for one little detail. Where are the jewels?"

"I wouldn't know," Carrick shrugged.

But the more I thought of it, the less sense it made. Would Ellis kill Lester, make a haul of forty grand worth of gems, and then come down to the fourth floor to pick up some cheap knick-knacks and a few bucks in cash? It was silly.

I went up to the fourth floor and tapped on the door of Room 411. Estelle Adams opened it. She was wrapped in some kind of a heavy silk dressing gown. She smiled when she saw me and blushed a little.

"Hello, honey," I said, stepping in. She kissed me and I liked that because it showed there was no pretense about her. She didn't bother to play coy. We'd gone for each other in a big way and she was perfectly honest and frank about it. I held her for a minute, then, very reluctantly, I put business before pleasure.

"You heard about the latest murder, up on the top floor?" I asked her. "Laura Lester?"

She nodded, then repressed a shudder.

"Yes, I heard about it," she said. "One of the hotel maids came in to make up my room, a little while ago. She told me all the details. It's ghastly, isn't it, Dan?" She looked at me. "Why do you ask?"

I seized her hand and gave it a squeeze.

"Listen, hon, I'm not satisfied with the official tag on this case. It's got more holes than Hitler's case against the Versailles Treaty. I want to try something and I'll need your help."

"Why, sure, Danny," she said. "What do you want me to do?"

"Stay here and wait. In a little while I'll call you from my room. No matter what I say, play along, act as though you know what it's all about. Get it?"

"Yes, but—"

"Then I'll ask you to meet me some place. Say okay, you'll be there. That's all you have to do, just bolt your door and stay put."

"You mean agree to meet you, but not meet you?"

"Right. Don't move from your room, no matter what I say over the phone."

"Danny," she said shrewdly, "this sounds as if you expect someone to tap the wire."

"Could be. Will you do it?"

"Of course," she said readily.

I lingered for a minute to kiss her some more—she was awfully good to kiss—then I went back to my own room. From there I called Room 411.

Estelle answered right away.

"Honey, this is Danny," I said. "Are you ready to make the test?"

"Yes, Danny. I'm ready."

"All right, meet me in front of Ellis' room right away. I've got the pass keys and the print powder."

"I'll be there."

I hustled down the hall and let myself into Slippery Ellis' room. It hadn't been touched yet and all the crook's stuff was still there. I'd brought some fingerprint powder with me—as a bona fide detective I had to have some on hand—and I busied myself dusting it around.

There were prints on the door frame and I thought I recognized the characteristic swirl Strawn had shown me on his card. The door knob, curiously, was clean and so was the glass atop the bureau and so were the bathroom faucets.

"Curiouser and curiouser," I muttered, wondering why anyone should have taken the trouble to come in here and wipe off Ellis' fingerprints.

I WAS still poking around the bathroom when there was a light tap on the door. That was strictly not according to the book. I slipped across the room and listened. The tap came again. Then I got it.

"Estelle, go away," I said. "You weren't supposed to come here."

"You let me in," she whispered. "If there's any excitement I'm getting in on it!"

I couldn't let her stand out in the hall, that certainly wouldn't be safe. So I opened the door and yanked her in.

"Double-crosser!" I said. "Is that the way you cooperate?"

"You'll probably be glad I'm here before you're through," the girl said.

"Sure. All I need is to worry about you now. Get in the bathroom, go on now, scoot and don't argue. No telling who might show up here next!"

She argued, but she went. And the door had scarcely closed behind her when the latch clicked. I whirled back, grabbing for my pocket, but I was a little late.

Sid Carrick heeled the door shut behind him, keeping his gun pointed right at my belt buckle.

"Drop it," he said.

He was very quiet—and very deadly. All that polish, that neat superiority had dropped away from him. He looked like a different man and sounded like one. I opened my fingers and let my automatic drop to the rug.

"Kick your gat over here, Duffy," he said.

I did just that. Then I noticed him adjusting a silencer on his gun and drew my own conclusions, which weren't pleasant.

"Where's the girl?" he said.

I was going to say "What girl?" but I knew it was silly and pointless to stall. He'd listened in, all right. He knew the score. I didn't say anything.

Keeping his gun on me, he backtracked to the bathroom, opened the door, reached in

and hauled Estelle out. She was scared pink. "Don't you hurt her," I said, trying to sound tough and not scared.

He didn't even glance at me. He pushed her over to me. Then he stepped back, covering both of us.

"I don't know how and I'm not going to take the time to find out," he said. "But evidently you're wise. I've got the diamonds and you know it so you'll have to be shut up. Good-by, Danny."

"You're loony," I said hurriedly, my eyes on the gun. "Strawn will have you tagged for this in a minute. Think he doesn't know?"

"He doesn't know his elbow from a hole in the wall," Sid snapped. Then his expression changed. "On the off chance he does know something I'll give you five minutes more of life if you'll talk. Go ahead, I'm listening."

"Strawn knows everything I know," I said, feeling the sweat trickling down my back. "I know you took off the doorknob, the faucets and the glass bureau top from this room and changed them for the stuff in Laura Lester's room. After you put the substitutes here in Ellis' room, you wiped Laura Lester's fingerprints off. That's how Ellis' prints were so thick in Lester's room, they were on his own furniture!"

Carrick's breath was coming faster and his finger was getting itchy on the trigger. I knew I'd scored a bulls-eye.

"Strawn knows that?" he breathed.

"Sure. He knows you did it last night after Ellis died, after the cops were gone. It was Ellis and his robberies that gave you the idea. And it had to be after midnight because Holloway told us he brought Lester home just before twelve. It couldn't have been before. So Ellis couldn't have killed Lester even if he'd wanted to, because she wasn't home yet!"

Carrick's lips lifted at one corner in what was supposed to be a smile. I've seen prettier ones on leopards in the zoo.

"All right, smart guy," he said. "You've figured it out. But when you say Strawn knows, you're a liar. When your bodies are found here nobody'll know anything."

"Oh, yes, they will," I said, "because you

just put your fingerprints on the knob behind you."

Well, he hadn't. But he couldn't help that instinctive jerk, that twist to look. He took his eyes from me for just a second.

When he looked back I was already moving. His gun blasted—a wicked, silenced "splat," but I was going down, already under it—sliding, feet first, for home plate.

So they said I couldn't slide, eh? Busted me out of baseball because I couldn't slide? They should have seen that slide!

I went across the room like a bozooka shell. My number elevens caught Mister Carrick's shins with a sock that would have been foul at Ebbet's Field. He did a jack-knife and plowed up the carpet with his nose.

HERE was a terrible stab of pain in that leg, but I ignored it, rolled over and grabbed Carrick. Then I had a lot of fun doing what I'd been yearning to do, bounce my knuckles off his face. He passed out around the fifth bounce.

Half an hour later Strawn was there, pacing up and down and Carrick had been hauled off to the Bastille.

"If it weren't for the girl here, Duffy, I'd say you were a liar," Strawn said excitedly. "You mean he confessed?"

"He bragged about it," Estelle said, "and that's the same thing."

"Well, the conviction depends on you two. You'll have to testify. Don't go off on a honeymoon now just when I need you."

"The man's got ideas," I said, looking at her. "What do you think?"

"New York's a great summer resort," she said, looking at the floor.

I started toward her.

"Ooh, my leg!"

"Darling, is that your bad leg? Oh, he hurt it sliding!" She hurried over to me. "Sit down here. There. Now put your head on my shoulder." She started to stroke my face.

Lieutenant Strawn gazed upon this revolting scene with disgust. "Doubtless you two would like to be alone," he said.

We never heard him go out.

Tired Kidneys Often Bring Sleepless Nights

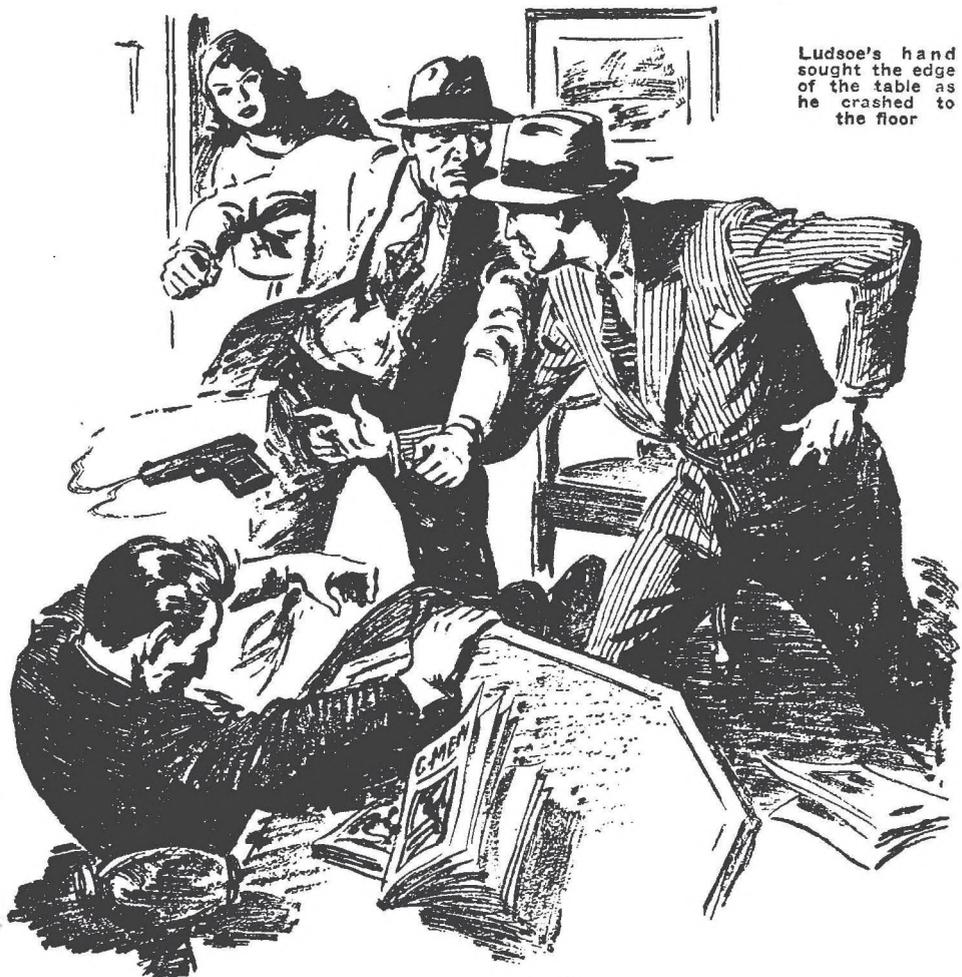
Doctors say your kidneys contain 15 miles of tiny tubes or filters which help to purify the blood and keep you healthy. When they get tired and don't work right in the daytime, many people have to get up nights. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder. Don't neglect this condition and lose valuable, restful sleep.

When disorder of kidney function permits

poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may also cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills.

(Adv.)



Ludsoe's hand sought the edge of the table as he crashed to the floor

DEATH PAYS EXTRA

By J. LANE LINKLATER

Detective Raney Was Old Enough to Retire, but a Headquarters Man Is Never Too Old to Tangle with Murder!

FOR a moment after the shot had whanged past his head, Raney remained where he was, crouched down beside his coupe. Then he slowly straightened up, scowling. A sedan had been waiting under a tree, parked about thirty yards from the big iron gate, and the shot had come from there. An instant later the sedan had speeded up and vanished.

Raney slipped his revolver back into his holster.

He shrugged his huge shoulders and opened the driveway gate. He swung it wide, got in his car and drove along the gravel.

It was a quarter of a mile to the large rambling house. The stone steps leading up to the front door were at least twenty feet wide.

Raney stood at the door and jabbed a button. A light just above the door sprayed its rays down on his head. Raney was massive. His broad face was phlegmatic, his skin leather-tough. The network of wrinkles about his eyes might have betrayed the human feeling which he rarely revealed, but people were usually too intent on avoiding his gaze to notice them.

The door swung inward noiselessly. A tall, thin-nosed butler stared reprovingly at

Raney. Raney didn't seem to notice the look at all.

"Does Warren Ludsoe live here?"

"This is Mr. Ludsoe's residence."

"I want to see him."

The butler appeared to be shocked. "It's quite late. I doubt if Mr. Ludsoe would care to receive visitors now."

Raney treated him to a stare, pushed past him, roughly, into the hall.

"Tell Ludsoe that Raney, from Headquarters, wants to see him right now," he said.

The butler was bewildered and indignant. "Well, I—he'll want to know your business."

"I don't know myself—yet."

The butler stalked away, turned into a doorway on the right. In a few moments he came back, moving fast.

"It's—it's most peculiar," he stammered. "You have arrived at the correct moment."

"What is it?"

"Apparently murder, sir," the butler said.

"Ludsoe?"

"No, sir. Mr. Ludsoe is not in the library as I thought. He's gone. The man there is a stranger to me."

Raney nodded and walked down the hall. The doorway to the right opened into a room of tremendous size. In the center of the room was a large ornate table where a chair had been drawn up. In the chair a man was slumped.

RANEY silently gazed at the man.

The butler had stopped just behind Raney.

"Most incongruous," muttered the butler more to himself than to Raney.

Raney didn't answer, but the butler was right. The man had been struck viciously about the head, and fresh blood made him a messy sight. It was not the wound to which the butler referred, but the appearance of the victim himself. Alive and well, he was not the type who would have merged into a luxurious room such as this. He was middle-aged and thin, his clothes cheap and dirty, and his face was unshaven. The hand that hung limply over the arm of the chair was callous from hard work.

The butler stood back against the wall while Raney carefully searched the dead man. Then Raney wandered about the place, still holding some papers he had found in his big fist.

Abruptly, Raney turned to the butler. "The weapon isn't here," he said.

"The weapon, sir?"

"Sure. Whatever the killer used to smash this guy's head is gone."

"Perhaps the murderer took it with him, sir."

Raney shook his head. Obviously that wasn't the right answer. He went on talking.

"Found three things on the stiff," he said,

as he again looked at the papers he had taken, before stuffing them into his pocket. "Three things—a birth certificate—girl, seventeen—picture of a pretty girl, inscribed 'To Mom and Dad with Love, Alice'—and a meal ticket at an eating dump owned by a guy I know." He glanced at the butler. "What do you think of that?"

"Not very illuminating," answered the servant.

"Huh? Why, they tell quite a story." Raney stared down at the glistening top of the table. "Something missing from the table, too. There's a faint square mark still showing on the surface. It looks as if maybe something had been resting on the table, and then been removed."

Someone spoke from the doorway behind them. "What's going on here?" said a voice, cold and polite.

"It's a murder, sir," said the butler. "This gentleman—a Mr. Raney, sir, from headquarters—called to see you, Mr. Ludsoe. I came in here to tell you, sir, and this—this is what I found!"

Warren Ludsoe walked into the room. He looked something like his butler, but his eyes were colder, his mouth more relentless. In an unmoved, emotionless way, Ludsoe gazed down at the dead man.

"Amazing," he said. "Disgusting. How did he get in here? Who is he?"

"I haven't the slightest idea, sir," the butler said. "I was working in the east wing for over an hour. Then the front bell rang and I came back to this part of the house to answer it."

Ludsoe clucked his annoyance. "Evidently a tramp. Probably sneaked in to rob the house. There also must have been an accomplice. Possibly they quarreled. The thing to do is to get him out of here and buried wherever they bury such people." He looked at Raney. "Can't you attend to it?"

Raney peered at Ludsoe solemnly. "Yeah. The poor guy looks like a tramp. But I guess it bothered him just as much to get his head smashed as it would have bothered you. We got to find out who done it."

Ludsoe's eyes hardened. "Perhaps so." He hesitated. "By the way, you said your name is Raney, and you claim to be from Headquarters. I vaguely recall something about you."

A grim smile curved Raney's lips. "Right," he snapped. "I used to be with Headquarters. I reached my retirement age not long ago."

"You hold your age well," murmured Ludsoe.

"Well enough to take care of myself. So you're looking for an explanation. Okay. I just told your man I was from Headquarters. My real idea was to bust in here."

"A rather dangerous ruse, I should think," commented Ludsoe. "Might get you into

serious trouble—even lose your pension for you."

"It might."

"Well, just why are you here?"

For a moment, Raney was silent.

"I was a copper for a long time," he said at last. "I got to know certain people who deserved a stretch in the pen a lot worse than some who actually got it. As a member of the department, I never could get 'em. Maybe, on my own, I'll have better luck."

Ludsoe delicately raised an eyebrow. "A venture which you may regret later, if you attempt it," he said in his chilled tones.

"I like to take chances," said Raney. Suddenly, he jabbed a finger at a pair of brown kid gloves, which had been dropped on a chair. "Yours?"

Ludsoe seemed momentarily disconcerted. "Those gloves? Certainly, they're mine."

"But you don't keep gloves in this room?"

"I can keep them here if I want to," Ludsoe said curtly. "I think I'd better telephone about you."

BUT RANEY was already lumbering over to a phone on a desk near the door. He called Headquarters, asked for Captain Wickman.

"I got quite a case, Wickman," Raney said.

At once Wickman's voice was wary. "What goes on?"

"Why, it was like this. I was getting a bite to eat down town, and a waiter came and told me someone on the phone said a friend of mine was in bad trouble and for me to go right out to Warren Ludsoe's house to see about it."

"Ludsoe's house? Better go easy!"

"So I came out here. At the gate someone took a shot at me and drove off. Then I came in the house and found a stiff in the library."

Wickman's voice was sharp. "Murder? Who?"

"Some poor guy that nobody seems to know. Ludsoe figures maybe you ought to take the stiff out and just forget it."

"You stay there," snapped Wickman. "I'll send a couple of the boys out there at once."

But Raney did not wait. He caught the sneer on Ludsoe's face as he went out. It took him nearly thirty minutes to drive down to the Star Social Club.

It was a two-story building. On the ground floor was a large space where all sorts of men played all sorts of games. There were also a few rooms which were not so public.

On the second floor were various cubby-holes used for various purposes by the owner of the club, Mark Dudas.

Raney hesitated outside for a moment. Then he crossed to a small drug store on the other side of the street. Inside, he edged into the phone booth and dialed a number.

"Joe, in ten minutes you call Mark Dudas on the phone," he said presently. "Give him a line about something confidential. Use your bean this time. Make it so he'll want to call you back. Then you keep him talking about fifteen minutes. Got it? . . . Yeah, I'll pay you, but don't charge too much."

Raney crossed the street again. It was two o'clock in the morning, but there were still a few players at the tables as Raney wandered into the social club. An ex-prizefighter, who was the outside door guard, recognized him.

"Hello, Raney," said the guard. "Looking for someone?"

"Yeah," said Raney.

He didn't stop to explain but barged on by, and walked across the big room to a rear corner. In this corner there was another door, leading to a stairway. The guard here, too, knew Raney.

"Hello, Raney," he said. "Who are you lookin' for?"

"A friend," mumbled Raney.

He pushed past the guard, who didn't seem to like it, and climbed the stairway. There were three doors fairly close together along one side of a corridor. Raney opened one of the doors and walked into a room.

The room had a few chairs and a small table, and there was one man in it. He wasn't as large as the other two, but sharper-looking, and Raney knew that he, too, was a guard. Mark Dudas was a believer in guards.

This guard, also, knew Raney.

"Hello," he said. "Looking for someone?"

"Yeah," Raney said. "Is Dudas in?"

"He might be," conceded the guard. "But he'd be kinda busy."

Raney moved quickly to the door. The guard reached out a detaining hand, but seemed undecided. Raney paid no attention to the guard. He turned the knob, pushed and walked in, kicking the door shut.

A tall man was standing at the window looking out at the stars. He turned casually and looked at Raney. He was carefully dressed, with delicate features and dreamy eyes. People often wondered what it was about Mark Dudas that made them know at once he was a cruel and inhuman monster.

Dudas' smile was superficial. "Hello, Raney," he said politely. "Didn't expect this pleasure."

"It's about a tramp, Dudas." Raney's eyes were like flint. "A tramp who got killed."

"A tramp?" Dudas was amused. "Well, well. If he were hungry, I might feed him. But if he's dead, he's probably better off dead."

"I don't feel that way about him," Raney grunted. "I have an idea this tramp was a good guy. I got a notion he was having trouble. And I'd like to find out who bumped him."

Dudas surveyed Raney intently for a moment, then shifted his gaze and looked in mock inquiry at another man, who was lounging in a comfortable chair in a corner of the room. The man in the chair had the appearance of a barbered ape. As he caught Dudas' eye he sat up as if he were about to spring.

"Wrang, do you happen to know who killed a tramp?" inquired Dudas.

Wrang grinned broadly. "I wouldn't know, boss."

DUDAS turned to Raney again. "Why come to me?"

"You specialize in tramps, Dudas," Raney said. "You make a nice front for yourself by taking care of a bunch of 'em. You got places where they can eat and sleep."

"Admitted," cut in Dudas pleasantly.

"This poor guy was bumped out at Warren Ludsoe's house," said Raney. "You know Ludsoe, huh?"

"Oh, I've met him. A queer chap."

"He's got plenty dough," said Raney. "You like dough, Dudas. You like it well enough to do a lot of things."

"I thought you were talking about a tramp who got killed," Dudas reminded Raney.

Raney shrugged. "Nobody knows this tramp," he said. "Nobody ever seen him before—except me."

Dudas' glance was like sharp steel. "You? You knew him?"

"I didn't say I knew him. I only said I seen him before."

"Interesting! Where was this?"

"Early this evening—that is, last evening. I was just sort of wandering around down where there are men on the bum. This feller was sitting on a bench. He had a sad face, and he didn't look like a no-good kind of bum. Anyhow, you don't see so many down-and-outers these days. Too many jobs building ships and stuff. When you do see one like that he's something special." Raney looked moody. "So I got to talking with this one."

A quick glance was exchanged between Dudas and Wrang.

"What did he tell you?" asked Dudas courteously.

"Not much. Didn't even tell me his name, or where he come from. I asked him if he was in trouble. He said maybe he would be in a jam before the night was over, but he wouldn't say what. Then I told him who I was and if he needed me to just give me a ring at the cafe where I get a sandwich about midnight. I guess maybe it was him who called me from Ludsoe's place."

"You should have a pretty good line on things, Raney," Dudas' tones were quiet. "Didn't he mention any names?"

"Only one."

There was a moment of quiet.

"Just one name?" Dudas said gently.

"Just one. A girl named Alice. He didn't say nothing about her—just let her name drop once."

Dudas was reflecting about this when his phone bell rang. He lifted the instrument.

"Hello," he said. There was no change on his face as he listened. "I'll call you back in a minute."

He turned suavely to Raney. "I'll return soon." He smiled. "Wrang here will entertain you."

He walked quietly out of the room, closed the door behind him. Raney was standing directly in front of Wrang, looming over him.

Wrang grinned. "Why don't you go home, Raney?" he taunted. "You ain't getting anywhere."

His eyes narrowed abruptly. An expression of fear spread over his face. Raney had slipped his revolver out of his holster and its muzzle was within six inches of Wrang's battered nose.

"You've done a lot of dirty things, Wrang," remarked Raney. "Made a lot of people suffer, doing Dudas' dirty work. Nobody ever had a chance to get even with you."

"Now, be a good guy," pleaded Wrang. "Put that thing away."

"Get up, Wrang," Raney said. "If you say or do anything to wise that bird in the next room, I'll let you have it!"

Wrang's wide toothy mouth twitched. Then he forced a grin. "Aw, you—you wouldn't croak me."

"You know I would! A pleasure. Get up!"

Wrang's face was working convulsively now. He clutched the arms of his chair and forced himself to his feet.

"Some mugs who are good at dishing it up, sometimes can't take it at all," said Raney. "You're that kind, Wrang."

Raney reached out and yanked two automatics from Wrang's clothes, one at a time. The gunman's face had gone green with fright. He was scarcely able to stand.

"What—what you want?"

"Just a little information," Raney stated calmly. "And to make sure of getting it, I'll take a little exercise first. You know, Wrang, I never made a practice of slugging people, but with certain mugs I just can't help it. Now, for instance, in your case!"

His powerful hand thudded against Wrang's face. Wrang landed back in the big chair in a whining heap.

"Don't, Raney," gasped Wrang. "Please!"

RANEY, holding his gun in his left hand, reached down with his right and grasped Wrang's ear. He jerked upward. With a squeal, Wrang came to his feet again.

"Please!" begged Wrang. "Aw, quit!"

Raney's fist smacked against Wrang's jaw.

Wrang collapsed on the floor rug.

Raney stood over him, leaning down. His gun almost touched Wrang's nose.

"You'll tell me the truth," he said with a tense placidity. "If you don't I'll scatter your filthy brains all over the rug." He glared down at the gunman. "Where is she?"

Wrang's panic-shot eyes fluttered. "She? You mean some dame?"

"You know who I mean. The girl, Alice—where is she?"

"But—well, I—I don't know."

"You've got just ten seconds, Wrang!" The shiny snout of Raney's gun was warming the end of Wrang's twisted nose. "Just ten seconds!"

It took Wrang only three seconds to decide. "She—she's at the Widden Apartments."

"The Widden?"

"Three blocks from here. On Blanton Street. Just a small place. She goes by the name of Eloise Hamman." The words came tumbling feverishly out of Wrang's mouth, as if he were trying to beat the ten seconds. "Apartment One-Seven-One. You—you won't do me nothing, will you? I'm your pal. You won't tell no one I told you? Dudas would kill me if he knew I'd talked."

Raney stopped him with a hefty slap across the face. He stared down at Wrang for a brief moment, then coolly stuck his revolver away and walked out past the guards.

Not longer than five minutes later he was at the Widden Apartments. It was a small brick building with a secretive look about it. The front door was locked, so he aroused the manager with long persistent ringing.

The manager was annoyed. But Raney grunted something about "Headquarters" and pushed past him. Apartment One-Seven-One was near the rear, on the first floor. Raney hammered on the door.

In a little while the door opened slightly. The face of the girl who looked through the crack at Raney was pretty and pale and startled.

Raney's gruff voice somehow became kindly.

"Lemme in," he said. "I won't hurt you."

She hesitated. Raney pushed on the door and went in. The girl looked at him with her hand at her lips. A flimsy negligee inadequately concealed her nightgown.

"Your name's Alice, ain't it?" said Raney.

The blue eyes widened. She had a young round face with a wealth of brown glossy hair. She was pretty, but inexperienced—credulous looking.

"Who told you my real name?" she asked Raney.

"Never mind that," said Raney. "Come on, Alice."

She shrank back. "Where to?"

"It doesn't matter. You ain't got time to dress. Just stick another dewdad on, so you

won't get too cold." She looked at his face again, and something she saw there reassured her, for she obeyed him now unhesitatingly.

Her trembling fingers adjusted another robe over her shoulders. Raney was already opening the door.

"Don't be scared, kid," he said, as he pushed her along the corridor.

He half carried her out to his car, dumped her in the front seat. He got behind the wheel and started away, zigzagging through darkened streets and narrow alleys. A short time later he stopped in front of a small cheap hotel and helped her out of the car.

They walked into a deserted lobby. No one was behind the short counter, but Raney held the end of a powerful forefinger on the bell button.

A stairway ran up from one side of the lobby. Presently a sleepy-eyed man in a shabby dressing gown appeared and descended. He grinned drowsily at Raney, then looked a little astonished when he noticed the girl.

"Hello, Raney," he said.

"Hello, Joe. A couple of connecting rooms for me and the lady. With a phone in one of 'em. You know the one. And don't go overcharging me, Joe, like you did the last time."

"Me overcharge!" protested Joe. "You know I wouldn't."

"Okay. Let's get going."

The man glanced at the pretty, frightened girl and shrugged. He led the way up the stairs and along a frowsy-carpeted corridor, unlocked a door. He watched as Raney escorted the girl into the room, halting at the threshold.

"Thanks, Joe," Raney mumbled.

Joe went out. The girl sank into a chair and stared at Raney. "What you thinking about, Alice?" Raney asked.

THE girl didn't answer. She shivered.

"You wouldn't happen to be thinking about your mother, huh?"

"Mom and Dad. I just wish I could see them." The girl's voice was low.

"They're a long way from here, huh?"

"Way off in the Middle West," the girl said, as if talking to herself. "It's less than a year since I left there, but it seems so long. Harry—my boy friend—came to this town. I ran away to be near him. He was in the Service. But soon he was sent away. He was one of the first to go, and he won't be coming back. So I was lost. I had no money. I didn't know which way to turn, what to do." The girl stared unblinking at Raney. "Mom and Dad! Gee, they're swell!"

"But not rich, huh?"

She moved her head. "Poor. Awful poor. But they're swell. I miss them a lot."

Raney fumbled for words. "Well, I guess

Mom'll be glad to see you, Alice."

"Yes. I never wrote. Mom will." Alice looked at Raney quickly. "But Dad'll write, too, won't he?"

Raney's fingers caressed his jaw uneasily. "I got to tell you something, Alice. It's about your dad. He—well, he's dead."

"Dead?" she whispered. "Dad is dead?" There was a pause. "Oh!"

"Yeah," said Raney, and gazed at the ceiling. "Someone killed him."

A stricken look came into the girl's eyes. Her voice was barely audible. "Who killed him?"

"Well, the way I figure it, your Dad found out you was in the city, and he didn't have any dough, so he beat his way to this town on the freights to try to find you. When he got here, someone killed him."

Her voice lifted. "Who killed my Dad?"

"That is what you and me have got to find out—right now!" said Raney grimly.

He took the girl's arm, led her into the room adjoining, sat her down at a small table upon which a telephone rested. He scribbled a number on a piece of paper.

"Dial it," he said.

She looked up at him, startled. "That—that's Warren Ludsoe's number!"

Raney merely nodded. She began dialing. "Ask for Ludsoe," Raney prompted her. "Tell him you got away from the place where Dudas had you, and that you are now in Room twenty-five, at Fifteen-thirty-seven Lesson Street."

In a moment the girl was speaking the words he had told her to say into the mouth-piece. Then she cut off the connection quickly.

"Swell," approved Raney. "Ludsoe won't be able to get here for at least twenty minutes. We'll take things easy until he comes."

They waited for some time. Then Raney gave her more instructions.

"Call this number. Ask for Dudas. Tell him you were tricked away from your apartment, and you are now in Room twenty-five, at Fifteen-thirty-seven Lesson Street."

Again, the girl obeyed. When she was through she spoke to Raney. "Dudas said for me to stay right here," she said.

"You'll do that," said Raney. He took her back to the other room. "Now, we'll get somewhere—if it works," he said.

The girl sank into a chair.

"You just wait," Raney went on. "I'll be nearby, but you mustn't allow anyone to know that. And don't let anyone get you to leave. Just stall 'em." He smiled a little. "I've used these rooms before. Joe is an old pal of mine. He's all right—only he likes to charge too much."

He retired to the adjoining room, closed the door and bolted it. He moved a chair up close to the door, stood on it. Above the door was a square wooden grating.

He peered into the room at the girl. From here he could both see and hear.

In a little while, the corridor door of the adjoining room was flung open. Warren Ludsoe strode in, closed the door. The girl looked up at him nervously.

Ludsoe's skimpy smile was cold.

"So here you are, my dear," he said. "Not a pleasant place. Better come along with me."

The girl wavered. "Well, all right. But where?"

"Oh, I know a place where you'll be comfortable, where we can talk things over."

"But Mr. Dudas promised to take care of me."

"If you knew as much about Dudas as I, my dear, you'd have nothing to do with him."

The girl sighed. "But I—I'm so mixed up. I hardly know what to do."

The corridor door opened again, quickly but quietly. The tall menacing form of Mark Dudas moved into the room, and the door closed.

HARD-EYED, Dudas stared at Ludsoe, "So you found her," he said softly.

"She's coming with me," Ludsoe cut in angrily.

Raney, at the grating, was watching and listening intently.

"I—I think I'd better go with Mr. Dudas," she said.

Dudas looked at Ludsoe mockingly.

Ludsoe reddened. "You won't when you know the truth," he snapped.

"The truth?" said the girl. "What do you mean?"

"That man, Dudas, killed your father!"

There was a moment of grim silence. Dudas was quite unmoved.

"Ludsoe is crazy," he said.

"I'm telling the truth," snapped Ludsoe. "I can prove it!"

"Yes?" drawled Dudas.

"Yes." Ludsoe spoke to the girl. "This man found your father at my place. He beat him over the head with a heavy metal paper weight. Evidently he didn't have a gun with him at the time."

Raney, listening at the grating, smiled. "No, he had left his gun in his car outside," the detective thought. "Later he used it when he tried to get me."

"I got that paper weight and locked it in my safe," Ludsoe went on. "That evidence will send you to the electric chair."

He stopped. Dudas had moved slightly. There was an automatic in his hand.

Dudas smiled. "But I've got a gun along now, Ludsoe."

It took Raney just two seconds to step off his chair, shoot the bolt back and step into the room.

"Okay, Dudas," he said. "It's a pinch!"

But Dudas already had fired. Ludsoe's

cold face had assumed a frozen expression. His hand sought the edge of a small table. The table crashed to the floor with him.

Raney lunged at Dudas. The gun was flung from Dudas' hand, streaked across the room. Dudas turned and poked at Raney. Raney dodged and threw his big clubbed fist against Dudas' jaw. Dudas moved his head enough to miss half the force, stepped back several paces.

Dudas stood still. He seemed unworried. He was even smiling a little. Hard metal was jabbed against Raney's back.

"It's just Wrang," explained Dudas. "You can't see him, but he opened the door a second ago and came in behind you. He could shoot you down, but he uses a forty-five and it would make too much noise—and we're not quite ready to leave." He reflected a moment. "Drop your gun on the floor, Raney."

Raney hesitated a moment, then reached

"I do. Well, the meal ticket in the dead man's pocket was good at your restaurant."

Dudas frowned. "I should have searched him."

"So the set-up was easy. The way I figured it, it couldn't be anything but blackmail—for plenty dough. Everything pointed to it. Ludsoe had got mixed up with the girl in the picture. Her father beat his way here looking for her, but couldn't find her.

"Some spy of yours got next to him, learned his story. You saw a chance to make some heavy dough. You found out the girl was only seventeen, which would make it bad for Ludsoe. You had the father send back home for the birth certificate.

"Meantime, you gave her father a bed and a meal ticket. You didn't tell him you knew where the girl was, only promised to help him. Then you got the girl and talked her into moving, so Ludsoe wouldn't know where she was.

"The Man On the Pavement Below Isn't a Suicide—He Was Murdered!"

TONY QUINN stated this theory so positively that Silk was astonished. They were both looking out of the window of the Black Bat's office at a heap in the courtyard—a corpse which had just flashed past them on its way down.

"He's the man that was coming to see us," said Quinn, "and somebody decoyed him to a higher floor and killed him!"

It was a bold statement—but investigation proved that somebody had switched the numbers on the office directory, so that the victim was intentionally misdirected! This baffling incident is only one of many puzzling mysteries in **MURDER AMONG THE DYING**, a thrill-packed Black Bat novel by G. WAYMAN JONES!

COMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE



in his holster and let his revolver slide to the floor.

The girl was sitting still, white-faced and breathless.

Dudas was still smiling. "How much do you know, Raney? And how did you find it out?"

The wide palms of Raney's hands were outstretched in patient explanation. "I found three things on the dead man—A birth certificate, a picture of a girl, and a meal ticket. Those three things told the story."

"Yes?"

"Sure. The birth certificate told me what it was all about—blackmail. The picture of the girl showed me who was the pawn. And the meal ticket led to you."

"Really?"

"Yeah. You run some so-called charity institutions—a couple of flophouses, a restaurant, things like that. You don't run 'em because you're kind-hearted, Dudas. You run 'em for two reasons—first, it gives you a front, and second, you get a bunch of poor bums to work with."

"You should know, Raney."

"A few hours ago you took the father out to see Ludsoe, as part of the blackmail scheme. But the father got wise to the blackmail part of it. He grew stubborn about it. He went into that room where I found him dead, and phoned me."

HERE the big detective paused, eyeing Dudas with grim intentness.

"So, to protect yourself, you murdered him. You knew that Ludsoe wouldn't squeal on you if he could help it. You knew he'd use his influence to have the thing hushed, because if he didn't, he'd be in a mess himself. So right after croaking the girl's father you hurried out and waited for me."

Raney stared at Dudas lugubriously. "You took a shot at me, probably to give Ludsoe a chance to get the body out of the house. But you must've been nervous."

"I'm not nervous now," Dudas said softly. "And neither is Wrang."

Wrang's voice came from behind Raney savagely: "Let me give it to him! Let me do it right away."

"Patience," cautioned Dudas.

"The only thing I had to prove was who

killed the man," Raney went on. "Now I can do it. I figured maybe Ludsoe had glommed the weapon to help protect himself against you. There was a pair of gloves in the room, kind of out of place, and I figured maybe Ludsoe had used 'em to carry the weapon away."

"Ah!" murmured Dudas. "So that's why you got Ludsoe and me together!"

Raney nodded. "To fight over the girl. The technical boys can do plenty with that paper weight in Ludsoe's safe—hairs, blood, fingerprints."

"You're anticipating, aren't you?" giped Dudas. "You see, so far as Headquarters is concerned, I'm not in this thing at all yet. And don't forget you're no longer an officer of the law." He smiled more broadly than usual. "If you and the young lady are found dead—with Ludsoe—it would be assumed that probably Ludsoe was the guilty party, and that you were mixed up in it. They'd figure all of you had a clean-up scrap here."

"Could be," Raney said moodily.

The girl was staring at Dudas as if hypnotized.

Dudas spoke to Wrang, briskly. "You can't shoot him in the back—it wouldn't look right. Move around in front."

"So you thought of that," muttered Raney.

Dudas didn't answer. Wrang circled. He stood in front of Raney, a few feet away. His face was twitching, as if in memory of the blows Raney had inflicted on it.

"We'll take care of Raney first, and then Alice," Dudas said.

A hideous grin of delight widened Wrang's face. The gun in his hand jumped up and down a little.

Raney snapped out his big foot, as if making a short punt. His own revolver was still on the floor, just in front of him, and his foot sent it smartly against Wrang's leg. Instinctively, Wrang jumped.

Raney jumped, too—at Wrang. His left hand grasped Wrang's right hand and held it rigid.

Dudas fired at Raney, but Wrang was in the way and the shot was wild.

Raney teetered on his heels, then toppled backward with a crash. His right arm was about Wrang and he took Wrang with him. He struck the floor with Wrang on top of him.

"Don't let him up, Wrang," Dudas' cool, clear voice said. "Just hold him down."

Raney grinned. Apparently it hadn't occurred to Dudas that this was the way Raney wanted it. Wrang's body gave him protection. Wrang was holding his forty-five in his right hand, but Raney's grip controlled it. Raney peered under Wrang's armpit. Dudas had calmly turned about. He was facing the girl, intent upon killing her at once. The girl was shrinking back, her eyes wide with terror.

Raney wrenched Wrang's wrist until Wrang gasped in agony. The gun slipped from his fingers. Raney snatched it up, leveled it, and fired rapidly past Wrang's ear.

The half-smile on Dudas' face stayed there as he turned to look down at Raney. The shot had taken him in the throat. For a few moments he rocked on his feet, blood making a red cravat just below his Adam's apple. Then he began to sink. He reached out a hand in front of him, palm down, as if he were trying to press against the air so that he could stay up. But the air didn't hold him. Nothing held him.

Raney flung the gun away. His right arm was taking the breath out of Wrang. Raney simply flopped over, with Wrang under him. Wrang's head cracked against the floor. Raney got on his knees. He grabbed Wrang and flung him into a far corner.

Then Raney picked up the guns on the floor and went to the girl. He stroked her hair. "It's time you went back home to Mom, kid," he said.

The girl closed her eyes.

The corridor door opened cautiously. It was the hotel proprietor, Joe, and he was still sleepy-eyed.

"I thought I heard a noise, Raney," he complained.

"Sorry, Joe," said Raney. "I guess you can charge a little extra this time—for the clean-up."

CAN YOUR SCALP PASS THE

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MONEY TO BURN

By DAVID X. MANNERS

"Ace" Bolton Figured All the Angles, but—

LEE'S RUN was the perfect setting for a hole-out. It was a one-in-a-million setting. I thanked my lucky constellations that Wib Holton had told me about it.

"If you ever get in a jam, Ace," he had told me, "go down there. I've seen it and I know. No wanted number would ever be dug up there in a hundred years."



"ACE" BOLTON

In a hundred years? Not in a million, if you asked me. That place was so sleepy, they hadn't yet quite caught up with the news of Pickett's charge. They still had the pins on their battle-maps stuck up around Gettysburg and Cemetery Ridge.

Physically, Lee's Run was just as Wib had described it during the long winter evenings of the year just passed. Spanish moss hanging from cypresses, chopped-cotton fields, cattle scrawny-lean from feeding in the sour marshes.

I looked out at the scene from my room at Mrs. McDonough's. I munched the molasses cookies she kept everpresent beside my chair, and thought over what had happened in New York, and how I would get in touch with "The Brain."

I winced as I thought of New York. Thinks had gone badly in La Guardiaville.

I'm not a dumb citizen, and I should have had a better break. I had figured my caper from alpha to omega. Ironically enough, it turned out just so much Greek.

I had figured it carefully. I had cased and accurately sketched the lay of things. I had rehearsed it mentally until I could have sworn I could do it in my sleep. It had to be that way because it was a robbery no one had any business trying solo. But Wib Hilton, in our cozy cell, had filled me with incredible stories of the things the Brain had done alone. We had hashed this job brown—Wib and I.

I timed it perfectly. The Dutch diamond merchant left the office of the Fifth Avenue diamond brokerage. Clapsed to him, he held a velvet-lined portfolio which I knew contained a two-hundred-thousand-dollar collection of joy—easily-negotiable, medium-sized stones.

I clasped the gun in my coat pocket tighter, and I felt the palm-sweat of my jumping nerves. I had it figured. I would take those rocks down to Lee's Run with me. I would make occasional forays to Atlanta, Macon, Tuscaloosa, and points east and west and sell them bit by bit, darting back to Lee's Run—my little, palmetto-fringed foxhole.

The Dutch diamond merchant stepped into the elevator and I stepped in with him. I jabbed my blued-steel pacifier into his kidney—and then he queered it. He queered it by having his portfolio chained to himself.

Chained!

There was no time to rip open the portfolio. There was only time to shoot and run. I left behind me a Dutchman who would never again grasp a diamond culet between his tweezers. . . .

I LOOKED out at the chopped-cotton landscape. The hot breath of an eight-state alarm was no longer blowing on my neck. I was safe—thanks to Wib Hilton—in Lee's Run, where the Law's long arm was securely sound asleep. But I was also next to broke. That was why it was urgent that I get into touch with the Brain.

The Brain was an old pal of Wib's. He'd been Wib's cell-mate before I moved in. I had only to mention Wib's name, and the Brain would stake me until I cooled. Wib would know where the Brain was. But incoming prison mail was subject to thorough ogling, and I had no intention of let-

ting my alma mater know my present diggings.

Who else? Who else? I tapped the side-arms of my chair in thought. I stood up involuntarily as I got it.

Besides Wib there was one other person who was likely to know the Brain's whereabouts. Wib had told me about her. Cherry lived in the Quarter in New Orleans. Cherry and the Brain were, or had been, married. I was shaky from what had happened in New York. I had no other contacts. I had to get to the Brain and get set right. I had to get down to New Orleans and find out if the Brain were there.

I went downstairs and out of the house. I ambled up the lane to the crossroads where a swayback shanty crowded the road-edge, with a single gas pump, rusted from disuse, in front of it. It had been a store until the war had dried up through traffic.

Sam Fuller sat on its stoop, drawing aimless lines in the dirt with a crooked stick.

"Hi-ya, Sam," I said amiably, as if I had come by only by accident. "You're just the man I want to see."

Sam Fuller raised his dark eyes in a long, slow look.

"Yeah?" he said.

He was a tall, somber man with a pinch-bottle face. His clothes were fraying on the edges, but they were surprisingly well-tailored. He didn't work, and he wasn't living on air. He was, surprisingly for Lee's Run, a man of quick and ready wit.

"It's this way, Sam." I paused, groping for the best way to make my pitch for railroad fare to New Orleans.

"Matter of fact, I just wanted to see you," he put in. He sucked thoughtfully on his lean cheeks, and a faint smile wandered lightly over his lips. "I'm flat. How about letting me have a deuce till next week? Or could you make it five?"

I looked at his eyes, with the perpetual dark moons under them, the sly-fox twinkle in their dark depths. I hackled up.

"Why, you dirty son!" I said. "You one-way pocket! You know you're not broke. You're rolling in candy. I telegraphed my touch by a mile, and you headed me off with a sob of your own. Come on, Sam. I need the coin."

He shook his head, and his look was unhappy.

"I'm not fooling," he said. "I mean it. I'm flat on my neck. I was just sitting here trying to figure a way out when you wandered up."

He was lying in his teeth, and he knew it.

I hadn't been in Lee's Run a month without looking around. I had looked over Sam Fuller's habitation previously, or I wouldn't have considered putting the bee on him. There was a small safe in the unused store at its front. Under a drawn blind I'd seen

Fuller take a pile of green currency from the safe one night, and sit at his table fondly counting it.

Sam Fuller, I decided, must be one of these queer birds you read about in newspapers. Not a week passed but ducks of his type were fished out of gutter in the city, either dead or dying of starvation. Almost invariably, the police have found thousands of dollars in cash and bank books attesting to more alfalfa, in the clothing of such birds. It might do Fuller's frustrated soul good to finance my trip to New Orleans.

I had only to check and make sure the money I'd seen him with was real. I did check that night. In the dark, I waited beside old pinch-faced Sam's back window. Sure enough he took a thick sheaf of money out of the safe and counted it. I could see the dough was real, all right. It made me feel like a sap. I had thought misers were something you only read about in books.

THOUGHTFULLY I went home to Mrs.

McDonough's and up to my room. I lay in bed and rubbed my fingertips against the roughly plastered wall. I didn't work well with gloves on, and I had no desire to leave any tell-tale prints behind. A habit of idly rubbing my digits at every opportunity kept them smooth as a kitten's pink nose. I had no desire to hurry. I would take Mr. Sam Fuller over the jumps in my own sweet time.

It so happened that time came the following night.

In the village, a sweet corn boil was being given for the church steeple fund. I was near enough to see Fuller set off for town.

It was dusk. I waited until dark. Then from back of his house I recovered a sledge, a counterpunch, and a small leatherette bag I had planted earlier. I went in through the window.

I knocked the dial off the safe. I punched through the spindle. It came open easy as a piggy bank. Jackpot come to papa!

I counted better than ten gees into my little black kitty—all in century notes. This Sam Fuller had really been a buffalo-squeezer of the old school. I zipped shut my bag. I turned—and there through the front door stepped Sam.

"Ace—what—"

He didn't have to ask any more. By the light of the lamp, which I had set on the floor, he saw all.

I was on him before he recovered. My two hands about his throat strangled his outcry. His eyes in their black pits rolled upward. I let him sag to the floor.

A feeling of glorious power surged through me. I could rig everything to let me out clean. Wib had always spouted about the Brain's mastermindings. What I was going to do was all right too.

I took Fuller's leather belt from around

his middle. I looped it about his neck. I didn't have to hoist him high. I knew, from a couple suicides I'd seen in stir, that a man can hang himself from the end of a bedstead if he likes. It's the shutting off of blood to the brain that does the trick. You don't have to dangle from on high.

I locked the window through which I'd come. I found a short stub of pencil and a length of string. The lock on the front door was a simple one. I tied a loop about the pencil, inserted it in the head of the key. I closed the door, taking the two ends of the string with me to the other side. A little manipulating and I flopped the key over and the pencil dropped out. I wadded the string in my pocket.

I stashed away the leatherette bag in a spot of heavy undergrowth beneath some swamp oak, where the palmettos had grown big because fire had never set them back. I went home to sleep.

I didn't hear about the death of Sam Fuller until the next day. Then, I wasn't even questioned. To the local yokels it was a simple, open and shut story. Sam Fuller had come home, discovered he'd been robbed of everything he had, and in grief had ended his own life.

I couldn't help but feel it was almost too true to be good. I held my breath for a week, waiting for the props to be knocked out from under me. Then I knew I could wait for a hundred years and nothing would happen. So, cash in hand, I said good-by to Mrs. McDonough and her molasses cookies, and blew.

In New Orleans I found a room. I cleaned up a little and went out to buy a new shirt and cravat. I took three thousand along with me to salt in the bank. The experiences of such as Sam Fuller had taught me it wasn't wise to have all my candy in one box.

I went back to my rooming house, then to call Cherry from the booth in the hall. I didn't need the Brain now in the way I'd needed him before. But I thought it might be nice to meet the old fox and compare notes.

Two bulky men were waiting in the hall when I shoved open the door.

"Jay Bolton?" said the taller man, who had blue jowls. As if it were a brother act, they both flashed their buzzers and cards. "Will you come along with us?"

Butterflies hopped around inside me.

"What for?"

"Questioning," the shorter man said.

"Routine questioning," said his partner.

RIGHT away I felt my toes getting colder and colder. It was nothing new for an ex-con getting picked up, but how did they know I was an ex-con? How did they know

I was in New Orleans? It couldn't be on Sam Fuller's account. It certainly couldn't be for that New York Dutchman with the chained portfolio.

Then what?

The New Orleans gum-shoes kept a closely buttoned lip and let me sweat. They were smart gimlets. They slapped me in a cell and let me sweat some more.

I had to get in touch with the Brain. I had thought I didn't need his help any more, but I did. He would help me. I got approval to put through a call to Cherry. I told her who I was. That I needed the Brain.

Her voice, that I expected to be bright, dragged tiredly across the wire.

"You want the Brain? The Brain is dead. He was killed."

"Killed?"

"Murdered," she said. "They say it was suicide. But I know he was murdered. Robbed and murdered. He was off in a little town in Georgia. Lee's Run . . ."

I let the receiver sag back onto the hook.

Lee's Run. Sam Fuller. The same hideout. Wib Hilton had confided in me. The Brain knew it too. The Brain—Sam Fuller, the out-of-place man in that cypress swamp country. The Brain, Wib's cell-mate before I had moved in. . . .

The coppers sat me down in a chair, and began their mortar fire.

"It was marked money," said the jowly bull. "The bank reported to us, and we've just finished checking it through Washington. It was money from the portfolio of a diamond merchant who was robbed some months ago in New York. Marking the money and keeping a record of serial numbers is a precaution they take against just such robberies."

I saw it all then. Wib and I had been talking over robberies and what kind we were going to pull when we got out. The Brain and Wib, cell-mates before I came along, had been planning the same things. What was more natural than that the Brain and I should pull the same kind of a robbery? Just as what had been more natural than that the Brain, Sam Fuller, should go to Lee's Run, as I had done, when he wanted a hideout?

The marked money had tripped Sam up—just as the chained portfolio had tripped me. But Sam had known when he looked at it, that the money was marked and that a record must have been kept.

"A man was killed in that New York holdup," the detective went on.

The butterflies began to fly. That made it three killings they could have me for. I could take my pick. I'd always wanted money to burn. Now I had it. I saw a long green carpet of it rolled out—straight to the chair!



THE HILLS LURE DEATH

By H. WOLFF SALZ

CHAPTER I

Torture for an Indian

PEOPLE said of County Prosecutor John Stuart that he was the "goldingest, wide-awakest, up-and-at-'em young feller" in the Ozark hills. Nevertheless, that July night it was more than five minutes before he awakened to the thunderous knocking at the front door downstairs.

And then, it was not the insistent demands of the belated visitor that so rudely shattered his blissful sleep, as it was Ann's urgent and none too gentle prodding.

He screwed one sleep-clouded eye open, stared foggily up at his wife's alarmed face, and waved his arms as if to sweep away a nightmare.

"Go 'way! Havin' wonderful dream! Got a ten-pound trout on the line!"

"Johnny!" his wife pleaded. "It must be important! They've been knocking for over five minutes. And they'll wake up the children!"

Only then did the continuing commotion at the door infiltrate into his sleep-befogged mind. With a futile groan for vanishing sleep, he pushed himself to a sitting position and listened.

"Guy's got the cussed persistence of a tax-collector," he grumbled.

"Maybe it's a matter of life and death," Ann suggested.

Johnny Stuart's grin was one of good-natured tolerance. Ann was not yet accustomed to the idea that the business of a county prosecutor was never a matter of life and death—at least, not in a sleepy, leis-

Johnny Stuart Plays a Dual Role When He



"Frisk him, Violet,"
the tall man ordered

An Exciting Complete Mystery Novelet

urely Big Bend County.

But Stuart, well along in his second term as county prosecutor, was seasoned to these midnight interruptions. He knew that as legal guardian of Big Bend County he was expected to serve as combination free lawyer, odd-jobs man and night watchman.

Ann, on the other hand—well, in St. Louis, where he had met and wooed her, while practicing law before returning to the home town, midnight alarms generally signified urgent police business.

Slipping into his robe he gave her a reassuring smile.

"Probably Lem Peabody to report that someone has raided his chicken house again. Or maybe Sophia Grant to requisition aid in bringing her ever-loving and ever-soused husband home from the saloon."

IN THE hall downstairs, he turned on the light and saw by the grandfather clock that it was twelve-fifteen.

He pulled a panel of the chiffon door curtain aside and peered out into the dark. Someone made violent gestures. Stuart recognized Pete Braveheart and opened the door.

The old Choctaw Indian staggered into the hall and would have fallen if Stuart hadn't caught him.

"Close the door, Johnny!" he gasped. "Lock it!"

Johnny Stuart pushed the door shut with his left hand, holding Pete up with his other hand.

"What is it, Pete? What happened?"

He saw that Pete was barefooted, and with a shock observed the fresh wounds on the

Tackles a Grim Ozark Mountain Mystery!

old Indian's toes, nasty open wounds. "Think they followed!" Pete panted. "Maybe hiding outside."

He swayed and his eyes closed.

Stuart swung the frail old Indian up into his arms, carried him to an open door at the end of the hall. He placed him on the studio couch of the room that he and Ann rather hopefully referred to as his "den," but which, more realistically, though unofficially, was the children's rumpus room. He flicked the light switch.

He turned back to the old Indian, saw that he was trying to sit up, and was fumbling weakly at the top button of his frayed cotton shirt.

"They not know—I have map hidden under shirt," he whispered. "They torture me—try to make me tell where—"

He succeeded in opening the top of his shirt, groped under it for a moment, then withdrew an old buckskin pouch. He extended the pouch to Stuart.

"I ran away—into woods—came here."

"What did they want, Pete?" Johnny Stuart asked.

"Map in pouch," Pete whispered. "Give to my grandson, Jimmy Braveheart. Dentist in Army. Sometime he come back."

"Who were they, Pete?"

"Not know them."

From the pouch Stuart withdrew a grimy sheet of folded paper. He smoothed it out, stared at the unintelligible lines and nearly illegible words. Slowly his eyes widened in disbelief.

"You mean the map to the old Spanish treasure!" he exclaimed incredulously.

"Give to grandson, Jimmy He not know about it. You are county lawyer—honest man. Will not steal map."

Pete's eyes closed. Stuart leaned over him, gently shook his shoulder.

"Is it the Spanish treasure, Pete? Pete!"

The old Indian's eyes opened. He was staring at Stuart with glassy eyes.

"Crazy white man law—take it away. No! For Jimmy. Make him—rich."

The old man's voice dwindled away, but his lips were still moving. Stuart bent closer, until his cheeks almost touched Pete's lips. Like the whisper of a dying breeze, came the sound of the old Indian's voice.

"Talk too much—tell too much secret. Whisky. I sell. Not tell where other stuff is." His voice rose like a harsh, angry wind. "No! You steal from me! Will not tell!"

He appeared to be slipping rapidly into delirium. His eyes closed again. His lips stopped moving.

There was a sound at the door. Stuart looked up, saw his wife standing there, her chenille robe fastened about her. Her brown eyes were wide with wonder.

"Phone Doc Traynor. Ann!" Stuart called. "Tell him to get over here in a hurry!"

Her lips moved. Stuart saw that she was staring past him, toward the window behind the desk.

"Johnny," she whispered, "there's someone at the window!"

He straightened, crossed swiftly to the window.

A shadowy figure was slipping across the lawn toward the shrubbery that bordered the sidewalk. No, there were two figures, bent forward and moving with stealthy swiftness.

He wheeled, dashed across the room and down the hall to the front door. As he plunged into outside darkness, he heard his wife's cry behind him.

"Johnny, come back! They may be armed!"

That sobering thought slowed Johnny Stuart, but he continued toward the shrubs. He found no trace of the unknown prowlers. On the sidewalk he looked both ways along the dark street. It was deserted.

Back in the house, he called:

"Have you phoned Doc Traynor, Ann?"

She shook her head numbly, her eyes fixed in awe on the motionless figure on the couch.

STUART followed her fixed stare, crossed to the couch and leaned over the old Choctaw's body. He touched the limp wrist, placed his hand over the old man's heart. He straightened. His eyes had a shocked look. It was hard to believe that old Pete^d was dead.

Doc Traynor, after he had arrived and completed his examination, murmured:

"Died of heart failure." He indicated the marks at the tips of Pete's fingers and the scars on the dead man's bare feet. "His old heart couldn't take the punishment. He must have been tortured for hours, his fingertips, the soles of his feet burned."

Sheriff Toby Kelstrom, who had arrived a few minutes after the coroner, shook his head incredulously.

"Who'd want to murder him for a Spanish treasure," he murmured, "when nobody hereabouts ever really believed there was a Spanish treasure?"

The sheriff was a gentle-mannered, soft-spoken man, built like a granite monument, but with cheerful blue eyes and a wide, humorous mouth. His eyes now were cold sober and his mouth was set in a grim line.

"Some people believed it," Stuart answered. "There were even some who tried following Pete, but it would have taken more than the combined talents of a bloodhound, Sherlock Holmes and Daniel Boone to trail him through the hills."

"What would a Spanish treasure be doing here in the Ozarks?" Ann Stuart exclaimed.

"You'll find a partial answer in your history books, honey," Stuart said. "You

know, way back in the Sixteenth Century, De Soto came up the Mississippi searching for an Indian city supposedly paved with gold. And Coronado came snooping around looking for the golden cities of Cibola. Then there was the French explorer de la Motte Cadillac, back around Seventeen-hundred. He'd heard about fabled mountains of gold, and rivers chock full of diamonds."

"But none of those explorers ever found any treasure, if I remember my history," Ann said. "So how could Pete find any?"

"The story is pretty familiar around these parts," Stuart told her. "There was a Spanish pirate named Antonio, who was supposed to have come up the Meramec with a great treasure. According to the legend, his loot was hijacked by French lead miners working in the Ozarks under a concession from Louis XV. They made off with all they could carry and hid the rest in a cave, which they sealed and marked with some kind of hocus-pocus sign. The Seven Mule-shoe Marks."

"The cave of the Seven Mule-shoe Marks!" Ann exclaimed. "I've heard about that! But I've always thought it was just a legend, one of those perennial stories told for the benefit of summer tourists."

"Well—" nodded Stuart, "according to that legend, those Frenchmen were wiped out by a band of Indians, and one of them is supposed to have told where he'd hidden a map to the treasure-cache. But the Indians couldn't understand his broken English, except one of Pete Braveheart's ancestors, and he kept the information to himself, later passing it on to his sons, until it finally came down to Pete."

"Pete didn't have any idea who the men who tortured him were, Johnny?" Sheriff Kelstrom asked, after Coroner Traynor and an assistant had removed the body.

"Said they were strangers, Toby," Stuart answered. He had already repeated Pete's dying remarks as nearly word-for-word as he could remember them. He had tried to shepherd Pete's jumbled, meaningless phrases into an understandable pattern.

"What I get, first of all," he murmured, "is that Pete had been selling something to someone—something from his hidden treasure, if we're to believe there really is a lost Spanish treasure. The one who'd bought the stuff then tried to find out where the rest of it was hidden."

"Then Pete must have told him he'd sell to him, but wouldn't tell where it came from," the sheriff suggested.

"Not quite," Stuart replied. "Pete evidently boasted about the amount of treasure he still had hidden. That's what he must have meant when he muttered, 'Talk too much—tell too much secret.' What I don't get is what he meant when he whispered the word, 'whisky.' I'm pretty sure he wasn't asking

me for any. He doesn't like the stuff."

"If I wasn't so certain Pete never drank," Kelstrom commented, "I'd say maybe he was trying to tell you that's how come he had talked too much. Maybe whoever he'd been selling part of his treasure to got him drunk, trying to loosen his tongue."

"That fits, all right." Johnny Stuart nodded. "But with plenty of summer visitors out here now, there's no way of knowing which of 'em are the ones we want."

"I reckon you'll want to be coming along when I go out to Pete's cabin, Johnny?" Kelstrom queried.

"Wouldn't do much good to go out there at night, Toby."

"First thing in the morning." The sheriff nodded.

"Stop by for me."

When Kelstrom arrived in his flivver next morning at seven, two of his deputies, Clem Corbett and Jeff Keater, were with him. They drove most of the way up the dusty, rutted road into the hills in silence.

Johnny Stuart was lost in his own thoughts until a shiny dark sedan careened around a bend in the road and almost drove the sheriff's flivver into the ditch. As the sedan roared past them, after slowing for only a moment, Stuart sat up and stared after it through the rear window.

"Know them?" Sheriff Kelstrom asked.

"Not the driver," Stuart said. "But I know that big fellow next to the driver."

"You'd think this was a race-track the way they come around the bend," Kelstrom snorted.

"I wonder—" said Stuart.

"You wonder what?"

"I wonder what Christie Miller is doing down here in Big Bend."

"Who's Christie Miller?" Kelstrom queried.

"Ever hear of Lou Donazelli, Toby?"

"The feller that runs that chain of taverns and tourist cabins all through the eastern part of the state?"

"That's the one," Stuart said. "Christie Miller is Donazelli's general manager, his first lieutenant. I used to run into him once in a while when I was practising law in St. Louis."

"If you want to ask him what he'd doing down in these parts, Johnny," commented Clem Corbett, "you can find him at Cap'n Nick's place. That's where he's staying. I saw him checking in there with a suitcase yesterday morning."

"Maybe I will want to talk to him," Stuart said thoughtfully. "After we look around Pete's place."

The examination of Pete Braveheart's one-room squared log cabin didn't take long. Pete had evidently put up a terrific struggle against his tormentors before escaping. The two straight-backed chairs and pineboard

table lay overturned on the planked board floor. The old iron cookstove and ancient bedstead that completed the furnishings appeared undisturbed.

There was no apparent clue as to his tormentors. They had evidently been cautious men. Not even a stray match-stick or cigarette butt was in evidence.

CHAPTER II

The Threat

BACK in town two hours later, Stuart and Kelstrom stopped off at Cap'n Nick's place, Big Bend's only hotel—a three-story brick building with a freshly painted green wooden awning extending over the sidewalk.

They found Christie Miller in the restaurant annex on the first floor. He was a beefy, round-shouldered man with cherry-red cheeks and dark eyes that blinked owlishly from under shaggy black brows.

He waved cheerily to Stuart as the county prosecutor and the sheriff appeared in the doorway.

"Greetings, John, m'boy! I hear you've done pretty well for yourself since you left St. Louis. They tell me you're the law in this county."

Stuart remembered that the last time he had seen Miller he had threatened to kick the fat man's teeth down his throat if he didn't pay up a bill he owed Stuart for handling a minor court case for Donazelli. Miller had paid the bill.

"What brings you down to Big Bend?" Stuart asked.

"Why, what brings anyone down into the Ozarks?" Miller grinned "Fishing, of course."

Johnny Stuart knew that Miller didn't know the difference between a whale and a small-mouthed bass.

"You weren't out fishing last night, for instance?" he murmured. "Say, between six o'clock and midnight?"

"As it happens"—Miller smiled expansively—"no. Last night I happened to be right here in the lobby of the hotel. Say, between eight and midnight. Why?"

"And I suppose plenty of people saw you here?" Stuart suggested.

"I suppose they did," Miller agreed. "Especially, your good Captain Nick, with whom I played checkers."

"You wouldn't know anything about Pete Braveheart, would you?" Stuart asked.

"Pete Braveheart?" Miller lifted a shaggy brow. "Sounds like a track pony."

Stuart nodded and walked out into the street with Sheriff Kelstrom.

"Now, why would you figure that feller knew anything about the murder, Johnny?" the sheriff demanded skeptically. "Seems to me, you've got no more reason to suspicion him than maybe a gross of other summer visitors."

"Maybe you're right, Toby," Stuart agreed. "But I know this. Up in St. Louis they used to say, if there's trouble, look for Christie Miller, and if Christie Miller is around, look for trouble. Thing is, though, nothing's ever been pinned on him. He may be a crook and a killer, but he's always been smart enough to keep out of the law's grip. Like, for example, making sure he'd have an alibi cooked up for last night—in case he is mixed up with Pete's murder."

"But what would a feller like that know about Pete's Spanish treasure?" Kelstrom demanded. "Strikes me he just ain't the kind that would go so far as killing a man for a treasure that nobody ain't really sure exists."

"Maybe." Johnny Stuart nodded absently. His lips were pursed and there was a far-away look in his eyes.

When they entered his office, Martha Randolph, his secretary, handed him a plain, sealed, but unaddressed envelope.

"Little Thad Brinker brought this about a half-hour ago. He said a man came up to him on a street corner and told him to bring it to you. Thad didn't know who the man was."

Stuart went into his private office, sat down behind his desk and tore the envelope open. Sheriff Kelstrom took the extra chair.

The prosecutor tried to keep his hands from shaking as he read the penciled lines:

RUN THIS MESSAGE IN TODAY'S DAILY BULLETIN:

"WILL SELL CAR CHEAP, GOOD CONDITION, BOX 5." IF WE SEE IT, WE'LL GET IN TOUCH WITH YOU ABOUT MAP. IT'S THE SMART THING TO DO IF YOU LOVE YOUR WIFE AND KIDS.

Wordlessly, Johnny Stuart extended the paper to the sheriff, who read the note slowly, then carefully placed it on the edge of the desk. He took out the big dollar watch from his vest pocket, studied it intently.

"Better be on your way over to the Bulletin, Johnny. Not much time before they go to press."

"What time is it?"

"Five after one."

"The Bulletin goes to press at two. Plenty of time."

They spoke in low tones. The office seemed very quiet. The sheriff watched Stuart's face. Stuart was staring at his desk blotter.

"You don't want to cut it too close, Johnny," Kelstrom murmured. "If you miss today's edition those fellers might think you weren't of a mind to hand over the map."

Johnny Stuart nodded. "That's what they'd think, all right."

HE STOOD up. He walked around his desk and crossed to the window, staring out into the glare of the hot, drowsy street.

Perspiration rolled down his face. He mopped it with a handkerchief that grew soggy.

"You see, Johnny," the sheriff said to his back, "you and me and most everybody else may not put much stock in that map. But these fellers were willing to commit murder once to get it, and there's no telling what else they'd do to get hold of it."

Stuart turned and faced the sheriff, his back to the window.

"It's like this, Toby," he said. "The map doesn't mean anything. I mean, that isn't the important thing—whether they get hold of it or not. But there's something else."

He paused, groping for the right words.

"Now, you take the war, for instance. We're fighting for Four Freedoms. Freedom from fear, that's one of them. Where the fear has its beginning doesn't matter. I mean, whether or not it starts with a paper-hanger on the other side of the ocean, who tries to get what he wants by intimidation and by bombing women and children in undefended cities—like Warsaw and Rotterdam."

"What you got on your mind, Johnny?"

The prosecutor found words flowing more freely from his lips. It was as though by throwing off the burden of uncertainty in his mind, he had also freed the flow of words that came straight from his heart.

"The people of this county elected me county prosecutor, Toby. They gave me a duty to protect their rights, to protect them against fear and intimidation. Today, I'm the one intimidated. Tomorrow maybe it'll be Cy Handley or Kay Osowska. Do you see what I mean, Toby? There's no telling where it'll stop, if you let that kind of dirty, underhanded intimidation have its way."

The sheriff stood up. "If you want a half-dozen deputies to watch over Ann and the kids while we're running those buzzards down, you can have them, Johnny."

"Three men will do it, Toby," Stuart said. "I want one man at the front door, one at the back and one inside the house."

The sheriff went out of the office. In a few moments he returned.

"I sent Clem Corbett out to your place with Jeff Keater and Frank Revel. They won't let Ann nor the kids out of their sight. Clem will phone soon as he gets there."

The phone on the desk rang. Johnny Stuart reached for it eagerly, though he knew the deputies couldn't have arrived at his place that soon.

The voice he heard was unfamiliar.

"Is this County Prosecutor Stuart?"

"That's right."

"I'm Thomas Hammond. I believe you know who I am."

Stuart did know who Hammond was. The Hammond brothers were St. Louis business men who had built a splendid modern home at the edge of Lake Oswayga twenty miles out of town. They owned a well-known importing firm, and spent summers at the lake-

shore house, surrounded by forty acres of well-kept grounds. They entertained guests from the city frequently, and mixed but little with the hill people. Thomas was the elder of the brothers.

"I want to see you, Stuart," Hammond said. He spoke in a low, hardly audible voice. "It's about Pete Braveheart's death."

"What do you know about it?" Stuart asked quickly.

"I can tell you a good deal," said the voice. "Stay in your office. I'll be there in twenty minutes."

Hammond hung up and Johnny Stuart repeated the man's statement to the sheriff. Then the sheriff went to the door.

"While you're waiting for Hammond," he said, "I'll hunt up Thaddy Brinker and see if he can describe the feller who gave him the message for you."

The phone rang again in a few minutes. It was Ann.

"What is it, Johnny? Why are the deputies here?" She was trying to keep the worry out of her voice. "Has it got something to do with Pete?"

Stuart did his best to sound casual, to treat the presence of the sheriff's men in the house lightly. But when he hung up he knew that he had not succeeded. Ann knew every nuance of his voice too well. He had not argued when she had ridiculed the notion that she needed protection. She was convinced that he, and not she, was the one in danger.

"Johnny," she had said, "please be careful, darling!"

STUART looked at his watch. There was still time to make the Daily Bulletin's deadline. His jaw muscles were ridged. His lips were dry. Suddenly he swept up the killer's message, crumpled it in a ball and hurled it across the room.

He opened his private safe, withdrew Pete's map and returned to his desk. Deep lines furrowed his brow as he stared at the penciled lines.

He was still staring unseeingly at the map when Sheriff Kelstrom came in later and reported a discouraging conversation with Thaddy Brinker.

"First the stranger was tall, then maybe he was short. He was dark, but he might not have been. He had a mustache, but Thaddy wasn't sure about that either. What about Hammond?"

Johnny Stuart was shocked when he looked at his watch and realized that almost two hours had passed since Thomas Hammond had phoned. Hammond had said he would arrive in twenty minutes.

Stuart phoned the Hammond house. George Hammond said he didn't know where his brother was. He had left about two hours ago for town. Yes, he was sure it was

about two hours ago. "Anything wrong?"

"I'm coming out to see you, Hammond," Stuart said. "Please wait there. Sheriff Kelstrom is with me. . . ."

The Hammond house was a single-story sprawling ranch-type building. The room into which George Hammond showed his two visitors was large, airy and high-ceilinged. The furniture was modernistic, expensive. Contemporary pictures decorated the pine-paneled walls. The atmosphere betokened graceful living.

George Hammond was obviously worried about his brother's whereabouts.

"Tom is a meticulous, precise sort of man," he said. "He doesn't do things on impulse. If he said he was coming into town to see you, that's exactly what he intended doing."

"He was right anxious to talk to Johnny," Sheriff Kelstrom commented.

"Did he say about what?"

"He thought he knew something about Pete Braveheart's murder," Stuart said.

"Pete Braveheart murdered!" Hammond exclaimed in shocked incredulity.

Stuart looked at Hammond. "Did you know Pete?"

Hammond didn't answer. He appeared not to have heard the question. His thin fingers were nervously dry-washing his pinched features.

"It's strange about Tom," he muttered. "I can't imagine why he never got to your office if he said that's where he was going."

Johnny Stuart stared at George Hammond's worried face. Lines and shadows around the deep-set dark eyes indicated a man who brooded much. It was hard to judge his age, though the prosecutor would have guessed by the gray that touched the man's temples that he was in his early forties.

"How did you and your brother happen to know Pete Braveheart?" he asked.

"Why, Pete occasionally worked for us—garden work," Hammond answered absently.

He stood up, crossed to an expensive-looking white oak cabinet between two large windows. He brought out a quart bottle of whisky and glasses.

"Your news about Pete's death has been quite a shock," he muttered. "Would you care to join me?"

He carried the bottle to the coffee table in front of Stuart. He poured a stiff drink into one of the glasses, looked questioningly at Stuart and the sheriff. Both shook their heads.

As Hammond downed his drink, Johnny Stuart leaned forward and picked up the bottle of "Old Angus." His eyebrows lifted and he puckered his lips as he studied the label.

"Thirty-four-year-old stuff," he murmured. "Why, that's a gold mine in itself in these days of liquor shortage."

Hammond nodded vaguely. "Help yourself," he said. "Wait—I'll wrap it up for you and you can take it along. I've a few more bottles of that pre-prohibition Scotch."

"You tempt me mightily, Mr. Hammond," Stuart admitted. "But I'm afraid it wouldn't be quite ethical for the county prosecutor to accept such magnificent gifts. Especially with the sheriff standing by!"

SHERIFF KELSTROM stood up.

"Johnny, suppose we drive along the road to town and see if we can't find someone who saw Hammond's brother drive by?"

Hammond accompanied them to the door. "If you run into my brother," he said anxiously, "please have him phone me. I can't help worrying about him, especially after what you've said about Pete Braveheart. Though I can't imagine what Tom thought he knew about that business."

Thomas Hammond's car was well-known along the old road to Big Bend. Mort Jennifer, who ran the general store at the 66 crossing, was sure he had seen Hammond drive by at about one o'clock. He had also noticed a second car, a dark coupé, close behind Hammond's sedan.

It was Jaimy Horton, further up the road, who had seen the coupé move up in front of Hammond's sedan and the two cars stop at the side of the road. Two men had got out of the coupé and walked back to talk to Hammond. Then one of the men had moved in beside Hammond and the two cars had turned into the narrow road leading to the old abandoned National Lead mine.

Jaimy had been hoeing in his corn field and was sure that none of the three men had noticed him. He had been some forty yards from them and couldn't be sure what the two strangers looked like. One had been tall, the other short and plumpish.

Not a significant description.

CHAPTER III

Missing Wife

IT WAS a ten-minute drive up a rutted dirt road to the old lead mine. Then Stuart and the sheriff had to climb over a barbed wire fence to get into the deserted mine property.

The place looked as if it had not been visited by a human being in the decade since the mine had been shut down.

As they moved toward the weathered, moldering clapboard shacks that had once housed the mine offices, Kelstrom murmured:

"Seems like a wild goose chase."

But the sheriff was wrong. They found Thomas Hammond behind a tumble-down tool shack. He was sprawled on the ground,

face to the earth, arms outstretched as if, in dying desperation, he had tried to grasp at something to break his fall.

Johnny Stuart turned away after his first look. The bullet had made an ugly mess of Hammond's head, where it had entered behind the left ear. Hammond's sparse hair was matted with coagulated blood.

"That makes two," he heard Sheriff Kelstrom murmur in a voice that was both sad and angry. "Two cold-blooded killings in two days!"

The sheriff's words started a cold wave at the base of Stuart's spine and up his back. The coldness spread along his hands and to the tips of his fingers. He felt the sudden violent hammering of his heart.

"Toby," he said, "I'll take your car and send help from town. I want to check up on Ann and the kids."

"Sure, Johnny. Just send Doc Traynor and a couple of my boys out here when you get there."

Stuart was not conscious of climbing over the fence, nor of the rusty barbs that tore his fingers. He was not conscious of getting into Kelstrom's car nor of the steering wheel that his hands clutched with such fierce intensity that his knuckles turned white and brought out purple veins on the back of his hands. He was not conscious of the darkening hilly countryside that swept past him in a blur.

He tried to remind himself that Clem Corbett and the other deputies were with Ann and the kids, but that didn't stop the pounding of his heart. He told himself that the killers wouldn't dare carry out their threat, but the image of a sprawled body with blood-matted hair swept that argument away like a blast of icy wind.

When he reached his house, Clem Corbett was waiting at the open front door. Clem's gray face and taut, pale mouth was a signal of disaster.

Stuart caught Clem's wrist in a fierce grasp.

"Talk fast, Clem! What happened?"

"I was sitting right here in front of the door, while Jeff was at the back door and Frank was in the house, when these two fellers drove up in a coupé. They came up to the door and said they were reporters from a St. Louis paper, sent down to write a story about Pete's death. They wanted to interview Mrs. Stuart. I told them nobody could see Mrs. Stuart, that they'd have to talk to you. They turned like they were going, then suddenly spun back and each of 'em had a gun in his hand. They caught me flat-footed."

He avoided Stuart's eyes as he went on.

"They got my revolver, made me go into the house in front of 'em. Frank, inside, couldn't do anything, for fear he'd hit me if he took a shot, so they got his gun, and

got Jeff the same way. One of 'em tied us up, and they got away with Ann."

"The children?" Johnny snapped harshly.

"They were playing upstairs. After a while, Junior came down, and he untied us. Jeff and Frank are out looking for you."

"Did you recognize either of those two men?"

"Never saw 'em before."

Junior and Sis came racing down the stairway noisily.

"Where's mother, Dad?" Junior demanded. "Mr. Corbett said she'd come back with you."

"I'm hungry, Daddy," Sis cried. "Mommy didn't fix dinner."

Johnny Stuart caught the little three-year-old in his arms, pressed his lips to her feathery yellow hair.

"You're a big girl now, honey." He tried to keep his voice from choking. "You can wait a little while for dinner now, can't you?"

Kathy's pride conquered the call of her stomach.

"Sure, Daddy."

He put her down. He patted Junior's shoulder.

"Son," he said, "you and Sis play upstairs till I call you. I've got some important work to do."

Junior looked frightened, but he nodded bravely.

"All right, Dad."

He must have realized that this was no time for questions.

STUART told Clem about the new murder, relayed the sheriff's instructions to send Doc Traynor and a couple of deputies to the mine. After Clem hurried away, the county prosecutor walked miles in his den, trying to calm his explosive nerves, trying to mold a pattern of reason out of his jumbled thought and fears.

He was still striding the floor when Sheriff Kelstrom arrived two hours later.

"Listen, son," Kelstrom said. "We'll find Ann for you." He had heard about Ann's disappearance from Clem. "We'll get every able-bodied man in the county organized into a posse. We'll comb the hills with a fine-toothed comb. We'll notify the State Patrol. There's no place in the state those buzzards will be able to hide out from us."

"No," Stuart said, "that won't work. With Ann in their hands, they've got us by the throat."

For a moment the sheriff was silent, chewing his underlip.

"Anything you say, Johnny," he murmured finally.

He started for the door.

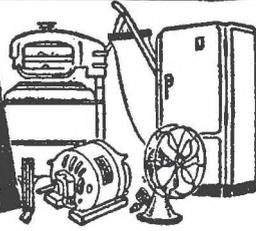
"Wait, Toby. There's a call I want to make and I'll want you on hand if anything comes of it."

The sheriff listened in silence while Stuart



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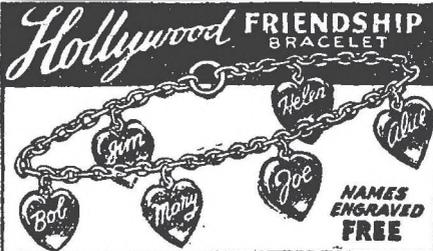


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asked the operator for Long Distance. When he hung up to wait for the call to be put through, Kelstrom looked at him questioningly.

"There's a friend of mine in St. Louis," Stewart said, "Joe Hallahan, an assistant prosecuting attorney, who might be able to come through with some information."

"What you got in mind?"

"Something George Hammond said. It's not much to go on, but we can't be choosy. Remember how Hammond explained knowing Pete?"

"Why, sure. Said Pete done some garden work for him."

"Had you ever known Pete to do any kind of work at all?"

Kelstrom rubbed his jaw, shook his head. "Come to think, I don't reckon I ever had. But still—"

"But still Hammond could have been telling the truth." Stuart nodded. "I know. But it won't hurt to look into every possible angle."

When Johnny Stuart got his connection ten minutes later and explained his request to Joe Hallahan, the St. Louis assistant prosecuting attorney said:

"Let me call you back on this, Johnny. I'll get some of the other boys to help me dig up whatever dope we can. It may be a couple of hours, so stick around the phone."

It was less than an hour later that Hallahan's return call came through.

"Sorry, Johnny. Not much dope that may be helpful to you."

"Let's have it, Joe."

When Hallahan finished talking, Stuart said:

"One more thing, Joe. What's the set-up between Christie Miller and Lou Donazelli? Are they involved in any shady deals right now? Can you dig up some info on them for me?"

"I can tell you that offhand, Johnny," Hallahan answered. "Christie Miller isn't working for Donazelli any longer, Donazelli was drafted into the Army last week and he sold out to Miller."

"Then Miller is boss of the tavern chain?"

"That's right."

Stuart thanked Hallahan, hung up and repeated the information about Christie Miller.

"Don't see what connection that can have with Pete Bravehart's Spanish treasure," Kelstrom commented. "What about the Hammonds?"

"No angle there," Stuart murmured. "Both the Hammond brothers have excellent reputations. Never been mixed in any sort of shady deals—strictly upright men, as far as Hallahan could find out. Before the war, their importing company did big business. Specialized in curios and spices

from the Orient."

Kelstrom nodded. "I could have told you that, Johnny."

"Since the war," Stuart went on, "their business has been taking a bad licking, what with all shipping space needed for essential materials. They've been on the rocks and have put the business up for sale."

"Both have equal share in the business?"

Stuart nodded. "Same as their summer home here. And they've put that up for sale, too, with a St. Louis real estate agency."

The sheriff stood up. "Don't see how any of that can have any bearing on Pete's murder, nor on Hammond's."

Johnny Stuart didn't answer. He knew the sheriff was right. He ran nervous fingers through perspiration-wet, tousled hair.

"I should have done what those killers told me, Toby. Put their message in the Bulletin. It was Ann's life I gambled with."

"Take it easy, boy," Kelstrom said. "You did what you thought was the right thing. Now you just sit tight, and those buzzards will get in touch with you. Do just what they say. Then when Ann's safe at home, we'll go after them."

THE way Kelstrom said it, it sounded simple. But Stuart knew it was not going to be as easy as that. Would they ever let Ann out of their hands alive? Once she had seen and could identify them?

It was half an hour after Sheriff Kelstrom departed when the phone rang.

"Been sweating good pal?" asked a strange voice.

"Who is this?" Stuart's knees felt watery.

"Next time, pal, when you're told to advertise in the newspapers, do like you're told, then you won't sweat so much."

Stuart came half-way out of his chair, clutching the phone in white hands.

"Listen, if you've harmed my wife—"

"Shut off the wind and listen!"

Stuart's breath piled up in his throat. He swallowed hard.

"I'm listening."

"That's a good boy," the brittle voice said.

"Now that the law has cleared out you be at the old lead mine in half an hour. Alone. Bring the Indian's map."

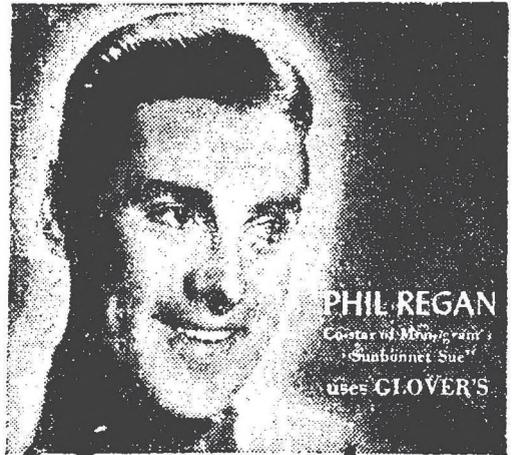
"My wife?"

"If you want to see her alive, come out alone. If anybody follows you out there, you'll never see her again."

There was an abrupt click at the other end.

Five minutes later, Johnny Stuart was at his office, withdrawing Pete's map from the safe. Earlier in the day he had stared at the map for hours, hating it with all his heart. It was the map that had brought

[Turn page]



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the cold, crushing hand of death down upon two human lives, the map and the stupid, romantic legend of the Seven Mule-shoes treasure that had beckoned death so close to his own home. . . .

Somewhere in the Stygian blackness a bullfrog was croaking mournfully, as Johnny Stuart levered himself over the barbed-wire fence of the lead mine property. It was the only sound that punctured the brooding silence.

A shroud of darkness curtained the dilapidated mine buildings toward which he moved with slow, groping steps. The crunch of his shoes on the graveled road sounded loud in the stillness.

"Put your hands up and keep walking."

The voice came from the darkness behind him. Stuart obeyed. With arms raised, he continued moving toward the shadowed buildings. The crunch of footsteps was directly behind him.

A human shadow detached itself from the larger shadow that Johnny recognized as the tool shack.

"Frisk him, Violet," the man behind Stuart said.

"Violet," was a chunky man, a foot shorter than Johnny Stuart. His features were obscured by the darkness. His fingers patted the prosecutor with professional sureness.

"He's clean, Roy."

The first man stepped out from behind Stuart. He was tall and lean, with wide shoulders and narrow hips.

"Give with the map, pal," he commanded, and Stuart recognized the voice he heard on the phone.

"Where's my wife?" he demanded.

"The map first."

Stuart withdrew the folded scrap of paper from his vest pocket. The tall man accepted it calmly, struck a match. In the brief flare, Stuart saw a pair of bright, dark eyes, a smooth-walled nose, thin lips.

The gunman's examination of the map was cursory. He pocketed it.

"Keep him here till we get back, Violet," he said to the chunky man.

"Not so fast!" Stuart exclaimed harshly. "Where's my wife?"

"How do I know this map ain't phony?" the tall man said, moving away into the darkness. "You'll see her after we check."

Stuart wheeled and lunged after the tall man.

"Take it easy, Stuart!" the chunky man grunted. "You don't want to get yourself blasted down right now!"

Stuart stopped. His jaw muscles were jumpy. He knew he could do nothing except obey.

Violet gestured toward the tool shack.

"In there."

The lawyer moved through the dark doorway. Behind him, the gunman flicked a cigarette lighter. In the dull flickering glow, Stuart made out a couple of packing cases, upended on the dirt floor. Otherwise the shack was bare.

"Sit down."

The prosecutor seated himself on the crate that stood against the wall opposite the open doorway. The gunman moved the second crate to the side of the door, sat down and doused his lighter.

When Stuart's eyes became accustomed to the gloom, he could make out the gunman's figure in the pale starlight drifting through the doorway and the paneless window beside it.

"We got a long wait, Stuart, so relax," the chunky man murmured. "I don't like gab. Just keep yourself shut up and we'll get along okay."

STUART could feel the eccentric beating of his heart. He knew he would never leave this shack alive. He knew that he and Ann could not be allowed to live, now that they could identify the killers.

His eyes were on the glint of metal in the chunky man's fist. The man rested his automatic on his knees, an ever-present reminder of swift death. Johnny Stuart's arms dropped to his sides. They felt numb, nerveless.

[Turn page]

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His fingers stiffened suddenly. The beating of his heart quickened, pounded against his ribs until he was sure the chunky man must hear it.

Keeping his body still, trying to breathe in steady rhythm, he stretched the fingers of his right hand, dug them into the dirt floor. They touched the thing again, something hard and cold, half-buried in the loose drift dirt and sand.

He shifted slightly, slid a little further down on his rude seat, his eyes watching the shadowy figure opposite him.

The gunman hummed a tuneless song, remained motionless. He had evidently missed the subtle movement, or had thought nothing of it.

Stuart's fingers carefully brushed aside the dirt, caressed the uncovered metal, questing its size and shape. It was flat, about eight inches in length, an inch wide, a half-inch thick. At one end it widened in a half-moon knob, smooth on one side, rough-edged on the other. It felt like a single-head wrench, with half the head broken off.

Warily, Stuart's fingers closed around the metal handle. He breathed carefully, steadily. The fingers of his other hand groped along the dirt floor, touched a pebble.

Johnny Stuart felt coldly calm now. He felt as if his body didn't belong to him. It was doing things as if detached from his personality, from life and fear and anger.

His fingers picked up the pebble, manipulated it into a cradle formed by his thumb and index finger. He brought his left hand up to the level of his knees. For a moment he remained motionless, watching the chunky man.

Violet continued humming his tuneless song. His eyes were on Stuart. He was sitting up a little straighter on his crate. Stuart forced himself to continue breathing naturally.

CHAPTER IV

Unfinished Business

WHAT seemed like an hour dragged by. Then Johnny Stuart decided it was time to act.

Sitting stock-still, his left fingers flipped the pebble at the paneless window beside the door, with the same technique he had used as a kid, when he had been champion marble shooter at Big Bend.

His technique was rusty. The pebble missed the wide target of the window, where it should have gone through to clatter outside the shack. Instead it hit the frame with a dry "ping" and ricocheted back into the shack.

The chunky man stiffened with the sound. Reflexively, his head turned toward the win-

dow. Stuart's tense body uncoiled, lunged upward and forward across the space that separated them.

The gunman jerked toward him, came half up from his seat. Yellow flame shattered the darkness for an instant. A roar filled the shack, throbbed in Stuart's ears. He heard the slug plow into decaying wood behind him. Then his right arm swept downward. The first crashing blow of the wrench caught the gunman's shoulder, sent him spinning sideward off the crate. His automatic barked a second time as he fell.

The second blow of the wrench caught the gunman above the ear. He toppled to the ground soundlessly.

Johnny Stuart dropped the wrench, bent over the motionless figure. He withdrew the automatic from limp fingers. The killer would never use it again. He was dead.

Swiftly the prosecutor slipped out in the darkness, headed for Spanish Rock.

Spanish Rock was about two hundred yards from Pete Braveheart's cabin. It was a tall granite boulder, standing precariously on a wooded ridge, like a sleepy, hunched-up sentry. This was the first of the landmarks on Pete's map. Stuart had stared at the map long enough that day to remember the penciled directions as clearly as if he had the map in front of him now.

He took his bearings from the rock, slipped
[Turn page]

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down into a gully and moved fifty paces along a sand-bar, then up a second ridge through clinging shrubbery, red sumac and scrub oaks.

At the top of the ridge he stopped, looked for the Twin Pines. An owl hooted in the darkness overhead. There was a rustle at his feet and Stuart stepped back quickly as the dark shape of a snake disturbed by the intruder, slithered away into the matted underbrush.

Johnny Stuart inched along the ridge through brush heaps and clumps of bushes. In the midst of this scraggly growth, the Twin Pines stood out like beacons, two erect, regal trees standing aloofly at the edge of a bluff overlooking a dark hollow.

Across the darkness of the hollow, Stuart saw the shadowy outline of the Three Humps. High, rocky hills, silhouetted dark and brooding against the night sky.

And far below, in the narrow gorge between the Twin Pines and the Three Humps, Stuart remembered, ran the old, winding road through the hills into Kansas. It was a deserted, seldom used roadway nowadays, but the prosecutor had heard tales that years ago, in pre-prohibition days, liquor runners had used this almost unknown road in illicit traffic between Missouri and Kansas.

He knew that somewhere in the interior of the center hump on the opposite side of the gorge were the killers. Unless they had already found the cache and departed with it. They had had a good two hours' start on Stuart. He figured that an hour must have passed since he had driven away from the lead mine.

But as he descended the precipice to the narrow roadway below he discovered, with a sudden tightening of his breath, that he was not too late. Almost indistinguishable in the night blackness of the gorge, a truck stood nestled close to the hillside, pulled off the road. From the darkness above came a faint murmur of voices.

Stuart crawled up the rocky hillside toward the sound. His body brushed against a shrub that yielded easily, too easily. He pushed against the shrub. It slid away and he saw the pale gleam of light in a narrow opening.

The mouth of the cave was barely wide enough to permit the passage of a broad-shouldered man. A few yards within the cave, the interior widened to three or four feet. The ceiling was high enough to allow a tall man to move through the passage erectly.

Johnny Stuart gripped the dead gunman's automatic as he inched toward the source of light, coming from a bend in the passage four or five yards ahead. He peered cautiously around the bend and held his breath. Before him was a high-ceilinged chamber, the size of a large room.

On the camp ground stood a kerosene lamp, giving off a wan yellow light. Two men, their backs toward him, were at work before what appeared to have been a boarded-up opening into a second chamber. Their great shadows danced weirdly on the wall and ceiling.

A HALF-DOZEN cardboard cases were stacked against a side wall. One of the men turned partially, and Stuart saw his face. His lips tightened in a hard line as he recognized George Hammond. The second man was the tall gunman called Roy.

"We've got to work faster, Roy," Hammond puffed. "There must be over five hundred cases of this stuff and we'll have to get it all out to my place tonight."

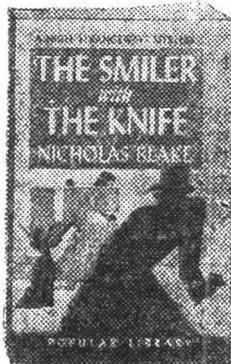
A third man came through the opening from the interior chamber, carrying a case, which he deposited on the floor against the wall. Christie Miller—and his red face was wet with perspiration. He paused to mop his face, grinning.

"Five hundred cases!" he gloated. "At about a hundred bucks a case on the Black Market, that means fifty grand!"

"Only don't forget, Miller," Hammond muttered, with a hint of suspicion in his [Turn page]

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voice, "that exactly one-half of that is n cut."

"Sure, sure," chuckled Miller. "You take me for a crook?"

Stuart stared at the stenciled lettering on the cases. He remembered the bottle of thirty-four-year-old Old Angus that had been on Hammond's living room table. He caught his breath as the entire picture rapidly crystallized before him.

So this was Pete's Spanish treasure! The hidden treasure of a modern, Twentieth Century pirate!

Pete's little farm was only a few miles from the Kansas state line. Kansas had been a dry state even before the coming of national prohibition. Liquor-running from Missouri and other wet states into Kansas had been going on long before bootlegging had become a national racket.

This subterranean cache must have been the store-house of a pre-prohibition liquor runner, who might have died, taking the secret of his cache to the grave with him. Or perhaps he was lingering somewhere behind prison walls, waiting for the day he could step out a free man to go back into business.

Pete must have stumbled on the cache while roaming the hills. No one in this section of the country knew the hills as well as Pete. There was not a foot of ground that Pete had not explored in his lonely wandering.

The cave was on Pete's property and he must have felt its contents rightfully belonged to him. Though Pete had received a sort of education, he had never fully been able to understand what he called "crazy white man law." He had probably been selling a few bottles of this pre-World War I whisky at a time, to summer visitors like Hammond.

That's what his feverishly muttered words, just before he died, must have meant—"Talk too much. Tell too much secret." Evidently, Pete had unwisely boasted to Hammond about the amount of liquor he still had stored.

Johnny Stuart's throat was dry as he inched forward. His fingers tightened around the automatic. A pebble crunched under his shoes. He stiffened.

The men whirled. They moved with startling swiftness. One of them kicked the kerosene lamp. Utter darkness enveloped the cavern. There was a spurt of orange flame. The sound of the shot echoed and reverberated like imprisoned thunder.

Stuart dropped to the ground, at the same time pressing the trigger of his automatic. The pistol bucked in his hand as he fired three shots in rapid succession into the darkness. There was a scream—Stuart recognized Miller's voice—then complete silence.

"Don't be fools," Stuart said in a low voice.

"You men might as well realize you're trapped. You're not getting past me alive."

"I don't know how you got here, Stuart," George Hammond answered in a dry, harsh voice, "but if you want to see your wife alive, give up your gun."

"So you can kill me and Ann, too!" Stuart laughed. It was not a humorous laugh. It contained all the prosecutor's pent-up anger and hate of the men who had already killed twice and who would kill him and Ann just as cold-bloodedly.

Flame blossomed at the opposite side of the cavern and Stuart dropped his head against the damp earth. The slug kicked dirt into his face.

"I'm not a professional killer, Stuart," Hammond's voice said. "I don't want to kill. Don't you understand? Give yourself up and I give you my word I'll let you and your wife go, if you promise to keep your mouths shut."

"Just like you let Pete and your brother go!"

"You don't understand, Stuart!" Hammond said softly. "You think I'm happy about their deaths? It was the hardest decision I ever had to make in my life. I would have given almost anything not to have to shut poor Tom up. But he was stubborn. He wouldn't listen to reason. He had everything to gain, nothing to lose by keeping his mouth shut!"

"So you killed him because he found out about your deal with Miller and his gunmen and wouldn't stand by in silence while you tortured, murdered and robbed Pete! Your importing business has been on the rocks since the war and you figured you had an easy way to replenish your fortune—what with Miller's chain of taverns as a ready-made outlet for the liquor. But your brother wouldn't consent to murder as a way of getting what you wanted."

TOO late, Johnny Stuart heard the movement beside him in the total darkness of the cavern. He twisted, kicked up at the shadow that lunged at him. There was no time to aim his gun. Half-consciously, as he raked the barrel of the automatic at the figure closing in on him, he realized that Hammond had deliberately held his attention, while the tall gunman had slipped silently along the wall of the chamber to come upon him from the side.

They had known there was not a chance in a thousand that their bullets would find him in the jet blackness, since he could retreat beyond the bend of the chamber. And while he commanded the entrance into the cavern, they were trapped.

Stuart sensed instinctively, rather than saw the second figure that hurled itself at him.

[Turn page]



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His feet kicked out, and he felt them crack against bone and flesh. The heels of his shoes must have caught Hammond under the jaw. He heard Hammond's choked-off groan and then he was too busy with the tall gunman to hear anything else. Neither of the killers dared shoot for fear of hitting the other in the blackness.

A gun-barrel raked his cheek, and he felt the skin tear open. He lashed out blindly, felt his fists crack against bone. He twisted, pumped his knee upward. It sank into yielding flesh. The gunman's body dropped away, merged with the darkness.

Stuart lunged to his feet. Arms encircled his knees, dragged him groundward. He swung his automatic down. It cracked against something solid. The arms around his legs relaxed, fell away.

Johnny Stuart whirled toward the sound behind him. He saw nothing, but triggered the automatic. In the brief orange flash, George Hammond's face was illuminated for an instant. He saw Hammond's look of animal rage twist into an expression of stunned pain. Then total blackness again, and he felt Hammond stagger uncertainly past him.

Stuart's left hand groped in his pocket, found a match. In its flare, he saw Hammond clutching at his right shoulder. The hand that he held to his shoulder was red.

Backing to the rear wall of the chamber, Stuart found the over-turned kerosene lamp. The glass chimney was shattered. He lit the wick and it gave off a pale glimmer of light. On the floor beside the lamp lay Christie Miller's motionless body. A brief glance at his torn, bloody throat was enough to tell that one of the prosecutor's slugs had ended the crook's career.

He picked the lamp up in his left hand, advanced toward Hammond, pointing the automatic at his stomach.

"Where is she?"

Hammond's tongue licked his lips. "My place."

"Your house?"

"The lodge. A mile down the lakeshore from the house."

The gunman on the floor groaned.

"He's no pal of mine," Hammond muttered in a dry voice. "He murdered Pete! I had nothing to do with it. He worked for Miller. He and his friend Violet—they killed my brother."

"With your consent." Stuart grimly accused. "And if you know the law, brother, you know that you're just as guilty of murder as they are, though you may have been miles from the place when it happened. . ."

Stuart found his wife in Hammond's lakeshore lodge. And though he had to keep his eyes and automatic on Hammond and Miller's gunman, lined against the wall, he finally

managed to cut the ropes that bound her arms and legs.

"Ann," he said, keeping his eyes on the killers, "go up to Hammond's house and phone Sheriff Kelstrom."

Twenty minutes later Sheriff Kelstrom arrived, bringing Deputy Clem Corbett with him.

"Johnny," the sheriff said, "ever since I phoned your house to learn if there was anything new and found you'd gone, I've been going plumb crazy. Thought sure we'd have to hold a special election for a new county prosecutor. Suppose you start talking."

Stuart handed Clem Corbett the dead gunman's automatic.

"Soon as I take care of some unfinished business, Toby," he said.

He turned to Ann. "Come here, unfinished business!"

He was too busy, then, to hear Sheriff Kelstrom's brusque comment.

"Stop gawking, Clem Corbett, and take them buzzards out to the car! Johnny has a perfect legal right to kiss his wife like that!"

The sheriff was blowing his nose harder than the situation seemed to require.

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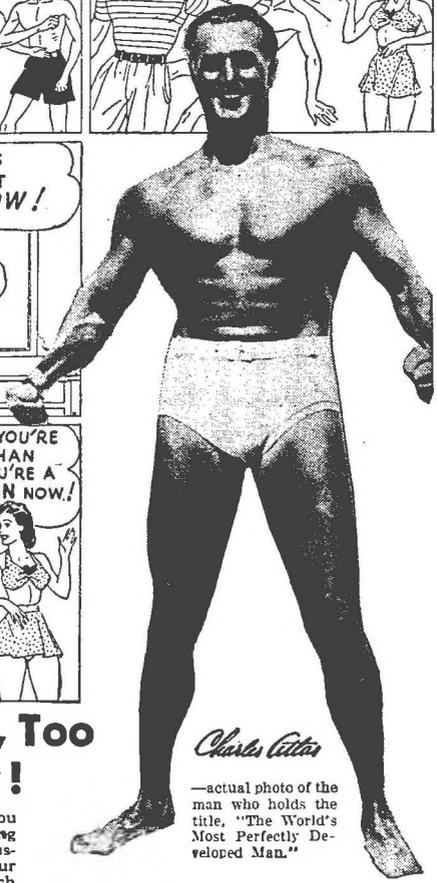
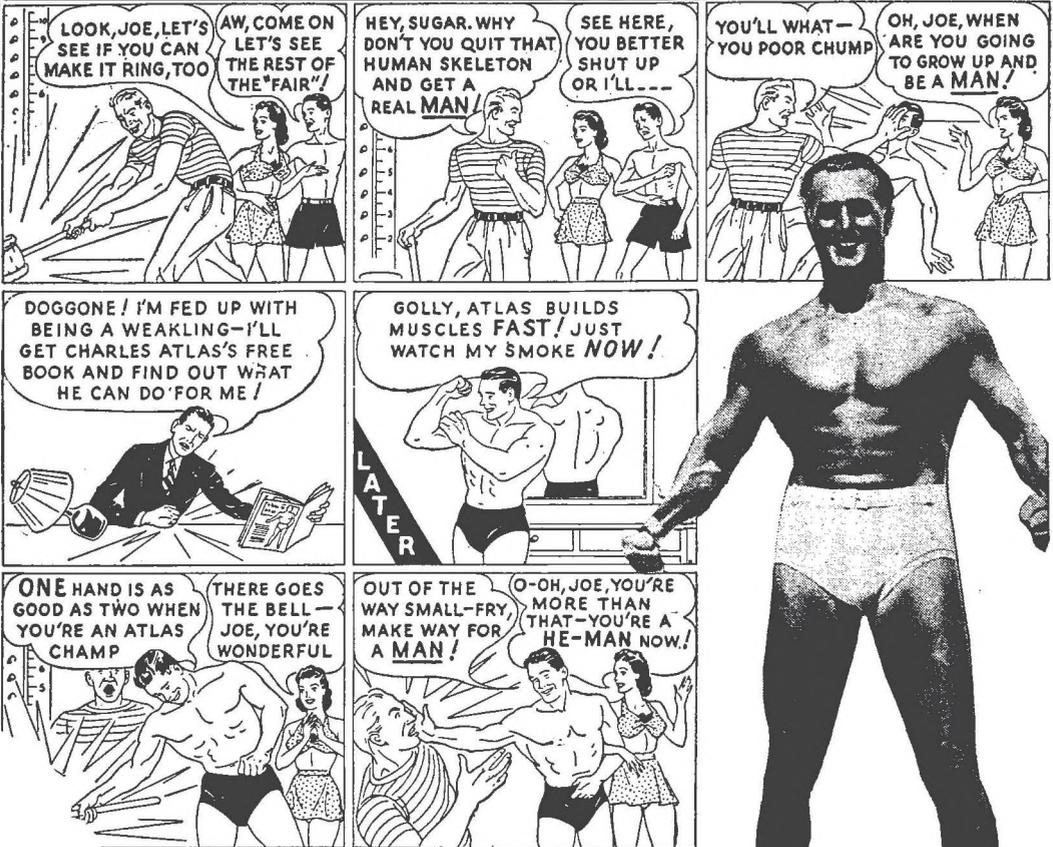
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