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BLACK BOOK

AND

# DETECTIVE



DEEP  
WATER

*An Action  
Novel*  
By EDWARD  
RONNS

FEATURING

The  
**Missing  
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*A Tony Quinn Mystery Novel*

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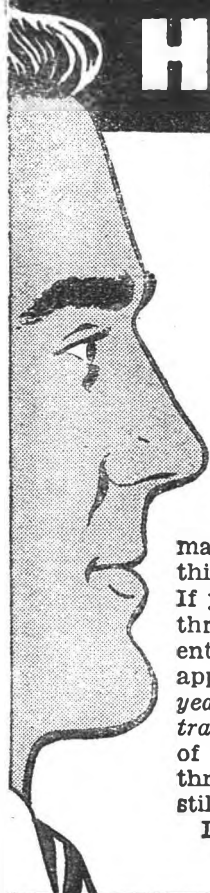
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# BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE

Vol. XXVI, No. 3

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

Summer, 1949

A COMPLETE TONY QUINN NOVEL



## THE MISSING MILLION

By G. Wayman Jones

The Black Bat fights plunder and murder on a grim trail of crime without clues—and with the help of his loyal aides, takes a hand in a perilous and mysterious game played with the cards of destiny!

9

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# OFF THE RECORD

## A DEPARTMENT WHERE READERS AND THE EDITOR MEET

**T**ONY QUINN, the famous "blind" Assistant District Attorney, dressed himself in the hood and robe of the Black Bat and prepared to go into action. The case he was working on was as weird and mysterious as any he had ever encountered!

Walking on crepe-soled shoes he gained entrance to the darkened house. The living room was nicely furnished. Everything seemed to be brand new. The rug was cushiony beneath his feet, as if the nap hadn't been trod upon very much.

Lovely Carol Baldwin, the Black Bat's faithful helper, had reported to him that the dead woman was in the bedroom. It had been a dead *man* that had first brought him on the case—a man who had committed suicide when, apparently, he had everything to live for.

In the bedroom, the Black Bat stopped. "There is no dead woman here," he murmured, and at once he realized what had happened. In the time it took Carol to leave here and go to the telephone to call him, the woman's corpse had been removed!

### A Deepening Mystery

The Black Bat began a systematic search. In the clothes closet, he found six men's suits. All of them were brand new. There were also six pairs of shoes, neatly arranged in racks. None of the shoes had ever scraped on pavements. There wasn't a scratch in the varnish covering the leather.

Search of the bureau in the room deepened the mystery, for it was filled with women's clothes. None of them was new, but from them all labels and other means of identification had been removed. Even the metal initials on a purse had been ripped away.

The Black Bat went down to the basement. Here he found a completely equipped workshop, with such tools as a lathe,

power saw and grinding wheel. They were all the finest tools money could buy, and they were all new—some in their original wrappings.

"This dead woman, whoever she was," the Black Bat decided, "had expected someone to move into the house—a man who'd require all new clothes and who evidently liked to putter around a home workshop. A man who intended to live with her—otherwise why these elaborate preparations?"

### Footsteps Above

The Black Bat opened a drawer in a bench. It slid from his hand and crashed to the floor. The Black Bat bent to pick it up and froze there.

Someone was moving very fast across the floor above. The footsteps seemed to lead into the bedroom.

The Black Bat drew a .38 automatic from one of his shoulder holsters, moved the safety to the off position and started climbing the stairs.

He pushed open the cellar door, stepped into the hallway and listened again. From the bedroom he could hear a faint, half muffled *click-click* sound. It was rhythmic and intriguing. Gun held at a slight upward slant, he moved noiselessly toward that room.

He did not realize he was moving toward a trap that meant almost certain death!

Moving softly toward the bedroom, the Black Bat heard that rhythmic clicking sound again. He risked a look into the darkened room and saw no one. The sound came from inside the clothes closet. He passed the closet door, which was wide open, brought his gun to a level position and stepped into the closet.

Only then did he realize he'd fallen for an old, but deadly trick. His eyes pierced the darkness to show him one of the new



suits tied to the electric light cord by its hanger, and it was swinging back and forth, hitting the walls lightly.

### Death Trap

The Black Bat started to turn. The closet door was already slamming shut. He tried to get his foot out in time to block it, but he was too late. As the door banged closed, the key turned.

Almost immediately, the man in the bedroom began shooting. He placed his bullets so they were almost bound to hit the man he'd locked inside. Two came through the door, followed by two more which slammed through the flimsy wall and were

(Continued on Page 128)

## THE CRIME QUIZ



HERE'S your chance to see how much you know about crime! Give yourself 10 points for each question you answer correctly. A score of 60 is good. 80 ranks you as an amateur detective. If you are 100 per cent correct—you're a super-sleuth! The answers are on Page 129—if you must look!

1. Is a person guilty of burglary if he picks a lock, enters a house, but is then scared away and leaves without taking anything?
2. If a man steals less than \$100 he is guilty of petit larceny. If he steals over \$100, his crime is \_\_\_\_\_ larceny?
3. The wilful burning, with malicious intent of a building or other structure is the crime of \_\_\_\_\_?
4. If a man has no intention of harming anyone, but through neglect or indifference kills someone, he may be convicted of \_\_\_\_\_?
5. If you plan to get a gun and commit a robbery, but fail to go through with your plan, are you guilty of any crime?
6. Why is it a crime to attempt to commit suicide?
7. If a bank cashier appropriates money out of his employer's till, he is guilty of \_\_\_\_\_?
8. If at a criminal's direction, a child of six gains entrance to a building and steals a large sum of money, which he then turns over to the criminal, is the child guilty of any crime?
9. If Mr. Jones invites Mr. Brown to the movies, so that an accomplice may then burglarize Mr. Brown's house, Mr. Jones is guilty of \_\_\_\_\_?
10. Why is it of benefit to a criminal if he is sentenced to a year and a day in prison rather than the shorter sentence of just one year?

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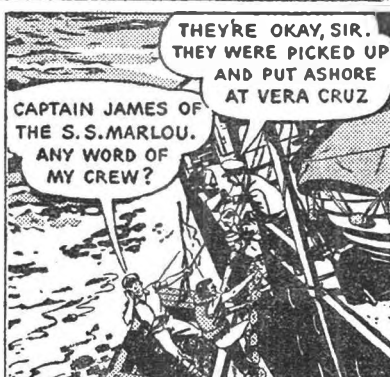
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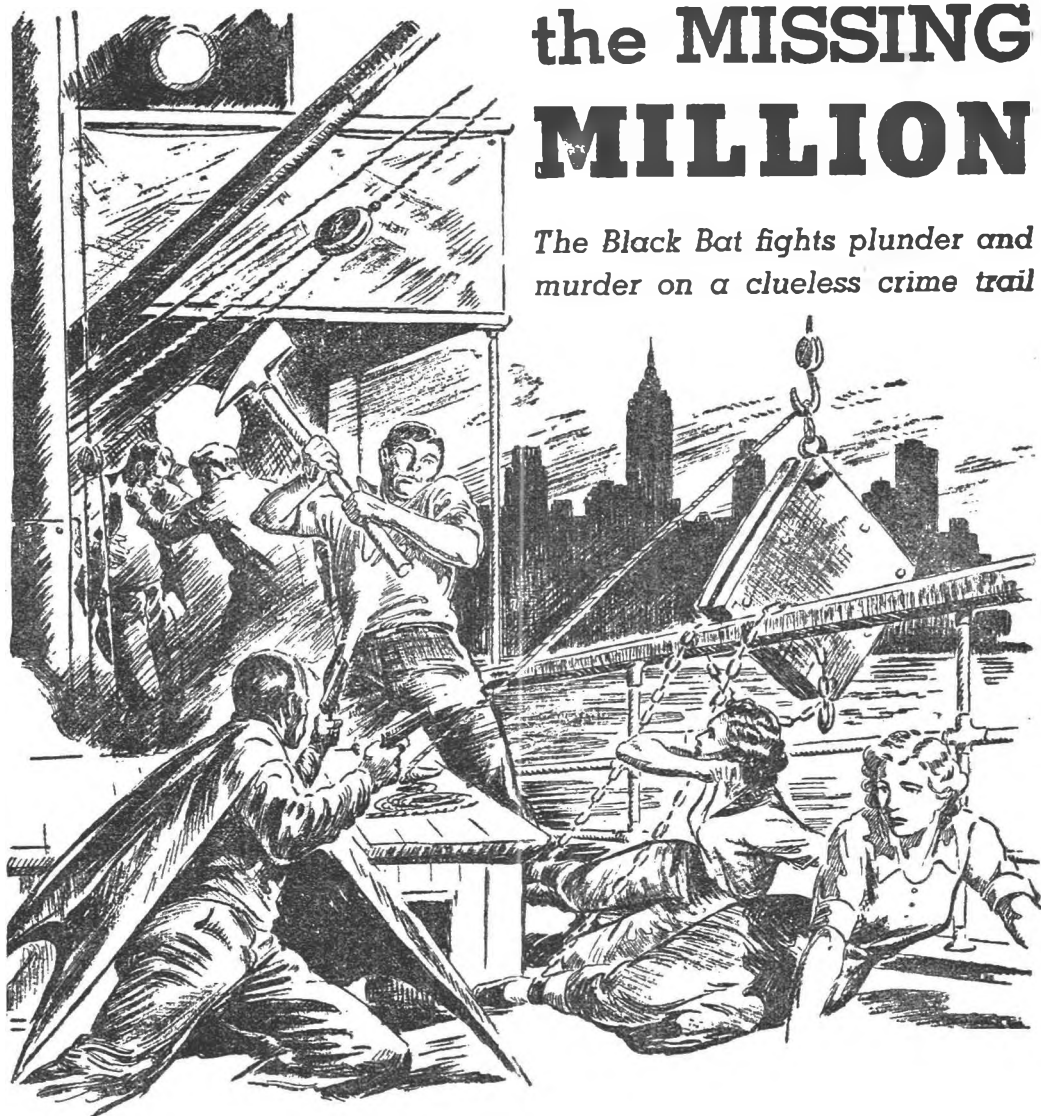
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# the MISSING MILLION

*The Black Bat fights plunder and murder on a clueless crime trail*

a Tony Quinn novel by

**G. WAYMAN JONES**

## CHAPTER I

### *Confession of Guilt*

**H**E threw the spotlight of the Cadillac along the front of the house, seeking the number, and then didn't need the number for the spot flashed across a nameplate on the fence beside the gate. The spot returned to the name and neatly picked it out. The driver of the car read aloud, "Anthony Quinn!"

He said it half as a prayer, half as a curse and rolled the big car to a stop. He got out a cigarette and smoked it slowly, thinking things over and over in that facile mind of his. Studying the situation from all angles, from its very inception to the present-day impasse. There was no way out. And he had

## Tony Quinn and His Aides Take a Hand in a

always known there never would be.

Once again convinced of this, Rex Duncan flipped the cigarette butt into the night, watched it rotate in a fiery arc and then hit the sidewalk and throw a mantle of sparks. That's the way it had been with him. A steady glow at first—success had been firmly seized and held. Then the rocket that went higher and higher to find its natural orbit, stay there a brief moment and then crash. That was what Rex Duncan was doing right now—crashing and beginning to throw off sparks like that cigarette.

Most any man, he realized, would have put a gun barrel in his mouth, pulled the trigger and finished the whole thing with a minimum of effort and pain. But those kind of men weren't made of the material that went into Rex Duncan. The amazing thing was that he'd actually done what he had done.

Duncan got out of the car, felt around for another cigarette and decided against having one. He did wish he had a drink. Some of the 1898 Napoleon would have suited him fine. About a quart glass of it. He smiled a little at the absurd idea, squared his shoulders and pushed the gate open.

Rex Duncan was a big blond man with fifty-three years that had been so far unable to blur his athletic figure. He had a certain arrogance—a positive air about him—which almost all millionaires possess. His steps were firm, confident. He closed the gate behind him, walked along the short path and up the porch steps. He extended a hand toward the doorbell, hesitated for the bare fraction of a second while his mind told him there was still time to alter his decision. He didn't though. He took a long breath and pushed the bell.

**T**HERE was rather a long wait. The kind a small boy endures while he strokes a swollen jaw and gazes without enthusiasm at a dentist's sign. Like that small boy, Rex Duncan murmured a short prayer that the man he wanted to see wouldn't be home.

And, as in the case of the boy, the dentist always is there. In this case the door was opened by a tall, well built man with a handsome face oddly pitted by scars around the eyes. The eyes were

the blank, staring eyes of a totally blind man. He held a white cane and looked straight out beyond his visitor.

"Hello, Mr. Quinn," Duncan said.

Tony Quinn allowed a faint smile to cross his lips. "How do you do, sir. I'm very sorry—I can't place your voice."

"You never heard it often enough. I want to talk to you, Mr. Quinn. About a matter that has to do with the District Attorney's office you represent."

"Of course. Come in please." Tony Quinn backed away and then off to one side until his thigh struck the corner of a hall table. He froze there while his guest passed him by and slowed up, trying to determine where he should go.

Quinn stepped forward, closed the door and then, using his cane, he tapped his way past the visitor. "Please follow me," he said.

Duncan didn't follow. He took Quinn's elbow and piloted him down the hall. He said, "You blind people are so proud."

Quinn chuckled. "Thank you, sir. Yes, we are proud. We try to be self-reliant and I suppose that is one form of pride. We're headed for the library. I take it, what you have to say is best said in strict privacy."

"The very strictest." Duncan tried to laugh but it didn't quite come off. "Later on, you can give it all the publicity you want but as of now, I'm begging for privacy."

They turned into a large room, lined with book shelves that extended to the ceiling. The furniture was old and mellow and well kept up. The room had a homey air about it and the smell of good, fragrant tobacco.

"You've quite a library, Mr. Quinn," Duncan said, "Tell me, as a matter of curiosity, what does a blind man do with all these volumes?"

Quinn's right hand went out, encountered a chair and moved lightly along the back of it until he found the arm rest. Then he walked in front of the chair and sat down. Duncan took a leather club chair opposite him.

Quinn said, "I'm afraid I've neglected these books, Mr.—Mr.—?"

"Duncan. Rex Duncan."

If the name meant anything, Tony Quinn didn't show it. He went on talking. "I accumulated them before I became blind. Afterwards, well—my man



## Deadly Game Played with Destiny's Cards!

reads to me sometimes. Now, what does the millionaire Rex Duncan want with the Special District Attorney?"

"So you did recognize the name," Duncan shrugged. "I guess I made it famous enough. Or should I say—in-famous?"

"That all depends on how you look at things," Quinn commented with a laugh. "You're the best person to un-

derstand the crime. What have you done, Mr. Duncan?"

"You even guess that," Duncan mused. "Well, I suppose I must have given myself away. Yes, I've done something I shall go to prison for. I did it deliberately. Or no—not that. It came upon me with all the insidiousness of a slow disease. First there were only vague symptoms and then—it struck.



THE BLACK BAT

derstand an analysis of yourself, so—you ought to know."

"We'll settle for infamy," Duncan said. "You're certain we won't be disturbed? I know a blind man can't live all alone."

"My friend—I call him a friend though I pay him to wait on me—happens to be out shopping. We're quite alone."

"Good. Mr. Quinn, I know a great deal about you. I've made it a point to find out things. I know, for instance, that you're a square shooter. That you don't go after a man's heart. If mercy becomes not a bribe but a way to make a man better, you dispense mercy. Briefly, to you the man is more important than the crime. Am I correct?"

"Perhaps. It depends a great deal on

I was helpless—too far gone to fight back."

"You're a wealthy man," Quinn said. "Usually money goes a long way to patching up things, even if they have grown into the criminal class. That is—all except murder."

QUINN'S visitor shook his head and smiled wryly at the Special District Attorney.

"I haven't killed anyone, thank heavens," Duncan vowed. He put a cigarette between his lips, helped himself to a pack of Quinn's monogrammed matches and after the cigarette was burning, he absent-mindedly put the matches into his pocket. "Yes, I've been wealthy. I made my money in the market by being a shade smarter than the

next man. I accumulated enough to turn myself into an important, respected financier. My crime, as you might guess, is just as big as my success in life."

"You might give me an idea," Quinn said patiently.

"I've stolen almost one million dollars. I'm one of the biggest and fanciest embezzlers in the history of this country. And it's all gone, Mr. Quinn. Not just the million I embezzled, but some of the millions I accumulated. All gone! I'm not quite bankrupt, but I am a criminal, and a complete failure."

Quinn shook his head slowly from side to side. "A million dollars or more! Mr. Duncan, did you spend the money wilfully? It wasn't taken from you by blackmail?"

"No! But it was taken from me all right. Let me tell you from the beginning. Like all these things it started small and grew like a snowball. There was a time when I could have quit, and not become a criminal. But this is really funny—I already was a criminal and I didn't even realize it."

Quinn frowned. "I don't quite follow you, Mr. Duncan."

Duncan clasped his hands together, squeezed them until the knuckles shone whitely under skin pulled too tight. "Mr. Quinn, to inform you about this properly, I'll have to show you my books, show you just how this was done. In black and white, I mean. But you can't see. You won't be able to know what I'm pointing out."

"The eyes I use," Quinn said, "are Silk Kirby's. He works for me. You will find him absolutely trustworthy. About those books, however, they can be sent for. Of course you realize that as a District Attorney I have certain powers. One of them is to place you under arrest as of now."

Duncan arose. "I've been thinking I'm all wrong, completely wrong, in the way I'm handling this. If you take me now, and the news comes out, there won't be any books for you to go over. Quinn, I've got to get them. I'm not going to accept this guilt alone. I can't! Hold off arresting me. Let me go—what am I saying? You let me go? How can you stop me? Quinn, this is a promise. I'll return in thirty minutes. I'll bring with me the evidence you will need to put me in prison, where I belong."

"I can't let you go," Quinn said. "Of course, I can't stop you either but if you do leave it will be as a fugitive. I'll send police for you, Mr. Duncan. It won't add to your family's enjoyment by having detectives swarming all over the place and have them followed by every newsman who has a tip about the story."

"Family!" Duncan's voice was a snort. "Quinn, I don't care about them. I simply do not care any more. Send your detectives if you like. But if they don't appear, I shall return here within thirty minutes. I'm a man of my word, embezzler or not."

"Good luck," Quinn said softly.

Duncan managed a smile, started to walk away and then came back. He bent and picked up Quinn's hand, held it in both his own and pumped it hard. "If I'd known I'd meet someone like you, Mr. Quinn, I'd have surrendered long ago. I've a feeling you'll give me a break, though I will not beg for one. You'll simply find out that I have something to offer in return for sympathy. That's all I ask, not amnesty. I don't deserve that. See you in thirty minutes."

He practically fled from the house. Quinn never moved. He heard the front door slam, then the car door open and close. The starter whined, the motor purred and a car pulled away in a whisper of power. Quinn's fingers, wound around the crook of the white cane, began to uncurl and start a tattoo on the bent handle.

Finally Quinn arose and went to the telephone. He'd made a decision. Rex Duncan might profess to be the most honest embezzler alive but no self-respecting D.A. ought to believe him. If Duncan ran away now, after visiting a D.A. and making a confession, Tony Quinn's record would suffer. Furthermore, those who were always ready to condemn a man would insist they'd been correct in this matter and that a blind man had no business being connected with the District Attorney's office.

Quinn picked up the telephone and dialed Police Headquarters. He asked for Captain McGrath, a detective attached to a Special Squad.

"Mac," he said with easy familiarity, "have whoever is in the D.A.'s office at Headquarters, prepare a warrant for Rex Duncan on a charge of embezzle-



The man beneath was raising his gun just as the Black Bat came hurtling down  
[CHAR. VII.]



ment. Take it to a clerk or a judge and have it signed. Then get one or two men, go to the home of Rex Duncan—yes, the millionaire—and serve it. Take him out of there. Do the job quietly, if you can, but do it any way that becomes necessary."

"Rex Duncan." McGrath whistled. "I hope you know what you're doing, Tony. That guy is big."

"He has confessed to me already," Quinn explained. "And he will have certain records and books. I want those brought to my home, along with the prisoner, at once. Or wait! I'll go up to Duncan's place myself as soon as Silk returns. Wait for me there."

"Anything you say," McGrath told him. "You're the big shot in this case, Tony. If it goes sour, you take the rap. I'm just a cop doing my job."

"Then do it," Quinn begged. "And hurry it up. I don't know why but I've a feeling about this I don't like. Duncan was too nervous."

## CHAPTER II

### *Dead Man's Alibi*



TONY QUINN tapped his way to the front door, took down a hat from a closet rack and then went out to the porch. There he waited, leaning lightly on his cane, until he heard the familiar purr of his own sedan. He waved the cane and called out Silk's name. The car rolled by, stopped quickly and backed up. Quinn was already hurrying down the path to the gate.

"You're late," Quinn said as he opened the car door. "We've a rush call."

The driver was a man of about forty-five, slimly built, bald-headed and narrow faced. He had mild blue eyes, a tolerant, easy going way and he'd once been the best confidence man in the business. Silk Kirby was as smooth as his name.

He said, "Where to, sir? What's happened?"

"Fellow named Rex Duncan, millionaire, dropped in and said he was giving himself up. Said he'd embezzled a million dollars and then he insisted on go-

ing home to fetch all his records so he could prove it. I think he will do exactly as he says—if he is permitted."

"Someone going to stop him?" Silk pushed a little harder on the gas pedal.

Quinn's blind eyes looked straight ahead. "When a man steals a million dollars, he is stepping on a lot of toes and greasing a lot of palms. There are too many people close to him and it isn't difficult to know when a man realizes he's had enough. Duncan had his and he's willing to pay the piper, but those others—those who took the money—won't like that."

"How much of a start has he?" Silk asked.

"He was at the house from eight-twenty until eight-thirty-two. His home is about two miles away. I'm clocking mileage and the time element now. He couldn't have reached his home prior to—say—eight-fifty. So we're not too far behind him. I've already sent McGrath there with a warrant. He should have preceded us by a couple of minutes, if he had no trouble getting the warrant."

The car entered a side street lined with trees and old houses. One part of a great city which had not given way to skyscrapers, yet. To maintain one of these homes required a great deal of money. The cash represented by people who resided here could have financed a major bank.

Rex Duncan's was at the end of the block and a police car was already drawn up. Silk stopped behind it, got out and hurried around the sedan to help Quinn alight. They walked up the steps to the entrance of the house and rang the bell.

A girl, about twenty-five, in a maid's gray uniform opened the door. Quinn reached into his pocket, took out a leather case and opened it to show his district attorney's badge.

"Oh!" the maid gasped. "More police! Mrs. Duncan isn't going to like this."

She opened the door wider and Silk led Quinn through. There was a party of some kind going on in a huge living room, hung with six chandeliers, equipped with a five-piece orchestra on a small stage and rather well packed by people who seemed to belong in a place like this.

Upstairs someone was banging on a door. A woman in a white evening

gown came swirling down the steps. She had perhaps been a beautiful woman in her day and she still attracted attention, except that her face was now a study in rage. She came to a stop, glaring at the bald-headed man who held a blind man's arm.

"Who in the world are you?" she demanded. "Don't tell me—blind policemen!"

"My name is Quinn," the blind man said. "Are you Mrs. Duncan?"

"I am. So you are the District Attorney. I think you're too blame for all this, Mr. Quinn. The idea of sending policemen here to arrest my husband!"

"Your husband wants to be arrested," Quinn said wearily. "He came to my home tonight and surrendered. Then he returned here to get certain books and records. Naturally, I couldn't permit a confessed embezzler to wander about free."

"You say my husband—came to your home? Tonight?"

"Yes. At about eight-thirty. He did return here, didn't he?"

**S**HE drew herself up and a triumphant smile came over her expensively preserved features. "Then I know there has been a mistake. My husband hasn't left this house tonight. Not for one moment. Mr. Quinn, if you have overstepped yourself and insulted my husband, I shall see to it that someone higher than you hears about this. I'll take the matter up with my husband and his attorney. You haven't heard the last of this!"

At the top of the stairs, Captain McGrath of the Detective Bureau, called down. "Mrs. Duncan, let Quinn come up here. And you'd better go get yourself a good strong drink. You're going to need it."

She was too astounded to protest and Silk quickly marched Quinn past her and up the stairs. McGrath was waiting for them, his face set and harsh.

"Those know-it-alls!" he snapped. "Just because they're important socially and get their pictures in the paper—oh, what's the use! Tony, I told Mrs. Duncan to get herself a drink for two reasons. First of all, she's had several and when she sees what I just saw, she'll need several more. Somebody almost cut Rex Duncan's head off his shoulders."

Quinn stepped into the room. He gave no indication that he saw anything though Silk gasped and quickly turned his head away. Silk was accustomed to such things but this was something that required time to get used to.

Rex Duncan was seated behind a desk. The upper part of his body had fallen across it. There were huge pools of blood on the surface of the desk, like bas relief maps of some weird country. Both arms hung down and almost touched the floor. Below the left hand lay a large knife with a thick, heavy handle. It was a blade that had become very common to troops slashing their way through South Pacific jungles. A deadly weapon. No blade is more deadly than a machete.

"Give me the picture, Silk," Quinn ordered crisply.

Silk described the scene. Quinn turned in the general direction of McGrath. "Tell it, Mac," he said.

McGrath wetted his lips. "I got the warrant, as you instructed. Came down here fast. Mrs. Duncan put up a fuss at the door. Wanted me to come back tomorrow afternoon. I didn't buy that, forced my way inside and listened to her jaw until I couldn't take it any more. I told her to go back downstairs or I'd have her arrested too. She went."

"And then?"

"I'd already knocked on the study door several times. Then I tried the knob. The door wasn't locked so I walked in and found — this. Tony, I heard Mrs. Duncan say her husband hadn't left the house tonight. Is this dead man the same person who was at your home?"

Quinn said, "Do you expect me to answer that, Mac? The man who visited me told me he was Rex Duncan. I never saw him, naturally. I had to take his word for it. I can't tell you if the dead man and the man who came to me are one and the same. I'm merely presuming they are."

"You'd better have something more than presumption when this moneyed crowd gets after you," McGrath grumbled. "I'll describe the dead man."

"Stop it, Mac," Quinn said in a tired voice. "You can't trick me into showing I'm not blind. I am blind, though you refuse to believe it. I assumed Rex Duncan told me that story because who else

would represent himself to be Duncan and confess to the embezzlement of a million dollars?"

"A million?" McGrath gasped.

"Something in that neighborhood. Duncan returned here to get some records. Is there a safe in this room, Mac?"

"I don't see any. Some of these ritzy houses have 'em well hidden. I'll try to find out."

"Do that right away. After you call Headquarters for the usual parade that follows homicide. And Mac, Silk will take me into the next room. Send the maid there, will you?"

"Sure. Only you and Silk stand guard until I call the driver who took me down here so he can watch the body. Can't leave the scene of a crime unguarded. Be right with you."

WHEN McGrath was halfway down the stairs, Quinn hooked his white cane over his arm and closed the room door softly. His eyes, so blank and staring, became alive and eager. He whispered instructions for Silk to remain at the door listening. Then Quinn stepped over behind the corpse and deftly searched the dead man's pockets. He found a single pack of matches and appropriated it.

Then he stood in the middle of the room and slowly pivoted while those very bright eyes scanned every inch of the walls. He sought signs of a hidden safe but didn't find any. Silk hissed a warning.

Instantly Quinn moved over to his side, held the white cane firmly once more and the blankness came down over his eyes.

A uniformed patrolman entered and gave Quinn a snappy salute. "I'm to stay here, sir. Patrolman Grady, Headquarters detail."

"Good," Quinn said. "Make certain nobody gets in and nothing is touched. All right, Silk. Take me to the next room."

The maid was already there, not quite certain what was going on but very sure it was important and involved her. She was quite pretty, neat as a honeymoon bungalow and almost on the verge of tears. She had an interesting figure, trim legs and ankles, and if she'd ordered this uniform herself, she knew how to have them made to bring out any salient points.

Quinn said, "I am a District Attorney. You are required to answer my questions. And truthfully, of course."

"But how else should I answer?" she asked, wide-eyed. Just a trifle too wide-eyed, Quinn thought. "My name is Betty Wilcox. I have worked for Mrs. Duncan more than a year. What is wrong? Why should the police be running about like this?"

"In a moment," Quinn promised. "When did you see Mr. Duncan last? Mr. Rex Duncan."

"But he is the only Mr. Duncan who lives here," the maid said. "I saw him at around quarter of nine, when I brought up the lemonade he telephoned for."

"Telephoned when? What time?"

"It was eight thirty-five or so, sir. I'm sure of it because I was making fresh canapes in the kitchen and listening to the radio. The concert at the Stadium was being broadcast and began at eight-thirty."

"Are you positive?" Tony Quinn demanded.

"But yes. Certainly I am sure, sir. I usually have tonight off and I always go to the concert with my boy friend. Tonight I had to work but I knew about the broadcast and I—well, to be truthful—made it a point to be in the kitchen when the program started."

"He phoned at eight thirty-five," Quinn said. "On the house phone?"

"Of course. There is but one phone and it handles both inside and outside calls. He was in his study upstairs. I prepared the lemonade at once. It required about fifteen minutes."

"To juice a lemon, add sugar, water and ice?" Quinn asked crisply.

She gave him a supercilious smile. "You do not understand, sir. Mr. Duncan required hot lemonade. Always hot lemonade—scalding hot and served in a thermos jug. It required fifteen minutes to prepare because I had to boil water and then boil eight whole cloves and some allspice in the water before adding it to the lemon juice and sugar."

"Thank you," Quinn said. "Mr. Duncan personally took the thermos from you?"

"No, sir. When I knocked he told me to come in. I placed it on his desk and then I left."

"He was alone?"

"Yes, sir. But what has happened? You ask so many questions."



"Mr. Duncan," Quinn said slowly, "has been murdered."

Silk had to move very fast to catch her before she landed on the floor. He carried her to a large chair. Then he fetched a glass of water and tried to bring her out of it.

The whole house was in an uproar now. McGrath's men from Homicide had lost no time in arriving and the guests in the house were getting a general idea of what had happened. McGrath came into the room.

"What happened to her?" He indicated the maid.

"She fainted when she heard the news," Quinn said. "Mac, go back to that room and see if there is a thermos jug on the desk. Bring it here if you find one."

McGRATH was gone only a moment. He returned with the thermos suspended from a piece of string which he'd looped beneath the handle. "It's full of something," McGrath said.

"Open it," Quinn ordered. "You can do that if you are careful. I doubt there'll be any prints on it anyway. Go ahead—open it, Mac. Tell me what is inside and what the temperature of the liquid is."

McGrath put the thermos on a table, worried the stopper free by using his handkerchief. He bent down and sniffed. "Smells like spiced lemonade to me," he said. "I ought to recognize the odor. My wife makes me drink it every time I have a cold. The stuff's better with a good husky slug of bourbon in it."

"The temperature, Mac. Stick your finger into it. I want to be sure."

McGrath immersed his finger and drew it out fast.

"Plenty hot, Tony. This must have been just made."

"All right," Quinn said. "You can put it back now. The maid told an honest story. Up to a certain point. She claimed Duncan talked to her on the house phone at eight-thirty-five. She was wrong, because Duncan had left my house only a matter of a couple of minutes before then and couldn't possibly have reached his own home."

"Tony," McGrath protested patiently, "how do you know it was Rex Duncan who gave you that story?"

Quinn sighed. "Yes, you're right, Mac. Perfectly right. I simply took the

man at his word because he sounded so sincere. Look, when you finish here, take a run over to my place and give me the details. Silk, I'm ready to go home now."

SILK escorted his apparently blind companion to the car, got him safely inside and drove off at a sedate pace. When they were half a mile away, he said, "Sir, what about that story the maid told? Was that Rex Duncan who came to see you? The same man you saw dead in that room?"

"They were the same," Quinn said. "I've even got excellent proof of it." He dug into his pocket and took out a match folder. It bore the initials A.Q. "Duncan picked up this pack of matches off my smoking table to light a cigarette. I saw him put the pack in his pocket, and I removed the same pack from that same pocket in Duncan's study after he was dead. There's been no mistake, no ringer passed off on a blind man."

"They're going to insist you're wrong," Silk prophesied.

"Naturally. And I can't deny it even though I know the truth. Because if I do claim he did visit me, I must admit I'm not blind. And that, Silk, wouldn't do the state of our health very much good."

"Nor the health of the Black Bat," Silk laughed. "Just the same, it's a rather tough proposition. Got any ideas, sir?"

"Not yet. The facts I know are few. Duncan admitted taking a great sum of money and talked vaguely about being forced to. His wife is a cold fish who will oppose every move we make. Betty Wilcox, that not too bad looking maid, didn't put on an act, Silk. And she didn't faint through sudden terror, either."

Silk nodded.

"Funny, but I got the same impression. Do you think Duncan sort of hired her for her looks?"

"I think Duncan did and we'll soon know because with Duncan dead, his wife will discharge that maid as one of the first things she will think of."

"And perhaps the Black Bat will find it necessary to persuade the truth out of certain people?"

"It's too early to tell, Silk. Perhaps McGrath can clean up the whole mess. I hope so."

## CHAPTER III

### *Man in Black*

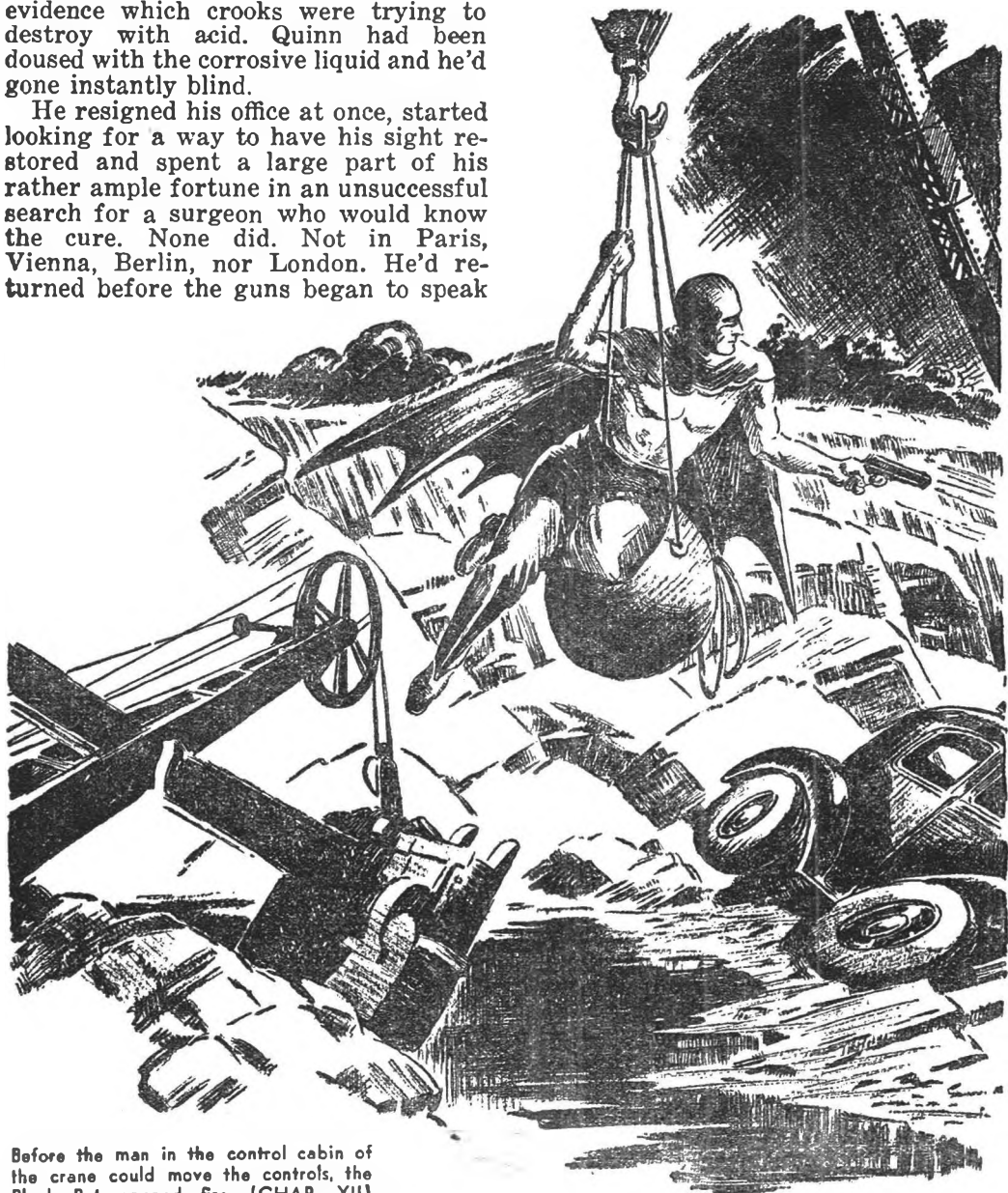
**S**ILK drove on through the night while Tony Quinn stared straight ahead and thought back to the time when he'd really been blind. To that moment when he was a young and highly successful District Attorney, duly elected and going places politically. All that had stopped when he'd attempted to save evidence which crooks were trying to destroy with acid. Quinn had been doused with the corrosive liquid and he'd gone instantly blind.

He resigned his office at once, started looking for a way to have his sight restored and spent a large part of his rather ample fortune in an unsuccessful search for a surgeon who would know the cure. None did. Not in Paris, Vienna, Berlin, nor London. He'd returned before the guns began to speak

over there, fully convinced that he was hopelessly blind.

Characteristically enough, Quinn set about making the best of his predicament. He discovered that his sense of hearing increased, his sense of touch became exceedingly acute. He learned how to walk with a cane, how to read Braille and generally conduct himself in as cheerful a manner as possible.

But the eternal night was long and



Before the man in the control cabin of the crane could move the controls, the Black Bat opened fire (CHAP. XII)

sometimes he keenly felt the complete defeat of his battle against crooks which had come to a dead stop. Silk Kirby served him well during this critical period.

Then Carol Baldwin, a very lovely girl, came to visit Quinn with a strange proposition. Her father was a police sergeant in a distant city, and lay dying of a gangster's bullet in the back. Her father had followed the career of Tony

Quinn and now believed he might do something to further it.

Sergeant Baldwin offered his eyes to Quinn. He also recommended the services of a surgeon who believed the operation might be a success. Quinn seized the chance and underwent the surgery. Though he didn't know it then, this operation was one of the milestones in modern technique which resulted in the restoration of sight to formerly hopeless



cases and the adoption of eye banks throughout the nation.

He'd returned home to wait the allotted time before removing the bandages. Sergeant Baldwin, meanwhile, passed away. Quinn had already made up his mind that if his sight was restored he'd continue his battle against crime on a scale he'd never attempted before.

As District Attorney he'd been pain-



fully aware of the red tape hampering the law. How crooks could hide behind it, stall, get rid of witnesses and evidence, fighting the law's gloved hand with a spiked club.

Therefore Quinn determined that he'd attack the Underworld with its own methods.

He would counter guns with guns, violence with greater violence. He would resort to tactics that broke every law if such tactics were necessary.

And, when the bandages were removed, his sight had returned. In fact, he discovered that he could see as well in jet darkness as in broad daylight. This was an advantage which sometimes meant the difference between life and death.

Immediately Quinn began his work. He created a criminologist's laboratory inside his home so cleverly hidden that the most careful search wouldn't reveal it.

He stocked this lab with every device required in the pursuit and conviction of criminals. He studied the subject intensively and when he went out to do battle, the Underworld discovered this man who dressed all in black and wore a black hood covering his head, wasn't someone to be laughed at.

The name of the Black Bat was quickly given to this eerie figure and he became feared and respected. Quinn was forced to adopt the use of the hood because those scars around his eyes were too widespread to be covered by dark glasses or an ordinary mask. Every policeman in New York would have recognized them.

Silk, of course, took a very active part in the world of the Black Bat; and later on Carol Baldwin came to join his ranks. She soon proved her capabilities and worth. Besides, Quinn fell in love with her and they planned that some day they'd be married and live normal lives. But until the Black Bat laid aside his somber clothing and jet black hood, Tony Quinn realized that if he married Carol she would have to share the danger under which he constantly lived.

Butch O'Leary was the fourth member of the little group. A huge man with the devotion of a Great Dane, Butch was no mental giant. But he made up for that in faithfulness and in the power of his enormous body. These three alone knew that Tony Quinn

wasn't blind and that he operated as the Black Bat.

CAPTAIN McGRATH guessed it and did his best to prove it. McGrath had sworn to arrest the Black Bat some day for, in McGrath's opinion, this marauder in black was no different from any crook who broke laws wholesale. McGrath's pugnacious determination kept Quinn on his toes. The slightest slip would bring McGrath down on him.

Tony Quinn, again in his own library, sat before the cold fireplace and puffed slowly on a pipe. His eyes were those of a blind man for he never took chances and relaxed his pose. Silk puttered around the room while they talked about the case of a murdered man who'd apparently been in two places at the same time.

Quinn said, "There is only one answer, Silk. I'm inclined to believe the maid about the phone call and the time she received it. But she was mistaken in saying it came over the house extension. I think Duncan was rigging an alibi for himself, because he was afraid that someone was going to kill him. I believe he wanted everyone at his home to think he'd never left. So, upon leaving me, he drove to the nearest phone, called his home and the maid answered in the kitchen. He told her he was speaking over the house extension and she believed him."

"I know what you mean," Silk said. "He told the maid to make up this beverage which would require fifteen minutes to prepare. By that time he'd be back at the house, entering by a rear door and making certain he was not seen. She'd deliver the thermos of lemonade and later would swear he couldn't have left the house. But why! He had already given himself up. What did he care if anyone found out he'd left?"

Quinn blew a column of smoke ceilingward. "I don't know, Silk. But if he swiped a million dollars and spent it, most certainly there should be evidence of that fact. You can't hide the loss of a million dollars. McGrath may have some information for us."

Silk dusted a bronze statue, placed it carefully down on the table again and worked his way closer to Quinn. "I wonder," he said, "why a machete was used

to kill Duncan. That's a sloppy weapon. Effective, yes. We saw how effective. But a smaller blade, a neat stab into the heart, would have been just as effective."

"I've thought of that too," Quinn admitted. "The blow was administered from behind. Duncan probably never knew what hit him. The killer must have been hidden in the room, down back of one of those big chairs or in the supply closet. He entered, I imagine, while Duncan was here, talking to me. So this killer knew, or guessed, that Duncan was giving himself up and that there were going to be reverberations."

"They'll never believe that the man who came to see you with that story was Rex Duncan," Silk said. "I'm betting they'll do everything possible to rig his books and try to prove he wasn't an embezzler."

QUINN laughed. "They'll have to do some fancy rigging, Silk. Because a million dollars is too much money to be wiped out of existence by erasing or altering figures. As District Attorney, I have the right to have the books examined, and they will be. I intend to see this through. Silk, McGrath is arriving. I heard a car stop and his footsteps on the walk. Maybe we'll have a few answers now."

McGrath's face was clouded and puzzled when he sat down. He squeezed cellophane off a cigar and applied a match. Then he leaned back and studied the apparently blind man seated across from him.

"Tony," he said, "I'm not doubting that someone came to see you and said he was Rex Duncan, but it wasn't Duncan. He never left the house."

"I can't argue the point," Quinn said. "What about the fact that Duncan was supposed to have stolen a million dollars?"

"You can't prove it by me," McGrath groaned. "I talked to Duncan's widow, his lawyer, a man who was in business with him, and his banker. They all say that Duncan was financially sound so far as they know."

"So far as they know," Quinn grunted. "Wait until accountants get through with the books."

"You're going to be surprised," McGrath said. "Some of the bankbooks of two firms he was involved in, were

found. They show balances that would knock your eye out. Of course those figures have to be checked, and they will be, first thing in the morning."

"After which," Quinn smiled, "I'll be waited upon by a delegation out to prove I'm either a blind fool or a liar. But there is one thing they can't alter, Mac. Duncan is dead and he was murdered. Or have they explained that too?"

"One of them, Wally Hanford by name, offered his opinion that it was murder by mistake. I pointed out that a killer simply can't step up behind a man, close enough to swing a machete, and be mistaken as to his identity."

"No prints? No stranger seen around the house?"

"Nothing. I have the machete with me. Nothing on it but a lot of blood and a design rather crudely scratched into the blade surface."

"May I see the knife?" Quinn asked. "See it with my fingertips, I mean."

McGrath took the carefully wrapped weapon out of his pocket, removed the paper and laid the handle of the knife across Quinn's proffered palm. The supposed blind man let the fingers of his other hand move very lightly across the blade. They encountered the design and traced it.

Quinn said, "It feels like an ugly weapon, Mac. Two edged, like a sword, and plenty sharp. It's fairly well balanced for throwing and could be well swung like a small hatchet. The edge is nicked as if it was used against a surface harder than Duncan's neck. The design etched into the blade seems to be that of an animal, like a panther. Some sort of a cat."

"I guessed it as either a tiger or a jaguar," McGrath said. "Maybe it is a panther. This knife shouldn't be too hard to trace."

Quinn said, "As soon as you get back to Headquarters have the camera boys photograph the blade and bring up this design. Then get it published on the front pages of every local newspaper tomorrow. Make the morning editions if you can but repeat it in the afternoon and evening papers."

"That will be done," McGrath promised. "Anything else?"

"Yes. I want a list of everyone who was at the Duncan home tonight."

"I'll have a copy made and delivered to your office in the morning, Tony. And

if that's all, I want to go home and get some sleep. One thing about murderers—they always seem to arrange it so their crimes are discovered just about the time the detective assigned to the case, goes off duty."

Tony Quinn sat up until very late that night. He tried to figure out the reason why a man would surrender as an embezzler of a million dollars, suddenly decide he must have the books to prove it and then try to fashion an alibi to show he'd never even left the house at all. Quinn saw one reason for that. Duncan had been afraid of someone.

But the fact that Duncan's books, even upon tentative study, gave no indication he'd stolen any such staggering sum of money, was even more mystifying than his murder.

THIS mystery grew even deeper around noon the following day. Tony Quinn, in his office, had Mrs. Duncan and her party shown in. He was introduced to Attorney Gallaway, sleek, gray-haired and aggressive. Then there was Mrs. Duncan's brother, Godfrey Chandler, who didn't seem especially interested in anything, including the murder of Duncan. Chandler was short, fat and double chinmed. His hair was wispy, not thick enough to cover the bald spots and he had a ninety-proof aroma of whisky clearly evident about him even at this comparatively early hour of the day.

Wally Hanford, who said he and Duncan had been in the real estate business, kept glaring at Quinn as though he felt certain the blind man must at least sense the glares. Hanford was younger than his partner had been. A man in his late thirties, tall and inclined to be ungainly. His mouth was too thin and there was a hint of recklessness in his gray eyes.

Mrs. Duncan said, "I also want you to meet Mr. Ernest Jamison who is a well known banker and with whom Rex banked most of his money. Mr. Jamison will tell you—"

Quinn interrupted, "Then let Mr. Jamison tell me, Mrs. Duncan. Please sit down everyone. You understand this is no court. You are not compelled to answer questions, though I'd advise you to. Everything here is on an informal basis. Now we'll get on with it. Mr.

Jamison, you handled Duncan's finances?"

Jamison, who was a movie version of a banker, had black hair trimmed with grey around the ears. He was sturdy, wide shouldered and dressed as if his tailors must have been justly proud of him.

Jamison said, "Some of Mr. Duncan's finances. I was also a close personal friend of his. My understanding is that someone visited you last night, claimed to be Rex Duncan and made a wild statement about having embezzled a million dollars."

"That's just what happened," Quinn said.

GODFREY CHANDLER glanced at his sister and winked. Then he waddled up to Quinn's desk and slapped a hand hard on it.

"You're blind. How can you say it was Rex Duncan who made such a statement? It could have been anyone. You can't see."

"Granted," Quinn conceded. "But the fact remains, such a statement was made to me. And the fact remains that Rex Duncan was murdered."

"We can't deny the murder," Jamison sighed.

Godfrey Chandler curled his upper lip.

"A blind man for a District Attorney. It's illogical. There must be other things a blind lawyer can do!"

Attorney Gallaway stepped up behind Chandler and put a hand on his shoulder. Gallaway said, "Godfrey, don't say things you can't retract. It happens that Tony Quinn is about the best District Attorney we've ever had—blind or not. One reason I stay out of criminal law is because of the chance I'd come up against Tony Quinn in court, and believe me, for a lawyer, that is an unhealthy business. If Tony Quinn says he had a visitor last night, who made these statements, then that visitor did exist."

"Thank you," Quinn inclined his head slightly.

Godfrey Chandler made a noisy sound deep in his throat. "Nobody said Quinn was a liar, but if he'd been able to see, we'd know who tried to pass himself off as Rex. Now what are you doing about the murder?"

"We're endeavoring to trace the



knife," Quinn explained. "There isn't much else to go on. There were so many people at that party. Incidentally, who thought up that party on that particular night?"

"I did," Mrs. Duncan said imperiously. "It happens that yesterday was my birthday."

"Oh, I see. You usually give a party on your birthday, I presume." Quinn nodded. "Therefore it was a known fact that many people would be present and the chances of getting at your

almost certain of that. Good day, Mrs. Duncan."

With only the banker, Ernest Jamison, and the business partner, Wally Hanford, remaining, Quinn got down to bedrock. He asked them dozens of questions and secured what he had reason to believe, were honest answers.

"I simply cannot understand why anyone would represent himself to be Rex Duncan and claim he'd embezzled a million dollars," Jamison said. "True enough Rex was a spender. He was a spendthrift, if you like. Especially of late. But he was wealthy. His balances are good; sound and substantial."

Hanford wagged his head too. "Rex and I have been in several deals. As of now, we're building two thousand private homes for veterans. We run the project known as Homestead Houses. It's coming along beautifully. More than eight hundred homes are already sold and occupied, the others coming along as fast as labor and material permit."

"Have you had labor trouble?" Quinn asked.

"No. Nothing we couldn't handle. We've made no enemies, if that's what you mean."

"Those homes," Quinn went on, "are built for veterans. The machete which killed Duncan, gentlemen, is probably GI issue. There might be a connection. At any rate I'd like both of you to have your books gone over again. Somehow I feel certain that—excuse me."



McGRATH

husband with a machete were good. The murderer had to kill quickly and return to the party before he was missed."

"What nonsense," Mrs. Duncan scoffed. "None of my guests would have killed Rex. Why, they were all his friends."

"Why wasn't he downstairs with them then?" Quinn asked. "According to the information I have, he didn't even welcome your guests."

Mrs. Duncan said, "Godfrey, take me out of here. Unless I'm under arrest. Perhaps you think I murdered my husband."

"Perhaps you did," Quinn replied. "Though quite frankly, I doubt it. The blow that killed your husband was a very strong one—made by a man, I'm

QUINN reached for the buzzing telephone. A woman's voice, high pitched in a deliberate attempt at disguise, came over the wire.

"If you want more evidence about the murder of Rex Duncan look up a night club singer who is named Sherry Shannon."

That was all. The single sentence ended as the receiver was banged up. Quinn slowly replaced his instrument, rubbed his chin and spoke to the two men watching him.

"Gentlemen," he asked, "did you ever hear of someone named Sherry Shannon?"

Both men looked astounded. Hanford found his voice first. He said, "Oh, oh, here it comes. I knew this couldn't possibly be hidden. Not after Rex was murdered."

## CHAPTER IV

*Weak Drinks and Strong Men*

LUB JOLLY ROGER had a one-eyed man dressed as a pirate for a doorman. He was no midget either, for he'd been selected to double as bouncer. He opened the door of the taxi that slid to the curb and helped a blond girl alight.

She was about five feet five, with big blue eyes that were deceptively babyish. She stood, trim and pretty in a tailored suit with a fur piece around her neck. And she had a .38 automatic in her leather purse.

The doorman started to help the other passenger alight but stepped back hastily as a human mountain, doubled up, managed to work his way through the cab door. The huge man unhinged, like a massive door, until he stood erect and towered at least five inches above the doorman's even six feet.

He had a bullet head set directly upon a pair of enormous shoulders. He slimmed down around the waist and unlike most tall, husky men, his arms weren't too long. But they were thick and looked as if they could go into the business of transplanting full grown trees without benefit of machinery.

Butch O'Leary took Carol Baldwin's arm in a grasp that was amazingly gentle. She tilted her head back and smiled up at him. His grin was as broad as the corny jokes of the M.C. inside this polite pirate's nest.

A head waiter, who wore a tuxedo to give the joint some semblance of authentic class, bowed slightly and sized up the pair with the usual shrewdness of a night spot head waiter. Butch made no attempt to go for his pocket and the usual tip. The head waiter crooked his finger and started moving to the left, in the direction of the cloak and other rooms.

Butch paid no attention to him whatsoever. He marched Carol down an aisle between tables, straight to a ringside spot with a sign reading **RESERVED** propped against the ash tray. Butch turned the reservation card face down, pulled out a chair for Carol and was

seating himself when the red-faced head waiter hurried up.

"But this table is reserved," he complained. "You cannot take any table you choose."

"Who reserved it?" Butch asked.

"Why—why a gentleman named Anders. Yes, Mr. Anders!"

"Good," Butch grinned amiably. "We'll make sure nobody else gets it. When this guy Anders shows up, bring him here. We'll give him the table. Meantime it'll make a little dough for the management. I'll have a highball and the lady would like a dry sherry."

"No." The head waiter clasped his hands as if in prayer. "I tell you things are not done this way. You must either take the table I assign you or leave."

Butch rubbed his chin, looked the place over and smiled broadly. "Send your bouncers," he invited. "I like a little workout before dinner. But bring the drinks. You understand that? The drinks!"

The head waiter gave up. "Yes, the drinks, of course. There is going to be trouble. I hate trouble. The drinks—I will send them at once. Do not blame me. I do not make the rules here."

Butch thrust out his fist, opened the fingers and revealed a five-dollar bill folded up. "This is yours," he said. "Head waiters who treat me right, get the same in return. I know you guys starve to death in your twenty-room country homes and you have an awful time paying for the gas for your twelve-cylindereed Lincolns. Never let it be said I cheated a poor head waiter."

The head waiter took the bill and bowed. His face was frozen. "A card! That's what you are! I did not mind before, because I thought you didn't know any better. But you're a wise guy and I hate wise guys."

He walked away and Butch shrugged. Carol said, "Well, we made a fine start anyway. Give me two minutes' notice before you start throwing the tables and chairs, Butch. I'll exit through the window in the powder room and meet you in the alley when they toss you out."

"Want to bet on that?" Butch grinned.

"No," she said. "I learned better long ago. Butch, if trouble starts, try to control yourself. We've got to see this singer Sherry Shannon."

"Boy," Butch said ecstatically, "that's a pretty name."

"She must have fashioned it during a spell of the D.T.'s," Carol observed dryly. "As I just said, Tony wants us to size up this Sherry Shannon. We're to ask questions, act tough and if we're put through a third degree, you show your private detective's license and say I'm working for you and we've been hired by a wife who is suspicious of Sherry Shannon. I imagine plenty of wives are, if the pictures in the lobby of this creep joint do her justice."

A WAITER came with the drinks and stood at arm's length from the table as he deposited them. His eyes never left Butch and there was considerable respect for the big man in them.

Butch raised his glass and took a sip. "Boy," he grunted, "I wonder how long the cork of this bourbon bottle lasts. Dipping it in charged water every time somebody wants a drink must wear and tear on it like nobody's business. How's your wine?"

Carol put her glass down. "The menu says they don't carry anything but imported wines. This was imported from upstate. It's good sherry and worth about one tenth of what they'll charge us for it."

Butch nodded. "Another thing, have you noticed how many of the customers head for the telephone room at the back of the place? Most of 'em don't come back. They must all be calling Australia."

"The usual gambling house routine," Carol said. "It makes the suckers think they are specially privileged to be sneaked into the gambling rooms and sheared. Tony said every cop in New York knows about the place but can't land it. The protection is too good. The physical protection, I mean. Steel doors and steely souled guards."

Butch finished his glass of light brown colored charged water. "I wonder how this singer ties up with the guy who was knocked off last night."

Carol, with a woman's shrewdness, said, "Tony thinks Mrs. Duncan may have phoned in the tip. I'm almost certain of it. She's going to make the younger girl in his life pay the piper. While her husband lived, she didn't dare. Now that he's dead she'll wreak whatever vengeance she can on this Sherry Shannon. Providing, of course,

there is any truth to the anonymous tip."

The house lights were dimming. Dancers left the floor and the orchestra was changing to a four-piece outfit—purely a rhythm section. The piano began to beat out a cadence and then the spot picked up Sherry Shannon.

Even Carol admitted, without a grudge, that Sherry was beautiful and that she could sing. "What I can't understand is why she performs for the kind of people who frequent this sort of place. She'd go well in musical comedy or an honest night club."

Butch didn't answer. He watched the svelte brunette as she moved in rhythm to the music and her clearly enunciated word-song. When it was over, his huge palms made as much noise as those of half a dozen people. Butch nodded in Carol's direction and summoned a waiter.

He said, "This girl—Miss Shannon—how long she been working here, chum?"

The waiter was unimpressed. "I wouldn't know. Only been here five months myself."

"Where does she hail from? She looks like somebody I know."

"She couldn't be," the waiter scoffed. "She's a nice kid."

Butch picked his napkin off his lap, laid it down gently and pushed his chair back. Seated he didn't look very big. Erect, he loomed like a giant and the waiter gulped and backed up hastily.

He said, "Honest, mister, that was just a crack. I didn't mean anything by it, only this joint gets so full of smart guys who pull that gag you tried, I get sick of it."

Carol said, "Butch, sit down. Waiter, we asked a civil question. I think I know Miss Shannon too. All you have to do is tell us how long she has worked here and where she comes from. By expelling the slight amount of breath necessary to answer those questions, you earn yourself ten dollars."

She slid a bill at the waiter. He scooped it up. "Thank you, ma'am. I'm sorry I made a mistake about you two. Miss Shannon's been singing here for about a year. She was born in some little town upstate. That's all I know about her."

"Is she married?" Carol asked quickly.

"Gosh no. She ain't married. She's got so many boy friends I don't think she'd have time to get married. And what for, I ask you? What for, anyway?"

HE turned and went away. Not for long. In a few moments he placed two fresh drinks on the table and winked at Carol. "These are the McCoy and they won't be on the check. Just to take the place of the stuff you drank already."

Carol said, "You see, Butch, the honey a bee gives gets him a lot more than the sting."

"Yeah," Butch grunted. "And what have we found out?"

"Wait," Carol said. "Our waiter stopped and had a chat with one of those slim tuxedoed gentlemen and he, in turn, spoke to a couple of others of his kind. Right now two of them are heading this way and two more have moved over toward the exit. Play this right, Butch."

One of the tuxedoed men pulled out a chair, bowed at Carol and sat down. "So nice to see you again," he said quietly. "But while I recall the faces, the names slip my memory. And, of course, the reason why you should be asking questions about Sherry Shannon."

Carol took a sip of wine. "Relax and act like you don't carry a gun under your left armpit. Show him, Butch."

Languidly Butch removed a leather wallet from his pocket, opened it and shoved it in front of the man's face. The private detective's license card had Butch's photo and thumb print on it.

"Okay." The young man sat back and unfolded his arms. "We can't take chances. What gives with Sherry?"

Butch spoke while he carelessly looked over the crowd. "At thirty bucks a day and expenses we go out in the field when a client asks us to find out if her husband sees this Sherry on the side."

The tuxedoed man smiled slightly. "Sherry is beautiful, smart and she has all kinds of friends. What's this character's name?"

"Duncan," Carol said swiftly.

The tuxedoed man gave a visible start. He tried very hard to look casual, but it didn't work under the trained scrutiny of two people like Butch and Carol.

"Never heard of him," he said.

Carol rotated her wine glass slowly. "He's a professor of histology at one of the local universities. A small man with a mousey mustache. The absent-minded kind. He forgets to go home sometimes."

The tuxedoed man seemed to be slightly relieved. "Sorry, but I'm so sure you're all wrong about this that I'll ask Sherry to come over here. Will that satisfy you?"

"We'll even pay the check without a murmur," Carol told him.

She leaned across the table when he'd gone off. "Butch," she spoke in a low voice, "this isn't coming off as smoothly as that polished rodent wants us to believe. We're being watched too carefully."

The same young man returned after a few moments. He said, "Sherry will be glad to see you folks. But in her dressing room. Out here everybody wants dates and autographs. You'd never get a question asked or answered. So just follow me."

Carol lifted her purse by its strap and hefted it. With all the paraphernalia she carried, plus the dead weight of the .38 automatic, it would make a pretty good sap. She followed the young man and Butch trailed behind both of them. Out of the corner of his eyes, he saw the other tuxedoed young men either move away or take up their usual stations, or close in. One or two had orders to cut off any possibility of retreat. Butch's smile grew more expansive than ever.

They were led to the annex lined with phone booths, all of which were empty. There was a door marked *private*, a word their escort didn't seem to understand for he pushed the door open and stepped aside to let them enter first.

They were in a narrow hallway now and when the door closed, all sound of the orchestra and the crowd was snipped off as if by magic. Here a new sound gradually took form in their ears. The low murmur of muffled voices, the click of a roulette ball and the slap of cards.

At the end of this corridor was a narrow stairway leading up. Carol kept right on going. Butch looked over his shoulder. Only the tuxedoed escort was behind him. Butch suddenly spun, one hand darted out and the fingers closed around the young man's throat. He went for his shoulder holstered gun, but



Butch's other hand chopped a bone breaking blow at the gunman's wrist and sent the whole arm flopping numbly to his side.

Butch hit the man a tap on the jaw, pushed him against the wall, twisted him around and then gripped him by the nape of the neck and the seat of the pants. He lifted him along the stairs and any casual observer from the landing above would have sworn the gunman was moving along under his own power.

At the top Carol stood talking to another young man. He was unsuspicious until Butch and his prisoner came very close. Then the young man went for his gun too. Carol had her handbag already swinging like a hammock. Now she brought it up and over to crash against the man's skull. It dropped him like one of Butch's taps to the chin.

Butch draped one of the men over the other, paused long enough to search them and extract their guns. Then he tapped on the door. A voice said, "Come in!"

## CHAPTER V

### *Gambler's Sanctum*



BEYING the command, Butch went in first, his arms slightly raised. Behind him, Carol gave an unsteady lurch forward, as if she'd been pushed. The door was closing behind them and she managed to pull it shut.

Carol said, "What's the meaning of this? Shoving me around?"

She was glaring at two people. The man who owned this place and—Sherry Shannon. The owner, whose name they knew was Conrad Condor, was portly, asthmatic and perfumed. He was no Adonis, no gunman, but in his day had probably been the cause of as many murders as any professional killer on the police records.

Condor simply never did his own killing. He farmed it out.

Condor said, "Okay, you two. We don't like private dicks snooping around. We take care of our employees and Miss Shannon is among those we value most highly. So get it off your chest, Tarzan, and don't think your size cuts any ice around here. Those boys who brought you over here won't be any further than a foot away from the door."

"With guns," Carol shuddered. "We know. Now look here—all we want to find out is if Miss Shannon knows a man named Duncan. If she says she doesn't, that's that. Because even if she does run around with him, it's no crime, and we can't do a thing. All we want is information."

"I never heard of anybody named Duncan," Sherry Shannon said. She had a pleasant voice, almost as musical as her singing voice.

Carol opened her purse and took out a small photograph. She laid this on the table. Sherry and Condor quickly bent over it and as one, they gave vent to silent gasps of relief. For the man in the picture was about sixty, small, mustached and a trifle on the seedy looking side.

Sherry laughed. "Look, Miss—whatever-your-name-is, do I look as if I'd

[Turn page]

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go around with a creep like that?"

Carol smiled. "Frankly I doubted it. But you know how jealous wives are. Before she retained our agency, she did some snooping on her own. It seemed that she found out you do know, or did know, someone named Duncan and she assumed it was her husband. Well, I'm sorry we disturbed you. We'll be going now."

"You'll be staying." Condor's eyes had narrowed. "What's the name of this client of yours?"

"We couldn't tell that," Butch said happily, sensing the trouble ready to burst. "Ethics, you know."

"Ethics be hanged. We want to know who was prowling around asking questions about Miss Shannon. You'll tell us or you'll wish to heaven you had. Mickey!—Joe!" Condor shouted the last two words.

Butch rubbed his chin and stepped closer to the desk. "Those boys of yours," he said carefully. "They're busy right now sleeping off a poke on the jaw. I been hearing what a tough guy you are, Condor. I've been wondering if a man could be so tough. Go for your gun."

Condor gave a backward leap and seized a paper knife as he did so. Sherry Shannon gave a cry and started for the door. Carol stepped in front of her and Sherry slowed down. She didn't like the glint in Carol's eyes.

Butch rounded the corner of the desk, moved in fast and reached out both hands toward Condor. The gambler dropped the paper knife. To try to use it would get him a broken neck and he realized this.

He said, "I don't go heeled. I made a mistake about you two. Okay, call the whole thing off. Or better yet, let me pay you a grand for the name of the woman who hired you. All I'm trying to do is protect Miss Shannon."

Carol stepped up to Sherry Shannon and took her arm gently. "Let's go feminine and leave here while these two big men argue it out. Personally, I hate the sight of blood."

Sherry Shannon smiled grimly. "That's no hint—it's an order, and I expect if I don't go, all of the blood won't be spilled by the men. I don't want any part of this. It's a racket of some kind and I'm bowing out."

"Of course," Carol said. "You and

the little man named Duncan."

Carol let the brunette singer precede her. Sherry Shannon gave a nervous start when she saw the two tuxedoed men lying on the floor and an even greater jump when she heard the impact of a fist against jawbone.

Carol said, "That would be a knock-out in the first, Miss Shannon. We'll go to your dressing room. If anyone stops us, you'll behave. Say that Mr. Condor gave his full and free approval that we women have a little chat."

SHERRY bit her carmined lip and S hazarded one more bluff. "You're not too clever," she told Carol. "It's quite impossible to leave this part of the building without passing certain guarded points. All I'll have to do is call out!"

"You and—this snub-nosed friend of mine." Carol reached into her purse and lifted out the automatic. "If you call out, my friend speaks out. I did say I hated the sight of blood."

Sherry didn't reply. She went down a flight of steps and tapped on the door at the bottom. The door gave off a metallic ring. It swung open and a burly man nodded to Sherry and then fixed Carol, who had hidden the gun, with a baleful glance.

"How about her?" he asked Sherry. "Is it okay?"

"Would she be coming down from Condor's office with me if it wasn't?" Sherry argued.

Carol fell into step with the singer. "Thanks. That was using your head."

"You bet I'm using my head," Sherry said softly. "All along I've had a feeling I'm in something beyond my depth. I figure if I'm honest with you, I'll get honest answers to my questions and I've got a bucketful of them."

"We'll get along," Carol said smoothly. "You and I and my snub-nosed friend."

Sherry led Carol into her dressing room, which had been constructed behind the restaurant proper and away from the steel shuttered gambling house section of the place. It was a neat room, lined with photos of night club and stage stars. There were flowers on a reading table, a great basket of them. There were more on the makeup table.

Carol closed the door and slid the bolt into place. She went over to one

basket of flowers and parted the stems carefully, looking for the usual sender's card. There was none so she checked the other bouquet with similarly unsatisfactory results.

"I tore the cards up," Sherry wasn't being fooled. "I tore up lots of cards and lots of letters earlier tonight."

Carol pulled up a chair and sat down. "Let's not kid ourselves any longer," she said. "When I mentioned the name of Duncan, you jumped like the nerve of a sore tooth. Then you seemed relieved when we explained it was some mythical college professor named Duncan. Now you know we meant Rex Duncan all along. How much did this place take him for?"

"I don't know," Sherry spoke in a whisper. "That's the truth. Rex came here often—to see me. Condor was glad to have him. Why not, when Rex played the wheels and the card games and the dice? He wasn't a squawker either. If he lost, he took it the same as if he won. I liked Rex. I—I guess I darned near loved him. Now you know where I stand."

Carol said, "I like you, Sherry. All the grease paint, mascara and rouge doesn't hide a certain homespun quality about you. You're no saint and you'd be the first to admit it. Therefore, I'm being perfectly frank with you. Rex Duncan was murdered last night. I'm assigned to cover certain angles of the case but I'm not a police detective. If you tell me anything, it is kept confidential. We know you couldn't have murdered him."

"I?" She gave a hollow laugh. "I'm ashamed of the things I accepted from him. If it will help, I'll give them back. Some of the things were worth a small fortune."

"His wife won't need the money they'll bring," Carol said. "Rex meant you to have them. Now will you answer some questions?"

"Anything I can. I want to expose whoever killed Rex."

"When did you see him last?"

"Day before yesterday. Last night he phoned my apartment and broke a date for after the show. He sounded worried and nervous. It must have been about seven when he phoned."

"Did he owe any money around here? Had he welched?"

"Never. Not Rex. He paid up every

time he had a streak of bad luck. Condor will tell you that. I think Condor would give a lot to know who killed Rex. If he found out, I'm sure the police would be saved a lot of trouble."

"Have you any idea how much Rex lost here?" Carol asked.

"No. He never talked about it. Thousands, I expect. A month ago I saw him place a thousand dollars on a horse, lose it and laugh as if a nickel slot machine hadn't paid off. He always had plenty of cash."

CAROL thought this over. Then she asked Sherry more questions.

"How long had you known him? How long had he been gambling and spending this way?"

"Why do you ask?" Sherry demanded. "Do you think I led him on?"

"Rex wasn't the type anyone could lead. I'm trying to get at a basis for the murder motive."

"I met him two years ago. He told me at once that he was married. Rex never lied. He was spending heavily then but nothing like he did soon after, and right up until now."

"Thank you, Sherry," Carol said. "I'll see if I can pick up my boy friend now."

There was a terrific crash from somewhere in the night club, then running steps and excited voices. Carol closed her handbag with a snap.

"He's out," she told Sherry with a smile. "He's very impulsive. When a person doesn't get out of his way, he removes that person."

Sherry went to the door. "You'd better leave by the stage exit. Come to my home when you get time. Perhaps there is more I can tell you. It's in the Harrington Square Apartments. I don't even know who you are but I know a straight-shooter and I'll be glad to see you."

Carol offered her hand. As she turned away Sherry was zipping down the back of her dress and hurrying to make the next number. Outside Carol walked around the block and spotted Butch glowering at the entrance to the club from a doorway across the street. He came out to meet her.

"I was just going back in and work my way up from the cellar," he explained. "I figured maybe they were holding you. How'd you make out?"

"Better than I expected," Carol ad-

mitted. "Sherry happens to be okay. You did your job as Tony asked?"

"It's set. We'd better get back to the lab now. He told us not to waste any time. Besides, when Mr. Condor wakes up I think he's going to send every torpedo he has after me. We took a dislike to one another."

## CHAPTER VI

### *The Well Guarded Dead*



AFTER dismissing their taxi, Butch and Carol walked briskly along a residential street in one of the best sections of town. They turned the corner and soon passed the fenced in front yard of Tony Quinn's home. There was another side street, dead-end and little used. The corner was very dark and Carol and Butch simply seemed to fade out of sight.

Halfway down the side street, they entered a garden gate, progressed to a small garden house. There Butch opened a carefully hidden trap door in the floor. He helped Carol down into a tunnel, followed himself and they went along this for a short distance.

A moment later they were both in a white tiled laboratory and Tony Quinn was coming toward them. He held Carol closely and offered his hand to Butch.

"How did you make out?" he asked. "Silk didn't have too much to base his orders on."

Carol and Quinn walked over to a leather covered divan and sat down. Butch, as usual, straddled a lab chair.

Carol said, "I had a talk with Sherry Shannon. She admitted knowing Rex Duncan, told me she accepted gifts from him and that Rex frequently lost a lot of money at Condor's gambling tables and at race tracks."

"The prelude and the set-up for embezzlers," Quinn nodded. "How does this Sherry stack up in your estimation?"

"She's honest. She was genuinely in love with Rex Duncan. Maybe she steered him to the gambling tables and shilled for Condor, but I doubt it. I

like that girl, Tony. I think she'd help us if she could, and she swears that Condor would too."

"That's a good start," Quinn commented. "We can use friends in this affair. Now about Condor's private office, Butch."

Butch made a circle of thumb and forefinger. "You had it sized up right. Three steel doors, electrically locked and set to give out with an alarm if they're touched after the switch is set. Big safe in the office. Hidden behind the woodwork, but I saw it. Modern combo and I don't think you could whisper it open with your fingers. It'll take soup."

"Which I can supply," Quinn glanced at his perfectly stocked supply of chemicals. "What about the switches, Butch?"

"They're in the closet off the main office. When the joint closes up, all the switches are thrown. Plenty of guys sleep in the place and would come hopping if the alarm system went off. You can get in only by using two keys. One good push at the door sets off the alarm. Using only one key sets it off. How come all these precautions?"

Quinn said, "Condor operates a highly successful place, Butch. The police and my office have tried to hack a path through to his tables but it never works because of this super-efficient system, the details of which were in our files. I knew I couldn't crash it, even working as the Black Bat. That's why I sent you there to smooth my way."

Butch said, "Well, I plastered Condor a good one. Then I looked the office over until I found the switch box in the closet. I cut in the wires from the main switch, hooked them to that cut-off clock you gave me and set the clock for four-thirty in the morning. At that time, the juice to those doors and the burglar alarms will stop running through the wires."

"Good," Quinn said.

Butch took out a small metal box. "I also took impressions of the keys which unlock the doors. They were in Condor's pocket. He'll never know I did that. There won't be any trap set. Also, the cut-off is well enough hidden so that they won't notice it unless they make a real search."

"Tony," Carol asked, "what are you after in Condor's safe?"





SNK

"Rex Duncan confessed that he'd gone through nearly a million dollars. He inferred that some of it had been practically stolen from him. Mr. Duncan is dead and his business partner, his wife and his banker all swear his financial condition was good and he couldn't possibly have stolen a million dollars. Obviously someone is lying and quite as obviously I mean to find out who."

"Then you believe that Condor might have kept some sort of a record of Duncan's losses?" Carol went on.

"It's probable. Apparently Condor secured a good share of the money and there might be something in his safe which will indicate how much. I'm trying to prove that Duncan did lose a great deal of money."

**T**HE girl frowned at Quinn in puzzled bewilderment as she gazed at him.

"How a man can cover up the loss of a million dollars so effectively that even after he is dead, his heirs and intimates can't find anything missing, is beyond me," Carol sighed. "But I guess Duncan did just that. Are you going to see Sherry Shannon, Tony?"

"I think so. She too, could supply the proof that Duncan lost a million. We're

working against an odd situation. We know that Duncan confessed to the embezzlement but we can't prove he confessed because I'm supposed to be blind and can't make an identification of the man who came to see me and said he was Rex Duncan. Now we can't even locate the million he's supposed to have stolen."

"Do you believe that Rex Duncan told you the truth?" Carol asked.

"The fact that he was murdered right afterwards is good proof, so far as I'm concerned. For some reason, someone doesn't want Duncan's defalcations to come out. Perhaps whoever is trying to hide the theft, got so much money that he'd be as guilty as Duncan. Perhaps Duncan wasn't alone in the theft and another shared in the missing million. To get at the truth we've got to break down people and records. Until we have concrete proof, our whole case is no more solid than a will-o'-the-wisp."

Quinn went to work then, moulding keys out of a fast melting metal and using the impressions Butch made as a mould. This finished he went over to a steel locker. He removed jet black clothing, stepped behind a screen and changed from the tweeds blind Tony Quinn usually wore to the crepe soled

black shoes, the black shirt and tie.

The suit which was the color of midnight. Thin black gloves went over his hands. He strapped on a brace of shoulder holsters and slid heavy automatics into them. A flat, compact kit of small but exquisitely made burglar tools went into a pocket. Finally he drew the black hood over his head and surveyed himself in a full length mirror.

He removed the hood after a careful inspection, folded it and tucked it into an especially made pocket. The hood was worn only when the Black Bat was actually on the prowl. In a car, or on the street when circumstances forced him to mingle with people, he wore a wide brimmed black hat which shadowed his features well enough to all but conceal them.

He said, "I'm taking Silk along because after I visit Condor's place, I'll probably go to see Sherry Shannon and I'd better do that as Tony Quinn and not the Black Bat. So you two can get some rest. In the morning I'll want Mrs. Rex Duncan covered, which is your assignment, Carol. Butch, you begin acting like a private detective. Use your license and visit jewelry and fur stores; race tracks and other gambling joints. Try to trace Rex Duncan's spending as fully as possible."

Half an hour later Silk Kirby swung Tony Quinn's sedan in toward the curb of a street two blocks from Condor's gambling place. The sedan door opened and a dim form clung for a moment to the running board before dropping off, landing lightly and streaking toward an alley. Any casual observer would have honestly believed someone had darted into the alley, but would never have sworn to it.

The inky darkness enveloped the Black Bat to hide him completely, but the darkness could not impede him. His uncanny sight penetrated the gloom and saw things as plainly as though they were illuminated with a spot light.

He proceeded down the alley to its end where he scaled a fence and came out on the street behind Condor's place. A glance at his watch told him that the cut-off which Butch had rigged on the gambling house alarm system, was already in operation.

Unlike most direct investigations of this type, the Black Bat knew exactly

what he faced. Condor's gambling house had been the subject of a close police scrutiny and many of the facts they'd learned were on file in Quinn's office. He knew therefore, from scale plans, where the best method of entrance was located, where the weak points in the elaborate guard system were to be encountered. With this information, the Black Bat stepped up to a rear door, waited a few seconds to listen and scan the darkness and then he took out a key, moulded from the impressions Butch had taken from Condor's key ring.

**B**UT the lock turned easily for only one key was required here. The Black Bat stepped into a corridor, closed the door and locked it behind him. He reached another door and this one, he knew, formed the first of the protective shield. It had two keyholes, and the surface had the cool feel of metal.

If the alarm system was off, as it should be, the Black Bat would have no trouble. He used two keys this time, murmured a silent prayer and swung the door open. No bells clamored, there were no shouts or sound of running feet. The establishment was as quiet as a tomb.

Another door of similar type gave the Black Bat just as little trouble. He mounted a flight of steep, narrow stairs and faced the last door which led into Condor's office. This succumbed easily. Inside the office he peered around. The Black Bat required no lights and left the room in darkness.

He saw no signs of the safe he knew must be there and walked swiftly to the nearest wall. There he withdrew one glove, let the tips of his fingers move very lightly over the wall and kept working his way around the room in this manner.

The months of actual blindness had given him an acute sense of touch. When those inquisitive fingers encountered the almost invisible crack in the wall surface, the Black Bat knew he'd found the hidden safe. Next he searched for whatever control exposed the safe. This he discovered inside one of Condor's desk drawers.

The section of wall slid away, revealing the shiny safe door. Butch was right. This safe couldn't be opened by listening for the fall of the tumblers. Perhaps there were one or two men on

## CHAPTER VII

*Exit from Danger*

earth who might have been able to open the safe that way, but the Black Bat, with all his skill, realized he couldn't do so.

Therefore, without wasting any more time, he set about filling in the space between the safe door and its thick frame with a special kind of clay which hardened almost instantly and soon sealed up the door.

But behind this seal was still enough space to accommodate the nitro which the Black Bat slowly pumped through the seal.

He attached an electric fuse, stepped well back from the safe and then touched the fuse connections to a small battery.

The explosion was dull and without much reverberation, but it blew the door off the safe very effectively.

The Black Bat pulled the door free, fanned away some smoke and prepared to step into the vault. He emitted a gasp. Someone was already inside—someone who lay huddled in a corner with the grey pallor of death on his face. It was Condor, the gambler who owned the place.

**T**HE Black Bat made a very quick examination and discovered that death seemed to have been caused by a terrific blow across the back of the head. He straightened up and looked over the contents of the safe.

A shelf where record books had been kept, was half bare and the only books remaining were those at least five years old.

Filing cabinet drawers had been rifled too—and not very long ago because Condor's body was still warm. The Black Bat spent no more than a moment at this work. Then he stepped out of the safe, ran to the supply closet where Butch had installed the cut-off and found it intact.

But where Butch had concealed the time mechanism which shut off the juice, it now lay exposed. Someone had found it.

The Black Bat wrenched the clock free, laced the wires together and hoped that if he'd walked into a trap, Condor's alarm system would give him some measure of time if police, crooks—or both—tried to bottle him up. He had a rather firm idea that he was the victim of a clever scheme.



**Q**UICKLY the Black Bat rifled Condor's desk without finding anything important and then headed for the door. As he reached for the knob, the first clamor of the alarm system went off.

The Black Bat opened the door, sped down the corridor and held a gun ready. He wondered where Condor's guards were hidden. Certainly someone must have been left on the premises after closing hours, yet even the explosion that ripped off the safe door hadn't aroused anyone.

The Black Bat reached the gambling rooms proper, entered them and proceeded to a window overlooking the street. The window had steel shutters but there was just space enough between them so that a narrow view of the street could be obtained. The Black Bat counted seven police cars, pulled up at all sorts of crazy angles.

The alarm system was still going strong and he knew it wouldn't take too long for the cops to cut their way through the steel doors. Apparently they'd received a tip which sounded authentic enough to take a chance and really wreck the place.

There was no ready way out, the Black Bat knew. All exits would be well guarded. He kept watching the street and gave a sigh of exasperation when he saw a uniformed Inspector arrive and take charge. That meant nothing was going to stop this raid. It wasn't just another gambling clean-up. An entire Police Command Unit was involved.

The Black Bat walked over to a roulette table and sat down on the edge of it to think. He forced himself to forget the danger and the fact that he had walked into a trap. Very coolly he considered how to find a way out of here.

The electrically locked doors would hold the police back for another ten minutes at the least. The Black Bat thought swiftly. The doors were meant to delay. They were expensive, difficult to install and to maintain; therefore they must have a valuable purpose. Mere de-

lay wouldn't be sufficient unless the delay could accomplish something that would save Condor money or a police record.

The Black Bat recalled that every time a raid had been made on this place, no evidence of gambling had ever been found. Yet this room was filled with bulky equipment. While a raiding party was delayed by the steel doors, something was done with this equipment. That was the answer to why Condor had spent so much in setting up his delaying barriers. Gambling equipment was extremely expensive and worth a considerable outlay to protect.

The Black Bat lifted one end of the roulette table and found it quite heavy. He knelt on the floor, his strange sight scanning the highly polished surface until he saw certain scratches. The table had been dragged across the floor several times and always toward or from the west wall.

That wall was hung with thick draperies. The Black Bat swept them aside and found solid brick wall behind. They were merely ornaments. He tapped on the walls with the butt of his gun but realized if he was going to find Condor's secret way out, there wouldn't be time to go over every inch of the room for the hidden door.

He had to open that exit fast. As fast as Condor's people did when a raid was announced. The Black Bat snapped gloved fingers and hurried to the cashier's cage. He'd seen two telephones there and realized that if a raid was announced, the word would probably come over the phone. Therefore, the controls which opened any secret exit would be close by the telephones so that instant action could be taken.

The Black Bat recalled the button concealed inside a drawer of Condor's office desk. The man who installed it would be apt to use that same sort of hiding place for any other button controls. The Black Bat slid out the drawers in the cashier's desk. He found the control in the bottom drawer, pressed it and nothing happened.

He groaned and pushed again. There wasn't a sound. No opening appeared and after a few seconds he heard the crash of police caving in one of the metal doors.

Then he saw one of the drapes move just a trifle. It billowed out as if a

breeze was hitting it from the rear. The Black Bat sprinted across the room, swept the drape aside and saw the fairly wide opening. He went through it fast and came to a stop against a waist high railing. He peered around in the darkness and whistled in amazement.

He was on a small balcony of the movie house next door to Condor's place. A balcony that was, under ordinary conditions, merely an ornamental structure without seats or room for theater patrons. But all the gambling paraphernalia could be quietly carried out here and quickly covered up to remain well hidden until police cleared out of the gambling room.

**T**HE Black Bat examined the wall just inside that secret door and discovered the small lever which sent the door sliding shut again. As it snicked into place, he began turning.

A gun was fired from somewhere in the orchestra, near the pit. The gunman apparently had pulled trigger when he heard the mechanism click the secret door shut and knew someone must be standing near the switch to operate it.

The bullet whipped past the Black Bat's shoulder, missing him by three or four inches. He took half a dozen fast sidesteps. Crepe soled shoes made no sound. Jet black clothing so merged with the darkness that any ordinary eyes would have detected no sign of movement.

The Black Bat neared the railing and looked over. A man was moving up the middle aisle of the small theater. He had a revolver in his fist but possession of the gun was no great comfort to him. His lips were drawn back in a grimace of fear. The Black Bat was certain he'd never seen this man before. He wasn't heavily built. He wore a tuxedo and was partially bald. Apparently he was heading for the theater exit and if he reached the street, he would give some kind of an alarm which would draw the police.

The Black Bat swiftly climbed over the railing, clung to it by one hand and slid his gun back into its holster, next to his other weapons. It wasn't more than ten feet drop from the balcony to the aisle floor and when the gunman passed underneath him, the Black Bat let go.

He hurtled down, landing within two feet of the advancing man and throwing enough of a scare into him so that he cried out and tried to dodge out of the way instead of cutting loose with the revolver. The Black Bat's arms wrapped around a pair of legs and tugged, just once. The man came down heavily.

He tried to bring the gun to bear but a black gloved hand was faster. Fingers fastened on the gun cylinder

ily and didn't move after that.

The Black Bat didn't waste time searching him. He simply took a small metal box from his pocket, removed a black cut-out fashioned in the shape of a bat in full flight and pasted this by its glued back to the forehead of the unconscious man.

It was the brand of the Black Bat, mostly found on men he'd been forced to kill. In this case the Black Bat



CAROL

and hung long enough so the Black Bat's other hand could encircle the man's wrist and give an expert twist. The gun fell to the floor and the Black Bat knocked it spinning beneath a row of seats.

He got up quickly. So did the gunman who fought with the fury of terror now. He couldn't see his opponent but he recognized the fact that his life might hang in the balance. He used feet, fists and fingernails.

The Black Bat evaded most of the blows because he could see them coming. Then he stepped in close, brought up an uppercut and landed it against the gunman's jaw. The man flew backwards, threw up both arms and then fell over. He hit the floor heav-

wanted this gunman and whoever hired him to know that the Black Bat was involved. It would remove any element of suspicion that blind Tony Quinn was doing just a bit too much close work for a man bereft of his eyesight.

The Black Bat carefully opened one of the exit doors which led into an alley. No police were guarding this point. He hurried back into the theater and located the manager's office where electric light switches were placed. They were properly labeled and he turned on the lights which flooded the interior of the theater, the lobby and the marquee. The sudden and mysterious turning on of those lights would bring police swarming into the theater



where they'd find the gunman.

The Black Bat dashed back to the exit, through it and along the alley. He was now the width of an entire building away from Condor's restaurant and gambling house, but he didn't go to the front of the theatre. Instead he climbed a fence at the end of the alley and sprinted for the street behind the place.

There he concealed himself in a doorway until he saw Silk roll the sedan around a corner. The Black Bat raced out to meet him, swung aboard and Silk quickly threw the car into reverse and backed away from all the activity a block ahead.

**I**N THE rear seat the Black Bat was already removing the somber clothing, the guns and the hood. He put on Tony Quinn's much brighter apparel, swiftly knotted a tie and stepped into ordinary brown shoes. The regalia of the Black Bat was quickly folded and stowed into a well hidden compartment which only the most intensive search would reveal.

Tony Quinn climbed into the front seat of the sedan, pulled on his gray fedora and slipped dark glasses over his eyes. He picked up the white cane, held it between his knees and then relaxed.

"Head for the Harrington Square Apartments where Sherry Shannon said she lived," he instructed. "I may require an alibi before this night is over and Sherry could provide it."

Silk emitted a long sigh of relief. "I've lost ten pounds, sir. When those police cars began to converge, I knew there was some kind of a trap being sprung. All I could do was keep circling and praying I wouldn't be noticed."

"Someone beat me to it," Quinn said slowly. "Someone who was after the same records I wanted. Whoever this man was, he managed to bring Condor along. In my opinion the clock device which Butch rigged up so I could open the steel doors, was found. Not by Condor but by someone in his employ who also works for the man who murdered Condor. This spy guessed what was up, notified his employer and they went to work fast."

"You found nothing in the safe?" Silk queried.

"Only Conrad Condor, dead. Condor was murdered by a blow at the back of the head. I delayed the police who had

been tipped, managed to locate a secret exit Condor used when he had to get rid of his gambling equipment, and found myself in that little intimate theatre next door to the gambling place. Somebody else was there too and he took a shot at me."

"You're not hurt?" Silk asked anxiously.

"No, he missed me. I knocked him out, attracted the police into the theatre and branded the man with a sticker. Tomorrow I'll find out who this man was and what sort of a story he gave. There is the advantage in being both the Black Bat and a Special D.A. The disadvantage is that I shall now require an alibi for about the time I slugged that fellow in the theatre."

"It's almost five o'clock in the morning, sir," Silk reminded him.

Quinn chuckled. "A fine time to be calling on a girl. But then, she works in a night club and isn't supposed to be home until dawn."

The Harrington Square Apartments were tall, covered most of a block and were deserted at this time of the night. Of the four elevators, only one was in operation and manned by a sleepy old man who didn't mind showing his resentment at being awakened.

Sherry Shannon lived on the sixteenth floor, obviously an expensive apartment in this building. But then, with Rex Duncan spending a million dollars in two years it seemed odd that she didn't occupy the penthouse suite.

Silk led blind Tony Quinn down the heavily carpeted corridor to its end where they found a card inserted in the slot below the bell. It was Sherry Shannon's card. Silk pushed the button. They waited about three minutes and then Quinn glanced down the corridor before he bent a little and pressed an ear against the door panels.

He stepped back quickly. "Go in," he said. "Someone's in trouble."

Silk tried the knob, found the spring bolt in place and attacked the door with his shoulder. He didn't smash it down in a single blow, nor half a dozen blows, but when the lower panel sprung, he was able to kick it in. All this aroused practically everyone on the floor and Quinn had blindly to extend his hand in which his badge of office nestled.

Silk bent, reached through the hole he'd kicked out of the door and man-

aged to grasp the night lock. He turned this and the door opened. Silk went in first.

It was a luxuriously fitted apartment and one of the first things Silk saw was a photo of Rex Duncan.

He glanced in the living room and found no one. Quinn was blundering around in the foyer and Silk finally returned to lead him inside.

Tony Quinn dropped his voice to a whisper.

"I heard someone kicking the floor with his feet. It was muffled and I expect it came from a closet of some sort. Since the kicking has completely stopped, I'm afraid that we may be too late. So hurry it up!"

**H**URRYING into the bedroom Silk found a closet door locked and the key missing. He blocked the doorway at a signal from Quinn who drew a bunch of skeleton keys from his pocket and selected one. It didn't fit. He tried another and then another until the lock turned back.

He stepped away fast and Silk took his place. Silk swung the door wide, darted inside and picked up a girl whose arms and legs were tightly bound, eyes taped and lips covered with adhesive. She was unconscious and breathing with great difficulty.

Quinn closed the bedroom door, bent over the girl and removed the adhesive over her mouth.

Behind her swollen lips a thick wad of gauze had been jammed. Quinn pulled this away.

So far he hadn't touched the blind-folding tape.

The girl's pulse was too fast and her forehead almost clammy. Quinn said, "The cur who put the gag in her mouth didn't realize the throat might become swollen and cut off the air passages from the nostrils. It's deadly, particularly with a mouth breather as this girl appears to be. In another ten or fifteen minutes she would have been dead, Silk. Get some water. Or brandy or whisky if you can find it. Then telephone Police Headquarters and have them send out a still alarm for Sherry Shannon."

"But isn't this Miss Shannon?" Silk looked at the figure on the bed.

"Not unless she dyed her hair since earlier tonight. Shannon is a brunette and this girl has red hair."

## CHAPTER VIII

*Protective Custody*

**I**VE minutes later the girl was breathing normally and in ten she opened her eyes and tried to scream. Silk was bending over her while Quinn sat near the window, sightless eyes staring at the opposite wall.

"It's all right, miss," Silk assured the girl.

"Everything is fine. We're of the police." The girl tried to push herself into a sitting position. "The police! Then something has happened to Sherry."

"Lie back," Silk said soothingly. "If you don't relax, we're going to call in a doctor and have him give you a sedative."

"You don't look like a policeman," the girl said, still in the grip of fear.

"My name is Kirby. I work for Mr. Quinn who is on the District Attorney's staff. We came here to talk to Sherry Shannon and found you instead. We'd like to know who you are."

"My name is Nancy Shannon. I'm Sherry's sister. Her name isn't really Sherry. It's Helen, but she changed it."

"Tell us what happened," Silk urged. "Here, I'll help you sit up a little straighter."

"I'm all right," Nancy Shannon assured him. "But that man—he seems so strange." She was looking at Quinn.

Quinn said, "I'm blind, Miss Shannon. So you see, things must be explained to me very carefully and completely. Perhaps we can help you. Sherry is missing and we want to find her too, so please don't waste any time. We discovered you gagged, blindfolded, tied up and almost dead in one of the closets in this room. How did you get there? Who tied you up?"

Nancy Shannon seemed much shyer than her more glamorous sister and she looked about five years younger. Her hair was a soft copper color and she didn't use much makeup. She wore medium priced clothes; a gray traveling suit at the moment. Her luggage was in the corner and consisted of two canvas covered suitcases.

Nancy said, "I'm sorry about your being blind, Mr. Quinn. I guess it's all

right to tell you what happened. I honestly don't know a great deal of it. Sherry wrote me a week ago and said things weren't going very well. She said she expected a lot of trouble and asked me to come live with her. I've been taking care of our home upstate. We're trying to sell the farm without much luck so far."

"And you came here to keep your sister company," Quinn encouraged. "Did she write about what kind of trouble she expected?"

"No, sir. Just trouble. I got here about ten o'clock and telephoned the club where Sherry works. She was doing her number, but about eleven-thirty she phoned and said I was to wait here and not go out nor let anyone in."

"You did though," Quinn said in a kindly voice.

"But it was Sherry who spoke when I asked who was knocking," Nancy said. "I know it was Sherry. That's why I wasn't afraid any more. I unlocked the door, opened it, and two men came in."

"Did you see any signs of Sherry or any other woman who might have made you think she was Sherry speaking?"

"No, sir. Just these two men and one of them put his hand across my mouth and dragged me into the living room. They put some gauze in my mouth and then adhesive tape over my lips. Next they tied my hands behind me and then my ankles. One of them said I ought to be blindfolded too so I couldn't see what they were doing and they put more adhesive over my eyes."

"But they didn't stop you from listening," Quinn said. "I'm a blind man and I know how much information can be picked up from just listening to people move about. So continue."

"I don't know. They were opening drawers and moving furniture around. Then I was picked up and dropped on the floor. I heard a door close and a key turn and that was all. I kicked my feet up and down, trying to get help. Then I felt myself slipping. My head started to spin. I couldn't breathe any more."

"Didn't these men say a word?" Quinn asked.

"They didn't speak very often. Oh, yes. While they were carrying me one of them said I'd be all right until they got back."

"They won't be back now," Quinn grunted. "Not with all the commotion

we started when we forced our way inside. But they might try to seize you later on. I think we'd better see that you are hidden away in some hotel and under a false name that only we know. Are you willing to do that?"

SHE nodded, her nostrils flaring out in sudden terror as she recalled what she had just gone through. "I'm so scared I'll do anything you say. You can even lock me up if you like. But why should they want me? And what have they done with Sherry?"

"We can't answer those questions now," Quinn said. "Silk, we'll take Miss Shannon to the car and drive her to some quiet hotel. Is it daylight yet?"

"Not quite, sir," Silk replied.

"Good. We can sneak her away from here better if it's still dark. Phone Headquarters again and have them send a radio car to guard this apartment until someone from the detective division can take over. Miss Shannon, have you any possessions you want to bring along?"

She gave a nervous little laugh. "I didn't even have time to unpack. There are two suitcases."

"Silk will take them," Quinn said. "You may lead me, if you will be so kind."

"Of course." She slipped an arm through his. "Somehow I feel safe when I'm with you. It's like having a good friend."

"Keep thinking of me in that way," Quinn told her with a chuckle.

In a few moments they walked through the lobby and out onto the street. Gray dawn was just creeping above the tops of the tall buildings but there were enough shadows to hide the two men in the doorway across the street from anyone equipped with only normal sight. Tony Quinn's apparently dead eyes spotted the pair at once and also saw the gun one of them was drawing.

To warn Silk, or take action himself, would betray the fact that his blindness was assumed. So Quinn had to act fast and in a natural manner which still served to protect the girl, himself and Silk. He pretended to trip. As he fell, he threw out one hand and grasped the side of the car. Silk sprang to his side and Nancy took his other arm to support him. This brought all of them be-



BUTCH

hind the car. They were no longer open targets.

The two men were hurrying toward them. Quinn dropped his cane, fumbled for the door lever and managed to stumble against Silk as he straightened up with the white cane.

"Gorillas." Quinn's lips didn't even move and the word was just a low hiss.

Silk got the car door open and pretended to spot the approaching pair. He reached under his coat for a gun. The two gunmen already had their weapons ready and aimed. They began shooting. Not at Silk or Quinn, but at the girl. She screamed and bent into a cowering position. Silk leaped to cover her and his own gun was coming up.

The pair turned and fled. A car, rolling fast along the deserted street, veered their way and the door opened. They swung aboard. Silk glanced at the girl and saw an ugly red streak across her forehead. He looked up, hate and death in his eyes. One of the gunmen was scrambling into the back of the car. The other clung to the door waiting his turn. Silk crooked an arm, rested his gun against it and fired one shot.

The man on the running board shout-

ed, sagged a little. His companion made a grab for his shoulder, missed and the gunman tumbled backward onto the road. The getaway car picked up speed and Silk ran over to take a couple of pot shots at it.

A radio car slid up and Silk quickly explained. The white and green car went roaring after the sedan. Another radio car pulled up. Silk identified himself to the officers. They examined the man lying in the road and found him unconscious but still breathing. The two radio cops stuffed him into their car for a quick trip to the hospital.

Silk went back to the sedan where the girl had climbed into the back and lay with her head resting against Quinn's shoulder. She was sobbing quietly. She had applied a handkerchief to the blood smear on her forehead. It was a gouge about half an inch long. Apparently one of the slugs had creased her.

"I hit one of them, sir," Silk reported. "They've taken him to the hospital. A radio car has gone after the getaway sedan they used."

"Miss Shannon is hurt," Quinn said. "She claims it isn't very bad. What do you think, Silk?"

"Just a crease alongside her forehead, sir," Silk said. "She'll be all right."

"Good. We're bringing Miss Shannon home with us. Those men are taking desperate chances to kill her and there must be a very important reason. Perhaps she'll be able to think of it. At least we can protect her."

**S**ILK said, "Yes, sir," and made no comment. But he wondered if Quinn's easy nature was taking precedence over common sense. A girl would be a decided menace in a home occupied by a man who was supposed to be blind and wasn't. Quinn must retain the pretense of blindness but come and go via the secret lab and the tunnel whenever it was necessary.

It was daylight when Silk pulled up in front of the house and helped Quinn and Nancy in. He assigned her a guest room and carried her bags there.

Nancy said, "I'm afraid I'm being a lot of trouble, Mr. Kirby. I promise you I won't stay. I'll go quickly when I lose this terrible fear."

"You will stay as long as there is any danger," Silk told her. "Mr. Quinn will insist upon that. I think you'd best get some rest now. Good night, miss."

He closed the door and heard her lock it. Then he went down to the library where Quinn was stoking a pipe. Silk sat down. "As long as that girl lives here, the Black Bat isn't going to find it easy to come and go, sir," he said.

"The girl's life is more important," Quinn replied. "And the reason why they want to kill her so badly may solve our riddle for us. You can see by what has happened so far, that more than one person is involved. And the men are dangerous killers."

"Yes, sir," Silk said dryly.

Quinn had half a smile on his face. He applied flame to his pipe and puffed contentedly. "Besides she's a darned pretty girl. Not more than twenty-one or two, would you guess? Nothing sophisticated about her either but then, both Carol and Butch were impressed by Nancy's sister. It begins to look, Silk, as if Sherry's prophecy of trouble has come true. They murdered Condor because he would have known a great deal about Rex Duncan's wild spending and gambling. So we can assume they have killed Sherry also because she knew the same things about Duncan."

Silk didn't unbend. "Do you wish breakfast, sir? Are you going to get a little rest before going to the office? It's six, sir."

"I've some thinking to do. What's wrong with you, Silk?"

"That girl. I don't like her here. She may be in danger; she may be extremely pretty and entirely unsophisticated, but she does not belong here, sir. She's too much of a danger to us."

"Oh bosh. You're getting on, Silk. You've lost your sense of gallantry. Go make a big pot of coffee. I'm going to need it to stay wide awake today."

There was a decided grin around Quinn's mouth as Silk gloomily went to prepare the beverage.

## CHAPTER IX

### *The Machete Man*



#### TECTIVE CAPTAIN

**MCGRATH** was an early morning visitor at Quinn's office. McGrath had several things on his mind. He said, "First of all, it looks as if the Black Bat is in this, Tony. And I'm saying here and now that, for one of the few times I've suspected you, I can't see how you could be the Black Bat."

"Well, that's interesting," Quinn smiled. "Usually it's the other way around and I have to prove I'm not the Black Bat."

"Last night," McGrath said, "we were tipped that if Conrad Condor's gambling joint was raided, we'd find something very interesting. The Inspector over at the Eighty-first Precinct was sick and tired of Condor and what he'd been getting away with. He decided to rip the joint apart."

"And he found Condor murdered in his office," Quinn said. "Silk read the morning papers to me, Mac."

"That's only half of it. Seems Condor used to lug all his gambling devices into a theatre next door and when a raid was pulled, we always found nothing. The Black Bat was in the gambling house last night when the police started the raid. He escaped by using a trick entrance to the theatre



and there he ran across one of Condor's gambling house guards."

"How are you so certain it was the Black Bat?" Quinn asked. "Did this man in the theatre make an identification?"

"He never knew what landed on him," McGrath grunted. "But when he was found, one of the Black Bat's stickers was pasted on his forehead."

"And what does this guard say about the murder of Mr. Condor?" Quinn asked.

"He didn't even know Condor was dead. The man's name is Sam Loring and he worked for Condor a long time. He has a brief police record of minor offenses. He claims his job was to see that nobody got to the gambling room through the theatre. Which I think is a lie, because the guy was wearing a tuxedo when he was found and why would he endure a tux to guard an empty theatre at three or four o'clock in the morning? That man worked in the gambling house."

"You've got something there," Quinn admitted. "What are you going to do with this Sam Loring?"

"That's what I wanted to see you about, partly. We haven't much on him. Found a gun under the theatre seats but Loring claims it isn't his and he never carried a rod. We can't tie him up with Condor's murder. In fact we can't trace Condor at all since he closed up the joint last night. Maybe he left and was brought back maybe not."

"With no real evidence I think Mr. Loring will have to be released," Quinn said. "Now, what about the missing night club singer, Sherry Shannon?"

"She just stepped off the end of the earth," McGrath grumbled. "There isn't a trace of her. Nobody came back to her apartment even though her sister said they would. You have the girl hidden away, Tony?"

"She's at my home and safe enough, I hope. How about the fellow Silk shot last night?"

"He's a plain punk but a dead one right now," McGrath replied. "He died a little while ago without regaining consciousness. Can't tie him up with anything definite. But right there is the reason why I can't figure you as the Black Bat any more. While you and Silk were saving the life of this Nancy Shannon, the Black Bat was taking Condor's

gambling place apart."

Quinn shook his head. "Haven't you any good news this morning, Mac? A gambling house guard who is too smart to talk if he knew anything. A missing girl, and a dead big shot gambler. Everything that has happened seems to be against us."

McGRATH chewed on his cigar for a moment. "I've traced the machete which was used to nearly chop off Duncan's head. Is that good news?"

"It might be," Quinn said eagerly. "Tell me about it."

"We had pictures of the thing run in all the papers. We never said it was a murder weapon but just that some GI might like to know his war souvenir was found. About an hour ago, a Mrs. Stanley Kowal phoned and said a machete with that design scratched on it belonged to her husband."

"You don't sound optimistic," Quinn said. "Running down such an important clue might mean a great deal."

"Yeah. I asked Mrs. Kowal to have her husband call for the shiv. She told me she wanted to know where it was found because her husband hasn't been home in three days and she figured he might be somewhere around the spot where the knife was picked up. I stalled her. We'd better go out there. She lives on Long Island in one of those new developments and she promised to wait for us."

Quinn reached for his inter-office speaker. "I'll be with you in just a few minutes, Mac. I agree we should make this trip but Rex Duncan's business partner has been waiting to see me and he may have something important."

"I'll be outside," McGrath said.

Quinn flipped the switch. "Send in Mr. Hanford, please," he ordered.

Hanford and McGrath exchanged cool greetings as they passed one another. Hanford started to stretch out a hand uncertainly toward Quinn, made a wry face because he forgot that Quinn was blind and pulled up a chair instead. He sat down in it, sprawling his long legs so that one was wound around a leg of the chair and the other stuck straight out.

Hanford said, "Have you learned anything new, Mr. Quinn?"

"Not of any consequence," Quinn said. "Did you bring along the firm's

books as I requested yesterday?"

"Yes. All you will need for a good checking up. They are in your outer office. You won't find anything wrong, Mr. Quinn, in the firm's accounts nor in Rex Duncan's personal accounts. I tell you whoever represented himself to be Rex and told you he'd embezzled a million was a rank imposter. And a liar to boot."

Quinn touched fingertips together, made a steeple of his hands and stared to Hanford's left. "Yesterday, when I received an anonymous phone call advising me to look up one Sherry Shannon, you were kind enough to tell me that Rex Duncan and Miss Shannon were old friends. Miss Shannon has disappeared. Do you know of anything which might account for that?"

"Why, no. Not unless she ran away with a lot of things Rex gave her. It's possible Miss Shannon thought that Mrs. Duncan could take them away, so she just got out from under any chance of bad publicity."

Quinn said, "Miss Shannon took none of her valuables. Her younger sister was almost murdered in the bargain. Tell me, did Mrs. Duncan know of the affair between her husband and Miss Shannon?"

"If she didn't, it wasn't Rex's fault," Hanford admitted. "He made no secret of it and there was no reason why he should have concealed it. He and his wife didn't get along. She's a cold blooded sort with an eye to where the money comes from. In my opinion she will marry Ernest Jamison after a decent period has elapsed."

"The banker who handled Duncan's funds?" Quinn frowned.

"That's him. Rex and I carried our account at his bank and I wanted to pull it out but Rex persuaded me not to. He said it would make too much trouble between himself and his wife. So we let it ride. Not that I distrust Jamison or his bank. I just don't like that man, that's all."

"This is very interesting," Quinn ad-

mitted. "The murder of Rex Duncan now becomes beneficial to his widow and to Jamison, which is the same as to say it provides them with a motive. You've been very helpful, Mr. Hanford."

"Keep the source of your information quiet if you can." Hanford arose, unhinging himself piece by piece until his six feet and odd inches of lean body stood towering over the desk. He continued, "I've always disliked Mrs. Duncan, but from yesterday on I've learned to hate her. Rex and I had been in business for years and we were the best of friends. There is nothing I wouldn't have done for him. Yet she had his body cremated without a funeral service or permitting anyone to view the body. If you want any more dirt on her, let me know. I'll try to dig some up, with all the good cheer at my command."

HE had to duck slightly as he passed through the doorway. Quinn waited until the door was closed and then he dialed his home. Silk answered promptly.

"How is Nancy?" Quinn asked.

"Quite well, sir." Silk was still cold about the whole thing. "She ate a substantial breakfast and she's in her room unpacking and getting ready to stay with us for a long time."

"Indeed." Quinn chuckled. "It will brighten the old house, Silk. Tell her I'll see her at dinner time. Meanwhile you're not to forget that there happen to be people who would like to kill Nancy."

"I'm not apt to forget it," Silk said and hung up.

Quinn leaned back and moved his swivel chair slowly from side to side as he went over the weird events of the last two days and tried to find some sort of a solution in the maze.

First of all Rex Duncan had confessed to stealing a million dollars. Somewhat arbitrarily, he'd gone off to fetch his books as proof of this embezzlement, and been murdered. The books, if they ever existed, were gone. The murder weapon had been traced to a man who vanished since or before the crime.

Duncan's finances were in good shape according to his banker and his business partner. Duncan's widow insisted there had been no money troubles. Yet when a man throws away a million dol-



## CHAPTER X

*Man Missing*

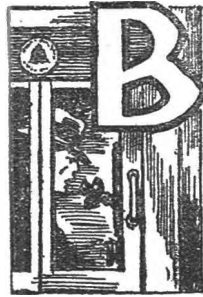
lars there are always money troubles. That Duncan had been a gambler was a proven fact. He frequented Condor's place and was friendly with the singer at Condor's nightclub-restaurant. Undoubtedly he had spent considerable on her.

But hardly a million dollars! Neither was it likely that he'd dropped such a fantastic sum in Condor's gambling rooms, although Condor had been murdered and some of his records stolen. Sherry Shannon had been kidnapped or murdered. Things seemed to happen to people who might prove Duncan could have spent a fortune.

Though Rex Duncan's finances were supposed to be in good condition, someone was going to extremes to prevent any discovery of Duncan's having squandered a great deal of money. Quinn felt that if he could find the answer to that, he would have the solution to the whole affair.

But people who could manipulate finances to such an extent as to conceal the embezzlement of a million dollars, were masters at the art. Convicting them, even if they were found, would be a tricky business. Quinn was all too familiar with trying cases which involved high finance.

The best angle to tackle this from was through the meagre clues. Through the owner of the machete which was the murder weapon; through tracing the movements of Condor and trying to find Sherry Shannon. He must also check on that gambling house guard, Sam Loring. Those were weak points in the attempted cover-up. Piercing any one of them might give passage to the influences hiding behind a facade of lies and intrigue.



RAKES squealed as Captain McGrath brought the police car to a halt at the top of a long grade. Beside him, Quinn moved restlessly and asked, "Are we there already, Mac?"

"No," he replied. "I just want to get a good look at this housing project and describe it to you. Tony, it's an amazing thing. As far as I can see are these houses. Most of them are one-family cottages. There must be a thousand of them. Neat as pins. Matter of fact this whole thing looks like some enormous planned project still attached to an architect's drawing board. It hardly looks real."

"Duncan and Hanford accomplished it," Quinn said. "I wish I could see it, Mack. I understand they were planning even more of these homes."

"They're already in the works," McGrath announced. "Way off in the distance I can see excavating machines at work and they're tearing down a lot of old buildings still further on. There are trees planted all around, playgrounds, new schools, stores and movie theatres. It's like a brand new city, Tony."

Quinn smiled. "You're really going for this, Mac."

"It worries me," McGrath said. "A guy who'd foresee, plan and execute this thing and accomplish what very few others have even tried, namely to provide homes for veterans and others

[Turn page]

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of medium incomes, is hardly the kind of a man who'd steal a lot of money."

"It works the other way too, Mac," Quinn said. "Only a man with sufficient capital around to swing a project like this could come into contact with a million dollars. Suppose we try to find out, eh? We were headed for the home of Mrs. Stanley Kowal."

McGrath released the brake, shifted and stepped on the gas pedal. He located the right street and soon parked in front of one of those neat little dwellings. As he helped Quinn out of the car, a woman of about twenty-eight came onto the little porch and stood there waiting for them.

"Have you any word?" she implored, even before they had reached the porch steps. "Is my husband in some kind of trouble?"

"We don't know," Quinn told her. "That is why we came. Captain, will you show Mrs. Kowal that knife, please? So she can make a positive identification."

McGrath unwrapped the package he was carrying. Mrs. Kowal pushed back her blond hair and opened her very blue eyes wide. "Yes, that's it, I'm sure. The design is proof. Stanley scratched it there himself while he was serving in the Seabees in the South Pacific. Where did you find it? Please tell me."

"In a moment," Quinn said. "When did you see this knife last, Mrs. Kowal?"

"Three days ago. Stanley came home—he was temporarily out of work. Just a seasonal lay-off. He seemed very excited and he went to the playroom in the cellar and took down this machete from the wall where we used it as an ornament. Then he went right out again."

"And that was the last time you saw the knife?"

"The knife and my husband," Mrs. Kowal was getting close to tears.

Quinn said, "Tell me about your conversation with him over the phone."

"He was gone maybe three or four hours," she explained. "It was past the dinner hour and the meal I had ready for him was spoiled. Around nine o'clock he phoned and said he had good news. He was at the railroad station about three miles from here. He was going to New Jersey on business but would be home as soon as possible. He

said he had a new job, one that paid more and would give him a great deal of satisfaction. That was all."

"Was he driving?" McGrath put in.

"No, our car was in the garage for an overhaul," she explained. "That is one reason I did not worry too much. I thought Stanley must have traveled by train and sometimes that is much slower. But he did not call the day after, nor yesterday and then I saw the picture of the machete. Now I have told you all I can. It is time that you tell me what has happened to my husband."

QUINN shook his head sorrowfully. "But we don't know, Mrs. Kowal. Tell me, did he ever mention the name of Rex Duncan?"

She backed up a pace and her face went pale. "You mean the man who built all these houses? No, Stanley did not know him. We talked of him, because of the wonderful things he has done for so many people. But Mr. Duncan was murdered. You don't believe my husband had something to do with it!"

"We didn't even suggest that," Quinn told her quickly. "Why should he have been involved when he didn't even know the man? But perhaps your husband's disappearance has something to do with the case. We're trying to find out. Meanwhile, if you hear from him, let us know at once. Telephone either Captain McGrath here or myself—Tony Quinn of the Manhattan District Attorney's office. We'll do our best to find your husband but we may need your help too."

"I'll do anything I can," she said tearfully. "I've been trying to think."

Quinn broke in. "Have you a picture of your husband? That would be of great value in looking for him."

"Yes. He had one taken only three months ago. I'll get it."

McGrath spoke softly when Mrs. Kowal had disappeared into the house. "Well, what do you think, Tony?"

"There is a tie-up, that's certain," Quinn whispered. "What it is or how it came about, is as much of a mystery as the motive for murdering Duncan. Perhaps the picture will help."

She gave them a studio shot of a square-faced, honest looking young man. "If you hear anything, will you let me know?" she begged.

"Of course," Quinn said. "All right, Mac, I'm ready to leave."

On the way back Quinn said, "Stop off at the local police station, Mac, and have them put a recorder on Mrs. Kowal's telephone, and ask them to assign a man to keep watch. I think Mrs. Kowal is okay but you never can be certain, so why take chances."

"I was thinking along the same lines," McGrath said. "And after that, what?"

Quinn grasped the crook of his white cane harder. "We'll visit Mrs. Duncan, show her the picture of Stanley Kowal and look for any reaction. It has occurred to me that if I suspect that well mannered, nicely voiced Mrs. Kowal, I ought to lock up Mrs. Duncan. That's how the two women compare."

McGrath stopped briefly at the local police station and arranged for Mrs. Kowal to be watched and her phone tapped. McGrath returned to the police car and headed back toward town.

"I asked them about Kowal," he told Quinn. "They say he's a nice lad. No record, no trouble and his name is up for election to a local Vet's organization as president. Fast moving, ambitious type is what I gathered about Stanley Kowal."

"We'll see what Mrs. Duncan has to say about him, if anything. I want to know why Kowal took down the machete from the playroom wall and went out in a hurry and a huff."

"But wait," McGrath cautioned. "That happened a couple of days before Duncan was hacked up. How do you account for that?"

"I'm not even trying," Quinn said.

When they rang the bell at the Duncan residence, Mrs. Duncan opened the door and stood there, blocking their way.

McGrath said, "It's Mrs. Duncan, Tony."

Quinn removed his hat and bowed slightly. "I'm sorry about our little misunderstanding in my office."

"If you came here merely to apologize, I'm not interested," Mrs. Duncan began.

"Oh, no. We're here on police business."

"Then state it please," she said acidly. "I've been put through enough. Must this inquisition go on for the rest of my life?"

"Now look here!" McGrath roared.

Quinn broke in. "Easy does it, Captain. Mrs. Duncan, we take it for

granted that you wish the murderer of your husband discovered and punished. But even if it is of no material interest to you, the people of this state do insist that killers not be allowed to run around loose."

She stepped back. "Come in, then. I suppose I must endure this."

SHE led them to the living room. Quinn, on McGrath's arm, was led to a chair and helped into it. Though his apparently sightless eyes gave no indication of it, he saw Mrs. Duncan's brother across the room, silently watching and listening. There was a half finished highball glass in his hand, and his jaw, pressed down against an ample chest, bulged out all his four chins.

He looked like a sleepy Buddha but Quinn wasn't being deceived by the man's lazy attitude. His eyes were too alert, too fast moving. Godfrey Chandler may have looked inefficient but Quinn had an idea he could move fast and straight when necessary.

Mrs. Duncan didn't sit down. She said, "Very well, you may ask your questions. If they seem too complicated or intimidating, I shall phone for my attorney before answering any of them."

"As a matter of fact," Quinn said, "we're not going to ask you a single question. All we want to do is look at a picture and tell us if you ever saw the subject before. Show her the photo, Mac."

McGrath turned back the cover of the folder and held the picture of Stanley Kowal so that Mrs. Duncan could see it plainly. She shook her head at once.

"This man is a complete stranger to me," Suddenly she all but yanked the picture out of McGrath's hand, walked across the room and thrust it at Chandler.

Two of his four chins were withdrawn as he raised his head for a better look. He tilted the picture toward the light, took a swig at his highball and then said, "Never saw him before. What's he supposed to have done?"

Quinn ignored the question. "Mrs. Duncan, perhaps your maid might recognize this man. It's possible he came here while you were out."

"I no longer have a maid," Mrs. Duncan said tartly. "I intend to close up this house soon and go abroad for a



long, long time. The quicker I can get away from here, the better."

Quinn arose. "I wouldn't leave too hastily, Mrs. Duncan," he said in a quiet voice.

She glared at him. "I shall leave when I choose. And how is it any of your affair, Mr. Quinn?"

Quinn smiled blandly. "If you try to leave, Mrs. Duncan, you may get no farther than the nearest precinct. Have you forgotten that your husband was murdered and that wealthy widows make very good suspects?"

She gasped, speechless for a moment. Then her face grew crimson in rage. She extended a finger at Quinn and waved it under his nose, an action which didn't get the slightest rise out of him, not even to making those blank eyes flicker.

"I shall take action for this. I most certainly shall see that you don't get away with such a statement."

"When you do," Quinn said just as calmly as before, "be prepared to answer a lot of questions about your relationship to Mr. Duncan and—your relationship to Ernest Jamison."

From the corner of the room, Godfrey Chandler let out a loud laugh. "Checkmate," he called. "Run along, Mr. Quinn. You won't find my dear sister making any further fuss."

"I doubted that she would," Quinn remarked.

Mrs. Duncan sat down slowly. She made no attempt to accompany them to the door and McGrath was laughing as he helped Quinn down the outside steps.

"You popped her cork all right, Tony. How those women burn me up! I swear, some day I'll haul one in and throw a cell around her just to see what happens. Well, she didn't know Kowal. Or she says she didn't. Now what?"

Quinn said, "The maid's name was Betty Wilcox. I'm sure you must have her address, Mac. She was questioned enough."

"It's in my notebook." McGrath hauled out a battered leather covered book. "I transcribe my notes but I always keep the originals until the case is closed. She lives uptown. Want to go there?"

"I think we might find her interesting."

Betty Wilcox looked even prettier out of her maid's uniform. She recognized

Quinn and McGrath and began to grow worried. She lived in one of those popular garden apartments, sharing four rooms with her mother and a younger sister. She led her visitors into a tidy, sun-filled living room.

McGRATH showed her the picture of Stanley Kowal and she nodded quickly. "Yes, I remember him. A young man who came to the house—twice, I think. The first time he was sore. Mr. Duncan was going out and I knew he didn't want to be disturbed but this young man just pushed me aside and went in."

"You didn't overhear anything?" Quinn asked hopefully.

She smiled. "I don't make a habit of listening, sir. But when this gentleman left he was smiling and seemed very happy about things. A few days before Mr. Duncan was—ah—killed, he came back. I never heard one word about why he came nor who he was."

"Did anyone else see him there?" Quinn asked.

"Mr. Chandler did, I'm sure. He's Mrs. Duncan's brother. Nothing escapes him. Sometimes I swear he can see while his eyelids are closed."

"Mr. Chandler denied ever having seen this man," Quinn told her. "Are you certain?"

"Mr. Chandler is a liar," Betty Wilcox said promptly. "The second time this young man came, Mr. Chandler stood in the living room doorway and we passed within five feet of him. He saw us all right."

Quinn asked, "Why were you discharged, Miss Wilcox?"

She gave an audible snort. "She didn't dare fire me before. Mrs. Duncan, I mean. Because her husband liked me. I felt so sorry for him, until he found Miss Shannon. He changed then. He was going to divorce Mrs. Duncan and marry Miss Shannon. He told me so. He said when he did, he wanted me to come and work for him at his new place."

Quinn whistled softly. "Did Mrs. Duncan know this?"

"I should think so. He told her so, right to her face."

"You're being of great help to us," Quinn acknowledged. "Now let's see if you can continue. Did Mr. Duncan ever have any steady visitors? People who came at regular intervals on business?"

## CHAPTER XI

*Search for a Dead Man*

"No, sir. He conducted all his business at the office."

"What about phone calls? You answered most of the calls. Would there be someone who phoned often enough so his voice became familiar?"

"Why, yes," she said. "Practically every morning, before Mr. Duncan left for the office, this man phoned and Mr. Duncan was always very eager to talk to him. He'd make notes on a pad and put the sheet of paper in his pocket. The man never gave his name, but once when Mr. Duncan wasn't there, he left a phone number."

McGrath closed his eyes and murmured a fervent prayer. Quinn held his breath. Betty Wilcox bit her lip and then jumped up. "Of course! It's in my want book. I always carried around a small book in which I wrote down things we needed. I put the number in that book too. Wait just a moment."

SHE returned in two minutes. "Yes," she flipped the pages of the little notebook, "I knew I was right. It's Ashford Nine—Three-seven-four-oh."

McGrath went into the next room where the phone was located. He called the business office, identified himself and gave the number.

Then he returned to help Quinn arise and leave.

Quinn said, "Miss Wilcox, we're very grateful."

"I'm glad I could help," the girl answered with a smile. "I only hope it traps that old buzzard into the electric chair before she can spend all that good money Mr. Duncan worked so hard to get."

In the car McGrath said, "Tony, we're on to something. That number belongs to Sam Loring, the monkey we captured in that theater next door to Condor's gambling place. And — get this — the Vice Squad has a check on the phone. It seems that Mr. Loring is among our very popular book-makers. And book-makers are usually the kind of people who lead cashiers, bankers and clerks along the rocky road of embezzlement."

Quinn nodded. "Mac, get to him quickly. Get Loring before someone else does. He falls into the same category with Condor and Sherry Shannon. He may have helped Rex Duncan spend a million dollars. If the murderer knows that he'll take action."



McGrath dropped Quinn off at his home and, as the apparently blind man used his cane to tap his way up the walk, the front door opened and Nancy Shannon came running by. She flew down the steps, reached his side and took his arm.

"I'm so glad you're home, Mr. Quinn," she said. "It's been so lonesome. Have you found Sherry?"

"I'm sorry," Quinn smiled in her direction. "We're doing everything we can. You know, it's rather nice to have someone meet me like this. Silk is a fine man. I couldn't do without him, but he's too used to me."

"He's an old grouch," Nancy said happily. "How long must I stay here?"

"I don't know," Quinn admitted.

"I hope it's a long time. The house is so pleasant. And then, I can sort of repay you for all this kindness by waiting on you. I'm not going to keep reminding you that you are blind but there are certain things I can do so easily and they'll give me so much satisfaction."

She chattered on and on. Silk was at the door to take Quinn's topcoat, hat and white cane. He frowned darkly behind Nancy's back and made motions of grim resignation for this cross he had to bear.

They had dinner soon afterwards. Then in the library, Nancy read the evening papers to Quinn.

When she finished the last one, Quinn called Silk in and asked him to take down a thick tome on medical jurisprudence from the library shelf. He asked Nancy to read a certain chapter of this book and she eagerly complied. But it was fine print, a very large book and an extremely long and dull chapter. By the time she was half through it she yawned prodigiously and found trouble focusing her eyes on the words.

Quinn chuckled. "I'm afraid I made you overdo it, Nancy. Such boring reading for a lovely girl. You've been through a great deal too. Tell you what! Tomorrow, bright and early, I'll have Silk drive us to a certain Inn I know

of where the breakfast ham comes thick and juicy and the hens lay their eggs right in the frying pan. It will be a nice drive, right after dawn but you'll sleep all through it if you don't get some rest now."

She kissed him on the forehead before she fled for her room upstairs. Silk came in with a highball. "I think you're carrying this too far, sir," he said in a flat voice. "And so does Miss Carol."

"Oh?" Quinn's lips pursed. "She knows about Nancy then?"

"Yes, sir," Silk replied with an uneasy glance. "She's in the laboratory now. Both she and Butch have things to report. But what about the minx upstairs? Do you dare leave the house?"

"Why not? So long as you stand guard and tell her I'm asleep if she awakens. I purposely made her read that fine print to put her to sleep, Silk. We're quite safe."

Silk served the drink and then went around the room pulling down the window shades. When this was done, Quinn arose and walked straight to the hidden entrance of the lab. Carol didn't come to meet him. He sat down beside her on the leather divan.

Carol said, without looking at him, "Do you trust her, Tony? Do you think it's wise to have her here like this? Mind you, I'm not in the least jealous."

"She's quite pretty, don't you think?" Quinn asked.

Butch said, "She's a knockout. I spotted her when Silk took her for a little drive this afternoon."

"Yes," Carol said. "She is quite attractive. Well, Tony, how is this investigation coming along?"

"We progress," Quinn still smiled. "Not by leaps, but we'll get there. It seems Mrs. Duncan was going to be divorced and that now her husband is dead, she will probably marry her banker, Mr. Jamison."

CAROL lighted a cigarette so quickly that he had no time to proffer a match. She spoke through a cloud of smoke. "If you discovered all this, Tony, why did you have me spend my time finding out the same things? Mrs. Duncan is a vicious, double-crossing woman. She married Duncan for his money and got her share. Now she'll take Jamison. That is the extent of my investigation today. What shall I do next?"

"Concentrate on Jamison, I think," Quinn told her. "Butch, what about your work?"

"I walked a couple of hundred miles," Butch said. "I talked to a couple of hundred bookies, touts, jewelers, small-time gamblers, big-time furriers. Rex Duncan bought a lot of jewelry and I don't think his wife saw all of it. He spent about forty grand in the past year on that sort of stuff. Paid cash mostly. Smalltime bookies and touts heard of him and said he was supposed to be a plunger but he never threw anything their way. I suggest we work on some of the big bookies. Fur stores gave a few results. Duncan bought a mink, size eighteen, last autumn and had it sent to his wife. Twenty-eight hundred bucks. The same day he had another made up—size twelve—and took it with him. Six thousand bucks. That's an example."

"He was spending it all right," Quinn mused.

"Tony," Carol spoke sharply as she crushed out the one-third smoked cigarette, "can't you see she's playing you for a sucker? All this sweetness and light. But I watched her today from the secret door. Yes, I took a chance and opened it a crack. She was sitting in your chair, smoking one cigarette after another and the brooding look in her eyes wasn't that of a sixteen-year-old maiden in distress."

"But Nancy is worried about her sister," Quinn argued. "Of course she'd seem worried and she'd brood too."

Carol arose. "I'm tired. I'll tackle Jamison tomorrow. Tony, I only hope this little angel doesn't sprout her wings and fly alongside the Black Bat. If you continue to trust her, you're a fool."

Quinn didn't reply and Carol stalked over to the exit. She descended into the tunnel and disappeared. Butch whistled off-key and rocked back and forth while the chair squeaked under his weight.

"Women," he observed, "are funny."

Quinn laughed out loud. "I never saw Carol so worked up before. What do you think of Nancy, Butch?"

"A sweet chick. Not in Carol's class, of course, but whoever thinks you're giving Carol the run-around?"

Quinn went over to the steel locker. "Let's forget women for awhile, Butch. We've things to do tonight. Find a missing man, for instance."

Once more dressed in the grim black clothing of the Black Bat, Tony Quinn was ready for action.

He called in Silk and gave him precise instructions about staying on the alert against Nancy's possible prowling about. Then he and Butch made their way to the side street where an old, rather battered coupe was parked. There was plenty of power in the souped-up motor under its dilapidated looking hood. The registration plates were properly issued by the motor vehicle department though an inspector might experience some difficulty in locating the name under which the car was listed.

With Butch driving, they headed east, crossed one of the important bridges and started rolling across Long Island. The Black Bat said, "We're going to try and find Stanley Kowal who owned the machete which killed Rex Duncan. Kowal's wife last heard from him when he phoned from the local railroad station and said he had a job in Jersey and had just bought a ticket there."

"You think maybe this guy Kowal stopped off at Duncan's place and turned him into a corpse?"

"That is what we must try to determine. Go into the railroad station and try to find out to what point Kowal bought his ticket, who was with him, if a car waited outside. Learn all you can and use your private detective's license if necessary."

**T**HE railroad station was a small, one-room affair and Butch spent no more than ten minutes talking to the ticket agent. He got back into the coupe and drove off to a quiet stretch of highway before he stopped.

"Well, that was easy," he told the Black Bat. "Kowal came into the station twenty minutes before train time and bought a one-way ticket to Trenton. Then he walked out and got into a sedan. The ticket agent says it was parked right outside of his window and there was a man in it, behind the wheel."

"Go on," the Black Bat urged. "You really learned things."

"The ticket agent didn't pay too much attention of course, but he did notice that the sedan was splattered with fresh mud. It had rained over here that night and he says the car could only get splashed as badly as it was by passing

along a newly dug road leading to the furthest point in a development of houses."

"I know where that is," the Black Bat said. "What else?"

"The ticket agent said he wouldn't even have remembered all this except that Kowal was so anxious to make that train and yet he never came back to take it. He just drove away with the gun in the muddy sedan and that's the last seen of him."

The Black Bat thought it over for a moment. "Start driving to the new development," he ordered. "Butch, Kowal is dead. His murderer was in that car. Look at it this way. Kowal visited Rex Duncan twice, though nobody knows what they talked about. The night he vanished—two nights before Duncan was murdered—the killer got Kowal to think he had a new job in Jersey, actually got him to buy a ticket and phone the good news to his wife. Then, when Kowal vanished, as he did, nobody became suspicious right away. He'd told where he was going and why. The murderer had leeway enough to commit and hide his crime. That's why he allowed Kowal to do these things."

"But where did he hide the body?" Butch asked.

"This new project—a thousand new cellars being dug, old buildings being demolished — a thousand potential graves. It's made to order, Butch, and we're going to have us a good look around. Especially for that mud splattered sedan which I doubt the killer dared to drive very far."

They continued along the highway, turned off finally and crossed that dirt road still in the process of being dug. No cement had been laid down at all as yet. The Black Bat suddenly ordered Butch to pull up. Then he exchanged places to drive the car with its lights shut off.

"I don't need light," he explained, "and as we start hunting around for that car we might not be noticed. I'd like to find Kowal, if he is dead, and keep the matter a secret until we've done everything possible to study the set-up for clues."

The Black Bat's uncanny sight saw all the deeper holes and ruts in the road and he avoided them easily, though the going was rough. They passed several bull-dozers, dozens upon dozens of new-

ly dug cellars, some with foundations already in place, a few with the skeleton of the house rising hopefully.

"How are we going to check on all those cellars?" Butch queried. "You did say every one was a potential grave. And we got all that debris to check. They must have knocked down a lot of old buildings."

"We can't examine everything. But if we find the car, establish the fact that murder was done by definite clues, then we can compel the police to go over every inch of this development. You can bury a corpse easily enough but it's another thing to bury a sedan."

They continued on, searching side roads, checking over piles of lumber or bags of cement to be certain they didn't shield the car or the body. Finally the Black Bat brought the car to a sudden halt and looked up at an ancient sign post.

"There's something printed on that sign," he told Butch. "And the sign itself is a crude arrow pointing down this side road. Let's have a look."

He got out, stepped close to the sign and only then could he make out the weather and age faded letters. The Black Bat returned to the coupe, backed it and headed down that road which apparently went straight into a thick grove of trees and brush.

"The sign," he said, "tells us that the Acme Sand and Quarry Company is down this way. And look at the road we're traveling over. Some equipment with treads passed this way. Heavy stuff."

The road seemed to have been grown over but the caterpillar treads had cut it open again. At the grove, the tread tracks turned left and wound their way around the trees. Behind them was fairly level land, but high too. In the far distance and in what seemed to be a valley, they could see a highway, spotted with tiny headlights of moving cars.

The Black Bat stopped the coupe. He and Butch got out, waited a moment while the man in black listened and peered about. Then he signaled Butch and they moved on to the edge of what appeared to be a cliff.

They passed by a bulldozer and one of the large cranes, its lifting mechanism pointed high and a tooth-jawed bucket lying on the ground. They came to the very edge, looked over and

Butch saw the glitter of stars below him. For a moment he thought something had happened to turn the world upside down and then he realized that what he saw was a reflection. There was water at the bottom of this deep pit.

"What do you think?" the Black Bat asked softly.

Butch nodded. "If I wanted to get rid of a hot car, there couldn't be a better place than this big hole in the ground. And take a look to the right. That bulldozer has been pushing dirt into the pond as fill. They're going to fill this hole and I'll bet, at the very bottom, is the car we're hunting."

## CHAPTER XII

### *The Pit*



SING all precautions they worked quietly until silence was no longer possible. The Black Bat climbed aboard the crane, started its motor and walked the weird thing as close to the edge of the pit as he dared. Butch unhooked the enormous shovel threw the lifting cables over the side and guided them as the Black Bat unreeled the cable.

He left the crane motor idling, climbed down and went to the edge of the pit again. He studied it carefully. It seemed to him that the quarry concern had obtained their rock by digging deeper and deeper instead of attacking the side of a cliff. It was a form of deep strip mining and usually done only in localities where the quality of the stone brought a price big enough to off-set this expensive way of quarrying.

The pit was perhaps a hundred feet across, tapering slightly like a cone until at the bottom, a pond had gradually formed. The sides of the pit were jagged rock.

Carefully now, the Black Bat went over the ground looking for traces of tires that would lead to the very edge of the pit and not return. He couldn't find any.

"Tire tracks could have been filled in," he told Butch. "Or the movement of the bulldozer, dozens of dirt trucks



and even that crane could have obliterated them. It's even possible the car was attached to the crane cable, swung out and lowered into the pond."

"Want me to go down and see?" Butch asked.

"Get aboard the crane," the Black Bat said, "and I'll show you how to work it. I'll let you lower me. Not into the water but to the edge of it. I'll take off my clothes and go wading or diving, whichever is necessary. If I locate the car, it's up to you to get that cable to me so I can hook it to the car and have you drag it ashore."

The crane was modern and simple to operate. Butch soon had control of it. The Black Bat went to the edge of the deep pit, grasped the cable and signaled. Promptly Butch swung the long arm out and then let the cable drop slowly. At the bottom, the Black Bat removed his brace of guns, outer clothing and stripped down to a pair of shorts. He left the hood intact. If he had to swim, it wouldn't interfere.

He waded out and found the water very cold. The bottom was all stone and treacherous. He took another step and went down to his chin. It startled and chilled him into a few moments of paralysis. Then he took a long breath, threw himself forward and began to swim.

If the crane had been used to lower a car into this pond, the car would be at the deepest point—somewhere around the middle. The Black Bat swam there and found that his uncanny sight was unable to penetrate the dark and muddy water.

He dived as deeply as possible, flailing out with arms and legs and encountered nothing. He repeated this half a dozen times before he became tired and swam toward the rocky shore. He climbed up on one rock and rested there a moment.

Then his nostrils flared. He raised his arm and smelled of it. There was oil on the surface of the pond. Spread so thin that it would be practically invisible but he'd gradually accumulated enough of the stuff on his arm until there was a fair film of it and possessed of its characteristic odor.

Now he knew the car was hidden here. He swam out again, crossed the pond and recrossed it, working back and forth at three or four feet intervals. He noticed where the bulldozer had been pushing dirt overside and swam there.

He dived again and this time one bare foot slid off something as smooth as only enameled metal could be. He dived again and found that the sedan had been partially covered with dirt pushed down by the dozer. Whoever had lowered the car at this particular spot, knew surplus dirt was being dozed down at this point and after a short time the car would be buried forever.

The Black Bat swam ashore, located the crane cable and gave it a yank. Then he grasped the end of the cable, swam out once more and went to work. The car windows were rolled up, the doors jammed, so he had to leave the cable, go ashore again and arm himself with a chunk of rock. He smashed in one rear window, climbed over the top of the car and smashed in the opposite window. Next he thrust the end of the cable through one window, got it inside as far as possible and then from the opposite side, drew it all the way through.

HE made a clumsy but strong hitch in it, stood erect on the top of the car and grasped the cable. He gave a shrill whistle and in a moment he saw Butch at the brink of the pit. The Black Bat waved a hand and Butch understood. He disappeared and in half a minute the crane motor whirled away.

The cable tightened, seemed to resist the pull and then the Black Bat felt the car slowly being loosened from its dirt and water grave. Finally it swung completely out of the water and hung there. The Black Bat whistled again. The car began to move gently in toward the shore. There it was set down as tenderly as if it were a case of eggs.

The Black Bat freed the cable, clambered down off the car and peered inside. The body was on the floor, jammed down behind the driving wheel and the seat. The Black Bat worked it free, carried it over to a dry spot and laid it down.

This was Stanley Kowal. There was no question about it. The back of his head was caved in by a blow from some heavy instrument in the hands of a powerful man. Grimly the Black Bat began searching the corpse.

He soon discovered that the pockets had been emptied. Perhaps the murderer hoped that if the body was discovered it would only be after a long period of time when there'd be just an

unidentifiable skeleton left.

The Black Bat pulled the car doors open now and got inside. He explored the glove compartment and found nothing. He lifted the back seat and looked behind and under it. He ripped up the floor mat and finding some rusted tools under the seat, he used these to rip away the upholstered sides of the doors.

He transferred his attention to the front seat now. Butch was apparently becoming impatient because the crane motor was going again and the cable was snaking across the rocks and being lifted. Perhaps Butch thought he'd been sent a signal to haul up the Black Bat.

Wedge down behind the front seat the Black Bat found an object rolled up in a man's handkerchief. It was initialed K and he assumed it must have belonged to Kowal and somehow escaped the attention of the murderer. The corners of the handkerchief were tightly tied around this small, heavy object and the Black Bat carefully attacked the knots.

Finally he had the corners freed, raised them and found that he held a chunk of plain rock in his hand. Or no—it seemed to be cement. He tried to figure this out, but it was impossible. The way it had been jammed down behind the seat seemed to indicate that Kowal guessed he was in a bad spot and he was trying to hide something valuable. But why should a chunk of cement be valuable? The Black Bat retied the handkerchief and started over toward the spot where he'd left his clothes.

Halfway there he heard the crane motor whine. He looked up and saw the long arm hanging over the brink of the pit. From that arm dropped the cable but at the end of the cable now hung a large round object. It seemed to be poised directly above the Black Bat and it was coming down with amazing speed.

The Black Bat started running. Rocks cut into his feet but he didn't even know that. He kept going with strides as long and fast as he could manage.

The round object at the end of the cable began swinging and no human could have run faster than that deadly thing moved. It swept after him and because he could see in the dark, he was able to throw himself flat in time. The gigantic ball whistled two feet above

him, hit the wall of the pit and sent huge pieces of rock smashing down. This, the Black Bat suddenly realized, was one of those wrecking balls that weigh a ton or more and are swung at building walls to knock them down.

It was sweeping around again, guided by the crane and the cable ropes. It hit the opposite wall of the pit, swung back and then dropped straight down on the car which the Black Bat had hauled out of the pond.

There was a crunch of metal and the car seemed to vanish. The ball whizzed upward, the crane arm brought it to a point directly above the spot where the Black Bat was crouched and the ball started to drop. The Black Bat reached the water line in two big jumps, hurled himself into the pond and began swimming.

**T**HE ball swung above his head. Whoever operated the crane was perched high in the operator's seat and from it he could look over the side of the pit and see this almost naked man sprinting for his life. Anyone at the bottom of the pit would be fairly well visible but if he could find a ledge to hide beneath, it would do little good. So long as a murderer swung that crane and its wrecking ball, anybody in this pit was doomed.

The Black Bat saw it coming, twisted savagely to one side and all but clawed a path to the bottom of the pond. The iron ball hit the water about ten feet ahead of him. It set up reverberations through the water that made his ears ring.

Now it was rising again. The killer was going to take another shot in the dark. One of those attempts was going to flatten the Black Bat into pulp. So long as he remained in this pit, he was at the killer's mercy but the only way out was via the crane cable.

The Black Bat watched the great round mass of metal stop its ascent, hang there a moment and then the crane swung slightly. The cables began to whine as the terrific weight of the ball pulled at them. As the ball let go, the Black Bat swam a dozen fast strokes, reached a shallow spot and waded the rest of the way ashore. There he began running until he came to the place where he'd left his clothing.

He managed to pull on his shoes and

trousers, slip the shoulder rig over his naked torso and then go on the move again before a murderer got his tremendous engine of destruction in operation again. The steel weight was already raised and the crane arm moving to get into position.

This time the Black Bat moved until he had his back flat against the side of the pit. This didn't escape the notice of the killer for instead of letting the weight crash to the bottom of the pit, he checked it half a dozen feet above the ground and set the object swinging. At the same time he lowered it little by little while the deadly arcs it created grew wider and came closer to the spot where the Black Bat was at bay.

The cable and weight swung out, then in, to hit the rocky side of the pit and drive a new indentation into the wall. It began to swing out. The Black Bat raced straight toward it. He made a flying leap, grasped the cable and wedged one foot against the top of the steel ball.

The weight began to rise, taking him along with it. He wound an arm around the cable, gripped it tightly and curled his right leg around it also, maintaining his balance by keeping his left foot on the top of the steel ball.

With his right hand now free, he drew a gun from his shoulder rig. The killer apparently hadn't noticed that he was hauling his victim up along with the murder machine, but when he did the Black Bat's dangerous position at the bottom of the pit would be small in comparison.

He was about as high as the killer raised the weight at any time and he could feel the cable being checked. In a moment the ball would be dropped. The Black Bat lifted the automatic and, as he swayed back and forth, he waited until the control booth in the crane was beginning to swing into line with his gun sights.

Then he fired. There was only time for one shot before the swing of the cable brought him off target. He knew he probably hadn't made a hit but the murderer would realize everything was no longer his way.

The crane gave a violent jerk and the massive ball began dropping. Twenty feet from the bottom of the pit it stopped short and the Black Bat was almost shaken free. The ball began its twisting, unsteady sway. That would

become more rhythmic after a moment, grow wider and wider and finally smash him against the side of the pit. The Black Bat had taken a long chance, riding the cable to get a shot at the murderer. He'd missed and now he was going to pay for his rashness.

The weight swung outward, reached the apex of its arc and began coming in to crash the rocky side of the pit. The Black Bat waited until it was almost directly above the pond before he let go. There was time and space enough to throw himself into a dive. Perhaps clumsy, but he hit the water clean and this time he swam for the opposite shore.

**W**HEN he'd been hauled up, he realized that, from a point directly opposite the crane, he might have a clear shot at the murderer. He scrambled ashore and crouched there, shivering, while he saw the great steel weight smashing against the other wall. Apparently the operator believed the Black Bat was still clinging to the cable.

The Black Bat shook water out of his guns. From where he crouched now, he could see the crane control cabin just clearing the edge of the pit. He aimed carefully and started firing. In a space of two or three seconds he had emptied one gun, throwing a fusillade of bullets into or close by the control cabin.

The murderer would be too busy seeking shelter to try pulverizing the Black Bat with the steel weight again. The Black Bat picked up his second gun, aimed and fired four fast shots. The crane motor was idling now and it stayed that way. The Black Bat couldn't afford to wait long. He knew that Butch must be either dead or badly hurt; otherwise the murderer would have been torn to bits before he could reach the crane.

He waded and swam the pond, reached the cable and grasped it. Then he began a dangerous climb. Dangerous because the cable wasn't easy to grip and required the use of both hands. Dangerous because the murderer might not have given up the fight and run away, but was just biding his time until a good opportunity to crush the Black Bat arose.

At any moment the cable might start swinging and the Black Bat knew he couldn't tempt luck much longer. He

was shivering by the time he climbed to a point level with the edge of the pit and all the shivering wasn't caused by the chill air against his wet body.

## CHAPTER XIII

### *Mystery Lady*



WEARING an apron and seated behind a table in the kitchen, Silk Kirby was busy polishing silver and wondering how things were on the road again. Con men must be having a field day, what with all the money loose and all the larcenous victims aching to be plucked.

Silk daubed polish on a tablespoon and swore softly. He knew he was just kidding himself. He would never go back to that old life. But Nancy Shannon was getting on his nerves. He didn't trust the girl. Not that she'd ever done anything to make her appear suspicious but she was a trifle too fawning. Too grateful and too much the sparrow-with-the-broken-wing type who simply couldn't be tossed out in the snow to die.

Silk scrubbed the spoon, dipped it into a basin of water and set it aside to be thoroughly rinsed later on. The kitchen clock told him it was nearly midnight. Nancy had been in her room for more than an hour and a half. The Black Bat had been on the prowl for almost as long but if Nancy awakened and by chance discovered that Tony Quinn had left the house, even a little dumbbell like her could add fast enough to realize something odd must be taking place. A blind man doesn't just go off.

Silk dried his hands long enough to light a cigarette and then he began work again. Perhaps half an hour went by and he carried the silver over to the sink for a final rinsing. He had the water turned on when he heard the footsteps. Silk shut the water off quickly, moved with an amazing lightness and speed to a kitchen cabinet drawer and opened it. His hand worried itself down below a lot of folded towels, fingers wrapped around the butt of a gun and pulled it out. He thrust the weapon under his apron and belt and turned in time to see Nancy enter the kitchen.

She wore a quilted robe, slippers with pink pom-poms. Her hair was pulled back and tied with a ribbon. She tried her best to look like a girl of about eighteen but Silk noticed the lines around her eyes and the corners of her mouth. Creams, rouges and powders could hide these but in the bright kitchen light, with much of her makeup removed, Nancy looked what she probably was—about thirty or better.

She smiled at him. "I woke up and couldn't go back to sleep. Whenever that happens I sneak downstairs and raid the refrigerator."

"You'll find plenty," Silk grumbled. "Anything you want. Help yourself."

"Oh, thank you. Do you think Mr. Quinn might like a snack too? I could take him a tray."

Silk thought very, very fast then. Nancy could have quietly opened the door to Quinn's room and found the bed unoccupied. She might be merely testing him now.

Silk said, "He never eats this late, miss. Besides, I don't think he has retired."

"Oh, good," she said. "I'll ask him if he wants a sandwich."

Silk blocked her exit from the kitchen. "Just one moment, miss," he said. "There are things you don't know about this household. One of the most important is that if Mr. Quinn stays up very late, it is because he is working on some case. I happen to know an important trial begins tomorrow and he is probably thinking out his handling of it. He is not to be disturbed—not for any reason nor by anyone."

She pouted at him. "I'm sure he wouldn't mind if I just peeked in on him."

"I'm sorry," Silk said. "Perhaps by the time you get through having your snack, we'll hear him moving about and then it will be quite all right to ask him."

Nancy seemed to hesitate for just a moment. Then she smiled. "Of course, Silk. He's a very wonderful man, isn't he?"

"Yes, miss."

"Can't he see at all? Even tell daylight from darkness?"

"He is totally blind, miss."

She sighed and opened the refrigerator door, took out some cold chicken and set about making a pair of sand-

wiches. Silk, willing to put up with anything that might stall off curiosity, began preparing coffee and prayed it wouldn't start to perk for an hour.

NANCY'S idea of chicken sandwiches was about that of an amateur short order chef in a diner. The meat was unevenly cut, dumped on a piece of bread and covered with another. All the while she kept up an incessant chatter and Silk commented with grunts or terse phrases. He wondered if she noticed him look at the clock every few moments.

At one-thirty, she finished her coffee and arose. Silk knew he couldn't hold her another moment without arousing a suspicion that might send her blundering through the whole house. He went over to the sink and started washing the dishes.

Nancy pushed open the swinging door to the butler's pantry, passed through the dining room and went down the corridor to the library. There she found the door closed and no light shone beneath it. She rapped timidly, received no answer and turned the knob. About that time Silk was in the corridor, wondering whether to throttle her or try some con scheme to talk her out of looking for Quinn.

He was too late to put either idea into practice for Nancy opened the library door, stepped in and then came out again looking very worried.

"He isn't in there, Silk," she said. "Could anything have happened to him? A blind man can stumble and fall. I'm going to look. He may be hurt and lying helplessly somewhere."

Silk stopped her by seizing both her arms. "You're exciting yourself over nothing, miss. Mr. Quinn may have gone for a little walk. He does that quite often and I assure you he is quite safe. Or he might be on the third floor. He keeps another library up there."

"I've got to find out—be sure," she said shrilly. "Those men who are trying to kill me might have come here and murdered him. You can't stop me."

From the darkness of the library came a sleepy voice. "What in thunder is going on? Silk, what's the matter? Is that Nancy I hear?"

Silk almost wilted with relief. He let go of Nancy. "Yes sir. Miss Nancy was worried. She looked for you in there."

"Put on the lights," Quinn laughed. "I suppose they're off or she would have seen me. Nancy, come in here. It must be very late. What are you doing awake at this hour?"

Silk snapped on the lights. Quinn, his hair tousled, tie loosened and shirt opened at the neck, got up from his chair before the fireplace. He closed a massive book and held it uncertainly toward the table. Nancy took it from him.

"I was so worried," she cried. "There wasn't a sound in the house. I thought you might be hurt."

"If I ever get hurt you'll hear me yelling clear to the next county," Quinn said with a laugh. "I merely sat down to read."

"But you're blind. How can you?"

He reached out, his hand touched her hair and came down to pat her cheek. "That very heavy volume you took from me is printed in Braille. It happens to be rather dull reading and I'm afraid I dozed off. Now get to bed because that's where I'm going as soon as Silk lets me have a cup of that coffee I smell brewing."

It was almost two hours later when Silk moved softly down the steps, into the library and to the secret door to the lab. This time he was positive Nancy wouldn't be snooping because the key to her room now rested in his coat pocket.

Carol was in the lab, pacing up and down and as he entered she added another butt to the growing pile of them in the big ash tray. She said, "Well?"

Silk sat down like a tired old man. "Carol, I don't know. I just don't know about that girl. She was hunting Tony, really set to tear the place apart in order to find him and she gave as good an exhibition of being worried as I've ever seen. Maybe that's all it is."

"Silk," Carol stopped before him and looked down at the bald headed man, "you know as well as I do that she was trying to prove that Tony Quinn wasn't home. I heard part of it, saw some of it through the lab door and if she'd entered that room any deeper or turned on the lights she would have seen that the chair before the fireplace was empty. It was just luck and your persuasion that stopped her."

Silk groaned. "Believe me, I dropped a few years then."

"When Tony arrived, I briefed him on what was happening so he was able to alibi himself, but this can't go on. He'll slip some day and she'll have him. She'll know that Tony Quinn isn't blind and then it will be as easy to guess he is the Black Bat as it is to breathe. That means the end of it all, Silk."

SILK nodded. "I've been thinking about it, Carol. But you can't convince Tony. It's almost as if he had some secret reason for keeping the girl here. Another thing—you recall how we found her darned near dead in Sherry Shannon's clothes closet? Well, that was the goods. The real thing. Nobody could have put on an act like that."

"Then you're almost convinced yourself," Carol accused him. "Silk, you can't imagine what a girl like Nancy would go through to gain whatever it is she's after. The girl is dangerous, I tell you."

"Let me go on," Butch pleaded. "Finding her like that just about did convince me, but right afterwards those mugs tried to kill her. Just plain gorillas, who'd hire out to anyone but they'd try to get the person they were paid to rub out. They were after Nancy."

"Yes, I know," Carol sighed. "I saw the wound on her head. You can't fake a bullet wound, Silk."

"That's what I'm driving at, Carol. Before the shooting started, Nancy did a dive for the gutter. By the time the bullets were flying, she was hunkered down and pretty well protected. Yet a slug creased her. Didn't knock her cold, mind you, just hacked a gouge out of her temple."

"So?" Carol was very interested now.

"So—how can a slug hit a person hidden behind a car without putting a hole through the car? There isn't any. I looked. That slug must have come sailing over the car, stopped cold, heeled over and obligingly headed down to nick her."

"That," Carol brought a small fist into the palm of her other hand, "does it. I'm going to track down Nancy Shannon until I know everything there is about her. If Tony asks for me, tell him I'm busy—saving him from a scheming female."

"I only hope we're right," Silk said solemnly. "Every now and then I get

some awfully big doubts."

"Well, watch me brush 'em off," Carol promised.

Silk opened the secret lab door, stepped into the library and started toward the hall. Quinn's voice from the chair before the fireplace, called him. Silk skidded to a stop, turned and walked over.

Quinn wore pajamas and a robe. He was making no pretence of being blind. "Thanks for stalling Nancy," he said. "Butch and I had quite a time of it. We found the body of Stanley Kowal, murdered as we feared. Also a car used by the murderer and stolen here in Manhattan. Butch was attacked—really beaten up quite badly by a man whom he never saw and who used a blackjack like an expert. I sent Butch home to sleep off his headache."

Silk said, "You know Carol was in the lab with me, sir. I came down purposely to talk to her."

"Yes, I know," Quinn replied. "She's a bit put out about Nancy, isn't she?"

"You're being rather mild, sir. She's plain sore and thinks Nancy is making a fool of you."

"Do you think so, Silk?"

"I don't know, sir. I can't make up my mind but whether she is or not, I'm with you all the way through this thing. If you trust her, so shall I."

"Good." Quinn arose. "Now let's go into the lab. Hidden in that murder car and wrapped in Kowal's handkerchief, I found a chunk of cement. At least that's what it looks like and I want to be certain. Won't take long to run it through an analysis."

## CHAPTER XIV

### *Men of Suspicion*



IN THE morning, Godfrey Chandler, Mrs. Duncan's brother, was Tony Quinn's first office visitor. He sank his pudgy body into a chair close by the desk and proceeded to look worried.

"I came out of a sense of duty because I do possess a conscience," he explained. "If I believed my previous attitude was responsible for a man's



death, I don't think I would care about living much longer."

Quinn made no remarks but in his mind he thought that Godfrey Chandler would hang onto life and fight with his last gasping breath no matter what the circumstances were. And so far as a conscience was concerned, Quinn doubted the rotund little man even had a hint of one.

Chandler went on. "You see, in this morning's paper I read about the murder of Stanley Kowal. I know you asked me to identify a picture of the man and I said I had never seen him before. That was a lie, told out of a sense of charity for my sister. Because when she denied ever having seen Kowal, I knew she lied and, naturally, I wanted to back her up until I knew why she had told such a falsehood."

"You did see Kowal then?" Quinn asked.

"Yes. He came to visit Rex two nights before he was murdered, I think. I saw him enter and I saw him leave. I did not know who he was but now that he is dead, I feel I have to come forward and state that Rex Duncan knew Kowal."

"Does Mrs. Duncan know you came here with this confession?" Quinn asked.

"She does not. I've ceased to tell her anything. Mr. Quinn, do you believe she murdered her husband?"

"Not personally. She isn't strong enough to have administered the type of blow that killed Duncan."

"What about Jamison, the banker? Could he have done it?"

"Yes, that's possible. Why do you ask?" Quinn's voice was calm and soothing.

Chandler took a handkerchief from his pocket and mopped a beet red face, pursued some beads of perspiration dodging in and out of his three chins and looked as though he'd have liked to be somewhere in the Antarctic about now.

"I have always respected and liked my sister," he said. "I liked Rex too. They were both kind to me, recognizing the fact that my physical condition doesn't permit me to do much work. They also realized I had little money and were extremely charitable. Therefore, I feel something like a heel coming here to tell you this. But murder

has been done. Two and three times, murder has been committed. I can't keep my silence."

"You're doing a pretty good job of saying nothing," Quinn told him flatly. "If you're going to talk—talk."

Chandler flushed. "Very well. My Sister and this banker Ernest Jamison have been having an affair for a long time. Rex knew it and didn't care. She and Jamison have maintained a pent-house apartment on top, of all places, a warehouse near the Hudson River. Furthermore I believe the two of them intend to skip out."

"Is there anything else, Mr. Chandler?"

"Jamison warned her to keep her mouth shut, to make no statements of any kind and especially to beware of you. That's all I have to say. I hope it makes up for my lapse in denying I knew Kowal."

Quinn said, "Tell me, Mr. Chandler, how long it's been since you talked to Betty Wilcox, who used to be a maid at the Duncan home?"

"Why—why I saw her last night. I thought I—that is—"

Quinn cut him off. "You were one reason she didn't mind leaving her employment. You persisted in seeing her again and she told you I'd been asking questions and I knew you had lied about Kowal. So you came here to mend your fences. Good day, sir."

Chandler arose, hesitated a moment and then waddled out. At the door he turned, as if he had something else on his mind but he didn't say a word. Quinn made a wry face after he'd gone. Then he called his secretary and told her to send in Captain McGrath and Sam Loring, the man who'd been captured in the theatre adjoining Condor's gambling house, and whose habit it had been to telephone Rex Duncan daily.

LORING slouched into the room, resentful of the handcuffs. McGrath pushed him into a chair and hooked the free end of the cuffs to the chair arm.

McGrath said, "This is Sam Loring, Mr. Quinn. He doesn't mean to be very communicative."

"I think he'll change his mind," Quinn said. "Loring, you were connected with Condor's gambling house. You knew that Rex Duncan frequented it often and lost a great deal of money

there. Isn't that true?"

Loring shrugged. "What happened in that place was Condor's business, not mine. I just put in my time there."

"Ah, yes," Quinn purred. "But tell me—why did you telephone Rex Duncan every morning? Why is it that when he couldn't come to the phone and you left a number, he made it a point to call back as quickly as possible? Now what matter of importance could there be between a wealthy, influential man like Rex Duncan and a cheap, grifting, gambling joint hanger-on like you?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," Loring snapped.

Quinn laughed at him. "Loring, how do you think we do business in this office? We checked. We know why he phoned you. We know you served him as a race track tout. You did the so-called research in studying horses. You placed his bets. All you had to do was get confirmation from him each day and that is why you phoned. Isn't that true?"

"You said you checked. Why ask me?" Loring wasn't quite so belligerent.

"How much did he lose? How much passed through your hands, Loring? And you'd better make that figure about right because we have a pretty good idea of what it should be."

"Why should I tell you anything?" Loring demanded. "Suppose I did tout a few horses. That's no felony."

"But Loring, you forget," Quinn said, "that Condor was murdered. That Sherry Shannon has vanished. That Rex Duncan had his head nearly cut off. You're deeply involved and I can hold you for weeks. Meanwhile, whatever gambling business you'd build up on the side, will pass into other hands. Furthermore, I don't think you merely worked for Condor. I think you were his partner and I can prove that if I choose. Being his partner you will now come into the business he left, and I've heard of worse murder motives."

"I didn't kill Condor," Loring said slowly. "I don't know what this whole thing is about but I guess the heat is mounting. Okay, I'll sing but only because I'm not involved. This is no stool pigeon stunt. Sure I touted for Duncan. Made him some dough, lost him some dough. That's the way it usually goes but Duncan wasn't content to take my advice. He had to go to the track, work

some mumbo-jumbo and bet like a fool on some nag that never had a chance. He lost plenty."

"Make a guess," Quinn urged, "of the amount. If it tallies with what we already know, I'll be certain you're telling the truth and you'll be sprung, Loring. That's a promise."

THE book-maker frowned and moved his lips as if estimating. "Okay. I figure I lost about a hundred grand of his dough. But he lost five times as much. I used to see him. I tried to make him stop but the fever was in his blood. He lost plenty at the gambling tables too. Sherry did her best to steer him away, even though she'd actually shilled the guy into the joint in the first place. I guess she—fell for him."

"His losses to Condor would run over a couple of hundred thousand?" Quinn asked.

"I'd say so. There's no way of checking. Condor used to keep books on his suckers so if they squawked too much, he knew where he stood but I understand those books were swiped."

"They were—to keep the figures out of our hands," Quinn said. "Captain, is Mr. Loring handcuffed?"

"He is."

"Free him. Loring, you have my thanks. I promised you freedom and it's yours. But if I were you I'd reopen Condor's gambling place somewhere else because if you open it here I'll crack down hard. I'll have your sworn statement taken before you go. Watch yourself because a killer might decide you know too much also."

"I'll scram," Loring vowed. "And thanks. You're a square guy, Mr. Quinn."

After Loring departed, Quinn lighted a cigarette and leaned back. "Well, Mac," he said, "we progress."

"In what direction?" McGrath growled sourly. "Last I knew all we had was a brand new murder. That of Stanley Kowal, and it took the Black Bat to find the body. But of course you wouldn't know anything about that."

"Why should I?" Quinn smiled. "But Mac, we really are getting somewhere. Look at it this way. We have a man who confesses that he stole a million dollars, who was then murdered and whose accounts later on were found to be in good shape. What does that sig-

nifty? That either an impostor made that confession to me, which is possible. Or Rex Duncan did steal such a sum and for some important reason, someone else doesn't want this to become known. Someone who has squared Duncan's books. They are okay too. Hanford, Duncan's business partner, brought them in and I had my staff go over them."

"What are you driving at, Tony?" McGrath asked.

"Just this. We're finding out that Rex Duncan did gamble away a huge fortune. He also made purchase of very expensive things, far out of proportion to his income and worth, even though he was wealthy. Therefore—if Rex Duncan claimed he stole a million, he probably did."

"But while I believe every word you say," McGrath frowned, "can you make a jury believe it? Or even a surrogate judge? Where are your facts?"

Quinn said, "We still have to get them. But don't you see, if Duncan's books check, if his ordinary expenses check and there is no proof that he spent all this money, then because we know he actually did, he must have obtained this money from some illegal source."

McGrath mulled that one over between puffs on his cigar. He looked up. "Tony, that would explain Duncan's strange attitude when he went to see you and confess. It shows why he insisted upon going back after his books. There must have been another set and they were stolen. Duncan could have backed up his story with facts and the man who murdered him knew it."

"That's the way I figure it," Quinn said. "However, there still seems to be some doubt in your mind."

"You read voices," McGrath grumbled. "Yes, there is some doubt. Suppose Duncan did swipe a million and blow it in? Okay, that's his business. Why would he be murdered because of it? The gamblers wouldn't risk their necks in bumping him off. They have his dough; he can't prove anything. Who, then, would kill him? And in that ghastly fashion?"

"We have Godfrey Chandler, the fat little individual who's been sponging off Rex Duncan and his wife for years," Quinn said. "Chandler is a type who would kill to protect his way of life, though I fail to see now how killing

Rex Duncan would insure a continuance of Chandler's soft manner of living."

"How about Mrs. Duncan?" McGrath asked. "And her affair with Jamison. Boy, there's an angle. Jamison handled Duncan's finances and he certainly ought to be in a position to know if Duncan was stealing money. And to rig the books if he wanted to hide that fact."

"True," Quinn admitted. "Also, Godfrey Chandler just left here after telling me Mrs. Duncan and Jamison have a love nest in town. Both Jamison and Mrs. Duncan look good. For two reasons—because Mrs. Duncan was afraid her husband would spend every dime he had before she could divorce him and get her share. Secondly, that she is involved in the theft of the million somehow and is protecting her own interests by having him killed."

"Then there is Hanford, who was Duncan's partner in this multi-million dollar housing project," McGrath mused aloud.

"Quite true. And it seems to me that if Duncan was stealing money he could be getting it only from this corporation. Yet Hanford swears the accounts are okay. If that's true, where did Duncan manage to steal a million? I maintain he did get it from the housing project somehow and that Hanford may not even be aware of it to this day. If Hanford isn't also involved."

McGrath got up. "Me, I'm taking some aspirin. Give me homicides that stay out of the million-dollar class."

## CHAPTER XV

### *Trap on the Roof*



ATE in the afternoon, just before closing time, Walter Hanford came to Quinn's office. When he had sprawled his lanky form out in a chair, he nervously fingered the brim of his hat and spoke.

"I may be an utter fool, Mr. Quinn, but I think I have the answer

to this. Did it ever occur to you that Rex Duncan might have been out of his mind? Not a lunatic—but temporarily unbalanced."

"It's an idea," Quinn admitted.

Hanford warmed to his theory. "Of course it is. Look at it this way. Rex's wife, frankly, hated him. I've known it for a long time. I also know that she was—and is—having an affair with Jamison. Perhaps this was what threw Rex off balance and made him think he'd stolen and spent a million dollars."

"Perhaps," Quinn half agreed while he wondered if Hanford was seeking information.

Hanford crossed his long legs, found that uncomfortable and finally tucked them under his chair while he sat on the edge of it, leaning forward to get as close to Quinn's desk as possible.

"Another thing—I've discovered that Mrs. Duncan and Jamison are maintaining a pretty well hidden penthouse apartment."

"How did you learn that?" Quinn asked. "Frankly, I already know it, but I'd like to have you tell me the source of your information."

"Godfrey Chandler told me," Hanford smiled wryly. "So he was telling the truth. I thought I'd hand you a neat surprise."

"The surprise," Quinn said, "is in the fact that Chandler also told you. I wonder why? Did he make it a point to seek you out?"

"He telephoned me and only to impart that information. Chandler plays both ends against the middle. Nobody can ever figure his motives but bank on it, he stands to profit somehow."

Quinn frowned deeply. "I wonder if a visit to this penthouse apartment would tell us anything. I've half an inclination to go there."

"Let me come along," Hanford begged. "I've felt so darned helpless in all this. And Rex was my best friend. I feel I'm letting him down, doing nothing about finding his murderer."

Quinn picked up the phone and called his home. He ordered Silk to call for him at once. Then he turned those sightless eyes in Hanford's direction again.

"Who was Stanley Kowal and what was his connection with the Hanford-Duncan Enterprises?" he asked bluntly.

Hanford shook his head. "All I know about Kowal is what appears in the newspapers. He purchased his home from us but we've sold so many and we leave those details to a staff of sales-

men, so that I never came into contact with him."

They went back to the theory of Rex Duncan having been mad. Quinn questioned Hanford about this but there was nothing more definite than mere suspicion. When Silk arrived, they set out for the waterfront and the penthouse which Jamison and Mrs. Duncan were supposed to maintain atop a warehouse building.

It seemed a strange place for living quarters but Quinn knew that in this great city, no space was wasted and that there were apartments in all sorts of odd places. Some of them extremely fashionable and very expensive.

Hanford knew the address and guided Silk there. Silk was strictly the chauffeur, saying little and paying all his attention to driving. The building turned out to be a very tall structure, without many windows and a single wide door to accommodate big trucks. Set in that massive door was a smaller one and they approached this.

Suddenly Hanford gave a silibant hiss. "Quinn, I just saw Chandler duck into a doorway across the street. A bare glimpse was all I had, but I'd know that fat boy. I don't like this."

"Neither do I," Quinn admitted, "but we'll go through with it anyhow. Is it dark yet?"

"Yes, sir," Silk said. "Quite dark, and well after hours for an establishment of this sort. Shall I ring for the watchman?"

Quinn nodded. In a few moments a middle-aged man wearing a Sam Browne belt with a gun in its holster, let them in. Quinn showed his badge. The watchman regarded it somberly.

"Yes, sir," he said. "There's a couple who lives on top of this building. They ain't home though. Ain't home much any time. You want to go up, that's your business. Take that small elevator over there to your right. It goes to the top floor and from there on you hike."

SILK operated the elevator. At the top they found a narrow, brick walled stairway leading to the roof. Hanford led the way with Silk coming up at the rear. Hanford reached a small landing, knocked on the door before him and then tried the knob. The door wasn't locked. He opened it and stepped out onto the roof proper.

But it didn't seem much like a roof. The whole top of the building had been converted into a garden, complete with trees growing in large vats of earth, rose bushes, trellises, late autumn flowers growing in beds. And in the center of it all was what seemed for all the world like a honeymoon cottage set amidst a strictly rural scene.

"I wish you could see this, Mr. Quinn," Hanford marveled. "It's amazing. Well, let's go find out what the house looks like, eh?"

Hanford walked down a wooden pathway to the house. It ran beneath a rose arbor, still fairly thick with foliage. At the end of it they reached the cottage porch.

Quinn heard a thud behind him and a low moan. He called out to Hanford. The real estate developer gave a sharp cry, brushed past Quinn and bent to aid Silk, who'd fallen in a heap.

Two men came out of the shadows. Both carried saps and swung them. Hanford fell across Silk's body and didn't move. Quinn, stabbing the air with his cane, blindly fumbling against the arbor, kept calling Silk's name. Then Hanford's—and getting no reply.

He tapped his cane against the path, took several steps. From somewhere to the left of the house he heard a low moan. Then his name called, as if from a great distance and by a man in pain.

"Silk," Quinn called out. "Silk, is that you?"

"I'm—hurt," the whispered answer reached him from the darkness. "I'm badly—hurt."

"Keep talking," Quinn urged. "I'll try to find you. Hanford! Where is Hanford?"

The low voice, supposedly Silk's, lured him on. He turned left at the house and followed a walk around it. All the walks and paths were made of wood, with small spaces between each wooden strip so that water could easily drain off. Quinn guided himself with his cane, apparently, though his eyes saw everything, even objects which darkness prevented others from seeing.

He saw, for instance, that one part of the wooden path had been slightly raised so that its further end was supported by the edge of the rooftop. A parapet no more than a foot high and not making the ramp too steep. Quinn kept moving along this. At the end of it,

watching carefully, was a man who kept imitating Silk's moans and his voice in a fair manner. Quinn kept on moving.

He knew what was intended. A blind man, guided only by a cane, would climb that ramp in the belief he was safely on a prepared walk where no harm could come to him. He'd reach the end of the ramp and then, if he refused to go on, a slight push would send him hurtling to the cement areaway far below.

Quinn tried to find a way out of this. Whenever he hesitated, the man acting as a lure, made more groaning sounds. Quinn took several steps forward. The walk was now definitely a tilted ramp. He reached a spot within a dozen feet of the roof's edge and then he deliberately stabbed offside with his cane and seemed to lose his balance. He gave a sharp cry, teetered, and then fell.

He landed on the roof in a clumsy position and tried to scramble to his feet. One man was coming toward him, pulling a blackjack out of his pocket as he moved.

Quinn said, "Silk—Silk, where are you? What is it? What's happened? Silk, I hear footsteps. They aren't yours—nor Hanford's. Who is it? Who is it, I say?"

The man kept coming closer. Quinn let him get to within six feet and then he suddenly raised his white cane, held it at arm's length and made a wild, swinging motion. The end of the cane, heavily armored and weighted, hit the man alongside the jaw and he gave a yelp of surprise and pain. The cane swung some more. Behind him, Quinn heard Silk rising to his feet and he called out to him.

The thug with the sap backed away, yelled something to his companion who apparently made certain there would be no interruptions from anyone coming up the stairway, and then hurried to the exit.

Silk, reeling badly, blundered around until Quinn's voice led him to the side of the apparently blind man. Silk had a gun in his fist. They hurried over to Hanford who was sitting up and rubbing a welt alongside his temple.

"It seems," Quinn said a few moments later, "that we walked into a well prepared trap. You saw Godfrey Chandler across the street as we entered, Mr. Hanford?"

"I'm certain it was Chandler," Han-

ford groaned. "My head feels as if the whole building fell on it."

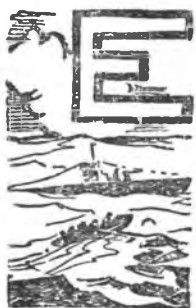
"A very mild feeling, compared to what is in store for Chandler," Quinn commented grimly. "Silk, we'll take Mr. Hanford home and then call in Captain McGrath and set the stage to haul in Chandler. Did either of you get a look at the men who trapped us here?"

"They looked like thugs to me," Hanford said. "I didn't get much of a chance to observe them with the darkness and the suddenness of their attack but they certainly were not gentlemen."

Silk gave a raucous laugh, took Quinn's arm and piloted him to the cottage in the clouds. They had come to inspect it and Silk knew Quinn would do just that.

## CHAPTER XVI

### *Killers' Ship*



VENING was approaching when Carol Baldwin finished her preliminary work in a small upstate town, that same afternoon. Sherry Shannon had been born and raised here. It was quite logical to assume that Nancy Shannon had also been born and brought up locally, but nobody seemed to know anything about Nancy, at least not as Carol described the girl.

According to the best information Carol could get from a variety of sources, Sherry had a sister who was quite a bit older and lived clear across the country. She didn't answer to Nancy's description at all. There was still the Shannon farm, run down and unoccupied for several years now. The land was played out, the place worthless except to someone who'd be willing to spend a great deal of money on it.

It was growing dark as Carol drove her car to the farm. She wanted some documentary evidence that Nancy wasn't Sherry Shannon's sister. Letters, old photographs, something that would convince Tony Quinn and which would make a mockery of any explanation Nancy attempted.

Night had descended when Carol finally reached the old place. There were

dim lights in the windows of the farmhouse. A feeling of uneasiness swept over Carol as she saw the faint gleam through the squares of dirty glass. The farmhouse was supposed to be deserted and yet there were lights burning inside.

"Sherry," Carol murmured as she parked the car in the shadows of some overhanging tree branches at the side of the road. "She is mixed up in this. She might have come here voluntarily to hide."

The more she considered the possibility, the more Carol thought it might be so. At their first meeting Carol had liked Sherry—the night club singer was no saint, but honest, and seemed to be kind.

Carol was sure Nancy had none of these qualities. Though Carol had never spoken to the girl, she was certain she knew what Nancy was really like, and it was far from the sweet, demure child Tony Quinn apparently believed her to be. Carol placed her suspicions of the girl purely to feminine intuition. She was sure she could spot a phony and it seemed she had. If Nancy wasn't telling the truth then she was heavily involved in this business of mysterious murder and crime.

Clouds darkened the sky, and a wind rustled the branches of the trees, as Carol got out of the car, after locking the ignition and thrusting the key into her bag. In front of the house a sagging gate hung from a broken picket fence that once had been painted white but now was a blotch of gray, half hidden in the shadows.

She reached the gate. The creaking noise it made as she shoved it open seemed loud in the silence. Weeds grew on what had once been a well-kept lawn in front of the farmhouse. The gravel on the walk crunched beneath her feet.

Carol glanced back at the road. The lights of her car were still on. She had forgotten to switch them off. They were a signal to anyone in the house that someone had stopped out there and might be approaching the old place on foot. To anyone waiting and listening the creaking of the gate had made that even plainer.

The feeling of uneasiness Carol had felt when she first reached the farm, was stronger now. It had grown into an impending sense of danger. As she



went on along the path she opened her purse, dipped a hand into it and took a firm grip on the automatic nestling there.

She stepped onto the rickety old porch. Boards creaked beneath her feet as she approached the closed front door and knocked. The instant her knuckles hit the old panels she knew that coming here was a mistake. She'd let jealousy lead her too deeply into this mess. Tony Quinn should have been told about Nancy before this trip had been started. She was certain of it now.

The shadows on the porch were so dark that she could only see a few feet. She waited and then someone opened the door. Someone who held a lantern rather high so its rays reached out and brought Carol's features into clear relief.

After the darkness of the porch, the light gleaming in her eyes blinded her, but the feeling of danger was strong. She started to bring the gun out of her purse. On either side of her hands caught her arms, and tightened, fingers pressing into the flesh.

"Don't try it, sister," a gruff voice said. "Little girls can get hurt playing with guns."

**S**HE saw them then. Two men who had apparently been standing there, waiting in the black shadows of the porch. They had stepped forward and grabbed her. One of the men slapped the automatic out of her grasp. It dropped back into the bag she wore on a shoulder strap.

The light lowered and Carol saw the face of the girl who held it. It was Nancy Shannon, but this was not the girl who had seemed so sweet at Tony Quinn's house. This was a woman with cold eyes, thin lips and an icy countenance.

"I think she's a private snoop, the one who went to check on Sherry," Nancy said. "We'll soon find out. Bring her in, tie her up and put her in with Sherry. Move fast. Things are closing in on us."

Carol offered no resistance as the two men led her into the living room of the farmhouse and took her automatic away. Resistance would have been quite futile and she didn't want Nancy to even guess that she could be in any way connected with Tony Quinn and

had recognized this false sister of Sherry Shannon.

Nancy followed them inside and placed the lantern on a table. The men got ropes and Carol was quickly and expertly tied. One of the men pushed her into a chair, and then moved back. Nancy crept forward. Her hard eyes were fixed on Carol's face. Her red hair gleamed like burnished copper in the light of the lantern and the oil lamp burning in the room.

"How about it, you skirted snoop?" Nancy said. "Who do you work for?"

"I'm looking for Sherry Shannon," Carol said hotly. "I know she is here, for I heard you say so. If you've harmed her, I'll see that you pay for it."

"Never mind Sherry," Nancy said impatiently. "I asked you who you are working for, so tell me."

"Why should I?" Carol demanded defiantly.

"Like that, eh. We'll find a way to make you talk later." Nancy glanced at the men. "Put her in the next room," she ordered. "And tell Joey to keep a sharp eye out. That big lug who was with this female eye at Condor's place might be hanging around."

"Yeah," said one of the men, "and if he is he's likely to wreck the joint."

The two men picked up Carol, carried her into another room and placed her on the floor, none too gently. Then they went out, closing the door behind them. There was no light in the room except for the faint yellow streak coming in through a crack at the bottom of the door. In the darkness Carol heard someone breathing hard as though in fear.

"Sherry — Sherry Shannon," Carol called softly. "Is that you?"

"Yes, I'm Sherry." The other girl's voice was weak and frightened. "Who are you?"

"The big, smart carefully trained private detective who talked to you in your dressing room," Carol said, a note of bitterness in her tone.

"Oh, I remember you," Sherry said. "You were blond and nice."

"I'm still a blonde," Carol said dryly. "But after what's happened I don't feel very nice."

"What happened?" Sherry asked.

"I was smart. Every cop in town has been looking for you and I figured you might have come back to your farm. I came out here to see if I was right and

ran into a fish-eyed woman and some gorillas. They took me prisoner, tied me up and threw me in here." Carol's tone grew anxious. "Are you all right, Sherry? I can't see anything."

"I've been held in this darkness for days," Sherry half sobbed. "They haven't hurt me yet. Except that I've been tied up and my arms and legs are perfectly numb. You came alone, I suppose?"

"Quite alone. Don't arouse any hopes. What's it all about, Sherry?"

"I'm not sure. Rex Duncan's murder is involved somehow. I try to listen but nobody has been here the last couple of days except three men who don't talk much. I think something is going to happen though. The woman came here tonight—just a few minutes ago, and she was terribly excited."

"I'm going to try and maneuver toward the door and do some listening. Not that it'll do us much good but I'd like to know what's going on."

"So would I," said Sherry.

CAROL gradually wriggled along the floor until she reached the door, guided by the light that came through the crack at the bottom. She pressed an ear against the thin lower panel. The red-headed woman was talking, issuing orders to the men.

"We're moving out tonight," Nancy said. "I've got to go back to Quinn's house but only long enough to take care of him. We'll wait a few minutes more though. Wally promised he'd try to make it and maybe I won't have to go back to Quinn's house. Maybe Quinn is dead by now."

"That's what I like about dames," one of the men said. "Always lookin' on the bright side of things. But don't be too sure about Quinn. From what I hear he's no push-over."

"Maybe not," said the woman. "But don't forget he trusts dear sweet little Nancy. I'm a guest in his house and I know of ways to get rid of a man for good."

Carol began testing the ropes that bound her wrists and ankles. She was worried, almost frightened. Tony was in danger. Perhaps already dead, this she-devil had said so calmly. She struggled harder, but the ropes were strong and tightly tied. All she did was tire herself. Then she heard a man open

the front door and announce that a car was coming and its headlights blinked a proper signal.

"Good," Nancy said. "That will be Wally. I wonder what news he has?"

After a few moments Carol heard a man's voice. It wasn't too familiar but she thought she'd heard it before.

"We muffed it, Nancy," he said. "For a blind man Quinn is either mighty lucky or he isn't as blind as he pretends. Everything was set for him to take a stroll into space but he stopped just short of it."

"Wally, I'm afraid of him," Nancy said. "There's something about the man I can't understand. Night before last I knew he wasn't in the house and yet he suddenly appeared in the library that I'd already checked. Besides, I'll swear his hair was damp—even wet—"

"What?" the man called Wally interrupted tensely. "Quinn's hair was damp the night before last? Nancy! He's the *Black Bat*!"

"The *Black Bat*!" exclaimed Nancy.

"Yes. He's the hooded man I trapped in that pit. Of course. It explains so much. How the *Black Bat* got so close—Quinn's luck in escaping death—that's the answer. He isn't blind!"

"No! Wally, if he isn't blind he must be onto me." There was fear in Nancy's voice. "He must, I tell you! I've acted all along as if he really was blind. I believed he must be blind. He never made one slip that might have made me think otherwise." Her voice rose hysterically. "Perhaps he's even on his way here now, Wally!"

"He might be at that," Wally said. "We've got to clear out fast. The freighter is loaded and ready to sail. Take Sherry there."

"We've picked up another girl—a private snoop. The one who asked Sherry so many questions at Condor's place. What shall we do with her?"

"Bring her along. The crew has orders on how to handle the situation. We've got us a nice pair of hostages just in case things go wrong. Mind you, I don't believe they will, but if Tony Quinn is the *Black Bat* we don't know how or when he'll strike next."

"Wally, I'm going back to Quinn's house," Nancy said in a calmer tone. "I've got to take the chance. I'll tell him I went to a movie. Then I'll feed him enough sleeping drugs to knock him

out for a week, if he doesn't die from them. It's risky but it's the only way. I've got to chance it. Even if he has guessed I'm not Sherry's sister, he may not be prepared to take any action and I might continue to fool him."

"Maybe you're right," said Wally. "At least you will be there where you can watch him, and maybe learn what he intends to do next."

Carol shuddered and closed her eyes in resignation. There wasn't a thing she could do while Tony Quinn's death was being plotted. She just had to remain there bound and helpless while the two killers toyed with the idea he might be the Black Bat. It seemed that she had reached the end of everything.

The four men and the woman worked fast after that. Nancy entered the room first carrying the oil lantern. She loomed strangely tall and sinister in the yellow light, and her smile was cruel as she gazed down at the prisoners lying on the floor.

**B**EHIND her came the man whose first name was Wally. Carol stared up at him, blinked and looked again for she had recognized him. He was Wally Hanford, the partner of the murdered Rex Duncan, the man who had presumably fooled Tony Quinn and the police.

"Recognize her, Wally?" Nancy asked with a nod toward Carol.

"No," he said, peering at Carol. "Let's get out of here."

The three other men appeared in the doorway and Hanford gave swift orders. Carol and Sherry were gagged, blindfolded and placed in some sort of a light truck. They sped toward the city, a drive of only forty minutes, but to the girls it seemed like hours. Finally the truck bumped over rough cobblestones and Carol sniffed the smell of the river.

In a short time they were deftly transferred to a dory and rowed for ten minutes. Next they were roughly hoisted aboard some ship and placed on the deck. Metal clanked beside them. Carol felt cold steel encircle her right ankle. Then the blindfold was removed, but not the gag.

Carol found she could raise her head and look around a little. She and Sherry lay side by side on the deck of a freighter anchored in the middle of the Hud-

son River and rather far uptown. Their ankles were chained and the length of chain led to the railside where a huge piece of rusty metal weighing at least half a ton was suspended over the water and held into position by a stout rope.

There was no one near the two girls now but in the distance Carol heard the murmur of men's voices. On the deck lay an ax. The stage was set to cut the rope with a single blow of the ax after the freighter had sailed on down the river and out to sea. The metal weight would drop into the sea and drag Carol and Sherry with it. Once that weight was cut free, there would be a chance for them.

Carol wriggled closer to Sherry. Side by side, they felt a little better. Sherry knew what it was all about. Carol could tell by the terror in her eyes. Carol's fear was as great as the other girl's for it was not only her own fate she had to consider. Nancy was about to poison Tony Quinn and there was every reason to believe she would get away with it.

## CHAPTER XVII

### *A Drink for Quinn*

**N**O TIME was wasted by Quinn and Silk in returning home after they had taken Hanford to his residence and left him there. When they found Nancy was missing, they called Captain McGrath and informed him what had happened.

"The lady has vanished," Silk said as he returned to Quinn in the library after a quick search of the house. "And if you want me to tell you the truth I hope she never comes back."

"I'm afraid you won't get your wish, Silk," Quinn said as he heard the front door open and close. "I suspect she is returning right now."

"I do hope you didn't worry about me too much," Nancy said a bit breathlessly as she rushed into the room. "I got tired of being alone and went to the movies. It was a double feature and I stayed longer than I expected."

"We wondered where you had gone," Quinn said. "Silk missed you."



Silk snorted and let it go at that. Nancy stood staring at Quinn as the apparently blind man kept his eyes fixed on a spot a little to one side of her.

"Now I'm very tired," Nancy said. "I'm going to bed very early because you didn't take me to breakfast at that Inn as you promised this morning, and I'm going to make you keep your promise and take me there tomorrow."

"Good," Quinn said with a smile. "Silk and I have things to do. Later on we'll all have a drink. I believe, Nancy, that very soon now we'll remove this danger that has been hanging over you."

"I don't care about myself," Nancy said. "It's Sherry who worries me so. I've a feeling she is—"

Nancy dabbed at her eyes with a handkerchief and fled upstairs. Quinn motioned to Silk to close the library door. Silk did so and then dropped into a chair.

"Well, he queered himself tonight, Silk," Quinn said in a low voice. "And I mean Wally Hanford."

Silk gaped at Quinn. "Do you mean he led us into that mess? That he is the man we're after?"

"Exactly that. Take his guilt in stages. He was present at the birthday party at Duncan's home and could have slipped upstairs to lay in wait for Duncan. He used the machete he'd taken from Kowal the night before because if the truth started to come out, it would look as though Kowal had done the killing. The police would hunt for him and waste time while Hanford either mended his fences or got away."

"But why?" Silk asked. "And what was the idea of sending Butch over to Trenton to check on any firms there which were doing business with Duncan and Hanford's contracting firm?"

"Because I believe that Kowal discovered some of those bright new houses were mere shells. That while the specifications called for the best of materials, the poorest were used. Kowal got sore. He took down the machete and used it to cut a piece of cement from one of the houses in the process of being erected. Kowal, you'll remember, was a construction man during the war and would know the quality of materials. He knew the cement wasn't good so he took it to Duncan."

Silk nodded. "I'm beginning to understand, sir."

"Duncan started an investigation and found that it was true. Hanford had substituted all kinds of inferior materials. The good stuff, lumber, cement, nails, steelwork and such, were literally stolen and shipped abroad where they'd bring fantastic prices. The poor stuff was brought in and made part of the construction."

"Hanford found out and killed Kowal?" Silk asked.

"I'll get to that part of it in a moment," Quinn said. "Duncan undoubtedly asked Hanford for an explanation and was stalled. Duncan, oddly enough, couldn't make too much of a complaint because he'd been tapping the firm's finances to a healthy tune."

"But when he realized the money he'd been taking was money stolen from vets by the rottenest device ever cooked up, Duncan couldn't take it. He came to me and admitted stealing the money. He said he could have stopped stealing before he really became a criminal but that when he decided to give himself up, he found he'd been a criminal all along. I couldn't make any sense out of that statement, but he meant that through Hanford's mechanizations, the firm was crooked."

"How can you be so certain it's Hanford?" Silk asked.

QUINN smiled. He answered in the assured manner of a man who is certain of his ground.

"There are several reasons. The piece of cement Kowal concealed is one. I analyzed it and found it very inferior. He told Kowal. I suppose, that poor quality stuff was going into the house, the firm was being gypped and asked Kowal to act as an investigator and find out more about it. That pleased Kowal very much. He was supposed to investigate some firm in Trenton first. That is why he bought the railroad ticket and phoned his wife about the new job."

"I see," Silk nodded. "Once he set the stage there, Hanford killed Kowal. Then what?"

"He had to kill Duncan, especially when he found out that Duncan was about to confess the whole deal. Duncan suspected he knew and tried to cover up his visit to me by pretending, through the maid, that he'd never left the house. Hanford knew better. He stole the set

of books Duncan kept. A set which showed his defalcations.

"Why?" asked Silk.

"Because if this was discovered to be true, Hanford knew all the firm's books would be checked and his colossal gyp discovered. So Hanford brought me a third set of books which he used to show to auditors and tax men and the Board of Directors. The firm is a corporation. What Hanford actually did was cover up Duncan's stealing."

"I still don't see how you knew it was Hanford," Silk said.

"Mainly because no one else fitted the picture. If Duncan had stolen a million and no trace of the theft could be found, then the books must have been fixed and only Hanford could have done that."

"Then too—Butch and I discovered Kowal's body and while we were checking around the new new housing development, Hanford heard us running the crane. Not a soul knew I was going there that night. Therefore, the murderer must have been in the vicinity on business of his own. Nobody else had business around there except Hanford."

"So that's it," said Silk. "And the killer knew how to operate that crane like an expert. Hanford would know, but you'd hardly believe Chandler would be able to operate anything more complicated than a kiddie car. Jamison was hardly likely to run one of the machines and Mrs. Duncan was out of it."

"Hanford had to remove any trace of the money Duncan had spent," Quinn said, still speaking in a low voice and watching the library door intently. "That meant killing Condor, the gambler, and stealing his records. It means getting rid of Sherry Shannon on whom Duncan had lavished expensive gifts."

"And tonight—that trap on the warehouse roof was Hanford's own idea. Chandler came to me with the story of the love nest but he got it from Hanford, who knew he'd talk about it. Chandler was just feeling his way along, hoping to profit somehow. Hanford claimed he saw Chandler around the neighborhood. That was a lie, because there were no signs of Chandler and I was watching very closely."

Silk rose and went over to the secret door to the lab, he opened it and glanced inside. There was no one there. He closed the door and came back to his

chair, a worried expression on his face.

"What's the matter, Silk?" Quinn asked as he watched him.

"I'm worried about Carol," Silk said. "We've both been slightly foolish about this Nancy you took in. There is something about her I think I ought to tell you—"

"Later," Quinn interrupted quickly. "What about Carol?"

"She was going to some small town where Sherry came from and check on Nancy. Carol felt certain Nancy is some sort of a spy."

"Were you supposed to hear from Carol before now?"

"Yes, sir. That's why I'm worried."

Quinn's hand curled into a fist. He sat there a moment or two, staring into space. A strange feeling of fear stole over him—a fear that Carol might be in danger. With Tony Quinn the knowledge that the girl he adored was safe and well was always vital, and now he could no longer feel that sense of security about her. Finally he spoke very softly, almost as if talking to himself.

"Carol meant well but I'm afraid she's gotten into something deadly," he said. "I didn't want to handle it this way but now I must change my plans. Carol's safety is the important thing."

"Naturally," Silk nodded. "But Nancy won't give you an opportunity to do much, sir."

"I'll take my chances with Nancy," Quinn said, a hardness in his tone as he spoke the name that surprised Silk. "She's just coming downstairs now. Go open the door so she won't believe we have any great secrets."

Silk went to the door of the library and silently opened it. A moment later Nancy came demurely into the room wearing a colorful dress.

"I'm ready for that drink now," she said, playing the sweet ingenue role for all it was worth. "Of course I'll have plain gingerale. I haven't learned how to drink anything else yet."

Silk made a strange choking sound. "Sorry, something stuck in my throat," he said blandly. "I'll prepare the drinks."

NANCY sat down opposite Quinn and eyed him closely as Silk left the room. In the soft lights her face was hard, and for an instant hate flashed in her eyes. She picked up a pack

of matches, lighted one and snapped it with her thumb and forefinger straight at Quinn. The match whizzed past his head, a tiny flaming torch, but he never even blinked those blind eyes.

"Why so silent, Nancy?" he asked. "Are you still tired?"

"A little," she said.

She got up, stepped softly toward him and passed her hand in front of his face.

"What in the world are you doing, Nancy?" Quinn demanded.

She laughed, but there was an expression of disappointment on her face. "One of those hard-shelled flying bugs was getting ready to land on your face. I shooed it off."

"You're so kind to me," Quinn said, and she didn't detect the dryness in his tone."

"Why not?" she said. "You have been very sweet to me." Silk entered the room carrying a tray. "Oh, here comes Silk with the drinks. I'm going to insist upon serving you."

"Let Silk do it," Quinn grumbled. "I pay him enough."

"Not tonight," Nancy exclaimed happily. She hurried to Silk and took the tray from him. There were only two glasses on it. Silk indicated the one which was plain gingerale. "Thank you, Silk. That will be all now."

Silk glanced at Quinn. "Will there be anything else, sir?"

"Not now, thank you, Silk."

As Silk again left the room Nancy went over to a small table, set the tray down and picked up Quinn's glass. The few drops of colorless liquid were squeezed out of a small bit of tubing she'd palmed. It required only a fraction of a second and it seemed that there hadn't been the slightest pause in between setting down the tray and picking up Quinn's glass.

"Here you are," she said as she carried it to him and moved his hand toward it, and then as he took the glass. "Just a moment until I get my drink."

Nancy got her own glass. "Here's luck to us," she said as she clinked it against Quinn's glass and then drank.

"Luck," Quinn said.

He sipped his drink, put the glass down and seemed to relax. In a few moments she gave him the glass again and he drank a little more. Finally three-fourths of the contents were gone. Quinn

sighed wearily and put his feet on a hassock.

"I feel completely relaxed," he said. "I may even have a little nap. Nancy, there is no need for you to stay here. Silk will make sure I'm all right later. He had work to do now. I'm sleepy."

She rose to her feet. For a moment she stood staring at him, a hard, mocking smile twisting her lips. The light gleamed on the red hair—red that was a signal of danger.

"You're afraid I'll keep you awake with my chatter," she said, and the coy sweetness of her tone did not match the expression on her face. "I guess I would too. I'm in the middle of a good book anyway. I'll see you later."

"Yes, later," Quinn said sleepily.

Again she stared at him, the cruel smile still on her face. Then she turned and left the room, satisfied she had accomplished the mission that had brought her back to this house.

Quinn sat motionless, listening to the sound of her footsteps as she ascended the stairs and went along the upper hall. The instant he heard her door close Quinn was on his feet and moving to the lab door, his highball glass in his hand. Silk appeared and silently followed him.

Hastily Quinn poured some of the drink into a test tube and ran it through a fast analytical process. Silk stood at the door, watching and listening.

"I was right," Quinn muttered.

He took down a bottle of tablets, poured an overdose of caffeine into his palm and swallowed the pills. He dumped a quantity of aspirin into an envelope and left that on the lab bench. Then he began changing to the regalia of the Black Bat.

Fully dressed in it, he pulled on Tony Quinn's clothing over the black outfit. Then he hurried back to the library and resumed his chair before the fireplace.

Silk closed the lab door and came over beside Quinn. "What's wrong, sir?"

"Little Nancy just fed me an elephant size shot of sleeping potion. I didn't take it all, but I've had enough. Go to the kitchen and pretend to be working. Nancy won't stay around long. She'll think I've passed out and she'll leave because little Nancy knows the game is about up and she has to move fast."



"Then you know she's just a spy?" Silk asked in surprise.

"Of course. I've known it all along, despite the fact that she was in a bad way when we found her. It was a plant, but neither Nancy nor the man who gagged her realized she was a mouth breather. It was nearly a fatal mistake."

"But you brought her here," said Silk dazedly. "You've been so nice to her."

"Right. Nancy has been my little ace-in-the-hole. I hoped that if I couldn't get a line on the murderer, she'd lead me to him. And that is what she is going to do, only now our finding the killer is even more important because I think Carol has been taken prisoner." For an instant Quinn's voice broke. "Or killed."

"I hope not, sir," Silk said. "I suspected Nancy, but only because I couldn't see how she got that head wound."

"She did that herself, with the hollow sharp edged top of a lipstick case," Quinn said. "I saw her do it. She suspects I'm not blind. She made that obvious by the way she was testing me tonight. That means Hanford suspects too."

"Suspects you are the Black Bat?" Silk asked softly.

"Yes, and they'll both scream it to the heavens if we catch them." Quinn frowned. "Silk, we need luck with us tonight. All the luck there is because I've got to land Hanford and Nancy, find out what happened to Carol and accomplish all this before the drug takes effect. I've delayed its action with counter drugs but I had too much."

## CHAPTER XVIII

### *Action on a Freighter*



RIMLY the red-headed woman who had called herself Nancy Shannon waited in her room for fifteen or twenty minutes and then silently descended the stairs. When she reached the hall she paused a moment, listening.

From the rear of the house there came the rattle of pots and pans, and then the sound of running water. Evidently Silk Kirby was quite busy in the kitchen,

and that suited Nancy. She hurried to the library door and peered in.

Tony Quinn was sprawled back in his chair just as she had left him, but now he appeared to be sleeping deeply. She walked over to his chair and stood there.

"Wake up, Tony," she said softly. "Wake up."

He did not even stir in his sleep at the sound of her voice, and yet she was not satisfied. She had to be sure that he was really sleeping soundly, perhaps fatally from the drug she had placed in his drink.

"Tony Quinn," she said, louder now, but careful that her voice did not carry to Silk as he worked in the kitchen. "Quinn, wake up."

She grabbed him roughly by the shoulder and shook him. Still he did not awaken. Nancy smiled, and it was the same cruel smile that had twisted her lips twice before that night.

"It worked," she murmured. "He's dead to the world, and I hope that is actually true."

It was strange, but even with Quinn lying there in a sleep she was sure was close to unconsciousness, Nancy found herself still afraid of the power this blind man possessed. What Wally Hanford had said about Quinn being the Black Bat lingered in her mind. Yet there was no longer any doubt that he was blind. Hadn't she tested that by throwing a burning match straight at his face tonight.

"Even if he was a clever faker he would have ducked when he saw that match coming," Nancy decided, and then she shivered and spoke aloud. "I'm jittery. I better get out of this house fast."

She hurried back upstairs and got her hat and coat and bag. She hated to leave her suitcases with all the nice clothes in them, but Silk might see her as she departed, and the bags would make the fact she was leaving for good too obvious.

"He's been suspicious of me from the first," Nancy said softly. "I could tell by the way he was always watching me."

She ran down the stairs and headed for the front door. She saw no one as she opened the door and left the house, but she remembered that this time she had heard no sounds coming from the kitchen. Where was Silk now? Had he

seen her? Nancy didn't know, but even out on the street she could not dismiss the idea that hidden eyes were watching her, checking every move she made.

The feeling grew and she fled from the neighborhood. Four blocks away she tried to hail a cab, failed to attract the driver's attention and had to travel another half a dozen blocks farther before she found one.

She gave the driver an address in midtown as she got in. The cab started. Nancy peered out of the rear window and saw no sign of pursuit, but she was not satisfied. She seemed to hear Tony Quinn's voice, and he was mocking her, laughing at her.

"But he's blind," Nancy said more loudly than she realized.

"No, I ain't, lady," the cab driver said indignantly. "I don't even drive that way."

"Sorry," Nancy said. "I wasn't talking about you."

She dismissed the cab at the midtown address, but quickly took another taxi, and this one brought her close to the river. She paid off the driver, walked the rest of the way and got aboard a dory tied up at the end of a small pier.

From the shadows Silk, Butch and the Black Bat watched her pull away. In Quinn's car they had trailed her all the way from the house without her even discovering any sign of pursuit.

"We can't swim after her," Silk said. "I'll get a boat."

He hurried off and appropriated another dory from a nearby yacht club basin. He rowed over and Butch and the Black Bat met him at the end of the pier.

"Silk, you stay with the car," the Black Bat said. "Butch, we're going aboard. It's that freighter lying out there and she's got steam up and is ready to sail. I'm glad you got back from Trenton before we started trailing Nancy. I'm going to need all your strength and all the punches you can throw tonight."

**S**ILK cast an anxious glance at his cloaked companion.

"How do you feel, sir?" Silk asked. "The drug still working?"

"Yes, and it's not doing me any good," the Black Bat said. "I've taken more aspirin and I'll have to risk more caffeine shortly. All I want to do is

get aboard, stop Hanford and Nancy from sailing and see if Carol is there. I'll probably pass out before I can accomplish this, so it's up to you, Butch. Silk, you are to get me back to the house as fast as possible. I'll hardly be able to give you any suggestions or orders, so handle it your own way. Let's go, Butch."

Silk climbed out of the dory and the Black Bat and Butch got in. Butch wanted to man the oars but the Black Bat took them from him.

"The exercise will keep me awake," he explained. "It's a dark night, we can slip up alongside easily. There's an anchor chain you can climb and I'll be right back of you if this—this stuff—doesn't get me first!"

Butch gulped. "You're not rowing very straight, sir. Want me to take over?"

"No, I'll be all right. I've got to be all right! Time is running out, and we must work fast or you'll have to handle it alone."

The Black Bat's night-sight wasn't affected by the drug yet. He saw that one man seemed to be on deck. Nancy had boarded the ship and apparently gone below. They reached the anchor chain and the Black Bat whispered to Butch about the location of the guard on deck. Butch nodded, seized the chain and started climbing.

They had tied the dory to the anchor chain. The Black Bat followed Butch up the chain, resting every few feet and fighting desperately to keep his eyes open. He knew that if he relaxed, gave way to the sleepiness that was steadily creeping over him he would go plunging down into the waters of the river.

Butch reached the rail and climbed over it. For a moment the big man disappeared from view and the Black Bat felt strangely deserted as he continued going up the chain. Finally he reached the rail and Butch leaned down and helped him climb over.

"Stay here," Butch whispered. "I'll take care of that guy up fo'ward."

He was halfway toward the man on guard when a crew member popped out of a hatchway and yelled the alarm. Butch had that man before he could draw a gun or take any other kind of action. A single punch put him away for a long time. Butch headed down the companionway but retreated quickly

and several bullets followed him.

"Look out!" Butch shouted. "They play rough on this ship."

The Black Bat dropped to the deck and lay there prone, with both automatics ready. His eyes were half closed as they peered through the eye-holes in the hood, but ten times the amount of drug wouldn't have put him under now. The lives of two girls depended on him retaining all of his senses, and one of those girls was Carol Baldwin. The girls were still lying there on the deck, their ankles chained to the huge weight that hung over the side. The weight that was prevented from dropping into the river by one single strand of heavy rope.

From somewhere forward two men came running. Below Hanford was howling orders for them to cut the rope that held the weight.

"Chop that rope!" Hanford shouted. "Heave those girls over the side. Get rid of everybody who doesn't belong aboard ship. Hurry!"

The man on guard picked up the ax lying on the deck, he raised it above his head ready to bring the sharp blade down on the rope that held the weight in place. Then the weight would pull the girls down into the water and drag them to the bottom of the river.

"Stop!" the Black Bat shouted. "Cut that rope and I'll kill you."

The guard laughed harshly, and was ready to swing the ax. The Black Bat's left hand automatic roared. The guard swayed as the bullet tore into his chest. The ax dropped from his hands, the blade missing the rope by inches as it fell. Like a tree crashing in a storm the guard went down, to sprawl motionless on the deck.

Butch suddenly found himself fighting men who came from all directions. He was too busy to help Carol, but he did see Hanford appear on deck. Butch battled his way toward the man.

"Get that big man!" Hanford shouted. "Kill him!"

**R**OUGHLY Butch swept aside two men with clubs, lunged at Hanford. As the killer turned to flee, Butch seized him by one shoulder.

"Don't be in such a hurry," Butch growled.

"Let me go," snapped Hanford.

Butch spun the killer around, trans-

ferred his grip to Hanford's wrist, bent and swung the man up and over to crash against the deck. Hanford pulled a gun. He had the weapon raised ready to fire, when Butch kicked him under the chin. He would liked to have broken the killer's jaw with his fists but there were too many other targets. Besides Hanford was completely out, his gun lying beside him.

The Black Bat, crawling slowly across the deck, saw a third man go after the ax. He blinked his eyes half a dozen times, tried to hold his head up and fought off the effects of the drug with all the energy at his command. There wasn't much left. The automatic weighed a ton. He was using one gun now, no longer even attempting to handle the two of them.

The man with the ax had it raised and was poised to bring it down.

"Drop that!" the Black Bat shouted.

He raised himself, held the gun with both hands and was shooting as he brought it up. The man with the ax staggered against the rail, dropped the ax and started running. He took a dozen steps before he faltered and then crashed to the deck.

In the darkness no one noticed Wally Hanford as he staggered to his feet. He peered around him at the struggling men. Three members of the crew were battling Butch and finding they had their hands full.

"The Black Bat," Hanford murmured. "He's here on board this ship. We've got to get him some way. Just got to do it!"

Waves of blackness swept over the Black Bat as he sprawled there on the deck. He wanted to crawl over and try to release Carol and Sherry but he no longer was able to move. The two girls weren't very far from him, but they seemed such a long distance away.

Butch was fighting a winning fight, but he did not see a fourth man sneaking up behind him with a heavy club. The man swung his club. It caught Butch on the back of the head and the big man went down, knocked unconscious from the blow.

Through the deepening haze that hung over him the Black Bat saw Butch fall. A weariness that was not created by the drug swept over Tony Quinn then. It looked like this was the end of the Black Bat, and of Carol and Butch,

for the killers on board this ship would probably not let any of them live long.

Then the Black Bat was conscious of Wally Hanford standing over him, smiling down at him with a smile that was utterly evil.

"The Black Bat," Hanford said. "And I've got you."

His words became a roaring sound in the Black Bat's ears, and then everything blanked out as the deep sleep he had been fighting for so long won the battle.

"Completely out," said Hanford. "As though he were drugged." Hanford uttered a startled exclamation. "Why of course. I was right in the first place. Tony Quinn must be the Black Bat."

The freighter was quiet now. The men of the crew were checking up on the dead and wounded. Butch and the Black Bat had created quite a casualty list during the brief time they both had been in action.

Hanford decided he would have some of his men carry the Black Bat down to Hanford's cabin. He knew that he need only remove the hood from the head of the black clad man to assure himself that Tony Quinn was the Black Bat, but that was something Hanford wanted to do when he was alone.

The police were still seeking the murderer of Rex Duncan, even if the identity of the Black Bat was revealed to the Law, that would not halt the search for the killer. Plans were forming in Wally Hanford's brain, ways in which he might be able to use the knowledge he was sure he now possessed regarding Tony Quinn to his own advantage. Those plans had not crystallized yet, but Hanford was sure they would be before long.

In the darkness no one saw Silk Kirby as he came up the anchor chain and climbed over the rail of the freighter. The huge weight hanging over the side of the ship caught his attention. He hurried to the spot and discovered Carol and Sherry still lying on the deck, bound and helpless.

**SILK** swiftly released the two girls and helped them to their feet.

"There are two dories fastened to the anchor chain," he whispered. "Try to climb down the anchor chain and wait in one of the boats. I've got to find the Black Bat."

The girls headed for the spot that Silk indicated, and no one noticed them. It took courage for them to swing over the rail and climb down the anchor chain but they made it. They reached one of the dories and sat there waiting anxiously.

On deck Silk discovered Butch just as the big man was getting slowly to his feet. It took more than a blow from a club to keep Butch O'Leary unconscious long.

"There's the Black Bat lying over there on the deck," Silk said. "Looks like that drug finally got him. He is completely out. Only one man is standing beside him."

"It wouldn't matter if there was a regiment guarding him," Butch said grimly. "Come on."

Hanford turned and saw them approaching, shadowy figures in the darkness, and he believed they were a couple of his own men.

"Take him down below and put him in my cabin," he ordered, pointing to the Black Bat lying at his feet. "I'll be down there later."

He turned away as Silk and Butch quietly picked up the black-clad figure and started for the nearest companion way. Hanford did not look back as he went forward along the deck. He was whistling and in gay spirits.

"I've got a hunch he won't be so happy in a little while," Butch said.

## CHAPTER XIX

### *Black Bat's Alibi*



**U**SING abruptly, Wally Hanford stopped whistling as a thought struck him. Now would be as good a time as any to get rid of those two girls lying bound and helpless on the deck. The Black Bat had shot down the men who had tried to cut the rope before. Now he was

helpless and unable to prevent anyone using the ax now.

"They know too much," Hanford decided. "I just can't afford to let them remain alive."

He headed for the spot where the huge weight hung suspended beyond the

rail of the ship. Horror swept over him as he found that his two prisoners were no longer there. With the aid of a pocket flashlight he searched the deck. The pieces of cut rope were mute testimony that the captives had been released.

"The big man who was with the Black Bat," Hanford muttered. "He must have regained consciousness and released those girls. They are probably hiding somewhere on board."

He shouted loudly. Some of the crew came running to him and he told them what had happened and ordered them to search the freighter.

"Find those girls and the big man," Hanford ordered tensely. "Don't let them get away."

"Yes, sir," one of the crew said. "We'll get them."

As they hurried away to carry out his orders, Hanford found fear creeping over him. It almost seemed that even when drugged into an unconscious sleep the Black Bat was still smarter than he was, and terribly dangerous to a man who had left a trail of murder behind him.

Hanford hurried below deck. There was only one thought in his mind now, and that was to reach his cabin and assure himself that the Black Bat was lying there helpless. He reached a passageway. Cabins were located on either side.

A door opened and Nancy stood there. She was smiling, pleased with the world. "I heard the fighting up on deck," she said. "I was frightened for awhile and then one of the crew came below. He said it was all over, that we had won."

Hanford did not speak and then she noticed how pale he looked and the fear that lingered in his eyes.

"Wally!" she said. "What's wrong?"

Up on deck there were loud voices and what sounded like scuffling but they paid no attention. Hanford went to the door of his cabin. It was closed and he flung it open. Relief swept over him as he stared at the blanket covered figure lying on a bunk.

"The Black Bat," Hanford said. "I'm sure he is Tony Quinn. That drug you gave Quinn knocked out the Black Bat. He was just about unconscious on the deck. I ordered two of the men to bring him below and put him in my cabin."

"Then that's the Black Bat lying there beneath the blanket?"

"Of course—it must be," Hanford said.

There were heavy footsteps coming down the stairs of the companionway. The murmur of voices. Hanford decided it was the crew searching for the missing prisoners and the big man. He stepped forward and lowered the blanket so he could see the head of the figure lying there on the bunk.

Sightless eyes seemed to stare up at the ceiling of the cabin, the hard face of one of the toughs that the Black Bat had killed was cold in death. On his forehead was pasted the little black emblem that the Black Bat sometimes left behind him to indicate he had been there and gone.

"That—that's not the Black Bat," Nancy said, dawning horror in her voice. "It is one of the men who was with us at the Shannon farm, and he's dead."

"I know," Hanford said bleakly. "The Black Bat has been too smart for me."

"You're under arrest, Hanford," a quiet voice said from the open doorway of the cabin. "On a charge of murder."

Hanford turned, as did Nancy to find Captain McGrath standing there covering him with a gun, and there were uniformed police behind the captain.

LATER Tony Quinn awoke in his library chair. He was dressed as Tony Quinn too, and it was broad daylight. Silk hovered near him and Captain McGrath sat across from him.

"Brother, what a slug she handed you," McGrath said.

"Who?" Quinn asked dazedly. "Who, Mac? What do you mean? I recall Nancy handing me a drink. Nancy! Mac, was she in this?"

"Only over her head, that's all. We got the whole lot of them, when the Black Bat phoned the harbor police and suggested we raid the freighter," McGrath said. "It was a good tip."

Quinn looked at Silk. Only the supposedly blind man saw Silk's wink and knew that Silk had done that telephoning after he and Butch had brought the Black Bat and the two girls to land.

"Hanford claims you are the Black Bat," McGrath went on. "Can you imagine that?" The captain smiled. "Honestly, Tony, I've been an awful fool about that. Hanford says you came aboard with some giant of a man. He

said he knew you wore that hood and black outfit. I had a doctor here, Tony. For your own good, of course."

"Naturally," Quinn said dryly.

"The doctor told me that if you even managed to raise a finger since the time you took that drug, he would turn in his license to practice. Man alive, what an alibi you had."

"I knew about Hanford," Quinn said. "I told Silk most of the details and then Nancy prepared that drink. The rest is a blank."

"It's a lucky thing you weren't killed," McGrath commented. "Nancy is a crook working with Wally Hanford. We found them aboard a freighter loaded with building material they intended to sell abroad. Stuff our G.I.'s had paid for. Hanford was substituting cheap material in those houses."

"He confessed the whole thing. He thought he was piling up millions and all the while Duncan was raiding the till, and when Hanford found it out, all he could do was kill Duncan. Because if he accused him of stealing the firm's money, an investigation would show the

firm had been earning too much."

"That explains about Kowal." Quinn yawned sleepily. "He must have found evidence of the fraud—the poor building materials."

"That's about it," McGrath said. "Those houses would stand up for a couple of years but then—oh, brother! And there were so many that the gyp ran into millions. I think we'll find Hanford has enough assets left to make good whatever the G.I.'s paid in. At any rate, Hanford is going to burn and Nancy—if she doesn't get the chair—will grow old behind bars."

Quinn closed his apparently sightless eyes. "Good," he said sleepily. "You did an excellent job, Mac. An excellent job. Tell Silk to wake me up sometime tomorrow. Good—night."

But two minutes after McGrath left Quinn was in the laboratory, holding Carol very close, listening to her story and urging her to forget the silly jealousy that had brought her into such danger. They sat down to discuss the case but somehow it didn't seem very important. Not for quite some time.



Wealthy and influential Paul Riker had everything to live for—but he unaccountably blew his brains out, leaving behind him a peril-laden and mysterious envelope containing—

## THE DENNISON DOCUMENTS

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FEATURING THE BLACK BAT AT HIS SLEUTHING BEST!





# TIME FOR MURDER

*Mystery surrounds the death of a clock man!*

**T**O SIZE up a man you're having trouble with means you must see him. That was what Glenn Crane thought as he trudged along the side street, searching for the clock shop run by Sidney Garven. There was such a shop across the street and Crane went over to it.

Glenn Crane was in his late forties, slightly stooped from working over chemical laboratory benches and furrowed about the forehead because he'd

brought up his motherless son who'd given him a lot of trouble. None of them had been quite as serious as the present one. Something had to be done about it.

According to Joey—the nineteen-year-old boy—Sidney Garven was a type who'd listen to no one and to whom pleadings would mean nothing. Garven was a hard man, an uncompromising, bitter old coot with a flair for being vindictive.

Crane came to a stop. There seemed

**By NORMAN A. DANIELS**

to be two clock shops, neither of which displayed the name of its owner. He entered the one nearest him but realized, from Joey's description of the place where he worked, that this wasn't it. Crane hastily backed out. Garven's was directly opposite, the type of store you'd scarcely notice for its windows were none too clean and it was jam-packed with all types of clocks, most of which looked as if they'd never run again.

A bell tinkled when Crane walked in. He saw Garven approaching. Crane knew it was Garven for he had a long, lean face and deep-set eyes. Garven was dressed in a pair of old pants sadly in need of a pressing, a dirty white shirt covered with a still dirtier smock and he had sandals on his feet. They looked as if he'd retrieved them from an trash can.

Crane nodded and smiled at Garven. "I'm interested in old clocks. I imagine you won't mind if I putter around."

Garven nodded. "Go ahead—so long as you get out by nine. That's when I close up. Yell if you see anything that strikes your fancy. My prices ain't high and I got some quality merchandise here for them as knows clocks."

Crane knew very little about clocks beyond the fact that some required periodic winding. The only ones he possessed were electric and he paid scant attention to them except to glance at the time. He reached a shelf loaded down with ancient timepieces and he idly picked one up. It was a rather large clock, shaped with a turret-like dome. It was old. The face was faded from the years.

Crane turned it over and saw a small brass plate screwed to the bottom. It was so dirty as to be hardly noticeable and the engraving on the plate wasn't legible at all. Crane scraped some of the grime away with a fingernail. He saw the words "King Edward Collection."

INTRIGUED, he methodically scraped away the rest of the dirt until he read that this clock was made in 1850 by someone named Lepaute and had been a part of the collection of King Edward. Crane wondered if it could be valuable. He knew that often there were lucky finds in places like this. He decided to buy it, with only one reason in mind. If Garven was willing to dicker and displayed an avarice for

money, perhaps he'd be amenable to a cash settlement and in return, not prosecute Joey. It wouldn't hurt to try, though Crane knew he couldn't bid up very high. An analytical chemist in a small lab doesn't make too much money and bringing up Joey had been expensive.

The bell over the door tinkled again and another customer walked in. He was what Crane would term as a gray man. His hair was gray, his closely cropped mustache was gray. So was his suit, tie, shirt and even shoes. Everything was costly and in the best fashion. He carried a cane under his arm and was removing a pair of gray gloves.

This man nodded at Crane and then his eyes fell upon the clock. With a cry of elation, he swooped it out of Crane's hands, turned it over and read the brass plate.

"A Lepaute," he gloated. "One of the three turret clocks he ever made. The one final acquisition for my Lepaute collection. My friend, I hope your heart isn't set on this clock. I admit you had it first, but if you have not made the purchase, I warn you, I intend to outbid you for it."

Crane didn't like the way this man had snatched the clock, nor his outspoken determination to own it. He took the clock back and placed it on the counter.

"I found it," he said slowly. "Perhaps I'll keep it for my own collection."

"Nonsense," the gray man snapped. "What collection? The British Museum has all of Lepaute's clocks which I do not own. Between us we have them all so how can you have a collection of his clocks? Don't attempt to hold me up."

Garven came out of the back room then. He was scowling. Crane indicated the clock. "I want to buy this," he said.

"Twenty dollars," Garven announced quickly.

"Twenty dollars!" the gray man cried. "Listen, I'll pay fifty—a hundred."

"The other customer saw it first," Garven said.

"Two hundred—three hundred—"

Garven turned to Crane. "You give me twenty dollars and the clock is yours. I don't like being forced to sell to a certain person and I ain't in need of money. Twenty dollars and the clock is yours."

"You're crazy!" the gray man shouted.

"Mind your own business," Garven snapped. "Less you want things to happen—"

The gray man subsided and his face grew somber. He moved away from the counter. Crane frowned. It seemed odd that Garven had rejected the largest bid. Either he knew little about clocks, or wasn't interested in money at all. Crane decided this was no time to talk about Joey.

He paid for the clock. Garven procured a piece of secondhand wrapping paper, set and wound the timepiece, and wrapped it up.

"Seven-twenty," he said. "Remember, there ain't no guarantee goes with this clock. Some of 'em are pieces of junk."

Crane took the package, tucked it under his arm and left the shop.

Upon arriving home, he prepared something to eat and, when Joey came in, the table was set. Joey was a handsome young man with wavy brown hair and the expression and features of an angel. He was a walking devil when he wanted to be.

Joey greeted his father without much enthusiasm. He looked worried. Sullenly he mashed a boiled potato and began smearing butter over it. He raised his eyes.

"Pop, did you talk to the old bag of bones?"

Crane indicated the clock with a movement of his head. "No. But I bought a clock from him. Funny thing, he sold it to me for twenty dollars while another customer offered him three hundred. It hardly makes sense, but it shows that Garven must be a reasonable man. He let me have the clock because I entered the store first."

JOEY slowly laid down his fork. "You mean the old buzzard turned down three hundred bucks against the twenty you offered him? Pop, he must have gone crazy."

"He acted quite sane," Crane said. "Anyway, I think it's a good investment—that clock. I have an idea it will bring us a few dollars. Heaven knows we could use them."

"But you didn't talk to Garven?" Joey asked hollowly.

"Not yet. Now listen, Joey, if they send you to jail, face it bravely. Make up your mind to behave yourself and never to steal again. That'll keep you out of trouble in the future."

Joey sighed and went back to his food. "I saw a movie this afternoon—about prisons. I sat through it twice. Boy, I don't crave to go there. But I walked around after I left the theatre—that's what made me late. I was thinking, Pop, that I've been all wrong. I figured anybody could have an easy life if they had the dough, no matter how they got it. I guess I grew up this afternoon because I found out you have to sweat a little, worry a little and fight like a fool to get ahead."

The door buzzer rang insistently. Crane got up and opened the door. Two men were there. They pushed past him into the flat. The younger man who closed the door put his back against it and stayed there. The heavy-set man with him walked over to the table where Joey was still eating.

"Are you Joey Crane?" he asked.

"Yes. That's me. Why? Who are you?"

The big man said, "I'm Lieutenant Brennan, of the Homicide Bureau. You're out on bail for stealing from Sidney Garven, aren't you?"

"Yes, that's right. What of it? My trial doesn't come up for a week yet."

"Joey," Crane said in a strained voice. "Joey, keep quiet a moment. Lieutenant, you said you were from the Homicide Bureau?"

Brennan nodded. "That's correct. Joey was seen coming out of Garven's store at six-fifty. In fact, he came out like somebody had shot him through the door and he kept running. Now isn't that a fact, Joey? And you might tell us why you were running."

Joey's face paled. His fork fell from his fingers and rattled against the plate of now forgotten food. He said, "Well—well, I-I had an argument with old Garven. I told him what I thought of him, but when he started to get a gun, I got out of there."

Brennan took handcuffs from his pocket. "It's no good, Joey—that story, I mean. You came out of the store at six-fifty. Garven was shot to death two minutes before that. And we're sure of the time because Garven put up a fight and his back room got banged around a bit. A whole shelf of clocks he'd been timing, fell to the floor. Most of them broke and they all stopped at six forty-eight. Now if you've got an alibi, this is the time to spill it."

Joey shuddered. "I was there earlier. I admit it, but when I left, I just wan-

dered around aimlessly. I don't know just where I went and I didn't see anybody I knew. But I didn't kill Garven."

Crane did some quick thinking and put a hand on Brennan's wrist, stopping the descent of the handcuffs.

"Wait, Lieutenant," he said. "I don't pretend to know what this is all about. I only know that Joey is supposed to have murdered Garven about six forty-eight tonight. But that's impossible."

"You wouldn't think so if you could see Garven. He's got a big hole in his head."

"I don't mean the murder itself. I'm referring to the time. If Joey was observed leaving Garven's store at six-fifty or a minute or two after that, he couldn't have killed Garven."

"No? Why?"

"Because at seven-twenty I was in Garven's store and I bought that clock from him. He set it. I remember because he mentioned the time and compared it to an electric clock on his wall."

Brennan smiled slowly. "You're his father, aren't you? You look like a nice guy. Now imagine, Mr. Crane, how a jury would take such a story. They'd laugh you off the witness-stand."

"But there was another man present. A man dressed all in gray."

Brennan's smile faded. "Who was he? Listen, if you can back up your statement, even I'll believe you and I don't believe anybody."

Crane's shoulders sagged. "I don't know who he was. We had an argument about the clock." He brightened a bit. "I'll find out though. He'll come forward when he reads the newspapers. I'll get them to print all the facts."

**B**RENNAN put the cuffs around Joey's wrists. "I'll see that the reporters get the facts, Mr. Crane," he said. "I'll give the kid every break he deserves, but you got to produce this witness. If you don't the kid starts his way along the route that leads to the electric chair. You can see the boy whenever you wish. Look me up if you get any information. Let's go, Joey."

During the next twenty days, Glenn Crane grew ten years older. He worked every day, did his best to earn the salary check each week, but his mind was on one thing—finding that witness who could clear Joey. Why hadn't he come forward? The story had been printed in every newspaper, played up big because Lieutenant Brennan had told all

the reporters about the man in gray. Yet, there hadn't been a word.

Brennan no longer believed the tale. Even Joey smirked in disgust when Crane mentioned it. Joey had been indicted. In a week he'd be brought to trial and it promised to be a short one. In fact, the attorney Crane had hired was already hinting that they might have to make a deal with the D. A. in the hope of drawing a life sentence instead of the chair.

Crane was adamant against this. Joey was innocent. Joey had been in plenty of scrapes and lied himself blue more than once. Crane hadn't believed him, but now he did. He believed because he held the balance of doubt in his own brain though nobody had any faith in his story. He was a harrassed, worried parent doing anything to get his son free of a murder charge.

Crane realized time was running out. He had to do something. He sat down to think and his eyes fell upon the clock. He hastily wrapped it, seized his hat and hurried down to the street where Garven had operated his store. This time he didn't go to Garven's, but to the clock shop across the street.

An elderly woman ran it. She listened to Crane's story with slow, doubtful shakes of her head.

"So the man who could back up your story and alibi your son, wanted this clock so bad he was willing to pay three hundred for it?" she said. "You think he may come by here again and if he sees it in my window, he'll stop. Well, I'll help you. I got kids of my own and I know the grief they can cause sometimes. Sure, I'll fix things so that if that gray man comes by, he'll be bound to see it."

"Fine," Crane approved gratefully. "Thanks very much. Tell you what—you can have all the money the clock will bring. Every penny."

The woman shook her head. "I'm no profiteer—like Garven used to be. No, sir. This clock is worth about six hundred dollars. If I sell it, even to the man you're looking for, I'll take my usual twenty percent commission and no more."

"Six hundred for that clock!" Crane gasped. "But you must be mistaken. Garven sold me that for twenty dollars."

The woman wagged her head from side to side. "That I do not understand. Garven was money mad. And yet, may-

be I do know why. It proves what I have always thought. That Garven knew nothing about clocks and had no business being in the clock business."

Crane pondered that explanation and wasn't satisfied with it. Because even if Garven didn't know the value of the clock, he had refused a three hundred dollar bid. Somehow, Crane thought, this was a clue though it pointed nowhere at the moment. He thanked the woman and departed.

Ten days later Joey was doomed. The trial had lasted three days and the jury stayed out exactly an hour and ten minutes. Nobody had believed Crane's story that Garven was alive at seven-twenty. The D. A. had made a mockery of it, inferring that Crane had perjured himself in an effort to save his son from the electric chair.

They sentenced Joey four days later. Crane didn't attend. He had no desire to hear the judge sentence his son to death. Each morning and every night he visited the clock store, but that clock was always in the window. It had neither been moved nor touched. There was a fine coating of dust over the clock already.

CRANE saw Joey a few times up at Sing Sing. The visits depressed him horribly. An appeal was filed postponing execution of the sentence for a few weeks. Crane grew thinner. He forgot to eat sometimes and he found that sleep was almost impossible. He took to pacing the floor or haunting the vicinity of the clock shop.

It was a Tuesday evening when he got a phone call from the woman, saying a man had come in and wanted to buy the clock. He hadn't been dressed all in gray, but he had grey hair and a closely cropped gray mustache. He was about six feet tall, husky, a fine looking specimen.

"What's more," the woman of the shop said, "I told him I wouldn't sell unless he let me clean up the clock a bit. He wanted to take it with him but I held out. Now I'm to deliver it. I've got the address. You can take the clock to him if you like."

An hour and a half later Crane pushed the doorbell of a large and imposing residence on Long Island. He was praying softly when the door opened. Sure enough there stood the Gray man. There wasn't the slightest question about it. It was he!

Crane bit his lip. He said, "I've got a clock for you."

"Oh," the gray man said. "Oh, yes. Thank you. Take this for your trouble."

The man proffered a dollar bill. Crane waved it away. "You can do more for me than that—" his eyes rested on the brass nameplate below the bell, "—Mr. Seifert. Look at me closely. Don't you remember me?"

Seifert squinted, held the door open wider for more light and shook his head. "No—I've never seen you before. Did I?"

"In Sidney Garven's clock shop, right across the street from where you bought this clock today. It was seven-twenty. I had the clock—the same one. You wanted it. You offered three hundred dollars for it."

Seifert laughed. "Oh, come now, what sort of a game is this? I don't know what you're talking about. I saw this clock this afternoon for the first time. I needed it for my collection—"

"Yes," Crane broke in eagerly. "Your collection. You told me about it at Garven's store. This clock would fill in your collection of Lepaute's clocks. That was why you wanted it so badly."

Seifert frowned. "My collection of Lepaute clocks? But I'm making no such collection. Mine happens to be a variety of turret clock and this one is a fine example. Frankly, I never even knew Lepaute had created it. No wonder the lady of the clock shop insisted upon seven hundred dollars."

Crane leaned weakly against the door frame. "You were in Garven's store that night. I couldn't be mistaken. My son's life depends upon your testimony."

Seifert said, "Oh!" with a wide and round mouth. "So that's it! You are the father of a boy who was sent to the chair for murder. Now look here. I'd like to help you, but I won't perjure myself to do it. I was never in Garven's store."

Crane said, "There is a detective who half believes me. I can get him to check up on you, Mr. Seifert."

Seifert started to close the door. "Let him. The innocent have nothing to fear. In fact, send your detective to me and I'll give him every assistance. But don't ask me to lie. Not even to save your son's life. Good night again."

Seifert closed the door. Crane walked slowly away. He didn't even know in which direction to turn. Finally he

came upon a drug store, entered and phoned Lieutenant Brennan. He told him the whole story and Brennan promised to come right out.

Brennan did, and told Crane to stay in the police car until he'd talked to Seifert. When Brennan emerged, Crane could see that the whole thing was lost. Brennan started driving back to town.

"It's no use, Crane," he said. "Honestly, I almost believe your story. That is, I did. But Seifert isn't the man. He couldn't possibly be. From five o'clock the afternoon of the murder, until nine that same night he was attending a banquet. He told me who had been present and I telephoned eleven people, all important and trustworthy men. Each said that Seifert had been at the affair. You can't buck an alibi like that. Don't you see?"

**B**UT Crane was stubborn. He felt sure he could prove Joey's innocence somehow.

"I see that Seifert has arranged this," Crane said. "I don't know how or why, but he is the man I saw in Garven's store. He did show interest in the same clock. That indicates—"

"It indicates little and proves nothing," Brennan said wearily. "There are lots of people who collect clocks and every one of 'em would want that particular clock. It's no use, Crane."

Crane didn't agree. He stayed up almost all night, thinking and planning. By morning he had an idea and that night he began putting it into effect. He went to Seifert's home again. This time a servant let him in and showed him into a large living room.

There were more than a dozen clocks of all types from the old fashioned shelf type to grandfather clocks that ticked monotonously. Every one of them was very valuable and irreplaceable. Crane hastily took a small plastic box from his pocket and extracted several squares of moist blotting paper. He made a quick tour of the room and placed a square of this paper inside six of the clocks. A seventh piece he laid carefully in an ash tray.

Seifert came in and didn't look amused or pleased to see his visitor.

"Now see here, Mr. Crane," he said, "I told you the truth. That detective checked my story. I was not the man you claim happened to be in that store the night of the murder. I couldn't have been there."

"I believe you were, Mr. Seifert. I've talked to people who attended that banquet. Oh, you were present all right. There's no doubt about it, but the hotel where it was held happens to be not far from Garven's store. You could walk that distance in ten minutes. What's more, around seven o'clock they started showing motion pictures at the banquet and the room was darkened. You could have slipped away. Also, that evening, you were dressed entirely in gray. You're going to tell me the truth."

Seifert bristled. "I'm going to kick you out of here."

"I wouldn't." Crane held up one hand. Then he reached for the bit of paper in the ash tray. "This," he explained, "is saturated with a phosphorous compound. Air acts upon it to evaporate a volatile liquid which keeps the phosphorous from catching fire. Watch—and see what happens. I'm a chemist. I know about these things. Watch!"

Suddenly the innocent appearing bit of paper broke into flame. It was consumed in a matter of seconds.

Seifert rubbed his chin. "What has that to do with me?"

Crane said, "There are a dozen valuable clocks in this room. You're a collector and they are worth a fortune to you. They cannot be replaced. In six of the clocks I have placed similar bits of paper. When they burn, these clocks will burn too."

Seifert jumped to his feet. Crane said, "You can't possibly open all dozen clocks in time. Some are bound to burn up. You have about three minutes to make up your mind, Mr. Seifert. The phosphorous soaked papers won't catch fire as quickly as the one in the ash tray because they are in a confined space but they'll begin to ignite in three minutes. I can tell you which clocks are doomed. Like my son is doomed. I'll tell you if you tell me—the truth."

Seifert drew himself up. "Crane, you're mad. I spent a life time collecting those clocks. If anything happened to them, I—I'm liable to go mad too. But I can't tell you anything more. I am not the man you say you saw in that store. I wasn't there. I never heard of Garven. I want to save my clocks, but I tell you—"

Crane pointed out three of the clocks. "Hurry—open the back of each. I'll attend to the other three. Throw the papers into the fireplace. Quickly, now."

They got all six incendiary devices



into the fireplace before they started to burn. Seifert mopped his forehead and turned on Crane slowly.

"I should have you arrested for this," he said shakily. "But I can imagine what you are going through. Maybe your son is innocent. I wish I could help you prove it."

Crane nodded. "Thank you. I'm a desperate man. I have to take long chances and this was one of them. I knew, if you were lying, you'd tell the truth to save those precious clocks. You couldn't change your story even if they burned to cinders. So—you must be telling the truth. I'm sorry. I won't bother you again."

SEIFERT offered his hand and led him to the door. They parted without another word and Crane walked dejectedly toward the sidewalk. It was all over now. He'd been mistaken, that's all. Mistaken and foolishly wasting all this time on Seifert when he wasn't the man at all. If he had been, he'd have talked.

Crane knew how much collectors valued their array of priceless possessions. They prized them above almost anything—including their lives.

Their lives! Crane gasped and almost turned back. Seifert had been willing that his clocks be destroyed by fire. Only one thing he possessed could be worth more to him than the clocks. His own life!

Seifert was the murderer! The man who had killed Garven! His life depended upon his keeping quiet.

Crane almost ran to where he remembered there was a bus stop. He meant to phone Brennan and tell him, but that wouldn't help. Brennan was too filled with doubts. Whatever must be done must be accomplished by himself alone. He was at the prison first thing in the morning and something about his pleas and his appearance made an assistant warden relent. He was allowed to see Joey.

Crane was startled at the change in the boy. He seemed to have lost all hope, but he brightened when he saw his father.

"Pop—the way you look. Something has happened. Something good!"

"Listen, son, we can't waste time. There isn't much left. Don't ask questions. Just tell me everything that went on in Garven's store. Every tiny detail. Nothing is too unimportant. The most

trivial occurrence. For instance, did Garven sell many clocks?"

"He made a living. A darn good one. Some men paid him plenty for his old clocks. I've seen a thousand dollars change hands and the same customer would come back to buy more."

"Good, I expected something like that," Crane said. "Tell me about the time Garven became angry at you. I remember your saying he was acting odd before you helped yourself to his money."

Joey ran fingers through his unruly hair and stared off into space. "I don't know what you're getting at, Pop. But while I never did tell you, I wondered about it. The whole thing began the day I wanted something out of Garven's safe. I didn't ask him. I knew the combination so I simply opened it. There was a funny kind of a box in there, right on top of everything else. It was a bright red box of some metal—tin, I guess."

"Yes," Crane said, almost breathlessly. "Yes, Joey, go on."

"Well, in order to get at some ledgers I wanted I had to pick up the box. Just then Garven entered and snatched the box away from me. He slapped me across the jaw and said I was a sneak. After that he got tougher and tougher with me. I didn't know what to make of it, but the whole thing stemmed from that moment when he found me with the red painted tin box."

"Joey," Crane said, "with a little luck I'll get you out of here. I know what this is all about. Now, you worked for Garven nearly seven months. What did he have you do?"

"Why, not much of anything. Attend auctions and buy old clocks. Any kind of clocks so long as I didn't have to pay much for them. He didn't seem to care and he hardly even looked at them."

"But they sold for high prices," Crane nodded. "All right, Joey. I'm going now. You start praying."

Joey grinned. "Pop, I've become the prayingest guy in this whole prison. Look, no matter how it turns out, don't worry about me. I've learned my lesson. An innocent guy isn't scared—so very much. Not like a man who knows he killed somebody. That's what really scares a man so much—knowing he's guilty."

Crane smiled. "You've grown up, son. You're a man now. I think, when you get out of here, you're going to be

a lot different."

Joey rubbed his nose and looked at the floor. "Try me, Pop. Just try me, that's all I can say."

CRANE was humming as he rode the train back to the city. He had something to go on, something definite. At nine that night he prowled an alley behind Garven's store. Getting into the store wouldn't be hard. Joey had told him there was a rear window, unbarred and so loose that it could be rattled open. He found the window and worked on it for twenty minutes. Joey had been a bit optimistic about the way it would open, but finally Crane succeeded in working the catch loose.

He clambered through, suddenly realizing he was not young any more. It took all his strength and he was puffing badly when he got inside. This was the rear room behind the store, where Garven had been found dead. Nothing had been disturbed. Even the broken clocks were still littering the floor and a sinister dark spot indicated where Garven had fallen.

The massive, old-fashioned safe was there too. Crane knew the combination. Joey had provided that. Crane knelt beside the safe and began twirling the dial, but it was very dark. He turned on a light, got the safe door open and peered inside.

There was no tin box, painted red!

He sighed with relief and closed the safe door. He was straightening when he saw the shadow across the floor and then a gun was pointed at him. Behind the gun was a patrolman.

"Reach," the cop ordered crisply. "What kind of a crook are you, turning on lights in a place where a murder has been committed and which we have orders to keep an eye on. So help me, you mugs get dumber by the day!"

Crane said, "I'm no crook. My son was arrested for the murder in this store. Lieutenant Brennan knows all about it. Call him, please. You've got to let me go. I haven't stolen anything. I'm only trying to prove my son is innocent."

The cop looked skeptical, but finally he did telephone Brennan who promised to come right over. He was there promptly and Crane told him the story. Brennan shook his head.

"Will you never give up, Crane? So there was a red tin box. So Seifert is the murderer. So what? You can't

prove one thing. Now you've broken into this place and committed a felony. I'm sorry, Crane, but you're under arrest."

Crane leaned weakly against the back of a chair. "Lieutenant, I know I'm right. I admit breaking in here but if what I did saves the life of an innocent man, I don't think any court would hold me. All I need is a chance."

"A chance?" Brennan cried. "Man alive, you've had a dozen chances."

"Just let me go through with this plan," Crane begged. "If it fails, I'll surrender myself. You know I wouldn't run away, just as you know I'm not a thief."

Brennan rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Look, if I give you this break and it doesn't pan out, I'll expect you at my office. Do you understand? If you don't show up, I'll send for you."

"Thank you, Lieutenant," Crane said. "Next week I'll treat you to the best dinner in town. With all the liquor you can drink. Personally—for the first time in my life—I'm going to get drunk. Yes sir, that night I'm going to get cock-eyed. Joey will be there to take care of me. Wait and see."

"I won't go on any diet," Brennan said wryly, "waiting for that dinner to roll around. Keep your nose clean, Crane. And stop busting into places. You're no burglar."

Crane shook hands with him and hurried away. He hailed a cab, checked his money and found it sufficient. He went straight home and looked for a tin cash box in the attic. He found it and applied a coat of fast drying red paint. He hoped it now closely resembled the one Joey had described.

He took another cab to Seifert's home, dismissed it some distance away and approached warily to study the place. He saw the maid and an elderly woman who could be the cook, depart, but the lights stayed on. Seifert was home.

SOFTLY Crane tried the back door. It was locked. He tried a window. That was locked too. Then he smiled, wrapped his soft felt hat around his fist and smashed one of the windows. That made considerable noise.

He got it open and climbed inside. He put his hat back on, held the red tin box prominently and he was apparently in the act of clambering out of the window when Seifert came into the room. Seifert held a gun.

Crane suddenly threw the red tin box out in the night. "Run with it," he shrieked. "Run as fast as you can. He's got a gun!"

There were hurried steps outside. Someone really was there, running off with the tin box. Crane was so startled that he became an easy victim when Seifert slugged him with the barrel of the weapon. The blow sent Crane to his knees. Seifert was at the window, torn between a desire to go out of it and after whoever had run off with the tin box—or to remain inside and guard Crane. He decided to stay, after listening intently for a couple of minutes.

Crane got up slowly and held his hands rigidly at his sides. The idea that he was no detective was being pressed deeper and deeper into his consciousness. Seifert held a gun and all the cards now. He'd be a hard man to fool.

At a curt command from Seifert he walked to the living room and sat down. Seifert kept the gun trained on him. Seifert said, "Well, how long do you think you can keep pestering a man?"

"This is the last time," Crane promised. "From now on only the police will bother you. My son happened to know the truth about all this, though he never associated the proper ideas. He knew about the red tin box and what it contained. He knew that Garven sold cheap second-hand clocks for big sums. That's as far as my son got, but I started from there."

"And you wound up here," Seifert smiled insolently. "Go on, Crane. You're crazy but interesting."

"Darn right I'm interesting," Crane said. "So is this whole case. We've got Garven, a clock dealer, who knew nothing about clocks, but who sold a valuable clock for twenty dollars even in the face of your offer of three hundred, an offer you made because you happened to be a collector and you wanted the clock. Garven was money hungry. So why did he do it? There's only one answer. Garven knew he'd get your three hundred anyway—and my twenty besides."

Seifert smiled thinly. "And what makes you assume such a preposterous opinion?"

"Garven wasn't in the clock selling business," Crane said flatly. "It was just a front. In that red box he had something valuable. Something you had to have. Something so important that you'd murder to get it. I think the tin box contained evidence used in black-

mailing you and others. I think that Garven used his clock shop as a front. His victims bought clocks. At fantastic prices, perhaps, but if they squawked there was legal evidence they'd paid their money for merchandise. There's no law against selling old clocks at high prices. The whole set-up was meant for blackmail. It had to be that. Nothing else fits the picture."

"Of course you can prove it," Seifert smirked.

"Wait until my friend opens that red tin box," Crane said. "Garven wouldn't have really needed my son to work for him, if all he did was operate that clock store. But Garven's blackmailing business kept him busy. He was the operating agent of a blackmail ring. So he hired Joey to take care of the store while he went out looking for more evidence, or getting into communication with his victims. What did Garven care about the men who were paying off? I wondered why he was so nasty to you—a potential customer."

"So he was nasty to me," Seifert said. "For that I killed him."

"After I left, you killed him and took the red tin box," Crane accused. "You never planned it so that my son would be convicted of the crime, but it was a lucky break when that happened and you made the best of it. How could you admit being my son's alibi witness without involving yourself? You had slipped away from that banquet and your absence was never noticed. You reset Garven's clocks to determine the time for the police. Then you smashed them."

"Get up," Seifert ordered. "Walk ahead of me. I think you're bluffing and you never even saw the red box. Tell me—where did you find it?"

**B**UT the old chemist set his lips defiantly. He'd gone as far as he dared.

"Why should I talk?" Crane argued. "I refuse to say another word."

"Upstairs with you," Seifert snapped.

"You're all done," Crane said. "Why don't you give up? My friend will have the red box in the hands of the police very soon. They'll come out here. You heard my friend running away."

"Yes," Seifert said. "Yes, I did. Quite clearly. That's why I realize there isn't much use holding back. But you are the only witness against me, Crane. You forgot that. First though, I want to be sure you really had the red box."

Upstairs, Crane was forced into a

small room without windows. It was a fireproof room where Seifert seemed to have all his precious clocks on exhibit. The ticking of fifty of them made the place sound like a boiler factory. Seifert closed the door, locked it and hurried away somewhere to see about the red box.

Crane sighed. Seifert would find his red box, know the whole thing had been a bluff and be forced to kill again. Crane wondered what he could do about it. He also wondered who had been outside the window downstairs and run off with the red box.

Crane stared at several of the clocks and wished they'd stop ticking. It was bad enough to know he'd failed and was going to die for it, but he hated to have fifty clocks ticking away his life all at once. Then he had an idea.

Ten minutes later Seifert unlocked the door and stepped inside. Under his arm was the genuine red box and Seifert was smiling broadly.

"You're a fool, Crane. You guessed right about my killing Garven and my reasons for doing it. I kept the red box and its contents because some of Garven's victims were influential people who might help me if I got caught. Now I won't be caught. Your friend, who ran away in the darkness, will have nothing for his pains. But you—ah—you'll have plenty. I'm forced to kill you, Crane. You've brought it upon yourself."

Crane eyed the clocks. He looked at Seifert and kept talking. He had to use up three minutes. Seifert's gun leveled, the man backed up a couple of steps. His trigger finger tightened.

Then twenty of the clocks went off all at once. Twenty alarm clocks of all shapes, sizes and vintages. They made a clamor that rivaled nothing Crane had ever heard. They made Seifert whirl around in surprise. The man was on edge anyway and the sudden jangling

was enough to unnerve him. Crane leaped. The gun spat flame, but it had been held very unsteadily and the bullet missed.

Crane threw a punch. It landed accurately enough, but there was no steam behind it and it didn't stop Seifert. He aimed a blow at Crane with the gun. The barrel grazed Crane's skull and Crane almost fell. He clutched at the back of a chair, dazed and weak. Now he was finished. Joey would die the way of a murderer. Seifert would find a means to get rid of a corpse easily enough. He was going to shoot. He was going to pull the trigger—now!

Seifert didn't. Lieutenant Brennan crept up behind him and used a black-jack with plenty of force.

Later Brennan told Crane how he'd trailed him, saw him enter the window, saw the red box come flying out and how he'd picked it up and scampered off. Then he'd found that the box was empty.

Crane said, "I did that to make Seifert go to the place where he had the real box hidden. We might not have located it otherwise."

Brennan wagged his head. "You're a stubborn fool, an idiot and a grand guy, Crane. I heard enough to convict Seifert, even if the stuff in that red box doesn't. I'm betting he'll talk—to bargain for his life."

"And Joey—what about Joey?"

"He'll be free in a little while. A few days maybe. The wheels of the law turn slowly. And that robbery charge Garven made will fall to pieces, too. And Crane—don't forget that date the three of us have. I almost sent an innocent youth to the chair. So I'm going to get drunk too. It might make me forget—for a few minutes—how close I came to being a legal murderer."

"Yes," Crane smiled. "Yes. But Joey will be there. To take care of both of us."

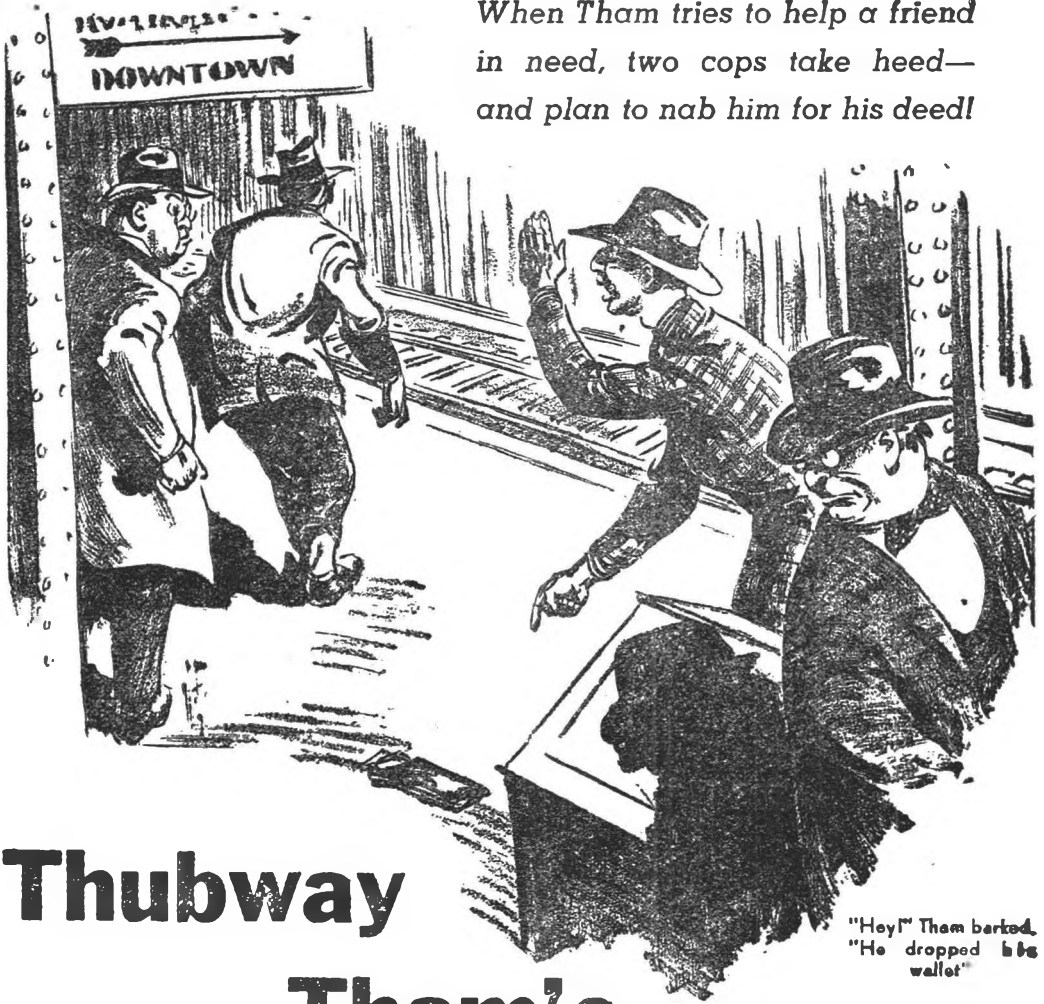
COMING NEXT ISSUE

# THE BODY IN THE BAR

*A Thrill-Packed Detective Novelet*

By D. L. CHAMPION

*When Tham tries to help a friend  
in need, two cops take heed—  
and plan to nab him for his deed!*



# Thubway Tham's

# Better Thelf

**T**HAT rainy evening, Thubway Tham, the little pickpocket noted for working in the subway and lisping when he spoke, was stretched on the bed in his room in the lodging house operated by "Nosey" Moore, retired burglar.

Tham was half undressed and mentally relaxed. His cheap radio set had been turned on, and Tham had been listening to the report of a mediocre fistic combat. The fight over, Tham was too comfortable to get up and turn off the radio. And so it happened that Tham

heard a so-called radio philosopher giving the listening public fifteen minutes of what he termed the better way of life.

"So, my dear radio friends, always let

**By JOHNSTON McCULLY**

your better self exert its influence upon you," the philosopher said. "Do not fight it off. Listen to the dictates of your better self, and you will be finding yourself in less difficulties, will enjoy peace of mind. The inner speaking of your better self is what may be called, in the vulgar vernacular of the street, a hunch. Always do as your better self suggests, and you'll win every time."

Tham left the bed to get a drink of water, and turned off the radio. "Thilly ath!" he muttered. "Alwayth lithen to your better thelf, huh? But thuppoth your better thelf ith not thpeakin' to you when you want to lithen?"

Tham was tired and decided to retire. He was low in funds, a chronic state with him, and tomorrow he would have to lift a leather in an effort to replenish his purse. And he wanted a night of good sleep to steady his nerves and fit himself for the job.

As he dressed the following morning, he found that the words of the radio philosopher had been retained by his memory. He descended the rickety stairs to the floor below, where Nosey Moore sat behind his battered desk reading a morning newspaper. Mr. Moore was one to keep a keen eye on the comings and goings of his tenants, especially the goings.

"Good mornin', Tham," Nosey greeted.

"Good mornin', Nothey," Tham replied. "How ith your better thelf thith mornin'?"

Mr. Moore looked startled. "How's that?" he asked.

"Alwayth lithen to your better thelf, Nothey. If you do that you will have peath of mind and life for you will be like a bed of rotheth."

"Bed of roses . . . better self?" Nosey muttered. "Tham, I've known you to drink a beer now and then, and even take a shot of harder stuff on festive occasions such as New Year's Day. But I never suspected, boy, that you were hitting the hop. Keep off it, Tham. Many a good man has gone to ruin—"

"What ith all thith?" Tham interrupted. "I do not hit hop, and never will. My goodneth! I wath jutht thpeakin' of your better thelf. You thurprithe me, Nothey. I thought you had thome intelligenth."

"You feel all right, Tham?" Nosey

asked. "Feel feverish or light in the head? Have dizzy spells?"

"I am all right," Tham declared, "exthept I am a little light in the pocket. The heat ith on, and tho I have not been workin' much. Copth have been ath thick ath flieth around a buthted watermelon."

"I know," Nosey said, sympathetically. "The cops get hot every so often. Habit with 'em. Speaking of money—"

"My rent ith not due for three days," Tham interjected.

"I am not worrying about the rent, Tham. I was about to make a touch."

"You broke, Nothey?" Surprise was in Tham's voice. It was notorious that Nosey Moore had been profligate with his funds while following the profession of burglary, but had changed into a miser after turning honest.

"Oh, I manage to get along, Tham," Nosey replied. "I was thinkin' of Dave Trent. The boys are chippin' in to give him a goin'-away present."

"Goin'-away prethent? What ith thith about Dave Trent?"

"His appeal was turned down, Tham. He has to go to the Big House day after tomorrow. It's his third trip, Tham, and he'll probably be there for the rest of his life, unless he can get a parole in a few years."

"That ith tough," Tham commented.

"I feel sorry for Dave—he never had a chance," Nosey said. "I've known him since he was a kid. Got kicked around, couldn't ever hold a job, went hungry a lot. One of those guys who just never can get along, Tham."

"Tough," Tham repeated. "Tho the judge threw the book at him, huh?"

"His first pinch . . . he had a job on the docks when he was little more'n a kid. Got kicked and cuffed around a lot—he's the kind others pick on. He got fired off the job and went hungry awhile and got a job in a little delicatessen shop. He got fired there for bein' too slow. Then, he sure did go hungry. Ragged shoes and no overcoat, too, and winter comin' on. He was passin' the delicatessen one day and the boss called him. Wanted him to watch the shop while he unpacked goods in the rear room. Dave took off his hat and got behind the counter. Maybe he'd get a quarter and could buy somethin' to eat, he thought.

"He got to thinkin' of how cold he'd



be in winter if he couldn't get a job—and right then jobs were hard to find. He remembered how the storekeeper piled away profits, ran the place cheap, and was always braggin' about his poker games and race bettin'. Nobody was in the store, so he opened the cash register to take a few bucks—and the storekeeper came in and caught him."

"Caught him cold, huh?" Tham asked.

**N**OSEY nodded. "Dave didn't even put up a fight. No money for a mouthpiece. He was sentenced for three years. When he got out, he had an odd job here and there, and friends helped him, but he never could get goin'. The cops pestered him and kept him movin' around.

"A gang of loft thieves got him for a lookout. Cops were watchin'. They caught the gang, and Dave. This time he was handed five to ten and served six years. Never got a thin dime out of either job.

"Dave was desperate when he pulled this third trick. He'd been hungry and ragged for a long time. Tried a stickup with a fake gun, and the man he tried to stick up slapped him down and yelled for the cops. A young mouthpiece took his case, but he couldn't do anything. The boys dug up money for an appeal, and Dave stayed in jail. The lawyer worked for nothin'. Now, Dave gets twenty years—which practically means life. Not a cent in his ragged clothes. So the boys are chippin' in to make up a little fund for cigarettes and stuff, and the young lawyer will deposit it with the warden."

"If I have any luck today, you can count me in," Tham told him, promptly.

"I know you'll do all you can, Tham. I chipped in fifty, and a few of the boys five or ten each. Not a lot knew Dave. He didn't hang around with crooks much. Just a hard-luck guy. You couldn't call him a reg'lar crook."

Tham went on down to the street thinking of Dave Trent and his trouble. Tough! Seemed like a man had a right to food and clothing in life. It wasn't Dave Trent's fault, Tham decided, that he had been born a person without a strong character, one of the kind that always gets pushed around.

He went to the usual little restaurant

for breakfast, intending afterward a leisurely stroll up Broadway to Times Square. There, he would descend into his beloved subway, also his work ground. He wanted a little money for rent and food, and he hoped he could lift a leather with enough in it so he could contribute liberally to the Dave Trent fund.

He found the words of the radio philosopher still ringing in his head, much as a man sometimes will find an old song running around through his memory cells. Leaving the restaurant, he crossed the street, went up the Avenue and turned into Madison Square, intending to sit on a bench there for an hour or so and enjoy the fine day and watch the human parade.

From the corner of his eye, he saw he was being followed. Detective Craddock, his old enemy, was approaching and overhauling him. It had been almost a week since he had seen Craddock.

Tham went to a bench and sat down and lit a cigarette, giving no indication he knew Craddock to be in the vicinity. The detective came up and sat down beside him. Tham turned his head and pretended surprise.

"Howdy, Craddock!" he greeted. "Where you been? Haven't then you for dayth and dayth."

"Witness in court, Tham," Craddock replied. "A big-time crook. He was sent up for five years. Now that it's over, Tham, I can relax by watching some small-timers—like you."

"Tho?" Tham saw Craddock's grin and knew the detective was in the mood for an attempt at repartee, wherein Tham generally bested him.

"Tham, I want to talk to you," Craddock said, seriously. "No funnin'. I really like you, boy, because you're clever. But, after all, I'm a cop and you're a dip. I've been after you a long time, and you've dodged me. But your luck can't hold out forever, Tham. Some day I'll nab you with the goods. And then, much as I hate to do it, I'll do my duty, Tham."

"It theemth to me," Tham rejoined, "that all I hear theth dayth ith ther-month."

"Sermons, Tham?"

**T**HAM grinned. "Lath night, thome guy on the radio who thaid he wath a philothropher, thaid we should alwayth lithen to our better thelveth. If

we would, and do what our better thelveth tell us, we would be a lot happier, he thaid—or wordth to that effect."

"True, Tham, very true. But it puts you behind the eight ball."

"And how ith that, Craddock?"

"To listen to your better self, Tham, you have to possess a better self, in the first place, to which to listen. Have you a better self, Tham?"

"Thomethin' ith talkin' to me at timeth."

"That, Tham, is probably your conscience," Craddock informed him.

"Everybody has one of those. But a better self—that's different, Tham. A lot of people do not have them."

"Do cophth have 'em?" Tham asked.

"I may say so, Tham."

"You may, Craddock, but who would believe you?" Tham wanted to know.

"If your better self is talking to you now, Tham, what does it say?" Craddock asked. "Is it telling you to lead a righteous life and so avoid a term in the clink? Does it warn you that up at the Big House there is a cell with its door yawning to close behind you when you enter?"

"Nothin' like that, Craddock. It ith thayin' that it would be better if I did not athothiate with cophth. It thayth that cophth have a bad influenth on an innothenth perthion."

"Interesting," Craddock commented.

"Tham, do you have it in mind to take a ride in the subway today?"

"Potthibly, Craddock. I have been thinkin' of takin' a ride uptown and goin' to the Thentral Park thoo."

"The zoo, Tham?"

"Yeth. They have thome cute monkeyth up there. I like to watch 'em, Craddock, and compare them with cophth. They have much in common, cophth and monkeyth, ath the thayin' ith."

"You're wasting your time, Tham. Monkeys don't carry fat wallets."

"Jutht what are you tryin' to inthinate, thir?" Tham asked.

As they had talked, Tham had noticed an individual hanging around in the vicinity, pretending to be watching the antics of the sparrows and pigeons as they scrambled for scraps of food left in the Square by lunching office girls. But the man was not the type, Tham decided, to be interested in ornithology.

Tham identified him as a plainclothesman. Moreover, Tham on one occasion had had a friend point the man out and name him as Jim Ward, a one-time flat-foot now elevated to plain clothes. And this Jim Ward, Tham had been told, was one of those clever cops who acted parts and set traps to catch people off guard and nab them.

As he continued his repartee with Craddock, Tham watched the plainclothesman cautiously. And he saw Jim Ward make a signal with his left hand, a signal that meant, "I'm here and ready. I'll take him."

So, this was a plant! Craddock had spotted Tham for Jim Ward, and Ward would contact him and try some trap.

The old double-tail stunt, Tham thought. It really was beneath Craddock, who had tried it before without effect. The double tail—where one cop tailed in such a manner that the man he tailed knew it. The first cop then became careless, apparently, and if the man tailed made a bad move, the second cop moved in for the kill.

Tham was incensed. It was an insult to think he would fall for an old one like that.

HE was sure that was what the two cops were trying when, a moment after receiving the plainclothesman's signal, Craddock rose from the bench.

"Well, Tham, I have chores to do," Craddock said. "I implore you, boy, to behave yourself. There have been several pocket robberies in the subway recently, and the Commissioner is slightly irked. There are cops thick in the subway, Tham."

"Oh, that ith none of my conthern!" Tham replied. "May I offer you thome advithe, Craddock?"

"Such as what?"

"Alwaysith lithen to your better thelf, Craddock. Do ath it thuggeth. You will be happier, Craddock."

"The same to you," Craddock replied, and swaggered along the walk toward the Avenue.

After a moment, Thubway Tham rose from the bench and left Madison Square to wander over to Broadway and start uptown. He observed that Jim Ward, the plainclothesman, was tailing him carefully. Craddock had gone ahead up the Avenue and had cut over to Broadway when he saw Tham start through the

side street. The double tail was at work.

Tham's problem was to lift a leather without incurring disaster. He had his own monetary needs to supply, and he wanted also to do something for Dave Trent, the unfortunate who faced a prison cell for the third time, and this time for a long stay. Tham had a feeling of genuine pity and sorrow for Dave Trent.

As he neared Times Square, he made sure that Jim Ward was still tailing him. In fact, Ward had come quite close to him. Tham stopped on a corner to light a cigarette, and the plainclothesman came to a stop beside him.

Ward was pretending to be intoxicated. His manner, and his thick speech as he talked to himself within a few feet of Tham, were good acting. But he did not have the flushed face and bleary eyes of a man genuinely intoxicated, and Tham suppressed a grin.

Jim Ward put on the rest of his act. He kept mumbling something like, "Nine hundred dollars—should have one good time in my life on that roll . . . Make it last a month . . ."

From a hip pocket, the plainclothesman extracted a bulging wallet. He opened it so Tham could see that it was stuffed with currency. Tham knew that setup. If he lifted the wallet, he would be nabbed. The currency, undoubtedly marked cleverly, would be found on him, and the evidence would be conclusive enough to convince any jury. They were out to get him, Tham decided.

Perhaps, he thought, he had better dodge Jim Ward, and also Craddock—if the latter happened to be in the vicinity. And if he could not do that, perhaps he should return home and call it a bad afternoon, and possibly try again at night when the subway was jammed with after-theater crowds.

Tham leaned against the corner of the building and smoked and watched the passersby. From the near distance, Jim Ward was watching him. Of all times, Tham thought! When he wanted to help out Dave Trent and do what he considered was a little good for a fellowman!

The traffic lights changed, and a jam of people hurried across the street and stepped on the curb near Tham, jostling and bumping. Then, out of the crowd, stepped two men to a vacant space against the wall quite near Tham.

"Never so surprised in my life!" one was saying. "Old Bart Sanders! Haven't seen you for four years or so, Bart."

"That's right, Ed."

"How's things?"

"The sweetest ever, Ed. This racket is lining my pockets with easy dough."

THAM gave the pair a swift look. The man the other had called Bart Sanders was the robust outdoor type. Tall, heavy in body, jovial, husky—he looked like a westerner in town for a little expensive fun. He wore western clothes and a ten-gallon hat. His fat face was wreathed in smiles.

"It's like this, Ed," Sanders told his friend, "I dress and play the part. The honest, jovial man from the great west! A whisky-drinkin', poker-playin' galoot, friendly with everybody and free with talk, advice and money."

"What's the lay, Bart?"

"One of the oldest—fake mining and oil stocks. A man who looked like a broker couldn't sell a share. But Bart Sanders can. He's in town for a high old time, and he makes friends, and is always willin' to let his new friends in on somethin' soft. My pockets are stuffed with money, Ed."

"Lucky boy! I've been playing in hard luck myself. All I can do to keep up a front."

"I'll give you a helpin' hand, Ed. I'll take you in with me. There's a little cream to be skimmed off the milk of human kindness yet, and then I change names and hit for new and greener pastures. Look, Ed!"

Thubway Tham saw the fat, jovial Bart Sanders shove a hand into his left coat pocket and bring forth a bundle of currency that would have stuffed a large-sized wallet.

"Just the afternoon's spendin' money, Ed," he said. "Got plenty more at the hotel. Let's have a party."

"No dough for parties."

"Don't make me mad, Ed. You helped me out a couple times. I'll give you a fistful of dough. Tell you what! I want to go to Penn Station on the subway and get a little grip I put in a locker there for safe-keepin'. We'll ride down and get it, and then we'll ride back here and go to my hotel suite. It's just up the street there."

"All right, Bart."

"We'll have a few drinks to celebrate

our meetin' like this, then get down to cases. I'll cut you in on my deal. Then we'll have dinner somewhere and do the town. Won't take 'no' for an answer, Ed!"

"Okay, Bart, if you feel that way about it."

They moved to the curb to wait for the traffic light to change. Thubway Tham was sure that Jim Ward, the plainclothesman, had not overheard their talk nor had observed Tham's interest in them. And now Jim Ward, still feigning drunkenness, bumped against Tham.

"Pardon me, Bud. You got change for a twenty?" he asked Tham, pulling the stuffed wallet from his pocket.

"Thorrry, but I haven't," Tham replied. "Maybe you can get it changed in the thigar thtore acroth the thtreet."

"Thanks, Bud!"

The traffic light flashed green, and Tham stepped down off the curb behind Bart Sanders and his old friend, Ed. Tham had decided he would get that wad of currency from the swindler if possible—if he could get away from the plainclothesman. The latter, he knew, was at his heels. He had flashed the stuffed wallet as a temptation, hoping Tham would follow him and try to take it.

**A**CROSS the street, Tham drew closer to Bart Sanders and his companion. He saw Jim Ward dart into the cigar store and emerge again almost immediately without spending time enough inside to have a bill changed. Ward brushed past him and started down the stairs to the Times Square subway platform.

Tham followed the plainclothesman down the stairs for the simple reason that the swindler and his friend were a step ahead of Ward. It was Thubway Tham's task to separate them and follow Bart Sanders and get the roll in Sanders' side pocket. So he hung back slightly, hoping Ward would board a train thinking Tham would follow, and then Tham could miss the train and continue to follow his quarry.

The bogus breezy westerner and his friend, Ed, went to the platform and waited for a downtown express. Tham pretended to be fussing around trying to get a handkerchief out of his pocket. His face was a mask and his manner

that of a bored man.

He caught Ward glancing at him, but looked away as if he had not seen the plainclothesman. The express rolled into the station, and Tham's quarry got aboard with his friend. But Ward stepped into the car also.

Tham followed them, yawning. He was careful to not let Ward or anybody else suspect he was interested in the man in the big western hat. He bumped along the crowded aisle of the car and moved close to Ward, which was what the plainclothesman had expected.

But Tham upset Ward's expectations there. He did not move close enough. He did not reveal that he knew Ward was in existence. When the express pulled into Penn Station, he went out upon the platform a distance behind his real quarry, but not far enough to lose sight of him.

Ward drifted away and turned back to trail Tham. While the bogus westerner retrieved from the locker the little grip he had mentioned, Tham kept him in sight, but devoted his time to getting a railroad time table. He stuffed it into his pocket and followed Bart Sanders and Ed through the crowd again. They went to the subway platform, undoubtedly with the intention of returning to Times Square and going to Sanders' hotel, as they had planned.

Tham had not caught sight of Craddock. If he was double-tailing Tham, Craddock was very skillful about it. Tham kept a distant eye on the pair he was following, and when the train approached he crowded forward with the others, getting close to Sanders again.

And Jim Ward, the plainclothesman, boarded the car a step behind him!

Inwardly, Tham raged, but he did not show his rage in his face. Here was a big haul he would miss unless he acted quickly. If the swindler and his pal left the subway and went to the former's hotel, Tham's chance of getting the wad of bills would be gone.

The plainclothesman bumped against Tham again and spoke a drunken apology. He hung to a strap and swayed with the action of the train, but Tham made no effort to go after the wallet. As the train approached the Times Square station, Tham began crowding along the aisle, getting nearer the bogus westerner.

There would be the usual crush of

people trying to leave the car and get into it at the station, Tham knew. In that scene of wild elbowing and jostling, perhaps he could get the westerner's wad of currency. But he had to be sure the eyes of Jim Ward were not upon him.

For a fleeting instant, Tham thought of giving up the task. But he needed money, and he wanted to help Dave Trent's going-away fund, and he felt it no more than justice that he should lift the roll of the swindler to help Dave.

HE would not be robbing an honest man, he knew. And he felt that Dave Trent, the bad luck man, on his way to the Big House for practically the rest of his natural life unless paroled, merited the money. It would be handled with the rest of the fund to Trent's attorney, and placed in care of the warden, and nobody would know from whence it came.

The train rolled to a stop. Tham crowded ahead toward the door with the others in the aisle. People grumbled and feet were trodden upon as usual. And the plainclothesman, trying hard again, bumped against Tham.

"Hello, Bud!" he said. "You here again? I ain't got that twenty changed yet."

He exhibited the wallet, clutched it as they left the car. And, as the crowd broke up, Jim Ward was a couple of steps ahead of Tham. Deliberately, he fumbled with the wallet as if trying to stuff it into his outside coat pocket—and the wallet missed the pocket and hit the platform.

The plainclothesman reeled on slowly, but did not turn to look. That warned Tham that a second tail was behind him, and he did not doubt that it was Craddock. And he knew better than to stoop and pick up that wallet.

If this was a frame, and he picked it up, he would be grabbed and accused of picking Ward's pocket. Known as a professional pickpocket, no judge and jury would believe otherwise.

"Hey!" Tham barked at a man passing. "Catch that drunk! He dropped his wallet."

Several men near heard him. One touched Ward and drew his attention to the wallet still on the platform. There was nothing natural for Ward to do but return to get the wallet. He eyed Tham as he picked it up.

"Thanks. Wanna give you a reward," Ward said.

"Never mind," Tham said. "Don't want any reward for bein' honest. You better take care of your money, Bud."

If it was a frame, any bill given him as a reward would probably be marked, and they might try to pin a theft charge on him.

Thubway Tham turned away quickly to walk toward the stairs, and came face to face with Craddock.

"Hello, Craddock," he said, easily. "Tho I thee your ugly fath again! I dethided not to go to the thoo. Enough monkeyth walkin' around the thtreeth and in the thubway."

Craddock beckoned him aside, his manner professional.

"Tham," he said, "I saw that wallet dropped and saw you see it. How come you didn't help yourself to some easy money?"

Tham grinned at him. "I'll tell you, Craddock," he replied. "My better thelf whithpered to me that it wath not the right thing to do. Alwayth lithen to your better thelf, Craddock."

"What were you doing at Penn Station, Tham?"

"Me? I wath gettin' a time table, Craddock. I thought maybe I might make a trip to vithit my old aunt up in New Hampshire. Ain't theen her in yearth. My aunt ith gettin' old. Family duty to go and thee her. My better thelf told me it wath the right thing to do."

Craddock glared at him. "And where are you going now, Tham, if I may ask?"

"Oh, you may athk," Tham replied. "I am goin' up to the thtreet and take a walk in the thunshine, and then go to my room at Nothey Moore'th."

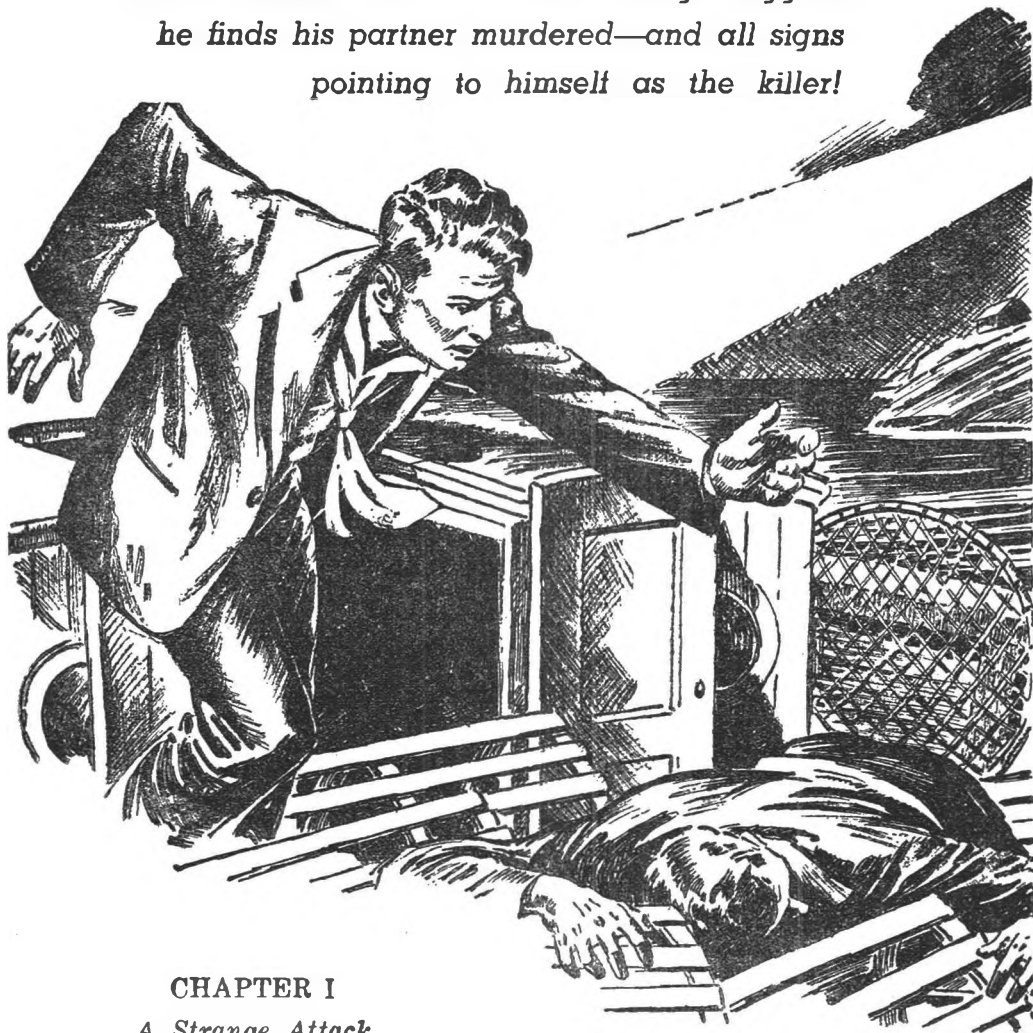
Tham smiled and went up the stairs, and turned down Broadway. He strolled along window-shopping, but after a time he made sure that Craddock was no longer tailing him. Only then did he take from his pocket the wad of currency he had lifted from the bogus westerner as they had crowded side by side out of the subway car. He inspected the money quickly and thrust it into his pocket.

It had been a good haul. He could help Dave Trent. He had funds for his personal needs—and he had taken some of his ill-gotten gains from a swindler. Moreover, he had dodged a police trap and fooled Craddock again.

It was a good day.

# Deep Waters

*When Adam Bennett comes to after being slugged,  
he finds his partner murdered—and all signs  
pointing to himself as the killer!*



## CHAPTER I

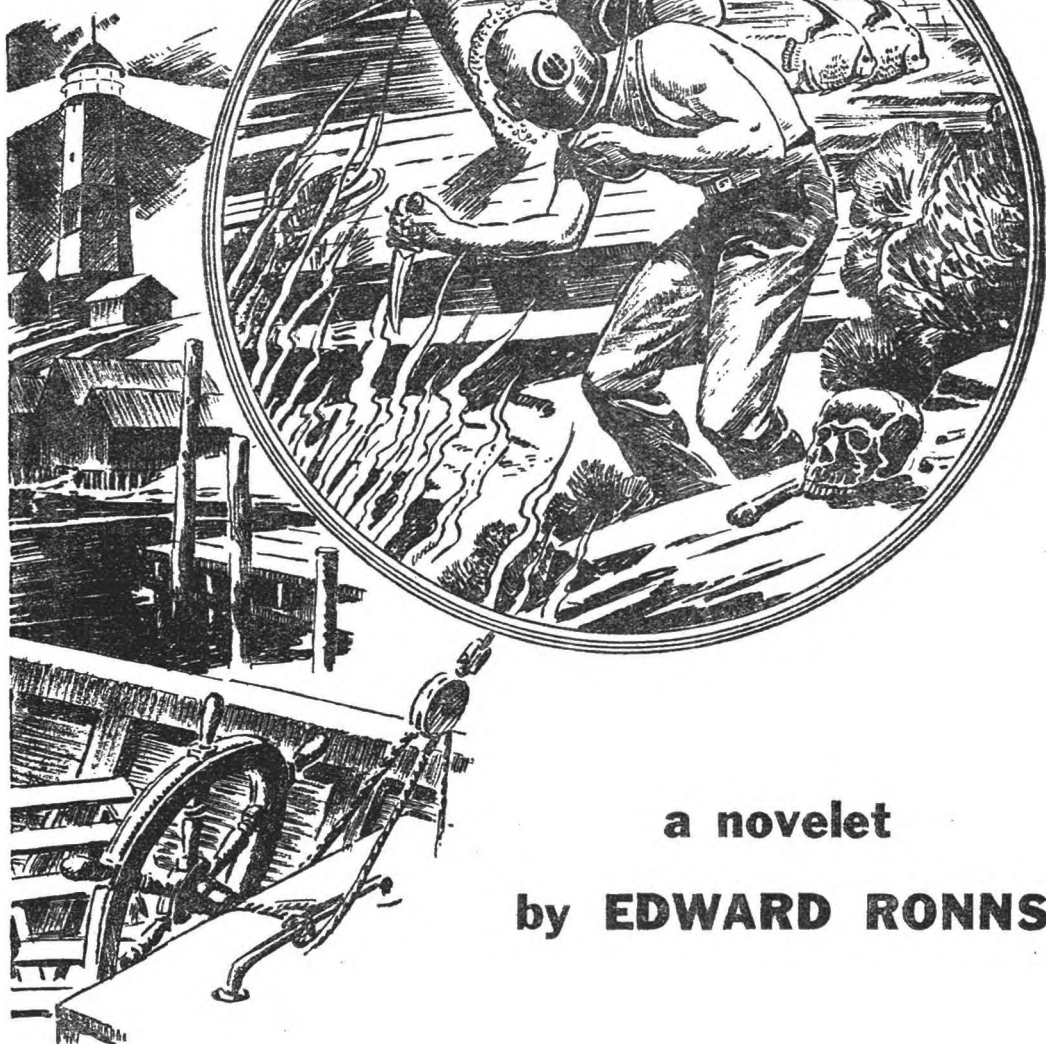
### *A Strange Attack*

**H**E COULDN'T breathe. There was sand in his mouth, in his nose and throat. Cold water washed up from the cove and licked at his outflung arm, washed his fingers that were dug convulsively into the coarse gravel. Starlight shone down on him, and the moon watched the spasmodic twitch of his body as he tried to lift his head—then collapsed again.

Adam Bennett groaned. The sound was muffled in the sand. The gentle surf that washed the beach seemed like a hammer pounding the pain that already tortured the back of his head. A wave rippled over his arm. The shock of the cold water made him stir again, and he summoned strength to roll over flat on his back. For a long moment he stared blankly at the starry sky, draw-



Adam found what  
he dreaded



a novelet

by **EDWARD RONNS**

ing in deep gulps of warm night air.

He tried to remember. He had driven down Point Road from town, around the harbor to the Trylgie estate, and turned in to the beach as he had been directed. The telephone call from Dave Olney, excited and urgent, had come almost as soon as he set foot in the door on his return to Blue Haven from Boston. He had been asked to come

here, and warned not to say anything of it to anyone.

He'd gone back to his car without seeing any of Dave's family, not even Jessica, and driven here to the lonely beach. He'd walked down from the sand road through the shadows of giant glacial boulders.

And he could remember no more.

Someone had slugged him on the back

of his head, viciously and efficiently. But it didn't make sense. He hadn't seen Dave Olney, whom he was supposed to meet, and he had no idea who had knocked him out, or why.

Adam drew a deep breath and sat up. For a moment, the night-shadowed landscape of lonely beach and starlit sky spun dizzily. He leaned back against a boulder, gasping. Then, gently, he felt the back of his head. His hair was clotted with blood and sand. He wondered how long he'd been unconscious, and he looked for his car. It was still there, stark against the moonlight on the high sand dune above him.

He felt for his wallet. He found it still in his pocket. Robbery, apparently, hadn't been the motive for the slugging. Blue Haven was only a little New England lobster village, swollen for a few summer months by an influx of summer tourists. Crime was relatively non-existent here.

There was plainly more to the attack than merely attempted robbery.

**D**OWN the beach, lights shone from the Trylgie place. Adam turned toward the sprawling estate, walking on slowly strengthening legs.

Tony Carter was the Trylgie caretaker. The lights, Adam soon saw, were in Tony's little shack by the yacht pier, not in the main beach house. The latter was dark and deserted. There was no yacht at the pier, either—only Tony's battered lobster boat, dimly visible in the light reflected across the harbor water.

Quite steady on his legs now, as he climbed the ladder from the beach to the pier, Adam turned to the lighted cabin. The pain in his head had dissolved into a throbbing ache, but a nagging sense of worry for Dave Olney's safety still knotted his stomach. He wished Dave had told him more over the telephone, and he knocked heavily and impatiently on Tony Carter's door.

Light poured out over the cluttered pier as the door was opened. Adam looked first at the knife in Tony's big, meaty hand—a fish knife, recently honed to razor sharpness. Tony Carter's face went with the knife—heavy, lowering and unfriendly. The man was dressed in a dirty plaid shirt of cotton and blue dungarees, his feet incongruously thrust into battered huaraches.

"Adam Bennett," the man grumbled.

"What the devil—"

"I need help, Tony," Adam said. "I'm looking for my partner, Dave Olney. I thought he might be here."

"Nobody here but me," the man said.

"Was Dave here a little while ago?" Adam insisted.

"Why do you want to know?"

"I'm looking for him" Adam said patiently. "He called me out here. Didn't he use your phone?"

"Maybe. Maybe not."

"Well, don't you know?"

"I just come in. I don't know nothing." The squat man still blocked the doorway. The knife in his hand was pointed upward at Adam's throat. "What's the matter with you, anyway?"

"Somebody just slugged me," Adam said. "Maybe it was you, Tony."

The man blinked. "Why should I slug you?"

"Maybe you could answer that one, too."

Adam looked at his watch. It was past ten o'clock. He had returned to Blue Haven about nine, and it took only ten minutes to drive here to the beach in response to Dave Olney's call. He must have been unconscious on the beach for over half an hour. His thoughts felt sticky and momentarily incoherent as he looked down at the knife in Carter's hand.

"What's that for?"

"For gutting fish," Carter said heavily. His mouth was a sneer, his eyes bright and alert. "And other things, sometimes." He was suddenly but grudgingly helpful. "I seen Dave's boat a while ago in Gull Cove, around the Point. Maybe Dave is still there."

"Thanks," Adam said. "Now let me use the phone. I'd better call Dave's folks first."

"No," the man said.

"What's the matter, Tony? What are you sore about?"

"It's Mr. Trylgie's phone, and not for me to lend you. I ain't sore. I don't like you, is all. Better get off this property, and quick."

"What are you afraid of, Tony?" Adam said. He tried to look beyond the caretaker into the cluttered shambles of the shack, but there was little to see—only a corner of the man's bunk, a solid oak table, and a pile of broken lobster pots awaiting repair. "Maybe you'd cooperate better if I called the police, Tony. I owe somebody something for

this egg on my head."

"Go ahead and call the cops," Carter said sullenly. "But not on this phone, Adam Bennett. Beat it."

There was no arguing with the knife in his hand. . . .

IT SEEMED a long walk across the dunes to the ocean side of the promontory. The surf was stronger here, and the wind was sharpened by the open sweep of the sea. There were few lights along this jagged, desolate strip of coast. Looking back, Adam wondered, momentarily, about the dark Trylgie estate.

The summer before, the Trylgie house had been photographed and discussed in all the newspapers, bringing an unwelcome notoriety to the village of Blue Haven. Otto Trylgie was an international figure, a diplomat and financier, known for his lavish entertaining and high connections. The publicity had been occasioned when his yacht, the *Vixen*, a common sight in Blue Haven harbor, had been swallowed up, with him and all the rest of those aboard, in an August nor'easter. No trace of the yacht was ever found.

The Trylgie estate thereafter remained dark, the object of law suits aimed at clearing the dead nan's tangled affairs. Tony Carter stayed on as caretaker, looking for ghosts, so to speak—sullenly waiting for the yacht and its owner who would never return. . . .

The cold whip of ocean air helped ease the ache in Adam's head. But his sense of worry had not been relieved by his encounter with Tony. He swept Gull Cove with anxious eyes, seeking the *Jessie II*, the lobster boat he and Dave Olney owned jointly. He almost missed it, as the white lines of outer surf distracted him, but then the reflected glow of the rotating lighthouse beam across the harbor touched on glass and metal, close inshore, and he saw the craft.

Half sliding, half running, he made it down the dune to the beach, wondering what the boat was doing in Gull Cove. Dave and he had never set traps here before. Splashing through a salt tidal creek, heedless of his city clothes, he approached the pier to which the boat was tied.

"Dave!" he called.

There was no answer—except the roar of the surf beyond the cove entrance. Forcing himself to breath even-

ly, he clambered across rotted planking toward the boat. There were no lights aboard. He saw the open cockpit in the stern, piled high with lobster traps. He listened to the mooring lines creak as the tide pulled at the boat. An air of desolation hung over the scene. Adam paused again.

"Dave! Are you aboard?"

No one replied. He stepped over the gunwale, surprised to note a long jagged rip in the sturdy wood, as if the *Jessie II* had sideswiped another boat. The trim white paint was scored off, and there was a long smear of dark green. Adam's sense of disaster grew stronger. Turning to the pilot house, he picked down and electric lamp from the overhead, and paused at the door. He was shocked by what he saw.

It looked as if someone had made a savage effort to tear the tiny cabin apart. His and Dave's equipment, boots, lines and instruments, lay strewn in jumbled heaps on the floor. The chart case was broken open. Three of their four coastal charts were trampled and muddled on the deck.

He looked around for the fourth chart, but it was gone.

He stood still, feeling the boat lift and fall with the pull of the tide. Loneliness and dread closed in on him. He turned the lantern toward the disheveled bunk—and stood frozen.

A man's artificial leg lay in the tangle of netting under the bunk—a cork and aluminum leg, Dave Olney's. Adam's face was gray and drawn as he looked at it. He and Dave had fought side by side from Bizerte to Salerno, where Dave had saved his life at the cost of his leg. Afterward, Adam, being without family, had succumbed to Dave's urgings and come to Blue Haven to form their partnership in the lobster business.

Adam didn't touch the leg now. But his worry had grown into grim certainty. Something had happened to Dave, or that leg wouldn't be here. Nor would this cabin be wrecked—by what was apparently, a life and death struggle. Whatever it was, it tied in somehow with the phone call and the attack on himself on the beach.

He turned abruptly toward the stern cockpit. He didn't have to look far. The slatted lobster traps were in a suspiciously jumbled heap. He removed only the topmost two—and found what he dreaded.

"Dave?" he whispered.

The surf and the wind answered him. Dave Olney was beyond ever making a reply.

## CHAPTER II

### *The Sheriff*



**C**RUMPLED on the boat's deck, Dave Olney was a shattered corpse among the lobster traps. His blond hair looked wet in the starlight. His eyes no longer held laughter.

Adam shuddered, felt his stomach tighten and go loose all at once. He fought against nausea. Someone had killed

Dave with a knife, insanely hacking and rending the one-legged man's face to ghastly ribbons. The entire rear end of the boat was a dark puddle of blood.

There was blood on Adam's clothes and on his hands as he slowly straightened, his face white in the gloom.

"Why did they do this to you, Dave?" he whispered.

The wind mocked at his question. He thought of Tony Carter's razor-sharp fish knife. But why would Tony want to kill Dave? And why had Dave called him here, and why had he been attacked on the beach and left unconscious to await discovery? If the sharp cold of the water washing over him hadn't revived him, Adam thought, he'd still be there on the beach. . . .

Suddenly, he saw a grim, incredible pattern in it all. Could it be that the killer had left him there in the hope he would be discovered by the police, perhaps blamed for Dave's death?

It was crazy. But not too crazy. There were some who might like to see Adam Bennett blamed for Dave Olney's death—Dave's step-father, Tom Olney, to name only one. Tom Olney had raised a terrific row when Dave's half sister, Jessica, had agreed to marry Adam. Tom Olney had refused to permit that marriage, branding Adam as an intruder, and it was plain that he resented Dave's sacrifice of a leg to save Adam's life. Dave had sided with Adam in the quarrel, of course, but how many of the townspeople, who knew of the row, would also know that?

But that still didn't explain why any-

one should kill Dave. Or why a chart would be stolen from the boat. Or why the *Jessie II* had been damaged, boarded and searched.

Adam had no time for further speculation. The answer to one of his questions came with the deep-throated throb of a powerful engine on the other side of the Point. Adam had heard Sheriff Sam Garfield's harbor patrol boat too often to mistake it. There was no doubt the police had been tipped off about the murder and were already looking for him. He could imagine what Tony's story to Garfield had been like. In only a matter of minutes, the police cruiser would round the Point for Gull Cove.

Moving fast, Adam touched the starter button and the *Jessie II* pulsed into life. Promptly, he cast off the lines and guided the lobster boat in reverse for the cove mouth.

He had no definite plan. But he realized that—desperate though it might be—if he could conceal Dave's body for a time, he would at least have some chance to make his own inquiries before circumstantial evidence drew its web tight about him—as tight as a hangman's noose.

The lobster boat pitched to the ocean swells as she backed from the quiet waters of the cove into the open sea. Adam throttled down, listening for the cruiser on the other side of the Point. He heard nothing except the mocking slap of water against his boat's side.

His hands sticky, he turned on a northwesterly course, urging the boat to maximum speed, fighting against the urge to look back at his grisly passenger in the stern. Twin lights from Deer Island winked at him from ahead. He turned the bow in that direction, wracking his memory for the contours of the coast. The channel between the island and the mainland was a treacherous run, even in daylight, and now the tide was flooding, fast and dangerous. With the compass smashed, he could navigate only by feeble starlight and the mainland glow.

He had been running five minutes when a flash astern reflected in his windshield. It was the sheriff's boat, rounding the Point. The police cruiser's beam was a long and dangerous finger, searching the sea for him.

Adam ducked instinctively as the light swung overhead, but he had already put a mile between himself and Gull

Cove, and the searchlight slashed harmlessly into the cove. Keeping the engine wide open, Adam bucked the swift tide until his boat trembled in every plank. Moments were precious. It wouldn't take Garfield long, he realized, to learn that the cove was empty, and then they would be after him with a vengeance.

THE break he was looking for in the shoreline appeared at last—a narrow gap in a high cliff through which the water raced madly. Locally, the slot was known as the Key, a narrow inlet that could be navigated only in the direction the tide was running. Once in here, the boat and Dave's body would be safe for twelve hours.

It took all of Adam's strength to keep the *Jessie II* on an even keel as he swung her into the racing stream. Jagged rocks loomed up on either quarter as the boat gained momentum with the current. With dismay he realized he apparently wasn't going to make it. But then, miraculously, he was through and into the Key, surrounded by a wall of darkness in which the surf crashed with reverberating echoes.

The wheel went sluggish as the boat turned broadside to the current. For several moments he swung helplessly in a giant eddy. Then something grated heavily on the boat's side, and the *Jessie II* veered, heeled over, and took water over the gunwale. Adam wrestled with the wheel. The keel bumped over sand, found water again, and then slid grindingly onto the beach. There was no further movement.

Shivering, Adam cut the ignition. He felt numb, and the pain in the back of his head came back with trip-hammer force. He forgot it, momentarily, as the frustrated snarl of the police boat sounded down the coast. Lights winked beyond the narrow channel by which he had entered the hideout, then passed on, the muttering engine gradually fading away.

Adam pulled himself together with an effort. He took off his bloodstained coat, buried it in deep sand, washing his hands in the surf. Whatever spatters of blood remained on his shirt could be explained as his own, from the wound on his scalp, unless Sheriff Garfield decided on a blood test.

Then he began the tough climb to the top of the scarp enclosing the inlet, and the long walk back to his car.

Jessica Olney saw him first. She stood by the road at the turn in the lane that led to the Olney house on Lookout Hill. It was after eleven o'clock. His headlights picked up her slim dark-haired figure as he made the turn, and he braked abruptly, his heart pounding crazily as she ran toward him.

"Ad?" she called. "Is that you?"

He held the door open for her and she climbed in. "Thank heavens you're back," she said. "There's been the most awful talk—" She touched his hand, then his face. She was wearing dark slacks and red-leather beach sandals. "Isn't Dave with you?"

"No," he said. "Listen, Jessie. You'll have to help me."

"What's happened, Ad? The sheriff was here, and Tom has been saying the most awful things. Rick Horner, too. He—"

"What's Rick doing here?" Adam asked.

"He came just before the sheriff, to see me. You know how Rick is. He won't believe I don't love him any more."

"Is Rick still here?"

"Yes, they're all here. Sam Garfield, too." Her eyes were enormous in her white face. "Ad, haven't you seen Dave at all? We heard you had a fight, that Dave—"

He didn't know what to say. She looked tiny and frightened in the car beside him. He stared at her wide gray eyes that searched his, her white silk blouse on which her dark hair fell in soft waves. He looked beyond her to the house on the hill.

"Tell me what happened here, Jessie?" he said. "Who told you Dave and I had a fight?"

"Ma heard it first. Someone telephoned. But we don't know who it was, because she fainted before she could say a word. Just Ma and myself were here then, but Tom came in with Rick Horner only a moment later, while I was still trying to help her."

"Didn't she know who it was who called?"

"She just says a man's voice told her Dave was dead, that you and Dave had a terrible fight and that you had—you—you had—"

"I didn't kill him," Adam said sharply. "You know that."

"Yes, but who—?"

"I don't know," Adam said. "What

time was this call, Jesse?"

"About nine-thirty."

"And when did the sheriff show up?"

"I'm not sure. Maybe forty minutes later. He said he'd had the same type of phone call and he wanted to know if you were back from Boston. I had to tell him you were, Adam, because your luggage was in plain sight in the hallway, by the telephone. But you weren't here when Ma and I got home from the movies. That was just after nine." The girl took her hand from his and twisted to face him. "Where did you go, Ad? Where've you been?"

**H**E had to tell her the truth. No matter what happened, he had to have faith in someone.

He spoke slowly, beginning with his return from Boston to find the house empty and the phone ringing with Dave's call. He tried to tell it as gently as possible, but he suspected that Jessica knew what was coming at once. She sat stiffly, as if expecting a physical blow, until he told her of finding Dave's body. Then she didn't weep. She merely slumped, the starch going out of her, her eyes staring blindly at the house ahead of them.

"Jessie," Adam said softly, "you do believe me, don't you? You know I wouldn't kill Dave. He was your brother, and to me he was more than a brother. I had no reason to quarrel with him. The business was going swell. There was nothing in the world between us."

She spoke quietly, her eyes still dry. "I believe you, Ad, but no one else will. You don't know how people here regard outsiders. They'll be quick to pin the guilt on you, rather than on one of their own kind. And they'll find motives enough, one way or another."

"Jessie—"

"It's all right, Adam. I'll be all right."

"I'll need help. They'll find the boat and Dave's body in the morning. Until then, of course, there's nothing they can do."

"I know. I'll help you all I can."

He felt dissatisfied, uneasy about the flat coldness in her face and her words. He wished she would cry. He wanted to see normal tears of grief in her eyes. But her gaze was dry and distant.

He drew a deep breath. "Let's go in. I might as well face them and get it over with."

The huge living room was crowded when he followed Jessie inside.

"Here he is, now," someone said sharply, and Mrs. Olney turned from the window overlooking the dark harbor and stared as if he were a stranger.

A question trembled on her pale lips, but she glanced instead to her husband, Tom Olney, who took a ponderous step from the fireplace.

"It's about time you showed up, Adam," he said. "We've been worried sick. Is Dave with you?"

Tom Olney was a portly man with thick white hair, a florid face, and pale blue eyes. His voice held a politician's geniality at most times, and he was a local political power. But he wasn't genial now.

"No. I don't know anything about Dave." Adam matched the cold dislike in the big man's voice. He and Tom Olney had clashed ever since he had first arrived in Blue Haven. "Jessie told me what's happened, and I'll begin by saying I know nothing about it. I haven't seen Dave, I didn't quarrel with him, and I can't help you locate him."

A new voice interrupted. "No need for a chip on your shoulder, Ad. We're only trying to see if there's any truth in what we heard. Probably it's nonsense, but we have to make sure."

It was Sheriff Garfield. Tall, sun-browned, and surprisingly young for his position of authority, Sam Garfield had intelligent eyes and a soft manner of speaking that was disarming. He swung to Jessie's taut figure.

"Have you told him, Miss Olney?"

Her chin came up. "I thought it only fair to warn him."

Garfield nodded. "Rick said you would. I guess that leaves it up to you, Adam, to set us straight on this."

Adam didn't answer. He knew the sheriff hadn't missed the blood spots on his shirt, although, so far, Jessie seemed unaware of his wound. The room wavered as he fought down momentary dizziness to look at Rick Horner.

"You're among friends, Adam," Rick said. "We're the ones you can trust."

Rick Horner was a modern fisherman, owner of a fleet of draggers and seiners, a leader of the waterfront. He was as tall as Adam, but heavier, with thick black hair and dark brows. His pale eyes were friendly, his voice soft.

Adam said grimly, "I know nothing about this rumor that I killed Dave."



## CHAPTER III

*Knife Fighter*

GARFIELD considered that for a moment. "Where have you been all this time, then?" he asked.

"Dave called me when I got here. He wanted to see me. He told me to meet him at the Trylgie estate, but he wasn't around when I arrived. Somebody slugged me, and I was out cold for half an hour. Then I went to see Tony Carter, and he said our boat was in Gull Cove, but it wasn't. I must have passed out again. When I finally came to, I drove back here. That's all I know.

"You sure the boat wasn't there?" Tom Olney asked heavily.

Adam kept his eyes on the sheriff. "Didn't you find it?"

"No. I'm waiting for daylight now." Garfield indicated the bloodstains on Adam's shirt. "That from you?"

"Of course," Adam said. "You want to look at my head?"

As the sheriff verified the wound, Adam glanced about the room at the others. Tom Olney looked threatening, suspicious. Rick Horner was hovering over Jessica, attentive and solicitous, his face dark and handsome. Ma Olney seemed to be paying no attention. And Jessica herself seemed to be withdrawn, full of secret thoughts of her own.

"You were rapped on the noggin all right," Garfield said, finishing his examination. "Any idea who had it in for you?"

"No," Adam said.

"What about Dave?"

"Neither of us had enemies, unless you figure we were cutting dangerously into Rick's lobster business. My trip to Boston netted us a contract with the McGill people whom Rick thought he had sewed up. And I understand Tom's investments in Rick's fleet are pretty heavy. Unless you count them as mortal enemies, I don't know of anyone who'd want to harm either Dave or myself."

Tom Olney's face flushed scarlet. "Why, you ungrateful——"

"Do you think I'm going to murder for a few lobsters?" Rick laughed.

"Anyway, Sheriff, we don't really know if anything has happened to Dave, or not."

"But we'll know tomorrow," Garfield said. "It's a funny thing, that boat vanishing from Gull Cove after Tony said it was there."

"How would Tony know?" Adam asked. "It seems to me that if there's any question about Dave's safety, Tony is the man to see."

"I've seen him, and I'll see him again." Sam Garfield's thin face was tired. "Meanwhile, there's nothing more to do until daylight. I'll take the cruiser out then. If Dave shows up meantime, I'd appreciate it if you notified me promptly. Coming along, Rick?"

The big man glanced reluctantly at Jessica. "Well, I don't know."

"Please go, Rick. I'll see you tomorrow," Jessie said.

The two men left, and for a while there was an embarrassed silence. The muffled sound of the surf came through the windows, and the clock in the hall ticked softly.

Tom Olney stirred then, and turned to Adam. "I'm warning you," he said harshly. "I had no use for you when Dave brought you here, and it still goes. If anything's happened to him, I'll hold you responsible."

Ma Olney said helplessly: "Now, Tom——"

"You keep out of it," Tom Olney snapped. "I'll handle this."

Adam saw Jessica flush with anger. There was a hard core of brutality under Tom's outwardly friendly manner, and it came to light most often in his home, where his defenses were down. It was not for Adam to interfere. He left the room.

The big, old-fashioned kitchen was inviting, and Adam helped himself to brandy from a bottle in the cupboard, standing for a moment to look out at the dark, sleeping harbor through the back window. He heard Tom Olney lumber upstairs to bed, then there was a murmuring exchange from Jessie and her mother.

Adam let out his breath. Perhaps, after all, it had been a mistake to come here with Dave, to fall in love with Jessie. He pushed the thought aside, wondering what the others would do when Dave's body was found. It was only a matter of time, and the hours were running out fast.

HE put the empty glass down, feeling the warmth of the brandy in his stomach, and turned to find Mrs. Olney silent in the doorway. She was a small woman, as lovely, he thought, as Jessica would be at her age.

"Adam," she said. There were dark shadows under her sober eyes. "Is David all right?"

"I don't know yet."

"I know you didn't harm him, Adam. I know what affection you had for each other. But even if something has happened to David, you won't leave us, will you? I've come to regard you as my own son, too."

"I won't leave," Adam said.

"Please don't worry about Rick Horner," she said then. "Jessica has quite recovered from her infatuation."

He waited until her steps faded from the upper hall before he went back into the living room. Only a night lamp was on. He checked the front door, hoping Jessica was still around, but she didn't appear. Usually they sat alone for half an hour or more, planning their future.

His own room was on the third floor under the attic roof. He didn't turn on the lights, but stripped in the darkness, changing his oxfords for blue sneakers and his city suit for sturdy slacks. A dark sweater pulled over his shoulders satisfied him that he would be no more visible than necessary when he went out into the night again.

He dragged his Gladstone out from under the bed and rummaged among his winter clothing for the Luger. The gun was a souvenir of Salerno, taken from the Nazi whose grenade had blown off Dave's leg. He dropped an extra clip in his pocket.

A moment later he quietly closed his bedroom door and descended to the second floor. He paused briefly at Jessica's door, but there was no sound inside. He went on to Dave's room. There was enough light to outline the bed, the dresser and chairs, the clutter of personal mementos—high school and college banners, model ships and planes—that marked Dave's life from his earliest years. The only thing new or strange in the room was the portable diving helmet and oxygen tank behind the door.

He turned from it as the door opened and Jessica came in. She was still fully dressed. In the moonlight her face was pale as she turned silently toward him.

"I hoped you'd be here, Adam," she whispered. "I couldn't talk to you with the others around."

Adam nodded. "I'm trying to see if Dave left anything to explain his death," he said. "I've found this diving equipment."

"He bought that yesterday," Jessie said. "He told me it was a surprise for you, and that we would all be rich, but I didn't pay much attention. You know how enthusiastic Dave gets over things."

"Did he go out fishing yesterday and the day before?"

"The day before. But not yesterday. I guess he covered the usual traps." Her face was anxious, tilted up to his. "What are you going to do?"

"I've only the rest of the night to find out anything on my own," he said grimly. "I think Tony Carter is the logical place to start. Tony knows more than he's telling, and I'm sure Dave called me from his place."

"I'm going with you," the girl said. "Don't argue about it."

He grinned a little ruefully. "Thanks. Let's go."

His car was still in the driveway by the road, and no one seemed to be awakened by their departure. It was after midnight when they reached the Point. The big Trylgie house was still dark, and Tony's shack on the yacht pier looked equally deserted. Adam parked in the deep shadows of a dune and got out with Jessie. The tide was running high, although the wind had shifted and was now blowing with a raw breath from the open sea.

He felt Jessica shiver as she walked beside him.

THE planks of the yacht pier creaked as they approached the cabin. No one was in sight. Jessie touched his arm in warning.

"There's a light inside."

He saw it at the same time—a faint crack of yellow escaping under the cabin door. He thought of Tony's knife, and he touched the gun in his own pocket.

"You'd better stay here, hon," he whispered.

"No, I'm going with you."

Her chin was too stubborn to deny her. He tried the cabin's latch, found it open, and the door swung in, light streaming outside. The place was unkempt, littered with fishing tackle and

old clothes, and the general air of disrepair was only emphasized by the glare of the naked bulb dangling from a ceiling cord. The telephone, new and shining, stood out starkly on a crude shelf against the wall.

"The devil!" Tony Carter said. "You again?"

The chunky man stood at an electric stove at the other end of the shack. He was fully dressed, and the knife, as if it were part of him, was again in his hand. He wiped his palm on his thigh, his eyes flicking nervously from Adam to Jessica.

"What you want now?" he asked. "Ain't you got enough trouble?"

"You're up late, Tony," Adam said.

"Is it against the law? What you want here?"

"I came back for the truth," Adam said. "This time you're going to tell me all of it."

Carter's squat body shifted a little. He balanced on his toes with a seaman's skill, ready to move with deadly speed.

"I think you better get out." His mutter was impatient. "You, too, Miss Jessica."

"Please, Tony," Jessie said. "We're all friends. We are only trying to find out what happened to my brother David."

Carter pointed the knife at Adam. "Ask him. He knows."

"Dave called me on your phone, didn't he?" Adam asked.

"I don't know."

"If you weren't here, where were you at the time?" Adam's voice went sharp. "Were you on the boat in Gull Cove? How did you know it was there?"

The chunky caretaker looked sly. "Oh, you did find it? The sheriff says it's missing now."

Adam drew a deep breath, trying to make reason penetrate the man's closed mind. "Look here, Tony, I'm not the only one who's in a jam if anything happened to Dave. You're a suspect yourself!"

"No. David was my friend."

"And mine, too. I'm only trying to help."

Carter hesitated. "For you, Miss Jessica, I'll tell. It's true, David was here. He called Adam Bennett on my telephone, much excited."

"What about?" Adam demanded.

"He asked to see you, didn't he? That was what it was about."

"Didn't he tell you anything else?" And when Carter shook his head, "Where did he go from here?"

"He didn't say. I didn't ask. It was none of my business."

"Did he leave anything with you?" Adam asked abruptly.

The caretaker looked startled, his eyes shining with sudden fright. "No, he didn't leave me nothing."

"Then you stole the chart," Adam said flatly. "One is missing from the boat. I think Dave had it with him when he came here to phone me, and you killed him and took it from him."

"That's a lie!" Carter roared. He brandished the knife in quick fury. "I've heard enough. Both of you, get out!"

"Not until you tell the truth. Of course, if you killed Dave—"

Carter looked down at the knife in his hand. That was all the warning Adam had before the man leaped for him.

## CHAPTER IV

### *The Plunge*



ADAM forgot the gun in his pocket as he thrust Jessie aside and braced himself for the other's charge. What Carter lacked in subtlety, he made up for with brute strength. His powerful drive sent Adam crashing against the wall.

Adam's left arm shot up desperately to counter the gleaming knife in the caretaker's hand. As if from far away, he heard Jessica scream. His open palm blocked Carter's first wild thrust. The man cursed, panting, and wrenched free, and Adam twisted away from the wall.

Adam used a quick trick, a judo trick learned in Africa, but the man lunged aside, grinning, and raised the knife again. Adam closed in fast, one hand hooking for Carter's wrist, the other sinking in a quick drive to his middle. The man's breath came out with a grunt and the second knife blow ended before it was started. This time Adam's grip held true.

Carter cursed, tried to pull free, and found his wrist being slowly twisted into a torturing position. Blood drained from his face.

"You're no—friend of—David's," he gasped.

Adam wasted no breath in reply. Every ounce of strength was concentrated on the brutal fish knife in Carter's hand. He heaved once, then again, suddenly hooking a heel behind the other's foot and applying a double, twisting pressure.

The caretaker screamed in mingled pain and frustration, fell backward, the knife clattering to the floor.

A split second after the man hit the floor, Adam was on him. A quick right snapped Carter's head to one side. A left brought it back again. Blood dribbled from the man's slack mouth. Adam kneeled over him, another right cocked.

"The truth, Tony," he panted. "Where is the chart?"

"I promised I wouldn't tell! Please!"

"Who did you promise?"

"David. I promised David. Let me up, please."

"So you can knife me, like you knifed Dave?"

Carter stiffened with horror, his eyes wide with shock. He tried to squirm free of Adam's threatening grip.

"David was killed by a knife?"

Adam nodded. "You can see how it looks to me. You have a knife, and you seem to like to use it. All I want from you is the truth. Dave came here to phone me, and he had the chart with him."

The caretaker's eyes rolled whitely. "Yes, yes. He had the chart."

"Where is it now?"

"—I promised David—I can't tell."

"Dave is dead," Adam said harshly, "and I'm trying to learn who killed him. If it was you, God help you. If not, you're not doing what Dave would have wanted you to do. Where is the chart?"

Carter shuddered. "I have it. Let me up."

Adam loosened his grip and moved quickly backward. Carter lay gasping on the plank floor, his barrel chest heaving. His hands shook as he rolled over and clambered to his feet. He staggered a little as he crossed to a cupboard on the opposite wall.

The chart he produced was crudely folded, a Coast & Geodetic survey chart of the Blue Haven harbor area and the nearby coast. One corner had been torn and repaired with tape, identifying it immediately for Adam. It was the missing chart from the *Jessie II*.

Carter put it on the table. "David had this with him when he came here to telephone you. He said it was very valuable, but I didn't look at it. After he called you, he gave it to me to keep." The caretaker licked his lips. "He thought so: ebody followed him. He joked about it, but he said if he didn't come back, I was to give it to the police—to nobody else. Tomorrow, I was to give it to the sheriff if anything happened to him. That is what he told me." He turned to Jessie. "But if it is true David is dead, then you should have it."

"Did you see anybody around when Dave left?" Adam asked.

"Only you," Carter said pointedly.

Adam ignored the implication that he was the man Dave had been afraid of. He unfolded the chart and spread it on the table, Jessie's head close to his. He could see nothing unusual about it.

Then Jessica found the mark. Her finger shot out and touched a penciled notation on the northern edge of the chart.

"This looks like Dave's writing."

It was hardly noticeable, yet Adam knew at once it was ample cause for murder. Close to the shoreline of Kettledrum Island, in Three Fathom Cove, was a small X and one word in Dave's script.

*Vixen.*

JESSIE was driving. She drove slowly, with Adam leaning back on the seat, his eyes almost closed. But he could see her face, pale and determined, in the reflected glow from the dashboard.

"I still don't understand," Jessie said. "Why should Dave have been killed for the chart?"

"You remember Otto Trylgie, don't you?" Adam asked.

"I knew of him, of course. Everybody here did. But none of the natives was an intimate friend, exactly."

"But you remember the furor last summer when his yacht, the *Vixen*, was lost, with crew and passengers unaccounted for." Adam drew a deep breath. "Trylgie and his friends were plenty wealthy. They could have bought all of Blue Haven and hardly noticed a notch in their bank books. Nobody ever found the *Vixen*, and none of the bodies was ever recovered. Each of those guests was loaded with cash—not to mention Trylgie's own jewel collection which

was supposed to be aboard. At least, the jewels were never found in the house, and everyone assumed they were lost with the schooner."

Jessie braked the car as they turned down the cobbled hill-road to the dark waterfront. Excitement made her voice shake.

"Adam, you really think David found that wreck?"

"I'm sure he located the *Vixen* in Three Fathom Cove, where he put that mark on the chart. That's why he bought diving equipment, and said we'd all be wealthy. And we would—if only from salvage shares of the yacht and its cargo. And that's why he was killed."

"But he didn't tell anybody," she protested. "Not even me."

"Somebody knew," Adam said. "And killed him for that chart."

"But since the killer didn't succeed in getting what he was after—"

"Then there may be more murder," Adam said. "Turn here."

They were on the road that wound along the waterfront. The houses and wharves lining the old street were dark, and the taproom at the corner was long closed and locked for the night. Adam indicated the entrance to one of the fish piers.

"Stop here, Jessie."

She did as he directed. "But this is Rick Horner's pier."

"I want to look over his boats," Adam said. "Someone hit Dave's boat yesterday and left some green paint on the gunwale."

"Surely you don't think Rick did it?"

"I'm not thinking anything yet."

"You're being unreasonably jealous of Rick, Adam. I've told him it's all over, that I don't love him any more. He just came around because he's Tom's business partner."

Adam didn't pursue the argument. He left the car and walked silently into the shadows of the fishery buildings. Jessie, stubbornly, remained behind the wheel.

There were no sounds now except the quiet lapping of the tide. Moonlight made a pattern of faint silver and deep ebony among the piled lobster pots and gently swaying masts of the fishing boats. The Town Hall clock chimed one. The wind felt raw. Adam finally reappeared from the shadows and plodded slowly up the ramp to the parked car.

"All the boats here are clean," he an-

nounced. "Where does Tom keep the *Emma*?"

"On Weaver's Pier. But—"

"I have to check," he said desperately. "It's my neck at stake—as well as everything else."

"All right." Her voice was cold. "Let's go there."

THE *Emma* was tied up on the other side of a small yacht basin farther down the waterfront. This time Jessie went with him down the pier. They didn't see the light in the cabin until they were almost abreast of it.

The *Emma* was a small boat, rigged for tuna, owned by Tom Olney but used only rarely. Now and then he leased it to fishing parties, but Jessie knew of no recent trips the vessel had made.

The light shone dully from a cabin porthole. There was no sound from the boat. Adam paused, looking her over in the moonlight before stepping over the rail from the stringpiece. Jessie saw it even as he lifted his hand to indicate the port rail. A stanchion was bent inward, and a long jagged splinter of fresh wood was torn from the green hull. She cried in dismay.

"Oh, no. Not Tom!"

"It's his boat," Adam said grimly.

"But he hasn't gone out in it!"

"Are you sure? Let's see who's aboard. If the boat was taken out, Tom would know."

He stepped carefully over the deck toward the cabin door, opened it. He stifled a muttered curse as he looked in.

Tom Olney lay sprawled inside. He was still wearing the same clothes Adam had last seen him in. Evidently he hadn't gone to bed, but had come here instead. A thick ribbon of blood trickled from a matted wound on the back of his head and made a dark puddle on deck.

Jessie moaned and moved swiftly toward him. "He's dead!"

"No," Adam said. His voice was weary with defeat. "But we won't get any information from him. Somebody gave him the same treatment I got on the beach—only better."

Jessie's eyes were wild. "But what can we do?"

"Call a doctor, then the sheriff. You stay here and wait."

"Aren't you going to stay, too?"

"I can't. The sheriff will be searching the coast with the first streak of dawn. If he catches up to me tonight, I'll be in

fail at daybreak—and I want to be at Three Fathom Cove.”

“Adam, you can’t run away.”

“I’m not running far. But before I go, I want you to get a few things straight — things I want you to do.”

**O**DDLY enough, Three Fathom Cove was neither three fathoms deep, nor was it a cove. On the seaward side of Kettledrum Island, it was more of a lagoon, enclosed by long and treacherous reefs, with a depth varying in accordance with the shifts of the sand bottom and the tide. Kettledrum Island itself was low and unprotected. Often submerged by nor’easters, it was uninhabited, bleak and desolate.

Dawn added little to the island’s charm. Adam shivered in the morning chill. Sitting in the stern of a power dory, borrowed without the knowledge of its owner the night before, he swung the boat gently to its mooring. He had stowed grappling hooks in the bow, and now he turned sharply as a voice raised above the sound of surf and seagulls to hail him.

A skiff’s sail glistened against the rising sun beyond the channel. He watched it take expert advantage of the wind to skim through the narrows, come about on a tack, and heave to in the cove.

It was Jessie. She was alone.

Adam felt quick relief and then impatient curiosity until the girl brought her boat competently alongside. A moment later she was aboard, her kiss wet and salty with the ocean spray. She looked wonderful to Adam’s tired eyes.

“Have you found it?” she asked anxiously.

“Right below us,” he nodded. He looked seaward, after a moment. “Are you sure you weren’t followed?”

“Quite sure. But we haven’t much time. The sheriff is out in the harbor already, headed for the Key. He’ll find Dave and the boat in half an hour, Adam. And you can be sure he’ll be

after us in less time than that, afterward.”

Adam looked again beyond the spray of the reefs, but only a distant dragger was visible on the horizon. He raised his voice over the everlasting roar of the breakers that surrounded them.

“What about Tom?”

Jessica’s eyes were shadowed. “Whoever attacked him must have left him for dead. He couldn’t have done it himself, Adam.”

“Has he talked yet?”

She shook her head. “He’s up and around this morning, which made it tough for me to slip away. But he has no idea who hit him.”

“What was he doing on his boat last night?”

“He won’t say. And he denies having used the boat lately. I asked him if anyone else used it, but I think he’s afraid to talk.”

“Maybe,” Adam said grimly. “Did you see Rick?”

“Rick was with the sheriff almost all night, trying to help out. They went back to Tony Carter’s and got him to admit giving the chart to you. Tony, though, didn’t know what was on the chart, so he couldn’t give them any information beyond that. Sam Garfield hit the ceiling when he heard it. He’s got a warrant for your arrest.”

“What about the man who sold Dave the diving equipment?”

“Mr. Jamison? He said he was alone in the store when Dave bought the helmet, and he’s positive Dave didn’t tell him what he wanted it for, because he asked and Dave just laughed and wouldn’t answer. I brought that stuff along, as you asked me to.”

Adam nodded. “There’s a wreck under us, all right. The grappling hooks tell me that. But whether it’s the *Vixen* remains to be seen.”

“What good will it do?” Jessie asked. “If it is the *Vixen*, and Trylgie’s jewel collection is aboard, it will look all the worse for you—as if you killed Dave to keep it all.”

“I have to be sure it’s down here first,” Adam said. “In any case, did you do as I asked? Did you spread word around about the *Vixen*?”

She nodded, but he scarcely heard her reply. Diving equipment in hand, he was staring down into the cool green water, stripping off sneakers and sweater for the plunge. . . .

NEXT ISSUE’S NOVEL

## THE DENNISON DOCUMENTS

By G. WAYMAN JONES

A BLACK BAT MYSTERY



## CHAPTER V

*The Living Dead*

HE murky green water sparkled with reflected sunlight from the white sand bottom. Adam found it a world of wonder and horror, of inquisitive fish and dead men.

He moved about the treacherous rotten hulk, feeling the insidious pull of tide and cur-

rent. Seaweed and barnacles, growing around the cabin entrance, resisted his knife and his slow-motion efforts to get below. He was glad he didn't have the traditional, cumbersome diving outfit to fool with. The little portable tank on his shoulders gave him complete freedom of movement.

Darkness, shot through with little flashings of light, hid a grinning skeleton in formal afternoon clothes. Another twisted heap of bones was attired in a scanty feminine bathing suit. An eel wriggled through the gaping wound in the schooner's hull.

Adam didn't know how long he was underwater. His only contact with the outer world was by a light signal line to Jessie in the skiff above. It couldn't have been too long that he was down. The water was too cold to endure for any length of time.

Sick and shaken by what he saw, he was at first relieved by the two quick tugs on the signal rope from Jessie, advising him to come up. He wasn't too surprised when, on coming to the surface and hauling himself, dripping over the gunwale, he saw that Jessie's attention was on the channel entrance. Adam removed the nose clamp and shut off the oxygen valve before following her gesture.

"Whose boat is it?" he asked, observing the craft she was indicating.

"I'm not sure. One of Rick's, I think."

Her voice was stiff with dismay. Adam watched a small dragger swing in for the channel, and he reached for his Luger.

"Don't you want to know what I found?" he asked. He shook his head disconsolately. "Everything I figured on has gone haywire."

"Isn't the sunken boat the *Vixen*?"

"It's the *Vixen*, all right. And some of the passengers are still aboard. But there are no jewels. The safe is open—and very empty."

She tore her gaze from the approaching dragger. "So—?"

"I found no trace of Otto Trylgie," Adam said. "I wonder if he was drowned. I wonder if he is dead."

Only one man was visible at the dragger's wheel as it shot through the channel into the quiet cove. Adam felt Jessie move closer to him. He kept the Luger loosely in his hand, muzzle down, the sun warming his naked shoulders as he studied the newcomer.

Rick Horner hailed them, his voice unintelligible above the roar of the bleak surf.

"He couldn't have killed Dave!" Jessie murmured. "Not Rick!"

"He's here, isn't he?" Adam said savagely. "We figured the killer would show up first. And it's Rick Horner."

Before Jessie could reply, the dragger was alongside, Rick leaping down from its higher deck. The big man's hair was dark and wet with spray. His sun-browned face was taut. There was a faint slackening of tension around his mouth as he looked at Jessie.

"Are you all right?"

He had no gun, or none that was in sight.

"Of course," Jessie whispered. "Rick, what are you doing here? How did you find us?"

The big man looked at Adam's Luger. His eyes were bleak. "Are you thinking of using that on me?"

"If I have to," Adam said. "I owe it to you—for Dave."

"I didn't kill Dave."

"Then why are you here? Jessie deliberately tipped you off that we had found the *Vixen*. That would be reason enough for murder, on your part. The treasure alone would set you up for life. Except that there is no treasure, chum," Adam added grimly.

Rick didn't seem to listen. "I tell you I didn't kill anyone," he said quickly. "I found Dave last night, it's true—in the Key, after I left your house. I presume you hid him there to gain time. But I don't think you killed Dave. I noticed the damage on the boat and put two and two together and went to Tom's *Emma*. Tom was there, and I accused him of killing Dave. Tom denied it. He rushed

me, and I hit him—a little harder than I intended.

"Like you slugged me on the beach?" Adam asked.

"I didn't slug you," the big man protested. "Look, we can work this out together. The sheriff will be along soon."

Adam said nothing. He felt at a loss. He had assumed Rick was the killer, but the man's words rang true, and unless he was playing a deep and devious game, why should he have come here unarmed? Unless, of course, he were trying to shift suspicion to Tom Olney—

His thoughts were interrupted by Rick. "You say the *Vixen* is below here, but there are no jewels, and Trylgie's body isn't there?"

Adam nodded. "Trylgie may not be dead after all."

Rick Horner's eyes were shiny with alarm! "Lord, I've made a brutal mistake!" He swung sharply back to his own boat. "I brought Tony Carter with me, Tony!"

He didn't have to call. Tony's squat figure appeared on the dragger's deck, darkly outlined against the glare of the morning sun, as if he were wearing a bloody halo.

Glinting wickedly in his hands was a sawed-off shotgun, covering them all.

FOR a moment no one spoke. Then Rick said sharply, "Tony, put that down!"

The man didn't move. Adam felt his muscles crawl, and in the moment of indecision that followed, it came to him—all the reasons for murder, the why and the when and the who. Thoughts and suspicions he had only dimly felt suddenly clicked into place, and with it the desperate knowledge of unreasoning danger.

He stepped carefully forward, and Carter called sharply over the boom of surf and the cry of the wheeling gulls.

"Drop your gun, Bennett!"

Adam hesitated. Rick Horner's face was pale, and Jessica was breathing too quickly, watching that ominous figure bloodily outlined by the sun. One blast from Carter's shotgun would finish not only himself, but Jessie and Rick as well. He let his gun thud to the deck.

Rick let out his breath in a long sigh. "It's my fault," he said. "He asked if he could come along, and I thought it was a good idea. I forgot about that gun

over my bunk. He's not my man, Adam—don't think that."

Adam kept his attention on Carter. "What are you doing here, Tony? We've found the *Vixen*. You always knew it was here, didn't you? You've got to take us to Otto Trylgie now!"

Tony leaned forward. "What do you know about Mr. Trylgie?"

"I know all about him now," Adam said. "Take us to him, Tony. Don't try to figure a way out of it for yourself."

It was a long chance, a stab in the dark, but it was the logical conclusion that had come to him only a few moments before.

Adam's words found their mark. Carter moved slowly along the dragger's rail and climbed down into the skiff with them. But not once did his shotgun waver from the trio.

"We'll go ashore," he said heavily. "It's a bad thing, but it's not for me to decide any more. We'll go to the beach."

"But nobody's lived on this island for years!" Rick Horner said.

"Shut up," Carter said. "And row."

The wind and the gulls mourned over the bleak dunes surrounding the house on Kettledrum Island. The house stood in a little hollow, invisible from the mainland or the sea, shadowed in the lee of a great bank of sand that towered over it like a wave, its surface rippled by the rough saw grass that rattled in the wind. Desolate, untenanted, the house and its existence were all but forgotten by the Blue Haven people. But there was a fire inside, and a thin wisp of gray smoke came from the chimney to be whipped away by the sea wind.

Ugly on the outside, the house was surprisingly lavish inside. The gray stone fireplace in the main room was enormous, and the driftwood fire cast golden spears of light on the heavy mahogany and teakwood furniture.

Otto Trylgie stood with his back to the flames, regarding his visitors. For a man supposedly dead for over a year, he looked in remarkable health, Adam thought. Tall and slender, with the bearing of a military commander, he watched them with alert eyes that were set in a firm, tanned face. He was wearing a turtle-neck sweater, sneakers and slacks, and looked quite the part of a vacationing millionaire sportsman. Adam didn't miss the muted hum of an electric pump and the rhythmic beat of

diesel power generator adding to the comforts of the house.

"It is a dilemma," Otto Trylgie was saying. "I must confess you three are most unwelcome guests."

"I could do nothing else," Tony Carter apologized. "I had to bring them here." Adam glanced up sharply at the caretaker's slavish, humble tone. The man went on, "I did not know what to do with them. They found the wreck, Mr. Trylgie."

"You are a fool, Tony."

"Yes, sir."

"You have ruined everything."

Carter pointed the shotgun at Adam. "This man knew you were alive, sir. I'm sorry, Mr. Trylgie."

TRYLGIE turned his sharp gaze at Adam, his eyes queerly haunted and lonely. When he looked at Jessica next, it was plain he hadn't seen a woman in a long time.

"What am I to do with you?" the man sighed. "For a year now I have been safely hidden from the world, free from its pains and turmoil. Alone on this island, I have been happy for the first time. Chance brought me here, tragically enough—but I made the most of my opportunity, as you can see. I have been comfortable in my solitary retreat until Tony brought you here a few moments ago. Tony is faithful, but quite, quite stupid. It poses a difficult problem. I can hardly remain here in the hermitage I have selected, if I permit you to leave. On the other hand, I hardly know how to dispose of you."

Tony Carter growled. "I'll see to it, Mr. Trylgie." He cradled the shotgun in his hands, his face congested and ugly, his small eyes flicking from Adam to Rick Horner and Jessie. Yet his voice was worshipful as he added, "I'll take care of all of them, sir."

"You have done quite enough damage, Tony."

"It has always been for you, Mr. Trylgie."

"And you've murdered, too, Tony," Adam said. "That's why you killed Dave Olney—because Dave discovered the *Vixen* and guessed your boss was alive somewhere. Dave called me last night, and then realized that Trylgie's only hope of living here while the world thought him dead was through you, his faithful retainer. You were so shocked

and frightened over Dave's discovery of the truth that you knifed him and hid his body in Gull Cove, then returned in time to slug me and try to frame me for the murder." Adam swung sharply to Trylgie. "There is only one answer to your problem of what to do with us. Come back to the world with us and face whatever justice waits for you."

"It would mean prison for me, I fear." Trylgie's voice was calm, but he looked shaken, as if some inner rigidity were slowly giving way. "The wreck of the yacht was an act of God, and it happened at a time when I was most desperately involved in certain financial manipulations that the public would not understand. That is why my estate has not been liquidated to date—an effort is being made to suppress the collapse of my holdings in order to prevent or delay a public panic."

The tall man sighed. "More than that. Tony did kill your friend, David Olney—but he was merely an instrument, working through me. Mine is the truly guilty hand, although Tony will pay the legal penalty with his life."

"No—" Tony whispered.

"I told you that you were stupid, my Tony," Trylgie said sharply. "Of course you will pay! You will have to confess!"

"Not even for you," the man said hoarsely. "All my life I've been as a slave to you, Mr. Trylgie, because you once did a fine thing for me and my family. I can kill these three, too, and hide the boats."

"No. No more, Tony."

Silence, crackling with tension, crept into the room. A queer desperation shone hot in Tony's murky eyes. His breathing made a harsh sound over the crackling of the driftwood fire.

"You would give me up?" he faltered.

"I must. I can have no more murder, Tony."

Adam could see what was coming. Reason slowly faded from Tony's eyes. His chunky body trembled. Behind the quick shifting of his glance, Adam read his thoughts. *Kill them anyway!* Then Tony would be safe, then Trylgie would be forced to help him hide the new crimes.

Jessie shivered suddenly. Rick Horner opened his mouth to speak, but no sound issued from his white lips.

Trylgie said wearily, "No, Tony, don't disobey me—"

**H**AVOC broke loose in the room. Adam moved before Tony started to bring the gun up. The roar of the shotgun was thunderous, an explosive blast of sound that seemed to rock the universe.

Adam heard Jessie scream, as he knocked up the barrel of the gun. Tony cursed and staggered backward. Only one charge had gone off in the shotgun. There was still another barrel.

Tony backed frantically, seeking to place a heavy table between himself and the others. Adam upended the table over him with a crash. Someone shouted and cursed, and Adam landed in a flying leap on the man, wrestling for the gun. There was movement behind and all around him. He knew despair as Tony's grip proved superior, slowly twisting the shotgun under him to bring it level.

With a final wrench, Tony broke free and scrambled to his feet. Adam started after him, then froze as the gun swung to cover him. He spared a desperate glance around the room, saw that Jessica was safe, that Rick and Otto Trylgie had been untouched by the first blast. There was a huge chunk of wood gouged out of one of the ceiling beams where the first charge had gone.

In the moment's pause there was no sound except that of their heavy breathing and the crackling fire on the hearth. Tony wasn't looking at Adam. Something had changed in his eyes, and glancing in the same direction, Adam saw Trylgie come slowly forward. The man had a .38 revolver in his hand. It was pointed at Tony.

Tony stared with wide-eyed disbelief. His mouth went slack and trembling.

"Mr. Trylgie! Please—I did it for you."

The tall man spoke in a voice that sounded far away.

"As I said before, Tony, you have been only the instrument, and mine is the real guilt. I wanted only peace and solitude here. It is now impossible. Your hands killed, but mine have the victim's blood on them. Good-bye, Tony."

The shots crashed before Adam could move or speak. Trylgie's .38 was all but inaudible in the blast of Tony's shotgun. Tony moved forward two or three steps, while bright blood gushed from a wound in his neck. Trylgie was dead on the instant, slammed back against the wall as it crushed. The charge had torn away his chest. Tony dropped his shotgun. He made bubbling sounds in his throat.

His face reflected agony and a puzzled question as he died. . .

The sun was warm on the other side of the dune that hid the house. Adam walked slowly, plodding through the sand, his arm tight around Jessie. She was still shivering. Rick Horner paused, looked back, and then smiled ruefully, walking to the rear to leave Adam and Jessie alone. Ahead, the sea sparkled with a bright summer blue.

"Adam—" Jessie began.

"Don't talk about it," he said quickly. "It's all over, and nothing can bring Dave back. It was one of those hideous mistakes that has no answer. None at all—unless it's hidden out there in the deep water."

After a while, as they walked down to the beach where the boats were, Jessie stopped shivering. It was a beautiful morning. The sea wind caressed them, and the sun felt good on their faces.

*It's good to have a place to call home*  
Adam thought. *It's good to know some-*  
*body wants you to stay, to live here.*

Far in the distance came the muted drone of Sheriff Garfield's patrol boat, turning in toward the island.



**DEAD DOGS TELL TALES**, by ROBERT WALLACE, a true story based on a case in the career of famous handwriting expert David Carvalho—coming in the next issue, plus many other stories and features!

*A true story of a crime and its punishment  
that remains a strange riddle to this day!*

by **JACKSON HITE**



## **DEATH** **AT THE FINISHING SCHOOL**

**A**N IMPORTANT difference between true crime and fictionized murder is the way a case ends. In fiction, the story usually comes to a close when the sleuth names the killer and explains how he solved the case. In real life, even a jury verdict may not end the case. Arguments still revolve about the verdict in the Lizzie Borden case after these many years. Was she innocent as the jury de-

clared, or did she murder her father and stepmother with "forty whacks" of an axe? And carved on an obscure tombstone is another doubt, questioning the jury's verdict in an earlier case, a case that is one of the great crime classics of our country.

In the year 1891, the Comstock School for Young Ladies, a fashionable finishing school for the daughters of the well-

to-do, was located on West Fortieth Street just off Fifth Avenue in New York City. Across the street was the city reservoir. Today the reservoir is the site of New York's famous Library and Bryant Park. The finishing school was long ago pulled down to make way for a skyscraper.

The girls boarded at the school under the strict supervision of Miss Lydia Day. One of the students was a sweet unsophisticated girl of 19 named Mary Helen Nielson Potts of Ocean Grove, New Jersey, who preferred the name of Helen.

Helen was a gifted piano player and although quite shy she was the envy of all the other girls. She had a steady beau, handsome, romantic looking Carlyle W. Harris, a senior at the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Columbia University. Harris called frequently at the school where he sat in the parlor and talked to Helen under the watchful eye of Miss Day, while the other girls made excuses to wander in. Occasionally the couple would go for a walk, particularly on Sunday afternoon, but Helen always was back well before curfew time.

The night of January 31, 1891, was a gala one for the girls at the finishing school. On this wondrous night they were allowed to attend a concert and could return to school as late as eleven o'clock.

Helen, who had not been feeling well for several days, decided not to go to the concert. Instead she spent a quiet evening playing the piano for a few of the teachers and students who remained at school. At nine o'clock she excused herself and went up to bed. Late that night several of the girls who had overstayed curfew time, crept quietly up the stairs. Two of them shared a room on the third floor with Helen. When they entered, giggling and shushing each other, Helen woke up.

### One Way to Die

Her voice sounded strange to her schoolmates. She said she had just had the most wonderful dream. Suddenly she began to complain of feeling numb and of not being able to see. Several times she called out, "Carl, Carl," in a frightened voice, Carl being her nickname for her sweetheart, Carlyle Harris.

No longer worried about being reprimanded for coming home late, the upset

classmates dashed to Miss Day's room and awakened her.

Helen by this time was having the greatest difficulty in remaining awake even though she wanted to stay up. "Don't let me fall asleep," she begged, "I'm afraid I won't wake up again."

Miss Day summoned Dr. E. P. Fowler from his residence nearby. After a rapid examination the physician decided the girl's condition was critical and he sent for two additional physicians. The girl appeared to be under an opiate of some kind and the doctors administered digitalis, atropine, caffeine, heat, artificial respiration, and even used compressed oxygen and the new-fangled electricity in an effort to save her life. For a time it appeared that the doctors had won and they left the house only to be called back within a half hour. Before noon of February first Helen was dead.

On her night table was an empty prescription box and Dr. Fowler learned from the girls that Harris had prescribed some capsules for his sweetheart because he was worried about her health.

### Mysterious Medicine

The young medical student was summoned and he quickly explained that Helen had been suffering from insomnia and so he had prescribed six capsules with four and one-half grains of quinine and one-sixth grain of morphine in each. Dr. Fowler realized that even if Helen had taken all six capsules at one time the dose of morphine would have been so small that it could not have poisoned the girl.

Even at that, Harris said he had been worried about the small dose of morphine in the capsules and since he did not want the sleeping pills to become habit-forming, he had given her only four of them, keeping the other two. He advised her to take the capsules every other day.

The prescription had been compounded at McIntyre's Drug Store on Sixth Avenue and Harris had noted on the prescription that he was a student. The pharmacist agreed that the prescription had been written as Harris stated and he added he was positive he had made no error in filling it. The two capsules Harris had kept were analyzed and upheld the druggist.

The doctors were puzzled by Helen's death and her grief-stricken parents



agreed that an autopsy should be made. Two coroner's physicians performed the post-mortem and reported that the girl had died from influenza plus a heart condition. A death certificate then was issued. Helen was buried in Ocean Grove.

The girls at Miss Comstock's School for Young Ladies were sorely disappointed over the behavior of the medical student. He was not languishing away. In fact, they failed to spot him at the funeral. While his sweetheart had been dying he had appeared at the school and his main worry had been about himself. "What will become of me?" he had asked Dr. Fowler when the physician wondered if a wrong dose of medicine had been administered. He became quite cheerful, however, when the doctor agreed that his prescription, as written, had been correct.

### *Enter, the Press*

Several weeks after Helen's death her mother entered the office of the old New York *World* and startled reporters by voicing a suspicion that her daughter had been murdered. It was strong bait for the newsmen since it involved a young, pretty girl, a fashionable school, and socially important families.

Mrs. Potts suspected Carlyle Harris of poisoning her daughter. She revealed that the couple actually had been married for a year. The ceremony had been performed by an alderman at City Hall, her daughter using the name of Helen Nielson on the application and Harris changing his first name to Charles.

Mrs. Potts first had learned of the marriage the previous summer when her daughter became ill and went to visit her uncle, a physician, in Scranton, Pa. Her uncle discovered that Helen was suffering from the results of a bungled illegal abortion and when he questioned her she confided to him the secret marriage and said Carlyle had performed the operation. The uncle promptly notified the girl's mother.

Mrs. Potts wanted to make an immediate public announcement of the marriage and also wanted a church ceremony but Carlyle pleaded with her to keep the matter a secret until after both had graduated from school. His grandfather was Dr. McCready, one of the heads of the College of Physicians and Surgeons and Harris feared that the other would force him out of school and

also cut him out of his will.

Mrs. Potts agreed to wait for a short time but when Harris asked that the announcement be put off for two years, she demanded that the young couple go to a minister on the anniversary of their secret wedding and have a religious ceremony. In addition, she asked Harris to give her the marriage certificate which she would make public at the proper time.

### *Mother-in-Law Trouble*

The wedding anniversary was on February 8 and as the date neared Mrs. Potts reminded Harris of his promise in a strongly-worded letter and received his lukewarm assurances. Helen had died on February 1, just one week before the deadline set by Mrs. Potts.

The reporters went to work investigating the background of all those concerned. They learned that Harris first met Helen during the summer of 1888 while he was living with his mother in a cottage at Asbury Park. His mother was a well known lecturer for a temperance society and the author of popular stories and books of advice to young married women. She used the pen name of Hope Ledyard.

The young couple began to go out with each other that summer and Harris asked Mrs. Potts if she would consent to Helen becoming engaged to him. Helen's father, a railroad contractor, disliked Harris and would not allow it. Mrs. Potts also was against it since Helen was only 18, but she allowed him to continue to call on her daughter.

The couple slipped away to City Hall one afternoon and had the marriage performed.

The newsmen were interested in a letter Harris had written to Mrs. Potts just ten days before Helen had died in which he agreed to marry Helen publicly in a religious ceremony on February 8, "if no other way can be found to satisfy your scruples."

The letter was dated the same day that Harris wrote out the prescription. He gave Helen the capsules the following day and immediately left town, returning home the night she died.

Mrs. Potts had visited Helen at the finishing school the day before she died. Her daughter told her that she had taken three capsules and showed her the fourth. Helen complained that they had not done her any good and said she was

going to throw the last one away. Her mother pointed out that since Carlyle was studying to be a doctor he probably knew what was good for her and so she urged Helen to take the capsule. Helen also had written Carlyle and he commanded her to take the last capsule.

The reporters dug up information indicating that Carlyle had been married previously and divorced, which was why he was afraid to have his grandfather learn of his new marriage. They also hinted that Harris had performed illegal operations on other women.

The *World* published a story which suggested rather bluntly that Harris had poisoned his secret wife by substituting a lethal dose in one of the capsules, which by a quirk of fate, turned out to be the last one she took. The story hinted that he had kept two of the capsules as an alibi for himself and also had gone out of town where he had disported himself rather gaily also to build up an alibi. They added fuel to the fire by printing information to the effect that he had been keeping company with a married woman and also that at one time he had been suspected of selling illegal liquor. The other newspapers quickly jumped into the battle of words, all against Harris.

### *Indicted for Murder*

The stories created a sensation in New York and elsewhere. No official charge of any kind had been filed against the medical student and he was under no official investigation. After the stories broke, Mrs. Potts appeared at the District Attorney's office and requested an inquiry.

Meanwhile Harris also appeared at the prosecutor's office, denounced the published reports, and offered to put himself at the disposal of that office for any questions. He hinted that Mrs. Potts's mind had been affected by the death of her daughter and said he had wanted to keep the marriage a secret because it would harm the reputation of the finishing school.

The District Attorney was non-committal to both, but four days later he secured a secret court order, had the body disinterred and a new autopsy performed by three medical authorities instead of the hacks employed by the coroner. The doctors reported that Helen had died from morphine poisoning. They had found evidence of morphine in her stom-

ach but no traces of quinine.

Carlyle Harris was indicted, charged with the murder of his secret wife.

The trial developed into one of the most sensational ever held in this country. Francis L. Wellman, whose trial work is legendary, was the prosecutor. Defending Harris was William Travers Jerome, who later became the great crusading district attorney. Feeling ran so high that at one time Jerome broke down and wept in the courtroom unable to continue. After a week-end recess he was able to go on.

### *Circumstantial Evidence*

The case presented against Carlyle Harris was completely circumstantial. The facts given so far were presented plus a few additional woman chasing black marks against Harris' reputation. Wellman brought to light information which told that shortly before the capsule episode, Harris had attended a lecture in the medical school by Dr. George L. Peabody on the effects of morphine. Dr. Peabody was called to the stand, and the dying symptoms of Helen, as described by her classmates, were read to him. The medical professor testified that the symptoms described by the girls were the exact reactions of morphine poisoning.

Wellman made much of the fact that Harris had not given the capsules to Helen the same day he had the prescription filled, and charged that Carlyle had taken them home in order to substitute the lethal dose of morphine in one.

No evidence was produced that Harris had ever purchased morphine, had ever been in possession of any, or had access to the drug.

The trial became a battle of experts. With each expert brought forward by Wellman to say the girl had died of morphine poisoning, Jerome brought forward experts for the defense who claimed that drugs administered by Dr. Fowler and his associates before Helen died would have destroyed the morphine in the body. They also assured the court that the embalming fluid could have left a poisonous residue in the body.

### *A Tearful Woman*

Wellman's top card was the tearful picture made by Mrs. Potts as she took the witness stand and recounted, be-

tween sobs, her attempt to have the marriage made public.

"I told him that he had asked Helen to remain in the hardest position for a woman—that of an unacknowledged wife," she said. "I could see no reason for it but a whim. Her illness in Scranton had been commented on and the marriage should not much longer be kept secret. I told him what keeping a secret so long meant to her and what a position it placed her in. He might die inside the two-year delay he asked for and I could not publish the marriage in the form it was then in."

Mrs. Potts had met Harris at the ferry the day Helen died and she testified she accused him of having caused her daughter's death by another operation.

Carlyle denied this and said it might have been a mistake on the part of the druggist.

"I appealed to Harris," she continued, "to let my daughter be buried under her right name—her married name—but he refused, saying it would ruin him and injure Miss Day's school. He demanded the return of the affidavit in which he made acknowledgement of the marriage, but I would not give it to him."

The trial was remarkable for several features. One was the conflicting testimony of the medical experts, all of whom were highly respected. No test for poison had been made by the inefficient coroner's office at the time of the first autopsy. Some twenty-five years later the coroner's office in New York was abolished when a report was issued showing how easy it was for anybody to get away with murder because of the lax system.

The evidence presented against Harris actually revolved about three points. He wanted his marriage kept secret, he went out with other women, he had the opportunity of substituting the morphine for the quinine.

On the other hand no evidence showing that the capsule actually had contained morphine was presented, and Harris had consented in writing to the public marriage and also had given Mrs. Potts an affidavit which she could have made public at any time.

### *Howe and Hummel*

The trial lasted for over three weeks but the jury took less than three hours

to reach a verdict. Carlyle Harris was found guilty of first degree murder.

In fiction, the case by now surely would have been over, but in reality, the case had a long way to go. Harris dropped Jerome as his attorney and employed the notorious jury-fixing firm of Howe and Hummel to obtain a new trial. They came up with an affidavit which proved that Helen had been a dope fiend, a fact which undoubtedly accounted for the morphine found in the body. The court rejected the affidavit as worthless and refused to grant a new trial. The Court of Appeals also upheld the verdict.

When Harris was brought into court to be sentenced to death he turned to Judge Recorder Smyth and made a speech with few parallels in criminal history.

### *The Injustice of Justice*

"Do you remember how you charged the jury?" he asked the court. "I know your honor's words: 'the only witness probably, who could establish that this defendant committed murder—is dead.' And so, your honor, I must speak my piece in justice to myself, when living testimony fails. Didn't you realize that you placed between the pallid lips of that poor dead girl who loved me, a lie?"

"You must stand some day, Recorder Smyth, before the Judge, stripped of all these dignities that you wear today and when He says to you, 'Where is Carlyle Harris?' will you answer that the duty of a judge is always a painful one? Or will you say, 'I believed those self-proved perjurers.'"

"I remember two years ago last month I visited in secret and alone, a grave near Ocean Grove. I little thought that I should never visit it again, and yet today, standing by the brink of another grave—my own—I thank God that in the light of this new testimony, he who will, may read inscribed on that grave, 'not suicide, but at rest.' Perhaps when my poor body and brain are laid at rest, someone may mark that spot with a little slab of stone. I ask that there be engraved thereon, in justice to those who sat in judgment (Harris indicated the jury box) a year ago, 'We would not if we had known,' and signed, 'The Jury.' I will leave the rest of the epitaph to your honor."

He added bitterly referring to the

girls at the boarding school, "I hope that this will be the last case dominated by schoolgirl experts."

### *The Ironic Epitaph*

Harris was sentenced to die in the electric chair. When he entered the death chamber he turned to the witnesses assembled there and said, "I can have no motive for concealment now. I die absolutely innocent of the crime for which I have been convicted."

Since that day, the question of his guilt has been debated. Was he telling the truth when he maintained his innocence, or was he hoping that this last-

second statement might miraculously save his life?

His mother, who never wavered in her belief of his innocence, fulfilled his courtroom wish. She had engraved on his tombstone the line, "We would not if we had known. The Jury."

His mother also completed the epitaph which Harris had invited the judge to finish. She added one line which read, "Carlyle W. Harris, Murdered, March 8, 1893."

Was an innocent man legally murdered, or was a murderer legally executed? Which is correct—the words on the tombstone, or the verdict by the jury?



## ON THE BLOTTER

**C**ALLED the year's "meanest thief" on the police blotter, an ex-convict was arrested at Massena, New York, by Secret Service agents for stealing a pension check from a totally disabled war veteran. After committing the crime, the thief went to a saloon in nearby Ogdensburg and used the check to buy drinks for the house. He pleaded guilty and was sent to Atlanta Penitentiary for two years.

**R**ECORDS of shoplifters reveal that a woman once provided herself with an artificial arm which she inserted through her sleeve and fastened to the front of her coat, where her handbag was hung on the artificial hand to give it a natural appearance. She was thus free to use her hidden free hand for stealing, dropping her take into an inside pocket. The store detective who caught her admitted he was slightly puzzled when he counted her hands and found them to number—three!

**I**N Massachusetts State Prison at Charleston one hundred years ago, any convict who misbehaved was forced to wear an all-yellow cap with a pair of cloth donkey ears sewn thereon. If this failed to cure the cut-up he was tied to a post and left there without food or water for 24 to 48 hours, according to the nature of his offense.

**M**AKING two of the largest commercial diamond seizures in years, Customs agents at La Guardia Field, New York City, caught an airplane passenger concealing 1,025 carats of cut and polished diamonds valued at \$190,000, and another passenger with 343 carats of gems worth \$73,000. In each case the passenger in whose luggage the gems were found was a woman. Both face charges of attempted smuggling.

**E**VIDENTLY the burglars were two young men who believed in concentrating on what they were doing. They concentrated recently on the safe of the India House Restaurant in New York, and never heard those police sirens or cautious-footed patrolmen George Tauschek and Joseph Messina creep up behind them to slap on the steel bracelets. They concentrated, but not quietly enough—for their hammer blows at the safe attracted a night watchman who notified the police!

"Don't lie yourself  
out of killing,"  
French said.



# The Murderer Had a Choice

**T**HE butler pounded frantically on William Simpson's bedroom door. "Mr. Simpson! Mr. Simpson!" he shouted. "Mr. Mason's been shot! Mr. Simpson!"

Simpson was taking a shower. His flat baritone sounded a raucous obbligo to the splashing water in the shower.

The butler pounded louder. "Mr. Simpson!" he screamed. "Mr. Mason's been shot!"

*—but it was too bad for him, in this case, that he couldn't select his pursuer!*

The splashing of the water in the shower stopped.

"What's that you said, Jackson?" came Simpson's voice from inside.

"Mr. Mason's been shot! He's down in the library."

"The devil you say!" called back

**b y M Y R O N D A V I D O R R**

Simpson. "I'll be right down."

William Simpson, President of the Acme Electrical Supply Company, located in a small Mid-Western town, had invited John Mason, the treasurer of his company, and Albert French, the general auditor, to come to his home for cocktails before they went to the golf club for their weekly, Saturday afternoon, round of golf. The three of them had ridden out to Simpson's house and had gone into the library to have cocktails while Simpson took a shower and changed into his golf clothes. Simpson himself was a teetotaler.

Dressed in a bathrobe and slippers, he came into the library and found Mason sprawled on the floor. French and the butler were standing near him.

"What happened?" demanded Simpson, as he stared down at Mason.

"Somebody shot Mason while I was talking to him," said French. "Your butler had gone to mix us a cocktail. Mason and I were standing here in the center of the room talking. All of a sudden, there was a shot. Mason grasped his forehead and collapsed to the floor. I was so stunned myself that I didn't realize what was going on. I just stood there looking at him. Then the butler came running in and asked what had happened. I told him to call you."

Simpson looked at French. There was a peculiar expression in his eyes. He looked down at Mason. There was a small blue spot in his forehead just above the right eye. He reached down and felt Mason's wrist. After a few seconds, he straightened and faced French.

"He's dead," he said quietly. "Did you shoot him, Albert?"

"Now wait a minute, Bill!" protested French. "What are you getting at?"

"People don't get killed like this unless someone shoots them," said Simpson. "You and Jackson are the only people in the house, besides me. The cook is off today and Mrs. Simpson is at her bridge club."

**I** WAS outside mixing cocktails," said the butler hurriedly. "When I heard the shot I was just coming in with the cocktails."

Simpson looked skeptical as he glanced from the butler to French.

"I can't vouch for him," said the auditor briefly and turned his back on the butler.

"I think I'd better call the company's attorney," said Simpson as he walked over and picked up the telephone. "Even before we call the police. We can't afford adverse publicity while we are under investigation for government contract fraud."

It was Attorney Frank Smith, who, when informed of Mason's death, immediately called Chief Archibald Andersen, of the three-man police department and told him to go to the Simpson residence immediately. He left it to the chief to notify the coroner, who also was the local undertaker and sold tombstones as a side line.

The lawyer was just getting out of his car at the Simpson residence when Chief of Police Andersen and a deputy sheriff swung into the driveway, with siren wide open and three huge red flashing spotlights blazing like a fire truck's warning signals. Andersen brought his car to a sliding halt that kicked up a cloud of dust and fine gravel. He climbed out of the car.

"I'm in charge here now, Smith," he announced, "and I won't be needin' any buttin' in."

"Now *you* listen!" exploded Smith. "You go right ahead with your work and don't bother about me. I'll take care of my business and I'm going to see that you do yours also—you mail-order detective!"

Which was true—though Andersen didn't like to be reminded that he had once taken a correspondence course from the Ace Detective Agency Incorporated. He had finally ended up without his promised diploma because his uncle, who was the local mayor, had taken him off the farm to make him Chief of Police, but had refused to make the final payment to the Agency for his correspondence lessons.

Andersen and the deputy followed Attorney Smith into the house. William Simpson met them, took them into the library and told them quickly what he knew about Mason's death.

The lawyer studied the small bullet-hole on Mason's forehead and the bruise. He judged Mason's age to be around thirty. He had never thought about it before, since he had known the man only about three weeks. Mason had been new with the company. The stockholders had insisted that he be made treasurer at the annual meeting or they would turn

the whole board of directors out of office. Mason had been well-liked. Simpson had repeatedly boasted that Mason was doing a fine job of getting the tangled finances of the company into shape for the investigating committee.

Andersen started to move the corpse.

"Don't touch that body!" Smith warned the chief. "Wait for the coroner. That's his job."

"He don't know nothin' about murder," growled Andersen.

"Well, you can't move the body until he says so," declared Smith. "And I'm here to see that it isn't moved until he orders it moved."

"I'm in charge of this investigation," snapped Andersen. "I'll tell folks what to do around here."

"Do anything you want to—except touch that body," Smith said quietly.

The butler started to leave the room.

"Hey, you!" shouted Andersen. "Where you think you're goin'?"

"I have some work to do," said the butler nervously.

"You stay here until I tell you to leave," ordered the Chief.

"You might start asking those who are here what they know about this," Smith suggested. "Or would you rather I did it scientifically?"

Andersen only glared as he barked at the butler:

"Did you kill this man?"

"Oh, no, sir," said Jackson quickly. "I wasn't even in the room."

"Ask him where he was," said Smith and nodded at the butler. "Tell the Chief of Police just what you were doing and why you were doing it, Jackson."

THE butler's face was flushed and his lips trembled as he spoke.

"I was mixing cocktails for Mr. Mason and Mr. French, sir. I had left them in the library and had gone to my pantry. I heard them talking in very loud voices. The library door was shut—"

"The library door was open," interposed French quickly, "and we were not talking in loud voices."

"You shut up!" ordered Andersen.

"Take it easy, Chief," warned Smith. "Mr. French is a respected man around here. You can't talk like that to him."

"You keep out of this, Lawyer Smith, or I'll take you down to the jail," growled Andersen.

"That's all right, Frank," drawled

French. "The Chief is merely upset. He doesn't mean to be rude."

Smith shrugged and Chief Andersen ordered the butler to go on with his story.

"Well," Jackson said, "both Mr. Mason and Mr. French were talking so loudly that I could hear them through the closed door." He glanced defiantly at French. "I heard Mr. French accusing Mr. Mason of being too attentive to Mrs. French. They sounded very angry, sir. I tried not to hear what they were saying but they were talking so loudly I just couldn't help myself."

"Go on—go on," ordered Andersen as the butler hesitated.

"What were the exact words that Mr. French used?" asked Smith.

"He said, 'You keep away from my wife or I'll take care of you.'"

"Go on—go on," urged Andersen again.

"They began to get excited and then I heard the shot. I rushed into the library—"

"Without opening the door," drawled French again.

"I opened the door," said Jackson quickly, "and rushed into the library. I saw Mr. Mason on the floor and Mr. French bending over him."

"Where's the gun he had in his hand?" asked Andersen.

"Really, sir, I was so excited I don't remember. I saw what had happened and rushed out to call Mr. Simpson."

"Where was he?" asked Andersen.

"He was taking a shower."

"How do you know he was?" asked Andersen.

"I heard him singing," said Jackson.

"All right—continue," said Chief Andersen.

"I informed Mr. Simpson what had happened and he came down and called Mr. Smith."

"Ah, ha!" snorted Andersen, as he whirled on Simpson, "So you called your lawyer before you called me, did you?"

"There's nothing wrong with that, Andersen," Smith said shortly. "I'm his attorney, and I called you immediately, acting for him. Get on with your questioning. Forget you still smell of the cowbarn even if you do have on a policeman's uniform."

Anderson's face became scarlet. He looked ready to spring at Smith.

"Chief Andersen is quite right,"



Simpson hurriedly interposed. "I won't forget to call you the next time I need help. Mr. Smith didn't think you would be offended."

Andersen's anger subsided. "What do you know about this affair?" he asked Simpson.

"Not much," said Simpson. "Of course I knew that Mason was a guest in the French home often. He was new to the community and they were trying to make him feel at home. Mrs. French is a charming woman. She is about Mason's age and they had quite a lot in common."

French's eyes were cold and hard. His gray hair and wrinkled skin showed him to be older than Smith had ever before noticed. But now that the lawyer had mentioned French's wife he realized that French was old enough to be her father.

"Where's the gun you killed Mason with?" asked Andersen abruptly.

"The gun?" French looked surprised.

"Yeah, the gun, g-u-n, gun—something you shoot with," barked Andersen.

"Now isn't that funny," said French with a peculiar glare in his eye. "I never thought a gun would kill him."

"So you admit you killed him, do you?" gloated Andersen. "That's just fine."

"This is ridiculous!" Simpson appealed to Smith, "Can't you do something?"

"Better let me help you, Chief," suggested the deputy, speaking for the first time.

"When I need your help, I'll call on you!" snapped Andersen.

The deputy stepped back and shrugged.

**A**NDERSEN took his handcuffs out of his pocket and started toward French.

"I wouldn't do that, Chief Andersen," warned Smith, his voice low.

Andersen stopped. His beady eyes blinked rapidly.

"I suppose you're denying that stuff about your wife and Mason?" he said.

"Any one who says there was anything between them is a liar!" snapped French.

"How about it, Jackson?" said Andersen turning to the butler. "Didn't you say that you heard French and Mason arguing over French's wife

here in the library?"

"Why, ye-e-s, sir, I did, sir," stammered Jackson and glanced apprehensively at French.

"Now do you deny it?" Andersen demanded of French.

"I most certainly do," said French, and glared at Jackson fiercely. "And now that this matter has become personal, did this butler tell you that he used to be Mason's father-in-law?"

"Father-in-law?" echoed Simpson in astonishment. "Why, Jackson, I didn't even know that you knew Mason. Why didn't you tell me you were related to him?"

Jackson's eyes were veiled. His lips set in a firm, straight line.

"It wasn't necessary," he said, as he started to back out of the room.

"Stay right where you are!" ordered Andersen. "What happened to your daughter and Mason?"

Jackson didn't answer.

"I'll tell you what happened," French broke in. "Mason got tired of his wife. There was a peculiar automobile accident. Mason's wife was killed but Mason wasn't even scratched. A lot of people, including Jackson—your butler, Simpson—thought Mason killed his wife. I also had my suspicions."

"And *you* killed Mason when *you* found out that he was running around with *your* wife!" Jackson shouted fiercely. "Don't lie to me, Albert French! I heard everything you said to Mason in the library this afternoon—everything! Understand?"

French whirled on Jackson. "Don't lie yourself out of killing Mason, you murderer!" he shouted. "I felt the bullet pass my ear when you shot through the open door behind me. Mason was facing me, facing the door, also. You were the only one in the house who could have done it. I heard Simpson upstairs taking a shower. He was singing. He couldn't have done it but *you* could!"

"I'm arresting you for killing Mason," Andersen growled, as he snapped a pair of handcuffs on Jackson's wrists. "Come on, you! Produce the gun you killed Mason with."

Jackson seemed stunned as he looked down at his manacled wrists.

"I didn't kill John Mason," he said slowly and bitterly, "but I did see Albert French pull a gun from his pocket and shoot Mason between the eyes."

"Now wait a minute!" shouted Andersen. "Only one man killed Mason! How am I goin' to know which one to arrest if you both keep accusin' each other?"

"What does your notebook say about such situations?" asked Smith with an amused twinkle in his eyes.

"This is terrible!" Simpson chattered nervously. "Terrible!"

"I'd arrest both of them," suggested the deputy, stepping forward from behind a high-backed chair.

"I can't arrest two men for the same thing," snapped Andersen and blinked helplessly.

"I can," said the deputy as he quickly handcuffed French. "I arrest you, Albert French, for the murder of John Mason."

"Now wait a minute, Jim," ordered the Chief. "You can't do that. I've already arrested the murderer. This butler killed Mason."

"He didn't neither," said Jim, the deputy. "I've pinched the real killer."

"I'm in charge here!" shouted Andersen angrily.

"I'm a deputy sheriff," Jim reminded him.

"You won't be after my uncle hears what I have to tell him," Andersen promised him. "You'll answer to the mayor."

Lawyer Smith raised his eyebrows and motioned with his head for Simpson to follow him out of the room. Andersen made both French and Jackson sit down while he prepared his question and answer report as set forth in the Ace Detective School forms.

"That'll take him an hour," said Smith as they walked out into the hall.

**S**IMPSON mopped his perspiring brow.

"What a mess this has turned out to be!"

"Things do look a bit complicated," admitted Smith. "And for the life of me I can't decide which one of them did it."

"I've known Albert French all my life," said Simpson. "And I just can't bring myself to believe he would do such a thing."

"I've always had the feeling that French's wife was in love with him even though he was twice her age," said Smith.

"I would have staked my word on that until today," agreed Simpson and shook his head wearily.

"Mr. Simpson," called Chief Andersen from the library, "will you come in here a minute? I want to get some information from you as to the time you arrived home from the office this noon."

"Go ahead," said Smith, "Andersen won't cause any more trouble and the questions he'll ask are worthless in court. I'll take a look around and see what I can find in the butler's pantry."

As Smith entered the butler's pantry there was a buzz at the kitchen door. He walked through the kitchen and opened the door. A man carrying an automobile fan belt stepped in.

"Had quite a time findin' this belt," he said, holding it up. "But I finally found one on an old Ford. Spent the whole morning trying to locate it. . . . Where's the cook?"

"She's out," said Smith.

"Good." The man smiled as he started down the basement stairway. "She won't know it took me so long."

The lawyer went back to the butler's pantry. The front door bell chimed. Again he answered the summons, and this time admitted the coroner and showed him into the library. Waiting a moment to see if Andersen and the coroner would agree as to the manner in which the investigation should be conducted, Smith stepped into the library.

He noted that the only opening through which a shot could have been fired was through the doorway opening into the foyer. Filled bookshelves covered the walls from floor to ceiling. The only windows were leaded and could not be opened. Seeing that Andersen was so occupied in filling out his questionnaire that he was allowing the coroner to proceed without opposition, Smith went back to the butler's pantry.

The small liquor cabinet was open and melting ice floated in a glass bowl. He walked back to the library door, and timed his movement. Next he went back into the pantry and listened to the voices coming from the library. It was not difficult to hear them, even the lowest tones.

There was a thumping in the basement. Smith remembered the man with the automobile fan belt and reached the basement door just as the man came up.

"Tell the cook, she won't have any more trouble for a while," he said, "and tell her if she wants to see what was the cause of the trouble for her to take a

gander at this old belt I took off the motor. I'll leave it on the back porch for her to see. She won't believe I've been here unless she sees what I've done."

After the man had left Smith went upstairs to the bathroom, and finally returned just as Andersen was completing his report.

"Now, I'd like to ask everyone here a few questions," the lawyer announced.

"You ain't asking no questions of nobody," snapped Chief Andersen. "I'm taking French and this here butler down to the jail and after we've booked 'em you can talk to 'em all you want to."

"Did you ever heard of false arrest, Mr. Andersen?" asked Smith quietly. "Neither the butler nor Mr. Smith committed the murder."

"Wise guy, eh?" sneered the Chief. "You can't stop me, Frank Smith, even if you are the crack lawyer round these parts. You ain't scaring me. Come on, you fellows—we're going to jail."

"Aren't you going to do anything for them?" asked Simpson as the men drove away.

"In time," Smith said quietly. "Come on in the library."

"Sit down, Bill," he said. "I want to talk to you."

For a moment the two men were silent.

"Are you ready for the Government investigators?" Smith finally asked.

"I think Mason had everything about ready," said Simpson.

"Are you involved personally, Bill?" asked Smith, watching him closely.

"Why—why, what do you mean?" Simpson asked quickly.

**D**O YOU know what this is, Bill?" asked Smith.

He pulled from his pocket the broken fan belt that the man had brought from the basement, and tossed it into Simpson's lap. Simpson examined it.

"That's the belt that goes on the pump in the basement," he said curiously. "Where did you get it?"

"The plumber just replaced it with a new one," Smith said quietly. "He said the pump had been out of order all day." Simpson frowned.

"I noticed that you have a phonograph-recorder-radio unit in your bedroom, Bill," said Smith slowly as he removed a newspaper from his pocket and spread it open on his knees. He

picked up a small ball of black thread from the center of the paper and held it up for Simpson's inspection. "This paper is three days old," he said. "This bunch of record cuttings was wrapped up in the paper. Bill—what did you do with the record you made?"

"I don't know what you're driving at, Frank," Simpson was nervously licking his dry lips.

"You didn't have any water in your bathroom, Bill—when you were supposed to have been taking your shower. The water pump in the basement was out of order. I was in your bathroom, Bill. Your shower was bone dry. It hadn't been used today." Smith was looking directly into Simpson's eyes. "Where's the record you made of yourself singing in the shower?"

Simpson swallowed rapidly.

"I also found the door from your bedroom leading down into the storage room next to the library, Bill," Smith said quickly. "You forgot and didn't close the hole in the wall through which you shot Mason."

Simpson's eyes flashed toward a spot about two feet from the center section of the bookcases on the right wall. It was only a fleeting movement, but Smith saw it and got up from his chair and moved toward the wall.

"Thanks for telling me where the hole is, Bill," he said quietly, "I couldn't find it."

Smith's back was toward Simpson. Suddenly he whirled and with a quick leap pinned Simpson's arms to his sides before he had time to put a small pistol to his head and kill himself.

Simpson struggled violently in the powerful arms of his lawyer, then suddenly collapsed. Smith took the pistol away from him and forced him down into a chair.

"Why did you kill Mason, Bill?" he asked. "Was it because you found out that he was a Government agent and had found out how you had been milking the company as well as collecting from the Government on nonexistent material?"

Simpson nodded dejectedly, then broke into dry sobs of self-pity.

"Sorry, Bill," said Attorney Smith, "but you've got to go down and face French and your butler, tell the truth and take your medicine. You've made it the chair, Bill—for murder—instead of only a prison term for fraud."

By **RAY  
CUMMINGS**



# The Case of the Drowning Fish

**A**S HE passed the luxurious apartment house on the corner of the block, Peter Hanley came into view of the little frame house where he lived with his cousin, John Mackey. The tumbledown, shabby building was a strange sight, here among the city buildings that were crowding it. A

faded white picket fence surrounded its acre of ground, where decrepit apple trees were still standing.

Fifty years before this had been a farming section, well outside the city limits. But the city had grown here now, and the old Mackey place was an anachronism. The bus line was only

*Nobody has ever heard a fish talk—but killer*

*Peter Hanley believes a certain goldfish did!*

two blocks away. There was a movie theatre and many neighborhood stores. The shabby Mackey house, with its big peeling sign, **MACKEY'S PET SHOP**, was a neighborhood disgrace. An eyesore. It smelled, figuratively and literally.

Neighborhood committees wanted to get rid of Mackey. Building companies itched for his land, for an apartment house. His father hadn't sold, nor his grandfather, who had owned the original little farm. There was a fortune tied up in the old dump now, but Mackey, who was a bachelor, wouldn't sell. He ran a pet shop, and he intended to continue running that pet shop as long as he lived.

The situation concerned Peter Hanley very intimately indeed—especially the potential money involved. As he jerked open the front gate now and headed for the front door, he was contemplating the thing with a sort of desperate bitterness. It was ironic that one stubborn, pig-headed man should be such a stumbling block to everything he wanted in life.

Hanley had reached his fifties, this year. All his life, batting around from one job to another—generally as some sort of salesman on commission—he had had money trouble. His fiftieth birthday had seemed a landmark. Almost the beginning of old age. A turning point. He had determined then that nothing would stop him from getting the money necessary to live the end of his life without stress and worry. To achieve that, he would do anything.

Do anything? . . . A month ago he had quit his last job, which had been no good anyway. Temporarily he was now living here with his cousin. Mackey had fallen for his story of being arbitrarily fired to make room for the boss' new son-in-law. Mackey was staking Hanley to petty cash, letting him live there until he could find another job.

**N**OTHING like that, however, was in Hanley's plan. This acre of ground, with its old farmhouse and the city now crowding around it, really belonged half to Hanley. At least, Hanley considered it so. His and Mackey's mutual grandfather had always said that Peter should have half when the place eventually was sold. He was in Mackey's will for half, with the other half going

to an Animal Society. To get that half now, was what Hanley wanted. To get it, he was telling himself, he would do anything.

The big front room of the house was the pet shop. Pete Hanley found it dark and smelly as he entered. All the windows were closed so that the tropical parrots wouldn't take cold. Bird cages stood about. Cats lay asleep in their little caged boxes. At least, there were no dogs—just birds, cats, rabbits and two big aquariums of goldfish. Shelves of accessories—bird cages of various shapes and styles, cat food, bird food, fish food made up the rest of the stock. It was a repulsive place to Hanley. It always made him shudder. What he should have had was a hotel suite downtown, but what could he do?

Despite his lack of money, Peter Hanley was always well dressed, even if he had to go into debt to accomplish it. He had always figured that if you looked shabby, the world treated you shabbily. He was a tall, rather distinguished-looking man with a high-bridged nose, thin cheeks and generous iron-gray hair. This warm summer night he was dressed in white doeskin trousers and blue serge jacket. His modish hat was pearl gray. In the dimness, he threaded his way carefully past the smelly cages with the feeling that nothing could be more incongruous than a man like himself living in such a dump.

"That you, Peter?" Mackey called, hearing him in the pet shop.

"Yes," Hanley said.

At the back of the dark shop was a partly open door, leading into the little living room and the kitchen beyond it. Mackey was sitting in the living room, reading.

Hanley went in. He put his hat on a grimy old couch with a gesture of distaste, and sat down.

"Been to the movies?" Mackey asked. He glanced up over his spectacles and then went on reading his paper.

"No, I was with friends," Hanley said.

Why couldn't he get this cursed thing fixed tonight? It seemed suddenly as though he had to get it fixed tonight. Too much was wrong with his personal life to let it slide any longer. He drew a long breath.

"Look," he said. "I'm sick of this. I've been talking about it to my friends,

and everybody says I'm a sucker. You and I have pretty different ideas on things, John. We're very different sort of people—about as different as you could get."

"Sick of this? A sucker?" Mackey took off his spectacles and put them on the table beside him.

He was a dried-up little man, with a big head on a spindly neck. He was just about Hanley's age, but he looked much older. He was clad now in baggy pants and unbuttoned vest. He always needed a shave. To Hanley he looked like a tramp. It had, indeed, been humiliating to Hanley when once some of his friends had come to the pet shop, and Hanley had had to introduce Mackey as a relative. But the Pet Shop customers seemed to like him. People said he had a kindly smile, a gentle voice.

**B**UT Mackey wasn't smiling now, and his voice was shrill and nasal. Hanley tried to say something else, but he was given no chance.

"I know what you're gettin' at," little Mackey rasped at him. "You don't have to tell me. An' look here, Peter, my affairs are my own, not yours! I'm pretty sick myself of having you nag me!"

"I'm not nagging you. I'm trying to tell you—"

"Tell me what? That you'd like to dig up a bunch of money to squander?" Mackey was sitting tense in his chair, like a coiled spring. His pale eyes were glittering. "You think you're a slick article, don't you? Well you ain't foolin' me! Buttin' into my business—"

Hanley strove to keep his temper. All this ranting was just a means of avoiding the issue. That's what they generally did. He tried to put across his point with one last, supreme effort.

"I tell you, this pet shop isn't your business, John, any more than it's mine. Look, this is the best time we could possibly sell. We can get maybe fifty thousand in cash, if we put it up for sale now."

"We?" the old man squealed. "What you mean, we? Listen, I'm sick of you tellin' me what to do. If you don't like to live here, why don't you get out? You think I want you around here?"

"Why you—"

"I don't! Go ahead an' get out! Why should I feed you an' give you money

anyhow? I been thinkin' of that for quite a while. You're just a lazy loafer, puttin' on the Ritz with your pretty clothes that I pay for!"

"You—you—"

The room was a red blur to Hanley as he leaped to his feet. So that was it! So that was how things stood! Well, there was a way to fix it. A way to fix everything all at once!

The vague thought was like a little snake that perhaps always had been in the back of Hanley's mind. Now it jumped out at him.

"Go on," Mackey was saying. "Without you I'd have a little peace to do my work! If you think because you're in my will for half my property—because grandpa insisted—"

"You—you rotten little—worm!"

"—I can fix that an' give the Society all of it. I'll—"

Mackey had been pressing his Sunday pants for church the next day. The ironing board was still set up there, his pants on it, the big flatiron cooling now. Hanley was hardly aware that he seized the iron, flung it.

The heavy chunk hit Mackey on the side of the head as he rose half out of his chair. He collapsed back into it, screaming, sagging sidewise as the flatiron clattered to the floor. Then his shrill, eerie cry gruesomely choked into a gasp and ended.

He was slumped there now, dangling over the chair-arm, motionless, his face contorted, his eyes glazing, and his cracked skull a welter of blood.

Hanley, panting, dazed, staggered back. He was conscious of terror, confusion, then a vague sense of triumph. Of course! Subconsciously he must always have been anticipating something like this! The triumph gave him confidence. His mind began working again. Things would be all right now. . . .

In those first few seconds, he had a swift succession of realizations. The windows here were closed, the shades down. No one had seen him come in. No one could have seen what happened. Mackey had a penchant for jewelry. This could be made to look like a robbery committed by some outsider.

Hanley seized the watch Mackey wore, took his ring and stickpin, dropped them into his pocket.

But that scream! In those first seconds, with his rush of other thoughts,

Hanley had not considered it. But he remembered it now, and with a rush of horror he stood frozen in the living room, listening to shouts out in the street, at the front gate. Passing pedestrians had heard the scream. They were coming to investigate. The old gate creaked and bumped as it was flung open.

**T**HERE could have been no wider panic than that which engulfed Peter Hanley at that instant. He knew only that he must get out of there! But he couldn't go by the front way. He'd be seen!

He started for the back door, which was at the back of the kitchen beyond the living room. He snatched his hat, put it on his head. Then he was plunged into a new rush of horror. Three or four men had come from the street. They were pounding on the pet shop door now, shouting. Then one or two others were running along the outside of the house, toward the back. From the sound, the whole neighborhood was being aroused.

Hanley knew then that he couldn't get out of the house. But somehow his mind rose to the emergency. He had been seen down at the corner drug store only about ten minutes ago. He could say he just arrived now, came in by the kitchen door, heard the scream just when he was out in the yard. Whether they believed it or not, what was the difference? There could be no proof of anything else.

It was his only chance.

They were pounding on the back door now. Hanley darted out of the lighted living room into the pet shop. Then he thought of something else. He had the jewelry in his pocket. He might be searched.

Glancing about the shop, his eyes encountered the aquarium. No matter how they searched the house, they wouldn't empty the water out of that big tank. It had a few inches of sand at its bottom. Pulling up his sleeve, Hanley poked the watch, ring and stickpin down into the sand and smoothed it over.

"Help! Help!" he shouted then. "He's dead! He's been killed!" Dashing to the front door, he flung it open. "I just came in the back way—heard a scream! He—he's dead! Somebody's killed Mr. Mackey!"

What difference did it make what he said? It was shocked, incoherent. People were in the front yard, and in the side yard. And now a police car, passing on the nearby parkway, had heard the commotion and was pulling up.

Two husky young fellows seized Hanley. "Don't be a fool!" he shouted at them. "I live here. I'm Peter Hanley, his cousin! I heard the scream same as you did. I just came in the kitchen door."

Other people were trying to crowd in. Somebody turned on the pet shop light. Confusion took over. Somebody ran into the living room, saw the body and came running back. Hanley was shoved around, as though he were the criminal responsible. And now the police were pounding up through the front yard.

The confusion sorted itself out when the police came. There was Sergeant Kane and two of his men and, in five minutes more, half a dozen other policemen. It was a horrible jam for Hanley. Of course he realized it was natural at first that he be treated as the killer. His identity was not questioned. One of the policemen knew him. Then, gradually, the onlookers were shoved back, most of them being put out of the house.

Now Hanley, after gasping out his story, had a respite to stand and watch as Kane and his men examined the body.

"Skull cracked!" Kane said. "The killer threw that flatiron at him, hit him full!"

Even if his fingerprints had been on the iron, Hanley knew it wouldn't have caused any serious difficulty. He could easily say he had used it that afternoon. They couldn't prove that what he said was untrue.

"I usually come in the kitchen door," Hanley interjected. "Look, Sergeant, I—I realize this is horrible—me being the first in here. But I heard the scream when I was in the back yard. Sure, I guess these young fellows, like they say, were just passing the front gate at the moment. I couldn't think of anything—I just became frightened, I came rushing in through the kitchen. I—I saw the body—then I rushed on through the shop and let them in."

**S**IMPLY put, that was it. And how could they prove it was a lie? But the sergeant's brow arched skeptically.



"Yeah?" he said. "Look, we found all the windows locked. These young fellers were out front, an' you say you were coming in the back. The killer sure was in here. And if he couldn't get out, where is he now?"

The sergeant was grimly confronting Hanley.

"Why—why, how do I know where he is?" Hanley stammered. "Why ask me? I rushed through the lower floor here. Maybe he's in the attic. How do I know?"

But the killer wasn't in the attic. The little house had been thoroughly searched. Hanley recovered himself. What the sergeant argued didn't prove anything. It just posed a mystery. He wasn't responsible for what happened to the killer. He managed a touch of sarcasm.

"I know you'd like to pin it on me, Sergeant," he said, "since there's nobody else around. Maybe the killer's up on the roof. I wouldn't know."

"Don't get funny," Kane retorted.

Now the policemen were figuring on robbery. Hanley had mentioned that Mackey's jewelry was gone. Kane knew Mackey. He had seen the little man wearing that ring, that stickpin and watch many times.

"He always wore them," Hanley said. "That could be the motive, couldn't it, Sergeant—somebody who noticed him wearing them? Anyway, they're gone. Obviously, they went with the killer."

"You wouldn't have 'em in your pockets by any chance, would you?" Kane said abruptly. He gripped Hanley. "Suppose we take a look."

"Go right ahead," Hanley said. He stood with a faint, contemptuous smile

[Turn page]

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while the policemen searched him. "You're really being very silly, Sergeant."

Then, from the pet shop room, one of the officers called to Kane. The sergeant went in. Hanley, standing by the door, saw the policeman in the shop pointing down to the floor near one of the aquariums.

"Look," the policeman said, "one of them goldfish got out."

On the floor, near the tank, lay a little goldfish. It still wasn't dead. It could wiggle a little, and gasp. Kane picked it up, tossed it into the tank, where a hundred or more just about like it were swimming around. The fish floated for a few seconds. Then, reviving, it wiggled, turned and swam slowly down.

"Been out of the water only a few minutes," Kane commented. "It was drowning down there on the floor, just like a human drowns from lack of oxygen. That tank's pretty full of water. The fish could have flipped itself out—a goldfish would do that, if it became frightened enough."

But what would frighten it? Now Kane suddenly was holding his flashlight beam into the tank. Then he turned and looked at the second tank a few feet away.

"The water here in this first tank looks sort of turgid," he remarked. "Kind of stirred up. The other tank is much clearer." He added, "Something riled up that water, an' that fish jumped out not very long ago, or it'd be dead by now."

Hanley stood mute, frozen, as the sergeant pulled up the sleeve of his uniform and plunged his hand down into the tank, his fingers digging around in the sand at its bottom. Then his hand came out with the watch, the jeweled ring, the stickpin.

"An' there they are!" Kane said triumphantly. He confronted Hanley, his voice sardonic. "So our mysterious killer, before he went up in smoke or into the Fourth Dimension or something, decided he wouldn't take his loot with him."

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So he stopped an' hid it here! Don't make me laugh!"

And now two of the other policemen had seized Hanley. Their flashlight beams were on him. Kane grabbed Hanley's jacket sleeve, slid it to the elbow, to where Hanley's sleeve was rolled.

"This is sure proof enough," the sergeant growled. "After you hid that stuff, your hand was wet. In all the excitement, you didn't think of it—just wiped your hand off instinctively on the back of your jacket and trousers. There's always a lot of green-slime algae in a fish tank. You can see it drying there now on your clothes where you wiped your hand. An' it dried on your bare arm, under your coatsleeve. Take a look. It's plain as day!"

Hanley stood stricken. He had planned so carefully, so ruthlessly, on his fiftieth birthday that his remaining years should be free from trouble. His future now seemed shorter than he had believed—and not nearly so pleasant!

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[Turn page]

### Answers to Questions on Page 7

1. Yes.
2. Grand larceny.
3. Arson.
4. Manslaughter.
5. No.
6. Principally to give police officers the authority to stop such attempts.  
Embezzlement.
7. No. Legally, a child under seven is incapable of committing any crime.
8. Burglary. Legally, he is considered to be constructively present in the commission of the crime.
10. A convict is not eligible to parole unless his sentence is one longer than a year.

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I would also like to see the Black Bat and the Phantom Detective team up once or twice a year, and I wouldn't mind seeing two Black Bat novels in one issue once in a while. However, I think you're doing a good job as it is. Keep it up!—*Davy Moody, Ward, Arkansas.*

THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE, for you readers who haven't yet made its acquaintance, is one of our many companion magazines.

Here is a letter from another reader of BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE who is also a Phantom fan.

I am writing you to tell you I like the Black Bat adventures. How old is Tony Quinn in real life?

Why don't you start a club like the Phantom has in his magazine whereby members could obtain an emblem of the Black Bat? Keep up the good work.—*Bob Peterson, Hillsdale, New York.*

We're a bit uncertain about Tony Quinn's age in terms of years, Bob. And he's purely a fiction character—though in his devotion to duty he is typical of many valiant lawmen working for justice today.

I find BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE very interesting, and I read it regularly.—*Wm. McAlister, Route 3, Box 480, Asheville, N. C.*

We're happy that BLACK BOOK has so many loyal fans and it's always pleasant to hear from you readers, if only it is to say hello. Perhaps you have no more to relay than the letter from Mr. McAlister above, but we appreciate all such communications and we're happy to publish them in this column.

MURDER'S PLAYGROUND in your latest issue was tops. And I always enjoy the Thubway Thom stories. Will there be more of them?—*Kathrinn Folder, Plymouth, Mass.*

You bet there will be! Another of the amusing adventures of Thubway Thom is lined up for our next issue.

We'll be back again next issue, too, with many, many more letters, and here's hoping there'll be one from you! Kindly address all letters and postcards to The Editor, BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y.

See you all next issue, and until then—happy reading and our sincerest thanks to everybody!

—THE EDITOR.

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